

# Plan for Rebuilding Pennsylvania Ave. Is Near Completion

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The most significant redevelopment project in the country, the plan to redesign Pennsylvania Avenue, is nearing completion after more than a year of closely guarded, top-level work.

The plan recommends the rebuilding of large sections of the nation's principal thoroughfare from the Capitol to the White House, to re-establish its glory as the "grand axis" of the city and the great ceremonial boulevard of the nation.

Pending the plan's implementation, a voluntary freeze has been called for on all Government and private construction on the avenue. This has stopped work on one of the largest new Federal structures, the \$60,000,000 Federal Bureau of Investigation Building, now in the design stage.

## No Actual Designs

The completion of this building as originally conceived would have knocked out a large segment of the Pennsylvania Avenue design. To avoid this as well as the equally serious problem of real-estate speculation and rising land values in the area to be redeveloped, work on the plan has gone ahead with as much discretion—some have called it secrecy—as possible.

Begun by Presidential directive in June, 1962, the project has been proceeding under the watchful eye of the White House. Following the report of a Cabinet-level Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Office Space at that time, President Kennedy appointed a 10-man Pennsylvania Avenue Advisory Council in July, 1962, to draft recommendations for the area joining the capital's two most important buildings.

The council's recommendations, which will reach President Kennedy within the next few months, consist of a schematic layout for a broadened

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# CAPITAL AVENUE MAY BE REBUILT

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avenue with large new plazas and structures that will stress life and variety rather than cold monumentality. Although there are no actual building designs, there are firm guidelines for the avenue's present and future development.

Justice Arthur J. Goldberg, who initiated the project while he was Secretary of Labor, after the inaugural parade had shocked him into awareness of the avenue's shabby condition, has seen the proposal and praised it highly. "I think this is a magnificent plan," he commented enthusiastically. "Pennsylvania Avenue has gone to pot."

Only three times previously in Washington's history has a planning effort of similar size, scope and sweep been undertaken. The first was Major Pierre Charles L'Enfant's original plan in 1791, which transformed a partial marshland into a formal city and established the capital's famous broad vistas, axes and boulevards. The second was the McMillan Plan of 1902, which reconfirmed and rescued portions of the original scheme, and the third was the massive Federal Triangle complex executed in the 1930's, which forms the south side of Pennsylvania Avenue today.

The north side, which has deteriorated progressively, is a contrasting mixture of hotels whose considerable past grandeur has been tarnished by injections of cheap modernity, small, shabby commercial buildings housing equally undistinguished enterprises, curio shops, parking garages and a few glossy new office buildings that have begun to give the avenue the standard commercial vista of most American cities.

## Action Was Produced

It is this new commercial construction that sparked the Government into action. Private redevelopment of the north side of Pennsylvania Avenue, already under way, threatened to spell the irrevocable loss of any opportunity to carry out the boulevard as a public street of formal, ceremonial elegance, as originally was intended.

The avenue, once a swampy trail, has been the route of every Presidential inaugural parade since Jefferson's second term, when he rode to the Capitol on horseback, hitched his horse to a tree, and took the oath of office. In 1809, with Madison's inaugural, the ceremony became an official institution.

By the eighteen-forties, the street was wide but its appearance was seamy; it was lined with boarding houses, restaurants, hotels, gambling establishments, and the city market, where slaves were sold.

Lincoln rode up the avenue in 1865 on the night of his assassination, and two days later his body was carried along it to the Capitol to the roll of muffled drums. After the Civil War, a parade of 200,000 men was led by Generals Grant and Sherman, who now review the street in bronze. Spread with tanbark to gentle the ride, it was the route of President Garfield's ambulance after he was shot in 1881.

Parades continued—for Presidents, generals, heroes and bonus marchers—but the avenue grew increasingly blighted and unworthy. Eventually the south side was rescued by the Federal Triangle, but the shabby north side seemed to condemn it to perpetual mediocrity.

## Radical Changes Urged

The design about to be proposed by the Pennsylvania Avenue Advisory Council, working with the National Capital Planning Commission disposes of that possibility forever.

Specifically, it calls for radical changes in the street itself, and for the buildings along it. The already wide avenue would be widened further, and where it now ends, petering out at the Treasury Building, a monumental plaza would be created as a fitting and functional terminus. This would involve the demolition of the Washington and Willard Hotels to open the area to 14th Street.

From this point toward the Capitol, large-scale demolition of much of the mixed, deteriorating construction on the north side, is proposed by the council, along with a series of new structures, of which two are already determined.

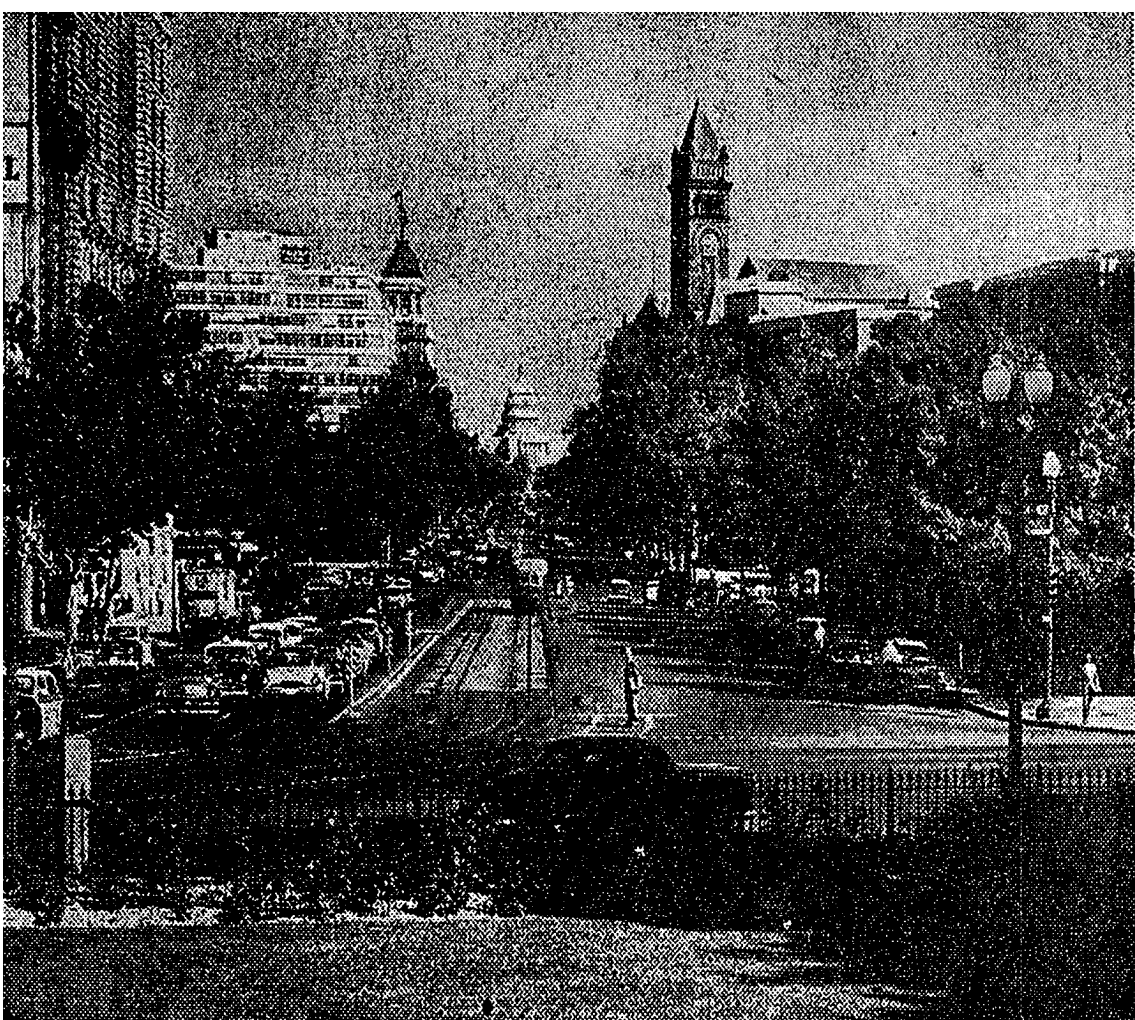
One is to be the F.B.I. Building, a mammoth structure that has been a continual bone of contention during the development of the plan. Scheduled for the avenue before the council's study began, it proved to be immovable, although the report that initiated Presidential action had stated a clear directive to avoid a "solid phalanx" of Government structures as a street facade.

The F.B.I. Building will occupy a double block opposite the Justice Department between 9th and 10th Streets, extending from Pennsylvania Avenue through to E Street, closing D Street. It will house 7,500 employees and easily equal the oppressive size of the new State Department Building.

## Labor Department to Get Home

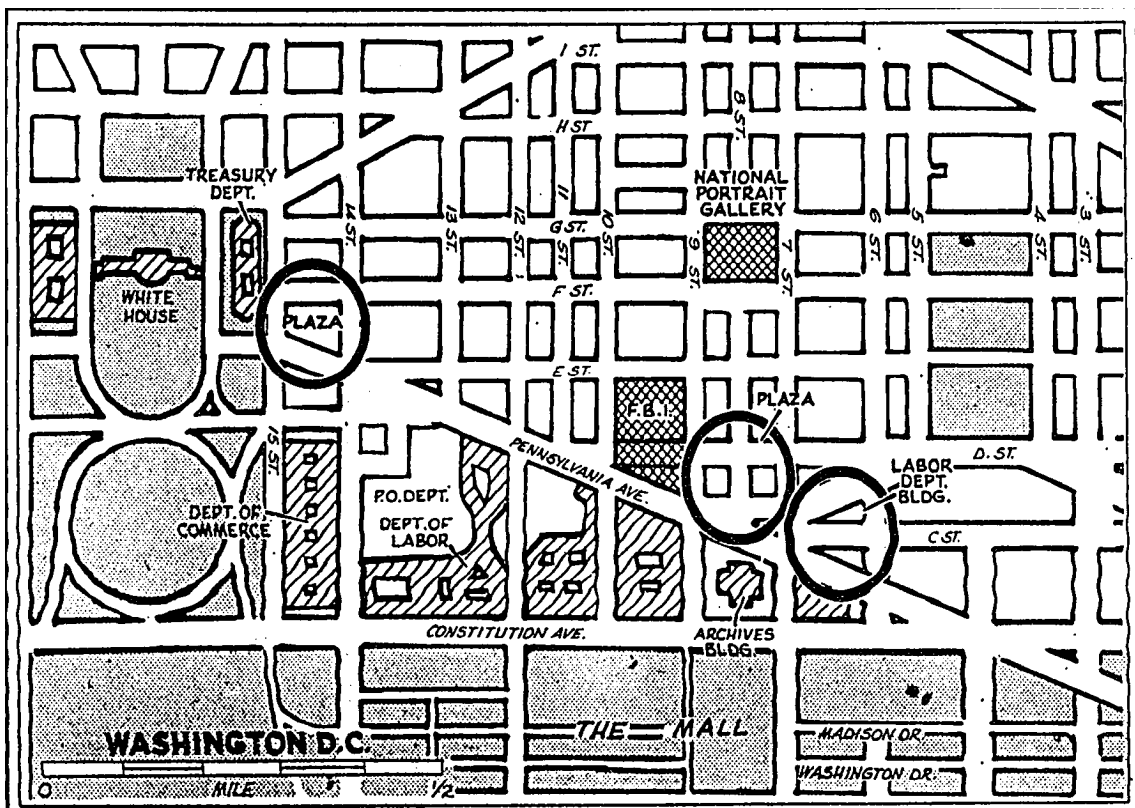
Just beyond, between Sixth and Seventh Streets, there will likely be a \$47,000,000 Labor Department Building. A second plaza will separate the two, facing the Archives Building on its south side. This will have the virtue of breaking the row of structures and the long boulevard with an almost centrally placed square in front of an important tourist center. It also provides a new north-south axis across the avenue to the old Patent Office, a Greek Revival masterpiece of 1837 that has existed shakily under threat of

# National Capital's 'Grand Axis' Is to Be Restored



Charles Phelps Cushing

A view of Pennsylvania Avenue, looking to the east toward the Capitol, from 15th Street



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Circled areas are sites marked for improvement along the avenue. Diagonal markings indicate existing Government buildings. Cross-hatching denotes buildings that will be erected or improved as part of plan to redesign avenue. Shaded areas are existing parks.

demolition in recent years, and is now to be refurbished as a National Portrait Gallery.

In this way, the plan reaches beyond the facade of the avenue itself to organize and revitalize connecting portions of the city. It also includes generous underground parking.

As important as the plan, are the specifications for the new buildings. At no point will the "monsters of the mall" across the way, as the Federal Triangle buildings have been called by critics, be repeated on this side of the street.

According to the council, there has been a definite effort to avoid the conventionally formidable, solid marble or granite Government blocks, forbidding by day and dead after dark. The proposal indicates that the new buildings directly facing the avenue are to be low structures, "lively, friendly and inviting," preferably including arcades, shops, restaurants and other public and commercial uses. Behind them—on E Street in the case of the F.B.I. Building—will be taller structures to contain the bulk of the necessary office space.

## Considered a Defeat

The course of neither true love nor great plans runs smooth. In January of this year the F.B.I. Building made it clear that it would not permit commercial use of its ground floor. Some considered this a defeat for one of the plan's basic objectives of bringing vitality to a street dominated by still-born pantheons and mausoleums.

At the same time, the directors of the National Cultural Center came out strongly against another council idea in consideration then, but later abandoned—the moving of the center, in whole or in part, from its proposed Potomac site to Pennsylvania Avenue. One Council member, Minoru Yamasaki, the Detroit architect known for his spectacular Federal Science Pavilion at the Seattle Fair, who favored the idea, resigned as Government buildings moved inexorably onto the avenue.

In April of this year the council requested the voluntary freeze of building activity on the avenue after the sale of the National Theater and the Munsey Building and the start of two commercial structures on Indiana Avenue, where they would interfere with the Labor Department site.

In July, the General Services Administration agreed to halt design on the F.B.I. Building, and is proceeding now only with programing requirements.

During these months, statements emanating from the council's chairman, Nathaniel Owings, repeatedly stressed a "park-like avenue in which buildings could float" but as buildings became more definite, like the F.B.I. behemoth, levitation became more difficult. Other spokesmen for the council brought them down to earth. "Our feeling is that it would be better to have buildings interrupted by plaza space." This, essentially, is what has evolved.

Presentation of the proposal to the National Capital Planning Commission the first week in June met strong resistance. "It shocked us," said one commission member. "The word should be 'stupefied,'" said another.

## Acceptance Was Feared

A preview appointment with President Kennedy was lost as the capital planners expressed their fear of official acceptance that might rush the ambitious

scheme's approval. A second meeting, held a few weeks ago after the design had been absorbed, brought extremely favorable reaction.

There are still many hurdles ahead. If the President approves, the plan will then have to be conveyed to Congress, put in the form of a bill, hearings held, reports made, money appropriated, the many agencies and committees involved coordinated, and a composite commission probably appointed for its execution.

Land must be acquired and business compensated against the opposition of private owners and the hazards of commercial speculation. There will be howls from vested interests and shouts from Congressional budget-watchers when cost estimates—and they will be large—are released.

But the most serious challenge to the success of the plan is in the nature of the problem, with no guarantee that there is any solution at all. A built-up dynamic modern urban scene and the static tradition of the "grand avenue." No one yet has resolved the hard facts of acres of dull, routine office space, which is the real requirement of modern bureaucratic government, with the equal need for beauty and dignity, which is the spiritual requirement of a nation's capital.

The Pennsylvania Avenue

plan attempts to do this without "false fronts" or the resuscitated answers of another age. It is a monumental task, and if it succeeds, it will add permanent luster to Washington's image, in the spirit of our time.

In addition to Mr. Owings, the members of the Council are Charles Eames, designer, California; Frederick Gutheim, president of the Washington Center for Metropolitan Studies, Washington; Douglas Haskell, editor of *The Architectural Forum*, New York; Dan Kiley, landscape architect, Vermont; Daniel P. Moynihan, Assistant Secretary of Labor, Washington; Chloethiel Woodard Smith, architect, Washington; Paul Thiry, architect, Seattle; Ralph Walker, architect, New York, and William Walton, artist and presidential adviser on the arts, Washington.