

# Capitol Plan

While there has been a great deal of vague campaign rhetoric about streamlining the Washington bureaucracy, there has been some very real action toward dealing with the physical chaos on Capitol Hill.

These 243 acres of buildings and grounds controlled only by the Architect of the Capitol, usually under parochial Congressional prodding, are noted equally for their historical and esthetic richness and terminal disorder. The nation's symbolic center has become its most anguished space squeeze.

After years of indifference and resistance, the preparation of a master plan was finally authorized by Congress last year. The initial study, begun in April, has produced an admirable first-phase report, prepared by the Capitol Planning group appointed by the Architect of the Capitol, George M. White. The report defines essential areas of study for the present and future needs of the legislative and judicial branches of the Federal Government. It is also a model of rational thinking and an impressive apolitical act. The basic problems addressed are total space needs, circulation, and visual and environmental effect. The next stage will study these clearly identified problems in detail.

The best argument for a master plan is the success of the two that have preceded it. The original L'Enfant Plan of 1792 and the McMillan Plan of 1901 have set and controlled the character of Washington to a remarkable degree, and Capitol Hill growth was surprisingly well accommodated within that handsome framework until recently. Where those plans have been violated for expediency, as in the visual mutilation of the south facade by an expressway and bridges, real damage has occurred. Building-snatching, as in the recent desperate House grab for the Madison Library, was expediency turned into farce.

What is envisioned now is not a rigid blueprint, but an organized, flexible process for the future. If the plan also embodies the vision and standards of L'Enfant and McMillan, both the Capitol and the country will be well served.