

# Pennsylvania Avenue

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For the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (August 1-September 13, 1964) there were assembled the model and some of the graphic materials used by the President's Council on Pennsylvania Avenue in its report giving its proposals for this nationally important ceremonial thoroughfare in Washington. To suggest the many-sidedness of the proposal, the following article has been reprinted from the July 1964 issue of Architectural Forum.

## Pennsylvania Avenue



Archive

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The President's Council on Pennsylvania Avenue, appointed June, 1962, was made up as follows (alphabetical listing):

Nathaniel Alexander Owings, FAIA, San Francisco, Chairman  
Frederick Gutheim, Washington, D.C.  
Douglas Haskell, FAIA, New York  
Frederick L. Holborn, Washington, D.C.  
Daniel Urban Kiley, AIA, Charlotte, Vermont  
Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Washington, D.C.  
Chloethiel Woodard Smith, FAIA, Washington, D.C.  
Paul Thiry, FAIA, Seattle, Washington  
Ralph Walker, FAIA, New York  
William Walton, Washington, D.C.  
Mrs. Polly Shackleton, Washington, D.C. (Secretary)

Charles M. Horsky, Advisor to the President for National Capital Affairs, is the White House officer in charge. The proposals were prepared under the administration of Elizabeth Rowe, Chairman of the National Capital Planning Commission.

The Report Editor was Douglas Haskell; the detailed planning and design features of the Report were executed for the Council by a group of architects, including John M. Woodbridge, Chief of Design, John F. Kirkpatrick, Robert G. Becker, Peter Walker, William Turnbull, Jr., Rolf Ohlhausen, Arnold Savrann. The model was constructed by Theodore Conrad Model Makers. The renderings were made by Nicholas Solovioff.





CAMPBELL PHOTO SERVICE

# PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE

The air view of Washington, D.C., above, shows America's most famous street. It is Pennsylvania Avenue, which leads from the national Capitol (at the bottom of the view) to the White House (at the top, slightly to the right among its trees). This is the "Avenue of the Presidents" and their inaugural parades, and the symbolic linkage between two lofty centers of the Nation's separated powers. But where the Avenue leaves the great Mall it shows also as a business street; and, more than that, a business street flanked conspicuously by a pocket of low-lying business slums. At the heart of the national establishment the Avenue is more than touched by a national disgrace.

To a virile young president named John F. Kennedy this was shockingly apparent even amid the music of bands and the cheers of inaugural crowds. He discussed it with Arthur J. Goldberg (now a Supreme Court justice), his observant friend. The ultimate outcome was the creation, in June 1962, of a President's Council for Pennsylvania Avenue on which ten of the country's respected architects, planners, landscapists, and social observers were asked to serve, with the National Capital Planning Commission as their base.

Superficially, the assignment was to report with proposals of how to bring the Avenue's glory back. But, as the *New York Times* observed, this required more than a "veneer of monumentality"—it required a plan in depth.

The view shows clearly what the central problem was. For, if the monumental Federal Triangle area which shows on the Avenue's left were to be flopped over, it would cover almost exactly the grubby triangle of business decay on the Avenue's right. Thus, on an Avenue which is intrinsically one of business and government both, it had been a disaster to treat each as separate.

Uniquely, the Council's study was an inquiry how government and business could collaborate: government creating a framework in which business could thrive, business accepting rules through which government could regain its dignity. The outcome involves the future of all of Washington's downtown.

The introduction and conclusion to this report are by Douglas Haskell, a member of the President's Council, and the description and evaluation in between are by Donald Canty. In addition to Haskell and Chairman Nathaniel A. Owings, members of the Council were Frederick Gutheim, Frederick L. Holborn, Dan Kiley, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Chloethiel Woodard Smith, Paul Thiry, Ralph Walker, and William Walton.



## The Avenue would become a clear shaft of space between the White House and the Capitol

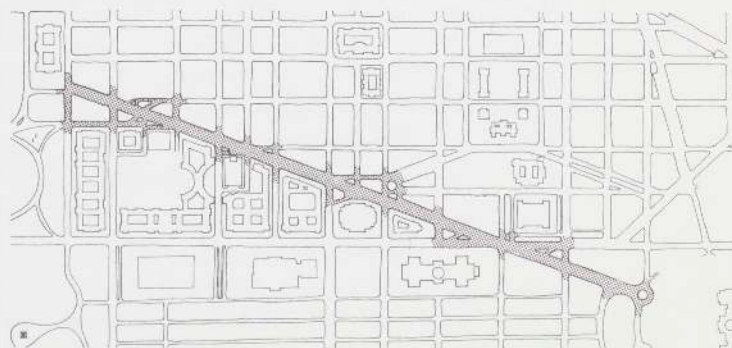
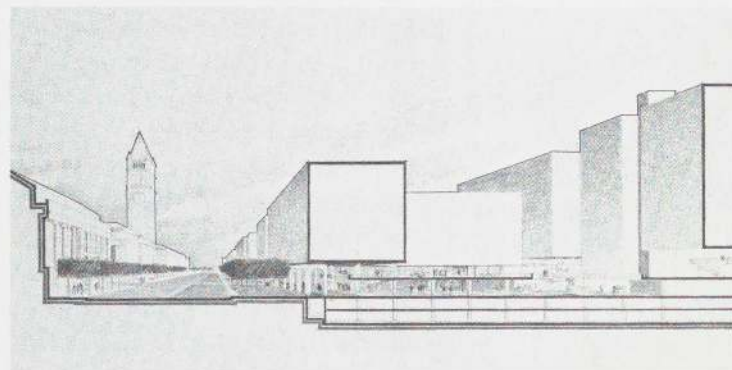
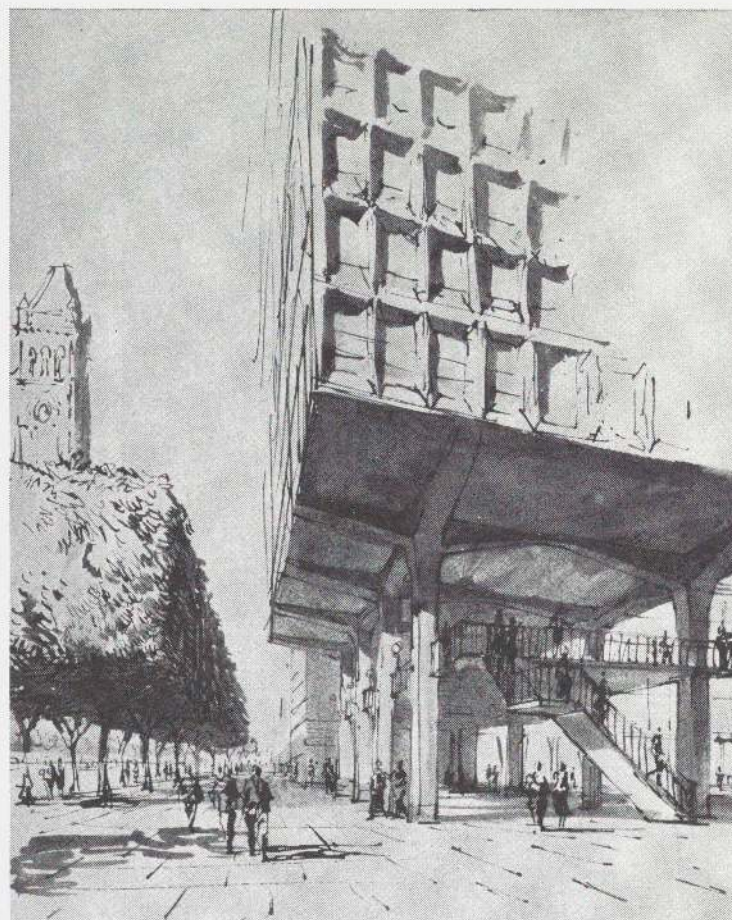
This is the plan: to allow the green-banded breadth of Pennsylvania Avenue to proceed ceremoniously, without interruption or hesitation, from the White House to the Capitol; to give new emphasis and expression to the Avenue as the link between these two symbolic structures, and to them as the Avenue's points of destination; to create a triangular zone north of the Avenue which will provide, for the first time, a place of transition between monumental and commercial Washington; to use the earth beneath this zone to relieve the Avenue and surrounding streets of the problems of the automobile, and the space above it for pedestrian concourses and promenades.

It is thus more than a plan, just as it is more than a façade-deep design for the buildings that wall the Avenue. It is a work of architecture in the three physical dimensions, cognizant of the fourth dimension of time—of history, past and future—as well. It gives new meaning to this city as a world capital, and unprecedented attention to this city as a city; it gives the kind of example to other American urban centers which Washington has steadfastly refused to give.

It begins with detail as fine as the pavement of the eight-lane Avenue, recommending that it be "rich but subdued," perhaps hard brick laid over concrete with a wide and permanent granite median. Sidewalks would become graduated shelves, shallow three-level "grandstands" for the watching of parades and processions. To achieve this effect, the new buildings on the north side would be held back 75 to 80 feet from the curb, and five feet of the Avenue's south side would be taken from autos and given to pedestrians. Ample use would be made of that favorite means of visual salvation in Washington, the planting of trees: two rows would stand along the south sidewalk, three along the north, and all would be formally and elegantly trimmed. Additional shade, and additional elegance, would be drawn from the elevation of the northerly buildings' first two stories to create an almost continuous arcade along much of the way.

The Avenue now moves in fits and starts, stuttering as it cuts across the basic gridiron of streets or meets other diagonals. The result is a series of confused and leaky intersections, in which small, meaningless bits of land are left as useless islands. The plan proposes that the Avenue cut a sharper, cleaner swath; that its intersections be greatly simplified; that the open spaces it encounters be clearly defined and carefully related to views of squares and concourses on either side. The plan takes pains to see that, in the process, it does not create more problems than it solves. The simplification and clarification of the Avenue's course is tied to broad-scale proposals for a thoroughgoing reorganization of the circulation patterns at the city's core.

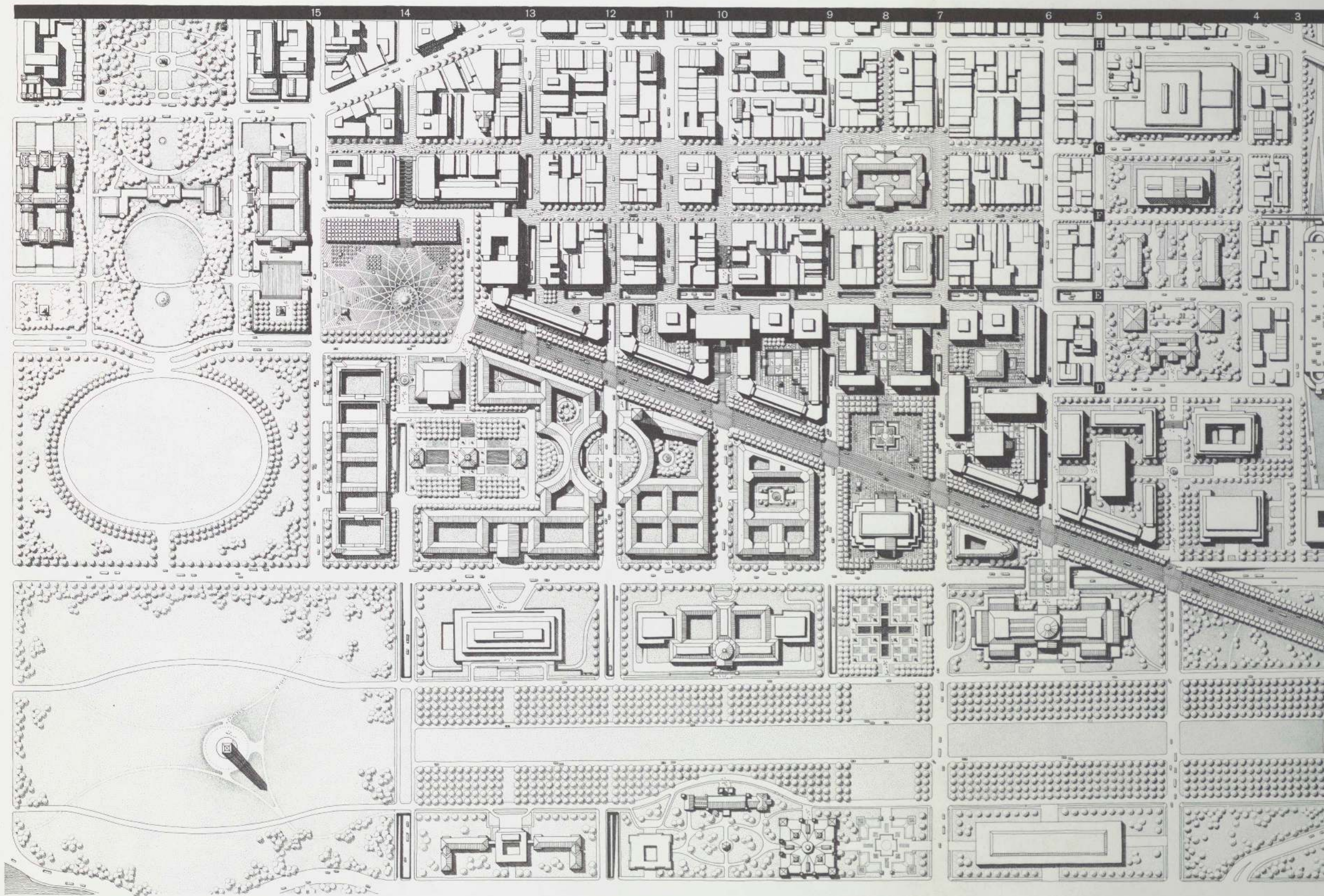
It is this constant attention to the relationship between the Avenue and its urban context, in fact, which gives the plan its singular sweep and significance. Through a series of cross axes and public-private superblocks, described on the "Archives" spread, it builds new bridges between the capital and the city. And even in its most ceremonial gesture—the proposal of a National Square at the Avenue's western end (overleaf)—the plan takes cognizance of how Washington's commercial and cultural life might be enhanced.



At present (map, above), the Avenue encounters a muddled series of multiple intersections on its way from White House to Capitol. The plan would greatly simplify its course, but would also apply a multilevel treatment to

the traffic problems of the blocks to the north (see section). The new buildings on the Avenue's north side (see rendering, top) would be arcaded to shelter pedestrians and provide added width for the tiered sidewalks.





**The White House:** The natural terminal point of the Avenue, yet too small for this role and partly blocked by the Treasury (double hollow square to its right), it would be given a forecourt linking its grounds to an immense new

**National Square.** West of the square's patterned pavement would be a massive White House gate, and to the north a densely treed belvedere joining it to the city's retail core. The square's eastern edge would mark the beginning of the

**Northern Triangle,** where most new federal construction would occur, balancing the existing Federal Triangle across the Avenue. In the Northern Triangle, however, public and private buildings would be planned together in multilevel

superblocks, typically with two sub-surface parking levels, ground level concourses, and an upper deck for pedestrians, crossing a dozen blocks. Fingers of space, including the major Archives cross axis, would reach north-

ward from the Avenue, connecting it physically and visually to the downtown business district. At Sixth Street, a platform placed over Constitution Avenue would give the National Gallery a forecourt opening onto Pennsylvania.

At Fourth Street, Constitution would underpass Pennsylvania, with an access cross axis leading north to John Marshall Place and the center of District government. The depression of Constitution would rid Pennsylvania



## The Avenue would become a clear shaft of space between the White House and the Capitol

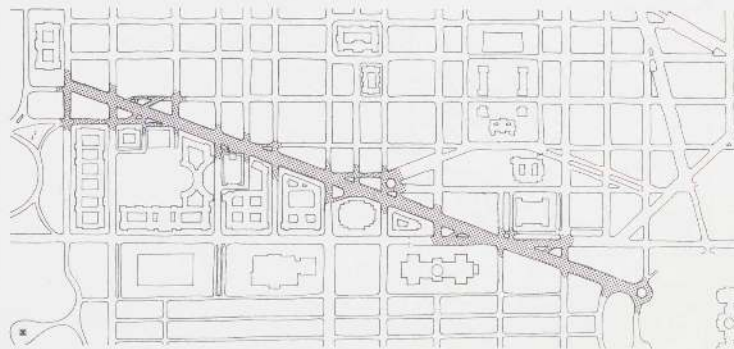
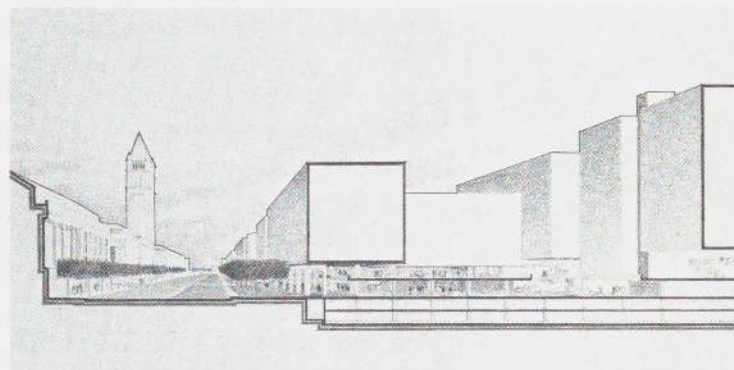
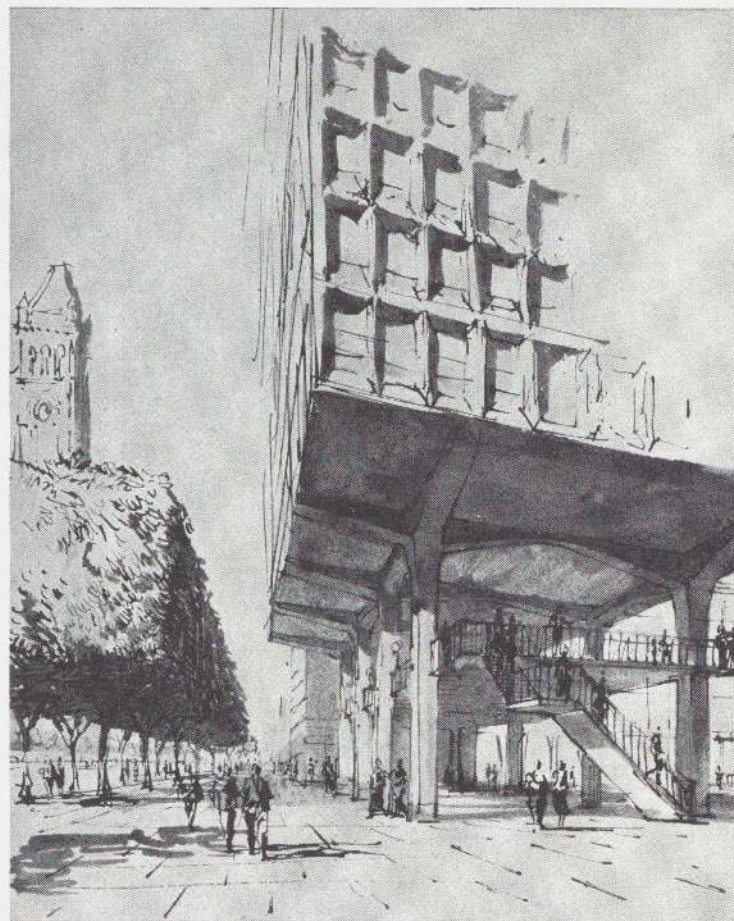
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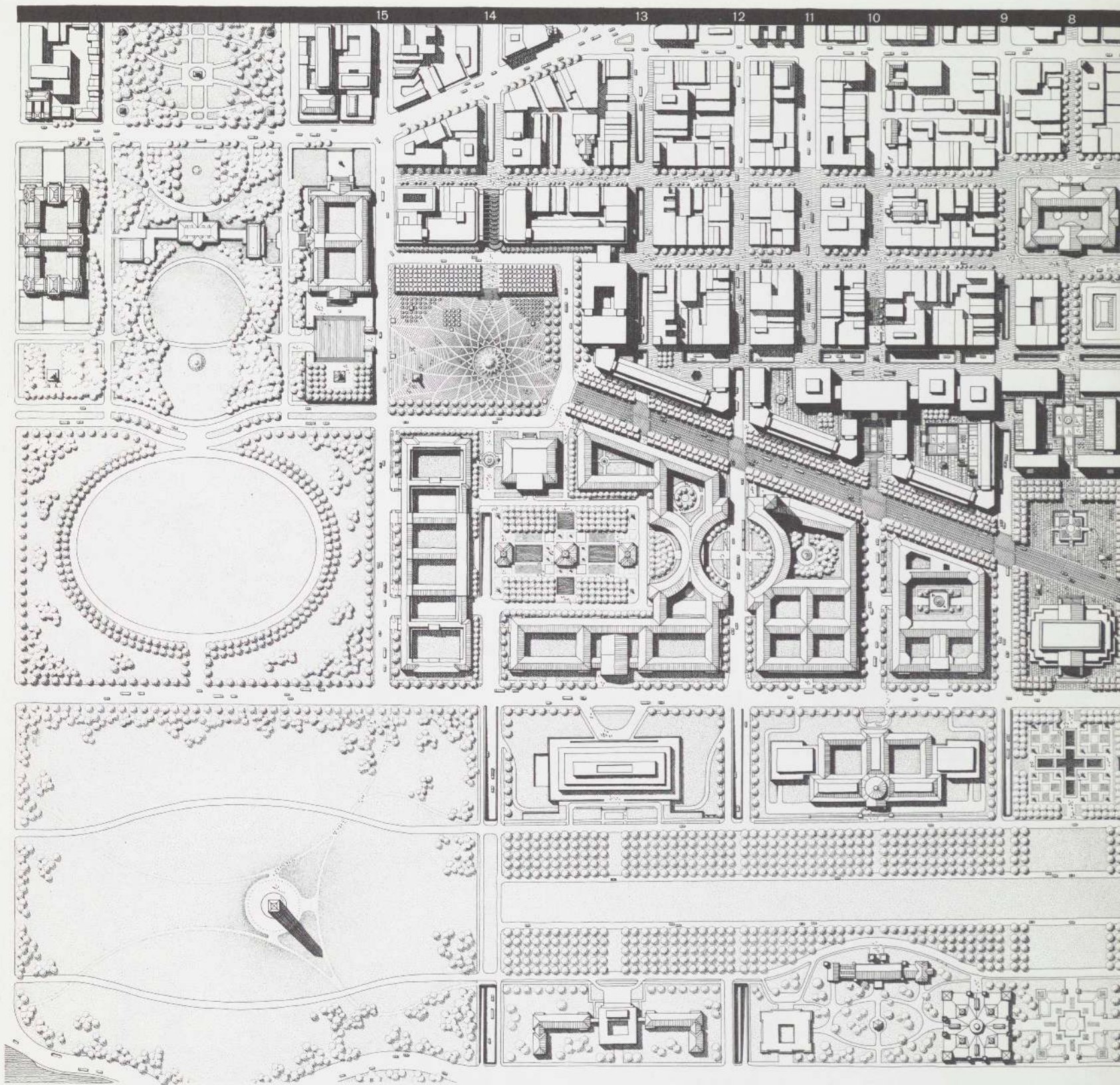
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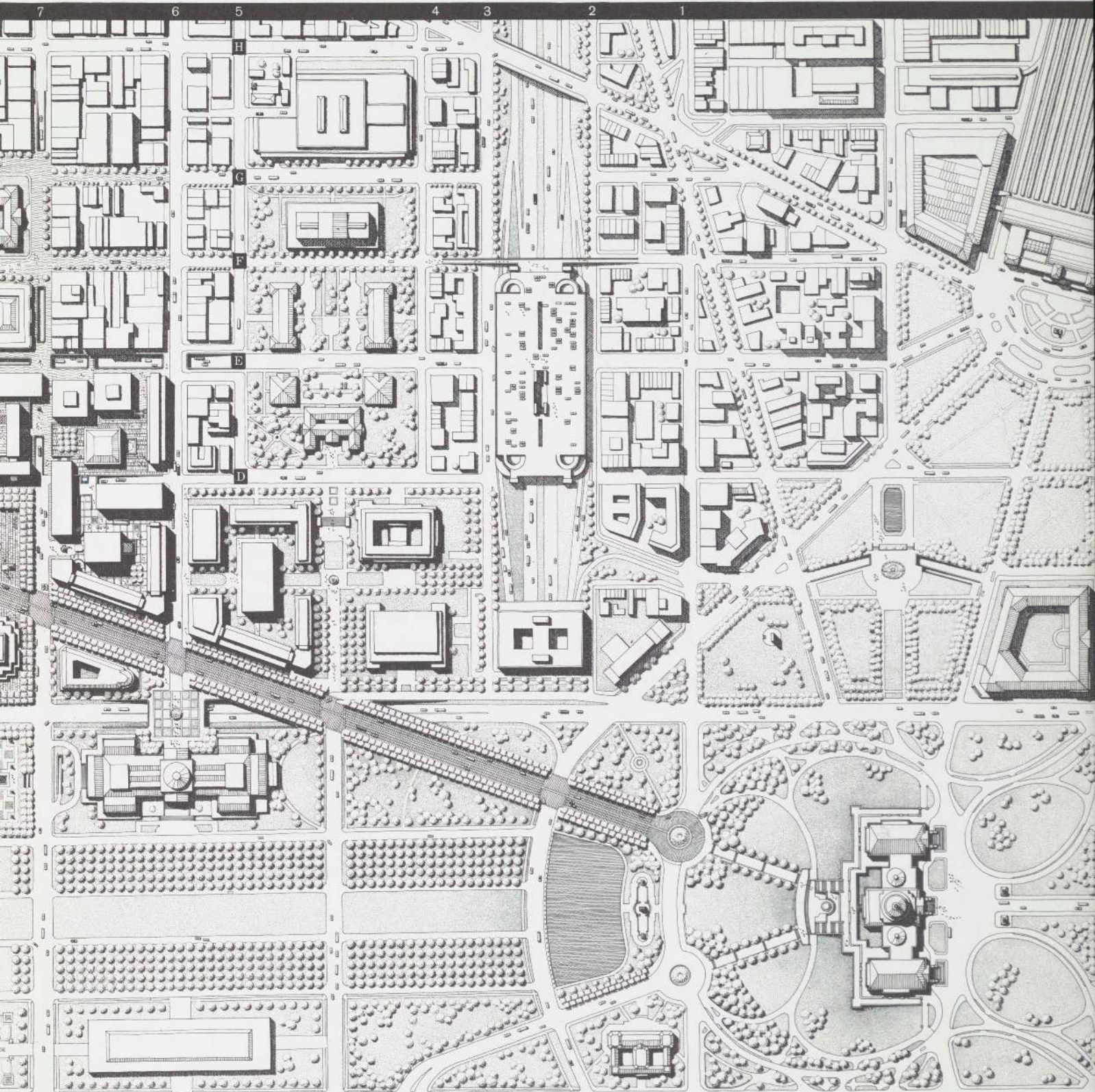
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jumbled six-way intersection which interrupts its approach to its eastern terminus below the Capitol. Just south of this terminus would be a large reflecting pool surrounded by a paved plaza. The only other major change at this

end would be completion of Louisiana Avenue, Pennsylvania's last intersection, in its arc through the Mall to Union Station. Beyond that, the grounds of The Capitol were considered to be outside of the plan's purview.











**The White House terminus would be  
a great National Square, as  
urbane as it would be ceremonial**

The boldest architectural proposal in the plan concerns the Avenue's western terminus, which is, at present, symbolic only of confusion. A jumble of offices and shops on the north side faces the District Building and the Federal Triangle, and in between is a multiple intersection that has been chopped to bits with particular thoroughness. The commercial buildings stand in the way of the stately Treasury at the Avenue's tip, and it, in turn, all but screens the White House from view.

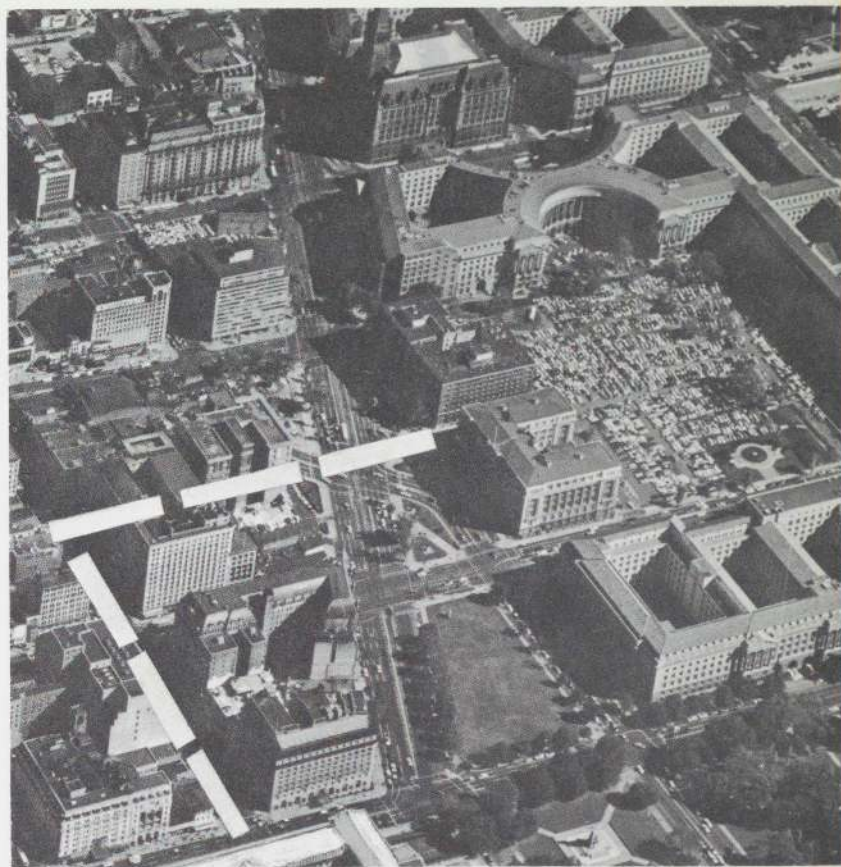
The plan envisions this as the site of a great National Square, measuring 800 by 900 feet. This grand space would be created by completing a process of demolishing old, non-air-conditioned buildings that has already spontaneously begun. Two major streets which now complicate the intersection, 14th and F, would tunnel underneath the square, at the same subsurface level as a parking garage for 600 cars.

The northern edge of the square would be pushed back far enough to display more of the Treasury colonnade but its principal focal point—and the principal terminal point of Pennsylvania Avenue—would be a new White House gate. The gate, say the authors of the plan, "would be large enough to be seen from far down the Avenue, would be designed by a master, would be strong enough to command respect, and would be enhanced by being sturdily flanked." Behind the gate would be a smaller square, Treasury Place, intended as a White House forecourt.

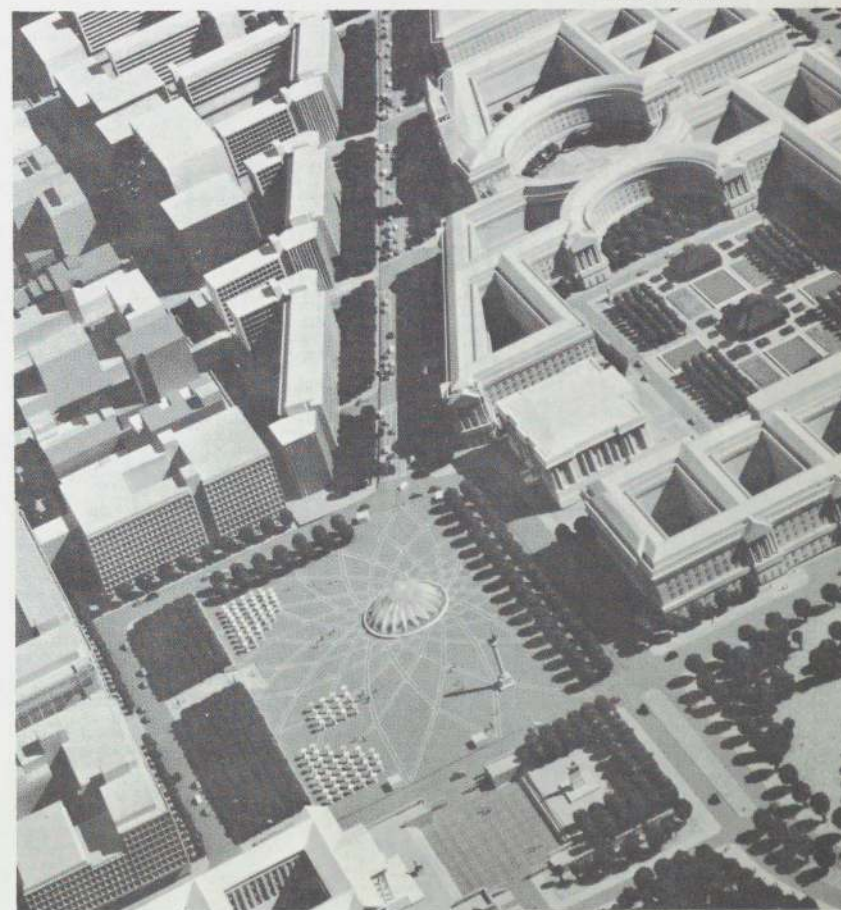
Thus linked to the President's house, the National Square becomes a place of national celebration, of national mourning, of greeting for the nation's guests. The plan, however, has in mind that it should serve urbanity as well as ceremony. Except for a large fountain, the square would be empty of permanent obstructions, but its radiating pavement would be bordered south and east by shade trees and enlivened by "seats, tables, vending accommodations, and umbrella-shaped shelters, all removable easily in advance of parades."

The north side would retain its commercial nature; it is, as the plan points out, the natural western anchor of the retail core which Washington's Downtown Progress organization hopes to revitalize. But commerce here would be raised to a dignity unprecedented for Washington. Along the square's north edge would be a belvedere, 20 feet above the level of the square and 200 feet in depth, covered with "tree planters, tables for outdoor restaurants, and convenient seats." The belvedere would be reached by broad stone steps leading to a glass-roofed shopping arcade that would serve as a dramatic gateway to the shopping district.

The east side, the plan suggests, would be an ideal location for a new press and broadcasting center; the present National Press Building would be the square's most prominent displacee. And the south could be given over to culture and entertainment. The open well of the District Building, the plan points out, would make an ideal auditorium "for ceremonies, symphony, or theater."



CAPITOL AIRVIEW



LOUIS CHECKMAN

The new National Square: From left to right in foldout are the White House gate, the neo-classic Treasury, and the glass-roofed shopping arcade leading to the city's retail core. In front of the arcade is a broad belvedere, reached

by monumental stone steps. Photos at right show the Avenue's western end as it is (top) and as it would be. Note that the automobiles have been removed from the Grand Plaza of the Federal Triangle (right in both photos).







**The Archives cross axis would be a  
multilevel link between the  
city's public and private lives**

Roughly halfway along the Avenue's course from the White House to the Capitol, at the site of the National Archives, the plan makes its most ambitious attempt at cross linkage between the public and private uses of Washington's core. It proposes creation of a major north-south axis along what is now Eighth Street, reaching from the Mall to the National Portrait Gallery three blocks above the Avenue. Across from the Archives would be a generous square called Market Place (the name has historic overtones), north of which Eighth Street would become a pedestrian way through a quadrangle of new private office buildings and hotels.

This Archives cross axis demonstrates the plan's determination to re-knit the city's central area, not just architecturally, but in terms of its very life. Market Place, for example, would be used by tourists and visitors to the Archives and the adjacent National Gallery; by federal employees from the projected new government office buildings on either side of the square; by occupants of the hotels and private office buildings in the quadrangle to the north; by shoppers from the major department stores nearby. The axis would, in effect, at once upgrade the commercial life of downtown Washington, nourish it, and draw it toward the Avenue and monuments of the Mall.

The Archives axis also demonstrates the principles which would be used in development of the entire Northern Triangle, through which it passes. The plan gives a significant form of recognition to the fact that the circulation problems of the Avenue and of downtown Washington—problems which could be intensified by the amount of new construction it envisions—are not susceptible to surface treatment. It proposes to go both above and below the surface, making the whole of the Northern Triangle a multi-level mechanism for the movement and storage of vehicles—and for the free and convenient passage of pedestrians.

The Northern Triangle would be built in superblocks reminiscent of New York's Rockefeller Center, groups of buildings carefully organized around a series of urban spaces. Beneath the entire great wedge would be two levels of parking, worked in around the vertical service cores of major buildings. E Street, the important commercial artery which meets the Avenue at its western end, would become a parking distributor whose ramps would provide the principal access to the underground garages. Within the superblocks, at ground level, would be a network of shopping concourses. Unifying the superblocks, a level above ground, would be a continuous, elevated pedestrian platform.

The impact of this concept would be widely felt. It would relieve the Avenue of congesting traffic (and of the curb-breaking driveways which mar its continuity). It would relieve the people who come here to work, to shop, to tour, of the worry of their cars. And it would give the nation its first large-scale example of the stratified city core, in which people and vehicles are separated to their mutual relief.

Three views of the Archives cross axis, looking toward the National Portrait Gallery: vantage point of the rendering at left is Market Place; the flanking buildings in the foreground are projected new hotels. The photo above,

taken from the Avenue, shows the section of Eighth Street to become a pedestrian way. At right, the entire axis, beginning with the proposed sculpture garden on the Mall to the south of the Archives building,

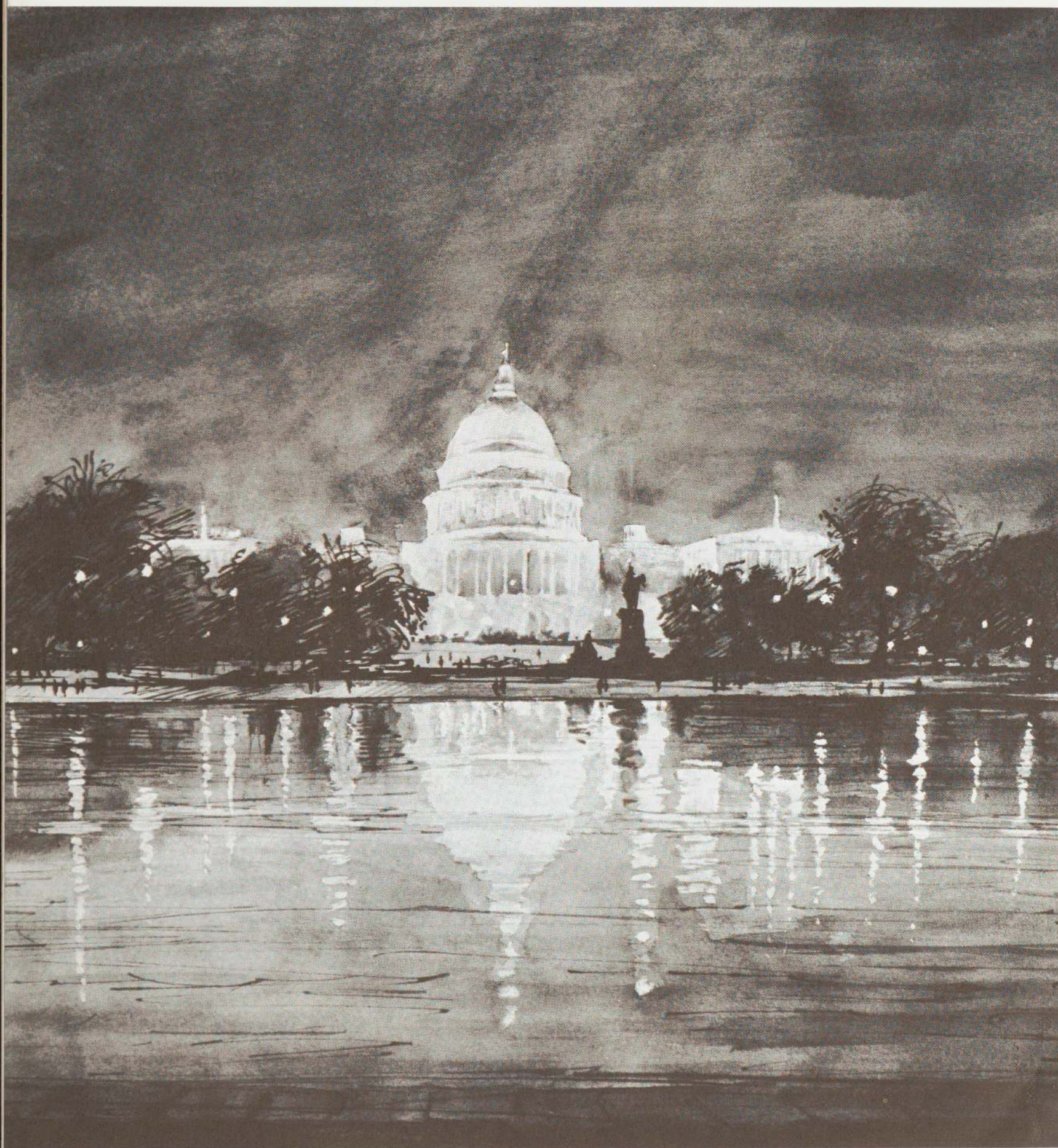


EDMUND BARRETT



LOUIS CHECKMAN







**How can the shining vision be made reality? The authors propose a single agency to see it through**

The question how so ramifying a concept could be implemented has many people confused.

To begin with, the Avenue would not be at all an "urban renewal" undertaking in the usual sense, either as to procedures or results. The basis of national action here is that the Avenue of the Presidents and its ancillary area are of national interest and public concern. In order that the buildings of the national commonwealth may stand with dignity instead of chaos alongside business buildings, there must be controls.

Moreover, such controls cannot be facade regulations alone, but must embrace such things as handling of transportation and parking, fitting buildings over arcades, distribution of buildings on superblocks. The architecture and the transportation, the government and private land use, must all mesh.

For this reason the Council asks for the plans to be put in the hands of a single administrator, agency, or authority, and phased carefully over the years. Above all, such a project must not become a political football for dozens of agencies to kick around and confuse. Architecture is not an art that can stay noble in a grand chaos of conflicting decisions. The agency would take charge of the plans as a whole and would deal with all others having jurisdictions and concern but not as an administrative "assembly" of them all.

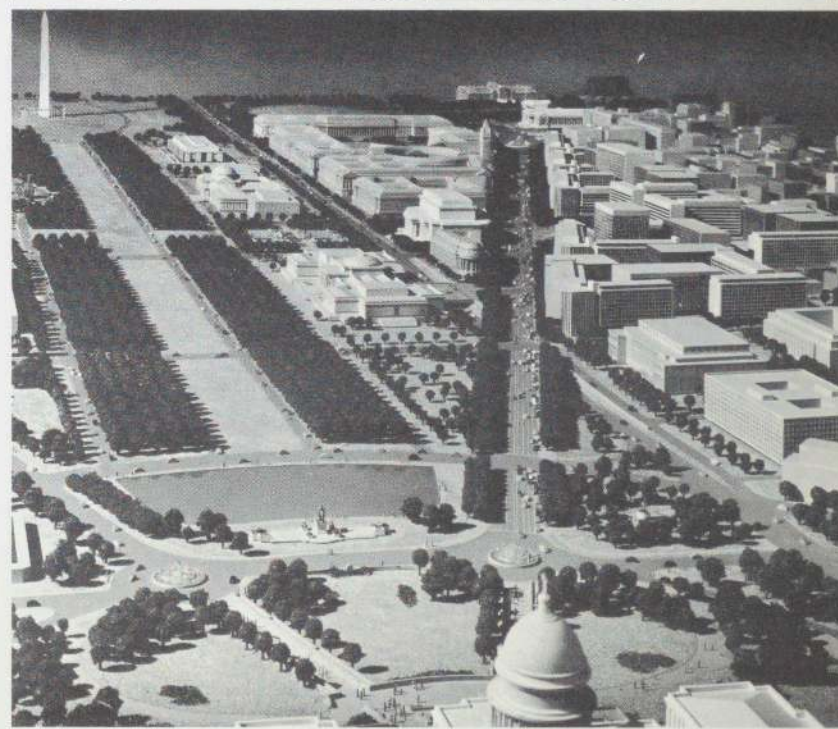
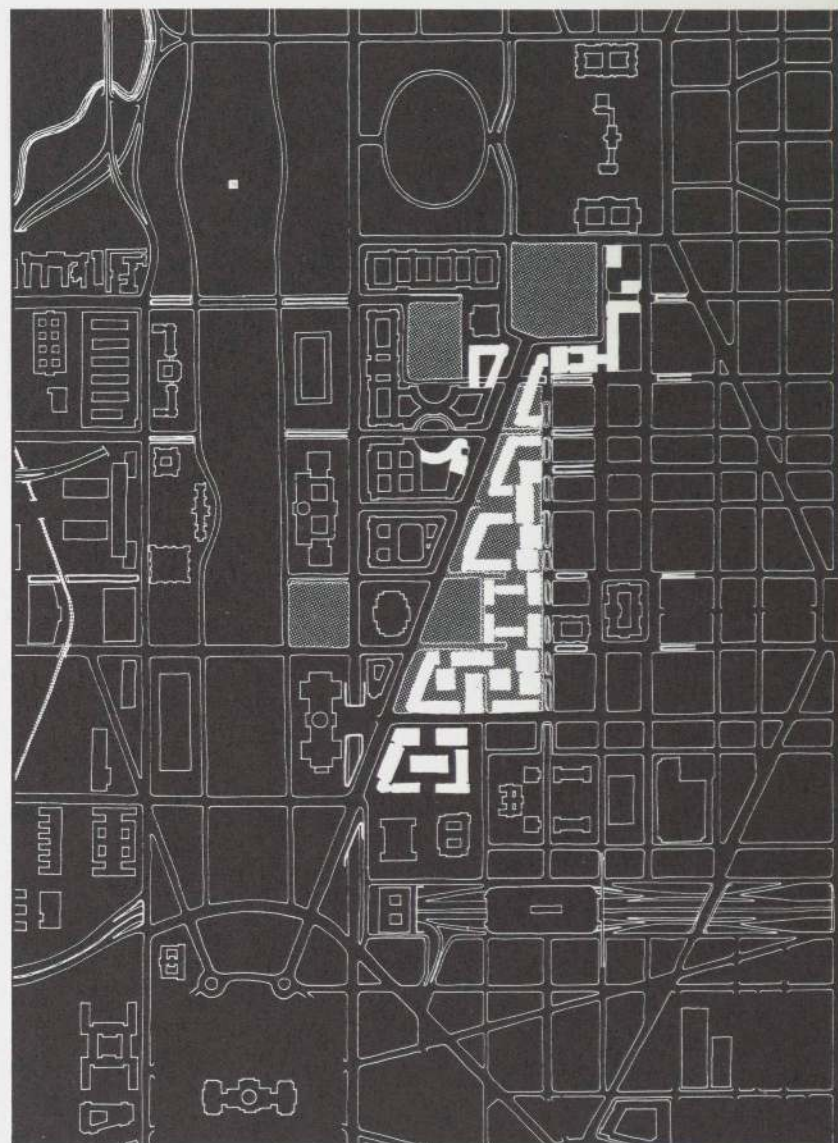
Public costs and appropriations necessary have been vastly exaggerated in some quarters which can contemplate billions for utility or highway construction and never wince. From a total cost that might approximate half a billion, one must subtract much and take many factors into account. Thus, first of all, at least one half of total construction would be by private investment for very secure conditions of return. Among the public buildings and utility improvements, a number are either already appropriated for or independently necessary in any case. Much could be self-liquidating enterprise which could bring the government a return. And finally, the economic effect of the plan is to increase employment, commerce, and tax revenues out of fresh activity which its provisions would generate.

Even supposing that the total public cost, self-liquidating features and all, were to approximate what would be the present dollar cost of the Federal Triangle—around \$300 million—this, spread over 15 years, would be half as much annually as the reported estimate for a private office development, "Main Place" in Dallas, whose underlying features so resemble those of the plan.

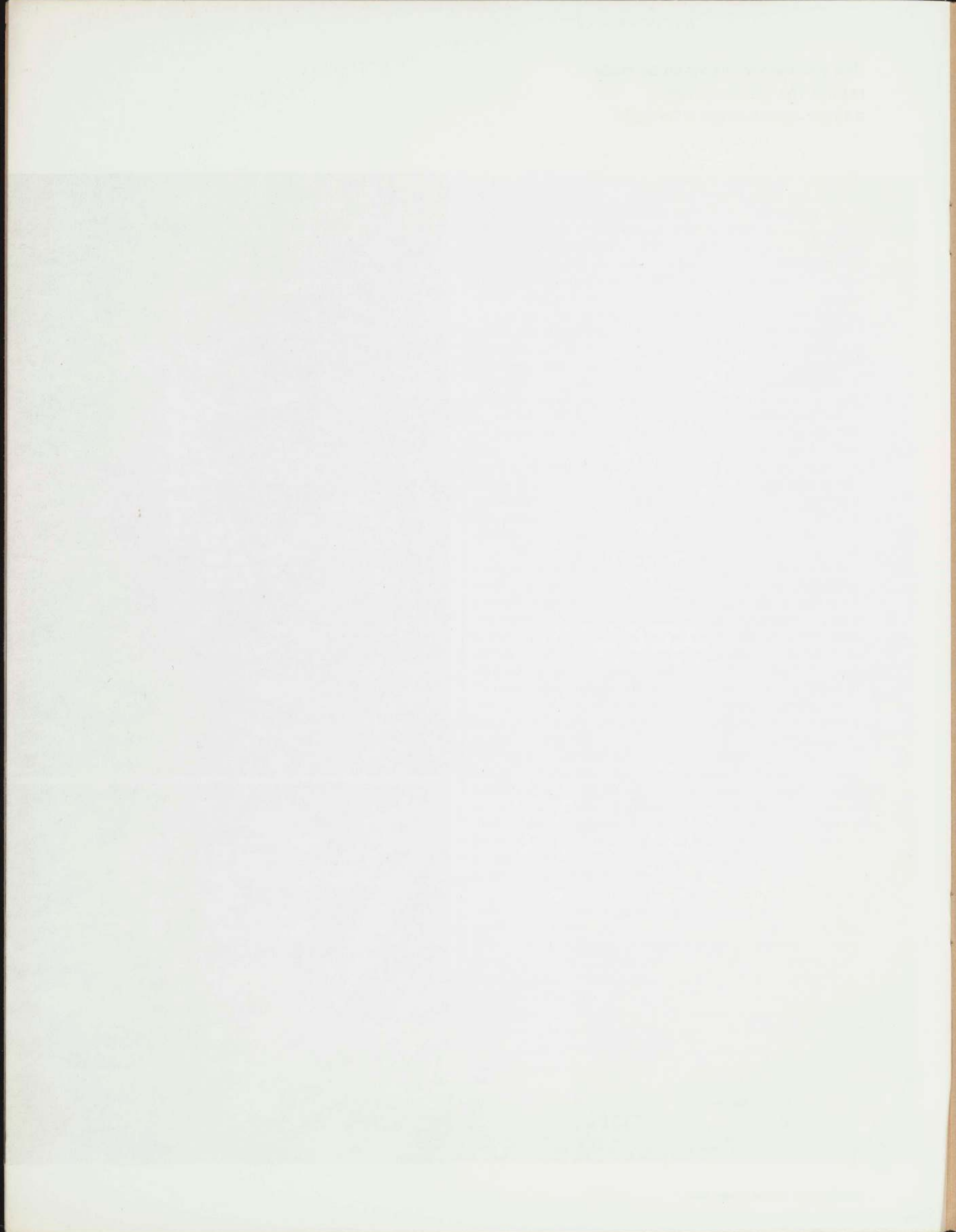
Moreover, even if the price tag should reach into billions—which it most definitely would not—this would be a cheap price for starting rescue of a national capital from the decline with which it is faced. The Pennsylvania traffic proposals alone are prototype ones that could be of great value to many large U.S. towns. And then as to scale: the older members of the Council have witnessed an increase of U.S. population by one-half within their own adult lives. What next?

The Capitol shimmers in the reflecting pool flanking the Avenue's eastern end. The pool and its surrounding plaza would bring the Avenue to a graceful terminus, but they would be of even more benefit to the Capitol and

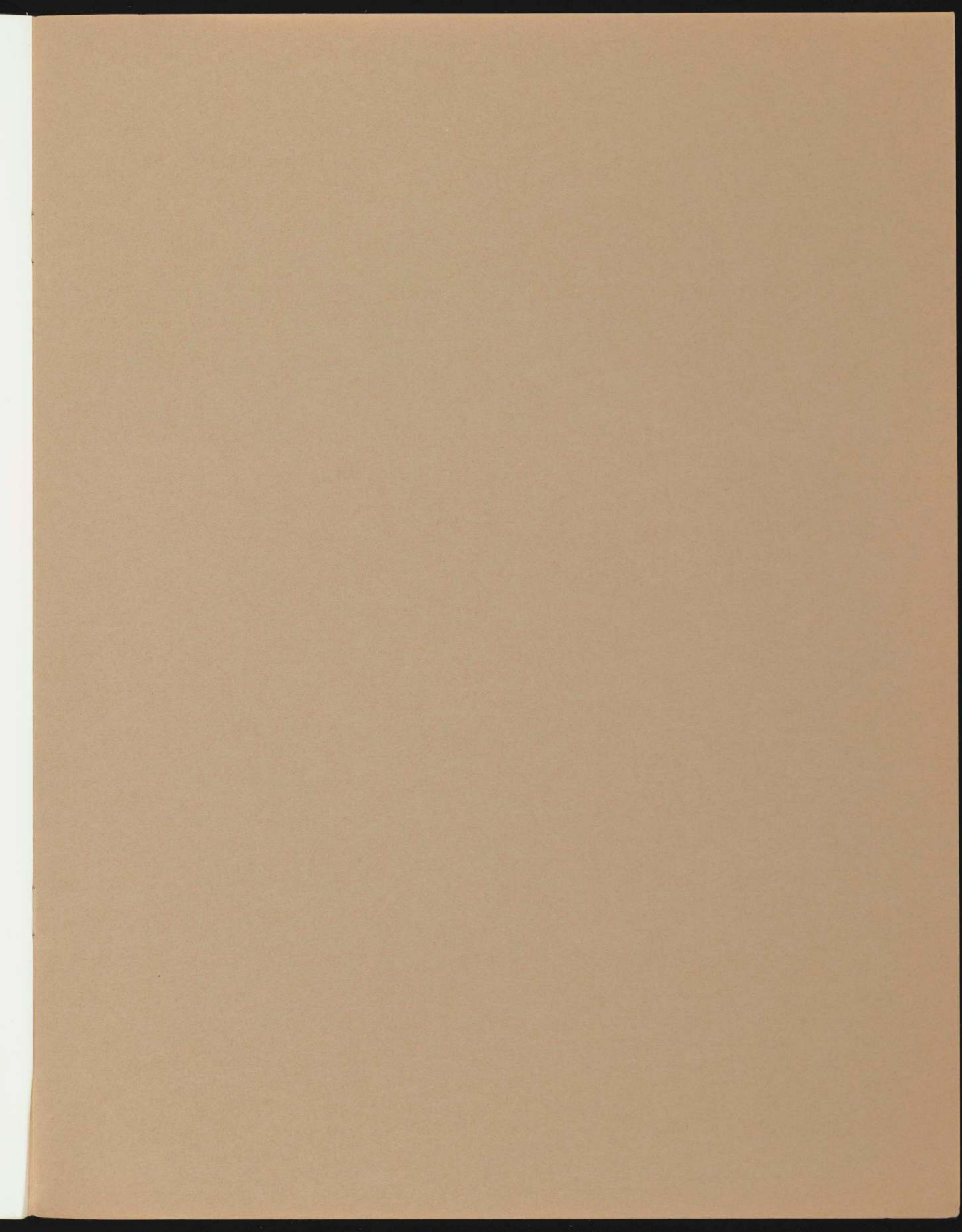
to the stately Mall (see photo right). Above, a final summary of the plan. Gray areas are those to be developed on more than a single level. New private buildings are shown in white, and new public buildings cross-hatched.













Architectural Forum/magazine of building/published by TIME, INC.