

Developers, Government Planners Eyeing Land Around D.C. General

by Edward Spannaus

The official planning agency for the Federal government has adopted long-term plans for the area around D.C. General Hospital — over the vehement objections of the community — which envision getting rid of the hospital and other existing facilities, and which would force the removal of existing low-income housing in the adjacent neighborhoods.

This is typical of the manner in which such “urban renewal” and “redevelopment” programs have worked since the 1950s and ’60s in cities across the United States, and it is why such programs became known as “Negro Removal.” They are a prime example of the exultation of “shareholder values” over the principle of the General Welfare.

In the District of Columbia, as was documented in the March 23 *EIR*, the most powerful force behind such programs as “Negro Removal” and the shutdown of D.C. General — the only public hospital in the city, which serves a predominantly African-American constituency — is the secretive Federal City Council, an organization of leading banking, real estate, and business interests in the city, founded and largely run by the *Washington Post*.

The ‘Legacy’ Plan

The master plan developed by the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), entitled “Extending the Legacy,” focusses on the axes of the city radiating out from the U.S. Capitol, particularly North Capitol Street, South Capitol Street, and East Capitol Street, the area in which D.C. General Hospital and other facilities are now located. (The Mall, running westward from the Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial, is the equivalent of “West Capitol.”)

The East Capitol component of the plan calls for a new park on the west bank of the Anacostia River, which “would replace RFK Stadium and adjacent institutional buildings with gardens, fountains, and waterfalls connected to playing fields, marinas, and a riverside nature preserve.” It adds: “New housing and commercial development would complete the redevelopment of the area.”

A scale-model of the plan on display at the NCPC headquarters, depicts a complete transformation of the East Capitol-Anacostia Waterfront Park area, which now includes RFK Stadium and large parking lots, the D.C. Armory, D.C. General Hospital, and the D.C. Jail. In the model — and in the written descriptions — all those structures have disappeared,

and they are replaced by an environmental park and recreational area, which is bordered by high-rise private development. High-rises are shown both in the area which is presently Federal land, and also on the block-wide strip which abuts the Federal land, between 18th and 19th Streets, from C Street N.E., to D Street S.E., which is presently a mostly black area of older private houses and some subsidized housing.

Moreover, the model shows a marina on the Anacostia River at the foot of Massachusetts Avenue, S.E., which has high-rise buildings surrounding it. In the model, other high-rise apartment buildings and a baseball diamond are shown behind the high-rises, in the location of the present hospital complex.

The introduction to the NCPC’s “Extending the Legacy” plan, denies that this is a “comprehensive master plan,” but terms it a “framework,” and “a basic guide for long-term growth” over the next 50 to 100 years.

And, in light of the current controversy around the proposed shutdown of D.C. General, NCPC spokesmen have denied that their schema calls for getting rid of the hospital. Nevertheless, it is indisputable that their plans depict a complete transformation of the area — with *no* hospital.

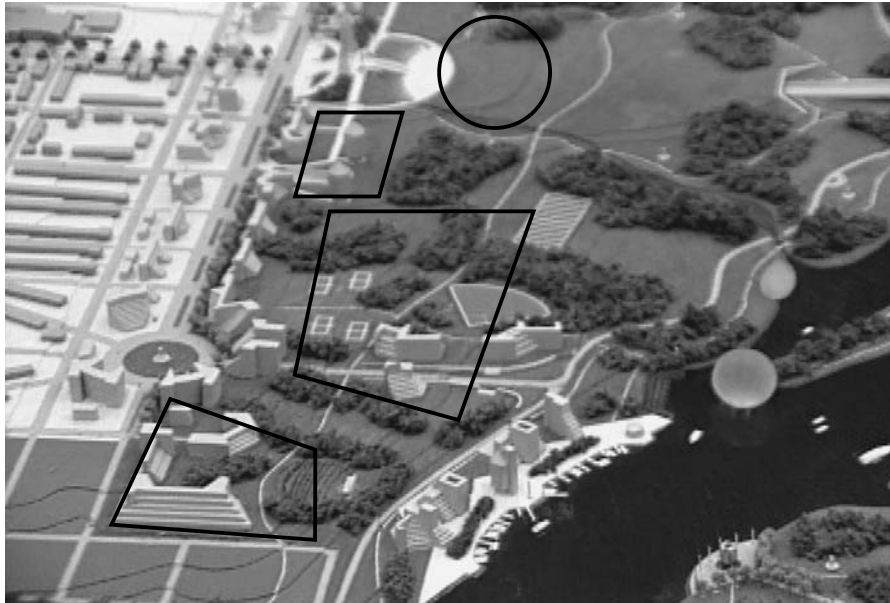
The Federal City Council Role

During the development of the “Legacy” plan (or “concept,” as the NCPC calls it), the Federal City Council (FCC), the Greater Washington Board of Trade, and other groups were “at the table,” according to knowledgeable sources. The FCC seems to have gotten particularly favorable treatment as the plan was developed, according to NCPC records examined by *EIR*. It was allowed to participate in one of the earliest briefings (a “focus group”) for D.C. government agency and department heads on March 3, 1993; the FCC was the *only* private group invited to this government event.

Then, in September 1993, the FCC participated in another special briefing conducted with about a half-dozen civic organizations. And (as did some other organizations), it received a special briefing to its Executive Board on Feb. 27, 1996.

‘Screwing the Neighborhoods’

In the September 1993 group briefing, representatives of the preservationist-oriented “Committee of 100 for the Fed-



The photograph shows the National Capital Planning Commission's scale model of planned "redevelopment" of the area surrounding the present location of D.C. General Hospital. The large "redeveloped area" shown in the center, is where that hospital now stands. The locations of other structures evidently slated for removal, are: the D.C. Jail (lower left), the D.C. Armory (square in upper left), and RFK Stadium (circle at upper right). In the Commission's model, the row of high-rise buildings, and other new buildings on the west (left) side of the park-like area, would displace present residential housing, and would wall off the neighborhood from the waterfront.

eral City" were extremely critical of the NCPC concept, suggesting that the NCPC was just paying "lip service" to the idea of residential neighborhoods, and asking what had happened to the residential areas in the South Capitol part of the plan.

They also objected to what they called the NCPC's "pre-occupation" with the East Capitol area, saying that the NCPC had a stronger case for its proposals for North and South Capitol Streets, but that East Capitol was different, because it is not a main artery, and that it doesn't bifurcate the neighborhood. "If on paper you say, well, this area needs to be strengthened, what you're doing is screwing the neighborhoods," one of the Committee of 100 representatives said.

While all this was going on, the Executive Director of the FCC was sitting in imperial silence, not saying a word, according to the NCPC transcript of the meeting.

The intense controversy generated by the "Legacy" scheme for the East Capitol area, has also been described to *EIR* by both community activists and professionals who were involved. According to one activist, the first draft of the plan called for wiping out one whole neighborhood, and for a new sports complex replacing RFK Stadium; those features were changed, but the fundamental parameters of the plan remained the same.

Notes taken by an NCPC staffer at a May 27, 1997 public meeting for the East Capitol community, reflect heated criticisms of the Legacy plan. The notes indicate that community

members said that the plan calls for too much development, and that the plan "appears to demolish existing residential neighborhoods and displace people." One participant's comments are reported as follows: "The plan calls for a 'Hadrian's Wall' of buildings separating the East Capitol Street residential area from the park and waterfront. The high-rises will isolate residents from the river. The entire development should be on a much more human scale to match existing neighborhoods. . . . Get rid of the big buildings."

While some modifications were made, the wall of high-rise buildings remains in the plan, and many of those high-rise buildings would require the demolition of existing housing in the mostly black area.

The 2012 Olympics

A more immediate scheme for the area, being pushed by the same interests that make up the Federal City Council, is to develop the riverfront area as one of the venues for the 2012 Olympics. "The Washington/Baltimore Regional 2012 Coalition," which is drawing up Washington's bid for that year's Olympic games, includes the Federal Communications Commission, the D.C. Chamber of Commerce, and representatives of major banks (such as Bank of America), corporations (such as Mobil), and some of the most powerful Washington law firms.

Their plan involves a renovation and expansion of RFK Stadium, which would host track and field events for the Olympics. Boxing would be held at the Armory, and archery events along the waterfront. Sources in the community and D.C. politics believe that much more development is planned to go with the renovation of the stadium, including expansion both to the north, and to the south—where D.C. General is now located. It is certain that commercial development would also occur adjacent to the expanded stadium, which would displace existing low-income housing.

All of this is only the tip of the iceberg on major "redevelopment" plans under way in the Anacostia region to the east and south of this area. Sizable projects are planned, or under way, in the South Capitol area and around the old Navy Yard, which will also have the effect of driving the poorer, mostly black residents of these areas farther out in the city, or outside of the District altogether into neighboring Prince George's County, Maryland—that is, if they haven't been killed already by the lack of adequate hospital and health care services in the area.