

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 1, 2014

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## Studies Support National Mall Underground

Sponsors Requesting Independent Commission to Develop Implementation Plan

Washington, DC – As Americans prepare for Independence Day celebrations, one of the country's greatest treasures, the National Mall, continues to face myriad threats to its vitality and viability, both natural and manmade. Just eight years ago, record-breaking rainfall wreaked havoc, flooding museums and public buildings in the Federal Triangle and National Mall. Daily, the Mall is flooded with vehicular traffic. After 15 months of various studies, the nonprofit National Coalition to Save Our Mall has developed a novel underground solution to address future challenges as part of its larger mission to ensure an open and sustainable National Mall for the country's third century.

With input from leading planning, design, engineering, architectural and environmental experts, the Coalition's broadly supported proposal for a National Mall Underground would address anticipated future flood threats as well as provide visitor welcome facilities and parking beneath the Mall's central grassy panels. The three-level Underground, to be located between the Smithsonian Castle and the National Museum of Natural History, will provide parking for 900 cars and 200 tour buses, not only reducing congestion and pollution on city streets but also improving visitor access to Smithsonian museums and cultural events.

"The Mall is the centerpiece of the district economy, culture, identity and tourism. If you're talking tourism and not talking about the Mall you're missing something crucial. This project has the potential to make the Mall for the 21st century a place people populate and animate," said Former DC mayor Anthony Williams, now head of the Federal City Council.

In advance of heavy storms, vehicles will be removed from the garage and the lower two stories will act as a 34-million-gallon cistern to collect storm water. Separate irrigation cisterns will collect rainwater and groundwater to be used for National Mall irrigation.

Constructing cisterns under the Mall was proposed in 2011 by a joint federal-DC government study conducted in the aftermath of flooding on June 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> in 2006 that inundated buildings along Constitution Avenue. Millions of dollars in damages were sustained at the National Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Department of Commerce, and IRS. Three Smithsonian museums were closed to the public following that storm. With no source of funding and National Mall management divided among eight agencies including the Smithsonian, the National Park Service, and the Architect of the Capitol, no agency was able to implement the study's recommendations.

"The Underground is a comprehensive proposal and consolidates multiple ideas into one innovative, sustainable solution. It is a step toward the Coalition's ambition to encourage a public vision of a 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall as the stage for our evolving democracy," said Judy Scott Feldman, PhD, Board Chair, National Coalition to Save Our Mall.

The multi-purpose facility will include much-needed public amenities for local residents and tourists including a National Mall Visitors Center, restrooms, food concessions, security, and first aid facilities. Revenue from bus and car parking, along with creative public-private partnership financing, will offset the major costs of construction and operations.

This innovative, multi-purpose, public-private approach is proposed by local philanthropist Albert H. Small, the nonprofit National Coalition to Save Our Mall, and world-renowned architect Arthur Cotton Moore. The design concept is the culmination of 15 months of study and a number of engineering, traffic, and parking studies, using input from over 200 meetings with members of Congress, the Obama Administration, federal and District agencies, security authorities, and business and civic groups. The National Mall Underground Exhibition, a graphic depiction of the need, the concept, and similar engineering projects around the world, is located at 1000 Connecticut Avenue, NW, (at K Street across from the Farragut North metro stop) in Washington, DC.

The National Park Service, whose turf grass restoration is scheduled for the proposed area for the proposed National Mall Underground between 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Streets, has stated that the new grass can be taken up in future to allow construction of the underground facility. An alternative offered by the National Coalition to Save Our Mall would be to start the turf grass restoration for the areas between 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Streets, and 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Streets, while the proposed commission conducts its evaluation.

“The National Mall Underground is a multi-faceted concept that will help protect the National Mall and federal buildings while enhancing access to and enjoyment of ‘the people’s place.’ We know the design works based on other similar projects from Washington Harbor to the Netherlands” said Arthur Cotton Moore, FAIA, a renowned architect and Member of the NCSOM Board of Directors.

The National Mall Underground sponsors are asking the President and Congress to authorize the creation of a commission or task force to independently evaluate the project’s feasibility and develop a plan to implement it. Sen. Ben Cardin (D-MD) and Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) are currently collaborating on developing legislation to create such a commission.

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### **About the National Coalition to Save Our Mall**

The mission of the Coalition is to provide an organized voice for the public on Mall matters, to advocate comprehensive, visionary planning for the Mall in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, and – working in collaboration with government, nonprofits, and the business sector – to implement forward-looking improvements that support the Mall’s continuing role in American democracy. The Coalition’s long-term vision for the Mall includes expanding its boundaries to include federal land along the Potomac River to accommodate new museums, memorials and public events so the Mall can continue its important role as stage for America’s Democracy.