BUZZARD POINT COMMUNITY PLANNING ASSISTANCE TEAM

Alternative Futures: Final Recommendations
The American Planning Association provides leadership in the development of vital communities by advocating excellence in community planning, promoting education and citizen empowerment, and providing the tools and support necessary to effect positive change.

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INTRODUCTION

Community assistance is built into the professional role of a planner. One principle of the AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct states that certified planners shall aspire to “seek social justice by working to expand choice and opportunity for all persons, recognizing a special responsibility to plan for the needs of the disadvantaged and to promote racial and economic integration.” Yet another principle is that certified planners should aspire to “contribute time and effort to groups lacking in adequate planning resources and to voluntary professional activities.” In the early 1990s, the American Planning Association (APA) and its professional institute, the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), began an on-the-ground effort of addressing issues of social equity by providing pro bono technical assistance to communities facing limited resources. By pairing expert urban planning professionals from around the country with citizen planners from local communities, the initiative seeks to foster community education, engagement, and empowerment. APA and AICP have worked with many communities across the country, including most recently, a concerted recovery effort in the Gulf Coast region in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Through the American Planning Association’s Community Assistance Program (CAP), the American Institute of Certified Planners organized a Planning Assistance Team (PAT) in November 2009 to conduct an intensive study of Buzzard Point in Southwest Washington, D.C. The PAT consisted of a national team of expert planners and design professionals whose particular expertise was selected based on input from community leaders and their insights on the specific needs of the study area and scope of the project. The Buzzard Point project was initiated at the request of D.C. Councilmember Tommy Wells (Ward 6). APA staff worked with the Office of D.C. Councilmember Tommy Wells and the Capitol Riverfront Business Improvement District to identify and connect the Team with residents, community organizations, business owners, developers, government agencies, and other stakeholders in the area’s neighborhoods.

Work began in August 2009 as APA staff worked with the Office of Councilmember Tommy Wells and community leaders to identify the expertise needed for the project, so the Team member selection process could begin. The specializations needed for the project were: housing/integrated community development; urban design; parks/waterfronts; economics/development; and transportation/transit. On October 19, the Team Leader, Alan Mallach, FAICP, and APA staff met with Councilmember Tommy Wells and a group of stakeholders to discuss the opportunities and challenges associated with the Buzzard Point study area. After compiling and assembling resources from D.C. government agencies, including the D.C. Office of Planning and District Department of Transportation, and other stakeholders, the Team was provided with a briefing book to study and reference throughout the project. Additionally, prior to the Team’s on-site visit, APA staff met with the Advisory Neighborhood Commission to discuss the project and seek further input from community residents.

The Team arrived in Southwest Washington, D.C. on November 18 for a kick-off meeting with the community. The following day, the Team took a walking tour of Buzzard Point and met with more than 40 stakeholders throughout the day, including neighborhood groups, government agencies, property owners, developers, and residents, at the King-Greenleaf Recreation Center. The Team also spoke with the District’s Office of Planning Director, Harriet Tregoning, to discuss the challenges and opportunities in the Buzzard Point area. Over the next two days, the Team met to analyze all of the data and generate a preliminary report. The Team presented their preliminary findings and recommendations in a public meeting on November 21. The presentation was followed with comments and questions by the community members and stakeholders in attendance. The presentation was then made available on the APA website to solicit further feedback for the Team’s final report.
OVERVIEW

The purpose of the PAT

In November 2009, at the request of D.C. Councilmember Tommy Wells, a Planning Assistance Team (PAT) was assembled by the American Planning Association (APA) to study the Buzzard Point area and make recommendations for its future.

The purpose of the PAT initiative is to serve communities by helping them address planning issues that deal with social equity, inclusion, and accessibility. Staff from the American Planning Association and its professional institute, the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), works with the community, key stakeholders and the host organizations to assemble a team of planners from around the country with the specific expertise needed for the project. After preliminary meetings and review of briefing materials on the study area, the Team meets on-site for three to five days during which a series of site visits, focused discussions, and analysis is performed. On the final day, the Team reports their preliminary findings and results back to the community with local press in attendance. A written report of final recommendations, following the on-site visit completes the Team’s work. This report contains the final independent recommendations concluding the Buzzard Point PAT. While the Team’s work ends with the publication of this report, APA will continue to serve as a resource for the Buzzard Point community.

Notably, the recommendations that follow below do not represent a small area plan or a plan for zoning changes. The report is the Team’s vision for how the neighborhood should develop over the next 20 to 25 years. During site visits, public meetings, and scheduled interviews, the Team gained valuable insights from the residents of Southwest D.C., stakeholders including the development and business communities, Fort McNair, PEPCO, and various government agencies including the D.C. Office of Planning, D.C. Department of Transportation, D.C. Housing Authority, D.C. Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, D.C. Water and Sewer Authority, and National Capitol Planning Commission.

Description of the Buzzard Point area

Buzzard Point is an area located in Southwest Washington, DC bordering the north side of the Anacostia River just west of the point of confluence of the Anacostia and Potomac rivers. While for purposes of the PAT, Buzzard Point was defined as the area running south of M Street, which incorporates a large residential area, the District Office of Planning (OP) defines Buzzard Point more narrowly, limiting it to the area below P Street, and excluding the greater part of the residential area. Although a small area, Buzzard Point (as defined for purposes of the PAT) contains a wide variety of physical settings and features, including residential development in the northern half of the area, from M to both sides of P Street, and a diverse mixture of largely non-residential uses below that, of which Fort McNair to the west and a major PEPCO substation to the east stand out as the most prominent.

Team visit/PAT process

The Team met and assembled in the study area with an open meeting on the evening of Wednesday, November 18, 2009. The process included a kickoff meeting to gather community input, a neighborhood tour, interviews with local experts, and an intense working session. Through this process the team prepared a vision and recommendations that are high level in nature, and intended to inform and assist local stakeholders and government as they move forward with a formal planning process. Team findings were presented at a community meeting immediately following the PAT, and this final report of the findings will be delivered to the Southwest Waterfront Business Improvement District and the office of Councilmember Tommy Wells.

1 While we recognize that the definition of the area used in the PAT does not conform to that of the Office of Planning, in the interest of consistency with the charge to the PAT, when referring to Buzzard Point throughout this report, we are referring to the area from M Street south, except where clearly stated to the contrary.
SITE ANALYSIS & CONTEXT

Context of Buzzard Point

In some ways, Buzzard Point, located in Southwest D.C., feels isolated from the rest of the District, despite the dome of the United States Capitol clearly visible to the north. The Southeast Freeway (I-395) serves as a physical barrier to the north for the majority of Southwest. While there are numerous access points to the north, a cognitive geographic separation from the north is identifiable. Furthermore, the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers to the west and south both work to insulate the area, especially Buzzard Point.

The sense of distance from the rest of the District, however, is misleading. Immediately to the east lies the Capitol Riverfront district including the old Navy Yard, a major center for development of new housing and office space, and home of the Washington Nationals ballpark. To the west lies the emerging Southwest Washington Waterfront. These areas are linked to Buzzard Point and to one another by M Street, an important cross-town artery. While the area began to build up quickly along M Street (primarily in SE) with several high-rise buildings, both residential and for office space, and the new baseball stadium, which opened in 2008, the area has yet to attract very much of an entertainment district, despite the rising number of new residents. While the faltering economy slowed the pace of development in the area, there are signs that this may be changing.

Key site/area features

Buzzard Point can be seen as three distinct areas:

- The residential area, between M and P streets, made up predominately of publicly-subsidized multifamily housing, including a number of public housing projects.

- Fort McNair, which runs from P Street to the Point, and from the Potomac River to 2nd Street SW. A historic military installation dating from 1791, it houses the National Defense University and the headquarters of the U.S. Army Military District of Washington.

- A mixed use area, between 2nd Street SW and South Capitol Street below P Street, containing a variety of largely low-density non-residential uses including junkyards and a cement manufacturing plant, considerable vacant land, two marinas along the Anacostia River as well as the PEPCO substation and two mid-rise office buildings, one of which houses the headquarters of the U.S. Coast Guard. It is the last of the three areas that offers both the most complex questions and greatest challenges for the future of the area.

Planning Background

Buzzard Point has been included in several recent visions for a revitalized waterfront and South Capitol Street gateway. The National Capital Planning Commission first identified South Capitol Street as a priority area for revitalization in the 1997 *Extending the Legacy Plan*, which imagined South Capitol Street as a more
Buzzard Point study area outlined in red (above); three distinct areas within the Buzzard Point study area.

Google Maps
aesthetic and monumental entry point to the nation’s capitol than it currently functions. The 2000 Anacostia Waterfront Initiative Framework Plan identifies Buzzard Point as one in a chain of neighborhoods along either side of the Anacostia River targeted by the initiative. Buzzard Point figures most prominently in the South Capitol Street Target Area Plan associated with the reconfiguration of the Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge abutment at South Capitol Street as "a worthy gateway to the Capitol." The planned improvements to South Capitol Street draw off proposals originally made by the National Capital Planning Commission.

The 2006 D.C. Revised Comprehensive Plan provides a broad vision for Buzzard Point and the surrounding waterfront neighborhoods. Specifically, the plan envisions South Capitol Street as a gateway linking the Capitol to the north with the waterfront to the south. South Capitol Street will be surrounded by mixed use development, green space, and a new realigned Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge. At the foot of South Capitol Street and the reconstructed bridge, an oval traffic rotary is planned as a site for a future national memorial. Buzzard Point shares a border along South Capitol Street with the ballpark entertainment district, which will be further developed with retail, high density residential, entertainment, and commercial uses.

Within Buzzard Point, new mixed use residential and commercial development will be encouraged on former industrial land. The Office of Planning recognizes the opportunity for innovative design and architecture in this area, and for the creation of a unique urban waterfront in this neighborhood. The Comprehensive Plan describes working collaboratively with the Anacostia Waterfront Corporation in developing a detailed area plan for Buzzard Point. The area plan “should address the future of industrial and utility uses in Buzzard Point, identify concepts and standards for new development, and address a range of related urban design, transportation, infrastructure, environmental, and community service issues. The feasibility of access along the Fort McNair waterfront also should be addressed.”

**Major Transformative Events Timeline**

- **Waterfront reconfiguration including Riverwalk**
- **M Street Streetcar**
- **South Capitol Street reconfiguration**
- **Relocation of U.S. Coast Guard HQ to St. Elizabeth’s**

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Years to Completion
Major transformative events
A number of major physical changes are in the works that may have powerful implications for the future of Buzzard Point:

- the creation of the DC streetcar network, which is planned to include a streetcar along M Street (5 to 10 years from now);
- the reconfiguration of the DC waterfront, including the Riverwalk designed to provide continuous access to the Anacostia and Potomac River banks (2 to 5 years from now);
- the reconfiguration of South Capitol Street and the construction of the new Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge (5 to 10 years from now); and
- the relocation of the Coast Guard headquarters to the St. Elizabeth’s site across the Anacostia River (2 to 4 years from now).

All of these events could and will likely affect the future of Buzzard Point. None of them, however, are immediate, and most are likely to take place between 5 and 10 years from today.

In the area’s more immediate future, commercial developments focused around the Waterfront Metro station (at 4th and M Streets, SW), most of which are well underway, will also help shape development decisions in the Buzzard Point area.

BUZZARD POINT: ALTERNATIVE FUTURES
We do not propose a single vision for the future of Buzzard Point, because there are too many constraints, too many unknowns and too much uncertainty to present a single direction. There are many potential and different futures for Buzzard Point, depending on factors that may be largely out of the control of the District’s planning process.

Constraints on change
Fundamental change to Buzzard Point is likely to be an issue in only one of the three areas mentioned above – the mixed use area and vacant land between 2nd Street SW and South Capitol Street below P Street. The other two areas, Fort McNair and the residential area, are not considered candidates for significant change. As discussed below, while we recommend improvements to the residential areas, we do not believe that those areas should be the focus of any large-scale redevelopment or any activity that would significantly reduce the amount of affordable housing available to DC residents. We also recognize that Fort McNair, as a secure military facility, must be recognized as a ‘given’ for purposes of the area’s long-term planning. There is no reason to believe that its use or configuration will change in the relevant future.

That leaves the third area – the area of mixed uses and vacant land east of Fort McNair. Although much of the land in this area is either vacant or underutilized, so that it may be tempting to think of this area as a clean slate, that is not the case. The area is subject to substantial constraints of its own. The most significant is the PEPCO facility, which is expected to continue in use for the foreseeable future. This facility covers four city blocks or more than 15 acres between 1st Street SW and Half Street SW. Although there is the possibility that part of the land currently occupied by this facility may be vacated, that is uncertain. Similarly, the underground utility lines running from this area that serve the Capitol and other important government buildings, and which occupy the existing street rights-of-way, are likely to effectively define both the existing street framework and city block sizes for the foreseeable future.

The two mid-rise office buildings in this area, known respectively as the Monday or the Transpoint Building (2100 2nd Street SW), which is occupied by the U.S. Coast Guard, and Jamal (1900 Water Street SW) buildings, also represent constraints. Built in the early 1970’s, they are both architecturally undistinguished, with
Monday Building—U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters (above), Jamal building.
Photos by Ryan Scherzinger
footprints that will not easily be converted to more sustainable configurations capable of utilizing natural lighting and other energy saving features. Furthermore, they are sited directly on the banks of the Anacostia River in a manner that would be unthinkable today. They nonetheless represent a significant capital investment. While ultimately acquiring and removing them would make sense from a planning standpoint, it is questionable whether the financial resources or the inclination to do so will be available in the coming years.

Finally, the greater part of the vacant land in the area – a roughly 9 acre parcel between 1st Street SW and 2nd Street SW – has been assembled at considerable expense by Akridge, a major DC developer. That developer’s financial objectives and constraints also represent a significant part of the area’s reality. Those objectives may lead to this area being used in ways that will pose challenges to integrating the site with the rest of the future reuse of the surrounding area.

Opportunities
At the same time, the area offers important opportunities. The most notable of these is the expanse of water that surrounds it on three sides. While slightly more than half of that waterfront is inaccessible inside the Fort McNair perimeter, there is still roughly ¾ of a mile of waterfront along the Anacostia River from the edge of Fort McNair to the foot of the Frederick Douglass Bridge. While there are constraints on access to parts of that waterfront as well, it represents a significant opportunity. This area contains two marinas run by the National...
Park Service, as well as the headquarters of the Earth Conservation Corps.

The area contains one of the larger inventories of vacant and underutilized land in the District of Columbia. This land, which includes the Akridge parcel, a second large site known as the Steuart property, and a number of smaller parcels, represents a second important opportunity, if it can be developed in ways that enhance the area.

**Alternative futures**

Thus, the issue is not what might be the ideal use of the area at the confluence of the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers, but how to make the best use of an area (for both local residents and the District at large) that is subject to the complex mix of constraints described above, and how to realize the opportunities that emerge in such a way that the area will gradually be knit together as a vital part of the District’s urban fabric.

To that end, our focus is not – with limited exceptions – on specific land uses or parcels. Instead, we see the key issue as one of building the infrastructure network within the area that will optimize development opportunities within the area, recognizing that there are real constraints but also real opportunities available.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Increase the quality and accessibility of the Buzzard Point waterfront, while recognizing its distinctive character.

The Buzzard Point waterfront should be enhanced and rendered more accessible to users. At the same
In terms of access, size and dimensions – particularly when compared to nearby waterfront areas to the east and west, means that it should not be seen as a major visitor destination, but a center for low-intensity recreational uses by area residents, visitors to the area and residents of other parts of the District, as well as an important link along the Anacostia River chain.

The two marinas should be maintained, with the larger one enhanced and energized by reuse of the parking lot immediately north of the marina for waterfront housing or mixed-use development at densities consistent with the District Comprehensive Plan, incorporating water- or recreation-related functions such as restaurants, bike shops or boat repair facilities. Strong pedestrian connections should be created between the marinas and along the Anacostia River, linking it to the Riverwalk being developed in the Capitol Riverfront district to the east. The extremely limited amount of accessible land between the Jamal and Monday buildings and the Anacostia River raises a serious design issue. Serious consideration should be given to ways by which it might...
Jamal building next to Anacostia River (above), Monday building next to Anacostia River.
Photos by Ryan Scherzinger
be possible to expand the amount of pedestrian space between the buildings and the river, including possibly constructing a boardwalk that would extend outward from the riverbank, either cantilevered over the river or supported by footings in the riverbed. We recognize that such a project raises complex permitting and technical issues, but urge that it be seriously considered as an important means of significantly increasing the value of the riverfront as a recreational and aesthetic amenity in this part of the city.

As noted earlier, if at some future date resources permit, it may be worth considering acquisition of either or both the Monday and Jamal buildings, and the reuse of these sites in ways that are both more sensitive to the riverfront as well as to other potential uses in the area, such as the use of the Steuart site and the PEPCO property. The reuse of these sites would not be entirely for recreational or open space purposes, but for a mixture of uses that could include either residential, office or mixed use development on parts of the site in ways compatible with maximizing the use and attractiveness of the waterfront. Some of the acquisition cost could be recovered, therefore, both by reuse of parts of each site and by transferring remaining development rights to other areas in the District. We recognize that this possibility is highly speculative, and it should not affect the decisions that are made today about the Riverwalk or about other facilities in the area.
Improve pedestrian and bicycle linkages through the area and to the water along P Street and 2nd Street.

Creating pedestrian and bicycle linkages through and within Buzzard Point serves many important purposes. It increases the connectivity of the area to the District as a whole, increases access to the water, and improves the linkage between the major activity areas being created in the Capitol Riverfront to the east and the Southwest Waterfront to the west. The presence of Fort McNair, however, means that an alternative to a continuous riverfront path must be found for the Riverwalk through Buzzard Point.

In addition to the riverfront walk linking the two marinas to the Capitol Riverfront, we recommend that two major pedestrian/bicycle routes should be created through Buzzard Point.

P Street should be improved to provide attractive and safe bicycle and pedestrian connections between the Capitol Riverfront to the east and the Southwest Waterfront to the west.

2nd St SW between the marina and P Street should become a link in the Riverwalk, designed for attractive and safe bicycle and pedestrian use. If the Akridge site ends up being reused in a way that is not pedestrian-friendly, a creative landscaping treatment should be designed to ensure that the route along the site perimeter remains attractive and safe for pedestrians and cyclists.

The historic Southwest Community House on 2nd St SW should be preserved, treated as a link on the Riverwalk, and restored for a community-related use, such as a museum, gallery or coffeehouse. The house at 156 Q Street SW was purchased by the SWCH organization in 1978, but was recently sold to PEPCO and is now vacant. SWCH traces its origins back to 1921 and its predecessor was one of the first social service
providers for black residents in Washington, DC. The house, originally owned by the Rev. James C. Dent, is among few surviving late 19th-early 20th century stand-alone homes in Buzzard Point to have survived mid-century urban renewal neighborhood clearance. Strong support exists in the community to save this structure and place it on the National Register of Historic Places.

Preserve and upgrade existing affordable housing in area.

The northern part of the Buzzard Point area, as defined for purposes of the PAT, is largely residential. While it contains a scattering of privately-owned homes, largely vernacular District row houses built between the late 19th century and the middle of the 20th century, the greater part of this area is devoted to multifamily affordable housing developments, including a number of affordable co-operative developments and public housing projects. This small area, roughly a dozen city blocks, contains over 900 units of public housing, or almost 1 out of every 8 units in the District’s entire public housing inventory. The housing in this area varies widely in both architectural quality and current building condition. While the 1942 James Creek project is an architectural gem, it is in need of modernization as is the less-distinguished Syphax Gardens project built in 1959.

This housing represents an important part of the affordable housing inventory in a city where a growing share of the private housing has appreciated in recent decades well beyond the means of lower income families. This inventory should be preserved, and no redevelopment strategy should be pursued which would have the effect of reducing it to any significant extent. At the same time, the concentration of public housing, which contains disproportionate numbers of very low income families, and the extremely limited number of middle-income housing opportunities in the area, both act as severe constraints on the development of the area as a healthy, vital mixed income residential community.

In the short run, the existing public housing in the area should be upgraded, including both interior modernization and better landscape treatment of the surrounding area. In the intermediate and long run, a strategy should be put in place to increase the quality and economic diversity of the Buzzard Point residential community, with a priority being the development of mixed-income housing in the triangle between the existing residential area and Potomac Avenue, as extended to 2nd Street SW. That development should be planned and sited in ways that encourage a single residential community in the Buzzard Point area, not two distinct and separate areas. As additional affordable housing is created in the triangle through inclusionary development with a 10 to 20 percent low and moderate income housing set aside, it may then become
timely to look at reconfiguration of some of the public housing in order to foster a more economically diverse community throughout the area, with no net loss of affordable housing.

Make the South Capitol Street oval a major gateway to the District, creating an iconic building on the adjacent Steuart site.

The reconfiguration of South Capitol Street and the construction of the new Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge are an important transformative project, with a potentially dramatic impact on the Buzzard Point area. At the same time, unless they are both carried out in a way that enhances the urban landscape and creates connections between the areas through which South Capitol Street runs, they could become a barrier between those areas, undermining rather than enhancing the area’s human scale and connectivity.

The oval planned to be created at the foot of the bridge is a large and potentially difficult open space. Although seemingly modeled on the traditional District circle, the oval will contain nearly three acres of open space, substantially more than the open space areas such as Dupont Circle created through the L’Enfant plan.

Proposed South Capitol Street oval.
Courtesy www.theanacostiawaterfront.com/
As a result, it could become an underutilized and neglected space unless the design of the vehicular routes around its perimeter provides adequate calming of traffic movements to make access to the oval from both east and west safe for pedestrians, and the design of the space itself is attractive to potential users. This space should be treated in a way so that motorists perceive it as a major gateway into the District’s Core area, as an arrival point where driving conditions change dramatically from being car-oriented in the suburban manner to becoming urban and pedestrian-friendly. In addition to a traffic configuration that will make the oval accessible and usable, great care needs to be taken with the design of the oval itself, to ensure that it attracts a high level of utilization by area residents, workers, and visitors.

How the perimeter of the oval is treated is equally important, with respect to both the visual character of the area as a gateway to the District, and the extent to which the oval itself is likely to be effectively utilized as an open space. All of the properties fronting on the planned oval should be developed intensively to create a substantial working and/or residential population around the oval, and should be subject to clear design standards in order to bring about creation of a strong urban space.

Of the sites that will frame the oval, the critical site affecting the Buzzard Point neighborhood, the bridge, and the waterfront, is the Steuart site, which is situated along the Anacostia River immediately south of the planned oval and bridge access on an important axis with the Capitol. As demonstrated in the National Capital Planning Commission’s Monumental Core Framework Plan, this site is too visually important to be left as open space; moreover, the topography of the area does not permit a view of the water as one travels south along South Capitol Street. The Steuart site should be used as the site of a major destination, such as an important cultural or educational facility; alternatively, it should be used for a mixed-use facility, with the principal use being residential or office space, with strong destination elements. The site should be

Looking north at intersection of Potomac Avenue SW and South Capitol Street. The dome of the U.S. Capitol is visible in the distance.  
Photo by Ryan Scherzinger
Looking east on Potomac Avenue as it crosses South Capitol Street and runs behind the Washington Nationals baseball stadium. Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge is directly to the right.

Photo by Ryan Scherzinger

designed in such a way that it engages equally at the street level on the landside, and at the river level on the waterside, so that it interacts strongly with both the South Capitol Street oval and the Riverwalk. The site should also be designed to provide an attractive pedestrian connection at water level between Buzzard Point and the Capitol Riverfront area.

**Strengthen Potomac Avenue as the link between the area and the Southeast waterfront.**

Potomac Avenue is the critical link between the heart of the Buzzard Point area and the rest of the city, linking the area to South Capitol Street and to the emerging sports and entertainment district across South Capitol Street to the east. Rather than the attractive, high-intensity boulevard that it can and should be, however, Potomac Avenue in Buzzard Point is a barren asphalt strip – even lacking sidewalks along most of its length – flanked by vacant lots and low-intensity uses.

The reconfiguration of Potomac Avenue represents a major opportunity for the transformation of Buzzard Point. We recommend that Potomac Avenue be extended through to 2nd Street reconstructed to become a street that comfortably accommodates not only cars, but pedestrians, bicycles and streetcars as well, and turned into a major spine of both accessibility and activity through the area. Potomac Avenue can become the focal point that ties the existing neighborhoods and the potential waterfront development together.
Sonny Bono Park, located at 20th and O Streets NW in Washington, DC, is an example of a triangular parcel converted to usable green space (above). Potomac Avenue shown in blue extending to 2nd Street SW. Area in yellow illustrates where mixed-use development should be encouraged.

Photo (above) by Rob Goodspeed and Google Earth
Mixed-use development of parcels containing frontage on Potomac Avenue between Half Street and 2nd Street should be encouraged – the uses can be a mixture of office and residential uses, but with ground floor commercial and restaurant uses. The triangular mini-parks created where Potomac Avenue crosses the District street grid should be restored, and reconfigured in ways that will further the redevelopment and intensification of adjacent parcels. A carefully-selected point along Potomac Avenue should be treated as a central place, where neighborhood-serving shops would be located, creating a focal point for this area independent of the riverfront public infrastructure.

Ensure that development of the Akridge site maximizes connectivity and economic benefits to the Buzzard Point community.

The Akridge site fronts on the planned extension of Potomac Avenue to 2nd Street, and it raises important questions. The owners, a major development firm, are currently actively seeking an opportunity to develop this site as a secured federal installation, although neither firm plans nor federal commitments are in place at present. Given current market conditions for private-sector use, either residential or non-residential, this represents a rational business strategy on the part of the developer. Should Akridge be successful in obtaining such an installation, this represents both an opportunity and a challenge for the area. The opportunity lies in the large number of federal employees who will be drawn to the area, and the potential they represent to occupy housing that is being built in the Capitol Riverfront area, or that we propose should be built in the Potomac Avenue triangle adjacent to the site. The challenge lies in ensuring the visual and economic permeability – as characterized by the Office of Planning – of such an installation. Doing so requires that the installation not be designed as a monolith, but that the site remain to some extent permeable, that the landscape and circulation systems around the site perimeter be designed in an
attractive, pedestrian and bicycle friendly fashion, and that at least some limited public uses (such as a café or restaurant) be incorporated into the scheme. The design of the nearby Department of Transportation facility in the Capitol Riverfront district suggests at least some of the possibilities.

It is unclear whether the developers will in fact be able to attract a secure federal installation to this site, and ultimately, a mixed use development, which combines residential and non-residential uses, may be preferable to such an installation in terms of its ability to help foster a stronger, more vital Buzzard Point community. While market conditions today may not render such a development feasible, conditions may change in the future. One particular idea worth exploring is whether the developer can form a partnership (or less formal arrangement) with the Department of Defense to use this site for a predominately residential development aimed at military personnel serving in the District, particularly but not limited to those serving at – or participating in training programs at – Fort McNair.

Change the proposed streetcar alignment to better serve the Buzzard Point area.

The proposed streetcar line along M Street should be reconfigured in order to better serve the Buzzard Point area – the reconfiguration should link Nationals Field, follow across South Capitol Street down Potomac Avenue – enhancing its role as the spine of the area and a major connector – and up 2nd Street SW.

The District Department of Transportation's proposed streetcar alignment.  
Courtesy District Department of Transportation
Develop a long-range strategy for the PEPCO property, including ultimate reuse of the historic power plant building for cultural or educational use.

The PEPCO property represents a critical question mark for the future of Buzzard Point. Covering some 15 acres, it not only occupies a large part of the area but, by virtue of both its visual character and the nature of its activity, acts as a constraint on the potential development opportunities for adjacent parcels. At the same time, it is part of an essential electric power distribution system for the District of Columbia. If this site was to be reused for other purposes, its power-generating functions would have to be replaced elsewhere, a potentially difficult and expensive undertaking. Although this is not currently in PEPCO’s plans, they have contemplated it in recent years, and sold off in 2005 a large parcel adjacent to the power facility that had previously been held in reserve for future expansion. Reuse of the site would also raise environmental remediation issues, that would have to be investigated and possibly addressed, also at potentially considerable cost. In short, this is not a question mark likely to be answered definitively in the near future. It calls out, however, for a long term answer.

Over the coming years, the District should work with PEPCO to gradually shrink the footprint of the area used for electric power generation, consistent with sound energy and environmental practices, in order to make land available for uses compatible with the mixed-use development planned for the Potomac Avenue spine.
The power plant itself is an architecturally significant building, which would lend itself to reuse for a variety of high-value activities, similar to the reuse of old power plants for mixed use in the Baltimore Inner Harbor and as a major museum and visitor destination along the Thames riverfront in London, the now-famous Tate Modern museum. A museum or other cultural facility could uniquely take advantage of its long-span spaces and considerable interior height to create unique venues for a wide range of visual arts exhibits or performing art activities.

Pepco Buzzard Point power plant (above); The Tate Modern, Britain’s national museum of international modern art housed in the former Bankside Power Station. Millennium Bridge seen in front. London, UK.
Photo by Ryan Scherzinger (above); The Tate Modern photo reprinted with permission.
CONCLUDING NOTE
Change will not come quickly to the Buzzard Point area. Market conditions at present, both residential and non-residential, are far from conducive to redevelopment, a situation likely to persist at least for the next one to three years. The transformative investments that are planned, such as the new Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge or the construction of the District streetcar system, are many years off. At the same time, change is inevitable. Buzzard Point is located along an important waterway, in the heart of one of the strongest, most vibrant metropolitan areas in the United States if not the world. The market will change, and the investments will take place. Redevelopment will eventually come to Buzzard Point.

Redevelopment can take many forms. It can lead to creation of vibrant, healthy and diverse communities, or to sterile areas without vitality or variety. If the redevelopment of Buzzard Point is to lead to a strong, diverse community, that goal must be carefully and systematically planned for; that planning, moreover, should begin now, so that the principles to guide the area’s redevelopment are firmly in place when conditions make it possible. Moreover, that planning needs to focus not only on the physical configuration of space, but how those spaces will actually work. The South Capitol Street oval at the foot of the new Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge is a case in point. Whether it becomes a strong gateway to the District, or a neglected open space will hinge not only on how the space itself is designed, but on the systems put in place for vehicular and pedestrian circulation to and around the space, and on the way the space around its perimeter is designed and used. These are all issues that should be planned now.

The housing in the northern part of the Buzzard Point PAT study area raises other questions. Made up predominately of public and subsidized housing, there is little doubt that the quality of life in this area is

Buzzard Point rendering.
Jeff Lee
impeded by the concentration of poverty, and the lack of diversity that it offers. It represents, however, a significant share of the housing that people of very low income can afford in a city and region where housing is becoming increasingly expensive, and less and less affordable. Strategies need to be put in place that preserve and upgrade the subsidized housing in the area while bringing in new mixed-income housing, designed and sited so that it will gradually transform this area into a more economically diverse community. This too is a long-term strategy, but one that needs to be planned carefully in advance.

We have not proposed to replace any existing planning for Buzzard Point, but to build on those plans and take the thinking about the area a step further. As the residents, property owners and other stakeholders in Buzzard Point, in adjacent areas such as the Capitol Riverfront, and in the District as a whole, begin to address the issues we have identified and addressed, we hope that our recommendations will help their efforts, and help lead to a bright future for Buzzard Point.
Buzzard Point Planning Assistance

Team Profiles:

**Alan Mallach, FAICP – Team Leader**

*Team Specialty: Housing and Integrated Community Development*

Alan Mallach is a Nonresident Senior Fellow at the Metropolitan Policy Program of The Brookings Institution in Washington, DC, where he works on foreclosure issues, neighborhood stabilization and the revitalization of older industrial cities. He is also a visiting scholar in the community affairs department of the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia and a senior fellow at the National Housing Institute. He has been a consultant, advocate and public official, and served as Director of the Department of Housing & Development in Trenton, New Jersey from 1990 to 1999. His latest book, *A Decent Home: Planning, Building and Preserving Affordable Housing* has just been published by Planners Press and the University of Chicago Press. He is also the author of *Bringing Buildings Back: From Vacant Properties to Community Assets* and many other works on city planning, housing and Italian opera. He is a member of the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Certified Planners, and holds a B.A. degree from Yale University.

**Jeffrey E. Frank, PhD, AICP**

*Team Specialty: Economics/Development*

Dr. Frank is the Immediate Past President and former Vice Chair of the Board of Directors of Patton Harris Rust & Associates headquartered in Chantilly, VA. He served the firm for the 1979-2008 period in a management, planning and Registered Surveyor capacity. He is an experienced urban planner, land development consultant, researcher, and author of technical studies related to regional and community planning, developmental feasibility, public finance, master planning and zoning. He holds a Masters in Urban and Regional Planning and a degree in economics. He received his doctoral degree from the University of Maryland in geography. He completed his dissertation on the economic geography of the emerging biotech industry.

**John R. Gosling, AICP, RIBA**

*Team Specialty: Urban Design*

For the past twenty-five years John Gosling has led the Planning and Urban Design Practice for RTKL, a full service design firm with offices in Europe, the United States, and Asia. In this role he has been responsible for managing and developing high profile urban planning assignments in major cities across the world for both public agency and private sector clients. The scope of this work ranges from the Santa Lucía Riverwalk Redevelopment Plan, Monterrey, Mexico, the Regeneration Plan for Edinburgh Harbour, Scotland, to the brownfield redevelopment plan for US Steel's Bethworks in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. A committed urbanist he formed RTKL's Urban Housing group in the mid 90's, recognizing that sustainable urban regeneration means re-connecting commercial and residential architecture and urban design. Together the urban design practice and urban housing group have gone on to win many awards for their leading edge examples of sustainable live/work developments including awards from the Congress for the New Urbanism, the International Downtown Association, NAIOP, and the Urban Land Institute. He has taught graduate courses on urban design at the University of Virginia and design studios at the University of Texas School of Architecture and Environmental Design. Now based in Washington after a 3 year assignment in RTKL's London office, he sits on the Urban Renewal Council of the Urban Land Institute, is an active writer and speaker, and participated in the recent AIA-sponsored Design DC conference in Washington DC, and in the ULI's World Cities Symposium held in London. A native Londoner, Mr. Gosling received his architectural education at the Architectural Association School of Architecture and is registered as an architect in the UK and is a certified AICP planner in the United States.
Jeff S. Lee, FASLA  
**Team Specialty: Parks/Waterfronts**
As the founding principal of lee+papa, Jeff Lee has been the visionary force behind the firm's practice. Through his creative leadership, lee+papa has successfully executed some of the most significant and unique projects throughout the world including: Master Plan for Mecca's New Central City; Master Plan for Incheon's New World City surrounding the New Incheon Airport in Korea; 30,000 Acre Primary Resource Park in Brunei; Dubai Lifestyle City; and numerous other urban masterplans in Asia. He is widely recognized for his leadership in sustainable design. With award winning built projects in place, lee+papa recently won the Merit Award in the International Competition for the 360 Acre Magok Waterfront in Seoul, Korea creating a vibrant urban environment while reducing the carbon imprint. He has recently co-authored a handbook on sustainable techniques to treat stormwater for the Water Environment Research Foundation with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for nationwide distribution. He was the sole planner for the feasibility of Ecotourism Plan for Lake Baikol in Siberia. He has directed his practice based upon context sensitive designs of the public realm which is founded upon historic, cultural, ecological, social and geo-political sensitivities. In doing so, he has redefined the community planning process in the community he resides and practices. His commitment and knowledge of the region has also created a practice within a practice where his advice and perspectives are sought out by local, national and foreign governments. In 2005, Jeff was awarded the Excellence in Arts Award by the U.S. Pan Asian American Chamber of Commerce (USPAACC), the largest Asian American organization in the U.S.A. With this recognition, Jeff joined the ranks of I.M. Pei, Vera Wang, Yo-Yo Ma, and other prominent Asian Americans. In 2007, he was inducted as a Fellow (FASLA), the highest achievement in the profession, to The American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) for his design excellence. He is a graduate of University of Virginia's School of Architecture and presently serves on the Advisory Board to The Architecture School and is a member of The Dean's Forum.

Nicole A. White, PE, PTOE  
**Team Specialty: Transportation/Transit**
As the principal of SymmetraDesign, Nicole White leads her organization's strategic direction with close to 15 years of experience in transportation planning and traffic engineering projects. She brings extensive management skills and expertise ranging from intersection safety and operational studies to parking studies and Transportation Management Plans. She has worked on and directed a variety of project-types including Transit-Oriented Development, medical and educational facilities and major tourist destinations. Ms. White specializes in master planning for Federal Campuses and Universities, as well as revitalization and redevelopment studies for corridors and small areas. She has worked on high-profile projects in the District including the Department of Homeland Security Headquarters Consolidation at St. Elizabeth’s, Rhode Island Avenue Great Streets and Mt. Vernon Square District Transportation Plan. Ms. White has a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering and a Master of Engineering degree (with a Transportation Engineering emphasis), both from the University of Maryland College Park. She is licensed as a Professional Engineer and is a certified Professional Traffic Operations Engineer. She has extensive experience working with various project stakeholders and is a certified Charrette Planner through the National Charrette Institute.
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For more information about APA’s Community Assistance Program, including AICP’s Community Planning Assistance Team, please visit the APA website at:  www.planning.org/communityassistance/