



MOUNT VERNON PLACE RESTORATION and REVITALIZATION MASTER PLAN

Mount Vernon Place, South Square, 1946

Mount Vernon Place Conservancy

Brief History of Mount Vernon Place Restoration and Revitalization Master Plan

History of the Mount Vernon Place Conservancy

In 2008, the non-profit Mount Vernon Place Conservancy (MVPC) was formed to enter into a public-private partnership with the City of Baltimore to restore and maintain Mount Vernon Place, the cornerstone of a National Historic Landmark district. At present, the Conservancy is focused on two primary objectives: commissioning a Master Plan, and finalizing its partnership agreement with the city. These projects are being worked on simultaneously as each will inform the other.

MVPC is a 501(c)(3) organization governed by a Board of Directors.

History of Master Plan Team Selection

In the summer of 2008 the MVPC issued a Request for Qualifications, advertised on the American Society of Landscape Architects website (www.asla.org), in order “to identify a nationally recognized landscape architecture firm capable of undertaking the creation of a Master Plan for the restoration of Mount Vernon Place in Baltimore, Maryland.” Approximately twenty firms from across the country responded to this RFQ and five were selected to submit full proposals.

Selection Criteria

The teams were asked to submit proposals by August 15, 2009, and were informed that their proposal would be evaluated on the following criteria.

- **Related Experience:** State your firm’s experience with comparable projects.
- **Professional Qualifications:** Describe the project team that will be assigned to the work, together with the experience of key staff personnel. Provide resumes of each project team member.
- **Capacity of Firm:** Describe your team’s capacity to

complete the project within four to six months.

- **Reputation:** Include case histories of the firm’s work on comparable historic sites. Include a minimum of five client references.

Master Plan Purpose

The Master Plan will articulate a restored vision for Mount Vernon Place that enables it to realize its potential as a world class urban space – a pedestrian-friendly environment with better and safer access to the squares for all. It should

- Include detailed condition surveys of all hard and softscape elements and attendant systems both above and below ground.
- Supply guidelines/recommendations regarding event capacity.
- Supply estimates of restoration.

The Master Plan will serve as the guiding document informing the fundraising and restoration of Mount Vernon Place to be completed before its bicentennial in July 2015.

Selected Firm

From these firms, OLIN of Philadelphia was selected to create the Mount Vernon Place Restoration and Revitalization Master Plan. What follows is a summary of an over one hundred page document.

Area of Master Plan

Mount Vernon Place is a cruciform-shaped public park owned by the City of Baltimore. Located in a local historic district, the squares and monument are also part of a National Historic Landmark District. For the purpose of the plan, Mount Vernon Place is defined as the area within the MVPC’s proposed management borders (see map) embracing all elements in the

public right-of-way up to, but not including, the building line of the structures around the squares. This area contains roads, sidewalks, the four park squares, as well as the Washington Monument and its surrounding plaza. The plan will also include recommendations on how the central cruciform area connects with its intersections of the surrounding streets at Madison, St. Paul, Centre, and Cathedral Streets.

Washington Monument

Forming the centerpiece of Mount Vernon Place is Robert Mills’s Washington Monument, the first public monument to honor George Washington. Commenced on July 4, 1815, the marble monument proper was completed in 1829 when the statue of Washington was raised to the top. In the following decade, the elaborate cast-iron railing was installed that completely encircles the monument.

Park Squares

The four park squares have been designed three times by premier American architects, notably Mills, the Olmsted firm, and lastly, Carrère and Hastings. The final and existing design was commenced in 1917 and, in plan, survives largely unchanged, with only minor intrusions, since its completion in the early 1920s. Carrère and Hastings’s design for the squares included marble balustrades, retaining walls, and several elaborate fountains, granite steps and concrete pathways. In addition, the firm partially re-organized the many bronze statues that had been placed in the various squares. Electric lights were first installed under Carrère and Hastings (previously gaslight), and other subsequent lighting has since been added.

Park Use

Mount Vernon Place is used casually on a daily basis as well as for special events. It is a tourist attraction

of the Mount Vernon Cultural District: the Walters Art Museum and Peabody Institute face the squares, and the Maryland Historical Society sits two blocks west.

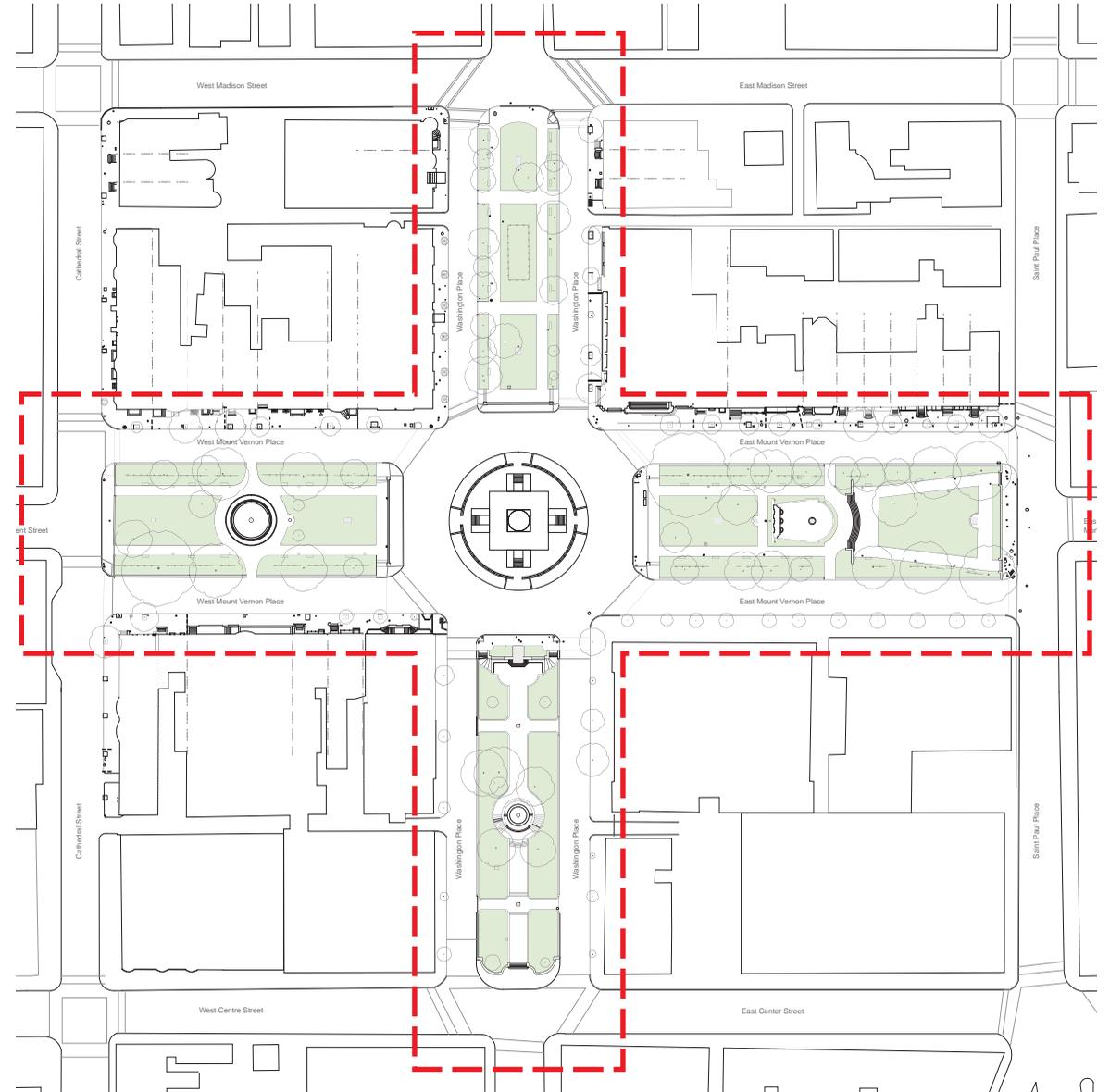
Master Plan Next Steps

The restoration and revitalization master plan for Mount Vernon Place is not a construction document, rather it establishes principals and presents a vision illustrating how the principals can be realized to improve the long-term viability of Mount Vernon Place. Each recommendation and proposal will undergo detailed analysis as the project progresses through additional phases of design. As the Mount Vernon Place Conservancy is in partnership with the City of Baltimore, each plan component will continue to receive input from city departments and will be reviewed at key phases in public hearings before the Baltimore City’s Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation (CHAP).

The Conservancy and the City are committed to a transparent public process to restore and revitalize Baltimore’s historic urban design masterpiece.



Mount Vernon Place aerial



Mount Vernon Place study area

EXISTING CONDITIONS

TREES

A comprehensive assessment of all 118 trees within the study area was completed by Bill Graham, a consulting arborist, previously Chief Horticulturist of the University of Pennsylvania Morris Arboretum. Existing trees in all four squares display signs of stress, with a number in very poor condition. From the arborist's study, 21 trees are recommended for immediate removal due to their present condition and a further 24 trees are judged to have a life expectancy of less than 15 years. Additionally, 21 trees are planted within the view corridors to the Washington Monument, one of the "Character Defining Features" of this Historic Landmark.

The trees in poor condition display the following characteristics of stress:

- Roots exposed
- Trees planted too deep
- Stump only remains
- Thin canopies
- Calluses and wounds

There are 13 species of trees present within in the squares five of which are native. The north square is dominated by Red Oak species with only two Kwazan Cherry trees. The south square contains various flowering trees including the magnolias and a red bud. The east square is primarily Zelcovas along with three Hawthorne trees, two of which are in poor condition, and one large American Elm. The west square has six trees species including two oak species, Chinese elms, hawthorns and Japanese maples.

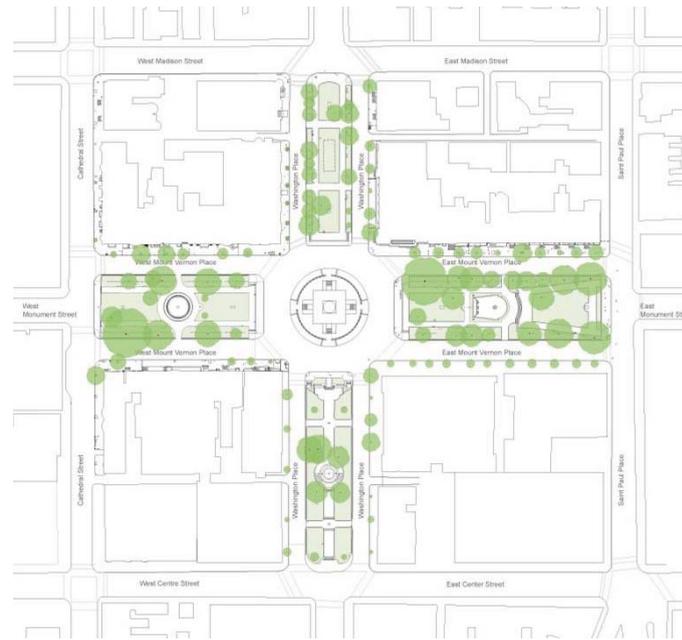
Mount Vernon Place and Washington Place have 59 of approximately 90 possible street trees installed. Many are currently in poor condition due to trees being planted too deeply, preventing proper drainage and nutrient acquisition, and too-small soil pits, contributing to small tree size and poor condition.

Park Tree Species

Acer palmatum
Celtis occidentalis
Crataegus sp. (N)
Magnolia grandiflora (N)
Magnolia korbus
Magnolia virginiana (N)
Prunus serrata 'Kwazan'
Quercus acutissima
Quercus imbricaria
Quercus rubra (N)
Ulmus americana (N)
Ulmus parvifolia
Zelkova serrata

Street Tree Species

Acer platinoides (N)
Acer rubrum (N)
Acer saccharum (N)
Amelanchier sp. (N)
Fraxinus americana (N)
Fraxinus pennsylvanica (N)
Prunus okami
Prunus serrata
Prunus serrata 'Kwazan'
Prunus sp.
Pyrus calleryana
Quercus palustris fastigiata (N)
Quercus robur fastigiata
Tilia americana(N)
Tilia cordata
Ulmus parvifolia
Ulmus rubra
Zelkova serrata
Zelkova serrata fastigiata



Existing trees



Trees that are in the view corridors of the Washington Monument or are dead or in decline and have a life expectancy of less than 15 years

EXISTING CONDITIONS

PAVING & MATERIALS

Sidewalks

At the time of the Carrère and Hastings work, concrete was used throughout the plan area for sidewalk construction. There are some isolated areas of bluestone and brick that will be restored and reset. Although there is no available documentation that suggests the current concrete paving is original, the existing concrete is largely of a similar color, finish and tooling in all four squares.

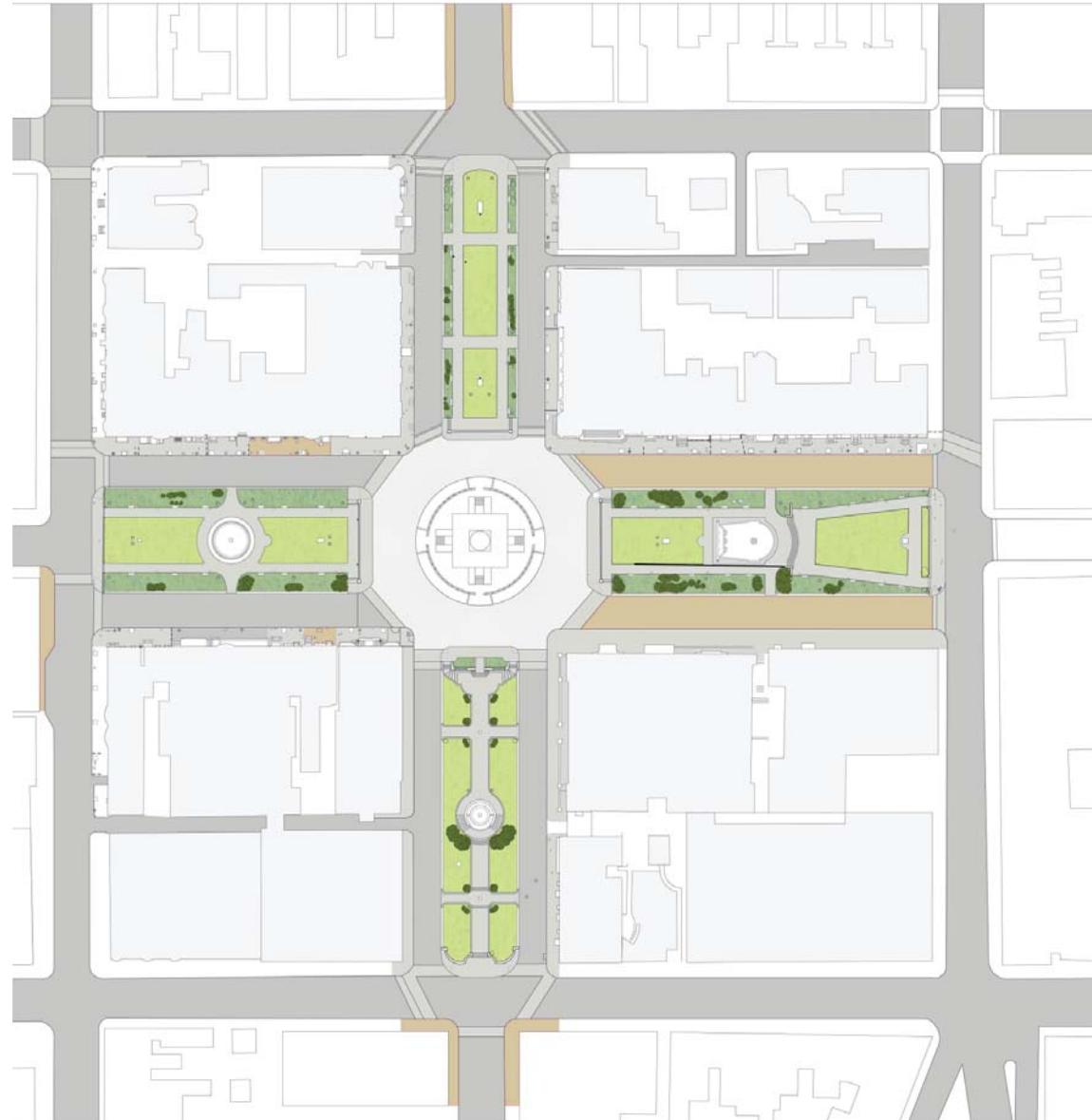
The existing concrete is in poor condition in many places, spalled, cracked and patched with a variety of different mixes and finishes. In three of the squares, precast concrete planting curbs have been used, as in the original plans.

In the South Square, which was first to be constructed, planting curbs are a generous 6" by 12" granite band, carved to follow the layout of beds and steps. These curbs are in relatively good condition and will be restored as part of the historic masonry.

All street edges are faced with a 6" granite curb, which need to be reset. These curbs have been replaced by cast-in-place curb cuts at the corners, which are in variable condition, and do not necessarily align with the granite curbs.

Streets

At the time of the construction of the Carrère and Hastings design, all of the streets in the plan area were paved in brick. Brick remains only on the streets of the east square. The plaza of the monument appears to have been treated differently, and retains a stone pavement treatment (Belgian block).



Existing paving layout

Total Project Area (incl streets):	275,850 sq ft	(6.3 acres)
Total Area of 4 Squares:	103,955 sq ft	(2.4 acres)
Total Paved Area:	51,115 sq ft	(1.7 acres)
Total Vegetated Area:	54,200 sq ft	(1.2 acres)

South Square - 22,925 sq ft (.5 acres)



42% Paved	58% Vegetated
Concrete Paving	7,400 sq ft
Concrete Curbs	0
Granite Curbs	650 linear ft

North Square - 19,380 sq ft (.45 acres)



45% Paved	55% Vegetated
Concrete Paving	8,125 sq ft
Concrete Curbs	1,125 sq ft
Granite Curbs	600 linear ft

West Square - 26,900 sq ft (.62 acres)



43% Paved	57% Vegetated
Concrete Paving	12,000 sq ft
Concrete Curbs	11,100 sq ft
Granite Curbs	600 linear ft

East Square - 34,750 sq ft (.80 acres)



48% Paved	52% Vegetated
Concrete Paving	14,556 sq ft
Concrete Curbs	1,325 sq ft
Granite Curbs	750 linear ft

MASTERPLAN PROPOSALS

HISTORIC FABRIC

Restore the Washington Monument

The masonry of the column, its base, stairs and paving, will be cleaned, repointed and restored. The balcony will be disassembled and the fittings replaced with new stainless steel cramps and pins prior to reinstallation.

Restore and repaint Cast Iron Fence

The fence will be disassembled and its components and attachments repaired. Existing paint will be carefully removed and the fence will be re-coated with a new high performance historically sympathetic paint.

Repair historic stone balustrades, masonry and extant historic paving

The balustrades will be cleaned and repaired where possible and individual elements replaced where necessary.

Replace concrete walks

Replace all concrete walks with new concrete, with finishes and jointing to match original concrete paving.

Repair and restore fountains, fountain sculptures and plumbing

Restore fountain masonry and plumbing systems. Sculptures, which are in remarkably good condition, and sculpture bases will be cleaned and restored as needed.

STREETS

Restore the historic brick and 'Belgian' block paving on the East Square and around the Monument

Brick, which remains intact on the East Square, was the street paving material used at the time the Carrère and Hastings plan was completed

in the early 1920s. The historic Belgian block around the monument will be retained, repaired and reset.

Replace existing asphalt streets with brick or other appropriate historic paving

Create a unified and coherent urban fabric by repaving streets with an appropriate historic material such as brick, granite pavers or cobble. Extend paving across the intersections of adjacent streets to create clear thresholds to this landmark historic district.

PEDESTRIAN ACCESS & SAFETY

Consider adding sidewalks on the long sides of squares

On each long side of all squares consider adding a new sidewalk to allow step-less access along the perimeter, significantly increasing access to the squares for all. After detailed traffic and parking studies determine the best method to increase access, while maintaining the functionality of the streets for surrounding users.

Improve curb cuts to meet current ADA standards

Improve curb cuts at pedestrian crossings for improved access and safety.

Re-align pedestrian crossings at intersections

Align pedestrian crossings at intersections perpendicular to vehicular traffic flows to improve pedestrian safety.

Enhance traffic calming

Work with the City to develop and implement traffic calming strategies, particularly on the north-south streets. Traffic calming has been demonstrated to significantly reduce traffic

speeds and increase driver vigilance to enhance pedestrian safety. All measures will be carefully coordinated with long-term city-initiated studies to maintain the functionality of streets for surrounding users.

PLANTING

Reinforce the Carrère and Hastings design with new trees and planting

Install new planting and planting beds to support the formal French layout of the squares, restore the axial views and architectural character of allees formed by perimeter trees. Replace all trees but the existing large Elm in the East Square with new large caliper trees. Select species that are tolerant of urban conditions and where possible use native species. Plant trees according to best contemporary horticultural practice in continuous trenches complete with irrigation and aeration.

Replace soils

Replace the exhausted and infertile soils with new soils engineered to promote drainage and resist compaction.

Install irrigation

Install a moisture sensing automated irrigation system, using recycled rainwater for lawns and planting beds.

LIGHTING

Re-Install historic fixtures

Re-install the historic "Great White Way" fixture originally specified by Carrère and Hastings, and which is still in production. If these are not readily available, consider similarly appropriate historic fixtures.

Highlight the fountains and sculptures

Reinforce the night time identity of the squares by lighting the fountains and sculptures with new efficient spotlights on masts, located to minimize the visual intrusion of fixtures.

UTILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE

Repair, replace and upgrade utilities to meet long term capacity requirements.

Assess the condition and capacity of existing utilities to determine future needs. It will be essential to the long term success of Mount Vernon Place to install the supporting infrastructure of utilities, power supply and stormwater management.

Collect and reuse stormwater

Stormwater will be retained onsite to meet City standards, and will be collected in underground cisterns to recycle for irrigation.

STEWARDSHIP

Develop a management, maintenance and operations plan

Establish a clear and coordinated management strategy led by the Conservancy, between the City, Midtown Benefits District and others to provide for the longterm care and stewardship of this historic landmark cultural landscape.

Engage the community and volunteers

Continue to encourage volunteer efforts that engage the Mount Vernon Place community and all of Baltimore.

Foster year-round use of Mount Vernon Place

Continue to engage the city and region in large events such as the Book Fair, with a new calendar of smaller events throughout the year.

MASTER PLAN PROPOSALS

HISTORIC FABRIC

Restore the Washington Monument

Restore and repaint cast iron fence

Repair historic stone balustrades, masonry and extant historic paving

Replace concrete walks

Repair and restore fountains, fountain sculptures, and plumbing

STREETS

Restore the historic brick and cobble paving on the East Square and around the Monument

Replace existing asphalt streets with brick or other appropriate historic paving

PEDESTRIAN ACCESS & SAFETY

Consider adding sidewalks on the long sides of the squares

Improve curb cuts to meet current ADA standards

Re-align pedestrian crossings at intersections

Enhance traffic calming

Coordinate with long term studies to continue to explore further traffic calming measures in Mount Vernon Place.

PLANTING

Reinforce the Carrère and Hastings design with new trees and planting

Replace soils

Install irrigation

LIGHTING

Re-Install historic fixtures

Highlight the fountains and sculptures

UTILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE

Repair, replace and upgrade utilities to meet long term capacity requirements.

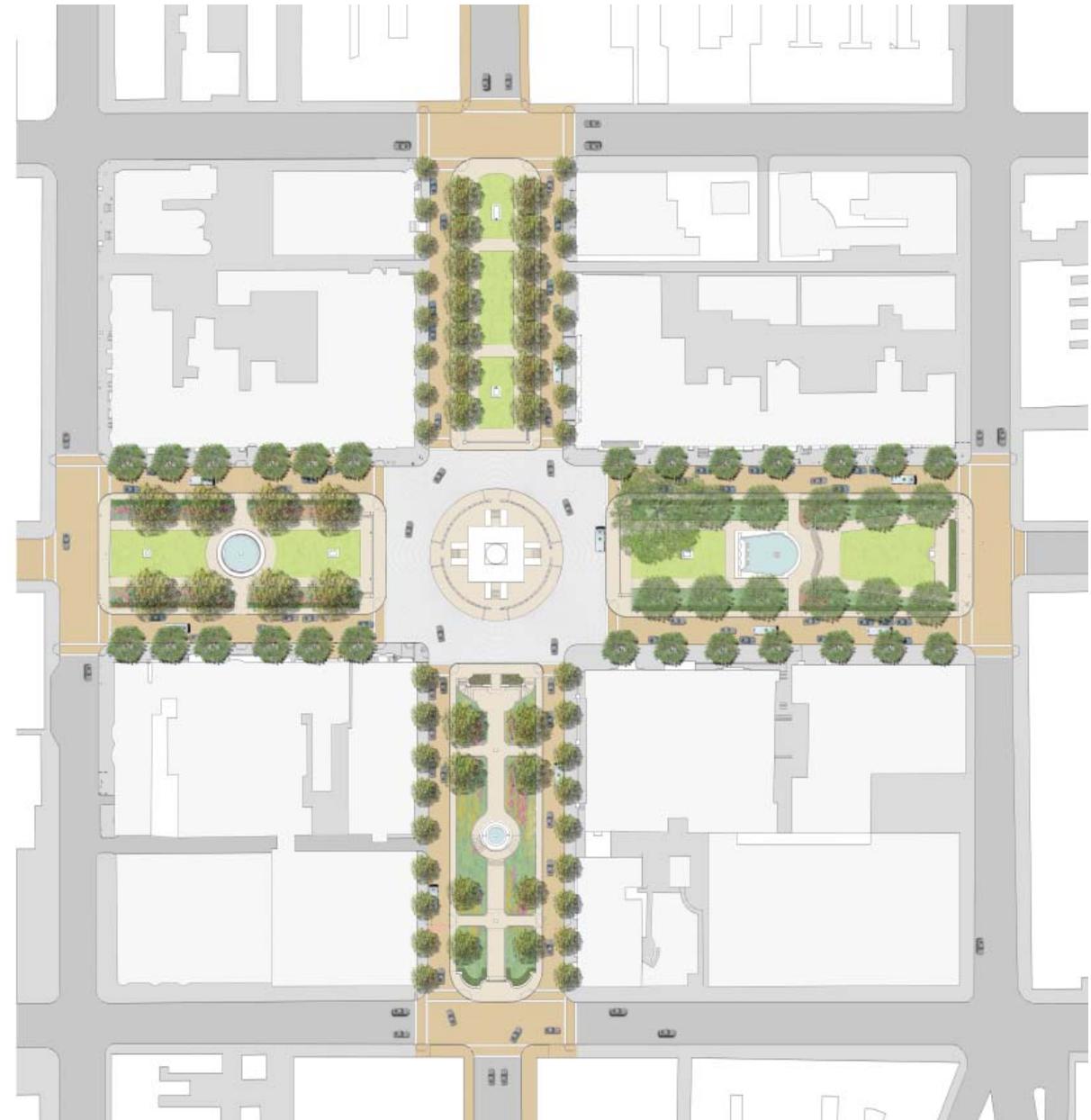
Collect and reuse stormwater

STEWARDSHIP

Develop a management, maintenance and operations plan

Engage the community and volunteers

Foster year-round use of Mount Vernon Place



PEDESTRIAN ACCESS

Pedestrian circulation within and around Mount Vernon Place is relatively unsafe in part because of angled street crossings and high speeds of traffic on Charles Street.

Because there is no sidewalk on the park side of the East and West Squares (only sloping granite setts), pedestrians walk in the street or in planting beds.

The steep slopes of the south and east square and adjacent streets make ADA access a challenge.

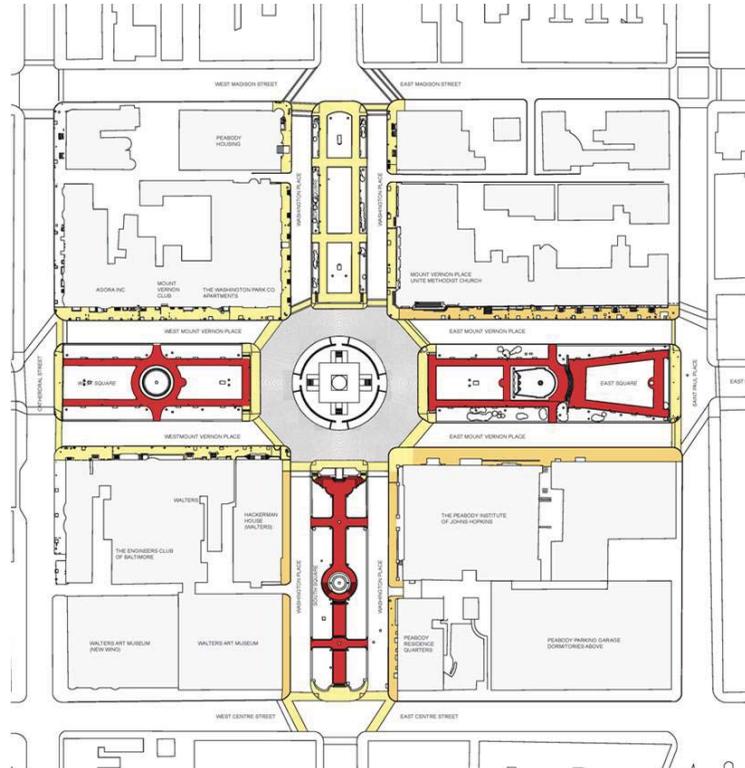
Half (14) of the access points into the parks include historic granite steps and therefore cannot be made accessible, as this action would compromise the historic integrity of the place.

However, fourteen remaining entries do not have character-defining features and can be made accessible without compromising the historic fabric. Currently, only two of these entries are accessible; the others are all edged with curbs.

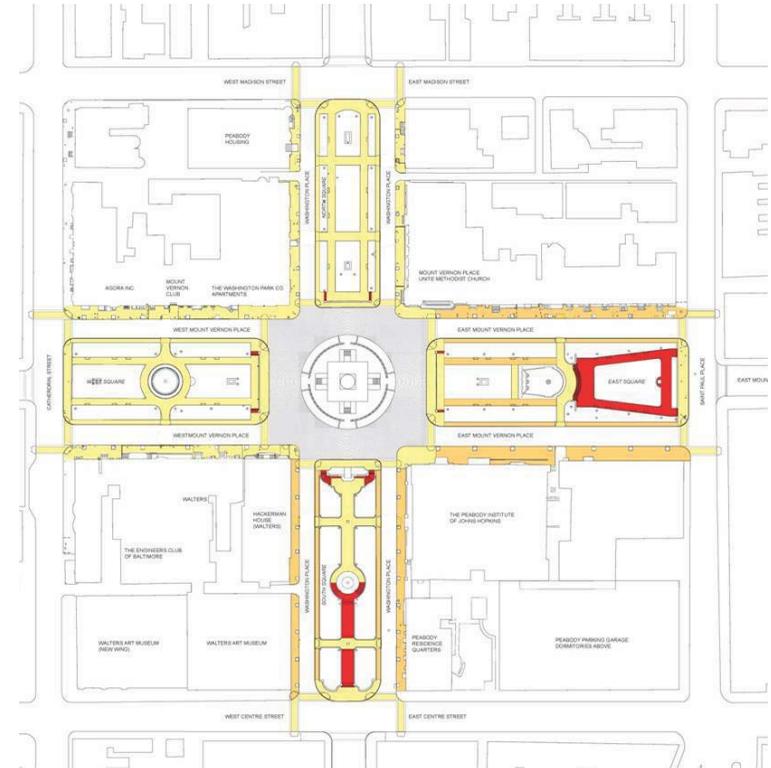
The Master Plan recommends the addition of sidewalks on the long sides of the squares in order to significantly increase access to the squares, and recommends exploring the best way to accomplish this access while maintaining the functionality of the roads.



Existing barriers to universal access are identified in red. Barriers with potential to become stepless entrances without disrupting the historic integrity of the design are circled in blue.



Areas (in red) having barriers to access



Proposed condition showing reduced areas having barriers to access (in red) under one possible scenario of a new perimeter sidewalk and curb cuts



“A beautiful park awakens a desire for a lovelier home-garden, and the wish for a beautiful home grows into the wish for a beautiful street and every other development will be influenced by it and will follow in its train.”

John Carrère 1910



“Why should Baltimore not have a square as beautiful as the Palais Royal? Or one as beautiful as the Luxembourg Gardens and the Tuileries?”

John Carrère 1902,
Lecture at McCoy Hall, Johns Hopkins
University