



A Plan for the Streets of Washington, DC

Highway Plan: Street Names of Washington, DC

Named for States, Notable American Men and Geographic Features



Street Names of Washington, DC



The Highway Plan extended streets like Connecticut Avenue to areas beyond Florida Avenue, where it terminates in Chevy Chase Circle at the District line

Washington, DC's street system beyond the historic L'Enfant Plan was established through the Highway Plan, which was adopted in 1898 and extended streets into the area north of Florida Avenue and east of the Anacostia River. Designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., it dictated where streets would go when private property was subdivided and included circles in the outlying neighborhoods of the District. Implementation of the plan included a systematic naming of east-west streets that used one, two, and three syllable names in alphabetical order, as well as states and territories of the United States for broad, diagonal avenues. An early 20th-century policy adopted by the District Commissioners prior to DC getting Home Rule required streets running east-west in the northern half of the District to be named for notable American men and streets running east-west in the southern half of the District to be named for notable places or geologic formations.

The street naming system did not originally include names of notable Washingtonians and/or women, but that is not the case today. Two circles are named for local residents: Anna Cooper Circle in LeDroit Park is named for a Black-American civil rights activist, scholar, author, and sociologist, and Randle Circle at the intersection of Minnesota Avenue and Massachusetts Avenue SE is named for Colonel Arthur E. Randle, a property owner and developer of neighborhoods east of the Anacostia River. The DC Council has also dedicated ceremonial street names honoring women like Gloria Steinem and Sojourner Truth. Commemorating a diverse array of Washingtonians through naming streets and places diversifies a grid with streets names that prioritized men over women and educates Washingtonians on the historical contributions of women and people of color.