PUD Submission Title Page

McMillan

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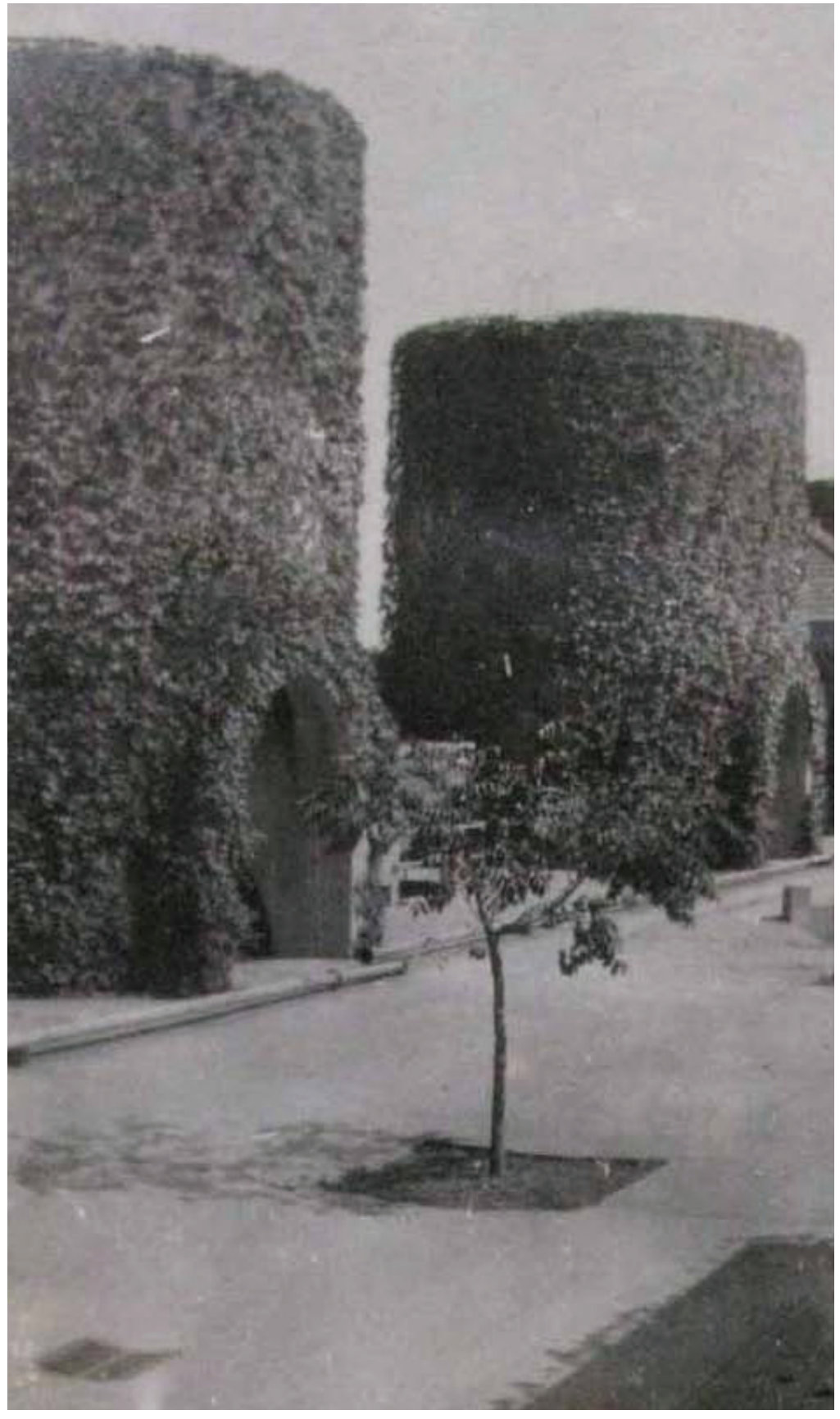


VIEW OF SERVICE COURT, C. 1920-25 FROM THE FISCHER-WALTZ PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION

Project Introduction

The McMillan Reservoir and Sand Filtration Site is an important part of the city of Washington. Its key location within the extended boundaries of the city as envisioned by the McMillan Commission's Plan of 1901 and its concomitant demonstration of the influence of the City Beautiful Movement on civic works is implicitly tied to its vital role in the technological advancement of public health in the District of Columbia. However, the site's immediate surroundings have grown to include diverse neighborhoods, institutions, landscapes, and infrastructure. This duality—between the site's historic use and its evolving urban context—informs the Vision McMillan Partners (VMP) approach to the redevelopment of the site.

First, the site and its physical characteristics can be understood as a unique designed environment that exemplifies late 19th-century advances in water purification technology to support the public health of the growing city. Conversely, the site can be considered not in terms of its historical use, but instead in the context of the adjacent neighborhoods, institutions, landscapes, and infrastructure that surround it.

These two contrasting yet critical modes of understanding the site have informed the VMP master plan from the inception of the project. We articulate them separately below, then synthesize them in an overall vision.

The Site as Infrastructure

The creation of the McMillan Sand Filtration Site was one of the city's first steps toward becoming a modern metropolis. Fresh water delivered from outside the city was filtered via the "slow sand" method, stored in the adjacent McMillan Reservoir, and eventually delivered to the city's growing population.

The sand filtration site structures, both above- and below-ground, were built in a simple, utilitarian manner to perform the site's main function, the filtration and purification of water.

Four themes characterize the architecture of the historic site. The first is **repetition,** above and below ground. The vast arrays of underground filtration cells are arranged in rational, orthogonal grids, sky-lit from above and suggesting an almost infinite expanse of space below grade.

The second theme that emerges is **simple geometry,** with the overall trapezoidal site grid divided into three parts by two service courts. These service courts are punctuated with pure three-dimensional forms—cylindrical concrete sand storage bins, cubic brick regulator houses, and pyramidal concrete sand washers.

Landscape is the third theme. The site is dominated by flat, grassy planes formed by the concrete roofs of the below-grade cells, while a tree-lined walkway follows the site perimeter.

The fourth and final theme is the site's **distinction and separation from its surroundings.** The topographical levels of the filtration cells and the service courts create a raised, continuous landform that makes only the most minimal accommodation to meet the grades of the adjacent streets. The elevated ground level allows continuous views across the site from east to west that tend to underscore its vastness and separation from the city. The adjacent streets, particularly Channing and First Streets, face steep berms on the perimeter of the site; views of the site and beyond are obstructed.

The Site in the City

The site is uniquely situated in the context of the capital city; it is surrounded by highly diverse land uses, building heights, and site densities. To the north are the large, tall medical buildings of the VA Hospital and the Washington Hospital Center. To the west are expansive views across the McMillan Reservoir to Howard University and the residential neighborhoods to the northwest. To the east are the small-scale row houses of the Stronghold community, while to the south is Bloomingdale, a similarly scaled residential neighborhood defined by its rows of stately bay windows and Victorian detail.

Views from the city to the site are most expansive for passersby traveling south along North Capitol Street and west along Michigan Avenue. Views of the site are increasingly obstructed as the viewer moves to the south along the perimeter; an inclined concrete berm, in places covered in grass, is all that is visible along Channing Street and parts of First Street and North Capitol Street. From the vantage point of Howard University, which occupies an elevated area to the west, the entire site is visible.

The site is located at an important gateway or threshold into the historic core of Washington. The land south of Michigan Avenue is characterized by the small-scale gridded fabric of the L'Enfant plan, while north of Michigan is a more open, pastoral setting dominated by the Armed Forces Retirement Home, Catholic and Trinity Universities, and the VA/Washington Hospital Center complexes. Michigan Avenue also marks the boundary at which North Capitol Street transforms from a rectilinear urban street to a curving boulevard. Traveling southbound on North Capitol Street at the intersection of Michigan Avenue, one is struck by the unfolding of the historic core and the view of the US Capitol with the McMillan site in the foreground of the scene.

The site itself is fenced off, and the immediate context is not pedestrian-friendly. This threshold in the city is dominated today by vehicles traveling at high speeds along North Capitol Street, Michigan Avenue, and First Street NW. The hospital campuses to the north are comprised of large, imposing buildings surrounded by parking lots. The small-scale residential neighborhoods to the south and east are disconnected from the McMillan site by topography and busy, high-speed streets.

Synthesis

The McMillan master plan developed by Vision McMillan Partners proposes the first step in transforming this part of the Nation's Capital from a crossroads of diverse and unrelated land uses to a walkable community that supports and enhances the existing residential neighborhoods, provides for a robust and carefully considered preservation and adaptive re-use strategy, and includes a variety of much-needed open spaces, pathways, and streets to connect the McMillan site to its neighbors and transform the area into the next great community in our city.

Design Principles

Five design principles informing our approach are derived from the inherent physical and historical characteristics of the site itself and the influence of the surrounding urban fabric of the city:

- *Connect the site to the city via a system of walkable streets and blocks.*

  As described above, the site is currently isolated and cut off from the city by fencing and topography. The proposal introduces streets and blocks that connect the VA/Washington Hospital Center to the north to the Bloomingdale neighborhood to the south via Half Street, which bisects the site, and an internal park system.

  East/west connections are achieved by repurposing the north and south service corridors as part of the street system, as well as introducing a new east-west street aligned with the existing Evarts Street NE.

  All streets in the plan are designed with sidewalks and generous pedestrian accommodations, and a perimeter sidewalk system ("The Olmsted Walk") recalls the historic perimeter pathway.

- *Preserve, re-use, and enhance the unique historic elements of the site.*

  The Vision McMillan team proposes to incorporate and reuse the most character-defining elements of the historic McMillan sand filtration site. All of the cylindrical sand bins and rectangular regulator houses are to be retained and incorporated into the park at the south service corridor and the mixed-use urban street at the north service corridor.

  Filtration Cell 14, located at the northeast corner of the site, becomes, on its surface, a new park permitting views to the cylindrical sand bins from the north; its underground structure is reserved for future uses to enhance the public and retail activities in that area of the site. In addition, Cell 28, located on the south side of the site between the south service corridor and Channing Street NW, is preserved for future use and incorporated into the public park. In total, the plan proposes that approximately 1.5 acres of underground cells are to be preserved and slated for future use.

- *Provide guidelines for building heights, massing, and architectural language to ensure that site development relates to adjacent areas.*

  Each proposed development area on the site relates to its specific surrounding context. In the southern and eastern areas of the site, building heights, massing, and architectural language are designed to weave the new development into a smooth relationship with the surrounding neighborhoods of Stronghold and Bloomingdale. By contrast, the northern and western areas of the site are designed to relate to the adjacent expanses of open space and large hospital buildings.

  Building heights increase from the south/southeast to the northwest of the site. The overall massing of the blocks provides a varied skyline with the tallest buildings at the northwest corner, and the building massing in the northern half of the site is articulated to avoid large, unbroken walls that would dominate the historic setting.

- *Design open spaces that offer a variety of experiences and incorporate existing site features to the greatest extent possible.*

  Open spaces of diverse sizes and uses are included throughout the design. They range from small linear rain gardens integrated into the sidewalk system to an expansive 6-acre park with preserved historic features, terraced seating, and fountains.

  The northeast corner of the site is host to a one-acre public park occupying the structurally-stabilized roof of the preserved underground Cell 14. This public space connects to the mixed-use neighborhood center of the north service corridor, an urban space lined with shops and restaurants and punctuated by preserved cylindrical sand bins, some of which will be adaptively re-used. The western half of the north service court can be closed to vehicle traffic and used for public gatherings, a farmers' market, concerts, and other neighborhood activities.

  The largest park in the proposal, the "south park," spans the entire width of the site from east to west, from North Capitol Street to First Street NW and the McMillan reservoir site. This park preserves views across the site (from North Capitol Street to Howard University, for example) and incorporates water features, a preserved portion of Cell 28, open space for recreation, and a public community center. The south service court is united with the park design, providing pedestrian access to the park through the historic entrance portals of the sand filtration cells.

- *Integrate environmental sustainability concepts and practices in building, site, and landscape design.*

  The Vision McMillan team is committed to achieving a LEED ND (Neighborhood Development) Silver rating for the overall design. The site plan is designed to use public space to treat storm water and includes progressive methods such as rain gardens, bio-retention, and subsurface cisterns. Each building proposed for the project will achieve, at a minimum, a LEED Certified rating or equivalent. Tree cover for the site—currently non-existent—will be generous, with tree-lined streets and large stands of trees in the south park.

Conclusion

This proposal transforms the McMillan site into a unique mixed-use community where city residents can work, live, shop, and play. It will connect to the VA/Washington Hospital Center complex, reduce the isolation of the Stronghold neighborhood, and provide public parks and amenities for the many diverse communities surrounding the site.

The design will help to make the area safer by providing more "eyes on the street." Retail opportunities will be supported by residents and neighbors on evenings and weekends and by occupants and visitors to the new medical office facilities during the workday.

Finally, the design will revive an important part of the city's history through preservation, adaptive re-use, and open spaces. The proposal seeks to enrich the life of the city by not only reconnecting with the past, but also providing opportunities for the future.

Executive Summary

The 24.69-acre McMillan Slow Sand Filtration Plant (hereafter referred to as the "McMillan site") is proposed for redevelopment as a new mixed-use center combining retail, office, and townhouse-style and multi-family residential uses; passive and active open spaces placed throughout the site to provide diverse recreational programming; and an active and passive preservation program designed to protect, respect, and promote the site's historic character.

Part of a local historic landmark, the McMillan site offers the District of Columbia an extraordinary opportunity to introduce a new center of activity that balances economic development with public benefits, community amenities, and historic preservation.

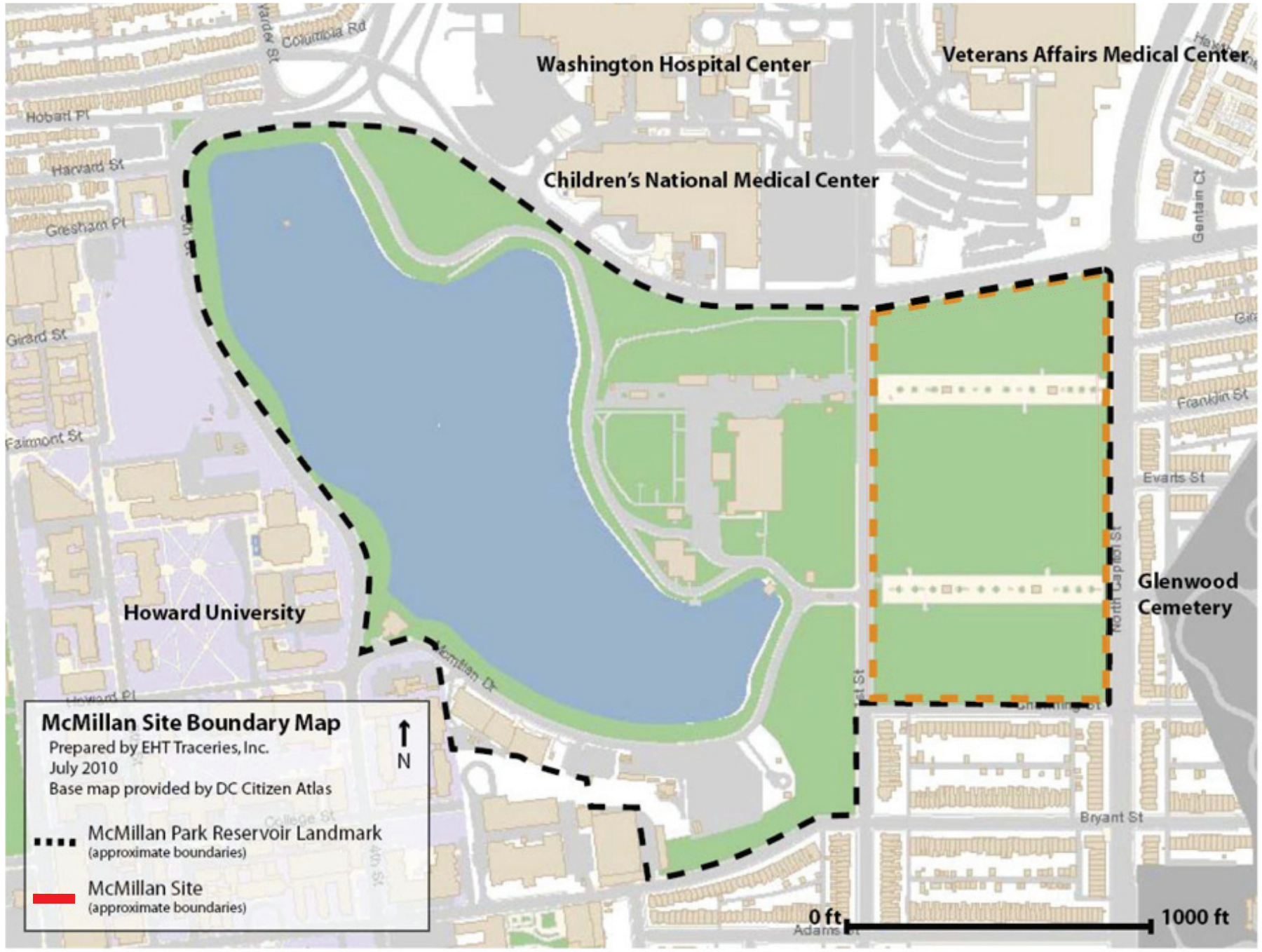
The site is located on the eastern edge of the northwest quadrant of the city, and was once part of the larger 92-acre McMillan Reservoir and Filtration Plant, owned and operated by the United States. The development site is bounded by First Street NW to the west, Michigan Avenue to the north, North Capitol Street to the east, and Channing Street to the south.

Critical to the project's success is its treatment of the site's historic character. The McMillan site is within the McMillan Park Reservoir Historic Landmark, which was listed in the District of Columbia Inventory of Historic Sites in 1991. As such, the McMillan site is protected under the District of Columbia's preservation law (Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act of 1978, DC Law 2-144 as amended).

VMP retained EHT Traceries to prepare an independent study of the site's history and significance with the goal of recommending an approach to its preservation within the context of mixed-use development. This study provided the development team with an understanding of the site's historic integrity and recommendations, based on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, for an approach to preserving the site's historic character and resources.

General and resource-specific recommendations have been incorporated into the redevelopment plan as much as possible. Knowing that full preservation of the site was not feasible, additional recommendations for the mitigation of the loss of historic fabric and integrity were made and incorporated into the amenities package for the Planned Unit Development application.

Key recommendations, including the retention, preservation, and adaptive re-use of above-ground historic resources (service courts, sand bins, regulator houses, sand washers, and portals) and the retention of at least one complete below-grade cell, have been incorporated into the redevelopment scheme. Beyond water, themes of health, healing and sustainability play critical roles in site's development and proposed uses.



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Masterplan

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Daytime Rendering

McMillan