

# Summary of Alternatives

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In developing this plan, the Commission studied a range of alternatives to address the goals and mandates for battlefield and resource protection, interpretation, visitor services, and management. Throughout the planning process, public suggestions led to often significant adjustments and changes to the proposed alternatives. Ultimately, the Commission developed and then studied four alternatives. One, a “No Action” alternative is required for any federally funded project and is a baseline for evaluation. The other three were termed “action alternatives” and propose varying levels of activity. As the plan developed, it became apparent that in these “action alternatives” there was only one approach to battlefield and resource protection, interpretation and management that would satisfy the Commission’s mandates. Their principal distinctions are in the visitor services component.

This section provides an overview of the alternatives that were analyzed and an explanation of the options and alternatives eliminated from consideration. A complete description can be found in the draft Management Plan/Special Resource Study/Environmental Impact Statement prepared for this project.

## OVERVIEW OF ALTERNATIVES

**Alternative A – No Action / Continue Current Management:** Under this alternative, the efforts of existing groups would continue and a successor to the Commission would not be formed. Although a significant amount of development for visitors is planned, little coordination exists among District sites, governments, and other partners. Interpretation of the Civil War is currently limited, uneven, and narrowly focused. Visitors are not presented with a consistent message and visitor attractions are not tied together. Although much has been accomplished in the District, without coordinated leadership and state and federal assistance, it is unlikely that District resources would be protected from development or that an improved visitor experience would be provided.

**Alternative B – "Clusters," the Proposed Action:** Alternative B was identified in the draft plan as the Commission’s “preferred alternative” and is presented as “The Plan” (Chapter III) in this document. It involves the creation of a new non-profit organization to achieve the mandates of the Commission’s legislation. Visitor services and interpretation will be focused at Civil War orientation centers situated in five “clusters” of battlefields, towns, and related-resources. Visitors will follow historic routes to move around the entire District, from cluster to cluster, or within clusters. This alternative encourages communities to collaborate on creating or improving interpretive sites and other community development opportunities. The Commission selected this alternative because it best fulfills the legislative mandates, has the fewest negative impacts, and generates the greatest degree of local participation. It distributes the economic benefits of tourism most evenly throughout the District, creates the greatest degree of local stewardship for battlefield preservation, and offers opportunities to tell the most complete story of all the alternatives.

**Alternative C – Exploration:** Under this alternative, visitors would be encouraged to explore the battlefields and the District on their own. Visitor facilities would be developed at each of the battlefields to provide orientation to the District and interpretation of the site. Visitors would move from one site to the next along marked and interpreted historic routes and trails. Extensive use of brochures, maps, and informational kiosks would encourage self-guided exploration of the District. This alternative was not selected because it would require the most extensive development of the battlefields and would be the least likely to generate strong District-wide support.

**Alternative D – Destination Center:** Under this alternative, the District would be organized around a single, “blockbuster” facility at the Virginia Military Institute’s Hall of Valor Civil War Museum in New Market. The Destination Center would present a sophisticated, state-of-the-art educational experience and provide an overview of all aspects of the War in the District. Extensive tour routes, brochures, and interpretive displays would encourage visitors to venture beyond the Destination Center and see the other battlefields and sites in the District. This alternative was not selected because it would be difficult to draw visitors from the Destination Center to the other sites. This approach would also concentrate economic benefits—and development pressures—in one area and make it difficult to create and sustain District-wide partnerships.

## **OPTIONS AND ALTERNATIVES ELIMINATED FROM CONSIDERATION**

In the process of considering options, the Commission rejected a number of ideas based on study of models, the experience of its members, and public comment. Because the Commission did not combine these options into full-fledged alternatives, technically speaking the Commission did not eliminate alternatives from consideration, only potential parts of alternatives. Options considered and eliminated include:

**Designation of the entire eight-county National Historic District as a new national park.** The Commission felt that such a proposal would be inappropriate and ineffective in meeting the partnership mandates of the legislation. Longstanding resentment over the establishment of Shenandoah National Park and concern over the size of federal landholdings in the District, make it unlikely that strong District-wide support could be generated. In the Special Resource Study that was prepared with the draft plan/EIS, the National Park Service (NPS) evaluated this proposal and found that it would be difficult for the NPS to effectively manage a resource on the scale of the District. In addition, the Commission was concerned that designating the NPS as a lead agency would cause the Commonwealth, local governments, and private donors to assume their support would not be needed.

**A single, stand-alone management entity, whatever its structure as a public agency or non-profit organization.** The Commission believed that its successor would be unable to attempt the agenda laid out in its alternatives alone, nor should it try. The Commission’s enabling legislation emphasizes the importance of creating “... partnerships among federal, state, and local governments....” It would be difficult for a single group to develop and maintain the partnerships necessary to implement the ambitious program the plan outlines.

**A federal authority or federal commission as the management entity.** The Commission studied the experience of other federal entities organized on a regional basis to interpret, conserve, promote, and otherwise manage similar resources, known as “heritage areas.” While early versions of these efforts employed federal commissions, the trend in recent years, in reacting to the administrative difficulties experienced by these commissions, has been to establish federally recognized non-profit organizations.

**A new state agency as the management entity.** Early in its study of options, the Commission regarded the long-standing Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation and the more recent Museum of American Frontier Culture as advantageous models, because of their strong leadership from state officials and the continued state support of their operations. Discussions with state leaders, however, persuaded the Commission that establishment of a new agency responsible to one of the Commonwealth’s departments (the two examples here are within the Department of Education) would not be feasible in today’s political climate. Moreover, a greater degree of independence would be desirable.

**A new state authority as the management entity.** The Commission retained this option long into its consideration, seeking a major role for the Commonwealth and an alternative to the idea of a state agency that would still obligate the state to contribute to the annual budget of the successor and otherwise draw state leadership. The retention of this idea was also in response to the expression of public concern that the state be directly involved. The model is the Virginia Tourism Corporation, a quasi-governmental organization recently created as an alternative to a former state agency. Discussion with state leaders, however, persuaded the Commission that, like the state agency, this option would not be feasible. Moreover, the Commission was assured that the Commonwealth would become involved in a non-profit organization—thus still addressing public concern about state leadership.

**Creation of a non-profit to act solely as a "lands board."** Early in its deliberations, the Commission discussed the idea of segmenting the roles that would be assigned to its successor, focusing particularly on the need to protect the extensive acreage comprising the battlefields. The idea of an organization focused entirely on land acquisition and protection was ultimately rejected because of the intertwined nature of the roles of protecting and interpreting the battlefields—it would be necessary to understand interpretive needs in order to decide how to protect certain aspects of the battlefields. The Commission ultimately found that it would be better for both policy and fundraising to maintain a unified approach to all parts of the successor’s agenda.

**Creation of a private, for-profit corporation as the management entity.** The Commission briefly considered this idea. The model was a new for-profit organization spun off by the Southwestern Pennsylvania Heritage Preservation Commission. The Commission felt that while there may be certain opportunities for licensing or concessions that would generate funds independent of government support, there are not enough for-profit opportunities to generate the funding required to accomplish the overall agenda. The opportunities for licensing or concessions can be managed within a public or non-profit approach, much as museums and parks do in many cases.

**Establishment of a regional authority (within the Shenandoah Valley) as a manager.** Two models for this idea exist within Virginia; one is in the District, focused on a single park shared by Augusta and Rockingham counties. Two heritage areas also employ this approach, one in a single county in Pennsylvania, and one involving Augusta, Georgia, and the county in which the city is located. The Commission believed that District residents and governments have been skeptical of regional authorities and that the number of jurisdictions that would be involved in an authority to manage the District makes the idea too unwieldy.

**The ability of the successor to review actions of local jurisdictions that may negatively affect the District.** The Commission considered the idea of seeking the power for its successor to review “developments of regional impact,” similar to the process employed in Vermont under its Act 250, in which regional organizations review the zoning and permitting decisions of local jurisdictions affecting developments over a certain size. The Commission felt that this power, being unfamiliar to Virginia, was too difficult to sell to counties and other jurisdictions, and too great a burden on a successor already facing a large agenda. The Commission elected to have its successor work with local jurisdictions and non-profit organizations to reduce the impacts of development decisions and to step in as an advocate in issues where its leadership in articulating preservation and interpretation values is needed.

**Development of two Civil War “Gateways.”** One option for visitor services called for the development of two large “gateway” orientation centers. In meetings with the public, the Commission learned that group after group supported more than just two orientation centers. This idea was ultimately folded into Alternative B: “Clusters,” with the proposed Civil War orientation centers providing overall orientation to the District.