

Re-Imagining Reeves:

Public Life Study | Summary of Findings



In the Summer and Fall of 2020, the Office of Planning (OP) conducted a Public Life Study at the intersection of 14th and U Streets, NW, to help re-imagine these public spaces as a welcoming, active, and accessible community hub. Based on input from two public meetings, interviews with stakeholders, and an online survey that garnered nearly 4,500 responses, OP presents the following findings and guidance which will be included in a full report to be released in early 2021.

Why Study Public Life?

OP is interested in understanding how people operate within the city’s public spaces to better guide their design. A Public Life Study is a data-driven approach that uses observational, people-centric principles to inform policy and advocate for improved access and investment for all.

For more information, please check out:
planning.dc.gov/page/public-life-initiatives



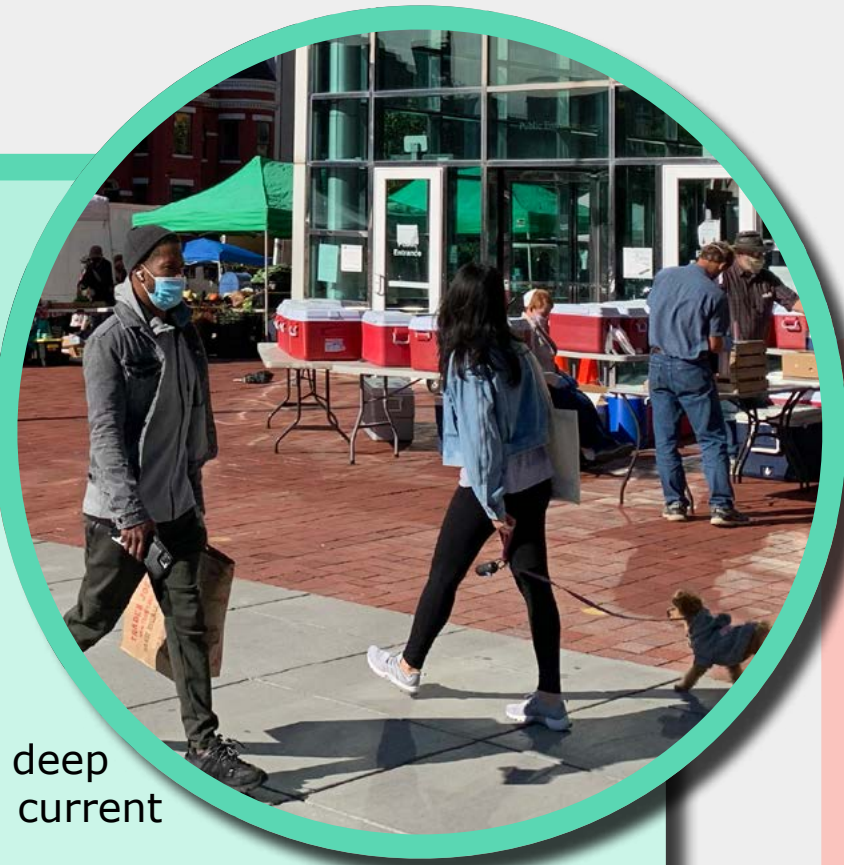
HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE



Legacy as a Center of Black Washington

- Area has a long and storied history as the center of a Black financial and entertainment district dating back to the 19th Century. The 14th and U Street intersection was a principle gateway to the neighborhood.
- Dubbed *Black Broadway*, the area’s 300 Black-owned businesses contributed to a flourishing arts and culture scene into the mid-20th Century.
- The intersection has been a magnet for local and national political activism; crowds gathered in the area after the death of Dr. MLK Jr in 1968, on election night for President Barack Obama in 2008, and many other momentous occasions.
- This site was chosen for the Frank D. Reeves Center in part due to the link to Black Washington and has remained a symbol of the District’s Home Rule efforts and a civic institution for decades.

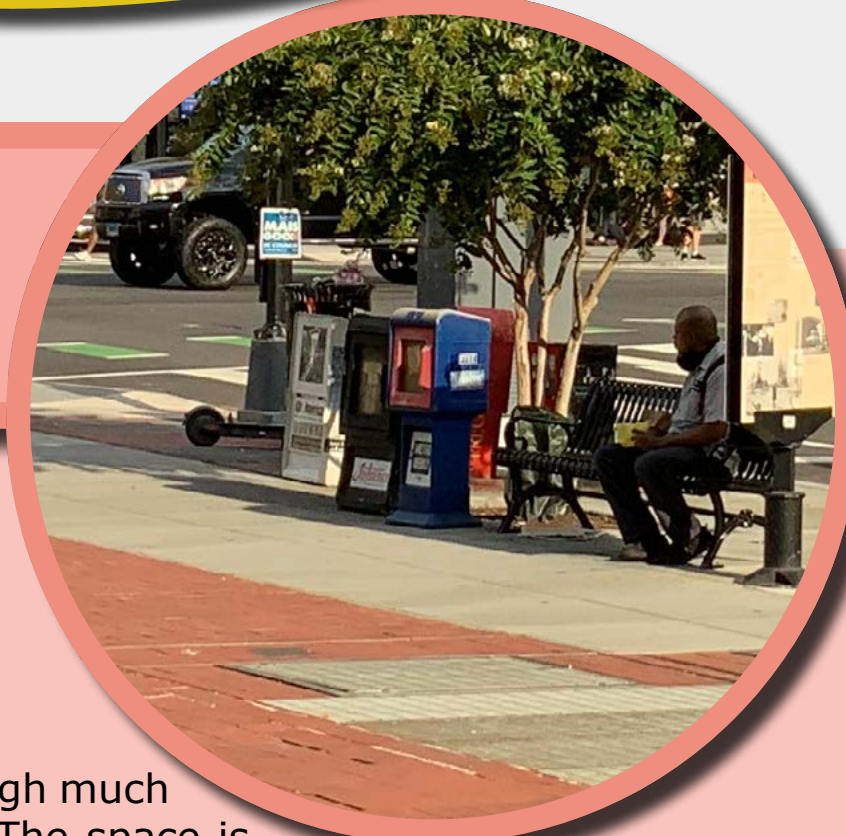
PERCEPTION SURVEY



Connection to the Community

- Majority of respondents value the intersection’s deep roots in the community, but also perceive the current plaza as unwelcoming and underutilized.
- Respondents who have visited the weekend farmers market are more likely to view the space as well-utilized, comfortable, and welcoming.
- Safety is seen as a top priority for the redevelopment. No immediate consensus on the types of activities people would prefer to see in the future:
 - large gatherings (29%)
 - parklike setting with gardens and benches (33%)
 - cafes or open air market (33%)
- Perceptions differ depending on the race: Black respondents more likely to see the space as safe (51%) and welcoming (32%) than White respondents (32% and 10% respectively).
- Majority of respondents support a memorial or other commemoration dedicated to an important figure in the District’s history or culture at the site.

SPATIAL ANALYSIS



Opportunities to Improve the Public Space

- Ample open space at the site, though much is underutilized during the week. The space is uncomfortable in heat of summer or cold of winter as it lacks street trees or shade fixtures to block the sun or wind or noise.
- Outside of weekly farmers market or other occasional events, there is little reason to stop to linger. Most report just passing through.
- Narrow sidewalks on the rest of U Street limit the opportunity for outdoor dining or similar. Sidewalks adjacent to Reeves are widest in the area and can support additional retail or pedestrian uses.
- Well-connected to the surrounding neighborhoods and to the rest of the city through mass transit: the nearby metro station and several adjacent bus lines remain busy. One of the busiest Capital Bikeshare stations in the city is located here.

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Design Principles and Guidance:

Based on community input and an urban design analysis of the 14th and U Street intersection, the Office of Planning has developed the following Guiding Principles to advise future redevelopment of the Reeves site, in coordination with the release of the Re-Imagining Reeves RFP.



PRINCIPLE 1: LIVING LEGACY

Meaningfully honor the U Street corridor’s historic link to Black identity, culture, and enterprise and acknowledge the Reeves Center’s ties to civic activism and the struggle for Home Rule in the District.

Design Guidance:

1. Showcase the neighborhood’s history and legacy as a center of Black enterprise through architecture, urban design, commemoration, and/or public art.
2. Promote Black-owned businesses as the principal tenants, particularly those with ties to the existing community.
3. Support one or more civic amenities on the site such as a post office or other municipal service.
4. Explore opportunities to link the design of the site to the design of the intersection as a whole.

PRINCIPLE 2: PUBLIC PLAZA

Provide a public gathering space that prioritizes visual openness and physical access and that reflects the shared values of the District and its people.



Design Guidance:

1. Dedicate a portion of the site to the design of a publicly-owned plaza that is accessible and welcoming to all.
2. Design for pleasant and comfortable environmental conditions by addressing the impacts of noise, direct sunlight, and access to trees and shade.
3. Align plaza programming to serve the needs of the community through the provision of open gathering space and/or access to outdoor retail and market space.



PRINCIPLE 3: ENGAGING EDGES

Prioritize day-to-day activity at the site and within the adjoining public spaces through site design, architecture, and a curated selection of ground floor tenants that reflect the surrounding neighborhood.

Design Guidance:

1. Encourage ground floor tenants that activate the street, promote civic life, and reflect the neighborhood’s identity and history.
2. Promote day-to-day foot traffic through the strategic placement of building entrances, outdoor seating, creative storefront displays, outdoor retail components, or public art.
3. Promote transparency and visual interest at the street level through the design of the building and avoid long expanses of blank walls along the sidewalk.

