

# K STREET TRANSITWAY

## Street Design and Activation Strategies

May 2023



# Executive Summary

The K Street Transitway is a key implementation action of Mayor Bowser's [DC Comeback Plan](#), which envisions 15,000 new residents living in a vibrant, inclusive, and active downtown by 2028. K Street must respond to evolving mobility needs, as reflected by the District Department of Transportation (DDOT)'s efforts to design K Street NW from 12th Street NW to 21st Street NW. The District recognizes this need as a prime opportunity to elevate the pedestrian experience along the transitway corridor. To support this effort, the DC Office of Planning (OP) conducted and released a Public Life Study in November 2019.

The [K Street Public Life Study](#) outlined potential strategies to activate K Street and turn it into a more vibrant, boulevard-like corridor. OP's high-level recommendations took a three-pronged approach: *activation*, *design*, and the *creation of opportunities for fun*. OP's study encouraged design strategies working in tandem with regular, quality programming to activate the corridor. Additionally, low-cost, temporary changes (known as tactical urbanism) could pilot initiatives and engage the community. The balance of short and long-term, high and low-cost solutions ensures that the planning process is iterative and inclusive of all stakeholders.

To implement these strategies over the long-term, the District may choose to encourage active ground floor uses, respond to changes in post-pandemic commercial space demands, work with the BIDs and other stakeholders to actively program public space, or pursue any number of other complementary approaches. In the meantime, the District wants to ensure that the immediate physical changes to the corridor can support and adapt to K Street's gradual transformation.



*Activation*



*Design*



*Creation of Opportunities for Fun*

# Summary of Design and Activation Strategies

During (and after) the streetscape design process, DDOT, OP, the design consultants, BIDs, property owners, and other agencies and stakeholders can utilize this document to ensure a more unified, active corridor that accommodates and promotes:



## Pedestrian-Oriented Boulevard

A safe, comfortable, pedestrian-oriented boulevard with multi-user spaces that can break down the scale of long blocks and host low-cost temporary programming (BIDs, DC Agencies), and a median catering to transit riders, cyclists and pedestrians (DDOT);



## Tree Canopy and Landscaping

A consistent, continuous and healthy tree canopy and lush landscaping that visually frames the corridor and nearby focal points, shades walking and stationary activity areas, activates blank walls, and complements the integration of potential future residential uses (DDOT, BIDs, Property Owners);



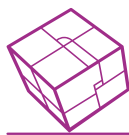
## Streetscape Amenities

Creative, well-shaded seating opportunities (BIDs), high-quality streetscape amenities (BIDs, DDOT), and other elements that invite pedestrians to linger, that incorporate bold design tactics (such as color-coding of amenities and infrastructure) making access to public spaces, jobs, education more engaging (BIDs);



## Outdoor Cafés

Expanded café seating and special lighting at gathering spaces to complement projected ground-floor restaurant/retail uses (Property Owners, Businesses, DDOT);



## Public Art

Permanent and temporary public art, including art with playable elements, that invites more pedestrians beyond the central activity node around Farragut North Metro Station (DDOT, OP, BIDs);



## In-street activation

Opportunities such as parklets and food trucks, where roadway dimensions allow it (BIDs, DDOT, Businesses);



## Sense of Place

A sense of place through branded and bold streetscape elements, wayfinding, and materials that create transitions to and better awareness of parks and other local destinations along the corridor (DDOT, BIDs, Property Owners); and,



## Corridor Gateways

Creative wayfinding at corridor gateways signaling to drivers that they are entering a multimodal zone and slow speed environment (BIDs, DDOT).



# Streetscape Amenities for K Street Transitway



# Streetscape Amenities for K Street Transitway

K Street between 19th and 20th Streets looking East





# Overview

Going back in history, K Street was originally platted as part of the 1791 L'Enfant Plan that established its unusually wide 146-foot Right-Of-Way (ROW) (for almost its entire width with the only exceptions being around federal reservations) when most streets in the city had a 90-foot ROW. This ample width is a result of its important historic role connecting the port towns of Georgetown and Bladensburg and linking several important public squares. Like North, South, and East Capitol Streets as well as 16th Street, K Street was in effect an avenue aligned along the city's grid.

During the 19th Century, particularly after the Civil War, K Street developed as a prestigious residential corridor lined with homes of prominent individuals including District mayors, congressmen, and Governor Shepherd. Its prominence, in addition to its unusual width, made it the location where



*Photo of K Street looking toward 14th Street Circa 1880*

the District installed the first section of its system of landscaped 'public parking', the area between the back of the sidewalk and property line set aside for landscape and greenery that is legally part of the District's park system.

Its importance was also highlighted by being one of only four streets in the District with double rows of street trees identified on an 1880 map of shade trees. The length of the double rows of trees on K Street from 11th Street NE to 27th Street NW was second only to that of Massachusetts Avenue from 11th Street NE to Boundary Street NW (today Florida Avenue). The other two areas with double rows of trees were considerably shorter in length, and included New York Avenue NW between 9th and 14th Streets NW and Pennsylvania Avenue from 2nd to 11th streets SE. The generous 42-foot wide public parking, double rows of street trees, and proximity to the White House contributed to the prestigious character of K Street NW and to its desirability as an address for the city's wealthy and influential elite.

In the early 20th Century, the corridor evolved from a residential street with high-end homes to a prominent location for multi-story apartment buildings and hotels; and later on, to a commercial corridor lined



*Photo of the 900 Block of K Street Circa 1930*

with the offices of real estate and insurance companies, lawyers, and lobbyists. This change in land use coupled with increasing vehicular traffic prompted the District in the 1930s to remove the "public parking" and create its three-lane configuration seen today with 50-foot wide central travel lanes, 8-foot wide medians, 22-foot wide service lanes, and 18-foot wide sidewalks.

In the post-World War II era, encouraged by a 1952 change in zoning that allowed for 14-story versus 12-story buildings along the corridor, K Street began to witness the replacement of its first-generation office buildings. The variety of office building styles and forms, often with upper-story setbacks, were replaced with more contemporary ones that filled their lots and rose the full 130-foot allowable building height, giving rise to the so-called "K Street box."

# Overview

Today, K Street is a designated multiway boulevard making it one of the most prominent streets in the District of Columbia. Falling within the L'Enfant Plan boundary, it serves as an East-West connection and intersects with Vermont and Connecticut Avenues and 16th Street NW. As a result, it takes in significant amounts of pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

The **K Street Corridor** spans from 12th Street NW to 21st Street NW covering 22 block faces, 11 North and 11 South of K Street NW. It is shared by the Downtown BID and the Golden Triangle BID.

K Street is mentioned in the District of Columbia Comprehensive Plan as having predominantly single office use vintage buildings from the 1950s and 1960s, lacking modern "Class A" amenities (1616.4). The Public Life Study echoes this language: currently, 57% of the corridor has an office/ lobby use, which makes it primarily active during daytime hours with no incentive to pause.

The Comprehensive Plan underlines the need for street-level activity and a projected mixed use character of high-quality architecture. It recommends

creating a park-like promenade along the K Street axis - a major East-West pedestrian route with wide sidewalks and abundant trees and landscaping (1614.7; 1614.12).



*View of the K Street Corridor from the intersection of K Street NW and 15th Street NW Looking West*

# Sidewalk Distribution

The sidewalk is described as the street sections delineated by the face of curb and face of building and/or park space situated to the North and South of the corridor. Use sidewalk design to clearly define the transition between:

**roadway** - section of the right of way open to vehicular traffic;

**street furniture zone** - section of the sidewalk immediately adjacent to the curb;

**pedestrian zone** - clear travel zone; and,

**frontage zone** - section of the sidewalk immediately adjacent to the building.

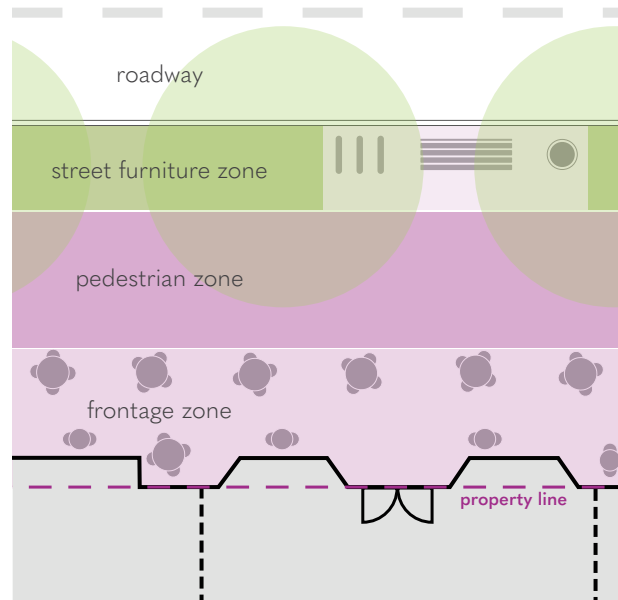
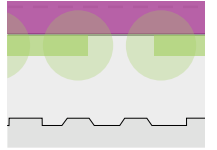


Diagram Showing Sidewalk Zones



# Roadway



## Background

Though not technically part of the sidewalk, the roadway is the platform where pedestrian areas such as sidewalks and medians can be linked together. Because it is where motorists among other users operate, the roadway can be one of the reasons the sidewalk either succeeds or fails.

With that in mind, it is safe to assume that roadway design can directly be linked to pedestrian activity and safety, highlighting the importance of the use of traffic-calming techniques, both tactical and structural.

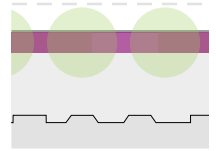
## Recommendations

- Where possible, provide extra queuing space at intersections and minimize pedestrian crossing distance.
- Ensure that all tactile paving/ramps are in accordance with accessibility standards.
- Use artistic signage and artistic striping along the corridor, infusing a playful environment for pedestrians and alerting motorists to frequent cross traffic and facilitating visibility and predictability. Artistic striping in crosswalk areas can only occur outside of the crosswalk.



*Photo of Artistic Crosswalk Striping*

# Street Furniture Zone



## Background

The street furniture zone is meant to invite the pedestrian to linger, promote street-level activity, walkability and safety. It hosts seating, planting strips and trees, and overhead lighting for vehicles - among other amenities.

The street furniture zone is also important to provide good transportation infrastructure to help us move towards being a more equitable city with access to public spaces, jobs, education, and opportunities for all.



*Photo of Planting in Street Furniture Zone*

## Recommendations

- Provide informal seating opportunities where possible (curbs, ledges, etc.) particularly through planter design. Coordinate with the associated BID for maintenance.



*Photo of Informal Seating*

- Allow for frequent and shaded seating opportunities, quality street furniture and amenities like comfortable bench designs, newspaper boxes, trashcans, etc.



*Photo of Shaded Seating*

- Use bold colors to brand the corridor's amenities, such as trash cans and bike racks.



*Photo of Creative Bike Rack Design*

# Pedestrian Zone

## Background

The pedestrian zone should have enough clearance to accommodate activities like walking to work, people travelling in wheelchairs, jogging or running, tourists stopping and looking, dog-walking, parents with strollers and children playing, and older adults going at their own pace.

## Recommendations

- Maintain a 10' minimum clear pedestrian path of travel, finished with standard paving, and compliant with accessibility standards. Fixed objects such as street furniture should not be present in the pedestrian clear path of travel or restrict it.

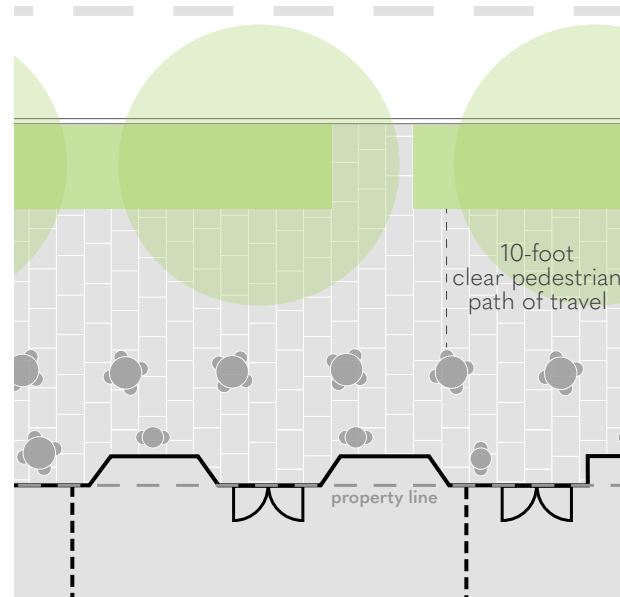


Diagram Showing Pedestrian Clear Path of Travel



Photo of Active Sidewalk



# Pedestrian Zone

- To mark the corridor's intersections and engage pedestrians, introduce 4' x 10' minimum and 10' x 10' maximum public "art carpets" where public art by local artists could be located. All art requires a covenant of maintenance. Art carpet designs can be finished with either (a) the standard 24" x 36" x 2" pressed concrete block pavers 'london pavers' in a color differing from the standard 'limestone gray', but consistent with all other DDOT specifications per DCMR 24-11.105; or (b) special paving to be coordinated with the applicable BID, DDOT, and OP. Permanent public art opportunities are especially recommended to be concentrated west of Farragut Square where the street is wide enough to accommodate them and



Photo of the Central Activity Node around Farragut North Metro Station

pedestrian attractions are limited. Locate temporary public art at a view distance from Farragut North Metro Station (and potentially other nearby metro stations), and especially towards the corridor's ends – to strategically invite people of all ages to take the extra step beyond the central activity node and activate the street. Art carpets strategically overlap with the 10' wide pedestrian clear path of travel to engage pedestrians, but should maintain a 6' clearance from the nearest obstruction in public space at all times so that they do not impede the accessibility of curb ramps, bikeshare stations, bike racks, or micromobility corrals at intersections.

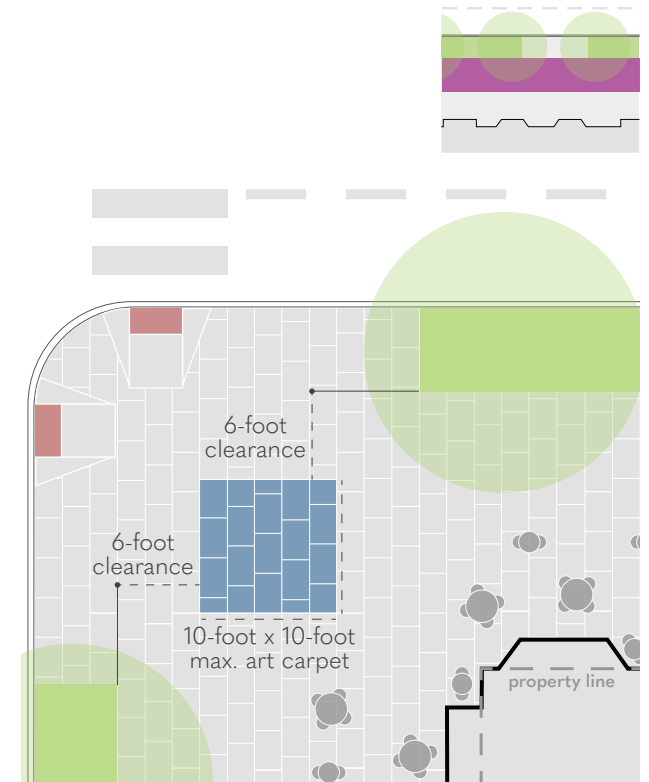


Diagram Showing Art Carpet Layout



Photo of Engaging Public Art at Intersections

# Frontage Zone

## Background

The frontage zone's main objective is to provide sufficient opportunities for pedestrians to engage with the street, whether through greening and corner activity that complement potential projected residential architecture, or promoting projected uses of restaurants and retail. That is especially true West of 16th Street NW where pedestrian activity is low, restaurants and especially fast-casual restaurants are uncommon, and there is a concentration of offices.

The Public Life Study estimates that K Street mostly attracts adult men and people of working age. The frontage zone can be utilized to create opportunities for women, and younger and older pedestrians to engage with K Street's outdoor spaces.

## Recommendations

- Define different spaces at building setbacks by integrating consistent landscaped areas along the building façade, to set the stage for any residential use integration. Where the sidewalk dimensions permit it, introduce a second row of trees in 4' wide planting pits or strips to frame the pedestrian zone and cast quality shade. Provide a continuous, uniform, and wide tree canopy and utilize Low Impact Development (LID) and sustainable practices to the greatest extent possible, using a wide variety of lush native and adaptive plant species to complement the street trees.



Photo of Landscaped 'Parked' Residential Areas

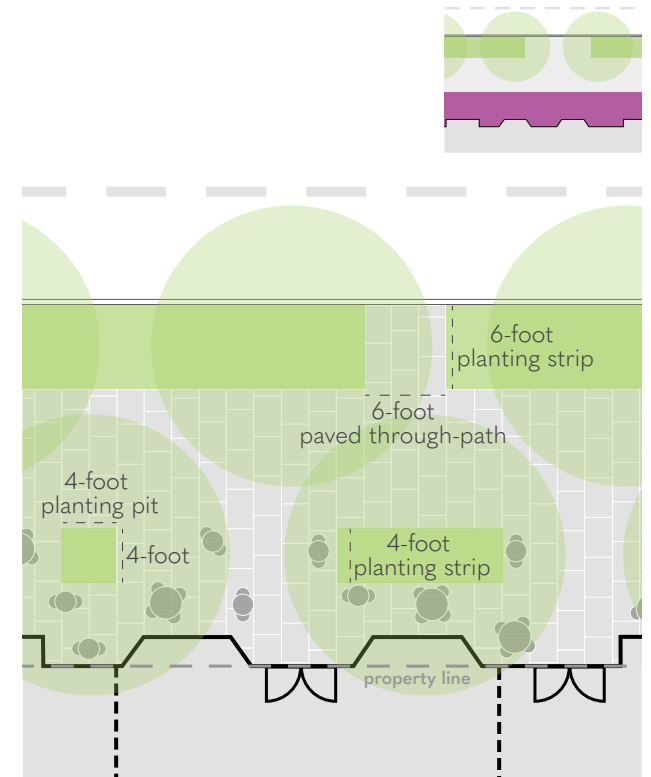


Diagram Showing Layout with a Double Row of Trees



Photo of the Double Row of Trees on 11th and K Streets NW, at the Corridor's East Gateway (G2)

# Frontage Zone

- Soften blank impermeable walls with climbers, vines and tall shrubs, temporary art like the use of chalk and other temporary materials - great to engage different user groups and encourage self-expression.



Photos of Wall Activation Strategies

- Provide continuous paving finished with standard paving throughout the frontage zone, and compliant with accessibility standards.
- Introduce "welcome mats" that define and complement building entrances. Welcome mat designs can be finished with either (a) the standard 24"x 36"x 2" pressed concrete block pavers 'london pavers' in a color differing from the standard 'limestone gray', but consistent with all other DDOT specifications per DCMR 24-11.105; or (b) special paving.

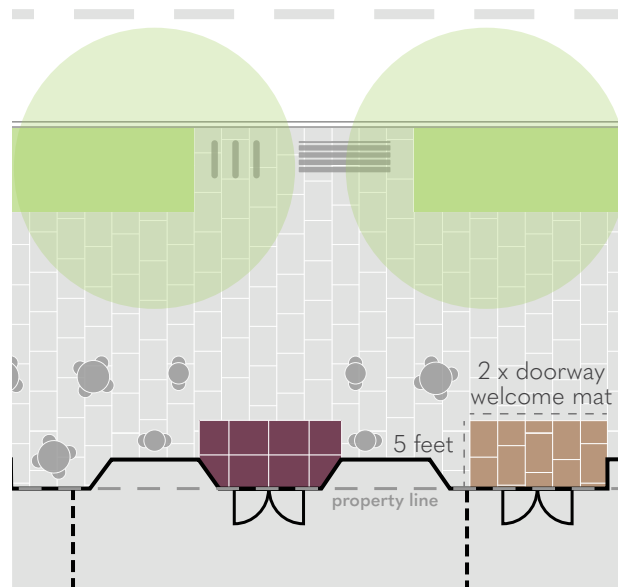


Diagram Showing Paving at Building Entrances

## Special Paving (*welcome mats*)

Per the District of Columbia Municipal Regulations (DCMR) title 24-1105.9 (b, d), variations in paving may occur at building entrances and along the building line, up to a 1/3 of the distance from the property line to the face of the curb and for a width up to twice the doorway size. For buildings falling within the K Street Corridor, this document requires "welcome mats" to be limited to 5' from the property line and a width up to twice the doorway size.

- Utilize the buildings' social edges to create community spaces where people can lean back and interact, or the BIDs and community can host activities like book fairs or interactive blackboards.

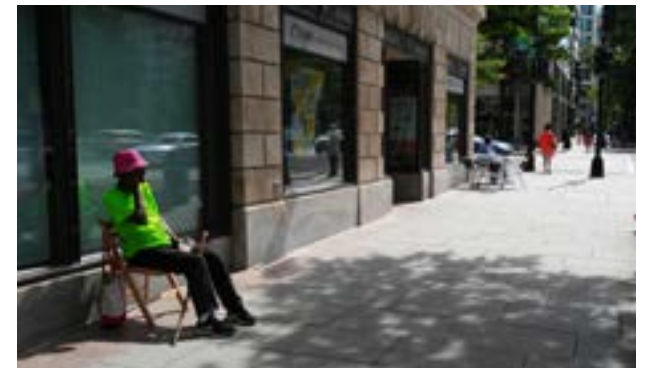
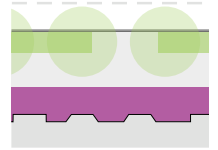


Photo of Active Social Edges



# Frontage Zone



- Promote café seating with seating options for people with different abilities and overhead structures like umbrellas and awnings for protection against the elements.



Photo of Café Seating

- Include creative human-scale lighting such as festoon or other types of lights integrated in café furniture or benches – adding to the corridor’s character and acting as a visual cue for its users.  
\* All fixtures must be coordinated with DDOT.



Photo of Café Seating with Festoon Lighting

## Lighting (sidewalk cafés)

When associated with a sidewalk café, installing lighting requires submitting an application to DDOT’s Transportation Online Permitting System (TOPS) and would trigger Public Space Committee (PSC) review. This guidance document can be used as support for the application to more likely go on the “consent agenda” item.

- Introduce opportunities for stationary activities such as people-watching, chatting with a friend or waiting at comfortable shaded seating.
- Use local artists to introduce playable public art mid-block, where children can be protected by the building face on one end and pedestrian path on the other. Strategically locate such art in blocks neighboring parks and those lacking parks and other public art, to provide more opportunities for children to enjoy the corridor. Art can also complement existing buildings such as Planet Word on K and 13th Streets NW. All art requires a covenant of maintenance. Special lighting may be appropriate for art installations.  
\* All fixtures must be coordinated with DDOT.

# Frontage Zone

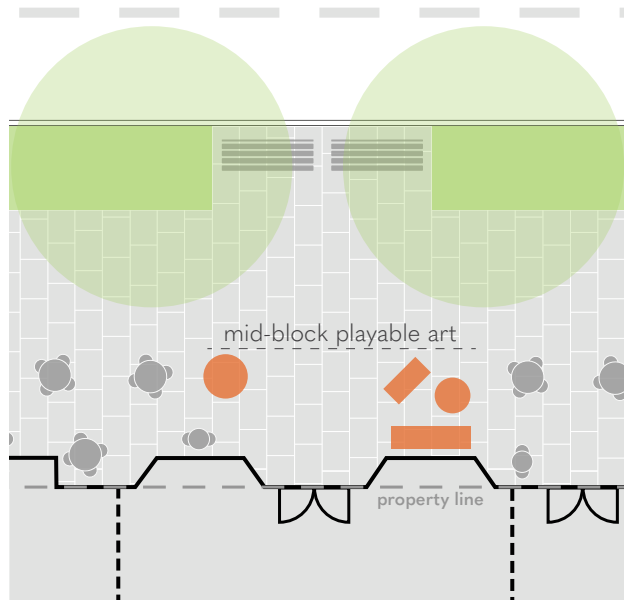
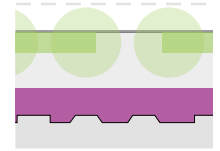


Diagram Showing Ideal Block Location of Playable Art

## Lighting (art installations)

When not associated with a sidewalk café (i.e. as part of an art installation in the frontage zone), installing lighting requires PSC review as "non-standard lighting".



Photo of Playable Art in the District

- Have the design of frontage zones be versatile to the greatest extent possible, through the creating of multi-use spaces that can temporarily be used by the BIDs for low-cost, temporary activation strategies that can bring interest and structure to public space. Examples include creative seating to be utilized for pop-up events, farmers' markets, exercise or even small cultural activities than can expand into neighboring parks or work as an extension of those.



Photos of Frontage Zone Activation



For more information on Urban Design in the  
District of Columbia, visit:  
[planning.dc.gov/page/public-life-initiatives](http://planning.dc.gov/page/public-life-initiatives)