

Access to Terraced Residential Buildings

A Guide for Providing Accessible Routes in Raised Landscaped 'Parking'



Overview

Providing universal barrier-free access to all buildings in Washington, DC is a goal of the District of Columbia. However, the city's wide streets and raised landscaped (parked) areas along some of them can make this challenging. These areas, referred to as landscaped 'parking', are an important defining feature of the city's character and are protected by public space and building projection regulations that can sometimes make providing accessible entrances difficult. This document describes some of the District's preferred design approaches when this happens.

Ideally, accessible routes should be fully compliant with all applicable standards and regulations listed on page 2 of this document. When this is not possible, the District of Columbia encourages working with the

Office of Planning (OP) and District Department of Transportation (DDOT) staff to find design solutions that are compliant with accessibility standards and consistent with the underlying intent of public space and building projection regulations. These guidelines provide consistent design guidance for these non-standard situations.

Designs that follow these guidelines will move through review and approval processes more efficiently, since the approaches described in this document have been developed by OP and DDOT with input from the broad group of technical advisors and stakeholders listed on page 8. Ultimately, the goal is to streamline the process for increasing the pool of accessible residential buildings in the District.

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Principles and Guidelines

APPLICABILITY

These guidelines apply to all public space in the District. They address the provision of access to residential building entrances from the sidewalk through a raised landscaped terrace. Raised landscaped terraces are not expected to be made accessible.

Where it is too challenging for accessible entrances to fully comply with accessibility standards and public space and building projection regulations, applicants can use these guidelines to develop solutions that are compliant with accessibility standards and consistent with the underlying intent of the District's public space regulations. Applicants must first demonstrate that an accessible entrance cannot be provided in a way that complies with public space and building projection regulations; and submit proof that the accessible route leads to an assessible space in the building. In certain cases, applicants may also be asked to provide additional supporting documentation.

Local Regulations | dcregs.dc.gov

- » **DCMR Title 12A - Chapter 32: Encroachments**
Defines allowances for how far above- and below-grade building projections can extend into public space. Administered and enforced by the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA).
- » **DCMR Title 24 Public Space and Safety**
Defines allowances for changes in grade and other improvements in public space, including the area between the back of the sidewalk and property line or building restriction line. Administered and enforced by The District Department of Transportation (DDOT).

Federal and Other Standards | ada.gov/ansi.org

- » **Fair Housing Act (FHA), Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and American National Standards Institute (ANSI)**
Require and regulate accessible sites, facilities, buildings, and elements, as well as public and common use areas and doors of passage into and within a range of dwelling types and unit additions.

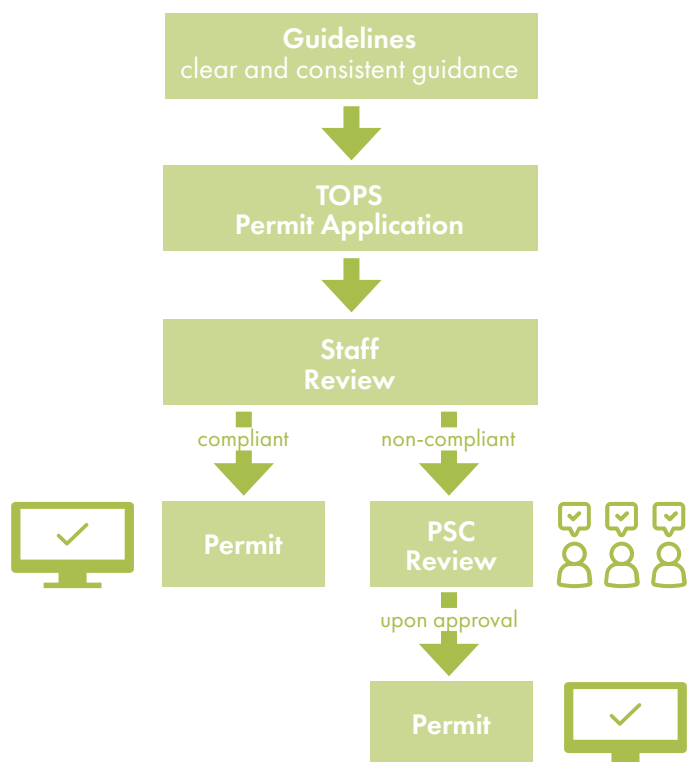
Public space and safety regulations reinforce the importance of maintaining a green and uniform park-like character in landscaped 'parking' areas and protecting the natural grade, in many cases elevated by several feet or more above the adjacent sidewalk grade. Some of these regulations may cause conflict with accessibility standards in the Fair Housing Act (FHA) and by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), which in certain cases require and regulate accessible entrances to buildings.

Typically, larger buildings have more space to provide building access that is consistent with all applicable regulations, and smaller or narrower buildings are more constrained since accessible solutions can take up much of the available public space. Additionally, some sites may display a change in grade that makes providing an accessible entrance prohibitively costly or otherwise impractical.

These guidelines do not alter or replace any existing regulations or standards nor do they supersede any relevant approval processes, but rather define a consistent approach that applicants can use for guidance as they:

- » Prepare their drawings to apply for a Transportation Online Permitting System (TOPS) permit and staff review; and,
- » Present their designs for Public Space Committee (PSC) review, when required. In these cases, the approval of any design modeled after scenarios outlined in this document remains at the discretion of the PSC on a case-by-case basis.

Ramps exceeding projection allowances in public space (as defined in the construction code) are still required to submit a construction code modification application to the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA). Applications that follow these guidelines can use them as support for their applications.



BREAKDOWN OF PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES

Design Principles	Associated Design Guidelines
1. Support District residents of all abilities to remain in their homes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. All applicants, including those with buildings and sites that are considered 'impractical' and/or are exempt from meeting accessibility standards, are encouraged to provide accessible entrances. b. For all buildings, it is advised to first look at all options that make a site accessible, including accessible solutions on public and private property. c. For existing buildings, it is advised to look at temporary accessible structures only when all other measures fail.
2. Provide a safe route that meets all applicable accessibility standards and the intent of public space and building projection regulations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Where the separation of an accessible route and the primary or existing entry route is unavoidable, access from the same street is encouraged. b. Accessible ramp turns that follow building and site lines are encouraged.
3. Maintain block and neighborhood character by proposing a design that is open, blends with the landscaped 'parking' in which it is situated, and appears secondary to the public space surrounding it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Finish materials that match adjacent ones in public space, at least in appearance, are encouraged. b. Accessible routes to new buildings are encouraged to be at or above the grade of the adjacent sidewalk. c. To soften the visual impact on public and private spaces, a 3' minimum planted buffer is encouraged: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Between the sidewalk and the accessible ramp running parallel to the sidewalk; and, » Between an accessible ramp and any adjacent private living spaces.
4. Maintain as much of the existing landscaped 'parking' as possible. Where a permanent alteration of grade is inevitable, prioritize designs that minimize such change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. It is encouraged to locate the accessible route such that the landscaped 'parking' grade at the back of sidewalk is uniform to the greatest extent possible. b. It is encouraged to choose a starting point at the back of the sidewalk where the accessible ramp would require the least grade transition. This would be the point where the sidewalk grade and the building's main entrance grade are closest to one another. c. For accessible routes, it is best to use the minimum width required by accessibility standards. Where stairs are present, the combined accessible walkway and stair (including any retaining walls) width can determine the least width possible. If it is structurally sound to do so, it is possible to eliminate the retaining wall separating the stairs and accessible walkway and replace it with railing in order to gain more space. d. Sometimes a controlled change of grade is best achieved through an accessible walkway at-level with the sidewalk between the building entrance and back of sidewalk. In these cases, to avoid creating a "tunnel" effect, a walkway at least 4' wide and at most 8' wide is preferred. Walkways located in narrower and taller landscaped 'parking' (i.e., up to 10' in distance and with a level change of 2' or more in height between building entrance and sidewalk) are encouraged to be not less than 6' wide.

SPECIAL SITES

Buildings with At-Grade Entrances

Applicants are encouraged to (re)locate the building entrance(s) at the adjacent sidewalk grade, eliminating the need for a ramp in public space. If needed, this approach could include a lobby space located between the basement and first floor, providing an accessible solution to other floors on private property.

Sites with Sloped Sidewalks at Building Entrances

When providing accessible solutions from a sloped sidewalk, applicants are encouraged to provide an additional landing that is level with the nearest point of the sidewalk at the ramp or accessible route connection.

Sites with Narrow Sidewalks at Building Entrances

Where minimum distances between building projections (like steps and ramps) and the curb are not met, applicants are still encouraged to provide accessible entrances, given that they submit a construction code modification application to DCRA.



Image showing building with accessible walkway to at-grade entrance

Buildings located on Two or More Levels

For buildings that front streets with different levels, applicants are encouraged to (re)locate or the building entrance(s) on the street where it would be at (or close to) the sidewalk grade.

Buildings Located on Flood Plains

Buildings located in flood plains typically have their entrances located above the sidewalk level, and often require an accessible ramp that exceeds projection allowances to enter the building. In these cases, applicants are advised to follow these guidelines to increase their chances of getting their non-compliant ramp approved.

Buildings Located in Historic Districts

Applicants are encouraged to consult with the Historic Preservation Office (HPO) early in their project planning. Site and building alterations for properties subject to historic preservation review may pose additional constraints to ensure compatibility with the character of the historic property or district.

All Sites : Existing Technical Requirements for Ramps

Where providing an accessible route requires the use of a ramp, the ramp design (including edge protection and ramp surface quality) must comply with Section 4.8 of the ADA compliance standards. Additionally, accessible ramps are required to comply with the following:

- » Max. ramp slope = 1:12
- » Max. cross slope = 1:50
- » Max. rise = 30"
(For ramps that rise more than 6", provide handrails on both sides of the ramp.)
- » Min. clear ramp width = 36", with a surface at-level with and immediately adjacent to the entrance door
- » Min. clear turning ramp width = 60", with a surface at-level with and immediately adjacent to the entrance door
- » Turning ramp angle = 90 degrees

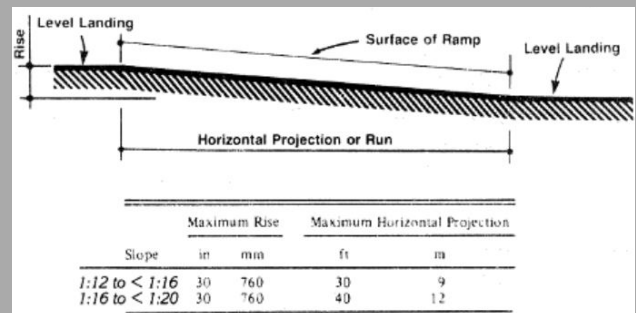


Image from the ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) by the United States Access Board

Potential Scenarios

The following scenarios illustrate access solutions for a variety of common site conditions, based on public space applications typically submitted to TOPS. However, they do not guarantee the immediate approval of the design and may need to be adapted to the existing site conditions for each application.

SCENARIO #1

This scenario illustrates the potential treatment of sites where landscaped 'parking' is constrained in width and challenging in height. A ramp installation that is compliant with accessibility standards would either be impossible to fit or would replace most or all of the landscaped 'parking' area with paved surfaces. The suggested design approach includes an accessible walkway clustered with the existing adjacent stairs, leading directly to the lower-level entrance closest to sidewalk grade.



Image showing building with accessible walkway to below-grade entrance to accessible unit

Design Benefits

- » Maximizes the uniformity of grade at the back of sidewalk;
- » Avoids the landscaped area's fragmentation by having only one interruption in the planted space (combined existing stairs and new accessible route); and,
- » Provides direct and safe access.

Notes

- » In this scenario, the applicant has demonstrated that the interior of the unit serviced by the accessible route is compliant with accessibility standards, in line with guideline 2a on page 3.
- » In this scenario, the applicant made sure the combined width of the below-grade access, stairs, and associated retaining walls is as narrow as possible, in line with guideline 4c on page 3.

Potential Scenarios

SCENARIO #2

This scenario may be used in new or renovated buildings with a proposed primary entrance that is below the landscaped 'parking' grade. The suggested design approach includes an accessible walkway leading directly to the lower-level entrance closest to the sidewalk grade. The installation of an accessible ramp leading to a terrace-level entrance would cause greater disruption to the existing grade and predominant character of the landscaped 'parking'.

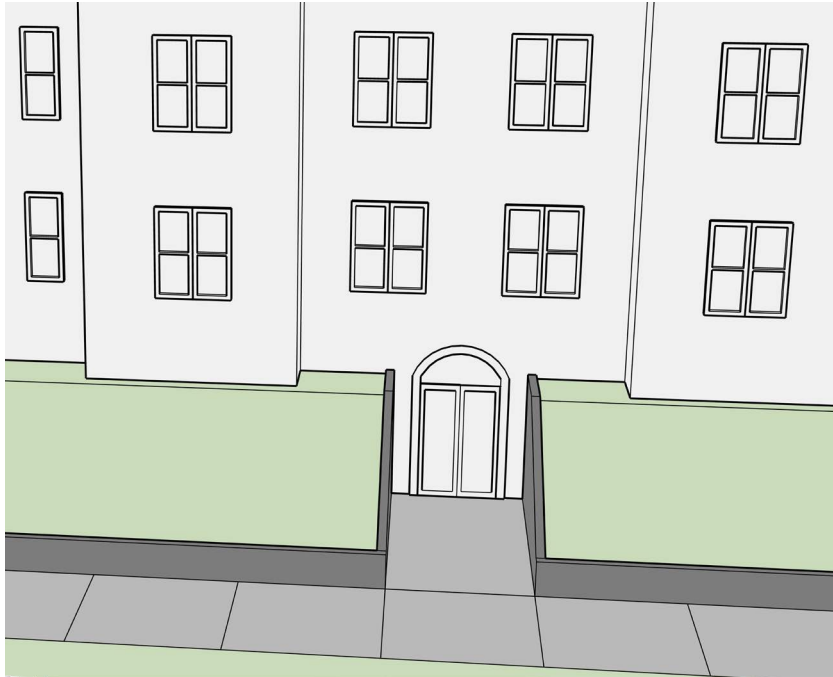


Image showing building with accessible walkway to primary below-grade entrance



Design Benefits

- » Minimizes the change in grade;
- » Maximizes the landscaped area and minimizes its fragmentation; and,
- » Provides direct and safe access.

Notes

- » In this scenario, the applicant made sure they do not create a "tunnel" effect by having a 6' wide accessible walkway, in line with guideline 4c on page 3.

Potential Scenarios

SCENARIO #3

This scenario illustrates the potential treatment of sites with more generous landscaped 'parking' (such as corner lots) and an elevated primary entrance. The suggested design approach includes an accessible ramp that is compliant with accessibility standards, works with the site's topography, and causes minimal alteration to the existing grade and predominant landscape character of the landscaped 'parking.'

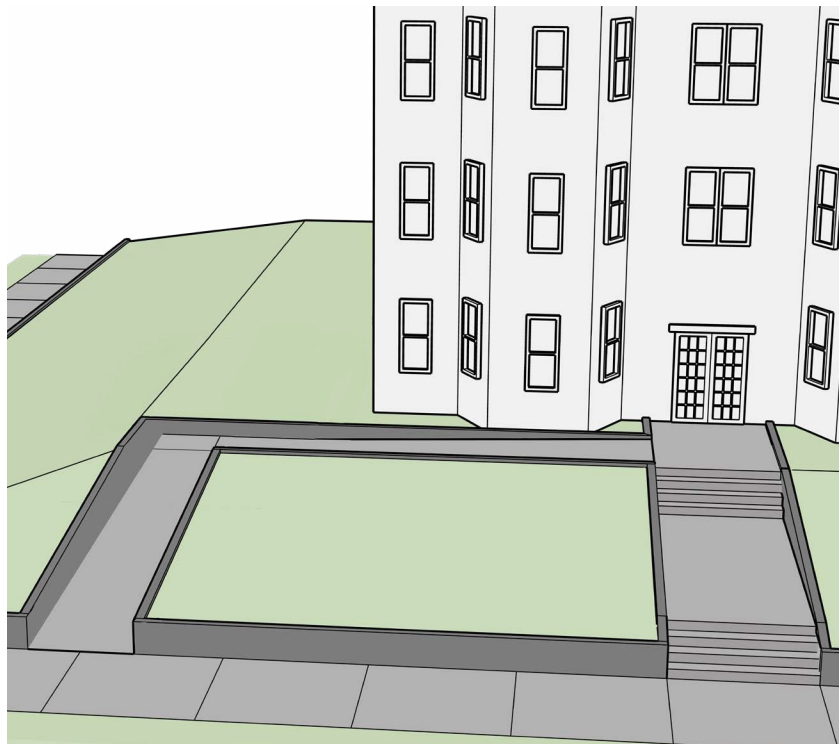


Image showing building with accessible ramp to an elevated primary entrance



Design Benefits

- » Utilizes the corner lot character and generous open space dimensions;
- » Works with site topography lines;
- » Maximizes the landscaped area;
- » Provides direct access from the same street as the lead access with safe turns and follows building and site topography lines; and,
- » Most of the ramp falls within the 10' projection allowance.

Notes

- » In this scenario, the applicant followed building and site lines, in line with guideline 2c on page 3.
- » In this scenario, the applicant softened the visual impact on public and private spaces, by adding a 3' planted buffer between the ramp and adjacent private living spaces, in line with guideline 3c on page 3.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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DC Developmental Disabilities Council (DDC) | ddc.dc.gov

District of Columbia Building Industry Association (DCBIA) | dcbia.org

Multimodal Accessibility Advisory Council (MAAC) | twitter.com/accessibleDC

For questions about these guidelines, contact the Urban Design Division at OP or the Planning and Sustainability Division at DDOT.

