

# Guidelines for Overhead Building Projections

Awnings, Canopies, Marquees, Belt Courses, Cornices, and Roof Overhangs



## Overview

The District of Columbia has a long history of allowing building projections into public space to encourage buildings that are attractive, inviting, and have a human scale. Adding projections as embellishments to buildings that achieve this goal should be made as easy as possible for applicants applying for construction and public space permits.

Awning, canopy, marquee, belt course, cornice, and roof overhangs are building projections allowed to extend over a property line or building restriction line and into public space. Allowances for these types of projections are not always clearly defined and architectural terms used for these types of projections sometimes fail to reflect contemporary design elements. As a result, applicants and reviewers often use their best judgement to determine if a proposed projection realizes the regulation's intent, which can result in non-compliant designs from applicants and inconsistent comments from reviewers.

The guidelines included in this document will:

1. Establish clear guidance for applicants submitting

- applications for overhead building projections;

2. Increase applicants' understanding of different types of overhead building projections and when, where, and how they can be used to embellish a building; and,

3. Ensure consistent guidance from agency staff to applicants.

The Office of Planning (OP), District Department of Transportation (DDOT), and Department of Buildings (DOB) worked together to define a shared understanding of these regulations and clarify the differences between awning, canopy, marquee, belt course, cornice, and roof overhang projections. This initiative is part of OP's Public Space Program's mission to:

1. Promote building projections and engaging facades;

2. Encourage projections that adhere to and meet the intent of projection allowances; and

3. Streamline the permit review process for applicants and reviewers in the Transportation Online Permitting System (TOPS), ProjectDox, and Preliminary Design Review Meetings (PDRMs).

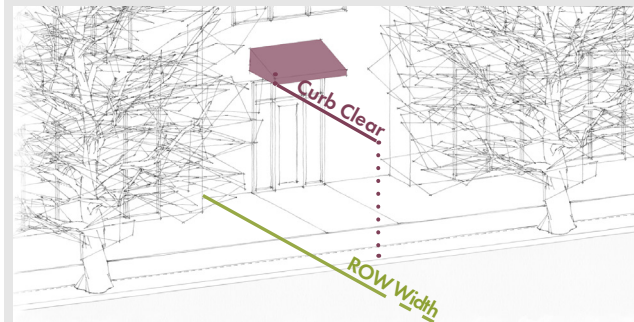
## Existing Regulations and their Interpretation

Applicants proposing overhead building projections must comply with allowances defined in the District of Columbia Municipal Regulation 12A - Encroachments into Public Space, the Public Right-of-Way, or Building Restriction Area ([DCMR 12A – Chapter 32](#)) and the International Building Code (IBC).

Pages 2 and 3 summarize these regulations, include guidance from reviewing agencies, and define review processes.

### Minimum Clearance to the Curb Line

A minimum clear space from the outer edge of the curb to the outer face of all projections shall be preserved (DCMR 12A-3202.7.1.1).



ROW Width	Curb Clear
60-80 feet	10 feet
>80-90 feet	12 feet
>90 feet	15 feet

Projections into public space that do not meet these minimum distance requirements must obtain a code modification from DOB. OP and DDOT support the following projecting embellishments on streets where they are allowed by regulations but unable to maintain these minimum distances, do not conflict with the existing or future tree canopy, and the minimum vertical clearance between balcony, awning, canopy, and marquee projections from a sidewalk is 12 feet:

- Cornices, bases, water tables, and pilasters;
- Open balconies projecting up to 3 feet;
- Awnings, canopies, and marquees up to 18 inches over windows; and
- Awnings, canopies, and marquees up to 3 feet over primary entrances.

### Projections in Historic Districts or at Historic Landmarks

Structures and exterior features on historic properties are subject to historic preservation review ([DCMR 10C, Chapter 25](#)). Applicants are encouraged to consult with Historic Preservation Office staff prior to submitting plans.


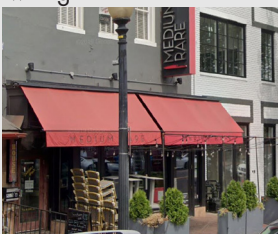


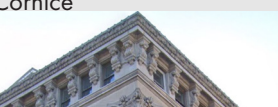
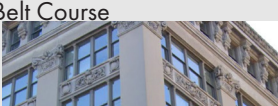
### Code Waiver Process

A modification from projection allowances is allowed when it is in the public interest and meant to embellish the building (DCMR 12A-3202.4.1), provided that:

- It is consistent with DC public space use policies;
- It will not negatively impact public space;
- It does not detract from the landscaped 'public parking' and public space experience;
- The primary effect is not the privatization of public space; and
- The projection is an embellishment.

There are four steps in the projection code modification review process:

1. Applicant submits a projection code modification to DOB;
2. DOB forwards the application to OP and DDOT for review;
3. OP and DDOT determine if the application can be reviewed by staff or requires Public Space Committee (PSC) review. [a] If staff review, OP and DDOT forward their recommendations to DOB. [b] If staff determines PSC review is required, the applicant files a public space permit application for further processing; and
4. DOB takes final action on the application.

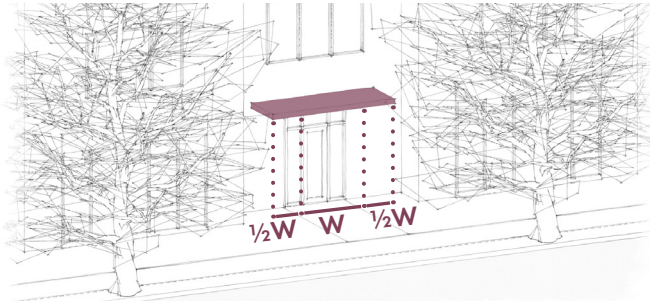
Projection Type	Agency Interpretation	Location Allowance	Projection Allowance	Ground Clearance	Width Limit	Zoning Restriction	DCMR 12A	IBC
<b>Building Attachments</b>								
<b>Marquee</b> 	A permanent structure supported directly by the supporting building and identifies and is located over a primary entrance at the ground floor.	<u>Ground Floor</u> over primary building entrances					A permanent structure supported directly from a building, projects up to 5 feet, has a width sufficient to cover an entrance and a reasonable distance on each side thereof, and maintains a minimum 8-foot clearance from the grade below it (DCMR 12A-3202.3.1).	A canopy used for weather protection, identity, or decoration; located less than 10 feet from an operable opening, covers up to 2/3 the adjacent sidewalk, and maintains a minimum 8 feet clearance from the adjacent grade (IBC-202).
<b>Awning</b> 	A lightweight non-combustible roof structure that may be fixed or retractable, provides protection from elements or is decorative, attached to the building over and next to windows on all upper floors, over doors and show windows at the ground floor, and that break down the scale of the building.	<u>Ground Floor</u> over building entrances and show windows  <u>All floors</u> over and next to building windows	5 feet			None	A folding, hinged, or fixed structure attached to the building, projects up to 5 feet, has a width sufficient to cover a window or entrance and a reasonable distance on each side thereof, and maintains a minimum 8 feet clearance from the grade below it (DCMR 12A-3202.12.1).	A lightweight frame with attached covering used for weather protection, identity, or decoration; partially or wholly supported by the building or other structure to which it is attached and that may or may not retract against the building or other structure (IBC-202).
<b>Canopy</b> 	A roof structure attached to the supporting building and supported by posts easily removable within 24 hours over sidewalk cafes, building entrances, show windows, and loading docks at the ground floor that provides protection from the elements and creates a pedestrian scale at the sidewalk.	<u>Ground Floor</u> over sidewalk cafes, building entrances, show windows, and loading docks	5 feet, or up to the sidewalk's inner line/18 inches from the curb with Public Space Committee approval, or covering a sidewalk cafe area with Public Space Committee approval			Mixed-Use (MU) and Production Distribution and Repair (PDR) only	A structure anchored to the ground by posts; projects up to 5 feet into public space or to the sidewalk's inner line or 18 inches from the curb; maintains a minimum 8-foot clearance from the adjacent grade; has a width sufficient to cover a show window, entrance, display opening, and loading platforms with a reasonable width on each side thereof; may cover the full area of an associated sidewalk cafe; and, is located in a commercial or industrial zone or meets additional requirements based on group occupancy classifications (DCMR 12A-3202.12.2).	A permanent rigid structure with attached covering used for weather projection, identity, or decoration and that may be structurally independent or attached to a building on one or more sides (IBC-202).
<b>Architectural Embellishments</b>								
<b>Roof Overhang</b> 	A horizontal embellishment to the building that articulates the roof line and is open in appearance with exposed supports.	<u>Roof Level</u> on building façade					Architectural Embellishments unlimited in length and height that may extend to but not over party/alley lines extended as long as they do not encroach on adjacent sites and building projections; with cornices and roof overhangs permitted to project up to 5 feet beyond the building line and belt courses up to 8 inches of the building line (DCMR 12A-3202.12.9 and 3202.7).	None
<b>Cornice</b> 	A horizontal embellishment on a building that creates depth, delineates and ornaments the building facade, and is solid in appearance.	<u>All Floors</u> on building façade	5 feet			None	Architectural Embellishments unlimited in length and height that may extend to but not over party/alley lines extended as long as they do not encroach on adjacent sites and building projections; with cornices and roof overhangs permitted to project up to 5 feet beyond the building line and belt courses up to 8 inches of the building line (DCMR 12A-3202.12.9 and 3202.7).	A projecting horizontal molded element located at or near the top of an architectural feature (IBC-202).
<b>Belt Course</b> 			8 inches			None		None



## Additional Guidance

### Projection Widths

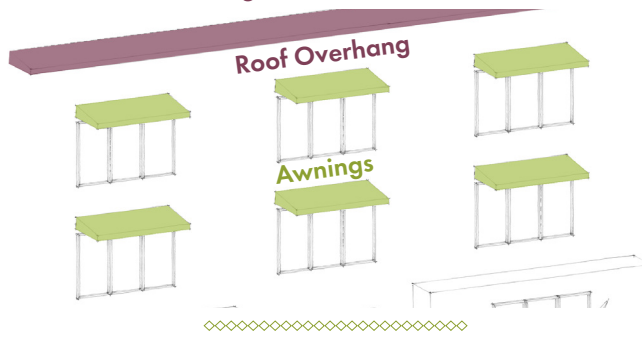
Awning, canopy, and marquee projections are allowed widths a “reasonable distance” to each side of an associated opening, which is up to half the width of the opening on either side. Oriel window or balcony projections over an opening are not considered an awning, canopy, or marquee projection and may connect with them.



### Sunshades

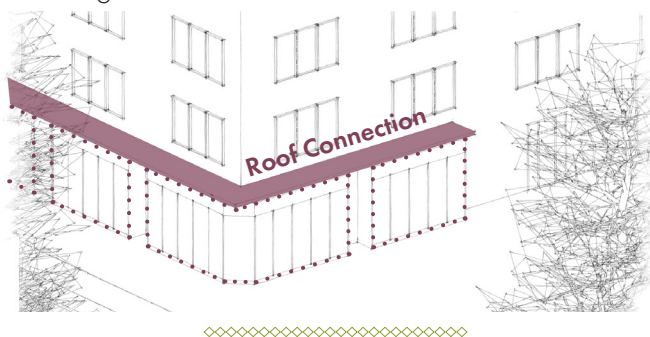
Projections intended to block sunlight from entering buildings and entrances (i.e. brise-soleil, awnings, shade panels, etc.) are regulated as awning or roof overhangs, depending on their placement:

- **Awnings** when over windows or entrances; and,
- **Roof Overhangs** when at the roof line.



### Roofs Connecting Ground Floor Show Windows

Show windows separated by 48” may be connected by a continuous roof connection when supported by a projection code modification endorsed by the PSC and approved by DOB with permit type “Other: Exception not to Building Code”.



### Canopy Projection Allowances

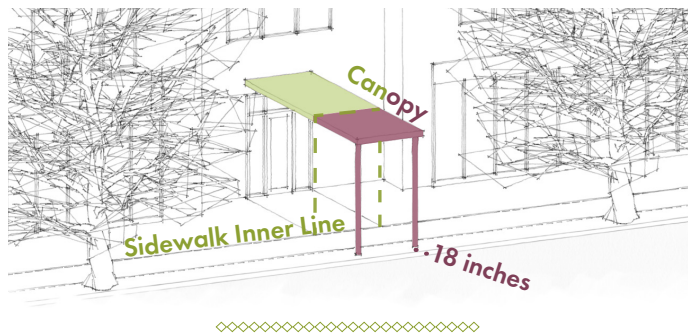
Canopies are a type of projection supported by posts

that can block pedestrian paths and therefore have the most restrictions. Canopies are allowed on buildings in commercial or industrial zones, or in the landscaped ‘public parking’ area adjacent to any building with a group occupancy classification included in the table below (DCMR 12A-3202.12.2.5):

Group	Purpose	Occupancy
A	civic, social, or religious functions	occupant load > 100 persons
R	associated with sleeping	dwelling units > 50
M	associated with commercial uses	frontage ≥ 100 ft. on the street where the canopy is located OR area > 15,000 square feet/floor
B	associated with office uses	

When recommended by the PSC, DOB can approve canopies extending to the inner line of the sidewalk or 18 inches from the curb if they (DCMR 12A-3202.12.2.5.1):

- Do not impede the pedestrian clear path of travel;
- Do not impede street tree preservation and additions, or cause their over-pruning;
- Are consistent with neighborhood and street character; and
- Are associated with the entrance to a business with frequent pick up/drop off or that anticipates large groups of people arriving and leaving at the same time (large auditoriums, hotels, hospitals, funeral homes, wedding venues, etc.).



#### Acknowledgements



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 Sharon Dendy | Landscape Architect, Urban Forestry



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 Chris Bailey | Deputy Chief Building Official  
 Raju Shrestha | Residential Plan Reviewer  
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