

# K STREET

## Public Life Study

November 2019



District of Columbia  
Office of Planning



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# What is Public Life?

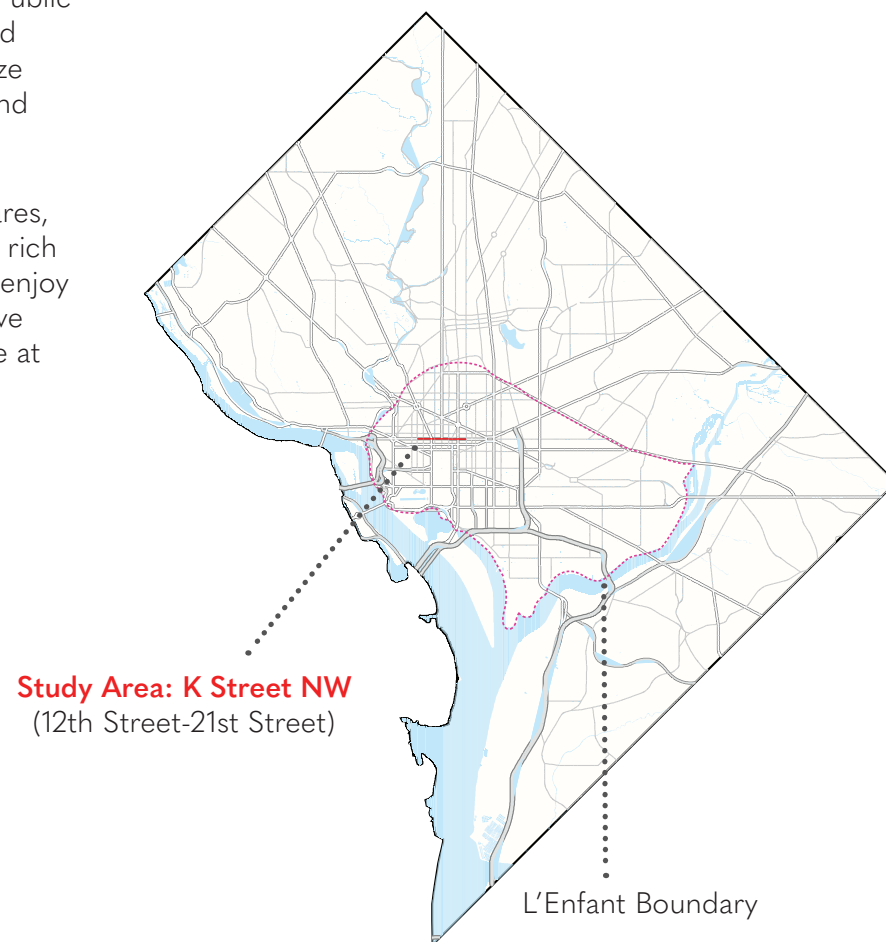
**Public life is what people create when they connect with one another in public spaces** — streets, plazas, parks, and city spaces between buildings. Public life is the everyday activities people naturally participate in when they spend time outside of their homes, workplaces, and cars. Public life studies analyze observed human behavior in shared spaces to inform policy, regulations, and temporary or permanent public space design initiatives.

The District of Columbia is fortunate to have a wealth of park spaces, squares, and pedestrian-friendly streets that provide opportunities for a vibrant and rich public life. As the District grows and changes, ensuring that all people can enjoy public life in our shared spaces is an important part of achieving an inclusive city. Learn more about the DC Office of Planning's (OP) work on public life at [planning.dc.gov](https://planning.dc.gov).

## Public Life on K Street

This public life study assessed the current public life and pedestrian activity of K Street to inform recommendations on how to best transform K Street into a **grander, more active,** and **vital** pedestrian corridor. K Street was planned as a grand east/west avenue as part of L'Enfant's plan, and has since been designed as a multiway boulevard.

The District recognizes that K Street is responding to evolving mobility needs. A DC Department of Transportation (DDOT) effort is currently underway to redesign the transitway on K Street NW from 12th Street to 21st Street. The project is bounded by mobility constraints: the narrowing of the street to two lanes at 12th Street, and the underpass at 22nd Street. This is a prime opportunity to elevate the pedestrian experience along the corridor.





## Why a Public Life Study?

**To understand the user experience**

**To provide data and evidence for:**

- (1) improving the design of projects
- (2) making choices about capital funding

**To inform strategies for improving streets**

**To track progress**



# Analysis

## Methods

This public life study aimed to answer four questions (listed on pages 6-7) about the pedestrian experience. Knowing how K Street works — or doesn't work — for current users allows us to make informed design recommendations.

Pedestrian counts focus on people who are moving. Stationary activity mapping, as the name suggests, focuses on people who are stationary. Volunteers conducting pedestrian counts stood mid-block, facing the street, and tracked the total number of people, their direction, and basic perceived demographic information.

The DC Office of Planning (OP) partnered with the Gehl Institute and Sidewalk Labs to testdrive a new app for conducting public life studies. Volunteers tracked people stopped on the sidewalks, logged basic perceived demographic information, posture, and activity.

## Study Area

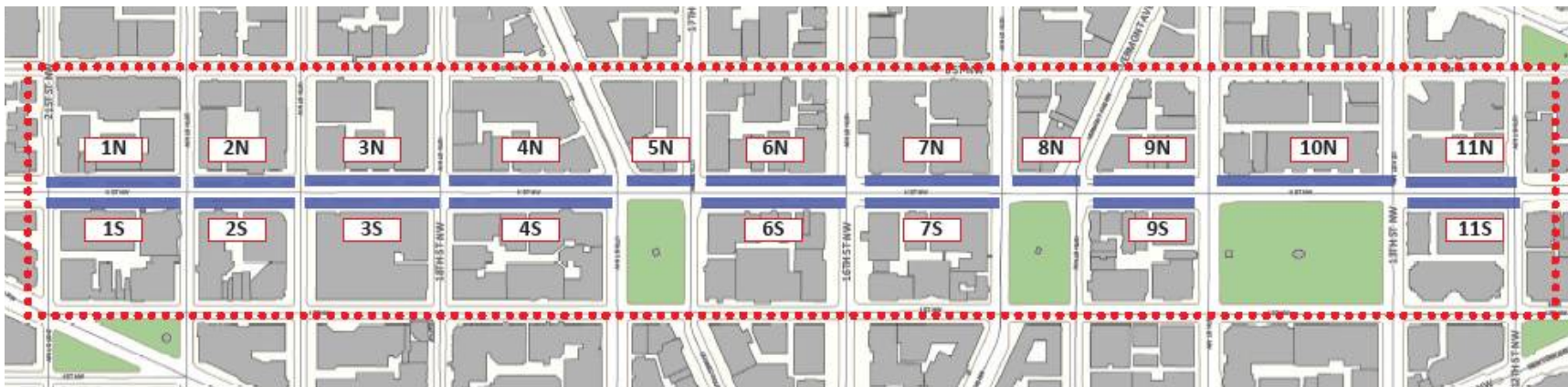
The K Street Public Life Study covered 19 blockfaces along 11 city blocks — 12th Street NW to 21st Street NW.

This study did not include the 3 blockfaces with park land: Franklin Park, Farragut Square and McPherson Square. Because parks operate much differently than do sidewalks, they have been separately studied by OP.

## Field Work

Data collection took place over two 12-hour days (Tuesday, 6/25/2019, and Saturday, 7/13/2019). Volunteers collected two sets of data: stationary activity mapping and pedestrian counts.

Such a large study area required collaboration with project stakeholders. Volunteers included staff from the DC Office of Planning, DC Department of Transportation (DDOT), Gensler Architecture, Downtown DC BID, and Georgetown University's Urban and Regional Planning program.



# Executive Summary

The K Street public life study aimed to answer four key questions about the corridor. The answers to these questions allow us to make thoughtful design and long-range planning decisions that respond to current conditions and uses.

## 1. What barriers do pedestrians face?



There isn't enough shade



It's difficult to cross K Street



K Street needs more seating

## 2. Who is using K Street?



Working age adults on the weekday



Tourists on the weekend



### 3. Why is K Street not more active?



Nearby public spaces are more appealing



57% of land use is office

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### 4. How do we design for greater activity?



Streamline place management and permitting processes



Improve street design: tree canopy and public seating



Change land use to increase restaurants and retail



Use temporary activation strategies

# K STREET TODAY

- p. 10 Comparative Pedestrian Activity
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# Cross-section of K Street NW Today



# How does K Street NW measure up?

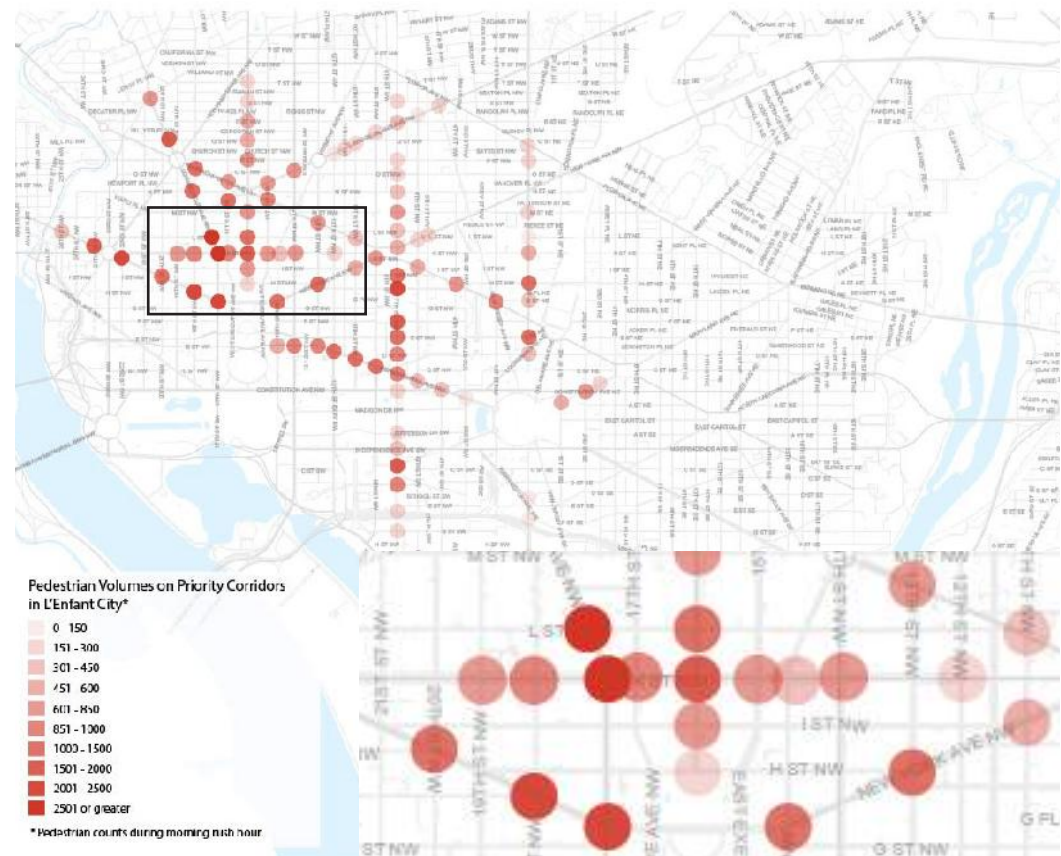
## DC's major boulevards meet on K Street NW.

The map to the right visualizes pedestrian volume on priority corridors in DC's city center. Vermont Avenue, Connecticut Avenue, and 16th Street all intersect with K Street. This means that K Street takes on special importance as a pedestrian and vehicle thoroughfare.

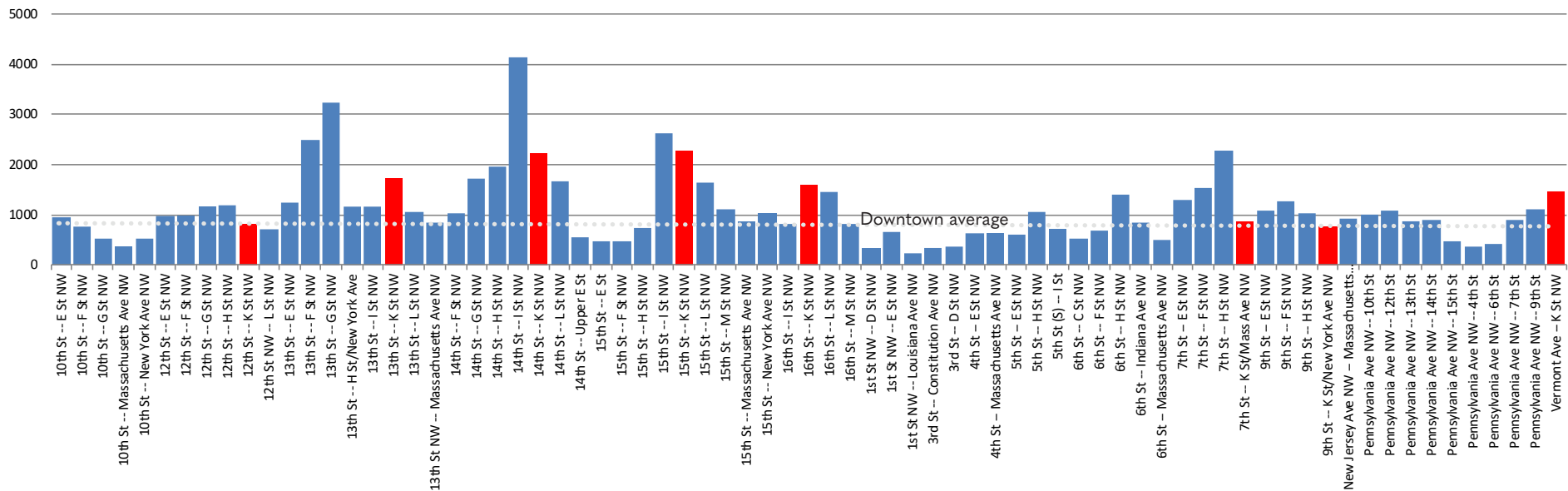
## K Street/Connecticut Avenue NW is the busiest intersection in the city.

During the work week, pedestrian activity centers around the metro stations at the intersection with Connecticut Avenue. Our study found a significant decrease of activity on the weekend, showing that K Street is used primarily by people commuting to work.

Pedestrian Volumes on Priority Corridors in DC City Center



Peak Hour Pedestrian Volumes in DC City Center



## K Street is an important pedestrian boulevard.

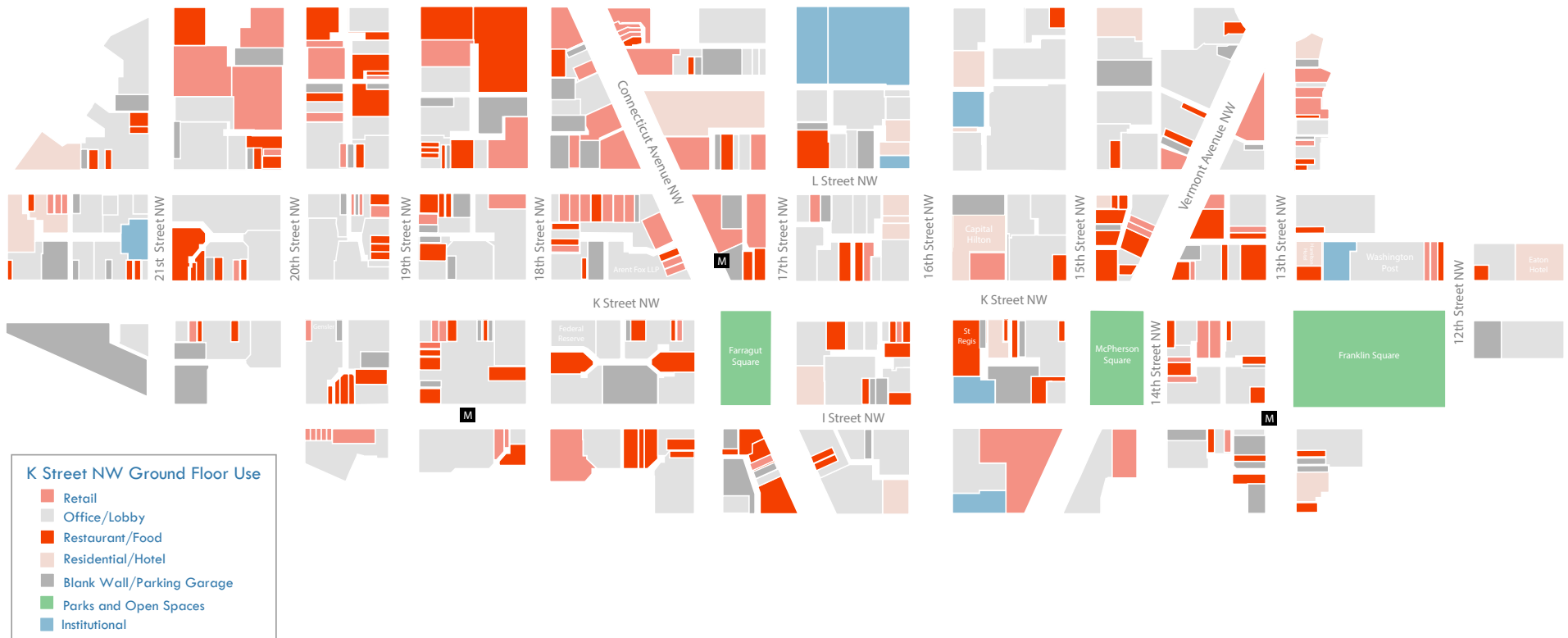
K Street is home to some of the city's busiest intersections. The table above compares peak hour pedestrian volumes in DC's city center — intersections on K Street are red. With the exception of a few extremely high volume corridors — namely the intersections of 14th and I Street, and 13th and G Street — K Street is a top performer of pedestrian volume.

**What does this mean?** People are using K Street — as pedestrians, transit users, and drivers. The District is right to invest resources in optimizing its performance as a pedestrian and transit corridor.

# Ground Floor Use

## K Street is 57% office/lobby space.

Overwhelmingly, K Street's ground floor use is occupied by office/lobby space. The street lacks sufficient opportunities for pedestrians to engage with the street. With the scarcity of restaurants and retail, pedestrians travel to nearby corridors or neighborhoods (Connecticut Avenue and Mount Vernon Triangle, respectively).





# Representative Ground Floor Uses



57% Office/Lobby



23% Restaurants



4% Hotel



7% Retail



9% Blank Wall/Parking

# Ground Floor Activity

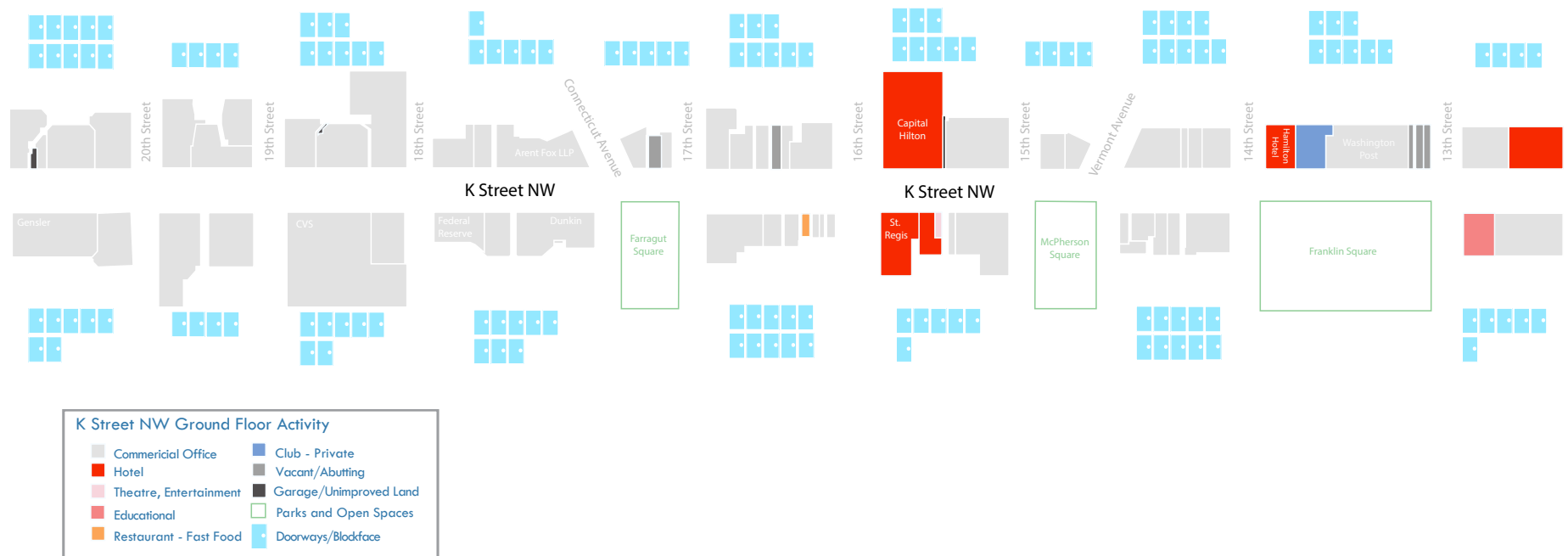
## K Street is built for offices, not people.

The majority of the buildings on K Street are zoned for office/ lobby use, as illustrated in the map below. Offices are more highly concentrated to the west end of the corridor. Not coincidentally, the west end of K Street has the least pedestrian activity.

Some office buildings have incorporated diverse ground floor uses such as restaurants and retail (illustrated on page 17), but these buildings are the exceptions, not the rule.

## Long blocks have few entrypoints.

On average, K Street NW has 7 doorways per block: 3 less than Connecticut Avenue and the same number as 7th Street NW. From a logistical standpoint, it is more difficult to enter buildings on K Street because there are fewer points of entry. This is reflective of the street's expansive ground floor lobbies which allow infrequent entry points into private spaces.



# Comparative Permeability Factors



**K Street NW**



**Connecticut Avenue NW**



**Champs-Élysées, Paris**

Average # of Doors/Block	7	10	21
Peak Hour Pedestrian Count	741	4,833	8,000*
Average Building Facade Width	98 ft	100 ft	89 ft
Average # of Colors on Facade	3	10	3

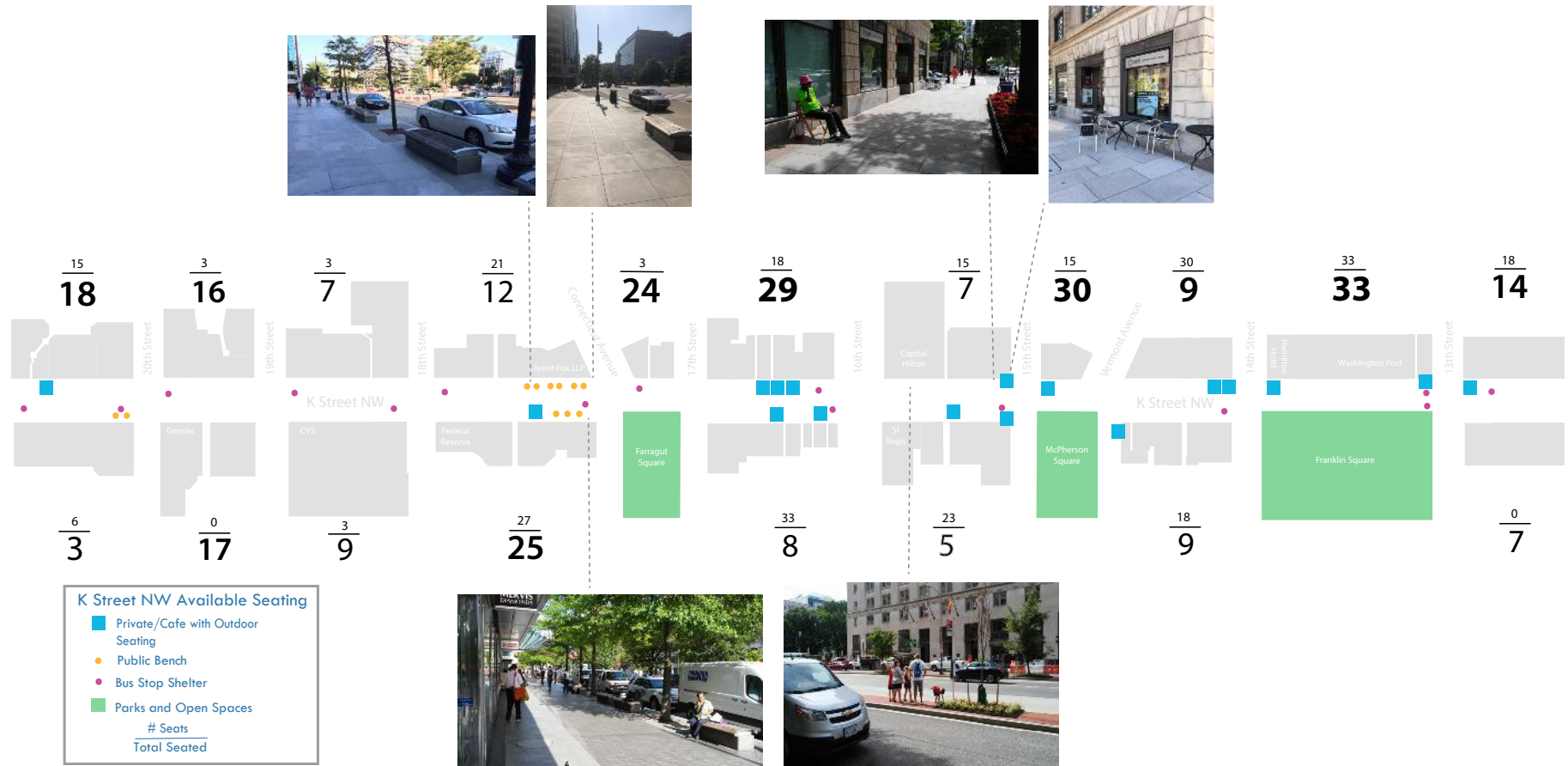
\*estimated average hourly count per block based on Gehl preliminary data



# Available Seating

## K Street lacks quality public seating.

Only 3 blocks in our 11 block study area have public benches. Interestingly, those benches don't greatly increase the number of people sitting. The street's unfriendly conditions are likely responsible for this outcome: benches on the northside of the block are unshaded, making sitting uncomfortable. Of those seated, we found no difference between those using formal and informal seating (bench vs. curb). This tells us that current seating does not entice pedestrians.

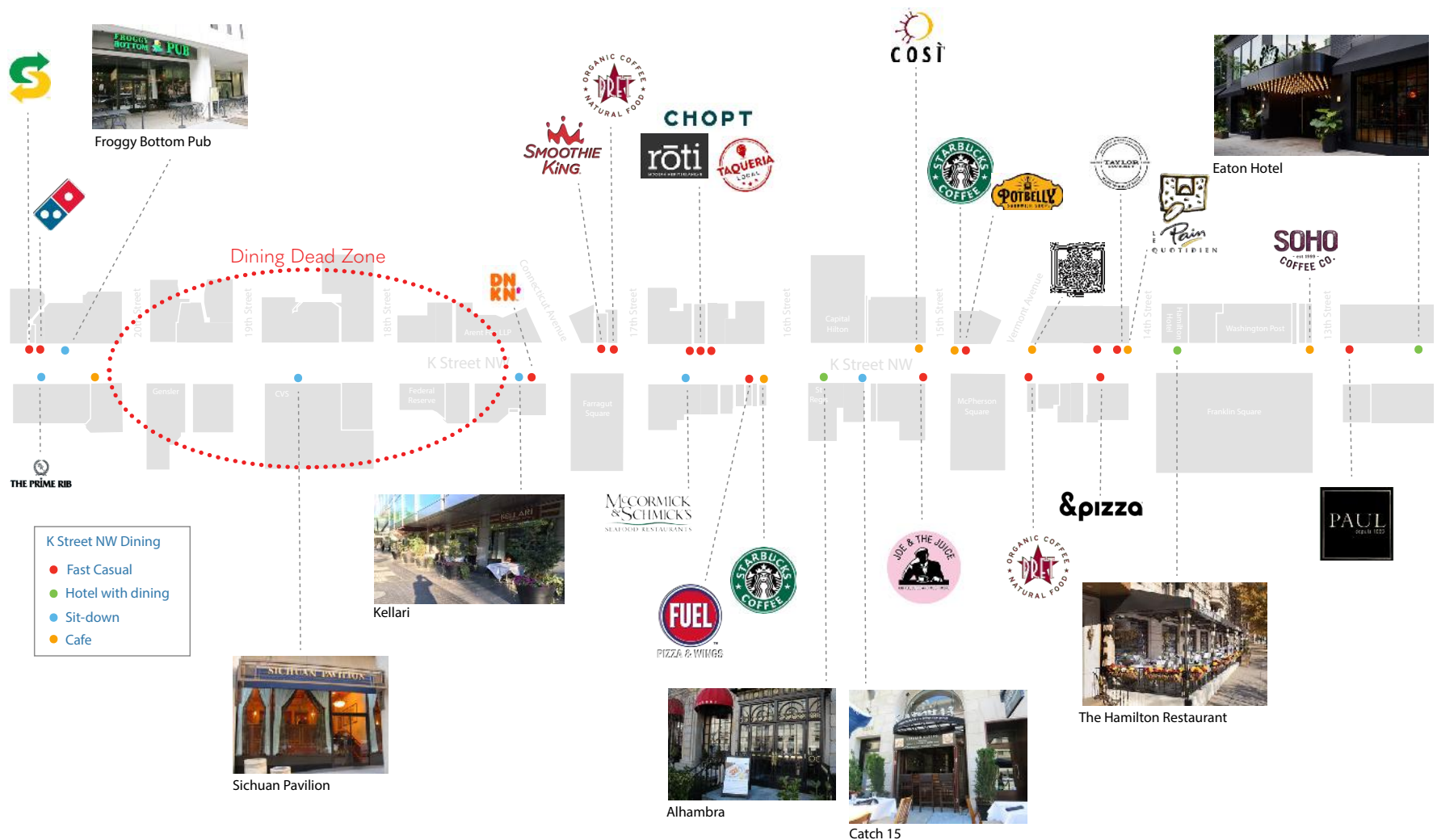




# Dining

**There are few options on the west end of K Street.**

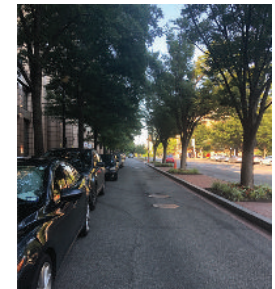
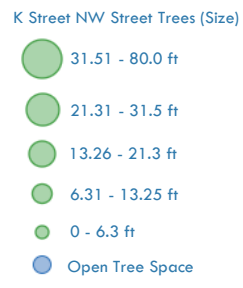
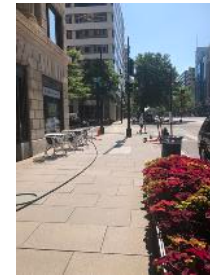
Because K Street is a business hub, it is important to cater to working peoples' needs. There is a good range of fast casual dining in the center of the corridor, extending east. On the west end of K Street, the only dining available is sit-down — meaning that people must visit a nearby corridor (L and M Street are popular) or walk many blocks for diverse lunch options.



# Street Canopy

**K Street lacks a consistent, quality tree canopy.**

While there are street trees along the K Street NW corridor, they fail to provide quality shade for pedestrians. It is also worth noting that many of the corridor's most impactful street trees are planted on the median separating access lanes from drive lanes.



# FIELD RESULTS

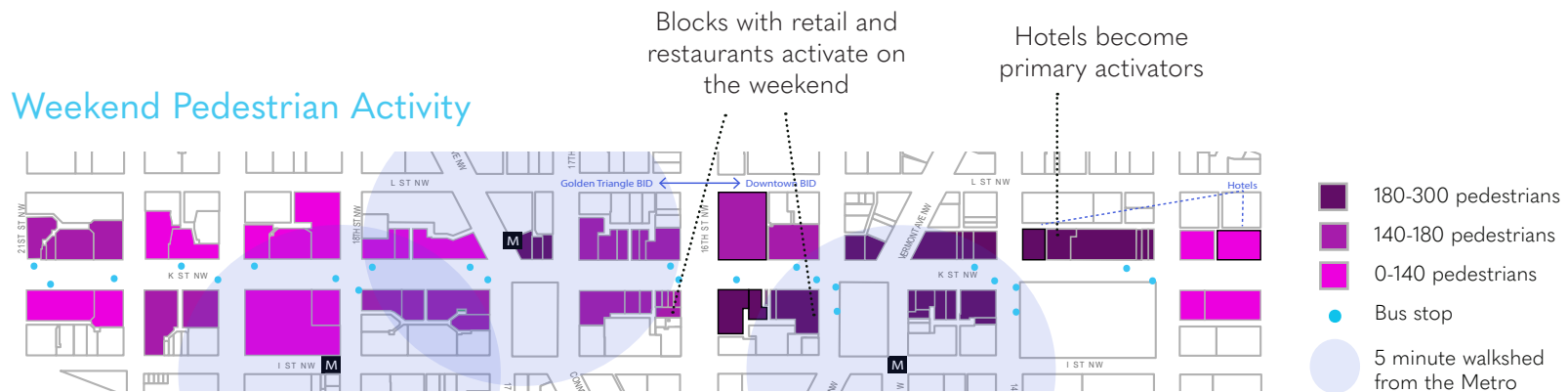
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# PEOPLE MOVING

## Weekday Pedestrian Activity



## Weekend Pedestrian Activity





## K Street loses 77% of its activity on the weekend.

Surveyors conducted screenline counts — tracking the number of people walking past them on designated blocks. For more information on screenline count methodology, refer to page 5. After the survey, blocks were broken into three categories: high pedestrian activity, medium activity, and low activity.

Pedestrian activity is so much higher on the weekday that it is important to remember blocks are categorized by their pedestrian activity relative to other streets on that particular day.



Low Activity



Medium Activity



High Activity

# People Moving: Demographics

## Gender

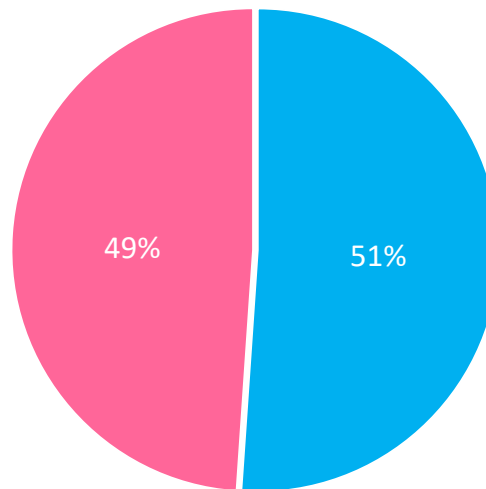
On the weekday, K Street is largely used by working age adults en route to nearby office buildings — many of which are clustered on the west end of the corridor. Therefore, it's unsurprising that gender differences on the weekday are minimal.

On the weekend, however, when commuter traffic is absent, men outnumber women on K Street. It is difficult to draw conclusions from this finding alone. Are pedestrians working on the weekend or participating in leisure activities? The answer is indeterminable without survey data.

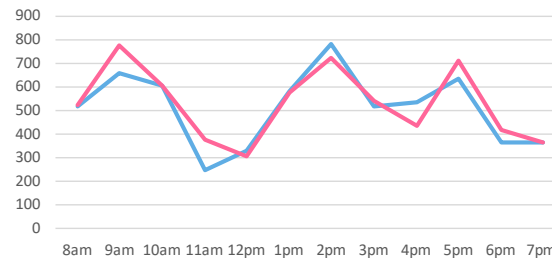
However, the presence of women is used to measure perceived safety. The absence of women on the weekend suggests that feelings of safety may be an issue on K Street.

**Men and women use K Street to a similar degree,**

Weekday

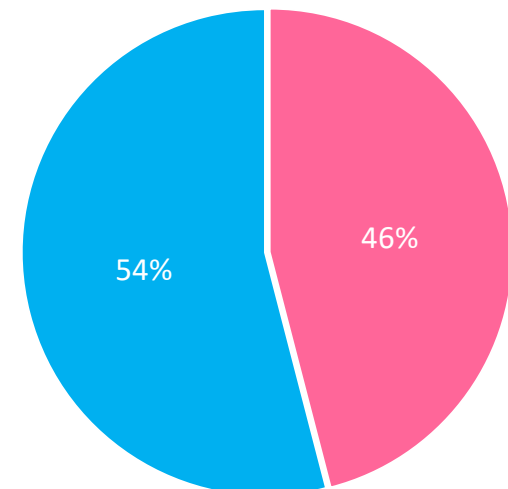


Weekday

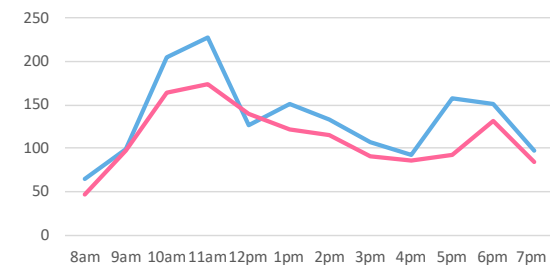


**but on the weekend, men outnumber women.**

Weekend



Weekend

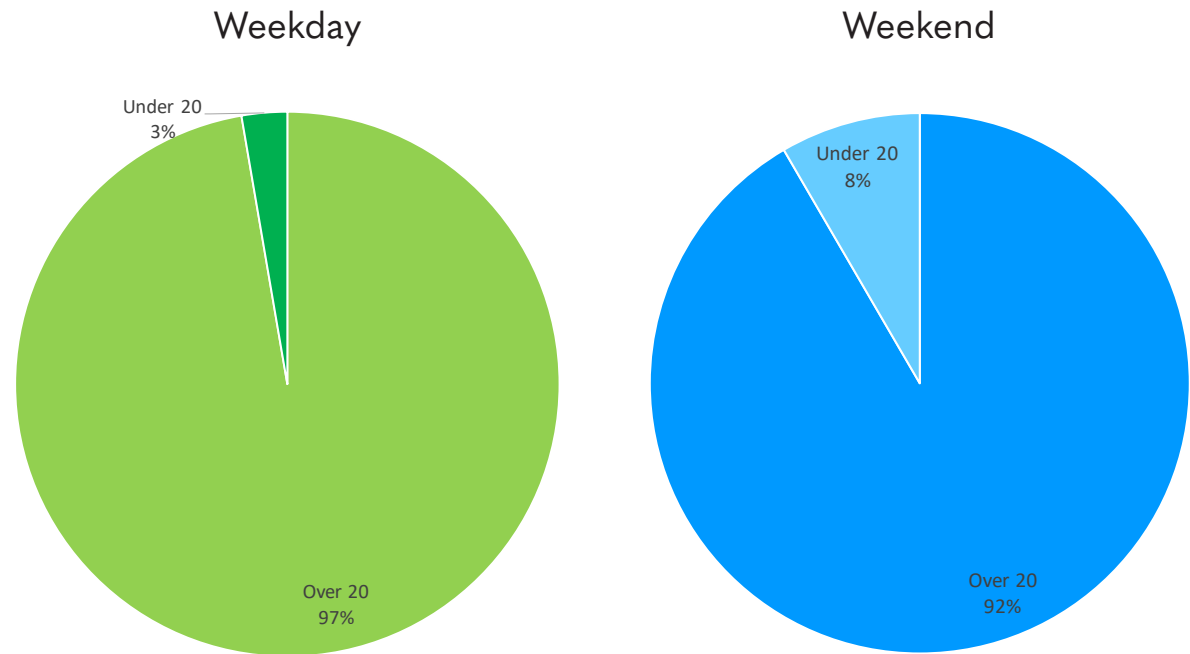


## Age

### 95% of pedestrians are working age adults.

Calculating the average perceived age of pedestrians on the weekday and weekend, we find that K Street is used nearly exclusively by working age adults. This makes sense given that K Street is built as a commuter thoroughfare and houses important private and public entities.

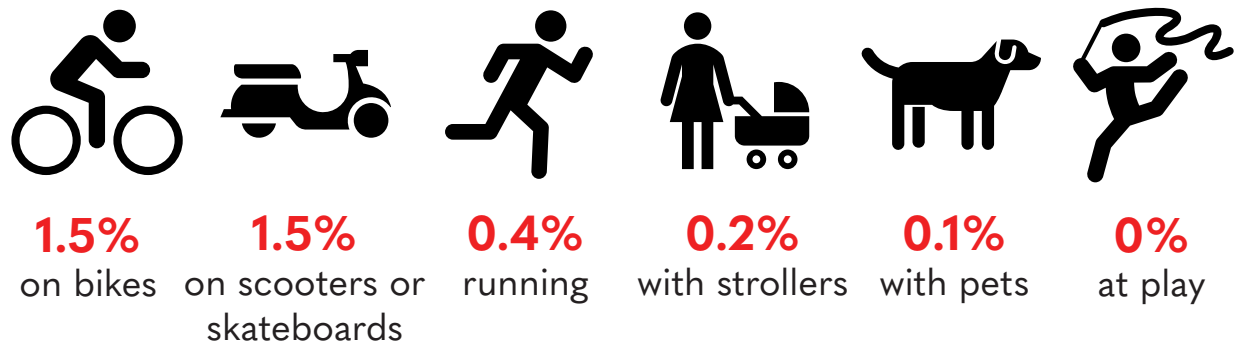
Future design should cater to current users (adults over 20) while building in opportunities for younger and older people to engage with K Street's public spaces.



## Wheels + Fitness + Pets

### Incredibly few people use K Street for non-work activities.

The figures to the right represent the prevalence of particular activities on K Street's sidewalks as a proportion of total pedestrian activity over the two-day study period.



# People Moving: Direction

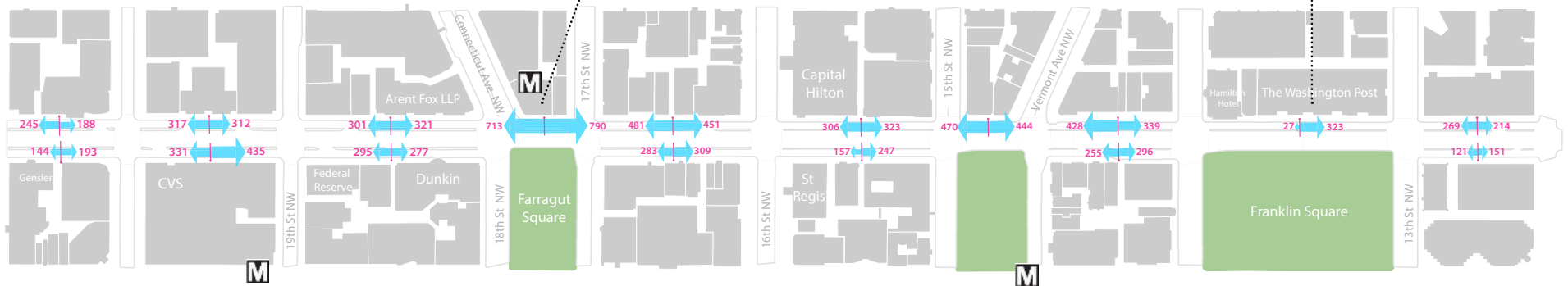


Activity is concentrated around the Farragut North Metro Station



Blocks with few dining options have low activity. People move towards the nearest block with fast dining.

## Weekday Screenline Count



## Method and Findings

Surveyors collected directional data using a screenline count. A screenline count is a public life tool in which surveyors track pedestrians passing them by — logging direction and basic perceived demographic information. The direction of pedestrians on K Street confirms that people move towards the middle of the corridor, but not towards the ends. The centrally located Farragut North Metro Station is the central activity node, but its high activity does not greatly impact the activity of neighboring blocks. This suggests that there is an opportunity for increased pedestrian activity on K Street.



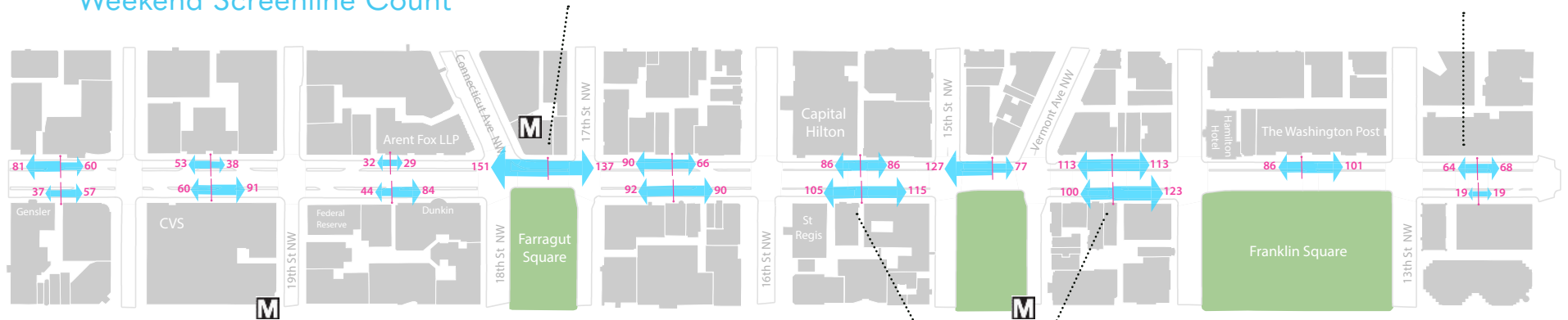


Farragut North Metro Station remains the biggest activator on the weekend



K Street is not well integrated into Mt. Vernon Triangle

## Weekend Screenline Count



Activity centers around hotels on the weekend

# PEOPLE STAYING

## Method

To measure people who stay, surveyors walked the 11-block study area, tracking where people stopped and what they were doing. We define “stopping” as anyone who pauses in their movements: to chat with a friend, wait for a bus, etc.

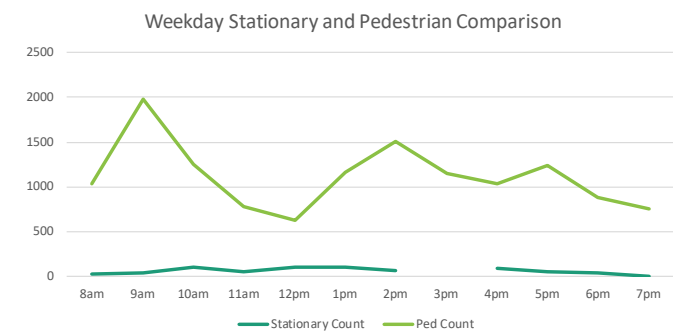
The DC Office of Planning partnered with the Gehl Institute and Sidewalk Labs to pilot their new public life study app, [CommonSpace](#). This mobile application allowed surveyors to track and log stationary activity and basic demographic information in real time.

## Few people stay. Even fewer women stay.

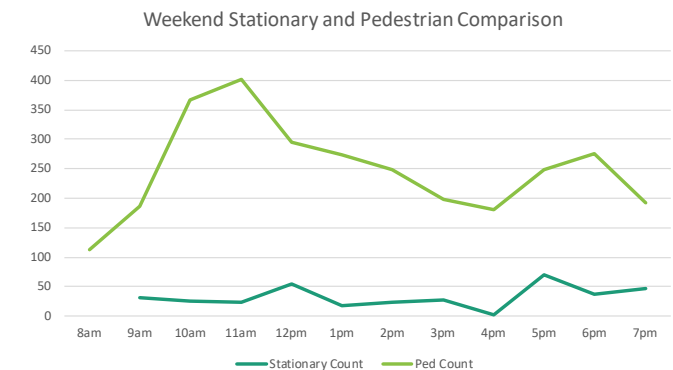
774 people stopped on K Street over the two-day study — representing 6% of people on the weekday and 13% of people on the weekend. These are very low figures, illustrating that K Street is not a place people want to stay. We attribute this to a lack of ground floor active uses along the corridor and unfriendly street design.

**Of the people who stay, only 41% were women.** That’s 10% less than we would expect given that 51.5% of pedestrians were women. In planning, the presence (or lack thereof) of women, children, and the elderly is used to gauge a place’s perceived safety. The absence of women and children suggests feelings of safety may be an issue.

**6%** of people stopped on the weekday.



**13%** of pedestrians stopped on the weekend.



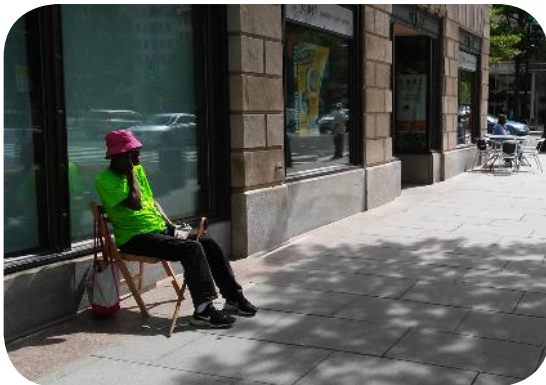
# People Staying: Posture



68% standing



13% sitting formally



13% sitting informally



1% lying

**What does  
this tell us?**

The majority of people who stop on K Street are standing. The street's lack of seating, shade, and destinations (restaurants, retail) may be responsible. The percentage of people using formal seating (benches, bus stops) and informal seating (curbs, ledges) is equal. Formal seating is neither inviting nor available. In the absence of quality seating, people either stand or improvise.

Note: 5% of posture was uncategorized

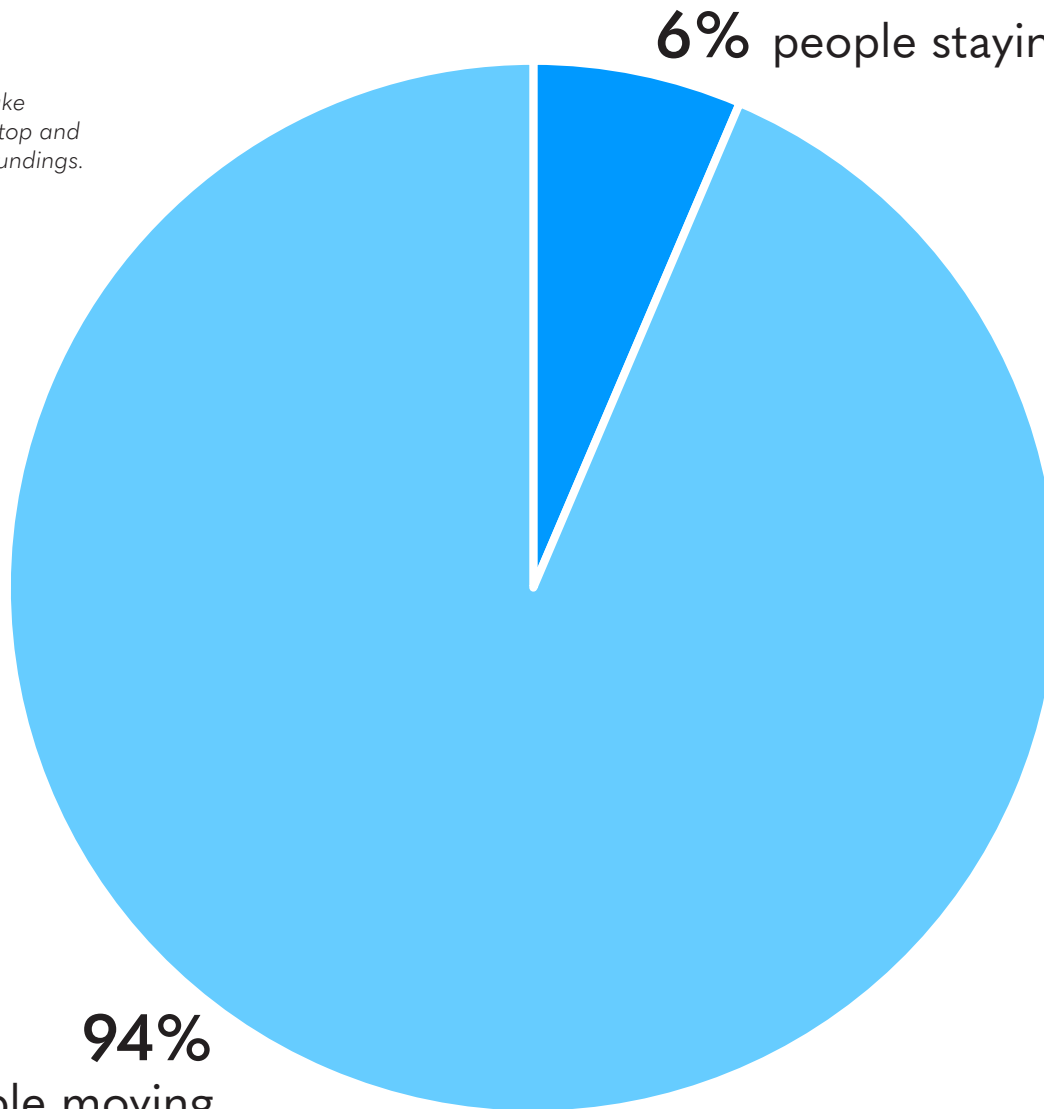
# Stickiness

## Sticky streets:

Avenues that make people want to stop and enjoy their surroundings.



94%  
people moving



6% people staying



## K Street does not encourage lingering.

The overwhelming majority of people using K Street NW are moving — using the street as a means of getting somewhere else. Very few people stop on the corridor.

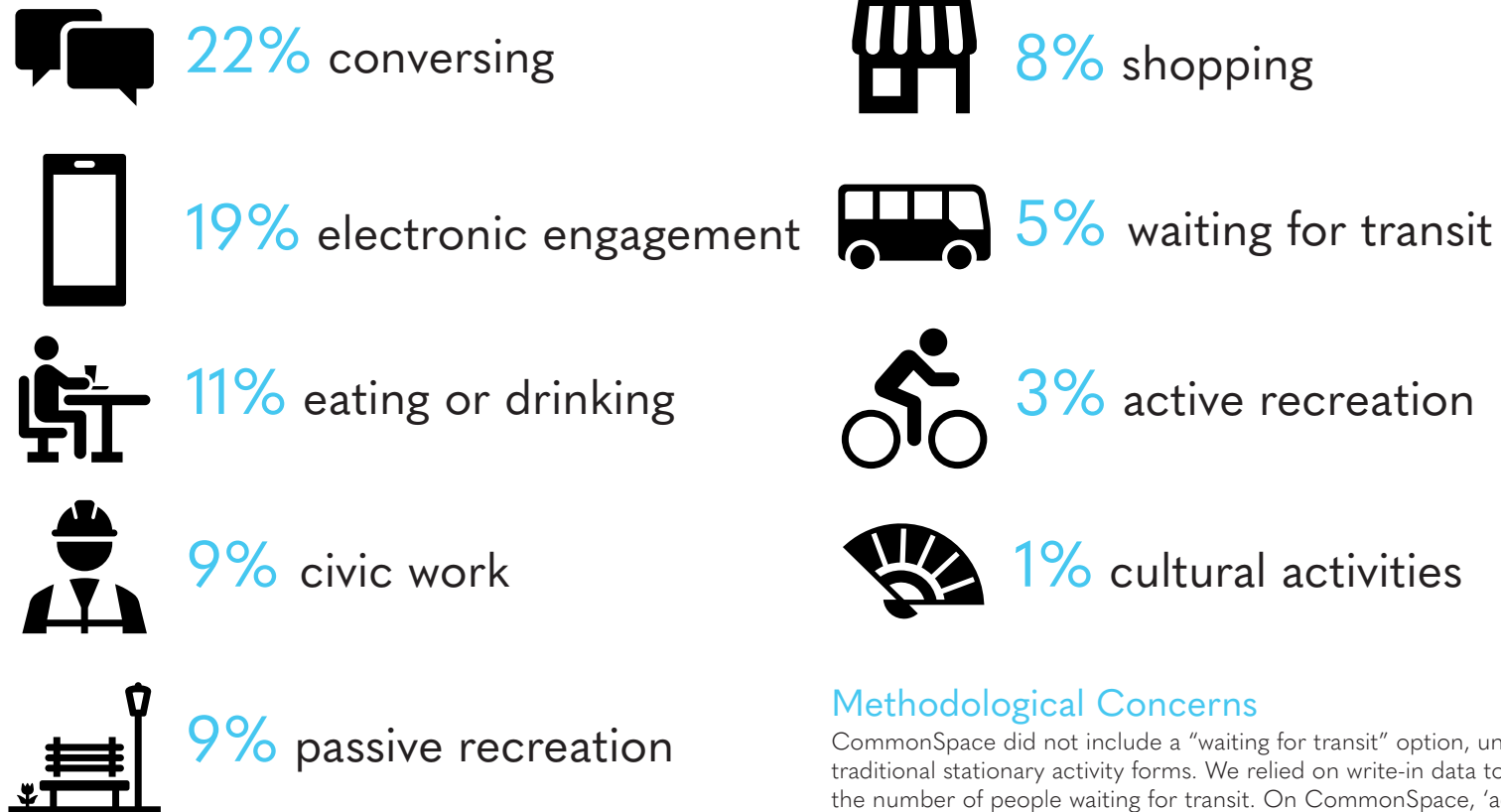
Parks on K Street — Franklin Park, McPherson and Farragut Square — are quite sticky and attract many visitors and workers during lunchtime. How might K Street leverage these public spaces to improve the corridor's overall stickiness?



# People Staying: Activity

## Of people who stay, most are engaging in leisure activities.

Of the people who stopped, the majority engaged in leisure or non-work activities: chatting, spending time on their phones, eating/drinking, etc. This tells us that people using K Street are willing to spend time on the corridor and would benefit from increased amenities and destinations.



### Methodological Concerns

CommonSpace did not include a “waiting for transit” option, unlike traditional stationary activity forms. We relied on write-in data to gauge the number of people waiting for transit. On CommonSpace, ‘activity’ is not a required category — meaning 13% of stationary activity was logged as ‘no category’.

# FINDINGS

1

## K Street is an underperforming downtown street.

Activity on K Street peaks during weekday rush hour and falls off on the weekend. This tells us that locals spend time on K Street only when they must. Tourists make up the majority of K Street's weekend activity. The corridor is popular with tourists because of its hotel presence and proximity to the White House.

2

## Ground floor uses don't support 24/7 life.

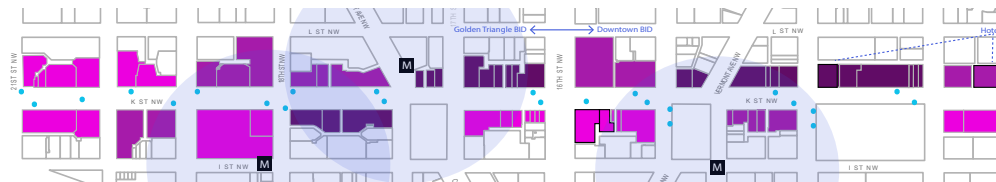
Compared to nearby Connecticut Avenue and 7th Street, the K Street corridor lacks active destinations. With over half of its ground floor land use occupied by offices/lobbies, K Street struggles to attract pedestrian and commercial activity.

3

## Activity is centralized in the middle and eastside of the corridor.

The west end of K Street is home to lobbying, consulting, and financial firms. The ground floor use on this end of the corridor is almost entirely office/lobby space. The east end of K Street has more diverse ground floor uses: restaurants, limited retail, and hotels attract workers and tourists. Even so, pedestrian activity does not reach the eastern bound of the study area, 12th Street NW.

Weekday pedestrian volumes (p. 18)



4

## K Street is not welcoming.

The number of women stopping on K Street is not proportional to the number of women using the sidewalks. The presence of women, children, and/or the elderly is used as a metric for measuring perceived safety of a place. The fact that women are not choosing to stop on K Street confirm that the corridor's lack of seating, shade, and restaurant/retail options negatively impact feelings of comfort and safety.

5

## The streetscape doesn't support pedestrian activity.

K Street's streetscape lacks consistency. Some blocks on the east end of the corridor feature shade trees, well-tended tree boxes, and hanging planters. The west end of the corridor features K Street's only benches, but lacks shade and its tree boxes are underwhelming. A set of streetscape guidelines would help to unify the corridor and improve the pedestrian experience.

6

## K Street doesn't connect to destinations.

Activity on K Street is concentrated in the middle third of the corridor. North/South cross-streets (Connecticut Avenue, Vermont Avenue) somewhat connect K Street to destinations to the north and south. However, pedestrian activity falls off to the east and west bounds of our study area (12th Street and 21st Street, respectively). Activity drop-off is most pronounced on the west end of K Street. This suggests that K Street does not effectively connect with surrounding areas, particularly Foggy Bottom to the west.

**K STREET  
TOMORROW**



# THREE STRATEGIES

## How did we choose strategies?

After our two-day data collection, DC Office of Planning (OP) staff sorted and analyzed the findings, which are compiled in this report. Empowered with this information, DC OP, in partnership with the DC Department of Transportation (DDOT) and Gensler Architecture, began brainstorming next steps. Gensler hosted a design charette — the end result of which was a series of design and programming recommendations. The following section outlines these recommendations.

Recommendations for K Street take a 3 pronged approach: activate, design, and create fun. Design strategies would work 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.



1. Activate



2. Design



3. Fun

# Strategy 1: Activate

## Give people more reasons to visit K Street.

Today, people are not choosing to spend time on the K Street corridor. We can change that. By regularly programming activity nodes along the corridor, we give people reasons to visit K Street.

K Street is lucky to have three public spaces along its corridor: Franklin Park, McPherson Square, and Farragut Square. These spaces are currently underprogrammed. K Street has the unique advantage of public space that can be leveraged to activate the corridor.

A more active street is a more comfortable and safe street. By programming K Street, we address concerns about safety illustrated in this report.



Movie showings in the park



Civic events



Pop-up events



Yoga (fitness) in the park



# Strategy 2: Design

## Good design ensures that all people feel welcome.

Currently, K Street is an unfriendly boulevard. It lacks seating, shade, quality bus stops, and signage. This issue is of particular importance as we consider the pedestrian experience of those with disabilities. The thoughtful incorporation of design elements ensures that all people feel welcome on K Street.

K Street has two major user groups: commuters and tourists. Of course, there are in-group differences, but these two user groups alone have very different needs. By considering both groups' unique needs, we work to ensure that K Street is a friendly, safe, and attractive place for all users.

### Commuters need:

access to transit, shade, seating (places to eat lunch and take breaks)

### Tourists need:

signage, attractions, access to transit



Crosswalks



Wayfinding



Street Furniture



Planting and Landscape



Bus Stops



Bus Stops



## Strategy 3: Fun

### Give people reasons to enjoy staying on K Street.

People want to spend time in places that they enjoy. K Street is unwelcoming, and unsurprisingly people don't enjoy lingering there. There are low-cost, temporary activation strategies that can bring interest and structure to public space (right).

By enlivening the street with public art and creative seating, we create environments that support pedestrian life and delightful experiences.

Because these strategies are easily implementable, their impact is immediate. More importantly, the community can experiment with different design and programming strategies before committing to large street design renovations.



Public Art



Micro Mobility



Play



Creative Seating



# K Street Public Life Study Team

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District of Columbia  
Office of Planning



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