

UD-4 Making Great Urban Architecture ⁹¹⁶

While a city is made up of more than its buildings, its image is often linked to its architectural expression. This is especially true in a capital city like Washington, DC, which must balance its roles as a national emblem and a city of neighborhoods. As an intentionally planned capital, designers have given a special emphasis to street corridors, axial vistas, and symbolic buildings, public space, and monuments to support the plan's broader vision. A series of height acts and various zoning regulations gave Washington three-dimensional form and a distinct horizontality that emphasizes the more vertical prominence of civic landmarks. Washington, DC is more than a capital city of grand proportions and axial formality. Its architectural legacy includes multiple scales: the finer-grained expression of bay window projections, tower elements, varied storefronts, and smaller-scale institutional buildings shaped by time-tested building codes and public space regulations. ^{916.1}

Washington has a long-standing civic design tradition. Moving forward, innovative, creative design should celebrate District public life, and embrace design excellence and sustainability. Civic buildings should be community icons, and transportation infrastructure inspiring. As development continues on waterfronts and signature sites, there are opportunities to create dynamic and contemporary places. ^{916.2}

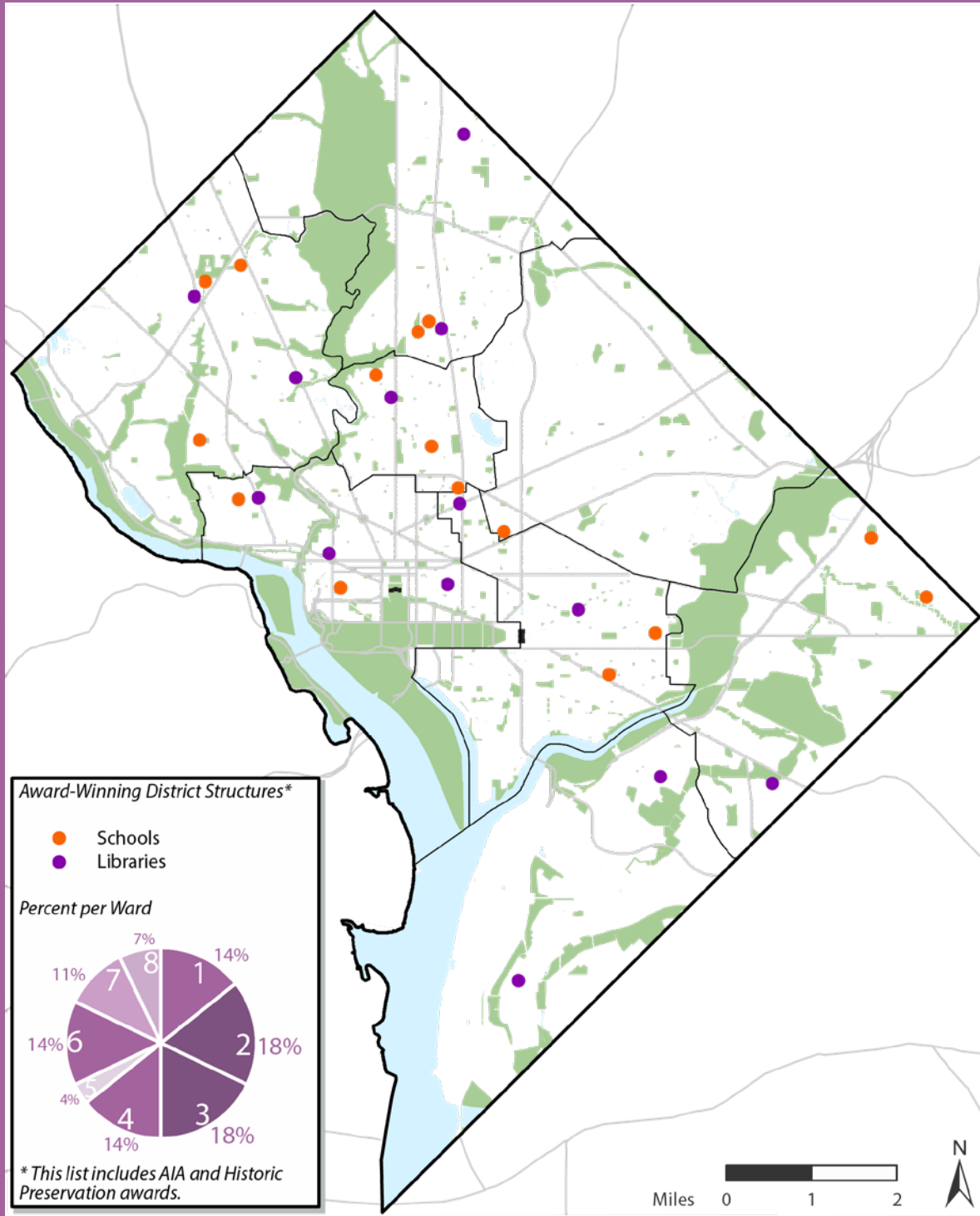
UD-4.1 The Design of Public Buildings, Public Spaces, and Infrastructure ⁹¹⁷

The design of new civic architecture and infrastructure reinforces the District's image as a forward-looking city that supports civic engagement and respects historic context while embracing change and innovation. Each library renovation, fire station addition, school modernization, park renovation, streetscape project, and recreation center construction project is an opportunity to create a great civic asset that contributes to neighborhood livability, collective resident pride in civic institutions, and the District's status as a national capital. The District has intentionally worked over the last 15 years to equitably build award-winning civic buildings in all eight wards (see Map 9.5). The District can continue to lead by example by actively seeking an agenda of sustainable design excellence across all agencies. ^{917.1}



People lingering at the small park at the intersection of 14th and Girard Streets NW

Map 9.5:

Award-Winning District Architecture ^{917.2}

Over the next 20 years, transportation infrastructure projects will provide some of Washington, DC's most important urban design opportunities through the reconstruction of transportation corridors, bridges, and upgraded systems. Within the District, Union Station is one of the world's great train stations and the Metro system itself is an iconic piece of transportation architecture. The integration of new bicycle, high-capacity transit, and other modes into the transportation system, along with the reconstruction of connections across the Anacostia River and other physical boundaries, will shape the identity of the District and its neighborhoods for decades to come. ^{917.3}

Policy UD 4.1.1: Capital Improvements and Urban Design

Use new capital improvement projects as opportunities to strengthen the District's urban design vision. Important community-serving civic places, such as schools and libraries, should be designed as civic icons with a high level of architectural quality, enhancing neighborhood identity and promoting the pride of residents and the admiration of visitors at both the neighborhood and District-wide level. ^{917.4}

Policy UD 4.1.2: Design Excellence

Promote design excellence contracting processes in District capital improvement projects for public buildings and public spaces to achieve a more attractive, functional, and sustainable environment in the District and its neighborhoods. ^{917.5}

Policy UD-4.1.3: Design of New Public Transit

Design transit system elements as an important component of public architecture. Elements including transit shelters, waiting platforms, signage, off-board fare collection, bicycle-sharing facilities, and other improvements should contribute to meeting District-wide urban design goals. ^{917.6}

Policy UD 4.1.4: Metro Station Entrances

Promote design improvements and public art at Metro station entrances and other transit hubs to provide a stronger sense of arrival and orientation for travelers and contribute to neighborhood identity. ^{917.7}

Policy UD-4.1.5: Design of Bridges and Other Transportation Infrastructure

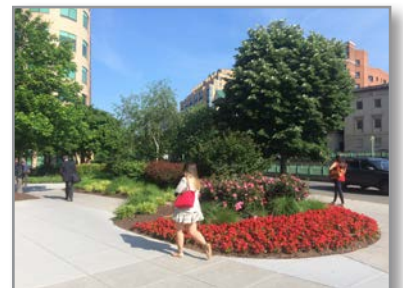
Promote high-quality design and environmentally advanced engineering that accommodates various modes of transportation and supports public life, natural ecology, and civic identity in all infrastructure projects, including bridges and other public works projects. ^{917.8}



The Arts Walk in Brookland is an active plaza with surrounding retail



S Street Park at the intersection of New Hampshire Avenue, 7th, and S Streets NW is a small park turned dog park for recreation purposes



Small parks can be improved and activated through cross-agency partnerships

Policy UD-4.1.6: Infrastructure Reuse Projects

Continue to explore creative reuse of obsolete District infrastructure facilities, including transportation and utility structures, to address current needs for new types of public spaces and recreational facilities. ^{917.9}

Policy UD-4.1.7: Design for Longevity

Public buildings and infrastructure should be designed to be aesthetically pleasing with the highest quality and durable building materials providing long-term appearance and functionality and to minimize energy usage and maintenance needs. ^{917.10}

Policy UD 4.1.5: Small Area Plans

Integrate urban design considerations into small area plans and other applicable studies. Consider the use of illustrative design guidelines and place-specific urban design standards as part of these plans. ^{917.11}

Action UD-4.1.A: Design Excellence Program for District Facilities

Develop a Design Excellence Program for architectural/engineering contracting processes for District government-controlled public buildings and public spaces based on the federal General Services Administration Design Excellence Program. ^{917.12}

Action UD-4.1.B: Commission of Fine Arts Review of District Government Capital Projects

Develop guidelines for assisting the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) design review for any applicable District building and infrastructure projects. These guidelines should reflect the District's urban design goals. ^{917.13}

Action UD-4.1.C: Excellence in Urban Design Initiative

Develop a District-wide Excellence in Urban Design Initiative for the District, including an award program and public education campaign, to make Washington, DC a nationally recognized leader in architecture, landscape, environmental design, historic preservation, and city planning.

^{917.14}

UD-4.2 Designing Architecture for People ⁹¹⁸

Buildings and architecture have a direct impact on comfort, sense of safety, and emotional well-being; they form the physical fabric of the District. The quality of the District's physical character should be designed to improve the experience of walking down its streets, create moments of joy and visual delight, and promote a sense of civic pride and order. To achieve this, the relationship of buildings to the human experience should be closely considered, including the size of buildings, their distance to the sidewalk, the treatment of ground-floor-level points of entry, and the impact of light and air. ^{918.1}

Experiences are defined by limitations to senses: environments that relate directly to what is comfortably perceived elicit pleasant emotions, while environments that are disorienting or monotonous challenge the senses and can create isolation or discomfort. Humans interact with and understand the surrounding urban environment based on their inherent physical, sensory, and social capabilities:

- Social: distance (intimacy of communication), group sizes, level of activity;
- Physical: walking distances, material size, speed of movement; and
- Sensory (visual, auditory, tactile, etc.): craftsmanship and texture, order (scale and hierarchy), visual limits. ^{918.2}

Policy UD-4.2.1: Scale and Massing of Large Buildings

Design the scale, height, volume, and massing of large buildings to avoid monotony and enhance the human scale. Varied roof heights, facade widths, and more expressive massing can provide variety and visual interest. Massing should be articulated with a special emphasis placed on corners, especially along important view corridors or intersections. Patterns of architectural elements, expressive structure, or other design tactics can provide variety and visual interest. ^{918.3}

Policy UD-4.2.2: Engaging Ground Floors

Promote a high standard of storefront design and architectural detail in mixed-use buildings to enhance the pedestrian experience of the street. Promote a high degree of visual interest through syncopated storefronts that vary every 20 to 30 feet, provide direct lines of sight to interior social spaces, provide socially oriented uses along the public street, and use tactile, durable materials at the ground level. ^{918.4}

Policy UD-4.2.3: Continuity and Consistency of Building Frontages

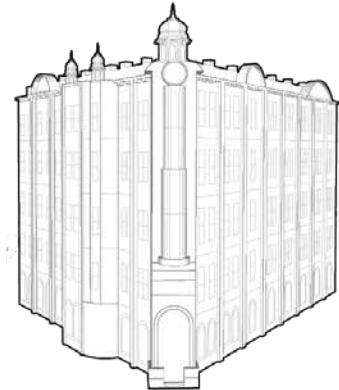
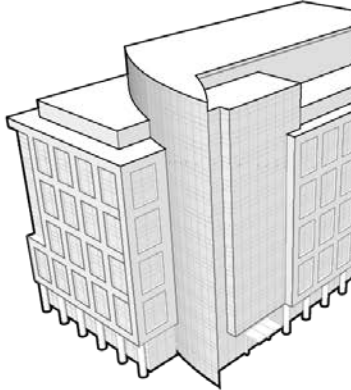
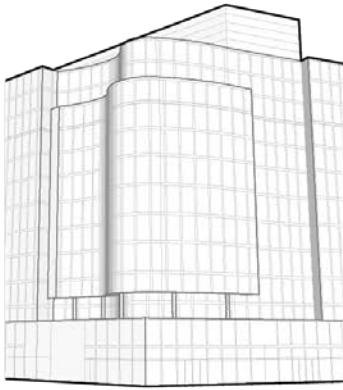
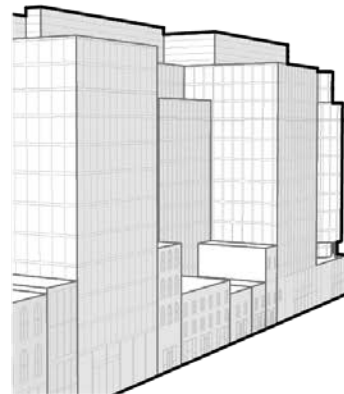
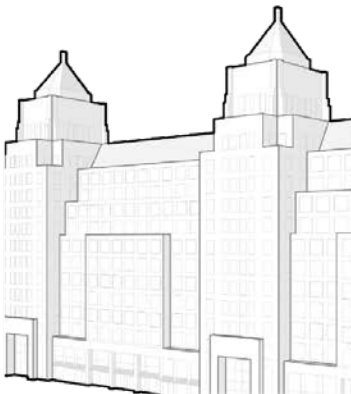
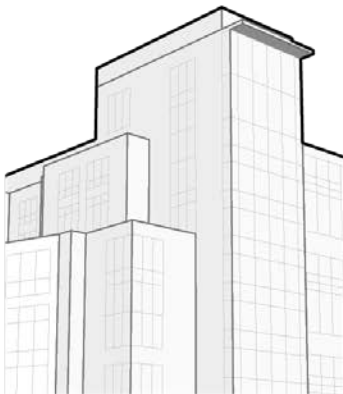
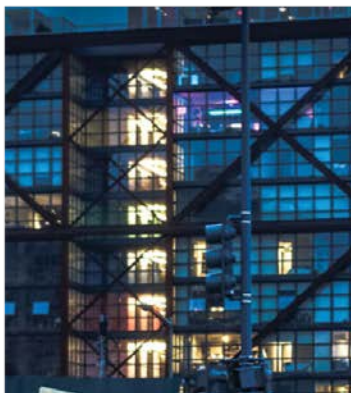
Maintain the established frontage lines of streets by aligning the front walls of new construction with the prevailing facades of adjacent buildings. Avoid placing new construction that extends beyond the existing facade line unless it significantly benefits the public life of the street. Where existing facades are characterized by an established pattern of windows and doors or other elements, new construction should complement the established rhythm. ^{918.5}

Policy UD-4.2.4: Creating Engaging Facades

Design new buildings to respond to the surrounding neighborhood fabric by modulating façade rhythms and using complementary materials, textures, and color, as well as well-designed lighting. Varying design tactics may be used to engage a building with its surroundings. In contexts with smaller lot sizes and multiple closely spaced building entrances, breaking up a building façade in the vertical direction is encouraged, along with strongly defined

Figure 9.19:

Creating Engaging Facades 918.7

*Engaging Corners**Dynamic Rooflines**Varying Textures*

and differentiated bases, centers, and tops of buildings. In areas lacking a strong building-form pattern, the use of complementary or reinterpreted materials and colors could strengthen architectural identity (see Figure 9.19 for recommended façade design strategies). ^{918.6}

Policy UD-4.2.5: Interesting Roof Lines

Design architecturally interesting roof lines to help articulate the massing of buildings and add visual appeal. Along commercial streets, tower elements at corners can help define intersections; in more residential neighborhoods, towers and penthouses can help scale and mass buildings to respond to surrounding building scale and mass. ^{918.8}

Policy UD 4.2.6: Active Facades

Prioritize the placement of multiple entrances for new multi-family and mixed-use buildings across the length of a block rather than a single lobby entrance at one location. New residential developments should promote active facades with spaces for social activity, such as porches, stoops, or patios along public streets, to encourage more activity along the sidewalk and increase social interaction in a neighborhood. ^{918.9}

Action UD-4.2.A: Designing the District for the People Reference Guide

Create a reference guide that catalogues principles of good urban design at a human level. This reference guide should articulate these concepts in a clear manner to be understandable to both the general public and members of the design profession. ^{918.10}

UD-4.3 Celebrate Washington, DC's Unique Design Legacy ⁹¹⁹

Every city has a built form and character that is specific to its sense of place. Like New York City's tiered skyscrapers, San Francisco's Queen Anne row houses, or Boston's brownstones, Washington, DC has its own specific building traditions and character. They are the result of a long history of conscious design goals that have resulted in many defining features of the District. Recognizing their importance, intent, and value is critical to preserving Washington, DC's design legacy, as well as continuing design traditions as the District develops and grows. ^{919.1}



The Anacostia neighborhood library



The Duke Ellington School of the Arts in Georgetown

Washington, DC's unique design legacy is far reaching and touches every aspect of the built environment:

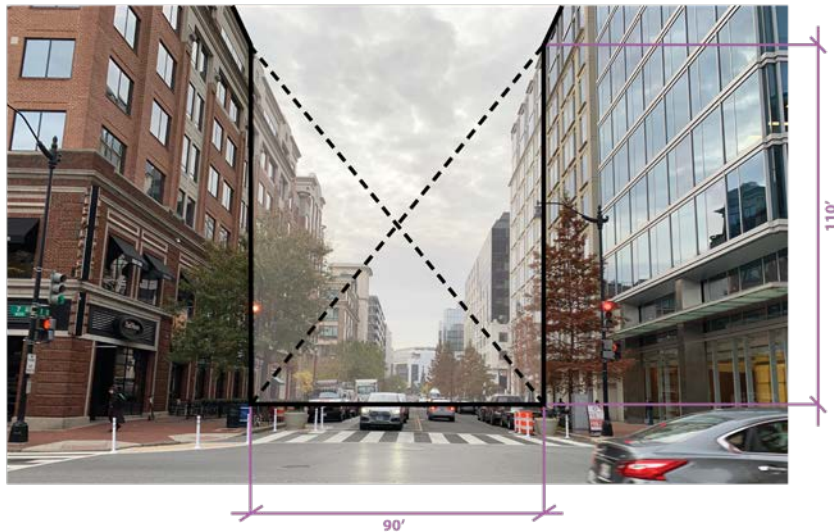
- A relationship of building heights to street width and setbacks for penthouses create a distinct scale along streets and avenues, as well as architectural opportunity for rooftop expression;
- Public parking and building restriction lines establish a green and park-like area along residential streets;
- Limits on building height give the District its consistent skyline and open look and feel;
- Shop windows, awnings, and wide sidewalks are emblematic of active and inviting commercial areas; and
- Building projections such as porches, bay windows, oriels, and towers embellish buildings and frame picturesque views. ^{919.2}

This design legacy is the result of conscious efforts to shape the District and is created through a number of different regulatory controls, some established for a specific design intent and others for practical reasons. Although they have evolved over time in response to concurrent planning and architectural trends, it is their consistent application that is most important. Their continuous use and enforcement has greatly benefited the District and its residents by creating distinct places to live, work, and visit. ^{919.3}

Policy UD-4.3.1: Recognize the Legacy of the Height Act

Utilize the basic principles for regulating building height by street width in the Height of Buildings Act of 1910 to guide the redevelopment of corridors and new large site developments, continuing Washington, DC's historic design tradition of well-proportioned streets and consistent building heights (see Figure 9.20). Examine opportunities where enabling buildings to exceed zoning height restrictions can encourage better site massing and architectural design. ^{919.4}

Figure 9.20:

Height Act Diagram ^{919.5}

The Height of Buildings Act generally regulates building height based on the width of the street it faces.

For streets with mixed-use and non-residential uses:

max. building height = street width + 20'

For streets where only residential uses are permitted the following rules apply:

Maximum building height
Streets < 60' wide
Streets 60' - 65' wide
Streets > 65' wide

90'
max. building height = street width
max. building height = 60'
max. building height = street width - 10'

Policy UD-4.3.2: Building Projections That Shape Urban Form

Design building projections to enhance the visual experience of the street and neighborhoods as a whole, as well as add distinct form to individual buildings. Projections should provide design embellishments while respecting the scale of the primary building façade, access to light and air for adjacent properties, view sheds, and the pedestrian experience of the street (see Figure 9.21). ^{919.6}



The Marvin Gaye Recreation center is an award-winning public building near the Capitol Heights metro station



Massing of a large building by the Columbia Heights metro station

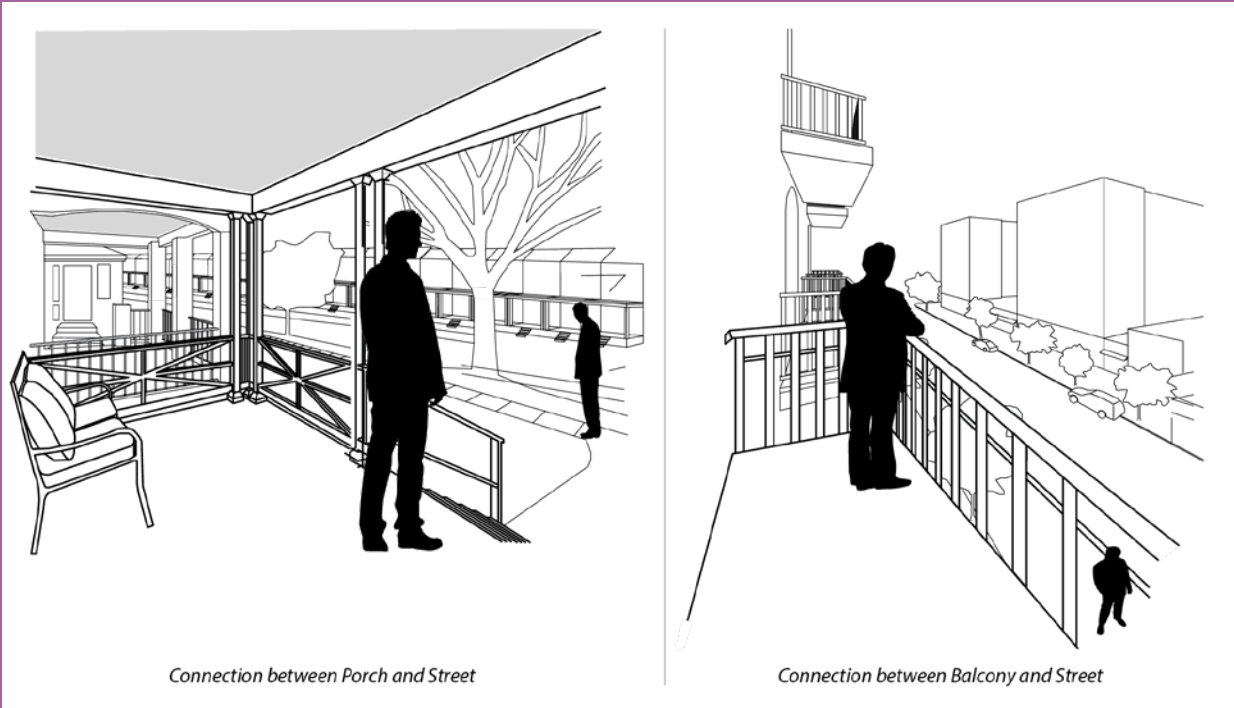


Storefronts at Barracks Row create an engaging ground floor level contributing to a streetscape that engages passersby.



The West End Public Library's dynamic roofline is one architectural element that makes its façade engaging.

Figure 9.21:

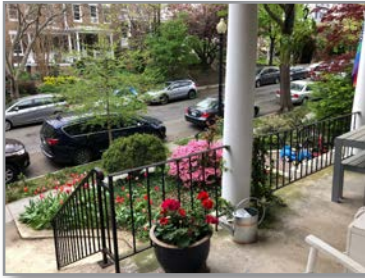
Porches and Balconies ^{919.7}***Policy UD-4.3.3: Building Setbacks and Rooflines***

Maintain uniform building setbacks and roof lines to establish a consistent pattern along avenues and priority view corridors. Setbacks should create a consistent street wall rather than have abrupt disruptions with facades that are set back or extend in front of an established pattern. The treatment of roof lines, such as recessed penthouses or variations created by bay windows and towers, should respond to the predominant character of a corridor. See Figure 9.22 for an example of building setbacks and rooflines. ^{919.8}

Figure 9.22:

Building Setbacks ^{919.9}*Architectural setbacks of H Street NE buildings****Policy UD-4.3.4: Rooftop Penthouses***

Encourage new buildings to maximize the potential of penthouse regulations that allow for greater design flexibility and architectural expression of rooftops. Use penthouses to create shared recreation spaces for building users, using sculptural roof forms. Pay special attention to setback lines and tower projections in designing rooftop treatments. See Figure 9.23 for examples of dynamic rooftops. ^{919.10}



Active building projections: Porches



Active building projections: Balconies



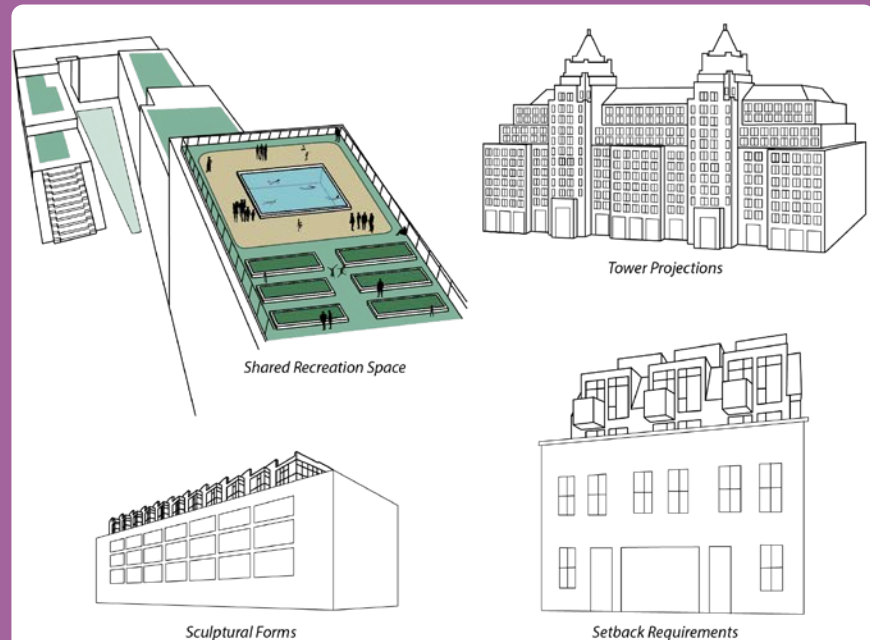
Active building projections: Storefronts



Active building projections: Bay Windows

Figure 9.23:

Dynamic Rooftops ^{919.11}



Policy UD-4.3.5: Building Projections that Promote Interaction

Encourage buildings with public parking along their frontage to use the flexibility of projection regulations for steps, porches, balconies, and awnings and create opportunities for in-between spaces that encourage social interaction and add visual interest to building facades. ^{919.12}

Action UD-4.3.A: Washington, DC Urban Design Guide

Prepare an Urban Design Guide for Washington, DC that compiles the existing codes and regulations that play a role in creating the District's urban design legacy. ^{919.13}

Action UD-4.3.B: Update of the Projection Code

Conduct a comprehensive study and subsequent building code update to address issues of large projections on long building facades that detract from the public realm, view sheds, and monumental character of the District's streets. The study should consider the role projections have played in shaping the form of Washington, DC and assess their intent and how they have evolved over time. ^{919.14}

Action UD-4.3.C: Review Zoning Height Restrictions

Review the zoning code to determine where it may be more restrictive than the federal Height of Buildings Act to identify the potential capacity for more affordable housing and opportunities to expand inclusive neighborhoods (see Figure 9.24). ^{919.15}

Figure 9.24:

Zoning Height and Street Width ^{919.16}