

Standard District Streetscape Design Guidelines

Regulations and Guidelines for All Streets in the District of Columbia



Typical Streetscape at S and 12th Street NW Intersection

Overview

The character of Washington, DC's neighborhoods are in part defined by leafy residential streets and wide sidewalks in commercial areas. The public spaces between curbs and buildings create places where the daily routines of District residents, workers, and visitors take place. This is where we walk to school, wait for the bus, talk to neighbors, walk the dog, window shop, or sit outside in a café to drink a cup of coffee. Having a consistently regulated extensive network of sidewalks, street trees, and public space encourages walking as a transportation alternative, supports environmental goals of increasing tree canopy and reducing stormwater runoff, and creates an environment with open views that reduce crime and promote public safety.

These public spaces are regulated and controlled by the DC Department of Transportation (DDOT) and built and maintained by adjacent residents and property owners. The Office of Planning (OP) is responsible for overseeing the future growth of DC and has a strong interest in the design and function of public space. In addition to being lined with sidewalks and

streets trees, public spaces are created by regulations and guidelines that realize two distinct characters. A park-like character on residential streets created with minimal paving and ample landscaping; embellished with fences, hedges, and retaining walls with similar dimensions and materials; and, lined with interesting facades ornamented with steps, bay windows, and porches. An active commercial character is created on wide sidewalks in business districts lined with show windows, interesting storefronts, sidewalk cafes, benches, and other amenities.

This document includes the most referred to regulations and guidelines that applicants – such as homeowners installing a fence or a developer rebuilding an entire block - should follow when preparing a public space application. DDOT issues over 130,000 public space permits annually. When applications are consistently reviewed, these regulations and standards create safe, welcoming, and environmentally-responsible public spaces that are walkable, inclusive, and sustainable.

Standard Streetscape Layout

There are many common features of public space in many cities, but DC's wide public rights-of-ways include features not found in any other North American city. It is important to understand DC's public space when applying for permits.

The areas between the curb and sidewalk are typically divided into three distinct zones:

Furnishing Zone

The area of public space immediately adjacent to the curb containing public amenities like bike racks, benches, streetlights, regulatory signs, street trees, and Pick-up Drop-off zones.

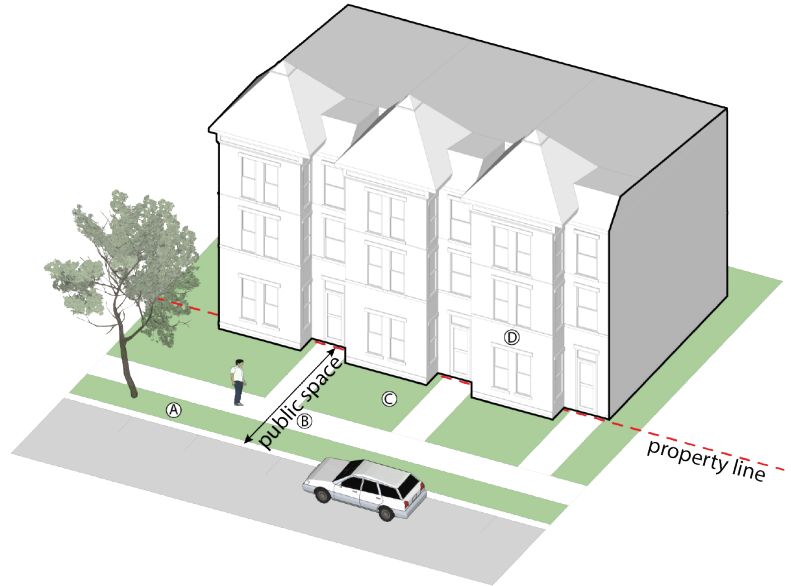
Sidewalk

The unobstructed pedestrian path of travel with widths that are typically:

- » 6' in for low density residential areas;
- » 8' in high density residential and some small-scale commercial areas; and,
- » 10' in most commercial areas including all of downtown and adjacent to Metro stations and major venues.

Landscaped Parking/Tenant Zone

The area of public space between the back of the sidewalk and property line or building restriction line used for landscaping on residential streets or active commercial use in business districts. See call-out box to the right for more information.



Perspective Showing Standard Streetscape at a Residential Property

- A Tree Box/Furnishing Area
- B Sidewalk
- C Landscaped Public Parking
- D Bay Window Projection

Several terms used to define public space are specific to the District:

“Landscaped” Public Parking

The landscaped area between the back of the sidewalk along residential buildings is referred to in District public space regulations as “public parking”. The term dates to the late 19th century, means “park land”, and refers to the area that is legally part of DC’s park and open space system. It includes areas that look like front yards.

Tenant Zone

The area between the back of the sidewalk and along buildings with ground floor commercial use that could be paved or landscaped. This area can be used for outdoor dining, displays of merchandise, or other active uses. On mixed-use streets with “landscaped” public parking, a 3’ minimum vegetated buffer between the sidewalk and paving may be required.

Building Projections

Also known as encroachments, building projections are embellishments that extend over property lines or building restriction lines. The District allows a wide range of windows, steps, ramps, and other features to project into public space that give public space a pedestrian scale. They are a privilege, cannot be claimed as a right, and require a permit.

Building Line

The line delineating areas regulated as public space that can be either a property line or building restriction line, defined in the call-out box below.

Building Restriction Line

Some properties have a building restriction line recorded with the Office of the Surveyor that delineates an area of private property regulated as public space. In the building restriction area, no buildings are allowed and all public space regulations apply. The District may build sidewalks in this area, and DC Water can use it for sewer and water lines. Building projections that are compliant with construction code regulations and typically allowed over the property line are, in this case, allowed over the building restriction line.



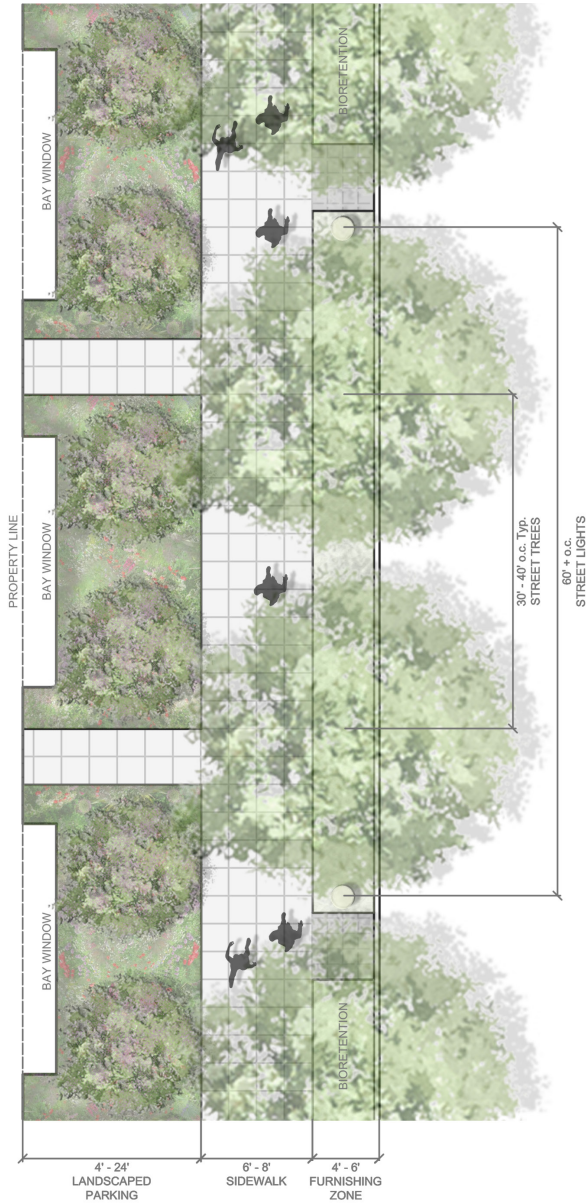
Landscaped Parking at Residential/Non-Commercial Ground Floor



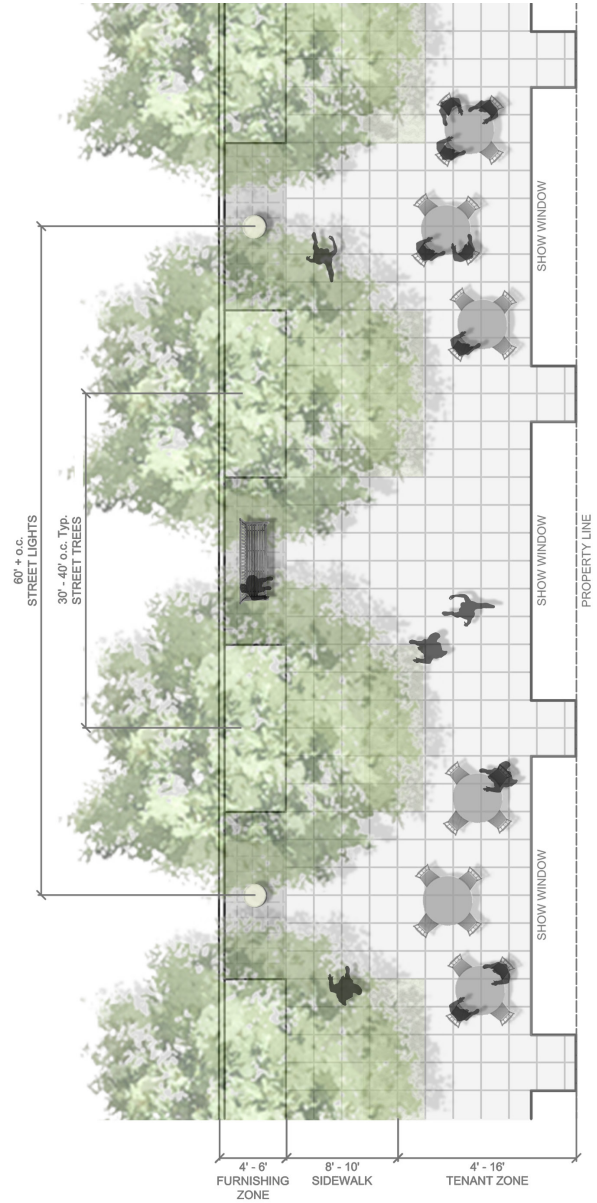
Tenant Zone at Commercial Ground Floor

Standard Streetscape Layout

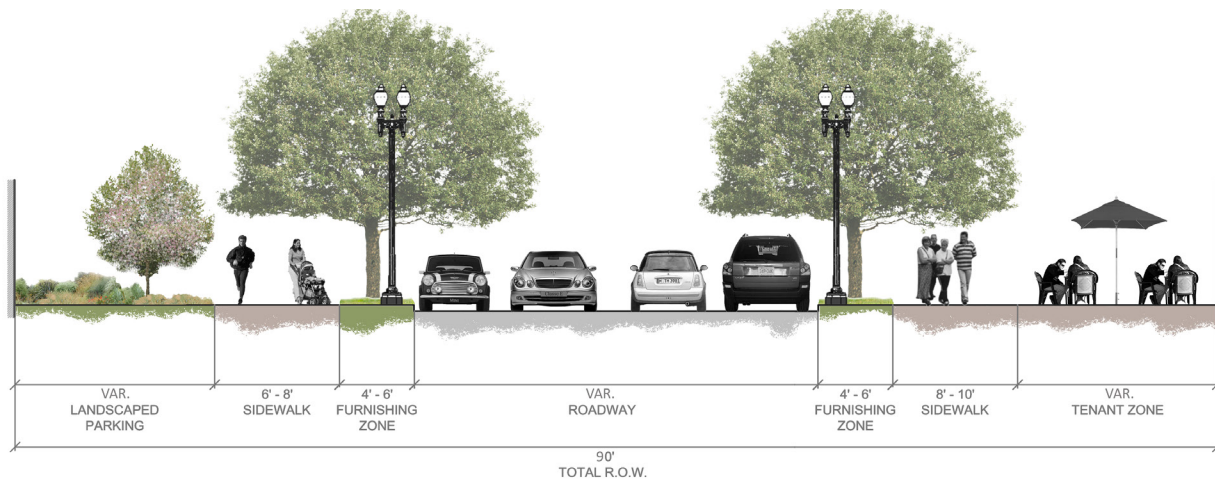
Plan - Residential Zone



Plan - Commercial Zone



Section - Residential Zone



Section - Commercial Zone

Streetscape Dimensions

To ensure consistency along streets, all streetscape plans should follow DDOT standard dimensions and materials. The most common features are summarized in the tables to the right but may be superseded by special streetscape guidelines that can be found [here](#). Areas with special guidelines are shown on the map below.

District municipal regulations allow for features to enhance public space. Allowances for such features are listed below:



- 1 16th Street NW Streetscape Review Guide
- 2 Buzzard Point Streetscape Guidelines
- 3 Downtown Streetscape Regulations
- 4 GWU Foggy Bottom Campus Streetscape Guidelines
- 5 Golden Triangle Streetscape Guidelines
- 6 Kennedy Street Streetscape Guidelines
- 7 Massachusetts Avenue Streetscape Review Guide
- 8 Mount Vernon Triangle Transportation and Public Realm
- 9 NoMa Streetscape Guidelines
- 10 North Capitol Streetscape Guidelines
- 11 Union Market Streetscape Design Guidelines
- 12 South Capitol Street Streetscape Review Guide
- 13 The Parks at Walter Reed Streetscape Guidelines

Citywide Guidelines

- Access to Terraced Residential Buildings Guidelines
- Streatery Guidelines
- Overhead Building Projections Guidelines
- Standard District Streetscape Design Guidelines

Feature	Dimensions	Materials
Fences	up to 36" high for Sidewalk Cafes; up to 42" high and predominantly open in design for Construction (DCMR Title 24-103)	wood "colonial" fence, metal
Retaining Walls	up to 42" high (DCMR 24-103)	brick or stone to match existing within block
Hedges	up to 36" high (DCMR 24-102)	N/A
Planters	up to 36" high including planting within for Sidewalk Cafes only (DCMR 24-102)	N/A
Lead Walks	up to 6' wide (DCMR Title 24-104)	concrete or brick pavers

Furnishing Zone	Sidewalk	Landscaped Pkg/ Tenant Zone
4 - 6 ft.	6 - 10 ft.	Varies

Streetscape Element	Specification
Street Trees*	30'-40' on center (o.c.)
Street Lights**	60' o.c.
Sidewalk	3' x 3' scored concrete or running bond brick, except where special streetscape guidelines apply.
Curb	concrete or granite
Gutter	concrete or granite
Furnishing Zone	same paving and scoring as sidewalk, except where special paving is allowed, typically at main building entrances at 1/3 of the sidewalk and double the width of the doorway.

* Applicants should work with the DDOT Urban Forestry Division to confirm tree species and ensure soil volumes are met.

** All applicants should work with the DDOT Street Light Division to confirm street light model and color.

Acknowledgements

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

