

Chapter 3

Area Characteristics

Union Market's long history is grounded in wholesale and light industrial uses. Unlike a more typical city street in which the needs of pedestrians, bicycles, cars and service traffic are all balanced, the design of the streets at Union Market has, for good reason prioritized truck and service traffic.

As the neighborhood is redeveloped, new uses will have different functional needs that may require changes to the existing infrastructure and street design. However, it is crucial that the existing neighborhood character not be lost.

This chapter surveys the existing conditions within the neighborhood to identify in particular those that are unusual, and that lend the neighborhood its unique character. Many of these details would be considered "non-standard" by DDOT, and these guidelines are intended in part to demonstrate how the character-defining details can be re-purposed while still meeting DDOT's functional and regulatory requirements.

Typical Street Materials Plan

Streets interior to Union Market were constructed to support the heavy truck traffic associated with wholesale and light industrial uses, and generally include a uniform treatment of concrete road beds and sidewalks. There are no gutter pans, but the curbs are generally granite header. Road striping is almost nonexistent.

The surrounding streets at the edges of the neighborhood have a different character that highlights their role in carrying more through-car traffic and connecting to the adjacent neighborhoods. These streets are generally asphalt with concrete curb and gutter. Where sidewalks exist they are generally concrete and lined with street trees when space allows.

The following pages include a photographic inventory of the various streets and alleys in and around Union Market. This includes both the public right-of-way and part of a district controlled parcel that looks like right-of-way but is private property and commonly referred to as “3rd Street”.



Concrete Street Scoring Pattern on Morse



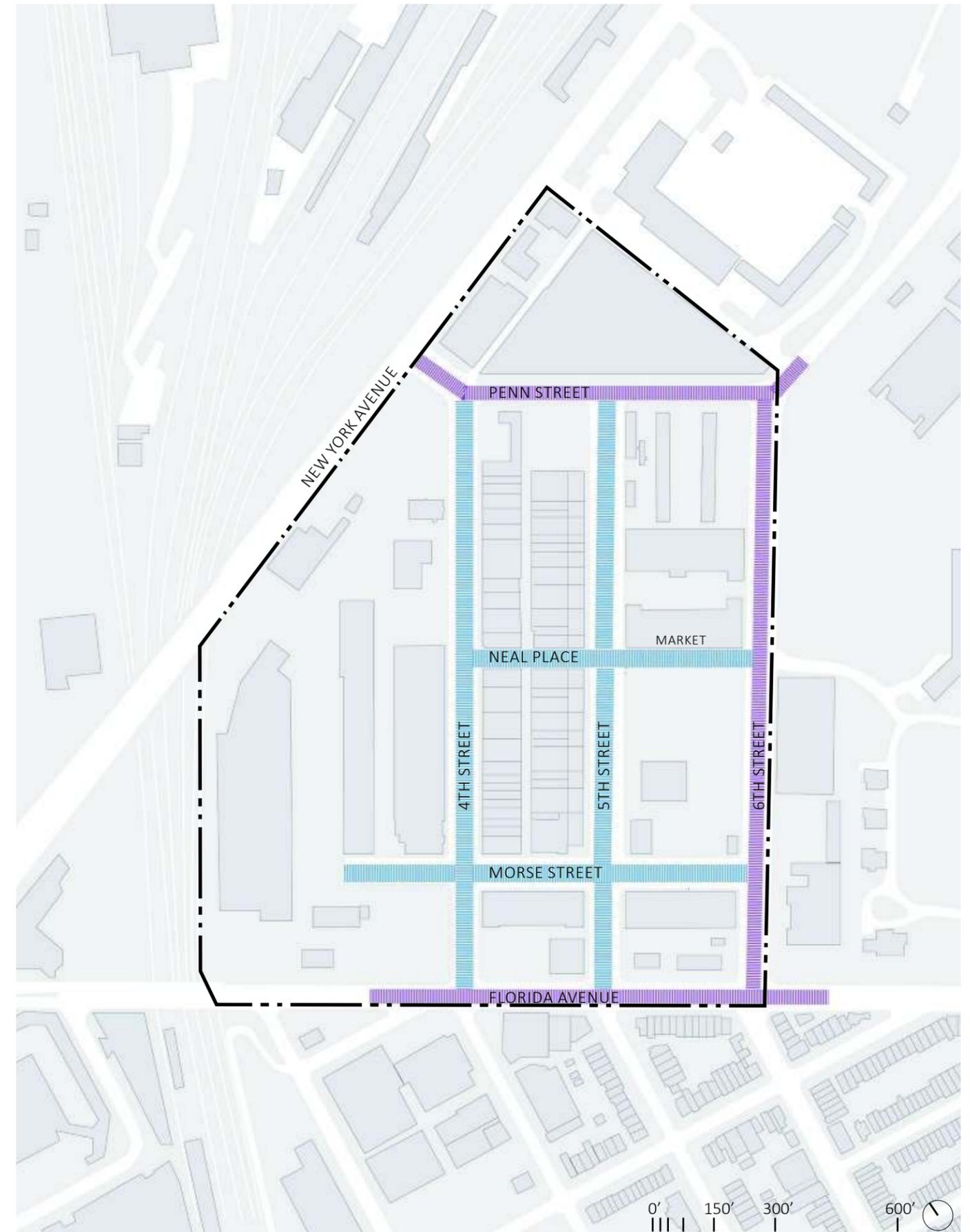
Asphalt to Concrete Street Transition at Florida and 5th St



Granite Curb Along 4th St

Key

-  Street (Asphalt)
-  Curb (Concrete)
-  Gutter (Concrete)
-  Sidewalk (Concrete)
-  Striping (Yes)
-  Street (Concrete)
-  Curb (Granite)
-  Gutter (Concrete)
-  Sidewalk (Concrete)
-  Striping (No)



Concrete Score Joints

Existing concrete streets have a uniform, tooled scoring pattern of 16' x 10'. Scoring patterns on sidewalks vary from street to street. Some joints are wider than others, suggesting that expansion joints were once included. The concrete is scored with a raked finish, giving it a distinctive appearance and texture.

The concrete material, widely spaced scoring and rough finishing distinguish Union Market from other areas of the district, which generally feature asphalt paving. Although the rationale for heavy concrete paving (high levels of truck traffic) is now changing, the atypical paving material is one of the defining features of the neighborhood.



Concrete finish



Concrete Scoring Pattern Along 4th St



Concrete Finish Enlargement



Street Trees

There are currently very few street trees within Union Market. Penn Street and 6th Street have a limited number of red oaks (*Quercus rubra*) and pagoda trees (*Styphnolobium japonicum*), although the latter are predominantly in the public parking zone adjacent to Brentwood Hamilton Field. There is also one Siberian elm (*Ulmus pumila*) in the public parking zone on Penn Street.

The trees on private property include coarser species typical of urban regrowth, including black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), catalpa (*Catalpa bignoides*), Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*) and princess tree (*Paulownia tomentosa*). Although these would generally not be considered appropriate street trees, they may suggest an atypical character for future street tree selection.

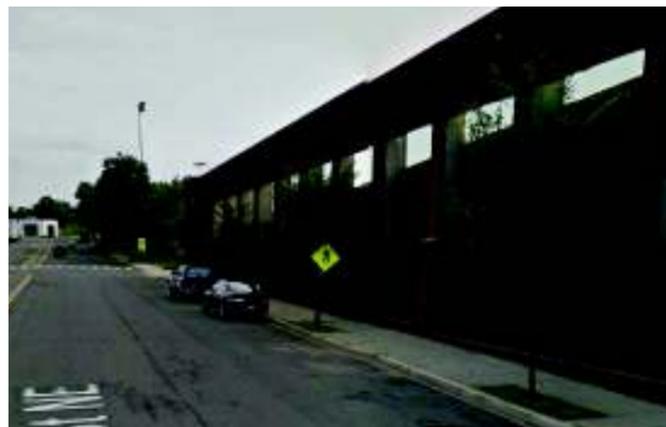
The paucity of street trees at Union Market is another unusual but distinguishing characteristic of the neighborhood. The two story market buildings which now comprise the spine of the historic district were designed to allow trucks to back in directly from the street and unload beneath the deep concrete canopies. This loading arrangement precluded planting street trees on 4th, 5th and Morse Streets, and multiple curb cuts on Penn and 6th Streets had the same effect.



Red Oak Tree- Penn St View NE



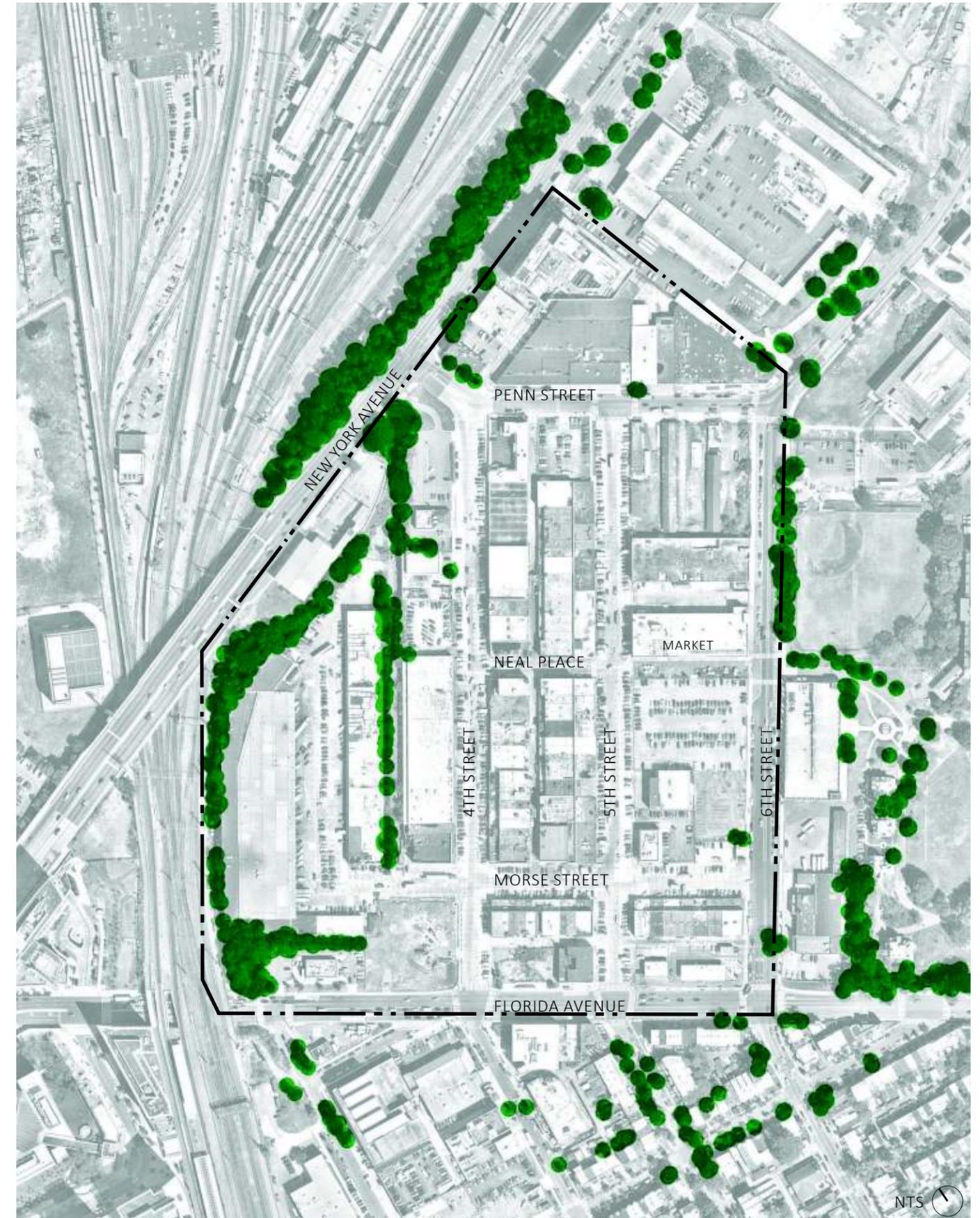
Red Oak Tree- 6th St View NE



Pagoda Tree - 6th St View NE



Red Oak and Pagoda Tree- 6th St View NE



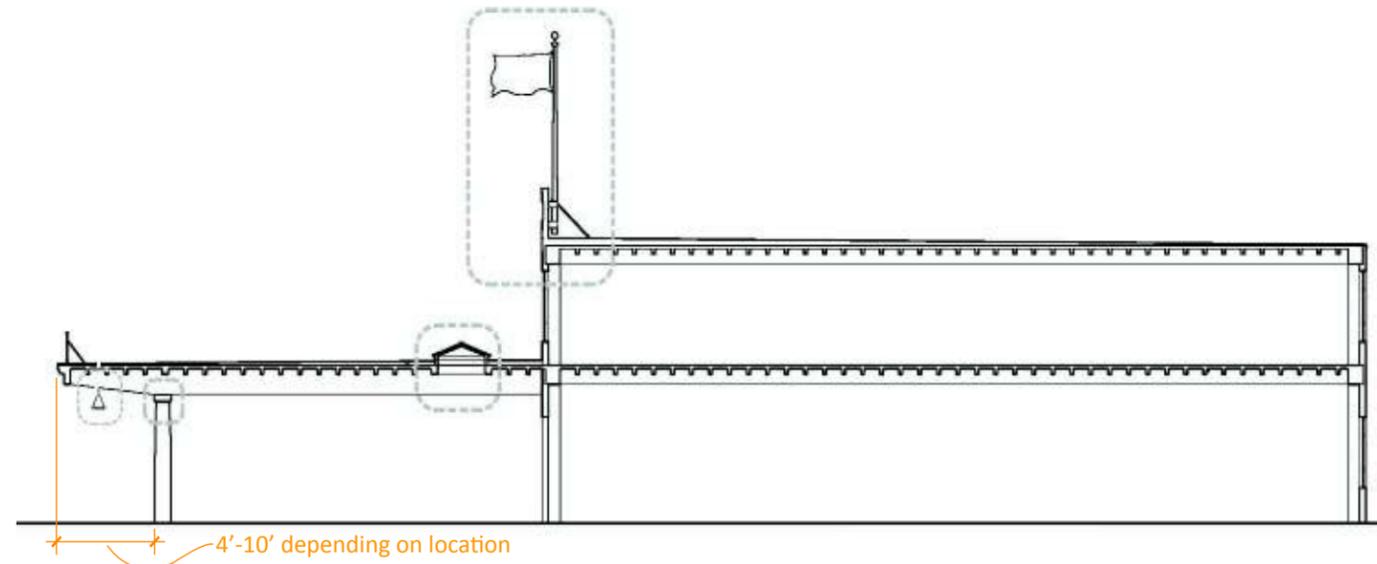
Street Trees On Satellite map - Summer 2015

Building Canopies

The existing canopies vary in height from 10' to 16' above grade. The projections also vary from 10' on the east side of 5th Street, to 4' on the south side of Morse Street, to a variety of dimensions ranging from 4' – 10' on 4th Street. As noted previously, the canopies were originally intended to facilitate the off-loading of trucks into the historic market buildings. A truck could back up to the curb and be beneath the outer edge of the canopy, ensuring that project could be unloaded out of weather.

Visually, the historic canopies at Union Market form a unique element within the streetscape. It is possible to walk for entire blocks on public sidewalks beneath the cantilevered canopies. The canopies provide both shade and a particular spatial experience that is unmatched elsewhere in the district. As older businesses move out, back-in loading has been decreasing over time. Nonetheless, the canopies remain an important defining element within the neighborhood.

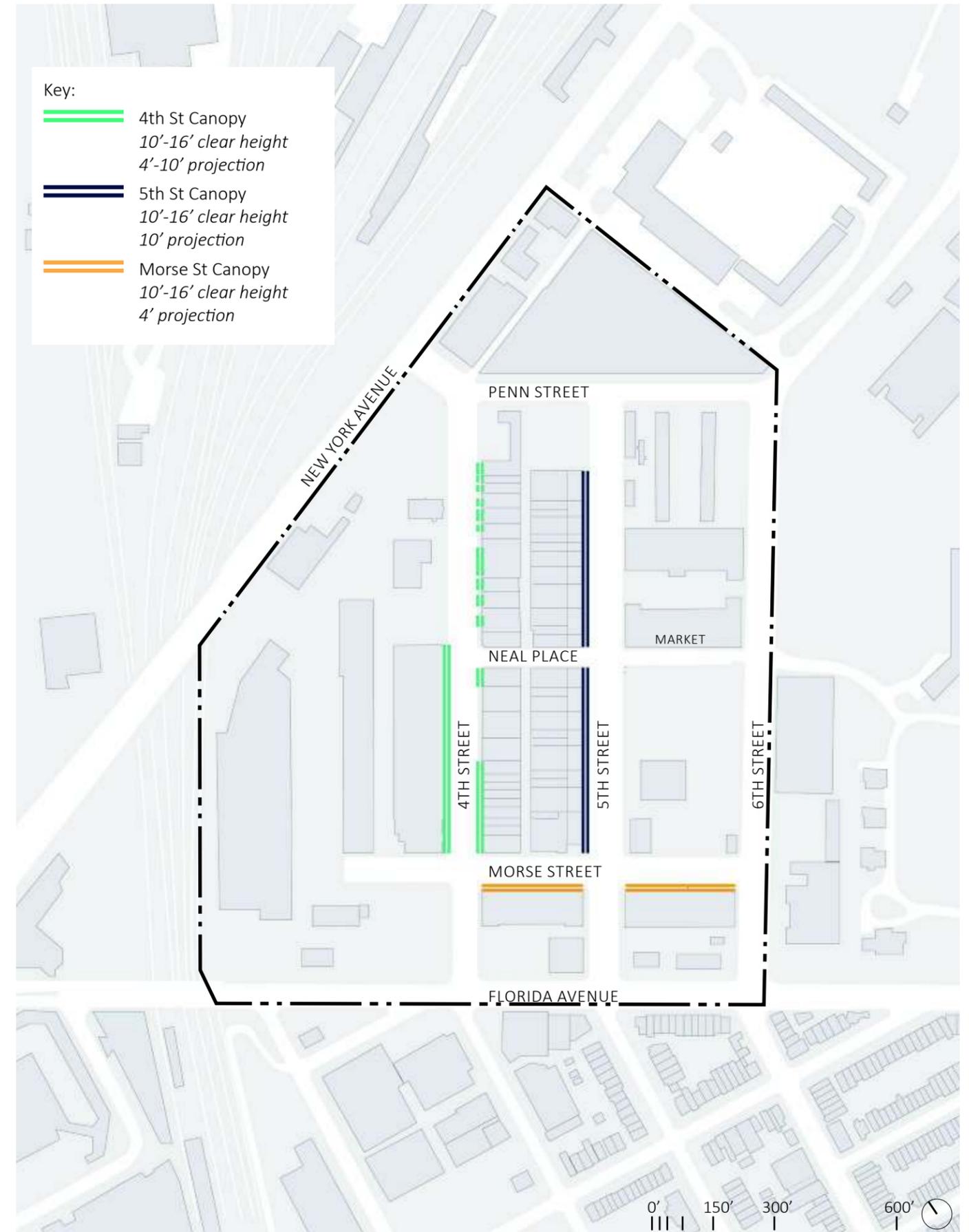
Note that the DC Building Code generally limits canopy projections into public space to 4'-0", although code modifications may be issued by the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA) where, like here, there is reasonable precedent.



Canopy at Intersection of 5th St & Morse St



Canopy along 4th St



Street Lights

The existing street lights within Union Market are exclusively 1950s era cobra head fixtures with sodium vapor lamping. The surrounding streets include a combination of Washington Twin 20 fixtures along Florida Avenue and Teardrop Pendant fixtures along New York Avenue.

The cobrahead light fixtures are generally taller than either the Twin 20s or the Teardrop Pendants, allowing them to be spaced farther apart. This meant fewer light fixtures to conflict with historic loading needs. Although the high volume of truck traffic is decreasing as wholesale and light industrial businesses relocate, the cobrahead fixtures are an unusual and distinctive streetscape element within the neighborhood.



Cobra Head Lights



Washington Twin Lights



Teardrop Pendant Lights

- Key:
- Cobra Head
 - Washington Twin Light
 - Teardrop Pendant Light



Right-of-Way Widths

Several of the existing rights-of-way (ROWs) have atypical widths. While 4th Street, 6th Street, Penn Street and Morse Street have typical 90' widths, both 5th Street (100') and the northernmost block of 4th Street (120') are wider than normal, while Neal Place is only 50' wide.

The roadways (as measured from face-of-curb to face-of-curb) are also unusually wide, designed for ease of truck maneuvering and curbside loading associated with an active wholesale district. The roadways on 4th, 5th, and 6th streets are up to 80' wide. As a result, sidewalks are narrow (5' - 15' wide), with insufficient space for the increasing amount of foot traffic drawn to the neighborhood by new uses.

The narrow ROW width of Neal Place is particularly unusual, and it offers a more intimate spatial experience moving east to west across the neighborhood.



Neal Place (50' ROW)



5th Street (100' ROW)



Alley (25' ROW)

- Key:
- 120' ROW (70' roadway)
 - 100' ROW (roadway varies 70'-80')
 - 90' ROW (roadway varies 40'-75')
 - 50' ROW (40' roadway)
 - 25' ROW (Alley)
 - Private Street (widths vary)



Pedestrian Infrastructure

Where sidewalks exist, they are often less than 10' in width, which is less than DDOT's standard for a pedestrian clear path in commercial areas. They also fall short of current ADA standards for details such as curb ramp design and cross-slopes. This is compounded by the fact that trucks are frequently backed across sidewalks for unloading, completely blocking sections to the pedestrian. While this may have been more appropriate when the neighborhood was dominated by wholesale uses, the increased levels of pedestrian traffic will necessitate that more space be given over to them.



Utilities Obstructing Circulation Path on Morse St

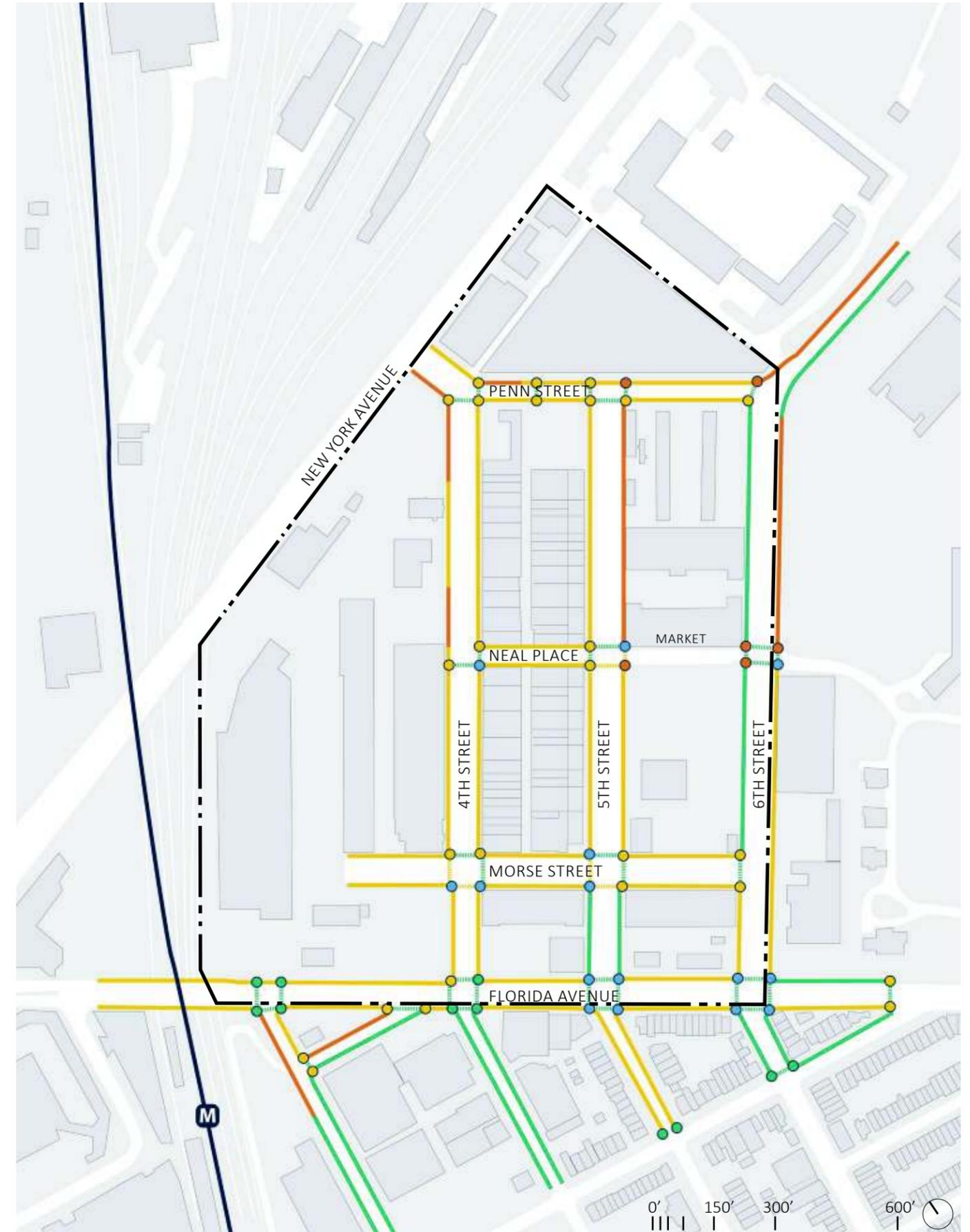


Curb Ramp without a Detectable Warning at 4th St & Morse St



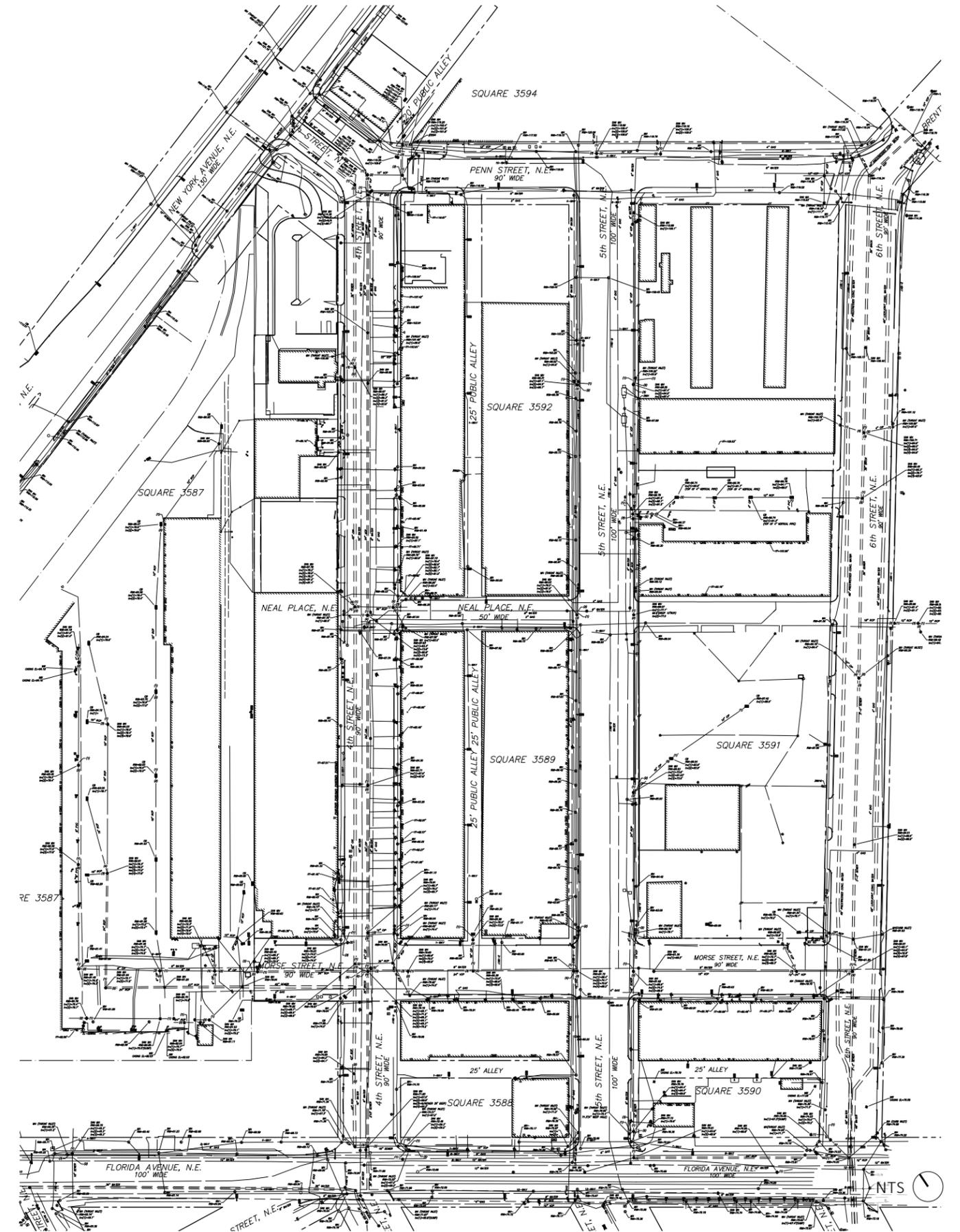
Narrow Sidewalk Along 4th St

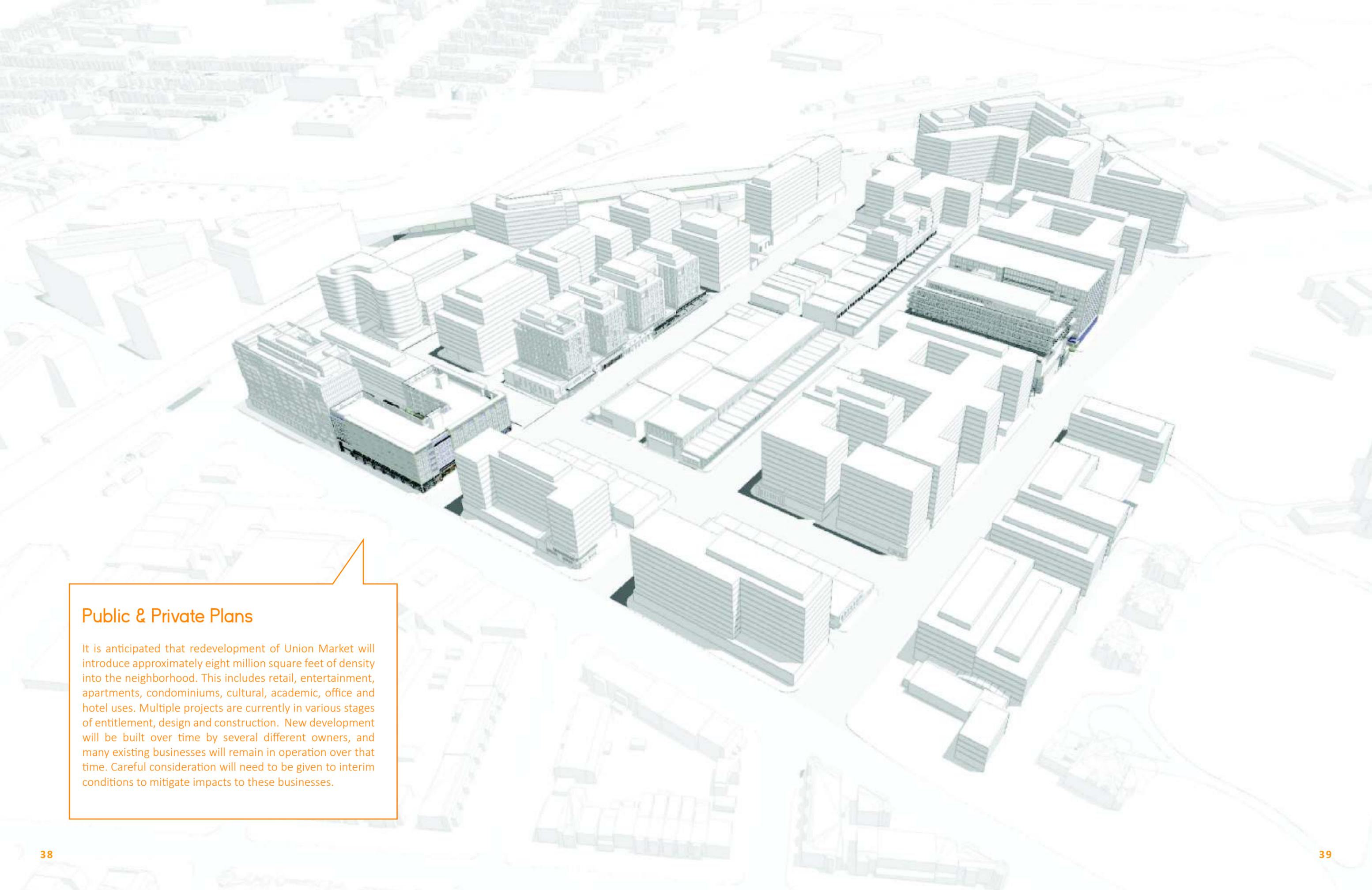
- Key:
- Sidewalk Meets Standards
 - Sidewalk Doesn't Meet Standards
 - No Sidewalk
 - ⋯ Crosswalk Meets Standards
 - ⋯ No Crosswalk at Un-signalized Intersection
 - ⋯ No Crosswalk at Signalized Intersection
 - M Metro Rail Portal
 - Curb Ramp Meets Standards
 - Shared Curb Ramp or No Detectable Warning
 - Shared Curb Ramp AND No Detectable Warning
 - No Curb Ramp



Utilities

Wet and dry utilities were surveyed in 2014 and are the subject of a separate infrastructure report submitted to DMPED that year. In general, most of the existing utility infrastructure is undersized for the amount of new development expected in the market, and will need to be upgraded to serve the neighborhood. New streetscape designs will need to accommodate both existing and proposed infrastructure.





Public & Private Plans

It is anticipated that redevelopment of Union Market will introduce approximately eight million square feet of density into the neighborhood. This includes retail, entertainment, apartments, condominiums, cultural, academic, office and hotel uses. Multiple projects are currently in various stages of entitlement, design and construction. New development will be built over time by several different owners, and many existing businesses will remain in operation over that time. Careful consideration will need to be given to interim conditions to mitigate impacts to these businesses.

Public & Private Plans

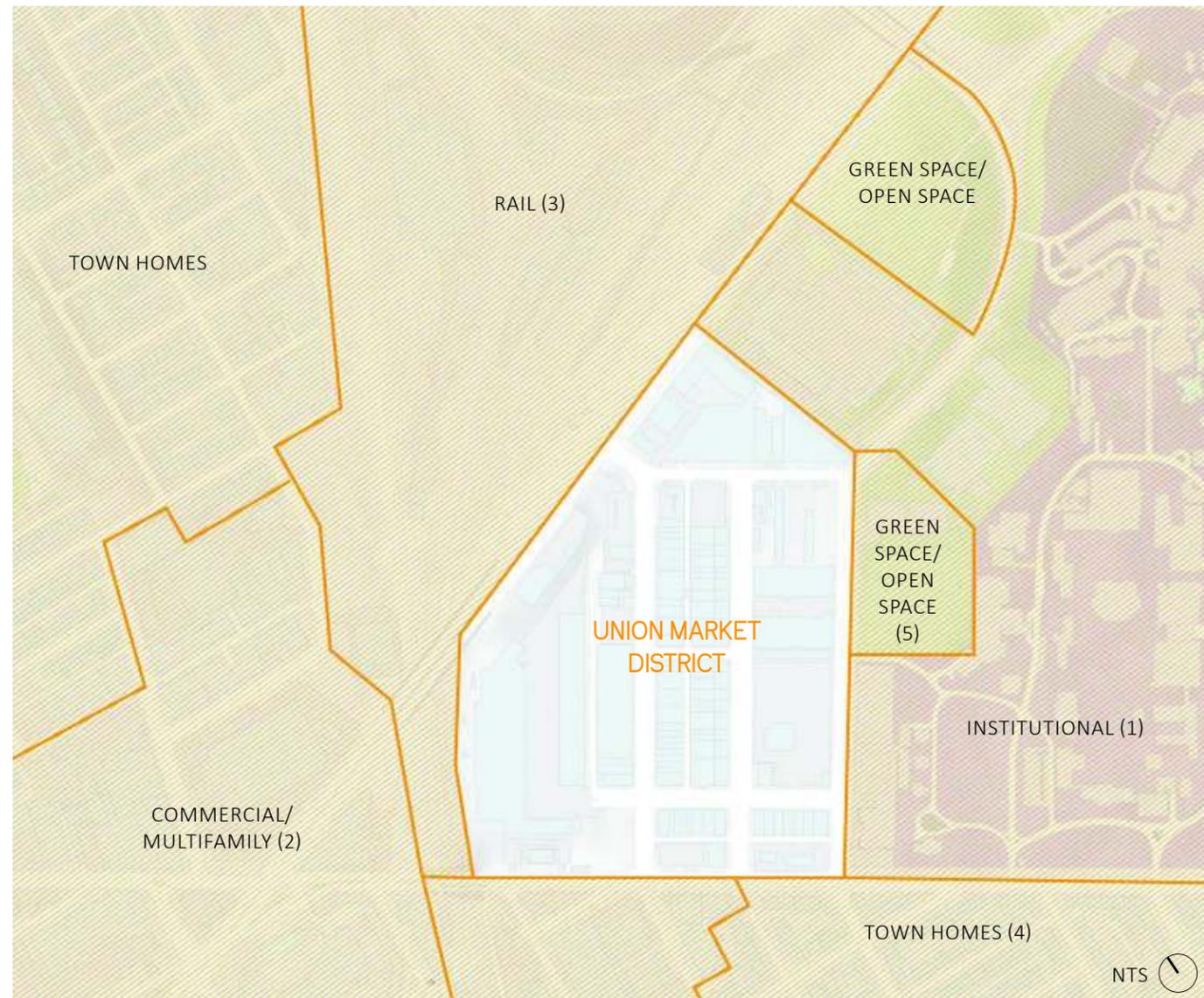
In November of 2016 the DC Historic Preservation Review Board approved the nomination of Union Market as a historic district. The newly created Union Market Terminal Historic District includes the area show at right. Existing architectural features such as pedestrian entrances and concrete canopies will not only be retained, but will influence the design of the ultimate streetscape throughout the Market. PUDs approved and under review by the district, as well as several that have not yet been submitted, cover almost all of the market that is not included within the recently created Florida Avenue Market Historic District.

Key:
■ Approved
■ Has Been Setdown
■ Submitted, but not Setdown



External Land Use

Union Market borders several neighborhoods with disparate land uses that include the row houses of Eckington and the H Street corridor, the campus of Gallaudet University, high-density and active NoMa, and the National Park Service's Brentwood Park. It is also bounded by major transportation infrastructure including CSX and Amtrak train tracks to the west, and New York Avenue to the north. Each of the adjacent neighborhoods has a different urban form and scale. It is reasonable to assume that redevelopment of the Market might take its cues from several neighborhoods, and not take on a consistent form and scale.



Viewsheds

One of the striking characteristics of the Market are the views from the Market into adjacent neighborhoods. As the grade rises sharply from Florida Avenue and the urban grid rotates to the east, one is afforded long views over the rooftops of Capitol Hill to the US Capitol and the Library of Congress. To the southeast, one catches glimpses of Gallaudet University's green tree canopy as well as the Appleby Building and the campus housing along Faculty Row. To the northeast, one can see Brentwood - Hamilton field, and playing fields of the Kipp DC College Preparatory school.

As noted previously, there are few street trees within the neighborhood. The views to the south are particularly striking as they are not obscured by street trees.



View Down 6th St Toward the Capitol



View Down Morse St Toward Gallaudet



View Down 5th St Toward the Capitol

Mercantile & Industrial Character

In addition to wholesale businesses that call the Union Market home today, there are many materials, signs, colors and textures that reflect the neighborhood's long history as the region's premier wholesale market. All could inform the character of future redevelopments.

There is also a positive precedent in the way that wholesale, retail and entertainment uses currently mix on the sidewalks. Existing businesses display their wares under the historic canopies, tight up against the buildings. Vending windows open directly onto public space, allowing the purchase of hot food from the sidewalk. Light industrial uses such as food production and load and unload across the sidewalk - these uses would today be called "maker space", and are desirable.

The mix of these disparate uses speaks to the vibrancy of the neighborhood and should be promoted as the area redevelops.



Merchandise Displays in Sidewalk



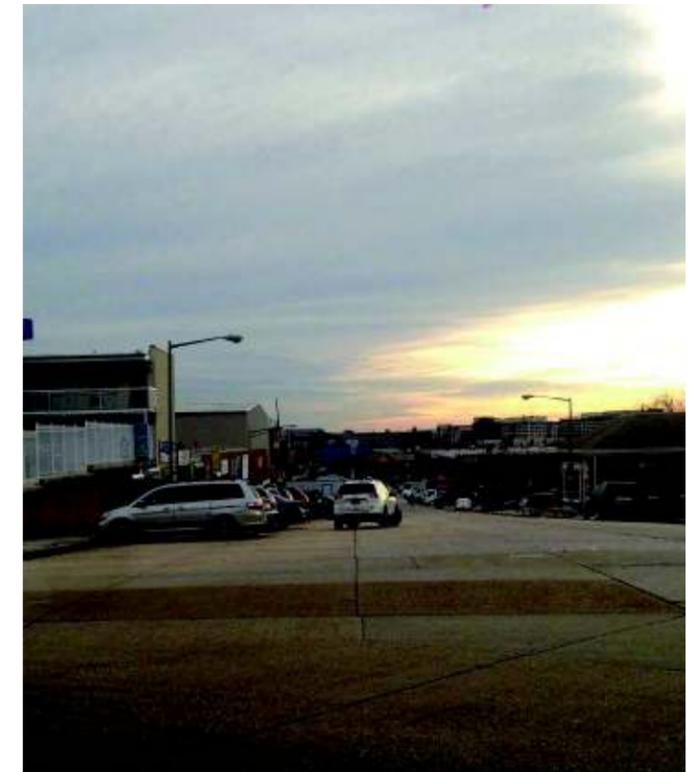
Loading/Unloading of Trucks along Sidewalk



Market Sheds



Rail Lines



Concrete Streets

Findings

1. Many of the existing details that lend the neighborhood its character are non-standard or atypical for the district.
2. The use of public space in Union Market includes extensive display of merchandise and commercial operations in all areas, making pedestrians feel as though they are walking through an active and vibrant commercial area.
3. 4th, 5th, Morse and Neal Streets are paved in concrete and have “industrial” scale details.
4. There are few if any street trees. Existing trees on private property are urban regrowth trees, and suggest that street trees might be atypical selections.
5. Existing street lights are cobraheads.
6. The historic buildings include concrete canopies which cantilever into public space. The dimensions and proportions of the canopies vary within a narrow range. In the absence of street trees, canopies provide shade and cover from weather.
7. Union Market contains streets of varying widths, vistas, orientations, and adjacent building stock. These varying adjacencies warrant different treatments for different streets.
8. As the uses at Union Market change from wholesale and light industrial to retail, entertainment and mixed-use, there will be new requirements placed on the function of the streets. Given fixed ROW widths, there will likely be a reapportionment of space between roadways and sidewalks as pedestrian traffic and uses become more important. Wider sidewalks will accommodate increased pedestrian traffic, outdoor cafes, potential outdoor vending, and other programmatic elements.
9. The existing door elevations of the historic buildings, the required cross-slopes for sidewalks, and the retention of the old concrete streets make it generally infeasible to build new streetscape with a 6” curb. As a result, the streets adjacent to historic buildings (Morse, 4th and 5th Streets) should be curbsless to accommodate the wider sidewalks necessitated by mixed-use redevelopment.
10. As existing uses transition from warehouse to retail and mixed-use, curbside loading will gradually transition to parallel parking. In the interim, it is likely that curbside loading and pedestrian-driven outdoor uses (such as cafe seating) will occupy the same zone within the street.

