

UD-2 Designing the Livable District ⁹⁰⁷

The shape of the District profoundly affects the quality of life of its residents, from physical and behavioral health to opportunities for having close friends and neighbors to even how likely it is to find and hold a job. The built environment influences the ability for neighbors to interact, the opportunity for communities to form, and the richness of social networks. It regulates how much everyday exercise is possible through walking and biking on District streets and contributes to reducing crime when buildings support active facades, and public spaces are designed to support civic life. Beautiful parks, architecture, and public places can relieve stress, and improve physical and emotional health. ^{907.1}

A city's livability is measured by the safety, health, and happiness it provides to all its residents, particularly to the most vulnerable members of society: children, older adults, and those who are economically or socially marginalized. Additionally, every individual in Washington, DC will have a distinct definition of what makes a place livable for them. To realize a shared vision of livability, the District should be designed to be a place where all residents feel safe in their neighborhoods and are socially connected to one another; where they feel closely linked to community services, employment, education, shops, public parks, leisure, and culture; where healthy and active lifestyles can be fulfilled; and where children grow and play with increased freedom. ^{907.2}

This section of the Urban Design Element addresses four key design aspects of the livable District:

- Streets for People;
- Designing for Vibrant, Inclusive Neighborhoods;
- Play Everywhere; and
- The Accessible District. ^{907.3}

UD-2.1 Streets For People ⁹⁰⁸

The District's streets are more than just spaces for transportation: they are also spaces that the public inhabits, where residents, workers, and visitors alike can participate in urban life. While streets must bring people to their destinations, they also serve as the community backdrop of the District, where neighbors mingle, children play, and culture and ideas are exchanged. The physical design and layout of a city's streets directly impact the human experience of the public realm in a variety of ways: the design of a tree-lined residential street can foster casual conversations between neighbors, whereas the bustling pace of a retail corridor can encourage patrons to pause at a sidewalk café or to window shop while passing through. As shown in Figure 9.13, currently 25 percent of the District's retail corridors lack the pedestrian



Frequent Curb cuts on Connecticut Avenue NW in Tenleytown



Minimal Curb Cuts on 14th Street NW in Columbia Heights

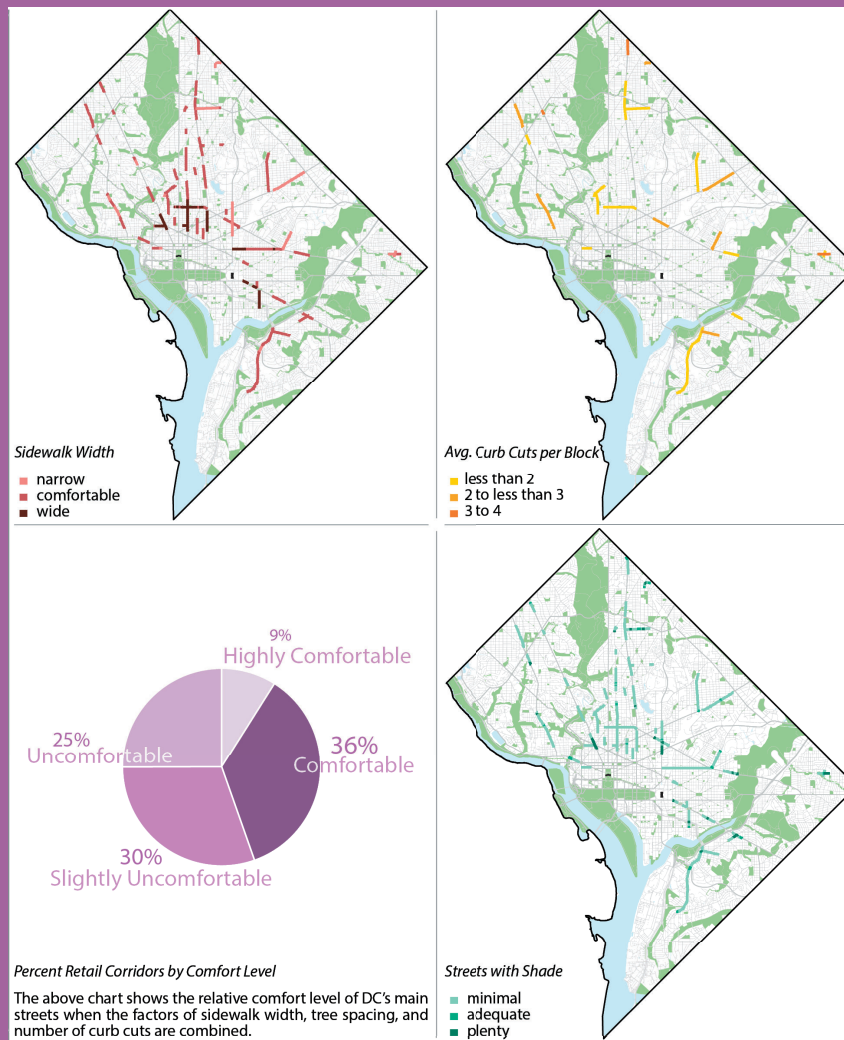
infrastructure of wide sidewalks, plentiful street trees, and minimal mid-block curb cuts to support enhanced pedestrian comfort and urban life. It is critical to focus on creating streets that are comfortable, walkable, interesting, and safe for pedestrians. 908.1

Policy UD-2.1.1: Streetscapes That Prioritize the Human Experience

Commercial streetscapes should be designed to be comfortable, safe, and interesting to pedestrians. At a minimum, commercial corridor sidewalks should be designed with clear, direct, accessible walking paths that

Figure 9.13:

Pedestrian Comfort of the District's Main Streets 908.2



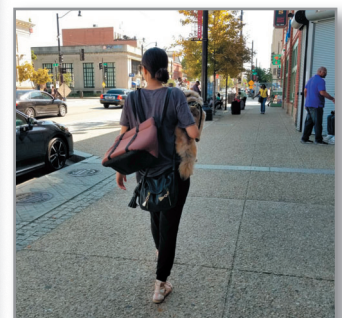
Plenty street tree canopy coverage on a District residential street



Adequate street tree canopy coverage on Pennsylvania Avenue SE, a commercial street



Minimal street tree canopy coverage on a District residential street



Minimal street tree canopy coverage on H Street NE, a commercial street

accommodate a range of pedestrian users and facilitate a sense of connection to adjacent uses. Where width allows, corridors should have a generous presence of shade trees and café seating areas, as well as bicycle facilities. In areas with large pedestrian volumes, streetscapes should provide seating, drinking fountains, publicly accessible restrooms, and other infrastructure that supports increased frequency and duration of walking. ^{908.3}

Policy UD-2.1.2: Neighborhood Streetscapes

Neighborhood streetscapes should be designed to visually reflect the character and level of intensity of the adjacent land uses. For instance, narrow sidewalks may be appropriate for narrow streets with low-scale buildings, while sidewalks with more trees and vegetation may be appropriate for large-scale development. Pedestrian-oriented lighting should be designed to enhance walkability for all users, as well as visually reflect the character of neighborhood. ^{908.4}

Policy UD-2.1.3: Complete Streetscape Design

Co-locate multiple forms of transportation amenities such as bus shelters and bikeshare stations to better integrate them into a complete streetscape design. Design access for delivery trucks, valets, and rideshare services within the street and not at the expense of the pedestrian sidewalk or bike lanes. ^{908.5}

Policy UD-2.1.4: Connections Between Public Spaces and Streets

Public spaces, such as parks and plazas, should have entry points that create clear and porous visual and physical connections to the adjacent public realm. Where possible, coordinate streetscape designs to create a continuous experience between parks and streets. Limit the installation of tall fences or grade changes that create boundaries between parks and public rights-of-way. Public gathering spaces should be incorporated directly into the streetscape through pedestrian amenities, such as benches, public art, spacing of shade trees, and gardens. ^{908.6}

Policy UD-2.1.5: Intersection Placemaking

Incorporate urban design strategies as part of pedestrian and cyclist safety improvements at key neighborhood intersections. As appropriate, incorporate placemaking improvements such as installation of curb bump outs, raised crosswalks, artistic crosswalk markings, special paving, and other means of placemaking-oriented traffic calming. ^{908.7}

Policy UD-2.1.6: Minimize Mid-Block Vehicular Curb Cuts

Curb cuts should be avoided on streets with heavy pedestrian usage and minimized on all other streets. Where feasible, alleys should be used in lieu of curb cuts for parking and loading access to buildings. Curb cuts for individual residences should only be allowed if there is a predominant pattern of curb cuts and driveways on the block face. ^{908.8}

Policy UD-2.1.7: Streetscapes That Encourage Activation

Design new streetscape projects with public spaces that can be flexibly programmed to enhance public life with short- or long-term uses throughout the year to meet the needs of a wide variety of community members. Such spaces can be sites for creative placemaking efforts, block parties, festivals, markets, pop-up retail, or food trucks. 908.9

Policy UD-2.1.8: Special Streetscape Design Guidelines

Create tailored streetscape guidelines for new neighborhoods or large sites undergoing redevelopment to promote interesting pedestrian experiences and a unique and consistent design for the public realm. 908.10

Action UD-2.1.A: Retail Ceiling Heights

Develop zoning regulations to require higher first-floor ceiling heights in new buildings along main streets and other commercial/mixed-use areas.

908.11

Action UD-2.1.B: Streetscape Design by Neighborhood Type

Review current District-wide streetscape design regulations and policies to prioritize the pedestrian experience. As necessary, develop a typology for basic streetscape design standards that meet the unique needs of various types of neighborhoods in the District, including the downtown business district, commercial areas, and high- and low-density residential neighborhoods. 908.12

Action UD-2.1.C: Standards for Street Furniture

Produce standards for street furniture in public spaces, such as benches, trash cans, and bike racks, that designate spacing, layout, and other characteristics to promote socialization and interaction, as well as public health and well-being. 908.13

Action UD-2.1.D: Public Space Permitting of Street Furniture

Explore process improvements to the public space permitting process to reduce the time and complexity of reviewing and approving District-standard street furniture. 908.14

Action UD-2.1.E: Public Restrooms in Streetscapes

Map the location of publicly accessible restrooms in the District and develop location recommendations for the installations of new restrooms. Investigate opportunities to install attractive, clean, and safe standalone public restrooms that are accessible at all hours. 908.15

Action UD-2.1.F: Sidewalk Widening

Conduct a corridor study to investigate widening sidewalks through a variety of means including the establishment of building restriction lines, reducing cartway width, or pedestrian bulb-outs. 908.16



Crossing the Street event, a DC Office of Planning creative placemaking initiative



Snip from the Union Market Guidelines



Street Furniture on I Street NW in Foggy Bottom



Barnes Dance at the intersection of 7th and H Streets NW in Chinatown

Action UD-2.1.G: Placemaking and Vision Zero

Establish a pilot initiative to enhance roadway safety through placemaking at intersections at three locations. Incorporate green infrastructure, low-impact design, and public life design principles. ^{908.17}

Action UD-2.1.H: Resilient Public Life Guide

Study and develop design guidance for how public spaces can be managed and designed to be more resilient during times of natural, security, and public health emergencies. ^{908.18}

UD-2.2 Designing for Vibrant Neighborhoods ⁹⁰⁹

The sense of place in the District's neighborhoods is a function of their cultural history, physical features, visual qualities, and resident mix. Those neighborhoods with a strong sense of place tend to share certain walkable and well-connected centers, well-defined edges, attractive streets, and character-defining architecture. This is most apparent in Washington, DC's historic districts, but it is also true in non-designated row house neighborhoods and in single-family neighborhoods where particular architectural styles, setbacks, and building forms prevail. Especially in row house neighborhoods, the repetitive use of form, materials, color, and spacing creates a sense of solidarity that transcends each individual structure. ^{909.1}

Significant population growth in Washington, DC is placing pressure on every neighborhood to grow and change. One challenge is how to design and incorporate new affordable housing at varying levels of affordability, along with more family-sized housing, throughout the District. Many neighborhoods in Washington offer solutions on how to incorporate different housing types while maintaining neighborhood character (see Figures 9.14 and 9.15). A close examination of neighborhoods like Columbia Heights, Glover Park, and historic Anacostia show that infill development can be added to the District's historic neighborhoods. While overpowering contrasts in scale and height should be avoided, thoughtful design can make moderate variations in height and scale compatible. Encourage use of high-quality materials that are durable and rich in texture and incorporate character-defining details. Continue established alignments and landscaping elements. ^{909.2}

Policy UD-2.2.1: Neighborhood Character and Identity

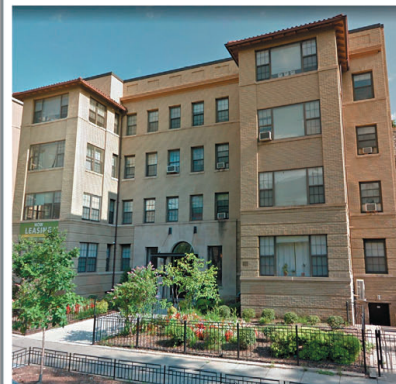
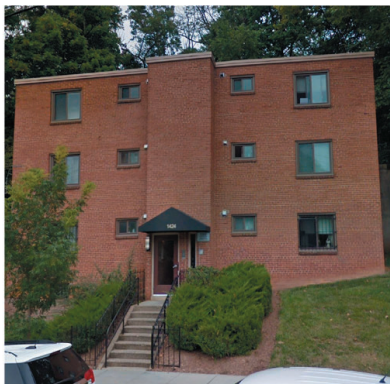
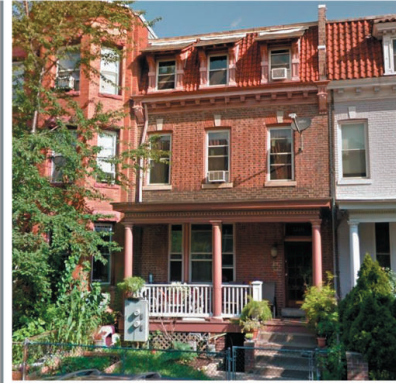
Strengthen the visual qualities of Washington, DC's neighborhoods as infill development and building renovations occur by encouraging the use of high-quality and high-performance architectural designs and materials. In neighborhoods with diverse housing types, or when introducing more diverse infill housing types, use design measures to create visual and spatial compatibility. ^{909.5}

Figure 9.14:

DC Neighborhoods with Diverse Housing 909.3



Figure 9.15:

DC Neighborhoods with Diverse Housing ^{909.4}

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Policy UD-2.2.2: Areas of Strong Architectural Character

Preserve the architectural continuity and design integrity of historic districts and other areas of strong architectural character. New development, additions, and renovations within such areas do not need to replicate prevailing architectural styles exactly but should be complementary. ^{909.6}

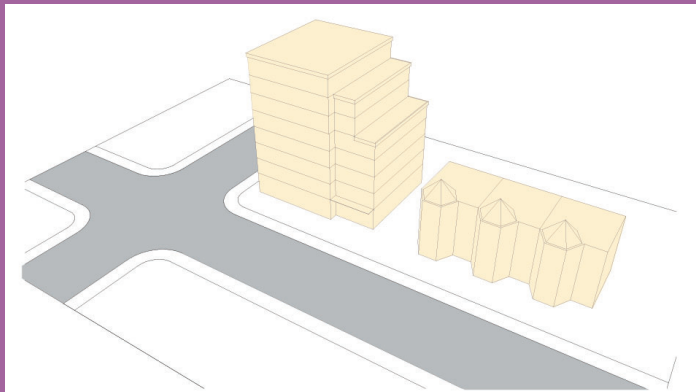
See the Historic Preservation Element for additional policies and actions related to historic districts.

Policy UD-2.2.3: Neighborhood Mixed-Use Centers

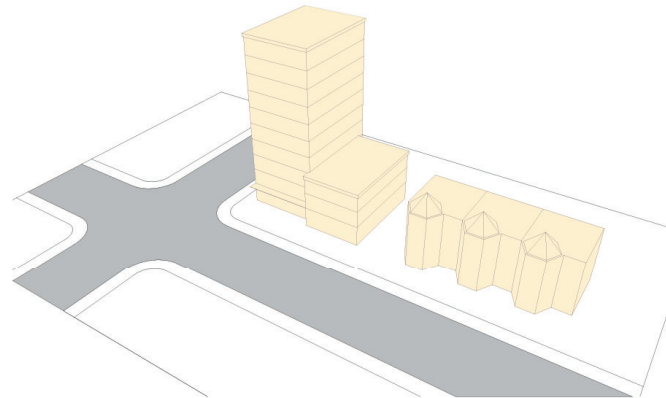
Undertake strategic and coordinated efforts to create neighborhood mixed-use centers that reinforce community identity and form compact, walkable environments with a broad mix of housing types, employment opportunities, neighborhood shops and services, and civic uses and public spaces. New buildings and projects should support the compact development of neighborhood

Figure 9.16:

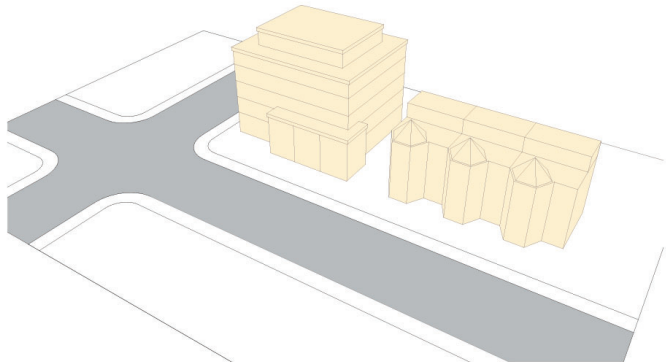
Encouraged Transitions in Building Intensity and Scale ^{909.7}



Stepped-Down Massing



Slender Massing



Stepped-Back Massing



Transitions in building scale in the Mount Vernon Triangle neighborhood

centers and increase the diversity of uses and creation of public spaces where needed. 909.8

Policy UD-2.2.4: Transitions in Building Intensity

Design transitions between large- and small-scale development. The relationship between taller, more visually prominent buildings and lower, smaller buildings (such as single-family or row houses) can be made more pleasing and gradual through a variety of context-specific design strategies, such as a slender massing of taller elements, stepping back the building at floors above its neighbors' predominant roof line, stepping a building's massing down to meet the roof line of its neighbors, or strategic placement of taller elements to mark corners, vista terminations, or large open-space frontages. 909.9

Policy UD-2.2.5: Infill Development

New construction, infill development, redevelopment, and renovations to existing buildings should respond to and complement the defining visual and spatial qualities of the surrounding neighborhood, particularly regarding building roof lines, setbacks, and landscaping. Avoid overpowering contrasts of scale and height as infill development occurs. 909.10

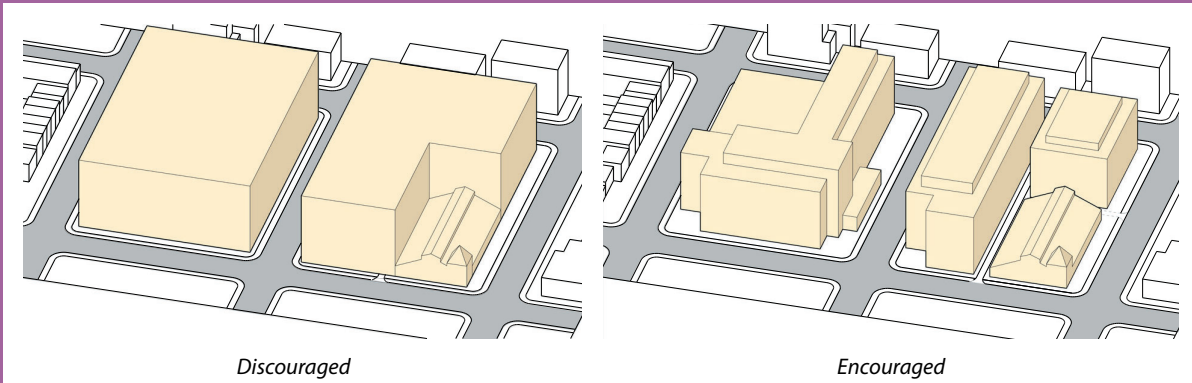
Policy UD-2.2.6: Large-Scale Development

New developments on parcels that are larger than the prevailing neighborhood lot size shall be carefully integrated with adjacent sites. Structures on such parcels should be broken into smaller, more varied forms, particularly where the prevailing street frontage is characterized by small, older buildings with varying facades. Incorporate existing assets, such as historic buildings and significant natural landscapes, into the design of redeveloped large sites. For sites that were originally planned as integrated complexes of multiple buildings, historic groupings of structures should be conserved where possible. (see Figure 9.17 for examples of breaking up the massing of development on lots larger than the prevailing neighborhood lot size). 909.11

Policy UD-2.2.7: Preservation of Neighborhood Open Space

Ensure that infill development respects and improves the integrity of neighborhood open spaces and public areas. Buildings should be designed to minimize the loss of sunlight and maximize the usability of neighborhood parks and plazas. Buildings adjacent to parks or natural areas

Figure 9.17:

Development Massing 909.12

should orient their entrances or other community-serving functions toward these shared resources. 909.13

Policy UD-2.2.8: Planning for Large Sites

Urban design plans for large sites shall consider not only the site itself but also the context of surrounding neighborhoods, including the continuation of and connection to existing street grids. 909.14

Policy UD-2.2.9: Resilient and Sustainable Large Site Development

Site plan large sites to minimize the risk of flooding to buildings and extreme heat and other climate impacts. Preserve natural resources and implement stormwater management best practices, while maintaining active building frontages and pedestrian-focused streetscapes. 909.15

Also See Parks and Open Space, Land Use, and Environmental Protection elements for additional information.

Action UD-2.2.A: Scale Transition Study

Complete a Scale Transition Study to evaluate options for improving design compatibility between larger-scale and lower-scale areas. The study should respond to the varying situations where larger-scale development is (or will be) situated adjacent to lower-scale, predominantly residential neighborhoods. It should include design guidelines and provisions for buffers (including open space), stepping down of building heights, and solutions that reflect the different lot dimensions, block faces, and street and alley widths found in different parts of the District. 909.16

Action UD-2.2.B: Use Zoning and Other Regulatory Tools to Achieve Design Goals

Explore awards and incentives to promote excellence in the design of new buildings and public spaces. Recommendations should include incentives

for facade features, window placement, courtyards, buffering, and other exterior architectural elements that improve the compatibility of structures, including roof structures, with their surroundings while promoting high architectural quality and allowing for innovative, contemporary design. ^{909.17}

Action UD-2.2.C: High-Quality Affordable Housing Review

Conduct a review of the District's affordable housing policies, buildings, and zoning regulations to identify impediments that inhibit affordable housing from achieving high quality design. Produce a list of recommended changes to these codes, policies, and supplement with a form-based guide that outlines how new dwelling units can be better integrated into existing neighborhoods.

^{909.18}

Action UD-2.2.D: Urban Design Strategies for Resilient Communities

Research best practices and develop recommendations and urban design and biophilic guidelines to mitigate manmade and natural hazards, such as flooding and climate threats, while meeting other urban design goals. ^{909.19}

Action UD-2.2.E: Design Guidelines for Large Sites

Develop design guidelines as part of the review process for large site developments. These guidelines should address building appearance, streetscape, signage and utilities, parking, landscaping, buffering, protection of historic resources, compatibility of development with surrounding neighborhoods, and environmental sustainability. ^{909.20}

See Land Use Element for additional policies, actions and definitions for large sites.

Action UD-2.2.F: Design Guidelines

Develop illustrated design guidelines for private residential areas and commercial uses addressing such architectural and resilient aspects as facade design, building texture and materials, lighting, detail, signage, and building- to-street relationship. Design guidelines should allow for flexibility and creativity, and in most cases should be performance-oriented rather than based on rigid standards. ^{909.21}

UD-2.3 Play Everywhere ⁹¹⁰

Play is a universal experience that brings different people together, helps children learn, and promotes better physical and mental health for all residents. When play is thoughtfully designed into the public realm, it creates enriching, whimsical, and memorable public spaces and facilitates interactions and community-building among residents of diverse backgrounds and ages. Before the advent of the automobile, play largely happened on the neighborhood street, in the public square, and in the formal federal and ceremonial public spaces of the District, such as the National Mall. Over

time, play slowly receded to private yards and public playgrounds. Today, play largely happens in safety-engineered playgrounds or the unique urban park with a splash fountain or playable sculpture. ^{910.1}

Encouraging play in public spaces requires policies and actions that can address multiple challenges, both physical and regulatory. Structural barriers, such as the infrequent placement of public playgrounds, make it harder for 47 percent of District households to access playgrounds within a quarter-mile of their homes. Inadequate access is reinforced by social behaviors where many kids go to playgrounds only if accompanied by adults. Washington, DC has been addressing the structural challenges through the renovation and creation of more than 40 playgrounds in the last 10 years and the creation of new signature park spaces, such as Canal Park, with interactive, playable elements. The District will work further toward bringing play even closer to residents through a variety of local and small-scale play spaces that are built into the fabric of neighborhoods, streets, and schools. ^{910.2}

Policy UD-2.3.1: Play for Every Age

Create appealing plaza spaces that incorporate play and welcome multiple generations, such as playable fountains, skateboarding facilities, climbable sculptures, chess tables, and other interactive elements. In particular, attention should be paid to elements that can encourage social play and interaction among community members, play between parents and children, and opportunities for engaging teenagers. ^{910.3}

Policy UD-2.3.2: Playing in the Square

Encourage the use of formal public squares and parks as everyday play spaces and explore ways to incorporate design features that encourage play while respecting the park's design and other purposes when redesigning signature public open spaces. ^{910.4}

Policy UD-2.3.3: Play Everyday

Encourage the creation of play spaces in or near public and private facilities where people gather and receive services on a routine basis, such as transit stops, community-serving businesses, medical offices, and government facilities. ^{910.5}

Policy UD-2.3.4: Streets and Corners as Play Spaces

Create mini-play destinations on neighborhood blocks to bring play closer to where people live and help encourage social interaction between neighbors. Encourage the installation of small-scale play features in landscaped public parking areas or along sidewalks in the tree zone. ^{910.6}

Policy UD-2.3.5: Shared Play Spaces

Promote the incorporation of play spaces in the common outdoor areas of new multi-family buildings, with a focus on spaces for less mobile infants

and toddlers. Courtyards, terraces, and roofs can serve as outdoor spaces for children's play. ^{910.7}

Action UD-2.3.A: Play Streets Guidelines

Develop guidelines for resident and civic organization activation of streets and other public spaces as temporary or permanent safe play spaces, and investigate regulatory changes necessary to enable play streets. ^{910.8}

Action UD-2.3.B: Playable Art

Complete permanent artistic play structures in small parks, street corners, or civic buildings to pilot the concept of playable streets. ^{910.9}

UD-2.4 Inclusive Community Spaces ⁹¹¹

The needs of District residents are changing and becoming more diverse as families have more children, the number of older adults increases, and the population diversifies. As neighborhoods change demographically, new and existing residents may differ in how they use and appreciate community space. Design can be a crucial tool to make Washington, DC an open, inviting, safe, and delightful place for children, families, seniors, communities of color, and persons with disabilities. However, the design of new neighborhoods and buildings does not entirely meet the needs of a growing and diverse population. Ninety-one percent of new housing growth between 2006 and 2018 has been in multi-family buildings that add considerable supply but tend to have units that are smaller in size and amenities and spaces that reflected tenant, rather than neighborhood, needs. Creating accessible, racially equitable, and inclusive spaces means examining the amenities that new and existing buildings and neighborhoods have, the way they relate to open space, and how they provide places for residents of all backgrounds to participate in a rich and full public life. ^{911.1}

Policy UD-2.4.1: Inclusive and Diverse Neighborhood Spaces

Provide for neighborhood spaces that support a diverse array of users, particularly spaces that can be designed and inhabited by people who have typically been marginalized. Inclusive neighborhood spaces should be designed to enable social interaction among neighbors and to allow for community and cultural expression as the community's needs evolve. These spaces should be inclusive for racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ populations, women, persons with disabilities, older adults, youth, immigrants/refugees, and pregnant women. ^{911.2}

Policy UD-2.4.2: Design for All Ages and Abilities

Design public spaces for use by all ages and abilities, through the use of universal wayfinding and the highest standards of accessible design. During processes for designing public spaces, community involvement is

critical, and teenagers, older adults, and persons with disabilities should be intentionally engaged and included in the design process. ^{911.3}

Policy UD-2.4.3: Children Everywhere

Incorporate family and toddler/youth-oriented uses and accommodations into existing and new mixed-use projects, commercial projects, and public facilities. These may include special-purpose facilities, family bathrooms, and play-friendly waiting rooms. ^{911.4}

Policy UD-2.4.4: Accessible Neighborhoods at Every Scale

Design large sites to facilitate good connections to District-wide and regional destinations by public transportation. Design streets and other aspects of the public realm to enable residents, workers, and visitors of all abilities the same level of access to public destinations. ^{911.5}

Action UD-2.4.A: Design Guidelines for Higher-Density, Family-Sized Housing

Develop design guidelines for higher-density, family-sized housing with the intent to address key design issues at the scale of the neighborhood, site, building, and unit that relate to residential livability for families with children. ^{911.6}

Action UD-2.4.B: Design Standards for Universal Wayfinding

Develop a standard template to enhance universal wayfinding integrated into public art, buildings, and streetscapes as well as signage. The template should be designed to be employed District-wide, yet customizable to showcase or promote the individual needs and character of various neighborhoods across the District. ^{911.7}

Action UD-2.4.C: Toolkit for Inclusive and Intergenerational Public Space Design

Research, prepare, and implement a set of engagement strategies and design guidelines for inclusive and intergenerational public spaces in neighborhoods. These guidelines should include best practices for how to encourage community-led design efforts, successful ways to encourage community and cultural self-expression in the public realm (which includes streets, sidewalks, parks, plazas, and other public spaces), and incorporate accessible design principles, such as deaf space. ^{911.8}