

[PLAN]DC

THE DC OFFICE OF PLANNING



NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL CENTERS

OVERVIEW

The District of Columbia is not only defined by its monumental core but also by its diverse neighborhoods and commercial districts. DC neighborhoods range from historic districts to modern new neighborhoods, and from high density urban environments to low density suburban -like areas. At the heart of many DC neighborhoods are commercial centers and corridors that provide local services and jobs, create a sense of neighborhood identity, and serve as public gathering places to meet and interact with neighbors. Additionally, these neighborhood commercial areas provide a significant source of revenue as they are destinations for retail and commerce.

The neighborhood commercial corridors range in size, scale and types of uses. Some are more focused on serving the immediate neighborhood with small “mom and pop” retail shops while others are city-wide or regional destinations. Despite their differences, neighborhood commercial corridors share common issues, including parking, compatibility with adjacent residential areas, aesthetics and blight, and the mix and character of activities. The Comp Plan provides important policy direction on these issues, both on a citywide level and on a neighborhood level. Having a viable neighborhood center is an important part of creating “complete” neighborhoods, where residents can walk to nearby shops and services rather than driving. This can also reduce retail “leakage” to the suburbs, and keep sales tax dollars in DC.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OUTCOMES



Photo Credit: Capitol Riverfront BID

During the engagement process, which included seven “PlanDC” citywide community meetings and various engagement forums throughout the last year, community members expressed their appreciation for the District’s neighborhood centers, and the role they play in shaping neighborhood character and community life. Residents would like to maintain the neighborhood-focus of these areas, enhance the diversity of uses to better serve the needs of individual neighborhoods, allow for mixed use development, provide support for small and local businesses, and ensure that new development along the corridors respects and reinforces the character and identity of each area. Overall, there was strong support for continuing the current path of strengthening neighborhood-service retail and commercial corridors throughout the District.

BACKGROUND + FACTS

MAIN STREETS

The District has 11 active and accredited “Main Street” programs. Created in 2002 through the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Main Streets serves as the citywide coordinating program that provides services and funding for the 11 Main Streets in the District of Columbia. The mission of the program is to promote the revitalization of traditional business districts.

Active DC Main Streets programs:

1. Barracks Row Main Street
2. Destination Congress Heights
3. Ward 7 Business Partnership
4. Historic Dupont Circle Main Streets
5. H Street Main Street
6. North Capitol Main Street
7. Shaw Main Street
8. Rhode Island Avenue Main Street
9. Tenleytown Main Street
10. Van Ness Main Streets
11. Eastern Market

In 2015, DC Main Streets programs generated the following economic activity:

- Net Jobs Created: 1,252
- Net New Businesses: 30
- Rehabilitation Projects Completed: 30
- Public Improvement Projects Completed: 18
- New Construction Projects Completed: 15



GREAT STREET CORRIDORS

The Government of the District of Columbia through the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development (DMPED) administers the Great Streets Retail Small Business Reimbursement Grants. These are competitive grants of up to \$50,000 for qualified small business owners who wish to improve their place of business. The purpose of the grant program is to support existing small businesses, attract new businesses, increase the District’s tax base, create new job opportunities for District residents, and transform emerging commercial corridors into thriving and inviting neighborhood centers.

Great Street Corridors:

1. Wisconsin Ave NW Corridor
2. Connecticut Ave NW Corridor
3. Georgia Ave NE Corridor
4. U Street/14th Street Corridor
5. 7th Street/ Georgia Ave NW Corridor
6. North Capitol Street Corridor
7. Rhode Island Ave NE Corridor
8. New York Ave NE Corridor
9. H Street/Bladensburg Rd NE Corridor
10. Minnesota-Benning Corridor
11. Nannie Helen Burroughs Ave. Corridor
12. Pennsylvania Ave SE (A) Corridor
13. Pennsylvania Ave SE (B) Corridor
14. Pennsylvania Ave SE (C) Corridor
15. MLK/South Capitol (A) Corridor
16. MLK/South Capitol (B) Corridor
17. MLK/South Capitol (C) Corridor

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS (BIDS)

The DC BID Council is an association of Washington DC’s ten business improvement districts. Collectively, The DC BID Council brings together BID leaders and stakeholders to collaborate on issues and concerns that cut across all of our boundaries and impact the entire city. BID members spend \$27 million dollars per year to help manage and enhance neighborhoods that are home to 70% of the DC employment base and 40% of the city’s tax base.

1. Adams Morgan Partnership
2. Anacostia BID
3. Capitol Hill BID
4. Capitol Riverfront BID
5. DowntownDC BID
6. Georgetown BID
7. Golden Triangle BID
8. Mount Vernon Triangle BID
9. NoMa BID
10. The Southwest BID



Photo Credit: Capitol Riverfront BID

COMP PLAN DIRECTION

SUPPORT NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESSES. The Comp Plan includes current policy direction to expand and strengthen neighborhood commercial corridors across the District. To improve access to goods and services for residents, the Plan encourages the reuse of vacant buildings, along with appropriately-scaled retail infill development on vacant and underutilized lots.

Example:

Policy ED-2.2.3: Neighborhood Shopping. Create additional shopping opportunities in Washington's neighborhood commercial districts to better meet the demand for basic goods and services. Reuse of vacant buildings in these districts should be encouraged, along with appropriately-scaled retail infill development on vacant and underutilized sites. Promote the creation of locally-owned, non-chain establishments because of their role in creating unique shopping experiences.

Policy ED-3.1.1: Neighborhood Commercial Vitality. Promote the vitality and diversity of Washington's neighborhood commercial areas by retaining existing businesses, attracting new businesses, and improving the mix of goods and services available to residents.



Policy ED-2.2.7: Planning For Retail. Coordinate neighborhood planning efforts with the District's economic development planning and implementation programs in order to improve retail offerings in local commercial centers.

AREA-SPECIFIC POLICIES. The Comprehensive Plan includes policies and programs targeted to each of the District's 10 planning areas. These policies are more location specific, and provide policies and programs for how new and existing commercial corridors in each area could be developed, enhanced or revitalized.

Example:

Policy CH-1.1.3: Upgrading Commercial Districts. Reinforce and upgrade the major commercial districts of Capitol Hill, including the H Street and Benning Road corridors, the Pennsylvania Avenue corridor, 7th and 8th Streets SE, and Massachusetts Avenue between Union Station and Stanton Park. Support the further development of these areas with local-serving retail services, provided that such uses are compatible with surrounding land uses and the historic architecture and scale of the shopping districts themselves. Support the retention of existing neighborhood-serving businesses in these areas through programs that provide technical and financial assistance to small, locally-owned establishments.

Policy MC-2.1.1: Revitalization of Lower Georgia Avenue. Encourage continued revitalization of the Lower Georgia Avenue corridor. Georgia Avenue should be an attractive, pedestrian-oriented "Main Street" with retail uses, local-serving offices, mixed income housing, civic and cultural facilities, and well-maintained public space.

Policy RCW-2.1.1: Connecticut Avenue Corridor. Sustain the high quality of the Connecticut Avenue corridor. The positive qualities of the corridor, particularly its attractive older apartment buildings, green spaces, trees, and walkable neighborhood shopping districts, should be conserved and enhanced. Continued efforts to improve traffic flow and parking should be pursued, especially in the commercial districts.

NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS

AND CENTERS. Commercial uses are an essential part of the District's neighborhoods. The Comp Plan includes policies to promote well-defined centers by improving business conditions, upgrading storefronts and the street environment, and improving parking and pedestrian safety and comfort. It also recommends zoning changes to reduce land use conflicts through buffering and screening requirements.

Example:

Policy LU-2.4.1: Promotion of Commercial Centers. Promote the vitality of the District's commercial centers and provide for the continued growth of commercial land uses to meet the needs of District residents, expand employment opportunities for District residents, and sustain the city's role as the center of the metropolitan area. Commercial centers should be inviting and attractive places, and should support social interaction and ease of access for nearby residents.

Policy LU-2.4.2: Hierarchy of Commercial Centers. Maintain and reinforce a hierarchy of neighborhood, multi-neighborhood, regional, and main street commercial centers in the District. Activities in each type of center should reflect its intended role and market area, as defined in the Framework Element. Established centers should be expanded in areas where the existing range of goods and services is insufficient to meet community needs.

Policy LU-2.4.6: Scale and Design of New Commercial Uses. Ensure that new uses within commercial districts are developed at a height, mass, scale and design that is appropriate and compatible with surrounding areas.

SUPPORTING THE NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT.

Some District commercial centers lack neighborhood serving retail, basic amenities or have commercial vacancy rates. The Comp Plan includes policy direction to promote the vitality and diversity of neighborhood businesses through technical assistance, financial incentives, and by coordinating its revitalization programs with those of the private and non-profit sectors. The Comprehensive Plan also addresses ways to promote the downtown commercial district to lend itself to supporting the growing residential neighborhoods in the downtown area.

Example:

Policy CW-1.1.9: Neighborhood-Serving Retail in Central Washington. Ensure that Central Washington's retail uses serve not only the regional market, but also the local neighborhood market created by residential development within the area. This should include basic consumer goods

like drug stores, hardware stores, and grocery stores, to supplement the major anchors and specialty shops.

Policy ED-3.1.1: Neighborhood Commercial Vitality. Promote the vitality and diversity of Washington's neighborhood commercial areas by retaining existing businesses, attracting new businesses, and improving the mix of goods and services available to residents.

Policy ED-3.1.2: Targeting Commercial Revitalization. Continue to target government economic development programs to areas of greatest need, including older business areas and commercial centers that inadequately serve surrounding areas. Focus on those areas where the critical mass needed to sustain a viable neighborhood commercial center can be achieved.

SUPPORT SMALL AND LOCAL BUSINESSES. The District's neighborhood commercial corridors are sustained by small and local businesses. The Comp Plan includes policy direction that enable small businesses to continue to thrive, including income and property tax incentives, assistance to commercial tenants seeking to purchase their buildings, commercial land trusts, and relocation assistance programs for displaced business.

Example:

Policy ED-3.1.7: Community Equity Investment. Provide opportunities for community equity investment in local economic development projects. This may include methods of business financing that provide District residents with greater opportunities for equity shares in new development.

Policy ED-3.2.6: Commercial Displacement. Avoid the displacement of small and local businesses due to rising real estate costs. Programs should be developed to offset the impacts of rising operating expenses on small businesses in areas of rapidly rising rents and prices.

Policy ED-3.2.7: Assistance to Displaced Businesses. Assist small businesses that are displaced as a result of rising land costs and rents, government action, or new development. Efforts should be made to find locations for such businesses within redeveloping areas, or on other suitable sites within the city.

