

CITYWIDE ELEMENTS

should be on stations that have the capacity to accommodate substantial increases in ridership and the potential to become pedestrian-oriented urban villages. Neighborhoods that meet these criteria and that would welcome a TOD overlay are the highest priority. 306.19

LU-1.4 Neighborhood Infill Development 307

There are hundreds of small vacant lots across the District of Columbia located away from transit stations and off of the major boulevards. Analysis conducted through the Comprehensive Plan revision determined that vacant, residentially-zoned lots totaled more than 400 acres in 2005. Approximately 50 percent of this acreage was zoned for single family homes, 15 percent was zoned for townhomes and rowhomes, and 35 percent was zoned for multi-family development. Most of the sites were less than one acre in size. Some of this land may not be developable to the limits allowed by zoning due to site constraints such as poor access, awkward parcel shapes, and steep topography. 307.1

Infill development on vacant lots is strongly supported in the District of Columbia, provided that such development is compatible in scale with its surroundings and consistent with environmental protection and public safety objectives. In residential areas, infill sites present some of the best opportunities in the city for “family” housing and low- to moderate-density development. In commercial areas, infill development can fill gaps in the streetwall and create more cohesive and attractive neighborhood centers. Vacant lots in such settings may also present opportunities for public uses, such as pocket parks, job training facilities, and child care centers. 307.2

[PULLQUOTE: In residential areas, infill sites present some of the best opportunities in the city for “family” housing and low- to moderate-density development. In commercial areas, infill development can fill gaps in the streetwall and create more cohesive and attractive neighborhood centers.]

In both residential and commercial settings, infill development must be sensitive to neighborhood context. High quality design standards should be required, the privacy of neighboring structures should be respected, and density and scale should reflect the desired character of the surrounding area. 307.3

Infill development may also include the restoration of vacant and abandoned structures. In 2003, there were an estimated 2,700 vacant and abandoned residential properties in the District. While the number has declined since then, some parts of the city continue to have relatively high concentrations of vacant buildings. As noted in the Housing Element, the city’s Home Again Initiative was launched in 2003 to restore such properties to active use.

Policy LU-1.4.1: Infill Development

Encourage infill development on vacant land within the city, particularly in areas where there are vacant lots that create “gaps” in the urban fabric and detract from the character of a commercial or residential street. Such development should complement the established character of the area and should not create sharp changes in the physical development pattern. 307.4

Policy LU-1.4.2: Long-Term Vacant Sites

Facilitate the reuse of vacant lots that have historically been difficult to develop due to infrastructure or access problems, inadequate lot dimensions, fragmented or absentee ownership, or other constraints. Explore lot consolidation, acquisition, and other measures which would address these constraints. 307.5

Policy LU-1.4.3: Zoning of Infill Sites

Ensure that the zoning of vacant infill sites is compatible with the prevailing development pattern in surrounding neighborhoods. This is particularly important in single family and row house neighborhoods that are currently zoned for multi-family development. 307.6

See the Housing Element for policies on the development of “New Communities” on the site of aging public housing complexes and a discussion of the city’s “Home Again” program for rehabilitating vacant properties.

See the Community Services and Facilities Element for policies on the “joint redevelopment” of public facilities such as libraries with modernized public facilities and additional private development.

LU-2.0 Creating and Maintaining Successful Neighborhoods 308

This section of the Land Use Element focuses on land use issues within the District’s neighborhoods. It begins with a set of broad policies which state the city’s commitment to sustaining neighborhood diversity and protecting the defining characteristics of each community. This is followed by a discussion of neighborhood appearance, particularly the treatment of abandoned and blighted properties. This section then turns to a discussion of residential land use compatibility issues, followed by a discussion of neighborhood centers and commercial land use compatibility issues. 308.1

LU-2.1 A City of Neighborhoods 309

The same effort given to keep Washington’s monumental core a symbol of national pride must be given to the city’s neighborhoods. After all, the public image of the city is defined as much by its homes, businesses, streets, and neighborhood spaces as it is by its monuments and federal buildings. For Washington’s residents, the neighborhoods are the essence of the city’s social and physical environment. Land use policies must ensure that all neighborhoods have adequate access to commercial services, parks, educational and cultural facilities; and sufficient housing opportunities while protecting their rich historic and cultural legacies. 309.1

Washington has no fewer than 130 distinct and identifiable neighborhoods today. They range from high-density urban mixed use communities like the West End and Mount Vernon Square to quiet low-density neighborhoods like Crestwood and Spring Valley, providing a wide range of choices for the District’s many different types of households. Just as their physical qualities vary, the social and economic characteristics of the city’s neighborhoods also vary. In 2001, the DC Office of Planning used a range of social and economic indicators to classify neighborhoods as “stable”, “transitional”, “emerging”, or “distressed.” These indicators included income, home value and sales, school performance, crime rates, poverty rates, educational attainment, and building permit activity, among others. 309.2

Most of the District’s recent planning efforts have focused on transitional, emerging, and distressed neighborhoods. Land use strategies for these areas have emphasized the reuse of vacant sites, the refurbishment (or replacement) of abandoned or deteriorating buildings, the removal of illegal land uses, and improvements to the public realm (e.g., streets and public buildings). These strategies have been paired with incentives for the private sector to reinvest in each neighborhood and provide new housing choices and services. A different set of land use strategies has been applied in “stable” neighborhoods, emphasizing neighborhood conservation and appropriate infill. Land use policies in these areas have focused on retaining neighborhood character, mitigating development impacts on services and infrastructure, preventing demolition in historic districts, and improving the connection between zoning and present and desired land uses. 309.3

During the coming decades, the District will keep striving for increased stability in its transitional, emerging, and distressed neighborhoods. This does not mean that all neighborhoods should become the

CITYWIDE ELEMENTS

The 2006 Task Force report presents seven basic recommendations for improving housing affordability and growing the population. Foremost among these is the production of 55,000 new housing units, including 19,000 affordable units, and the preservation of at least 30,000 existing affordable units. The report includes strategies to increase the home ownership rate, provide direct assistance to 14,600 low income renter households, and include affordable housing in the “new neighborhoods” to be developed during the next 15 years. The report emphasizes the need to build the city’s administrative capacity for housing production, and to enact complementary programs to improve neighborhood services to attract and retain residents. The cost of these recommendations is estimated at \$300 million per year over 15 years.

Many of the strategies in the Housing Strategy have been carried forward into this Housing Element. This is an important step toward their implementation, and will move the city one step closer to achieving its housing goals.

[END SIDEBAR]

H-1.1 Expanding Housing Supply 503

Expanding the housing supply is a key part of the District’s vision to create successful neighborhoods. Along with improved transportation and shopping, better neighborhood schools and parks, preservation of historic resources, and improved design and identity, the production of housing is essential to the future of our neighborhoods. It is also a key to improving the city’s fiscal health. The District will work to facilitate housing construction and rehabilitation through its planning, building, and housing programs, recognizing and responding to the needs of all segments of the community. The first step toward meeting this goal is to ensure that an adequate supply of appropriately zoned land is available to meet expected housing needs. 503.1

Policy H-1.1.1: Private Sector Support

Encourage the private sector to provide new housing to meet the needs of present and future District residents at locations consistent with District land use policies and objectives. 503.2

Policy H-1.1.2: Production Incentives

Provide suitable regulatory, tax, and financing incentives to meet housing production goals. These incentives should continue to include zoning regulations that permit greater building area for commercial projects that include housing than for commercial projects that do not include housing. 503.3

Policy H-1.1.3: Balanced Growth

Strongly encourage the development of new housing on surplus, vacant and underutilized land in all parts of the city. Ensure that a sufficient supply of land is planned and zoned to enable the city to meet its long-term housing needs, including the need for low- and moderate-density single family homes as well as the need for higher-density housing. 503.4

Policy H-1.1.4: Mixed Use Development

Promote mixed use development, including housing, on commercially zoned land, particularly in neighborhood commercial centers, along Main Street mixed use corridors, and around appropriate Metrorail stations. 503.5

Policy H-1.1.5: Housing Quality

Require the design of affordable housing to meet the same high-quality architectural standards required of market-rate housing. Regardless of its affordability level, new or renovated housing should be

CITYWIDE ELEMENTS

indistinguishable from market rate housing in its exterior appearance and should address the need for open space and recreational amenities, and respect the design integrity of adjacent properties and the surrounding neighborhood. 503.6

Policy H-1.1.6: Housing in the Central City

Absorb a substantial component of the demand for new high-density housing in Central Washington and along the Anacostia River. Absorbing the demand for higher density units within these areas is an effective way to meet housing demands, create mixed-use areas, and conserve single-family residential neighborhoods throughout the city. Mixed income, higher density downtown housing also provides the opportunity to create vibrant street life, and to support the restaurants, retail, entertainment, and other amenities that are desired and needed in the heart of the city. 503.7

See the Land Use, Urban Design, and Area Elements for related policies.

Policy H-1.1.7: New Neighborhoods

Accommodate a significant share of the District's projected housing demand in "new neighborhoods" developed on large sites formerly used for government functions. In addition to housing, these neighborhoods must include well-planned retail, public schools, attractive parks, open space and recreation, as well as needed supportive services. The new neighborhoods should include a variety of housing types, serving a variety of income levels. 503.8

See also the Land Use Element policies on transit oriented development and mixed use.

Action H-1.1-A: Rezoning of Marginal Commercial Land

Perform an evaluation of commercially zoned land in the District, focusing on the "Great Streets" corridors, other arterial streets, and scattered small commercially-zoned pockets of land which no longer contain active commercial land uses. The evaluation should consider the feasibility of rezoning some of these areas from commercial to residential districts, in order to ensure their future development with housing. 503.9

Action H-1.1-B: Annual Housing Reports and Monitoring Efforts

Consider development of an Annual "State of DC Housing Report" which improves the quality of information on which to make housing policy decisions and/or a Housing Oversight Board comprised of residents, for-profit, and non-profit developers that reports each year on the effectiveness and outcomes of the District's housing programs. 503.10

H-1.2 Ensuring Housing Affordability 504

The District of Columbia faces numerous affordable housing challenges. It has both a disproportionate share of the region's poorest residents and the region's most rapid decline in the availability of housing to serve these residents. In 2005, the median income for a family of four for the region was \$89,300, but it was just \$55,750 in the District. In fact, about three-quarters of the city's households earn below the regional median income, while at the same time housing prices in the city are increasing at a faster rate than almost any jurisdiction in the metropolitan area. The share of District renters who paid more than 30 percent of their incomes for housing jumped from 39 percent in 2000 to 46 percent in 2004. The share paying more than 50 percent of their incomes climbed from 18 percent to 23 percent. 504.1

Prices have risen everywhere, but have gone up most rapidly in the older neighborhoods to the north and east of downtown. Parts of Capitol Hill, Shaw, Columbia Heights, and Eckington experienced annualized sales price increases of over 20 percent a year between 1999 and 2004. Even neighborhoods east of the Anacostia River experienced double-digit inflation during this time period. Price increases in the affluent

CITYWIDE ELEMENTS

Policy UD-1.5.1: Mitigating Freeway Impacts

Reduce the negative effects of freeways on neighborhoods by decreasing blight around freeway overpasses and underpasses, and improving pedestrian and bicycle overpasses. Longer-term solutions that address the design of the freeways themselves also should be explored. Such solutions should consider rebuilding freeways to reduce their “iron curtain” effect and developing the air rights over sunken freeways. 907.3

Policy UD-1.5.2: Major Arterials

Reduce the barrier effects created by major arterials (such as New York Avenue and South Capitol Street) through improved signal timing, traffic calming, mid-crossing medians, and other design improvements that improve aesthetics and enhance safety at pedestrian crossings. 907.4

Policy UD-1.5.3: Reducing Railroad Barriers

Upgrade railroad overpasses and underpasses to maintain the continuity of the street network along rail lines and ensure the comfort and safety of pedestrians and bicyclists. In appropriate settings, such as Downtown Washington, explore longer-term solutions to addressing railroad barriers such as air rights development over the tracks. 907.5

Action UD-1.5-A: Waterfront Barriers

Continue to explore ways to address freeway and highway barriers along the Anacostia waterfront, including the removal of Water Street along the Southwest waterfront and the narrowing of I-395 at the Anacostia River. The city should also continue to study options for addressing the visual barrier presented by the Whitehurst Freeway and the physical barrier presented by the waterfront CSX rail line. 907.6

Action UD-1.5-B: Light Rail Design

To the maximum extent possible, ensure that the design of the streetcar line along the east side of the Anacostia River does not create a barrier to waterfront access from East of the Anacostia River neighborhoods. 907.7

See also the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Element for a discussion of trail policies, and the Lower Anacostia Waterfront/ Near Southwest Area Element for a discussion of detailed provisions related to barriers and access to the Anacostia River.

UD-2.0 Creating Great Places 908

This section of the urban design element addresses design issues in three geographic settings:

- Central Washington
- Neighborhoods
- Large sites 908.1

UD-2.1 Place-Making in Central Washington 909

Some of the very qualities that make Central Washington’s design so memorable also create its greatest challenges. Distances are unusually long, walking is difficult in many places, and there is a lack of connectivity between the sub-districts of the central city. It is nearly four miles from the West End to the Navy Yard—arguably both are parts of the central business district—yet the two feel like entirely different cities. The District’s height limit, while lauded for its human scale, has also resulted in long

CITYWIDE ELEMENTS

rows of featureless office buildings with little architectural interest. Moreover, Downtown is not particularly well integrated with the National Mall. To some extent, the Mall divides—rather than unites—the central city, and adds to the perception of a city with multiple downtowns bearing little connection to one another. 909.1

While the goal of creating a more coherent central business district has been in place for awhile, the current rapid pace of development means that the District must take a more proactive role. A stronger urban design framework is needed to attain the goal of a more cohesive and well-designed central city. 909.2

This framework should establish a stronger identity for the emerging business districts on the northeast and southeast edges of Downtown. It should improve streets and public spaces, promote a higher level of architectural quality, and establish appropriate scale and density transitions to protect small-scale residential neighborhoods on the edges of Downtown. It should include strategies to deal with specific site challenges, such as the isolation of the Kennedy Center from surrounding land uses, the poor pedestrian environment at L'Enfant Plaza, and the presence of industrial uses on New Jersey Avenue, SE and Delaware Avenue just blocks from the US Capitol. 909.3

Design decisions for Central Washington should also address the peculiar architectural dynamics created by the 1910 Height Act. Currently, the desire to maximize buildable floor area while adhering to height limits often results in buildings with very little sculptural form. The most innovative and distinctive buildings tend to be public places—museums, libraries, and other structures where maximizing rentable space is not the primary objective. This is consistent with the city's architectural heritage in some respects, but there are still opportunities to improve the design of office, residential, and retail buildings in the central city. 909.4

While the height limit clearly affects building form, it also affects street life in unexpected ways. It results in ground floors that are sunken below grade by as much as several feet to maximize the number of stories that can be accommodated in each building. This in turn creates challenges for street-level retailers, and impacts the experience of walking or shopping downtown. Other challenges include the appearance of vents, mechanical equipment, and other essential rooftop elements that exceed the maximum building height. The design of these elements takes on special importance given their high visibility on an otherwise “flat” downtown skyline. 909.5

[Photo Caption: Sunken retail space is common in the District, as it allows for additional square footage in buildings that are otherwise limited in size by the Height Act.]

As the Historic Preservation Element notes, the presence of numerous historic buildings, historic districts, and important vistas also affects design. Attempts to create false facades mimicking historic styles, or to preserve facades and tear down the buildings behind them, have produced mixed results. As the existing stock of aging office buildings is replaced, greater attention must be given to design quality, street character, and landscape. 909.6

Policy UD-2.1.1: Design Character

Create a more coherent design character for Central Washington by improving the physical linkages between the monumental core, the business sub-districts on the perimeter of the National Mall, and the expanding mixed use areas to the east and southeast of Downtown. Urban design strategies should focus on making the entire area more walkable, discouraging monolithic architecture, improving signage and streetscape features, and adding new land uses which make the area more lively, interesting, and dynamic. 909.7

CITYWIDE ELEMENTS

Policy UD-2.1.2: Downtown Street and Block Pattern

Maintain a fine-grained pattern of Downtown blocks, streets, and alleys, with intersections and frontages that encourage pedestrian movement and reduce the potential for immense variations in scale and “fortress-like” office buildings. (see Figure 9.8) 909.8

[INSERT Figure 9.8: Superblock versus Fine-Grained Street and Development Patterns 909.13]

[Caption: The diagram above contrasts the finer “grain” of a low-scale neighborhood with a downtown “superblock” (right, background) and a finer grained downtown block with multiple structures (left, foreground).]

Policy UD-2.1.3: Downtown Edges

Establish and maintain scale and density transitions between Downtown and adjacent lower density neighborhoods. Use variations in height, massing, and architectural quality to ensure that the fine-grained pattern of adjacent neighborhoods is protected. (see Figure 9.9) 909.9

[INSERT Figure 9.9: Desired Scale Transitions at Downtown Edges to Residential Areas 909.14]

[Caption: This diagram illustrates the desired transition for new development from a moderate density neighborhood to the high-density urban core, avoiding abrupt contrasts in scale and mass.]

Policy UD-2.1.4: Architectural Excellence

Promote excellence in the design of Downtown buildings and landscapes. Particular attention should be focused on ground floor (street) levels, with greater architectural details used to improve visual image. 909.10

Policy UD-2.1.5: Federal Coordination

Coordinate with the federal government to achieve a consistent urban design vision for Central Washington. As applicable, the District should incorporate design concepts from the National Capital Planning Commission’s Legacy Plan and similar design-oriented plans for the monumental core of the city into its own design plans and strategies. 909.11

Policy UD-2.1.6: Pedestrian Bridges and Tunnels

Discourage the construction of second-level Downtown pedestrian bridges that drain activity from the street level. Subterranean tunnels between buildings also should be discouraged, unless they improve access to Metro and are necessary for pedestrian safety. 909.12

[Photo Caption: Development along Chinatown’s 7th Street shows how contemporary designs can be integrated into historic settings.]

Action UD-2.1-A: Retail Ceiling Heights

Convene a Task Force of retailers, developers, architects, and others to evaluate alternative approaches to achieving higher first-floor ceiling heights in new Downtown buildings. 909.15

UD-2.2 Designing for Successful Neighborhoods 910

The “sense of place” in the District’s neighborhoods is a function of their cultural history, physical features, and visual qualities. Those neighborhoods with the strongest identities tend to share certain characteristics, such as walkable “centers”, well-defined edges, attractive streets, and character-defining architecture. This is most apparent in the city’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. 910.1

CITYWIDE ELEMENTS

Not all neighborhoods have a strong sense of identity, however. Some are negatively affected by dilapidated buildings, poorly maintained properties, vacant storefronts, and worse. These problems may be exacerbated by the absence of landscaping and street trees. Infill development and the adaptive reuse of historic buildings in such areas create a real opportunity to establish a stronger identity, and to create neighborhood centers where they are lacking today. 910.2

The prospect of significant future growth in the city's neighborhoods will require a heightened focus on architectural quality in both well established and emerging areas. In neighborhoods of high architectural quality and strong identity, a greater emphasis on design compatibility and appropriate scale is needed. These factors are also important in neighborhoods of weak identity, but the priority should be on setting a higher design standard and defining a stronger, more positive image. 910.3

Regardless of neighborhood identity, overpowering contrasts in scale, height, and density should be avoided as infill development occurs. High quality materials that are durable and rich in texture and details should be encouraged. Firmly established building forms and landscape elements should be reinforced. These guidelines may seem self-evident, but they have not been consistently followed in the past. Even alterations and additions are not always sympathetic to architectural character, sometimes with jarring results. 910.4

The design of commercial and mixed use development also should be harmonious with its surroundings. This does not mean new buildings must duplicate adjacent buildings; rather it means that new construction should respect basic block characteristics like building alignment, access, proportion of openings (windows and doors), exterior architectural details (cornices, parapets, etc), and heights. Signage, awnings, and other exterior elements should be designed as an integral part of each structure and should avoid negative effects on the visual environment. Buildings should also provide for the comfort, safety, and enjoyment of their users, avoiding excessively windy conditions and providing sunlight or shade as is appropriate on each site. 910.5

Policy UD-2.2.1: Neighborhood Character and Identity

Strengthen the defining visual qualities of Washington's neighborhoods. This should be achieved in part by relating the scale of infill development, alterations, renovations, and additions to existing neighborhood context. 910.6

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 within such areas does not need to replicate prevailing architectural styles exactly but should be complementary in form, height, and bulk (see Figure 9.10). 910.8

[INSERT Figure 9.10: Complimentary Massing for New Development in Historic Districts and Areas of Strong Architectural Character 910.7]

[CAPTION: The top illustration shows inappropriate massing within the context of a historic district. The bottom illustration shows appropriate massing.]

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

Policy UD-2.2.3: Neighborhood Centers

Undertake strategic and coordinated efforts to create neighborhood centers, civic buildings, and shopping places that reinforce community identity (see Figure 9.11). 910.9

[INSERT Figure 9.11: Neighborhood Center Concept 910.11]

[CAPTION: The area at 14th and Park NW is re-emerging as a strong neighborhood center for Columbia Heights.]

Policy UD-2.2.4: Transitions in Building Intensity

Establish gradual transitions between large-scale 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 when the transition is gradual rather than abrupt. The relationship can be further improved by designing larger buildings to reduce their apparent size and recessing the upper floors of the building to relate to the lower scale of the surrounding neighborhood. 910.10

Policy UD-2.2.5: Creating Attractive Facades

Create visual interest through well-designed building facades, storefront windows, and attractive signage and lighting. Avoid monolithic or box-like building forms, or long blank walls which detract from the human quality of the street. (see Figure 9.12) 910.12

[INSERT Figure 9.12: Façade Articulation 910.18]

[Caption: Façade Articulation on new residential development along 13th Street NW]

Policy UD-2.2.6: Maintaining Façade Lines

Generally maintain the established façade lines of neighborhood streets by aligning the front walls of new construction with the prevailing facades of adjacent buildings. Avoid violating this pattern by placing new construction in front of the historic façade line, or by placing buildings at odd angles to the street, unless the streetscape is already characterized by such variations. Where existing façades are characterized by recurring placement of windows and doors, new construction should complement the established rhythm. 910.13

Policy UD-2.2.7: Infill Development

Regardless of neighborhood identity, avoid overpowering contrasts of scale, height and density as infill development occurs. 910.14

Policy UD-2.2.8: Large Site Development

Ensure that new developments on parcels that are larger than the prevailing neighborhood lot size are 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. (see Figure 9.13). 910.15

[INSERT Figure 9.13: Breaking Up Massing of Development on Lots Larger than Prevailing Neighborhood Lot Size 910.17]

[The design on the left is generally preferable to the design on the right. Breaking large structures into smaller, more varied forms can reduce harsh contrasts and improve compatibility.]

Policy UD-2.2.9: Protection 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 avoid the loss of sunlight and reduced usability of neighborhood parks and plazas. 910.16

CITYWIDE ELEMENTS

Policy UD-2.2.10: Surface Parking

Encourage the use of shade trees and landscaping or screening of surface parking areas. Parking should be designed so that it is not the dominant element of the street, and should be located behind development rather than in front of it (see Figure 9.14). 910.19

[INSERT Figure 9.14: Parking Lot Location Behind Buildings Rather than in Front 910.20]

Policy UD-2.2.11: Parking Structures

Encourage creative solutions for designing structured parking to minimize its visual prominence. Where feasible, the street side of parking structures should be lined with active and visually attractive uses to lessen their impact on the streetscape (see Fig 9.15). 910.21

[INSERT Figure 9.15: Concealing Parking Garages with Active "Liner" Uses 910.27]

[Caption: The parking structure has been "concealed" behind the building, with active uses along the street frontage.]

Policy UD-2.2.12: Strip Shopping Centers

Ensure that zoning and parking standards discourage strip commercial shopping centers and auto-oriented building designs within designated neighborhood centers. 910.22

Policy UD-2.2.13: Urban Design Priorities

Focus the District's urban design assistance efforts on neighborhoods where the original design character has been damaged by disinvestment, blight, and poor architecture. 910.23

Action UD-2.2-A: Scale Transition Study

Complete a "Scale Transition Study" which evaluates options for improving design compatibility between more dense and less dense areas. The study should respond to the varying situations where higher density development is (or will be) situated adjacent to lower density, 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 city. 910.24

Action UD-2.2-B: Using Zoning to Achieve Design Goals

Explore zoning and other regulatory techniques to promote excellence in the design of new buildings and public spaces. Zoning should include incentives or requirements for façade 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. 910.25

Action UD-2.2-C: Conservation Districts

Explore the use of "Conservation Districts" to protect neighborhood character in older communities which may not meet the criteria for historic districts but which nonetheless have important character-defining architectural features. 910.26

See the Historic Preservation and Land Use Elements for Related Policies

UD-2.3 The Design of New Neighborhoods 911

The potential redevelopment of a dozen or so "large sites" around the city provides particularly important urban design opportunities (see the Land Use Element for a map of large sites). The large sites provide some of the city's best opportunities for distinctive architecture as well as the application of green design

CITYWIDE ELEMENTS

Policy HP-2.3.2: Historic Image of the City

Protect and enhance the views and vistas, both natural and designed, which are an integral part of Washington's historic image. Preserve the historic skyline formed by the region's natural features and topography and its historically significant buildings and monuments from intrusions such as communication antennas and water towers. Preserve the horizontal character of the national capital through enforcement of the 1910 Height of Buildings Act. 1010.4

Policy HP-2.3.3: Spatial Character of L'Enfant Plan Streets

Protect the generous open space and reciprocal views of the L'Enfant Plan streets, avenues, and reservations. Protect the integrity and form of the L'Enfant system of streets and reservations from inappropriate new buildings and physical incursions. Support public and private efforts to provide and maintain street trees to help frame axial views and reinforce the city's historic landscape character. 1010.5

Policy HP-2.3.4: Public Space Design in the L'Enfant Plan

Reinforce the historic importance and continuity of the streets as public thoroughfares through sensitive design of sidewalks and roadways. Avoid inappropriate traffic channelization, obtrusive signage and security features, and other physical intrusions that obscure the character of the historic street network. Work jointly with federal agencies to preserve the historic statuary and other civic embellishments of the L'Enfant Plan parks, and where appropriate extend this tradition with new civic art and landscape enhancements of the public reservations. 1010.6

Policy HP-2.3.5: Enhancing Washington's Urban Design Legacy

Adhere to the design principles of the L'Enfant and McMillan Plans in any improvements or alterations to the city street plan. Where the character of the historic plan has been damaged by intrusions and disruptions, promote restoration of the plan through coordinated redevelopment and improvement of the transportation network and public space. 1010.7

Action HP-2.3-A: Review of Alterations to the Historic City Plan

Ensure early consultation with the Historic Preservation Review Board and other preservation officials whenever master plans or proposed redevelopment projects envision alterations to the features of the historic city plan. 1010.8

Action HP-2.3-B: Review of Public Improvements

Ensure an appropriate level of consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer before undertaking the design and construction of public space improvements in the L'Enfant Plan area and the public parks of the McMillan Plan. 1010.9

See the Urban Design Element for additional policies and actions on historic plans for the District of Columbia

HP-2.4 Review of Rehabilitation and New Construction 1011

Historic properties have generated record levels of rehabilitation and construction activity in the District of Columbia in recent years, and this trend is expected to continue. Whether these projects are modest home improvements reviewed by HPO as a day-to-day customer service, major development projects involving extensive HPRB review (see text box on next page), requests to certify work for tax credits, or monumental new federal buildings, all involve the application of similar preservation and design principles. These principles recognize that historic environments need to grow and evolve as cities constantly change. 1011.1

CITYWIDE ELEMENTS

[BEGIN SIDEBAR]

Historic Preservation Review Board 1011.8

The District of Columbia Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) is a group of private citizens appointed by the Mayor to represent professional and community viewpoints in the historic preservation process. HPRB professional members meet the Secretary of the Interior's preservation qualifications and represent expertise in architecture, architectural history, history, and archaeology. HPRB advises the Mayor under the District law and the SHPO on matters authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act.

[END SIDEBAR]

The District preservation law (Act 2-144) is the basis for review of most preservation projects, but others are considered under the federal Section 106 process or the preservation tax incentive program. The Act establishes that the test for alterations/ additions and new construction is "compatibility with the character of the historic district." Coordination with cooperating agencies—the Commission of Fine Arts and its Old Georgetown Board, the National Capital Planning Commission, and the National Park Service—is a key factor in this review.

Whether applying District or federal standards, the city's preservation officials encourage an approach to rehabilitation and architectural design based on the premise of compatibility with the historic context. This does not mean that additions or new construction should try to mimic historic buildings, but rather should achieve harmony with the historic surroundings through basic good design and close attention to the characteristics and design principles of the historic environment. Good contemporary architecture can fit within this context; in fact, it is necessary in an evolving and dynamic city and is welcomed as an expression of our time. 1011.2

Compatibility with the historic environment also means that new construction should be suited to the fundamental character and the relative importance of a wide range of historic buildings and environments. Delicate historic environments like a quiet residential street demand design restraint at a uniform scale, while more robust historic environments can sustain stronger design statements and more striking juxtapositions of scale—high-style and densely packed downtown, or daring and cutting-edge on an industrial waterfront. 1011.3

Policy HP-2.4.1: Rehabilitation of Historic Structures

Promote appropriate preservation of historic buildings through an effective design review process. Apply design guidelines without stifling creativity, and strive for an appropriate balance between restoration and adaptation as suitable for the particular historic environment. 1011.4

Policy HP-2.4.2: Adaptation of Historic Properties for Current Use

Maintain historic properties in their original use to the greatest extent possible. If this is no longer feasible, encourage appropriate adaptive uses consistent with the character of the property. 1011.5

Policy HP-2.4.3: Compatible Development

Preserve the important historic features of the District while permitting compatible new infill development. Within historic districts, preserve the established form of development as evidenced by lot coverage limitations, yard requirements open space, and other standards that contribute to the character and attractiveness of those areas. Ensure that new construction, repair, maintenance, and improvements are in scale with and respect historic context through sensitive siting and design and the appropriate use of materials and architectural detail. 1011.6

Policy HP-2.4.4: Suitability to the Historic Context

Apply design standards in a manner that accounts for different levels of historic significance and different types of historic environments. Encourage restoration of historic landmarks while allowing enhancements of equivalent design quality, provided such enhancements do not damage the landmark. Exercise greater restraint in residential historic districts and areas with a clear prevailing development pattern or architectural style. Allow greater flexibility where the inherent character of historic properties can accommodate greater intervention or more dramatic new design, for example, in non-residential areas and in areas without a significant design pattern. 1011.7

Policy HP-2.4.5: Protecting Historic Building Integrity

Protect historic buildings from demolition whenever possible, and protect the integrity of whole buildings. Discourage treatments like facadism or relocation of historic buildings, allowing them only when there is no feasible alternative for preservation, and only after a finding that the treatment is necessary in the public interest. Waivers or administrative flexibility should be provided in the application of building and related codes to permit maximum preservation and protection of historic resources while ensuring the health and safety of the public. 1011.9

Policy HP-2.4.6: Preservations Standards for Zoning Review *[Note: this was formerly Action HP-2.4-C]*
Ensure consistency between zoning regulations and design standards for historic properties. Zoning for each historic district shall be consistent with the predominant height and density of contributing buildings in the district. Where needed, specialized standards or regulations should be developed to help preserve the characteristic building patterns of historic districts and minimize design conflicts between preservation and zoning controls. 1011.10

Action HP-2.4-A: Conceptual Design Review Process

Sustain and improve the conceptual design review process as the most effective and most widely used means to promote good preservation and compatible design. Support the use of this process by property owners and developers by committing sufficient resources and appointing highly qualified professionals to the Historic Preservation Review Board. Enhance public participation and transparency in the process through increased use of electronic means to provide public notice, process applications, and post documents for public review. 1011.11

Action HP-2.4-B: Design Standards and Guidelines

Expand the development of design standards and guidelines for the treatment and alteration of historic properties, and for the design of new buildings subject to preservation design review. Ensure that these tools address appropriate treatment of characteristics specific to particular historic districts. Disseminate these tools widely and make them available on the Internet. 1011.12

Action HP-2.4-C: Zone Map Amendments in Historic Districts

Identify areas within historic districts that may be “overzoned” based on the scale and height of contributing buildings, and pursue rezoning of such areas with more appropriate designations. 1011.13

HP-2.5 Historic Landscapes and Open Space 1012

More than almost any other feature, the exceptional width and openness of Washington’s parks and streets define the basic character of the city. These spaces include the major monumental greenswards of the Mall, riverfront and stream valley parks, and the green space of estates, cemeteries, and campuses. Tree-lined streets and landscaped front yards unite many historic neighborhoods, and there are small green oases scattered throughout the city. Some are publicly owned, and others are private. Many provide the setting for historic buildings, creating a balance between the natural and built environment