

Downtown Residential Streetscape Guidelines

Public Space Guidelines for Office-to-Residential Conversions



Overview

As the District of Columbia's (DC) Downtown shifts from an office-focus to a mixed-use neighborhood with residents, restaurants, entertainment, and cultural venues, our buildings and the public spaces around them must adapt. This includes converting office buildings to residential use and redesigning public spaces to include amenities and landscaped areas. By working together, DC and the private sector can more easily facilitate office-to-residential conversions in Downtown. The DC Comeback Plan includes the goals to add 15,000 residents and seven million square feet of residential units - market rate and affordable - to Downtown. Multiple offices in Downtown are in the process of being converted to residential use.

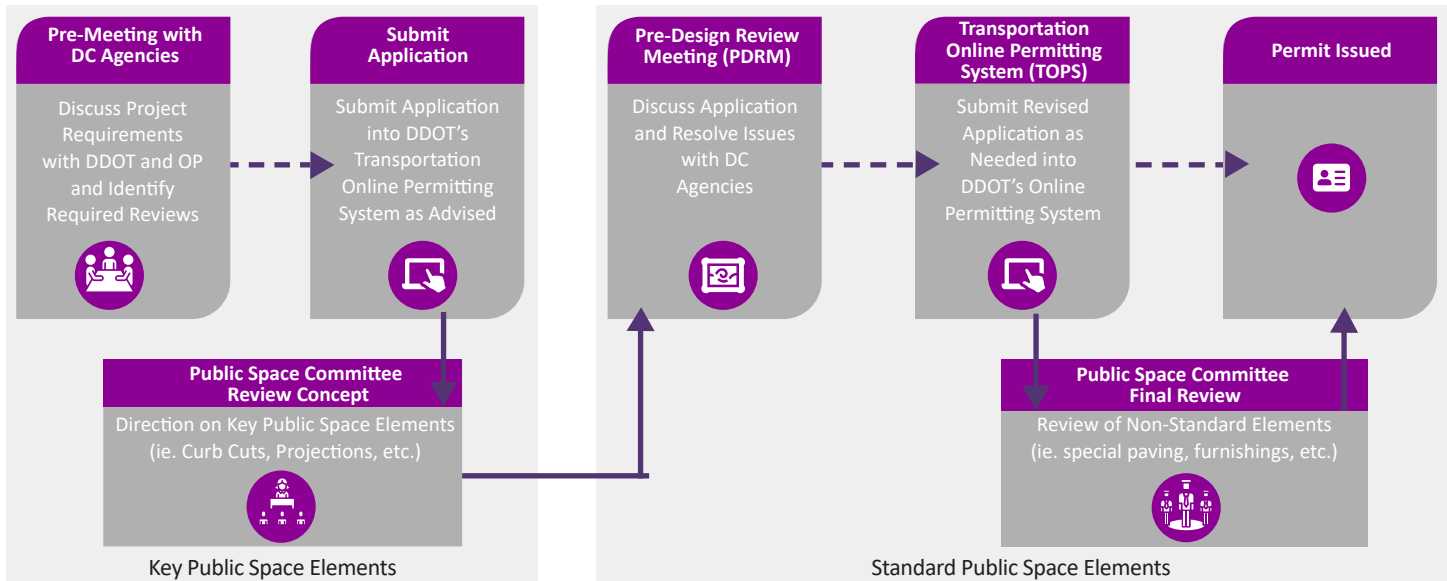
To facilitate conversions, the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) and Office of Planning (OP) developed guidelines in collaboration with the District of Columbia Building Industry Association. The guidelines will help shape a well-designed public realm that is part of a vibrant neighborhood with green spaces and housing where residents have options for enjoying the out-of-doors. The guidelines define the process for reviewing public space permits, set expectations for public space design, and can apply to any building converting from office to residential use.

The guidelines describe how to use public space as an amenity that encourages people to choose Downtown as a place to live, work, visit, and thrive. They ensure minimum standards for street trees, sidewalks, and other infrastructure are maintained; support non-standard amenities in public space; and, address issues including reusing curb cuts, introducing landscape to public space, and adding window and balcony projections. Downtown living can be enhanced by public space improvements that separate busy streets from ground floor uses, provide outdoor spaces for residents to enjoy, and create memorable places with public art or distinct designs. The enhancements will add to an existing network of parks and greens spaces that the Downtown DC Public Realm Plan is looking at to identify opportunities for additional outdoor activities and residential amenities.

Retrofitting public space requires flexibility to transform it into spaces more appropriate for a mixed-use Downtown. Application of the guidelines will need to be considered on a case-by-case basis to thoughtfully incorporate landscape and amenities into sidewalks and balance safety, aesthetics, and functional design.

Review Process

Any change to District public space requires a public space permit. Clear guidance on proposals and an efficient and predictable review process is critical to the success of office-to-residential conversions. DDOT and OP meet with applicants early in the review process to establish expectations for public space use and define the review process.



For more information on the review process, contact DDOT's Permitting Center at (202) 442-4670.

Vehicle and Loading Access

Site access must be safe and efficient for all modes of travel and determined early in the design process. Existing buildings may not comply with current access requirements defined in the [Design and Engineering Manual, Chapter 31](#), and office buildings converting to residential use are expected to evaluate how to bring sites into compliance. Existing buildings may have limited ability to modify current access and DDOT will consider non-standard options if supported by analysis and/or documentation justifying constraints. Non-standard access requires [Public Space Committee](#) approval.

Relief from DDOT preferences and standards will be considered on a case-by-case basis and accompanied by analysis demonstrating constraints. If vehicle and loading access is requested through curb cuts, analysis and/or documentation must show why alley access is infeasible (e.g. structural limitations, circulation/capacity, turning radii, alley width, ground floor uses, grade, etc.). Options for site access are listed in order of preference below:

1. Alley (built or unbuilt)
2. Single Curb Cut
3. Multiple Curb Cuts

All access must be designed to meet current standards (e.g. width/design of curb cuts, truck movements for loading must be head-in/head-out across sidewalks, etc.). Multiple curb cuts must be minimized by combining access points when possible. If DDOT determines loading cannot be accessed with head-in/head-out movements, alternatives include curbside or back-in loading and Loading Management Plans.

Impact Mitigation

In general, by-right office-to-residential conversions applying for public space permits will not be required to complete a [Comprehensive Transportation Review](#) (CTR), which inform appropriate multimodal impact mitigation. There are three situations when a CTR should be scoped and will be determined by DDOT on a case-by-case basis:

1. Analysis is needed to justify non-compliant access;
2. Redevelopment includes a significant increase to a building's square footage; or,
3. Evaluation of proposed changes to vehicle circulation or signalization on adjacent streets and alleys.

Conversions should provide pedestrian-focused site design, Transportation Demand Management, meeting or exceeding short- and long-term bicycle parking as established by [DCMR Title 11: Zoning, Subtitle C, Chapter 7](#), and adjacent public realm improvements that support non-automobile modes of transportation.

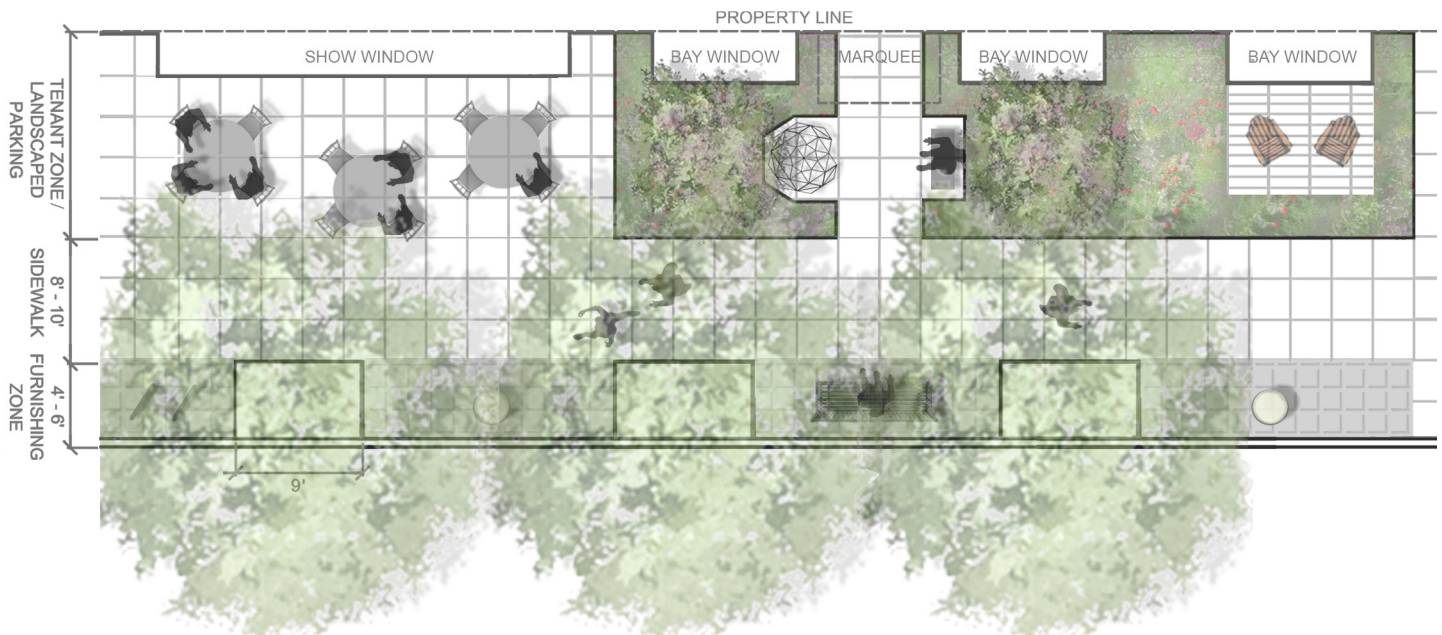
Existing Parking Facilities

Many office buildings feature multiple levels of underground parking that, when converted, will provide parking ratios significantly exceeding zoning requirements and DC's preferred parking ratios for multi-family buildings. Oversupply of parking can induce driving and is inconsistent with DC's non-automobile mode split goals. Through the public space permitting process, DC will encourage repurposing of excess parking to other uses such as bicycle parking, personal storage areas, gyms, and other building amenity space.

Sidewalk Plans

The width of street right-of-ways throughout the District varies and determines how much public space is available for sidewalks and other amenities tailored to the adjacent building. Plans must follow established streetscape guidelines. Elements of plans that do not meet standards require approval of the Public Space Committee.

Plan of Residential Facade Incorporated into Commercial Area



Public space adjacent to Downtown buildings with non-commercial or residential units at the ground floor should be designed with green space and amenities creating welcoming spaces and incorporated into the surrounding context. As ground floor uses change and streetscapes become more varied, continuity of public space within a block must be maintained with consistent width, design, and materials used for tree box/furnishing zones and pedestrian walkways in sidewalks. Exact dimensions need to be determined in consultation with reviewers at DDOT and OP.

Residential Ground Floor Use

- Pedestrian walkways in sidewalks should be 8 to 10 feet wide.
- Furnishing zones/tree boxes at the curb can vary in width from 4 to 6 feet
- Street trees should be spaced 35 to 40 feet on center.
- Remaining public space should be landscaped and tailored to the design of the adjacent building.

Commercial Ground Floor Use

- Pedestrian walkways in sidewalks should be 8 to 10 feet wide
- Furnishing zones/tree boxes at the curb can vary in width from 4 to 6 feet
- Street trees should be spaced 35 to 40 feet on center.
- Remaining public space should be set aside for tenant zones (café seating, show windows, etc.) along the building

Building Projections into Public Space

Building projections are allowed to embellish facades and their allowances are described below:

- Windows/Balconies – 4 feet from facade; see regulations for allowed widths.
- Steps/Ramps – 6 feet at buildings without landscaping; 10 feet at buildings with landscaping; unlimited width.
- Vaults – Solid tops in pedestrian walkways in sidewalks; grated vaults can be supported when surrounded by 3 feet of landscaping; no exceptions for existing vaults.
- Building Facades – 8 inches to allow for energy efficiency requirements for curtain walls.
- Porches – 5 feet in residential, mixed use and special purpose zones; supported in commercial zones when compliant with allowances for residential zones; see regulations for allowed widths.

- Areaways – 4 feet in commercial zones; 4 to 7 feet in residential, mixed use, and special purpose zones; unlimited width.
 - Allowances vary depending on street width and amount of landscape at buildings.
 - Areaways up to 6 feet are supported at all buildings with ground floor residential use and when surrounded by 3 feet of landscaping.
 - Zoning may further restrict areaway width.

See [DCMR Title 24: Chapter 32 - Encroachments into Public Space, The Public Right-of-Way or Building Restriction Area](#) for more information on projection allowances and the [Public Realm Design Manual](#) for additional guidance.

Amenities and Non-Standard Fixtures

Making Downtown an attractive mixed-use neighborhood includes providing outdoor spaces for residents. This can be done in public space between the sidewalk and building, an area with great flexibility for creativity and design. Non-standard elements require Public Space Committee approval and a Covenant of Maintenance from the permittee, but the following are generally supported by reviewing agencies.

Landscaped Outdoor Seating Areas

Small, landscaped or plaza-like spaces can mark entrances to residential buildings and are places for residents to enjoy the outdoors. Examples include:

- Benches
- Special Paving
- Fencing
- Water Features
- Flowering Annuals
- Seat Walls
- Lighting
- Planters

Continuous, above-ground planters up to 24 inches in height are supported where there are below ground obstructions preventing adequate soil volume for supporting landscape.

Public Art

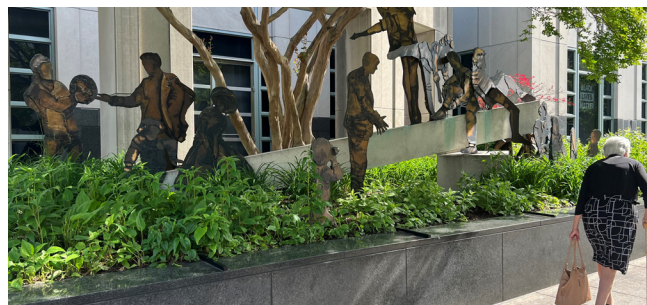
Sculptures and other public art can create an identity for residential buildings and can be designed as play features for young children. Examples include:

- Playable Art
- Abstract Sculpture
- Boulders, logs or other natural features

Recreation

Opportunities for recreation can be provided in small areas that become a place for residents to interact and get to know their neighbors. Examples include:

- Yard Games
- Gardening Plots
- Moveable Furniture
- Pet Areas



Streetscape Dimensions and Materials

Streetscape plans in the Downtown are recommended to follow these dimensions and materials.

	Furnishing Zone/ Tree Box	Sidewalk	Parking/Tenant Zone
All Streets	4 to 6 feet	8 to 10 feet	Varies depending on street width

Some areas of Downtown have streetscape standards with specific design requirements and material specifications not included in the guidelines. Check with OP or DDOT to learn of these requirements for projects in these areas:

- [Downtown](#)
- [George Washington University Campus](#)
- [Golden Triangle](#)
- [Mount Vernon Triangle](#)
- [NoMa](#)

For questions about these guidelines, contact OP's Urban Design Division at planning@dc.gov or DDOT's Planning and Sustainability Division at neighborhood.planning@dc.gov.

Streetscape Element	Specification
Street Trees	Coordinate with Urban Forestry Division
Street Light	Washington Globe or Twin 20; black color; 60+ ft. o.c.
Sidewalk	London Paver, brick, or 3 x 3 Poured-in-Place Concrete (depending on location)
Curb	Granite
Gutter	Concrete
Furnishing Zone	Granite Cobblestone

