

Part 1: Urban Design Streetscape Framework

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Introduction

The Urban Design Streetscape Framework (Streetscape Framework) provides the organizational structure for streets within the monumental core and adjacent areas within the capital city. The Streetscape Framework provides context and principles for more detailed planning and technical guidance that is contained within the Streetscape Guidelines and Streetscape Construction Manual.

These components inform the Streetscape Framework Categories and Principles:

- Gateways, Thresholds and Approaches,
- Three Street Categories,
- Eleven general Character Areas, and
- Streetscape Elements.

Gateways, Thresholds, and Approaches

It is important to identify where and how streets interact with urban and natural features. These locations are moments offering a sense of arrival and typically occur at entry points, such as intersections, bridges, parks, or waterfronts. Depending on location and context, these entry points form a capital gateway, gateway, threshold, or approach as described in the Federal Urban Design Element and are further described and elaborated below.



Figure UD-2: The new Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge, which crosses the Anacostia River, is a Capital Gateway that leads to the US Capitol. The distinctive and elevated design underscores its importance as a gateway approaching the monumental core. (Image: AECOM)

Gateways are entry points to the capital city. Gateways contribute to the identity and experience of the city by announcing arrival through a passage (possibly through a structure or building such as a bridge or train station) into the capital city, the city's periphery, or connecting between neighborhoods.

Capital Gateways are entry points to the nation's capital and monumental core. Capital gateways contribute to the identity and experience of the capital city by announcing entry and connecting to national icons, either as:

- Visual connections that provide views to the most nationally significant buildings, structures, or landscapes; or,
- Physical connections that are major axial or radial avenues and streets that link to the most nationally significant buildings or structures.

Transitional Thresholds are entry points to or between character areas. Transitional thresholds describe where and how streetscape elements define points of entry and may support unique views or circulation patterns. Transitional thresholds:

- Denote moments of streetscape transition to define entryways or changes in streetscape character where two or more character areas come together.
- Occur within monumental core (as defined by the 1992 Streetscape Manual Boundary).



Figure UD-3: The Smithsonian Castle and Renwick Gates are located at a Transitional Threshold, where L'Enfant Promenade/10th St. SW (in the SW Rectangle Character Area) transitions to the Smithsonian campus and Haupt Garden (in the National Mall Museums Character Area). (Image: Smithsonian)

- Occur between character areas or sub-areas.
- Possess important visual and material cues to signal character change, support unique views, direct pedestrians to site and building entries, and express moments of passage and transition.

Axial Approaches define entry sequences to the monumental core, reinforcing continuity along major streets within the nation's capital. Axial Approaches:

- Denote moments of streetscape continuity where Radiating and Edging and Connecting and Traversing streets enter the monumental core (as defined by the 1992 Streetscape Manual Boundary).
- Occur along major radiating and axial streets connecting to Capital Gateways or Gateways along the city periphery, as identified in the Federal and District Urban Design Elements of the Comprehensive Plan and Frederick Law Olmsted's Highway Plan.
- Occur along major radiating and axial streets where there are important connections to key reservations, open spaces, or destinations within the L'Enfant city, such as Virginia Avenue, 23rd Street, Pennsylvania Avenue NW, and Vermont Avenue NW.
- Possess important visual and physical connections between points within the monumental core and key reservations, open spaces, or destinations within the L'Enfant City.



Figure UD-3: East Capitol Street NE, traveling westward from RFK Stadium, is an Axial Approach that provides a strong visual and symbolic connection to the US Capitol. (Image: Library of Congress)

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Street Categories

Street categories are an important foundation to providing a strong organizational structure of streets within the capital city and its monumental core. Typically, these streets are defined by their national and local identity which is characterized by the street function; spatial and visual relationships to nationally significant structures or spaces; and civic, ceremonial, and symbolic roles, as addressed in the [Plan of the City of Washington](#) and the Comprehensive Plan’s Urban Design Element. The three categories are:

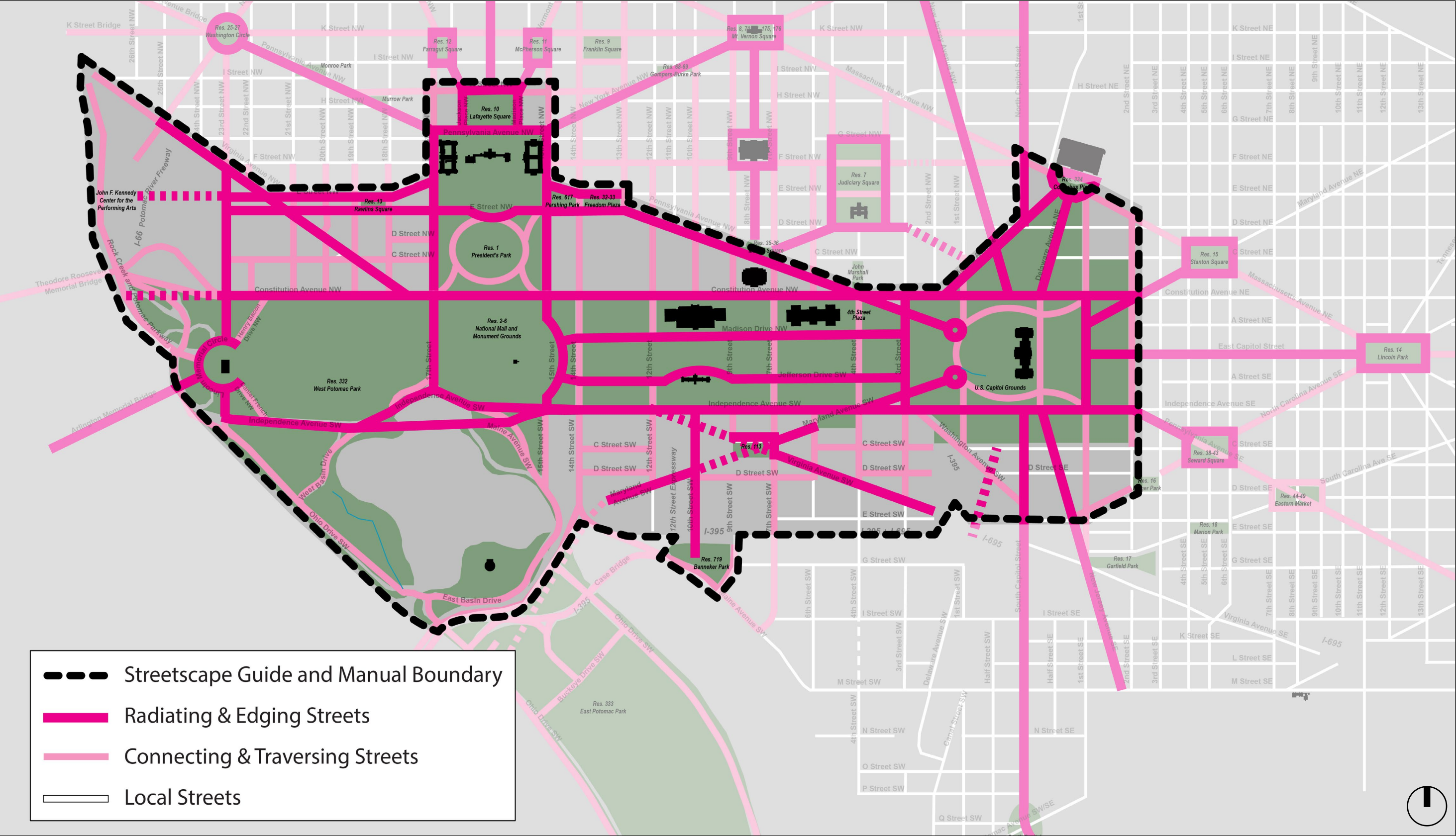
1. **Radiating and Edging Streets:**
The iconic avenues and streets radiating or edging the nation’s most preeminent civic buildings, reservations, monuments, memorials, or commemorative sites of national importance. These streets are associated with their historic, ceremonial, civic, or symbolic role, allowing some to stand alone as a destination. Example: Pennsylvania Avenue, NW.
2. **Connecting and Traversing Streets:**
Important avenues and street that edge, connect, or traverse one or more nationally and/or locally significant civic buildings or reservations, monuments, memorials, or commemorative sites. Example: K Street, NW.
3. **Local Streets:**
Generally, part of the Plan of the City of Washington’s orthogonal grid. These streets provide circulation through and between blocks within precincts and neighborhoods to local destinations and are locally significant. Example: 3rd Street, NE/SE.

Table UD-1: Street Principle Summary

CATEGORY	Radiating & Edging Streets	Connecting & Traversing Streets	Local Streets
DEFINITION	<p>Preeminent L’Enfant Plan Streets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Symbolic/ Monumental/ Civic/ Commemorative/ Cultural Role• National significance• Radiate from or edge nationally significant structures or icons and open spaces• May stand alone as a destination• May have Linear Viewsheds as described in the Urban Design Element*	<p>Notable L’Enfant Plan Streets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Civic/Recreational Role• National and local significance• Connects destinations and nationally significant open spaces• Edge, connect, or traverse one or more nationally or locally significant civic buildings or reservations, monuments, memorials, or commemorative sites	<p>Local L’Enfant Plan Streets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Orthogonal grid with a functional role• Local significance• Provides circulation through and between blocks within precincts and neighborhoods• Provides access to destinations
GUIDANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highly consistent streetscape• Streetscapes and elements unify the identity of the monumental core and capital city• Cohesive and consistent across character areas and neighborhoods• Balanced and symmetrical with continuous rhythm• Direct and focus vistas/viewshed to significant structures• Ample pedestrian space for civic and ceremonial uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mostly consistent streetscape• Elements unify the identity of the monumental core and capital city and link destinations• Responds to the character areas and neighborhoods with some variable elements• Balanced and symmetrical with continuous rhythm, except where spatial relationships or character area edges warrant an asymmetrical streetscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Somewhat consistent streetscape• Elements unify the identity of the capital city• Adapts to the character areas and neighborhoods with many variable elements
QUALITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highest durability of material in accordance with the Streetscape Construction Manual	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• High durability of material in accordance with the Streetscape Construction Manual	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• DC material standards and treatments

Note: Street categories are shown on Map UD-2. Guiding principles for streetscape character and quality are described on page 16.

Map UD-2: Urban Design Streetscape Framework



Proposed streets are shown with dashed lines. These proposed streets are opportunities to restore L'Enfant Plan streets or viewsheds. Refer to the Monumental Core Framework Plan and Legacy Plan for more information. Buildings/structures shown on the map are referenced in L'Enfant Plan Contributing Vistas.

Note: Interstates, freeways, tunnels, and other similar infrastructure are exempted from the Streetscape Guide and Manual. Guiding principles for streetscape character and quality are described on page 16.

Character Areas

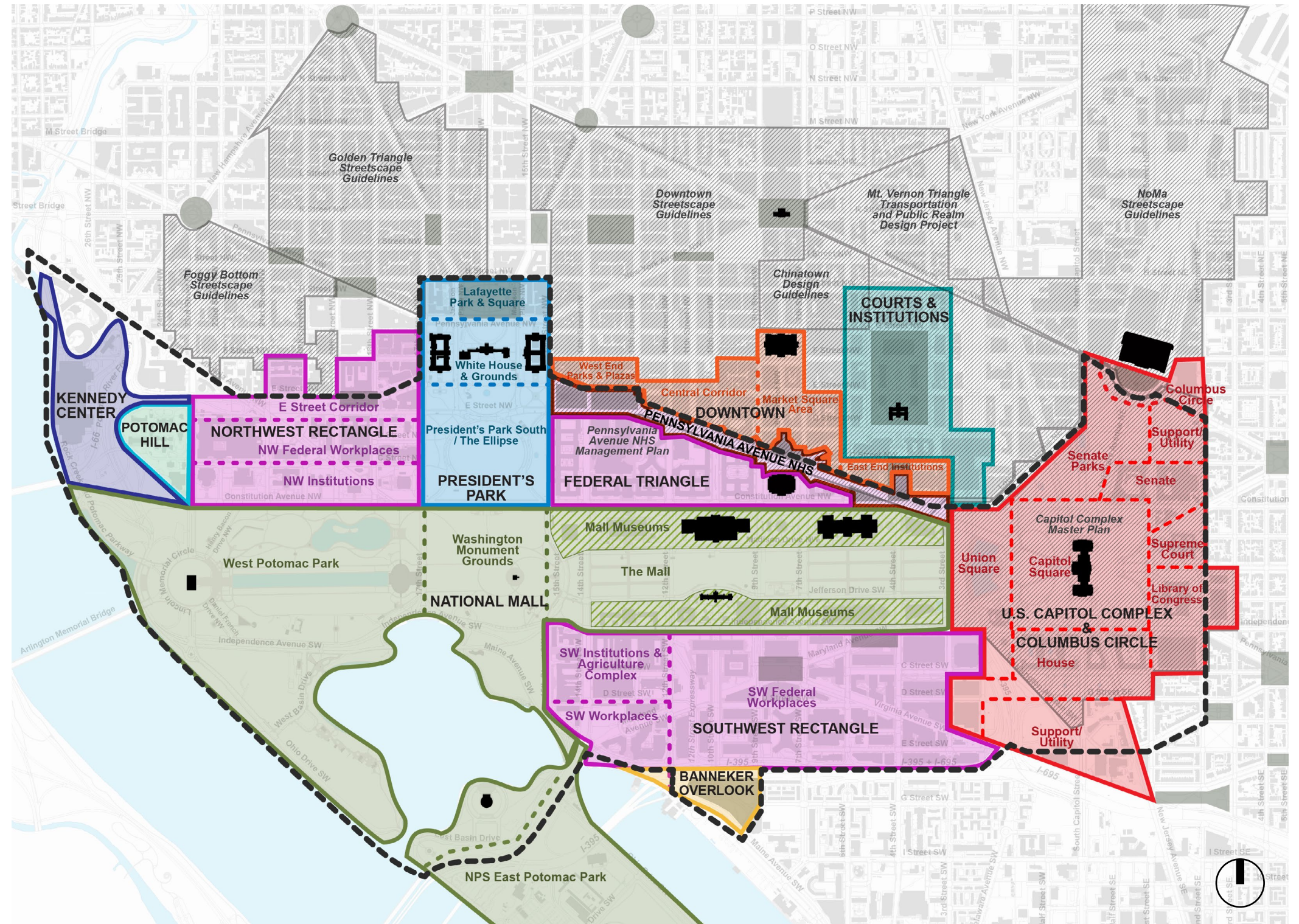
Character Areas contribute to the foundation for the Urban Design Streetscape Framework, providing distinctive places within the broader urban landscape of the monumental core. Character Areas do not represent jurisdictions; they are areas distinguished among each other by the patterns of the built environment, landscape organization, and the streetscape infrastructure and amenities that are visible within the public realm.

Character Area boundaries are informed by the following attributes: land use, spatial organization, views and visual relationships, topography, vegetation, circulation, and architectural and landscape structures. Physical features such as a wall, path, or road may clearly define boundaries; in other circumstances, vegetation or topography may loosely delineate boundaries. Most of the character areas include one or more-character sub-areas. The sub-areas share many attributes of its overall character area, but their use, patterns, or features are distinctive enough to set it apart as a section or component of the larger character area.

The Streetscape Guide's boundary area includes general character areas (in bold on map) and sub-areas:

- Banneker Park
- Courts and Institutions
- Downtown (contains 5 sub-areas)
- Federal Triangle
- Kennedy Center
- Northwest Rectangle (contains 3 sub-areas)
- Pennsylvania Avenue NHS
- Potomac Hill
- Southwest Rectangle (contains 3 sub-areas)
- The National Mall (contains 5 sub-areas)
- The White House and President's Park (contains 4 sub-areas)
- U.S. Capitol Complex

Map UD-3: Character Areas



LEGEND

STREETScape GUIDE AND MANUAL BOUNDARY

BUILDINGS/STRUCTURES REFERENCED IN L'ENFANT PLAN CONTRIBUTING VISTAS

NATIONALLY SIGNIFICANT OPEN SPACE

EXAMPLE

CHARACTER AREA

Character Sub-Areas

Areas with existing streetscape guidance

Note: Additional information and descriptions of Character Areas can be found within the appendices.

Locations within Character Areas

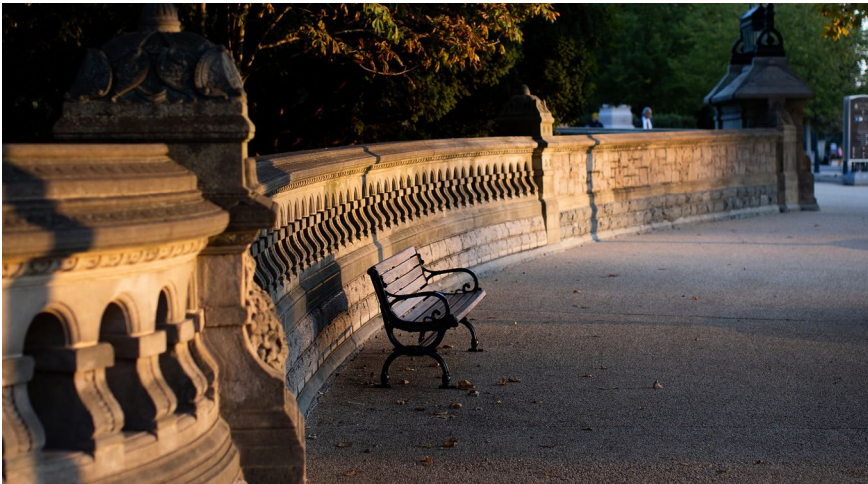


Figure UD-4: U.S. Capitol Complex (Image: AOC)



Figure UD-5: Kennedy Center (Image: Kennedy Center)



Figure UD-6: National Mall - Museums (Image: Smithsonian)



Figure UD-7: Banneker Park



Figure UD-8: Federal Triangle (Image: Wikipedia)



Figure UD-9: National Mall (Image: NPS)



Figure UD-10: White House and President's Park



Figure UD-11: Northwest Rectangle



Figure UD-12: Southwest Rectangle

Streetscape Elements

Streetscape elements have an important role in informing the streetscape character, consistency, and the sense of continuity that link the monumental core with the capital city. The importance of streetscape consistency within the monumental core was documented in the 1992 Streetscape Manual. Many of the monumental core’s streetscapes frame nationally significant open spaces and connect to national icons. Therefore, the setting and role of these streets demand a consistent treatment that unites the identity of the monumental core and provides formal and ordered connections to important destinations.

The type, use, and application of streetscape elements contribute to the street character, its continuity, and quality of the pedestrian’s experience. Highly consistent streetscape elements are important for visual harmony, a cohesive identity, and creating well-defined streetscape corridors. The degree of variation in the type, use, and application of streetscape elements is important to set an area apart, creating a unique sense of place.

Streetscape elements include both living and non-living elements and are usually interrelated by their role and function. For example, landscape elements such as trees, tree boxes, plantings, and stormwater systems form interconnected systems that perform ecosystem services and have ecological value in the urban environment. However, for the purposes of the Framework, streetscape elements are organized according to their formal and visual role and are categorized into vertical, surface, and small-scale elements.

Level of Visual Consistency

The Framework’s Street Categories require different levels of visual consistency to support their role within the framework of the monumental core and capital city.

The diagram at right illustrates the type of streetscape elements that fall within a spectrum of consistency to variability.

* A consistent wayfinding system would not preclude unique wayfinding signs within character areas. More information on streetscape elements’ consistency and continuity is provided in the Street Categories on page 11.

High consistency among streetscape elements is particularly important for Radiating and Edging Streets because of their direct physical and visual relationships to national icons.

Moderate consistency among streetscape elements is important for Edging and Traversing Streets because they indirectly link national icons, and many are located within character areas.

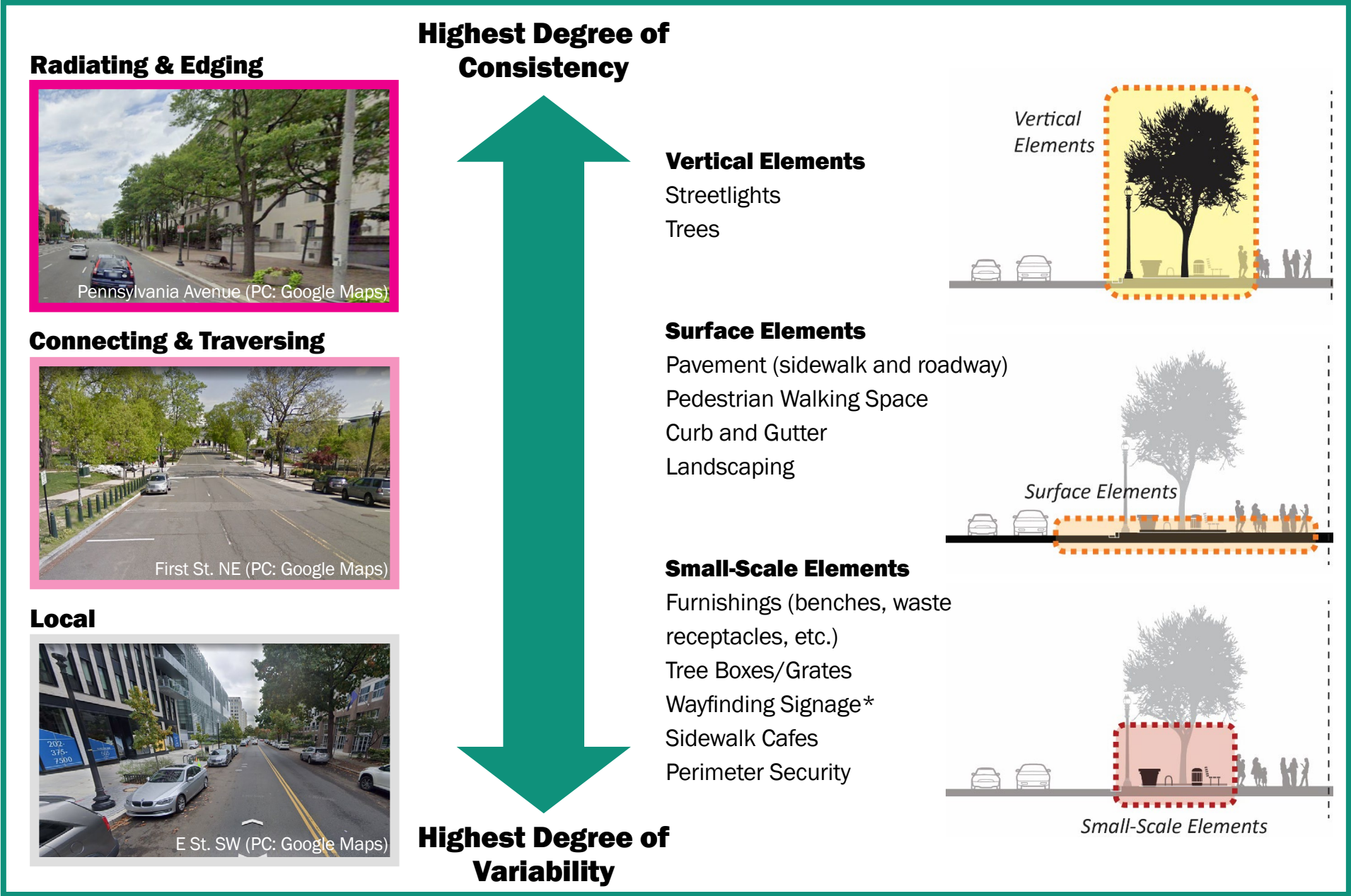
Some consistency among streetscape elements is suitable for Local Streets because they are part of the defining characteristics of the city.

Vertical elements: define the edges and form outdoor rooms that establish the visual frame or corridor and sense of scale along streets. They are the most pronounced elements that contribute to continuity.

Surface elements: define the ground plane and have a powerful ability to set the context of the place and either contribute to its continuity or set an area apart.

Small-scale elements: contribute to the character and continuity but have the greatest potential to diversify the character and add variety to the pedestrian’s experience.

Table UD-2: Street and Streetscape Consistency Summary



Streetscape Framework Principles and Criteria

The Streetscape Framework is defined by Gateways, Thresholds, Character Areas, Street Categories, and Streetscape Elements. The relationships among these components and their attributes inform the urban framework’s guiding principles and critiera, contributing to the overall sense of place of a street or given area.

Depending on the degree of consistency or variability of streetscape elements, the streetscapes either contribute the city’s national identity, local identity, or to the identity of a particular neighborhood or precinct, regardless of jurisdictional boundaries. Because streetscapes link, connect, and unify the capital city, transitions between street categories are important to establish consistency and continuity of a streetscape.

Capital Gateway and Gateway Principles

1. Capital gateways (such as bridges, rail lines, or major transit hubs that physically or visually connect to the monumental core) and gateways (entries into the city or its neighborhoods) should have a distinct or elevated quality to signal entry into the capital city.
2. Capital gateway and gateway bridges that carry pedestrian or bicycle modes, should provide continuity along their length by continuing the adjacent street character across the bridge through consistent lighting, pedestrian walking spaces, sidewalk pavement, curb and gutter treatment, and wayfinding.
3. Newly constructed gateway bridges with signature design elements (such as the South Capitol Street Bridge and 11th Street Bridge/Park) may have streetscape elements that are specific to the character and design of the gateway bridge elements and should be coordinated with adjacent streets’ streetscape elements with respect to placement and alignment for continuity.

Principles and Criteria for Transitional Thresholds and Axial Approaches provide additional guidance regarding how the built environment can reinforce transition or continuity.

Transitional Threshold Principles:

1. Transitional thresholds enhance connections and wayfinding to destinations within the monumental core.
2. Transitional thresholds between character areas may break from the consistency and continuity (rhythm and symmetry) of linear streetscapes to indicate an entry point; establish clear view corridors to other destinations; or direct circulation patterns.

Transitional Threshold Criteria:

1. Announce entry by prioritizing the vertical and surface elements of the character area being entered.
2. Present opportunities to create welcoming and inviting spaces that capitalize on the unique character of the area.
3. May transition in scale (from monumental to pedestrian) to create a more welcoming human- scaled streetscapes.
4. May use streetscape materials and viewsheds to direct pedestrians and focus on site and building entries.
5. May have a distinct or mixed material palette to transition between diverse character area palettes.
6. Design inspiration for any transitional threshold enhancements should be derived from the National Mall’s streetscape design and program.

Axial Approach Principles:

1. Continuous approaches enhance visual continuity and symmetry along major streetscape corridors entering the monumental core, within the nation’s capital.
2. Continuous approaches should prioritize continuity of streetscape elements including: Vertical Elements, Surface Elements, and appropriate Small-Scale Elements.

Axial Approach Criteria:

1. Vertical elements (streetlights and trees) should not obstruct open vistas and viewsheds where streetscape corridors intersect important reservations.
2. Axial approach character should reinforce continuity along the streetscape. This can be done by using similar streetscape elements (such as street trees, streetlights, or sidewalk pavement) at both the axial threshold and along the streetscape corridor; for an extent of one or more blocks, depending upon the type of entry sequence desired.
3. Design inspiration for any axial approach enhancements should be derived from the existing surroundings and relevant historic plans at the entry point to the axial approach.

Radiating and Edging Street Principles:

1. Generally, the character of each individual street should be **highly consistent** across precincts, neighborhoods, and jurisdictions.
2. The vertical, surface, and small fixture elements are **highly consistent** as they traverse through neighborhoods and precincts to unify the monumental core and city. This reinforces the monumental core and capital city identity by tying the city together, physically and visually, to maintain a stately streetscape appearance.
3. Streetscape elements should have a continuous rhythm and be balanced and symmetrical on both sides of the street, to represent the order and stability of nation's government, create streetscape corridors, and to direct and focus vistas and viewsheds to significant landmarks or destinations.
4. Ample pedestrian space should accommodate a range of civic and ceremonial uses.
5. The streets nationally symbolic, civic, and ceremonial role warrants the highest attention to streetscape design and quality to reinforce the street's identity and significance in the nation's capital.

Connecting and Traversing Street Principles:

1. Generally, the character of the streets is **mostly consistent** to unify the streetscape and link destinations across precincts, neighborhoods, and jurisdictions to reinforce the city's identity and imply wayfinding cues.
2. Vertical and surface elements are **mostly consistent** along the street's length to provide continuity and contribute to the capital city's identity; however, surface and small fixture elements may adapt to character areas, highlighting a precinct or neighborhood unique qualities.
3. Streetscape elements should have a continuous rhythm and be balanced and symmetrical on both sides of the street, except where spatial relationships or edges of certain uses warrant an asymmetrical streetscape. For example, waterfront streets like Ohio Drive may have an asymmetrical streetscape oriented to the water edge; and streets that edge different uses like 2nd Street, NE may have an asymmetrical streetscape transitioning between the US Capitol Complex and Capitol Hill neighborhoods.
4. The streets significance as a connection between important national and local civic uses warrants high attention to streetscape design and quality.

Local Street Principles:

1. Policies, guidance, and regulations for local streets are in DC's Public Realm Design Manual or Business Improvement Districts' Streetscape Guidelines.
2. Generally, the character of streets should be **somewhat consistent** across precincts, neighborhoods, and jurisdictions to define the capital city and give character and grace to neighborhoods.
3. Generally, the character of the street reflects the identity of the local city, precincts or neighborhoods that it traverses, creating a strong local identity.
4. Vertical elements are mostly consistent along the street's length to provide continuity and contribute to the capital city's identity and imply wayfinding cues; however, surface and small fixture elements may adapt to character areas, highlighting and reinforcing a precinct's or neighborhood's unique qualities.
5. Streetscape elements should have a continuous rhythm and be balanced and symmetrical on both sides of the street, except where spatial relationships or edges of certain uses warrant an asymmetrical streetscape. For example, streets that edge different uses like 1st Street, NE may have an asymmetrical streetscape transitioning between Union Station and the NOMA neighborhood.
6. The street's significance as a connection between important national and local civic uses, or its significance to a local neighborhood or precinct may warrant streetscape treatment that is different from local standards and treatments.

Character Area Principles:

1. Streets within character areas shall have a high level of consistency to reinforce the character area and sub-areas within it.
2. Streets at the edges or boundaries of character areas should defer to their street category for guidance on consistency and continuity of streetscape elements.
3. Vertical streetscape elements (streetlights and trees) shall be consistent on both sides of character areas boundary streets to provide consistency and define vistas and viewsheds.

Adjacent Areas

The monumental core's streets extend through and connect to adjacent areas that are comprised of local neighborhoods that have their own identity as part of the capital city. Their adjacency enriches the monumental core with their unique character, design features, and distinct sense of place. Adjacent area's streetscapes generally conform to the District of Columbia's Public Realm Design Manual (PRDM) or Business Improvement Districts' streetscape guidelines. To strengthen the identity of the capital city and the monumental core, some monumental core streetscapes should appropriately transition into some adjacent areas for consistency and continuity of character.



Figure UD-13: Radiating and edging streets, such as Pennsylvania Avenue, are nationally significant and can host major public gatherings and events.