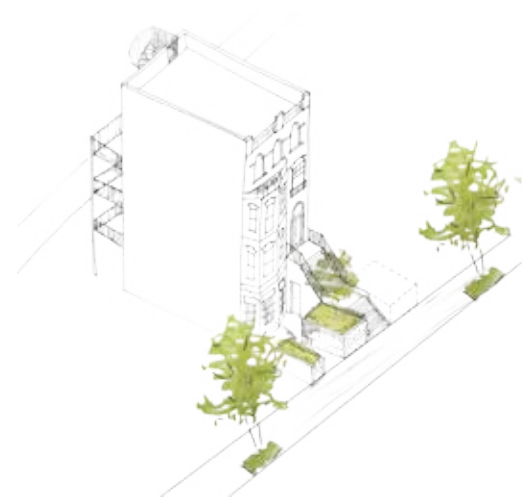


# Adams Morgan Parkway: Envisioning a Network of Green Parking Streets



Laura Escobar  
Graduate Urban Design Thesis



Adams Morgan Parkway: Envisioning a Network of Green Parking Streets

**Laura Escobar**

Thesis submitted to the faculty of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Science  
In  
Architecture

Susan Piedmont-Palladino, Chair  
Paul Kelsch  
Elizabeth Morton  
Scott Archer

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Key Words:  
Urban Design, Parkways, Parking Area, Blue-green infrastructure

Adams Morgan Parkway: Envisioning a Network of Green Parking Streets

Laura Escobar

**Abstract**

The footprint of urban streets have become conflict zones of interests; ranging from efficient automobile infrastructure, building restriction lines, economical interests, shy efforts to introduce nature, services, etc.

I ask myself: How can we, as urban designers, retrieve a portion of this footprint to nature by taking advantage of the existing public parking areas and create a network of streets that speaks to the larger park network?

Can a neighborhood like Adams Morgan serve as an example for a collaborative design between private and public interests to enhance the potential of blue-green infrastructure?

Adams Morgan Parkway: Envisioning a Network of Green Parking Streets

Laura Escobar

**General Audience Abstract**

This thesis presents a way of utilizing “public parking areas” to connect the network of streets to a larger network of parks. In Washington, DC, parking areas are public spaces situated between the property line and the sidewalk. Though public, these parking areas are under the immediate care and maintenance of the owners or occupants of the premises.

For the purpose of this thesis, streets in the Adams Morgan neighborhood are used to illustrate the potential of a collaborative design between private and public interests in such parking areas. The Adams Morgan neighborhood provides several key elements, including many residential streets, three DC parks (Walter Pierce, Marie H. Reed Community and Learning Center, and Kalorama Park) and four National Park Service Parks (Meridian Hill, Smithsonian National Zoological Park, Rock Creek Trail and Parkway) as well as an active commercial district.

Moreover, this thesis illustrates the potential benefits of using blue-green infrastructure, which integrates natural with semi-natural landscape elements, including water. Using this type of infrastructure to link streets to the park network would promote sustainability and resilience and provides an opportunity to enhance connectivity and reduce park fragmentation.

## Acknowledgments

My family for never doubting my curiosity and following my dreams alongside.

My committee for encouraging and fostering an interdisciplinary environment throughout this process.

Also, my wonderful coworkers that supported me beyond their capabilities.

And finally, to all my peers in 601 that offered me a hand when I needed it the most.

## Contents

### Investigation

<b>1 //</b>	Adams Morgan is almost alright.	1
	<b>1.1</b> Residential genealogy.	3
	<b>1.2</b> Marie Reed Recreational Center.	7

<b>2 //</b>	Parkways in Washington DC.	11
-------------	----------------------------	----

<b>3 //</b>	Evolution of “parking” as a verb.	15
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### Intervention

<b>4 //</b>	Site selection :	17
	<b>4.1</b> Topography.	21
	<b>4.2</b> Land use.	23

<b>5 //</b>	Parks and streets: The Loop.	25
-------------	------------------------------	----

<b>6 //</b>	Parking Areas.	37
-------------	----------------	----

<b>7 //</b>	Blue-green Infrastructure.	47
-------------	----------------------------	----

### Solution

<b>8 //</b>	Adams Morgan: The Parkway.	49
	<b>8.1</b> Kalorama St.	51
	<b>8.2</b> 16th St	55
	<b>8.3</b> Harvard St.	59

<b>9 //</b>	“Menu” of options.	63
-------------	--------------------	----

<b>10 //</b>	Conclusion.	65
--------------	-------------	----

<b>Bibliography</b>		67
---------------------	--	----

<b>Images</b>		68
---------------	--	----



## Adams Morgan is almost alright.

“Almost Alright” is the name of the studio project conducted during the fall semester of 2015. Taught by Susan Piedmont-Palladino and Scott Archer, this project challenged students from different disciplines to analyze an urban site and explore potential design interventions.

Assessing the potential of a lively neighborhood like Adams Morgan was as important as learning about its history and the steps that were required for this intricate urban fabric to flourish.

During this semester, two main projects were completed: the Adams Morgan’s Residential Genealogy and the Marie Reed Recreational Center case study, which examined how the recreational fields related to the neighborhood and its adjacent streets.



Studio description written by Virginia Tech faculty:

### *Almost Alright*

*Like Robert Venturi's iconic main street, the intersection of 18th street and Columbia Road NW in Washington DC is almost alright. Despite quotidian architecture, little intentional planning, and domination by asphalt and automobiles, the intersection serves as the center of the lively community of Adams Morgan and a model of contemporary urbanity. The unavoidable Starbucks - resistance is futile- anchors the north west. It's almost alright, but almost isn't good enough. Adams Morgan could use a cultural center, a music venue, a music school, more housing, an oasis, space to play, space to gather, space to protest... What can the design disciplines - architects, landscape architects, and urban designers -- offer this place? This project can be a building, a landscape, and/or an urban revision.*



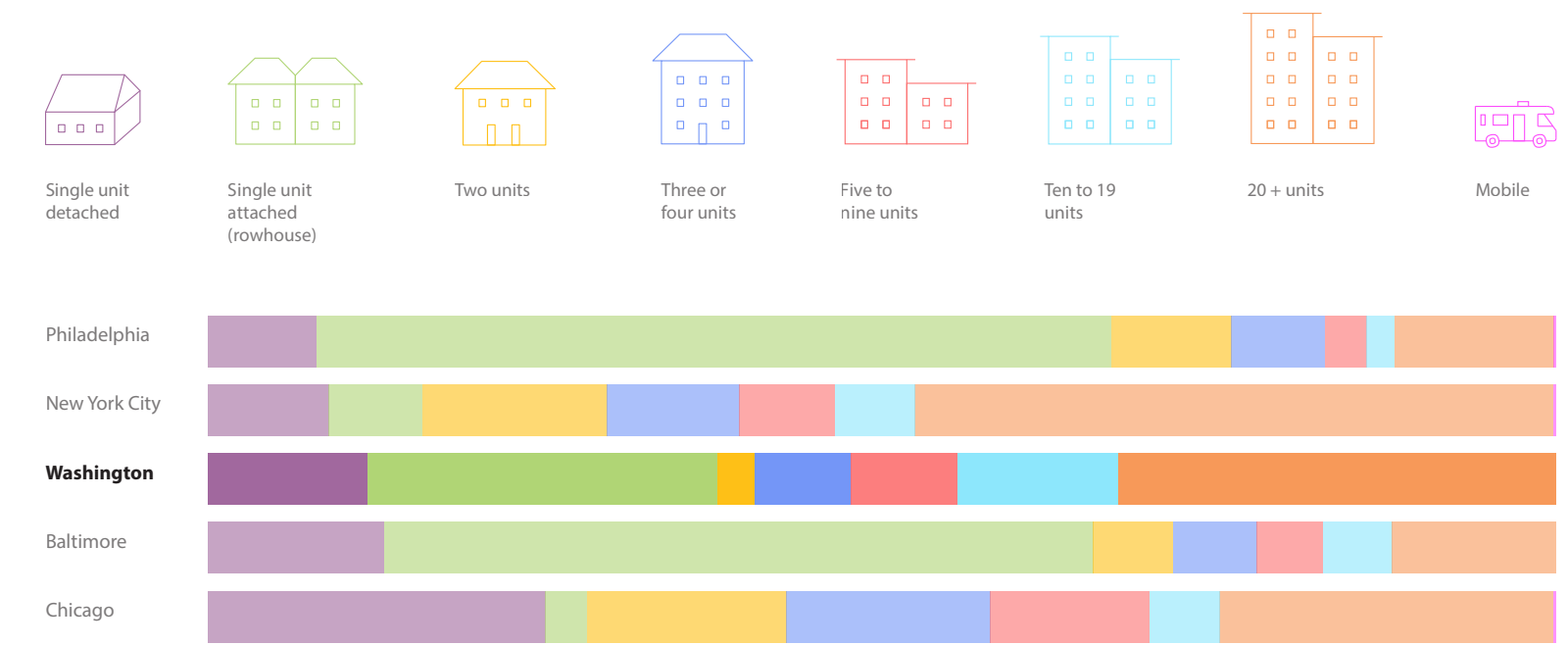
Adams Morgan row houses. Printmaking class, spring 2016 final print.

Adams Morgan is well known for its lively business corridors and historical residential houses. Part of the charm of these streets is the mix of different housing types on each block and the fact that they all belong to different historical eras.

Jane Jacobs discussed the integration of different building types, uses, and historical styles as important factors in improving the lives and economical sustainability of cities and neighborhoods.

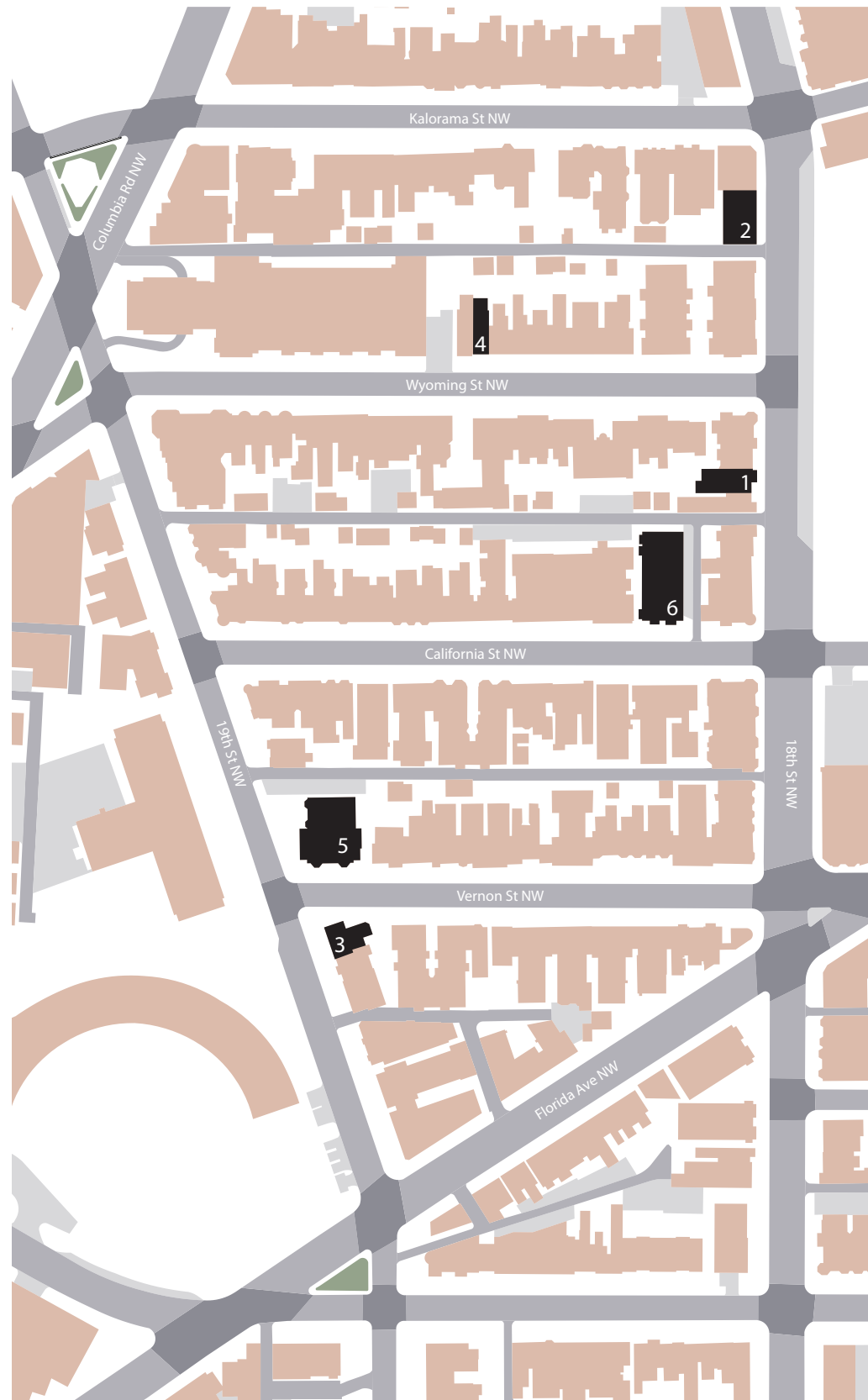
*“Cities need old buildings so badly it is probably impossible for vigorous streets and districts to grow without them.... for really new ideas of any kind--no matter how ultimately profitable or otherwise successful some of them might prove to be--there is no leeway for such chancy trial, error and experimentation in the high-overhead economy of new construction. Old ideas can sometimes use new buildings. New ideas must use old buildings.”*

-Jane Jacobs



Cox, John Woodrow. "The Most Popular Type of Home in Every Major American City, Charted." Washington Post. The Washington Post, 21 Sept. 2015.





**the ROWHOUSE**



Spanning the entire width of lot  
Middle-class residents

2114-2118 18th St. NW  
1897

**Wardman ROWHOUSE**



Commercial on first story  
Residential on second story

2216-2228 18th St. NW  
1911

**developer-built ROWHOUSE**



Shared party wall  
Two-and-a-half-story  
Central-hall plan  
Upper-class residents

1933 19th St. NW  
1908

**architect-built ROWHOUSE**



Not share party wall  
Independently built  
More detailed

1839 Wyoming Av. NW  
1908

**MANSIONS**



Usually in corner lots  
Freestanding, at least one secondary elevation  
Built on the front building line

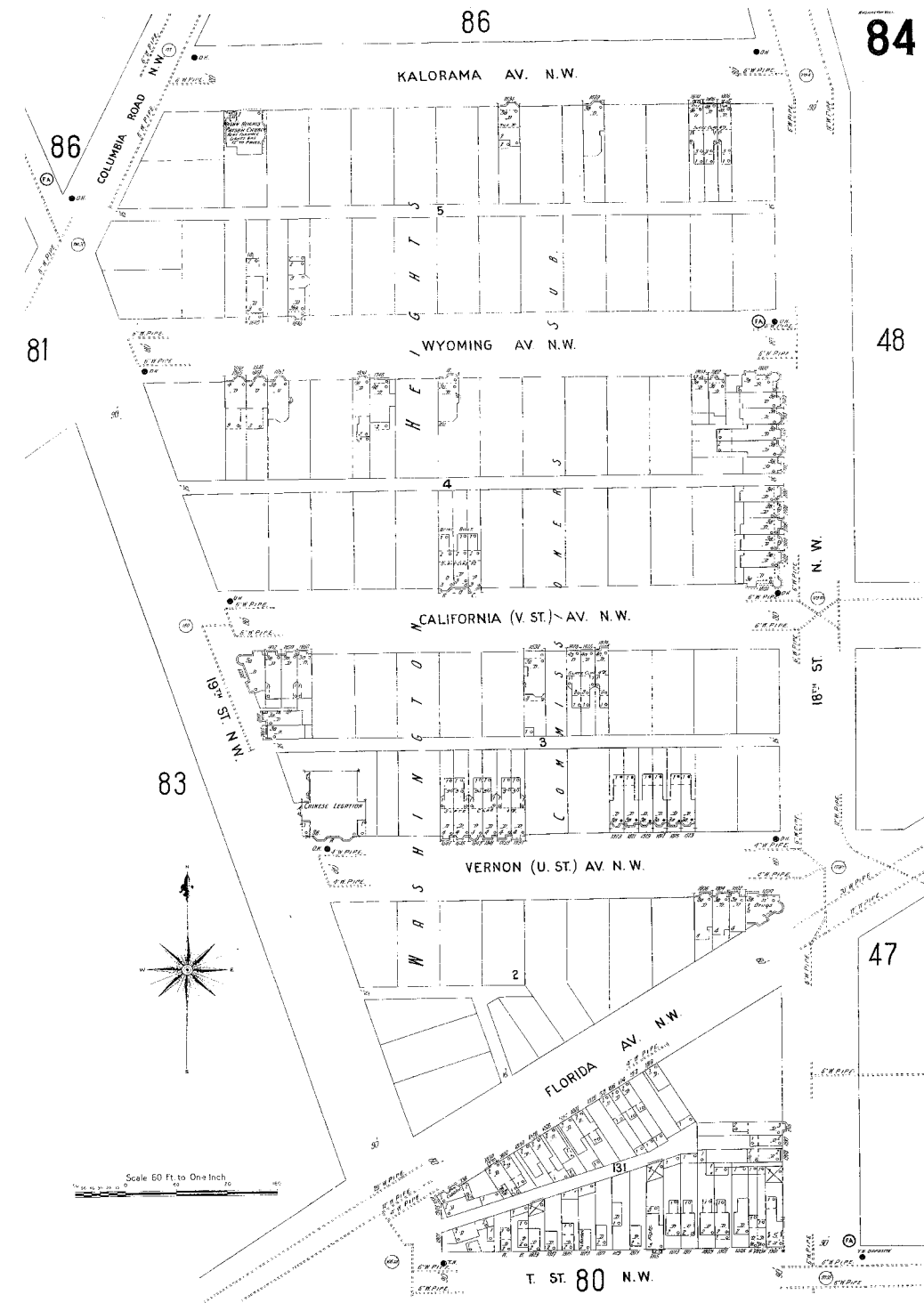
19th and Vernon St. NW  
1902

**APARTMENT BUILDINGS**

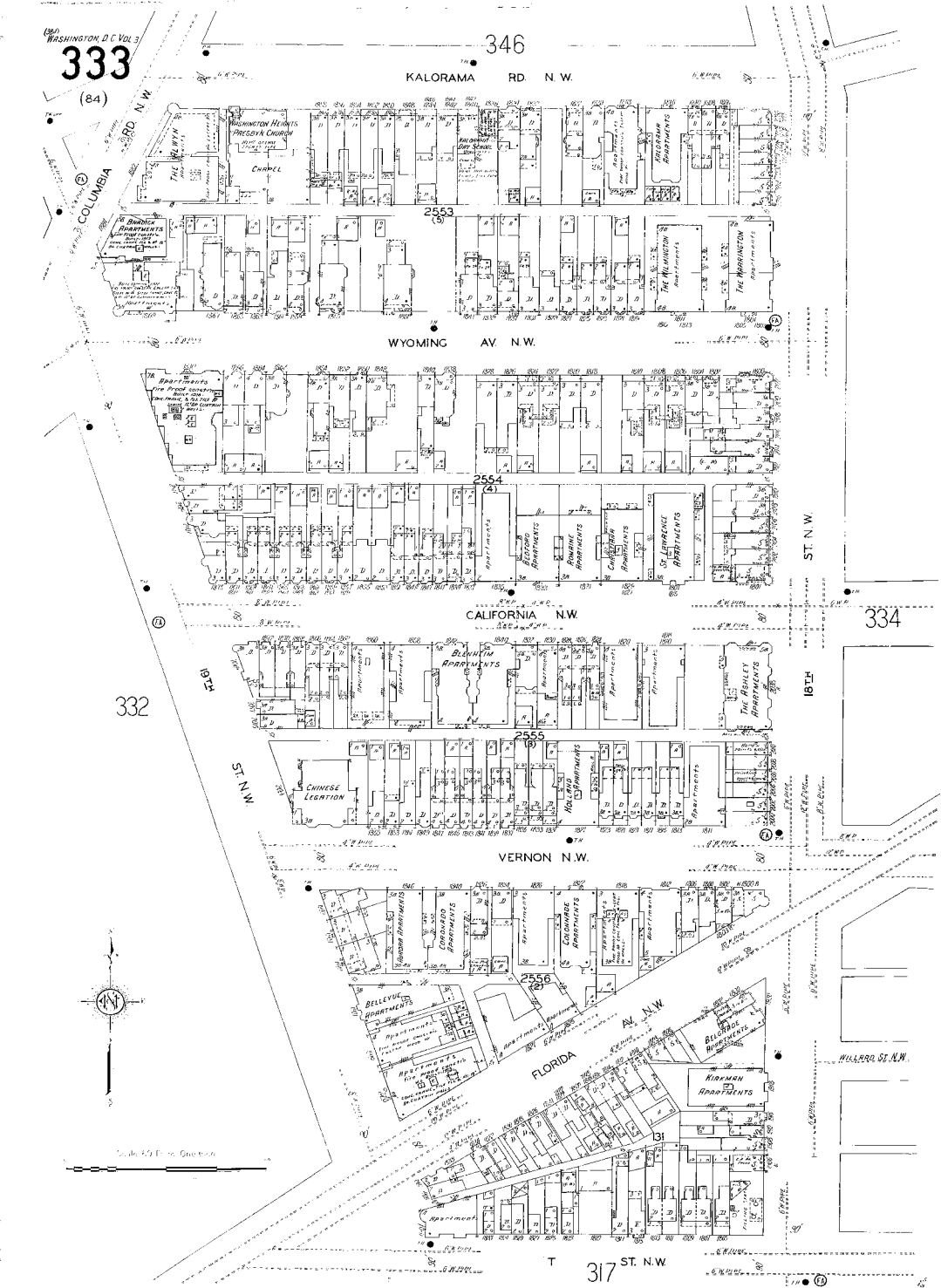


Middle-class families  
Rowhouse-like facade and scale

7 California St. NW  
08



Development in Washington Heights by 1903. Sanborn Map Company, Fire Insurance Maps of Washington, D.C., Volume 1, Plate 84, 1903.



Development in Washington Heights by 1927-1928. Sanborn Map Company, Fire Insurance Maps of Washington, D.C., Volume 3, Plate 333, 1927-1928.



## 1.2// Marie Reed Recreational Center - Case Study

Experiencing and understanding the role played by Marie Reed Recreational Center in the community of Adams Morgan opened a series of questions about how we use parks to escape from the fast-pace of city life. We think of cities as combinations of open (parks) and occupied (buildings) land. However, the street becomes a connector, a site for everyday interactions within all parts of the city. It is here that everything comes together into a whole, as a system.

How can we infuse the existing streets of Washington, DC with more opportunities for people to interact with nature? If a neighborhood like Adams Morgan is already well established with parks that serve different functions for its inhabitants, can we rethink the way in which streets serve as public conduits to go from point A to point B?



Past



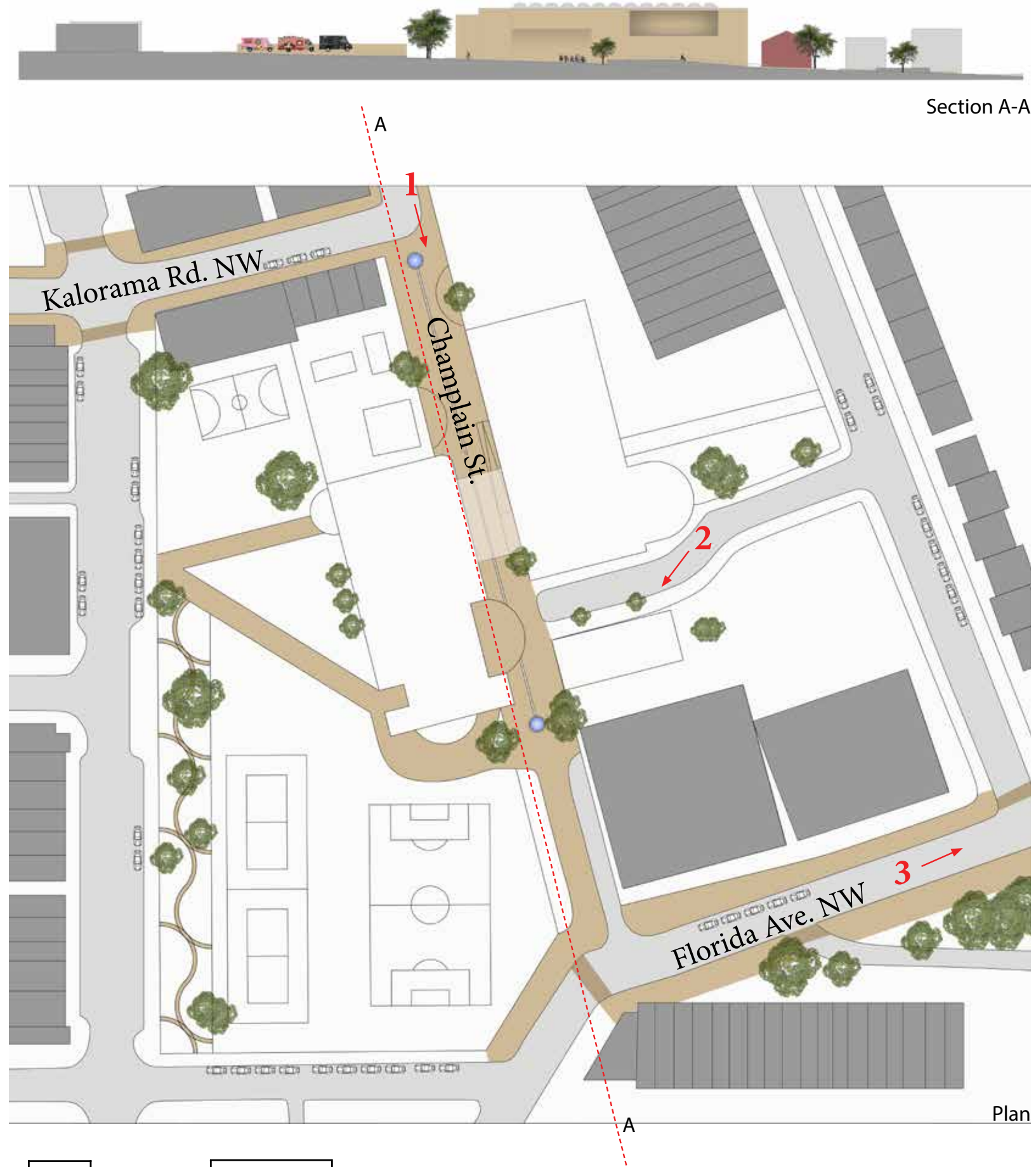
Present



Future



# Marie Reed Recreational Center - Proposed



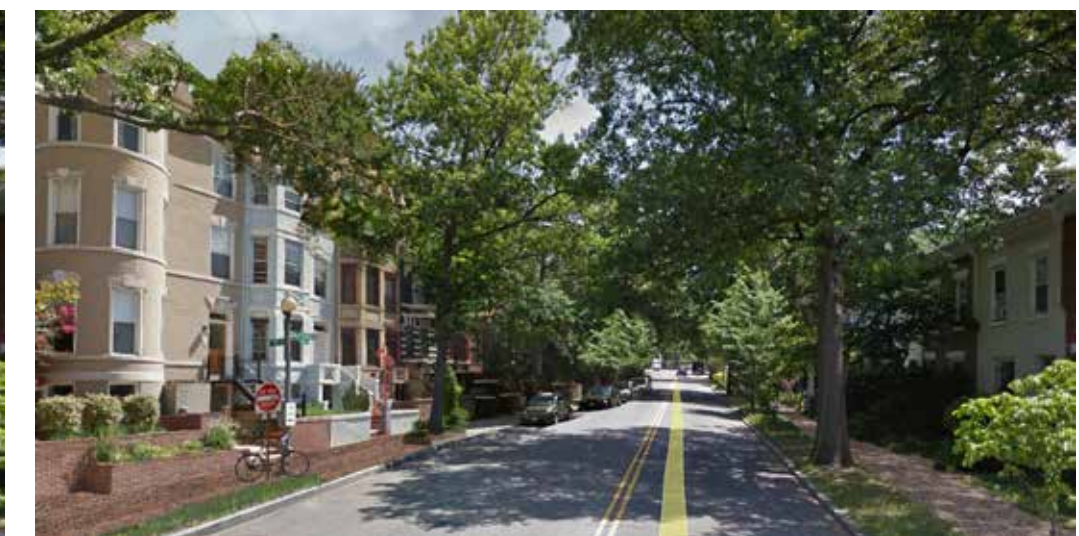
# Before and after views



1



2



3



## Parkways in Washington DC

In 1902, the Senate Park Commission developed a comprehensive plan for the development of the monumental core and the park system in Washington DC. Following Frederick L. Olmsted footsteps, the parkway concept in Washington DC was envisioned as a system of streets that connected parks through picturesque boulevards with a strip of land on the sidewalks for trees to be planted.



"A walk down Connecticut Avenue circa 1907"  
<http://www.streetofwashington.com/>

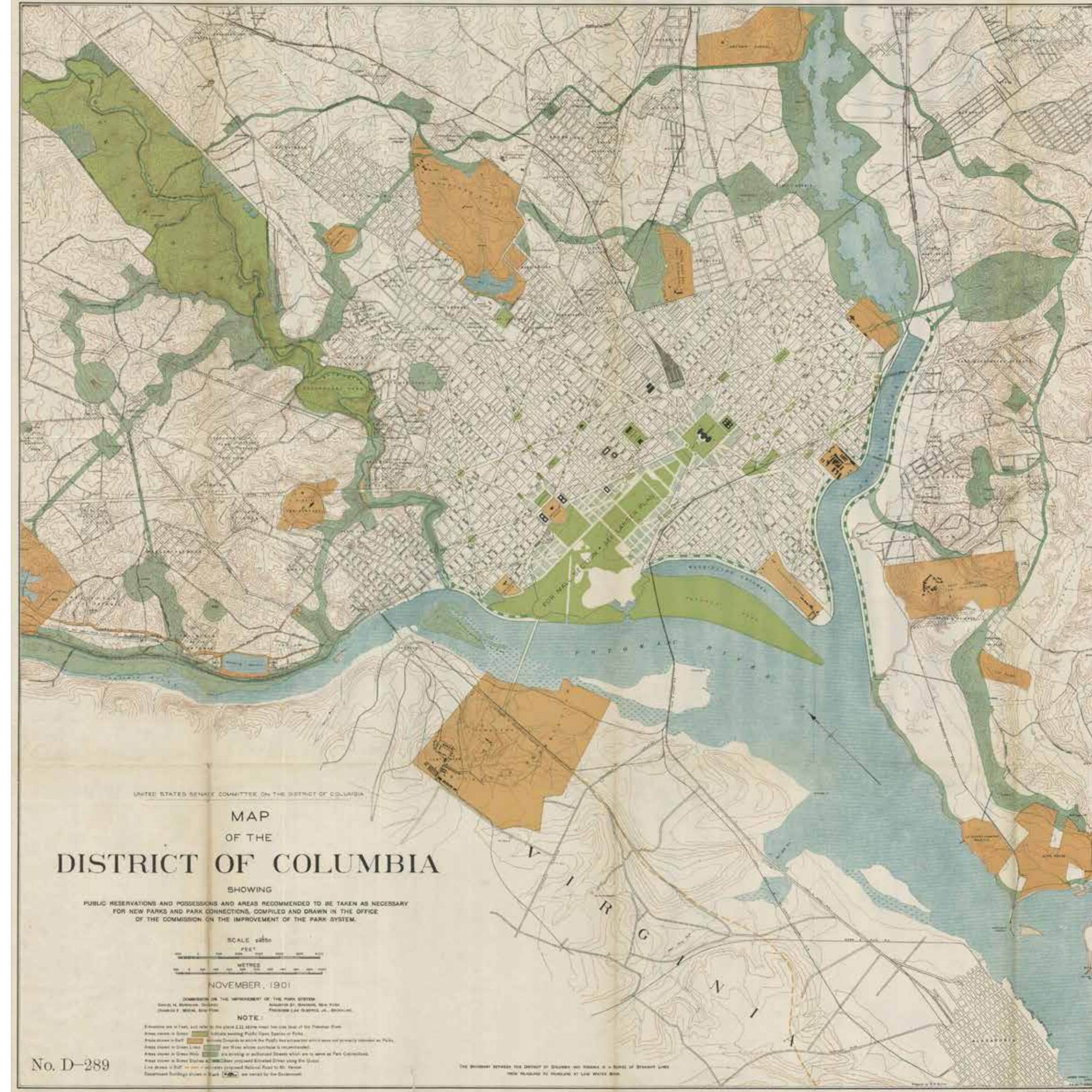
Even though this vision wasn't fully developed, it explains the abundance of public spaces in the city as well as the wider streets. Over the years, Washington DC has used and regulated these public spaces to build the city's identity and to maintain its open scenic feeling.

In 2013, DC launched the Sustainable DC Plan<sup>1</sup> aimed at positioning DC as a more sustainable city. Many of the actions included in the Plan are linked to improvement of public spaces by incorporating natural elements. According to the Washington DC Office of Planning<sup>2</sup> the road right-of-way (the area that defines public space) is over 20% of the city's total area, creating an important opportunity from an urban design perspective.

The potential of bringing nature into public spaces builds L'Enfant ideal of a more cohesive visual network of avenues for social interaction. Integrating nature into the city's landscape has gained relevance as means to provide resource efficient urban environment. As urban planners, we need to think of public spaces as an important resource to improve cities and enhance livability.

<sup>1</sup> "Sustainable DC Plan" 2012, <http://www.sustainabledc.org>.

<sup>2</sup> "Public Space: A Defining Characteristic of Washington, DC" <https://planning.dc.gov>.







### L'ENFANT PLAN

Street rights-of-way ranged in width from 90 to 160 feet.



### PARKING ACT

Congress granted the city of Washington DC the authority to set aside parts of the street right-of-way as park land.

Parking Commission was founded.

The city's Legislative Assembly passed a law making the adjacent property owner legally responsible for maintaining landscaped areas.



### PROJECTION ACT

Permission to build bay windows, corner towers, and porches in the public parking space.

### HIGHWAY PLAN

The "parking" was extended to resident beyond the L'Enfant Plan developed by The Army Corps of Engineers.



Olmsted Jr. firm was commissioned to modify the gridded streets so that they followed the topography.



Congress passed several bills associated with building restriction lines.

1877

1893-1898

1900 1901

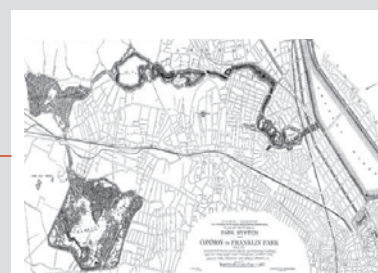


### 1ST PARK WAY

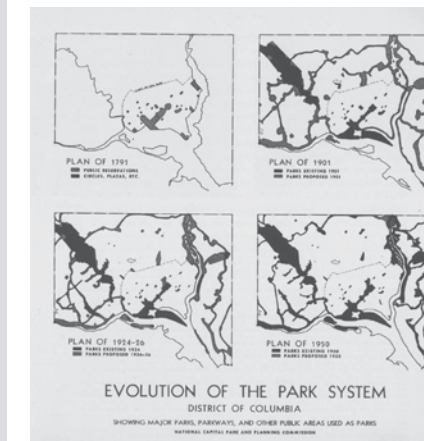
Frederick L. Olmsted introduces the concept of the "Park Way" in a letter to the Board of Commissioners of Prospect Park.



### BUFFALO PARK SYSTEM



### BOSTON EMERALD NECKLACE



### WASHINGTON'S PARK SYSTEM

The Senate Park Commission hired Daniel Burnham, Charles McKim, August Saint-Gaudens, and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. to design Washington's Park System scheme.



## Evolution of “Parking” as a verb.

*park* (circa 1812)  
verb

- a. to plant a tree or spread a patch of turf or flowers
- b. to create a little patch of parkland

*park* (circa 1845)  
verb

- a. to arrange military vehicles in a park,” from park (n.)  
in a limited sense of “enclosure for military vehicles”
- b. general non-military meaning “to put (a vehicle) in a certain place”

*park* (circa 2015)  
verb

- a. (1) to bring a vehicle to a stop and keep standing at the edge of a public way  
(2) to leave temporarily on a public way or in a parking lot or garage
- b. to enclose in a park



PARKING



TO PARK



PARK(ING)

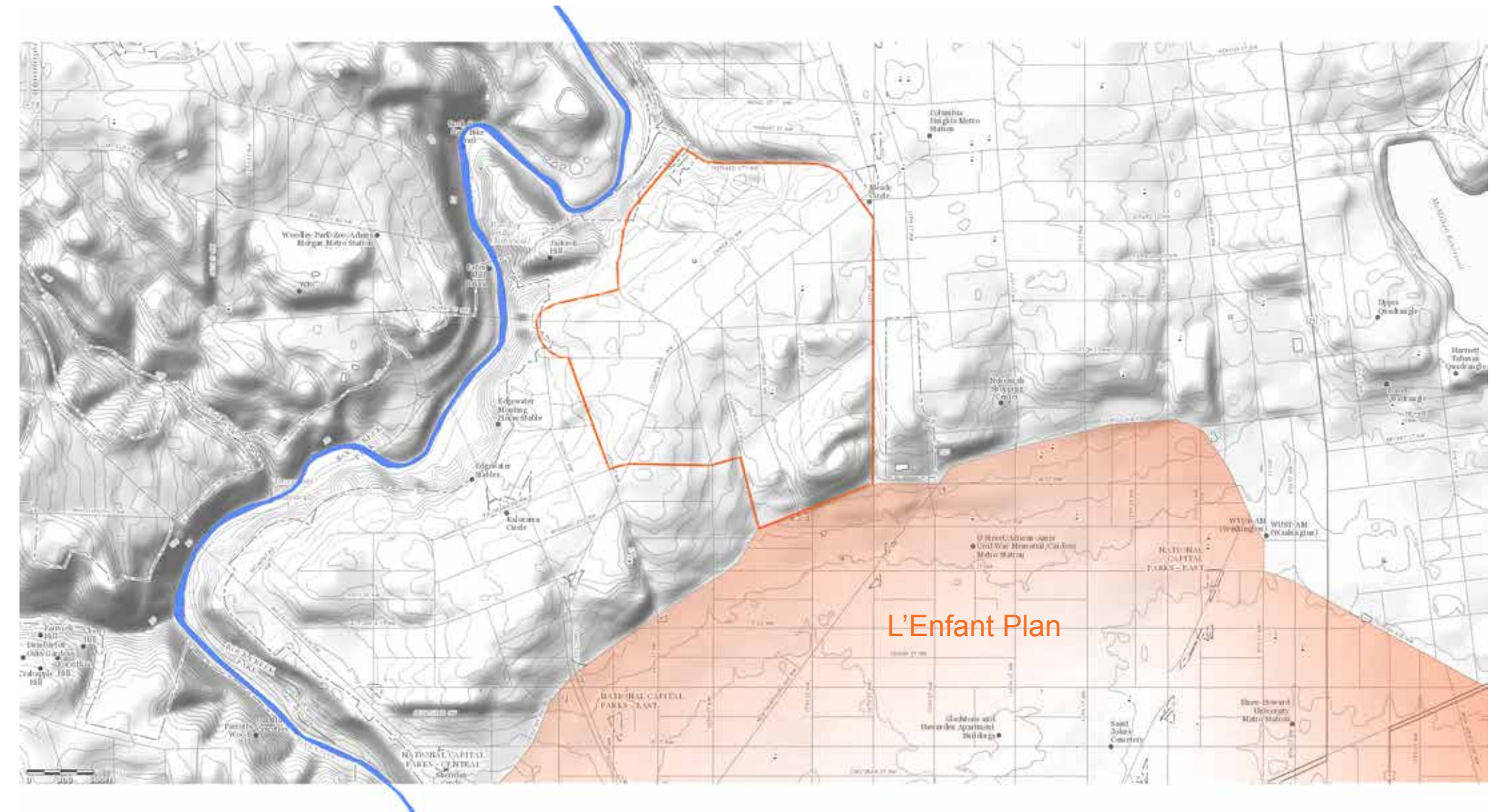
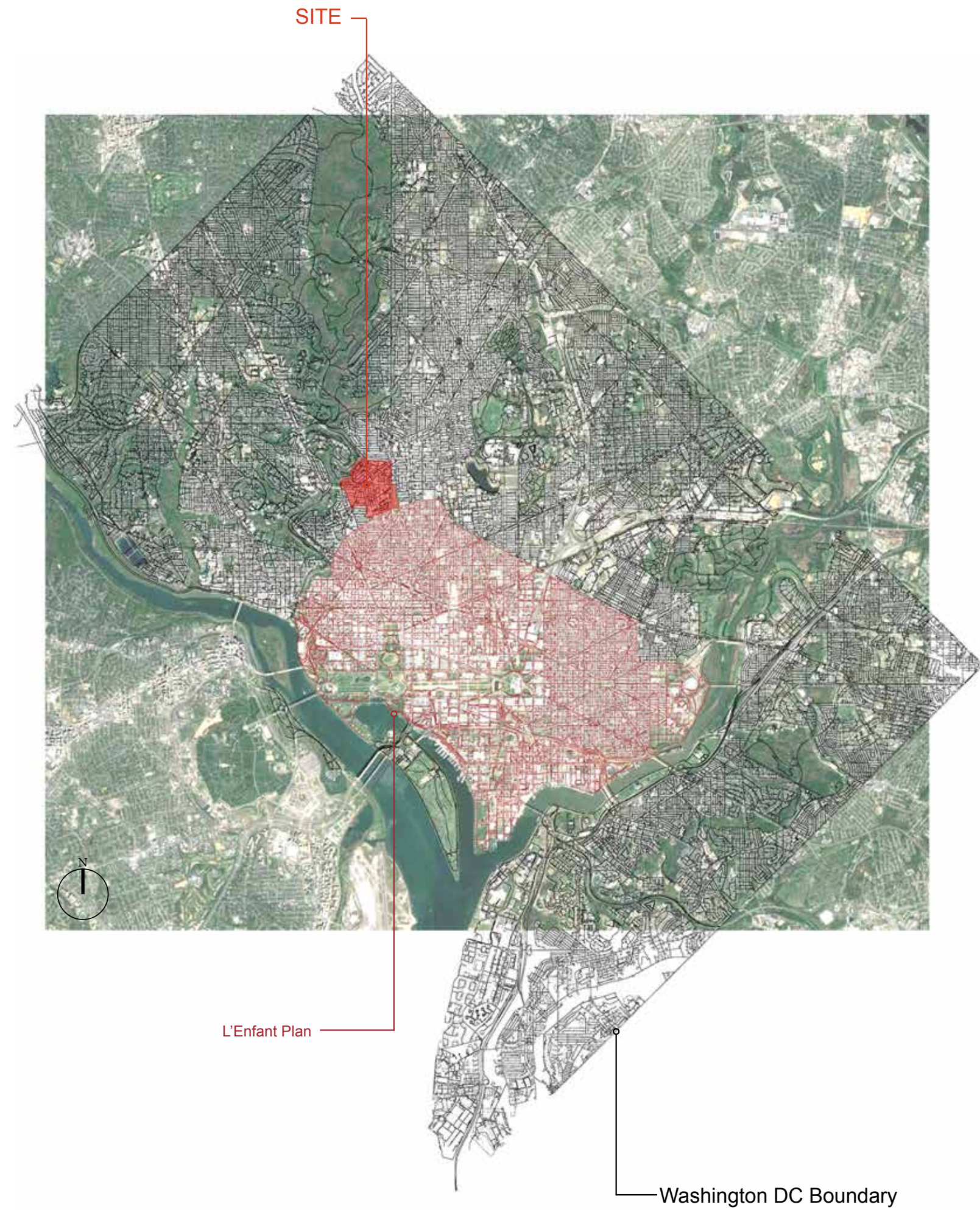


Adams Morgan is the perfect laboratory for three reasons:

1. Variety of fully functional parks;
2. Topography suitable for water treatments; and
3. Small enough to engage the community, but big enough to be replicable in other parts of the city.



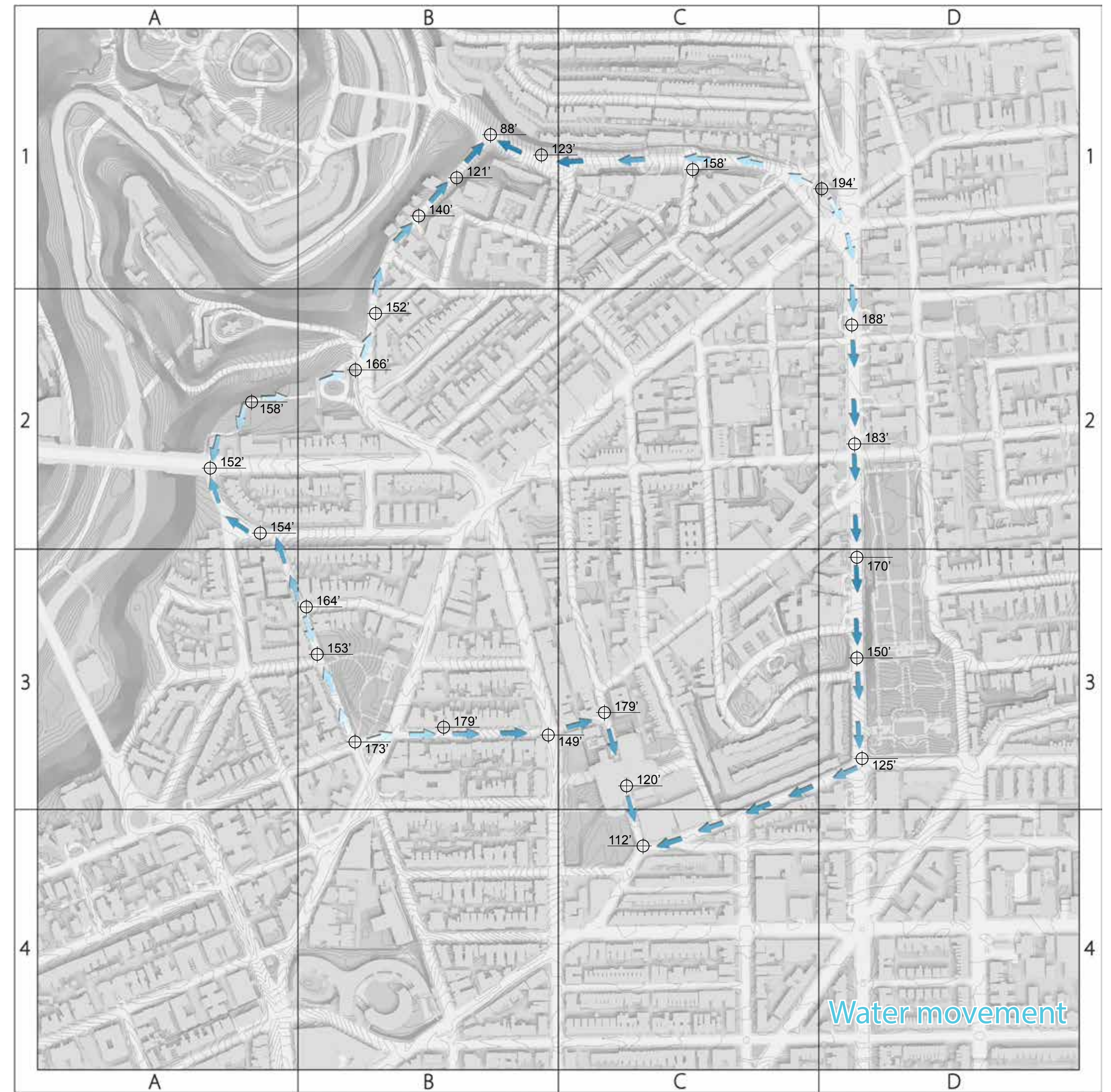
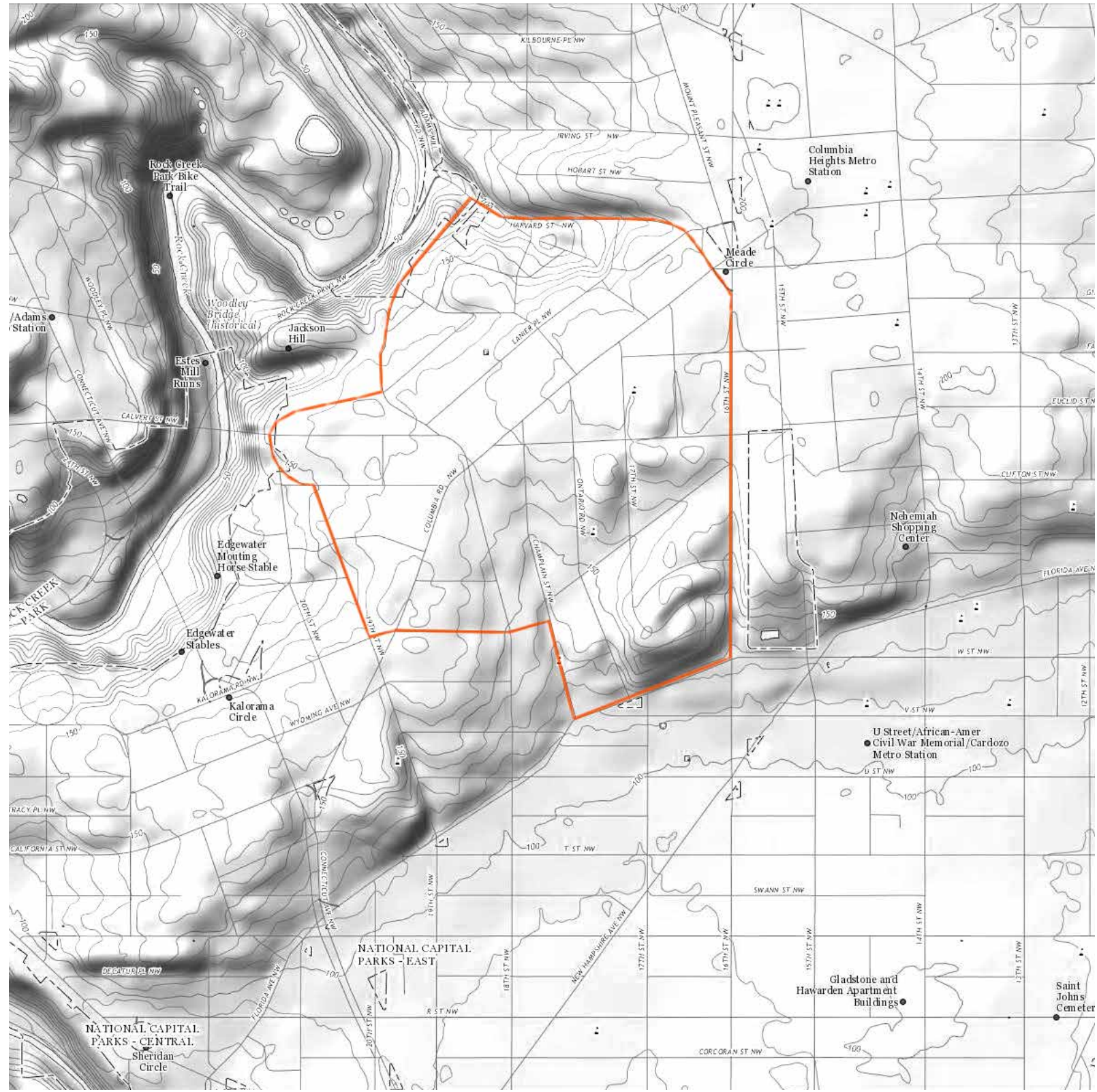






4.1//

Topography





Adams Morgan is characterized by its strong community involvement to promote and maintain a diverse and vibrant neighborhood. Ranging from building types to different land uses, Adams Morgan sets an example of a truly mixed-used neighborhood.

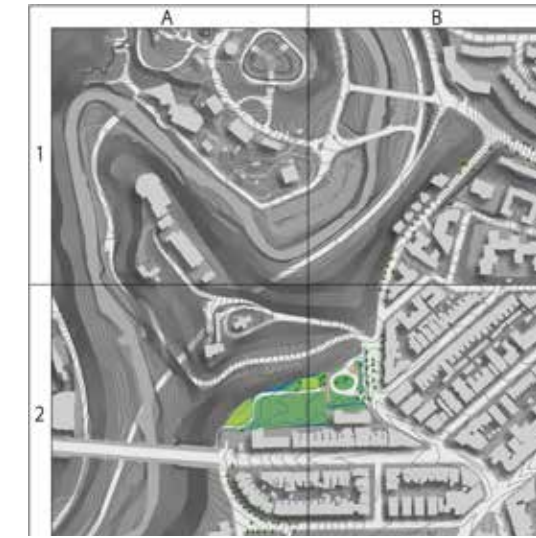
It is not a coincidence that The American Planning Association named Adams Morgan as one of the best ten neighborhoods in the nation in 2014. A lot of this well-deserved recognition is due to the fact that its Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC)1C has consistently taken advantage of its innate diversity while reinforcing the idea of walkable streets and around-the-clock commercial streets.



"Adams Morgan named one of nation's 10 best neighborhoods" 2014. www.washingtonpost.com







### #WalterPiercePark

- Activities:**  
 Basketball  
 Soccer  
 Dog Park  
 Kids Playground (all ages)







## #KaloramaPark

### Activities:

- Community Garden
- Soccer
- Basketball
- Informal Dog Park
- Kids Playground (all ages)
- Multipurpose room



## #MarieReedCenter

### Activities:

- Swimming Pool
- Soccer
- Basketball
- Tennis
- Kids Playground (all ages)
- Amphitheater







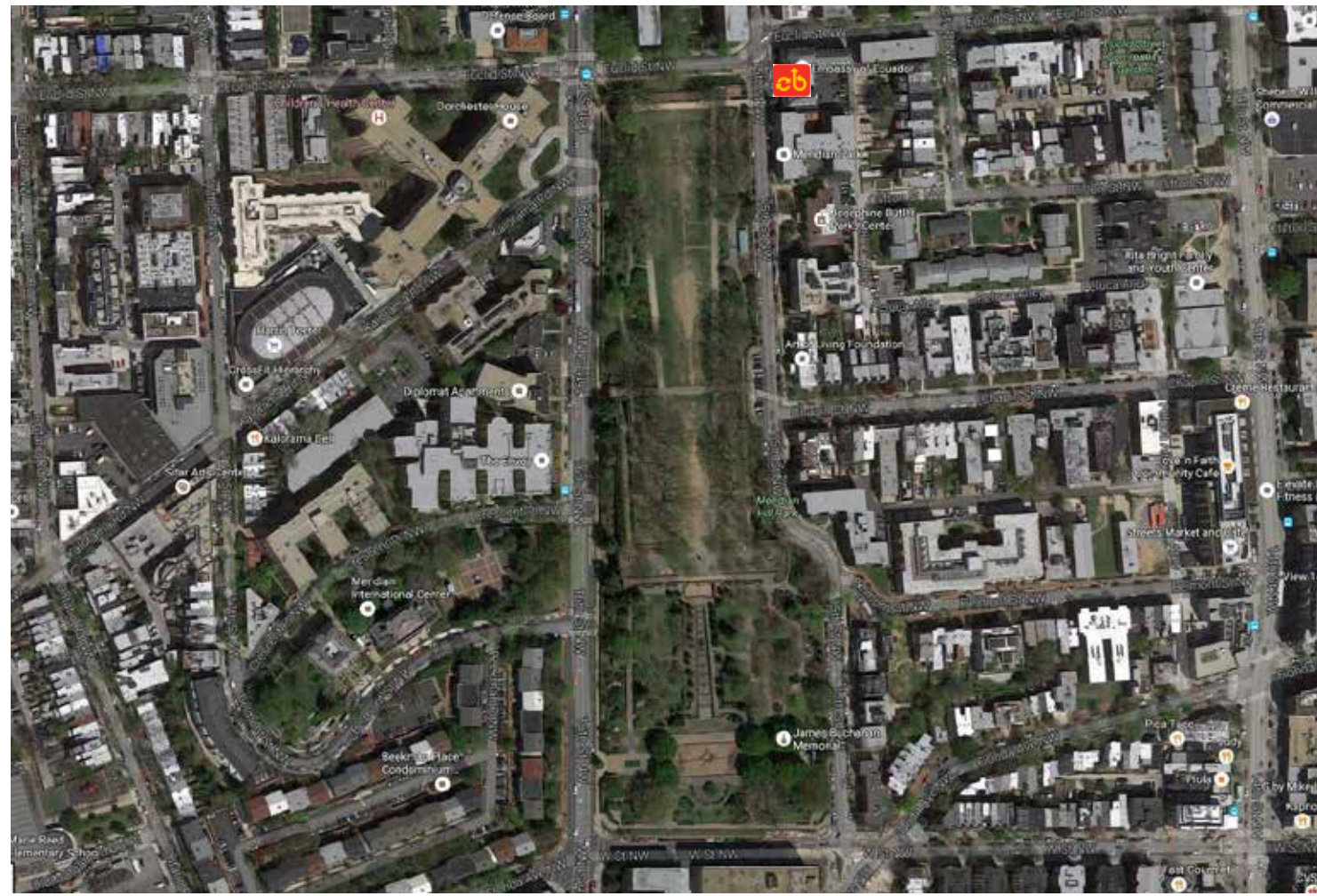
## #MeridianPark

### Events:

Drum Circle  
Jazz Heritage Series

### Activities:

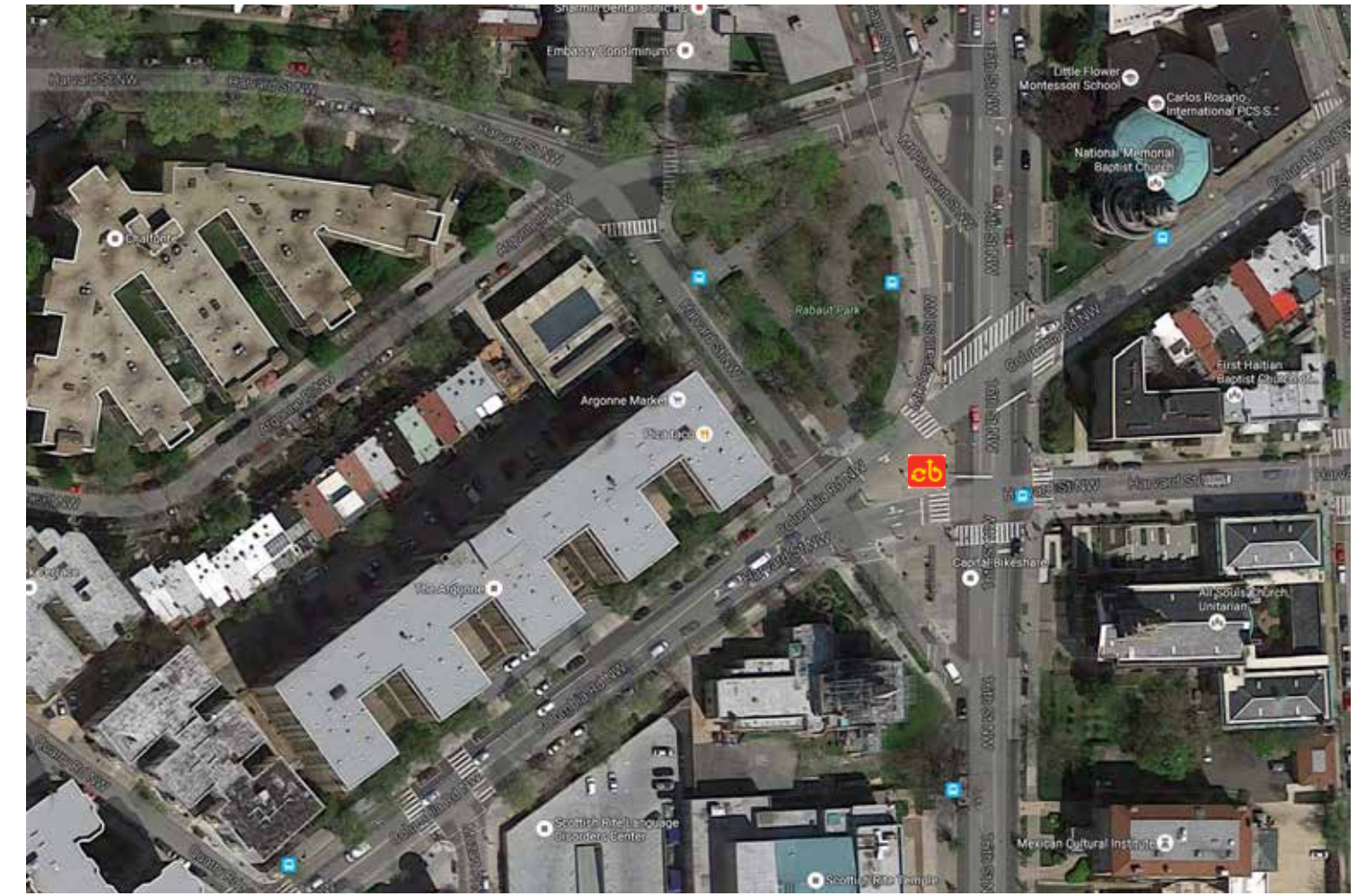
Frisbee  
Hammocks  
Tightrope walking  
Aerial silk



## #RabautPark

### Activities:

Benches

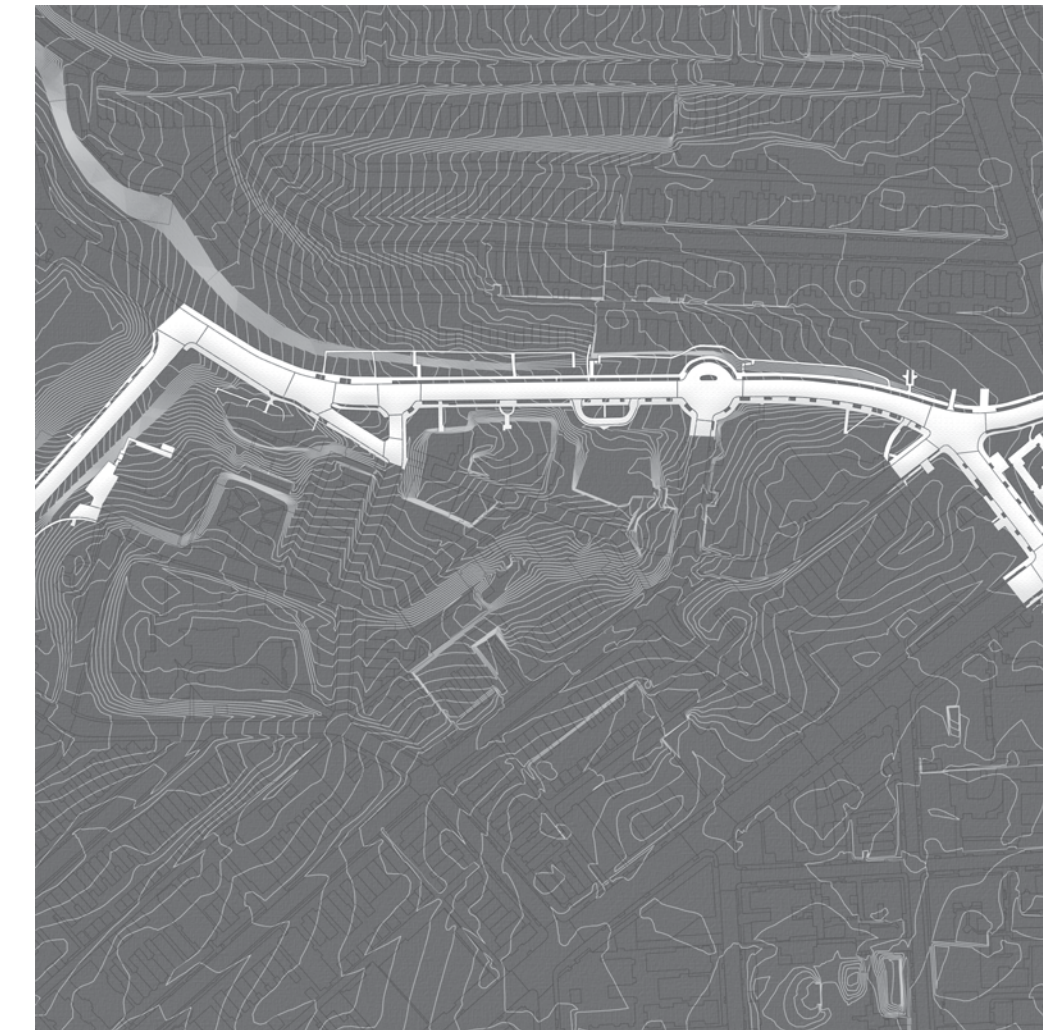




Three of the six streets connecting the parks were selected to understand the spatial proportions of the street, impervious areas, and public vs. private space.



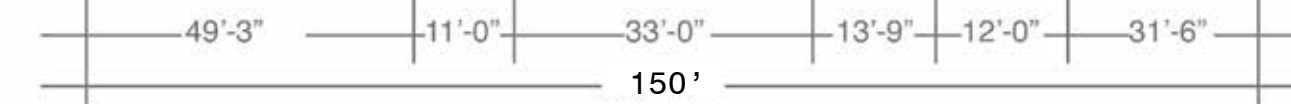
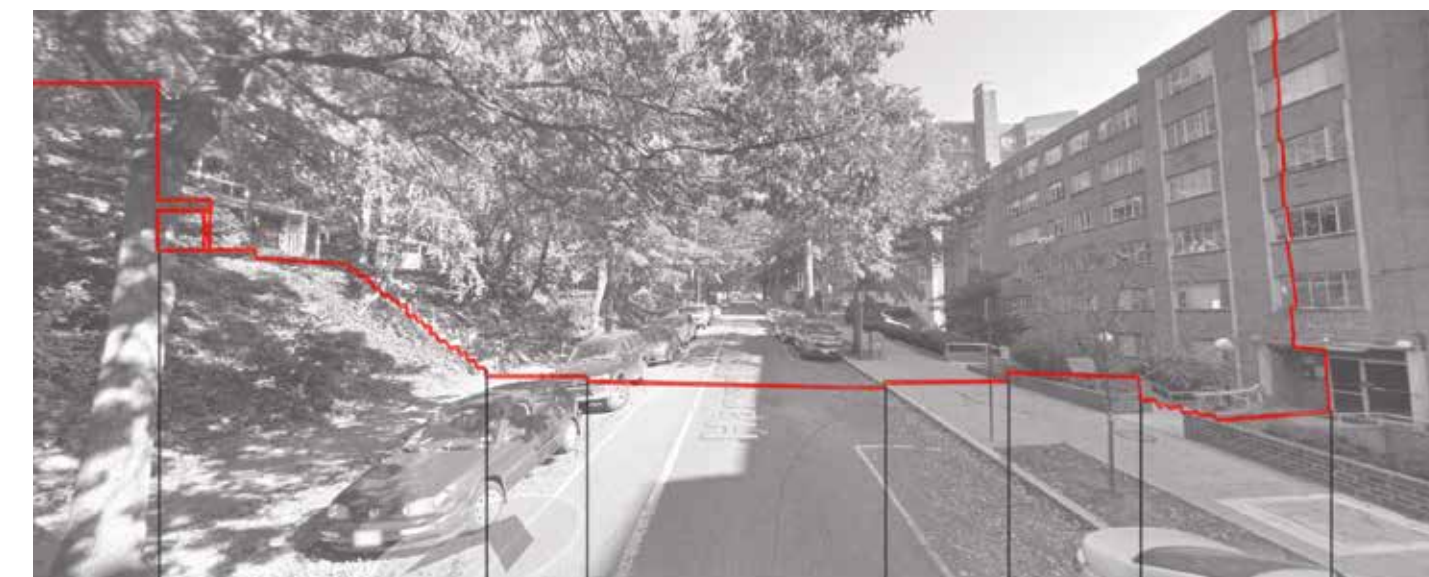
### Harvard St. NW



Impervious Surfaces



Existing Condition



Section



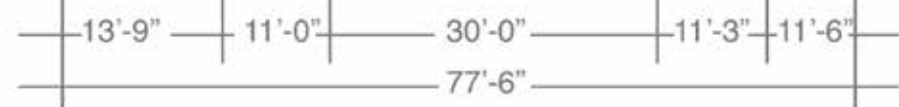
# Kalorama Rd. NW



Impervious Surfaces

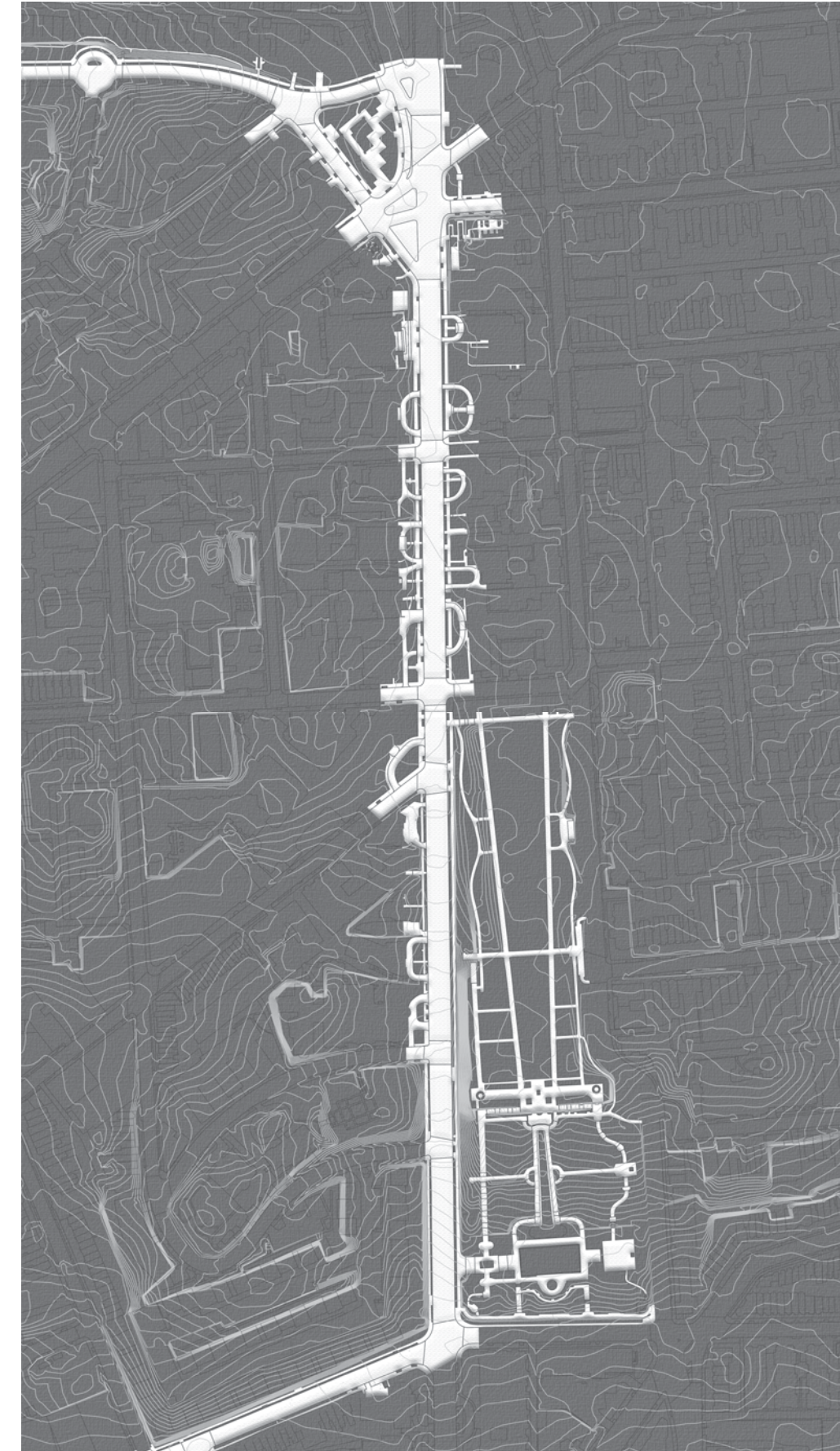


Existing Condition



Section

# 16th St. NW



Impervious Surfaces



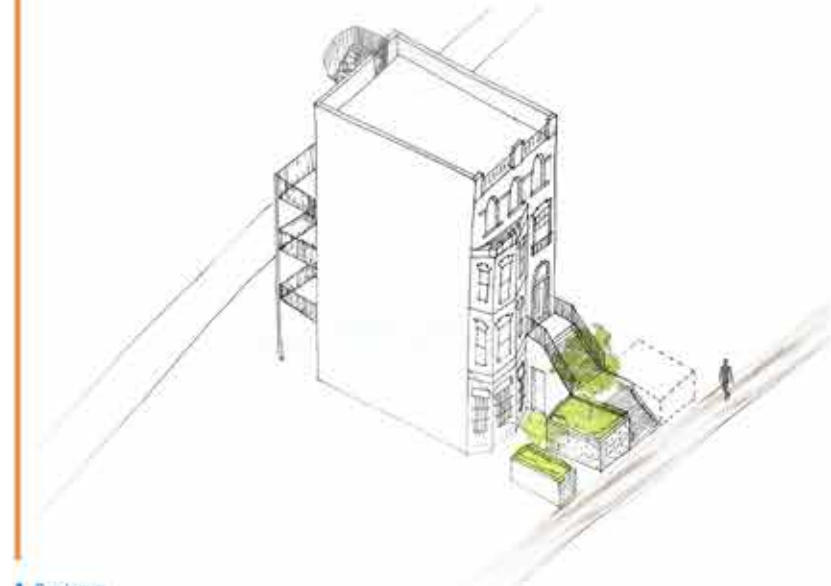
Existing Condition



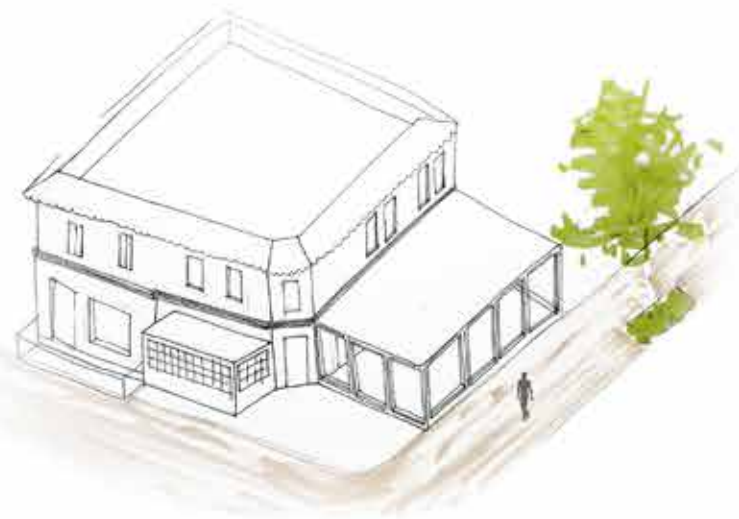
Apartment Building



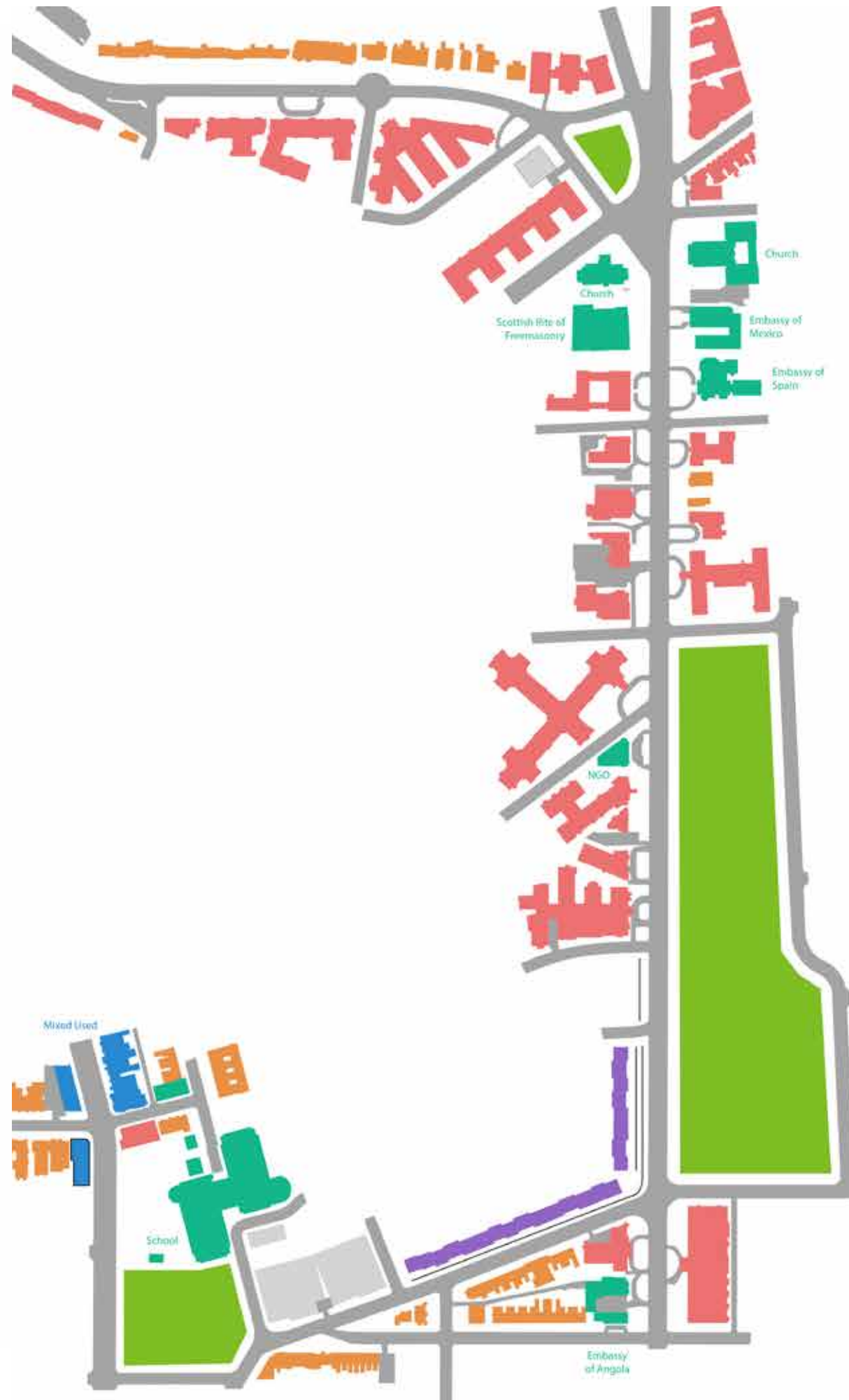
Row House



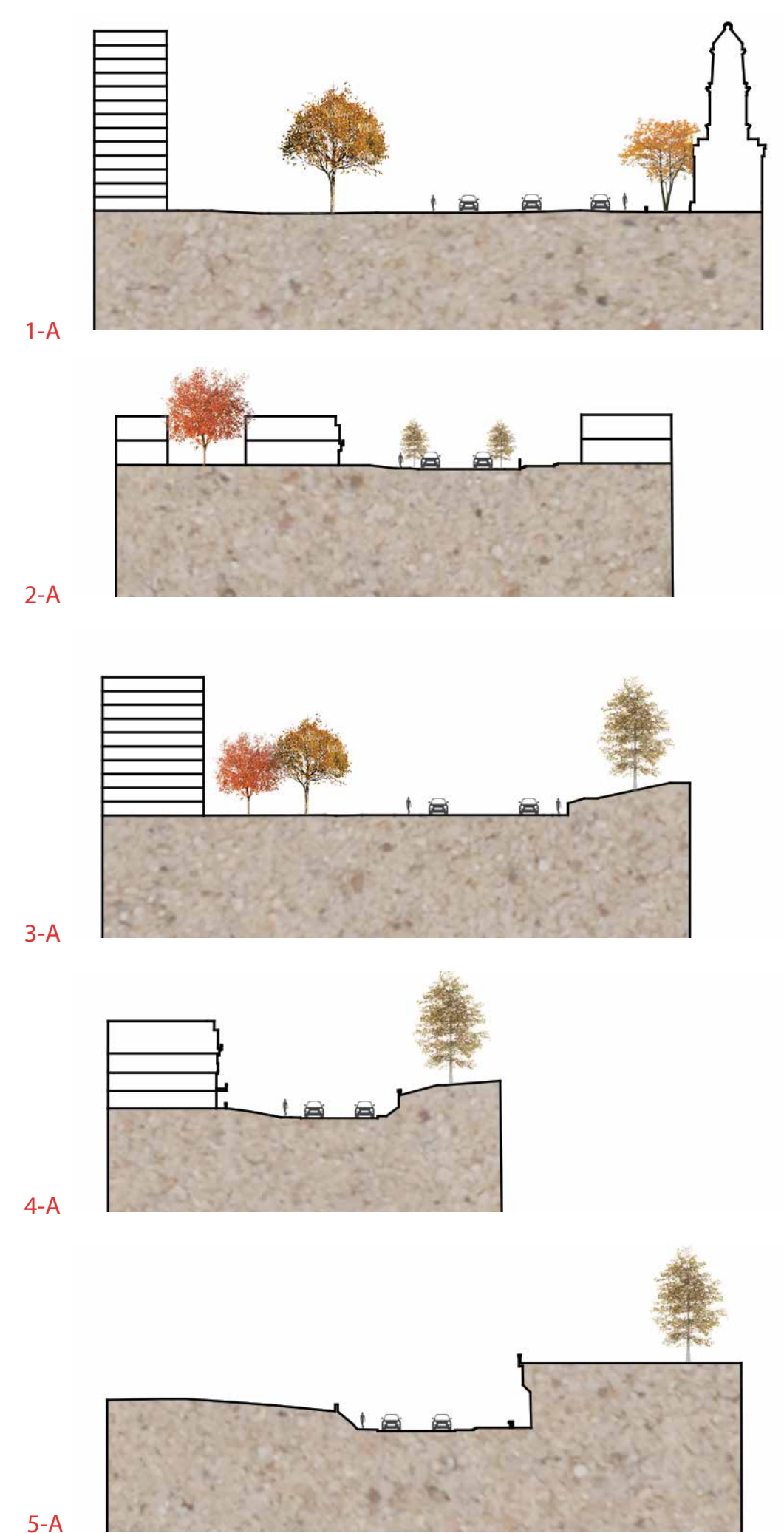
Business



16th Street NW - Building Type Examples

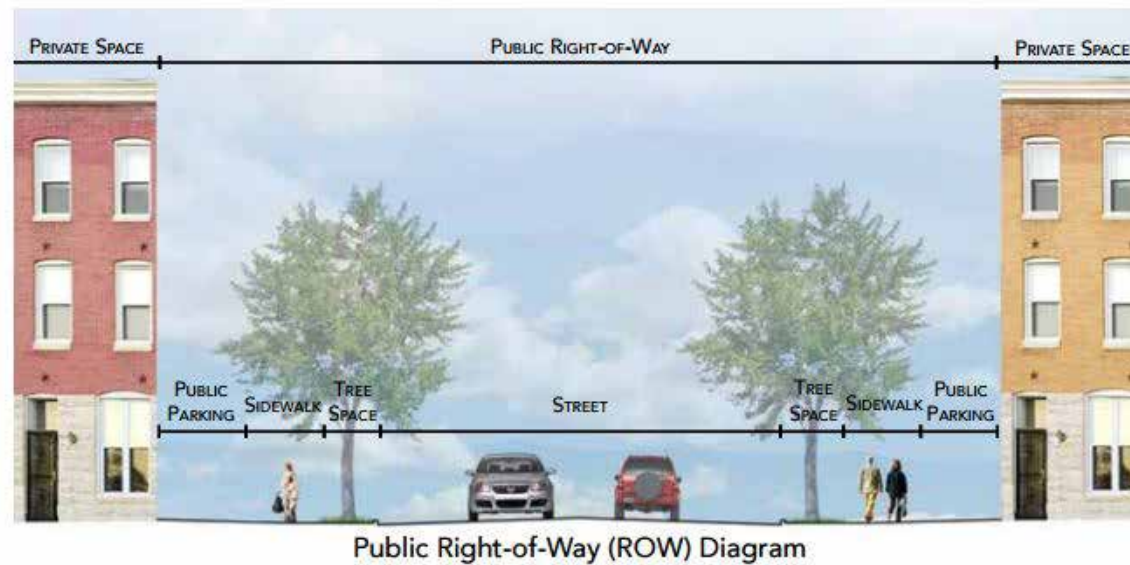


16th Street NW - Existing Conditions



Sections





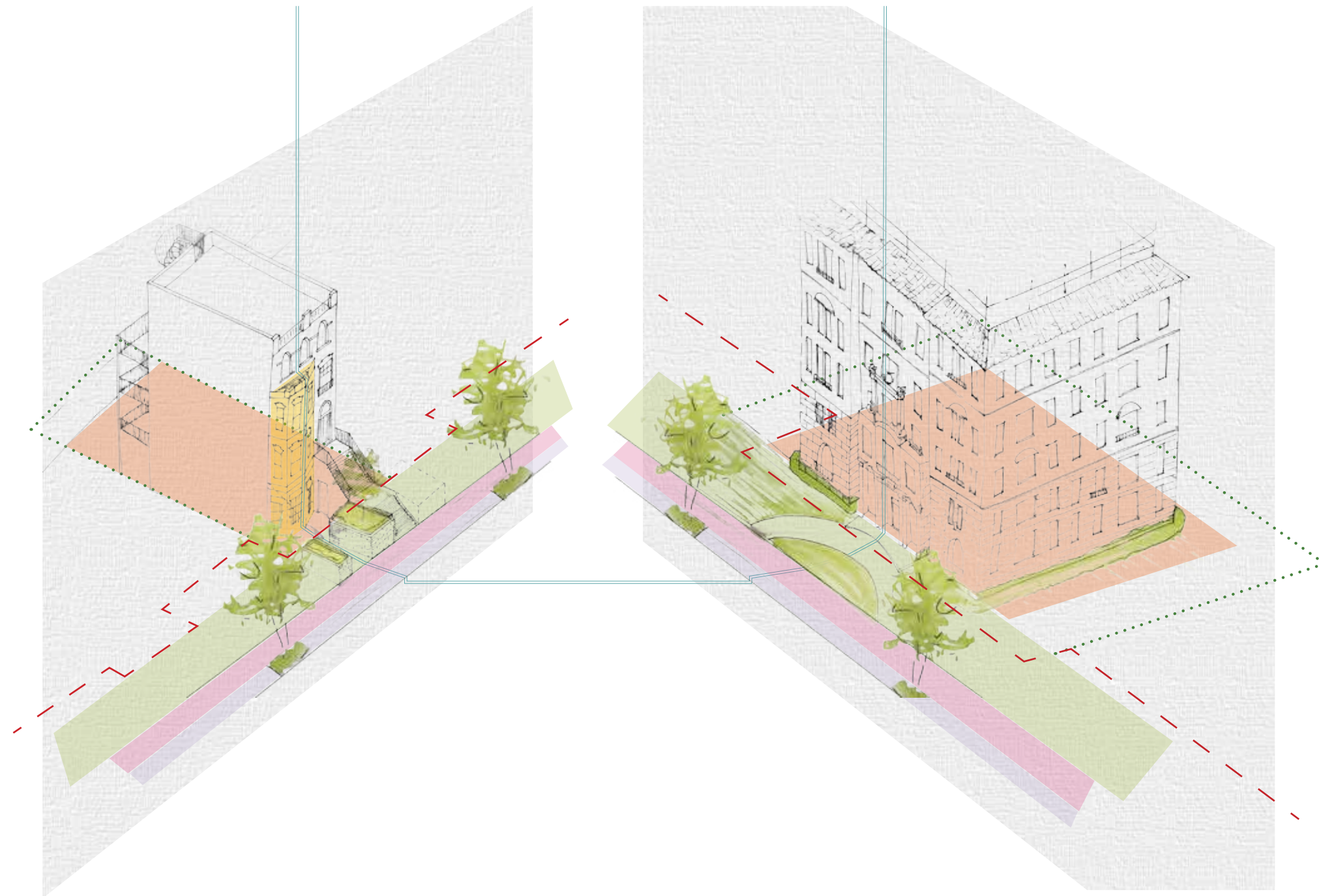
Public Realm Design Manual. 2011.  
<https://ddot.dc.gov>

Public spaces are often a source of debate due to their multiple uses and competing interests. This is particularly relevant in the context of the "Parking Act" of 1870, in which part of the right-of-way immediately next to private property was designated as a park area to be maintained by the adjacent property owner. In this context, "Parking Area" refers to those areas devoted to planting trees on each side of the street creating a park-like environment.

In 1898 Congress transferred the oversight of parking areas to the local government. For this purpose, regulations were developed to allow homeowners to make improvements. These improvements are managed through the permit division, under the oversight of the DDOT. The DDOT reports that an average of 6,000 public space permits are granted every year to owners or occupants for improvements. Unfortunately, this property-by-property approach has created some fragmentation and although from a regulatory point of view it creates some consistency from a design point of view is a missed opportunity.

The fact that parking areas are designated as public spaces but are to be maintained by property owners has become an issue of contention between public and private interest. As cities move forward towards more sustainable development, addressing this fragmentation creates an opportunity for the parking area to revert to its original intent to create an environment that promotes park connectivity.

## Important definitions

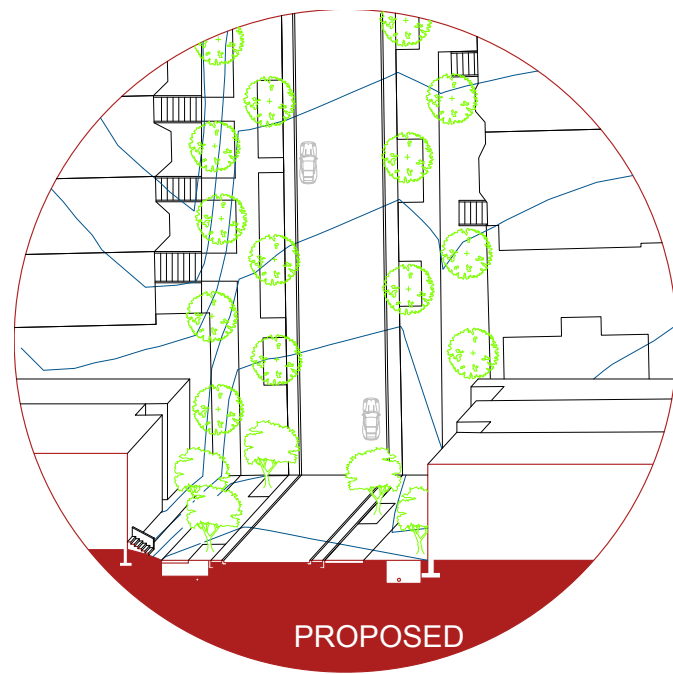
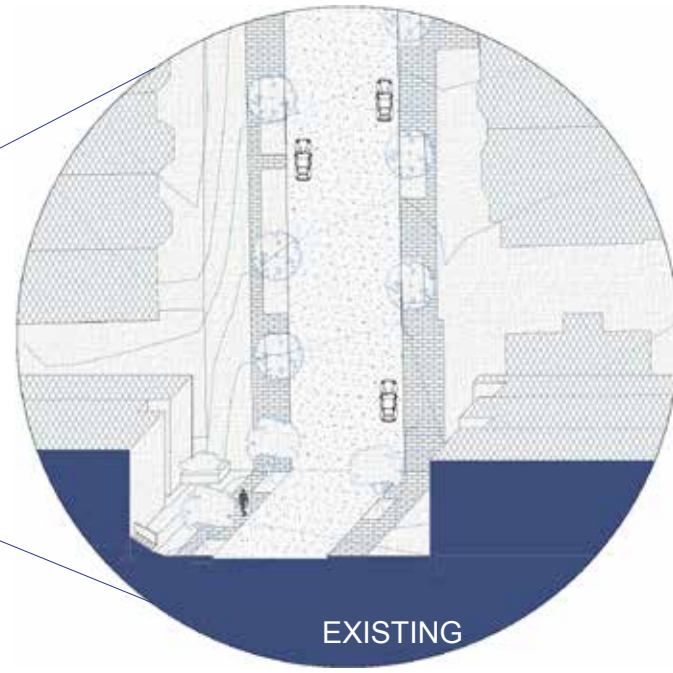


- BUILDING RESTRICTION LINE:** A required set-back a certain distance from the public right-of-way within which no building may take place and upon which the District's public space regulations apply.
  
- BUILDING RESTRICTION AREA:** The space between the property line and building restriction line.
  
- PROJECTION:** Sometimes known as an "encroachment" - a structure that extends beyond a property line or building restriction line that is a privilege. Projections may not be claimed as a right, and require a permit. The building code establishes limitations on projections that may be granted. Proposed projections may be further restricted or refused if the code official determines such action best for the public interest.
  
- PROPERTY LINE:** The line delineating the boundaries of public space and private property.
  
- PUBLIC PARKING AREA:** **"Public Parking" means that area of public space devoted to open space, greenery, parks, or parking that lies between the property line, which may or may not coincide with the building restriction line, and the edge of the actual or planned sidewalk that is nearer to the property line, as the property line and sidewalk are shown on the records of the District.**  
**This area often includes spaces that appear to be front yards with private landscaping that create park-like settings on residential streets.**
  
- PUBLIC RIGHT-OF-WAY:** The surface, the air space above the surface (including air space immediately adjacent to a private structure located on Public Space or in a Public Right-of-Way), and the area below the surface of any public street, bridge, tunnel, highway, lane, path, alley, sidewalk, or boulevard.
  
- TREE BOX/FURNISHING AREA:** The area of the roadside that provides a buffer between the pedestrians and vehicles, which primarily contains landscaping such as a continuous planting strip in residential areas.
  
- SIDEWALK AREA:** Sometimes known as the "pedestrian clear zone" – this is the walking zone on the sidewalk that must remain clear, both horizontally and vertically.

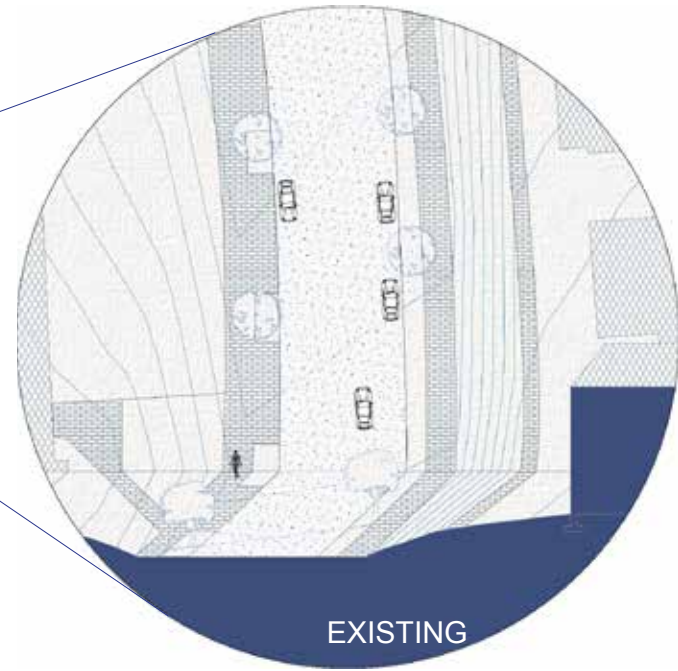




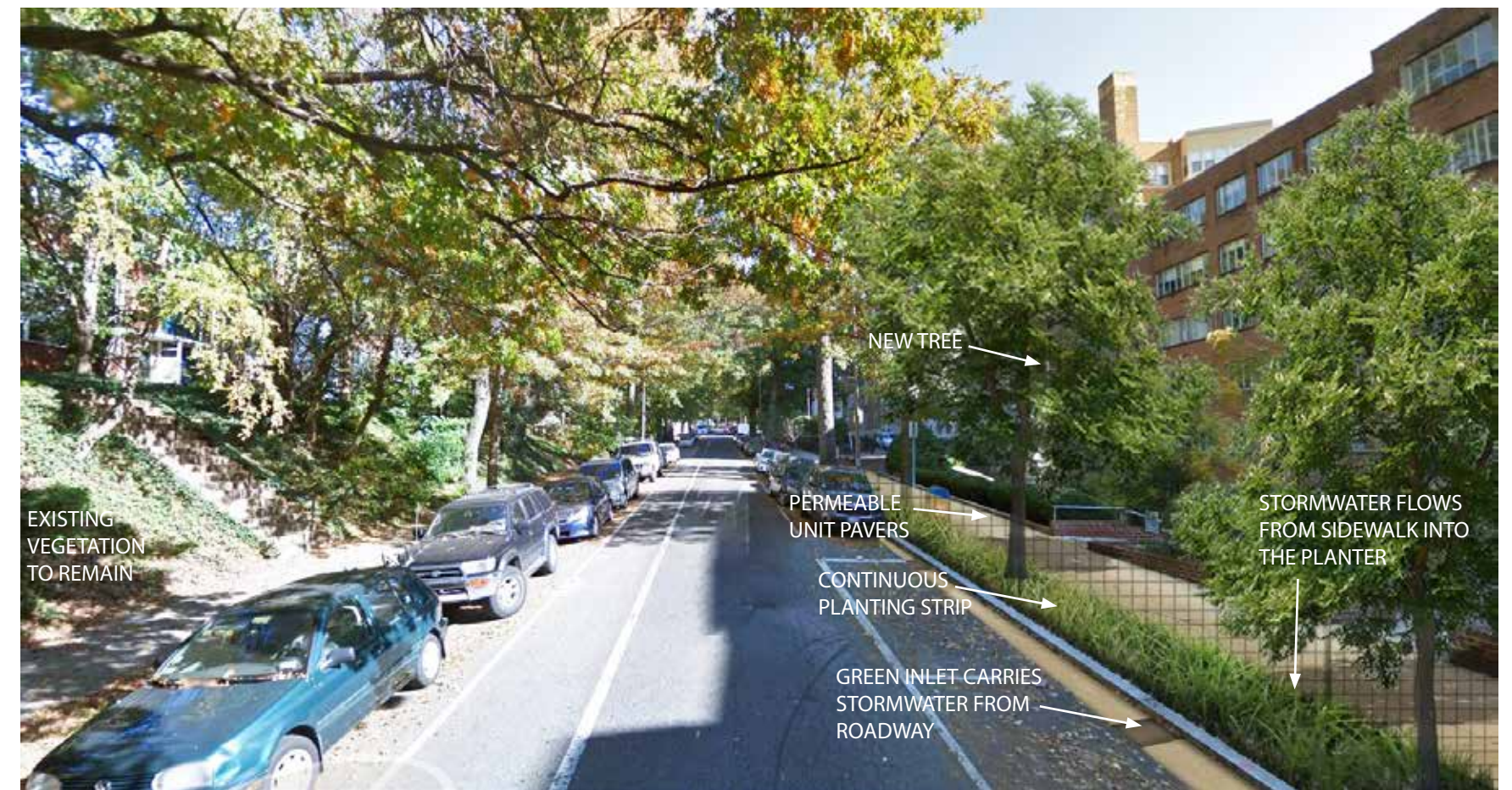
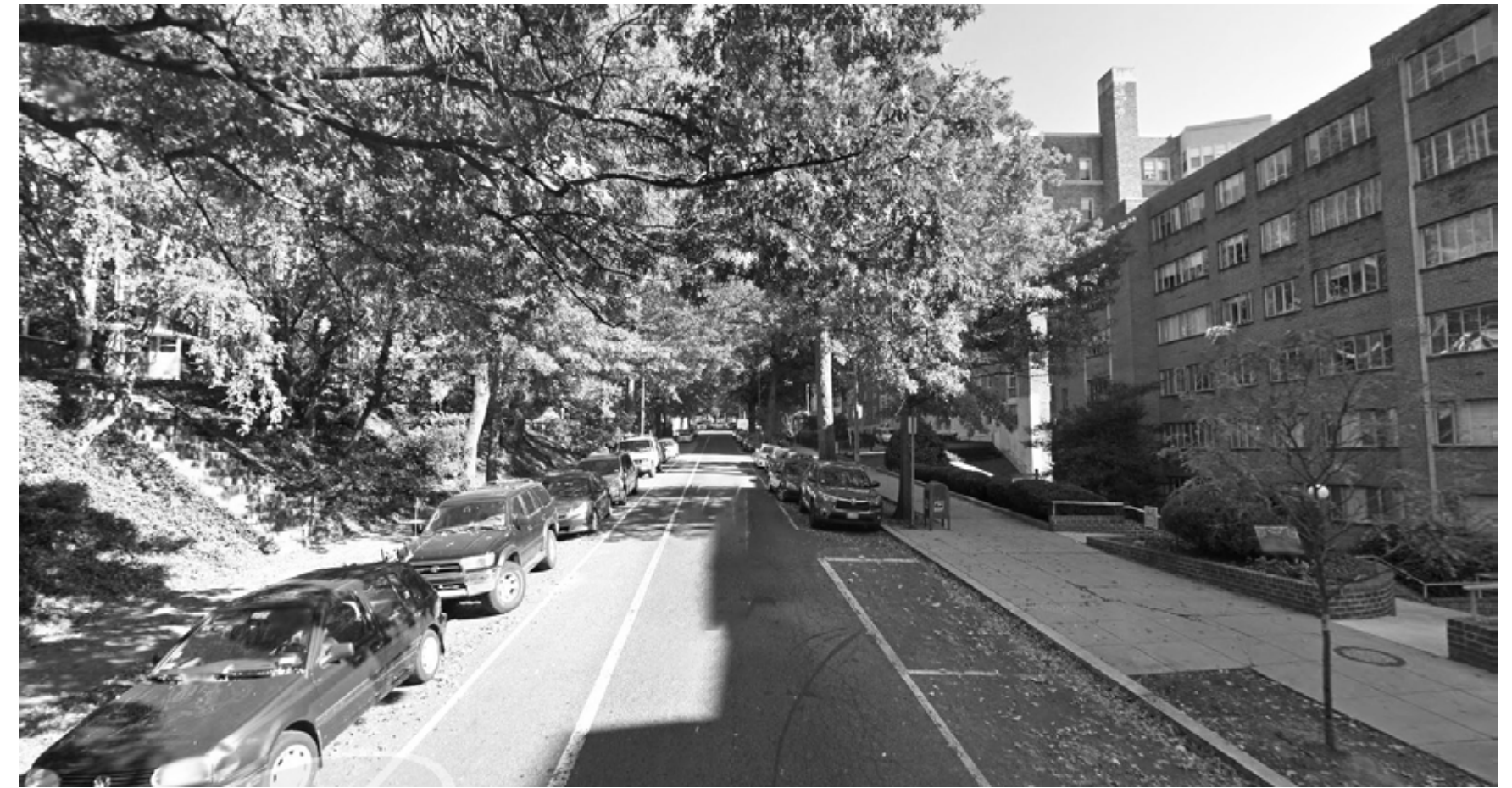
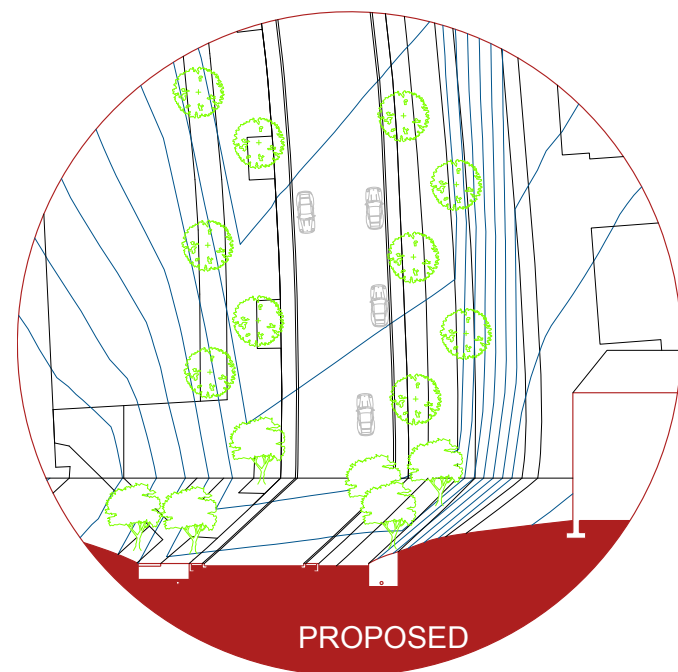
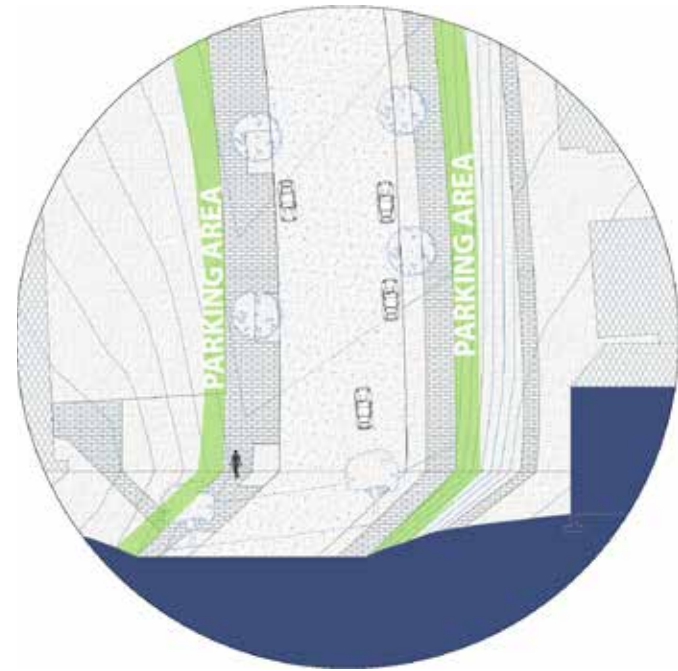
Kalorama Rd. NW







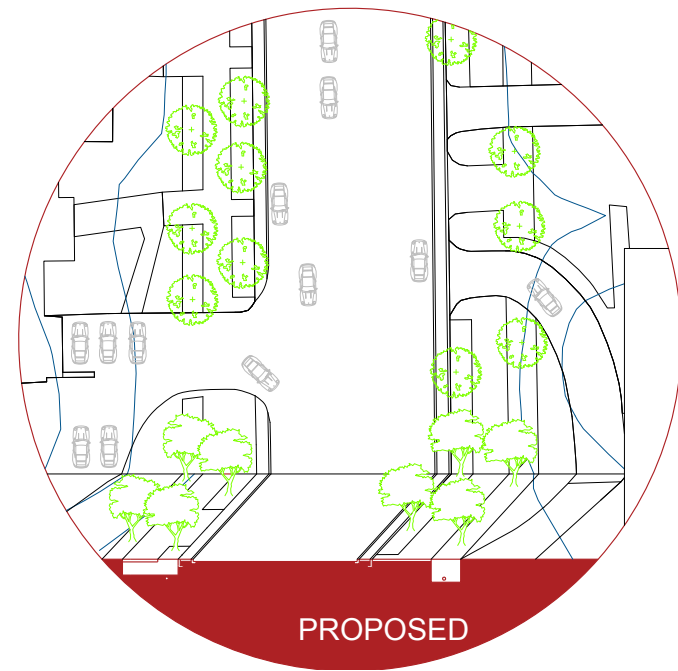
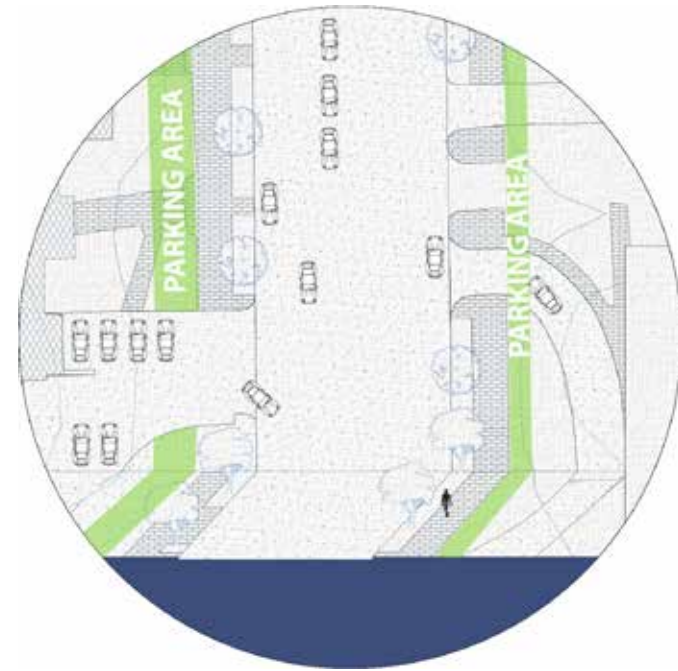
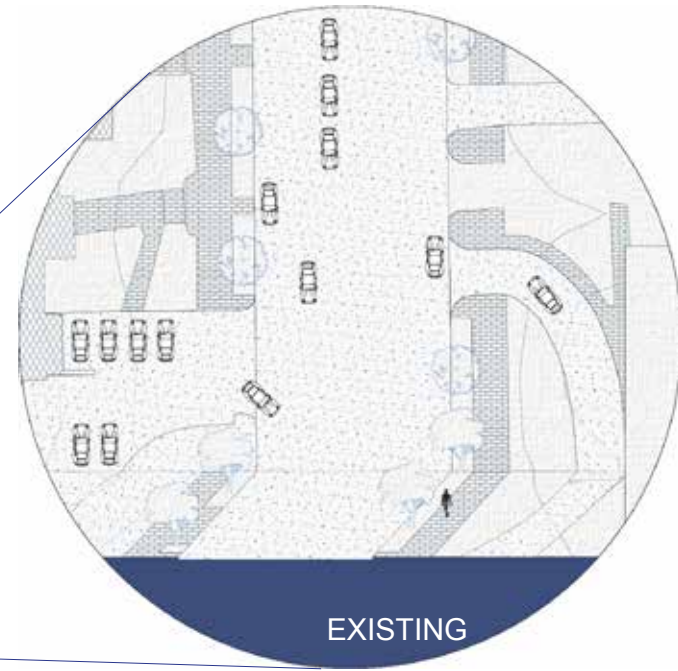
Harvard St. NW





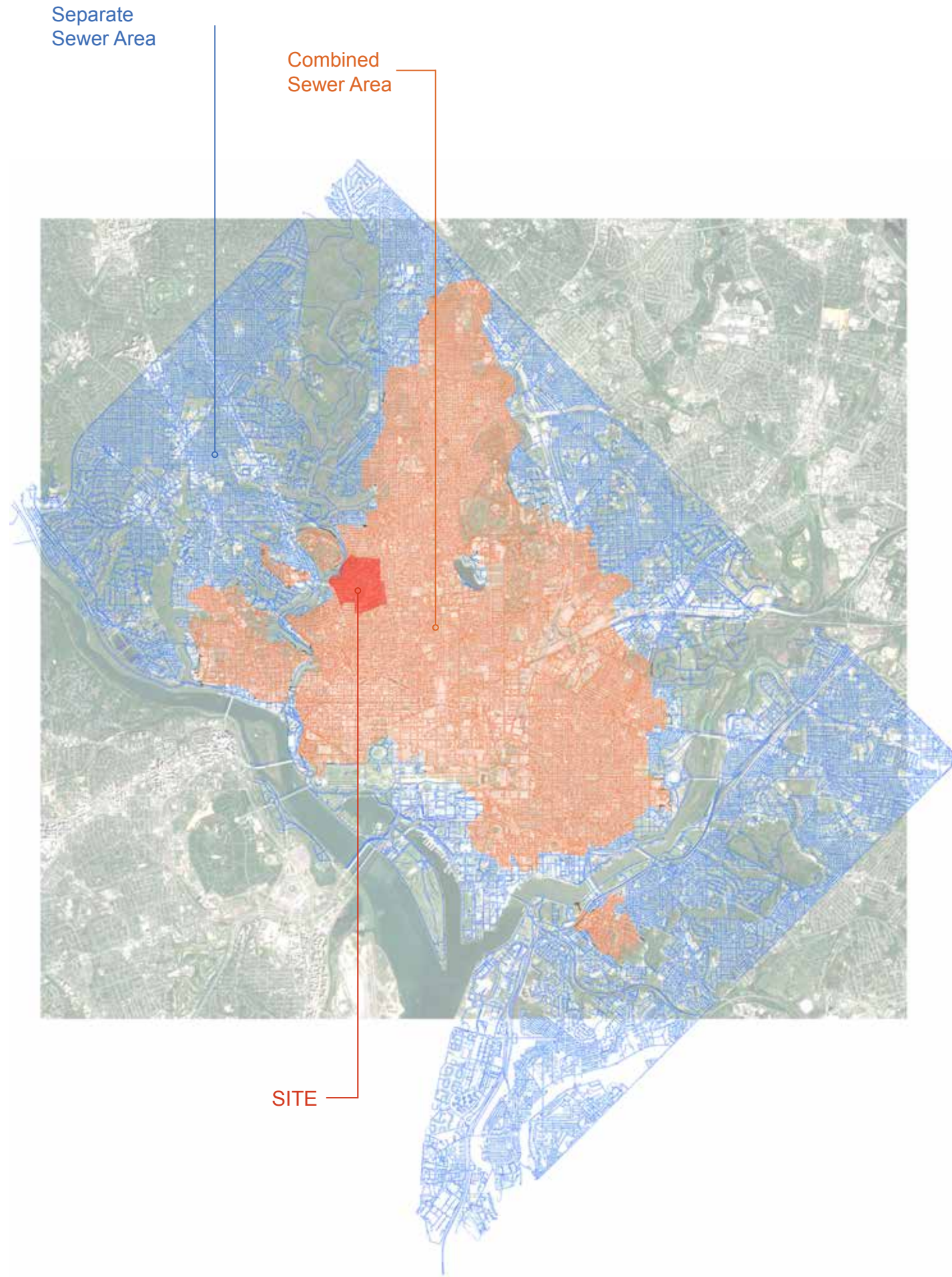


16th St. NW

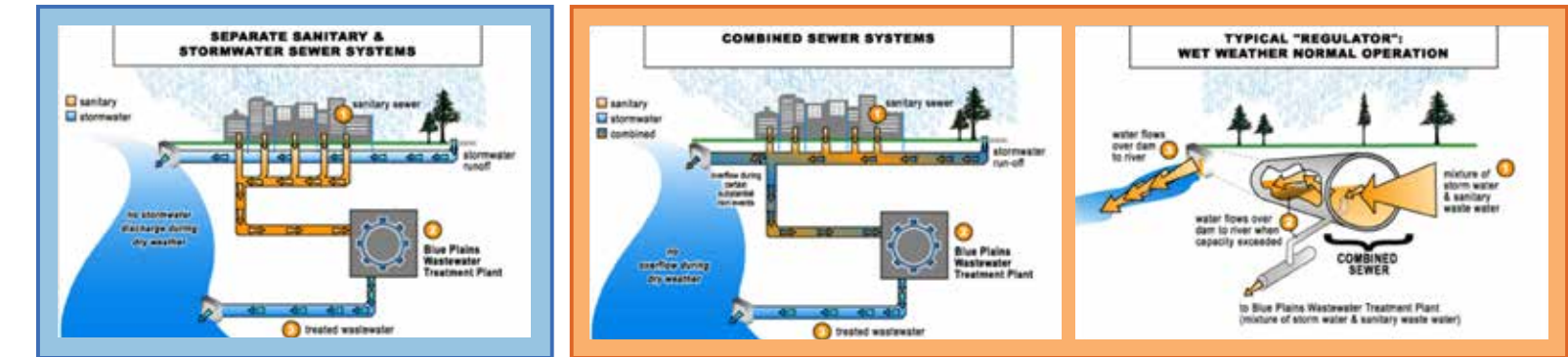




# Blue-green Infrastructure.



Impervious surface areas are major contributors to rainwater runoff entering the district's sewers and polluting waterways.



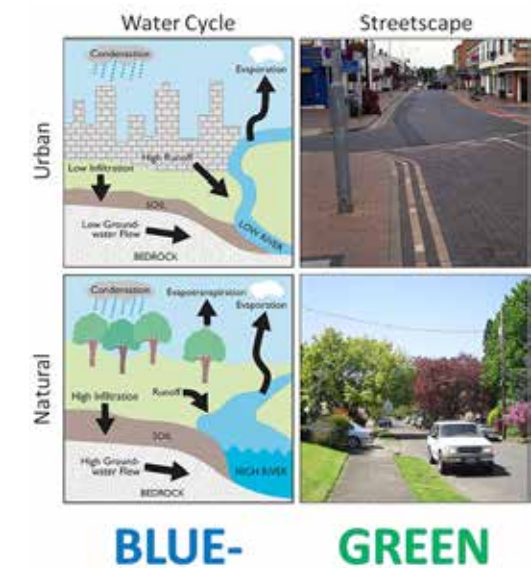
[https://www.dwater.com/wastewater\\_collection/css/](https://www.dwater.com/wastewater_collection/css/)

*“The district is striving to be the healthiest, greenest and most livable city in the nation and has established the Sustainable DC Plan to achieve greening goals. The District’s public space is a valuable asset that makes up approximately 26% of the city’s land area. By working together with residents and property owners, we intend to install green infrastructure to support the Sustainable DC plan.”*

Terry Bellamy - DDOT Director. 2014.



Stormwater planter, from the Green Streets Design Manual <http://www.phillywatersheds.org/>



**BLUE- GREEN**

<http://www.bluegreencities.ac.uk/>



## Adams Morgan: The Parkway.

The selected streets were assessed based on characteristics as a means of investigating and better understanding the replicability of this study in other parts of the city that share similar physical qualities:

## Kalorama Road

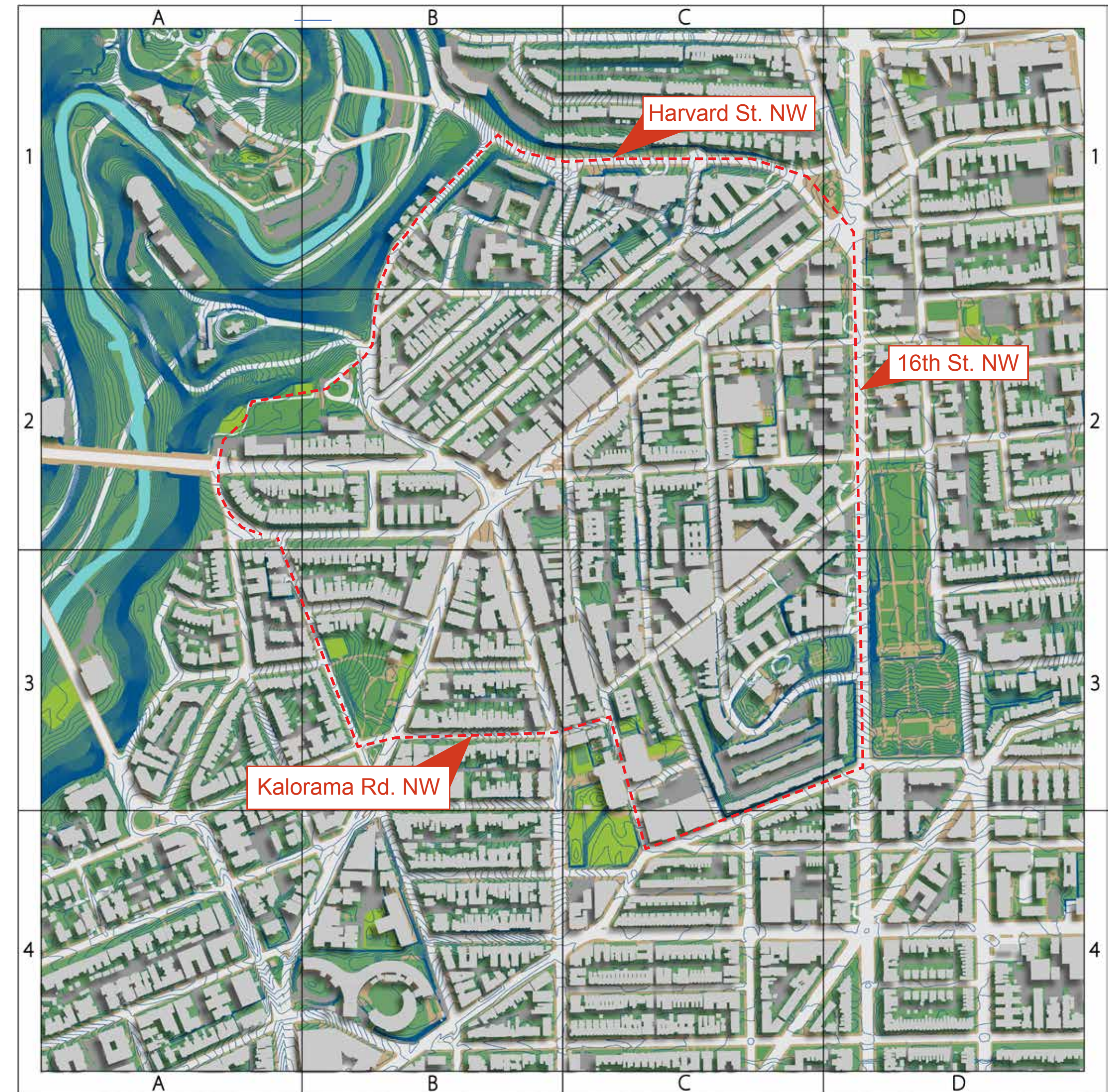
Residential street. Row houses on both sides;  
Built structures reflect original record of lot divisions;  
Approximately 70% of parking area is landscaped by owners.

## 16th Street

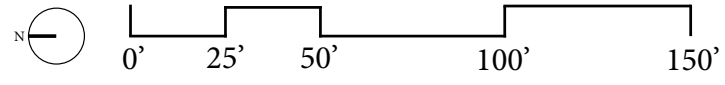
Predominantly institutional and high-density residential;  
Large front setbacks from the street;  
Parking areas interrupted by driveways and fences.

## Harvard Street

Residential street. Mix of high- and low-density on each side;  
Extensive parking areas due to steep topography changes;  
Very little parking area landscaped by owner.







**8.1//** Kalorama Street - Existing conditions



North Elevation

Plan

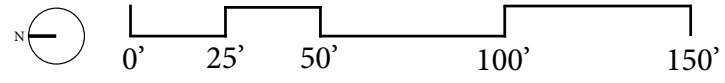
South Elevation

*Before*



**View 1A** Sidewalk Perspective  
(See plan for reference)





# Kalorama Street - Proposed improvements



**Individual Design Strategy:**

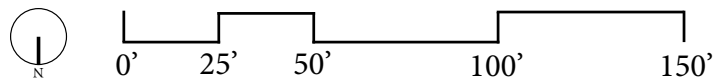
Kalorama Road is one of the streets in Adams Morgan that it is better suited for individual design of public spaces. Kalorama Road has a historical background, is easily accessible by public transportation, and is dominated by condominiums, row houses and single-family homes. Since this area is well connected, it promotes walking, which greatly supports the goal of enhanced connectivity. The recommendation for this street is to create a path to nearby parks while at the same time integrating into the design the unique characteristics of its structure.

After



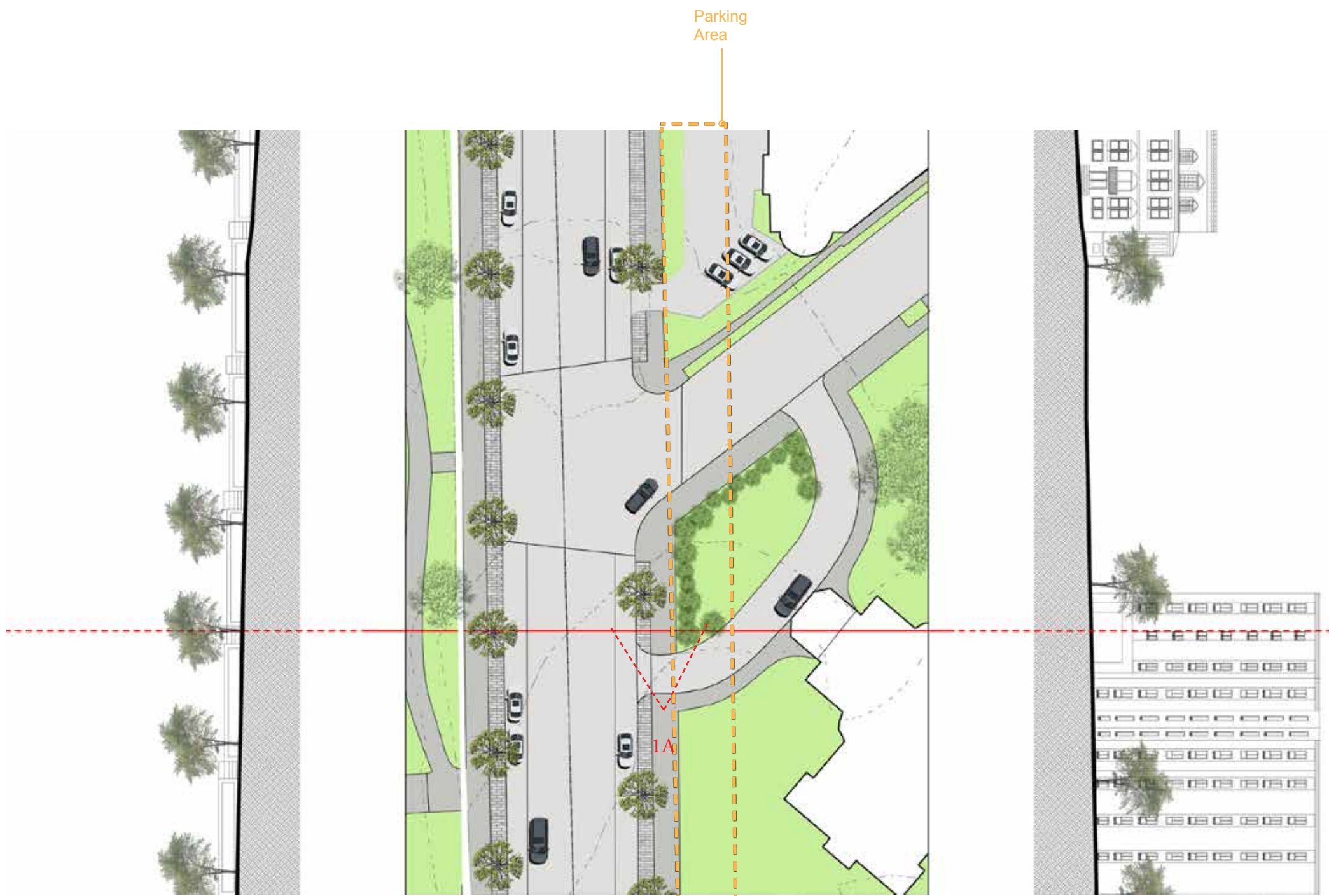
Permeable Pavement in Pedestrian Crossing  
 Street tree  
 Street tree  
 Pervious Concrete  
 View A  
 Sidewalk Perspective (See plan for reference)





8.2//

16th Street - Existing conditions



North Elevation

Plan

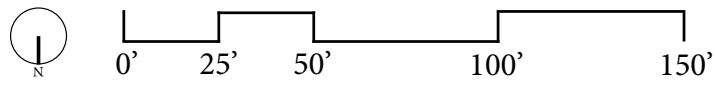
South Elevation



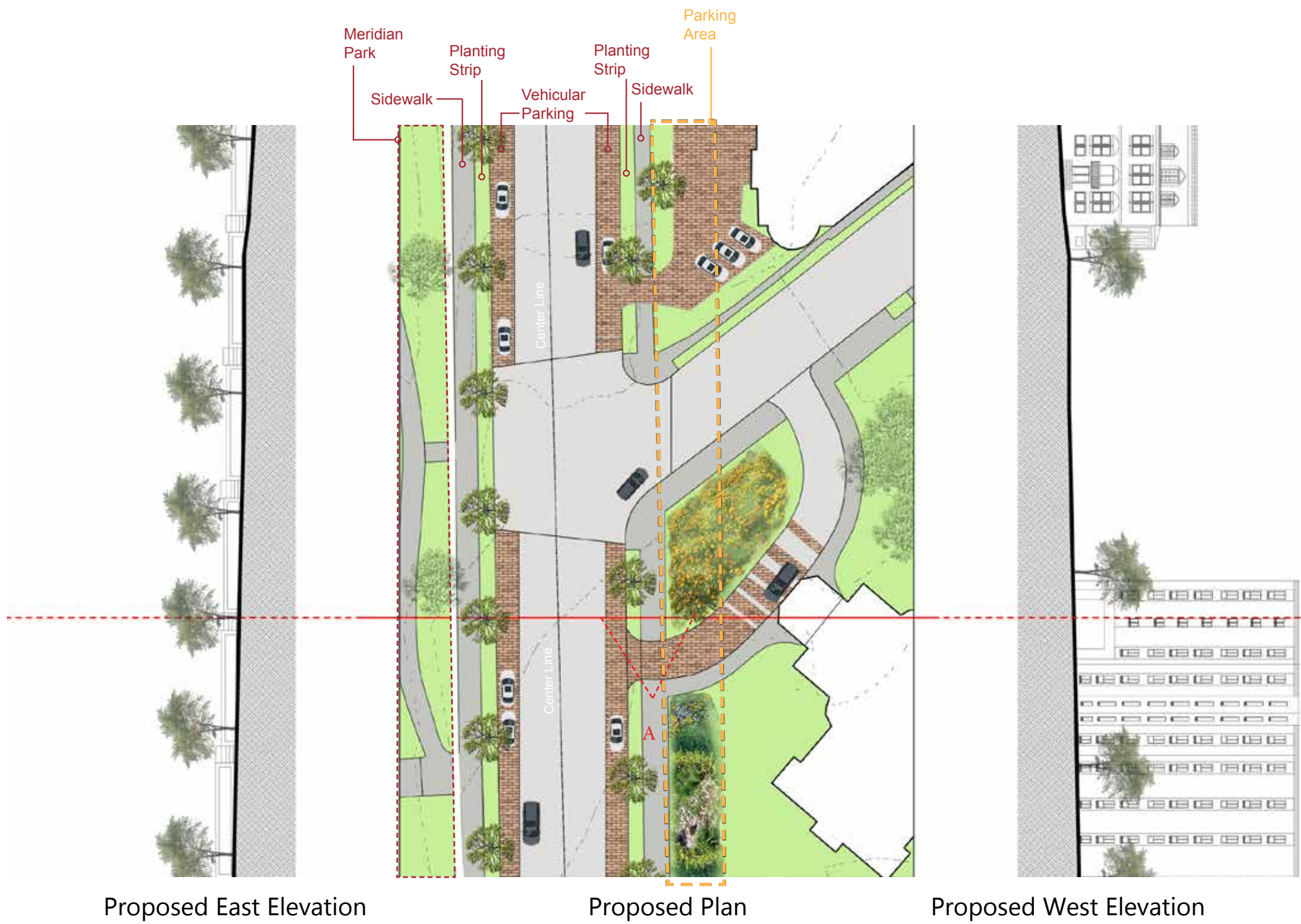
Before

View 1A Sidewalk Perspective  
(See plan for reference)





# 16th Street - Proposed improvements



### Unified Design Strategy:

16th Street has a number of features, including its close proximity to Meridian Park, one of the largest in the area. In addition, 16th Street creates a natural path on the east side of Adams Morgan and is a vibrant street that houses numerous businesses, attracting many pedestrians every day. The proposed unified design aims at extending the feeling of the park to the street, and providing owners and occupants a space to contribute to the streetscape that would eventually increase foot traffic.

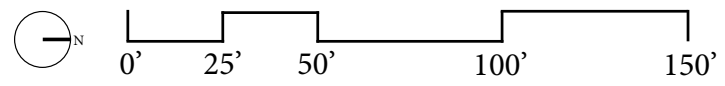
After



View A  
 Sidewalk Perspective  
 (See plan for reference)

- Permeable Pavement in Pedestrian Crossing
- Permeable Pavement in Vehicular Parking Areas
- Street tree
- Permeable Pavement in Driveway
- Street tree
- Bioretention in Open Area collecting water from driveway
- Bioswale





8.3//

# Harvard Street - Existing conditions



North Elevation

Plan

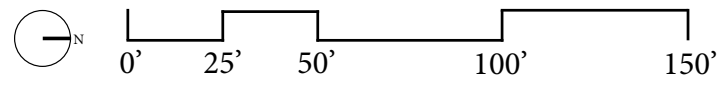
South Elevation

*Before*



View 1A Sidewalk Perspective  
(See plan for reference)





# Harvard Street - Proposed improvements



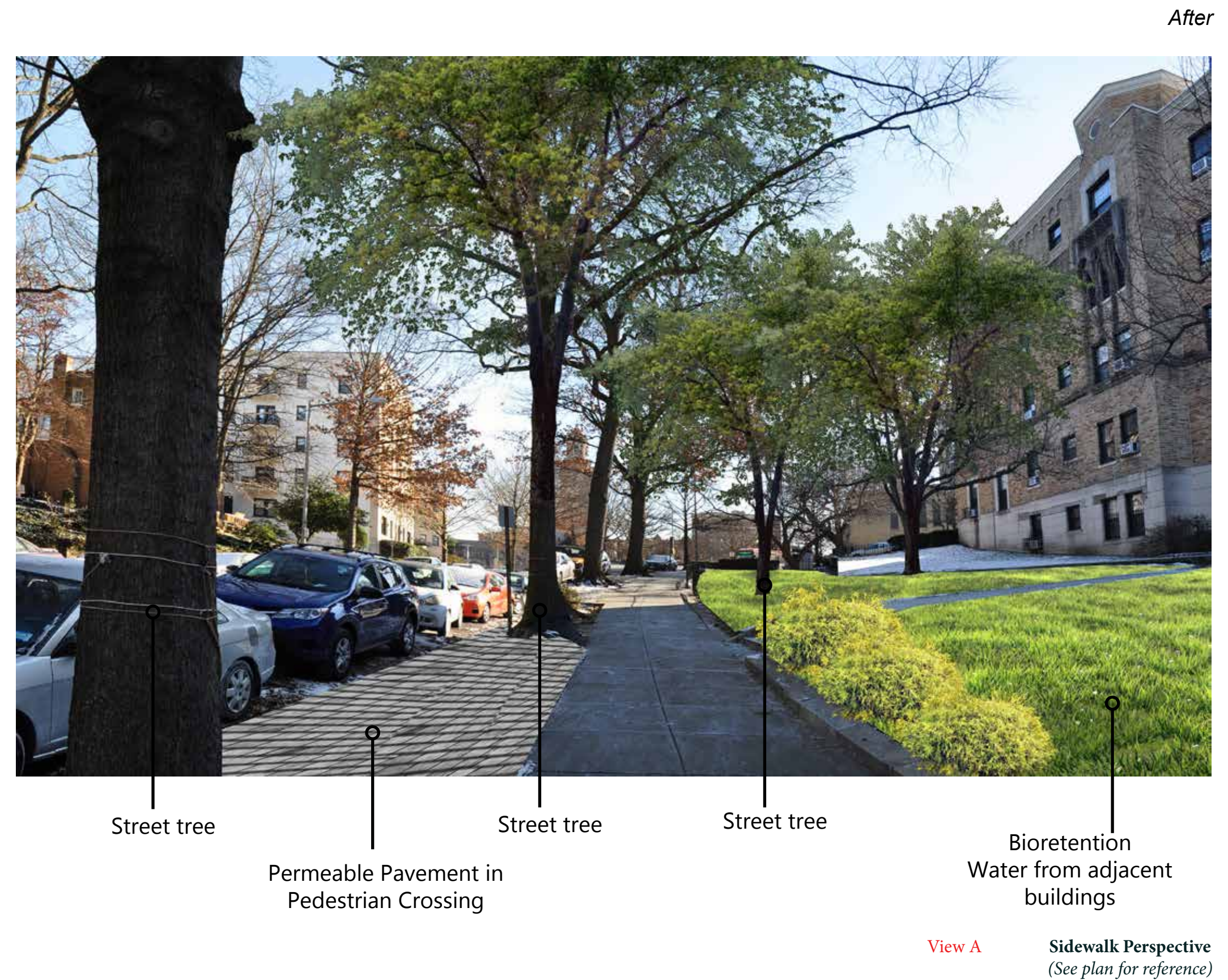
Proposed South Elevation

Proposed Plan

Proposed North Elevation

**Individual with unifying elements:**

Harvard Street is one of the most residential areas in Adams Morgan. The importance of Harvard Street is the potential to serve as a connecting area between Rabaut Park and Smithsonian National Zoological Park. The challenge with this street is to ensure that owners and occupants retain some of the uniqueness of their constructions. The proposal here is to provide a menu of options that maintains some of the individual elements, while at the same time providing for a common overarching scheme.



After

Street tree

Permeable Pavement in Pedestrian Crossing

Street tree

Street tree

Bioretention Water from adjacent buildings

View A

Sidewalk Perspective (See plan for reference)



## Menu of options

The semi-public nature of these areas is due partly to the fact that before Congress passed the Parking Act of 1870, these areas would have been maintained by and for the city. The idea of re-purposing the parking areas to create a more cohesive streetscape is only possible by collectively designing these spaces.

This collaboration requires active participation of the public and private sectors, with particular focus on:

**Decision-making processes:** Delineating the various responsibilities with regards to the parking areas is a key priority. Although current regulations impose numerous restrictions, they allow for some flexibility on the use of the space. As a neighborhood, this flexibility presents an opportunity to enhance connectivity of these public spaces by presenting owners and occupants with a menu of options. The concept of connectivity, in this project, focuses on natural elements and builds upon the existing designated park areas. By choosing from a menu of options, the neighborhoods benefit from individually within the systems while also building on the vision of the system as a whole. This process requires the heavy involvement of community organizations, which are one of these neighborhoods' strengths. The recommendation in moving forward would focus heavily on the involvement of community organizations and local government.

**Planning and design:** For purposes of presenting the key concepts, the project focuses on three types of design—individual, unified, and a combination thereof. To better illustrate these concepts, each of the designs is presented in the context of a particular street within the project area.

The menu of options that would be offered to owners and occupants would highlight the design recommendations, which have been built on the vision of the neighborhood as whole and the potential of each individual street.

**Sustainable design elements:** Selection of materials is one of the most important parts of building blue-green infrastructure, and includes a focus on recyclable, renewable, non-toxic materials. In addition, by integrating water, the design of public spaces has the potential to address issues related to water management. For example, it would be important to continue exploring the potential of porous paving and bio retention systems in an urban context.

## Types of Permeable Pavement



Permeable Unit Pavers



Pervious Concrete



Porous Asphalt



Porous Rubber

## Types of Bioretention



Bioretention Planter Adjacent to Roadway



Curb Extension



Bioretention in Open Area



Bioswale



As a city, Washington, DC is unique in that it has no front yard setbacks. The spaces that are considered “front yards” are in reality public spaces that, according to city regulations, are under the immediate care and keeping of the owners or occupants of the premises adjacent to the public parking.

This project acknowledges the limitations of public partnerships for urban design, and focuses instead on formulating recommendations and alternatives for developing a sustainable streetscape. The three proposed designs—individual, unified, and individual with unifying elements—have been presented and build upon existing opportunities identified on each street. These designs, together with the potential of using blue-green infrastructure, represent a unique prospect to link streets to the park network while promoting sustainability and resilience. The potential of parking areas to function as conveyors of this vision should not be underestimated, not only in terms of their potential for urban designed but as a well-defined alternative to enhance connectivity and reduce park fragmentation in Adams Morgan.





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## Images

Image Citations on the images where they occur.

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