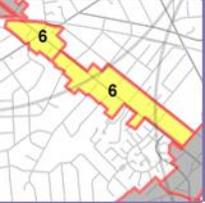


7. Character & Design



West Broad Street Connecting Falls Church

Importance of Urban Design

Urban design describes the look and feel of public spaces. This includes many facets of the built environment, including:

1. **Buildings** The shape, size, spacing, and materials of buildings;
2. **Streetscape** The dimensions of streets and sidewalks and the design and placement of street furniture; and
3. **Open Space** The landscaping of parks and plazas.

The urban design of an area helps to define its character. Good urban design provides smooth transitions between different land uses, creates places that are safe and inviting, and reinforces the personality of an area.

This chapter describes urban design preferences for the West Broad Street area, including buildings, streetscape, and open space.

Building Design

In December 2001, the City adopted the “The “Falls Church Design Guidelines”. The adopted design guidelines differentiate between the City’s Downtown area and the Washington and Broad Street corridors.

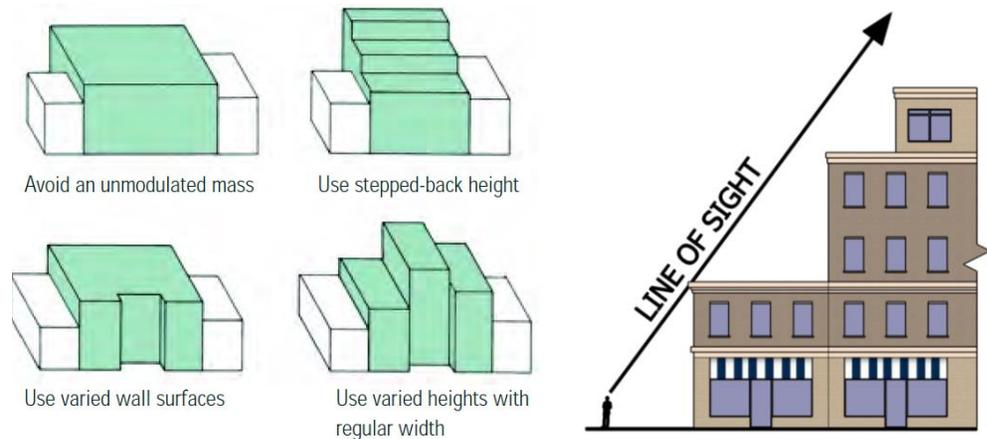
The Design Guidelines note that, “The overall design and development pattern along these corridors is not very cohesive in its components, placement or scale” (p24). The guidelines assert that, “Corridor developments should strive to create the appearance of a small to mid-scale urban streetfront, as opposed to traditional suburban strip development or more dense downtown development, without creating a massive building wall” (pp25-26).

The Design Guidelines identify several architectural techniques that should be incorporated into new development. Several techniques are described below for reference.

As noted in the Land Use chapter (4-14), the Urban Land Institute suggests an FAR of 2.5 for “suburban business districts” Within the context of the City, projects with a minimum FAR of 2.0, minimum parcel size of 1.5 acres, and minimum building height of 5 stories have been successful at providing an urban feel, with updated streetscape and underground automobile parking.

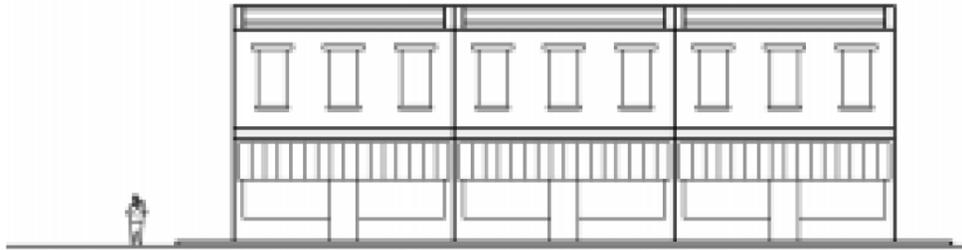
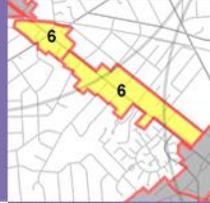
Unique Character of the Area

This area of the City should highlight traditional design aspects. Use of the below-mentioned techniques is central to this plan’s key concept of using respectful building design to transition to surrounding residential neighborhoods and existing buildings in the area (see Concept Chapter). Building design should be compatible with nearby residential or historic properties.



Left: Examples of massing techniques from the Commercial and Office Buildings chapter of the Falls Church Design Guidelines.

Right: The use of stepbacks in building design can give the impression of a lower-scale building while still allowing for higher density.



Do This

Above: An illustration of human-scale massing and design from the 2001 Falls Church Design Guidelines.



Above: An example of a building that does not have a pedestrian-oriented design (Left) and Pearson Square showing how the façade of a large building can be designed to interact positively with the streetscape and character of the City (Right).

Below: The Spectrum Condominiums (Left) and The Byron (Right) include masonry in their design to help mimic the look and texture of surrounding buildings.



Step-backs

Building step-backs can allow for taller buildings while also providing smooth transitions to lower height adjacent buildings and reducing the perceived “canyon” effect of taller buildings abutting a sidewalk.

Strategy: Incorporate step-backs into new building to relate the heights of new buildings to the heights of surrounding residential properties.

Horizontal Design and Façade Organization

Horizontal design techniques can help relate larger buildings to smaller buildings and promote a sense of human-scale. Façade and material choices can give the look of several distinct, narrower buildings.

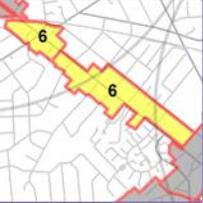
Strategy: Use horizontal design and façade organization to give larger buildings the look of several smaller buildings.

Materials and Decorative Elements

Use of consistent materials throughout a district provides a cohesive look while decorative elements provide visual interest. Note that some variation in color and/or style should be incorporated to avoid developing a monotonous look.

Strategy: Building façades should be brick, stone, and other natural materials to mimic the look and texture of surrounding buildings. Use these materials in a variety of colors to avoid monotony.

Strategy: Use decorative features such as unique window facades, cornices, and other attractive elements that add to the traditional feel of the area.



West Broad Street

Connecting Falls Church

Streetscape

The term streetscape refers to the look and feel of sidewalks and streets – the areas between buildings. Streetscape guidelines typically cover the following design elements:

- **Street Furniture** such as benches, lights, and signs
- **Spacing** relative spacing of streetscape elements
- **Travel Widths** width of pedestrian space, travel lanes, amenity spaces
- **Materials** for use in sidewalks, streets, and crosswalks

The various streets in the West Broad Street Area serve different purposes and therefore have different design needs. Consequently, this Plan provides different design guidelines for the different kinds of streets. This Plan provides guidance for the following three kinds of streets:

- **West Broad Street** is the major thoroughfare in the area and is identified a Commercial Great Street in the City’s Comprehensive Plan;
- **Park Avenue** runs parallel to West Broad Street and serves many of the City’s municipal buildings. Consequently, Park Avenue is identified as a Civic Great Street in the City’s Comprehensive Plan; and
- **Other Streets** in the POA provide connections between West Broad Street and Park Avenue and to surrounding neighborhoods.

Great Street

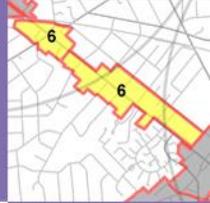
Beginning in 2007, the American Planning Association (APA) began recognizing and awarding communities for development

of “Great Streets”. The APA identifies the following characteristics of great streets:

- Provides orientation to its users, and connects well to the larger pattern of ways.
- Balances the competing needs of the street – driving, transit, walking, cycling, parking, drop-offs, etc.
- Fits the topography and capitalizes on natural features.
- Is lined with a variety of interesting activities and uses that create a varied streetscape.
- Has urban design or architectural features that are exemplary in design.
- Relates well to its bordering uses – allows for continuous activity, doesn’t displace pedestrians to provide access to bordering uses.
- Encourages human contact and social activities.

There are many examples of Great Streets throughout the country. The following examples come from communities that exhibit similarities with the City of Falls Church and therefore can serve as guides for development of Great Streets in the City.

West Broad Street Planning Opportunity Area 6



Above: The varied character of West Beverley Street from the commercial core (Top) through adjacent residential neighborhoods (Bottom).

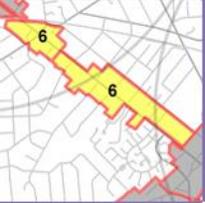
Below: A new City Hall (Left) and Courthouse (Middle) were built in the commercial core in the early-to-mid 1990's. An anonymous donation in 2002 was made to maintain hanging flower baskets on City streetlamps (Right).



West Beverley Street, Staunton, Virginia

West Beverley Street in Staunton, VA was named a Great Street by the American Planning Association (APA) in 2013. The City of Staunton, located in western Virginia, is 20 square miles in size with a population of just under 24,000. West Beverley Street runs east-west through the central commercial core and adjacent neighborhoods, all of which contain an abundance of historic structures with Victorian architecture. The street is both commercial and residential in character at different points along the nine block stretch designated as a Great Street, which has similarities to the combined character along Park Avenue in the City of Falls Church.

The Staunton City government has been working with local organizations for over thirty years toward the revitalization of West Beverley Street. In 1981 the City developed its Comprehensive Plan 2000, which outlined public improvement projects and historic preservation policies for the downtown area, including West Beverley Street. In the early-to-mid 1990's the City allocated \$3.4 million for a new city hall and courts complex located along West Beverley Street and also created the Staunton Downtown Development Association to maintain the economic and aesthetic integrity of West Beverley Street. Ordinances were created to maintain the character of the downtown area, the "Historic District Ordinance and Design Guidelines" and the "Corridor Overlay Ordinance and Guidelines". Local organizations, including the Historic Staunton Foundation, and individuals have helped to finance over \$60 million toward the rehabilitation of historic structures. Over 250 buildings have been rehabilitated under the public/private façade improvement program. In 2002, an anonymous donation of \$9,000 was given to the City for the maintenance of hanging flower baskets in the streetscape.



West Broad Street Connecting Falls Church

King Street, Charleston, South Carolina

King Street is the spine of the central commercial corridor that runs through the heart of downtown Charleston, SC and was named a Great Street by the APA in 2014. King Street in Charleston, SC is similar to West Broad Street in Falls Church as they both are central commercial corridors with a rich history.

The maintenance and economic revitalization of downtown Charleston, SC has been a coordinated effort between the City and the business community. In 1931, Charleston, SC adopted an historic district zoning ordinance. The maintenance of the historic character within the Old and Historic District has been an ongoing process. The City adopted a Historic Preservation Plan in 1974 and later updated it in 2009. In 1986 federal grants financed the construction of the Charleston Place Hotel and Shops in 1986. The grants included a \$10 million Urban Development Action Grant and a \$4 million grant from the Economic Development Administration. Beginning in 2000, Charleston invested \$20.5 million in streetscape projects, including undergrounding overhead utilities, special paving for sidewalks, and stormwater system improvements.

The City government works with local businesses to maintain the appearance of King Street. General upkeep of the streetscape is provided by an association of private businesses along King Street. In addition, the City of Charleston created the Livability Department, which works to monitor the maintenance of the streetscape by enforcing minimum standards such as debris removal, lawn maintenance, maintenance of vacant structures, graffiti removal, and garbage can regulations. In addition to ongoing maintenance of the streetscape, the City has been working with local businesses and citizens to update the Tourism Management Plan.



Upper King, the Design District



Middle King, the Fashion District



Lower King, the Antique District

West Broad Street Planning Opportunity Area 6

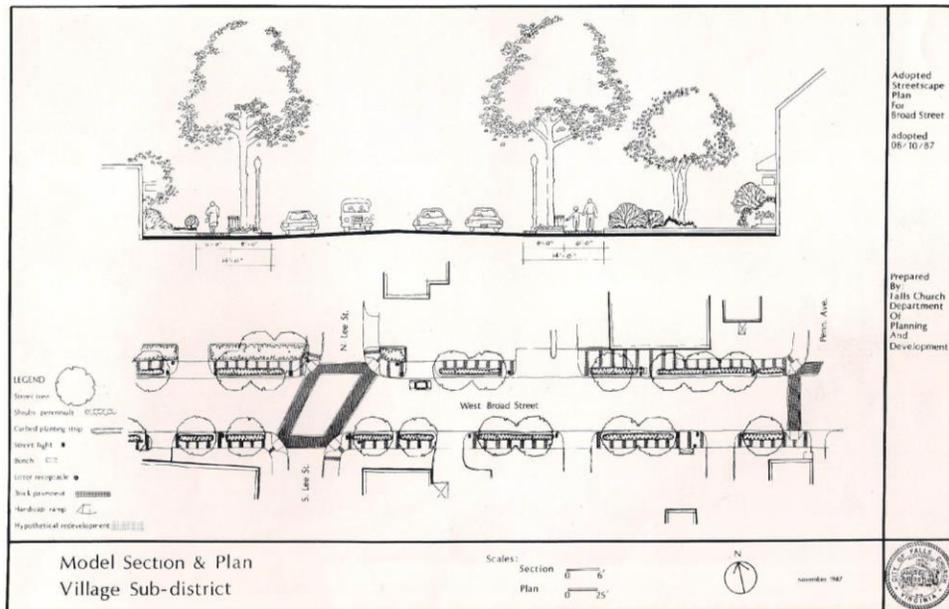


West Broad Street

Streetscape along West Broad Street is governed by the “Streetscape Plan for West Broad Street”, adopted on August 10, 1987. The Streetscape Plan includes design standards for street furniture, such as benches, bike racks and street lights; and materials, such as brick sidewalks and crosswalks.

The streetscape guidelines were adopted to respond to existing conditions, which the plan defines as, “A jumble of signs, poles, asphalt expanses, numerous curb cuts, stunted land-scaping and deteriorating sidewalks and facades leav[ing] the impression of confusion, neglect and, in some locations, decline...” which, “discourages pedestrian and business activity.”

Since adoption of the streetscape standards, sections of the street have been updated through public and private investment. In the early 1990’s, the City invested to construct portions of the streetscape along West Broad Street. Additionally, some portions of the streetscape have been improved by private investment concurrent with the more recent redevelopment projects. Gaps and partial implementation of the streetscape standards exist along parts of the corridor. Specifically, stretches along the southern edge of West Broad Street, the northern edge of West Broad Street near St. James Church and School, and small stretches along the northern edge of West Broad Street between redevelopment projects have not yet been improved.



Above: Illustration and plan view of the Village Sub-district from the West Broad Street Streetscape Plan, 1987.

West Broad Street

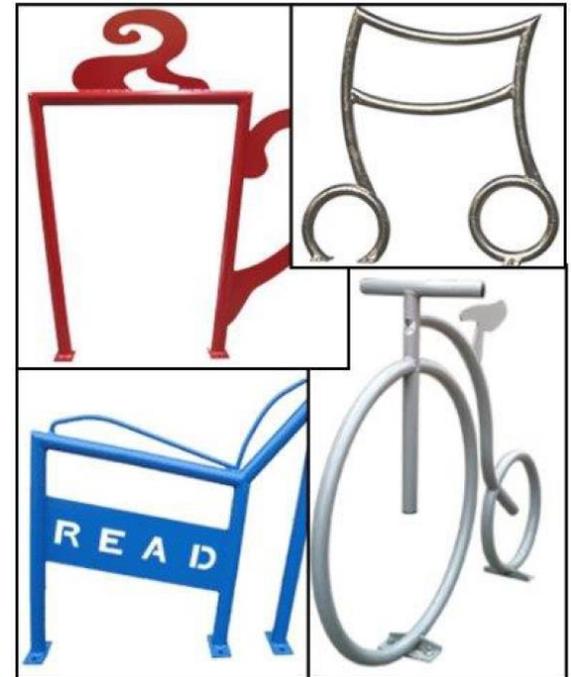
Connecting Falls Church

Updates to the Standards

The Streetscape Plan is approximately 30 years old. Since the Plan's adoption in 1987, several policy changes have affected the design of specific streetscape elements. Additionally, changes in best practices suggest changes to other elements. Consequently, the following streetscape elements may differ from the 1987 Streetscape Plan:

- **Sidewalk Width** In 2013 the City updated the Zoning Ordinance to require 20 foot setbacks along West Broad Street;
- **Bus Stops and Bus Shelters** In 2013 the City adopted a Bus Stop and Bus Shelter Master Plan to guide the design and placement of bus stops and bus shelters;
- **Bike Racks** In 2014 the City adopted a Bicycle Master Plan that include guidelines for design and placement of bike racks;
- **Tree Planters** As originally designed, the tree planters along West Broad Street include a 12 inch buffer to the curb line and are so long as to inhibit access for transit riders and fire protection. Changes should be made to the planters as necessary to maximize available sidewalk space and access while preserving soil volume and root protection to allow for healthy tree growth.
- **Street Lights** Since adoption of the Streetscape Plan, new light technologies, such as LED lighting, have become available. New light technologies should be used to the extent that it can provide similar or better quality light at similar or lower cost.

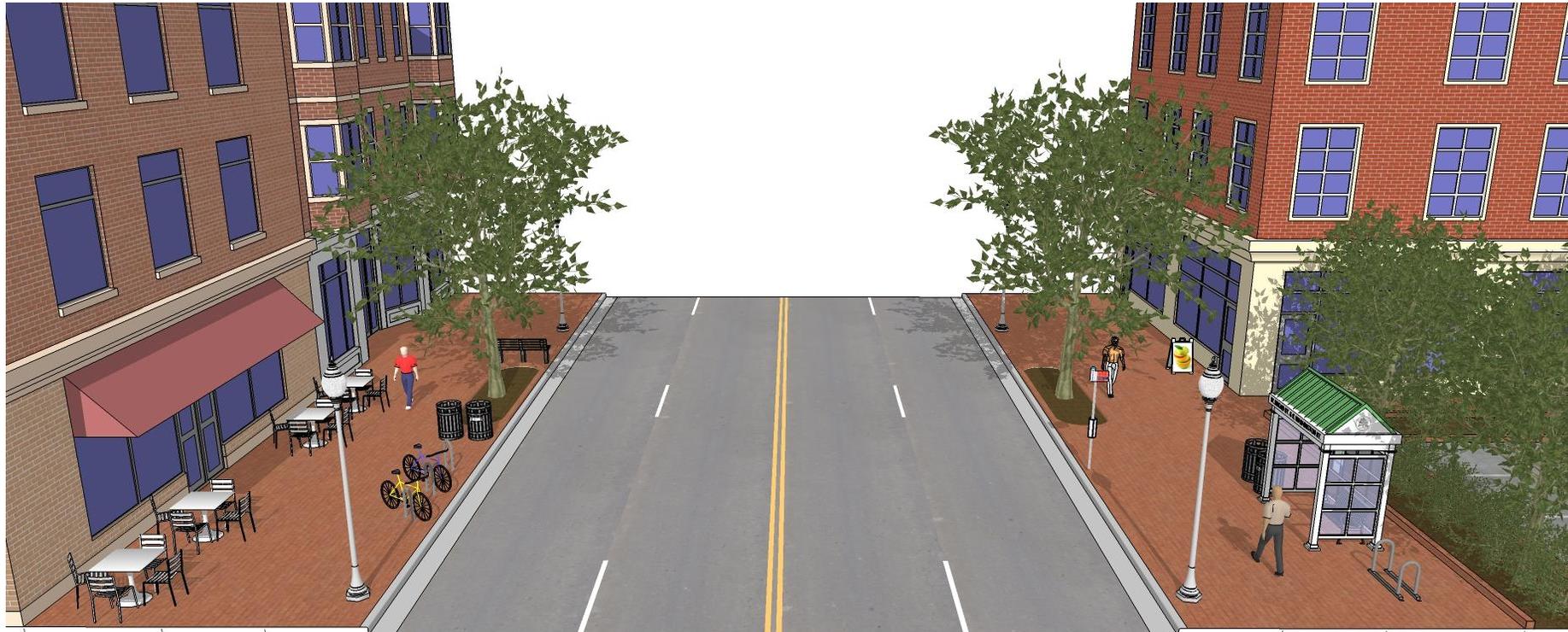
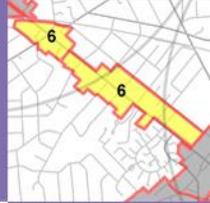
Right: Examples of custom bike racks manufactured by Dero from the *City of Falls Church Bicycle Master Plan: Connecting Communities*. Specially designed bike racks would add visual interest and improve the character of the area in addition to providing bicycle parking.

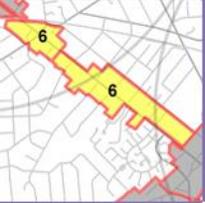


Below: An illustration of a new bus shelter at the intersection of West Broad Street and Pennsylvania Avenue based on the designs presented in the *Bus Stop and Bus Shelter Master Plan For City of Falls Church, VA*.



West Broad Street Planning Opportunity Area 6





West Broad Street

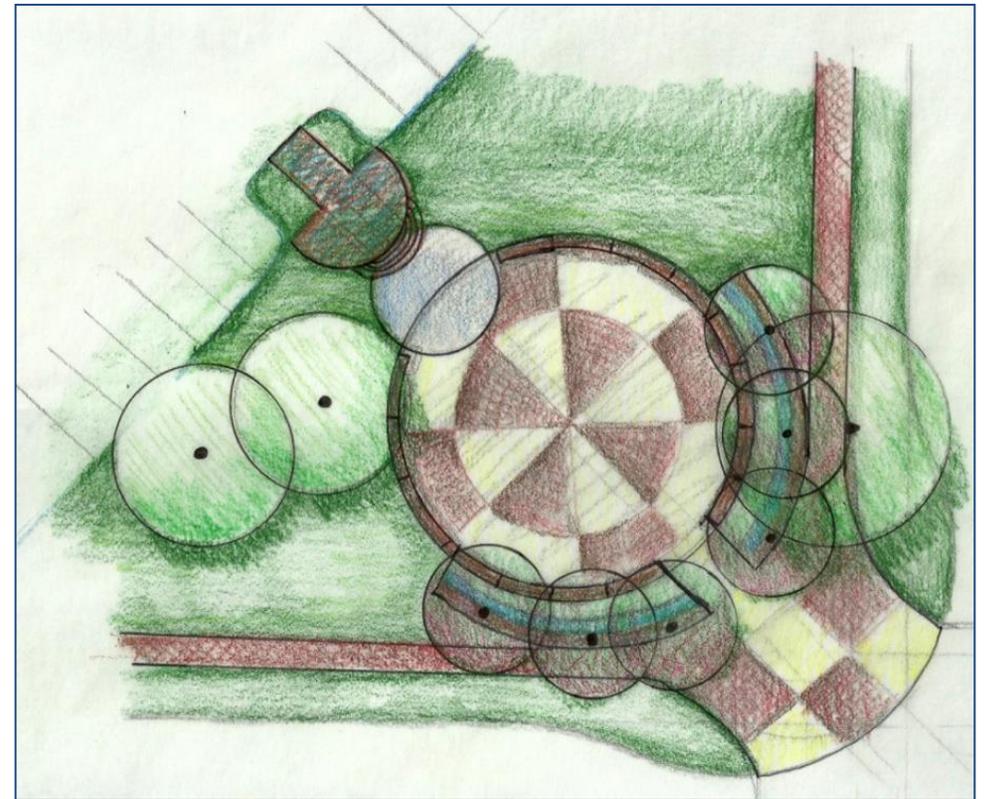
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Park Avenue

The City's Comprehensive Plan identifies Park Avenue as a Civic Great Street. The street provides numerous cultural and civic connections. Specifically, Park Avenue serves as the connection between residential neighborhoods and the commercial district. It also provides access to the W&OD Trail, the historic State Theatre, and the City's municipal campus, including City Hall, the Library, the Community Center, and Cherry Hill Park.

The existing infrastructure varies greatly along Park Avenue. Sidewalk widths vary, some sidewalks have buffers between the walkway and the road, and other portions of Park Avenue do not have sidewalks. The sidewalk along the northern side of Park Avenue ends abruptly in two locations. Crosswalks exist at some intersection crossings and not at others. Utilities are above ground along the majority of Park Avenue, even in areas that have been redeveloped such as Spectrum Condominiums and the new Hilton Garden Inn.

In 2015, City of Falls Church staff prepared a concept plan for updating the streetscape along Park Avenue. The concept plan, *Park Avenue, A Civic Great Street*, included construction of a new plaza in front of City Hall, provision of seating along the corridor, installation of street trees, and reconstruction of intersection geometry. This concept plan is the starting point for streetscape standards along Park Avenue.

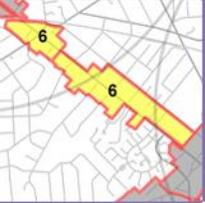


Above: The City Hall Plaza concept from *Park Avenue, A Civic Great Street* accommodates a multi-use space for residents, City employees, and visitors at the northwest corner of the Park Avenue and Little Falls Street intersection.

West Broad Street Planning Opportunity Area 6



Character & Design



West Broad Street

Connecting Falls Church

Other Streets

Whereas West Broad Street and Park Avenue are the Great Streets in this area, other streets serve a secondary role. These streets need to provide safe, comfortable access to West Broad Street and Park Avenue from surrounding areas and neighborhoods. Because of their secondary nature, these other streets are also appropriate places to provide site access for automobiles, such as driveways and garage entrances.

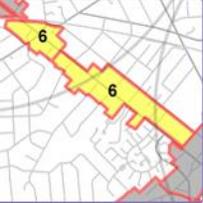
West Broad Street Planning Opportunity Area 6



5' Building Space 6' Ped. Space 4' Amenity Area 7' Parking 10' 6" Travel Lane 10' 6" Travel Lane 7' Parking 4' Amenity Area 6' Ped. Space 5' Building Space



Character & Design



West Broad Street

Connecting Falls Church

Open Space

Public spaces are important placemaking elements that help reduce the impact of density, provide a respite for pedestrians, provide places for recreation, and allow historic and cultural elements to be integrated into the fabric of the commercial corridor through design.

The boundary of the West Broad Street POA is limited to the commercial areas of the City and, therefore, excludes the larger format parks in the City. However, there are several such parks adjacent to the POA. This Plan focuses on increasing connectivity to existing large format parks and identifying opportunities to create smaller format spaces, such as pocket parks and plazas, within the POA.

Park Connections

Several large format parks abut the West Broad Street Area, including: Berman Park, Cherry Hill Park, Howard E. Herman Stream Valley Park, West End Park, and W&OD Park.

Strategy: Provide larger format, gateway style signs to make park entrances more prominent.

Berman Park

Berman Park measures 2.4 acres in size. The existing Park is segmented by numerous street crossings; however, the City's adopted Parks for People Plan calls for better connecting these segments. Once completed, these connections will provide off-street pedestrian and bicycle access between the West Broad Street Area and residential neighborhoods.

Cherry Hill Park

Cherry Hill measures 11.9 acres in size. The Park is home to a historic farm house and hosts numerous summer events, such as SunsetCinema, an outdoor movie event, and the Concerts in the Park series of live music events.

Howard E. Herman Stream Valley Park

Howard E. Herman Park measures 5.2 acres in size. The Park runs along Coe Branch and Regan Branch, which are part of the Tripps Run watershed. The Park provides pedestrian connections between the West Broad Street Area and neighborhoods to the south as well as to Thomas Jefferson Elementary School.

West End Park

West End Park measures 2.2 acres in size. Recently completed efforts in the Park include updated landscaping and walking paths, and installation of a skate feature. Additionally, a new entrance provides direct access to West Broad Street.



West Broad Street Planning Opportunity Area 6



Above: Concept images showing connections to the W&OD Trail with possible plazas as gateway features.

Below: Conceptual illustrations of possible gateway features at connections with the W&OD Trail. The recreated West Falls Church Train Station (Left) could serve as a rest area with concessions, a historic room, bike repair stations, an information kiosk, and a plaza. A simpler plaza illustration (Right) is centered on the intersection of Park Avenue and North West Street and would serve as a small respite for travelers along the W&OD Trail as well as a landmark feature at the western terminus of Park Avenue.



W&OD Park

The W&OD Park includes the popular W&OD Trail. The Park and Trail stretch for 45 miles across Northern Virginia, connecting Shirlington to Purcellville and points in-between. Within the City, the Park measures 16 acres.

The Park has two connection points to the West Broad Street Area. The first is at the intersections of Park Avenue, North West Street, and Grove Avenue. The second is by the West Falls Shopping Plaza, west and south of the intersection of West Broad Street and South West Street.

The connection at Park, West, and Grove serves multiple purposes. This piece of the park is the terminus of Park Avenue. It is also adjacent to the location of the original West Falls Church Train Station, constructed in the mid 1800's. Lastly, it provides a buffer between residential neighborhoods and the commercial areas of the City. The design of this area should accommodate the urban design needs of current residents and provide opportunities to tell the history of the railroad, which was instrumental to development of the City.

The conceptual design for this area should be finalized through the ongoing public engagement process for the W&OD Park Master Plan. Design should include consideration of both smaller scale park features and larger scale park features.

Smaller scale features would include a small plaza/seating area at the end of Park Avenue (see images to left). This could leave the rest of the area in a natural/landscaped state.

Larger scale features would include a recreation of the historic train station. This recreation could provide space for a historic room or City museum and a welcome center. If larger scale features are used, potential impacts on adjacent neighborhoods should be clearly addressed.

The connection near the West Falls Shopping Plaza provides limited access to the Trail. The Park is bordered either by the back yards of houses or fencing along the sides of commercial

West Broad Street Connecting Falls Church

properties. If the West Falls Shopping Plaza redevelops, a better connection to the Park should be provided, as shown in this Plan's Concept Chapter.

Pocket Parks

Pocket parks are small parks, often the size of one or more single family housing lots. They can be created in urban areas by utilizing residual lots that were not incorporated into larger redevelopment projects and are now "locked" between larger buildings.

Pocket parks provide green space and public gathering areas. They typically include focal points, such as fountains or monuments.

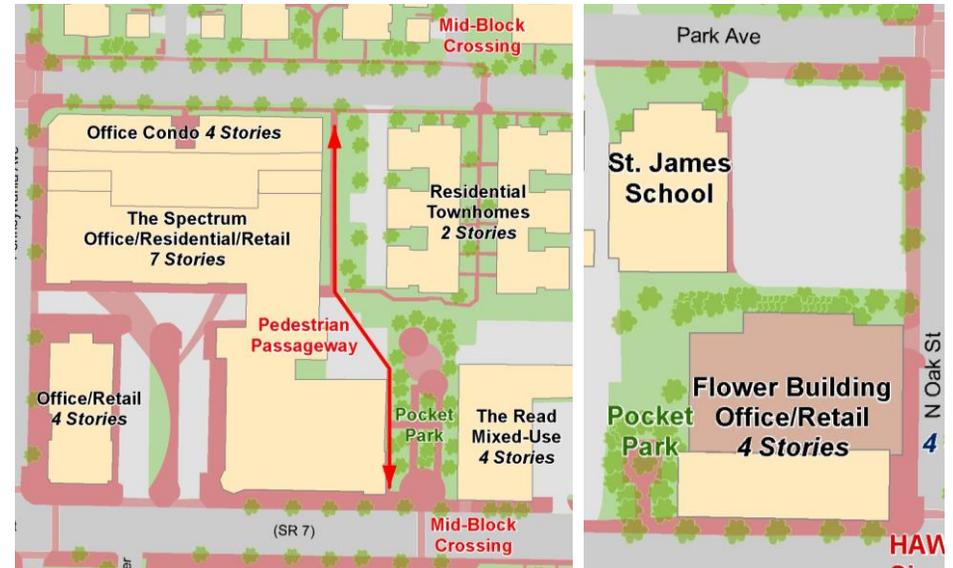
Within the West Broad Street Area, two lots provide good candidates for pocket parks. The first is immediately west of The Flower Building. The second is immediately east of The Spectrum.

Strategy: Acquire the identified areas and develop them as pocket parks.

Plazas

Plazas are small format open spaces. They typically include a mix of hardscape and greenery. Recent development projects in the City have incorporated plazas into their building entrances and retail areas.

One existing example of the incorporation of public space in the West Broad Street POA is the plaza at Spectrum Condominiums. The curbsless roadway design and decorative paving encourages walking and gives priority to pedestrian activity. The pedestrian-oriented design helps to slow vehicles and encourage walkability. The plaza also serves as an entrance to the site's parking garage, space for deliveries, and limited parking space for retail shops. A small park is located at the center of the plaza area, where people regularly gather to eat food bought at one of the restaurants.



Above: Concept images showing possible future locations of pocket parks along West Broad Street.

Below: The corner plaza at the Tax Analysts building is an example of an existing plaza in the City that was built as part of redevelopment.





Above: The curbless entranceway, central park, and plaza area at The Spectrum is designed with pedestrians in mind.

Below: Commonwealth Avenue in Boston, MA is an example of a street that also serves as a greenway.



Another example of the incorporation of a public plaza is at the Tax Analysts building next to Pearson Square along South Maple Avenue in the South Washington Street Corridor POA. An approximately 4,000 square foot plaza was created by integrating a corner notch into the architectural design of the building. The plaza includes outdoor seating, decorative planters, pavers, lighting, and space for potential outdoor dining. This strategy of giving some buildings space at the corner to create a plaza may be appropriate at intersections along West Broad Street.

Strategy: Work with developers on large scale projects to provide plazas and other spaces that are available for use by the general public.

Streets as Open Spaces

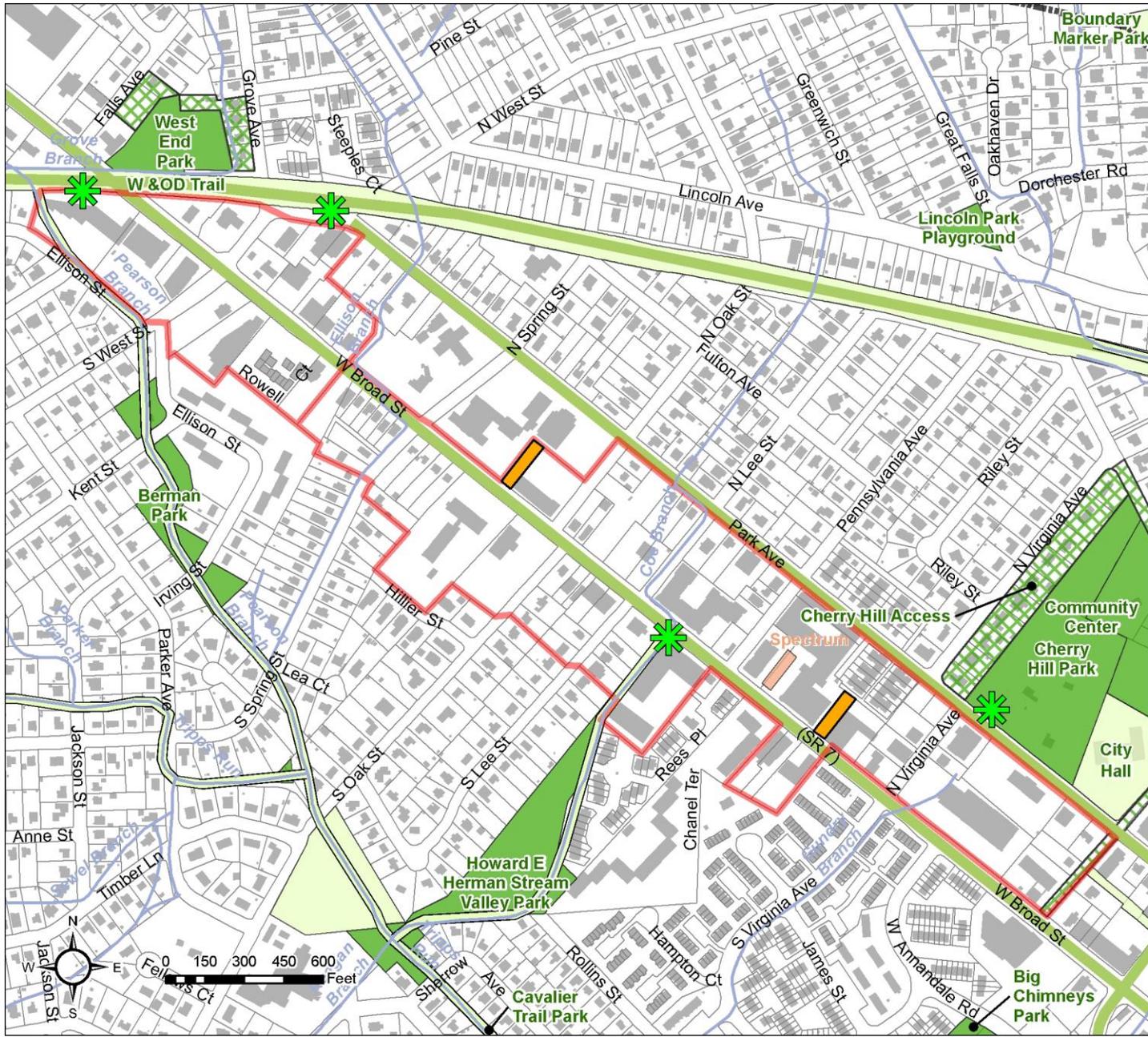
The City's Parks for People Plan; the Parks, Open Space, and Recreation Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan; speaks to using streets and greenways to create a connected network of parks throughout the City. The City's Great Streets, like West Broad Street and Park Avenue are critical components of that Plan.

Including street trees, furniture, and attractive materials can give streets a more park-like feel and provide a softer edge to urban environments. With well-designed treatments, traveling through the City can literally feel like a walk in the park.

Strategy: Develop West Broad Street and Park Avenue as Great Streets and take advantage of the opportunity to change these public open spaces into public green spaces.

West Broad Street Connecting Falls Church

Character & Design



Future Parks & Open Space

- W Broad St POA
- Parcel
- Building
- City Park
- Pedestrian & Bicycle Access
- Other Parks & Open Space
- Plazas & Great Streets
- Existing Pocket Park/Plaza
- Proposed Pocket Park/Plaza
- ✱ Park Connection/Entrance

