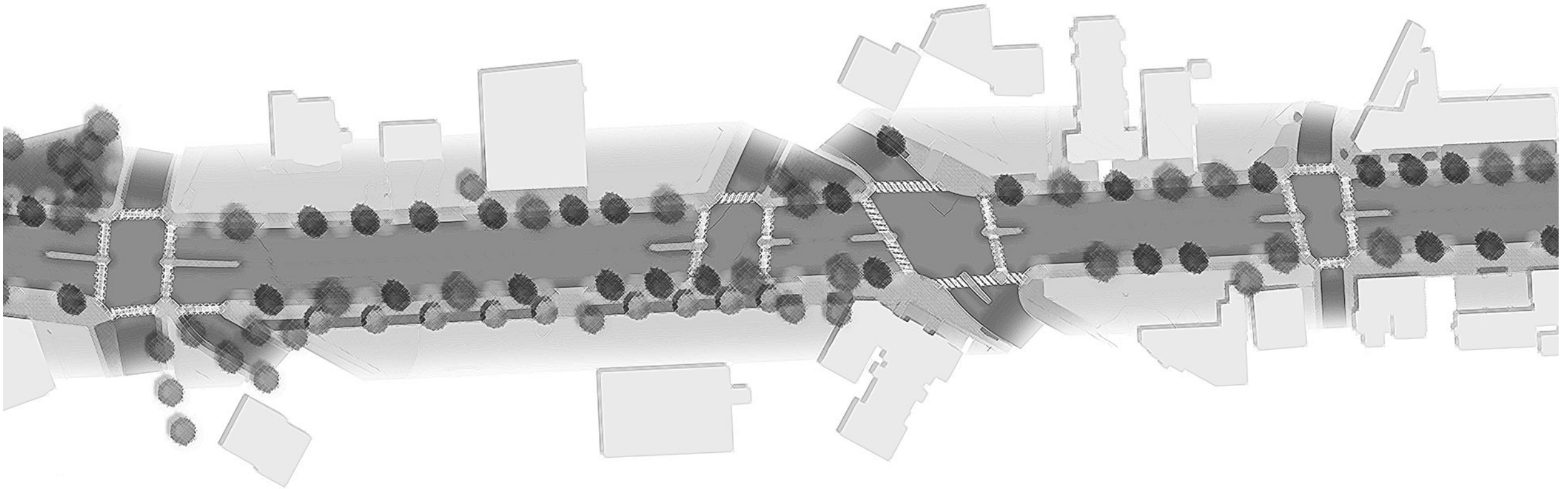


Rhode Island Avenue, NE

# STREETSCAPE MASTER PLAN







# Rhode Island Avenue, NE STREETSCAPE MASTER PLAN

*Prepared for*

DISTRICT DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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WASHINGTON, DC 20003

*by*



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# Introduction

## PROJECT BACKGROUND & STUDY AREA



In 2013, the District of Columbia Department of Transportation (DDOT) selected the landscape architecture and planning firm of Rhodeside & Harwell, along with team members A. Morton Thomas and Associates and City Activators to develop a conceptual set of streetscape plans and illustrations for Rhode Island Avenue, NE.

One of the city's major diagonals, Rhode Island Avenue is a principal transportation route into and through the District of Columbia. The northeast portion of the corridor acts as a key entry point into the city, offers public transit services including Metrobus routes and the Rhode Island Avenue Metrorail Station, and serves both residential neighborhoods and commercial zones.

The project limit encompasses 28 blocks of Rhode Island Avenue, NE, from 4th Street, NE to Eastern Avenue, NE. The overall intent of the project is to create a pedestrian friendly environment with amenities that include enhanced paving, site furnishings, lighting improvements, low impact development strategies, street trees and other “green” spaces. As a result of improving the pedestrian experience, key objectives of the master planning process—enhancing the livability, image, safety, sustainability and commercial viability of the project area—can be more readily achieved. In addition to a streetscape plan of the entire project corridor, the project identifies subareas and priority segments of the corridor, with a goal of breaking ground in these areas in early 2015. The project is

focused on the streetscape, and the existing traffic operations of Rhode Island Avenue, NE remain unchanged.

The project study area has plenty of challenges as well as plenty of potential opportunities. One of the primary issues of the corridor is that it lacks cohesive, sensible pedestrian features. The wide roadway cross-section, numerous curb cuts, lack of buffer between pedestrians and traffic, and the overall sense that Rhode Island Avenue, NE is primarily an auto-oriented thoroughfare, are all factors that contribute to the perception that the corridor does not currently embrace pedestrians. The current condition of the sidewalk paving along the route, often with obstacles and areas of disrepair or



PROJECT AREA: 4TH STREET, NE - EASTERN AVENUE, NE

deterioration, adds an additional complication to pedestrian accessibility. The streetscape enhancements shown in this report will help to reverse this perception by improving the pedestrian experience and providing visible cues that Rhode Island Avenue, NE is a corridor for people as well as for cars.

One of the key assets of the corridor is its fabric of existing historic buildings. There is a diversity of land uses and structures along the corridor, from traditional residential and multi-family apartment buildings, to 'Main Street' commercial and pockets of institutional and light industrial use. The diversity along the corridor will provide a vibrant backdrop for the potential streetscape design.

The corridor is also lined with many large, mature street trees, primarily Willow Oaks, located very close the curb. While these trees help to add a sense of grandness to the boulevard, many of the trees suffer from dramatic pruning scars and misshapen canopies due to their proximity to existing power lines. The streetscape enhancements seek to embrace these trees as much as possible, while also planning for future street tree planting and maintenance.

Finally, one of the approaches that the District was interested in exploring for this project is the recognition and enhancement of the relationships and differences between the commercial areas along the Rhode Island Avenue, NE corridor and the surrounding residential

neighborhoods. While this is a streetscape improvement project, the design team has embraced this methodology and has worked closely with DDOT and the surrounding community to realize this vision in the final streetscape plan design.

# Community Engagement

## SUMMARY

One of the key components of the Rhode Island Avenue, NE design process was to have input from the community. The design team received this input in two ways.

The first way was with the establishment of a Community Advisory Committee (CAC). This group of (approximately) fifteen people was invited with input from DDOT's Project Manager and was comprised of residents, business owners, members of the Friends of Rhode Island group, a local ANC member, and other key community members. The consultant team was

able to meet with this group at the project's initiation, which allowed the team to quickly understand many of the community's current concerns, and how they envision the area looking in the future.

At the kick-off meeting in November 2013, CAC members were asked, "What does success on the "Avenue" look like to you?" Some of these answers are included on the following page. CAC members were also invited to two Open Houses where they could ask additional questions and/or provide the team with feedback. On February 12th, 2014, a second CAC

meeting was held to share and discuss the team's progress.

After the design team presented their concepts, CAC members were asked what they thought about the design alternatives presented, which alternative they preferred, if there were additional streetscape elements to consider, and for any other guidance that they wanted to provide. The consultant team was then able to incorporate the CAC input into the draft streetscape plan that was a part of the second Open House.

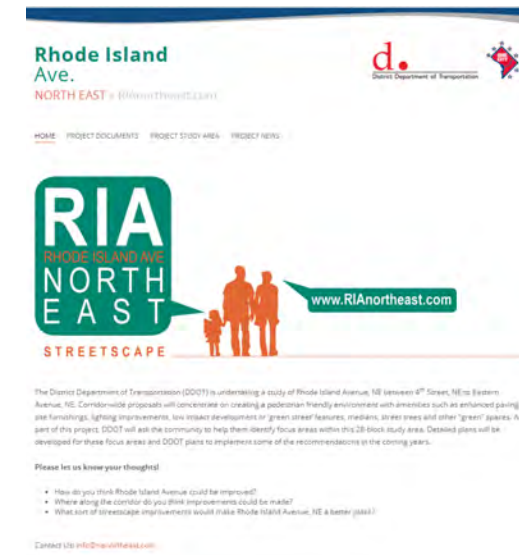


PREPARING FOR AN OPEN HOUSE: STATIONS AND DRAWINGS



DDOT, in conjunction with the consultant team, hosted two Open Houses for the public at large. The format of these events provided the community with an opportunity to learn about the project, speak directly to DDOT and their consultants, review the prepared drawings, see a brief PowerPoint presentation, ask questions, and offer input by “voting” for their preferences with colored dots. Community members were also asked to answer open-ended questionnaires either in person at the Open Houses or via email.

Both events brought a lively group of participants whose input was extremely valuable and was a large part of shaping the final streetscape plan.



OPEN HOUSE FLYERS

PROJECT WEBSITE

## CAC RESPONSES: WHAT DOES SUCCESS ON THE “AVENUE” LOOK LIKE TO YOU?”

### 1. Improving perception of safety/comfort:

- Need to feel safe as a pedestrian and feel this is an enjoyable place to walk. Give priority to pedestrians, especially under the Metro bridge.
- Bus stops need to be safer, especially at night
- Improve safety issues at underpass
- Improve lighting: pedestrians should feel safer

### 2. Improving aesthetics:

- Need better tree boxes (especially 16th - 24th)
- Historic Route 1 should be a “beautiful boulevard”
- Green the median (like on Pennsylvania Avenue)
- Include public art, possible sculpture at gateway

### 3. Supporting economic development

- Infill the large lot on 12th/13th street
- Need local and regional businesses. The Avenue should look inviting from a commercial perspective. Want to boost economic viability for the neighborhood
- Three segments: different segments need different things
- Aging community depends on driving. Avenue needs stores that residents “should have.”
- Need outdoor cafes (South Dakota - 20th St.)
- Need family-oriented places: the library, restaurants

### 4. Adding multimodal access

- Add parking and bike lanes to make the streetscape more inviting



COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE & DESIGN TEAM MEMBERS

# OPEN HOUSE #1

The first Open House, held on December 11th, 2013 at the (former) Woodridge Library, was attended by 40 people and reflected the enthusiasm that community members have for this project. Using a 14-foot long existing conditions map, attendees were asked how Rhode Island Avenue, NE could be improved and where those improvements should be made. Writing directly on the map or on “sticky notes” was encouraged, and the results were very telling.

The consolidated comment results, synthesized in the map below, graphically illustrate that most of the input was provided in the area around the Rhode Island Avenue Metro Station and in the village-like area where storefronts are facing wide sidewalks.

## ELEMENTS REQUESTED FOR THE CORRIDOR:

### 1. Improving perception of safety/comfort:

- Streetlights
- Pedestrian-scale lights (especially in commercial areas)
- Fixed and wider sidewalks
- Pedestrian medians at crosswalks
- Traffic signage: “Don’t Block the Box,” “Stop Here on Red,” etc.
- Speed cameras or other traffic slowing devices
- Better-timed traffic lights

### 2. Improving aesthetics:

- Trash and recycling bins (with covers)
- Medians (vegetated to prevent jaywalking)
- Re-striped or decoratively painted crosswalks

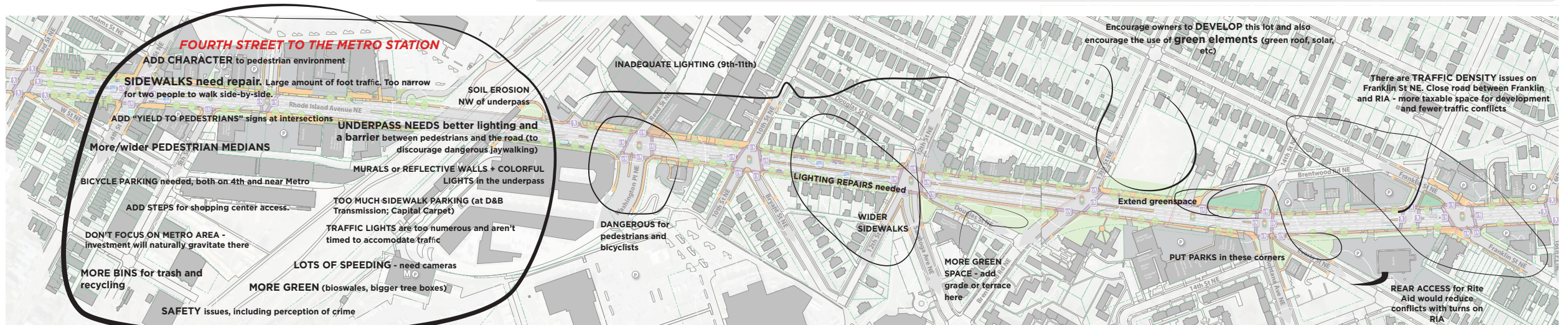
- Increased tree planting along entire length: add tree boxes

### 3. Supporting economic development

- Park space
- Better storefronts
- More welcoming overall character
- Benches
- Neighborhood identity signage

### 4. Improving multimodal access

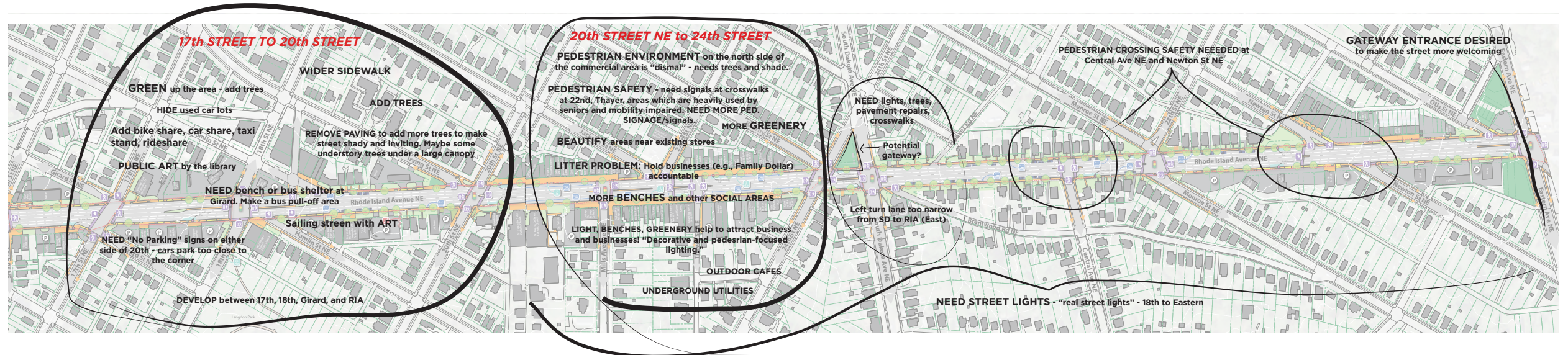
- Bike lane or sharrows
- More bike sharing stations
- Bus shelters at the most heavily-used stops, or benches if shelters aren’t possible



COMMUNITY INPUT MAPPING



PHOTOGRAPHS FROM OPEN HOUSE #1



## OPEN HOUSE #2

The second Open House was held on March 12th, 2014 to discuss concept alternatives and design recommendations for Rhode Island Avenue, NE. This meeting was attended by 29 people and offered many opportunities for community interaction and input.

At this meeting, the design scope, goals, and recommendations were presented. Attendees were also asked to choose a preferred design alternative, choose and comment on the Standard and Enhanced materials/furnishings toolkit, comment on the recommended low impact development (LID) approaches, and provide feedback for possible art installation ideas. The following pages summarize comments received at the meeting and by email, and are sorted by topic.



PHOTOGRAPHS FROM OPEN HOUSE #2



### CONCEPT ALTERNATIVES:

- Based on all forms of response, there were 3 votes selecting Option 1 (Consistent Standard Design Treatments Throughout) as the preferred concept alternative.
- There were 15 votes selecting Option 2 (Standard Design Treatments Throughout + Distinct Design Treatments in Three Focal Areas) as the preferred concept alternative.

### LID TOOLKIT:

- Permeable Flexi-Pave around existing trees showed to be the preferred option.
- LID planters (both continuous soil and depressed stormwater types) were heavily favored, but only those pictures that included low fences (or curb) around the planter and massing of grasses within.

### ART INSTALLATION IDEAS:

- All pictures displayed had positive results. The most negative votes any picture had was 1.
- Medians, Gateway, Metro Underpass, and Triangles were the most positively dotted. (Medians had the most overall positive votes, while Surfaces had the overall least votes.)



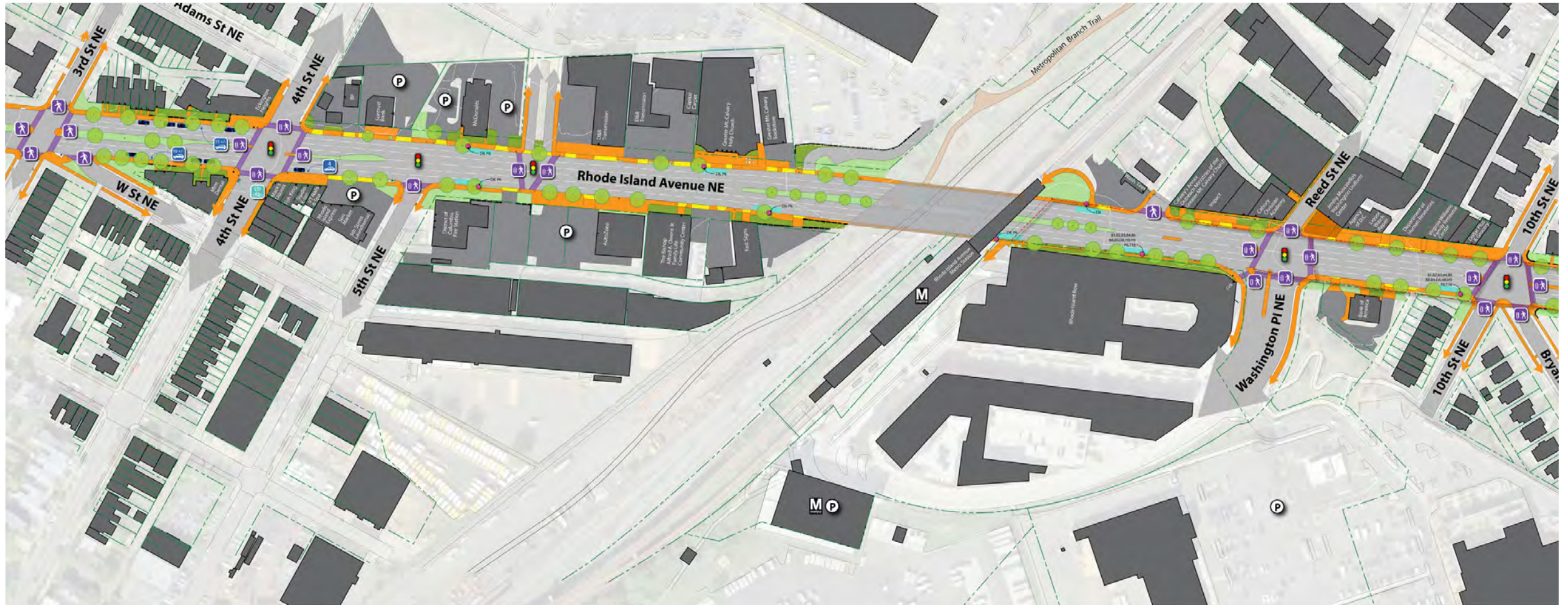
PHOTOGRAPHS FROM OPEN HOUSE #2

### DESIGN TOOLKIT:

- There was also a positive response to lighting and/or art within the Metro underpass.
- Lighting was the single most wanted amenity for Rhode Island Avenue, NE, followed by wider sidewalks
- Neighborhood identity signage, which would be installed on light posts (Main Street/BID) was one of the most commented recommendations.
- Results reflect a neutral outcome between the Standard vs. Enhanced gateway signage. Traditional and modern styles were supported equally.
- There was an overall want/need for bike racks, cross walks, bus shelters, and benches.
- Concrete paving with aggregate had the most overall votes for any paving type.
- The consultants received all positive comments for the possibility of flowering trees behind the existing walls in the residential areas. This approach would require coordination with the private residences.
- There was a large favorability of bold median planting at the Gateway (intersection of Rhode Island Avenue, NE and Eastern Avenue, NE).

# Existing Conditions

## STREETSCAPE ANALYSIS



As part of the project initiation, the design team created a map of existing conditions along corridor. GIS mapping data was compiled with tree inventory data from the DDOT Urban Forestry Administration and Casey Trees to create the base map. The team then

completed a careful inventory of the site by walking the entire corridor in order to verify the GIS data, and to gather additional information such as building entrances, bicycle parking, bus stops, overhead utility lines, street parking, public art locations, curb-cuts and

names of business. A careful photographic inventory was taken at the same time. Finally, a map with numerous layers of information was created and is shown above.



CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

LEGEND

- |                |            |            |                          |                   |                               |             |                         |                       |
|----------------|------------|------------|--------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Vehicular Zone | Curb Cut   | Tree       | Non-Signalized Crosswalk | Bicycle Parking   | Approximate On-Street Parking | Public Art  | Signalized Intersection | Parcel                |
| Conc. Sidewalk | Building   | NPS Lots   | Signalized Crosswalk     | Capital Bikeshare | Metered On-Street Parking     | Parking Lot | Bus Stop                | Overhead Utility Line |
| Crosswalk      | Lawn/Plant | Brick Walk |                          |                   |                               |             | Building Entrance       | Mural                 |



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**LEGEND**

- |                |            |            |                          |                   |                               |             |                         |                       |
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## CHARACTER ZONES

What defines Rhode Island Avenue, NE? During the analysis and investigation of this question, the design team concluded that the Rhode Island Avenue, NE, between 4th Street, NE and Eastern Avenue, NE, can be characterized by zones of different and quite diverse physical typologies. There are six distinct zones along the Rhode Island Avenue, NE project area, segmented by changes in adjacent land-use, public realm space, and streetscape features.

Many of the grand boulevards within the District of Columbia experience a similar transition. However, Rhode Island Avenue, NE particularly lacks a consistent set of streetscape features and consistent right-of-way standards. Addressing this would help stitch together these zones in a coherent and pedestrian-friendly manner. The Avenue currently suffers from inconsistent building frontages, typically dispersed by impervious surfacing, and private businesses that have encroached into public rights-of-way. These conditions together help to degrade the public realm.

The Character Zones map (right) uses photographs to show the typical condition in each zone, and a color to connect the photograph to the length of the Avenue it corresponds with. Descriptive terms help to broadly define the zone.

