



# PRESERVING RETAIL

## Current Trends

**Vibrant and walkable commercial districts** with a range of retail businesses including small and local retailers that meet neighborhood needs are critical to ensuring healthy communities. Preserving and improving retail is a complex and challenging task – made all the more difficult by the recent downturn in the economy.

Over the past decade, many neighborhoods in the District have experienced changes in their commercial and retail areas. However, many neighborhoods are still considered ‘underserved’ in terms of not offering the goods and services demanded by local residents. This results in spending ‘leakage’ - residents shopping outside of their neighborhood. At the citywide level this leakage amounts to more than \$1 billion annually.

Residents and small business owners along Ward 8’s neighborhood commercial corridors understand these challenges all too well. In 2007, residents in neighborhoods around Martin King Jr. Ave, in Anacostia and South Capitol Street spent a total of over \$275 million dollars outside of those neighborhoods. While it is impossible to capture all of residents’ retail purchases within a general surrounding area, significant spending could be redirected to the community and local businesses, particularly for basic retail goods and services.

Newer strip retail development in Ward 8. Source: DCOP



# What's Being Done

Multiple agencies in the District government work to enhance commercial corridors and strengthen local businesses. In many cases, agencies rely on local partners to implement programs that respond to business owner and customer needs.

## 1 The Department of Small and Local Business Development (DSLBD)— Commercial Revitalization & Training and Education Division [www.dsldb.dc.gov](http://www.dsldb.dc.gov)

Supports the revitalization of DC's neighborhood economic development through the retention of the small, local, and independently-owned businesses. The divisions provide free technical assistance and up-to-date management advice, training managing programs designed to support the attraction, retention and development of DC businesses. The funding and direct services offered by DSLBD specifically support Ward 8's Congress Heights Main Street and clean team services.

## 2 Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)— Residential and Community Services Division [www.dhcd.dc.gov](http://www.dhcd.dc.gov)

Works with community organizations to provide small business technical assistance and façade improvement opportunities. The division currently funds Anacostia Economic Development Corporation, Arch Development Corporation, and Congress Heights Community Training and Development Corporation.

## 3 Office of Planning—Retail Action Strategy 2008 (OP) [www.planning.dc.gov](http://www.planning.dc.gov)

Analyzed corridors across the city and within Ward 8, assessing retail demand, vacancy, and infrastructure. The Strategy recommended steps to be undertaken by a range of stakeholders, including business owners, business organizations, non profits and government. Many of these actions taken together will preserve some elements of existing commercial corridors, but at the same time, allow for some transformation.

## 4 Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development (DMPED)— Director of Business Development [www.dcbiz.dc.gov](http://www.dcbiz.dc.gov)

Established under Mayor Gray's leadership, the Director of Business Development guides the overall strategy for business attraction and retention in the District. DMPED also manages the Neighborhood Investment Fund program and various business incentive programs.

## 5 Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA) <http://dcra.ecenterdirect.com/Welcome.action>

Launched the Small Business Resource Center that offers one-on-one business counseling and workshops specifically designed to help small business owners and entrepreneurs with navigating the District's regulatory environment

Mainstreet Retail. Source: DCOP



## Small Business Assistance

The District funds several community based organizations to provide a variety of services and assistance to businesses and commercial areas.

### ARCH Development Corporation

- Created the “THE HIVE” office space solution to replace traditional retail office space with money-saving alternatives. The “Hive” provides commercial space conference rooms by the hour, remote and on-site receptionist services, professional administrative work, and much more for Ward 8 businesses.
- Launched Eat. Shop.Live.Anacostia program in September 2010 to promote Anacostia businesses.

### Congress Heights Training and Development Center

- Hosted several installments of its Education and Training webinar series for local businesses featuring relevant topics such as: the Certified Businesses Enterprise (CBE) certification process, legal and financial safeguards, tax regulations, bookkeeping practices, and website formulation.
- Surveyed over 80 businesses in the area, posting them to their website, and adding them to their database.

### Anacostia Economic Development Corporation (AEDC)

- Involved in the re-development of the Anacostia Warehouse Supermarket to provide healthy food options for residents in order to improve eating habits and health outcomes. The supermarket will also provide cooking classes, nutrition training and outreach programs.

### Congress Heights Main Streets (CHMS)

- Assisted over 30 businesses improve their capacity through technical assistance such as needs assessments and business health checks.
- Published a business directory in 2010 and undertaken four corridor-wide marketing campaigns—two print ad campaigns through local media and two through Metro bus curbside display ads, Metro rail diorama displays, and bus shelter ads.
- In 2010, CHMS saw a net gain of 89 jobs, and eight building rehabs (two of which were part of the CHMS Storefront Improvement Program).

## Storefront Improvements

Neighborhood Investment Fund Anacostia Sign and Storefront Improvements (2007) and the Congress Heights Main Street Storefront Improvement Program (ongoing).

## New businesses and Establishments

Giant Grocery Store, IHOP, Yes! Organic Market, Uniontown Bar and Grill, and many more.

## Clean Team and Beautification Programs

The CHMS Clean Team has an on-going presence of four full-time crew workers who provide clean team services which include, graffiti removal, tree box maintenance and ambassador services. The service area consists of eight blocks along Martin Luther Ave, JR SE. From November 2010 through April 2011, 5,371 bags of trash were collected, 572 pieces of graffiti were removed and 165 tree boxes were maintained.

## What Makes a Successful Retail Corridor?

Successful retail is influenced by a number of market and other factors, which are important to consider in strategizing for the commercial districts. In addition to population and income levels, factors include –

**Accessibility** – pedestrian-oriented retail districts and retail stores are important for urban shopping success. Also, the availability of multiple types of transportation and parking must be balanced to easily shop the District’s retail corridors without always relying on cars.

**Critical Mass** – in order to generate enough shoppers for retailers, clusters of shops offering a variety of goods and services are needed.

**Profitable retail environment** – a balance between operating costs (such as rents, taxes, etc.) and available sales is essential.

**Space and Infrastructure** – the availability of quality and appropriately sized retail space is key to retaining and recruiting retail to the District. Ideal retail storefronts offer visibility, good signage, appropriate store sizes, store depths, and functional systems (e.g. HVAC).

# Today's Summit Discussion - Thriving Commercial Areas

What specific steps can the District and community partners take to ensure that the existing commercial areas and business along them thrive? Strategies for discussion include:



## 1 Filling in the gaps in neighborhood markets by improving the retail tenant mix

- Support existing retailers and businesses through direct technical assistance and financing to offer new products and services to fill gaps.
- Recruit new neighborhood-serving businesses, including national chains (where appropriate) and target large-format regional retail development to strategic locations.
- Encourage mobile or pop-up retail units that can bring new products and services.



## 2 Technical assistance to businesses, including start-up assistance to small and local businesses

- Recognize and promote long standing businesses that meet certain criteria such as benchmark years, providing services that preserve or promote a heritage skill, or playing a unique role in the history of the neighborhood and District
- Help identify capital for businesses such as through cooperatives or equity investment and matching between entrepreneurs and investors



## 3 Physical improvements, including to streetscape and storefronts

- Enhance exteriors and interiors of stores through improvements to, storefronts, facades, display windows, and additions of awning and signs
- Leverage local assets- from historic, cultural and even architectural resources.
- Improve appearance of retail corridor through physical improvements such as streetscape and landscape, trees and street furniture



## 4 Improved marketing and promotion of commercial areas

- Develop signature promotional events for neighborhoods and market collectively
- Consider a graphic identity or unifying signage system for each neighborhood retail district
- Capitalizing on existing assets such as distinctive buildings, local assets that make the Ward unique and promoting the unique characteristics which create a positive image that will rekindle community pride and improve consumer and investor confidence the commercial corridor.