



Growing a Healthier DC: Greening Business Districts

In a healthier D.C., business districts are green:

City streets and sidewalks are framed by green spaces filled with trees. Shoppers, diners and pedestrians abound, drawn by the shelter, shade and beauty of the tree canopy and landscaping. These green elements cool and buffer pedestrian and outdoor seating areas from the traffic and noise of the street. There are green views from building windows and rooftop gardens. Inside shops, retail activity and sales improve, new clientele are developed, and new relationships forged. This is the city of the future.



Green business districts:

- Create attractive, pedestrian-oriented retail environments
- Make shoppers and diners feel more comfortable, stay longer, and spend more
- Shade, cool and buffer hot city streets, sidewalks and parking areas
- Provide healthy urban spaces for neighbors, workers, and patrons to interact and unwind
- Create a unique sense of place to help make the area a destination
- Attract new businesses and entrepreneurs
- Increase the value of properties and businesses

Trees and green space are good for business.



Businesses thrive in green environments

The customer experience. Healthy trees and landscaping send positive messages about an area. Several studies have found that people are willing to travel farther, visit more frequently, and pay more for goods and services in business districts with trees – on average 12 percent more.^{1,2} Similar studies have concluded that the amount of time that someone stays in a store is longer if trees and landscaping are present on the streets and surrounding areas.³ These studies tell us what we know intrinsically – that people prefer to spend time in areas with well maintained trees and landscaping.



A better urban environment. Trees and green spaces help us deal with the pressures of urban living.⁴ Desk workers with a view of nature report greater job productivity and satisfaction.⁵ Businesses are increasingly seeking out localities that have a reputation for maintaining their environmental quality.⁶ Trees in commercial areas provide important environmental benefits to the city: cooling shade, cleaner air, and reduced energy use and runoff.





Green commercial areas attract visitors and foster community.

The Challenge and Opportunity

Urban trees are best known for their beauty and environmental benefits, but their contribution to a healthy local economy cannot be ignored. Washington, DC, named the “City of Trees” for its wide, shaded streets and park-like character has lost significant amounts of green in recent decades. Many of the streetscapes along the District’s wide boulevards have vast paved areas which do little to create a lively and save environment for business. Good design can transform these uninviting spaces into community assets. With increasing population and density, the need for trees and green space also increases.

As development occurs and investments are made in commercial districts and corridors, it is important to recognize the value of trees and landscaping, and to provide long-term design solutions to ensure that these elements will thrive. Long-term and consistent stewardship is necessary to sustain the economic and social benefits that trees and green space provide, and to ensure that residents and visitors will increasingly want to shop, dine and conduct business in the District.

Recommendations

- Prioritize the integration of trees and green space elements in development and redevelopment plans.
- Design parks, medians, tree spaces, and landscaped areas so that they are not only aesthetically pleasing, but provide environmental functions, including stormwater management and urban heat island reduction.
- Work with business improvement districts, main street programs and property owners/ managers to provide long-term and consistent stewardship of trees, parks and vegetation.
- Seek out opportunities to reduce impervious surfaces and create quality landscaped areas.

Plan for trees and green space early in the development process.

Greening Business Districts is the second in a series of issue briefs from Casey Trees. The *Growing a Healthier DC* series is a product of conversations with a panel of national and local experts convened in cooperation with District agencies, organizations and foundations. The panel examined how green infrastructure could be used to maximize social, economic and ecological benefits in the District of Columbia.

For more information on the topic addressed in this brief, the series, or the other work of Casey Trees, visit www.caseytrees.org.

¹Wolf, K. L. 2003. Public Response to the Urban Forest in Inner-City Business Districts. Special Issue on Social Aspects of Urban Forestry. *Journal of Arboriculture*, 29, 3, 117-126.

²Wolf, K. L. 2005. Business District Streetscapes, Trees and Consumer Response. *Journal of Forestry*, 103, 8, 396-400.

³Wolf, K. L. 2004. Trees and Business District Preferences: A Case Study of Athens, Georgia. *U.S. Journal of Arboriculture*, 30, 6, 336-346.

⁴Kaplan, R., and S. Kaplan. 1989. *The Experience of Nature: A Psychological Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁵Kaplan, R. 1993. The Role of Nature in the Context of the Workplace. *Landscape and Urban Planning* 26(1-4):193-201.

⁶Florida, R. 2005. *Cities and the Creative Class*. New York: Routledge, 198 pp.