



City of Takoma Park, Maryland

TAKOMA JUNCTION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS PUBLIC SPACE AND USE

May 22, 2018

The following material was prepared in response to questions raised by members of the community interested in learning more about the public space proposed for the Takoma Junction redevelopment project, general guidelines for public space and use, and community tradeoffs.

For more information, please check the City webpage for the Takoma Junction Redevelopment: <https://takomaparkmd.gov/initiatives/takoma-junction-redevelopment/>

What is public space?

A public space is an area or place that is generally open and accessible to all people. Parks, town squares, sidewalks and even roads and parking spots are examples of public space. Public space may have limited times and types of use, for instance parks may close at sunset or require a permit for the use of a pavilion or ball field. The term 'public space' is not restricted to social gathering spaces, though many people think of the terms as interchangeable. Social gathering spaces, including sidewalks, seating areas and street buffers, are one part of the broader concept of public space.

How is public space used?

There are three general categories of use for public space: active space, such as basketball courts, soccer fields and performance venues; passive space, such as pocket gardens; and social gathering space, where people can meet neighbors or sit on a bench with friends. Spaces can serve multiple purposes and be activated for special events.

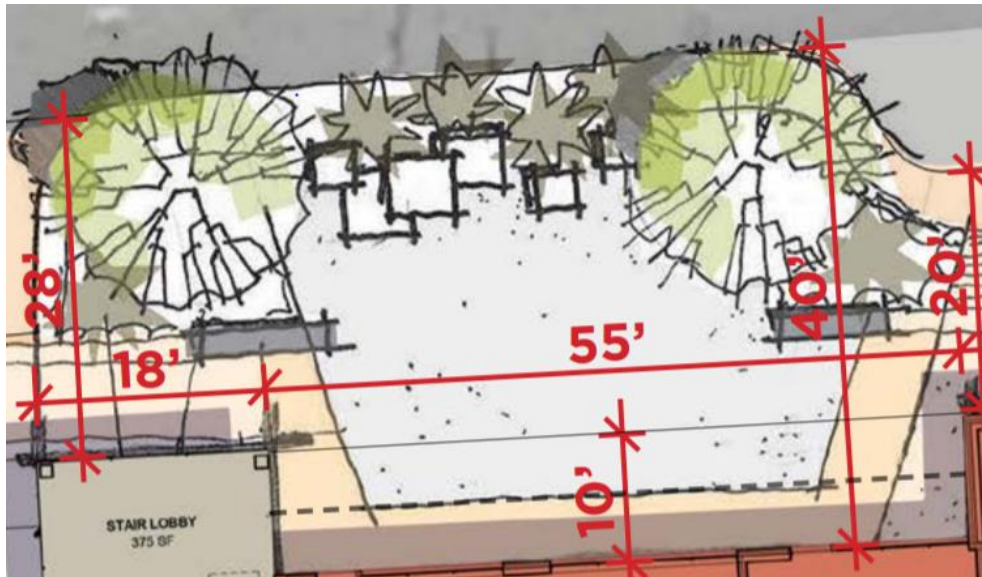
Public space needs to be managed in order to remain safe, clean and attractive. Concerns about noise, light and nuisance issues must be addressed. Public spaces can fail if they don't have enough open visibility, activation, sociability, and functionality. Factors such as design, level of activity, maintenance and enforcement play a role in the success or failure of a space. It is important that public spaces are accessible and easy to get to and navigate through by a variety of users.

One focus of the Takoma Junction redevelopment project has been on providing public space that creates attractive, easily accessible places for informal, un-programmed social gatherings. The green area along Columbia Avenue will remain as a natural area.

What is the proposal for public space in the Takoma Junction redevelopment plan?

The NDC proposal for the City-owned lot at the Junction is for an area for public social gathering space on the west side of the property measuring approximately 2700 square

feet. The space in front of the deepest setback of the building is approximately 2200 square feet and the area in front of the elevator tower is approximately 500 square feet. Deducting the eight-foot wide sidewalk which stretches the length of this public space, from the elevator to the lay-by (584 square feet) and the six-foot buffer by Carroll Avenue stretching the length of this public space, from the elevator to the lay-by (438 square feet), both of which are considered public space, results in a social gathering space of 1,678 square feet.



Does the public space include the lay-by?

In the above measurements, the lay-by for truck deliveries, the loading zone adjacent to the lay-by, and the sidewalk and seating zone east of the public space demarcated above, are not calculated into the measurements of 2700 square feet of public gathering space.

How can the public space be used?

The public gathering space as proposed is intended primarily for social gathering space, but can be used for a diversity of activities. By creating a comfortable space with nearby amenities, people can meet friends, relax and linger. The plan includes seating options and areas for all ages. The space would be inviting for performers such as musicians or other informal performances. The adjacent restaurants and shops help activate the space, but visitors would not be required to patronize them to enjoy the public space.

What are options for more public space and what are tradeoffs?

The vibrancy of the public space and the Takoma Junction area as a whole will contribute to the success of the proposed project and all of the businesses located in the area. Foot traffic generated by the development and its neighboring businesses will help provide the “eyes on the street” needed to keep a public space safe and welcoming. The businesses at that

location will depend on prominence and visibility with signage to attract new customers. The success of public space relies more on the ways in which it is used, its overall accessibility and comfort for users, and the types of activities that draw people to it than it does on the size of the space. Designers and planners strive for a “sweet spot,” that is, space that people will use and enjoy, and enough visibility for businesses, while not providing too much space that can lead to areas of no or competing activity.

B.Y. Morrison Park, at the Junction intersection, is an example of ample space that is rarely used because it doesn't feel safe or inviting and may be difficult for some users to access due to its location. Successful public spaces also require areas which make walking, standing, sitting, and conversing comfortable and easy.

What are tradeoffs if public access to the green roof was expanded?

During the Council's review of the preliminary site plan, community residents and members of the Council raised concerns about the potential for noise and light pollution if the roof of the project were to be used for community events. As a result of this input, NDC increased the size of the green or vegetative roof and proposed limited access to the space for use by the tenants of the proposed building. If NDC were to return to its original proposal, making it available for community events or generally accessible to the public, the space would need to be managed and monitored to ensure safety and appropriate use, as problems can develop in areas with low visibility. Such oversight would require staff to be on site when the space was open, and it would require access to restrooms. Any usable roof space larger than 750 square feet would require a second staircase to the roof, with the extra building height that would entail. Enlarged, usable space would diminish the green roof area for stormwater management. For leasable event space, the top floor would need amenities such as facilities for catering needs and restrooms, which would increase the visual impact of the building height with structures, fencing, etc.

Is temporary public use of indoor space for community events possible till all spaces are rented?

NDC representatives have indicated that they would be receptive to renting out the larger space on the ground level at the rear of the building for community events.

Can NDC contribute to the design of a relocated Morrison Park?

BY Morrison Park may be moved or altered by redesign of the intersection. It is too soon to know what the space may be and what role NDC may play in redesign. The City submitted a grant proposal to develop the optimal design for the Junction intersection, with an expected response in Fall, 2018.