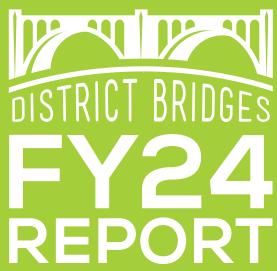


SECTIONS REPORT



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Dear Friends,

As I write this letter and reflect on 2024, I am struck by how much we have accomplished in just one year. Our strategic priority for the year was **Telling Our Story**—sharing the impact of our work, amplifying the voices of the communities we serve, and ensuring that our mission is understood and valued. Looking back, I can confidently say that this focus was not only necessary but transformative.

2024 challenged us to articulate who we are, why we exist, and how our work changes lives. We deepened our storytelling through data, personal narratives, and advocacy, ensuring that every stakeholder—from small business owners to residents—understood the vital role District Bridges plays in strengthening neighborhoods. Through this process, I learned that telling our story isn't just about communication; it's about connection. It's about inviting others into our work and building a shared vision for the future.

It feels like the last year has been a roller coaster with major highs and true lows. We added capacity-building staff, and expanded our community navigation team from two to seven full-time navigators. We won and lost contracts. We innovated to meet the challenges of reimbursement-based grant funding through our DB Impact Loan Fund. We have launched exciting new features on our Access Point platform that are helping small businesses across the city. But most importantly, we have strengthened our relationships and partnerships with organizations and community members here in our city.

The pages that follow offer a glimpse into the heart of our work—the passion, resilience, and commitment that fuel us every day. As you read, I invite you to reflect on the power of collective impact and consider the role you can play in shaping the future of our communities. Whether through partnership, advocacy, or direct action, your engagement matters. Let's step forward together, with boldness and purpose, to build a more connected, vibrant, and thriving city.

Sincerely,

Brianne Dornbush
Executive Director

Supportive

Present
Friendly

Committed
Helpful

Events
Positive

Empowering
Effective

Forward-Thinking
Essential

Thoughtful
Competent

Respectful
Proactive

Innovative
Creative

Local
Professional

Fun
Resilient

Hyperlocal
Vibrant

Inspiring
Changemaking

Listeners
Active

Engaged
Community

Innovative

Creative

Proactive

OUR MISSION, VISION, & VALUES

We are a community ecosystem development non-profit working to bridge community engagement and economic development opportunities to foster equitable, resilient, and connected communities in DC and beyond. Founded in 2005 by neighbors in Columbia Heights, our values of relationship, collaboration, innovation, diversity, impact-oriented, fun, story, and inclusion have driven our mission and work.

Our mission is to enrich neighborhood vitality by bridging community engagement and economic development opportunities so individuals, businesses, and organizations can thrive together.

Our holistic approach to community-based economic development utilizes strategic partnerships, small business technical assistance, volunteer opportunities, place management, events, resident outreach, and connective services. Our approach is different in that we start from a place of collaboration and capacity-building, looking to strengthen the whole ecosystem in which we work.

Our on-the-ground work happens in Wards 1, 2, 3, and 4, and we support businesses and community members across DC. Additionally, we work with communities across the country looking to emulate our unique approach.

"[District Bridges] does so much in the community, from community navigation to events and business cultivation."

ANC Commissioner

"As a new small business owner, Lower Georgia Avenue Main Street has been so helpful in making me feel welcome, supported, and connected in the neighborhood."

Business Owner

"The creative, persistent spirit everyone at District Bridges has is inspiring! The events are so fun, and I wish I could participate more. The neon party is a blast! Keep up the amazing work."

Resident

\$229,377

Grant Funds Awarded to Businesses

Funding to support rent/utilities, payroll, facade improvement, financial planning for sustainability and growth, security upgrades, marketing, and more.



39,494

Social Media Followers

Residents and visitors following our programs' social media channels to better connect with their local communities.



2024 IMPACT SUMMARY

371

Businesses
Directly Served

123

Active
Partnerships



4,653

483

1,217

104

Hours of Technical Assistance Provided
directly supporting local businesses

Volunteers

contributing to their communities & local businesses

Hours Contributed by Volunteers

directly supporting local neighborhoods & small businesses

Constituents Served

through Connective Services

129

Events

increasing foot traffic
to the corridors

1,358

Hours Spent on Connective Services

to help constituents experiencing substance use disorder and housing insecurity.





WHAT IS INTERSECTIONS?

The articles that follow profile tangible demonstrations of how our values are lived out through our work to achieve our vision of thriving together in equitable, resilient, connected communities.

CONTRIBUTORS

Editors

Brianne Dornbush
Madeleine Odendahl

Contributors

Brianne Dornbush
Carolina Buitrago
Cassandra Hetherington
Lindsay Hicks
Rachel Mowery
Madeleine Odendahl
Olivia Osborne
Paco Ramos-Meyer
Carmen Elena Thrope
Edward Wycliff

A NEW ERA OF ONBOARDING: ENSURING ACCURACY AND ALIGNMENT AT DISTRICT BRIDGES

As District Bridges continues to grow and serve the diverse communities of DC, ensuring that all new board members, staff, volunteers, and partners are aligned with our mission and vision is paramount. Onboarding is more than just an introduction to the organization—it sets the tone for long-term engagement and success.

Traditionally, onboarding at nonprofits relies on in-person sessions, which can be inconsistent and may vary depending on who conducts the training. This lack of continuity leads to varying experiences for new recruits and, in some cases, missed opportunities to thoroughly communicate the core values, processes, and expectations that drive the organization's work.

In thinking about how and why we wanted to shift our onboarding process, there were several considerations our Strategic Initiatives Team discussed – maintaining or even increasing alignment with our mission and vision; ensuring accuracy and consistency; and helping new team members feel connected and empowered faster.

"Onboarding is more than just an introduction to the organization—it sets the tone for long-term engagement and success."

Alignment with Our Mission, Vision, and Values

The shift to online onboarding was not just a practical decision—it was a strategic one that aligned with our broader mission and values:

- **Mission-Driven Impact:** District Bridges' mission is about bridging community engagement with economic development opportunities. To achieve this, all team members need to understand how our work ties into the broader goal of building resilient, thriving neighborhoods. Streamlined onboarding ensures that this understanding is shared across the organization by offering a centralized resource that can be accessed anytime and anywhere, reinforcing the continuity of our mission.
- **Innovation and Adaptability:** As an organization, we embrace innovation and are committed to trying new ideas. An online training format allows us to continuously improve our onboarding process. It's easier to update materials, add new content, and incorporate feedback from users. This flexibility ensures that we stay responsive to changing needs and continue to innovate our approach to onboarding.
- **Inclusion and Diversity:** Our diverse team reflects the communities we serve. Moving onboarding online allows us to create more inclusive, accessible training materials that can be adapted to different learning styles and languages, ensuring that everyone has an equitable opportunity to engage with and understand our programs.



Ensuring Accuracy and Consistency

Accuracy in onboarding is crucial—any miscommunication or inconsistency in training could lead to confusion, misalignment, or mistakes down the road. By moving training online, we ensured that all new team members were receiving the same accurate and up-to-date information, every time.

- **Interactive Features for Engagement:**

After researching, we chose an e-learning creation platform called Articulate that allowed us to create courses with quizzes, interactive elements, and videos that help reinforce learning and ensure that new members understand key concepts. These features not only encourage engagement but also provide an easy way to measure comprehension, identifying areas where additional clarity or training may be needed. These courses were also easy to upload to our People Management platform, Rippling, and added to our onboarding workflow, so that new hires are automatically enrolled in the course and assigned a completion due date within a week of their start date.

- **Centralized Information Hub:** In addition to the e-learning course, we moved our internal resources and how-tos library onto Notion, a productivity web application that is a prettier, and more user-friendly version of Google Docs. Notion's page hierarchies and search functionalities mean we can better organize information, embed

how-to videos, and list small steps without information being overwhelming, and our team can search for exactly what they need. We also created a special section for Onboarding so new hires know exactly what the expectations are for their first day and first two weeks.

• **In-Person Follow-Ups:** At District Bridges, our passionate, dedicated team is one of our greatest assets, and we didn't want to lose that connection as we moved training online. To maintain that personal touch, we've implemented in-person follow-ups with team leads or supervisors after key training modules (e.g., Finance, Communications, and Performance). These sessions allow new hires to see how the training topics apply to their role, ask questions, and feel more connected to their colleagues. This hybrid approach combines the efficiency of online learning with the value of real-time feedback and relationship-building, ensuring new team members feel supported, confident, and aligned with our mission from day one.

ONBOARDING COURSE AND RESOURCES

As District Bridges continues to grow, the shift to online onboarding training offers an opportunity to enhance both the accuracy and consistency of our processes. By embracing technology, we can ensure that every new team member receives the same high-quality, accessible, and engaging experience. This will ultimately strengthen our organization's capacity to build relationships, foster collaboration, and have a lasting impact on the communities we serve.

The online training transition is not just about efficiency; it's about staying true to our core values of inclusion, innovation, collaboration, and community. In doing so, we can ensure that everyone who joins District Bridges is equipped to thrive together and contribute meaningfully to our work in enriching neighborhood vitality.



MANAGING A LEGACY SMALL BUSINESS:

LESSONS FROM THE FISHERY SEAFOOD MARKET IN CHEVY CHASE

WRITTEN BY RACHEL MOWERY
MAIN STREET MANAGER, CHEVY CHASE

Sonny and Henry recently celebrated their first anniversary as the proud owners of The Fishery Seafood Market, a cherished institution in Chevy Chase. Their journey began when they took over from the previous owners, Bob and Sue, and it has been a year filled with learning, adaptation, and resilience. The story of The Fishery offers valuable insights into the challenges and rewards of taking over a legacy small business.

From the outset, Sonny and Henry knew that taking over The Fishery would require a clear vision and a strong commitment to their goals. The seafood market, known for its fresh offerings and community ties, presented both opportunities and challenges. They understood that maintaining the market's reputation while introducing their unique approach would be key to success. This involved not only offering high-quality seafood but also creating an inviting atmosphere that reflects their passion for the business.

In their vision, Sonny and Henry knew that there was a lot of equipment to upgrade, while still maintaining day-to-day business operations and getting key funding was going to be important to navigating that challenge. Chevy Chase Main Street assisted The Fishery in securing \$18,000 in grant funding for these projects from the DC Department of Small and Local Business Development (DSLBD) and Chevy Chase Main Street. With these funds, The Fishery upgraded their produce refrigeration and wash station, and bought a new, beautiful lobster tank that you can view from their storefront window!

Persistence was vital during their transition. The duo faced various obstacles, including navigating the complexities of local regulations and ensuring compliance with health standards. This is a common scenario for many small business owners who often underestimate the bureaucratic hurdles involved in running a food establishment. However, Sonny and Henry tackled these challenges head-on, demonstrating that determination and a proactive mindset can significantly contribute to overcoming initial setbacks.

Collaboration and Community Support

A major factor in the success of The Fishery has been the collaboration with Chevy Chase Main Street (CCMS). This local program provides essential support to businesses in the area, and in FY24, CCMS dedicated 21 hours of technical assistance to The Fishery. This included guidance through inspections, construction efforts, and even addressing unexpected challenges, such as an emergency lobster tank failure.

The support from CCMS illustrates the importance of community resources for small business owners. Networking and building relationships with local organizations can provide invaluable assistance and foster a sense of community. For Sonny and Henry, this partnership has not only helped them navigate the operational aspects of running a seafood market but has also enhanced their visibility and credibility within the Chevy Chase community.

Embracing Change

Sonny and Henry realized that change is a constant in the world of small business. As they sought to make The Fishery their own, they embraced innovation while respecting the traditions that the community cherished. This meant updating the market's offerings and engaging with customers in new ways, and looking forward to bringing in new services like online ordering and planning to add sushi in the future.

The journey of Sonny and Henry at The Fishery Seafood Market is a testament to the power of vision, persistence, collaboration, and adaptability in managing a small business. Their story highlights that while challenges are inevitable, they can be overcome with the right mindset and support systems in place. As they move forward into another year, their experience serves as an inspiring example for aspiring entrepreneurs navigating the complex yet rewarding world of small business ownership. The Fishery is not just a market; it is a vibrant part of the Chevy Chase community, and its success is a reflection of the dedication and hard work of its new owners.

BUILDING BONDS:

HOW CLEVELAND PARK DAY IS TACKLING AMERICA'S LONELINESS EPIDEMIC, ONE CONNECTION AT A TIME

The United States is facing a crisis of loneliness, according to a May 2023 report from the U.S. Surgeon General. Even before the pandemic, nearly half of Americans reported feeling lonely, at rates far higher than in previous years. The isolation and stress brought on by COVID only made matters worse. The Surgeon General warns that poor social connections can have serious physical and mental health consequences, including a 29% increased risk of heart disease, a 32% increased risk of stroke, and a 50% increased risk of developing dementia among older adults (NPR, May 2, 2023).

In Cleveland Park, an affluent neighborhood in Washington, D.C., this issue is especially poignant. Though 30,000 people live within a one-mile radius of the Cleveland Park commercial corridor, 61% live alone, and 64% are older adults.

It might be dramatic to say that Cleveland Park Main Street (CPMS) is saving lives, but it's not an understatement to say that it is improving them. In June 2024, CPMS brought together all seven local community organizations to plan the first-ever Cleveland Park Day. This committee, composed of groups that don't always agree



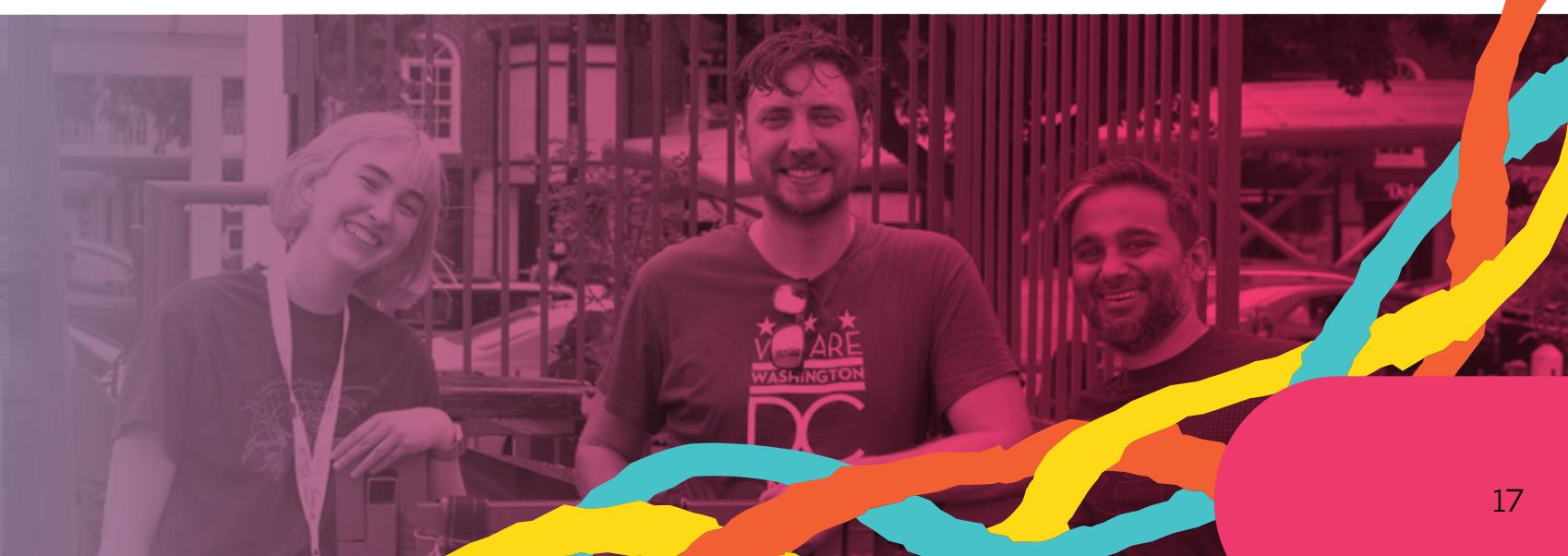
on neighborhood issues, met regularly for months to craft an event that would appeal to everyone. Despite differences in opinion, they cooperated fully and focused on the shared goal of creating an inclusive and fun day for the entire community.

The event was made possible by the many residents who volunteered countless hours. From hanging posters to setting up tents, a small army of dedicated community members came together for the greater good. Many volunteers had lived in Cleveland Park for years but had never felt truly connected to their neighbors. As one volunteer shared, they met more of their

neighbors through their involvement with CPMS than ever before, and for the first time, they felt a genuine sense of belonging in this small village within a large metropolitan area.

Simply hosting an event doesn't guarantee connection, but creating shared, enjoyable experiences can. The planning committee added playful elements to the day's schedule, including a Pet Fashion Show, which brought out a diverse crowd united in laughter as dogs (and one chicken) strutted their stuff in costumes. The highlight of the day was the Grover Cleveland Look-Alike Contest, where a young winner named George, dressed in suspenders,

WRITTEN BY CASSANDRA HETHERINGTON
MAIN STREET DIRECTOR, CLEVELAND PARK





a fake beard, a top hat, and a three-piece suit, stole everyone's heart. Local judges, including Ward 3 Councilmember Matthew Frumin, ANC Commissioner Roric McCorristan, and history enthusiast Judy Hubbard (dressed as First Lady Frances Cleveland), added an extra touch of charm to the event.

While Cleveland Park Day may have lasted only one day, it brought out the best in everyone involved—from the planners to those brave enough to jump into the dunk tank. Every element of the event was an opportunity to bring people together, and that is more important now than ever. CPMS plans to host more events next year, both big and small, with the goal of fostering stronger connections among neighbors.

Meaningful human relationships create a sense of belonging and purpose, reduce mortality rates, improve mental health and well-being, and contribute to the overall health and longevity of individuals. If connection can achieve all that on an individual level, the power of a connected community is limitless.

"While Cleveland Park Day may have lasted only one day, it brought out the best in everyone involved—from the planners to those brave enough to jump into the dunk tank. Every element of the event was an opportunity to bring people together"





"Columbia Heights Main Street became an instrumental partner in their journey, helping the couple apply for and win a Columbia Heights Main Street Small Business Grant"

LIVING THE DREAM ONE CROISSANT AT A TIME: THE STORY OF LE CAPRICE

WRITTEN BY PACO RAMOS-MEYER

MANAGER, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS AND MOUNT PLEASANT MAIN STREET

The first thing that hits you walking into Le Caprice in Columbia Heights is the mouth-watering smell of full-fat-buttered pastries being baked. Behind the glass, there is a full color-wheel array of macarons on display. Whether it's my personal favorite, the pistachio croissant, or a classic butter one, you can't go wrong! With luck, a charismatic character whose personality is as big as his smile will welcome you. He is the husband half of this husband-and-wife ownership duo that crafts tasty baked goods on offer every day in Columbia Heights. 'Woubishet "Woubee" Lemessa is helping bring to life his wife, Almaz Mengesha's longtime dream of owning a pastry shop; it's a tale that started half a world away and has taken half a lifetime to realize.

Woubee first came to the U.S. in the early 2000s, having worn many hats, including a career as a professional volleyball player and coach, and working for various international organizations. At one point, he even turned down a full scholarship to University of Alabama, such was his prowess as a middle hitter in court volleyball. Anyone who has spent any time with Woubee knows what a giving person he is; he is generous with his time and care, so it may not come as a surprise that, with all of his talents, he decided to dedicate himself to his wife's dream.

Even as Woubee was adjusting to life in the DC area, Almaz remained in Addis Ababa, working at a local pastry shop. Together, the couple saved diligently until Almaz could join

him, and also attend the Cordon Bleu culinary school for formal training in pastry-making. She started work with the original owner of Le Caprice Ahmed Efram. Quickly, she showed her dedication and promise and Ahmed promoted her to head baker. Even while studying, Almaz juggled the demanding role of head baker at Le Caprice, starting her days as early as 3:30 AM and finishing classes in the evenings—all while raising their young son.

When the original owner, Ahmed Efram, was ready to step back from the business, Almaz and Woubee took the leap and purchased Le Caprice, fulfilling Almaz's lifelong dream. Columbia Heights Main Street became an instrumental partner in their journey, helping the couple apply for and win a Columbia Heights Main Street Small Business Grant, which funded much-needed new patio furniture, already a gathering point for local residents and customers alike. With guidance, they also secured the Robust Retail Grant from the city, a \$10,000 boost that allowed them to make further improvements and stabilize during challenging times.

Now, Le Caprice is a neighborhood staple, known not only for its warm hospitality but for some of the best pastries in D.C.—from their yummy homemade carrot cake under-the-radar favorites like their croissant sandwiches. Each croissant is the fruit borne of a dream that is being realized; thank you Almaz & Woubee for including us in such a tasty way!

THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC BENCHES: BALANCING COMMUNITY BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES IN LOGAN CIRCLE

WRITTEN BY CAROLINA BUITRAGO
DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMING

Public benches are a vital component of urban design, offering numerous benefits to communities by creating spaces for relaxation, interaction, and social connection. However, when not carefully managed, they can also face challenges that affect the safety and functionality of public spaces. In Logan Circle, particularly along the 14th Street corridor, benches are both a community asset and a potential point of contention. Below are some of the benefits and challenges that public benches offer in urban spaces:

Benefits of Public Benches:

Encourage Social Interaction: Benches provide spaces for people to sit, chat, and connect, fostering a sense of community. In parks and public areas, they often become gathering spots for families, friends, or even strangers who strike up conversations, helping to create a sense of belonging.

Promote Relaxation and Rest: Benches offer resting spots for pedestrians, particularly for the elderly or those with mobility issues. In busy urban areas, they provide a much-needed break for shoppers or commuters. In areas with limited green space, benches can offer a moment to pause and enjoy the surroundings.

Enhance Public Spaces: Well-designed benches can beautify an area, making it more inviting and accessible. Artistic benches or those made from local materials can reflect the character of a neighborhood, encouraging people to linger and contributing to a more vibrant street life.

Support Local Businesses: Benches outside cafes or shops can encourage passersby to sit, relax, and spend more time in the area, potentially increasing foot traffic and sales. They can act as informal advertisements for local businesses, creating a welcoming atmosphere.

Facilitate Accessibility: Benches can make public areas more inclusive by providing seating options for everyone, including families with children and individuals with mobility challenges. Benches with armrests can help those with disabilities sit and stand more easily.

Support Healthy Routines: Benches promote outdoor engagement, supporting a healthy lifestyle. Along walking or cycling paths, they offer a chance to rest and take in the environment, which can contribute to mental, physical, and social well-being.

Challenges of Public Benches:

Maintenance Costs: Regular upkeep, such as cleaning, repairs, and replacements, can be costly for municipalities. These ongoing expenses can strain local budgets, leading to neglected or deteriorating spaces if resources are limited.

Potential for Misuse: While benches provide a place for relaxation, they can also attract loitering, which can raise safety concerns and lead to complaints from residents and businesses. In some cases, benches may become gathering spots for unsupervised or illegal activities.

Weather Exposure: In extreme weather, benches made of certain materials, such as metal, can become uncomfortable—too hot in the summer or too cold in the winter. Proper design and material selection are essential to ensure that benches are usable year-round.

Design Limitations: Not all bench designs are user-friendly. Some benches may not be accessible to individuals with disabilities or may not offer adequate comfort for longer periods of sitting. Poor design can alienate certain members of the community.

Space Constraints: In densely populated urban areas, benches can take up valuable space that might be better used for other purposes, such as bike racks, planters, or gathering areas. Balancing seating needs with other community priorities can be challenging.

Vandalism: Public benches are often targets for vandalism, including graffiti and damage. This not only detracts from their aesthetic value but also increases maintenance costs and requires protective measures to prevent misuse.



Conclusion: Thoughtful Design and Community Input

Public benches offer more benefits than drawbacks, but their impact can be significantly improved through thoughtful design and strategic placement. To mitigate the challenges associated with benches—such as misuse and maintenance costs—community input is essential in the installation process. When planned carefully, benches can become integral to the urban landscape, enhancing public spaces, fostering connection, and supporting local businesses.

There are still plenty of other benches to enjoy along the 14th Street corridor. So, next time you're in Logan Circle, find a seat, relax, and enjoy the neighborhood!



BUILDING BRIDGES AND BREAKING BREAD:

COMMUNITY DAY ON LOWER GEORGIA AVE

WRITTEN BY EDWARD WYCLIFF
DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Over the last year, the Community Navigation program expanded to serve more corridors in Ward 1, one of which was Lower Georgia Avenue and one thing was clear: the Navigators needed to do more than just distribute meals. District Bridges needed to build relationships and create meaningful connections. We decided to transform our monthly meal distributions into something more dynamic—what our field would call a resource fair.

For years, members of our team had been distributing boxed meals to the homeless—an assembly-line operation, where the interaction was transactional at best. One meal after another, with the only choice being “meat or veggie.” While necessary, it never felt personal, never felt like enough. Sometimes, you want to give more than just food. You want to offer connection, warmth, and community.

Inspired by the cookouts he used to have growing up in Houston, Texas, one of our navigators, Edward, proposed we shift gears. Why not

create a real community cookout? We were already serving Los Hermanos at Juernes in Columbia Heights, so why not take it to the next level? If we’re looking to engage more deeply with a primarily Black community, what better way than to offer a cookout—a space where so many of us, especially Black Americans, have shared some of our fondest memories from childhood?

The idea quickly took off, and the impact exceeded anything we could have imagined. We set up shop in Bruce Monroe Park, where we cooked and served over 150 meals. It wasn’t just “Here’s your meal.” It was “What kind of cheese do you want? Pickles? Mustard? Mayo? Ketchup?” And while you’re at it, swing by the barber tent for a free haircut, or chat with Dr. Tobie from Street Health if you have any medical concerns. This felt different—it felt like we were serving friends, neighbors, not just faces in a line waiting for food. There was no impersonal, cold distribution; it was warm, engaging, and full of life.

We didn’t stop there. We invited a group of partner organizations to join us, creating a one-stop shop for services. On that scorching June afternoon, we partnered with 10 local groups to provide legal assistance, re-entry services, victim advocacy, substance use support, and housing case management. We recognized that the challenges our neighbors face aren’t just limited to those who are unhoused—our housed neighbors also need support. In tough times, we all need a meal and access to services that can help us live fuller, healthier lives.

Community Navigation isn’t just about responding to homelessness—it’s about preventing it. And we know that the first step in solving larger challenges is providing a hot meal and a welcoming space where people can ask for help.

By the end of the day, the entire community had gathered together in a spirit of unity and gratitude. The success of this event prompted us to make it a quarterly gathering on Georgia Ave and U Street. Each Community Day not only feeds our neighbors but connects them to trusted service providers and agencies that can help them take the next steps toward a better life.

District Bridges recognizes that we can’t solve all the issues surrounding homelessness or the systemic challenges of affordable housing, income inequality, or institutional racism—those problems are too big for any one organization to tackle alone. But through our Community Navigators and our partnerships with organizations doing the hard work on the ground, we’re building bridges. Community Day is the public-facing embodiment of this effort, but behind the scenes, we’re working tirelessly to create lasting change for those in need.



FROM MANAGING A SMALL BUSINESS TO HELPING THEM SUCCEED

WRITTEN BY CHELLEE WALKER
MAIN STREET MANAGER, LOWER GEORGIA AVENUE

Running a small business is never easy, and the challenges of managing day-to-day operations, dealing with overhead costs, and staying afloat in a competitive market can be overwhelming. For small businesses to thrive, they need more than just financial resources—they also need community and technical support. That's why organizations like District Bridges are so vital to ensuring that small businesses remain an integral part of their neighborhoods.

Chellee, the Lower Georgia Avenue Main Street Manager, understands these struggles first-hand. After her own small business was forced to close due to the lingering effects of COVID-19, Chellee joined District Bridges to continue supporting small business owners through similar challenges. "It's rewarding to support these businesses in getting back on their feet and revitalizing our community," she says. Chellee is now dedicated to helping business owners navigate the ongoing impacts of the pandemic and rebuild their businesses.

Walking through the neighborhoods, checking in with small business owners, Chellee often sees firsthand the daily challenges they face. Many

of these businesses are grappling with rising overhead costs, including inflation and high rent, which force them into deeper debt just to keep the doors open. The decision to close a business is never taken lightly—small business owners invest their time, energy, and savings into creating something meaningful for their community. For many, the idea of shutting down is devastating.

In these moments, technical assistance becomes a lifeline. Many small business owners, particularly those who are non-native English speakers, struggle to navigate government resources, including grant applications and support programs. This language barrier can lead to missed opportunities for assistance. By offering technical support and helping small businesses access grants—such as retail or great street grants—District Bridges provides critical help in these times of uncertainty.

Karin Sellars, the owner of *Here's the Scoop*, is one of the many small business owners who have benefitted from District Bridges' support. Karin received a small business grant that allowed her to upgrade the air conditioning



CHELLEE WALKER

KARIN SELLERS

in her shop, making it more comfortable for customers. "*Here's the Scoop* continues to be a positive, family-friendly destination in our community," she says. "Thanks to this grant, we can now offer a cooler escape from the heat, even though we're not an eat-in shop. Thank you all for your support!" Grants like these give small business owners the chance to improve their operations and continue serving the community in meaningful ways.

Small businesses are the backbone of our economy. They create jobs, drive innovation, and keep money circulating within local communities. Their presence adds character and diversity to neighborhoods, fostering a unique sense of place and identity. Unlike larger corporations, small businesses emphasize personalized customer service and engage directly with the communities they serve, building stronger bonds with local residents.

Technical assistance is key to helping small businesses overcome barriers to success. These barriers may include language differences, cultural diversity, and a general mistrust of external organizations or resources. By offering

support, District Bridges helps businesses navigate these challenges, strengthening their capacity to thrive. This empowerment enables small business owners to access capital and resources, driving their growth and contributing to a more resilient local economy.

Providing technical assistance to small businesses is at the heart of District Bridges' mission. By offering support and resources, we help create a community-driven ecosystem where businesses can grow, thrive, and contribute to a stronger, more connected neighborhood. When small businesses succeed, the entire community benefits—creating jobs, building local pride, and fostering an environment of equity and opportunity for all.

At District Bridges, we're committed to ensuring that every business has the tools, resources, and community support they need to stay open, grow, and succeed. In doing so, we help to strengthen the neighborhood identity, ensure a thriving local economy, and make sure that our communities continue to thrive together.

WRITTEN BY PACO RAMOS-MEYER
MANAGER, COLUMBIA HEIGHTS AND MOUNT PLEASANT MAIN STREET

SECURING THE FUTURE OF A NEIGHBORHOOD GEM: MARX CAFE IS HERE TO STAY

The crisp, dry air of Autumn made it a perfect night to take a stroll down Mount Pleasant Street with a couple friends visiting from out-of-town. As we walked north, crossing Lamont Street, one of my friends pointed to the crowd of people outside of a business looking in and asked "Is this where people come to watch the World Series?" clearly perplexed as to why this bar was so busy on a random Tuesday. It was a regular Tuesday at the weekly Bring-Your-Own Instrument Jazz Jam at Marx Cafe. Since its acquisition by Fabián Giorgi and Daniel Quiroz in July 2022, this beloved establishment has solidified itself as a cultural hub, especially for Latino culture, in addition to its longtime status as a local gathering point. With the help of Mount Pleasant Main Street, now the business owners are also the property owners, which has dramatically changed the outlook of this neighborhood jewel.

Marx Cafe has long been a cornerstone of Mount Pleasant. Founded in 2001 by Mark Peters, it quickly became a gathering point, a place where residents could connect over good food and drinks. The establishment hit its stride under its second owner, Haris Dallas, who introduced Latino DJs and revamped the menu to resonate with local tastes, according to longtime bartender Manny Morales. Manny, who knows almost every single customer that walks in, left his good bartending gig downtown to support Haris's vision fulltime in 2007 and hasn't looked back. When I asked Manny how the business has changed in the transition from Haris's leadership to Daniel and Fabián's, Manny reflected "The local neighborhood vibe is the same, but there is definitely a bigger focus on the live music."

The café is thriving under the stewardship of Fabián and Daniel, neither of whom had any idea they would end up in business owning a bar together when they met in 2014. Daniel's wife, an Argentine like Fabián, introduced them as she'd seen Fabián perform multiple times. Fabián then reached out to Daniel in 2019 when he and other musician friends decided to make their dream of starting a Music Institute a reality. Daniel, hailing from Santa Cruz, Bolivia, is a realtor and was excited to help his friend Fabián find a spot to carry out his vision. Two years later, they still had not found a viable space for the Music Institute and Fabián started to lose hope; the pandemic hadn't helped, either. Fabián was ready to give up and joked to Daniel, "Maybe I'll just open a bar with great music". What Fabián didn't know is that Daniel had always dreamed of opening a neighborhood bar, specifically one with a wooden interior.

Daniel has had success as an entrepreneur on multiple occasions including his first venture in Santa Cruz, opening a business with his friends renting Nintendo video games when he was just 18 years old. When Fabián mentioned that he was open to a bar, Daniel asked if he would be okay fusing their visions together to create a neighborhood bar with great live music; but it had to have a wooden interior. With renewed energy, they continued their search, this time for a bar. In early 2022, the search was still on and not going well when Fabián visited Marx with his wife Lorena as he often did—sometimes as a performer, sometimes to watch a musician he liked. He checked in with his friend and the then-owner Haris, and jokingly asked if Marx was for sale. Haris called his bluff by telling Fabián he would absolutely be willing to sell him the bar if the price was right. In July 2022, Fabián and Daniel bought Marx Cafe.

"He checked in with his friend and the then-owner Haris, and jokingly asked if Marx was for sale. Haris called his bluff by telling Fabián he would absolutely be willing to sell him the bar if the price was right.

Marx Cafe is more than just a bar; it is an incubator for music, where artists can share their voices and connect with the community. Longtime patrons like Carlos Parada, a Salvadoran immigrant, former Mount Pleasant resident and award-winning poet, shed some light on the significance of Marx Cafe in the context of the history of DC and Mount Pleasant. He recalled his time living in the neighborhood in the late 80's and early '90s, when tensions ran high in the Latino Community as they chafed against a city that refused to recognize their existence and needs. The city went so far as to ban live music in Mount Pleasant, one of the main centers of Latino populations in the DC area at the time. All of this culminated in the Mount Pleasant riots in May of 1991. Now, Marx Cafe stands as a vibrant counterpoint to that history, hosting live music every night and nurturing local talent, a prime example being Bongo District, known for their innovative fusion of Colombian and reggae music. When I asked Fabián why he hasn't booked them in a while, he proudly proclaimed "They are too big for this space now."

The journey of Fabián and Daniel was not without its challenges. Recognizing the need for support in their endeavor, they turned to the Mount Pleasant Main Street program, which has played a crucial role in fostering the success and self-determination of local businesses. With the assistance of the Main Street, Daniel secured a grant that allowed them to invest in essential renovations in 2023, including new bar stools and chairs, enhancing the customer experience.

Moreover, in the early conversations with myself in my capacity as the Mount Pleasant Main Street Manager, Daniel learned about an opportunity to get the city's financial support to purchase the building. After 18 months of hard work, in the Summer of 2024, and in collaboration with local city contacts, myself and lenders, he successfully won the massive grant from the city: the Commercial Property Acquisition Fund (CPAF) from the city. This meant he was able to purchase the building where Marx Cafe is, a huge win for the business, the neighborhood, and Daniel & Fabián personally. Their mortgage payments are half what they paid in rent—essentially ensuring the long-term viability of Marx Cafe. This strategic investment has not only allowed the business owners to reinvest more in the business and building, but has also allowed them to channel resources back into the community.

As Marx Cafe continues to thrive, it stands as a vital part of Mount Pleasant's identity. It offers a space where music, culture, and community converge, breathing life into the neighborhood. With Fabián and Daniel at the helm, the cafe is not just surviving; it is flourishing and inspiring a new generation of local musicians and patrons.

In a city where the challenges of gentrification often force people and businesses out, Marx Cafe's story is one of innovation, resilience, and staying. With the ongoing support of programs like Mount Pleasant Main Street and their building purchased, the future looks bright for this local gem, which remains committed to fostering a sense of belonging for all who walk through its doors. When asked what his dream is for the future of Marx cafe, Daniel smirked knowingly "We are living it now."

"As Marx Cafe continues to thrive, it stands as a vital part of Mount Pleasant's identity. It offers a space where music, culture, and community converge, breathing life into the neighborhood. With Fabián and Daniel at the helm, the cafe is not just surviving; it is flourishing and inspiring a new generation of local musicians and patrons."



BEFORE RENOVATIONS

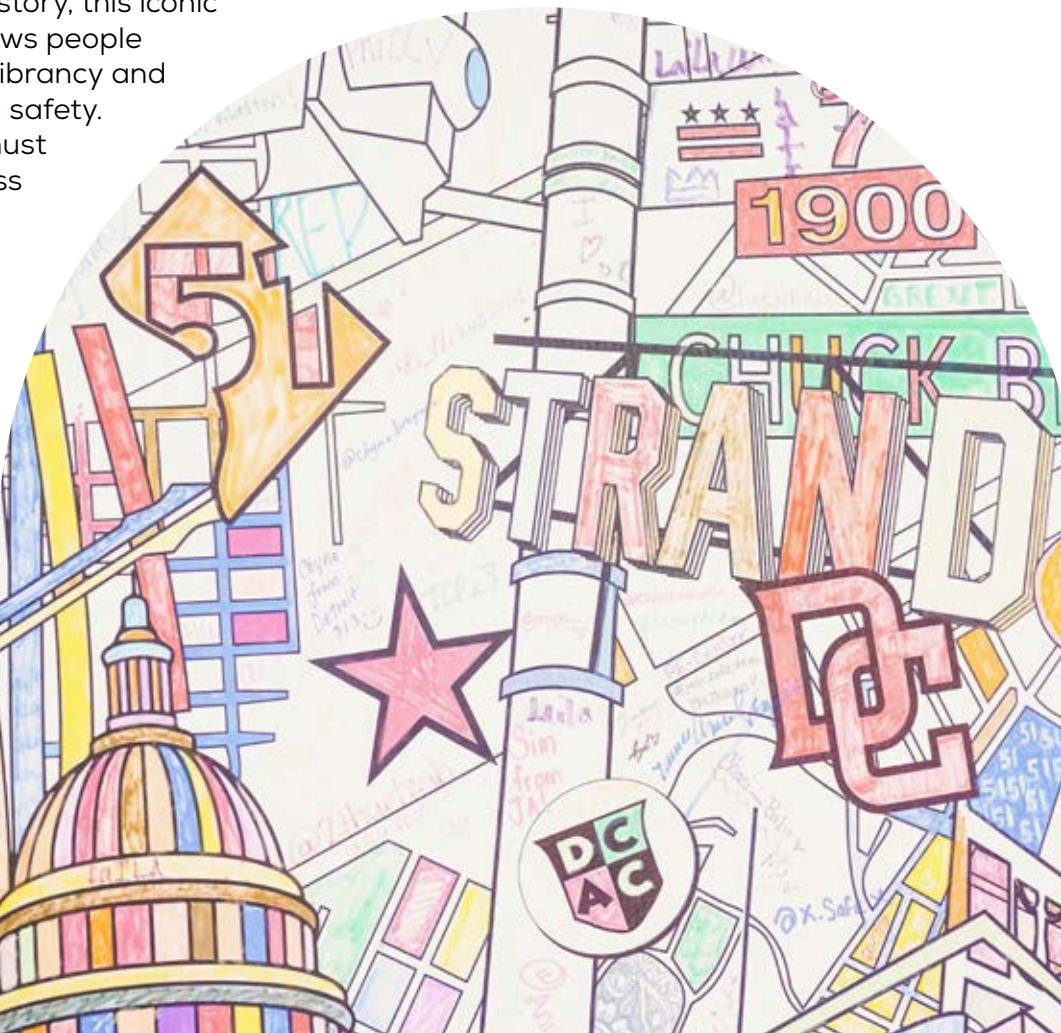


AFTER RENOVATIONS

U STREET SAFETY AND SECURITY: ENSURING A SAFE COMMUNITY FOR ALL

WRITTEN BY LINDSAY N. HICKS
Main Street Manager, U Street

The U Street Corridor is not just a place—it's an experience. Renowned for its dynamic music scene, eclectic nightlife, and rich cultural history, this iconic Washington, D.C. neighborhood draws people from all walks of life. Yet, amid the vibrancy and energy, one thing remains essential: safety. For any neighborhood to thrive, it must be a space where residents, business owners, and visitors feel secure and welcome. A safe community fosters trust, enables freedom of movement, and creates an environment where everyone can enjoy everything this iconic district has to offer. Let's explore what makes a community safe, how U Street is enhancing security, and why these efforts are critical in ensuring it remains a destination for all.



What Makes a Community Safe?

Safety is more than just the absence of crime—it's the feeling of security that allows people to move freely, interact with one another, and fully enjoy the vibrancy around them. In a bustling and diverse area like U Street, safety is rooted in a few key principles:

Security: At the heart of any healthy community lies a sense of security. This sense is built when law enforcement, residents, and community groups work together to protect the neighborhood. When people feel safe, they're more likely to engage with local businesses, attend events, and connect with their neighbors, all of which nurture a strong, thriving community.

Mobility: A safe community ensures that its residents and visitors can move freely, whether walking, biking, or driving. With its blend of nightlife, culture, and unique businesses, U Street is a bustling hub where people come to explore and connect. Ensuring that streets and sidewalks are well-maintained and monitored means that everyone—locals and tourists alike—can safely enjoy the corridor without fear.

Enforcement: Effective law enforcement is crucial in maintaining order, particularly in high-traffic areas like U Street, where the mix of nightlife and daytime activities can present unique challenges. A visible, proactive police presence, along with clear regulations, helps prevent crime and assures people that their safety is a priority. In a district like U Street, a balanced, well-enforced approach builds confidence and trust, ensuring that both locals and visitors feel at ease.

How Is U Street Ensuring Safety?

Maintaining safety in a vibrant, fast-paced neighborhood like U Street requires more than just police presence—it's about creating a comprehensive, community-driven approach. Several initiatives have been put in place to ensure U Street remains a safe and welcoming destination:

DC Nightlife Task Force: One of the standout efforts in improving safety on U Street is the DC Nightlife Task Force, a collaboration between local businesses, law enforcement, and the city government. This task force works closely with U Street's nightlife venues to address safety concerns, ensure compliance with safety regulations, and provide guidance on responsible management. By proactively engaging with businesses, the task force helps to prevent potential issues before they escalate, keeping the area safer for everyone.

Improved Lighting: Sometimes, the simplest solutions make the biggest impact. Well-lit streets and alleys are one of the most effective ways to increase public safety. Studies and expert sessions—such as those at the National Main Street conference—confirm that bright, well-lit areas deter crime by enhancing visibility and making it easier for pedestrians to spot potential hazards. Investing in better lighting along U Street, from the main thoroughfare to hidden alleyways, not only boosts security but also adds to the neighborhood's charm. A well-lit corridor is a safer corridor, where everyone can feel at ease, whether they're out for a late-night bite or a morning stroll.

Community Ownership: Safety is a shared responsibility. Encouraging community members to take an active role in reporting suspicious activity is a powerful deterrent to crime. Empowering locals to "see something, say something" creates a culture of vigilance and care, where everyone looks out for one another. This approach doesn't mean over-policing—it's about proactive community engagement that fosters a collective sense of responsibility for the safety and well-being of the area. When the community is united in maintaining a safe environment, it reinforces the sense of security that makes U Street a beloved destination.

A Safe Community for Everyone to Enjoy

Safety is the bedrock upon which the vibrancy of U Street is built. When people feel secure, they're more likely to spend time in the neighborhood, supporting local businesses and contributing to the area's energy and economy. U Street's commitment to safety—through initiatives like the DC Nightlife Task Force, improved lighting, and community engagement—creates an environment where everyone can feel at home. It's this blend of safety and vibrancy that keeps the U Street Corridor a popular destination, drawing both locals and tourists to enjoy its music, food, and cultural offerings—all in a secure and welcoming space.

U Street Main Street's continued focus on security ensures that it remains a place for everyone to come together. By fostering a strong sense of safety, enabling the free movement of people, and empowering the community to take part in enforcement efforts, U Street is fostering an atmosphere where both residents and visitors can enjoy all that this historic district has to offer.

In the end, safety isn't just about preventing crime—it's about creating a community where connection, creativity, and culture can thrive. And that's what makes U Street truly special.



THE ART OF DRAG: CELEBRATING LOGAN CIRCLE'S NIGHTTIME ECONOMY THROUGH QUEER ARTISTRY

WRITTEN BY OLIVIA OSBORNE

EVENTS AND ENGAGEMENT MANAGER, WARDS 2 & 3



In 2024, District Bridges managed five Art All Night events across five neighborhoods in two days. At the same time, DC Main Streets and Business Improvement Districts hosted over 27 Art All Night events across all eight wards. In planning for our second annual Art All Night in Logan Circle Main Street, the District Bridges team faced the challenge and opportunity to create an event bespoke to the needs of the neighborhood, while selecting unique programming and activations distinct from other events happening in the city.

For Logan Circle, we chose to showcase the artistry of the LGBTQ+ community, highlighting their contributions to the nighttime economy of 14th Street and beyond. Logan Circle has long been a hotspot for LGBTQ+ nightlife, boasting multiple queer-focused and LGBTQ-owned establishments like Trade, Number Nine, and Logan Tavern. Our goal with Art All Night was to create a space calling attention to LGBTQ+ artistry and business, and celebrating *The Art of Drag* felt like a natural extension of that.

Drag has long been intertwined with queer nightlife, and Washington, D.C. has a storied history in both drag performance and LGBTQ+ liberation. One of the nation's first documented drag balls took place in the late 1800s, in the private home of LGBTQ+ activist William Dorsey Swann, just blocks from Logan Circle. At that time, Swann faced multiple arrests and public shaming for hosting these gatherings. His perseverance helped create safe spaces for gender and artistic expression for queer and trans Washingtonians. Over 100 years later, we honor these pioneers by bringing drag into the public spotlight through an outdoor stage production called *The Art of Drag*.

After receiving extraordinary positive feedback from the public surrounding our Jazz in the Park event in June 2024, we chose to utilize the public space available in Logan Circle Park for our main stage and activities. Logan Circle is already used by the public as a community gathering space, but activities beyond informal assembly, including performances and music,

are restricted to organizations with the capacity to obtain a Special Event permit. The most common piece of feedback we received from the community was the desire for more organized public events in public parks.

With *The Art of Drag*, Logan Circle Main Street leveraged the incredible nightlife talent of the DC LGBTQ+ community while celebrating the businesses that make 14th Street a thriving corridor at all hours of the day. We worked with local drag artist and social media personality Tara Ashleigh Austin to select nine local drag performers for two hours of drag performances. To create a dazzling performance space, we hired local multidisciplinary artist Bumper to design our stage and build three large-scale art installations. We also selected three local DJs, four go-go dancers, and formed a team of talented stage managers and producers to create a massive, full-scale stage production.

Building on the success of our 2023 event, Logan Circle Main Street partnered with over 13 businesses and 20 local artists to create a vibrant festival along 14th Street. Many of our businesses created unique activities and specials celebrating the LGBTQ+ community. From margaritas honoring drag pioneer Divine at Jane Jane to "Pink Pony" face painting at Giggle Water, our Main Street businesses amplified our organizing efforts to create a cohesive and multi-location festival.

By leveraging our increased capacity through the addition of multiple new roles, including a Director of Marketing and Storytelling, Director of Programming, Technical Assistance Coordinator, and a new Events and Engagement Manager, District Bridges organized an event that punched far above its weight, leveraging talent to overcome financial constraints. We increased our attendance by over 400% from 2023, maximized financial impact for our Main Street businesses, and pushed the boundaries of what public space activation can do for a community.

WHEN GOOD INTENTIONS AREN'T ENOUGH: THE IMPORTANCE OF STRONG PARTNERSHIPS AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN COMMUNITY WORK

WRITTEN BY BRIANNE DORNBUSH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
AND MADELEINE ODENDAHL, DEPUTY DIRECTOR

Community organizations and initiatives that aim to foster equity and opportunity face many challenges. Despite the best efforts and intentions of individuals and organizations involved, outcomes don't always align with expectations. This is especially true when partnerships between government agencies and the community, which are essential to success, break down or fail to meet the needs of all involved.

One such case came to light this year with the cancellation of the Columbia Heights | Mount Pleasant Vending Zone contract. In early 2024, the Department for Consumer Licensing and Protection put out a Request for Proposals to support new legislation. District Bridges won the contract and worked throughout the summer and fall to create an accessible and sustainable vending zone in one of DC's most diverse and vibrant neighborhoods. The goal was clear: empower street vendors with the resources, support, and technical assistance they needed to thrive in an environment that fosters both economic opportunity and community development.

However, despite District Bridges' best efforts, the contract was abruptly canceled after months of collaboration. This cancellation serves as a sobering reminder that even when you work with the best intentions, things can go awry if key partnerships are not built on trust, transparency, and mutual understanding of the goals and needed resources.

From the outset of the contract, District Bridges worked to engage with the community and involved stakeholders, including local vendors, Beloved Community Incubator (BCI), and property owners, to create a vending zone that could be mutually beneficial. We held numerous in-person meetings, developed a vending zone map, and worked collaboratively with local vendors to establish community agreements. The aim was always to ensure that the voices of those most affected were heard and respected.

Unfortunately, the reality of the partnership with DLCP was much more complex. Several issues became clear over the course of the project. This miscommunication and lack of clarity between partners had significant consequences.

Without clear communication channels and a shared understanding of goals and challenges, even the most well-meaning efforts can be undermined.

In this case, the abrupt cancellation of the contract mischaracterized District Bridges' actions and intentions, undermining the months of hard work and collaboration invested in the project.

The Impact of Misaligned Expectations

While District Bridges maintained its commitment to the community, the breakdown in partnership with DLCP left the organization in a difficult position. We were faced with defending our reputation against accusations that did not accurately reflect the work we had done. Despite the frustration of seeing a valued project be derailed by these misunderstandings, District Bridges made it clear that we were still committed to the community and would continue working with local vendors, even without the contract.

This situation highlights an important lesson: partnerships must be built on mutual trust, clarity, and shared expectations. When those elements are missing, even the most sincere efforts can be seen as failures. DLCP's decision to terminate the contract ultimately harmed the community that District Bridges had worked so hard to support.

The cancellation of the contract, while legally justified, creates lasting consequences for street vendors in the Columbia Heights and Mount Pleasant neighborhoods. These vendors, who had been receiving much-needed support, are now left without the resources and technical assistance they had come to rely on. The vendors' voices, which had been central to the creation of the vending zone, were drowned out in the confusion of a partnership that had lost its way.

Moving Forward: A Call for Better Partnerships At All Levels

The Columbia Heights | Mount Pleasant Vending Zone project, while it may have ended prematurely, serves as a powerful example of how vital strong, transparent, and well-aligned partnerships are to community initiatives. When organizations like District Bridges, which have deep roots in their communities and a clear vision of equity and inclusion, partner with government agencies or other organizations, the outcomes can be transformative—but only if those partnerships are based on mutual respect and shared understanding of the goals and needed resources.

For District Bridges, the cancellation of the contract does not mark the end of our commitment to the community. We reaffirmed our dedication to serving the neighborhood and continue to provide support to the vendors and businesses.

However, the more significant lesson here is for organizations, both nonprofit and governmental, to prioritize the health of their partnerships. Good intentions alone are not enough. Community work requires collaboration, communication, and, above all, a willingness to learn and adjust when things don't go as planned. It is only through strong, transparent partnerships that true, lasting change can be achieved.

THE NONPROFIT SECTOR'S UNDERINVESTMENT CRISIS AND HOW DISTRICT BRIDGES IS INNOVATING FOR CHANGE

In the world of nonprofit organizations, an ongoing crisis remains largely unaddressed: chronic underinvestment. Nonprofits work tirelessly to solve some of society's toughest challenges—often stepping in where government and private sectors fall short. Yet, despite their immense contributions, nonprofits are frequently underfunded, forced to operate under extreme financial pressure. This lack of investment doesn't just hinder the ability to scale their impact, it perpetuates a cycle that prevents meaningful change in the communities they serve.

The Numbers Speak for Themselves

Did you know that 92% of nonprofit organizations in the United States operate with annual budgets under \$1 million? Or that over 60% of nonprofits have less than three months' worth of operating expenses saved up? These statistics are startling, yet they are the reality for many organizations that are expected to tackle systemic issues like poverty, education inequality, and climate change.

This financial strain is not due to mismanagement or poor financial planning. Nonprofit leaders are often exceptionally skilled at stretching every dollar to maximize impact. But even the most resourceful leaders face a critical barrier—insufficient and unpredictable funding. The lack of operating reserves, combined with a heavy reliance on restricted, reimbursement-based funding, results in constant cash flow problems, which in turn undermine the long-term sustainability of nonprofits.

A Model Built on Innovation

At District Bridges, we've seen firsthand the challenges caused by chronic underinvestment. Founded in 2015 with no budget and a single employee, we now have 24 staff members and an operating budget approaching \$4 million. Our work, which spans community development, economic empowerment, and social equity, is supported primarily through government grants. In FY25 alone, we are set to receive over \$3.8 million in grants from the District of Columbia government—a testament to the trust and recognition we've earned for our efforts.

However, while government grants are a reliable source of income, many of these funds come with stringent reimbursement requirements. This means we have to front the costs of our programs, waiting weeks, sometimes months, for reimbursement. For

example, in FY25, \$2.6 million of the \$2.8 million we receive in government grants is reimbursement-based. This creates significant financial strain, as our organization must maintain cash flow despite these delayed payments.

The financial model for nonprofits is fundamentally different from the private sector. In business, companies that need to scale or expand can typically turn to banks or investors for capital. They can secure loans or lines of credit based on their business plans, projections, and assets. Yet nonprofits are largely excluded from this model. Many financial institutions won't lend to nonprofits unless they have significant collateral—such as real estate—or offer to personally guarantee the loan. This lack of access to capital severely limits the ability of nonprofits to grow or weather financial instability.

A New Approach: Impact Investing

To disrupt this cycle of underinvestment, District Bridges is pioneering a new financial model: impact investing. This summer, we launched the District Bridges Impact Fund, a creative financing initiative designed to provide short-term loans to help smooth out cash flow fluctuations while we work toward building our reserve fund.

The Impact Fund is a community-driven solution that allows our supporters to directly invest in our mission, while also earning a financial return. We are seeking investments starting at \$5,000 for periods of 6 to 12 months, with interest rates ranging from 1% to 5%. In just the first round of our campaign, we raised

\$190,000 from board members and close supporters. Our goal is to raise \$300,000, which will help us level out our cash flow peaks and valleys, while we build a stronger financial foundation for the future.

By participating in the District Bridges Impact Fund, investors can make a tangible difference in the growth of our organization. The fund is structured to provide passive income for investors while enabling us to continue delivering our essential programs. In essence, this model allows us to scale without taking on excessive debt or relying on the unpredictable nature of traditional grants.

Why It Matters

For nonprofits like District Bridges, access to flexible funding isn't just about financial stability—it's about impact. Every dollar that can be freed up from the uncertainty of cash flow issues goes directly toward helping us better serve our community. Whether it's providing local small businesses with critical resources, developing affordable housing, or enhancing educational opportunities, our ability to sustain and grow our programs is dependent on securing innovative funding solutions.

We believe the District Bridges Impact Fund represents a new model of giving—one where supporters can invest in a nonprofit's mission

in a way that also makes financial sense. It's a partnership between investors and organizations committed to driving positive social change, proving that it is possible to do well by doing good.

We invite you to join us in this exciting new chapter. If you are a socially conscious investor who believes in our work and wants to help us scale our impact, we encourage you to consider investing in the District Bridges Impact Fund. Together, we can build a more resilient and connected community, while also creating lasting financial returns.



INAUGURAL IMPACT MEMBERS

District Bridges launched the Impact Fund in 2024 to stabilize cash flow and scale our impact. As a nonprofit, we rely on government grants—\$2.8 million in FY25—but 93% are reimbursement-based, creating incredibly financial strain. To bridge funding gaps, we've previously used credit cards or loans, costing the organization \$25,000+ in annual interest. The Impact Fund raises funds from mission-driven investors to reduce debt reliance, lower costs, and sustain our work.

Bill & Becky Dornbush

Matt Lapin

Brianne Dornbush

Matt Malarkey

Chelsea Coffin

Meg & Kristina VanDeusen

David DeSantis

Micheal Ulrich

John & Carolyn Malarkey

Michelle Boquiren Urban

Kim & Z Sarin

Sandbox Collective

Kristen Lundquist

Tracy Loh

WHAT'S NEXT?



BRIANNE DORNBUSH
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Optimizing Our Capacity for Greater Impact

In 2024, our strategic priority was **Telling Our Story**—ensuring that the impact of District Bridges was not just happening behind the scenes but was seen, heard, and truly understood. We worked to amplify the voices of our communities, refine how we communicate our mission, and strengthen our ability to connect with those who make this work possible. Through this effort, we didn't just tell our story—we built deeper relationships, fostered greater trust, and created new opportunities for collaboration. Now, as we look to the year ahead, we are digging even deeper—with a clear vision for what comes next: **Optimizing Our Capacity**.

At District Bridges, we know that growth isn't just about doing more—it's about doing better – more impactfully. Over the last year, we've expanded, innovated, and refined our approach, but with that growth comes the need for stability, sustainability, and strategic focus. Optimizing our capacity means strengthening our internal systems, investing in our people, and ensuring that every program and partnership is working at its highest potential to serve our communities.

In 2025, we have four strategic priorities:

1. Strengthen internal and external relationships to boost community engagement by 15% and build trust.
2. Leverage our increased capacity to integrate work, streamline communication, and optimize systems, enhancing collaboration and maximizing impact
3. Enhance brand awareness and trust through consistent, clear communications and presence at multi-channel (digital and in-person) campaigns
4. Ensure financial stability and maintain trust across all DB programs by zeroing out organizational debt and increasing unrestricted revenue to 15% of the total budget

Optimizing our capacity is not just about sustaining what we have built—it's about unlocking new potential to create meaningful, lasting change.

We invite you to join us. Whether you are a partner, supporter, business owner, or community member, your engagement is what makes this work possible. Together, let's build a stronger, more connected city—one where every neighborhood and every individual has the opportunity to thrive.

OUR TEAM

OUR STORY

District Bridges is an ecosystem development nonprofit dedicated to bridging community engagement and economic development to foster equitable, resilient, and connected communities in Washington, DC, and beyond. Born from the grassroots Columbia Heights Initiative (CHI) in 2005, a group of neighbors united around a vision to celebrate and support their community. After a decade of organizing, CHI transformed into a year-round organization when it was awarded the Columbia Heights | Mount Pleasant Main Street grant in 2016. Rebranding as District Bridges, the organization broadened its vision to create a more sustainable and replicable Main Street model.

In 2017, District Bridges pioneered the nation's first multi-Main Street approach by launching the Lower Georgia Avenue Main Street program. Our unique model leverages robust administrative capacity, financial management, governance, and data systems to achieve economies of scale, ensuring the long-term success of both existing and emerging commercial corridors. Today, we manage six of DC's 28 Main Street programs, supporting over 1,000 small businesses across multiple wards, while our online platform AccessPointDC.com delivers essential technical assistance and resources to businesses across the city. We've also invested more in our neighborhoods by launching our Community Navigator program, which addresses the challenges faced by individuals in crisis who often struggle to navigate a fragmented system of resources. By employing a human-centric and place-based strategy, District Bridges aims to create vibrant and healthy public spaces while providing connective social services to Ward 1 residents.

Guided by values of relationship, collaboration, innovation, diversity, fun, and inclusion, District Bridges blends theory with practical action, strengthening local ecosystems through strategic partnerships, technical support, events, and outreach so that individuals, businesses, and organizations can thrive together.



OUR BOARD

MICHELLE BOQUIREN URBEN

Chair

DAVID DESANTIS

Vice Chair

MATT LAPIN

Treasurer

CHELSEA COFFIN

Secretary

CHÉ RUDDELL-TABISOLA

Member

STARSHA VALENTINE

Member

TRACY LOH

Member

DISTRICT BRIDGES

Statement of Financial Position

As of September 30, 2024

ASSETS

Total Current Assets	\$223,471.53
Total Fixed Assets	\$359,153.85
Total Other Assets	\$625.02
Total assets	\$583,250.40

LIABILITIES & EQUITY

Total Current Liabilities*	\$833,870.79
Total Long-Term Liabilities	\$294,003.00
Total Liabilities	\$1,127,873.97
Total Equity	-\$538,953.39
Total Liabilities & Equity	\$588,920.40

*Of the Current Liabilities, \$354,250 is the initial raise of the District Bridges Impact Fund. As of January 30, 2025, \$329,250 has been repaid, with the remaining loans being extended through March or September 2025. For more information on the Impact Fund, please read our Executive Director's article on pages 42-45.

EXPENSES

Programming	82%
Administration	18%

29% of programmatic expenses return to our ecosystem

Partners	3%
Small Business Grants	9%
Events	16%

REVENUE

Governmental Grants	89%
Direct Contributions	9%
Earned Revenue	1.8%
Other Types of Income	0.2%

\$1,000,000+

Department of Small and Local Business Development

DONORS

\$500,000-\$1,000,000

Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)

Department of Behavioral Health

\$10,000-\$50,000

CareFirst Insurance

DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities

Mayor's Office of African Affairs

Mayor's Office of Latino Affairs

Small Business Anti-Displacement Network (SBAN)

Amazon

\$1,000-\$5,000

Abdo Development

Anonymous

Beau Thai

Brian McGee

District Church

Enspire Creative

Fit360 DC

Giant Food

Gordon Buist

Knightsbridge Restaurant Group

Liz Furgurson

M&T Bank

Martin Diamond

Melissa Moskowitz

Michelle Boquiren Urben

Sharon Sens

Stream Reality Partners

Uptown Strategies

Shari Wilson

Peres Household

All Fired Up

Aziz Shariff

Gravely Household

Zuckerman Gravely

Andy Steinem

Eastbanc

ANC3C

ANC1A

Asana Partners

Lyft

Pepco

Thank you.

\$250-\$999

brooklinen

DC Vote

Julia Ventura

Kaitlin Lambert

Lalit Gupta

Robert Shoemaker

Susan Pitman

Tobie Whitman

Dega Schembri

Robin Halsband

7-Eleven

Jose Castellanos

Luis Vivas

Bob Ward

David DeSantis

Richard Hull

Will McAuliffe

Cassie Henriquez

Blakely Jarrett

Fishery Seafood Market

Falls Road Veterinary Hospital, A Thrive health care clinic

Friends of Mount Pleasant Library

Jane Jane

Lisa Resch

Manny & Olga's Pizza

Mt. Pleasant Village

Odd Provisions

Provisions Household

Remodel USA

Sonny's

David Fishman

Rose Donna

Cassandra Hetherington

THANK YOU TO OUR FY24 PARTNERS

DISTRICT BRIDGES IS GRATEFUL FOR **122 ACTIVE
PARTNERSHIPS** THIS PAST FISCAL YEAR

14TH/U FARMERS MARKET
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

ANC 1A

ANC 1B

ANC 1D

ANC 1E

ANC 3/4G

ANC 3C

APPLETREE INSTITUTE

ART STELLA PRODUCTIONS

ARTRAVE DC

ASTRO JUMP

BANCROFT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

BELTWAY LUXURY RESTROOMS

BRIT DAT'S HIP

CAPITOL HILL ARTS WORKSHOP

CAPITOL TAROT SOCIETY

CAREER PATH DC

CH/ART

CHEVY CHASE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

CHEVY CHASE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

CINDER BBQ

CITY CAST

CITY RIDGE

CLEMENTE CAPTURE

CLEVELAND & WOODLEY PARK VILLAGE

CLEVELAND PARK HISTORIC SOCIETY

CLEVELAND PARK LIBRARY

CLEVELAND PARK SMART GROWTH

CM FRUMIN AND STAFF

CPCA

CROSBY CREATIONS
DC ABORTION FUND

DC COMMISSION ON THE ARTS
AND HUMANITIES

DC HUMANITIES TRUCK

DC JAZZ JAM

DC JUSTICE LAB

DC OFFICE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

DC PEACE TEAM

DC PREVENTION CENTER / LAYC

DC WATER

DCPL

DDOT

DEPARTMENT FOR HOUSING AND
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

DEPARTMENT FOR SMALL AND
LOCAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

DISTRICT CHURCH

DISTRICT COALITION

DLCP

DMV FOAMBOREE

DOB

DOGS ON THE CURB

DPR

DPW

DUPONT CIRCLE MAIN STREET

EASTBANC

ENJOY LIFE ICE

EVENT RENTALS DC

FIT360DC

FOXTROT

FRANKOJAZZ

FRESHFARM
FRIENDS OF CHEVY CHASE CIRCLE

FROSTY SOFTY

GRAND RENTAL EVENTS

HAWWA HENNA

HIBA ART

HIMALAYAN SOUL FOODS

HISTORIC CHEVY CHASE DC

JARABE GOURMET POPS

JUDYMAKESJUICES

KHADIJA JAMILA FINE ART

KIMMY'S HEAVY HOOPS

KIWANIS CLUB OF WASHINGTON, D.C.

LIDL

LIME

LOGAN CIRCLE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

LONG LIVE GOGO

LOU VIVAS

MARKLE FOUNDATION

MASPAZ

MEAT ON STICKS

MERRY PIN

MPD

MT PLEASANT ARTIST'S COLLECTIVE

MT PLEASANT FARMER'S MARKET

MT PLEASANT FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY

MT PLEASANT LIBRARY

MT PLEASANT VILLAGE

N STREET VILLAGE

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NOTA FITNESS

NW COMMUNITY FOOD PANTRY

PEIRCE MILL
PELE YOGA

PETIT AFRIK

PRECISION EVENT RENTALS

RABBIT RECORDS

RIBEYE PHILADELPHIA STEAK

ROAMER PRODUCTIONS

ROSEDALE

SALVATION ARMY

SLIMEBAR

SMOOTH CANOE VISUALS

SOME CENTER FOR EMPLOYMENT TRAINING

SPUR LOCAL

SUSTAINABLESCOOP

TENLEYTOWN MAIN STREET

THE NATIONAL REENTRY NETWORK

THE VILLAGE

THRONE LABS

TRADE / NUMBER NINE

TREGARON CONSERVANCY

U STREET COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

VAN NESS MAIN STREET

VXN WORKOUT

WARD 3 MOCR

WE ARE ARTISTIC

WELLE MADE

WOODLEY HOUSE

WOODLEY PARK MAIN STREET

WORDS BEATS & LIFE

WORKFORCE INVESTMENT COUNCIL



The background of the image features a complex, abstract graphic composed of thick, wavy lines in three colors: yellow, light blue, and light green. These lines are set against a solid red background and overlap each other in various ways, creating a sense of depth and movement. The lines are primarily located in the upper and lower right areas of the frame, with a few smaller clusters in the lower left.

DISTRICT BRIDGES
3400 11TH ST NW SUITE 200
WASHINGTON, DC 20010
WWW.DISTRICTBRIDGES.ORG
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