

Bethesda Row - Bethesda, Maryland

Bethesda Row, located near the edge of downtown Bethesda, Maryland, illustrates the revitalization of a suburban commercial district into a mixed-use, walkable downtown. The project is so successful that it draws customers not just from surrounding neighborhoods, but also from around the greater Washington metropolitan area.

The development, being built in several phases by The Federal Realty Investment Trust, creates a thriving, pedestrian-friendly streetscape. Both the sidewalk design and parking solutions are key to making the project a walkable neighborhood. Brick sidewalks, trees, fountains, plazas, and outdoor seating all encourage residents and visitors to walk around the mix of local, regional, and national retailers and restaurants. The developer sought permission from the county to put sidewalk cafe seating next to the street while putting public sidewalks next to the storefronts. This creates a feeling of walking through the restaurants, making it a place to see and be seen. Street trees and curbside parking protect the seated restaurant patrons from street traffic.

Most of the parking, however, is located in a 1,000-space, county-owned, public parking garage located in the middle of the block. Cars are hidden behind the stores and restaurants but are easily accessible from all parts of the development. This public parking garage was built as part of a downtown parking district. Developers who build within the district can choose to pay a parking assessment to the county in lieu of providing parking on site. The county uses the assessment revenues to build public parking structures throughout downtown. Concentrating parking in these garages allows developers to build a walkable downtown streetscape uninterrupted by parking lots.

The project is being built in seven phases on parts of four city blocks. When complete, it will contain 360,000 square feet of retail and restaurant space, 140,000 square feet of office space, and 100,000 square feet of residential space. Phase Four was completed in 2002, and the subsequent phases include a new supermarket and all the residential space. The development's location along the Capital Crescent Trail provides a convenient connection to downtown Washington, D.C., by bicycle, in-line skate, and foot, while its proximity to a Metro station gives public transit users easy access.



This fountain and plaza located at the entrance of a bookstore act as a central meeting and gathering place in Bethesda Row.

[Larger Picture](#)

SMART GROWTH PRINCIPLES BETHESDA ROW	
#1 Mix Land Uses	✓
#2 Compact Building Design	✓
#3 Range of Housing Choices	-
#4 Walkable Neighborhoods	★
#5 Distinctive and Attractive Places	✓
#6 Preserve Open Spaces and Farmland	-
#7 Development in Existing Communities	✓
#8 Transportation Choices	✓
#9 Predictable and Fair Decision Making	✓
#10 Community and Stakeholder Participation	-

The Congress for the New Urbanism gave Bethesda Row a Charter Award in 2002. The Washington Smart Growth Alliance recognized Phase Seven of Bethesda Row as an exemplary smart growth proposal.



Brick sidewalks, street trees, and store fronts with plenty of windows create an inviting pedestrian shopping experience.

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The street tables for cafes and restaurants are located near the curb so people walking past get the sense of being in the middle of a restaurant where they can see and be seen. Street trees and on-street parking buffer the diners from traffic.

[Larger Picture](#)



A multi-story parking garage is hidden in the center of the block behind the shops, restaurants, and offices. Parking is easily accessible but is out of sight.

[Larger Picture](#)



A trail made on old railroad tracks runs alongside the development. This provides walkers and cyclists access to neighboring communities.

[Larger Picture](#)