

# THE DC DOWNTOWN FUTURING WORKSHOP

S U M M A R Y R E P O R T

**IDEO**

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01 Overview

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02 Futures Triangle Framework

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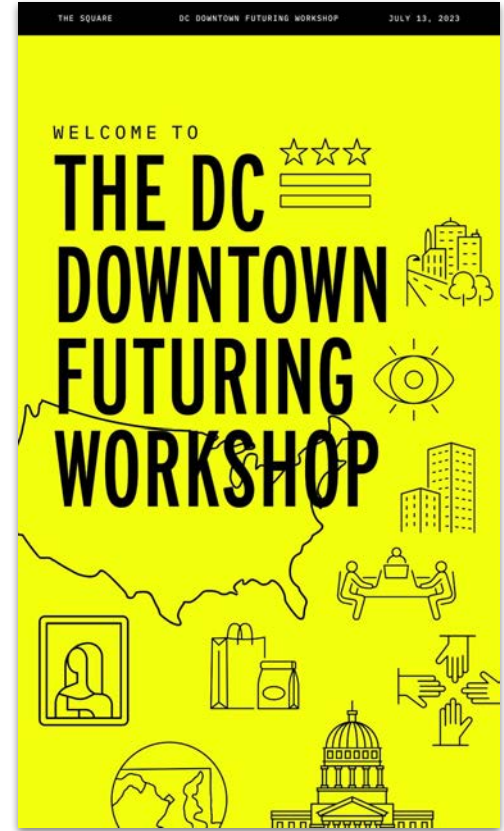
03 Summary Report

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On July 13, 2023, the Federal City Council and IDEO hosted a workshop for invited stakeholders to generate and share big ideas for the future of DC's Downtown.

This workshop was part of a larger stakeholder engagement initiative on behalf of the [Downtown Action Plan](#).

In this report, you will find the foundational framework used to anchor the DC Downtown Futuring Workshop as well as the synthesized themes, opportunities, and ideas that came from participants in the session.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This was a collaborative effort, and we want to acknowledge the contribution and support of our partners in this work.

Thank you for your sponsorship and for your enduring belief in Washington, DC. Your vision and leadership inspires us.

*\* Ideas and concepts presented in this Summary Report are products of the July 13, 2023 Futuring Workshop and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of our sponsors.*



EVENT PHOTOS



Photos by Rob Bratney



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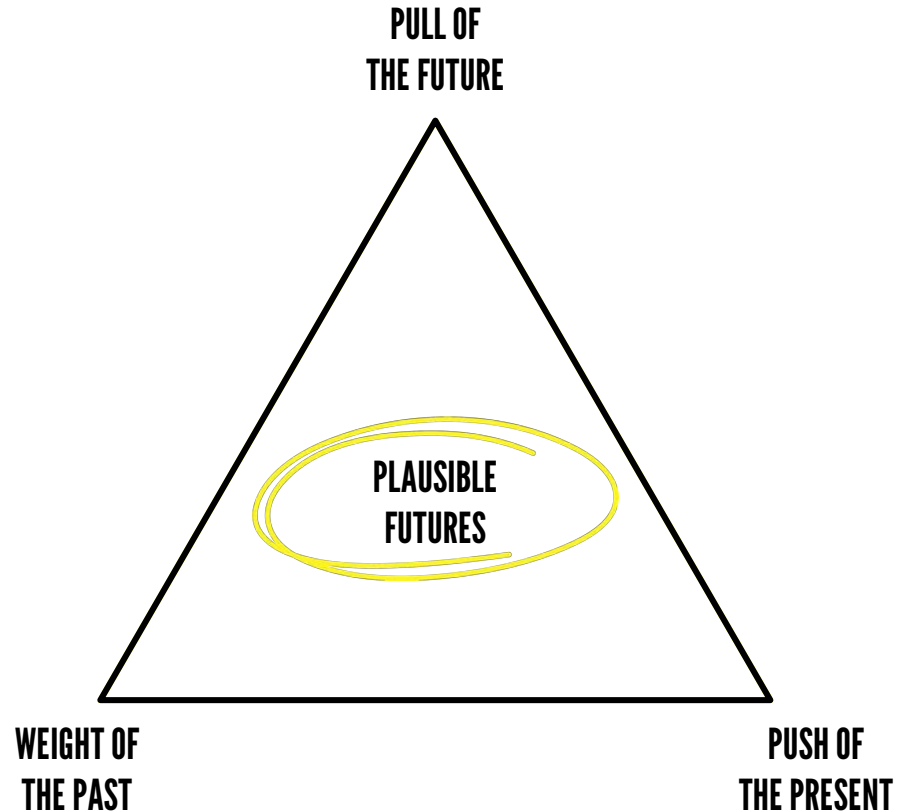
03 Summary Report

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The **Futures Triangle\*** is a strategic futuring tool that looks across three dimensions:

- **The weight of the past**
- **The push of the present**
- **The pull of the future**

The tension and interaction between these three forces create possible future spaces. We chose this framework to inspire ideation and create next steps during the Futures Workshop.



The **Weight of the Past** is the history of a place. It is the inertia to change that exists due to sticky values, ingrained belief systems, legacy programs and infrastructure.

These might include:

- **Physical assets**
- **Societal beliefs and behaviors**
- **Systemic constraints**





The **Push of the Present** refers to the major forces driving the present forward and steering us towards the future at a big scale.

We often use the **STEEP** framework to surface:

- **Social drivers**
- **Technological drivers**
- **Economic drivers**
- **Environmental drivers**
- **Political drivers**





The **Pull of the Future** refers to inspiring signals of change that point towards interesting opportunities for the future of cities, and in this case, DC specifically!

For this workshop, we aligned DC signals with five key areas:

- **Moving away from monoculture**
- **Multifaceted and multi generational**
- **Community as currency**
- **Global meets local**
- **Resiliency and adaptability**



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01 Overview

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02 Futures Triangle Framework

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## DC DOWNTOWN FUTURE WORKSHOP

**01**

**WELCOME &  
WORKSHOP  
OVERVIEW**

**02**

**WEIGHT OF  
THE PAST**

**03**

**PUSH OF  
THE PRESENT**

**04**

**PULL OF  
THE FUTURE**

**GALLERY  
WALK**

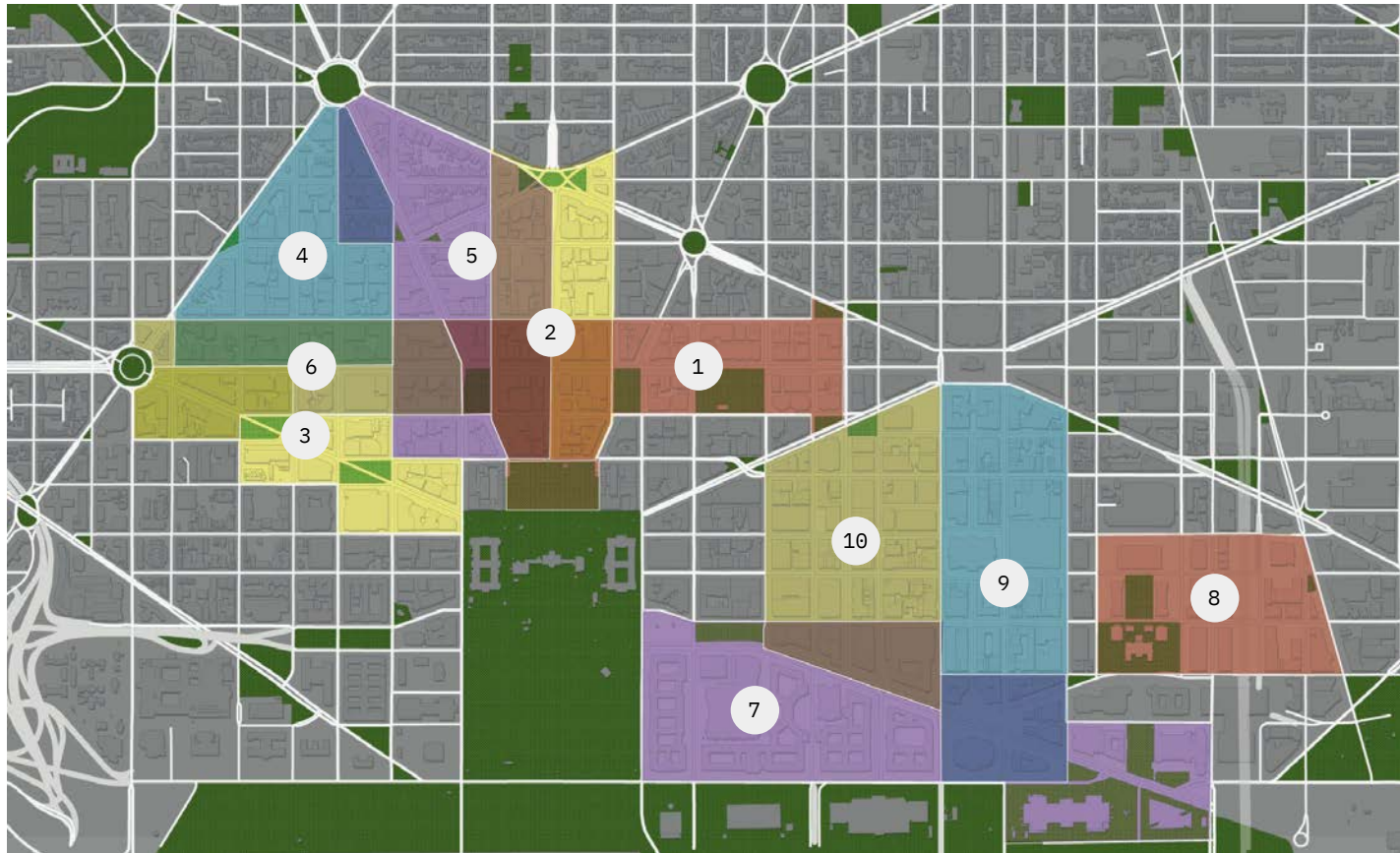




SUMMARY REPORT: INPUTS (WORKING SESSION BOARDS)







- 1** K Street Green Corridor
- 2** BLM Plaza / 16th St
- 3** Penn West
- 4** 19th, 20th, 21st St
- 5** 17th St / CT Ave / Dupont Circle
- 6** K St West
- 7** Penn East
- 8** Downtown East
- 9** 7th St / Chinatown / Penn Qtr
- 10** Metro Center

## Themes

Themes are clusters of patterns that emerge within a selection of work. They are interesting observations that point towards meaningful questions for design.

## Opportunities

Opportunities represent big strategic open space for design. They are thoughtfully constrained and provide a generative frame for ideation.

We use “How might we” statements to frame opportunities because they are open ended, optimistic, and inherently collaborative. A good “how might we” should inspire many ideas.

## Ideas

Depending on the challenge, ideas could span from physical, to digital, from service to system-level solutions.

Ideas point us toward possibilities for the future of DC’s Downtown.



- 01 How might we make the K Street Green Corridor feel more accessible and drive visitation outside of “official” business?

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- 02 How might we further activate BLM Plaza, positioning it as the heart of a thriving, multi-use neighborhood?

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- 03 How might we channel the best of university culture and tourism towards a vibrant, connected, and international Penn West?

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- 04 How might we “create space” for programming in an area that feels highly built out and overly restricted?

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- 05 How might we imagine existing buildings and infrastructure to create a sense of modernization and excitement?

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- 06 How might we increase foot traffic and after hours visits to non residential areas?

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- 07 How might we build a deep sense of community for residents while creating a vibrant destination for tourists?

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- 08 How might we make the area feel more attractive and accessible to people of all ages?

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- 09 How might we reimagine underutilized buildings as places for new ways of gathering, entertainment, and cultural programming?

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- 10 How might we bring vitality to the area without the need for massive structural change?

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# The future of DC's Downtown is...

1

...a global education destination.

2

...a university innovation hub.

3

...an international corridor for lifelong learning.

4

...a pedestrian friendly place for concerts and retail.

5

...a university hub hosting debates and incubators.

6

...a downtown full of greenways and piazzas.

7

...an entertainment, arts, and culture district.

8

...a K→20 learning hub with green space for families.

9

...a redeveloped arena surrounded by public spaces.

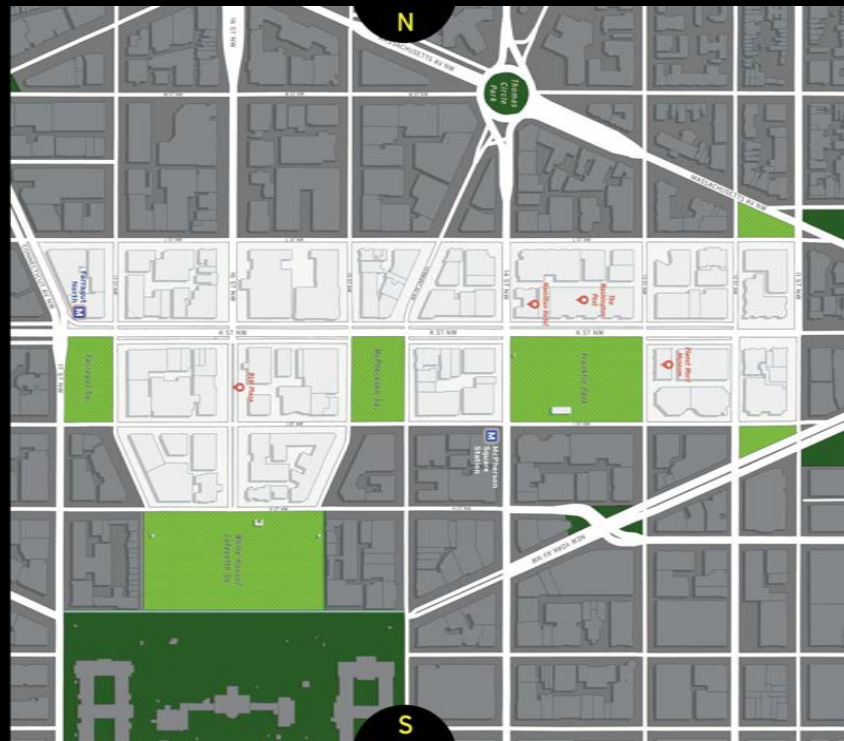
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...an arts and culture district with an emphasis on pedestrian space.



Table 1

# K Street Green Corridor



## WEIGHT OF THE PAST

- Office and commercial uses
- High traffic and car dominated
- Heavy, ceremonial, and dated
- Racial and socioeconomic inequality; overly policed
- Highly regulated zoning

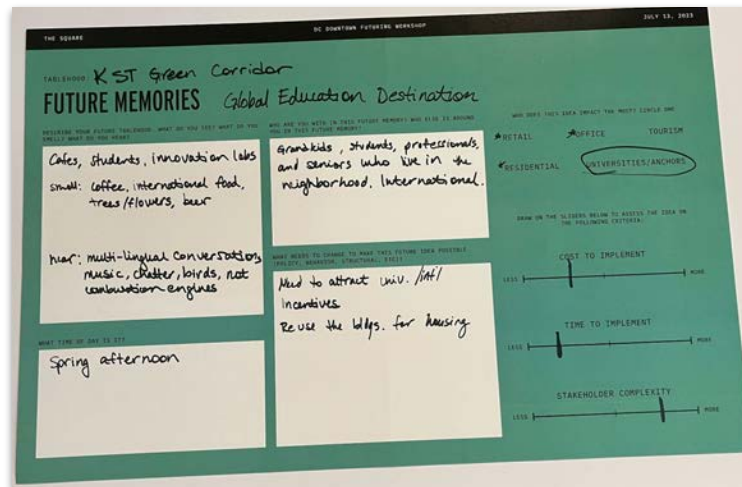
## PUSH OF THE PRESENT

- Work from home at scale
- Public safety
- Innovation in transportation
- Economic drivers creating unfriendly environments for business; however businesses are still opening
- Federal vs. local government

How might we make the K Street Green Corridor feel more accessible and drive visitation outside of “official” business?

TABLEHOOD 1 IDEA

# A global education destination.



## Arts & Culture

Art builds community.

Create seasonally rotating art installations through green spaces that celebrate the “neighborhoods and cultures of DC” to drive visitation to this area and start to build “community.”

Use public spaces to promote cultural events and spaces to enliven experiences.

## Parks & Green Spaces

Connect the parks to connect people and neighborhoods.

Greenway corridors with public art from DC, events, and programming. Connect current boxpark assets, building from White House node.

Invest in tree canopy.

## Families & Communities

Create a net zero community in the heart of downtown.

A residential center city with housing, schools, and retail.

Bring in housing for young people and families. Convert some of the existing spaces and make them affordable to live in.

## Education & Universities

Create a significant education destination. Leverage presence of federal government, think tanks, international organizations to be a much bigger destination for college/universities.

Recruit/ attract DC presence from key target universities International schools, HBCUs, US-based universities.

Create a university-sponsored innovation hub.

## Zoning To Support Development

Create regenerative zones where regulations are reduced and incentive is created to repurpose or rebuild current environment.

Increasing the height limit for buildings would allow for exciting design, more density of people, and more green space between buildings.

Bonus zoning to encourage interesting architecture.

Break up super blocks with walkable alleys.

Table 2

# BLM Plaza/ 16th St





### WEIGHT OF THE PAST

- Federal government as the dominant paradigm
- Transit availability
- Central location with broad geography
- Monoculture of programming
- Center of protest and Black Lives Matter legacy
- Major anchor institutions

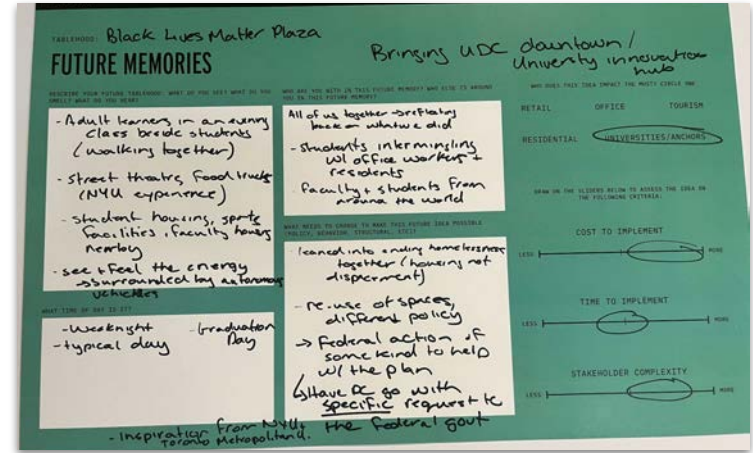
### PUSH OF THE PRESENT

- Uncertainty at a massive scale
- Large commercial footprint
- Environmental impact of big brick buildings and wide roads
- Protest site and protest tourism
- Presidential politics has outsized influence on DC and perception of DC

How might we further activate BLM Plaza, positioning it as the heart of a thriving, multi-use neighborhood?

TABLEHOOD 2 IDEA

# Bring University of the District of Columbia downtown to create a university innovation hub.



## Incubation & Commercialization

An opportunity for DC to lead and develop best practices to what future urban centers can achieve.

Establish leadership for tech and data driven policy - along with ethical parameters.

Innovation center to commercialize new solutions.

## Art & Green Spaces

Create art moments throughout the city that inspire gathering.

Car Free Penn Ave – a permanent event and performance space.

Music organized in a city square.

More trees and modern art.

## Redevelopment

Convert all commercial to residential surrounding Franklin Park, Farragut, and McPherson.

Take on a large floor plate federal building as a pilot mixed use building.

Unlock spaces between the buildings.

Create themed spaces full of small businesses and social spaces with F&B corporate sponsors.

## Downtown Campus

Create a downtown campus with student housing and focused on credential programming; focus on DC students with grant programs.

Develop a major capital campaign for UDC.

Bring students to the area - universities and magnet high schools.

## BLM Plaza Activation

Extend BLM Plaza as center of the district.

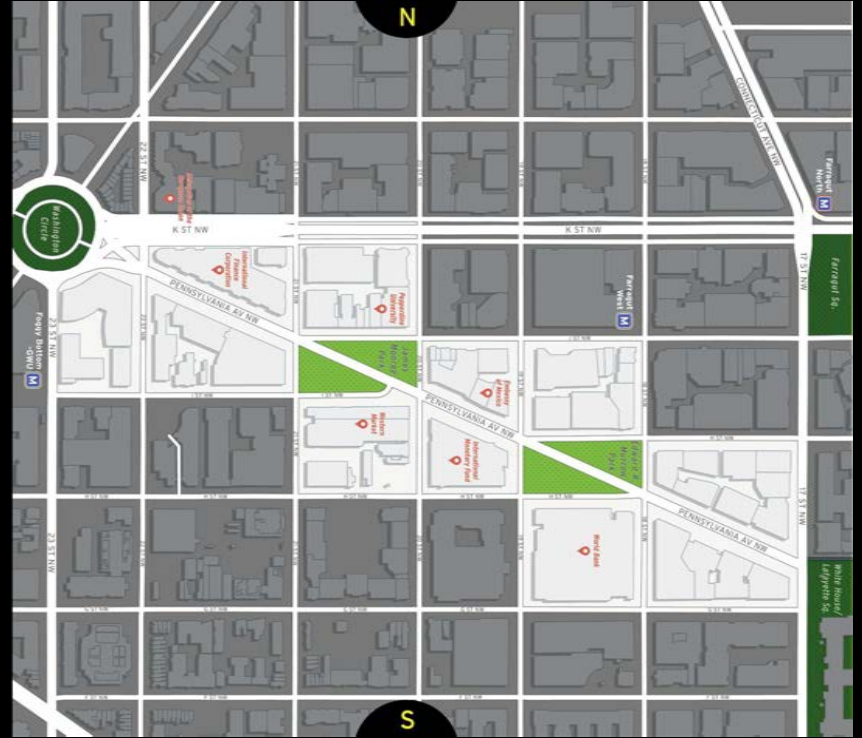
Make this a space that really becomes a path to protest and connection the legacy of what came before the protest.

Allow DC residents and social justice orgs to program BLM weekly.

Create a national competition to remake the space.

Table 3

# Penn West





### WEIGHT OF THE PAST

- Dominated by federal buildings and monuments
- Isolation of GWU
- Touristy area but tourism is not capitalized upon

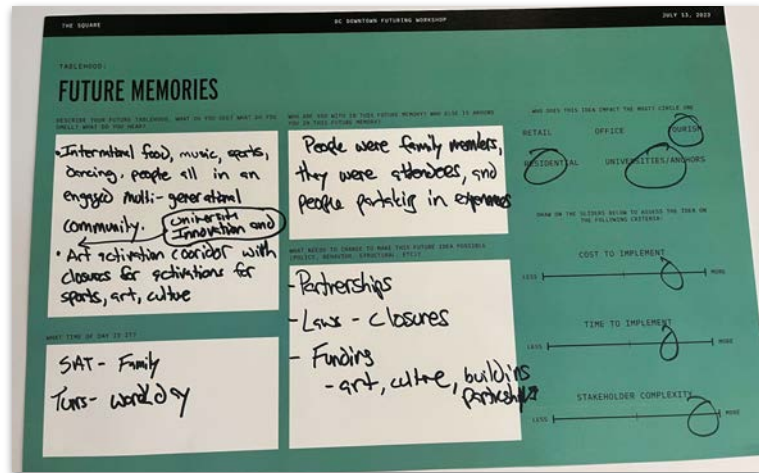
### PUSH OF THE PRESENT

- WFH = lack of workers = lack of day activities
  - *Leading to retail and commercial closure*
- Increase in homelessness and crime
- Increase in appreciation for repurposing of space
- High cost of maintenance/improvements
- Impact of GWU on this area

How might we channel the best of university culture and tourism towards a vibrant, connected, and international Penn West?

TABLEHOOD 3 IDEA

An international corridor with a focus on lifelong learning.



## Tourism

Identify past, present, and future assets that can create a narrative for this area (tangible + intangible, human + hardspace, business + university).

Cultural DC walk/ tour and integrate it with apps and social media showcasing historic past.

Cannabis tourism.

Sports tourism, like F1.

## Residential, Retail & Parks

Rooftop gardens for community harvesting, community plots, and farmer's market.

Tax abatements for residential and retail.

Outdoor activities like a roller skating rink.

Convert a large office space into a Korean spa.

## Education & Universities

Encourage growth of university programs and semester in DC programs.

Integration of universities into culture of DC.

Incubators - celebrate the school with school spirit.

Create a senior/ lifelong living learning community.

World class charter/ magnet school.

## International Experience

The city where you can taste the world: enhanced focus on global representation and international influence - food, culture, language, institutions, embassies, and universities.

Showcase of world culture with embassies.

Top international institutions and local businesses to program Penn Ave, the parks, and the circle.

## Metro

Addition of metro station entrance at Farragut West.

Table 4

# 19th, 20th, 21st St (South of Dupont)





## WEIGHT OF THE PAST

- Restrictions like Height Act and Commission on Fine Arts Review
- K Street Power Corridor
- Feels like it's "fully built out"
- Transient; no one lives here
- Very little green space
- Public safety
- Flow of traffic
- Small town in a big city
- Government adjacent

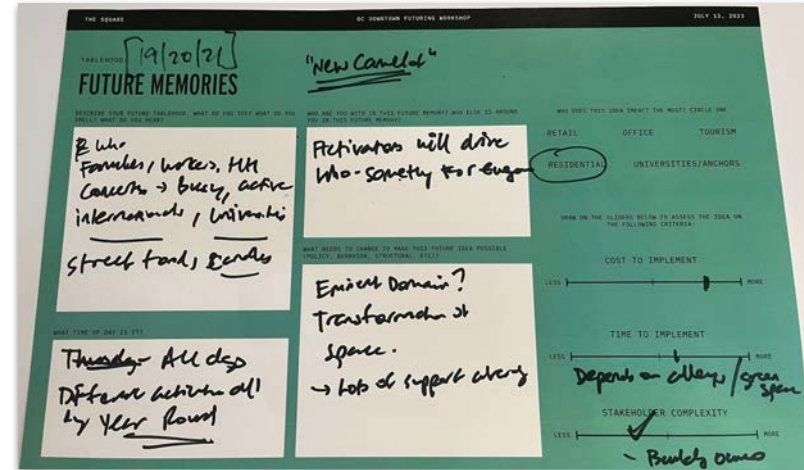
## PUSH OF THE PRESENT

- Rising cost of living
- Culture changes like loneliness epidemic and a preference for experiences over things
- Aging population and shrinking average household size
- Climate change
- The nature of work has shifted
- Frustration about limited progress on racial justice matched with riots, social unrest, and vandalism

How might we “create space”  
for programming in an area  
that feels highly built out and  
overly restricted?

TABLEHOOD 4 IDEA

“New Camelot” with pedestrian friendly alleyways hosting concerts and retail.



## Arts & Culture

Create programming on Connecticut Avenue.

Starting with farmer's markets, create more food opportunities; dining, cooking school, and cooking classes.

More public art.

Develop childcare capacity.

Create an urban oasis for the childless.

## Pedestrian Alleys & Blocks

Develop a dedicated pedestrian network (alleys + pedestrianized streets).

Activate alleys in DC with retail, housing, and green space.

Create a pedestrian street in the heart of the district and turn it into a park with cafes, restaurants lining the streets.

Take a least half a block to create a destination with substantial green and play spaces.

## Green & Public Spaces

A green social space to give neighborhood identity.

Tree + table placemaking project - small groups that live or work in an area adopt a tree and two seats and curate/ care for it.

Placemaking programs that promote more foot traffic and public space activities.

Create destination for gathering, entertainment, and relaxation.

## Economic Development

Protect the mall - 30 block radius - everything outside that area's restrictions gradually get fixed.

Build on existing assets to create bio-medial and tech hub.

Support a non-profit incubator.

## Residential & Mixed Us

Develop housing for students/ grads/ early professionals.

Targeted live near your work program; workforce housing program.

Expanded HUD program to encourage more conversion.





## WEIGHT OF THE PAST

- Legacy as a Federal city
- L'Enfant Plan
- Reliance on government stifles innovation and creativity
- Growth and change in this area
- Downtown feels suited for the middle-aged
- Segregation and gentrification
- Tenant mix of students, law firms, bars on 17th, shops, and tourists

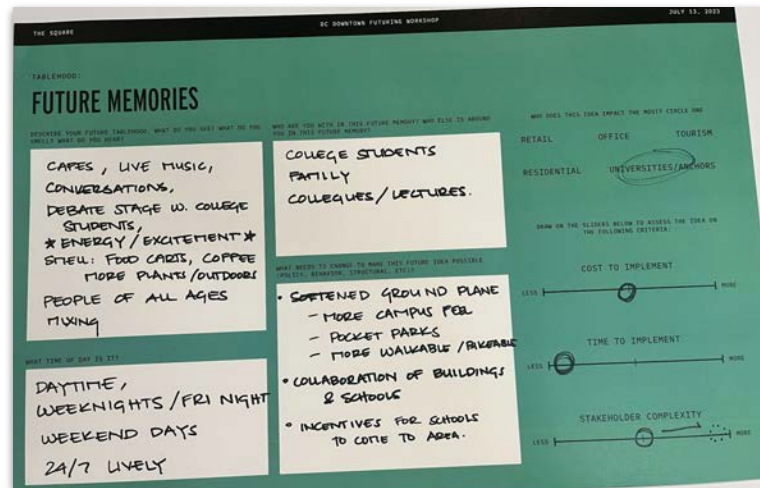
## PUSH OF THE PRESENT

- Political process slows things down
- High cost of housing
- Remote work and vacancies in commercial and retail spaces
- Clash between working age people
- Need sustainable transportation infrastructure
- Socioeconomic divisions
- Higher education and university footprint

How might we imagine existing buildings and infrastructure to create a sense of modernization and excitement?

TABLEHOOD 5 IDEA

# A university hub hosting debates and incubators.



## Arts & Culture

Attract a prominent School of Arts.

Concentrate art activities in one select street or locality to attract locals and tourists.

Create a local artist gallery.

## Incentives & Activations

A campaign to “take another look” at DC.

Provide affordable visitor lodging.

Free transportation one day a week.

Program a weekly food event on a sizable space to draw in people who want to sample new foods and buy speciality foods.

Activate the parks.

## Redevelopment

Reorient the location to serve the demand for both professional sports and local youth sports.

Build a state of the art Gaming Hall.

Create an event venue.

Develop a destination to celebrate freedom and equality throughout the city.

## Pedestrian Green Spaces

Invest in urban tree canopy.

A green, active spine to provide respite with a view.

Make this area a respite to tourists who come to see the mall and monuments with a tourism center and amenities.

Create a pedestrian corridor on 17th between Nat Geo Plaza and BLM Plaza.

## Education & Universities

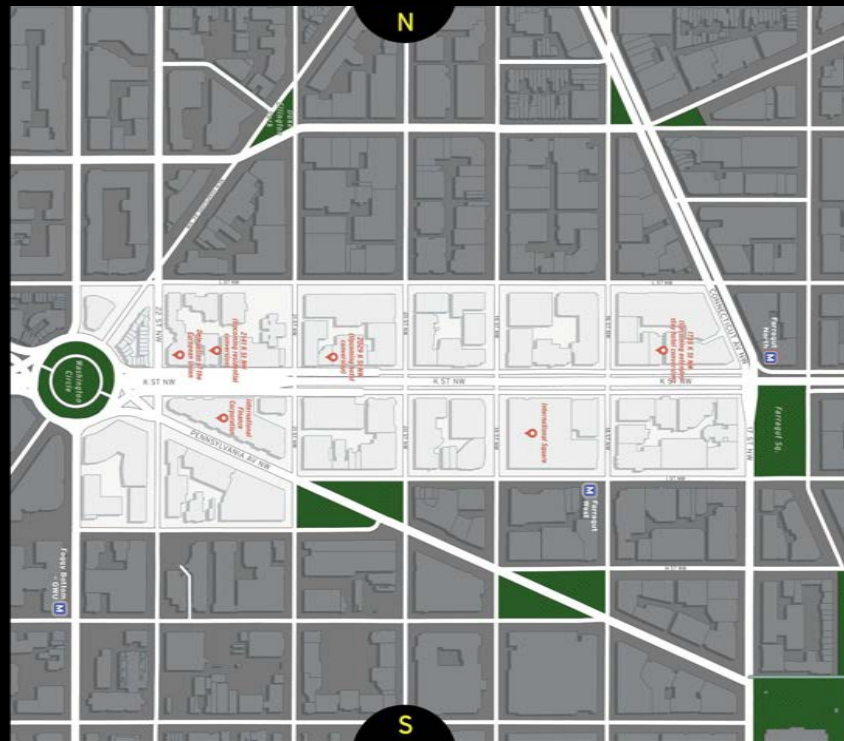
Utilize/ create university hub to build workforce and energy.

Lean into university interest to create modern interpretation and campus.

Leverage young people that surround this area (GW and other DC centers that are full of young workers) to create a vital gathering place.

Table 6

# K Street West



### WEIGHT OF THE PAST

- Zoning laws
- DC does not own much property within its own city
- K Street brand as “law firm alley,” politics, and lobbying
- No residential, no after hours activity
- Public safety
- Architectural history
- Transportation corridor
- Green spaces and green moments

### PUSH OF THE PRESENT

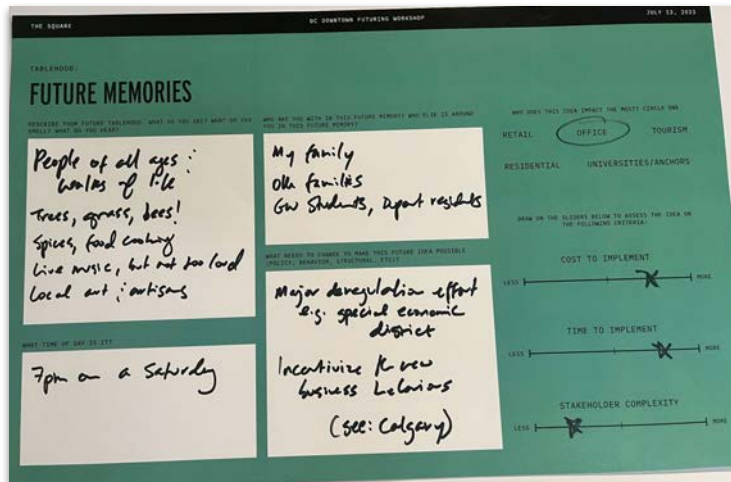
- Rising cost of real estate, interest rates, inflation, and taxes
- Boom of other neighborhoods in DC
- Post pandemic remote work, commercial vacancies, and empty storefronts
- Increased homelessness and awareness of systemic inequity
- People choosing transit has decreased
- Buildings with very little personality

How might we increase foot traffic and after hours visits to an area where nobody lives?



TABLEHOOD 6 IDEA

# Turn K Street into a greenway with piazzas in alleyways.



## K Street Opportunities

Have a goal of building the best urban boulevard in the world.

Crowdsource feedback on how a different “what” would compel people to come to this area.

Build a green spine that connects Wash. Circle to Farragut Square in active and open parkspace.  
Reorient the buildings along K towards the new park and consider design elements to bridge natural and built environment.

## Economic Development

Attract more universities to create an innovation hub and academic center.

Building owners convert to condos and sell floors to tenants.

All new buildings made from sustainable materials sources regionally.

Build a new regional/ local industry in manufacturing that focuses in sustainable materials, particularly mass timber

Urban manufacturing.

## Mid Block Opportunities

Develop data centers and hydroponic farming at empty or mid block buildings.

Mid block buildings become vertical farms and ground floors become distribution centers.

Create piazzas – take out the mid block buildings to access the center of the blocks for small/ intimate spaces for gathering, markets, performances with interior facing retail, restaurants, and culture.

## Arts & Culture

Instead of lamenting lack of arts funding in schools, create incentives for music studios and arts school programs to use vacant office space.

Create more artists studio space and housing, which will encourage more young people to move to DC.

Library outpost with programming beyond books so there is something open after 5pm.

## Redevelopment

Remove all regulations except those needed for health/ safety and allow demand to express itself within this zone.

Brand DC as where green will happen - DC as a green lab and innovation hub.

Create a tier of ownership interest in land and/ or improvements that shares wealth with individuals who have been denied access to wealth creation, and/ or arts and services non-profits that provide universal access to programs.

Table 7

# Penn East



### WEIGHT OF THE PAST

- Federal footprint covers the area
- Lack of residential activity
- Biking infrastructure and transit accessibility
- Expensive
- Not business friendly

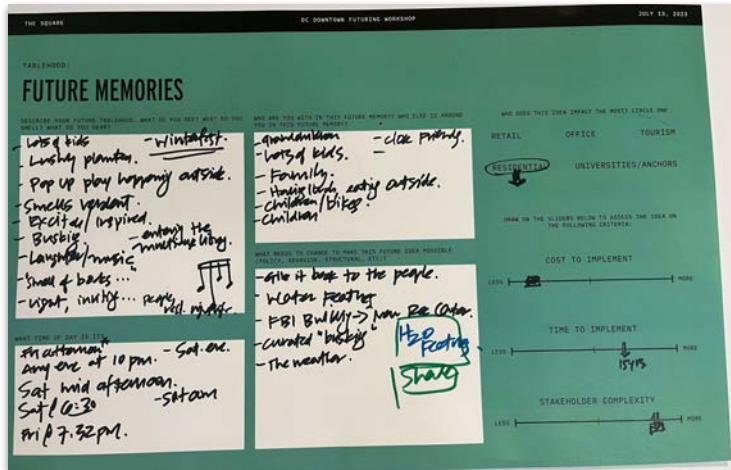
### PUSH OF THE PRESENT

- People are yearning for social connectivity, especially events that create community
- Climate change; DC's heavy built environment and flood plain
- Declining office demand
- Bringing back "third space"
- Interest in urban life for families while families continue to move out of the city

How might we build a deep sense of community for residents while creating a vibrant destination for tourists?

TABLEHOOD 7 IDEA

An entertainment, arts, and culture district called “The Triangle.”



## Arts & Culture

Theater/ arts district feels lively, animated, restaurants, cafés want to be in the theater/ arts district.

Penn Ave as America's venue – America's stage.

Pop-up arts events in office buildings.

Smithsonian on wheels.

Book festivals.

Makerspaces.

## Sports & Recreation

More public sporting facilities. Pickleball courts on rooftops with climate control and shelter.

Bicycle lending program for kids.

Open the DC rec centers and pools seven days of the week; year round.

Close Penn Ave more frequently for “cyclovia” for recreation with contemporary programming.

## Residential & Mixed Use

With the desire to keep graduates in town, provide degree-earners a tax-rebate for five years for staying in DC.

1,000 units of undergraduate student and young faculty housing.

Keep families in the city. Build an amazing playground on Freedom Plaza.

Create affordable office space to encourage in-office work and encourage start-ups/ small biz.

## Tourism

Provide Mall tourists with services like bathrooms, food, and wifi.

Make Penn Ave an alternative space that draws visitors without needing special festival programming.

Ensure Federal/ DC buildings have place and purpose for visitors.

Activate public space; make the Mall feel open and welcome.

## FBI Building

FBI Building as the new Rockefeller Center.

“District” anchored in Penn East (FBI Building) repurposed or new.

Redevelop the Hoover Building with residential, open space, and some office.



Table 8

# Downtown East



## WEIGHT OF THE PAST

- Proximity to capital makes it feel less local and more federal
- Legacy of 1960s and 1970s Federal office buildings
- No residential vibrancy
- Union Station, public transit, I 395
- No ground floor vitality
- Isn't downtown, isn't union station, isn't capitol hill
- Courts and criminal justice system
- Homelessness and poverty; deep racial disparity

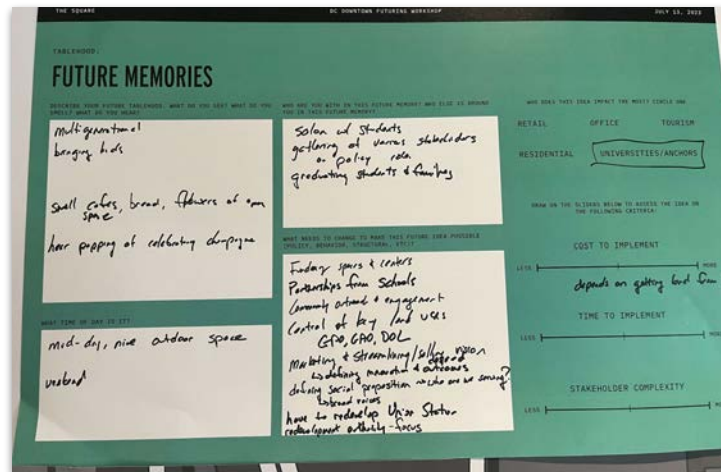
## PUSH OF THE PRESENT

- Assets like the National Building Museum, John Marshall, Georgetown, Union Station, and Capital Crossing
- Lack of affordable housing for families
- Heat islands
- Lots of transformation happening *around* Downtown East
- Justice system in flux in public opinion as well as shifting to digital
- Car infrastructure becoming less relevant

How might we make the area  
feel more attractive and  
accessible to people of all ages?

TABLEHOOD 8 IDEA

An education hub for K→20 learning, with policy labs and greenspace activated for families.



## Justice System

Use this court adjacent neighborhood to elevate the dignity of the unhoused – like services in the MLK library.

Use space to teach people their rights, not in a court building, to help negative feeling around this district.

Use technology to reestablish faith in the American justice system and practices.

Repurpose cluster of courts as a community space --- inverted to serve community not enforce structures.

## Residential & Mixed-Use

Mixed use housing focused on interns plus permanent housing.

Services/ employment hub include restaurants and build off success of DC Central Kitchen.

CCNV redevelopment into permanent housing with services.

Dedicated finance tool to facilitate ground floor uses at below-market rates.

## Green & Public Spaces

Embed Union Station into the rest of the city – create opportunities and perceptions that you can walk, bike, etc. thought a vibrant open space, stay in hotel, eat good food, and experience culture.

Greenway between John Marshall, Cobb, NBM.

Radical greening of streets with many trees and many parks, shared spaces, benches, stormwater retention, etc.

## Innovation & Collaboration

Southern anchor of N.E. Corridor - place to meet, debate, influence, and decide,

Civic innovation district - higher ed, foundations, think tanks.

Invest in makerspaces and urban manufacturing.

## Education & Universities

Dedicated partnership between downtown DC, NOMA, MTVT CID to create a DC University District for Georgetown and Hopkins.



### WEIGHT OF THE PAST

- Racial inequity, tensions, and challenges
- Scale of the city and growth; continuous redevelopment
- Historical buildings
- Metro and public transit access
- Primarily commercial

### PUSH OF THE PRESENT

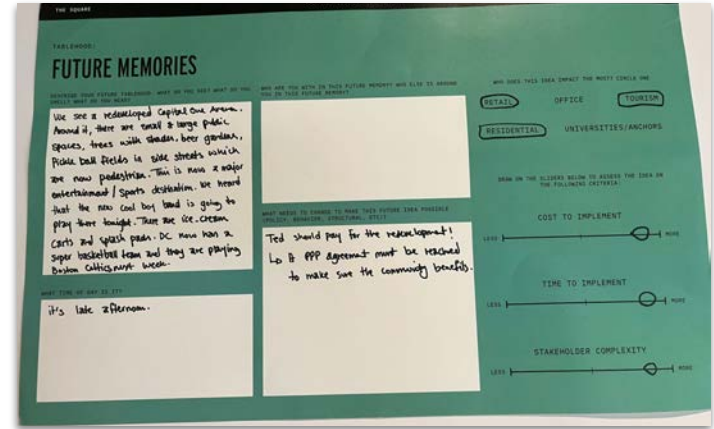
- Economic disparity, crime, and safety
- Aging, inefficient buildings
- Decline and closures of retail and businesses
- Underperforming sports teams
- Not considered a focus area for development



How might we reimagine underutilized buildings as places for new ways of gathering, entertainment, and cultural programming?

TABLEHOOD 9 IDEA

# A redeveloped arena surrounded by public spaces.



## Green & Public Spaces

Make 7th St true center of DC for locals: public space, events, community things to do, use local vibrancy to support tourism in surrounds areas and draw visitors from Mall.

Central destination: Street chess, fountains, joint restaurant space, weekend farmer's market, food halls.

Close some of the streets and create outdoor space either for entertainment, park space, or both.

## Capital One Arena

Modernize Capital One and program roof with public park/ space.

Relocate Capital One Arena and create public park/ common area - make this the center of the neighborhood to support museums.

Move arena to FBI HQ site.

## Redevelopment

Make a park at the fire station on 5th.

Transfer Penn Ave sidewalks and parks from NPS to DC government.

Redo Indian Plaza and place under local control.

Redo Navy Memorial and place under local control.

Reinvent Chinatown with focus on Asian American economic support of businesses and cultural programming.

## Arts & Culture

Shared educational space to create energy.

Initiative to give students theater tickets.

Municipal art project that leverages a massive amount of local artist work in public spaces.

## Public Safety

Clean and safe neighborhoods.

Create commercial zones with more police and judicial enforcement.

Table 10

# Metro Center



## WEIGHT OF THE PAST

- Center for public transit and wide streets for vehicle traffic
- Commercial corridor with some amenities
- Height limitation and uneven development
- Boxed in by Penn Ave and NY Ave.
- Lacks greenspace

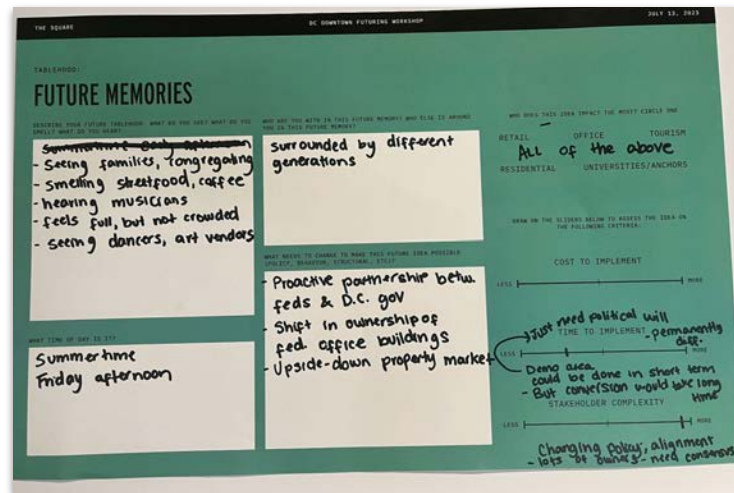
## PUSH OF THE PRESENT

- Remote work has major impact
- Conflict between DC goals and federal priorities
- Affordability and socioeconomic disparity
- Viability of conversion of old office buildings to multifamily
- Remodel vs. knock down and start over
- Online shopping vs. brick and mortar stores

How might we bring vitality to the area without the need for massive structural change?

TABLEHOOD 10 IDEA

An arts and culture district with an emphasis on pedestrian space.





## Retail & Small Business

A next era of shopping: makerspaces where you see goods being produced and buy on site generating jobs.

Retail as public good: pay rent by retailers.

Invite a variety of ground floor uses that cater to different life stages.

## Culture

Open streets events - maybe extend city center, arts and culture outside "theater row".

Reopen E Street, south of White House, to bikes and buses to alleviate congestion in east end.

Encourage and create more regular mechanisms to understand protest as an activity. Create open working spaces for issue discussion.

## Housing

Office to residential conversion.

Aging in place and creating a sense of community; provide various unit sizes.

Rethinking the southern edge of the area and turn into residential.

Create multigenerational housing.

## A New Identity

Rebranding of neighborhood to be more inspiring than Metro Center.

Activate the metro stations.

Expanding the arts to provide an identity: include National Theatre and Shakespeare Theater as neighborhood adjacent. And National Museum for Women in the Arts.

Create outdoor/ indoor recreational space.

## Land Use

DC taking ownership of Federal Triangle and creating a destination/ sense of pride.

Focus on activating Federal Triangle to extend retail and residential zones.

Have the federal government "donate" or exchange the FBI HQ building.

Greater flexibility in land use and height limits to make redevelopment economically viable.

# THANK YOU.

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