



# Growing a Healthier DC: Greening Our Neighborhoods



## In a healthier D.C., neighborhoods are green

All homes, from detached houses to apartments, have views of green and easy access to open space. Neighbors know one another and spend time outdoors relaxing and talking in the beauty of shade trees and flowers. Residents walk to neighborhood shops, schools, transit stops and parks along tree-lined streets. In yards, parks and common areas, children find safe places to play and interact with nature. Community gardens unite neighbors while allowing them to grow fresh produce close to home. The sense of community is strong and neighborhoods feel safe and well cared for.



## Green neighborhoods

- Are clean, safe and beautiful
- Draw neighbors outdoors and encourage interaction
- Give children nearby spaces for outdoor play
- Encourage walking and physical activity
- Foster a strong sense of identity and community
- Are the heart of a vibrant, green city

**Trees and greenery foster community.**



## Community thrives in green environments

**Stronger neighborhood ties.** People are drawn to green outdoor spaces, especially ones with trees. Researchers have found that residents of buildings with green common areas know more neighbors and have stronger feelings of belonging than those in barren buildings. Neighborhood tree planting and beautification programs also increase residents' sense of a shared identity.<sup>1</sup>

**Safer communities.** The ability of green to bring neighbors together is also a powerful deterrent to delinquency and crime. When residents are outside there are more eyes on the street and on the neighborhood. A Chicago study showed that apartment buildings surrounded by trees and greenery had less litter, graffiti, noise and crime than apartments without trees.<sup>2</sup>



**Healthier residents.** Social scientists have found that green surroundings refresh us and help combat stress, anxiety and depression. Views of green are also associated with fewer sick days and faster recovery times. A study of over 10,000 people in the Netherlands found that greener neighborhoods were linked to better overall health.<sup>3</sup> These benefits are especially important for those who spend more time close to home, like children, the elderly and the poor.





**Outdoor spaces with trees are used three times more than those without.**

## **The Challenge and Opportunity**

From Friendship Heights to Congress Heights, the Palisades to Shaw and Deanwood, Washington, DC is a city of more than 100 distinct neighborhoods. Each of these communities has its own character, history, leadership and natural features. Many older, established neighborhoods have beautiful, mature trees, lovely yards and gardens and well-tended common areas. Other neighborhoods are less green, and many communities are changing. Revitalization along the Anacostia Waterfront, development of large parcels like the McMillan Reservoir, increased density around Metro stations and commercial corridors and redevelopment of public housing tracts will change the face of many communities.

While these changes promise to bring more amenities and services, they will also challenge planners, designers and property owners to incorporate landscape in new ways. Barren triangle parks, medians and islands can be planted to create community parks, green gateways and rain gardens. Yards can become green oases. Rooftops can be garden-like gathering spaces. Vacant lots can be converted into community gardens. Schoolyards can be green neighborhood hubs. By investing in green, we not only beautify but foster stronger communities.

## **Recommendations**

- Promote community-driven beautification, tree planting, stewardship and clean-up efforts.
- Incorporate trees and landscaping at entrances to neighborhoods and at key focal points to define and give identity.
- As public housing and other large-scale sites are redeveloped, integrate green infrastructure into neighborhood design.
- Seek opportunities to convert underutilized properties and common spaces into green assets like parks, community gardens or attractive stormwater management features.
- Work with communities to set urban tree canopy goals at the neighborhood scale.

**As density increases, green amenities become increasingly important.**

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

Visit [www.caseytrees.org](http://www.caseytrees.org) for more information on the topic addressed in this brief or the complete series:

- Green City
- Green Neighborhoods
- Green Streets
- Green Parks and Open Space
- Green Schools
- Green Business Districts
- Green Parking Lots
- Green Residences
- Green Jobs

<sup>1</sup> *Fertile Ground for Community: Inner-city Neighborhood Common Spaces* by Frances E. Kuo, William C. Sullivan, Rebekah Levine Coley, and Liesette Brunson, *American Journal of Community Psychology* 26(6), Dec 1998.

<sup>2</sup> *Environment and Crime in the Inner City: Does Vegetation Reduce Crime?* by Frances E. Kuo and William C. Sullivan, *Environment and Behavior* 33(3), May 2001.

<sup>3</sup> *Natural Environments - Healthy Environments? An Exploratory Analysis of the Relationship Between Greenspace and Health* by Sjerp de Vries, Robert A. Verheij, Peter P. Groenewegen, Peter Spreeuwenberg, *Environment and Planning A* 35(10), Oct 2003.