

Montgomery Planning

01/08/2024

Friendship Heights Urban Design Study

Summary of Preliminary Findings

AGENDA

- Introduction and Study Goals
- Engagement Overview
- Urban Design Framework Analysis
- Lessons Learned



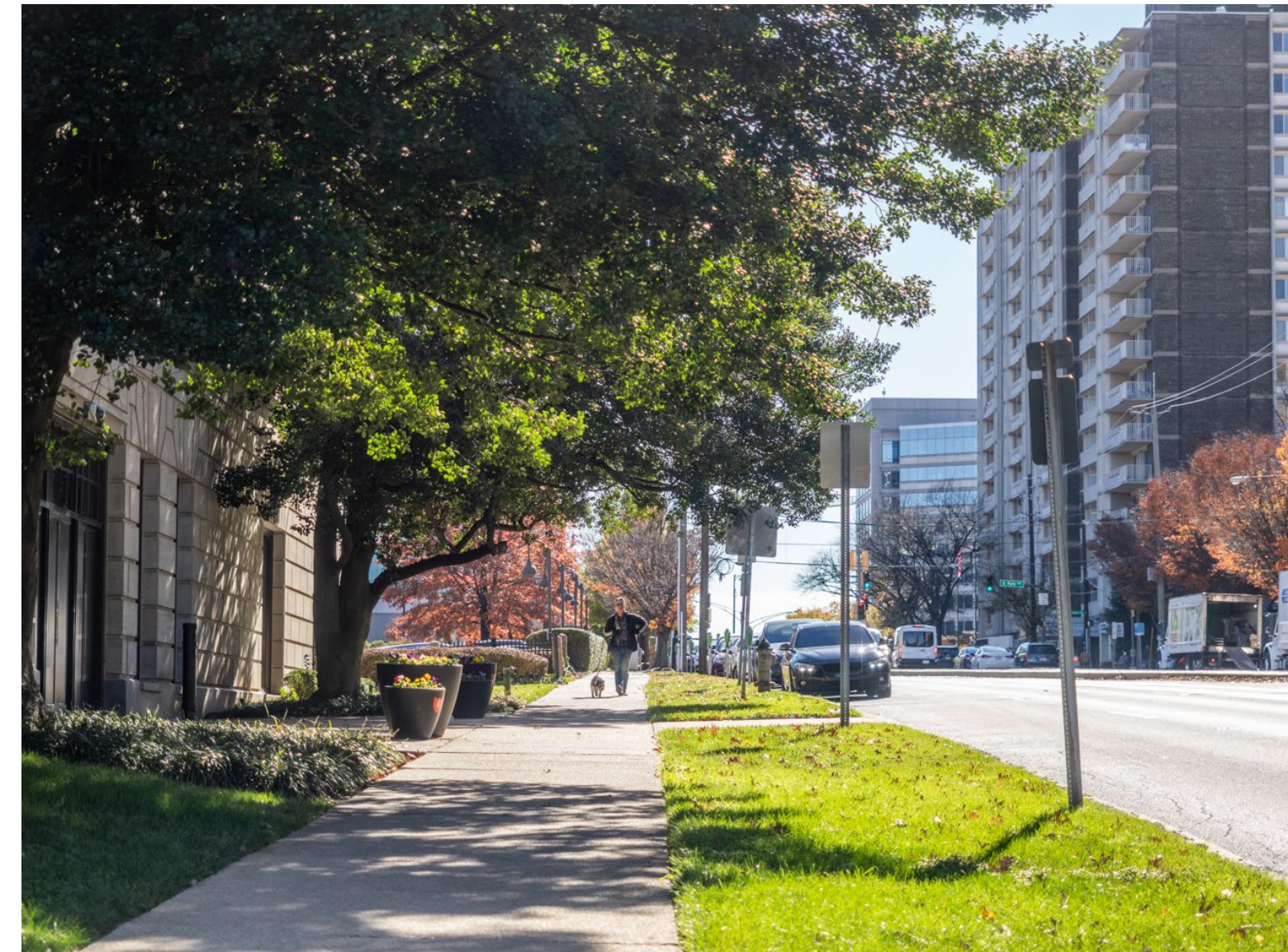
FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS URBAN DESIGN STUDY

What is urban design?

Urban design is the shaping of the physical form of a place so that the buildings, streets, parks, and public spaces work in harmony to create a dynamic, welcoming place that supports a thriving public life.

Successful urban design creates a strong public realm.

The **public realm** is any space or built environment that is open and accessible for public use, regardless of ownership. It includes streets, sidewalks, plazas, parks, and open spaces.



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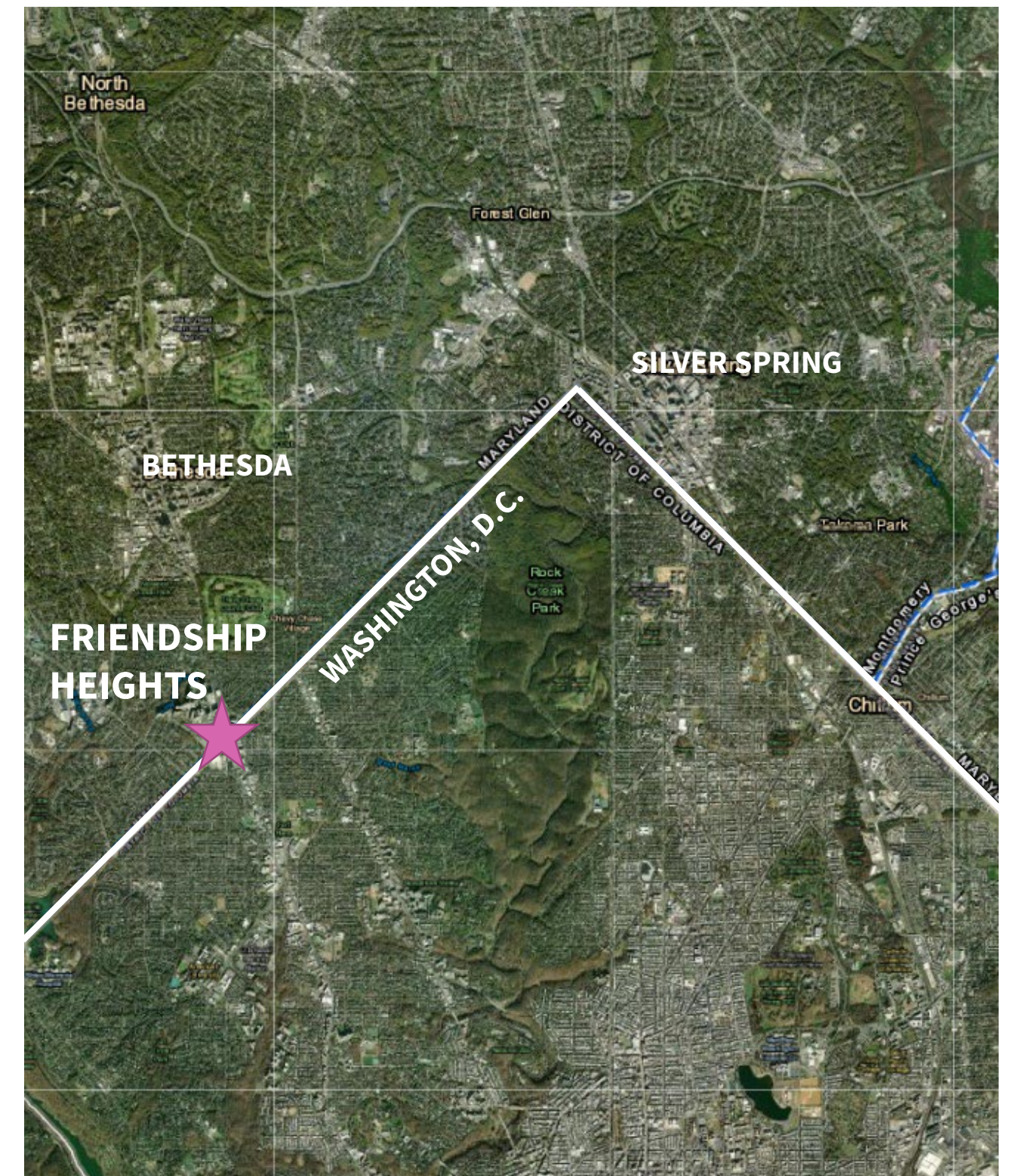
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The study highlights the urban design strengths and needs of this cross-jurisdictional transit-oriented community.

STUDY AREA AND CONTEXT



SCHEDULE

- July 2023: Scope of Work to Planning Board
- Summer 2023-Winter 2023: Conduct urban design analysis
- Fall 2023: Public Engagement
- Winter 2023/Early 2024: Present to Planning Board and County Council
- Winter/Spring 2024: Final report available



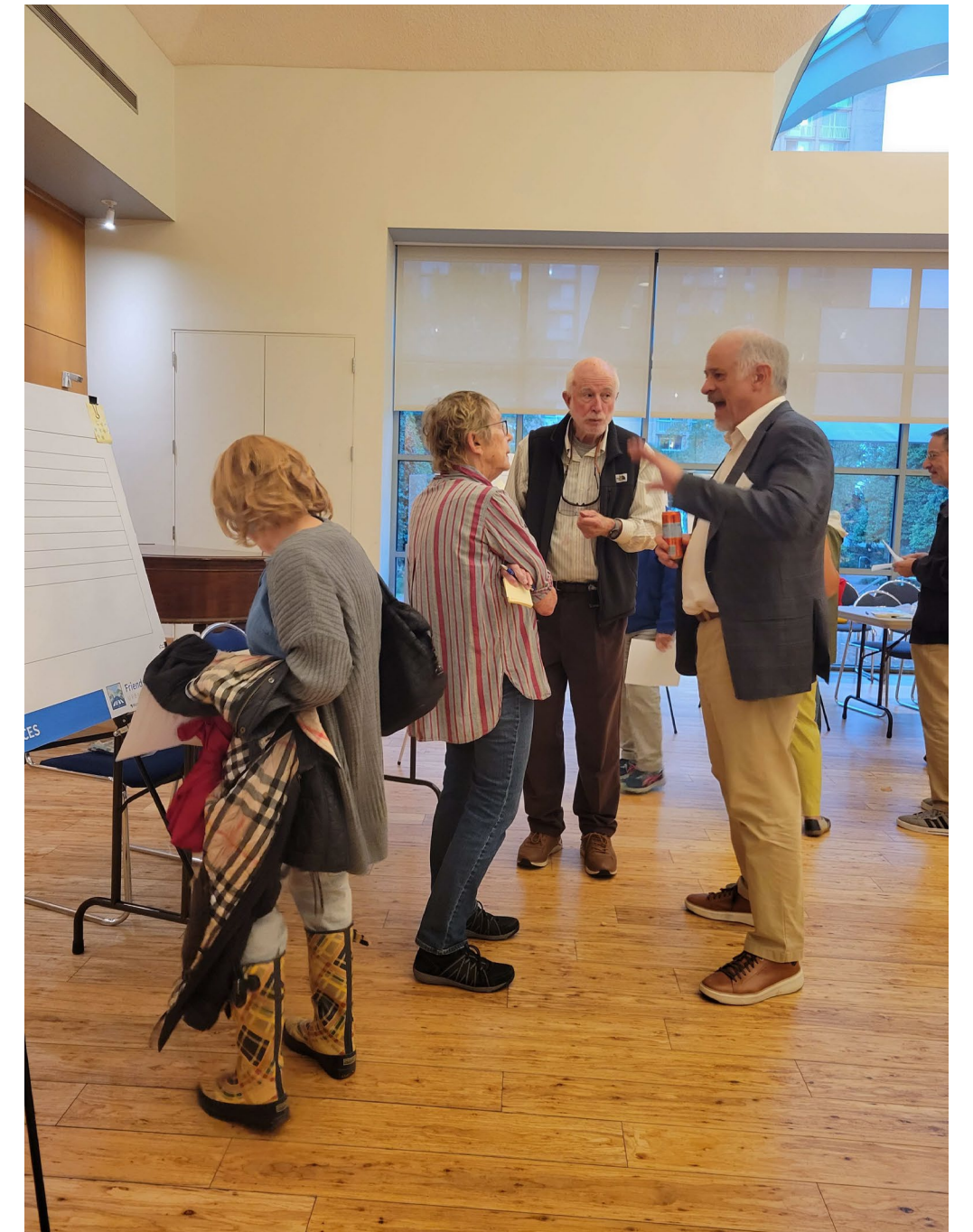


ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW



ENGAGEMENT

- Worked with engagement consultant Brick & Story
- Open house engagement events on 10/24 and 10/30
- “Pop-ups” around the neighborhood
- Tables at community events
- Online questionnaire up for 6 weeks
- Numerous meetings with community groups and neighborhoods, including surrounding special taxing districts/municipalities



ENGAGEMENT: TAKEAWAYS

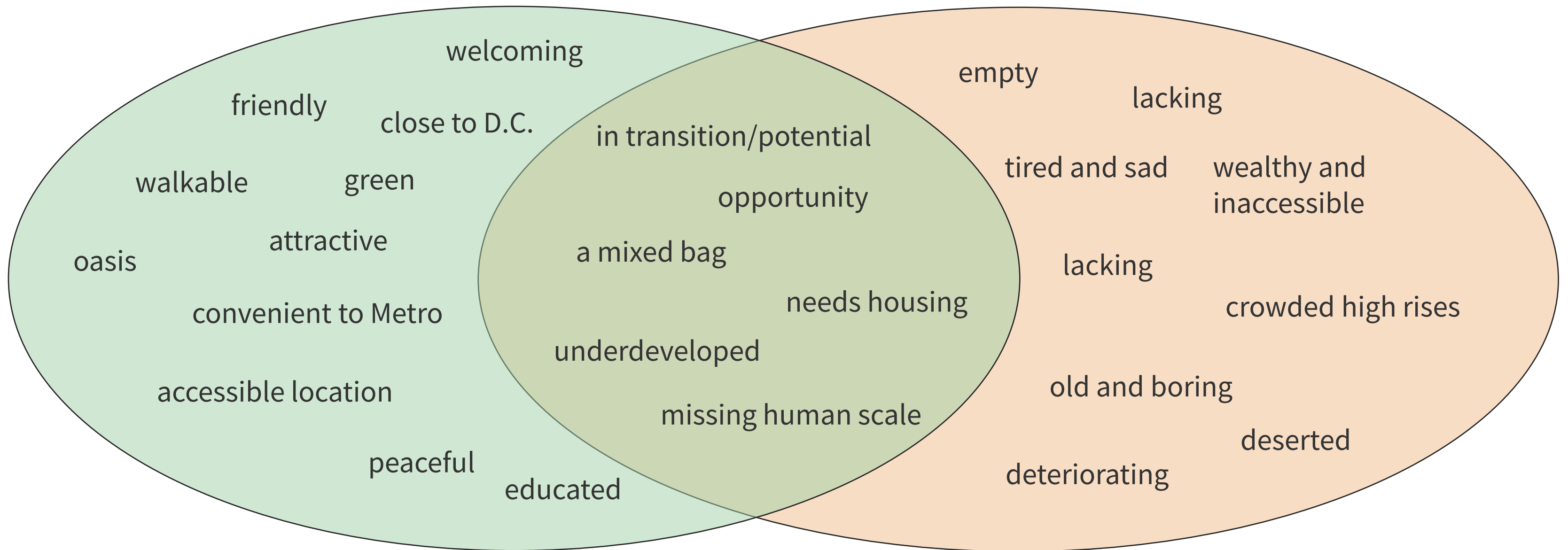
What do you like about Friendship Heights?

- Walkability
- Parks and green spaces
- Friendly, welcoming community
- Great access to transit
- Safe, clean neighborhood



ENGAGEMENT: TAKEAWAYS

Describe Friendship Heights in 3 words:

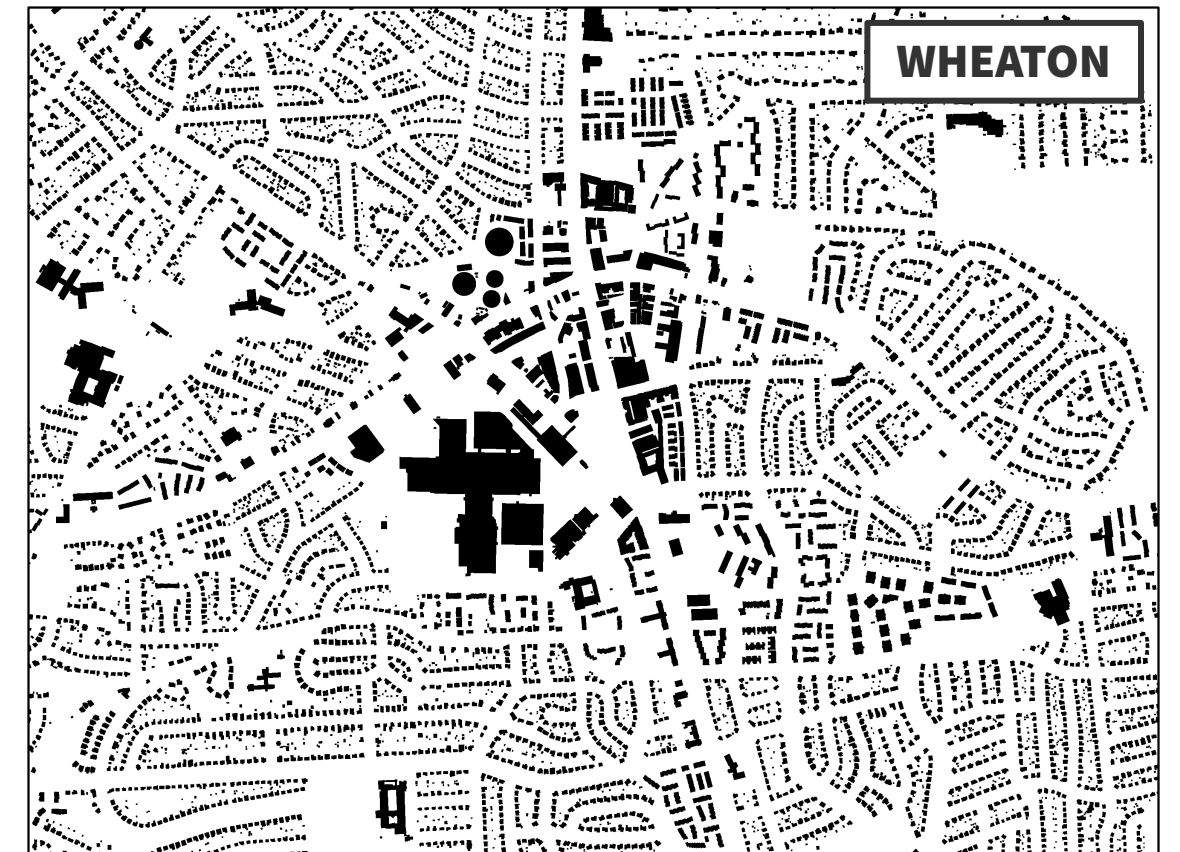




URBAN DESIGN ANALYSIS



REGIONAL CONTEXT: COUNTY DOWNTOWNS



- Major roads as “spines” that support activity corridors
- Bethesda and Silver Spring are more integrated with their surroundings than Wheaton and Friendship Heights

URBAN DESIGN NETWORK ANALYSIS

Analysis of four urban “networks”

- Pedestrian network
- Transportation network
- Open Space network
- Community Amenities network
- Staff completed 6 site visits from July – October 2023
- Engagement questions focused on network

PEDESTRIAN NETWORK: WHAT WE SAW

- Strong, continuous sidewalk network
- Mature tree canopy in many places
- Many high visibility crosswalks
- Signalized mid-block crossings



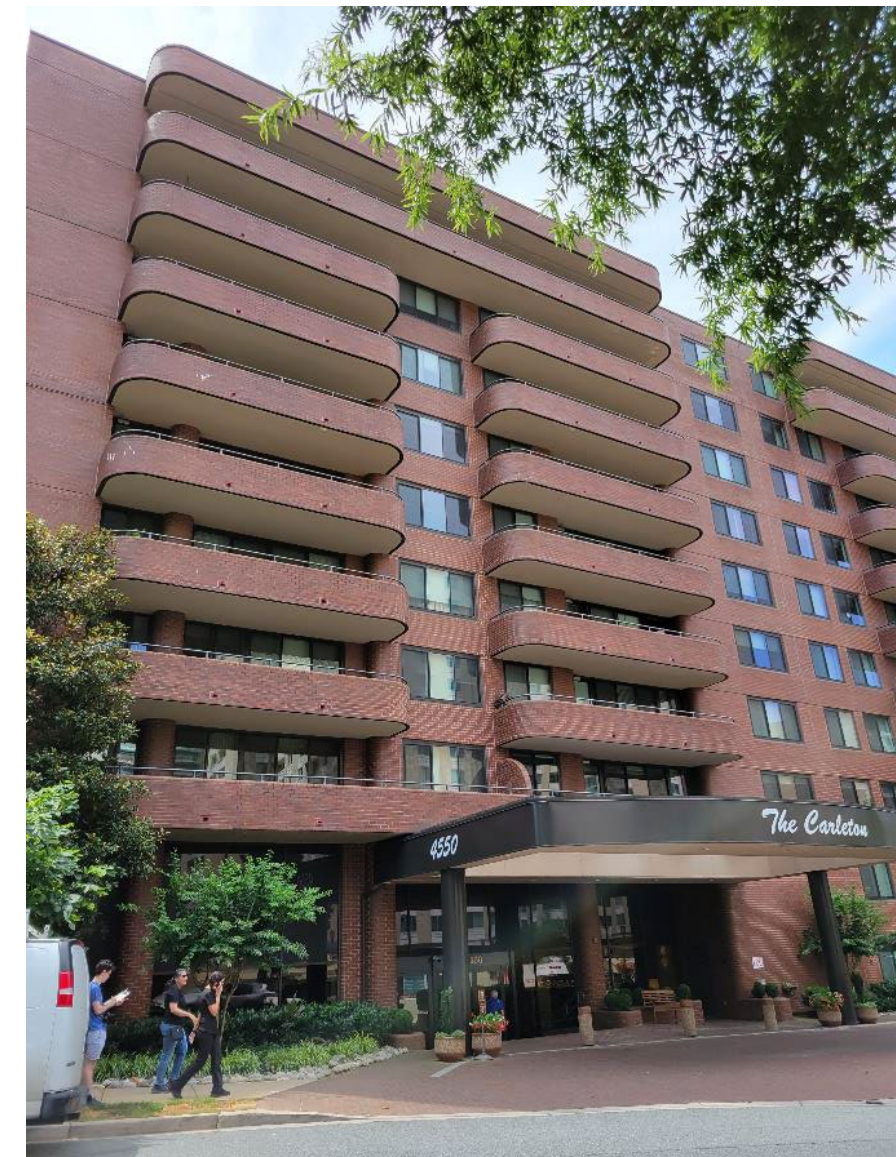
PEDESTRIAN NETWORK: WHAT WE SAW

There are limited connections between Friendship Heights and the surrounding neighborhoods



PEDESTRIAN NETWORK: WHAT WE SAW

Street Activation: Wisconsin Avenue and North Park Avenue



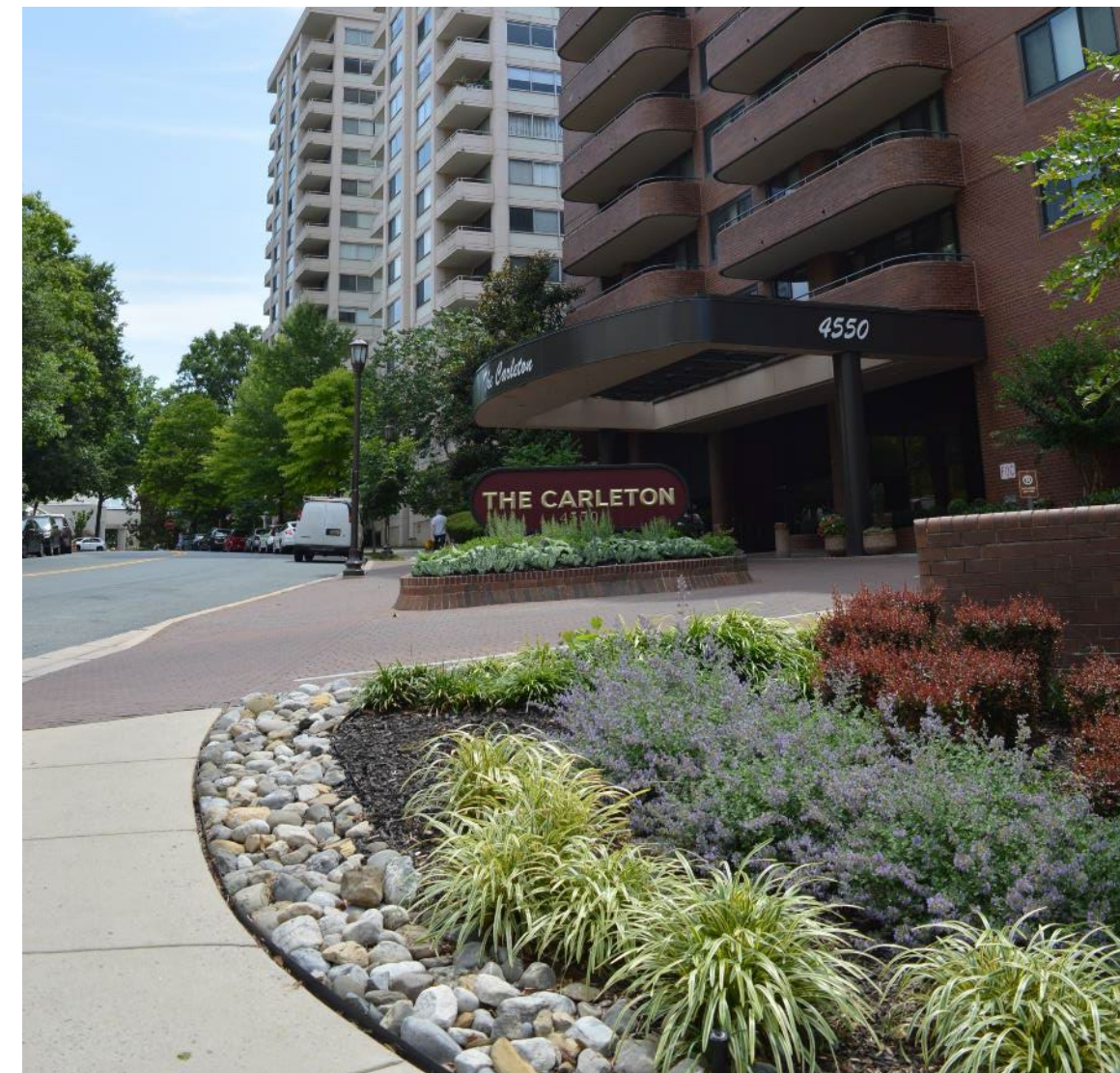
PEDESTRIAN NETWORK: WHAT WE SAW

Street Activation: Willard Avenue / The Hills Plaza



PEDESTRIAN NETWORK: WHAT WE SAW

Many residential high-rise buildings have car-centric front entrances



PEDESTRIAN NETWORK: WHAT WE HEARD

- 85% of questionnaire respondents named walkability as strength of the area
- 21% of respondents felt “comfortable everywhere in Friendship Heights”
- Some respondents expressed safety concerns about walking at night: lighting, crossing streets and speeding vehicles.



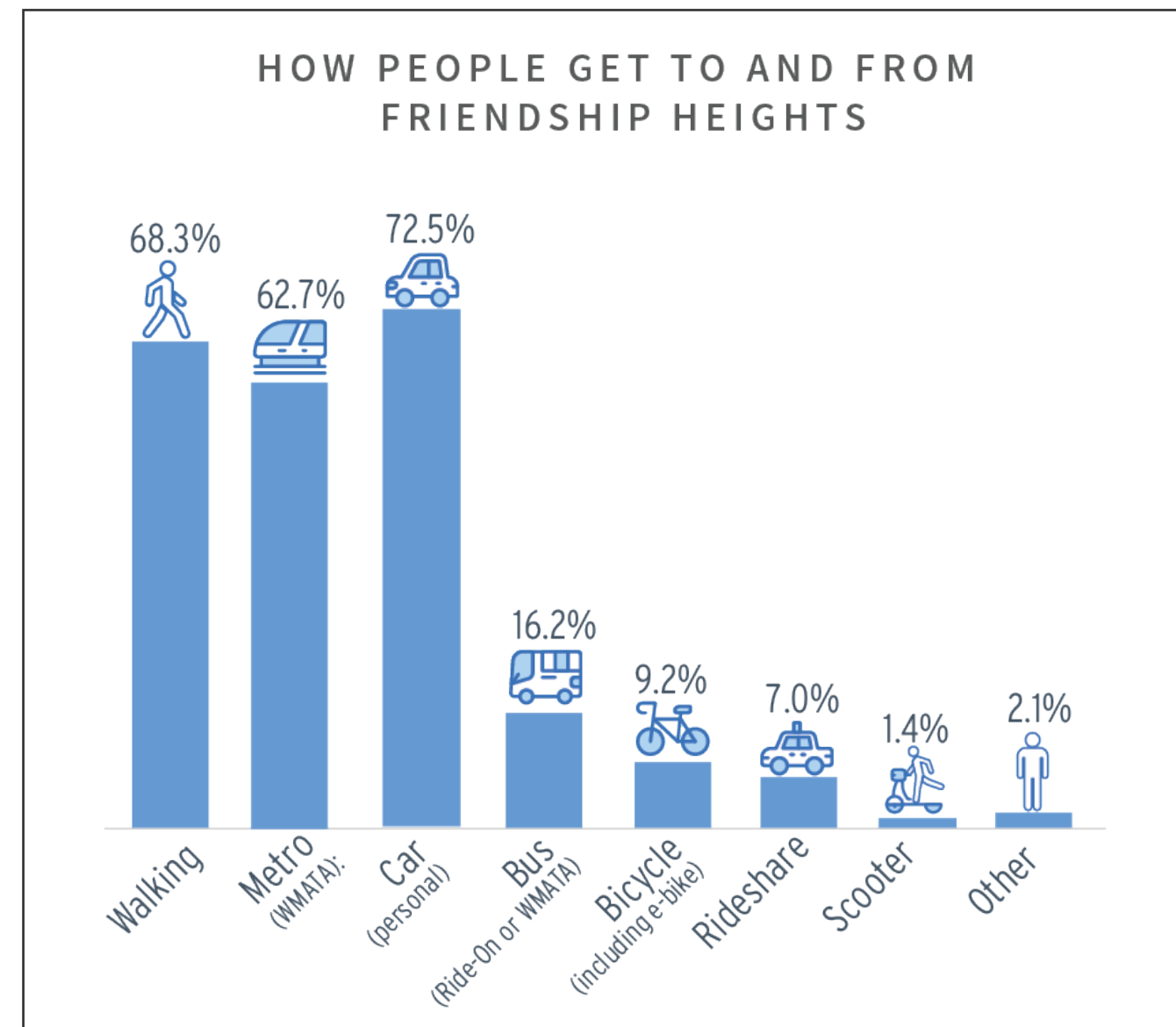
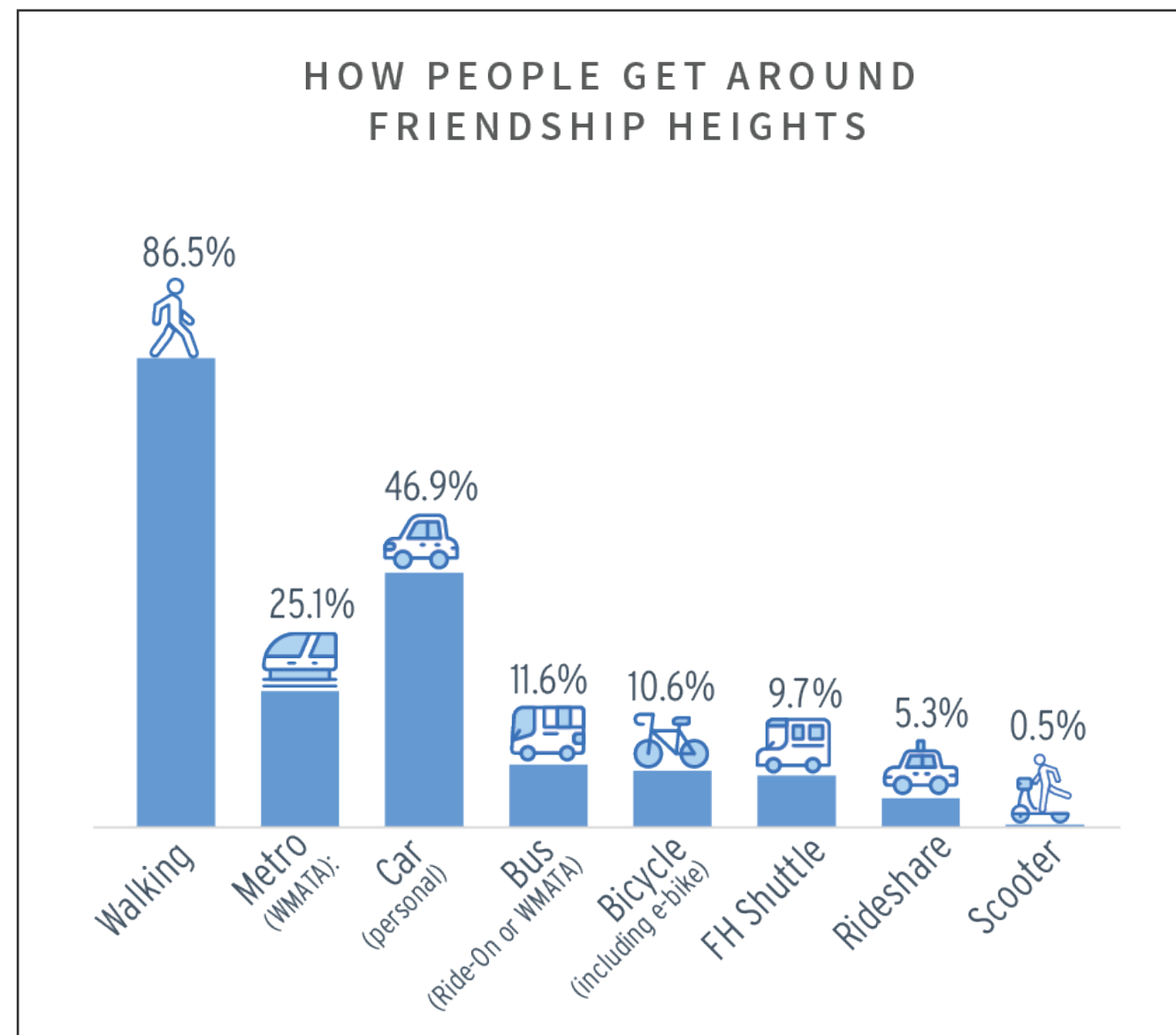
TRANSPORTATION NETWORK: WHAT WE SAW

- Access to Metrorail Red Line, WMATA bus, Ride On bus
- Village of Friendship Heights operates a shuttle
- No dedicated bike facilities built; several planned in 2018 *Bicycle Master Plan*



TRANSPORTATION NETWORK: WHAT WE HEARD

Many stakeholders named the Metrorail as “Friendship Heights’ greatest asset.” Few respondents reported using bicycles, scooters, or rideshare services



OPEN SPACE NETWORK: WHAT WE SAW

- Analysis included M-NCPPC parks, privately owned publicly accessible (POPS) spaces and parks owned by other municipalities
- Considered ownership and experience



OPEN SPACE NETWORK: WHAT WE SAW

- Many parks and green spaces in the downtown, and most are easy to access
- Hubert Humphrey Park activated by the Community Center
- Willard Ave and Brookdale only parks with active recreation opportunities



OPEN SPACE NETWORK: WHAT WE SAW



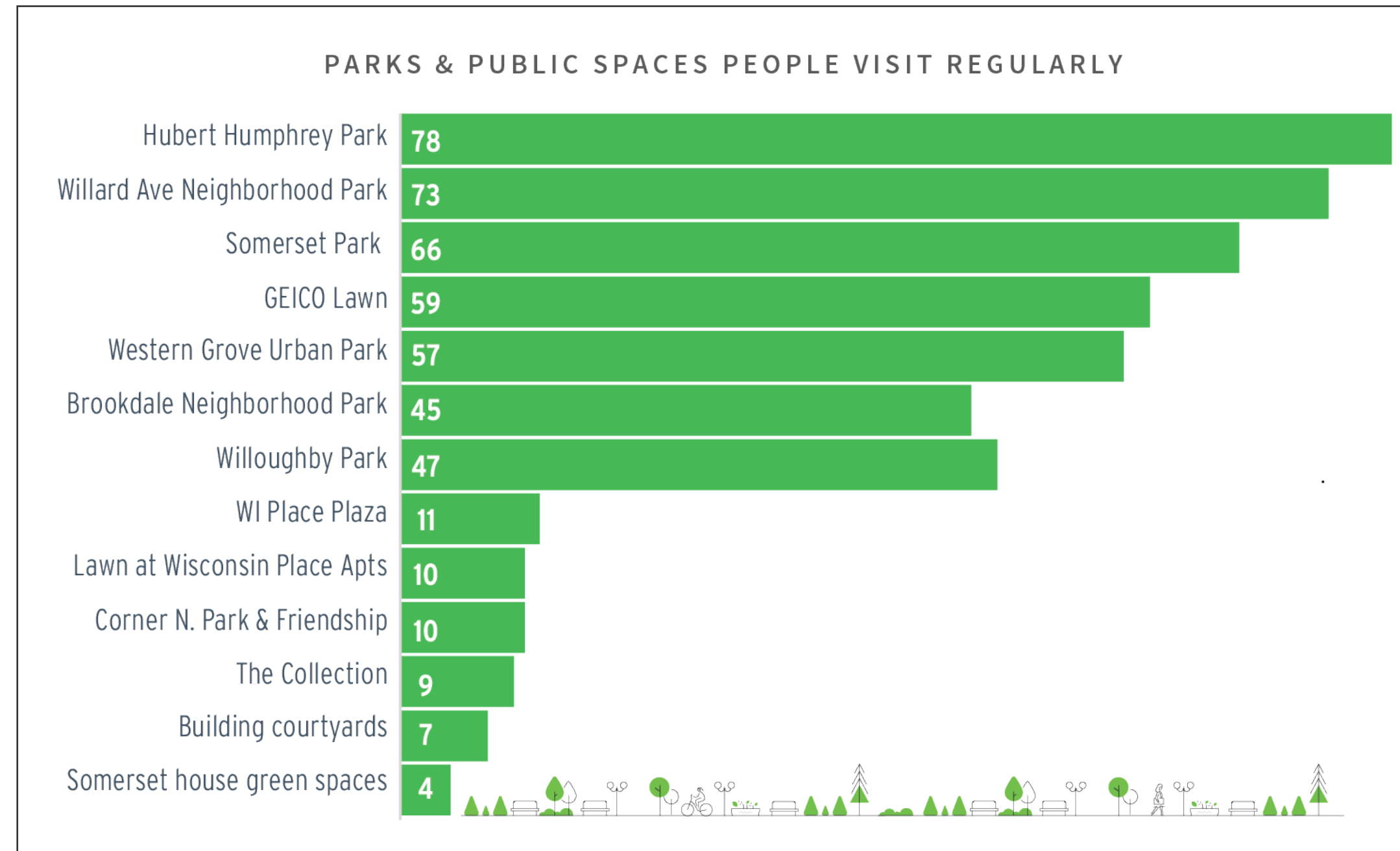
Bloomington's Plaza



Plaza at The Collection

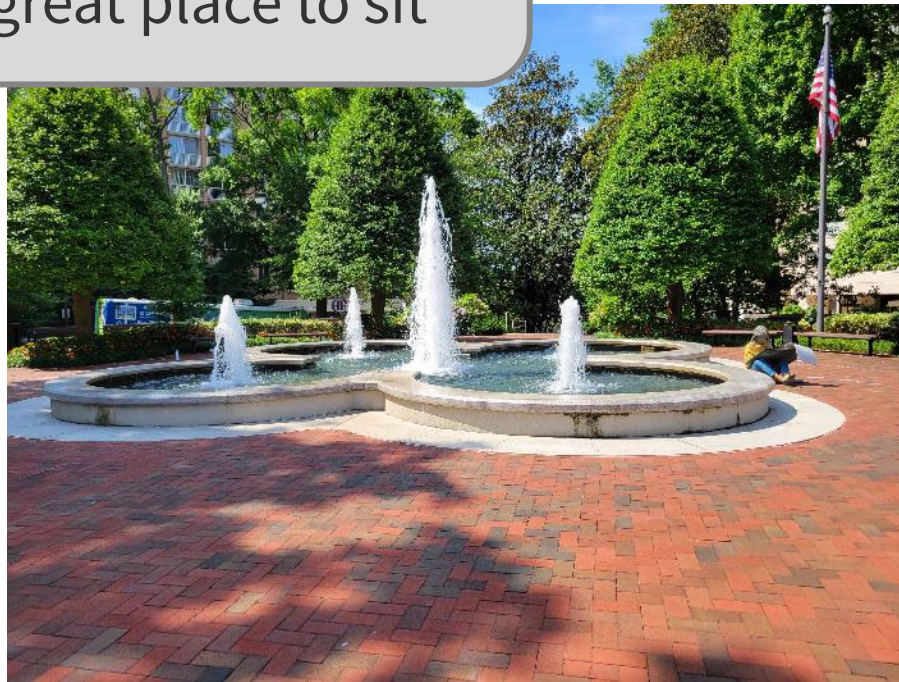
OPEN SPACE NETWORK: WHAT WE HEARD

- Humphrey Park is visited most often, but may reflect many Village respondents
- GEICO lawn used by many on weekends, often for recreation
- Some respondents did not visit a park because they did not know where it was located



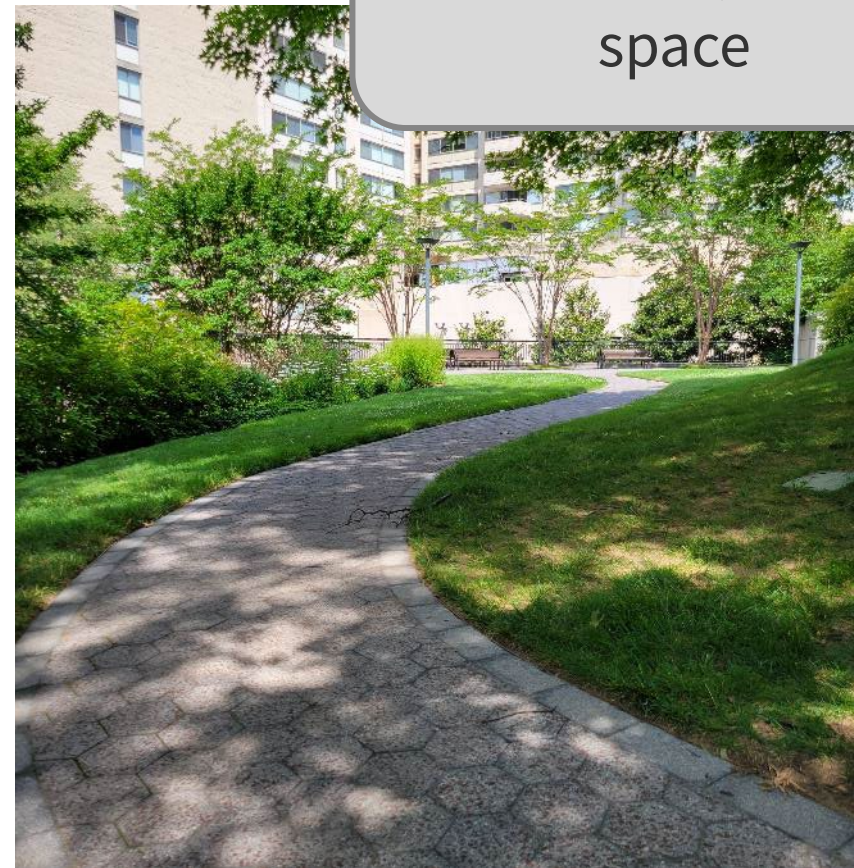
OPEN SPACE NETWORK: WHAT WE HEARD

Friendly, well-maintained, safe, great place to sit



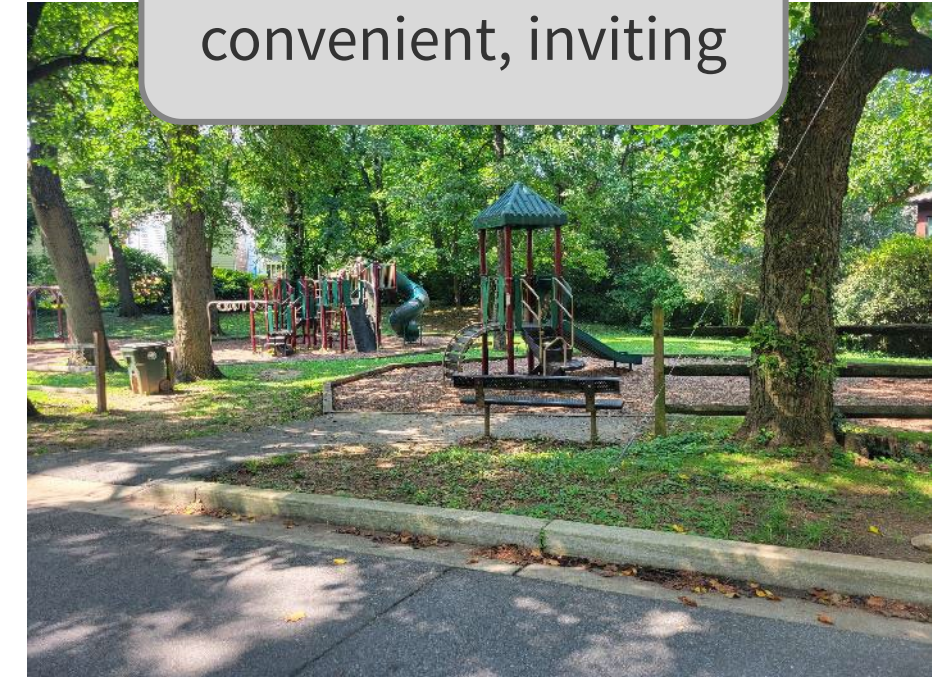
Hubert Humphrey Park

Dog-friendly, poorly maintained, wasted space



Willoughby Park

Great for kids, quiet, convenient, inviting



Brookdale Neighborhood Park

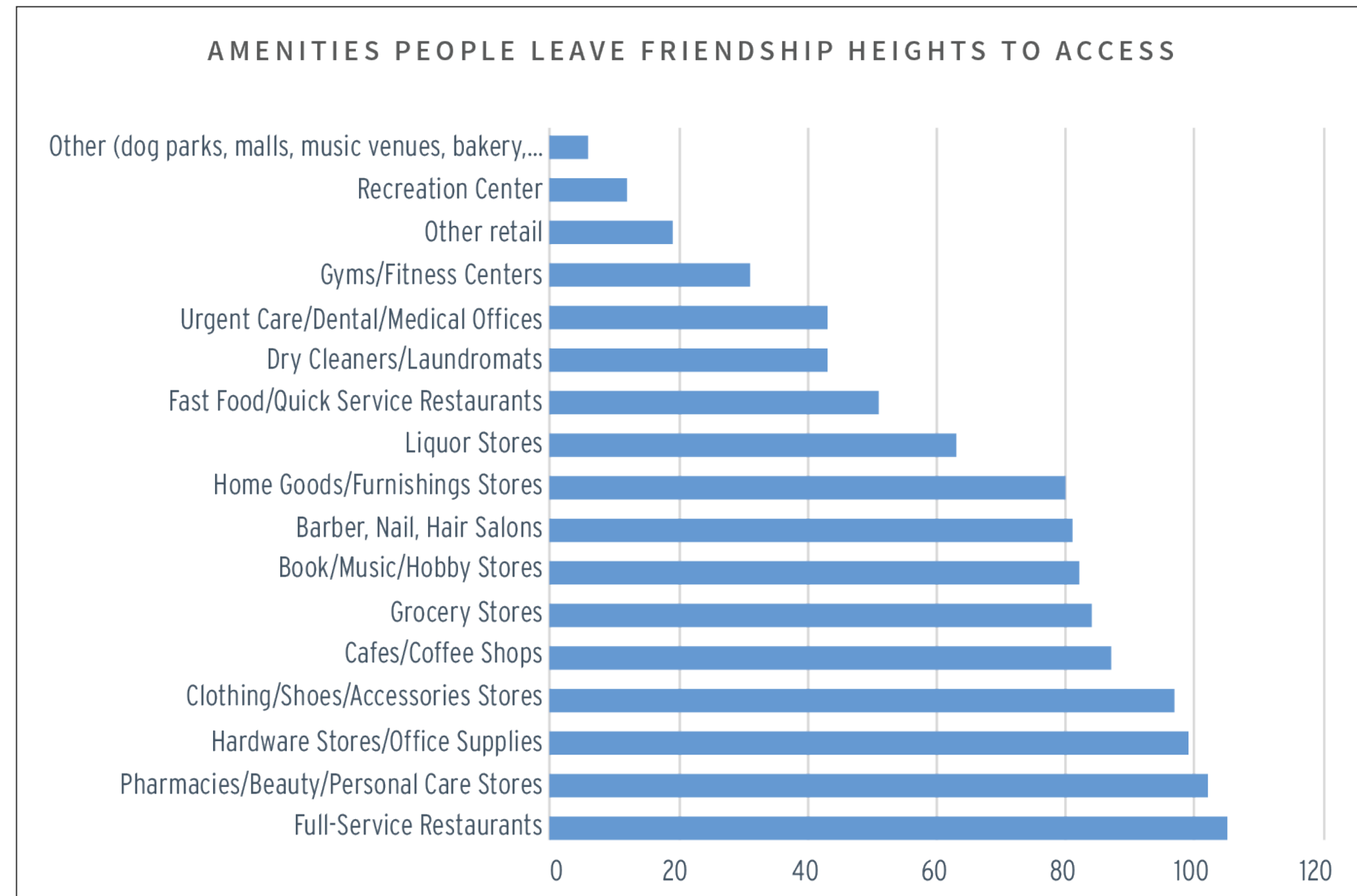
COMMUNITY AMENITIES: WHAT WE SAW

- Whole Foods is a key destination; medical services also draw people to FH
- Village Community Center and Wisconsin Avenue Rec Center are enjoyed by many
- Independent pharmacies but no large chains that are open later
- Public art throughout Friendship Heights enhances the public realm



COMMUNITY AMENITIES: WHAT WE HEARD

- Restaurants are most popular favorite amenity, particularly those with sizable outdoor eating areas.
- Respondents specifically noted lack of movie theater and other arts/culture amenities
- Many noted lack of affordable retail





LESSONS LEARNED



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Assets of Friendship Heights

- Easy access to multiple modes of transit including Metrorail station
- Strong and safe pedestrian network; mature tree canopy shades many streets
- Variety of green spaces throughout the downtown provide shaded areas for rest; several outdoor areas for community gatherings or events
- Strong active retail corridor on Wisconsin Avenue



LESSONS LEARNED

Areas for Further Study

- Downtown is not well-connected to the surrounding neighborhoods
- Limited opportunities for active recreation in the downtown, public parks at the periphery are hard to access; several sizable public spaces that are often empty
- Stakeholders feel unsafe along some streets due to lighting, visibility and vehicular speeds
- Many building entrances designed to privilege automobiles, despite the walkable nature of the area



NEXT STEPS

- Planning Board presentation in mid-February
- Final report expected online by end of March 2024; will also be shared with County Council

STAYING CONNECTED

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Sign up for e-letter to get updates on the study

