

# CONGRESS HEIGHTS



SOUL  OF  
THE CITY

BUSINESS PLAN 2018



# WHY THE TIME IS RIGHT FOR THE CONGRESS HEIGHTS PARTNERSHIP

## THE CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY AROUND IMPROVING CONGRESS HEIGHTS

Congress Heights is poised for significant transformation as a result of planned new developments at the Saint Elizabeth's campus, including a new 4,200-seat arena, which will be home to the Washington Mystics and provide practice space for the Wizards. Additionally, 1000 units of new housing are being built along with significant public and private investment in new infrastructure and streetscape improvements.

Led by the Congress Heights Community Training and Development Corporation (CHCTDC), a variety of stakeholders have come together, including businesses, residents, developers, government leaders, nonprofit organizations, arts groups and property owners to ensure that the changes underway build upon the neighborhood's rich history and culture. The overarching goal is to ensure that existing residents and businesses benefit from positive changes and that they are true partners in the process of managing revitalization efforts within the Congress Heights Business District. This group has sought to build a people-centered plan that focuses on place-based strategies to foster more vibrant, connected and dynamic community spaces, and that creates a mechanism for a variety of stakeholders to participate in managing the impact of development on the neighborhood.

**Postcards from the future:**  
Congress Heights residents envisioned how they want to see their neighborhood grow in the next decade



## A NEW STRATEGY FOR MANAGING AND ENHANCING THE CONGRESS HEIGHTS NEIGHBORHOOD

Working with a team of consultants who specialize in equitable development and place management, CHCTDC embarked on six-month community outreach process to develop a plan built around the following goals:

**1**  
Improve the overall experience of living near, working in and visiting the Congress Heights commercial center through revitalization of parks, public spaces and neighborhood amenities.

**2**  
Ensure that long-term residents, small property owners and local retailers have a voice in shaping the future of the neighborhood.

**3**  
Ensure that local culture, community aspirations and priorities are integrated into development plans and neighborhood branding efforts.

**4**  
Ensure that real estate development efforts including the new Arena and housing being built on the Saint Elizabeths Campus connect with and benefit existing Congress Heights residents and business owners.

Out of this planning process, the team developed the framework for a new entity, the Congress Heights Partnership, to advance these goals. Combining existing CHCTDC funding streams with new public and private sources, the Congress Heights Partnership seeks to deliver a higher level of programming and services aimed at improving the neighborhood while sustaining broad community buy-in and support. Governed by a board of directors representing its stakeholders and financial contributors, the Congress Heights Partnership represents a novel approach to neighborhood revitalization efforts that can often be atomized and under-resourced. The plan is based on an integrated approach to place based economic development in which marketing, events, public realm enhancement and improved maintenance of public spaces all drive toward a shared vision for a thriving, inclusive and vibrant neighborhood.

**MISSION**

The Congress Heights Partnership will create a more welcoming, better managed and vibrant neighborhood and create the context for a variety of stakeholders to participate in long-term planning efforts shaping the future of Congress Heights.

**GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

The effort will be rooted in the neighborhood's culture and heritage, and will tap into its aspirations around becoming a center for African American entrepreneurship and arts in DC. It will be governed by a board of directors representing a broad spectrum of stakeholders and provide the sustainable funding needed for a management team to implement its goals and carry out its programming.

**GOALS**

The Congress Heights Partnership will seek to:

- Coordinate efforts to ensure that existing residents and businesses benefit from new development and increased prosperity;
- Showcase the area's unique recreation and community assets;
- Create more spaces to showcase Congress Heights contributions to DC's culture and identity;
- Improve the area's parks and public spaces, creating more inviting places for neighborhood gathering and community building;
- Bring programs and resources to bear on making Congress Heights a center for African American arts and entrepreneurship;
- Diversify and strengthen neighborhood retail and services;
- Bring more job opportunities and neighborhood amenities to existing residents;
- Improve the perception of the Congress Heights commercial area;
- Increase visitation to area attractions and businesses;
- Increase sales and occupancy along the neighborhood's commercial corridors;
- Link new developments to the existing commercial area; and
- Raise the stature of the area with public sector leaders and agency directors.



# PLACE MANAGEMENT PLACE BRANDING PLACE ENHANCEMENT COMMUNITY COORDINATION

## PLACE MANAGEMENT

Working in conjunction with individual property owners and businesses, the Congress Heights Partnership will commit to enhancing the experience of a welcoming and inviting place with a variety of activities and projects. It will focus most immediately on ensuring that the area is clean, safe, and friendly. This will include activities such as:

- Sidewalk cleaning
- Trash collection
- Litter removal
- Tree box maintenance
- Graffiti removal
- Regular communication with MPD
- Snow and ice removal
- Maintenance of elements in the public streetscape needing repair

Program staff, hired from Congress Heights and surrounding neighborhoods, will be trained in hospitality services as well, so that they can provide direction and information about the area to visitors. The program will also connect with other training opportunities through CHCTDC, including the possibility of training local residents for security and hospitality jobs at the new arena.

Additionally, as part of the place management program, the partnership will engage with city agencies to ensure that the area receives the highest level of attention for its basic services, concerns and community priorities.

The partnership will also pay attention to the mix of retail stores and, where appropriate, work with individual property owners to assist in either retaining or recruiting retailers who will help contribute to the desirability of the area as a neighborhood hub.



**PLACE BRANDING**

The Congress Heights Place Branding Plan was developed by CHCTDC leaders with Jeanette Hanna of Trajectory Brands Inc., a firm that specializes in place-based identity building. The branding plan grew out of intensive community outreach including over 20 interviews with local business owners and influencers and five well attended community workshops with both residents and business owners.

Key themes that emerged from these consultations included:

<p><b>1</b> —</p> <p>Congress Heights needs to proactively manage its image and reputation; It must create an authentic, affirmative “narrative” that the community can “own” to create common planning and synergies;</p>	<p><b>2</b> —</p> <p>The brand can help strengthen community trust and engagement as well as enable locals to become more effective community champions;</p>	<p><b>3</b> —</p> <p>The Congress Heights Partnership should be positioned as a leadership organization and recognized voice of the community.</p>
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The place branding program will work to promote Congress Heights as a unique destination to live, to work in and to visit. In addition to providing consumer marketing and communication activities, it will also focus on investor needs to communicate the benefits of opening businesses or living in the area. It will employ an integrated marketing strategy to include cultivating relationships with the media and PR outlets, build community partnerships in collaboration, and differentiate the Congress Heights brand among others.

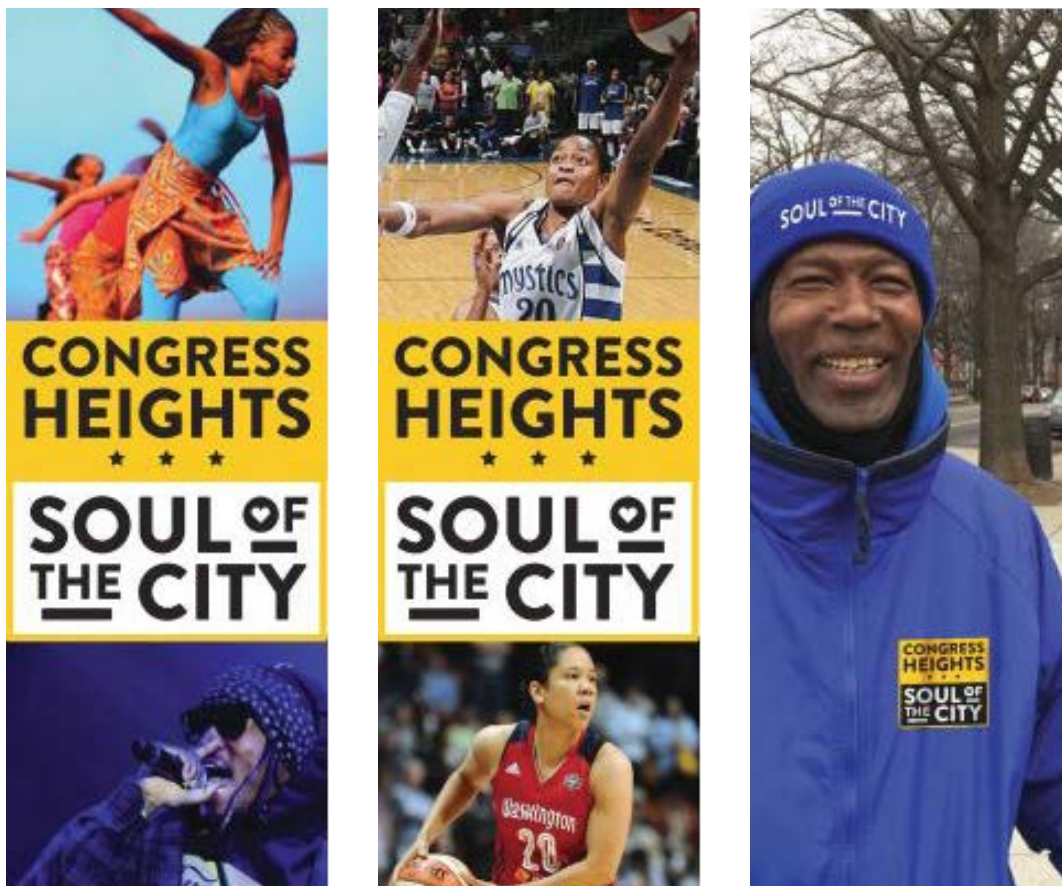
Important ways to reinforce the community identity include ensuring that:

- The Arena and St. Elizabeths are positively linked with Congress Heights in marketing e.g. St. Elizabeths Development in Congress Heights
- Wayfinding and signage for highways, transit, GPS systems, historical trails etc. identify Congress Heights;
- Ensure tourism maps (e.g. Where DC) and neighborhood profiles (e.g. Destination DC) include Congress Heights in their visitor guides.

The Congress Heights positioning as the “Soul of the City” is built on three fundamentals:

HEART & SOUL

- Its vibrant culture and heritage
- A center for African American entrepreneurship in DC



### HOMETOWN PRIDE

- Home of unique DC assets (including the Arena, St. Elizabeth's, parks, arts & culture facilities)
- Focus on youth development and education (43 schools including 9 charter schools, renowned Ballou marching band etc.)

### GROWING TOGETHER

- Focused on inclusive growth
- Welcoming, engaged community

To carry out the brand marketing program, Congress Heights will focus on building a identity that's based on the following attributes:

- **Welcoming:** Open/hospitable to visitors & all residents
- **Creative:** Imaginative, original & resourceful
- **Respectful:** Inclusive, collaborative, mutually supportive
- **Spirited:** Lively, full of vitality and confidence
- **Entrepreneurial:** Ingenuity in powering the local economy

The Partnership will proactively promote the community through specific strategies including digital marketing, social media and public relations.



**PLACE ENHANCEMENT**

The Place Enhancement Plan, developed by CHCTDC with support from consultant Otto Condon of ZGF Architects, strives to create a more dynamic and vibrant public realm.

Activities will include but not be limited to:

- Leveraging public realm improvements and working with DDOT to ensure the designs improve connectivity and the quality of civic spaces.
- Working with City, Community, Business and National Park Services stakeholders to create a sequence of Civic Spaces starting with Shepard Park,
- Strategically Enhancing the Main Street through storefronts, site revitalization and landscaping.
- Installing additional bike racks
- Installing public art
- Providing street pole decorations and street banners
- Assisting with façade improvements
- Activating public spaces with brand-centric events and activities

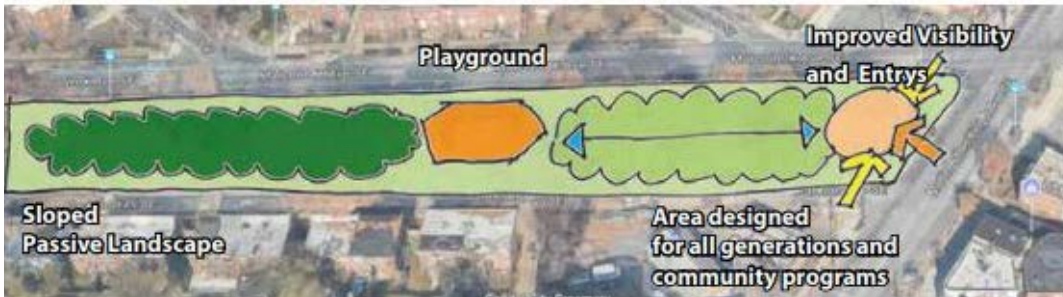
Proposed locations for wayfinding enhancements







Greening and creating seating in the public realm



Improving Shepherd Park: through design and programming



The Congress Heights Partnership will create ongoing opportunities for a variety of stakeholders to engage in neighborhood problem solving, to participate in community planning efforts and to coordinate resources around common objectives related to Congress Heights' community.

**FUNDING**

The Congress Heights Partnership will be funded by a combination of sources including Main Street and clean team grants, contracts for services, government grants and other contributions.

**FUNDING STREAMS TO SUPPORT THE CONGRESS HEIGHTS PARTNERSHIP**



## BUILDING SMALL AND LOCAL BUSINESS BUY-IN FOR THE INITIATIVE

In other neighborhoods and urban areas undergoing intensive change and redevelopment, the Business improvement district model has proven to be an excellent mechanism for achieving the objectives laid out by the Congress Heights planning team. The BID model is exceptional for two reasons. First, BIDs provide a sustainable funding source to improve the experience of living, working and visiting an area. Secondly, a BID creates the framework for varied stakeholders to coordinate efforts in mixed-use urban areas to build a sense of community, often through events, marketing and community building. Because property and business owners pay into BIDs and sit on their boards, the model brings a level of accountability which has allowed BID areas to sustain improvements over time.

However, Congress Heights' business district, like other smaller commercial areas outside DC's downtown core, lacks the tax base to support a sizable BID and is able to generate only about \$25,000 per year (with an assessment rate comparable to other neighborhoods). This represents a fraction of the typical DC BID's budget, the smallest of which is \$300,000 per year.

Though a BID funding model does not yet make business or financial sense at this stage of Congress Heights' development, small and local business participation in the partnership is key to its success. Businesses and property owners will be asked to voluntarily contribute, using a formula similar to a BID assessment model. The value proposition for them will be similar to that of a BID. By collectively investing in the quality of place, joint marketing and having a seat at the table for long-term coordination among the private and public sectors, these stakeholders will benefit in the long run. In short, the structure will enable business and property owners to not only have a voice in the overall planning process, but to have "skin in the game" as members and contributors to the Congress Heights Partnership.





**BOUNDARIES**

The proposed boundaries of the Congress Heights Partnership’s focus area are below.



**GOVERNANCE**

The organization will be governed by a board of directors who will set broad policies and goals; an executive committee of officers and appointed board members; and a chief executive officer who will manage the day-to-day affairs of the organization.

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

The board of directors will consist of 9–17 members, including representatives of Congress Heights Development and Training Corporation, business and property owners, developers with projects underway within and surrounding the Saint Elizabeth's campus, and representatives of existing service, cultural and civic institutions. Voting members will be elected to the three-year terms with an election held each year at an annual meeting. Approximately one-third of the board will be elected each year.

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

The executive committee will serve as the primary governance contact with the executive director and will include officers appointed by the board chair and confirmed by the board. It will guide the day-to-day operations and practices of the organization.



THE CONGRESS HEIGHTS PARTNERSHIP BOARD COMPOSITION



BUSINESS AND PROPERTY OWNERS WILL HAVE A VOICE IN THE OVERALL PLANNING PROCESS AND BE CONTRIBUTORS TO THE CONGRESS HEIGHTS PARTNERSHIP.



### **LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

The Congress Heights Partnership will be a 501(c)3 organization under the IRS code. As such, it will be exempt from federal income taxes and will also be exempt from DC sales taxes.

### **MEASURING SUCCESS**

The Congress Heights Partnership will measure its impacts in the following ways:

- Perception surveys of overall safety and cleanliness of public spaces and along key commercial corridors
- Number of jobs created for local residents
- Attendance at community events and gatherings
- Increased sales at local businesses
- Diversification of business mix, including new dining and neighborhood services options
- Number of homeless individuals and those with substance abuse and mental illness connected to services
- Number of website visitors and media coverage about Congress Heights community assets

### **MANAGEMENT TEAM**

#### DIRECTOR

The Congress Heights Partnership will employ an executive director who will have the overall responsibility for the management of day-to-day programs, oversight of its financial and operating performance, and strategic direction for the organization. The director will ensure that the organization follows the policies and procedures as promulgated by the board of directors. The director will represent the organization to its members, the community, the media, and the local government.

#### OPERATIONS AND MARKETING MANAGER

This staff person will work with the director to execute and manage all the various programs intended to manage the place and create a sense of place through marketing and events.



**BUDGET**

<b>REVENUES</b>	
Small business and property owner contributions	\$50,000
Main Street Grant	\$140,000
Clean Team Grant	\$150,000
Contracts for Services	\$135,000
Grants and Contributions	\$200,000
<b>Total Expected Revenues</b>	<b>\$675,000</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>	
<b>Place Management</b>	
Clean Team	\$260,000
Infrastructure (Street cleaning equipment, etc)	\$15,000
<b>Total Place Management</b>	<b>\$275,000</b>
<b>Placemaking/enhancement</b>	
Safe & Clean (streetscape projects, flowers, lights)	\$100,000
<b>Total Placemaking/Enhancement</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>
<b>Place Branding</b>	
Branding/Marketing initiatives	\$100,000
<b>Total Place Branding and Communications</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>
<b>Management Team and Administration</b>	
Staff and Administrative costs	\$200,000
<b>Total Staff and Administrative costs</b>	<b>\$200,000</b>
<b>Total Expected Expenses</b>	<b>\$675,000</b>





**CONGRESS HEIGHTS  
COMMUNITY TRAINING &  
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION**  
3215 Martin Luther King Jr Ave SE,  
Washington, DC 20032  
202-563-5200 / CHCTDC.ORG



**CONSULTANT TEAM**  
Rich Bradley, The Urban Partnership  
Natalie Avery, The Urban Partnership  
Jeanette Hanna, Trajectory  
Otto Condon, ZGF Architects LLP

*Front and back cover photos by Marta González de la Pena  
Report design by Alice Ashe*