

**Before After**

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# 6

# ADDITIONAL PLACEMAKING ELEMENTS

- 6A Signage and Wayfinding in the Public Realm
- 6B Gateways
- 6C Public Art
- 6D Water Features

**INTENT**

In addition to the features of the built environment discussed in previous chapters, an additional layer of urban design elements—signage and wayfinding, gateways, public art and water features—can help to further shape the identity and sense of place in CRDs and CRAs and bring these areas to life. These placemaking elements make the built environment more legible and easier to navigate, create landmarks, establish a sense of arrival, provide visual interest and variety, and encourage people to linger in public and private spaces.

While each element described in this chapter serves its own distinct purpose and functions, together they help shape how residents, employees, and visitors experience and respond to urban spaces and entire CRDs and CRAs. The following sections provide design principles and strategies for each of these elements.

## INSPIRATION



Image Credit: mmmm...

Baltimore, MD



Image Credit: www.carmelartsanddesign.com

Carmel, IN



Image Credit: Fairfax County

Fairfax, VA



Image Credit: Ashton Design

Baltimore, MD



Image Credit: Craig Kuhner

Washington, DC

Elements such as water, art installations, public signage, and gateway features contribute to the pedestrian experience and help build a sense of place in a community

# 6A SIGNAGE AND WAYFINDING IN THE PUBLIC REALM

Wayfinding includes specialty street signage, maps and other graphics designed to help visitors navigate an individual site or an entire community. Wayfinding informs people about where they are and what is in their surroundings. By strategically locating wayfinding information, people can be guided to key destinations, including landmarks, public facilities, special streets, and parks.

The Fairfax County Zoning Ordinance provides regulations regarding the permitted types, size and location of signs on private property. VDOT regulates signage in the right-of-way. Section 4E (“Building Signage”) provides guidance on project identity and commercial signage.

## BELOW

Distinctive street and wayfinding sign with mobile app integration  
Image Credit: PAM



Sydney, Australia

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES

**Design public signage in a comprehensive, coordinated manner that complements the area’s character.** While building and storefront signage can convey information about an individual use, signage and wayfinding in the public realm conveys information at a broader level and should be considered as part of a comprehensive area wide information system. In addition, wayfinding and other public signage serve as furnishings in the public realm and their aesthetic should be considered as a component of the site furnishings used to build on the sense of place. Coordinated public signage can help provide a recognizable identity and a unified character for an area. All such signage does not need to be identical but should be designed so that it is complementary to other signage, street furnishings, and the character of the area. Wayfinding signage often includes logos or other unique branding features that further distinguish an area.

**Provide clear, consistent information through a variety of media.** Effective signage and wayfinding consists of a comprehensive, clear and consistent visual communication system with concise messaging. Wayfinding can be presented in static signs that may include maps and text; it can describe distances in linear feet, miles or in average walking time; and, it can include dynamic options such as interactive, electronic displays that allow users to look up more detailed information.

**DESIGN STRATEGIES**

**1 PURPOSE AND LOCATION**

- A. Large, multi-parcel and mixed-use developments should develop a comprehensive system of wayfinding signage for both pedestrians and motorists that complements the individual project and the area as a whole. Wayfinding signs should be coordinated with the development’s pedestrian and vehicular circulation plan to ensure that signage is located in the most appropriate locations for pedestrians and motorists.
- B. If permitted, streetlight-mounted banners that advertise public events, seasonal or other area attractions are encouraged.
- C. Where possible, wayfinding systems should be interactive, and should coordinate with online information to provide up to-date information on travel, events and other relevant information.
- D. Gateway, monument, and location marker signs should be positioned in the Building Zone, in the median, or within plazas and open spaces, or should be integrated into the face of a planter or seat walls, or designed as art pieces.

**2 VISUAL CHARACTER AND GRAPHIC DESIGN**

- A. Wayfinding signs should be well organized, neat, well-maintained, concise, and legible. Signs should be able to withstand weather conditions, and should be constructed from durable materials and replaced as needed to maintain a high quality appearance. Structural components should complement the color and finish of street furnishings.



Hyattsville, MD

**RIGHT**  
A directional sign  
Image Credit: Fairfax County

**DESIGN STRATEGIES (CONTINUED)**

- B. Wayfinding systems that can be utilized by a wide variety of users, including the visually and hearing impaired, and that comply with accessibility requirements are strongly encouraged.
- C. Community logos should be incorporated when appropriate to help create an identity for the CRDs and CRAs. Signs in gateway areas, in particular, should include community logos.
- D. If appropriate, ornamental plantings should be provided at the base of signs to enhance their overall appearance.
- E. Overly lit wayfinding signs that create light pollution or distract drivers should be avoided.
- F. Unnecessary signage that results in visual clutter of the public realm should not be included. Signs should not impede pedestrian movement or sight lines of drivers.
- G. The size, typeface, graphics, illustrations and orientation of signs should be designed for the intended user based on where the sign will be viewed from – e.g. – by a pedestrian, by a driver, or by a passenger in a moving vehicle. International wayfinding symbols should be incorporated, where possible.

**LEFT**

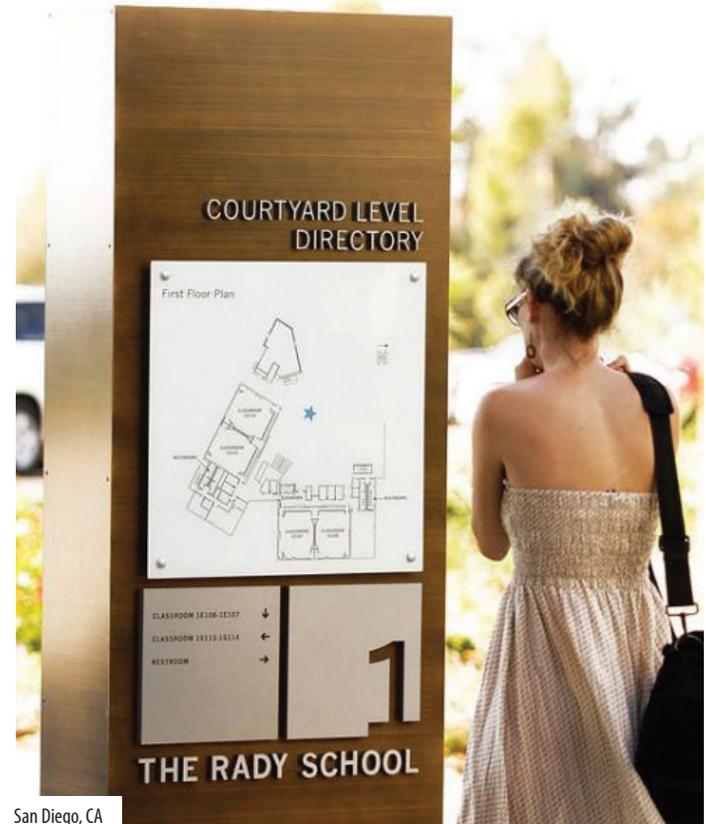
Wayfinding that shares local historic stories integrated into the sidewalk  
Image Credit: Richard Wolfstrom



Brighton, England

**RIGHT**

A pedestrian wayfinding sign with directory information  
Image Credit: CREO Exhibits



San Diego, CA

# 6B GATEWAYS

The integration of gateway elements into the built environment can help denote entrance points or major approaches to an area, as well as transitions between neighborhoods and districts, particularly along major roadways. Gateways play a key role in communicating a first impression of an area. They can serve as landmarks to announce to pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and motorists that they have arrived at a particular place or destination while helping to define an area's edges and entryways and can convey a community's identity.

Gateways can be established in the built environment in a variety of ways—through the design and placement of buildings; through the overall visual character of a streetscape; through distinctive landscaping and vegetation; or through signage, art and other visual elements that function as landmarks or express the identity of an area. The following design principles and strategies offer ideas and guidance for designing these elements to establish and reinforce gateways.

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES

**Incorporate signature elements that create a sense of arrival and a memorable visual impression of an area.** Gateways should incorporate signature elements that are iconic, memorable, creative, and innovative. Signature elements may include:

- High-quality architecture and building materials, including signature buildings in prominent and visible locations
- Specialty area signage or branding that is consistent with an established logo or brand identity, if applicable
- Streetscapes and prominent street furnishings that reflect the character and prevailing design language of an area

### BELOW

The twin churches at Piazza Del Popolo forms the northern gateway into historic City of Rome  
Image Credit: ArcheoRoma

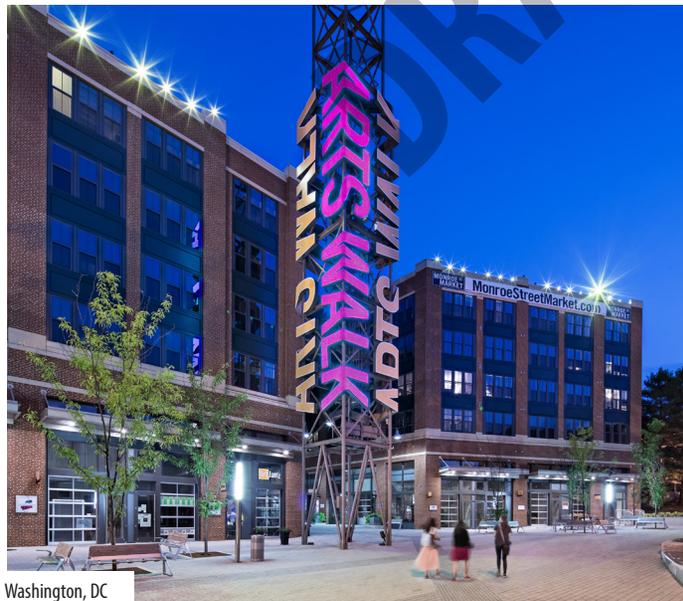


Arlington, VA

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES (CONTINUED)

- Distinctive tree and landscaping patterns
- Public art, including commemorative statues or art that highlights the history of the area
- Water features

**Establish gateways at prominent locations, utilizing elements that are clearly visible to both vehicles and pedestrians.** Gateways are most often located at prominent intersections at the edges of areas and districts to convey transitions in the built environment, establish a sense of arrival, and reinforce an area's distinct identity. As such, they should be legible to drivers of moving vehicles, signaling a transition in character to the CRD or CRA.



**LEFT**  
A pedestrian gateway at a transit station with landmark art  
Image Credit: washington.uli.org

Washington, DC

## DESIGN STRATEGIES

### 1 LOCATION AND CONTEXT

- The types and overall scale of gateway features should be appropriate to the gateway's location, context, and function.
- Gateways should reflect adjacent street types. For example, on Major Avenues, Avenues, and Local Streets, buildings should have prominent architectural features, signage, public art, and high-visibility crosswalks; along Boulevards and Multimodal Through Corridors, gateways should include landmark buildings, prominent signage/branding elements, specialty lighting, and large scale plantings.
- Streetscape design may establish or reinforce the gateway experience through distinctive paving, furnishings, lighting, trees, and landscaping that collectively express an area's discernable design language and visual character.
- Highly visible, landmark plazas and other open spaces can function as gateway elements. In certain locations, smaller public spaces and outdoor seating areas on street corners can also serve a gateway function by marking a transition to a more pedestrian-oriented environment.

**DESIGN STRATEGIES (CONTINUED)**

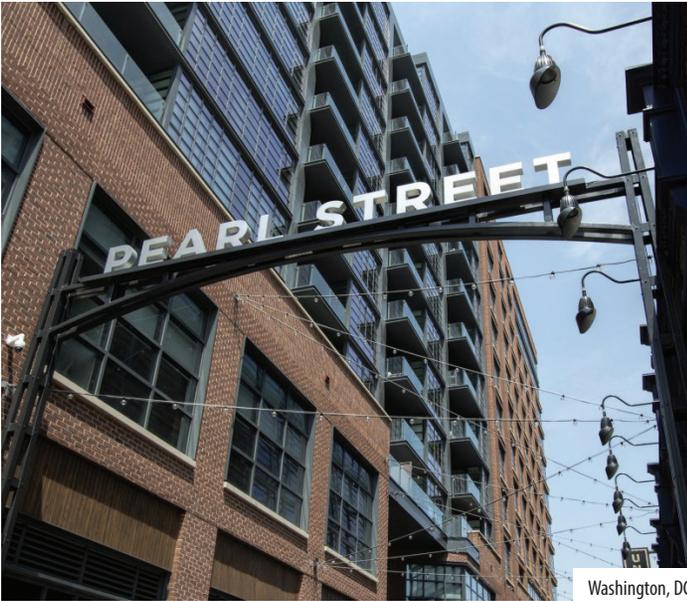
**2 FEATURES AND AMENITIES**

- A. Mechanisms such as signature buildings, changes or variations in height, distinctive façade treatments or rooftop elements, and the placement of buildings relative to the street should be utilized to create gateways.
- B. Public art, boundary markers, area signage, commemorative statues, or other location-specific elements should be incorporated where appropriate to foster a sense of arrival and connote the area’s history and context, and to help build community identity.



Vancouver, Canada

**TOP**  
Gateway highlighted by monument sign placed in a landscaped median  
Image Credit: University of British Columbia



Washington, DC

**BOTTOM LEFT**  
A gateway sign indicates threshold into a special district  
Image Credit: Daniel Kelly



Arlington, VA

**BOTTOM**  
Gateway site highlighted by a signature building at a prominent corner  
Image Credit: SmithGroup JJR and Design Illustration Group

## 6C PUBLIC ART

The integration of public art into everyday life is a key element in building a sense of place in the CRDs and CRAs. Public art can increase vitality, place identity, and pride in the community. Public art may be used to enhance or personalize otherwise impersonal spaces; to catalyze civic dialogue; to offer opportunities for local artists; to increase wayfinding by creating visual landmarks; or, to provide a vehicle for the community to express its identity. In some instances, public art may be facilitated as a joint venture between the public and private sectors.

[Arts Fairfax](#) is a resource for the development of public art in the community.



### RIGHT

Life-size bronze statues at the entrance to a median park celebrate historical figures  
Image Credit:

Prince George's County, MD

### DESIGN PRINCIPLES

**Public art should be contextual.** Public art can be used to honor, celebrate and give visual expression to the local diversity found in the community. Promoting culture and history through public art can be achieved by commemorating local historic events or people, or by recognizing the residents and workforce who live in the area today. Providing opportunities for citizens to participate in the process of planning and selection of public art is highly encouraged.

**Public art can serve multiple purposes, from ornamental and functional to playful and interactive.** While public art may be ornamental in nature, it can be particularly effective when it also serves other purposes. It may provide an essential function in an artistic manner (for example, art incorporated into stormwater management features), educate the public about the history or ideals embedded in a place, or inspire dialogue and interaction among members of a community. Alternatively, public art may provide a distinct environment where—or upon which—children are encouraged to play. When public art adds meaning to a place, brings people together, and fosters interaction, its impacts can extend far beyond the physical space it occupies.

**DESIGN PRINCIPLES (CONTINUED)**

**Public art should reflect, and be informed by, the population it serves.** Public art should be designed or selected through inclusive public involvement and education to ensure that it expresses the values of the community in which it is located and instills a sense of pride in place. When art is created with or by members of the community, rather than imposed from the outside, it is more likely to become a meaningful and cherished part of the urban landscape.

**DESIGN STRATEGIES**

**1 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

- A. The local community should be involved in the location, design and selection of artwork so that it reflects community goals and character. Property owners should work with stakeholders when determining the appropriate type of public art to be installed.
- B. Public art should enhance the built environment by placing engaging art pieces in locations where they can be enjoyed by residents and visitors.

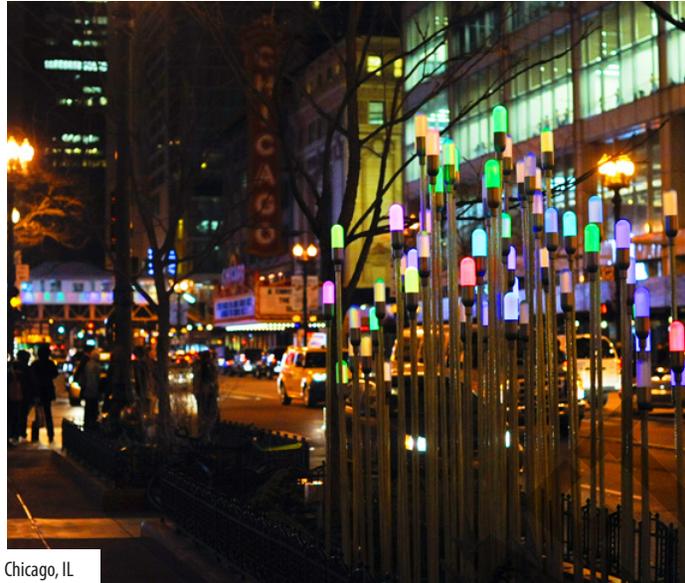
**BOTTOM**  
 A mural art that celebrates the local heritages on a blank wall of a building  
 Image Credit: Fairfax County



Fairfax, VA

**TOP**

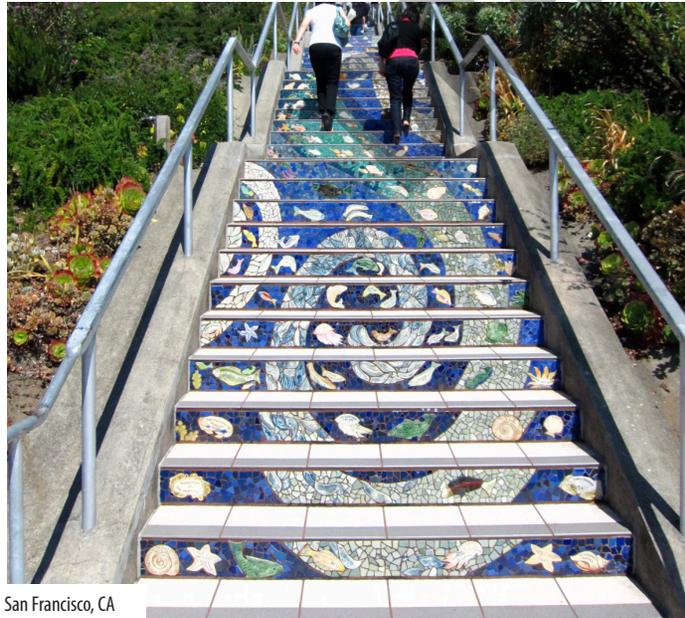
Light installation integrates programmable LED lights into the streetscape and choreographs lighting sequences with themed music  
 Image Credit: Chicago Loop Alliance



Chicago, IL

**BOTTOM**

Public art mosaic integrated into staircase  
 Image Credit: incoherentboy.com



San Francisco, CA

**DESIGN STRATEGIES (CONTINUED)**

**2 LOCATION AND CONTEXT**

- A. Opportunities to express local identity through functional and ornamental design elements should be considered. Art that is incorporated into functional elements in the public realm, such as mosaics in an interactive spray park, provide dual benefits to the community and are encouraged wherever feasible.
- B. If a development is proposed at or near a historic site, projects should address the significance of the location through public art and a narrative describing the site's history.

**3 FEATURES**

- A. Public art should be provided at a variety of scales, to be experienced by both pedestrians and drivers, where possible.
- B. Plazas and other public spaces should be designed in a manner that promotes the integration of both temporary and permanent visual and performance art.
- C. If public art is to be permanent, maintenance and durability should be considered, particularly if the art will be exposed to the elements.

# 6D WATER FEATURES

Water has a magnetic quality that attracts people. The sight and sound of splashing or moving water enhances an urban area. Water features are an important element of the public realm because they provide places to play, attenuate street noise, create a visually appealing environment, and can serve as landmarks and focal points. Water features are often used to distinguish places such as civic centers and cultural institutions.

Water features can be used to highlight environmental features or be incorporated into sustainable design practices. There are many ways to creatively and sustainably integrate water into the urban landscape, including the use of LID techniques such as stormwater collection, storage, and circulation.



Cincinnati, OH

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES

**Consider incorporating water in multiple contexts to enhance large and small public and private spaces.** Water features can fit into and enhance a variety of public and private spaces, from small features in the entry plazas and courtyards of private developments to large, interactive centerpieces of public spaces. In all contexts, and regardless of the size of the feature, the design of water elements should leverage water's innate ability to attract people, provide a calming visual setting and background sounds, and inspire play, gathering, socializing, and relaxation.

**Design water features to serve multiple functions—ornamental, functional, playful and educational.** As with public art, water features can serve a variety of purposes and functions, ranging from ornamental backdrops to water play installations or interpretive features explaining topics such as water resources, water quality and conservation, and stormwater management. Water features can be most compelling when they have purpose and meaning on multiple levels, encourage people to interact with the water and each other, or educate the public about the role of water in our communities and the natural environment. If designed properly, water features can serve environmental functions such as capturing and treating stormwater runoff or providing benefits to wildlife.

**LEFT**  
Fountain adds character, sound, and a sense of history  
Image Credit: Trip Expert



Silver Spring, MD

**TOP**  
Interactive fountain with mosaic art integrated into the paving surface  
Image Credit: Montgomery County



Arlington, VA

**BOTTOM**  
Water feature in a public plaza  
Image Credit: Arlington Public Art

## DESIGN STRATEGIES

### 1 LOCATION AND CONTEXT

- A. Water features should be located on private property, within the Building Zone or in open spaces. They should not be located within the public right-of way.
- B. The appearance of water features during winter months or droughts should be considered.

### 2 FEATURES

- A. All water features should be designed to adhere to Fairfax County standards for outfall, drainage, and other requirements.
- B. Water features should be used to augment recycling, storage, and recirculation of stormwater and HVAC systems, where feasible.
- C. High-quality materials should be used in a manner that complements adjacent architecture and public space design.
- D. Water features should be routinely maintained, repaired, and replaced as necessary.
- E. Water features that are intended for active play should not have standing water that could pose a safety hazard.
- F. Water features are encouraged to incorporate elements such as rocks, areas for animals to rest, and native plantings that make them wildlife-friendly.

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