What is a Neighborhood in the District of Columbia?

Data about the District of Columbia that covers the entire City is readily available from a number of web sites and reports listed at www.NeighborhoodInfoDC.org. This makes for easy reporting of statistics for the entire City. In many cases, though, this information is not nearly specific enough. The District of Columbia is a city of neighborhoods, and conditions vary widely among the different neighborhoods. Obtaining data for these different neighborhoods presents a unique challenge. A nonprofit or government agency providing services to a particular neighborhood often defines a neighborhood by a particular set of street boundaries. Unfortunately, these street boundaries often do not coincide with any of the boundaries used by local and federal agencies charged with collecting data about the District of Columbia. In addition, nonprofit and government agencies may be using slightly different street boundaries, making comparisons difficult.

To help cut through this confusion, a brief overview of the different neighborhood boundaries that are defined by the DC Government and by the U.S. Census Bureau is provided.

Commonly Use Neighborhood Boundaries in the District on Columbia

City Council Wards

There are eight City Council Wards that are used to elect members of the City Council. Data is often presented for City Council Wards in connection with legislation and policy work sponsored by specific Council Members, as well as by citizens that closely identify with the Ward where they live. The boundaries for City Council Wards were redrawn in 2002, which is important to consider when reviewing historical data. Ward 7 and Ward 8 are located east of the Anacostia River, and reports sometimes use an aggregate "East of the River" statistic.

Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANCs)

The 37 Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANCs) in the District of Columbia are subdivisions of the City Council Wards. Representatives from ANCs are elected to advise the District government on issues relating to zoning, social service programs, health, police protection, sanitation, and recreation.

Neighborhood Clusters

There are 39 neighborhood clusters throughout the city. Each individual cluster is made up of three to five neighborhoods. Neighborhood clusters are being used by the DC government for budgeting, planning, service delivery, and analysis purposes. In October 2002, the DC Office of Planning released Strategic Neighborhood Action Plans (SNAPs) for each neighborhood cluster. These SNAPs were developed by residents and neighborhood planners, and can be found linked on the web site for the DC Office of Neighborhood Action at http://neighborhoodaction.dc.gov/ (or use this direct link: http://neighborhoodaction.dc.gov/neighborhoodaction/cwp/view,a,1163,q,487308.asp).

Police District's and Police Service Areas (PSAs)

There are 45 Police Service Areas that the Police Department currently uses to organizes its services. These PSAs are grouped into 7 Police Districts.

Census Tracts

Census tracts are small geographic areas defined for collecting and reporting data from the U.S. Census. There are 188 census tracts in the District of Columbia. Census tracts are useful for zooming in on smaller areas. Multiple census tracts can be added together to create a neighborhood defined to closely match customized street boundary specifications. Note that census tracts are slightly changed every ten years. The census web site includes information about the changes. In addition, data presented for census tracts on the NeighborhoodInfo DC web site are adjusted so that census tracts are comparable across decades.

Census Block Groups and Blocks

Each census tract can be further subdivided into smaller census block groups, or even smaller census blocks. These smaller areas are useful for seeing even greater detail than what is attainable by using census tracts. These small area levels of detail, however, contain less information because of concerns about privacy and confidentiality.

Zip Codes

Data about businesses are often organized by zip codes, however, few other resources organize data this way. Zip codes do not neatly coincide with any local boundaries (Wards, Clusters, ANCs, PSAs). They do not overlap with census tracts well either. These incompatibility issues make it difficult to compare zip code data with other data sets.

NE, NW, SW, SE; Voting Precincts; School Catchment Areas

Data in the District of Columbia is rarely organized by these areas. Quadrants are not connected to any set of political, planning or research groups. Voting precincts are a further subdivision of ANC's, and generally do not get used in planning or research. School Catchment Areas are a relevant geography, but data has not been organized this way in past years in part because the catchment area definitions were not available. In addition, because of school choice and student mobility, school catchment area definitions are of limited value for research and planning.

Finding Where Your Specific Address is Located

In determining which of the above geographies you want to use, first you may want to know where a specific address is located. There are several tools available to assist you with this. One is the DC Guide, presented at http://citizenatlas.dc.gov/atlasapps/reporthometab.aspx (or visit http://about.dc.gov and click on "Where You Live").   Enter the address you are interested in to find out the Neighborhood Cluster, Zip Code, Ward, or ANC where your address is located.

Important: this information is at the bottom of the page, scroll down to see it!