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NoMa Parks Foundation Opens *Rain* Installation in M Street NE Underpass

4,000 LED-powered light rods that evoke the sensation of falling rain will glow 24 hours a day and pulse in response to traffic flow beneath the elevated railway.

OCTOBER 25, 2018 / WASHINGTON, D.C. — The NoMa Parks Foundation turned on the power today for *Rain*, a dynamic light installation in the M Street NE railway underpass. Comprising 4,000 LED-powered polycarbonate rods suspended above the underpass sidewalks, the artwork will illuminate the space 24 hours a day and pulse like gentle waves of rainfall in response to the flow of vehicular traffic beneath the elevated tracks. *Rain* is the first of the NoMa Parks Foundation’s four planned underpass “art parks” to open and was designed by Thurlow Small Architecture of Oakland, California, working in conjunction with Dutch firm NIO architecten in response to an international competition held by the Foundation.

“The railway tracks and underpasses in NoMa have been perceived as ‘dividers’ between the east and west sides of the neighborhood. However, with the explosive growth of the NoMa neighborhood, the underpasses have become critical connections for tens of thousands of neighborhood residents, employees, and visitors,” said Robin-Eve Jasper, president of the NoMa Parks Foundation. “From the outset, the goal of our art parks project has been to brighten NoMa’s east-west connections and make them appealing, even inspiring, places. With the *Rain* installation at M Street, the underpass will glow with ever-changing, soft white light, making an enormous, dramatic improvement in how pedestrians and cyclists experience the space.”

In early 2014, the NoMa Parks Foundation announced the international design competition to transform the four railway underpasses in NoMa. The initiative, part of the NoMa Business Improvement District’s 2012 Public Realm Design Plan and strongly supported by the community, will turn the underpasses at Florida Avenue and K, L, and M streets NE into stunning contemporary art installations. Although the winning designs for M and L streets were announced in the spring of 2015, delays in the permitting and permissions process meant they could not begin construction until this year.

Thurlow Small Architecture and NIO architecten have worked together over the past two decades on a number of infrastructure and public-realm projects. “Our tunnel proposal for NoMa does what all good urban parks do,” wrote the design team when *Rain* was first announced by the NoMa Parks Foundation. “It offers a moment of openness, a space to breathe, and a place where thoughts can drift away.”

The second art park installation — *Lightweave*, by San Francisco’s Future Cities Lab, an art and design studio — will begin construction in the L Street NE underpass in November 2018. Work is expected to take three to four months.

In addition, the NoMa Parks Foundation also has two public park projects in progress: (1) Swampoodle Park, an 8,000-square-foot dog park and children’s play space at the corner of 3rd and L streets NE, which will open in November; and (2) “Tanner Park,” a 2.5-acre park along the Metropolitan Branch Trail above New York Avenue NE, which will begin construction by year’s end.

“It’s a very exciting time for public space in NoMa,” said Jasper. “From now through the next year-plus, residents, works, and visitors will get to see and begin to enjoy the fruits of years’ worth of intensive planning, numerous community meetings, and hard work by many people at the NoMa Parks Foundation, the NoMa BID, and our partners in the D.C. government and the larger NoMa community.”

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About NoMa Parks

The NoMa Parks Foundation, an affiliate of the NoMa Business Improvement District, was founded in 2012 to establish permanent, public outdoor spaces in NoMa that are attractive, sustainable, and welcoming — places for people to refresh, play, and connect, now and for generations to come. The rapid transformation of this part of Washington, D.C., just blocks north of the U.S. Capitol, into a mixed-use urban neighborhood has highlighted the importance of creating great public spaces. Currently, more than 45,000 people live within 4/5 of a mile of First and M streets NE, and that population is projected to double over the next decade. Additionally, 55,000 people work here, and more than 100,000 pedestrians are out and about in NoMa’s commercial core every day. But the area suffers from a dearth of publicly accessible parks and plazas. In 2014, the NoMa Parks Foundation and the D.C. Government began a public-private partnership to create parks and great public spaces in NoMa. We have acquired three public park sites to date and have plans for publicly accessible parks on private spaces. In addition, major art installations for the M and L street NE underpasses will be completed by early 2019. For more information about the NoMa Parks Foundation, visit nomaparks.org and sign up for our newsletter. Follow us on Twitter ([@NoMaParksDC](https://twitter.com/NoMaParksDC)) and like us on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/NoMaParksDC).