

D.C. Nightlife Scene Remains Successful in a Post-Pandemic D.C.

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A view of Connecticut Avenue south of Dupont Circle, home to the area's nightlife scene. (Salmoncain Smith-Shomade/GW)

The D.C. nightlife scene continues to thrive and adapt, despite competition and concerns raised about post-pandemic effects impacting the District's nightlife and restaurant industry.

Employees, owners, advocates and business experts from across the District — particularly in the Dupont Circle and Adams Morgan areas — agreed that while the nightlife scene may be transitioning — there's still many businesses open to residents or tourists who venture into the District after 5 p.m.

How is the D.C. Nightlife?

Brayan Nieves, an employee at The Madhatter — a Dupont Circle establishment [owned](#) by The D.C. Restaurant Group — praised the D.C. nightlife scene for its opportunity and success.

“For me, (the) nightlife in D.C. is very fun, there are plenty of places you can go with your friends. There’s just so much ... (there are) many restaurants, clubs, concerts (and) bars,” Nieves said in a text conversation. “I believe nightlife in D.C. has grown. I believe it tends to (grow) every year. I don’t see nightlife in D.C. declining anytime soon.”

Kelly Laczko — co-owner of HER Diner and former general manager at Duplex Diner (both establishments were located between Adams Morgan and Dupont Circle) — said HER Diner is already receiving great feedback from [its opening](#) on November 20.

“We’re a business that thrives off of nightlife ... and we just opened our doors almost three weeks ago,” Laczko said. “People are reacting great (to the opening and are) very positive coming in. We are busier than we were in the past couple years.”

Kristen Barden, the executive director at Adams Morgan Partnership Business Improvement District, agreed with these business owners.

“There is still a vibrant nightlife scene in Adams Morgan and across the city. Air Restaurant [opened up during the pandemic](#) and has become very popular,” she said in an email

correspondence. “Le Mont Royale is a Canadian disco and also (are) very busy. They (opened) in the past couple years among 5 or 6 more. Namak Restaurant opened this past spring to much acclaim and [Tail Up Goat](#) and [Reveler's Hour](#) continue to get lots of regional and national awards.”

A History of Nightlife

The American Nightlife Association — an advocate for the national nightlife industry — [said](#) 21st century nightlife is “a dynamic tapestry woven with cultural trends, technological advancements, and global events ... Nightclubs will continue to evolve and adapt, finding new ways to bring people together through music, dance and shared experiences.”

Harrison Beacher — who is a Washingtonian employed as a realtor and managing partner at [Coalition Properties Group](#) — agreed with the ANA description of nightlife as “adaptive.” He described the D.C. scene as very transitional.

“Nightlife, as I would describe, migrated from Northwest (D.C.) — primarily Georgetown, Adams Morgan and DuPont (Circle) — and kept coming east. It then crept ... to U Street corridors,” Beacher said.

Beacher said the nightlife scene then moved to Shaw and NOMA areas following U Street and currently reside in Navy Yard and the Wharf.

“In my opinion, that (last move) kind of sterilized (the scene) a little bit. D.C. used to have some fun, grimy nightlife,” he said. “We had kind of a golden era of club nightlife ... (from around) 2004 to 2010.”

Competition Amongst Family

Dennis Garcia, a five-year bar manager at the Dupont Circle-based nightclub Decades, described the D.C. nightlife as “familial” and “friendly.”

“One of the best things working in a club is like even you (are) washing dishes or you are serving a cook to your family, you're there,” Garcia said. “Everyone is going to be treated with the same respect there ... They’re not like employees. Even the manager (is) really sweet.”

Garcia said many employees in the D.C. scene find a new home in nightlife.

“Most of the people working there are immigrants. So, they find their own family here when they don’t have family in the United States,” he said.

Joshua Reeves — general manager at Adams Morgan-based Mixxed, which opened last fall — agreed with Garcia on the nature of support within the nightlife community. He said other businesses were “helpful” when he relied on them for his understanding of the D.C. scene.

“The people that are in (Adams Morgan) restaurants, whether it's the bartender, the managers or the owners, they know a lot about the area and what to expect on certain days,” Reeves said.

“We're competing against each other, but ... they have good intentions.”



A view outside the restaurant and bar Mixxed in Adams Morgan. (Salmoncain Smith-Shomade/GW)

The Economic Situation

Garcia also described how the economic situation of nightlife draws in people.

“Most of the people who work in the nightclubs ... They work in the daytime then move to work during the night for extra (money),” he said. “Working during the night (also may) bring more money than the daytime.”

Beacher said pre-pandemic D.C. looked destined for great success, but now, businesses face challenges in the post-pandemic world.

“D.C. was on a very strong upswing in terms of commercial real estate prices ... D.C. really came roaring back (pre-pandemic),” he said. “(Post-pandemic,) I know businesses, specifically nightlife ... have struggled the most just because of this semblance of safety, the fear around it and the challenge to do things you used to be able to do in Adams Morgan.”

Beacher also mentioned an issue with the increasing population and types of businesses available in D.C.

“Our (D.C) regional population has continued to increase. The city doesn't have the infrastructure to host a lot of people comfortably. It just doesn't,” he said. “D.C. does not have many family-friendly places where adults could also get a drink if they wanted. It's a happy hour, young professional, kind of transient crowd.”

Beacher added that the expense of the city will also deter more customers.

“I think the changing demographic of the city, with life in general like to your economic point with life in general being more expensive from rent to ownership to everything to inflation means that like the nightlife options are also going to be more expensive,” he said.

Managing a post-COVID World

Barden said post-COVID, D.C. still continues to function well.

“I don't think D.C. has ever been a 9-5 city,” she said. “I think hybrid and remote work has perhaps benefited Adams Morgan since we have a dense residential community around the commercial corridors and when people are working from home, they need places for lunch close by and also a place for dinner or a drink right after work.”

Barden said, however, many businesses have changed their hours post-COVID.

“The one significant change we have seen in customer behavior is that people don't stay out as late post-COVID compared to pre-COVID,” she said. “We used to have businesses open to 4 or 5 a.m. on weekend nights and now most places close at 2 a.m.”