



PLACEMAKING IN LEGACY CITIES

Opportunities and Good Practices

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Turning Vacant Spaces into Vibrant Places



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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

People know a great place when they find one. They like the way the place feels. They like the way the place looks. They enjoy moving through the place and sitting in it. They like being in there alone and with others. It's usually not that difficult to get consensus around which places are great and which are not. As the building blocks of cities, places define our experience of cities, as well. Cities that have suffered population and job loss over the last six decades—for whom the term “Legacy Cities” has recently been coined—struggle to cultivate new or maintain existing high quality public spaces. Rediscovering and creating authentic places that evoke an emotional connection to the city must be a part of their revitalization.

“Place” Existed Before “Placemaking”

Placemaking is a concept that emerged to describe the intentional process of activating new or existing public spaces to create that emotional connection. Placemaking, which can take many forms and include a range of activity, activates public space through design, programming, community empowerment, wayfinding, art, marketing — whatever is needed for that particular community. Placemaking is contextual and situational, and whether a project begins with a community's needs or a specific physical location, it will require a unique recipe.

Placemaking is often referred to as an art. Like the production of art, the process and result of placemaking should produce an emotional reaction in viewers or users — a connection to a physical place. The success of placemaking efforts will depend on the degree to which a high-quality, welcoming place is produced, one where people want to be and gather.

While placemaking has emerged as a named concept within just the last half-century, ancient marketplaces, 18th century American town squares and urban parks that are set aside on some of the most valuable real estate in cities around the world demonstrate that humans have long understood the value of creating shared public spaces to meaningfully gather to socialize, recreate and exchange goods, services, information and ideas.

Historically, these public places were designed to put people first by necessity. Walkability, accessibility, and connectivity were essential elements long before the terms became

Washington Park
Source: New Solutions Group.

commonplace. In fact, this human-scaled design standard applied to most of the built environment in cities, not just high-profile public spaces. Neighborhoods, commercial districts and institutions were all designed to interact with the public realm in ways that made it easier, if not also more pleasant, for a pedestrian to access and utilize the built environment.

Unfortunately, development trends over the latter half of the 20th century ran counter to pedestrian-friendly design. Auto-centric suburban sprawl drained Legacy Cities of their people and their tax bases, and led to a dearth of investment in the place-based assets of cities, creating a nasty feedback loop that exacerbated (and continues to exacerbate) ongoing population flight and disinvestment. Far-flung suburbs don't easily connect to the core city via mass transit. And now the only way for many people to get *into* the city, if they do at all, is to drive and park. Subsequently, city planners and developers have felt compelled to design places as much for cars as for people, which has had utterly devastating effects on cities and their ability to foster a strong sense of place.

While it seems that, for most of human history, communities understood how to create special public places, the damage done to cities and their physical environments during the age of sprawl, as well as to these cities' own senses of community, is deep. The policies that incentivize sprawl are ingrained not just in development dollars and new road funding, but pervade the culture. Additionally, technological developments from the automobile to the internet have fundamentally altered the ways Americans interact with each other. While the ideal of the town square as a forum for public discourse still resonates with Americans, the practices relating to physical congregation and design have changed in a way that is often more isolating.

Nowhere has this shift been more vicious than in America's Legacy Cities, the former industrial hubs, predominantly in the Northeast and Midwest, which flourished in the early 1900s thanks to industry and innovation but floundered post-World War II. Global economic changes, suburbanization, racial segregation, unsustainable land use patterns and gripping urban challenges especially undermined cities that lacked diverse economies. And arguably, nowhere is placemaking a more vital undertaking. Placemaking strategies can help reposition Legacy Cities as a viable, even preferred, alternative to their suburban counterparts as people seek to experience community through their physical environment. Placemaking

can improve quality of life, enhance public safety, and spark business growth. Moreover, it can be versatile and relatively low cost, so even cities with no immediate prospects of growth can use the strategies and principles of placemaking to achieve positive outcomes.

Following an overview of placemaking principles, this paper explores revitalization efforts that include strong placemaking components. It draws out the insights, concepts and principles of placemaking in a Legacy City context to provide a more localized perspective, and real world case studies to show how placemaking is both already happening in Legacy Cities and how it can help them become healthier, more sustainable and more vibrant.

The goals of the report are: **(1) to demonstrate the value and necessity of weaving placemaking into the implementation of Legacy City revitalization efforts; and (2) to distill good placemaking practices that are especially relevant to Legacy Cities.**

This is not to say that the considerations illustrated in this report are only applicable to Legacy Cities, but that in Legacy Cities, these considerations are paramount. While this paper makes occasional reference to design elements (such as the appropriate scale for retail storefronts), it does not evaluate specific design choices made in the case studies. The concern of this report is the process of placemaking, the "how" of each of the case studies, with the hope that Legacy City leaders at community, neighborhood, institutional and city levels may find examples to learn from as they consider their own efforts.

The Placemaking Opportunity for Legacy City Revitalization

For Legacy Cities, placemaking can support policies that counter sprawl-based development patterns. Effective placemaking can vastly enhance the efforts of those seeking to revitalize Legacy Cities by ensuring that revitalization efforts are imbued with the spirit of place and community that made these cities great to begin with.

Most of the industrial cities of the Northeast and Midwest, such as Baltimore, Buffalo, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, Pittsburgh and St. Louis, are easily characterized as Legacy Cities. These cities suffered 30 to 60 percent population loss from peaks

roughly a half a century ago. While the case studies featured within this paper come from the formerly industrial cities of the Midwest, efforts in places like Philadelphia, Oakland and others could easily be relevant and offer lessons, as well.

Placemaking is not a panacea but it can, and should, be a part of almost every effort to address cities' challenges. Placemaking can be done as a component of other solutions and as a partial solution to a variety of problems. A false choice may present itself to community leaders in Legacy Cities burdened by the scarcity of resources: do we focus on placemaking, which can feel like a luxury, or crime prevention? But the answer, this paper and many other placemaking resources suggest, is usually not to choose between the two, but rather to understand the ways in which placemaking can be an important tool in efforts to increase public safety.

Two core concepts are especially pertinent to underscore for Legacy Cities:

- First, if the goal of improving sense of place is integrated into other revitalization efforts, the payoff of placemaking can multiply other benefits. Placemaking has the capacity to serve vital goals, like safety and public health, which are often approached via other strategies.
- Second, placemaking is both a physical and a social activity, requiring (and building) both physical and social capital. This is why the best placemaking efforts meaningfully include community stakeholders. This is possibly the most exciting opportunity for Legacy Cities, since placemaking can help address and improve, through its process, both physical and social connectivity and conditions in neighborhoods and beyond.

For many years, a series of revitalization efforts have been developed and tested to shore up Legacy City neighborhoods, enliven downtowns and increase livability and access for current and potential residents. It is important to understand that placemaking does not need to be considered separately from these revitalization efforts. In fact, the case studies in this report are predominantly of projects that were not primarily "placemaking projects," but where elements of placemaking were critical to the projects' successes.

These revitalization efforts are deployed in four basic geographies within Legacy Cities, and their placemaking

elements may change based on a particular project's context:

- **Downtowns** or business districts;
- **Anchor districts**, which contain clusters of education (university), arts and culture, health care and other (even longtime corporate) institutions;
- **Neighborhoods**, both those that are approaching market viability and those that are highly distressed; and
- **Trails and Corridors**, like river paths and greenways, including the formerly industrialized areas along land and water transportation corridors.

In each of these geographies, placemaking can be put into practice at different scales to different ends. But in all cases, a stronger, healthier, more vital place can be the result. The rest of this paper serves to increase familiarity with the general concepts of placemaking, and to then discuss, with specific examples, how placemaking can enhance Legacy City revitalization work in the four geographies.

Legacy City Placemaking 101

Placemaking is a **process** for **activating great public places** to create an **emotional connection in its users**. These public places can be created from scratch, such as a new public park on a former industrial site, or renovations of previously unsuccessful public places, such as unused public plazas. "Activation," the process of drawing and retaining users to a space, is almost never a one-time design task, but includes management, programming and adaptation over time. To unpack the elements further and establish the ways in which value judgments factor into assessments of placemaking:

- Placemaking is a **process** that, at its most effective, involves collaboration among many stakeholders, relies on proximate community assets and can be transformative to the place and its people.
- The placemaking process must go beyond design and creation to incorporate **management** of public places, which includes maintenance, adaptation over time, programming/events and marketing. The appropriate level of management depends on the project.

- Placemaking should result in **public places** that are designed by and with the community, that give people a sense of meaning, connection, and an emotional attachment to the place.
- The quality of a public place should be **evaluated** by the extent to which it serves a variety of functions, is comfortable, welcoming, safe, accessible, fun, and has an authentic identity and community character. Ultimately, whether the place is used and loved by a diversity of people is the best indicator of success.

Successful placemaking can lead to one or more outcomes that benefit community, including:

- **Enriched quality of life** for the public, who benefit from the social, cultural and/or recreational aspects of the successful place;
- **Community sustainability** through long-term reinvestment and maintenance of the successful place and a stabilized population;
- **Increased social capital** as neighbors build community around stewardship of the place, which can engender greater political or social advocacy;
- **Economic opportunity** for both neighboring property and business owners, as well as performers, and others who are empowered to economically benefit from the successful place;
- **Improved public safety**, as growing numbers of users and occupants of the space help eliminate the conditions that foster crime and the perception of crime;
- **Greater connectivity** between neighborhoods or districts through the public place; and
- **Strengthened community identity** through heightened public awareness of a shared asset that is manifested in the successful place.

The particular goals of a placemaking project may include all or just one of these outcomes. Different goals will be desired by and attainable for different locations and with different populations.

There are a number of organizations and a growing body of literature and analysis that help urban leaders and practitioners think about and implement placemaking projects in their cities. The American Planning Association, the Project for Public Spaces, the Michigan Municipal League, the International Center for Inner City Competitiveness, the National Endowment for the Arts, CEOs for Cities, Downtown Research and Development Center and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, in addition to periodicals and websites like *Next City* and the *Atlantic Cities*, among others, have all contributed to the available resources.

Placemaking literature consistently emphasizes the importance of a community-driven process reflecting community values and identity (which is as valid in non-Legacy City contexts as in Legacy Cities). Placemaking practitioners have drawn on the lessons learned by urban planners and community organizers to more meaningfully engage the community in a placemaking project. The expression of an

Project for Public Spaces: 11 Principles of Placemaking

UNDERLYING IDEAS:

1. The community is the expert
2. You are creating a place, not just a design
3. You can't do it alone
4. They always say, "It can't be done"

PLANNING AND OUTREACH TECHNIQUES:

5. You can see a lot just by observing
6. Develop a vision

TRANSLATING IDEAS INTO ACTION:

7. Form supports function
8. Triangulate – choose and arrange different elements in relation to each other for maximum impact.

IMPLEMENTATION:

9. Start with the petunias: Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper
10. Money is not the issue
11. You are never finished

authentic community identity is the heart—and the art—of placemaking. Often, it's also at the center of planning and other place-based revitalization efforts.

And though every placemaking effort must be tailored to its community, there has been instructive work done to describe the art of placemaking as a practice. The Project for Public Spaces (PPS), a nearly 40-year-old nonprofit organization based in New York City, has emerged as a world leader in this regard. PPS serves as a consultant and trainer for communities engaging in placemaking, facilitates community engagement processes, recognizes great places and describes what makes them so and produces resources and guides to the placemaking process. Their “11 Principles of Placemaking” are a useful shorthand, and a variety of other resources are available on their website.

The placemaking literature includes a number of other concepts that, synthesized with the lessons learned from the case studies, suggest that the following are key considerations in Legacy Cities:

- **It is important to create density and diversity of proximate activities.** A high-quality public place will have a number of draws for visitors, which will entice a diversity of users and then encourage them to stick around. This strategy is also known as “triangulation,” and PPS calls its impact “the Power of 10,” emphasizing the importance of clustering activities to create a place and clustering places to create a destination. This report finds in its case studies that often in Legacy Cities, where resources are limited, proximity of different activities is achieved at least partially through **connectivity, programming and marketing**, rather than through physical design or development decisions alone. These tools can help foster the perception and experience of different attractions as one unified destination.
 - o **Connectivity** involves creating physical linkages between destinations that might otherwise be considered separate locations (the Midtown loop, for instance, as described below, connects different anchor institutions). In Legacy Cities, this helps to build on scarce assets.
 - o In the case studies herein, **programming** offerings include musical performances, outdoor movies, farmers

markets, geocaching classes, children's sports leagues, historical tours, an outdoors exercise trail and more. It may not always be possible to create permanent activities within a site or position three new businesses on the border, but occasional programming (the more regular, the better) helps bring people to the space.

- o **Branding and marketing**, when complementing real connectivity if not actual proximity, can define a place. Pittsburgh's Three Rivers Heritage Trail is actually a series of connected trails that spread throughout the city, but users understand that the trails are linked together because of its name. Elmwood Avenue in Buffalo is actually two miles long, but a “Map and Guide” encourages users to view it as a single destination.
- **Community engagement is key.** It bears repeating, as Alan Mallach and Joseph Schilling, scholars of Legacy Cities, note: “Community engagement . . . takes on a particularly important role in the planning process in a city in transition, both because of the political dynamics in these cities and because of the nature of the issues that the planning process is seeking to address.” This claim is equally applicable to placemaking.¹ That said, the quality of community engagement for each of the case studies in this paper varied, showcasing the constant tensions around how “the community” is defined and what level of engagement is meaningful. While it may be possible to successfully design a place residents embrace without engaging them during the design process, examples abound of projects that either failed outright or were weaker than their potential because designers did not investigate or understand how the site's neighbors would be most likely to use it. When resources are scarce, the risks associated with not engaging the project's most likely users are too high to ignore.
- **“Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper,” (LQC) and its corollary, “Money is not the issue,” are two principles that suggest a starting point.** They encourage placemakers not to wait for the money for expensive design schemes, but to start with whatever small investments, perhaps based on volunteer sweat equity, are possible.

¹ Schilling, Joseph, and Alan Mallach. *Cities in Transition: A Guide for Practicing Planners*. Chicago: American Planning Association, 2012. p.29.

Most of the Legacy City case studies in this report provide evidence that inexpensive solutions, like neighborhood cleanups, often serve as the initial spark around which a group of community advocates may coalesce. But in Legacy Cities, these LQC efforts are not usually enough to transform their neighborhoods in and of themselves. Only after several years, and sometimes decades, of work and financial investment, would you be able to note a significant impact beyond the good will generated by community action.

- o It is most useful to recognize LQC investments in Legacy Cities for what they are: helpful first steps in creating and mobilizing a community of advocates for a specific place. Such a community of advocates can set the table for later investments.
- o However, **LQC should not be misunderstood as sufficient to transform a place in a Legacy City.** In cities and sites with major pedestrian traffic, LQC investments might be enough to bring users into a new space that are already passersby. In neighborhoods, however, where pedestrians are themselves a scarce resource, a LQC approach is not usually enough to repeatedly draw visitors to an improved public site.
- o In addition, while this paper finds immense value in the LQC approach, it also finds that the placemaking efforts that truly transformed their surroundings ultimately were the beneficiaries of major investments. LQC placemaking in Legacy Cities may increase public safety,

community sustainability and social capital, as in the Georgia Street and Clark Park case studies that follow. But alone, LQC projects are unlikely to lead directly to economic development opportunities.

The considerations above can be empowering to practitioners, grassroots change agents and other stakeholders in Legacy Cities. Placemaking is something anyone can do if they leverage their community's existing assets, relationships, creativity and energy.



Chapter 2

DOWNTOWNS

Washington Park.
Source: New Solutions Group.

Introduction

The downtown districts of Legacy Cities are rich with assets that can serve as the raw material of placemaking: natural water resources (riverfronts and lakefronts), beautiful historic architecture and public spaces designed for a more pedestrian-friendly era. The downtowns of Legacy Cities are usually the historic and geographic heart of the city and, in many cases, the region.

Despite tremendous potential, the downtowns of Legacy Cities often fail to attract the density and range of activity that downtowns in non-Legacy Cities enjoy. Legacy Cities struggle with turning the success of occasional entertainment crowds into a sustained benefit, as the designs of large-scale developments (such as casinos and stadiums), that have been at the center of many redevelopment schemes over the last 30 years, tend to further discourage walkability and a mix of use.

The reality is that employing good placemaking practices around downtown developments and revitalization efforts more generally can vastly improve economic development outcomes. Fundamentally, good placemaking practices help ensure that Legacy Cities capitalize on the assets and opportunities that already exist in their downtowns.

Leaders in Legacy Cities are trying many placemaking strategies and some of these downtowns are beginning to turn the corner. Projects range from creating pedestrian-friendly environments, to leveraging historic architecture and

tax incentives to revive dormant retail and commercial strips, to reinvesting in quality public space at the conjunction of a downtown and neighborhood.

The case of Washington Park in Cincinnati, Ohio, provides particular insight into the practice and process of placemaking in Legacy City downtowns, especially those that suffer from severe disinvestment. Through an infusion of capital investment and programming, the city achieved better connectivity between downtown and an adjacent neighborhood, which provides a spectrum of activity that residents and visitors alike enjoy and improves the community's overall quality of life.

The case study also raises vital questions about community engagement in a downtown revitalization planning process. Within the scope of this paper, complete evaluation of the project's community engagement process is not possible. It is not immediately clear how the project's leaders defined its community of users, and how they negotiated the desires of communities that may have differing preferences, such as tourists, downtown workers who live in the suburbs and nearby residents at various income levels. The authors suggest that these tensions are likely to be most nettlesome in Legacy City downtowns because of the intersection of these interests and the power dynamic that already exists among them. Additional research into the long-term impact on residents would help future placemakers weighing similar decisions.

Legacy Cities Challenges: Downtowns

As people moved out of Legacy Cities during the last half of the 20th century, the role of the historic commercial core dramatically diminished in scale and scope. Malls were built to cater to suburban shoppers, undercutting the vitality of downtown retail. Suburban office buildings with adjacent parking followed, shifting white-collar jobs out of downtown high rises, as well.

Since downtowns were built to maximize pedestrian- and mass transit-fed density and centrality, they struggled to compete with suburban design: every downtown building demolished to create a parking lot simultaneously created a less-engaging built environment, leading to a reduction in the number of people actually using the downtown to live, work and play. With fewer resources, the special public places of downtowns struggled and new placemaking efforts, to replace or re-envision what was lost, did not occur. Major developments, such as entertainment venues, did not prioritize walkability and only attracted significant crowds during occasional large events, requiring parking for thousands of cars while doing little to foster a day-to-day sense of urban vitality or real mixed use activity.



Washington Park. Source: New Solutions Group.

Downtown Case Study: Over the Rhine, Washington Park, Cincinnati, Ohio

CONTEXT

Over the Rhine (OTR) has been described as the largest, most intact, nineteenth century urban historic district in the United States.² Just north of the central business district, OTR is defined by its Italianate architecture from the second half of the 19th Century.³ Once the heart of Cincinnati's German community, OTR began to decline after the First World War. Between 1927 and 2007, a neighborhood of 50,000 shrank to a mere 4,900 residents.⁴ In 2001, the shooting of a young black male by a white police officer sparked the largest public disruption since the LA riots.⁵ The 2001 riots drew attention and new interest to OTR, a community facing many challenges, meaning big changes for the neighborhood in years to come.

Given OTR's proximity to downtown, crime was spilling over into the central business district, threatening to drive

2 "Historic Preservation." *Over the Rhine Foundation*. Web. Last retrieved: July 31, 2013. <http://www.otrfoundation.org/Historic_Preservation.htm>.

3 Glaser, Susan. "Cincinnati's Over the Rhine Neighborhood Makes an Amazing Comeback." *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, October 20, 2012.

4 Pederson, Kyle, dir. *The Rhine*. 2012. Web. 30 Jul 2013. <<http://vimeo.com/44334660>>.

5 Waddington, D.P. *Policing Public Disorder: Theory and Practice*. Oxford: Willan, 2007.

away Cincinnati's largest employers. In response, the City of Cincinnati partnered with corporate leaders to develop a strategy to improve the health of the city's urban core and create a destination for Cincinnati's sizable middle class. In 2003, backing from local corporate interests and the mayor's office led to the creation of the Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation (3CDC), a private, nonprofit corporation. Its mandate was to design and implement development projects and target investment in the downtown area. The organization has since procured \$284 million for the area, with \$69 million from the City and the remainder from equity funds, State and Federal Historic Tax Credits, and other, private sources. 3CDC serves several important roles in OTR and the central business district: developer, master developer, asset manager, and lender or fund manager for many projects.

In 2006, in the midst of OTR's major redevelopment, Washington Park became a focal point of placemaking. Washington Park was a six-acre park in the heart of OTR, close to Main Street and just blocks from the central business district. As OTR's population declined through the 20th century, the

increasingly underutilized park became notorious for drug trafficking and prostitution. Washington Park has, however, a rich, storied past. Before being established as a City park, the land was used as a burial ground for local churches and then as a Civil War cemetery. The City of Cincinnati acquired the land in 1855 and park construction started in the 1860s. For nearly a century, the park was a locus of activity for OTR and the residents of Cincinnati.

Given its value as an historic landmark, proximate to downtown and with the potential to hold public events, targeting the blighted park was an obvious next step in the revitalization of downtown Cincinnati. Leaders projected that the renovation and expansion of Washington Park would increase the connective fiber between the central business district and its surrounding neighborhoods. In 2011, Washington Park would get a \$48 million facelift.

REALIZING RENOVATION AND EXPANSION

3CDC, the City of Cincinnati, the Cincinnati Park Board and the Cincinnati corporate and philanthropic community formed a public-private partnership to renovate and expand Washington Park. Partners worked closely with a design team on specialized technical aspects of the park. The Cincinnati Park Board and 3CDC (from here on referred to as the "lead organizations") were the face of the project, convening the Washington Park Master Plan Steering Committee, public meetings and meetings with organizations, as well as overseeing media relations.

Integral to Washington Park's renovation plan was the park's expansion. Just north of Washington Park was the shuttered Washington Park School, a former neighborhood school. In 2007, the Cincinnati Public School District demolished the structure, leaving behind a vacant lot. After much negotiation, 3CDC facilitated a deal for transfer of the school property from Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) to the Park Board. At the time of the transfer, Willie Carden, director of the Park Board, explained the significance: "Expanding green space in an urban park is an opportunity that doesn't come along every day. This will not only enhance the beauty of Washington Park, it will serve as a national model for other urban neighborhoods."⁶



Washington Park – before. Source: Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation.



Washington Park – under construction. Source: Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation.

6 LeMaster, Kevin. "Washington Park will expand." *Building Cincinnati*. June 3, 2008. Web. Last retrieved: July 31, 2013. <<http://www.building-cincinnati.com/2008/06/washington-park-will-expand.html>>.



Washington Park – driveway & underground parking. Source: New Solutions Group.



Washington Park – families lounging. Source: New Solutions Group.

Expanding the park from six to eight acres allowed designers to develop a plaza to better link the park to a concert hall in the neighborhood, and add a civic green, a performance stage and a 450-space underground parking garage. Stakeholders viewed nearby parking as a critical amenity so that people—who are still growing to understand the area in a new, safe and inviting light—could easily access the park, as well as neighborhood restaurants and boutiques. The underground location allowed the full area to be utilized for active, green space and kept intact the aesthetic value of the historic Italianate architecture in and around Main Street. The park also incorporates sustainable design features, including zero-release stormwater drywells to reduce contaminated sewage overflows and eco-friendly green roofs, also known as vegetated roof covers, help to filter and absorb rainfall.

The total cost of the project topped out at \$48 million,⁷ a combination of public and private funds. Public sources included tax recapture funds from the downtown TIF (\$14

million), a State Urban Redevelopment Loan (\$5 million) and a State Capital Grant (\$2.8 million). Private sources ranged from \$100,000 from the Greater Cincinnati Foundation to over \$13 million in New Market Tax Credit Equity from PNC Bank.

PLANNING AND ENGAGEMENT

The lead organizations partnered to leverage funding and develop a strategic plan for placemaking in Washington Park. Planning for and construction of a safer, more welcoming public space began in 2006 and concluded when the park opened in 2011.

During the very early stages of planning, the lead organizations assembled a Washington Master Plan Steering Committee that represented the various voices of the neighborhood. Steering Committee members included several residents, representatives from the local Community Council, local social service agencies, the arts community, the historic preservation community, the OTR Chamber of Commerce, local businesses and foundations. Its principal role was to offer feedback and recommendations for the park renovation and expansion plans. The lead organizations assessed much of the Steering Committee's feedback to determine viability, feasibility and desirability. They considered and ultimately implemented some recommendations into the plan while rejecting others. The Steering Committee met six times between 2006 and 2010.

The Steering Committee's influence can be seen in the design of new structures on park grounds that incorporate the character of nearby historic buildings, the design and layout of lighting around the park and the design of a parking garage below the park that felt safe and approachable. Special planning sessions like the "Kids Design Workshop" engaged youth in the design of the playground.

The lead organizations hosted several meetings to apprise the public of the upcoming changes slated for the park. Some of the meetings were contentious. Although these public meetings offered a channel through which residents and other stakeholders could offer feedback and recommendations for the plan, many low-income residents and those who advocate on their behalf complained of feeling unheard. The lead organizations presented a plan that eliminated the park swimming pool and basketball courts. Many residents felt strongly that the swimming pool and basketball courts offered

7 "Features of Washington Park." Washington Park. Web. Last retrieved: July 31, 2013. <<http://washingtonpark.org/features-of-the-park/>>.

low-income youth in the neighborhood the opportunity to play team sports, an opportunity otherwise inaccessible to them. The lead organizations scheduled additional meetings in attempt to reach consensus with community stakeholders. Despite pushback from residents, the pool and basketball courts never made it back into the renovation plan.⁸

In addition to Steering Committee meetings and public meetings, the lead organizations facilitated several organizational meetings with the Cincinnati Recreation Commission, Cincinnati Park Board, Over the Rhine Community Council and the Historic Conservation Board to inform stakeholders of upcoming renovations and to seek feedback from area experts.

The lead organizations had the authority to accept or reject suggestions made by the Steering Committee, by the public, and by other stakeholders. They also carried the burden of negotiating the desires of stakeholders within the limitations of the City's budget (reportedly, the City budget lacked sufficient funds to maintain a pool in OTR) and the technical guidelines of the design team.⁹

PLACEMAKING SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

It takes one skill set to oversee the physical improvement of a park, and another to create a space that draws people from near and far to enjoy it. As with planning and renovation, a public-private partnership among 3CDC, the City of Cincinnati and the Cincinnati Park Board manages the activation and maintenance of the park.

Extensive publicity of Washington Park and its programs helped to activate the space, and a handful of performances in 2012 attracted between 6,000 and 8,000 people, an unprecedented turnout. Previously underutilized and avoided by residents and visitors alike, this park is now one of the most visited areas of downtown Cincinnati.

Placemaking in Washington Park resulted in an attractive, safe and welcoming park, improving the quality of life for



Washington Park – couple laying. Source: New Solutions Group.

many in the neighborhood and for those living, visiting, or working in Cincinnati's urban core. This placemaking initiative is a key complement to the major redevelopment efforts of downtown.

That being said, the final design of Washington Park faced its fair share of controversy and criticism, the outlines of which may be instructive to placemakers in other downtowns. Several evaluative questions emerge. To what extent was the input of low-income residents valued when it conflicted with that of the downtown business interests overseeing the park renovation? Have residents been displaced? Do they feel unwelcome at the park? Alternatively, did the park's ultimate design manage to serve residents even if they felt excluded by the community engagement process? Some argue that not only the renovation of Washington Park, but also the ongoing redevelopment of OTR is gentrifying the neighborhood. "The concern is that the low-income community won't benefit from all the investment in any kind of direct way—and that low-income residents won't be here going forward," says Mary Burke Rivers, Executive Director of Over the Rhine Community Housing.¹⁰

Downtowns, with their range of stakeholders, can create additional challenges when it comes to identifying stakeholders and empowering them equitably. In Legacy City

8 The park offers the following amenities: a civic green, a performance stage, a plaza to better connect the park with the music hall, extensive landscaping, a restored band stand, a dog park, a playground, a sandbox, a climbing wall, restrooms, a concession building, and an interactive fountain.

9 Schuckman, Steven. Personal Interview. June 3, 2013.

10 Pederson, P. (2012). "The Rhine."

downtowns, where a power imbalance already exists between low-income residents and well-connected business interests, this is a challenge. If the goal is to design a space where both middle-income and low-income residents and visitors feel welcome, it is necessary to include low-income residents throughout the design process.

Below are key placemaking pillars that drove the development of Washington Park:

- **Developing Strong Partnerships:** Since its inception, 3CDC has maintained strong relationships with the City of Cincinnati, as well as corporate and philanthropic partners. These partnerships helped the lead organizations of this project secure significant sums of money and move quickly on this large-scale placemaking effort.
- **Managing Great Public Places:** Central to placemaking is the ongoing management of great public spaces. The maintenance, programming/events and marketing of Washington Park are seamless. The park is now a space that attracts more residents than ever before and a growing number of people from across the city and region. Well-maintained amenities, such as a dog park, playground and performance stage, encourage visitors to return. Programming, which includes movies in the park, a kickball league, flea markets, weekly music, student performances and the local symphony and ballet, offers something for everyone and ensures that the park is legitimately occupied, thereby improving neighborhood safety.¹¹

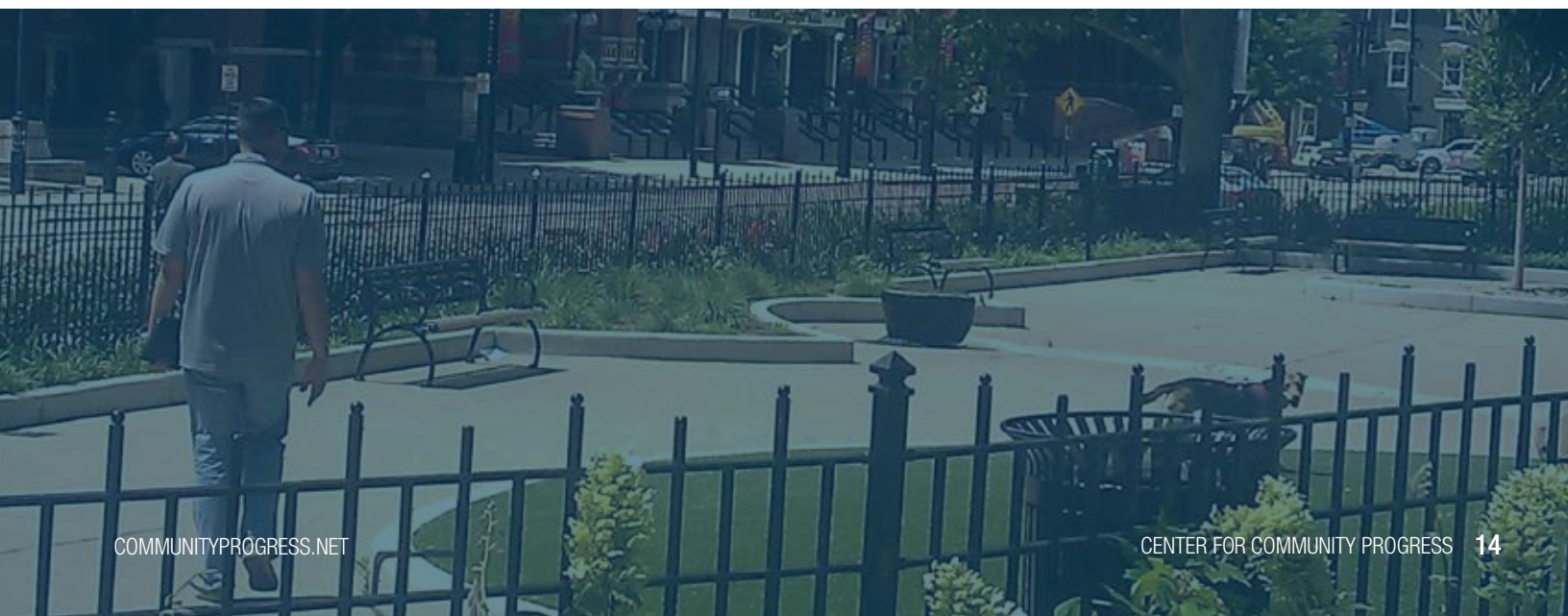
¹¹ Coston, Casey. Personal Interview. May 16, 2013.

- **Celebrating a Unique Community Character:** The lead organizations were careful to incorporate partners in the planning process that would help to design a park that complements the historic architecture of OTR. “This is a plan that brings together, in a suitable way, many of the ideas, many of the needs that have been expressed,” explained Steven Schuckman of the Park Board, Division of Planning and Design. “It’s something that fits the historic site, respects the character of the park and the architecture of the neighborhood and maintains the trees.”¹²

For the general public and for the downtown area, it would be difficult to miss the transformation that is happening in OTR.¹³ The restoration of Washington Park, now an anchor and major asset for the downtown area, has helped erase the informal boundary that, for decades, separated OTR from downtown. Placemaking efforts have encouraged many to explore a revitalized OTR, helping to inform people of the shift that has taken place over the past 10 years. The neighborhood, once regarded as dangerous and unfriendly, is increasingly seen as a welcoming and beautiful place to spend an afternoon. In the case of Washington Park, this massive placemaking project has played a key role in energizing Cincinnati’s urban core.

¹² Schuckman, Steven. Personal Interview. June 3, 2013.

¹³ Coston, Casey. Personal Interview. May 16, 2013.



Chapter 3

ANCHOR DISTRICTS

Midtown New Center Park – at dusk.
Source: Midtown Detroit Inc.

Introduction

Anchor institutions are integral actors in many Legacy Cities, so named because of their stabilizing effect on their surroundings. These institutions have a presence and roots that may extend back a hundred years or more.

At times, multiple anchor institutions are clustered within reasonable proximity to one another, outside of the downtown or traditional business district, creating an ancillary “anchor district” that contains a combination of educational, medical, cultural, and business facilities. Other supportive commercial, residential and even entertainment uses can be present as well, providing services and convenient living options for anchor institution patrons and employees. Examples of anchor districts include Cleveland’s University Circle, Flint’s Cultural Center, Philadelphia’s University City and Pittsburgh’s North Oakland.

Generally speaking, anchor districts in Legacy Cities are a stable presence over time, even through periods of population loss and other citywide disinvestment. Separate endowments and multiple funding sources, as well as the ability to act outside of municipal bureaucracy, fuel continuous reinvestment and allow anchor institutions to operate with some amount of autonomy from surrounding economic conditions. From an economic standpoint, these anchor institutions represent “sticky capital,” since they usually do not easily relocate and leave such significant investment behind.

In a 2007 CEOs for Cities report, *Leveraging Anchor Institutions for Urban Success*, author David Maurasse highlighted other

special features worth noting, including the ideas that anchor institutions:

- Can increase the desirability of surrounding neighborhoods through imaginative and thoughtful real estate, architecture, landscaping and design investments;
- Affect the local economy through employment, purchasing, real estate development and design, which can, in turn, affect nearby real estate values; and
- Often shape the brand of a city and vice versa. A shared identity is one way in which the interests of a city and its anchor institutions are inextricably tied.

Therefore, anchor institutions in Legacy Cities have a special opportunity to impact the city as a whole when they integrate placemaking into long-term development strategies. Given their deep roots and large presence, their projects can leverage placemaking principles to a greater extent than other actors and help reshape the future of their host Legacy City in many positive ways.

Examples of anchor institutions’ successful placemaking projects increase each year. These range from leveraging the success of an annual event at a pocket park into physical improvements and regular programming, to connecting proximate anchor institutions to improve non-motorized mobility through the public realm. Detroit offers one model to consider, where anchor institutions have come together to form and support independent nonprofit organizations that will realize placemaking initiatives with the surrounding community.



Midtown New Center Park – crowd lawn movie. Source: Midtown Detroit Inc.

Anchor District Case Study: Midtown in Detroit, Michigan

ORGANIZING ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS IN DETROIT: THE FORMATION OF MIDTOWN, INC.

Detroit is fortunate to have a large number of anchor institutions within its city limits. The largest concentration is located outside of the central business district, clustered in two nearby areas, the Cultural Center and New Center. In 2011, community development efforts and other activities in both of these neighborhoods united under the auspices of Midtown, Inc., a new nonprofit organization named for the section of Detroit it serves. Midtown Detroit is roughly 1.5 square miles, directly north of the city's central business district. Sunken freeways define its four rectangular sides, which are centered on Detroit's major thoroughfare, Woodward Avenue. Midtown is made up several distinctive areas, including the Cultural Center.

The Cultural Center encompasses several large anchors such as Wayne State University, the Detroit Institute of Arts, and main branch of the Detroit Public Library, among others, and also the complex of hospitals known as the Detroit Medical Center. The Cultural Center also includes residential buildings, ranging in size from large apartments and dormitories with

Legacy Cities Challenges: Anchor Districts

Though the individual institutions that make up anchor districts may have weathered population loss and disinvestment to a greater degree than downtowns, and certain Legacy City neighborhoods, anchor institutions have also tended to isolate themselves from their surrounding, struggling communities. The mechanism for this has largely taken the form of land control, as large institutions have been able to purchase and accumulate smaller, often blighted, lots for expansion or, more often, parking.

Historically, the perspective of anchor institutions resulted in a “fortress-like” outlook, with little desire, or perceived need, to create connective tissue between the institutions themselves, public space and adjacent communities. While this trend has been reversing course, too often, the inheritance of anchor institutions is a poorly planned buffer zone of low value space filled with parking lots, which cumulatively, does nothing to enliven the district as a whole, and which diminishes the opportunity for placemaking.

hundreds of units to single family homes, as well as churches and neighborhood commercial uses like restaurants, bars, retail stores and pharmacies.

The New Center district, lying half a mile north of the Cultural Center, is about 30 square blocks (a quarter square mile), and forms the northern edge of Detroit's greater downtown. New Center is notable as a large commercial center in its own right and, as the historic home of General Motors Corporation, the area has a significant amount of commercial space and a number of well-maintained residential blocks. GM moved downtown to the Renaissance Center in the early 2000s, and its former New Center headquarters building was taken over by the State of Michigan. Other nearby anchors include Henry Ford Hospital and many affiliated clinics and the graduate campus for the College for Creative Studies, a well-regarded art and design school.

Historically, the Cultural Center area benefitted from the leadership of the University Cultural Center Association, a nonprofit organization founded in 1976 by Detroit's leading cultural institutions to spearhead community development projects, as well as plan and host several large annual cultural events. Similarly, New Center Council, Inc., founded in 1975 by General Motors, Henry Ford Hospital, and other business leaders, oversaw comparable activity in the New Center area. After existing separately for over three decades, the University Cultural Center Association and New Center Council melded together in 2011 to form Midtown Inc., a single nonprofit corporation, "to support and enhance community and economic development in the Midtown area through collaboration and partnerships with key stakeholders and supportive funders."

PLACEMAKING IN MIDTOWN

With Midtown, Inc. now providing greater coordination and economies of scale over a larger geographic area, it is worth investigating the organization's signature placemaking projects in each of these two districts—New Center and the Cultural Center. These projects, New Center Park and Midtown Loop, offer placemaking lessons for anchor institutions in Legacy Cities, whether they are contemplating targeted work or a broader approach that requires the coordination of numerous stakeholders.



Midtown New Center – Park Pavilion rendering. Source: Midtown Detroit Inc.

NEW CENTER PARK

New Center Park is a 1/3-acre pocket park in the heart of the New Center neighborhood, which is defined by several large office buildings. The park is situated on a corner lot directly across the street from the 14-story Cadillac Place, the former GM Headquarters, and the iconic Fisher Building, a landmark skyscraper built in 1928 for office, retail and entertainment uses. Kitty-corner is New Center One, a more modern office structure, primarily housing Henry Ford Hospital-related clinics and offices. The walls of adjacent buildings border the park on the remaining two sides, which, combined with Cadillac Place and the Fisher Building, create the feel of an outdoor "living room."

Since 2010, Midtown Inc. has scheduled a popular weekly series of sponsored music and movies during the warmer months at New Center Park. Depending on the event, crowds range from dozens up to as many as one thousand people, enjoying a lunch accompanied by classical music, an afternoon of jazz or an evening outside with a movie or musical act. Events at New Center Park draw Detroiters from across the city (and even suburban residents), but locals from nearby neighborhoods also walk and bike over with picnics. During the remainder of the day, the park is open, and is a pleasant place to bring a lunch or take a break. Benches, moveable chairs, tables and tended grass provide visitors comfortable seats under a generous canopy of trees or in the sunlit open



Midtown New Center – 1983 aerial. Source: Midtown Detroit Inc.



Midtown New Center – “before” aerial. Source: Midtown Detroit Inc.

area near the park’s stage. Light fare and drinks are sold on-site during popular times.

While New Center Park has long had a presence in the New Center neighborhood, the park’s direction and long-term viability was uncertain until intentional efforts took shape under New Center Council and transitioned through to Midtown, Inc. The park was created in the 1970s after the demolition of several older structures on the site. General Motors secured the land as an amenity for workers in the New Center neighborhood and committed to programming and maintaining it as green space. From that time forward, New Center Park benefitted for a number of years from the largesse of GM and other longstanding neighborhood stakeholders and the guidance and support of New Center Council.

The design of New Center Park, however, provided only limited facilities. During events, sound and lighting equipment had to be brought in and electrified from remote locations. Security and clean-up were complicated by the fact that the park was not properly fenced in and therefore remained accessible after it was officially closed for the evening. Normandy’s, a

popular restaurant directly adjacent to the park, provided food, beverages and restrooms. Eventually, though, the restaurant was demolished to accommodate a new fitness center.

Programming at New Center Park halted for a time, then resumed on a limited basis with the advent of the annual TasteFest in the early 1990s, a major five-day food and music festival spearheaded by New Center Council, Inc., that transformed half a dozen blocks in New Center into a pedestrian only village. But during the rest of the year, programming in the park was minimal, since production costs were prohibitive.

By the mid 2000s, New Center Park was thirty years old and in need of new direction. “In terms of continuing to run New Center Park in the same manner, it just didn’t make sense anymore,” says Karen Gage, Economic Development Manager at Midtown Inc., and a former vice president at New Center Council.

*The major anchor (General Motors) had moved out of the neighborhood and was looking to donate the park to New Center Council. During those years, our leadership was seeking out other models where more consistent, regular activity at New Center Park could nurture quality of life. And we knew that our members, sponsors and the philanthropic community were beginning to shift away from underwriting large-scale, concentrated events like TasteFest, especially leading into the recession.*¹⁴

Staff at New Center Council, Inc. began in earnest to reimagine New Center Park in a more holistic way. “We knew we needed to find funding for both capital improvement as well as ongoing costs to maintain New Center Park,” Gage continues:

*A big part of that was thinking creatively about a wide number of sources, including grants and the potential of rental income from an adjacent commercial building and parking lot that was to be donated to New Center Council at about the same time.*¹⁵

Beginning in 2005, New Center Council received a \$100,000 grant as part of then-Governor Jennifer Granholm’s statewide

¹⁴ Gage, Karen. Personal Interview. June 13, 2013.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*



Midtown New Center – SE corner. Source: Midtown Detroit Inc.

Cool Cities initiative, which was designed to attract and retain knowledge workers to revitalize Michigan's cities. The grant was to help transform New Center Park into a "community meeting place to support efforts in developing a 24-hour district for the district's current and future employees and residents." Improvements and seed funding for planned improvements included construction of a three-season concession building, restrooms, perimeter fencing and a permanent stage canopy that doubled as a movie screen.¹⁶ With this vision for creating a more user-friendly, welcoming and multi-functional place, additional grants followed, including \$250,000 from the United Way's nonprofit facilities fund, \$150,000 from the Kresge Foundation, and \$200,000 from the Economic Development Administration for infrastructure improvements, including new electrification of the park and tree planting in the right of way.¹⁷

With capital funds flowing for physical improvements, New Center began to shift programming to better suit the park. After a twenty year run, July 2010 marked the end of TasteFest (by then the event was called CityFest), and the beginning of regular events at the newly renovated New Center Park. The Park offered activities throughout the duration of the summer, including movies on Wednesday nights, jazz concerts on Thursday evenings, Friday night rock concerts, children's activities on Saturday afternoons, and a farmer's market with

live music on Sundays. Over the last several years, and since the creation of Midtown, Inc., some events have remained, some have been eliminated and others have been added, depending on audience response and sponsorships from New Center anchors, such as Henry Ford Hospital and Health Alliance Plan, and media partners who promote the events in print, online and on radio.¹⁸

"We're constantly evaluating our programming at New Center based on a number of factors," says Sue Mosey, President of Midtown, Inc.:

*We're at a place where we've raised enough support and have a diversity of revenue streams to make New Center Park work well for a broad community, and people love it. We can do everything from featuring classical music at lunch, to showcasing local musical artists of different genres, to screening movies, to helping host Detroit's Caribbean Parade and African World Festival. Through a lot of hard work, New Center Council, and Midtown, Inc. have been able to evolve a well-loved space with the times and create a plan along with our anchor institutions for a more sustainable New Center.*¹⁹

16 "Governor Granholm Announces 2005 Cool Cities Designees; Expanded Cool Cities Program includes 29 projects." State of Michigan Licensing and Regulatory Affairs, June 27, 2005. Web. July 31, 2013. <http://www.michigan.gov/lara/0,4601,7-154-10573_11472-121248--,00.html>.

17 Gage, Karen. Personal Interview. June 13, 2013.

18 New Center Park website: <<http://www.newcenterpark.com/>>.

19 Mosey, Susan. Telephone Interview. April 25, 2013.



The Midtown Loop – greenway at the Detroit Public Library. Source: Midtown Detroit Inc.

THE MIDTOWN LOOP

The evolution of New Center Park demonstrates how anchor institutions can join forces to support a quality public space *over time*, while the Midtown Loop is a study of how anchor institutions can work together to conceive and coordinate activity to *create* quality public places.

The Midtown Loop is an emerging 3.5-mile urban greenway that connects, via a 12-foot wide path, the four corners of Detroit’s Cultural Center: (1) from the Detroit Institute of Arts and the main campus for the College for Creative Studies; (2) past the Michigan Science Center, to the Detroit Medical Center; (3) across Woodward Avenue to an emerging residential and commercial area; (4) up to Wayne State University and the Main Branch of Detroit Public Library; and back across Woodward to the Detroit Institute of Arts. The Loop will also extend, with a spur, to an existing greenway, the Dequindre Cut, a sunken former railway that connects points along Detroit’s near east side, including the residential area known as Lafayette Park, Detroit’s large public market, Eastern Market, and the hugely successful RiverWalk, a major initiative of the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy that is reclaiming 5.5 miles of long-neglected Detroit riverfront for public use and recreation.

“The Midtown Loop is fundamentally an enhancement project to promote walkability,” says Sue Mosey, President of Midtown Inc.:

But we’re also improving quality of life, with a much more pleasant street environment so that people want to walk between institutions. We’re narrowing streets so that there is a better balance between vehicular and pedestrian traffic. We’re planting, lighting, maintaining and installing bike racks, street furniture and art. Yes, it’s a ten-year infrastructure program, but the overarching goal of the project is to create place.²⁰

Mosey, who was President of the University Cultural Center Association (UCCA) before it merged with New Center Council, Inc., to create Midtown, Inc., has been working on developing the Midtown Loop since the early 2000s, when UCCA first began talking to its members about how to achieve better connectivity among the area’s anchor institutions, especially for pedestrians and cyclists. In addition, although anchor institutions did maintain public areas, the Loop was an opportunity to help address the overall shortage of highly utilized, quality public space. Certain recent elements like a new sculpture park at the College for Creative Studies were welcome additions, but other amenities such as benches, lighting and wayfinding had not been a priority over the years. In this sense, the Midtown Loop was envisioned as a place in its own right as much as anything else.

In 2002-2003, UCCA began to convene a preliminary working group with senior staff at all the institutions along the proposed route and hosted a series of meetings to engage area residents and other stakeholders for input and ideas. National precedents were offered as inspiration, including the Freedom Trail in Boston, the Chicago River Greenway, San Francisco’s Embarcadero and the Three Rivers Trail in Pittsburgh, among others.

“The first question we asked was, ‘Who will use this?’” Mosey says. “We needed to not only address the needs and aspirations of our members who desired a higher quality of connectivity between institutions and neighborhood assets, but we also needed to understand the motivations of people who would be drawn to the Midtown Loop for its own sake.”²¹ As part of the process, UCCA identified not just local residents, business and institutional constituents, but also users who might want access to the Loop as a destination in its own right for fitness, cultural awareness, school outings and tourism.

²⁰ Mosey, Susan. Telephone Interview. April 25, 2013.

²¹ *Ibid.*



The Midtown Loop – “before” at the Detroit Public Library. Source: Midtown Detroit Inc.



The Midtown Loop – Phase 1 examples fountain & Bike Rack. Source: Midtown Detroit Inc.

After a series of planning meetings over the next several years to garner the full buy-in and support of anchor institutions, an initial design process started that gave rise to distinguishing features of the project. These elements were to make the Midtown Loop unique and singularly identifiable through the coordination of design, materials and maintenance over time, including:

- Distinctive Paving Surface (Colored Concrete);
- Separation from Motorized Traffic;
- Attractive and Sustainable Landscapes;
- Unique Lighting and Wayfinding Icons;
- Cultural and Educational Displays;
- Public Amenities (Benches, Bike Racks, Dog and Water Stations); and
- Public Art²²

22 JJR Landscape Architecture + Planning, Midtown, Inc., and University Cultural Center Association. “Midtown Loop Presentation.” *Midtown Detroit, Inc.* Web. Last retrieved: July 31, 2013. <http://midtowndetroitinc.org/sites/default/files/images/site-content/pdfs/Midtown_Loop_Presentation.pdf>.

But how did the Midtown Loop take the leap from idea to realization? Even though UCCA had the endorsement of its partners along the route, there were still significant legal and financial hurdles to overcome. Once the initial plan was approved, seven maintenance agreements had to be drawn up between Midtown, Inc. and various property owners. Several easements were also needed, where the Loop actually encroached onto private property, notably on sidewalk abutting Wayne State University, the Detroit Public Library, the Detroit Institute of Arts and the Veterans Administration Hospital (part of the Detroit Medical Center). Though the easements had support, they required the approval of semi-public bodies, such as the Detroit Library Commission. Additionally, permits were needed from the City’s Department of Public Works, to maintain the sidewalk in perpetuity, and the Public Lighting Department, for the installation of specially designed LED lighting for pedestrians along the entire Midtown Loop.²³

Since onset of construction in 2010, the first Phase of the Midtown Loop has been completed, from the Detroit Public Library to Detroit Institute of Arts on the north, along the east side of the Loop, and south to the Detroit Medical Center. And now, with a couple of years of maintenance completed, Midtown, Inc. and its members are able to make some initial assessments about the first segment of the project.

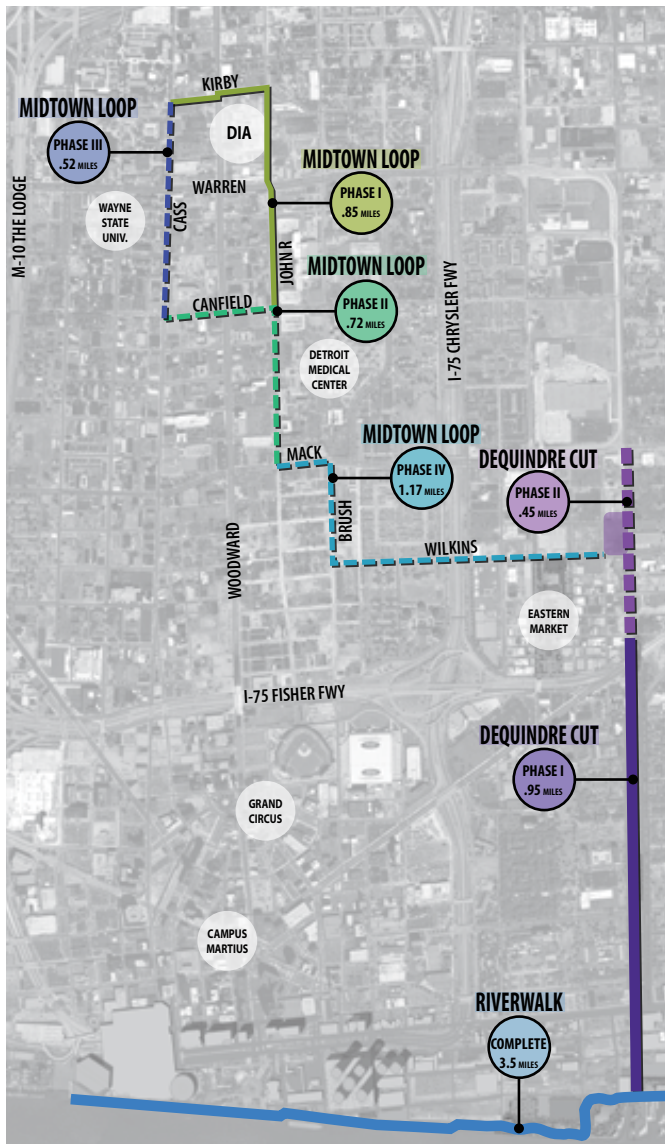
“I definitely see the Midtown Loop as a necessary part of our neighborhood’s future viability,” says Elliot Broom, Vice President of Operations at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

“You see these types of projects taking shape in other cities, so in some regards we’re playing catch up. But Detroit is already embracing it, and we’re using it a lot, even though it’s not complete. Just as an example, I see the same man running every morning on the Midtown Loop and our own staff uses the Loop to exercise on lunch breaks. It’s a very positive addition.”²⁴

Broom and representatives from other anchors along the Midtown Loop are responsible for communication with Midtown, Inc. about maintenance issues and how the Loop interfaces with anchor institution property. Thus far,

23 Rice, Jereen. Personal Interview. July 10, 2013.

24 Broom, Eliot. Personal Interview. July 9, 2013.



The Midtown Loop – Phases map. Source: Midtown Detroit Inc.

coordination between the anchors and Midtown, Inc. has worked relatively well. Midtown, Inc. maintains four separate contracts to oversee upkeep along the Midtown Loop, including agreements for landscaping, irrigation, snow removal and trash removal. A part-time employee at Midtown, Inc. is the main liaison between anchor institutions and maintenance crews. Multiple sources conduct daily and weekly monitoring, including staff at anchor institutions, additional staff at Midtown, Inc., maintenance contractors and the general public. This creates a feedback loop through Midtown, Inc. and sets the stage for smooth transitions to subsequent phases of the project, as they come online.

Phase II is nearly complete. It will form the southern boundary of the original loop, and extend further south as a spur to meet up with the Dequindre Cut. Due to shifts in strategy to capture Federal grant funds, Phase IV, which completes the connection to the Dequindre Cut, will be constructed in 2014, prior to the construction of Phase III, which completes the original loop. The entire project is slated for completion in 2015.²⁵

The Midtown Loop costs about \$2 million per mile to construct. The completed Phase I was just under \$1.7 million and Phase II, nearly completed, has cost \$2.1 million. Phase IV was bid but the estimate has not yet been validated. There are wide range of funding sources for the project, including the Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan, Michigan Department of Transportation, the Knight Foundation, the City of Detroit, Michigan State University Land Policy Institute, Metropolitan Title, Woodward Avenue Action Association, the Kresge Foundation and \$2 million in Federal earmarks. Additional Federal support comes from a \$10 million transportation grant (TIGER), to link the Midtown Loop to the Dequindre Cut.

One of the real placemaking highlights of the Midtown Loop is the incorporation of public art. “Quality public art along the Midtown Loop is incredibly important to tying the whole route together,” says Mosey. “It will give us a chance to highlight the arts and artists, including those from the internationally recognized Cass Corridor arts movement, which is an adjacent neighborhood. It will also be an additional attraction for tourists.”²⁶

With the guidance of a public art consultant, Midtown, Inc.’s public art committee, which is made up of representatives from arts organizations in the greater downtown area, identified a dozen sites that provided opportunities for placement of art along the Loop. Themes that emerged resonate with the character of the Cultural Center and nearby art, culture, and medical institutions, as well as businesses and housing.

Some of the art-related improvements include seating and new planting for an existing sculpture outside the Scarab Club, a private artists’ club and a gallery, by Lois Teicher, a professor at the College for Creative Studies. Another highlight is a newly commissioned work entitled Spirit Renewal, by Detroit

²⁵ Rice, Jereen. Personal Interview. July 10, 2013.

²⁶ Mosey, Susan. Personal Interview. April 25, 2013.

Charles McGhee, in front of the Horace H. Rackham Memorial Building. It consists of two dark gray-coated aluminum panels that support a 56-piece sculptural configuration.²⁷ Further south are large, colorful panels depicting life in Detroit on what would otherwise be blank walls on the back of Detroit's new Whole Foods. "We're very excited about the arts component as being a certain kind of culmination for the Midtown Loop," continues Mosey. "It will bring it all together, in a fun, funky and interactive way. Making the Loop work is about the layers of thought that went into making it mean something as a place."²⁸

EVOLVING LEADERSHIP

In New Center Park and the Midtown Loop, we see a process for placemaking emerging over time in anchor districts. Moreover, we see how organizational leadership that is tied to the interests of anchor institutions and the community is also vital, and sometimes must change in order to best achieve results. In the case of New Center Park, one key for success was to understand, from a community perspective, how a place like New Center Park must evolve in order to stay relevant. In the case of Midtown Loop, the concept of connecting clustered community assets through the creation of a new, third place, demonstrates how the kernel of the idea can grow organically and also be improved through intentional placemaking. For legacy cities, anchor districts may offer some of the biggest opportunities for significant placemaking investments.

27 <http://www.susanwilczak.com/files/midtown_public_art_master_plan.pdf>.

28 Mosey, Susan. Telephone Interview. April 25, 2013.

Chapter 4

NEIGHBORHOODS

Introduction

While Legacy City neighborhoods have many assets, such as historic architecture and affordability, they often face immense challenges, such as weak real estate markets, sporadic city services, crime and declining social capital. Many have experienced significant population loss and are littered with abandoned structures and vacant lots. In the face of these challenges, the possibility of attracting and sustaining the ten or more specific destinations recommended in the “Power of 10” placemaking guideline can seem remote, at best. What effective placemaking can offer in weaker market neighborhoods, however, is a greater sense of community, the increased ability of residents to advocate for themselves and create assets that address community needs, and improved public safety. These can be stepping stones toward a stabilized local market.

Given the capacity and expertise of grassroots stakeholders and other factors, it can be challenging for neighborhoods to procure external funding up-front to support neighborhood placemaking. In many cases, years of community collaboration and “sweat equity” are required before financial resources—whether from government sources, foundations or via private investment—are likely to follow. A robust, community-led placemaking process can help to demonstrate that the community is a worthwhile “investment” to either philanthropic funders or private investors. A well-run placemaking process, for example, provides an authentic pathway toward the identification of community assets and needs.

Most Legacy Cities include a range of neighborhoods: from those with a viable housing market, some institutional land uses, and perhaps a commercial strip, to those with a significant residential base but also significant blight, and finally, to those with a landscape dominated by vacant land or empty houses stripped of plumbing and wiring, with residents few and far between. The Detroit Future City 2012 Strategic Framework Plan, the culmination of one of the most comprehensive and ambitious city planning efforts ever undertaken, characterizes five framework zones in residential neighborhoods. In the low-vacancy neighborhoods, in this framework, housing vacancy is less than 16 percent and parcel vacancy is less than 7 percent. In the high-vacancy neighborhoods, over 30 percent of housing might be vacant, and over 56 percent of total parcels are vacant.²⁹

In some cities, resources are being targeted at neighborhoods with the likeliest chance of recovering a functioning real estate market. In other cities, governmental entities have a history of awarding affordable housing projects, recreation centers, or other projects to some of the weakest market neighborhoods as political favors, out of a sense of fairness or out of a desire to spread municipal investments evenly. Too often, this approach results in projects that are wasteful and distort the market, even triggering further abandonment. Examples include low-income housing developments or single-family homes in the middle of

²⁹ Detroit Future City, *2012 Strategic Framework Report*. 2012. p.108-109. The report is available for download in sections at the Detroit Works Project Long Term Planning Website; the page numbers cited here and elsewhere within this document refer to the printed report. <<http://detroitworksproject.com/the-framework/>>.

a sea of abandoned blocks, where residents are isolated from the services they need, or the converse in which libraries and recreation centers are built where little demand exists, resulting in facilities that are barely used or altogether abandoned.

In Legacy City neighborhoods approaching market viability, strong community identity, walkability and attachment to a neighborhood's authentic character are a few reasons why residents continue to call these places home – and others consider moving to them – despite public school, safety, and other challenges. Placemaking activities can enhance historic architectural and design assets, access to cultural and downtown activities and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, helping to prevent a tip toward blight and ensure community stabilization in these places.

In neighborhoods where vacancy dominates, there are limits, at least in the near term, to what placemaking can achieve and to how it can be implemented. As noted previously, “Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper” (LQC) is not necessarily effective in neighborhoods where there are few pedestrians. If there are not already passersby who can be drawn in to a newly renovated destination, that destination is unlikely to become a community hub, especially if the renovations consist of a few chairs and some planting beds. At the same time, in sparsely populated areas, resources to do anything other than LQC may not be readily available.

This points to the importance of a meaningful community engagement process. What do residents of the neighborhood want and need? What could inspire them to gather? What

Legacy Cities Challenges: Neighborhoods

Legacy City neighborhoods have often suffered the most damage in the context of population loss and disinvestment. Whole swaths of cities like Detroit and Youngstown, Ohio have “reverted back to nature,” where multiple blocks that were once filled with homes have been cleared and left open, with no prospects of redevelopment any time soon. In other neighborhoods, the structures remain, but they are clearly abandoned or neglected. For the few remaining residents, it is probably too late to ask the question, “What went wrong?” and more important to find productive ways to reframe the question, “What does the idea of ‘neighborhood’ mean in this context, and how can placemaking be utilized to support and empower the residents that are still there?”

On the other end of the spectrum, Legacy Cities' neighborhoods that have fared better and are largely intact still offer lessons that may inform traditional placemaking efforts. First, many Legacy City neighborhoods were developed in fits and starts, often as one- or two-family housing to accommodate newly arrived working class families, sometimes with little diversity of housing stock, or thought of accommodating a spectrum of community life. As families aged and structures and systems came to the end of their lifecycle, in need of repair, renovation or replacement, homogenous neighborhoods struggled to effectively evolve and contain population movement or attract new residents.

Over time and between generations, homeowners deferred repairs, houses were rented to lower income families for lower rents or went vacant and value dropped. Moreover, adjacent commercial areas suffered too, as quality retail and service opened on the suburban fringe, residents would be drawn away to cheaper (and often more desirable) offerings, even at the expense of the neighborhood commercial establishment. All these factors, and more, have contributed to making it difficult for placemaking to emerge and succeed in neighborhoods in Legacy Cities.

would help them feel safe? What would help them actually be safer? What type of public space would they want to not only use, but also contribute to? While input obtained through community engagement is not a perfect predictor of community preferences and eventual community involvement in the project, the community engagement process nonetheless increases the likelihood that the project will reflect the community's interests and needs—and therefore, the likelihood that it will be used. In addition, through donations of time, materials and skills, engaged stakeholders can lower program implementation and maintenance costs, as well as sustain investments over time.

LQC, as recommended by the Project for Public Spaces, may be more applicable to stronger neighborhoods as a way to experiment with strategies before making longer-term investments in place. Placemaking is an art, not a science, and LQC can minimize risk while maximizing opportunities to experiment. PPS suggests, "If one thing doesn't work, try something else. If you have a success, build on it. Cities can create 'demonstration' LQC projects to draw upon local assets and people, transforming underutilized urban spaces into exciting laboratories that reward citizens with authentic places and provide a boost to areas in need."³⁰

Neighborhoods at opposite ends of the density and market viability spectra, regardless of public investment they receive, should not expect to see the same results—either in type or in magnitude—from placemaking. Yet every neighborhood has something to gain from incorporating placemaking into its neighborhood support strategies. The case studies below demonstrate that placemaking is an effective tool for building community cohesion and improving quality of life within a neighborhood, even in the context of high vacancy rates. In some cases, a small placemaking project (a community garden, some hanging baskets, new lighting) may be the seed that grows into a decades-long process in which community collaboration around a specific place creates a positive feedback loop of investment and care. In other cases, it simply makes life more livable for the residents of a largely vacant neighborhood.

Following are three case studies that represent options for the spectrum of neighborhood conditions that exist in Legacy Cities.



Georgia Street – Community Garden sign. Source: New Solutions Group.

Neighborhood Case Study: Georgia Street Community Collective, Detroit, Michigan

In 2008, Mark Covington was laid off from his job as an environmental services worker and decided to dedicate time to cleaning the trash-filled vacant lots near his grandmother's house. The home is located in his eastside neighborhood near Harper and Gratiot, a distressed, blighted and largely abandoned community within a zone that meets Detroit Future City's characterization of highest vacancy.³¹ Locals had beaten a diagonal path across the three lots at the end of the block, creating a shortcut to the nearby low-quality grocery and liquor stores. At first, Covington only intended to police the littering in the lots. But as he cleared out the block's corner, he was inspired to turn it into a community garden.

The community garden Covington started—and still manages—expanded over time, and is now known as the Georgia Street Community Collective (GSCC). Today, it encompasses five lots on Georgia Street, including a fruit orchard with apples, plums, cherries, peaches, pears, raspberries and strawberries. Goats and chickens now call the lots home, as well. A board of directors oversees GSCC, which now includes an educational component, using the garden as a way to mentor students, and is the focal point of numerous community events, from an annual Easter egg hunt and brunch, to a Harvest Festival and street fair.

30 Project for Public Spaces, *Placemaking and the Future of Cities*, 2012. p.15.

31 Detroit Future City *2012 Strategic Framework Report*, p.106.



Georgia Street – painted wall. Source: *New Solutions Group*.



Georgia Street – Families at Fair. Source: *Georgia Street Community Collective*.

In 2011, during the annual Backpack and School Supply Giveaway, they provided 72 fully stocked backpacks “to help the kids get a good start on school this year,” and they provided winter clothing for those in need.³² GSCC hosted their 5th annual Easter Egg Hunt in 2013, which featured brunch with an Easter Bunny who gave away prizes to children. These events give residents more reasons to engage not only with the garden and its open park green space, but also with each other and their community’s public life. These kinds of community events did not exist before the garden became a unifying element in the neighborhood.

The Georgia Street Community Collective and Covington’s work is almost exclusively financed through individual charitable donations and small grants, including one \$4,000 grant from an out-of-state foundation interested in urban gardening. In addition, the Detroit Garden Resource Program (now known as Keep Growing Detroit) donated seeds and

gardening instruction. GSCC has become a resource hub for other Detroit farmers and gardeners well beyond Georgia Street. According to Scott Benson, a community development professional, “I’ve met other urban farmers in the surrounding Osborn area who partner with the GSCC and utilize their compost as the base for their soil. It’s a great resource for the area’s farmers and gardeners.”

This project exemplifies the creativity of local residents. Covington’s local roots were critical to neighborhood acceptance of the project. There were early fears from some neighbors that the produce would be stolen and some suggested erecting an expensive fence. Covington explains, “But we don’t need a fence. I just strung a rope around it. Nobody takes anything, and we leave tables and chairs out there. Now if you put up a fence and try to control something, people would want to fight that.”³³

Covington’s local knowledge also facilitated the choice of an underutilized, well-trafficked location. In a neighborhood that lacks density, the garden was placed at the busiest and most visible corner. An outsider, city planner, or citywide urban gardening nonprofit might have selected a less-traversed location to keep the garden and its resources safe or protected. Covington located his work in the most conspicuous place possible.

Displaying an innate understanding of the importance of proximity and mutually reinforcing existing and new assets—in

“Projects like the Georgia Street Community Garden serve three critical functions through food cultivation: reducing neighborhood blight, expanding access to healthy foods and building social cohesion. This project helps build the social structure of the neighborhood, increases individual responsibility and cultivates a sense of pride and ownership.”

-Khalil Ligon, former director of the Detroit Neighborhood Partnership East and Lower Eastside Action Plan (LEAP)

32 “Special Events.” Georgia Street Community Collective Calendar. Last retrieved: July 31, 2013. <<http://www.georgiastreetcc.com/events/>>.

33 Michael Jackman, “Food Fighters: Taking control of our food supply, from the kitchen garden to the community,” *Metro Times*. May 27, 2009.

essence, triangulation—Covington purchased an abandoned building near the lots and transformed it into a community center. In the attached abandoned home, he created a library with donated books and a computer lab, to keep children engaged during summer months and to help adults work on resumes and job applications.

Repurposing vacant land through urban agriculture is not always the right placemaking strategy. Georgia Street is successful, however, due to the project's hyper-local nature. More than just finding an active use for five vacant lots, GSCC created community activities and a meeting place where none existed prior. According to Scott Benson:

The Georgia Street Community Garden is a shining example of how a community can leverage its own financial resources and human capital (sweat equity), and turn numerous vacant lots into a thriving community garden that provides a space which grows high quality produce and is a meeting place for the community's youth and seniors.

The challenge for Legacy City leaders is to find and support the Mark Covingtons of the world whenever possible — placemakers who are willing to meet the challenges of the most distressed neighborhoods and who have the determination needed to see the project through.



Clark Park – ice skating. Source: Clark Park Coalition.

Neighborhood Case Study: Clark Park, Detroit, Michigan

Clark Park stretches for three long blocks, a quarter mile from the landing point of the Ambassador Bridge to Canada. It is located in Southwest Detroit, a neighborhood just three miles west of downtown Detroit along the Detroit River. This public park abuts three Detroit public schools and is surrounded by residential housing, a commercial retail strip of historic buildings, and the freeway. Today, the park provides much-needed recreational programming to over 1,400 youth annually and serves as the “town square” for this largely working-class Latino neighborhood.

On any given spring afternoon, as many as 300 or 400 children, families, and other adults can be found in Clark Park, playing on the ball fields, using playground equipment, sitting on benches or taking a walk. In Southwest Detroit, where more than 50 percent of children live in poverty, this is a rare sign of community life.³⁴ Perhaps even more remarkable, 20 years ago, drug dealing, gang activity and prostitution defined the park.

The story of Clark Park's revival demonstrates how turning over design, use, and control of a public space to the community

³⁴ Data Driven Detroit pegs child poverty in the larger Southwest Detroit community at 51.5 percent for children under six, and notes that overall income demographics lagged behind the city as a whole for Census data for the years 2006-2010. “Southwest Detroit Neighborhoods Profile.” *Data Driven Detroit*. Data Driven Detroit, May 2012. Last retrieved: July 31, 2013. <<http://datadrivendetroit.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/SW-Detroit-Neighborhoods.pdf>>.



Clark Park – families at picnic. Source: Clark Park Coalition.

can produce extraordinary results. In 1991, the City closed the Clark Park Recreation Center, a 1,500 square-foot building in the middle of the park, due to budget cuts. This set in motion an unexpected effort that would eventually lead to the active park enjoyed today.

THE CLARK PARK COALITION

In response to the recreation center’s closure, concerned neighbors decided to take action. Seeing the shuttered recreation center as the likely death of the park and a precursor to illicit activity, these residents formed the Clark Park Coalition (CPC) and asked the city for the recreation center’s keys so they could maintain and operate it as well as the park grounds.

The CPC is made up almost exclusively of local residents. When it came to planning and investing in the park they embraced “community as the expert” framing and responded to regular park users rather than outside groups—even outsiders that offered large capital investments.

Deb Sumner, Clark Park Coalition co-founder, self-proclaimed “mom of the effort,” and Board Member says the Clark Park Coalition started with the goal of keeping kids active in positive ways. Because the park was in a residential area and near three schools, the community prioritized children. According to Sumner:

It is crucial that children be able to walk to a nearby green space to have that healthy component and be able to be safe there, to play and recreate. . . and for families, a park is a vital hub. It provides that balance in an urban setting. It affects your health. It becomes the heartbeat of the community.

The Clark Park Coalition spearheaded a variety of capital improvements in the park that, without explicit planning or background in placemaking, nonetheless exhibit good placemaking practices. Rather than develop and work from a park “master plan,” the Coalition simply tackled the needs of the community residents and park users as those needs arose.³⁵ While some situations require a master plan, and others (perhaps even this initiative) would benefit from one, the work of the Clark Park Coalition demonstrates the real value in stepping up and taking action.

In the beginning, the CPC acted quickly to meet immediate concerns, with little time to plan. They received the recreation center’s keys in the fall, and set out to keep the popular ice rink—the only regulation-sized outdoor ice rink in metro Detroit—open and functioning.³⁶ Volunteers cleared the leaves and sticks, put down new layers of pure ice, and learned to run the compressors. It quickly became a community effort: when young people came to skate, they knew they’d need to shovel the snow and help with other maintenance before getting on the ice. Coalition members made phone calls to try to find a Zamboni, and a man knew of someone else who had one they didn’t need. That same man, years later, found them a better Zamboni, which is still in use today. At Clark Park, the City kept the electricity on and the residents did the rest. According to Sumner, “That was the City’s contribution. It wasn’t formal, but it was a partnership. We promoted that it was their partnership. Clearly we wouldn’t have been able to pay.”

CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Partnerships: Without any funding at the outset, the CPC used creative partnerships and donations to serve local children and families through tutoring, sports, lunches and cultural programming. The CPC took charge of maintenance and staffing, which involved scheduling volunteer neighbors to monitor the park during operating hours (after school and

³⁵ The Clark Park Coalition’s capital projects have included new tennis courts, art installations (including of a new mosaic tiled backing on the small amphitheater stage, a bus stop bench, and a bike rack across from the street from the local coffee shop), and the development of a community garden, as well as more traditional capital investments in the park’s outdoor ice rink, baseball fields and playground equipment. Several of these capital improvement projects were pursued to satisfy a community constituency looking to improve one small usage of the park.

³⁶ Clark Park has long been home to Metro Detroit’s only regulation-sized outdoor ice rink, but the rink was completely underutilized and often unoccupied under the City’s management.



Clark Park – kids playing baseball. Source: Clark Park Coalition.



Clark Park – community working. Source: Clark Park Coalition.

until dark). “We reached out to whomever we could,” Sumner recalls. They sought donations of toys and equipment. The area YMCA senior program cleaned the center, and CPC scheduled different outreach groups to come by and help in whatever ways were needed. Eventually, the CPC secured a federally funded lunch program. The CPC partnered, and continues to partner, with local organizations to host different events like art workshops and other activities that appeal to the park’s variety of users.³⁷ It was a long-term effort to get the CPC to where it is today, with year-round programming and a 2013 operating budget of \$250,000 (a mix of individual donations, private grants and government support). Creative partnerships in the early days laid the groundwork for long-term success.

Safety: Design decisions that improved park safety were a priority from the beginning. An early project was the creation of a health trail (a path with periodic signs depicting exercises

to do) in the northern end of the park, where most of the negative activity occurred. “We thought, let’s bring positive folks doing this exercise program as something that brings positive energy,” Sumner recalls. CPC worked informally with the City to make sure it was installed properly, and used bilingual signs to serve both English-and Spanish-speaking residents.

Programming: CPC has sought to maximize the use of this much-needed community asset through a range of programming, including a community garden, several children’s playscapes, and tennis courts, within one section of the park, fostering “triangulation” and “the Power of 10.” This sensitivity to the demands of different community voices resulted in numerous park improvements and activities that might not otherwise have been tried, each one bringing in new community users. Youth programming includes a blogging club, writing and theater workshops, nutrition classes, a gardening program, homework assistance and even a youth employment program. Now, each day on the Coalition’s summer calendar is typically programmed with upwards of eight activities.³⁸

The Park hosts major events year round, including a summer festival with games, a water slide, performances and more. In 2012, Clark Park celebrated the 20th Anniversary of its Winter Carnival, which included a petting zoo, skating, marshmallow roasting and horse-drawn carriages.³⁹

The community coalition has greatly enhanced the quality of recreational services offered in the park. An annual hockey league attracts as many as 150 kids ages 7 to 16. Additional hockey programs, such as Learn to Skate, were developed. In 2007 the park received a new, regulation-size ice rink from Wayne County.⁴⁰ A free summer youth program provides over 100 lunches each day and organizes baseball games. And more than 400 children play organized youth soccer through Think Detroit PAL, making Clark Park the entry point for almost one-fifth of the entire citywide program.

37 “July Family Day: Garden Art in Clark Park Detroit.” BLAC: *Black Life, Arts and Culture Detroit Calendar*. Last retrieved: July 31, 2013. <<http://www.blacdetroit.com/BLAC-Detroit/Calendar/BLAC-Events-Calendar/index.php/name/July-Family-Day-Garden-Art-in-Clark-Park-Detroit/event/22600/>>.

38 “2013 Summer Program” *Clark Park Detroit*. Web. Last retrieved: July 31, 2013. <<http://www.clarkparkdetroit.com/pdfs/2013%20Summer%20Schedule.pdf>>.

39 “Winter Carnival- Clark Park Coalition’s 20th Anniversary” *Savor Southwest Detroit*. 2012. Web. Last retrieved: July 31, 2013. <<http://www.savorsouthwestdetroit.org/event-Winter-Carnival-Clark-Park-Co-85.html>>.

40 Benavides, Anthony. “Clark Park Coalition celebrates 15 years, completion of new outdoor ice rink.” *Model D*. January 16, 2007. Web. Last retrieved: July 31, 2013. <<http://www.modeldmedia.com/devnews/clarkpark77.aspx>>.



Clark Park – crowd. Source: Clark Park Coalition.

CLARK PARK'S COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC IMPACT

Clark Park, in many ways, has been transformed from a vacant space into a thriving town square of activity. To be sure, the surrounding Hubbard Farms historic neighborhood and larger Mexicantown community in Southwest Detroit benefit from a variety of other factors (Latino immigration, strong nonprofit community development corporations, thriving arts and culture community, and the city's most robust neighborhood retail district), but the park itself has been activated through placemaking activities and principles and has become a centerpiece for many of the other individuals and organizations working to revitalize and support Southwest Detroit.

There is no doubt that the success of Clark Park helped to grow interest and investment for the area. The national Detroit Red Wings hockey team held a practice there in 2012, and attendees were asked to donate canned goods, used hockey equipment, or \$2 to the CPC.⁴¹ Also in 2012, a Detroit Police-versus-Firefighters charity game raised money for youth hockey. Red Wing Darren McCarty, who played for the Police team, told ABC News, "The people that are involved here do such a great job giving kids an opportunity."⁴² The Detroit Public Schools had twice slated one of the nearby elementary schools (Maybury) to close. Instead, in 2011, in a new public acknowledgement of community strength around Clark

Park, DPS built a brand new, LEED-silver certified school.⁴³ Commercial buildings were renovated nearby, and a creative art group and coffee shop put down roots in Clark Park neighborhoods. Café Con Leche, which moved from a different, unsuccessful location in Southwest Detroit, is flourishing. Due in part to its new location, revenue increased two times over within the first month.⁴⁴ Jordi Carbonell, owner of Café Con Leche, tells of the neighborhood he works in:

For us, Clark Park is a great example of integrating both a greenscape and a business district. It's a marvel to think that the park was planned decades ago and that the urban planning is still so sound. The park allows a great cross group of people to mix and a variety of business to provide services to those people. The park with its current administration attracts families, events, and fitness aficionados, and provides an inviting space for all around (teachers, tourists, Red Wings) so that for our business, Clark Park is really the heart and lung of S.W. Detroit. That's why we wanted to be located in and around Clark Park.

In 2007, the La Sed building, which also faces Clark Park, was renovated into a mixed-use, retail and residential complex. The building, which was notorious for housing crime and violence, is one more participant in the continued transformation of the Clark Park neighborhood.⁴⁵

41 Roose, Bill. "Wings entertain fans at outdoor practice." *Detroit Red Wings Official Website*. February 18, 2012. Web. Last retrieved: July 31, 2013. <<http://redwings.nhl.com/club/news.htm?id=617644>>.

42 Gallie, Brad. "Firefighters, police face off on ice for Detroit youth." WXYZ. January 30, 2012. Web. Last retrieved: July 31, 2013. <<http://www.wxyz.com/dpp/sports/firefighters-police-face-off-on-ice-for-detroit-youth>>.

43 Kavanaugh, Kelly B. "DPS starts building new Brightmoor, Southwest schools, part of \$100.4M in construction projects." *Model D*. July 27, 2010. Web. Last retrieved: July 31, 2013. <<http://www.modeldmedia.com/devnews/DPS072710.aspx>>.

44 Weisberg, Stephen A. "Café Con Leche." *Detroit Army*. 20 Apr 2009.

45 "Mixed-use redevelopment of Clark Park-facing La Sed Building completed." *Model D Media*. June 27, 2007. Web. Last retrieved: July 31, 2013. <<http://www.modeldmedia.com/devnews/lased9807.aspx>>.



Elmwood Village – streetscape Source: The Elmwood Village Association

Neighborhood Case Study: Elmwood Village, Buffalo, New York

So, it was a Sunday morning, and this was in the mid-to late-90s, and I was starting my run. I lived just off of Elmwood Avenue. I noticed that this guy is weeding a planter at a bus stop on Elmwood near my house. I finish my run an hour later, and this guy is still weeding the bus stop. So I stopped to talk with him, and it was Mike Attardo, who was, and is, a merchant on Elmwood Avenue. He told me his whole philosophy about the neighborhood, which was that we couldn't just wait around for the city to clean up for us. We have to just take care of it ourselves. The citizens needed to just make their own decisions about caring for the street, and then just get to work. That's how I got involved in Forever Elmwood.

-Mike Ferdman, who went on to serve as the second Board President of Forever Elmwood.⁴⁶

In the mid-1990s, Elmwood Avenue in Buffalo, New York was at what a number of observers have called a tipping point: it displayed many symptoms of disinvestment, including retail and residential vacancy, low rents and neglected properties. At the same time, it was home to significant assets. Elmwood

Avenue was narrow enough that pedestrians were able to read signs and interact with people on the other side of the street. Historic architecture was scattered throughout. Anchor institutions like the Albright-Knox Art Gallery and Buffalo State College were located at the north end of the street. Delaware Park and the Bidwell and Chapin Parkways, all part of the Buffalo Olmstead Parks Conservancy, offered ample green space. And even during the time when it was struggling against decline, the existing retail on Elmwood was clustered into discrete nodes that seemed to change in character every few blocks.

Yet a group of residents and business owners during this time sensed that, without intentional care and collaboration, the commercial strip and neighborhood Elmwood Avenue was embedded in would continue to suffer disinvestment as Buffalo's suburbs drew residents away from downtown. Those volunteers began to work together in simple ways: they swept the street on Saturdays, weeded beds, and planted flowers. These small expressions of care attracted additional support. One volunteer, passionate about local produce, began a producers-only farmers market on the Bidwell Parkway. Another initiated a concert series. A group of volunteers with design backgrounds developed a set of design guidelines to increase the pedestrian-friendly nature of Elmwood Avenue, and wrote a grant to hire a consultant to formalize these guidelines and facilitate a community engagement process around them.

FORMALIZING THE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

Forever Elmwood incorporated as a nonprofit organization in 1994 and, with the support of a three-year capacity-building grant from the Buffalo Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), hired its first Executive Director in 2000. Forever Elmwood—which underwent a name change to the Elmwood Village Association (EVA) in 2006—is at the heart of the story of how this neighborhood, which could have slid in another direction, is now home to over 250 retail and storefront businesses and a vibrant, mixed-income residential population. Much of the success of the neighborhood is due to the implementation of established redevelopment models, including the Main Street Four-Point Approach™ (described in greater detail below), traffic calming through infrastructure changes, and façade improvement matching programs to support a specific neighborhood character through design.

⁴⁶ Ferdman, Mike. Telephone Interview. July 17, 2013.

But the efforts in Elmwood Village offer additional tremendous lessons for placemakers, including:

- **Tools for stakeholder engagement.** The committee structure of the Elmwood Village Association, a physical presence at the neighborhood farmers market, robust social media and additional outreach and engagement efforts over the years have offered easy connection points for neighbors and business owners.
- **Design for people.** Everything about the design choices in Elmwood Village is meant to make pedestrians feel comfortable. The scale and proximity of buildings to the sidewalk, the height of display windows, the lighting, the art, the music, the signage and other features make the neighborhood attractive, easy to navigate and welcoming. It is important to note that much of this was already in place from the original layout and design of the neighborhood. According to the Elmwood Village Association’s Executive Director Carly Battin, “We want to be a place that is accessible and inviting at all points of a person’s life.”⁴⁷
- **The importance of programming and management.** While careful design plays a crucial role in Elmwood Village, design alone is not sufficient. In the early days of Elmwood’s transformation, a farmers market, concerts and other events and programming were vital to encourage residents and visitors to explore the neighborhood anew. Today, the events, changes in neighborhood décor, public art, promotions, marketing and ongoing stakeholder engagement all require management by a staffed organization.
- **Clustering and density of activities.** The assets of Elmwood Village, even at its most depressed point, were significant. What was needed was, in many ways, a champion to help visitors and other stakeholders view the disparate elements as a single connected destination. Forever Elmwood served as that connector and promoter.
- **Connectivity and accessibility.** Elmwood Avenue is connected to major bus routes around the city, and in recent years, bike lanes were added to the street and neighboring corridors.

- **Start small.** The story of Elmwood Village’s tireless volunteers, who birthed an organization that is now 19 years old, began with simple improvements like street cleanups. Over time, those efforts helped other residents and merchants develop and act on their own stewardship of the neighborhood. Even the initial financial investments—\$500 matching grants in the first façade improvement program—were relatively minor when compared with the returns they generated.

MAJOR INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMS

Forever Elmwood’s transition from an all-volunteer organization to a formal community association with staff support ensured that initial momentum was not lost with volunteer fatigue. The early partnership with LISC provided, in addition to financial support, connections to ideas and tools that have served the organization well. At the time, LISC Buffalo was interested in finding a neighborhood in which to leverage a partnership with the National Main Street Initiative (run by the National Trust for Historic Preservation). Michael Clarke, LISC Buffalo’s director then and now, describes some general criteria: LISC



Elmwood Village – streetscape with mural Source: The Elmwood Village Association



Elmwood Village – bench Source: The Elmwood Village Association

47 Battin, Carly. Telephone Interview. July 17, 2013.

“Intelligent street design and management has enhanced the visibility of local shops, restaurants, and entertainment venues. Elmwood Avenue businesses rely heavily on foot traffic, so the streetscape is of prime importance to retailers. Today, Elmwood Avenue is one of Buffalo’s busiest commercial districts with some 200 boutiques, restaurants, and taverns. It also is a place where business owners and residents work together to preserve the community’s unique urban character and bolster its image. The result is a lively, walkable, clean, safe and sustainable district where community spirit is contagious.”

-American Planning Association, announcing the selection of Elmwood Village as one of “10 Great Neighborhoods in America,” in 2007

was interested in investing in neighborhoods that, though challenged, had potential for a viable real estate market, and where leadership was present to connect the business and residential communities in a mutually supportive relationship. LISC found this in Elmwood Village, where several of the business leaders involved in Forever Elmwood were also neighborhood residents, and invested funding for three years of a full-time Executive Director to set the organization on strong footing. LISC also urged Forever Elmwood to stay out of the complicated business of real estate development and focus on advocacy for and marketing of the community.⁴⁸

Tom Cooney, the first Executive Director of Elmwood Village, spent significant time in the first months of his job personally walking in to every business on Elmwood Avenue, introducing himself and the organization. Cooney also formalized the committee structure to match the Main Street Four-Point approach, began to look for ways to invite residents into the organization (which is not a focus of the Main Street approach), and cultivated media for the neighborhood.

Over time, the organization has experimented with a variety of programs, including events, advocacy, promotion, and design. In loosely chronological order, following are the aspects of work that those intimately involved in Elmwood Village’s resurgence deem critical:

Elmwood-Bidwell Farmers Market: The farmers market gives people a reason to visit Elmwood Village; triangulation with the neighborhood’s offerings gives them a reason to stay. Volunteers, led by Karl Frizlen, began running the Elmwood-Bidwell Farmers Market every summer Saturday in the late 1990s. Since then, and with management by the Elmwood Village Association, the producers-only market has grown from around seven vendors to forty. Those involved say that it’s hard to overestimate the impact of the market on other efforts to support the neighborhood. The market came to serve as a hub or “town square” (as described by Tom Cooney, Forever Elmwood’s first Executive Director), giving residents a vital asset for food shopping, but also allowing them to meet and greet their neighbors. In addition to food, the market hosts community organization tables, giving residents direct access to other services and amenities available in the community. It is a draw not only to Buffalo residents, but to suburban residents and tourists as well.⁴⁹

According to Cooney, because Forever Elmwood had its own table at the market, it also served a vital role in giving the organization the opportunity to tell its story to the residents. “Some of them assumed that the city was planting all the flowers. We needed them to know that it was the organization that was causing the improvements in the community.” This allowed the organization to build allies and engagement among the residents of Elmwood Village.⁵⁰

Music and Other Events: Musical performances are a big part of the Elmwood Village strategy of making the area inviting and interesting. Acoustic musicians perform nearly every hour during the Farmers Market, and the Elmwood Village Association regularly hires musicians to perform on the street on holidays. In addition, a concert series, which was a month long in the early 2000s, now features weekly performances from mid-June through mid-August on Bidwell Parkway. As with the Farmers Market, these events create a reason for residents and non-residents alike to be in the community, which, in turn, leads to greater care for the community. It also helps contribute to the cultural identity and definition of Elmwood Village.

48 Clarke, Michael. Telephone Interview. May 29, 2013.

49 Cooney, Tom. Telephone Interview. July 19, 2013.

50 *Ibid.*

The Main Street Four-Point Approach™: As Forever Elmwood volunteers began conversations about formalizing their organization, they sought support from Buffalo LISC. LISC advocated for developing the organization's primary activities around the four-point approach of the Main Street model, whose tenets are: organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring.⁵¹ These four areas of activity continue to serve as the four standing committees of the Elmwood Village Association's board. The structure they provided for early Forever Elmwood volunteers, according to those involved at the time, allowed the organization to develop a focus on a clear and specific mission, within a successful model of how to pursue it.

The four-point approach has a number of commonalities with placemaking best practices, including an emphasis on how various activities become mutually reinforcing. Perhaps as important is the structure it suggests for channeling volunteer energies effectively — which Elmwood Village has now been doing for upwards of 15 years.

Design Guidelines: The volunteers who initially rallied around simple cleanup and beautification efforts happened to include a number of individuals with design backgrounds, primarily as architects and planners. They were familiar with design strategies for making an area feel safer and more welcoming. They began to work on a set of design guidelines for Elmwood Village, including elements governing the placement of doors and height and location of windows. The goal was never to make Elmwood Village “Disney-esque” — the sort of monochromatic, uniform district that mimics an outdoor mall — but to create guidelines that allow diversity in design while ensuring that the scale, density, and massing of buildings creates an inviting overall scheme with few gaps in the fabric.

A local foundation provided the first grant to the volunteers who incorporated Forever Elmwood to hire a consultant to draft the design guidelines and facilitate a community engagement process. Upon completion, Forever Elmwood began to lobby for the City of Buffalo to adopt the guidelines in the city's building code. While success in codifying the standards ultimately took over ten years, the planning commission began to consult them informally almost

Main Street Four-Point Approach™

From the National Main Street Center, a subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation
<http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/>

ORGANIZATION: Organization establishes consensus and cooperation by building partnerships among the various groups that have a stake in the commercial district.

PROMOTION: Promotion takes many forms, but the goal is to create a positive image that will rekindle community pride and improve consumer and investor confidence in your commercial district.

DESIGN: Design means getting Main Street into top physical shape and creating a safe, inviting environment for shoppers, workers and visitors.

ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING: Retaining and expanding successful businesses to provide a balanced commercial mix, sharpening the competitiveness and merchandising skills of business owners, and attracting new businesses that the market can support.

immediately. If a development in the Elmwood area required review in front of the planning board, Forever Elmwood, which tried to send a representative to every hearing, was usually consulted regarding to the development's adherence with the design guidelines.

In 2009, the design guidelines were officially adopted as part of Buffalo's building code for Elmwood Village. While enforcement by the City has been imperfect, the Elmwood Village Association now has a significantly easier time ensuring that new development plans are in compliance. EVA makes a comprehensive presentation that summarizes their current, updated design guidelines available on their website.⁵²

In addition to assisting businesses with building and storefront design, the Elmwood Village Association also cares for the streetscape within the neighborhood, including: public art, public seating, “spin bins” for trash, hanging flower baskets,

51 “Main Street Four-Point Approach.” National Main Street Center, National Trust for Historic Preservation. Web. Last retrieved: July 31, 2013. <<http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/about-main-street/the-approach/>>.

52 Why Elmwood Works.” Elmwood Village Association. Web. Last retrieved: July 31, 2013. <<http://www.elmwoodvillage.org/>>.

and neighborhood banners. Carly Battin, the Elmwood Village Association's current Executive Director, notes that, while no one is exactly sure how these two elements originated in Elmwood Village, steel art and blue neon (in signage, art, or on a building front) are seen as characteristic of the community. "We definitely work to build off of the existing themes, which have become an identifiable part of the community," Battin says.⁵³ An example is the public benches that are made by a local steel art shop, whose novel design makes the benches very difficult to sleep on.

Walkable Infrastructure: Many of Elmwood Village's advocates credit a late-1990s street narrowing with a large part of the increase in the neighborhood's retail and restaurant appeal. As Forever Elmwood and its volunteers coalesced around beautification and the creation of the design guidelines, the City identified them as spokespeople for the community and consulted them during contemplation of much-needed road, curb and sidewalk repairs.

According to Justin Azzarella, the Elmwood Village Association's second Executive Director, the community engagement meetings convened around the design guidelines surfaced a common misconception: that sidewalks and public space were covered by zoning requirements. Stakeholders' desires and ideas for the roads, sidewalks, and other public space were effectively "parked" to allow the conversation to continue around the zoning and building code. But those issues then formed the basis of the nascent community organization's first advocacy effort.⁵⁴ Forever Elmwood lobbied for the city to, instead of simply repairing this infrastructure in the same style, take the opportunity to narrow the street and widen the sidewalks. This increasingly utilized traffic calming method was controversial among some business owners, who believed that making Elmwood Avenue slower for cars would lead to a decline in business. The opposite occurred. The wider sidewalks made Elmwood more attractive for pedestrians, and increased foot traffic has benefitted businesses throughout the strip. According to Azzarella, "This was probably the biggest catalyst for change in Elmwood Village."⁵⁵

Façade improvement: Before inclusion in the city code became an available "stick," Forever Elmwood, and later the Elmwood Village Association, provided a "carrot"-based approach with successive façade improvement matching grant programs. Tom Cooney, Forever Elmwood's first Executive Director, researched façade improvement programs from around the country as his thesis project for his Masters in Urban Planning at SUNY Buffalo. After compiling research on over 20 programs, Cooney and the board developed a façade improvement program for Elmwood Avenue that leaned heavily on the members of the board's design committee.

Forever Elmwood targeted specific building owners and tenants and suggested that they apply for the façade improvement program. While applicants were free to develop their own designs, matching grants were only awarded when those designs complied with the design guidelines. Forever Elmwood also offered the consultant services of its volunteer architects and designers for those applicants who didn't already have professional design support. The first matching grant program awarded approximately \$21,000 total, to ten storefronts on Elmwood Avenue. The grants were small, some as low as \$500, and served as a one-to-one match for investments that property owners or tenants made into their property. The first program focused on things like signage, lighting, and windows — items whose renovation can have a major visual impact without major expense.

Façade improvement matching programs have been a near-constant part of the Elmwood Village Association's programming since, and have grown considerably. The organization has formalized the training and consulting it provides, still primarily through volunteers, for property owners and tenants seeking to develop plans that qualify for a matching grant. At time of writing, EVA is administering a \$500,000 grant from the New York State Main Street Program.⁵⁶ During its application, EVA worked with some potential applicants to submit example projects, but essentially designed their current program as an entirely competitive one. All landlords and tenants must attend a training session, and then work one-on-one with an EVA designer to finalize designs that qualify.

⁵³ Battin, Carly. Telephone Interview. July 17, 2013.

⁵⁴ Azzarella, Justin. Telephone Interview. July 9, 2013.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ More information about the New York Main Street Program can be found on the State of New York Office of Community Renewal Website. <<http://www.nyscr.org/Programs/NYMainStreet/NYMSProgramGuide.pdf>>.

Over the years, over \$2 million has passed through the Elmwood Village Association into the district's storefronts. In 2013, approximately 60 percent of the organization's total budget was passed through into the community.⁵⁷

Marketing and Promotions: One of the pillars of the four-point approach is promotion, which Forever Elmwood/Elmwood Village Association embraced with a standing committee. Marketing and promotions became a primary responsibility of Forever Elmwood's first Executive Director. Tom Cooney worked to promote the area on television, radio, and in print outlets, and even made an appearance on an HGTV special on Christmas in America. He developed a relationship with Visit Buffalo Niagara (Buffalo's Convention and Visitors Bureau) to assist with promotion of the neighborhood.

One of the most important marketing and promotion tools has been the Elmwood Village Visitor's Map and Guide, which has been produced since the early 2000s. The well-designed map covers the entire two-mile stretch of Elmwood Avenue and a block or two of its side streets in either direction. It includes major cultural institutions, public bus stops, a quick calendar of events and over 100 member businesses, in categories like "dining and nightlife," "apparel," and "deli & grocery." The current map is divided into four color-coded sections, which correspond to the color of the banners on Elmwood Avenue's streetlight poles for easy wayfinding. The layout, font, and design of the guide, which are consistent with the organizational logo and website, help reinforce the neighborhood's brand as trendy and unique. The guide paints a graphic portrait of how many different types of activities and businesses are in Elmwood Village, where a visitor can find clusters of activities, and how to access Elmwood Village and move around it.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR ELMWOOD VILLAGE

According to LISC's Michael Clarke, detractors claim that the reason for its success is that Elmwood Village was and is a wealthy community. "But 14222 is just not a rich zip code. It's a mixed income community, which includes Section 8 housing. Part of the success in Elmwood Village is that the commercial options serve a diversity of needs for an economically diverse

community."⁵⁸ That said, nearly 20 years of growth has changed the community in some ways. "Elmwood Village is no longer a place where you can afford the rent and start a business with \$10,000 of capital," says Tom Cooney.⁵⁹ As a consequence of some businesses being priced out of Elmwood Village, other commercial strips around Buffalo are benefitting, with those smaller start-ups locating on streets like Grand and Ashland.

Despite this, the occasional vacancy is still a problem on Elmwood Avenue. Those affiliated with the Elmwood Village Association claim the biggest reason is "problem landlords," whose rents are exorbitant and who don't mind leaving their space vacant. They contribute to business failure, when a new business moves in but can't afford the rent after a few months, and contribute to gaps in the urban fabric that the Elmwood Village Association is so carefully cultivating. The association is lobbying the city to be tougher on zoning and code enforcement, but is considering other solutions as well. More positively, the Elmwood Village Association is currently planning how to spend a \$60,000 grant for streetscape improvements, which will likely entail new, steel-based public art and public furniture that appeals to people from a variety of age groups. A new farmers market is in consideration for across the Bidwell Parkway, which (because it will not be limited to producers-only and will have a larger variety of food) can cater to immigrants from Burma, Somalia, Vietnam, and elsewhere in Asia and Africa who have arrived as part of recent refugee resettlement programs.⁶⁰

The Elmwood Village Association, the leadership of the volunteers that formed it, and the guidance of other community members who helped it take an effective shape, shows a remarkable understanding of how successful placemaking involves a tapestry of approaches. Community engagement and interesting, human-scaled design are certainly at the center of that tapestry on Elmwood Avenue. But changing perceptions of a once-downtrodden area also requires events and programming that invite people to rediscover the neighborhood, reasons to visit repeatedly and promotional efforts that tap into the neighborhood's authentic character.

⁵⁸ Clarke, Michael. Telephone Interview. May 29, 2013.

⁵⁹ Cooney, Tom. Telephone Interview. July 17, 2013.

⁶⁰ Battin, Carley. Telephone Interview. July 17, 2013.

⁵⁷ Battin, Carley. Personal e-mail to the author. July 30, 2013.

When asked about the emotional connection that exists for residents and visitors toward Elmwood Avenue, Justin Azzarella stated, "It's essential. People know when they love a place, they know they feel good, but they don't know why. They just think people used to build things like this."⁶¹ The Elmwood Village Association has put almost 20 years into understanding why—and, empowered by that understanding, changing Elmwood Village dramatically. "Now business owners are saying, 'I have to have a store on Elmwood,'" says Mike Ferdman, "That's the environment that was created."⁶²

61 Azzarella, Justin. Telephone Interview. July 9, 2013.

62 Ferdman, Mike. Telephone Interview. July 19, 2013.



Chapter 5

Pittsburgh – Downtown and Point state park from afar.
Source: christinphilly5448 on flickr Creative Commons.

TRAILS AND OTHER CORRIDORS

Introduction

The industrial heritage of Legacy Cities endowed them great regional infrastructure, connected via road, rail and waterway. As industry evolved, and in many cases closed or left Legacy Cities, the local parts of those networks often grew underutilized and fell into neglect. In the case of formerly industrialized waterfronts, whole new landscapes emerged, where public access and placemaking opportunities could replace industrial blight and vacancy.

When these formerly industrial-based corridors are combined with the city's more traditional road network—which in many cases is also underutilized due to population loss—a vast people-oriented circulatory system can be realized to connect neighborhoods, anchor districts and downtowns, potentially multiplying other placemaking efforts.

In this context, “corridors” can refer to any path or way between two or more points, usually designed for pedestrian or non-motorized transit, such as running or bike lanes. These connectors can utilize traditional placemaking elements found in parks and plazas, including plantings, seating, entertainment, fountains and art; more resource-intensive anchors, such as a restaurant, museum or retail use; and one-time or long-term events to draw attention to new investments and encourage community exploration.

The best examples utilize placemaking principles throughout their design and implementation phases, so that the community's understanding, endorsement and accessibility is made paramount for maximum utilization. Clear signage, distinctive amenities (like art or play opportunities for children), accessible entry points and public safety patrols are important components of a successful corridor project. Often times, city government works closely with newly formed nonprofit conservancies or agencies, set up specifically to fundraise, implement and manage the asset, though in some cases the project will fall under the purview of city or state parks department.

There are numerous examples of corridor and connector projects throughout Legacy Cities. Some of the most successful, like the waterfront revitalization of Pittsburgh, benefitted from a network of partners, including governmental and quasi-governmental entities, along with conservancies and other nonprofits formed for the express purpose of supporting the greenways system. These efforts have also benefitted from traditional planning processes and tactics, and included integration of historic and ecological elements into the designs. Other examples, like Detroit's Dequindre Cut and Lansing's River Trail, while newer and smaller scale, succeed by creating welcoming, safe environments in previously underutilized rail and waterways. In almost every case, these projects are ultimately expensive—some running into the hundreds of millions of dollars. But initial, smaller investments were usually required to engender a greenways-appreciative culture change in cities designed for cars.

Legacy Cities Challenges: Trails and Other Corridors

Many Legacy Cities suffer from the environmental impacts left by their industrial heritage. Huge swaths of land, where industry made a mark and defined an era, sit vacant and underutilized, often requiring major demolition and/or environmental remediation activity that make it very difficult for Legacy Cities to successfully recast industrial land for a new era, purpose or placemaking effort.

The road, rail and water systems that serviced industry are not effectively integrated or designed to allow for different types of access, and often must be retrofitted to allow for non-motorized transit. Moreover, existing transportation networks are often woefully insufficient and underfunded. This limits options for residents and for disconnected, often racially segregated neighborhoods. Connectivity and accessibility are significant challenges in Legacy Cities, with neighborhood residents cut off from a city's major assets and, often, its employment hubs.

Furthermore, Legacy City residents are often so unused to non-auto-dependent travel or a pedestrian lifestyle that a “build it and they will come” mantra for Legacy City corridors and connectors will likely fall short without incorporating other ways to engage residents.



Pittsburgh – North Shore Park. Source: Megan Irvine on flickr.

Trails and Corridors Case Study: **Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania** **Waterfront Development**

Pittsburgh is a prototypical Legacy City at the confluence of three major rivers: the Ohio, Allegheny and Monongahela, which served as major transportation corridors and contributed to Pittsburgh's industrial might throughout the first half of the 20th century. As Pittsburgh dominated in the production of iron, glass and steel, its own landscape, and especially its waterfront, was dominated by factories. But the long collapse of the steel industry over the latter half of the century—with factory closures, 100,000 jobs were lost between 1950 and 2009—left the waterfront nearly vacant, environmentally degraded and disconnected from the city.⁶³ Between 1950 and 2000, Pittsburgh's population dropped more than 50 percent from 680,000 to 330,000.⁶⁴

WATERFRONT RECLAMATION AND A NEW NETWORK OF COLLABORATORS

By the late 1980s, some Pittsburghers' efforts to turn the city around found a focus on its 24 miles of waterfront. Politicians,

63 Dokoupil, Tony. “Cutting Down to Size.” *Newsweek*. November 26, 2009.

64 “1950 United States Census.” *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. March 29, 2013. Population in 1950: 676,803; “Pittsburgh Population Profile.” *City-Data. Population in 2000*: 334,563.

community leaders, business owners, environmentalists and urban planners saw the vacant, blighted riverfront land as an opportunity, and created a variety of organizations with waterfront revitalization as their purpose. Those organizations, which have worked in a variety of collaborations over the past two-plus decades, include:

- Friends of the Riverfront (FOR):** FOR was developed in the late 1980s as a nonprofit partner for the city, with the original charge to explore opportunities within the brownfields on the rivers. FOR today works throughout Allegheny County to “increase awareness and engagement with the Pittsburgh region’s rivers and riverfronts through activities, stewardship and expansion of water and land trails.” FOR plans, secures funding, forms partnerships and implements land and water trails. The planning process for all major development consists of numerous public meetings, and FOR proactively engages volunteers to help maintain projects. They work to restore the natural ecosystem of the Pittsburgh region through programs and public education. FOR promotes Pittsburgh as a river city through events like the Pittsburgh Triathlon, which draws people from around the world to swim in the now-safe Allegheny, run on the Three Rivers Heritage Trail and bike in a high-occupancy vehicle lane on a highway. In addition to land trails, FOR developed water trails to increase peoples’ relationship with and recreation on the rivers. FOR is also a founding member of the Allegheny Trail Alliance, a coalition of organizations that worked together to create the Great Allegheny Passage, a 152-mile trail linking Pittsburgh to Cumberland, Maryland, completed in 2013.
- Riverlife:** Riverlife was established in 2000 as a nonprofit public-private partnership. Its mission is, “To reclaim, restore and promote Pittsburgh’s riverfronts as the environmental, recreational, cultural and economic hub for the people of this region and our visitors.” Riverlife was charged by the city with developing a master plan for the rivers and their miles of shorelines and that plan, *A Vision Plan for Pittsburgh’s Waterfront*, which built off of the earlier *Riverfront Development Plan*, still guides development today. Their project area is from the 31st Street Bridge on the Allegheny down to the Monongahela in the east to the West End Bridge on the Ohio River. Riverlife develops capital projects on city, county or state-owned land through construction. This entails plan development, securing funding,

community engagement, coordination of partners, and overseeing construction. They support the efforts of other capital projects through partnership and promotion and advocate on behalf of the riverfronts when others plan projects or developments, ensuring healthy use of land and cohesion with plans. Riverlife works to bring recreation to the area through planning events and advocating for recreational activities.

- Around specific projects, many community development groups and neighborhood organizations also rallied together to exercise community control over the waterfront rather than seeing it pass to private interests. For instance, the Mt. Washington Community Development Corporation and other neighborhood organizations in the Mt. Washington neighborhood partnered to preserve the 264 acres of undeveloped land that rings “the Mount.” With the goal of turning the isolated areas into a unified whole, community members got together, formed strategic, funding and advocacy plans, and created Emerald View Park.

According to individuals involved, many of these partners step in where the city or other organizations fall short (for example, to clean a park or cut some grass), and come together to advocate for healthy public land use when developments are in the works.

“Whatever you want to do, there’s always a hundred people giving you reasons to not do it,” said Murphy, who took office in 1994. “You just need to say, ‘We’re going to do it.’ Nothing happens without risk, political risk and financial risk.”

-Former Mayor Tom Murphy, from “*Steeltown Renaissance*,” in the *Courier-Post*, August 11, 2005

A substantial part of Pittsburgh’s success in waterfront redevelopment can be attributed to this network of entities that oversee and maintain the park system. While individual champions for the issue of reclaiming vacant land for public use may come and go, the network of collaborators offers vital resilience and consistency for a very long-term, major effort to change Pittsburgh’s relationship with its waterfront. On a monthly basis, executive directors from development-focused nonprofit organizations meet informally to discuss current

plans, share stories about successes and failures, prioritize projects, evaluate funding opportunities and make a plan to move forward.

Advocates credit Tom Murphy, who served as Pittsburgh's mayor from 1994 to 2006, with critical leadership and vision in the movement to reclaim the city's waterfront. Murphy made public riverfront access a priority, and was a leader in the development of trails throughout Pittsburgh. Mayor Murphy advocated for starting small, and emphasized that acquiring any waterfront access for the public would lead to tangible benefit and would inspire support for further (and larger) development. On his direction, city crews cut foliage to create trails without plans or designs—just to start getting it done.⁶⁵

Under Murphy's leadership, the city created the *Riverfront Development Plan* (RDP) in the late 1990s to guide all waterfront ventures. The other waterfront-focused organizations each formed their own missions and plans in alignment with the RDP. All of these organizations, while phrasing their goals in different ways, emphasized the linked riverfront as a city hub, creating a balance of opportunities for recreation, economic development and community connectivity. Essentially, they recognized the placemaking potential of the underutilized waterfront, acknowledged that people are drawn to water and sought to engage the entire Pittsburgh community in stronger identification with their rivers.

While the Riverfront Development Plan was essentially a set of guidelines to govern the development of waterfront property, the later *Vision Plan for Pittsburgh's Waterfront* made specific land use recommendations. The *Vision Plan* received the 2002 Honor Award in Urban Planning from the American Institute of Architects and the 2002 Merit Award in Planning from the International Downtown Association. The honors were due in part to the comprehensive strategic plans for the city, and they included preservation and restoration design elements sensitive to Pittsburgh's history and ecology.⁶⁶

While all of the entities involved in the management of waterfront land development have the same goal of reuniting

"In order to move forward with any major development project—in order to have plans—you have to have numerous public meetings. The community needs to participate in the planning process, it gives them ownership and they then care about the projects completion and maintenance. Once stewardship is built in the public realm, you know volunteers and other local residents and (entities) will help maintain."

- Tom Baxter, Executive Director,
Friends of the Riverfront

Pittsburghers with their rivers, they each accomplish those through various methods – advocacy, ecological maintenance, promotion, development, etc. All of these methods, however, have in common the use of the public. The planning efforts of the 1950s and '60s in Pittsburgh resulted in some successes and some failures, and taught the new generation of planners that without community engagement you will have community blight; large infrastructure had displaced thousands, and Pittsburgh's neighborhoods are still recovering today.⁶⁷ *Riverlife's A Vision Plan for Pittsburgh's Waterfronts* is rooted in the notion that the development would live or die based on the community's blessings, and therefore is the result of a 1.5-year public outreach process. Through highlighting its outreach efforts and reminding citizens that they don't have to be planners to know what they like, it has established itself as a transparent organization that works with communities, not around them. Once people saw results—attractive public land—and knew they were enjoying something new that helped change their city, Riverlife's reputation was established as healthy for Pittsburgh. Stephan Bontrager, Director of Communications for Riverlife, says their projects have seeds in tactical urbanism:

*People and nature find a way to do things—good or bad—and we use this as a starting point. If a community focused on an area, if it was popular to them, we started there. For example, if a community forged a path through a blighted salvage yard to go sit by the water, that is where their trail and park should be.*⁶⁸

65 Bontrager, Stephan. Telephone Interview. June 18, 2013. Bontrager spoke of Murphy as "a literal trail blazer" involved in the first trail making.

66 "Awards for Regional and Urban Design." *American Institute for Architects*. Web. Last retrieved: July 31, 2013. <<http://www.aia.org/practicing/awards/AIAS075344>>.

67 Bontrager, Stephan. Telephone Interview. June 18, 2013.

68 *Ibid.*



Pittsburgh – water steps. Source: Wally Gobetz on flickr.

Friends of the Riverfront’s plans rely heavily on creating a very site specific project—and they engage stakeholders at every level to do so. When conceptualizing a project, the goal is not just to build a trail; the goal is to create something that works for that location. They analyze site-by-site, parcel-by-parcel, and identify the right partners for that project, including community members, other organizations, etc. FOR believes that the community understands best what belongs.

Unlike in some cities where conservancies exist to preserve valuable, publicly used land from threat of private ownership, in Pittsburgh, the movement for waterfront reclamation required a culture change effort to convince the public that their waterfront land had value at all. According to Tom Baxter, the Executive Director of Friends of the Riverfront:

This land was perceived as contaminated, dangerous wastelands, inaccessible for a variety of reasons like the railroads. Getting the property was relatively easy; they were the least desirable parcels of land. Our organizations together knew we needed to change the perceptions of Pittsburghers about the riverfront land.⁶⁹

Today, Pittsburgh is an intricate network of parks and paths: the plan for a 13-mile interconnected riverpark system contemplated by the *Vision Plan* is 80 percent built, and 24 miles of trails and greenways border the riverfronts and weave through the city. The riverfront is now bordered by more than 130 acres of highly utilized green space, and its trails have become a major part of its post-industrial identity—in 2011

and 2012, for instance, *Bicycling Magazine* included Pittsburgh on its list of America’s Top 50 Bike-Friendly cities.⁷⁰ According to *Riverlife*, more than one million people bike, jog or walk on the riverfront trails annually.⁷¹

KEY WATERFRONT PROJECTS

The many overlapping waterfront parks, trails, and plans in Pittsburgh can be confusing: while most trails and parks have their own names, all of the connected trails are also considered part of the Three Rivers Heritage Trail, and all waterfront parks are considered—by some, though it’s not clear whether this has caught on widely—to be part of the Three Rivers Park. Essentially a branding effort to capitalize on the interconnectivity of the parks and trails, the name also attempts to capitalize on the centrality of Pittsburgh’s rivers to its identity. For instance, plaques throughout the trail orient travelers to both the distant and recent history of the area, a 100 percent site-specific detail to help provide a true sense of place.

Each of the waterfront parks is oriented to allow visitors to take full advantage of views across the water. Wherever possible, the greenways and promenades link the parks to other nearby retail, business and recreation attractions, creating density of options and triangulating to create more desirable destinations. All of Pittsburgh’s waterfronts provide common amenities like seating options, lighting and trash receptacles, and paved/brick ways for mobile traffic. The larger spaces host outdoor events,

69 Baxter, Tom. Telephone Interview. July 25, 2013.

70 “Bicycling’s Top 50.” *Bicycling Magazine Online*. Web. Last retrieved: July 31, 2013. <<http://www.bicycling.com/news/featured-stories/bicyclings-top-50>>.

71 Bontrager, Stephan. Personal e-mail to the author. July 30, 2013.

such as festivals and performances. Additional programming, like kayak rentals, children’s park tours, dragon boating, night hikes, fishing and more, attract people of all ages, activity levels and interests. Over time, certain elements have become popular destinations in themselves, like the interactive Water Steps fountain in North Shore Park. All along the waterfront one can see friends lounging in parks, children playing in fountains, groups launching kayaks, families for an afternoon bicycle ride, runners on the trails and employees having a picnic lunch—all simultaneously enjoying and creating a diversity of experiences that is exciting and inviting.

Pittsburghers have taken the legacy of their industrial history and turned vacancy into an asset. The focus on connectivity—within the park system, between the city and the water, and from the parks to neighboring attractions—has helped to maximize the impact of park development. Essentially, users can view each park as one node on an accessible system, increasing the power of the parks as a destination. Inviting park design, park programming and historic preservation wherever possible have helped Pittsburgh redefine its relationship with its waterfront.

A quick tour of the Three Rivers Heritage Trail starts on the northeast side of the Ohio River at Westhall Park, along the river to the point at which the Ohio meets the Allegheny and the Monongahela. There, on the north side, North Shore Waterfront Park sits across from downtown Pittsburgh. In total, there are eight miles of connected trails and parks on the north side of the rivers. Several bridges serve to connect those trails with downtown. On the south side of the Allegheny, and where downtown juts into the three-river intersection, is Point State Park. It’s at the crux of trails which run several miles out through Southside Riverfront Park to Schenley Park via Panther Hollow. On the south side of “the Mon,” an approximately six-mile trail connects downtown to the Great Allegheny Passage, a motorized vehicle-free trail that is part of a network that runs all the way to Washington, DC.

A few projects deserve special note in the story of how Pittsburgh reclaimed its waterfront:

31st Street Bridge: The 31st Street Bridge, which crosses the Allegheny from the city’s North side to the Strip District, was built in 1928 and by this century was in a state of disrepair. In 2007, after \$27 million and two years of work, it was restored



Pittsburgh – Bikers over 31st street bridge. Source: Art Noose on flickr.

to its former glory. Riverlife led the project, with partnership from the City of Pittsburgh, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation, the Allegheny County of Public Works, Baker Engineering and Pfaffman + Associates. The bridge’s underside was painted a new shade of blue, and replicas of the original decorative handrails and ornate streetlights (which had been replaced with basic arched highway lights) were installed. Safety barriers were designed to accompany the pedestrian paths while maintaining the lovely city views. Once the 31st Street Bridge restoration was finished, residents, who had gotten used to the bridge’s deteriorating condition, were taken with how beautiful it had once again become.⁷²

North Shore Waterfront Park: One of the first completed riverfront projects providing direct access to the water was North Shore Park, constructed in 2001 at the same time as the two stadiums, Heinz Field and PNC Park, that bookend it. The park opens and descends down to the water, offering beautiful views of downtown. Market Street Pier and three memorials honoring American veterans and law enforcement officers attract tourists, and the North Shore Great Lawn hosts outdoor events. An eighteen foot-wide riverwalk supports all types of non-motorized transportation and various recreational activities, and greenways and promenades link the stadiums to nearby neighborhoods, retail, business, and recreation

72 Bontrager, Stephan. Telephone Interview. 18 Jun 2013.



Pittsburgh – Point State park fountain. Source: John Blough on flickr.

destinations. The development of North Shore Waterfront Park at the same time as the stadia provided Riverlife an opportunity to advocate for water-focused development. Market consultants said the road serving the stadia should run along the water, but Riverlife and other advocates were able to sway the design to work around the park, and the stadia are oriented toward the rivers. From within PNC Park, in seats facing home plate, the views are said to be spectacular.⁷³ The area has become a popular destination for residents and tourists alike, and as the first waterfront access park of its kind in Pittsburgh, it showed the potential of waterfront land as public space.

Point State Park: Point State Park, one of the largest and most popular parks in the city, due at least in part to its location at the confluence of the three rivers, opened in 1974 and is a National Historic Landmark. 2013 marked the end of a \$35 million renovation of the park, which was a partnership between the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), the Allegheny Conference on Community Development and Riverlife. Point State Park consists of a large lawn, a wooded area of native plantings, a café, seating, lighting, walkways, boat docking and a large fountain. Programming—including, for instance, history tours and classes on geocaching and native plant species—has heightened the park's popularity. Regular outdoor shows and other events, and the best vantage point for viewing the 4th of July fireworks, continue to draw residents and tourists alike. An estimated 3 million people visit Point State Park annually.⁷⁴

73 Bontrager, Stephan. Telephone Interview. June 18, 2013.

74 "Governor Corbett to Participate in Ceremony to Return Fountain at Point State Park to Pittsburgh's Skyline." Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. June 7, 2013. Web. Last retrieved: July 31, 2013. <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/cs/groups/public/documents/news/DCNR_20027146.pdf>.

Mon Wharf Landing: Leaving Point State Park, one can travel east along the southern edge of downtown and enjoy the Mon Wharf Landing. Not long ago, the Mon Wharf was a frequently flooded five-acre parking lot on the Monongahela riverbank. Under Riverlife's guidance, with funding from Federal and State transportation dollars, including grants from PennDOT, DCNR Growing Greener funds and private donors including the K. Mabis McKenna Foundation, the Heinz Endowments and the RK Mellon Foundation, the waterfront is now a park and trail. Flood-resistant plants were planted, and access to the river for kayak launching was granted, with steps. It has become a popular place for jogging and biking.

Three Rivers Water Trail: Friends of the Riverfront has been developing Allegheny County's water trails since the 1990s. Water trails are low-impact recreational infrastructures: a network of access points along a waterway for people to start or end their journey, stop for a rest or picnic, or camp for the night. The development process has included community dialogues to inform the decision-making process with community expertise. The Three Rivers Water Trail access points in Pittsburgh link water users to popular destinations, trails and parks. FOR created a map and signage to keep recreational water users informed while supplying them with local legends and historical details. Between 2004 and 2009, according to Kayak Pittsburgh, kayak rentals in Pittsburgh rose from 2,400 to 15,000, a 625 percent increase.⁷⁵

South Shore Riverfront Park: SouthSide Works, a recreation and shopping complex on the south side of the Monongahela, opened in stages between 2002 and 2004. South Side Riverfront Park was completed in 2012 as its complement (though its plans were created with the *Vision Plan* in 2001), connecting the assets of the development with the riverfront and, through triangulation, creating an even stronger destination. The park design took advantage of the hilly landscape and other special features. The park—with an old steel mill barge dock as its base—connects the development over a 40-foot grade change, through switchbacked ramps and steps (which do double-duty as seating during events), to the water. Trails also connect at both the development and river level, with beautiful views via the upper trail's approach to the amphitheater. The park has places for boats to dock,

75 Bontrager, Stephan. Personal e-mail to the author. July 30, 2013.

outlooks for views, public art installations, interpretive features, and many other elements that pay tribute to the site's history.

As an additional destination that attracts visitors from around the city, the South Shore Riverfront Park has helped bolster the growth of the private development at SouthSide Works and throughout the South Side neighborhood. With the construction of SouthSide Works, and the plans for South Shore Park, American Eagle moved its headquarters here in 2007, and the building is designed to fit right in—it opens up onto the park and riverfront. Business growth in the area provides further evidence that the waterfront parks are having an impact. Stephan Bontrager of Riverlife says, "It shows that employers know employees value this atmosphere for work, that their employees will be happier if they can go outside onto a beautiful waterfront for lunch, or look out the window at it while plugging away." American Eagle's Press Release confirms:

We recognize that our associates are our most valuable resource and providing them with a creative and productive environment is our top priority. The many positive amenities of our new facility, combined with the exciting urban environment offered at Pittsburgh's SouthSide Works, will be key to attracting and retaining a talented workforce, which is absolutely essential to our continued success.

PLACEMAKING ON TRAILS; TRAILS ON PLACEMAKING

Pittsburgh's greenways are as much about fostering movement between destinations as they are about encouraging people to loiter at one, especially for people on bikes — placemaking in this context isn't about sitting still. These corridors might be considered placemaking for the entire city. They increase connectivity between neighborhoods and destinations. They provide Pittsburghers with a way to rediscover the city's physical assets. They bring people together in the outdoors and foster community interactions. They contribute to the city's unique character and authentic identity, and to the promotion of that identity. They have become a shared asset and point of pride where diversity of activities, accessibility and inviting design are critical. It's clear that, for those seeking to maximize the impact of trails, placemaking has lessons to offer—and Pittsburgh's Three Rivers Heritage Trails and Parks have lessons for placemaking.

Historic Preservation: Rebranding Pittsburgh's waterfront was as important to the long-term success of the waterfront's reclamation as the actual development. Before the work of Friends of the Riverfront and other pioneers, Pittsburghers viewed the waterfront as a massive industrial scar. But, as so many advocates have found in Legacy Cities, vacancy can be an asset when the appropriate network of collaborators comes together around a vision. Pittsburghers are proud of their history, and their historic places. During revitalization efforts, every bridge in Pittsburgh was treated as a unique entity. Bridge historical details were preserved, and infrastructure was updated to provide for modern transportation needs, including those of cyclists and pedestrians, and to enhance views of and from riverfront parks. Bridges no longer used for automobile transportation were converted to part of the trail system.

Connectivity: Many cities across the globe have been reclaiming their waterfronts from industrial and transportation uses for decades now. Pittsburgh's strategy stands out in the extent to which the connected system is designed to serve as a functioning whole. Nearly every Pittsburgh neighborhood has an access point to this trail network, and the trails are solidly built, with bricks or pavers and clear signage making the trail unmistakable. The network of regional parks, waterfront parks and promenades, and land and river trails means residents, commuters and visitors can travel via non-motorized corridors seamlessly throughout the city, by foot, bike, rollerblade, canoe, boat, or other methods. Proposed infrastructure like the Mon Wharf switchback and Point State Park Connector will go even further to provide connections over water and land.

Triangulation: It's now easy for a Pittsburgh resident or visitor to design an entire day on a bike. Not only do the parks provide multiple opportunities for activities in themselves, they also connect people to many nearby activities. While Pittsburgh's resurgence has been enabled by a variety of powerful economic factors, the spatial patterns of development, with significant new business near the popular waterfront parks, suggest that the parks have broad and meaningful appeal. The waterfront revitalization has drawn new developments along the corridors, increased the property values of nearby parcels and created a more competitive market for businesses in the area. Over \$4 billion has been invested in private development, in the North Shore, Downtown, Strip District, and South Side

neighborhoods and transportation infrastructure.⁷⁶ Tom Baxter of Friends of the Riverfront says what was recently fairly inexpensive land bordering the rivers is probably now among the most valuable in the city.⁷⁷

The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources found that a majority of Pennsylvania respondents to an Outdoor Recreation Study (released in 2009) value open space near their homes.⁷⁸ As waterfront public space grows, the resulting wholly accessible, densely programmed areas drawing activity and economic growth also draw housing investment.

THE CONTRIBUTION TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

As Pittsburgh's riverfront has been reclaimed for public use, the waterfront parks have served as nodes for new development that stretches from the water and for economic development that connects the waterfront to previously existing destinations. This economic development has included a diverse mix of type and employment opportunity. According to a *New York Times* article, as of 2013, "the city has managed to leverage \$124 million of investments in publicly accessible riverfront into \$4 billion in corporate, public, nonprofit and entertainment development downtown."⁷⁹ Additionally, the

park system has contributed to the Pittsburgh region's appeal to tourists. Tourism has become a major industry in Pittsburgh, with visitor spending in 2011 in Allegheny County totaling \$5.3 billion. More than 38,000 jobs in Allegheny County are directly supported by the tourism industry.⁸⁰

To a 2013 tourist who last visited in 2003, Pittsburgh today would look very different. Not only is the urban landscape completely changed, the city itself is on the rise again. In 2011, the population stabilized for the first time after 60 years of decline.⁸¹ In 2013, the city's Urban Redevelopment Authority approved preliminary plans for an \$80 million investment in new roads, streets and utilities on a 178-acre former industrial site, the last remaining vacant property of significant size on the riverfront.⁸²

In Pittsburgh, the riverfront is now a place for locals to gather, socialize and enhance their community connectedness. The tireless pursuit of a holistic vision by many partners has resulted in a shared success and continued investment, and ensured that Pittsburgh's waterfront will continue to serve as a vital element to the community's residents, tourists and indeed the city's core identity.

76 Bontrager, Stephan. Personal e-mail to the author. July 30, 2013.

77 Baxter, Tom. Telephone Interview. July 25, 2013.

78 "Pennsylvania Resident Survey." Department of Conservation and Natural Resources *Outdoor Recreation Plan*. Web. Last retrieved July 31, 2013. <http://www.paoutdoorrecplan.com/cs/groups/public/documents/document/d_002723.pdf>.

79 O'Toole, Christine H. "Pittsburgh's Three Rivers, Now A Public Attraction." *The New York Times*. January 22, 2013.

80 "Pittsburgh Tourism Impact." *Visit Pittsburgh*. Web. Last retrieved: July 31, 2013. <<http://www.visitpittsburgh.com/about-us/tourism-impact/>>.

81 Rotstein, Gary. "Pittsburgh population Moved Upward – by 152." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. May 23, 2013.

82 O'Toole, Christine H. "Pittsburgh's Three Rivers, Now A Public Attraction." *The New York Times*. January 22, 2013.

Chapter 6



Washington Park – kids playing in fountain
Source: New Solutions Group.

CONCLUSION

As the case studies in this report suggest, placemaking is alive and well in America's Legacy Cities. Placemaking adds value when incorporated into other redevelopment strategies in a variety of contexts and at many different scales. From Buffalo to Cincinnati and beyond, there is little doubt that placemaking is growing as a strategy to engage residents to move their cities forward. A few good practices emerge from the case studies that are particularly relevant in Legacy Cities.

First, placemaking is more effective with the inclusion of local input, and seems most likely to succeed (and be most meaningful) when local interests are not just involved, but a part of the leadership of the initiative at hand. It is hard to imagine Georgia Street transcending the simple role of community garden to become a community hub without the leadership and vision of Mark Covington. The same is true in each of this report's case studies. In Washington Park, where the greatest unresolved tension between project leaders and residents exists, the project was led by organizations that largely represented the downtown business community—whose interests were undoubtedly heard and met through the park design. The park now is a bustling hub that helps connect the downtown to the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood, yet open questions exist about whether the design (1) included resident input sufficiently, and (2) still appeals to certain residents who enjoyed aspects of the park prior to renovation, even if their input was not heard. This demonstrates the challenge involved in defining stakeholders and balancing their interests (perhaps more challenging than a project located entirely in a discrete and defined neighborhood).

An effective community engagement process will value and respect residents' perspectives over the course of community meetings that allow participants to build relationships in addition to providing feedback. This is especially critical in situations in which racial and gentrification tensions are unavoidable, as is the case in many Legacy Cities. A process that gives stakeholders equal power, such as the urban planning-based Strategic Framework process that

Community Development Advocates of Detroit designed, can be adapted to meaningfully engage and empower residents in a placemaking project.⁸³

That said, complete community engagement and achievement of consensus might be something of a holy grail, not quite attainable. The Elmwood Village Association, founded by individuals who both lived and worked in the neighborhood, walks a constant line of negotiation when residents' and business owners' interests appear to conflict. A well-designed community engagement process or structure and robust community leadership can channel the creative potential of conflict into a public place with the greatest relevance for its likeliest users.

While the case studies featured here have not, to the authors' understanding, actively contributed to the entrenched challenges of inequity and segregation in Legacy Cities, identifying projects that promoted integration and inclusion was more difficult than one might expect. Many projects promoted by their champions as placemaking have not done enough to ask: placemaking for whom? Multiple case studies considered for inclusion were dismissed because, as research continued, credible dissenting voices were identified that claimed, for instance, that the project had the effect of excluding people of color or the poor. Additional research in "placemaking for equity" could add to a dialogue that would be especially useful in cities—both Legacy and non-Legacy—still plagued by racial segregation.

Ultimately however, even the best of a community's intention is not enough. Commitment and sustained investment must support intention to meaningfully create a place over time. Perhaps one of the most important elements of placemaking for Legacy Cities is its power to invite people to rediscover a part of the city, seeing new possibility and promise in the vacancy and abandonment that is part of its industrial legacy. But the process takes time and commitment over the long haul. In Pittsburgh, the waterfront was an opportunity waiting to happen; Clark Park was all but given up on, at least by city government in Detroit. When local advocates reclaimed these areas, a critical part of their work was to make sure that they drew people in to experience the improvements made, and to do it again, and again, and again.

This speaks to one of the limitations of "lighter, quicker, cheaper" in Legacy Cities, where pedestrians are not a common sight in many parts of town. While LQC is a valuable frame of thinking—essentially, LQC strategies like clean-ups and flower plantings in Elmwood Village were the seeds of the area's renaissance—it is often not enough to draw people to a part of town that they consider dangerous, uninviting or irrelevant. If placemakers can't build on an existing destination or desirable assets, rediscovery, usually including culture change, needs to be a part of the placemaking plan. In the case studies, this occurred primarily through events, community outreach and promotions and marketing. Occasional events like TasteFest failed to regularly activate New Center Park, though they were useful prototypes of how the park could be used. To have an impact, events must be frequent and ongoing. Now, New Center Park has programming several nights each week throughout the summer. The "Map and Guide" produced by the Elmwood Village Association has been vital to help people recognize the sheer abundance and diversity of the neighborhood's offerings, and the Farmers Market and Elmwood Avenue Festival of the Arts invite people to explore the ways in which Elmwood Village has changed over the past 20 years.

Finally, successful placemaking requires significant investment. Georgia Street Community Collective is the only case study included that still has not received financial resources over several thousand dollars, mainly due to the scale and use. Most of the case studies' project costs reached into the millions. This may be because GSCC is a placemaking project that is temporarily improving lives in a neighborhood that, in the words of Detroit Future City, will be "replaced, repurposed, or decommissioned."⁸⁴ However, it may also be because GSCC is only a few years into its existence. It is difficult but not impossible to imagine that, in twenty years, GSCC will be the centerpiece of a neighborhood where "alternative uses" like food production coexist with low-density housing.

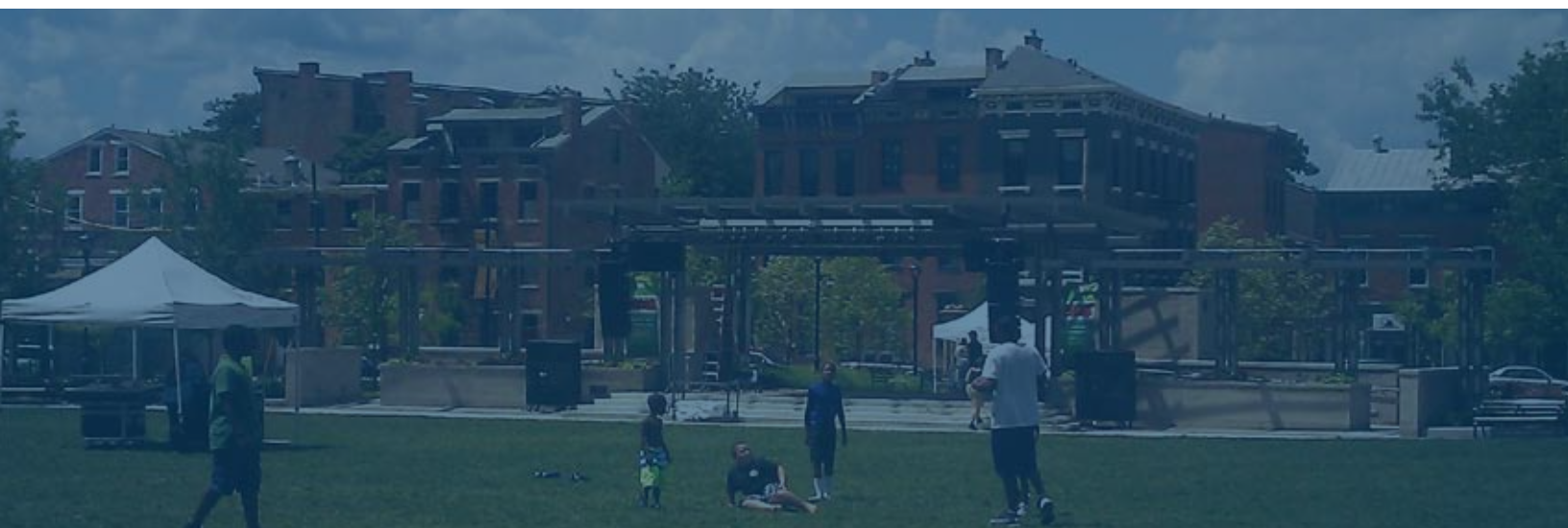
To those not deeply involved in Midtown Detroit, it may appear that the renovated and reprogrammed New Center Park and the Midtown Loop were sudden, major investments. These case studies demonstrate, however, that the projects were

83 The Strategic Framework is available for download at CDAD's website: <<http://www.cdad-online.org/strategic-framework>>.

84 The Detroit Future City 2012 Strategic Framework Report "Strategic Renewal Approach: Year 20" map on p.175 shows the zone where Georgia Street is located as within the "replace, repurpose, or decommission" framework, described in more detail on p.177. The future land use contemplated for that zone is "Innovation Ecological," according to the 50-year Land Use Map on p.112.

actually the culmination of decades of collaboration and years of active planning before major investment started. Likewise, a group of advocates worked together in Elmwood Village for over 15 years before the main community association received a \$500,000 Main Street grant. Pittsburgh's waterfront reclamation started in the 1980 and worked for years to build the competency, connections and organizational capacity to garner the millions necessary to create real transformation along the waterfront.

None of the selected projects embody quick transformation. In each case, years of hard work went into the project before it began to attract new users or meaningfully impact its surroundings. And in most cases, perhaps with Elmwood Village and Midtown as exceptions, the project leads interviewed for this report didn't identify their work as placemaking. They were simply doing what seemed right, using a variety of revitalization tools to strengthen their communities. Placemaking wasn't usually a goal in and of itself; rather, the desired outcomes included cleaner, safer neighborhoods, healthier kids and families, stronger business environments, better-utilized cultural institutions and greater social connectivity. The success of each of these projects in achieving its goals depended, and continues to depend, on the ability of a specific place to engender an emotional response in its neighbors and visitors. These places keep people coming back—and that's just what Legacy Cities need.





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PLACEMAKING IN LEGACY CITIES

Opportunities and Good Practices

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