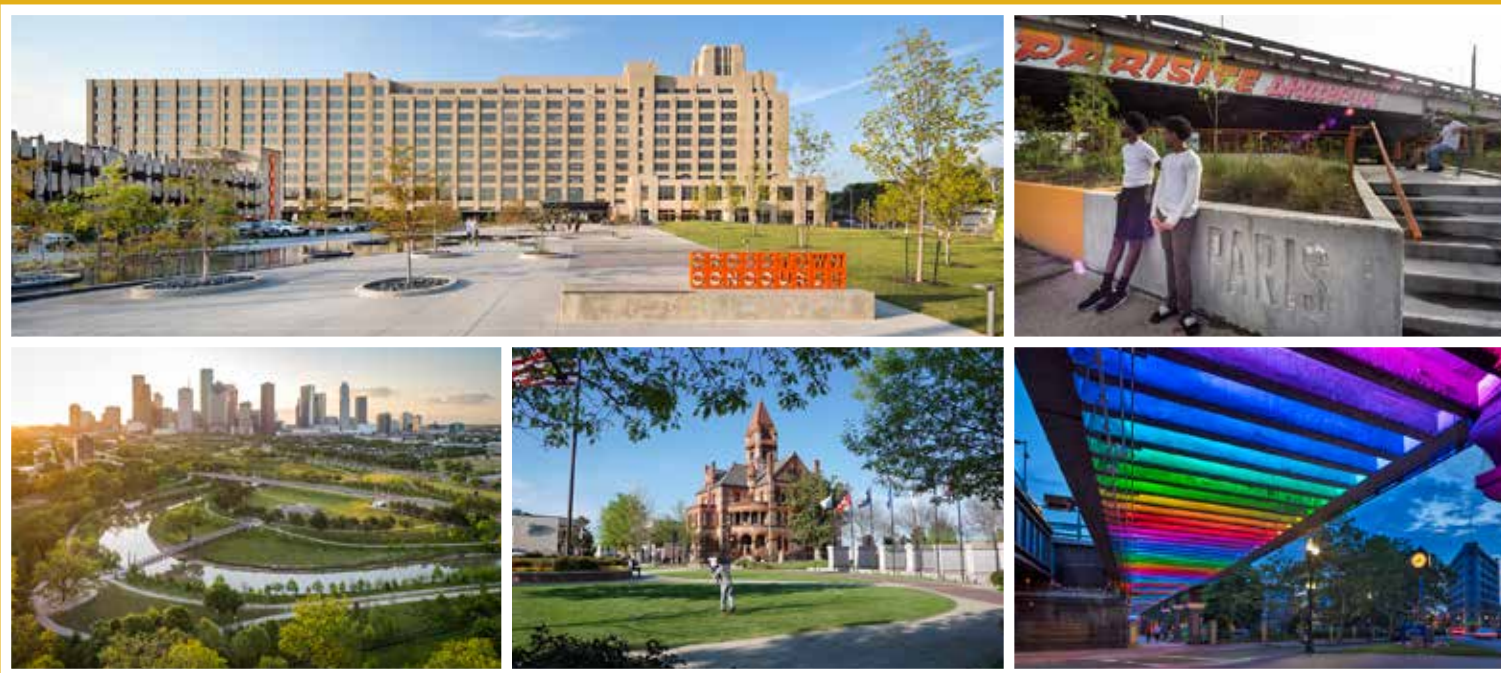


Changing the Narrative

The 2019 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence



BRUNER FOUNDATION, INC.

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**RUDY
BRUNER
AWARD**
FOR URBAN EXCELLENCE

BRUNER FOUNDATION, INC.

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Cover photo credits (clockwise from top left): Crosstown Concourse, Chad Mellon; Parise Skatepark, Michael Wong; Beyond Walls, Warren Jagger; Sulpur Springs Downtown; Buffalo Bayou Park, Jonnu Singleton

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Preface

In early 2020, as we were in the process of completing this book, COVID-19 arrived here in the United States and was declared a global pandemic. Offices, schools, public venues, and businesses closed as all but essential workers were ordered to shelter at home and practice “social distancing.” As people and places struggled to adapt to practices and policies designed to mitigate the spread of the virus, the uneven spread of the disease and government response to the crisis further illuminated the deepening racial, socioeconomic, and political divides in our country.

Then, the death of George Floyd on May 25 at the hands of Minneapolis police—shortly after the deaths of Breonna Taylor in Louisville and Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia—sparked outrage and large-scale civil protests decrying police brutality and demanding racial justice that spread rapidly across America and the world. Like COVID-19, their deaths brought into stark relief the deep structural inequities in our country resulting from embedded racism.

As we write this in late June, the US death toll from COVID-19 has exceeded 120,000, and the future is uncertain, at least until a reliable vaccine or treatment becomes widely available. Meanwhile, the social and economic consequences of the virus are deepening, and ongoing civil protests are giving rise to urgent demands for radical, structural changes by businesses, nonprofit and public institutions, governments, and individuals to address and end systemic racism in our country.

It has become clear that these events and the upcoming presidential election will have deep and lasting consequences for our society, the built and natural environment, and the practices and processes by which places are made. How will places respond? What can we learn from previous experience and lessons learned that can be applied to current challenges and future efforts?

At the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence, we have the benefit of both being on the front lines of urban development—researching, evaluating, and documenting new, noteworthy projects—as well as having the long view, based on more than 30 years of observation and reflection gleaned from 88 winners over 17 cycles. Each time, the evaluation process reveals issues and themes that resonate with the Selection Committee. While prompted by the submissions, they are not always explicitly identified by the applicants or addressed by projects themselves.

The 2019 discussion focused on the unintended consequences of success. Growing concern about increasing socioeconomic disparity in our cities is challenging long-held assumptions about what constitutes successful urban development. The traditional measures—new construction and investment, increased beauty and vitality, new residents and businesses, growth in income and market values, and increased resiliency in the face of climate change—are no longer adequate, especially if these changes come at the cost of low-income and minority residents, long-standing businesses and institutions, nature-based solutions to climate change, and treasured community identity and values. This discussion, in turn, prompted a more critical look at urban placemaking strategies, including the diversity of the leadership behind the projects and the responsibilities of those who lead, fund, and implement them to ensure that they are inclusive and benefit everyone.

Where do we go from here? We are exploring this ourselves and don’t pretend to have the answers. We encourage you to lean into the question and take advantage of the following case studies and “Lessons Learned” essay. We hope they will inspire you, stimulate more dialogue, and suggest better ways to address the challenges we all face in the decades ahead.

The Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence

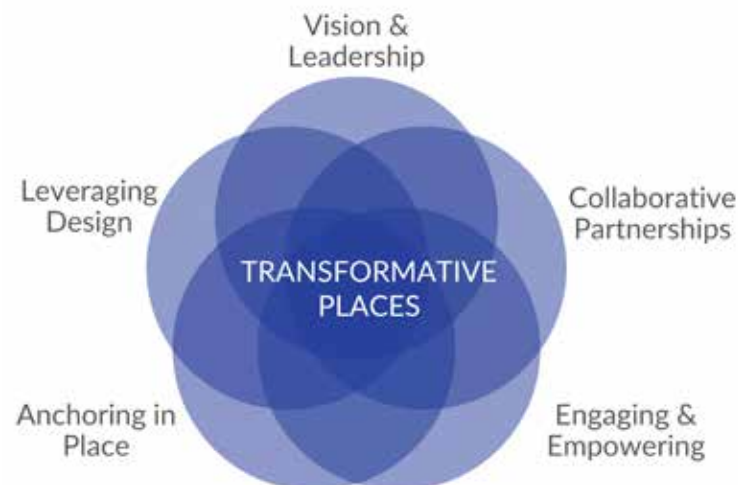
“Each cycle of the RBA prompts
a conversation about urban
excellence in America.”

The 2019 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence: Introduction

OVERVIEW

Every two years, the Rudy Bruner Award (RBA) selection process begins by tasking the Selection Committee with a simple mandate: find “urban excellence.” With a new multidisciplinary Selection Committee and a fresh batch of widely varying and always intriguing applicants, each cycle yields new and interesting results and fresh takes on recurring themes. The process is informed by the experience and perspectives of the committee members; the diversity of the submissions; and the economic, environmental, and social context of the time.

During the process of reviewing and discussing the submissions, committee members engage in lively and thought-provoking conversation about urban development. They establish criteria and priorities, identifying and bringing issues that matter to the group to the forefront while pushing others to the background, challenging each other and their own assumptions in the process. While the goal is to identify five medalists, the robust dialogue that takes place around the table and throughout the selection process is equally important and is one of many aspects that distinguishes the RBA from other design awards.



The RBA invests considerable effort and resources into documenting each award cycle to share what is learned from the process. Over the past 32 years, the RBA has recognized 88 transformative urban places in 28 states across America. The detailed case studies about each winner are published with a “Lessons Learned” essay about each award cycle that synthesizes observations and findings from the selection process. Each cycle of the award thus reflects the unique mix of winners and the economic, social, and political circumstances of their context. Collectively, they offer a valuable insight into urban development in America.

The RBA’s evaluation of winners and lessons learned over more than three decades reveals common attributes that contribute to “urban excellence”: the critical role of leadership and vision, the value of collaborative partnerships, the need to engage community and anchor projects in their own unique place and time, and the importance of leveraging design. These are expressed in different ways and in varying degrees in each winner. There is no single recipe for urban excellence as cities and places are ever changing. That is what makes the exploration and conversation so revealing.



Jose Cotto



The selection process includes a robust discussion of the applicants (top left) and site visits and interviews with the finalists.

THE RBA PROCESS

Each cycle of the RBA prompts a conversation about urban excellence in America. By design, the conversation begins anew every two years with another call for entries, set of submissions, and Selection Committee charged with choosing five winners.

To be eligible, projects must be urban, built (not just a plan or a program), in operation long enough to demonstrate impact, and located within the contiguous United States. The winners are chosen by a six-member Selection Committee newly comprised each cycle to include a mayor and a participant from a prior RBA winner along with other experts in urban design and planning, development and financing, and community engagement.

Applicants submit an extensive application. In addition to providing a brief description along with photographs and other visual materials, applicants must answer a series of questions about the project's underlying goals and values, urban context and impact on its community, development process, financing, how it addresses significant urban issues, and why it merits the award.

Each submission must also include at least four "perspective" forms completed by people involved in or affected by the project, such as the architects and designers, community representatives, professional consultants, and public agencies. Like the applicants, these supporters must answer a series of questions addressing their role, the project's impact, and its broader influence. Submitters must also complete an "award use" form that explains how the cash award will be used to benefit the project (the form remains confidential until the medalists are determined).

The Selection Committee meets twice: once to review and discuss all the applications and select five finalists, and again to determine the gold and silver medalists. Robust discussion is a central part of each convening. Rather than apply a set of predefined criteria, committee members are urged to "find urban excellence" in the projects, drawing upon their review of the submissions, collective experience, and interactive dialogue to select five winners that elevate issues and ideas that matter to urban America.

THE RUDY BRUNER AWARD FOR URBAN EXCELLENCE

Eligibility

Built, urban projects located within the contiguous United States are eligible to apply.

Selection Committee

A new six-member committee is assembled for each biennial award cycle, including a mayor and a participant from a prior winning project.



\$50,000
Gold Medal Winner



\$10,000
Silver Medal Winners

APPLICATION

The application provides an understanding of the project's design, development, and impact, including:

- Project data, overview, and description.
- Responses to questions addressing goals and impact.
- Perspective forms completed by people involved in the project and community.
- Photographs and other visuals.
- Award use letter (opened after medalists are selected).

SELECTION PROCESS

Winners are determined by the Selection Committee through a three-step selection process:

- Selection Committee reviews and discusses applications and selects five finalists.
- Bruner Foundation team conducts site visits to collect additional information.
- Selection Committee reviews and discusses site visit findings and determines the medalists.

AWARD & CASE STUDIES

The winners and their stories are documented and shared through presentations and publications:

- On-site award presentations that showcase and celebrate the winners.
- Events, presentations, and tours that highlight the stories of the winners and their impact.
- Detailed case studies with lessons learned from the medalists.



“Rather than apply a set of predefined criteria, committee members are urged to find urban excellence in the projects.”

At the first meeting, committee members discuss each application, gradually narrowing the pool of candidates. Throughout this iterative process, they share observations, exchange opinions, advocate, and debate until they reach consensus on the final five. The committee then articulates why each was selected and identifies questions and concerns that merit more investigation.

Next, a team from the Bruner Foundation visits each finalist, spending two to three days making observations, taking photographs, and interviewing people involved in or touched by the project. The team conducts additional research using secondary sources such as plans, reports, news articles, and phone interviews. All of the findings are documented in a written report and presented to the committee at the second meeting. One gold medal and four silver medals are then awarded, with the gold medalist receiving a \$50,000 cash prize and each silver medalist receiving \$10,000. Once the medalists are determined, the Selection Committee is asked to comment on each project and to identify issues and themes that emerged from their evaluation and discussion of the pool of applicants and the winners.

The Bruner Foundation works with the winners to plan events that celebrate the medalists. Public programming such as tours and panel discussions provide opportunities to highlight the stories of the winners and their impact in the community and spur dialogue about future planning and development.

After the awards are presented, the team’s research, including additional follow-up to address any questions raised during the second meeting, and highlights from the Selection Committee discussions are integrated into detailed case studies and a lessons learned essay that are published on the RBA website and in book form.



Joe Corto



Winners are celebrated with events (above) and documented with case studies that include observations from the Selection Committee discussions (left).

THE 2019 RUDY BRUNER AWARD

The 2019 Selection Committee reviewed 61 applications from 24 states and 44 urban areas. Projects ranged from small-scale, low-cost, do-it-yourself and temporary interventions to large-scale mixed-use developments, with budgets from as little as \$200,000 to as much as \$650 million. They included art installations, housing, infrastructure, mixed-use developments, libraries and museums, parks and civic spaces, and urban agriculture.

Not surprisingly, many of the submissions addressed familiar concerns in 2019: adapting to climate change, expanding affordable and supportive housing, investing in public spaces and outdoor amenities, leveraging arts and culture through creative placemaking, preserving and repurposing historic structures, providing access to healthy food, reimagining and improving existing infrastructure, and regenerating communities. Equity, diversity, and inclusion were prominent considerations. Applicants sought to address the past failures of urban renewal, the legacy of discrimination and disinvestment due to racism and redlining, immigration and US/Mexico border relations, and access to affordable housing, economic opportunity, and social services.

For the committee, “design excellence” was about more than aesthetics. In their determination of the medalists, they considered the impact of the award on each project and its immediate community as well as the message its selection would send to a broader national audience. The Selection Committee sought projects with compelling stories that “changed the narrative” about urban design by challenging assumptions and rules and changing perceptions and attitudes about people and places. They were interested in solutions that elevated important issues and could help other cities across America—issues including climate change; obsolete and underutilized infrastructure; changes in manufacturing and retailing practices; increased interest in arts, culture, and outdoor amenities; and growing socioeconomic disparity.

The Selection Committee looked for simple, accessible design strategies that could be adapted and applied by others and would work at different scales. While they looked for imagination, innovation, and inspiration as well as beauty, the committee was equally concerned with authenticity,

practicality, and replicability. Equity was likewise an important consideration. The committee was curious about how each project benefited people and affected quality of life and access to opportunity, not only in the immediate project area but also the city as a whole.

The five projects the committee selected highlight the critical role of infrastructure in cities, echoing the 2017 RBA theme of investing in urban infrastructure. All five 2019 winners entailed reimagining and repurposing existing infrastructure—obsolete and underutilized buildings, bridges, and waterways—that form the fabric of our cities. Each project did so in different and creative ways that could be adapted to other settings.

While they praised the 2019 medalists for addressing issues that matter and impacting their communities, the Selection Committee acknowledged that none were perfect. Each had shortcomings or “loose threads” to resolve, especially in terms of engaging people already living and working in the community and being fully representative of its racial diversity, particularly in the sponsoring organization’s leadership. Although each project involved community outreach, they felt that none of them got it quite right. As a result, the committee agreed it was important to suggest specific ways for each medalist to do more as they move forward. These are detailed in the “Selection Committee Discussion” section of each case study.

The Selection Committee’s evaluation of the 2019 medalists also led to a series of broader observations and questions about the evolution of cities and changing definitions and measures of “urban excellence.” In an era of renewed interest and increased investment in urban living and growing concerns about increasing socioeconomic inequity, market change and “economic success” carry additional implications. The committee considered the unintended consequences of success and the responsibility of developers to address diversity, equity, and inclusion in every project, regardless of its focus. They also highlighted the critical need for bold public sector leadership and investment to drive transformative change and ambitious, smart, and just public engagement to ensure that everyone benefits. These observations are described in more detail in the “Lessons Learned” chapter.

Gold Medal

Crosstown Concourse

Memphis, Tennessee

Chad Mellon



Silver Medals

Warren Jagger



Beyond Walls

Lynn, Massachusetts

Jonnu Singleton



Buffalo Bayou Park

Houston, Texas

Michael Wong



Parisite Skatepark

New Orleans, Louisiana



Sulphur Springs Downtown

Sulphur Springs, Texas

SELECTION COMMITTEE

Titles and positions of committee members were effective as of June 2019.



Libby Schaaf
Mayor
City of Oakland
Oakland, California



Carol Coletta
President and CEO
Memphis River Parks Partnership
Memphis, Tennessee



Adrian Benepe
Senior Vice President and Director
of National Programs
The Trust for Public Land
New York, New York



Marc Norman
Associate Professor of Practice
University of Michigan, Taubman School
of Architecture and Urban Planning
Ann Arbor, Michigan



Brenda Breaux
Executive Director
New Orleans Redevelopment Authority
New Orleans, Louisiana



Carol Ross Barney, FAIA
Principal Designer
Ross Barney Architects
Chicago, Illinois

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The 2019 RBA selection process was facilitated by Robert Shibley, who participated in all of the site visits and oversaw—along with RBA Director Anne-Marie Lubenau—development of the site visit reports, winner case studies, “Lessons Learned” essay, and the 2019 publication.

Robert Shibley, FAIA, FAICP, is dean of the School of Architecture and Planning at the University at Buffalo (UB). He founded The Urban Design Project and merged it with the UB Regional Institute, where he developed an award-winning ensemble of urban design and economic development plans for the City of Buffalo and the region.

Anne-Marie Lubenau, FAIA, is the director of the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence at the Bruner Foundation. She has led initiatives, organizations, and projects that engage people in the process of design and increase understanding of the built environment and its impact on our lives.

Jay Farbstein, FAIA, PhD, is an architect by training. He leads a consulting practice in Los Angeles that specializes in helping public sector clients develop and document their requirements for building projects as well as in post-occupancy evaluation.

Danya Sherman is an independent consultant, researcher, and writer based in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Her work includes creating, contributing to, and leading programs in arts, education, and urban development in collaboration with academic, nonprofit, and public-sector clients.

Richard Wener, PhD, is an environmental psychologist and professor emeritus in the Department of Technology, Culture, and Society at the Polytechnic School of Engineering of New York University, where he led the Sustainable Urban Environments program. He has done extensive research on the effects of built environments on individuals and communities.

Elizabeth Chesla, MA, helps individuals and organizations around the globe communicate clearly and effectively in both print and online media. She has over 20 years of experience in writing, editing, and teaching English and professional communication.

ABOUT THE BRUNER FOUNDATION

Established in 1963 by Rudy and Martha Bruner, the Bruner Foundation seeks to inspire meaningful social change. Building collaborative partnerships, leveraging resources, and tackling complex social issues are common threads in the foundation’s 56-year history. The foundation has placed priority on assisting neglected and disenfranchised segments of society and has influenced national policy in health care delivery, Holocaust studies, education, and nonprofit evaluation methodologies and increased understanding of the urban built environment.

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COMPLETE LIST OF MEDALISTS

- 2019** Crosstown Concourse | Memphis, TN
Beyond Walls | Lynn, MA
Buffalo Bayou Park | Houston, TX
Parisite Skatepark | New Orleans, LA
Sulphur Springs Downtown | Sulphur Springs, TX
- 2017** SteelStacks Arts & Cultural Campus | Bethlehem, PA
Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building | Boston, MA
Chicago Riverwalk Phases 2 & 3 | Chicago, IL
Iberville Offsite Rehabs I & II | New Orleans, LA
La Kretz Innovation Campus + Arts District Park | Los Angeles, CA
- 2015** Miller's Court | Baltimore, MD
Falls Park on the Reedy | Greenville, SC
Grand Rapids Downtown Market | Grand Rapids, MI
Quixote Village | Olympia, WA
Uptown District | Cleveland, OH
- 2013** Inspiration Kitchens—Garfield Park | Chicago, IL
Congo Street Initiative | Dallas, TX
Louisville Waterfront Park | Louisville, KY
The Steel Yard | Providence, RI
Via Verde—The Green Way | Bronx, NY
- 2011** The Bridge Homeless Assistance Center | Dallas, TX
Brooklyn Bridge Park | Brooklyn, NY
Civic Space Park | Phoenix, AZ
Gary Comer Youth Center & College Prep | Chicago, IL
The Santa Fe Railyard Redevelopment | Santa Fe, NM
- 2009** Inner-City Arts | Los Angeles, CA
Hunts Point Riverside Park | Bronx, NY
Millennium Park | Chicago, IL
St. Joseph Rebuild | New Orleans, LA
The Community Chalkboard & Podium | Charlottesville, VA
- 2007** Children's Museum of Pittsburgh | Pittsburgh, PA
Artists for Humanity Epicenter | Boston, MA
Crossroads Project & Marsupial Bridge | Milwaukee, WI
High Point Redevelopment Project | Seattle, WA
LA Design Center | Los Angeles, CA
Columbus Circle Public Plaza | New York, NY
- 2005** Portland Streetcar Project | Portland, OR
Lower Town Artist Relocation Program | Paducah, KY
Heidelberg Project | Detroit, MI
Fruitvale Village | Oakland, CA
Downtown Silver Spring | Silver Spring, MD
- 2003** Camino Nuevo Charter Academy | Los Angeles, CA
Bridgemarket | New York, NY
Colorado Court | Santa Monica, CA
Red Hook Community Justice Center | Brooklyn, NY
Providence River Relocation | Providence, RI
- 2001** Village of Arts & Humanities | Philadelphia, PA
Swan's Market Place | Oakland, CA
South Platte River Greenway | Denver, CO
New Jersey Performing Arts Center | Newark, NJ
Lower East Side Tenement Museum | New York, NY
- 1999** Yerba Buena Gardens | San Francisco, CA
ARTScorps LA | Los Angeles, CA
National AIDS Memorial Grove | San Francisco, CA
Parkside Preservation | Philadelphia, PA
Portland Public Market | Portland, ME
- 1997** The Times Square | New York, NY
Cleveland Historic Warehouse District | Cleveland, OH
Project Row Houses | Houston, TX
Center in the Square | Roanoke, VA
Hismen Hin-Nu | Oakland, CA
- 1995** Maya Angelou Community Initiative | Portland, OR
Campus Circle | Milwaukee, WI
Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative | Boston, MA
Greenpoint Manufacturing & Design Center | Brooklyn, NY
Harlem Meer | New York City, NY
Lowertown | Saint Paul, MN
- 1993** Harbor Point | Boston, MA
New Community Corporation | Newark, NJ
Betts-Longworth Historic District | Cincinnati, OH
Beyond Homelessness | San Francisco, CA
The Park at Post Office Square | Boston, MA
- 1991** Greenmarket | New York, NY
Brooklyn-Queens Greenway | Brooklyn/Queens, NY
Ocean Drive Improvement Project | Miami Beach, FL
Roslindale Village Main Street | Boston, MA
West Clinton Action Plan | Portland, OR
- 1989** Tenant Interim Lease Program | New York, NY
Portland Downtown Plan | Portland, OR
Southwest Corridor Project | Boston, MA
Stowe Recreation Path | Stowe, VT
Radial Reuse Project | Lincoln, NE
Cabrillo Village | Saticoy, CA
- 1987** Pike Place Market | Seattle, WA
Casa Rita | South Bronx, NY
Quality Hill | Kansas City, MO
Fairmount Health Center | Philadelphia, PA
St. Francis Square | San Francisco, CA



Since 1987, the RBA has recognized 88 transformative projects for their contributions to the economic, environmental, and social vitality of American cities.

“The Selection Committee gravitated towards projects that ‘changed the narrative,’ challenging assumptions and changing attitudes and perceptions about people, places, and urban development.”

Lessons Learned

CHANGING THE NARRATIVE: THE 2019 RUDY BRUNER AWARD FOR URBAN EXCELLENCE

Each cycle of the RBA encompasses substantial discussion about urban development and what we mean by “urban excellence.” “Lessons Learned” essays like this one synthesize observations gleaned from Selection Committee deliberations and draw upon research and secondary sources (including websites, news articles, and project documents) used to determine the winners and develop the case studies. Additional insights come from the numerous conversations and observations that took place during the site visits and case study process. These essays are intended to provide critical reflection and insight into the complex process of creating excellent urban places, pique curiosity, and inspire further discussion and exploration.

As with past cycles, the observations and lessons learned from this year’s winners are both unique and timeless. They reflect our perception of and responses to critical urban issues and challenges within the socioeconomic



Skateboarding youth led a do-it-yourself effort to create Parisite Skatepark in New Orleans (above). In Memphis, an abandoned warehouse was transformed into Crosstown Concourse, an inclusive, vertical, mixed-use village (next page).

and political context of America in 2019. They also inform our understanding of the evolution of cities and the impact of place-based planning and development over time.

This round in particular prompted consideration of how approaches to addressing these issues and our critique of them have evolved. Renewed interest and investment in cities over the past decade have precipitated unprecedented development and rapid market change in many urban centers. This, in turn, has sparked concern about the unintended consequences of success and the negative impact on populations most at risk, such as low-income and minority residents. Fears of gentrification, displacement, and growing socioeconomic disparity—while not new—are prompting a more critical look at urban development and place-making strategies, including the roles and responsibilities of developers, funders, and government entities.



Not surprisingly, the 2019 medalists share attributes with other RBA winners over the past 32 years: the critical role of vision and leadership, the value of collaborative partnerships, the benefits of engaging and empowering communities affected by the projects, the need to anchor projects in their distinctive culture and place, and the transformative power of design. These elements have enabled the people behind the projects to tackle tough urban challenges, overcome seemingly insurmountable hurdles, and create positive change in their communities.

“Changing the Narrative”

Over the course of the 2019 RBA selection process, the committee gravitated towards projects that “changed the narrative,” challenging assumptions and changing attitudes and perceptions about people, places, and urban development. The committee agreed that urban excellence is “more than a beauty contest” and the physical design of a place. They paid particular attention to the issues that each applicant addressed and the social impact on people both within and beyond the physical footprint of the project. They selected projects that address and elevate long-term challenges faced by cities of all types and sizes across America—large and small, on the coasts, in the heartland, and in major metropolitan areas as well as rural districts. While remarkably diverse in type and scale, each of the five medalists offers a rich, compelling story that resonated with the committee, illustrating how thoughtful design and place-based development can change the narrative of a community.

The five 2019 medalists all addressed critical issues of our time that matter to cities across America, including climate change; obsolete and under-utilized infrastructure; economic and social changes affecting urban centers, including shifts in manufacturing and retailing; increased demand for arts, culture, and outdoor amenities; and growing socioeconomic disparity. In the process, they turned deficits into assets, reimagining and repurposing outmoded, underutilized infrastructure—an abandoned retail distribution center, neglected highway and railroad underpasses, an overgrown waterway, and a declining town square bypassed and overshadowed by interstate development. They did so by employing scrappy and unusual approaches that challenged conventions and “danced with the

rules,” illustrating that innovation is happening in unexpected places and in unexpected ways.

Changing Attitudes, Expectations, and Perceptions About People and Places

Each of the winning projects created a “narrative shift”—a change in the perception of the community about what is possible as well as a change in how those from outside the community perceive the city and its residents. This includes the capacity and confidence residents and civic leaders feel and the positive results that they have experienced. There is, in this, a restoration of or a new-found pride that these residents feel for their cities.

Unlike the 2017 RBA cycle, the majority of the 2019 medalists were not spearheaded by government or public-sector entities. All but one, Sulphur Springs Downtown, were initiated by individuals and organizations outside of the public sector and accomplished with minimal government support. Even Sulphur Springs Downtown, which was government-led, was accomplished largely through the dogged efforts of one individual, whom the Selection Committee praised as an “entrepreneurial bureaucrat.” The not-for-profit sector made four of the five projects a success, and in so doing challenged perceptions about who can bring about the urban transformations citizens want and need. For example, after what the skateboarders accomplished with Parisis Skatepark, New Orleans will not likely discount what a passionate group of young residents can do. Similarly, Houston is now likely to have an expanded definition of what might be possible after the success of the park system managed by Buffalo Bayou Partnership.

- **Crosstown Concourse** in Memphis was initiated through an unlikely partnership between an art history professor, an artist, and a businessman. Together with local development experts and nonprofit partners, they crafted and implemented an ambitious vision to redevelop an enormous former Sears warehouse and distribution center into a mixed-use, vertical urban village. Rather than take the more common path of redeveloping the building for commercial mixed-use, they sought to create an inclusive community infused with arts, education, and wellness tenants and resources. They enlisted long-term commitments

Warren Jagger



Beyond Walls' lighting and public art installations have changed perceptions of Lynn, Massachusetts.

David Lloyd



In Houston, a historic waterway was reengineered as part of Buffalo Bayou Park, a resilient landscape and public amenity.

from eight socially-minded founding tenants, which enabled them to secure private financing for the venture. City and county agencies contributed approximately 10% of the \$210 million project budget.

- **Beyond Walls** in Lynn was the vision of Al Wilson, who started the initiative as a volunteer effort to reactivate downtown Lynn through public art and lighting installations. Wilson nimbly navigated and leveraged local connections to gain support from community leaders. He organized events that generated significant media attention and secured substantial in-kind and cash contributions from local individuals, businesses, and foundations. More than 90% of total project funding came from local private sources.
- **Buffalo Bayou Park** in Houston was catalyzed by Rich and Nancy Kinder, a husband and wife pair of local philanthropists who made a \$30 million gift to significantly expand and enhance an existing city park along the bayou in the heart of downtown. They charged Buffalo Bayou Partnership, a nonprofit, with the responsibility of designing, implementing, and maintaining the park. The partnership raised an additional \$25 million of the \$75 million total costs from private sources and secured a critical, long-term agreement with the city to fund its maintenance.
- **Parasite Skatepark** in New Orleans began as a volunteer, do-it-yourself effort by skateboarding youth who claimed vacant land along a railroad and built a skatepark. When the property owner demolished the park, the skaters partnered with faculty and students at Tulane University's Albert and Tina Small Center for Collaborative Design to craft a replacement park that they built on city-owned land. Construction was funded entirely with private donations and in-kind labor, and the park is maintained by volunteers.
- **Sulphur Springs Downtown** in northeast Texas, while government initiated and publicly funded, was made possible through the persistent efforts of one individual, Marc Maxwell, the city manager. At the behest of the city council, he sought out professional expertise to develop a

plan to revitalize the city's downtown center. Through online research, he found livable streets engineer Ian Lockwood who, through a series of short, intense workshops with local leaders, developed a 100-year vision for the redevelopment of the city's civic plaza and main streets. The majority (87%) of the construction was paid for with municipal funding and bonds.

Innovation Is Happening in Unexpected Places

Unlike the majority of RBA cycles, 2019 did not include any winners in large East and West Coast cities (such as New York, San Francisco, or Seattle), and all but one (Beyond Walls in Lynn, Massachusetts) are in the South. Even so, the cities where the five 2019 medalists are located are quite diverse, ranging from a small, rural city in northeast Texas to the fourth largest city in the United States.

- **Sulphur Springs, Texas** (population 16,000): A small city midway between Dallas and Texarkana, Sulphur Springs, like many small and rural communities in America, saw its once-vibrant downtown slowly decline to over 80% vacancy as businesses relocated to outlying sites along bypasses and the interstate. The revitalization of its downtown has infused the city with new life, attracting visitors from the region and beyond and interest from civic leaders of other small cities in Texas looking to renew their urban centers. Once derogatorily referred to by locals as "Suffering Springs," Sulphur Springs is now known as "Celebration City."
- **Lynn, Massachusetts** (population 94,000): A colonial-era, former industrial city once known as the "shoemaking capital of the world" and a longtime gateway for immigrants, Lynn has struggled to regain its economic footing and improve its image and downtown after the loss of much of its manufacturing industry. Beyond Walls' murals, lighting installations, and events have generated widespread interest, drawing long-term residents and visitors alike to downtown. The project also attracted support from leading arts and culture funders interested in building capacity, developing models, and increasing expertise to assist area organizations with public art initiatives. Now, thanks to Beyond Walls, this new attention is changing perceptions, and the place once



At Parisite Skatepark, a small-scale rain garden provides a model for managing stormwater.



New pedestrian-oriented infrastructure in Sulphur Springs Downtown revitalized the center of a small Texas city.

referred to as “Lynn, Lynn, City of Sin” is increasingly associated with art and creativity.

- **New Orleans** (population 393,000): After losing half its population in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the city has had limited public resources to meet community needs—especially investments in parks and recreational amenities in its poorest neighborhoods—and to respond to growing impact from climate change. In the absence of public leadership and resources, skateboarding youth partnered with a local university to develop a skatepark on city land. The skatepark, the first in the city, provides a much-needed amenity in a low-income, predominately Black community and helps to counter the negative perception of skateboarders. The park’s design incorporates a rain garden offering a small-scale, adaptable model for managing storm-water in a city on the front lines of climate change. The collaborative partnership with Tulane University offers an example of how universities can extend their resources to communities while offering valuable learning and personal and professional development opportunities for students and faculty.
- **Memphis** (population 650,000): Like many other mid-sized urban centers, this Mississippi River town is positioning itself to compete with other metropolitan areas for new investment and development. It is doing so by capitalizing on its multicultural creative identity while struggling with the legacy of racial and socioeconomic segregation and disparity and the highest rate of poverty in the nation. Crosstown Concourse illustrates how very large and abandoned facilities that become liabilities—in this case, a retail warehouse and distribution center—can be adapted to new uses and become community assets once again. Its very success challenges traditional assumptions about mixed-use development and what combination of uses, building designs, and financing strategies will or will not work. Art, education, health care, housing, office, and retail space all coexist within an open, inclusive, vertical community. The building has garnered national interest, becoming both a regional attraction and a local site for community gathering, drawing a broad mix of people of different ages, races, and socioeconomic classes.

- **Houston** (population 2.3 million): One of the 10 fastest growing cities in the country, the Bayou City is wrestling with the combined impact of climate change and decades of unchecked suburban sprawl, as evidenced by five 500-year flood events in as many years, including catastrophic flooding during Hurricane Harvey in 2018. Buffalo Bayou Park’s innovation was to make a historic flood control project a place of very public recreation that also aspires to mediate ever-more-serious future flood events. The park helped to increase awareness about the value of planning and investment in public amenities in a city known for its lack of zoning and urban sprawl.

Turning Deficits into Assets

As the Selection Committee observed, all of the projects faced challenges familiar to many communities across America: the impact of climate change, obsolete and underutilized infrastructure, loss of manufacturing and changes in retailing affecting traditional urban centers, increased demand for recreational amenities, and growing concerns about equity. The five winners offer powerful examples of innovative approaches to addressing these issues that can be applied regionally and nationally.

- **Abandoned manufacturing and retail centers and warehouses** are present in many cities, large and small, across the country. Like former steel mills in postindustrial cities and empty grain elevators across the Midwest, these structures that were once important sources of economic success and community pride have instead become looming symbols of loss. Crosstown Concourse reimaged and repurposed a former Sears regional distribution and retail center into a new community commons.
- **Elevated highway and rail infrastructure** crisscross many cities, resulting in underutilized spaces and dark underpasses that bisect and separate communities. Beyond Walls and Paristite Skatepark illustrate ways to rethink the unintended consequences of transportation arteries by making better use of the spaces beneath underpasses, transforming them into more appealing places with public art, light, and activity.

- **Outmoded flood control infrastructure** in our cities dating from the previous century is failing to keep up with the demands of the increasing levels and intensity of rainfall and runoff associated with climate change and unchecked development. Buffalo Bayou Park demonstrates how an existing waterway can be re-engineered to carry 30% more water while restoring natural ecology and enhancing the urban landscape. New bridges, trails, and amenities promote outdoor recreation, connect neighborhoods with downtown, and contribute to the public realm of the city.
- **Fading urban centers** in many small cities and towns are the byproducts of businesses moving to newly developed areas on the outskirts, often along highways and bypasses. The exodus from these traditional business districts is often exacerbated by the creation of surface parking lots and the conversion of two-way streets to one-way pairs to facilitate the movement of cars and trucks through and around downtown. The City of Sulphur Springs reclaimed its historic square and civic center by transforming a surface parking lot at its heart into a landscaped public plaza surrounded by pedestrian-oriented streets restored to two-way movement with traffic-calming measures. The shift of service and retail to the outskirts of the city along the bypasses became an opportunity for an entertainment, restaurant, and boutique retail strategy to blossom downtown, a strategy that is reinforced with year-round event programming. In Lynn, Beyond Walls used public art, lighting installations, and mural festivals to beautify and activate downtown and draw people back to the city.

Practical, Replicable Design Approaches

The 2019 award winners, working with modest budgets, all prioritized design as an essential part of their approach to excellence. While none of the projects were seen as perfect nor particularly innovative exemplars of design, each is a compelling, authentic response to the unique, functional needs of its program and aspirations of its community. Together they illustrate how simple, familiar design strategies and processes can be employed and adapted to work effectively at different scales and in different settings.

- **The application of livable streets principles and measures**, such as “road diets” (reducing the number and/or width of traffic lanes), traffic calming, and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes to create safe and inviting urban environments. These, in turn, can help attract people and businesses and renew and strengthen urban centers like Sulphur Springs Downtown.
- **The creation of resilient landscapes** to help cities address the growing impact of climate change. Stormwater management can be engineered in a variety of ways, ranging from the small-scale rain garden at Parisite Skatepark to the more ambitious creation of a space “designed to flood” at Buffalo Bayou Park, which incorporates multiple stormwater management methods, including fluvial geomorphology engineering to understand the movement of water and inform the design and installation of silt benches that ease cleanup after major storm events.
- **The installation of relatively inexpensive public art**—such as lighting and murals—to enliven infrastructure and blank walls of buildings to add beauty, increase the sense of safety, and attract new interest. Beyond Walls, like Parisite Skatepark, literally makes previously overlooked building walls and underpasses opportunistic sites of art, light, and programming. Crosstown Concourse makes use of artwork and salvaged artifacts from Sears Crosstown to animate building lobbies and corridors and connect present occupants with its past.
- **The thoughtful organization of uses and creation of spaces**, inside and out, to connect and cultivate community. At Crosstown Concourse, the arrangement of building uses and programming and approach to vertical circulation, including the careful insertion and design of three new atria, increase the legibility of wayfinding and connections among and between building tenants and the surrounding community. At Buffalo Bayou Park, the creation of a variety of linear activity zones along the waterside trails offers different opportunities for outdoor recreation and interaction, and new pedestrian bridges link people and communities across the bayou.



The renewal of Sulphur Springs Downtown is inspiring other small cities in rural America.



Students collaborated with skaters and members of the community to design and build Parise Skatepark.

- **The engagement of residents and property owners** in development by hosting events and offering incentives to encourage participation and private investment. A partnership with the Albert and Tina Small Center at Tulane University enabled Transitional Spaces to engage local skateboarding youth and architecture students in the design and construction of Parise Skatepark. Before construction started at Crosstown Concourse, the developers hosted onsite events with artists and the community to ignite interest and draw people across the city to the building and neighborhood. In Lynn, Beyond Walls negotiated agreements with downtown property owners to use blank building walls as canvases for large murals and vintage neon signs and hosted annual mural festivals that drew thousands to the city. They secured permission from the local transit authority to install colorful lighting to illuminate dark underpasses. In Sulphur Springs, the city offered matching grants to building owners to promote private investment in façade renovations on buildings facing key streets, further leveraging streetscape improvements to enhance downtown.

Addressing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion and the Unintended Consequences of Success

The 2019 winners also offer ways to employ design in the service of equity, diversity, and inclusion. The techniques vary in response to the unique set of circumstances presented by each project—its vision and goals, available resources (expertise, time, and funding) and capacity, and the broader socioeconomic context.

Crosstown Concourse achieves this through its very intentional mix of tenants and programs that attract a diverse socioeconomic mix of people and thoughtful building design that encourages interaction and a sense of community. Parise Skatepark addresses the needs of a very specific underserved community of skateboarding youth throughout New Orleans while offering its immediate neighbors a gathering space. Buffalo Bayou Park and Sulphur Springs Downtown were conceived as public amenities that are free and open to all. Beyond Walls introduces beauty into a gateway community that suffered from disinvestment and decline.

Cities that have experienced a steady loss of viability have seen property values decrease over time, often over a period of decades, resulting in a shrinking tax base necessary to fund public services. The municipalities that govern such cities and their business communities aspire to stop the downward turn and restore a healthy market by attracting new development that increases property values and tax revenues. The problem so many of them face is that each effort to improve a place makes those least able to afford to live there more vulnerable to displacement. As a result, the level of concern about the potential for gentrification and displacement invite a skeptical view of “market change” by those at risk and their advocates. What was once thought of as a measure of success in urban development has become increasingly problematic. This concern factored into conversations about Beyond Walls, as pressure from the strong real estate market in neighboring Boston causes for-profit developers to look more closely at Lynn.

There are increasing expectations among those concerned about displacement for developers, funders, and private sector participants in urban development to do more to guard against gentrification and displacement and protect the most vulnerable populations. This requires programs and policies that will mitigate displacement and encourage the engagement of those affected by development. Measures of success will require both positive market change and protections for those at risk.

Who's Driving Vision and Investment?

Creating great outcomes from urban development and ensuring that everyone—especially those most at risk—benefits requires leadership from many sources. In this cycle of the RBA, the Selection Committee noted that four of the five projects succeeded with strong leadership and investments from the private sector. This observation stands in contrast to the 2017 award winners, which tended to highlight leadership and investment in urban infrastructure from the public sector. Much of the private-sector involvement was philanthropy driven, often through nonprofit organizations. This was true for all but Sulphur Springs Downtown.

Additionally, assessment of all of the winners elicited some reservations about elite white leadership driving development and controlling much of the



Beyond Walls mural festivals and tours draw residents and visitors to downtown Lynn.



Onsite programming has been a critical part of building community at Crosstown Concourse.

processes (financial, political, philanthropic, and professional). Even though the projects achieved a level of racial diversity in participation in the final product, they did so without fully engaging, enabling, and protecting the communities they sought to serve. Curated inclusion is not enough. Truly equitable development must enable those in the community to not only be at the table, but to also lead the process.

The core leadership that made each of the winning projects possible were primarily white and mostly male. Importantly, these organizations acknowledged the need for diversity and inclusion and made efforts to deliver services and build teams to achieve it, even as a largely non-diverse leadership team made the final decisions. This stands in direct conflict with a fundamental principle of engagement that argues that the people most affected by decisions should have the most influence in such decision making. In virtually all of these cases, there was no clarity as to how leadership and decision making would evolve and cede leadership to those most affected by the project, either through capacity building or through the identification of those already in the community with the capacity and passion to lead.

One of the fundamental issues raised by this cycle is how to make projects like the 2019 award winners broader catalysts for change within and beyond the scope of their current efforts—projects that enable a fully democratic practice of placemaking and address broader social issues and their implications, including the unintended socioeconomic consequences of their success. Who is responsible for such approaches to projects, and how are they best held accountable? How can we take what we've learned from these observations and lessons learned and develop a more robust approach to truly equitable engagement?

A Call to Action

The readers of these case histories may wish to consider the need for audacious public sector leadership and investment to complement the private sector leadership that may be available in their communities. Working with multiple streams of leadership and funding will enable still more ambitious and visionary work as well as increase the opportunity for more just and equitable public engagement and consequences.

“The five winners have changed the rules of standard practice and elevated issues that matter, addressing ongoing and long-term challenges faced by cities across America.”

The five winners have changed the rules of standard practice and elevated issues that matter, addressing ongoing and long-term challenges faced by cities across America. All of them involve rich stories and meaningful successes. Many of these efforts were initiated by “bootstrapping” grassroots engagement by the community and economic development that turned deficits into assets with profound impacts on their communities, both within and beyond the physical footprint of the project.

The 2019 medalists have highlighted the need for multipronged, collaborative, public/private approaches to address equity and serve the underserved. They speak to the desire for more inclusive and equitable development, and they have triggered questions about the roles and responsibilities of developers, funders, and local, state, and federal governments to address those questions and create programs and policies to level the playing field.

These same medalists are changing the narrative about urban design excellence as they bring innovation to unexpected places. They make manifest many ways to turn distressed urban infrastructure into significant community assets even as they raise good questions about how we might assure such projects are not just used by but are actually led by the public they serve. Finally, these award winners and all of those recognized through the RBA process since 1987 challenge our thinking about how we define excellence in our projects and learn from precedents in other places.

Case Studies



RUDY
BRUNER
AWARD
FOR URBAN EXCELLENCE

**2019
GOLD
MEDALIST**



Crosstown Concourse

Memphis, Tennessee

Rehabilitation of an abandoned Sears, Roebuck and Co.
distribution center into a vertical mixed-use village



Chad Melton

Overview

Submitted by: Crosstown Arts

Completed: 2017

Total Development Cost: \$210 million

Once home to Memphis, Tennessee's leading employer, the 1.5-million-square-foot Sears, Roebuck and Co. warehouse was abandoned in 1993 and stood vacant for more than 20 years, despite being one of the city's largest structures. Reopened in 2017 as Crosstown Concourse, the 16-acre complex is now a vibrant community anchor that goes "beyond mixed use" and includes housing, commercial and nonprofit offices, restaurants, and retail, as well as arts and culture, health and wellness, and educational tenants. The biggest adaptive reuse initiative in Tennessee and the largest LEED Platinum Certified historic adaptive reuse project in the world, the \$210 million complex was nearly a decade in the making.

In 2010, Todd Richardson, an art history professor at the University of Memphis, and Christopher Miner, a video artist, founded Crosstown Arts, a nonprofit arts organization, to create a plan for the building's redevelopment that would cultivate Memphis' creative community through "an open and inclusive place designed to dissolve barriers to access." Over the next three years, guided by a philosophy of "better together," Richardson and Miner engaged development partners in the community to explore the feasibility

“Crosstown Concourse is simultaneously bold and sensible, reinventing an outmoded retail warehouse into a community asset that addresses basic needs and common urban problems.”

— 2019 Selection Committee

of their plan and enlisted eight other organizations as founding tenants. The City of Memphis, Shelby County, and financing from federal Historic and New Market Tax Credits provided additional support for the project’s realization.

Designed by Memphis-based architects Looney Ricks Kiss and the Vancouver-based firm Dialog, in association with the Richmond-based Spatial Affairs Bureau, the award-winning restoration/renovation maintains the historic building’s rugged industrial character while introducing contemporary features and uses. Now home to 48 diverse tenants including Crosstown High, Memphis Teacher Residency, Church Health, and Global Café, the project also includes 265 apartments housing over 500 residents.

“On a massive project like this, there are more red lights than green ones,” said former Memphis Mayor A. C. Wharton Jr. “This is why Sears Crosstown is not only ‘Exhibit A’ for rebuilding the core of our city, but also a model for how to creatively overcome the obstacles to it.”



Crosstown Concourse transformed an abandoned 1.5 million-square-foot former Sears, Roebuck and Co. warehouse into an inclusive, vertical mixed-use village.



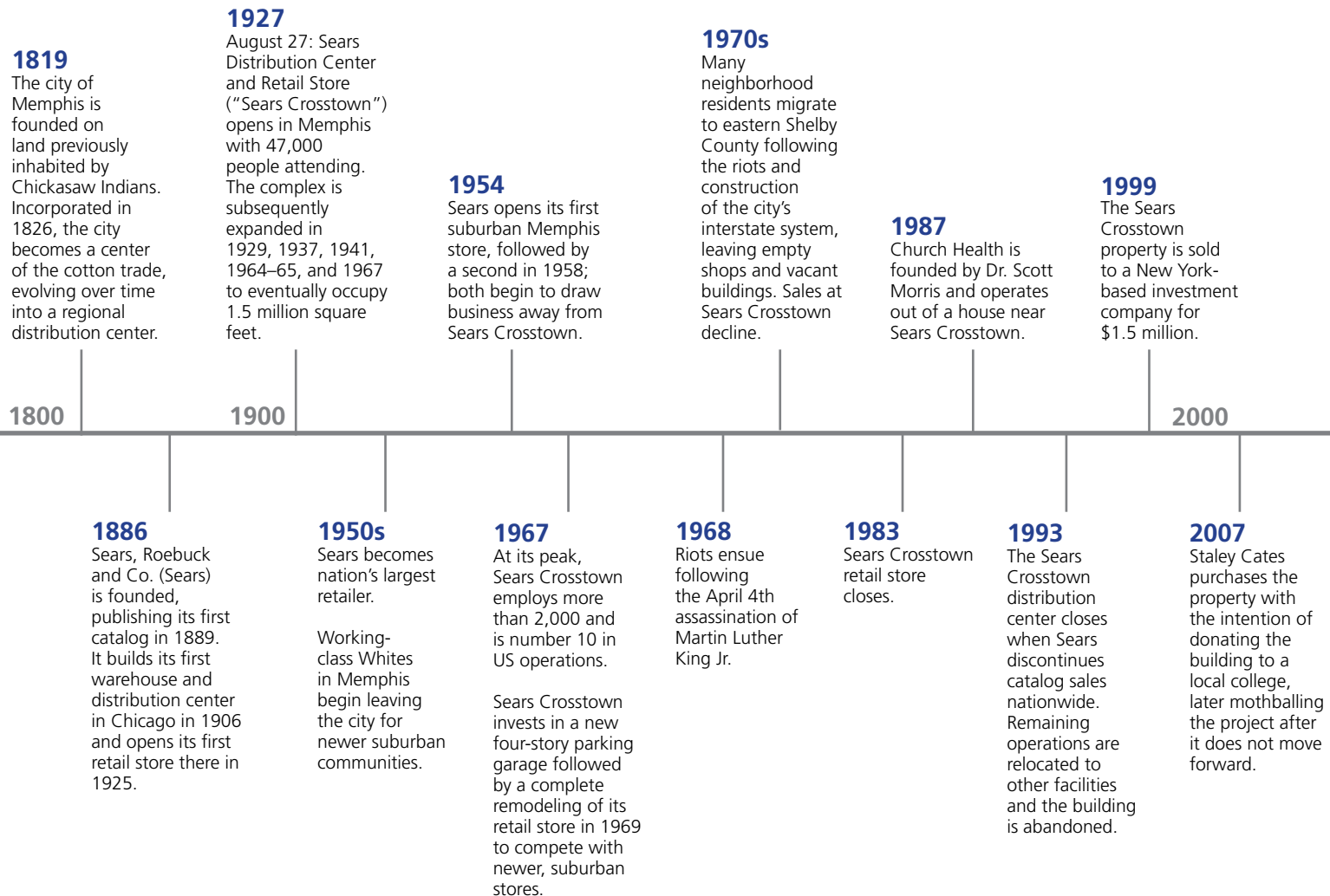
Project at a Glance

- Redevelopment of a vacant, historic 1.5-million-square-foot former Sears, Roebuck and Co. distribution center and retail store into a mixed-use “vertical village.”
- A new community anchor that integrates arts venues, commercial and nonprofit offices, health and wellness facilities, a high school, restaurants and retail, and 265 apartments housing over 500 residents.
- An inclusive development that builds upon the creativity of Memphis by using arts as a catalyst for community engagement and building civic pride.
- A \$210 million collaborative development financed in part through commitments from eight founding partner organizations in the arts, education, and health care that lease nearly 50% of the building and help govern its operations.

Project Goals

- Create an open, inclusive, and animated place designed to dissolve barriers to access and serve Memphians of every socioeconomic status.
- Promote openness, connection, learning, and exchange by offering regular programming that encourages spontaneity, cultivates curiosity, and inspires imagination.
- Recognize, embrace, and amplify the iconic industrial character and Art Deco style of Sears Crosstown and its historical context.
- Establish a flexible and adaptable vertical “micro-city” within the building by incorporating key components of “urban magnets” including retail, education, production, programming and events, and a unique sense of place.
- Merge the development with its surrounding neighborhood to allow a seamless connection between the activities within and around the building.

Chronology



2010

Richardson and Miner found Crosstown Arts as a nonprofit and begin hosting arts-focused events to generate interest in the property and its redevelopment.

Richardson, Miner, and Cates engage a team of design, development, and communications experts including Bologna Consultants and Spatial Affairs Bureau to study the feasibility of developing Sears Crosstown and complete a concept design.

2011

September: McLean Wilson from Kemmons Wilson Co. joins the Crosstown team, contributing additional development expertise.

October: Church Health agrees to consolidate its operations into a 150,000-square-foot space in the building, becoming a founding tenant along with Crosstown Arts and Memphis Teacher Residency.

2013

October: Downtown Memphis Commission approves a 20-year PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) for Crosstown Concourse.

December: Sears Crosstown is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Memphis City Council approves \$15 million in funding for public infrastructure upgrades at Crosstown Concourse.

2015

February: Construction begins.

July: After a charter school management organization committed to starting a new public high school in the building pulls out of the development, Ginger Spickler spearheads the creation of Crosstown High.

2018

Crosstown Brewing Company opens in a new building on the property in February. Crosstown High welcomes its first class of 150 ninth graders in August, and the 420-seat black box Crosstown Theater opens in October.

2009

Cates, Todd Richardson, and Christopher Miner connect over a shared interest in reactivating the Sears Crosstown property with a focus on arts and music as catalysts for community development.

2012

August: Nine founding partner organizations commit to leasing a total of over 400,000 square feet.

Crosstown Arts, Kemmons Wilson Co., and Bologna Consultants partner to redevelop Sears Crosstown. Memphis-based Looney Ricks Kiss and Vancouver-based Dialog are hired as the architectural team and Grinder Taber Grinder as the general contractor.

October: Crosstown Arts moves into storefront space on North Cleveland Street, across from Sears Crosstown, to incubate components of a contemporary arts center.

December: A full-time community relations coordinator is hired to more intentionally engage residents from the surrounding neighborhoods.

2014

April: Shelby County Commission approves \$5 million in funding for additional public infrastructure upgrades at Crosstown Concourse.

December 30: Development financing, including 30 sources of funding, closes hours before the December 31 deadline.

2017

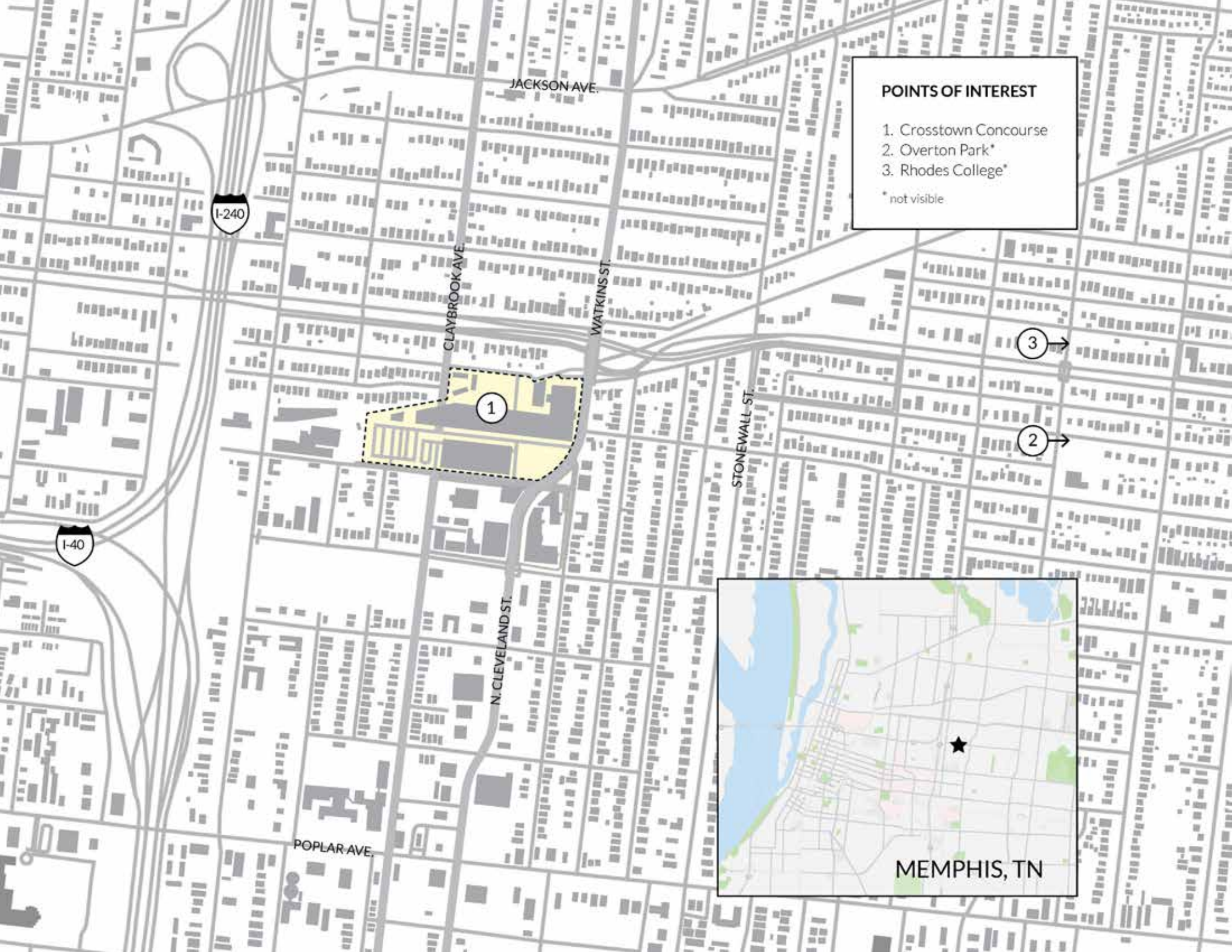
April: The development team hosts a Sears Crosstown former employee reunion at the building.

August 19: Crosstown Concourse celebrates its grand opening, 90 years to the day after the original 1927 grand opening, with the majority of the building leased.

December: The complex is certified LEED Platinum for building design and construction.

2019

The Crosstown High gymnasium opens in March, followed by the Church Health YMCA outdoor swimming pool in August.



POINTS OF INTEREST

- 1. Crosstown Concourse
- 2. Overton Park*
- 3. Rhodes College*

* not visible



MEMPHIS, TN

Project Description

INTRODUCTION

Crosstown Concourse is the renovation of a massive 1.5-million-square-foot former Sears, Roebuck and Co. distribution center and retail store into a mixed-use, vertical urban village. Constructed in 1927 and expanded five times over the next four decades, the landmark structure had long been a vital economic and community anchor in the city of Memphis until it was closed and abandoned by the company in 1993.

After sitting empty for nearly 20 years, the historic building was rediscovered by an artist, an art history professor, and a local businessman with a collective vision for creating a community arts center and redeveloped by a local team passionate about Memphis and investing in its unique history and culture. The \$210 million development was made possible in part by commitments from eight community-based founding tenants dedicated to the arts, education, and health care who together leased over 400,000 square feet in the building. Designed to be open and inclusive, the ten-story building integrates arts and culture organizations, a high school, a gym, health clinics, commercial offices, retail and restaurants, and 265 apartments.

Crosstown Concourse attracts over 3,000 people a day and has been a catalyst for new activity and development in Memphis and the surrounding community since its opening. Once a beacon for manufacturing and production, the building now signals renewed interest and investment in the city and its citizens.

CONTEXT

Memphis

Located in southwestern Tennessee in Shelby County near the borders of Arkansas and Mississippi, the city of Memphis was founded in 1819 by General Andrew Jackson on land previously inhabited by Chickasaw Indians on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi River. With ready access to water and rail transportation, the city became a center of trade for the cotton industry. Today Memphis is one of America's largest distribution centers, with the world's second busiest cargo airport along with a major river port, rail freight center, and trucking corridor. It is the birthplace of Piggly-Wiggly, the first self-service grocery store (1916); Holiday Inn (1952); Autozone (1979); and Federal Express (1971), currently the city's largest employer.

Memphis has a rich history of arts, music, and creative collaboration that helps draw 11.5 million visitors each year. Often referred to as the birthplace of blues and rock 'n' roll, the city is home to the Beale Street music district, Elvis Presley's Graceland, and Sam Phillip's Sun Studio, credited with discovering Presley, B.B. King, Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash, and Roy Orbison. This history is celebrated at the Stax Museum of American Soul Music and the Rock 'n' Soul Museum (a Smithsonian affiliate). Notable Memphis natives include photographers William Eggleston (hailed as the "father of color photography") and Dr. Ernest C. Withers as well as writers Shelby Foote and Alan Lightman.

Demographics and Disinvestment

Tennessee's second most populous city, Memphis had a population of 646,889 according to the 2010 census, with a regional metropolitan statistical area population of 1.3 million. The city's population has remained steady in recent years, hovering around 650,000 over the past three decades. Memphis is a majority minority city, with approximately 64% residents Black

Wikimedia Commons



Memphis' rich history of arts and music is celebrated at the Stax Museum of American Soul Music.

or African American, 26% White alone, 7% Hispanic or Latinx, and 3% Asian or two or more races.¹ According to the *New American Economy*, in 2016, there were more than 70,300 immigrants (about 11% of the population) living in Memphis, home to one of 20 World Relief offices in the United States.

Although Memphis has one of the lowest costs of living for a large metropolitan area, the city struggles with poverty and, like many areas in the South, racial and economic segregation. Although the overall poverty rate has decreased since 2016, Memphis was the second poorest metropolitan statistical area with a population of more than a million people in the US in 2018, according to the Memphis Poverty Fact Sheet. Its unemployment rate is double the national average, with non-Hispanic Black unemployment double that of non-Hispanic Whites. The median household income is \$37,072, compared to \$46,102 in Shelby County and \$51,324 nationally. According to the US Census Bureau's 2011 American Community Survey, "the wealthiest, best-educated households live clustered among the best job opportunities east of the city, while the least educated, most impoverished households live near

low-skill, low-wage jobs." The economic and racial disparity has played out in the school system, which remains largely segregated. And although much of the city's distinctive food, music, and culture has been shaped by African Americans, Memphis has been slow to embrace its identity as a hub of African-American talent.

As in many American cities, working-class White families began moving out of Memphis into adjoining suburbs following the development of the interstate highway system. Interstate 240, the highway loop around the city, was initially planned in the 1950s and completed in 1984. The riots that followed the 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. at the Lorraine Motel and court-ordered busing in 1973 further exacerbated the loss of residents and businesses to outlying areas. According to Tom Jones from SmartCity Memphis, what began as White flight became middle-class flight in the 1990s as African-American families moved across the state border to neighboring communities in Mississippi. In an effort to capture its fleeing tax base, the city annexed adjacent land. According to *Modern Cities'* article "Memphis Wants to Shrink," between 1960 and 2010, the city expanded its footprint by 240% to encompass 324 square miles (larger than New York City, Atlanta, or Chicago). Although the city expanded, its population remained steady at about 650,000, straining its ability to maintain municipal services as population per square mile dropped by 53%.

Recent Development and Investment

After decades of White and middle-class flight to the suburbs and slow recovery from the Great Recession, the city is seeing reinvestment in downtown. According to the *New York Times* ("From Blight to Bright Lights in Memphis"), Cushman & Wakefield/Commercial Advisors report over \$13 billion invested in 250 revitalization projects in downtown over the past four years. According to locals, Memphians, unlike the residents of Nashville, are more likely to renovate old buildings than build new. Major businesses investing in existing

¹ Unless otherwise noted, references to race, ethnicity, and nationality throughout this case study reflect the terminology used by the source. In instances where there is no direct source, we have attempted to use the most inclusive, accurate, and appropriate language possible.



Crosstown Concourse dominates Cleveland Street, a major artery connecting eastern neighborhoods with downtown Memphis.



Cleveland Street in Crosstown was once a bustling commercial district.

buildings include Service Master, which converted a former downtown mall into an office building; St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, which is expanding; and FedEx, which is moving into a former Gibson Guitar factory downtown.

In early 2019, city leaders identified Memphis' three key assets as arts, education, and health care. The city's economic base includes FedEx (which employs 30,000), hospitality and tourism, service industries, logistics, and transportation. The city is home to over a dozen colleges and universities, including Christian Brothers University, Rhodes College, the University of Memphis, LeMoyne Owen College, and the Memphis College of Art. The health-care industry, including St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare, and the University of Tennessee Health Science Center, is one of the region's largest employers.

Memphis has been experiencing a renaissance since its bicentennial year, with growing civic pride and a renewed interest in and enthusiasm for the city's unique identity. In December of 2019, the Memphis City Council officially adopted "Memphis 3.0," the city's first comprehensive plan since 1981, which is focused on strengthening neighborhoods and "right-sizing"—reducing the city's footprint through the de-annexation of land to increase density and improve the quality of government services.

Crosstown

Crosstown Concourse is located two miles east of downtown Memphis, along Cleveland Street, the city's most active transportation corridor. The neighborhood of Crosstown is defined by Jackson Avenue to the north, Interstate 240 to the west, Poplar Avenue to the south, and Stonewall Street to the east. Cleveland Street, which runs through the center, is a major transportation artery and was once a thriving commercial corridor. Crosstown gained its name following the city's construction of a north-south streetcar line in 1927 to serve the new Sears Crosstown store. The new line, which opened the same day as the store, connected two other existing lines "across town," hence the name "Crosstown."

According to its Rudy Bruner Award application, Crosstown Concourse lies at the intersection of three "socially distinct neighborhoods where the median



The residential neighborhoods surrounding Crosstown Concourse include houses dating from the 1890s to 1930s.



Today the neighborhood is home to working-class families, artists, and small businesses.

household income ranges from \$15,426 to \$60,799.” They include historic Evergreen to the east, North Memphis to the northwest, and the Medical District a half-mile to the southwest. The Crosstown neighborhood itself is comprised of two census tracks: Vollintine-Evergreen (population 38,112) and Klondike/Smokey City (38,107). The population of Vollintine-Evergreen is 53% Black or African American, 36% White, 5% Hispanic, and 6% Asian and other, with a median household income of \$31,647. Klondike/Smokey City is predominantly Black or African American (82%) with a median income of \$28,281. Both census tracks have mostly early twentieth-century housing stock dating from the 1890s to 1930s. According to 2015 census data, these neighborhoods experienced a decline in housing values after Sears Crosstown closed, with Klondike and Smokey City, among the oldest Black communities, being hit the hardest.

The Crosstown neighborhood is located on the northern edge of the Memphis Parkway System, a 12-mile-long rectangular boulevard system completed in 1906 with Overton Park and Memphis Zoo (ranked one of the top five zoos in the United States) just to the east. In 1971, the US Supreme Court ruled in favor of *Citizens to Preserve Overton Park v. Volpe*, an effort that overturned plans for the construction of Interstate 40 through the heart of the community (resulting in the construction of the Interstate 240 loop), preserving the 342-acre park and community. Also nearby, across from Overton Park and the Memphis Parkway, is Rhodes College, a private four-year college with 2,100 students focused on liberal arts and sciences. Founded in 1848, the college has been at its present location since 1925.

Today, Crosstown is home to working-class families, artists, small business owners, and ethnic restaurants. Median household income within a one-mile radius (as reported by the City of Memphis in 2011) is scarcely half the national average. Almost one in three households lived below the poverty level in 2010, more than double the national average of 13%.

Sears Crosstown

Founded in 1886 in Minnesota by Richard W. Sears and Alvah C. Roebuck, Sears, Roebuck and Co. (Sears) initially served rural farm households with limited access to retail shops and services. The company published its first

catalog in 1889 and built its first headquarters, warehouse, and distribution center in Chicago in 1906. Sears opened its first retail store in the city in 1925 in response to a growing urban market. The success of its catalog and retail stores prompted the creation of new combined retail/warehouse/mail order distribution centers beginning in 1926. These were located outside central business districts to avoid competition from other retailers and accommodated automobiles with paved parking lots and service stations. By the mid-1950s, Sears was America's largest retail merchant and became one of the world's largest companies in the 1970s.

Sears Crosstown was constructed in the midst of the development of Memphis's early eastern suburbs, adjacent to the Louisville and Nashville Railroad line. One of four regional distribution centers (the others were in Chicago, Philadelphia, and Seattle), the facility was one of the last of the distribution centers to open before the Great Depression and served smaller centers in Kansas City, Missouri; Atlanta; and Dallas, providing catalog service to Arkansas, Louisiana, eastern Texas, Mississippi, Tennessee, western Alabama, and Kentucky.

The building was designed by Chicago architect George Nimmons, who also designed Sears distribution centers in Boston, Los Angeles, and Minneapolis. The four regional distribution centers are similar in design, using a reinforced concrete grid of structural piers spaced 20 feet on center that enabled a consistent and efficient approach to movement and sorting of merchandise by company personnel. The standardized approach also enabled the integration of new additions with minimal disruption to ongoing operations. All of the Sears distribution centers featured a distinctive central tower as part of the main entrance façade. The tower housed a large water tank for the building's gravity-fed sprinkler and plumbing systems.

The initial 10-story, 650,000-square-foot Crosstown building was built in 180 days for \$5 million, with construction taking place 24 hours a day except for midnight Saturday to Sunday. It included a retail store, mail order catalog fulfillment, a hospital for store employees, a farm store, a filling/service station, and a 1,500-car parking lot. A reported 47,000 people attended the opening on Saturday, August 27, 1927.

Memphis Public Library Archive



Sears Crosstown was constructed in the heart of Crosstown, a growing eastern suburb.

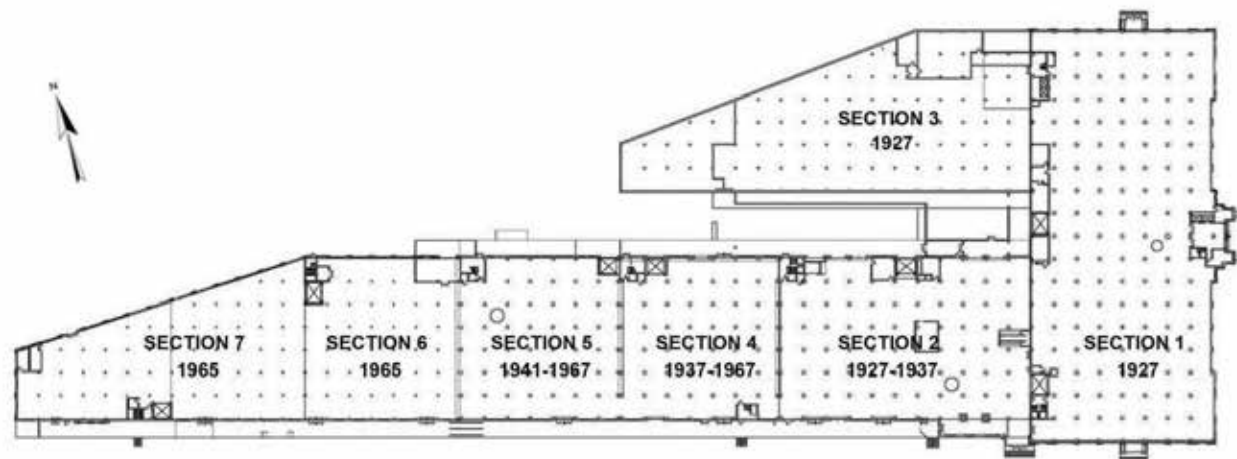
Arnold Prather



The building followed a standardized design that used a grid of reinforced concrete piers.



Sears Crosstown was constructed between 1927 and 1967 and totaled over 1.5 million square feet.



Memphis Public Library Archive

Schematic First Floor Plan of Additions 1929 to 1964-65



Schematic South Elevation of Additions 1929-1967

The initial 650,000-square-foot 1927 building was expanded several times between 1927 and 1967.



Sears Crosstown was abandoned after the distribution center closed in 1993 and stood empty for 20 years.

Sears' innovative retail distribution model spurred the growth of Sears Crosstown and the surrounding neighborhood. The facility was expanded five times between 1927 and 1967, bringing the total square footage to just over 1.5 million. The final building addition bisected Claybrook Avenue, a public street, and was followed by a separate, four-story parking garage constructed in 1967. Four years later, in 1969, the retail store was completely remodeled. At its peak, Sears Crosstown ranked tenth among the company's US operations, employing 2,000 workers and processing 45,000 catalog orders daily. The largest single employer and one of the most important buildings in Memphis, it became a central character in the social fabric of the city. As Ann Langston, a local resident, explained in her Rudy Bruner Award perspective submission, "Thousands of people had worked, shopped, met their spouses, filled Santa's toy bag and much more in Sears Crosstown. Most everyone who had lived in Memphis before 1995 had a memory story about this Sears."

Sears' retail business followed the migration of Memphis residents to newer suburbs after World War II, opening its first suburban store in the Memphis area in 1957 followed by a new suburban distribution center in 1961. Over time, continued suburban expansion and competition from other retailers drew business away from the Crosstown complex, despite the construction of the parking garage and renovation of the retail store. The retail store closed in 1983, and the distribution center shut down 10 years later when the company discontinued catalog sales nationwide. Remaining operations were relocated to other sites and the Crosstown building abandoned, leaving the massive, vacant structure towering over the surrounding neighborhood.

PROJECT HISTORY AND LEADERSHIP

Nearly 10 years in the making, the redevelopment of Sears Crosstown is a collaborative partnership between a group of community-minded people

and organizations working at the intersection of arts, education, and health care. The vision was initiated by a local businessman, an artist, and an academic, and it was realized through the collective energy and talent of people who share a deep passion for Memphis.

Vision and Leadership

The initial arts-inspired vision was developed by Todd Richardson, an art history professor; Staley Cates, the owner of the building and passionate supporter of Memphis music past and present; and Christopher Miner, a video artist, musician, and writer. All three share the belief that Memphis is full of creative activity but needs more spaces, venues, and resources to nurture it.

Richardson grew up in Tupelo, Mississippi. He moved to Memphis in 1995 after college to work in youth ministry, then started graduate school in art history in Berkeley, California. He then moved to the Netherlands, where he earned a PhD in art history from Universiteit Leiden, focusing on the intersection of art, architecture, and religion in early modern Northern Europe. He returned to Memphis with his wife and family in 2008 to become a professor of Renaissance art history in the Department of Art at the University of Memphis.

Miner grew up in Jackson, Mississippi. After college, he lived in Memphis briefly and worked as an art teacher in an urban public high school. While there, he would drive through the city's neighborhoods admiring the inventory of interesting old buildings. During one drive, he encountered the abandoned Sears Crosstown building and was brought to tears by its scale and overwhelming potential. However, like Richardson, he left the South, earning an MFA in photography at Yale University, then living and teaching in New York City. He returned after establishing an internationally recognized art practice, settling in Jackson with his wife (also an artist) and family, where the low cost of living allowed them to focus on their studio practice.

While in Jackson, Miner had the idea of starting a community-minded contemporary arts center and residency program in Mississippi, but he wasn't sure how to move forward. Knowing about Richardson's experience in nonprofit youth ministry, he asked for advice. Richardson introduced Miner

to Memphis contacts doing similar work, and they encouraged him to think about embarking on his project in Memphis.

Soon after, in August 2009, Richardson had his first conversation about the Sears Crosstown building with Staley and Elizabeth Cates, friends whom he knew from his previous chapter in Memphis and who owned the building. Staley Cates is a local businessman known for his "huge civic and philanthropic heart." He is vice-chairman of Southeastern Asset Management Inc., a global investment management firm founded by O. Mason Hawkins, and chairman of the Poplar Foundation, which is primarily focused on improving urban education and teacher training. Cates and the Poplar Foundation, one of the largest nonprofits in Memphis, have invested heavily in local education and the arts, including the Stax Museum of American Soul Music and several Crosstown tenant organizations in arts, education, and health care. Although active in local philanthropy, Cates prefers to keep a low profile.

Cates, as Crosstown LLC, purchased the Sears Crosstown building in 2007 from a New York investment firm (which purchased it from Sears in 1999 for \$1.5 million) with the goal of donating it to a local college (name withheld) for development of an urban campus. With that vision in mind, initial feasibility, environmental, and design work was completed. When that project did not move forward, Cates approached national developers about the property; they all declined. As the Great Recession slowed development, Cates mothballed the project, waiting for the right person to come along, and his ownership of the property remained a well-guarded secret.

The first conversations between Cates and Richardson centered around Cates' dual passions for education and the arts and, more specifically, the future of Memphis music. Cates had been instrumental in resurrecting the Stax Museum and reestablishing its history as central to the city's identity. He was also a driving force behind establishing the Stax Charter School and Stax Music Academy to ensure that the history of soul music is infused in young scholars and musicians training for future careers in music. He imagined developing a creative hub for local musicians that included supportive resources such as access to instruments and recording equipment, performance space, and health care.



The development team included (left to right) Christopher Miner, Staley Cates, Todd Richardson, and McClean Wilson.

After hearing about Cates' interests, Richardson and Miner began dreaming about the possibility of incorporating the creative hub idea and Miner's concept for a residency program into a larger vision for a contemporary arts center at the abandoned Sears Crosstown site. Together with Cates, they began to develop preliminary concepts for redeveloping the building with a multidisciplinary arts focus, looking to other developments like MASS MoCA in western Massachusetts and the Distillery District in Toronto as successful examples. In October 2009, the three joined forces, and Miner and his family moved to Memphis in May 2010. The idea to create an intentional community organized around the arts became the foundation for the redevelopment and programming of the building.

Development

The development team describes the process of creating Crosstown Concourse as taking place over four key phases: feasibility, research, and vision; tenant recruitment and design; financing; and construction.

Feasibility, Research, and Vision: 2010–2011

The first year focused on exploring the feasibility of redeveloping the building. According to Richardson, the team gave themselves "about a 2% chance of success, so we decided we were going to think outside the box from the beginning and have a good time doing it."

In May 2010, with financial support from Cates, Miner and Richardson enlisted a team of development experts, including architecture, design, engineering, and communications consultants, to help them evaluate the feasibility of redeveloping the building. The team included Tony Bologna and Amy Carkuff. Bologna, an architect and developer, has been instrumental in major urban projects in Memphis, including downtown development and historic adaptive reuse. Carkuff is a commercial interior designer with experience in hospitality and real estate and has partnered with Bologna in consulting on a number of adaptive reuse projects. Both brought considerable expertise in the renovation of historic properties. The team also included legal experts from Bass Berry Sims, who became involved with Cates during the purchase of the building and participated throughout the project's development.

The team proceeded to explore three development options: rehabilitation of the full building, partial demolition, and a phased approach. The primary goal was to identify costs and confirm that there were no significant barriers, such as structural or environmental issues, to prevent redevelopment. According to the team, much of the first year involved understanding the building's volume and how it could be used. They considered a variety of scenarios with different mixes of uses, all the while keeping arts as a core component.

A major challenge was sorting out the mix of uses that would meet the community-oriented goals and vision of the project, fit within the building, and generate the income necessary to finance the project. They sought to create a place that was open and inclusive and would promote connection and exchange between Memphians of every economic status. Early on, the team realized a mix of retail, office, and residential uses was needed to fill the immense structure, which is 100 feet longer than New York City's Chrysler Building turned on its side. They looked at the building as an opportunity to create a new neighborhood and considered the components that make

up vibrant neighborhoods: housing, education, food and entertainment, and health care. They also focused on incorporating components identified in the “urban magnets” theory: local retail, education, production, ongoing events and programming, and a unique built environment. Over time, this idea took form as a “vertical urban village” that would be “beyond mixed use,” where tenants, benefiting from close proximity to each other, would be better, both physically and missionally.

As the team explored options, they quickly realized that a primary design challenge to achieving a vertical urban village was finding the right mix of uses and the placement of the residential component. As the team observed, isolating the residential component in one block or tower would defeat that purpose by reducing the opportunity for chance encounters, one of the non-negotiables. Early scenarios included a hospitality (hotel) component, but the team was unable to secure a viable tenant. In the end, they identified the top four floors as the best location for the 265 apartments.

The development team concluded that the most promising scheme was the rehabilitation of the full building. The feasibility process reinforced the idea of developing a “collective of neighborhood-scale uses” that would utilize the space and create a sense of place anchored in arts and creativity. The team also realized that creating a strong identity for the new development that reinforced its role as a creative community commons would be important.

Engaging the community was an important part of the development process. As Richardson often says, “It’s about using the word ‘building’ both as a verb and a noun: the goal is to both renovate a building and also build community.” In May 2010, Miner and Richardson founded Crosstown Arts, a nonprofit organization with two goals in mind: (1) to establish a vision for the redevelopment of the historic Sears Crosstown building, and (2) to help cultivate Memphis’ creative community. Crosstown Arts initiated pilot programs to activate the site, organizing activities and events with the goal of providing opportunities for people across the city to meet and engage with the development site and Crosstown neighborhood. The organization offered venues for artists and performers by renting spaces across the street



Miner and Richardson founded the nonprofit Crosstown Arts and hosted on-site events to engage the community.

from the former Sears building for art and music programming in advance of the development, in part to establish and highlight the role of the creative community in the overall development project. In 2013, Crosstown Arts moved into a formerly abandoned storefront space across from the former Sears building on Cleveland Street. The space includes a gallery with 10 exhibitions a year for local and visiting artists, a performance space, an artist studio, and a music venue.

During the second year of the planning process, the team added a full-time community relations coordinator to build relationships with local residents, businesses, and organizations. According to Richardson, the team took the approach of a political campaign. Over a 12-month period, the development team hosted over 300 events, including building tours, town hall meetings, workshops, and smaller gatherings with established neighborhood organizations to reach as many people as possible and solicit support for the project. Events took place on-site in the building, in the parking lot and garage, and

Crosstown Arts



Crosstown Arts moved into a vacant storefront space across the street from the development site.

Crosstown Arts



The space provided venues for events and for artists to perform and display their work.

in adjacent buildings and sites in the neighborhood. The team convened meetings with the Evergreen Historic District Association, Klondike Smokey City Community Development Corporation, Vollintine Evergreen Community Association, Midtown Memphis Development Corporation, Central Gardens Neighborhood Association, and many others. Team members also went door to door introducing the project to residents and businesses and hosted MemFIX and MemFEAST, events that raised neighborhood awareness of what was possible as well as money to support art installations that activated the development site and surrounding neighborhood.

From Richardson's perspective, the campaign was critical to getting people back to the Crosstown neighborhood and helping them see beyond the vacant Sears building and embrace the vision of what could be. The team was surprised by the amount of interest in the project, with the first ticketed MemFEAST event selling out. The positive reception to the idea of a vertical urban village led them to realize the importance of making the building as open and "porous" as possible, with multiple entries that allowed people to come and go at any hour of the day without passing by a security desk. Hospitality and programming would be key. It was important to create an environment that felt equally welcoming to a resident, a high school student, a patient seeking health care services, and a CEO. With this in mind, the development team commissioned a design concept study from Peter Culley and the Spatial Affairs Bureau. Culley's vision, particularly related to the spaces of Crosstown Arts and creating bold, attractive common areas in the form of multiple atria and outdoor plazas, solidified the concept of creating a place that would promote a "mixing of people" and offer common areas for gatherings. This foundation informed the building design and programming as the project evolved.

Meanwhile, Cates urged the team to bring on someone with expertise in real estate lending and financing. McLean Wilson from Kemmons Wilson Companies was recruited by Richardson and came on board in September 2011, bringing valuable knowledge of development financing and experience in putting deals together. Wilson and Richardson were introduced by a mutual friend as the Crosstown development team was completing its initial feasibility study. Wilson is a private developer and grandson of Kemmons

Wilson, the founder of the Holiday Inn chain of hotels. Like Miner and Richardson, he grew up in the South (Memphis) and moved away for college, spending the first part of his career working with national developers and doing real estate development in Raleigh, North Carolina, before returning to his hometown around the same time as Richardson and Miner.

Tenant Recruitment and Design: 2012–2013

Through the process of research and analysis, the team concluded that it would cost about \$200 million to renovate the building. Wilson considered financing options, drawing upon his experience working with banks to anticipate how much money they could borrow. He concluded that the project would require a mix of funding sources and a large majority of space to be pre-leased in order to garner the credibility to secure necessary financing.

The development team began to assemble tenants, which initially included Crosstown Arts and Memphis Teacher Residency, a local teacher training organization similar to Teach for America. They sought local organizations and businesses rather than traditional anchor tenants, turning away national retailers like Kroger and Walgreens. As they approached each potential partner, they asked: would this tenant be open and inclusive about service and excited about participating in the proposed community?

Education, especially a high school, was an essential component of the vision for Crosstown. Gestalt Community Schools, a local charter school management organization, was one of the first institutions to commit to leasing space in Crosstown for a public charter high school. As the local newspaper *The Commercial Appeal* observed in “Crosstown Concourse Recruiting a ‘Crosstown High,’” “a high school would help to make Crosstown Concourse multigenerational, and also provide students with exposure to and mentoring from the medical professionals, scientists, artists, and other educators who will work and live in the building.” Gestalt was founded by Derwin Sisnett and Yetta Lewis with the vision of “building better communities through education” and operates K-12 college preparatory charter schools in targeted Memphis communities. The development team worked to ensure that the renovated building would accommodate a 500-student school and meet

necessary code requirements, including a separate building entry and elevator as mandated by the state.

In July 2011, at the urging of Cates, Richardson approached Dr. Scott Morris at Church Health about opening a satellite office at Crosstown. Morris, a primary care physician and ordained Methodist minister, founded Church Health in 1987 to provide health care to the working uninsured, operating at first out of a small house a few blocks from Sears Crosstown. By the time Richardson approached Morris, the organization was treating an average of 60,000 people a year and operating out of 14 different buildings in the neighborhood. To Richardson’s surprise, a central component of Church Health’s strategic plan was the dream to consolidate all of its facilities into one location to improve patient care and operational efficiencies. After commissioning the local architecture firm Looney Ricks Kiss (LRK) to complete a test-fit analysis to ensure they could fit all their programming into the existing Crosstown structure, Church Health signed on in October as an anchor tenant, committing to 150,000 square feet over three floors.



Church Health, founded by Dr. Scott Morris (left), became a one of the first founding partner tenants.

Warren Patterson Photography courtesy of Bruner/Cott Architects



The development team visited other repurposed Sears distribution centers, including the Landmark Center in Boston.

Fred Charles



The team drew inspiration from notable historic rehabilitation projects like MassMoCA in North Adams, Massachusetts.

As the process continued, the development team asked committed partners to help identify other potential tenants. Morris and Church Health leveraged their relationships with other health care institutions to help bring on board Methodist Healthcare, St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, and ALSAC/St. Jude, the fundraising arm of St. Jude. As these partners signed on, the concept of “better together” emerged: that a group of like-minded, community-serving tenants would be invaluable not only to securing financing, but also to filling and successfully activating the space to create a vertical neighborhood anchored in arts, education, and health care.

Throughout the feasibility planning and recruitment process, members of the development team travelled to other cities to look at similar projects for inspiration. They visited other former Sears distribution facilities from the 1920s that had been renovated into mixed-use developments including Ponce City Market in Atlanta, the Landmark Center in Boston (designed by Bruner/Cott Associates), and Midtown Exchange in Minneapolis. They also checked out other notable historic rehabilitation projects such as ArtsSpace developments in Minneapolis, Granville Island in Vancouver, the Distillery District in Toronto, and MassMoCA (designed by Bruner/Cott Associates) in North Adams, Massachusetts. They were encouraged and inspired by what they saw. In March 2012, members of the development team and founding partner organizations, as well as Memphis Mayor A. C. Wharton, took a one-day trip to Midtown Exchange in Minneapolis (made possible by prospective anchor tenants and Cates), where they met with Mayor R. T. Rybak and representatives from Ryan Companies, the developer. Visiting another redeveloped distribution center with a surrounding neighborhood that was very similar to Sears Crosstown reinforced the group’s vision for Crosstown and the value of anchoring that vision in the unique culture of Memphis, as well as the belief that they could do something different—creating a true community rather than a typical mixed-use development focused on office and retail. At the conclusion of the meeting, the participants affirmed their commitment to the project and the vision.

By August 2012, the team had secured commitments from nine “founding partner” anchor tenants dedicated to arts, education, and health and wellness who together committed to leasing over 400,000 square feet (nearly 50%)

of the space. They included Crosstown Arts, Church Health, Gestalt Community Schools, Memphis Teacher Residency, Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare, Rhodes College, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, St. Jude/ALSAC, and the West Clinic Cancer Center and Research Institute.

With founding partner commitments in place, the development team went public with its plans and engaged the design team of Memphis-based Looney Ricks Kiss (LRK) and Vancouver-based DIALOG Design. The team was one of six that responded to a national request for proposal that encouraged teams to include a local firm. DIALOG, the design lead for the Granville Island development in Vancouver, enlisted LRK, which was familiar with the project from its work with Cates and doing test fits for Church Health and other founding partners. The development team also brought on Memphis-based Grinder Taber Grinder as the general contractor.

Financing: 2013–2014

During the feasibility phase, the team concluded that the renovation would require \$200 million. Securing leasing commitments from the nine founding partners enabled them to proceed with assembling financing sources. The team determined that it would be comfortable with a maximum of \$85 million in debt financing, requiring \$115 to be raised from other sources.

The team focused first on raising the \$115 million, securing a lead gift of \$25 million in philanthropic support. They raised approximately \$40 million in Historic Tax Credits (a federal subsidy to incentivize the rehabilitation of historic buildings) and approximately \$18 million in New Market Tax Credits (a federal subsidy to incentivize development in low-income census tracts) from six different Community Development Enterprises or CDEs (corporations or partnerships that serve as financial intermediaries for the provision of loans and investments in low-income communities through the Community Development Financial Institutions Fund, a federal agency that promotes economic revitalization in distressed communities). Drawing upon Bologna's experience with historic rehabilitation, the team secured National Register of Historic Places designation to support the work of the design team. Crosstown Arts acted as the developer, its 501(c)3 nonprofit status providing access to public funding that would otherwise not be available to the project. The remaining

funds were provided by a combination of funding from the City of Memphis, Shelby County, the State of Tennessee, and federal sources, such as Qualified Energy Conservation Bonds, that flowed through the city.

In January 2013, RKG Associates completed an economic impact study (*Economic Impact Analysis of the Proposed Redevelopment of Sears Cross-town*) projecting 1,317 new and retained jobs, including 600 provided by the founding partners.

On October 3, 2013, Richardson and Wilson submitted an application to the Downtown Memphis Commission (DMC) for a 20-year PILOT or Payment in Lieu of Taxes, a temporary abatement of future property taxes. In exchange for the abatement, the applicant commits to a series of conditions, including contracting local minority/women-owned firms and small businesses, creating and/or retaining jobs, and, in cases where there are 51 or more residential units, reserving at least 20% of those units for low- and moderate-income individuals and families. In its recommendation, DMC staff considered the project to be a "paramount example of a catalytic development project that could redefine a neighborhood and result in substantial economic development and growth ... and advance all of Memphis and Shelby County." The City of Memphis granted a 20-year PILOT, the longest ever for a project outside the downtown area.

Securing direct funding from the City of Memphis was the last part of the puzzle. The developers held off approaching the city until the end given the lack of public resources for funding development. In December, Memphis City Council approved \$15 million in funding for public infrastructure improvements connected with the development. In April 2014, Shelby County Commissioners voted to provide \$5 million in county funds for the same purpose.

With the \$115 million committed, the development team pursued debt financing. Raising the financing required convincing lenders from outside Memphis to invest in the city, which was not considered an attractive market at the time; to invest in the project, which was both complex and unusual; and to invest in a development team that included an artist, an art history professor, and a young real estate guy "without any grey hair." As SunTrust

Crosstown Arts



Construction began in 2015 and included extensive community outreach to recruit local contractors and workers.

CEO and Memphis native Johnny Moore observed in his perspective for the Rudy Bruner Award application, it was a “great deal and good for the city but a humongous task, not your average deal, largest private development in the City of Memphis.” Getting bank representatives to Memphis and winning their confidence was key. For example, Wilson met with a representative from Goldman Sachs on the same day his beloved vintage VW camper bus caught on fire. He impressed her with his poise “under fire” and secured Goldman Sachs’ financing commitment to purchase the Historic Tax Credits.

In the end, the team secured 30 sources of funding, including a senior loan of \$86.5 million from Suntrust Bank, which then syndicated the loan to include six other banks.

Construction financing closed in December 2014. Like many complex projects, the process entailed many challenges. Negotiating the deal required weekly conference calls over a six-month period with representatives from all the financial institutions and their legal counsels, entailing as many as 80 people on the calls. In December 2014, days before the year-end closing deadline, the team learned that a 40% gap between two bank appraisals threatened to cancel the deal. The team acted quickly, leveraging personal connections and tracking down and corresponding with bank representatives over the holidays (including texting each other during a Christmas Eve service and tracking down a bank representative working on Christmas Day) to resolve the issue, completing the closing just hours shy of the deadline. Had they missed the deadline, the project would have had to be rebid, likely resulting in a 15% increase in construction costs and thereby causing the deal to fall through.

Construction: 2015–2017

Construction began with a groundbreaking ceremony in February 2015. Negotiating and managing construction, like the development and financing process leading up to it, was complex. A risk assessment done prior to construction identified communication as the greatest challenge due to the large number of people, businesses, and financing sources involved. As a result, weekly job meetings were held between the legal team, development team, engineers, and general contractor.

Several funding entities, including New Market Tax Credit financing and the City of Memphis, required meeting minimum women- and/or minority-owned business enterprises and local employment goals. To meet these requirements and facilitate the participation of smaller contractors, the team created nine smaller bid packages, necessitating nine different contract negotiations. They separated out the exterior envelope; mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and fire protection; sitework; and the parking garage, then divided the remaining work vertically, roughly following the five phases of the Sears Crosstown building expansion. The team also conducted extensive outreach, including multiple job fairs, to reach out to the community and local contractors to recruit local workers.

Throughout the process, Crosstown Arts hosted on-site music and art events and performances and building tours, including a tour and reunion for former Sears employees in April 2017. The organization produced videos highlighting the story of the project and construction progress, using footage shot by Justin Thompson, Crosstown Arts’ video production manager, and monthly drone flights the contractor used to monitor progress.

The grand opening for Crosstown Concourse was held on August 19, 2017. When it opened, the majority of the building was leased: 80% of residential space, 95% of commercial office, and 75% of retail.

FOUNDING PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Between 2013 and 2015, three of the organizations that had signed on as founding tenants in 2012— Rhodes College, the West Clinic Cancer Center and Research Institute, and Gestalt Community Schools— withdrew from the development for different reasons. While planning was underway, Rhodes College, a nearby private liberal arts college that planned to lease space in the building for its education and health-care related programs, took advantage of the opportunity to purchase a property across the street from its campus and expand there, rather than into Crosstown. Planning for the West Clinic Cancer Center and Research Institute revealed logistical challenges related to locating a linear accelerator for the radiation oncology department within a building with apartments, and the clinic opted to locate its facilities at the nearby Methodist University Hospital. Gestalt, which had started three

TABLE 1: FOUNDING PARTNERS		
ORGANIZATION	SQUARE FEET	APARTMENTS
Christian Brothers University	4,000	
Church Health	150,000	6
Crosstown Arts	40,000	14
Crosstown High	70,000	
Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare	105,000	
Memphis Teacher Residency	25,000	40
St. Jude/ALSAC	55,000	
St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital		40
	449,000	100

successful schools within a relatively short period of time, decided to focus its resources on existing facilities rather than open a new school. Two other founding tenants, Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare and St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, increased their space commitments, helping to offset the loss of Rhodes and the West Clinic. A grassroots effort initiated by a community member in 2015 led to the creation of Crosstown High, which took over the space allotted for the Gestalt school.

By the time Crosstown Concourse opened in 2017, there were eight founding partner organizations serving as anchor tenants. All are mission-driven nonprofit arts, education, and health-care organizations rooted in Memphis and committed to serving the local community. Five of the eight are faith-

based organizations: Christian Brothers University, Church Health, Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare, Memphis Teacher Residency, and St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

Arts

Crosstown Arts, founded by Miner and Richardson, is a founding partner, project developer, and current tenant of Crosstown Concourse. Its marketing materials describe it as "a contemporary arts organization dedicated to further cultivating the creative community of Memphis." To do so, it "provides resources and creates opportunities and experiences to inspire, support, and connect a diverse range of creative people, projects, and audiences."

Crosstown Arts occupies 40,000 square feet on the first and second floors of the building. It also operates an adjacent, newly built 420-seat performing arts theater on the site and leases 14 apartments for visiting artists/artist residencies. LRK was the architect of record, in association with Peter Culley and Spatial Affairs Bureau for both the Crosstown Arts space and the new theater.

Key program spaces include:

- 8,000 square feet of exhibition space in two galleries that are free and open to the public and host 6-10 shows a year of varying lengths, depending on the size and scale of the exhibition.
- Artist Residencies, on-site, 3- to 10-month residencies for Memphis-based and visiting artists that include housing, workspace, meals, and access to fabrication and production resources. Over 50 artists, musicians, and writers working in various media are hosted annually.
- The Café at Crosstown Arts, which serves pastries, coffee, and beer/wine.
- The Art Bar at Crosstown Arts, a full-service bar.
- Shared Art Making, a membership-based production facility for artists and musicians that includes access to a communal workshop, digital lab, print shop, recording studio, and other digital printing and fabrication tools. It offers \$80/month memberships with optional childcare for an additional \$15/month.
- The Green Room, a lounge-style space for intimate live music performances adjacent to the Art Bar and Crosstown Arts' cafe and galleries.
- Crosstown Theater, a 420-seat black box theatre completed in early

2019. Used for film, live music, and other performing arts, the theatre includes a sprung-wood floor stage; a modular open floor; retractable seating; and a state-of-the-art lighting, sound, and Digital Cinema Package projection system.

Early 2019 programming included:

- Music shows: three to five live music performances per week in three different venues on site.
- Youth Arts: Programs targeted at helping youth ages 10-18 develop their voices through creative activities including writing, film, music, theater, culinary arts, and visual arts; afternoon and in-school workshops with professional artists and trained volunteers; and partnerships with Crosstown High School and other nearby middle and high schools.
- Moonpie Project: A rotating mural series where artists paint murals in the main plaza of Crosstown Concourse. After a few weeks on display, the murals are permanently installed in the building.



Crosstown Arts occupies 40,000 square feet on the first and second floors.

Crosstown Arts



The organization hosts artists, exhibitions, and events in its facilities which include a membership-based production facility (left), galleries, and 420-seat black box theater (lower right).



Memphis resident Ginger Spickler organized a local effort that led to the creation of Crosstown High.



The "learner-centered" charter school leases 70,000 square feet on the fourth and fifth floors.

- Open Crit: A free, three-hour monthly critique group for up to four local visual artists.
- Micro Cinema: A monthly short film screening series with pay-what-you-can-admission and free food and drinks.
- Shoot and Splice: A monthly filmmaking forum presented by Crosstown Arts and Indie Memphis.
- Wish Book: A series focused on nontraditional approaches to film as a medium.
- Pecha Kucha Nights: Informal gatherings where artists share samples of their work with concise slide presentations.

Crosstown Arts owns 124 apartments in the neighborhood in four multifamily buildings that were acquired by Cates with his purchase of Sears Crosstown for the proposed college campus. When that project did not move forward, the properties were donated to Crosstown Arts. Crosstown Arts rents the buildings, which generates revenue to support its arts programming. The organization also holds long-term leases on 40,000 square feet of additional space in buildings in the neighborhood which it renovated and sublets at affordable rates for artists, arts-related businesses, and nonprofit organizations.

Crosstown Arts has a \$4.5 million annual budget. One third of the organization's operating expenses are supported by revenue generated from ticket sales, food and beverage sales, Shared Art Making memberships, subleases and residential properties, space rental for events, and fees for serving as the event coordinator for the Crosstown Concourse building as a whole.

Education

Crosstown High is a "learner-centered" charter school that focuses on project-based learning for grades 9 through 12. The school opened in 2018 with 150 ninth graders with the plan to expand the student body by adding one grade each year over the next three years. Any student in Shelby County is eligible to apply. Selection is lottery-based (if there are more applications than there are spots), although state law allows for children of charter school employees and board members to be given priority. The school received 308 applications for 150 spots its first year and received 230-240 for 140 seats in the next round.

The idea for the high school was inspired by a call for submissions by the XQ Super School Project, an initiative launched in 2015 to rethink and redesign the American high school. Led by co-founders Russlynn Ali, former assistant secretary of education for civil rights under President Obama, and Laurene Powell Jobs, president of the Emerson Collective, the initiative has committed more than \$130 million to create “Super Schools” that offer innovative, student-centered education.

In 2015, Memphis resident Ginger Spickler saw an ad for the XQ initiative, which offered five \$10 million awards to support design thinking for a new school. Spickler, a mother of two who was running Memphis School Guide, a website created by Memphis parents with information on local schools, knew about the Crosstown project and the interest in opening a high school in the building after Gestalt dropped out of the development plans. Spickler followed up with people she knew and assembled a group of over 100 parents, students, and community leaders to complete an application for the November deadline. Of over 700 applications, Crosstown High was one of 50 finalists. Although Crosstown High was not selected for an award, subsequent conversations with XQ, as well as Spickler’s passion and commitment, led to a series of later awards that now total \$8 million, enabling the launch of the school which became part of the Super School network.

Crosstown High seeks teachers with a desire to “do something different” and an average of three years of experience. The school focuses on real-world, interdisciplinary project-based learning that integrates traditional subject matter and content knowledge with problem solving, collaboration, relationship, and communication skills. Crosstown High uses 12 competencies that incorporate state mandates used to measure student performance:

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| ■ lead one’s learning | ■ develop self-knowledge |
| ■ reason quantitatively | ■ collaborate on teams |
| ■ read critically | ■ sustain wellness |
| ■ lead inquiry | ■ build community |
| ■ design solutions | ■ learn from the past |
| ■ express oneself boldly | ■ engage as a citizen |



Crosstown High focuses on real-world, project-based, interdisciplinary learning for grades 9 through 12.

Looney Ricks Kiss



Church Health offers an integrated one-stop shop for health care for people in low-wage jobs without health insurance.



Facilities include a teaching kitchen that provides classes for adults, children, and high school students.

Crosstown High leases 70,000 square feet on the fourth and fifth floors of the building. Designed by Memphis-based ANF Architects, the architect of record, and Wonder by Design, the unique design incorporates a variety of spaces for different types of learning, including individual and collaborative workspaces and traditional classroom settings. The school space functions as a kind of home base for students, as engagement with Crosstown Concourse tenants in arts, education, and health care is woven into the curriculum of the school, such that the site becomes the school campus.

Memphis Teacher Residency (MTR), founded in 2012, is modeled on traditional physician residency programs. Each year, MTR hosts 60 to 80 resident teachers who receive free housing in Crosstown Concourse (two per apartment), a modest stipend, and a tuition-free accredited master's degree in urban education in exchange for a four-year commitment to teach in Memphis' highest need schools. Its "Christian Community Education" training program focuses on the "spiritual, social, and instructional needs of teachers." The organization receives funding from the Poplar Foundation as well as other philanthropic and public sources. MTR occupies 25,000 square feet of office space on the third floor designed by the Memphis-based architectural firm archimania and leases 40 apartments. MTR has been the highest ranked teacher preparation program in the state for many years.

Christian Brothers University (CBU), with 1,892 students, is a four-year private university founded in 1871 and affiliated with the Catholic Church. The university's main 75-acre campus is located a short distance away in Midtown. CBU leases 4,000 square feet on the fourth floor at Crosstown, located off the central atrium and designed by archimania, and uses it for its MBA in Healthcare Management, College of Adult and Professional Studies corporate training programs, and special events. As of May 2019, CBU President John Smarrelli Jr. was the board chair of Crosstown High.

Health Care

Church Health provides health-care services to people in low-wage jobs without health insurance, delivering over 62,000 patient encounters a year. Church Health was founded in 1987 by Dr. Scott Morris, a family practice physician and ordained United Methodist minister. The faith-based

organization offers an affordable health-care plan for the self-employed and those uninsured through small businesses. In early 2019, Church Health had 24 medical providers on staff and 1,000 volunteer providers.

Church Health offers an integrated “one-stop shop” for health and wellness. Services and facilities include.

- primary care, including internal and family medicine clinics
- on-site specialty care, including 62 sub-specialty clinics staffed by retired volunteer doctors
- an urgent care facility
- physical rehabilitation
- behavioral health offered on-site in partnership with other practitioners in the area
- a 12,000-square-foot dental facility, one of the largest nonprofit dental clinics in the United States, with 24 dental chairs
- an eye clinic provided in partnership with the Southern College of Optometry
- a teaching kitchen operated in partnership with the Tulane College of Medicine’s Culinary Medicine curriculum that provides training for medical residents and offers free community classes for adults, as well as other classes for families, children, and high school students
- a 25,000-square-foot fitness facility operated in partnership with the YMCA, serving 5,000 members
- an outdoor pool (opened in August 2019) that will be used, in part, to teach swimming to neighborhood youth.

Church Health occupies 150,000 square feet on the first three floors of the building and leases six apartments. It raised over \$20 million, mostly from foundations, for tenant build-out designed by LRK.

Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare is a Memphis-based, integrated, not-for-profit system of health-care facilities affiliated with the United Methodist Church. The organization leases 105,000 square feet on the sixth floor, housing 550 people in its corporate offices for its departments of central business, billing, scheduling, corporate facilities management, innovation technologies, and patient financial services.

Looney Ricks Kiss



Church Health operates a 25,000-square-foot fitness facility and outdoor pool in partnership with the YMCA.

Looney Ricks Kiss



The redevelopment of Sears Crosstown into Crosstown Concourse was completed in 2017.

St. Jude Children's Research Hospital has been a Memphis institution since 1962 and an international leader in the research and treatment of childhood cancer (ranked the number one pediatric cancer hospital in *US News & World Report's* eighteenth annual "Best Hospitals" list). The vision for the hospital and funding for its development came from the entertainer Danny Thomas, who sought to create a place that would treat children "regardless of race, color, creed or their family's ability to pay." St. Jude leases 40 apartments, 20 of which are used by PhD residents and 20 by visiting families with children being treated at the hospital.

ALSAC (American Lebanese Syrian Associated Charities)/St. Jude is the global fundraising and awareness arm of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and the nation's largest health-care charity. It was formed in 1957 in response to Danny Thomas' appeal to fellow Americans of Arabic-speaking descent to honor their immigrant parents and give back to the United States for the opportunity it provided to their families. The organization leases 55,000 square feet on the fifth floor for its "contact center," where 250 employees assist individuals and organizations around the world who hold fundraisers for St. Jude.



The completed project includes the renovated building and parking garage, a public plaza, and three new structures housing the Crosstown Arts Theater, Crosstown High gymnasium, and Crosstown Brewing.

Looney Ricks Kiss



The interior of the building is organized around three new 10-story atria that admit light, connect programmatic elements, and promote a sense of community.

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

Sears Crosstown

The 10-story (14 including the tower) Art Modern/Art Deco style Sears Crosstown structure was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2013. According to the National Register nomination, the yellow brick and concrete building has floors designed to hold 250 pounds per square foot (compared to 150 for a typical building) and a simple, stepped-back façade with “stylized geometric and foliated patterns.” The designation includes the original 1927 structure and the later additions, including the adjacent four-story steel and concrete garage constructed in 1967. The original 1927 building totaled 640,000 square feet with subsequent additions in 1929, 1937, 1941, 1965, and 1967, bringing the total to 1.5 million square feet (equivalent to 25 football fields).

The building’s 192,723-square-foot footprint is L-shaped, with the bottom of the L running parallel with Watkins Avenue, the main artery that becomes

Cleveland Avenue, and the long edge running west along a new interior drive, Concourse Avenue. The original building entrance was located below the tower on Watkins Avenue, with loading docks spanning most of the southern and northern edges. A one-story service station and surface parking lot occupied much of what is now the entry plaza.

The renovated building includes 1,321,853 gross feet and was developed using the 2012 International Existing Building Code and the requirements for the preservation of a historic structure in accordance with the code. In 2019, it was the biggest adaptive reuse project in Tennessee’s history and the largest LEED Platinum Certified historic adaptive reuse project in the world.

Building Design

The renovation of Sears Crosstown into Crosstown Concourse was designed by Memphis-based Looney Ricks Kiss (LRK) and Vancouver-based Dialog, in association with Oakland, California landscape architecture firm Walter

Hood Studio and Spatial Affairs Bureau, based in Richmond, Virginia. LRK also designed all the residential units and 50% of the office tenant and commercial fit-outs.

The architectural team balanced the restoration of the building with the desire to open it up to admit light into the center. A key design challenge was addressing the massive scale of the 1.5-million-square-foot building and creating connected spaces within it that not only served tenants' needs but also promoted a sense of community. Members of the architectural team described the process of aligning tenant needs and adjacencies as being like a game of Tetris, with the evolution of the design and programming informing each other. Throughout the process, the development team pushed the design team to take nontraditional approaches, such as positioning the apartments on the top four floors rather than in one wing of the building to promote a greater sense of community and interaction with other tenants.

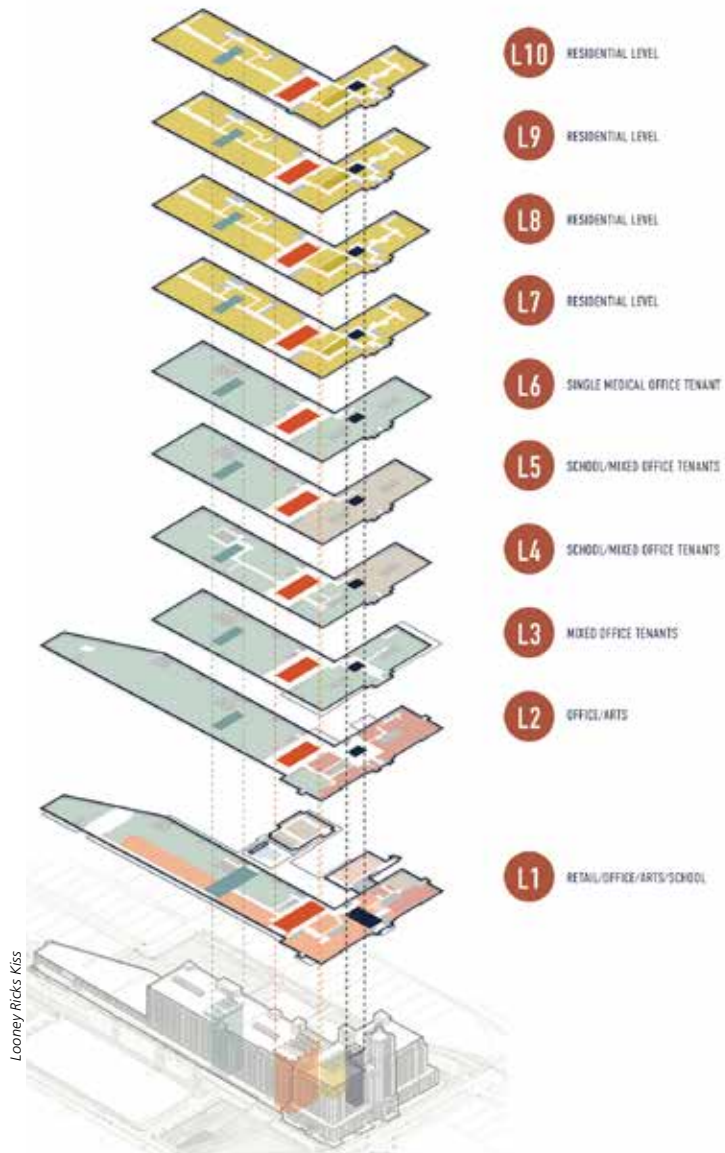
Key design strategies included adding three new 10-story atria, creating a new main entrance with an outdoor drop-off opposite the outdoor plaza, opening up the façade at the ground floor with multiple building entries to promote a sense of openness and porosity, and providing flexible common areas throughout the building. The overall design aesthetic of the common areas of the building is minimalist and restrained. The architects sought to maintain the “raw steel, conveyor-like aesthetic” of the warehouse, maintaining existing finishes where possible and using a simple palette of new finishes such as stained concrete floors and wood and steel stairways and railings.

The interior is organized around the three atria: central, east, and west. Ranging in size from 33 feet square to 52 feet by 90 feet, they were cut through the existing building to introduce light, create common areas, and help provide a sense of orientation and wayfinding. Distinctive, monumental stairways and adjacent elevators provide vertical access between the publicly accessible floors of each atrium, contribute to each atrium's unique identity, and aid in the wellness mission by encouraging people to take the stairs instead of elevators. Wide, street-like corridors provide critical horizontal connections between the atria and throughout the building.

Looney Ricks Kiss

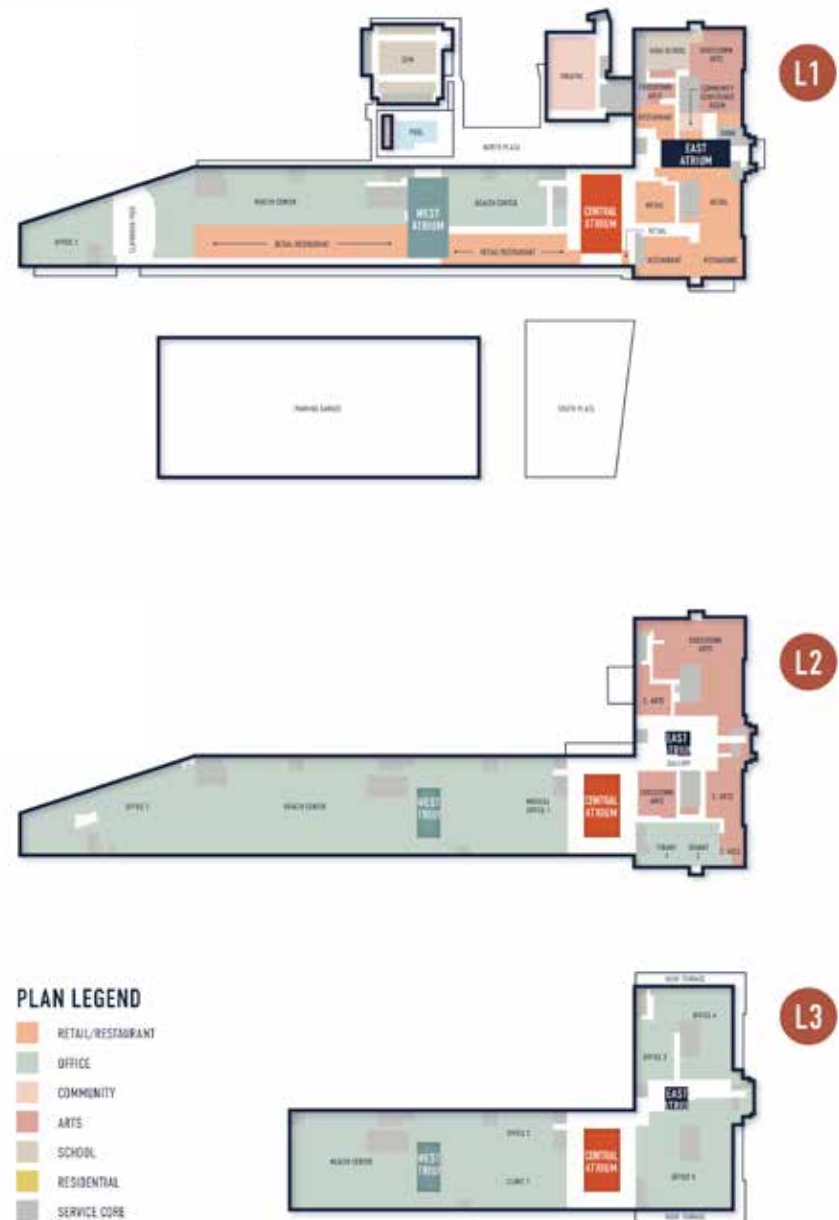


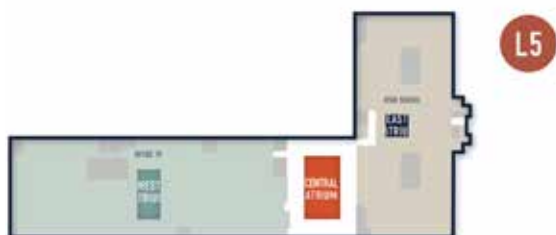
The design maintains the existing warehouse aesthetic with a simple palette of new finishes.



Looney Ricks Kiss

Uses are distributed among the ten floors of the building with apartments spanning the top four levels.







Each atrium features a distinctive, monumental staircase connecting the publicly accessible levels.

Looney Ricks Kiss



Built-in countertops along the seventh-floor railings of the Central Atrium provide informal work and study surfaces.

The main building entrance leads directly into the Central Atrium, which serves as the heart of the facility. It has a desk staffed 24/7 and retail businesses including a popular coffee shop, food market, and ice cream store. A wide, weathered steel “Theater Stair” leads up from the entrance to the next two floors. Between the second and third floors, large wood platform steps with orange cushions provide casual, amphitheater-like seating for public presentations and informal gatherings. Midway up, a broad landing offers a kid-friendly play space alongside shelves lined with books. A simple steel staircase enclosed with vertical metal rods continues up to the seventh floor. Floors 8 through 10 are accessible to residential tenants only.

Generous, open corridors with railings wrap all of the upper floors of the Central Atrium. Built-in countertops with outlets along the railings on the seventh floor (made with reused wood from shelving in the former warehouse) offer space for working, and areas surrounding the atrium are furnished with seating for informal gatherings. Upper levels include entrances to founding tenants ALSAC/St. Jude and Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare, as well as the leasing office for The Parcels, the 265 rental apartments. Free public Wi-Fi is provided in all common areas as well as the plazas.

Inside the original 1927 section of the building, the East Atrium includes a large, bright red, spiral steel staircase that winds between the first two levels, referencing the chutes that once used to move merchandise between floors. The first floor of the atrium houses restaurants, Crosstown Arts’ Shared Art Making workspace, and educational areas while the second floor includes Crosstown Arts’ galleries and café, the Green Room and Art Bar, resident artist studios, and offices. Glass-lined atrium walls on floors 3 through 10 provide views of activity in adjoining offices and Crosstown High on the fourth and fifth floors. The upper levels house residential units.

In the West Atrium, a ribbon stair, painted the same green of the original Sears conveyor systems, wraps up around the perimeter from the first to the sixth floor. The ground floor of the atrium includes the main entrance to Church Health and its Community Teaching Kitchen, which, in addition to classes and workshops, offers its commercial kitchen for hourly rentals to small businesses. The entrance to the 25,000-square-foot YMCA is a short

climb up the stairs on the second floor. The walls of the atrium on the second through sixth floors are lined with glass, offering glimpses of activity inside office spaces. Several wood-enclosed balconies on upper levels provide “outdoor” patio seating for tenants. As in the East Atrium, the upper levels house residential units, which are enclosed with a white textured facade of painted, fire-rated drywall and feature two shallow bays and a variety of punched openings. On the north side of the West Atrium is the entrance to the Church Health YMCA pool and Crosstown High gymnasium.

On the southern edge of the building, the architects opened up the first floor along the former loading docks to create a retail arcade which houses a mix of food and service businesses. The arcade terminates at Claybrook Pass, a city street once bisected by the last addition to Sears Crosstown that has now been extended through the building. It allows cars to travel between the site and adjacent neighborhoods and includes a covered drop-off for Church Health patients and its urgent care clinic.

Apartments are located on the top four floors of the building (7 through 10). Organized around the Central, East, and West Atria, they offer views overlooking the adjoining neighborhoods, midtown, and downtown. A seventh floor “porch” extends over a portion of the Central Atrium, marking the entry to the leasing office. The seventh level has a raised interstitial floor, creating space underneath to transition mechanical, electrical, and plumbing infrastructure from the apartments to core chases that run through floors below.

The 265 apartments include 38 different layouts ranging in size from 540-square-foot studios to 1,800-square-foot three bedrooms. The spacious, loft-style apartments are laid out with open living areas (kitchen/living/dining) with windows looking out over the surrounding neighborhood or into interior atria, with bedrooms and bathrooms to the interior (the 2009 International Building Code allows interior bedrooms). Bedrooms adjacent to living areas have an interior, non-operable window that admits light from the adjoining space. The majority of the units feature concrete floors, high ceilings, brick walls, and columns, many of which retain remnants of original painted finishes. Each apartment has individually controlled central heat and air and its own washer and dryer. Amenities include 24/7 security, bike storage,

Looney Ricks Kiss



Upper floors of the West Atrium are lined with glass and include balconies offering “outdoor” seating for tenants.

Looney Ricks Kiss



Residential apartments on the upper four floors offer loft-like open spaces.

terrace access, a dog park, and free covered parking in the garage (limited indoor parking is available for lease).

The basement level includes the central heating and cooling plant for the building and 110 parking spaces, 90 of which are available for lease to apartment residents and 20 to office tenants.

Branding, signage, way finding, and select artwork were designed by the local firm Loaded for Bear and embody the building's industrial design aesthetic. Artifacts and photographs from the building's days as a Sears distribution center and retail store reference its deep history as an important economic and social hub in Memphis. Colorful boxes on historic warehouse carts with directional signage offer wayfinding support. Seating and furniture are scattered along walkways surrounding the Central Atrium, offering places to eat, work, and gather for informal meetings.



The renovated parking garage faces a new internal street and public plaza.

Site Design

Primary access to the 16-acre site is via Concourse Avenue, an internal L-shaped drive that leads from North Watkins Street past the main building entrance and plaza to parking in on-street spaces, a four-story garage, and adjacent surface parking lots.

A large entry plaza at the intersection of Concourse Avenue and North Watkins Street, designed by Walter Hood Studio, serves as the “front porch” of the development. Once the parking lot of Sears Auto Center, it includes a 60,000-square-foot lawn, entry signage, seasonal water fountains, and large canopy shade structures with fans. Like the building, the plaza provides free public Wi-Fi.

The parking garage offers free public parking for 1,150 cars. The garage's concrete floors and diamond-shaped concrete façade panels were cleaned and repaired and replaced as needed. A new illuminated sign spelling “YOURS” replaces the original “SEARS” sign in the same location. The “Y” blinks on and off to signal, according to the developers, “what’s ours is yours and what’s yours is ours.”

Another internal street, Tower Avenue, provides access to the northern perimeter of the site including loading and service areas, the YMCA pool (opened July 2019), the theater, the Crosstown High gym (opened March 2019), and the school's student drop-off and entrance (required by code/law).

Claybrook Avenue connects Concourse Avenue through the building to Tower Avenue and the adjacent residential community. The sidewalk running parallel to the building turns as it approaches Claybrook, preventing pedestrians from walking directly into the street and reducing the likelihood of pedestrian-vehicle accidents.

The site includes three new buildings constructed by tenants and separate from the Crosstown Concourse development: a one-story trapezoidal structure just west of the main building housing the Crosstown Brewing Company and tasting room, a two-story performing arts theater just to the north of the Central Atrium, and the Crosstown High gymnasium, as well as an

adjacent outdoor pool for the Church Health YMCA just to the west of the theater on the other side of the loading and service area. Due to the column grid of the Crosstown Concourse building, with columns 20 feet apart on center, these uses could not be accommodated in the existing building.

Historic Preservation

The renovation was completed in accordance with the National Park Service Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for Historic Rehabilitation. LRK and Bologna Consultants worked closely with the Park Service to update an existing National Register nomination from 2008 (dating from the first project after the building was initially purchased) to extend the period of significance to 1967 to include the garage. They secured the designation in December 2013.

According to the design team, the Park Service was most protective of the original 1927 structure. Key points of negotiation included convincing the Park Service to include the garage as a contributing structure and to agree to remove six courses of brick from the parapet (to allow views from inside top floor apartments) and replacing 3,200 windows. Bologna Consultants prepared a report on every window in the building, making the case that more than half were beyond repair and needed to be replaced. The team reviewed mock-ups of windows by seven different manufacturers before selecting the new double-pane insulated model.

Sustainability

Crosstown Concourse is the largest LEED Platinum Certified historic adaptive reuse project in the world. The project scored 81 out of 110 points. According to LRK, the design and development team sought to make an "eco-conscious statement in the community" and to focus on conventional technologies that they knew would work in Memphis, rather than use more expensive means such as a biomass generation plant, solar panel arrays, and windmills.

According to LEED documentation, key project goals and sustainable features include:

- connecting health and wellness, arts, and education
- enhancing social inclusiveness
- revitalizing the area with business activity

- enhancing long-term asset value
- creating an easily maintained and secure facility
- access to mass transit
- improved accessibility
- enhanced landscaping and site lighting
- high-efficiency mechanical systems
- responsible waste management
- a new teaching kitchen, reflective white roof, LED lighting throughout the building and site, elevator cabs and controls, and energy-efficient windows.

Seismic Design

Crosstown Concourse is located in the New Madrid Seismic Zone, which stretches over a 5,000-square-mile area at the juncture of Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee, with Memphis at its center. The area was shaken by three major earthquakes within a two-month period in the early 1800s and is considered at risk for significant damage if struck again. Building codes in Memphis and Shelby County require seismic-resistant construction.

Since Crosstown is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the renovation was designed to meet the seismic requirements of the building code for existing historic buildings. The design team included professional engineers and building envelope consultants retained by the federal government to evaluate the damage to the Washington Monument following the 2011 earthquake in Washington, DC. The most significant seismic retrofits included removing, rebuilding, and bracing the building's roof parapets and anchoring precast concrete roof planks to the structure.

Design Challenges and Value Engineering

The design process entailed numerous challenges associated with navigating building codes, fire safety, and cost concerns. The team cut \$33 million in design to bring the project within budget. Changes included eliminating a 2,500-square-foot greenhouse on the roof and bridge-like walkways spanning the light wells as well as enclosing portions of the East and West Atria walls with glass, rather than leaving them open, to save money on smoke evacuation.

TENANTS, ACTIVITIES, AND PROGRAMS

The building is open 24/7 and is actively used throughout the day and evening. Regular programming and special events curated by Crosstown Arts and other founding tenants draw the public in and promote interaction between building occupants and visitors. Free Wi-Fi is available in all common areas, attracting students and freelance workers who use the countertops and furnished spaces adjacent to the main atrium.

Commercial Tenants

The Crosstown development team sought to curate a mix of locally owned businesses. In early 2019, the development housed a total of 48 tenants, including commercial and nonprofit organizations, retail, and restaurants. In addition to the founding tenants, these include:

Education, Office, and Service Provider Tenants

- A Step Ahead Foundation: empowers women by providing access to long-acting, reversible contraception
- Church Health YMCA
- City Leadership: leadership recruitment and development
- Crosstown Back & Pain Institute
- Crosstown Dental Group
- Focal Point at Crosstown Concourse: eye and vision care
- Forever Ready Productions: storytellers and video content creators
- G4S Security Solutions: local headquarters and also provides security for the building
- Hope Credit Union: financial education, products, and services
- Innovative Dental Technologies: dental training and consulting
- Layover at Crosstown: short-term stay apartments
- Memphis Education Fund: attracts, supports, and retains high-quality teachers and education partners
- nexAir: headquarters for national distributor of atmospheric gas and welding supplies
- OAM Network: independent podcast network broadcasting
- Suntrust Financial Confidence Center: free financial literacy information and classes and individual credit and money management counseling
- Tanenbaum Dermatology Center: Memphis-based practice

- Teach for America: Memphis office of the national organization
- Tech901: launches new careers through technology certification job training
- Temple Israel Crosstown: offers opportunities to connect with the Jewish community

Food Tenants

- Area 51 Ice Cream: small-batch, hand-made ice creams and sorbets
- Art Bar: full-service bar serving curated wines, craft beers, and cocktails
- Crosstown Arts café: coffee and pastries
- Crosstown Brewing Co.: craft brewery
- Farm Burger: burgers made from grass-fed, humanely raised cattle
- French Truck Coffee: small-batch coffee
- Elemento Neapolitan Pizza: pizza, salads
- Global Café: international food hall hosting three immigrant/refugee food entrepreneurs
- I Love Juice Bar: vegetarian, gluten-free juices and foods
- Lucy J's Bakery: full-service bakery
- Mempops: handcrafted frozen popsicles
- Next Door American Eatery: casual American eatery
- Poparoos: gourmet popcorn
- Saucy Chicken: antibiotic-free chicken

Retail Tenants

- AT&T
- Cheryl Pesce®: The Lifestyle Store: luxury handcrafted jewelry and home goods
- The Curb Market: food market
- FedEx Office: shipping, printing, and office supplies
- Focal Point at Crosstown Concourse: eyeglasses
- Gloss Nail Bar: nail salon
- Hero & Sage: hair salon
- Madison Pharmacy: independently owned pharmacy

Rental Apartments

Crosstown includes 265 rental apartments called The Parcels, a reference to



Food tenants are frequented by residents, office workers, and visitors.



Retail tenants line the corridor facing the former loading dock.

both a parcel of land and the thousands of parcels that were distributed by Sears Crosstown daily. LEDIC, which manages The Parcels, uses software with algorithms to help manage the leasing, occupancy, and rents. Three- to 13-month leases are available and a maximum of two pets are allowed per unit.

One hundred apartments are leased by founding tenants: 40 by MTR, 40 by St. Jude (20 for residents, 20 for visiting families), 14 by Crosstown Arts for visiting artists/artist residents, and 6 by Church Health (used for participants in its Scholars Program, which provides the opportunity for future doctors taking a gap year between college and medical school to train in the organization's holistic medicine practice). Fifty-three apartments (20%) are designated affordable.

Eight units are reserved for an in-house version of Airbnb, called Layover at Concourse, operated by Amy Carkuff. Furnished apartments can be rented like hotel rooms with prices beginning at \$185 per night for one-bedroom and \$230 for two-bedroom units. Carkuff's primary sources of guests are commercial and residential building tenants, neighboring nonprofit organizations, and Airbnb. Thus far, occupancy has ranged from 75–80%.

Governance and Management

Crosstown Concourse is owned by Crosstown Building Owner, LLC, which is a QUALICB (qualified active low-income community-based entity), a requirement for New Market Tax Credit financing. Crosstown Building Owner, in turn, is owned by Crosstown Redevelopment Cooperative Association, Inc., a Tennessee nonprofit corporation (approximately 1%); Crosstown, LLC (approximately 60%); and C Investor, LLC (approximately 39%).

Crosstown Concourse is governed by Crosstown Redevelopment Cooperative Association (CRCA) with a board composed of representatives from tenant organizations and the property owner(s). The board has nine members, with five appointed by managing member Crosstown, LLC and four appointed by a tenant advisory board composed of representatives from tenants occupying 35,000 square feet or more and two community members.

After the tax credit compliance period is completed (anticipated within the next five to seven years), the owners intend to donate the property to the CRCA. When this occurs, the tenant advisory board will appoint five members to the CRCA board, and Crosstown, LLC will retain four seats.

The property is managed by Cushman Wakefield/Commercial Advisors under the direction of the CRCA board. Management takes care to cultivate interest in and respect for the building's history and programming and to promote access and inclusivity. Building management, in collaboration with Crosstown Arts, provides an orientation for new staff every six months, including an introduction to the building and its history. While the building is open to everyone, loitering is discouraged. Crosstown has also partnered with the City of Memphis and Memphis Public Libraries to deploy an application that helps people in need access resources and services within a 10-mile radius, including clothing, food, shelters, job placement, substance abuse and mental health support, and health care. Security and management personnel have tablet computers with the application as well as cards listing resources and referral information.

As part of their lease agreements, all building tenants must report information regarding low-income employment and job creation to CRCA.

FINANCING

At the completion of construction in January 2017, the total cost for Crosstown Concourse was \$205,193,156. This amount does not include the additional funds (above tenant improvement allowances) invested by tenants to fit-out their spaces. Subsequent capital investments by tenants to build the new performing arts theater, high school gymnasium, and pool (not included in the following development budget) bring the total to over \$222 million.

Development

Financing for the development included 30 sources involving eight lenders, a bridge loan, and owner equity. They included philanthropic contributions, New Market and Historic Tax Credit equity, and City of Memphis and Shelby County financing.

Financing included \$86.5 million in senior debt led by SunTrust. Other syndicated participants in the senior loan included Bancorp South, Cadence Bank, Financial Federal Bank, Independent Bank, Magna Bank, Metropolitan Bank, and Renasant Bank. The project was recently refinanced with a 20-year fully amortizing term loan from JP Morgan. Philanthropic contributions included \$25 million as well as the value of the building and land, which was approximately \$6 million.

Operating Costs

At 98% leased, the building is profitable. The majority of operating revenue is generated by rents and covers expenses associated with building management, maintenance, and debt service. Profits are reinvested into the building.

The development team worked with the Tennessee State Legislature to pass a new law exempting buildings that are on the National Register for Historic Places, receive more than \$100 million in tax credit investment, and are located in a low-income census tract from franchise and excise tax, saving the development thousands of dollars per year.

The development team also secured a 20-year PILOT or Payment in Lieu of Taxes, a temporary abatement of future property taxes, from the Downtown Memphis Commission. In exchange for the abatement, recipients commit to a series of conditions, including contracting local minority- and women-owned firms and small businesses, creating and/or retaining jobs, and, in cases where there are 51 or more residential units, reserving at least 20% for low- and moderate-income individuals and families.

PROJECT EVALUATION

By most reports, Crosstown Concourse has been an outstanding success. One year after it opened, the building achieved 96% occupancy—99% residential, 97% commercial, and 85% retail. Richardson and Wilson have defined success not as breaking ground, nor opening day, but rather looking 10 years ahead to a future in which the Crosstown neighborhood is thriving and tenants want to renew leases. While at less than two years out it is premature to assess the project's long-term sustainability and community impact, early indications suggest that Crosstown Concourse

TABLE 2: DEVELOPMENT BUDGET**SOURCES**

Senior debt with syndication led by SunTrust (8 banks total)	\$86,500,000
Contributions and philanthropic equity (includes building)	\$31,179,267
Historic Tax Credit equity (Goldman Sachs Urban Investment Group)	\$36,461,845
New Market Tax Credit equity (SunTrust Community Capital including 6 Community Development Entities)	\$16,682,200
"Mezzanine" financing/bridge loan	\$13,969,844
City of Memphis (Brownfields Economic Development Investment, HUD Section 108, and capital improvement plan)	\$7,000,000
Shelby County (public infrastructure capital improvement plan)	\$5,000,000
Qualified Energy Conservation Bonds	\$8,150,000
Delta Regional Authority grant	\$250,000
Total	\$205,193,156

USES

Acquisition and hard costs	\$20,804,076
Building	\$90,469,329
Tenant improvements/finishes	\$49,829,675
Other costs (low voltage, signage, wayfinding, etc.)	\$5,325,000
Soft costs (legal, architecture, engineering, landscaping, and other consultants)	\$22,640,152
Closing costs/fees	\$9,900,298
Construction interest/reserves	\$6,224,626
Total	\$205,193,156

Crosstown Arts



The former Sears Crosstown building remained vacant for 20 years.

Chad Mellon



Crosstown Concourse transformed the massive structure into an inclusive and creative community.

is already making a difference and promises to play an important role in the city's future.

IMPACT

Creating an Inclusive and Creative Community Hub

At the grand opening, Richardson described looking into the crowd and seeing all of Memphis represented in the range of ages, races, and incomes. The developers report that 3,000 people—a combination of residents, workers, students, and visitors—pass through the building daily.

Public areas are active throughout the day and into the evening with a variety of people of different ages and cultures from the surrounding community and greater Memphis. The building comes alive early on weekday mornings as workers and students enter the building and people of all ages and fitness levels head to the YMCA. As the day goes on, others enter the building for appointments at Church Health, Crosstown Dental, and Focal Point, as well as other organizations. People gather at the coffee shop and cafés for meetings and presentations. MTR teachers, Rhodes College students, and other individuals are seated at the work surfaces along the railings of the upper levels of the Central Atrium while others gather in adjacent seating areas. High school students frequent ground-floor food vendors and study alongside college students in the atria. Families with children wander through, pausing to take in the space and artwork and to climb the Theater Stair to play alongside the bookshelves. Throughout the day and evening, apartment residents come and go, running errands, bringing in groceries, and walking dogs. Parents with young children entrust them to ride their tricycles and visit friends down the halls.

The building is active with formal and informal creative programming and activities. In 2018, Crosstown Arts hosted 65 artists-in-residence and produced over 300 arts and community-related events and live music performances, drawing approximately 100,000 participants. In May 2019, the organization launched a series of weekly movie screenings in its newly completed theater. Church Health hosts cooking classes in its teaching kitchen next to the West Atrium. Crosstown High students engage in project-based learning in their maker lab and video production studio. Crosstown Brewing Co. has live music three nights a week.

A recent two-part news story on “Memphis’ Underground Economy” highlighted Crosstown Concourse’s role in supporting the city’s freelance and remote workers. It referred to the building as “a perfect place for dreamers and risk takers,” offering creative inspiration and amenities such as coffee, food, and other services. Their presence is evident during the day, when they can be seen working alone and in small groups at café tables or in the corridors surrounding the Central Atrium. According to Richardson, 30 to 40 freelancers regularly use the building as their office.

Crosstown High leaders are intentional about shaping the diversity of the student body, seeking to mirror the racial and economic demographics of the City of Memphis. The state of Tennessee does not allow schools to set aside seats for specific populations, so Crosstown High targets specific neighborhoods for recruitment. The 2018 inaugural class of freshmen came from 28 middle schools and was 46% African American, 34% White, 10% multiracial, 4% Latinx, and 6% other. The freshman class arriving in 2019 was 54% African American, 33% White, 6% Latinx, 1% Asian, 1% American Indian, and 6% other. According to “Eating, Shopping, and Project-Based Learning: A View from Memphis’ Mall-Based Crosstown High” in *The 74 Million* (a nonprofit, nonpartisan news site covering education in America), Crosstown High leaders are “pleased with those numbers, along with the proportion of low-income students served.”

According to the Church Health website, more than 80% of its patients “live at or below the poverty line, equivalent to less than \$12,000 for a single individual per year.” At 6 a.m. on a weekday morning, the YMCA gym was filled with people who appeared to be socially, economically, and racially diverse.

Putting Memphis on the Map

Local leaders credit Crosstown Concourse as the catalyst for recent investment in Memphis. The project proved that large, mixed-use development is possible in Memphis. It also opened the door for the city to access national funding. Major mixed-use projects in development in early 2019 included One Beale (\$225 million development), Central Station (\$55 million), Wonder Bread Factory and Edge District Redevelopment (over \$100 million), and



The building’s atria are popular gathering spaces for families with children and Crosstown High students.



The building is active throughout the day with informal gatherings and formal programming.



Local freelancers and college students use the building's many public spaces for meetings and work.

Looney Ricks Kiss



The move to Crosstown Concourse enabled Church Health to consolidate and improve services.

Union Row (\$950 million). According to the article “5 Things to Know about Union Row, a \$950 Million Development in Downtown Memphis,” the developer of the project, considered to be the largest in the city’s history, cited the success of Crosstown Concourse with making it easier for his team to secure outside capital. LRK has toured developers from across the world through the Crosstown building, converting several of them into clients.

Improved Service Delivery, Increased Impact, and New Partnerships

Moving into new space in the building has increased the quality of services and impact of anchor tenants, including Church Health and MTR. Co-location, proximity, and the sense of community have facilitated new partnerships between tenant organizations.

The consolidation of Church Health from 14 separate facilities into one location at Crosstown enabled the organization to increase the number of patients served and the quality of its services. The organization reported a 17% increase in the number of patients seen between fiscal years 2017 and 2018 and a decrease in overall operating costs due to its consolidation. The new facilities enable Church Health to focus on its integrated approach to patient care by offering a one-stop shop for comprehensive health-care services. Church Health increased the number of chairs in its dental clinic from 10 to 24 and added new equipment and technology donated by Delta Dental of Tennessee. In 2018, the organization earned a “Patient-Centered Medical Home” designation by the National Committee for Quality Assurance, an independent nonprofit that works to improve health care quality through the administration of evidence-based standards, measures, programs, and accreditation. In July 2019, Church Health and the YMCA opened a pool next to the building where they plan to offer swimming classes as well as other wellness and community activities.

Memphis Teacher Residency was one of the first three office tenants to move into Crosstown in March 2017, relocating from its former space in a church basement. The Crosstown space offers offices, larger training rooms, and community areas, as well as on-site apartments for teachers. Moving into the new space has enabled the organization to expand its on-site programs and resources for teachers and launch a new executive program. The nonprofit



The proximity of organizations has fostered new partnerships, collaborations, and businesses.

reports that 80%–85% of teachers who complete the program remain in Memphis after their residency is completed, with some staying in the building.

Co-location and proximity of organizations have fostered new partnerships and collaborations. The high school is an active collaborator, inviting building tenants and local partners to faculty meetings to plan projects that engage students with the Crosstown community and the outside world. A recent example involved architects, engineers, contractors, and LEED consultants in the development of a geometry project to learn how to design sustainable housing. Another project engaged students in interviewing refugees from five different continents, including Global Kitchen operators, and developing projects to share their experiences to increase empathy and understanding.

Creating Jobs and Incubating New Businesses and Investment

Less than two years after its completion, Crosstown Concourse had created 1,290 construction jobs and 409 new permanent jobs and hosted 13 new business ventures. It has fostered a modest uptick in neighboring commercial

investment, and residential property values have increased significantly in the surrounding community. One neighborhood resident cited an almost 20% increase in values since 2015.

The Crosstown development team worked with Allworld Project Management to host three job fairs in 2016, 2017, and 2018, targeting low-income communities, women, and minorities. The effort included reaching out to job placement centers, government agencies, health departments, libraries and community centers, nonprofits, religious institutions, schools, and the media through in-person meetings, email correspondence, and social media. The 2016 fair drew 570 participants, 59% from communities surrounding Crosstown Concourse, 76% of whom indicated they were low-income, and included 308 jobs advertised by 12 employers. The third job fair drew 450 job fair registrations, and the exhibitor list included 60 organizations with job openings across Memphis.

The 1,290 construction jobs generated by Crosstown Concourse (as of late 2018) exceeds the 1,000 projected in the RKG study. Ninety-five percent were managed by local Memphis-owned businesses, and 32% were awarded to minority- and women-owned companies, exceeding the goal of 20%. The development team began tracking permanent job creation by building tenants (in addition to construction) in 2016; 409 full-time jobs were created as of December 31, 2018, with 62% filled by women, 57% by minorities, and 48% by people who qualified as low income.

The building itself is home to four new social entrepreneurship ventures, including:

- Global Café, an international food hall offering global cuisine, job opportunities for refugees, and healthy, sustainably sourced food. The cafeteria-style restaurant offers authentic, affordable dishes prepared by refugee food entrepreneurs from Nepal, Sudan, and Syria.
- Lucy J's Bakery, a 1,000-square-foot bakery serving pay-what-you-can coffee with proceeds benefiting Dorothy Day House, a transitional shelter for families experiencing homelessness. The organization pays a living wage of at least \$15 per hour and provides health insurance via Church Health Center.



Global Kitchen offers affordable ethnic cuisine prepared by refugee entrepreneurs.



A local business operates Amurica, a photobooth housed in a trailer inside the main lobby.

- Tech901, a mission-driven nonprofit seeking to increase the home-grown technology workforce in Memphis. The organization offers six daytime or evening courses leading to certifications in information technology hardware, user support, data security, coding, and software. Students range from 15 to 63 years old; 70% are non-White and 38% female.

New businesses have also opened on-site and across the street. As of early 2019, they included:

- Amurica, a photography studio once located on N. Cleveland Street that now operates a photobooth trailer inside Crosstown Concourse.
- Black Lodge, an art house cinema, video rental store, and music performance space.
- Brg3s Architects, a local firm specializing in health care, civic, retail, commercial, and hospitality design with an office at 396 N. Cleveland Street.
- Bubble Bistro, a store specializing in handmade soaps, body oils, and scrubs.
- CrossFit Hit & Run, a Memphis-based CrossFit training facility with four locations, including one at 439 N. Cleveland Street.
- Crosstown Brewing, an on-site brewing company and taproom owned by a nearby resident.
- The Doghouzz, a gourmet hotdog restaurant and bar.
- Dragonfly Collective, a community development organization.
- Hi Tone, a performance venue for local and traveling up-and-coming musicians and bands.
- Levitt Shell, a nonprofit presenting 50 free outdoor concerts a year at the 1936 Overton Park Shell, with an office at 420 N. Cleveland Street.
- Mardi Gras Memphis, a locally owned and operated restaurant serving Louisiana Cajun cuisine.
- Midtown Crossing Grill, a locally owned and operated pizzeria.
- Mortgage Financial Services, a full-service mortgage banker on N. Cleveland Street.
- My City Rides, a nonprofit offering a three-year lease-to-own scooter for \$3/day along with training, licensure, vehicle, tags, insurance, scheduled maintenance, helmet, and lock.

- Proud Mary, a retailer that sells vintage clothing and handmade goods by emerging artists at 433 N. Cleveland Street.
- Saucy Chicken, a Southern-inspired fast-casual restaurant featuring antibiotic-free chicken and locally sourced ingredients. The business replaced Mama Gaia, a vegetarian restaurant.
- Urban Art Commission, a nonprofit that connects artists and neighborhoods through public art, located at 422 N. Cleveland Street.

In 2016, Alzheimer's and Dementia Services of Memphis purchased 445 N. Watkins Avenue, a 7,300-square-foot former laundromat across the street from Crosstown for a new facility (its third in Memphis), where it plans to create a new dementia day center that will employ 40 to 45 people and serve about 50 adults.

While there is some new investment in the community surrounding Crosstown Concourse and residents in the neighboring community report that property values are increasing, there are a few commercial buildings along Cleveland Street that remain vacant. As local real estate brokers observed in the *Daily News* article "Crosstown Crossroads: With Crosstown Concourse open, it's only a matter of time before the Cleveland corridor is rejuvenated," some owners have unreasonable expectations about the market value of their properties while others are not willing or financially able to invest in their buildings to make them appealing to potential tenants.

Gentrification and Displacement

According to Richardson, there are constant conversations about displacement. During the development process, the Crosstown Concourse team was intentional about limiting the amount of retail in the building, with the goal of encouraging new development in the business district. Retail comprises 65,000 square feet (compared to 350,000 square feet in Ponce City Market in Atlanta) or less than 6% of the building and is designed to serve other activities rather than be an attraction itself. For example, FedEx serves business tenants with shipping services and office supplies, the Curb Market offers fresh and prepared foods for residents and office workers, and Madison Pharmacy provides over-the-counter and prescription medications for residents, office workers, and Church Health patients.



New businesses in the neighborhood include the Urban Art Commission on N. Cleveland Street.

The development team also targeted locally owned businesses rather than national chains. With office tenants, the team was careful to avoid causing displacement from other city districts by recruiting organizations located outside the city center or those seeking to consolidate or expand, like ALSAC, Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare, and Church Health.

Community leaders, including representatives from Crosstown Memphis CDC, a newly created local nonprofit community-based organization, agree that investment is needed and view Crosstown Concourse as an opportunity to strengthen surrounding neighborhoods while remaining cautious about the possibility of gentrification and displacement. As Darrell Cobbins, president and founder of Universal Commercial Real Estate, observed in the *Daily News* article, it is important that "community stakeholders, developers, and city leaders all work together to mitigate the possible unintended consequences of gentrification."

OBSERVATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

“Better Together”

Crosstown Concourse is the product of a robust collaboration among a group of people and organizations deeply committed to the project’s vision and values, to place-based investment, and to Memphis. The development leveraged individual and organizational relationships and skills to realize what many considered an impossible vision.

As one person described it, Memphis is “a big small town.” This helped Richardson and Miner find help when and where they needed it, tapping friends and families for ideas and contacts. These relationships opened the door at key points in the process: Miner and Richardson’s conversations with Cates about their vision for repurposing Sears Crosstown as a community-oriented contemporary arts center; Richardson connecting with McLean Wilson as he was searching for financing expertise; and Richardson approaching Scott Morris to secure Church Health as a founding tenant. It also helped to leverage buy-in and resources, such as getting the CEOs of major stakeholders to visit Midtown Exchange in Minneapolis.

The development team brought substantial expertise, and the eight founding partners brought essential credibility and funding to the process. The project would not have been possible without Cates, the progressive and open-minded building owner, who contributed essential, patient capital.

Development team members referred to their process of working together as “collaborative iteration” and “group ideation”—as Miner observed, “the way art projects are made.” Throughout the process, the team took a consensus-based approach to decisions, ensuring that all team members were heard and responded to. Everyone pitched in when needed. As one person said, a colleague “closed one of the most difficult deals in the country while carrying the trash out.”

The Benefits of “Not Knowing What You Don’t Know”

The Crosstown development team undertook an ambitious task that others thought—and even they readily acknowledged—might be impossible: renovating an abandoned 1.5-million-square-foot warehouse into a vertical

community with the arts at the center of the development plan. Throughout the process and up until the closing, the biggest challenge of the project was believability. According to Richardson and other members of the team, because no one took them seriously, the team was willing and able to try different, out-of-the-box ideas, such as anchoring the building with a mix of locally grown arts, education, and health-care organizations rather than national retailers. Rather than feel bound by traditional development approaches, they felt free and emboldened to test different ideas, continuing to iterate and adapt them over time.

Even so, the team’s work was grounded by substantial professional expertise and extensive research. Although no one on the team had completed a project comparable to Crosstown Concourse, the members leveraged past experience and considerable personal tenacity. The findings from the feasibility studies and visits to Sears buildings that had been redeveloped in other cities provided critical information that informed their thinking and the overall development strategy.

The Power of Inclusion and Diversity

During the planning of Crosstown Concourse, Christopher Miner wrote a short story to capture the team’s vision for Crosstown as a place that encourages people who may or may not know each other to come together. As Richardson describes it, “the culmination of that visioning session was Chris reading a story he wrote about a fictional character named Allison Ray who visited the building after renovation. The story provided a tangible, real-life vision for what we were collectively committing to work towards and left everyone in tears.”

Central to the success of Crosstown is the strength of the vision of an inclusive, vertical, mixed-use village. This guided decisions at key points in the development process, including tenant recruitment and building design. The careful curation of tenants resulted in a collection of civic institutions and nonprofit organizations with shared values that contribute to a sense of community. The open design of the building, including the large, light-filled atria and interweaving of uses, creates a welcoming environment that provides opportunities for mixing and chance encounters. During the day, the diversity

of users within the building reflect this goal with high school students from across the city mixing with college students, office workers and their clients, Church Health doctors and patients, YMCA members, neighborhood and buildings residents, and visitors from other parts of Memphis and beyond.

The purpose and importance of the Crosstown Concourse vision and values are reflected in the building's governance structure, which reinforces shared, community ownership and accountability. That said, some building users observed that the majority of the building's governing board are White and suggested that increasing diversity so that it is more representative of Memphis would be valued by the community.

Early on, according to Richardson, the Crosstown Concourse development team decided to document the project with a visual journal, creating videos to capture the entire process from its inception. These videos provide insight into past and present activities—open houses and building tours, Crosstown Arts' arts and music programming, special events, etc.—including the people attending. Overall, the people in the videos are diverse, appearing to mirror the demographics of Memphis. This diversity was noted during the site visit and is visible in the photos taken on opening day. Several people, including Richardson, shared the story of a young Black woman who approached Richardson at the opening event and told him that Crosstown was a place in Memphis where there is a community of people who look like her.

Even so, while many people familiar with the project agree that building users are very diverse, some Memphians noted that lower-income residents from adjoining neighborhoods like Klondike and Smokey City did not feel that Crosstown was for them.

Changing the Narrative of Memphis

The rebirth of Sears Crosstown as Crosstown Concourse appears to be a pivotal turning point for the city of Memphis. Sears Crosstown was an important part of Memphians' retail experience and economy, and its closure became a symbol of the city's decline and urban sprawl. Its renewal reflects characteristics of Memphis that Memphians value: a passion for arts and culture, old buildings, and their city.



Crosstown Arts

Crosstown Concourse's design and programming creates an inclusive, welcoming environment.



Looney Ricks Kiss

The renewal of the historic building reflects Memphis' artistic and creative identity.



The design of the building and its many public areas foster a sense of openness and community.

Crosstown Arts



Crosstown Concourse tenants and programming draw a diversity of people from across the city.

Arts and creativity have long been tied to Memphis's identity. At Crosstown Concourse, they are central to the building's redevelopment. They serve as catalysts for new activity, drawing upon Memphis's rich cultural history while fostering inclusivity and diversity. In this way, Crosstown has become a symbol of the city's future.

MEETING PROJECT GOALS

GOAL: Create an open, inclusive, and animated place designed to dissolve barriers to access and serve Memphians of all socioeconomic statuses.

Crosstown Concourse offers a welcoming environment. The mix and placement of tenants, interweaving of uses and programming, and thoughtful building design create many opportunities for interaction. The light-filled atria, generous corridors, and many interior windows and glass partitions create a sense of openness, transparency, and connectedness.

Apartment residents reported a feeling of ownership and being part of a broader community. Some are able to look out their kitchen windows across the atria and see neighbors in theirs, as one might look across a garden fence in a traditional neighborhood.

Management policies and programming support a sense of community and openness and inclusiveness. Employee orientations introduce new staff to the building and its history. Regular events and programming draw a variety of people from within the building and across the city.

GOAL: Promote openness, connection, learning, and exchange by offering regular programming that encourages spontaneity, cultivates curiosity, and inspires imagination.

The mix of carefully curated tenants and programming attracts visitors to Crosstown Concourse and fosters formal and informal interaction between members of the public and building occupants. Crosstown Arts hosts a broad variety of programs each week, many of which are free, including artist talks, concerts, exhibitions, films, and workshops as well as seasonal and special events. Church Health offers cooking classes and Crosstown High teachers partner with businesses inside the building to engage students in project-based learning outside the classroom.



Events take place throughout the year, including a traditional Vietnamese Mid-Autumn Festival.

The building, especially the Central Atrium, is also used for special events, such as an 880-person ticketed event for the Civil Rights Museum. Regular programming and special events attract a wide, diverse audience and provide valuable exposure to building tenants, including retail, restaurants, and nonprofits. Artwork and artifacts installed throughout public areas connect building users to both its history and its current role as a creative hub. Creative wayfinding signage and furnishings scattered along walkways invite exploration and interaction. The building is frequently used for photo and video shoots, informal meetings, working, and studying.

GOAL: Recognize, embrace, and amplify the iconic industrial character and Art Deco style of Sears Crosstown and its historical context.

Crosstown Concourse restored and reactivated an important architectural, economic, and social landmark in Memphis and the surrounding community. The developers rehabilitated the historic structure, preserving original architectural features while inserting new uses and contemporary features and finishes that complement its industrial character. Photographs and artifacts from the building's past remind current users of its rich legacy and contributions to Memphis and the surrounding community.

GOAL: Establish a flexible and adaptable vertical “micro-city” within the building by incorporating key components of “urban magnets” including retail, education, production, programming and events, and a unique sense of place.

The developers have succeeded in creating a strong sense of community via the building design and a carefully curated mix of tenants and programming that incorporates the key components of “urban magnets.” As of June 2019, the project had been in operation for less than two years, so it is difficult to evaluate its capacity to adapt to changing conditions over time. That said, one could imagine that the simplicity of the original warehouse design and more recent renovation will enable it to evolve and adapt to changes in uses and tenants over time.

GOAL: Merge the development with its surrounding neighborhood to allow a seamless connection between the activities within and around the building.

Crosstown is centrally located in the city along a major artery served by public transit. Three bus lines pass near the building, although most people who live and work in the building drive. Crosstown High has a separate drop-off and entrance on the north side of the building.

Developers were careful to include businesses and programming that complement rather than compete with what already existed in the surrounding neighborhood. However, despite efforts to open up the building with a ground floor arcade along the former loading dock and connect it to the surrounding neighborhood via the new plaza, entrances, and extension of Claybrook Avenue, the development feels physically disconnected from the surrounding community. This is due, in part, to the substantial difference in scale between Crosstown Concourse and the adjacent residential neighborhoods and the absence of a thriving business district. Even so, the building was actively used throughout the site visit.

SELECTION COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

The Selection Committee agreed that Crosstown Concourse offers a compelling story about the ability of an unlikely team to take on a large, difficult endeavor with audacious goals. They praised the project as experimental and

innovative and commended its determination to foster diversity, access, and sustainability, especially in a smaller, “slow growth” city like Memphis.

The project’s eclectic mix of socially minded tenants contributes to a vibrant and inclusive environment. The committee acknowledged the efforts of the developers to curate a broad mix of founding tenants with shared values including arts, education, and health and wellness organizations in addition to the more typical housing, office, and restaurant and retail space. The inclusion of the high school brought students into the mix and created the opportunity for teachers to live and work in the same building, something no one recalled seeing in another project.



The mix of uses and preservation of the building’s architecture contribute to a unique sense of place.

“Crosstown Concourse offers a compelling story about the ability of an unlikely team to take on a large, difficult endeavor with audacious goals.”

Committee members praised the developers' attention to design, balancing the preservation of the historic structure with thoughtful architectural interventions that enhance connectivity and interaction. Their design decisions and the intentional arrangement of uses resulted in richly layered spaces that contribute to the considerable energy and diversity of activity in the space. However, the committee expressed disappointment in the way the development seemed physically disconnected from the adjoining neighborhood. They recognized that it was due, in part, to the way the original Sears Crosstown was constructed and acknowledged the team's efforts to introduce new connections through the new plaza, re-introduction of a city street, creation of multiple building entrances, and opening up of the facade at ground level along Concourse Avenue. The committee was hopeful that continued efforts to enhance outdoor spaces and community-oriented programming will help to further integrate the project into the fabric of the neighborhood.

While enthusiastic about the project and the efforts its unusual development team have made to create an inclusive and welcoming place, the Selection Committee acknowledged that the development of the project was top-down. They encouraged the leadership team to be vigilant about their intention to cultivate community ownership and further diversify the governing board so that it becomes more representative of Memphis and surrounding neighborhoods. The committee remained concerned about Crosstown Concourse drawing businesses and investment away from



The building design and curation of tenants contribute to a vibrant and inclusive environment.

downtown and surrounding neighborhoods, even though the developers have made an effort to avoid such displacement and new development is occurring in downtown and other areas. The committee also observed that, like 2019 Silver Medalist Buffalo Bayou Park, the project entailed a significant amount of gifted, philanthropic support. Some expressed concern about the faith-based overlay among founding tenants, including Church Health, Memphis Teacher Residency, and Christian Brothers University, while others pointed out the significant supportive role of such organizations within communities, especially those in the South that often lack public resources.

While the committee concurred that the project is impressive and inspiring, there was some concern that it was unusual and would be difficult to replicate. Even so, the committee observed that many other cities are wrestling with similar underutilized and vacant retail, warehouse, and storage structures and that Crosstown Concourse offered a “unique solution to a widespread problem.”

RELATED RBA WINNERS

The following RBA winners involve the preservation and adaptive reuse of large-scale historic structures into community-oriented, mixed-use developments with ambitious social agendas. Like Crosstown Concourse, each entailed redeveloping and reknitting a well-known civic anchor that once defined its community and was threatened by demolition back into the social and physical fabric of the city.



STEELSTACKS ARTS & CULTURAL CAMPUS in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania (2017 Gold Medalist) transformed a historic steel mill into a cultural entertainment district. Envisioned as a 21st-century town square, the 9.5-acre campus was developed in partnership with an arts organization and public broadcasting station and hosts community-oriented facilities along with outdoor performance space, a park, and a visitor center.



CHILDREN'S MUSEUM OF PITTSBURGH in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (2007 Gold Medalist) is comprised of three National Register historic structures in the heart of a neighborhood devastated by 1960's-era urban renewal. Once abandoned, the renovated structures now form a collaborative campus and community hub housing the museum, arts- and education-related nonprofit partners, theaters, and a park.

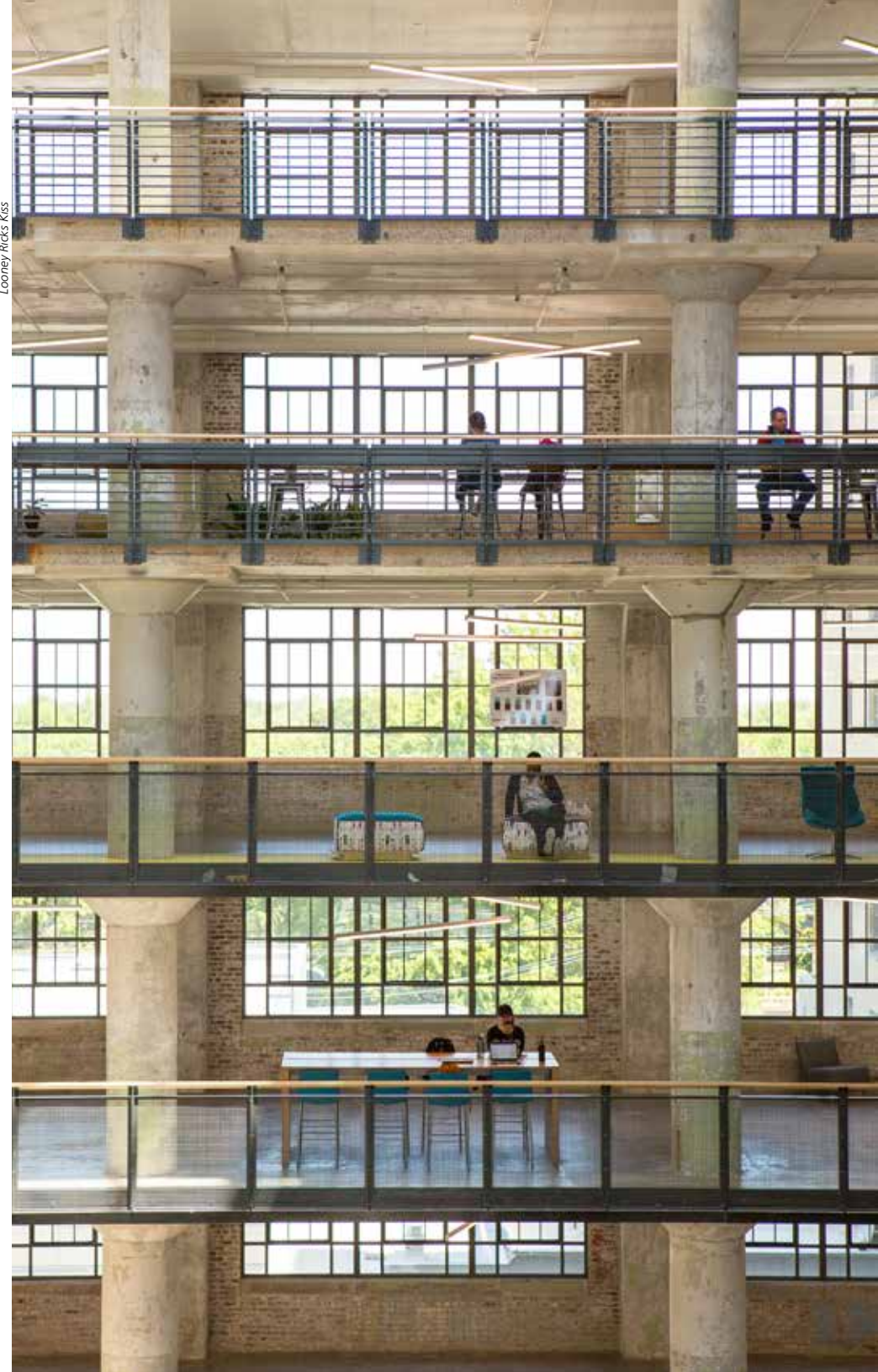


PIKE PLACE MARKET in Seattle, Washington (1987 Gold Medalist) is the preservation and expansion of a historic public market into a mixed-use development combining retail, residential, and community-oriented social services. The seven-acre project includes 300 businesses and 750 subsidized housing units along with a health clinic, food bank, childcare center, and senior center.

Other related RBA winners that involve the redevelopment of large-scale historic structures and sites into mixed-use campuses include Miller's Court in Baltimore, Maryland (2015 Gold Medalist); Santa Fe Rail yard in Santa Fe, New Mexico (2011 Silver Medalist); and Swan's Marketplace in Oakland, California (2001 Silver Medalist).

More information about these and other RBA winners can be found at www.rudybruneraward.org.

Looney Ricks Kiss



Resources

This report was compiled from information gathered from the project application; an extensive site visit by Simeon Bruner, Robert Shibley, and Anne-Marie Lubenau (lead author) in March 2019; and research and interviews conducted during those processes and throughout the writing of this report. Titles and positions of interviewees and URLs listed below were effective as of the site visit unless otherwise noted.

INTERVIEWS

Building Users

- **Mercedes Burch**, A&M Creative Partners
- **Bill Ganus**, local entrepreneur and consultant
- **Luther Mercer**, Director of Development, Whole Child Strategies
- **Averell Mundy**, A&M Creative Partners
- **Cardell Orrin**, Memphis City Director, Stand for Children

City of Memphis

- **Jennifer Oswalt**, President, Downtown Memphis Commission
- **Jim Strickland**, Mayor, City of Memphis

Community

- **Justin Gillis**, Board Member, Crosstown CDC
- **Tom Jones**, Smart City Memphis
- **Clark Ortkiese**, Co-founder, Crosstown Brewing, LLC
- **Bianca Phillips**, Board Member, Crosstown CDC and Communications Coordinator, Crosstown Arts
- **Porsche Stevens**, Board Member, Crosstown CDC and Community Relations Coordinator, Crosstown Arts
- **Kelvin Walters**, local resident and musician

Design

- **Alan Boniface**, Principal, Dialog Design
- **Tony Pellicciotti**, Principal, Looney Ricks Kiss
- **Jim Prillaman**, Vice President, OGCB, Inc.
- **Frank Ricks**, Founding Principal, Looney Ricks Kiss

Development and Management

- **Tony Bologna**, Bologna Consultants
- **Amelia (Amy) Carkuff**, Carkuff Interior Design
- **G. Staley Cates**, Chairman, The Poplar Foundation; Vice-Chairman, Southeastern Asset Management, Inc.
- **Taylor Gray**, Bass Berry Simms
- **Christopher Miner**, Director/Co-Founder, Crosstown Arts
- **Todd Richardson**, President, Crosstown Redevelopment Cooperative; Co-Founder, Crosstown Arts; Associate Professor, Renaissance Art History, University of Memphis
- **Richard Spore**, Bass Berry Sims
- **T. Gaillard (Gil) Uhlhorn**, Bass Berry Sims
- **Bradley Wilford**, Vice President of Asset Management, Cushman & Wakefield Commercial Advisors
- **McLean Wilson**, Kemmons Wilson Companies

Tenants

- **Ann Langston**, Senior Director of Strategic Partnerships and Opportunities, Church Health
- **David Montague**, Executive Director, Memphis Teacher Residency (MTR)
- **G. Scott Morris**, Founder and CEO, Church Health
- **MTR Teachers in Residence**, Faith, Grace, May, and Trey
- **Ginger Spickler**, Opportunity Wrangler, Crosstown High
- **Chris Terrill**, Executive Director, Crosstown High

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OTHER AWARDS

2019

- American Council of Engineering Companies Engineering Excellence Awards, National Recognition Award
- American Institute of Architects (AIA) National Honor Award
- *Memphis Business Journal* Building Memphis Awards, Best New Construction (Crosstown Theater)
- Pillars of Multifamily Industry Award Program, Best Mixed-use Community Award and Multifamily Community of the Year Award
- Urban Land Institute Global Awards for Excellence, Finalist

2018

- AIA Memphis Honor Award of Excellence

- American Society of Civil Engineers Outstanding Project of the Year for Tennessee
- American Council of Engineering Companies Tennessee Chapter Grand Award
- *Architectural Review* Shortlist, Adaptive Reuse
- *Building Design + Construction* 35th Annual Reconstruction Awards, Platinum Award
- Congress for the New Urbanism Charter Awards Grand Prize
- International Parking Institute Awards Award of Merit
- *Memphis Business Journal* Building Memphis Awards, Project of the Year
- *Multifamily Executive* Adaptive Reuse Grand Award and Editor's Choice (The Parcels)
- *Multi-Housing News* Excellence Award
- National Association of Home Builders Multifamily Pillars of the Industry Award, Finalist
- National Trust for Historic Preservation Richard H. Driehaus Foundation National Preservation Award
- Tennessee Governor's Environmental Stewardship Award, Building Green
- US Green Building Council Tennessee Exceptional Leadership Award
- World Architecture Festival Shortlist, New and Old

2017

- *Architecture Review* New into Old Awards, Shortlist
- Thomas W. Briggs Foundation Community Impact Award
- Trane National Energy Efficiency Leader Award

2015

- John S. Wilder Rebuild Tennessee Award
- Memphis Area Association of Realtors Community Impact Award
- *Novogradac Journal of Tax Credits* Community Development Qualified Low-Income Community Investment of the Year Award

2013

- *Inside Memphis Business* Innovation Award



RUDY
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AWARD
FOR URBAN EXCELLENCE

**2019
SILVER
MEDALIST**



Beyond Walls

Lynn, Massachusetts

A public art and lighting initiative in the
heart of a former industrial city



Warren Jagger

Overview

Submitted by: Beyond Walls

Completed: Ongoing

Total Development Cost: \$913,592

Located just north of Boston on the Atlantic coast, Lynn, Massachusetts, was once a thriving manufacturing center. Dubbed the “shoemaking capital of the world” in 1885, the city attracted immigrants who worked in its tanneries, shoe factories, and early electric industries. However, like other post-industrial urban areas, after World War II, Lynn began to struggle as production began to decline and manufacturing moved elsewhere.

Now, as regional growth fuels investment in surrounding communities, the city—a 10-minute commuter rail ride from Boston—is experiencing renewed interest and development. Its downtown was one of the first in the state to be designated a Massachusetts Cultural District, and in 2014, Lynn was named one of 10 pilots for MassDevelopment’s Transformative Development Initiative, which engaged the community in planning efforts to increase vibrancy and economic development downtown.

Inspired by these initiatives and mural programs in other cities, North Shore resident Al Wilson started Beyond Walls in 2016 as a volunteer effort to reactivate downtown Lynn through public art installations.

“Beyond Walls is a wonderful example of the power of arts-focused tactical urbanism to bring vitality and beauty to the urban landscape.”

— 2019 Selection Committee

By May 2019, the now independent 501(c)3 nonprofit had produced two citywide mural festivals, resulting in 42 large-scale murals by renowned local and international street artists, and mounted 11 vintage neon sign installations along with creative lighting displays under three commuter rail underpasses.

The initiative is generating widespread interest fueled by special events and tours. The 2017 festival attracted more than 5,000 visitors and 4.5 million social media impressions, prompting other organizations in the region to engage Beyond Walls for similar art installations in their own communities.

The \$913,592 project was made possible through significant philanthropic, corporate, and in-kind support from local individuals, businesses, and organizations including the City of Lynn, the Barr Foundation, the Boston Foundation, and the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades. The architecture firm Payette, the architectural lighting design firm Lam Partners, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, and Port Lighting Systems offered pro-bono design and installation services.

Beyond Walls is currently expanding its work into public space development. Later in 2019, the organization planned to launch four downtown “parklets” and develop a new concert venue and public park on three acres of open space on the city’s waterfront.

“There is now a sustained downtown energy of visitors taking in these pieces as well as residents rediscovering their own backyard through art experiences,” said Joseph Mulligan, Lynn’s MassDevelopment Transformative Development Initiative Fellow. “Ultimately, this has led to a change in perception, and the public views Lynn in a more favorable light.”



Murals, lighting installations, and arts-related events are drawing people back to downtown Lynn.



Project at a Glance

- Public art and lighting installations in downtown Lynn, Massachusetts, a working-class, former industrial city on Boston's North Shore.
- Multiple projects including 42 large-scale murals created by renowned artists as part of Beyond Walls Street Art Festivals; "Lynn Lights" underpass lighting; "RetroLit," the installation of 11 vintage neon signs in downtown public spaces; and "42," the conservation of a 1942 GE I-A jet engine.
- An ongoing initiative by an independent 501(c)3 that seeks to reactivate and revitalize downtown Lynn.

Project Goals

- Strengthen the community by activating downtown spaces through creative placemaking.
- Improve the perception of Lynn through investment in the downtown public realm.
- Increase pedestrian safety and economic activity downtown with the introduction of new lighting and public art.
- Produce visible, high-quality murals that reflect the culture of the community by engaging locally, nationally, and internationally renowned artists.
- Attract media attention to change the narrative around Lynn.

Chronology

1629

Area previously inhabited by the Naumkeag people is incorporated as Saugus by British colonists.

1838

The Eastern Railroad opens between Salem and East Boston with a stop in Saugus.

1850

Part of Saugus becomes the City of Lynn, which becomes a fashionable summer resort for Boston residents.

1880–1920

Lynn's immigrant population grows to one third of the city's population, a percentage that remains consistent through 2019.

1970s

The Eastern Railroad line is acquired by the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) for commuter rail service.

1981

Lynn's last shoe factory closes and a fire destroys 17 buildings downtown, contributing to the city's slow decline.

2009

Studies indicate that a disproportionate amount of crime and vehicle/pedestrian accidents in Lynn occur at railway underpasses.

1800

1900

2000

1635

The first leather tannery and shoemaking operation opens in Lynn, initiating an industry that grows over time to make the city the "shoemaking capital of the world" by 1885.

1845

Frederick Douglass writes *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* while living in the area.

1860

New England shoemakers strike in Lynn to protest reduced wages.

1892

General Electric Co. is founded with headquarters in Lynn and Schenectady, NY.

1972

Plans for constructing Interstate 95 through Lynn are altered, preserving its downtown.

1990s

The City of Lynn dissolves its municipal planning department as a cost-cutting measure.

1996

The Diamond Historic District is established in Lynn by the National Park Service, naming 590 structures that include Victorian homes and a Quaker meeting house.

2014

MassDevelopment selects downtown Lynn as one of the first 10 districts in the state to take part in the new “Gateway Cities” program.

2016

January: Al Wilson leaves his job in technology to focus on developing a public art project in Lynn.

April: MassDevelopment Transformative Development Initiative (TDI) Fellow Joe Mulligan begins working in Lynn.

November: Wilson signs an agreement with Neighborhood Development Associates, Inc., the nonprofit arm of the Lynn Housing Authority, to act as a fiscal partner for Beyond Walls.

December: Wilson applies for a license with the MBTA to install LED lighting in three underpasses, executes a three-year loan agreement with a collector for 11 neon signs, and receives a verbal commitment from GE that it will donate a 1942 jet engine.

2018

May: Beyond Walls is formally incorporated as a 501(c)3.

June: “Lynn Lights” is installed on three MBTA Commuter Rail underpasses. The dedication ceremony attracts approximately 500 attendees.

August: Beyond Walls’ second Street Art Festival is held, resulting in 27 additional murals.

November: Construction begins on 10 Monroe, a 10-story, 250-unit market-rate apartment building in downtown Lynn, the first ground-up, market-rate construction in decades.

2012

The Massachusetts Cultural Council names downtown Lynn, long occupied by the Lynn Museum/Lynn Arts (established 1897) and RAW Art Works (established 1988), as one of the first state-recognized arts and cultural districts.

2015

MassDevelopment Transformative Development Initiatives (TDI) partners with the Lynn Economic Development and Industrial Commission, Lynn Housing and Neighborhood Development, the Hall Companies, and the City of Lynn to develop its *Downtown Action Strategy*.

2017

March: The International Union of Painters and Allied Trades DC 35 agrees to prime walls for the murals and provide lift operation training and certifications for all of the mural artists.

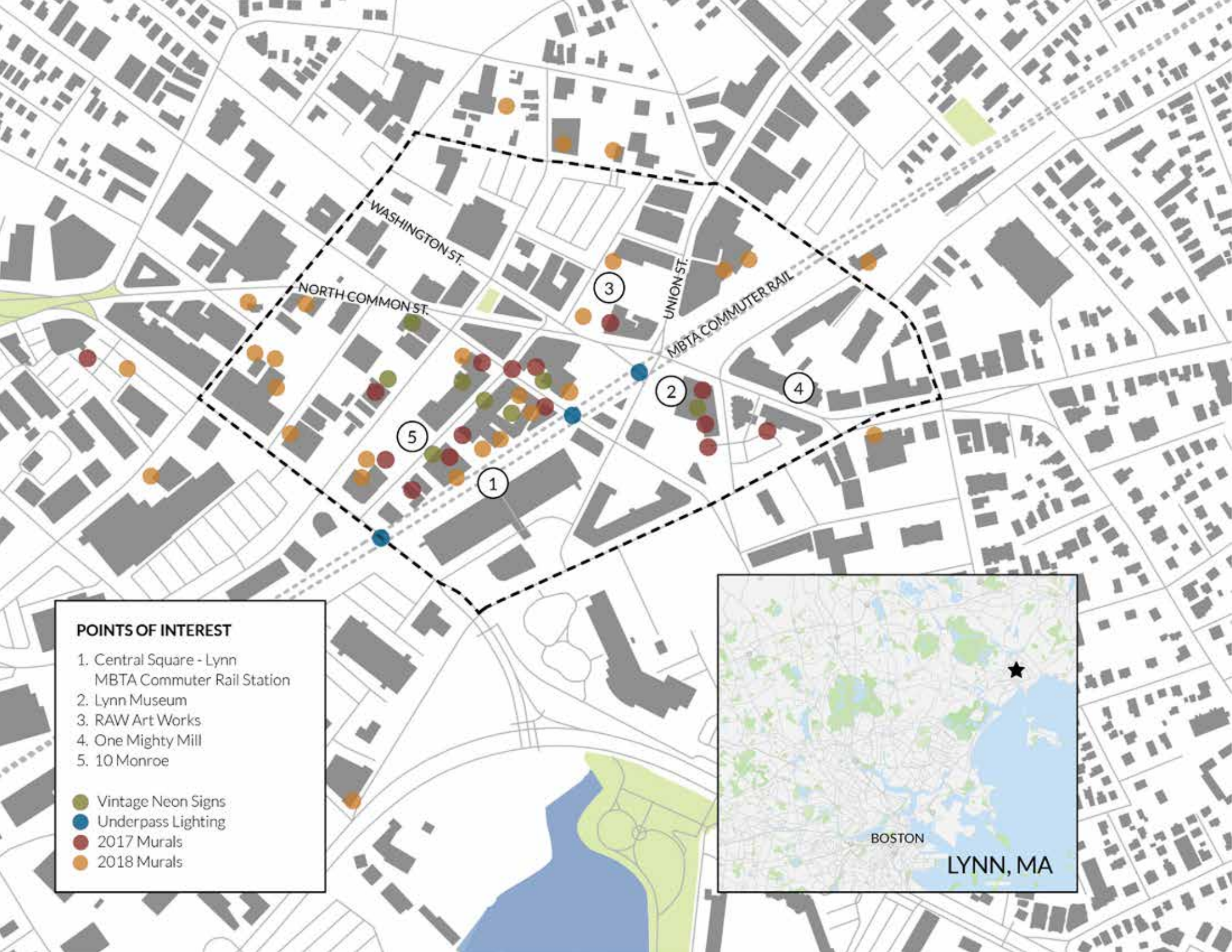
April: Beyond Walls hosts a fundraiser at the Lynn Museum to launch its first Patronicity crowdfunding campaign.

July: Beyond Walls’ first Street Art Festival produces 15 murals in downtown Lynn.

November: Beyond Walls is engaged as a consultant on a fee-for-service basis to produce a mural with French artist Eltono on IDEO’s new Cambridge headquarters.

2019

July 22–August 3: The third Street Art Festival is held, generating 15 additional murals.



POINTS OF INTEREST

1. Central Square - Lynn
MBTA Commuter Rail Station
2. Lynn Museum
3. RAW Art Works
4. One Mighty Mill
5. 10 Monroe

- Vintage Neon Signs
- Underpass Lighting
- 2017 Murals
- 2018 Murals

Project Description

INTRODUCTION

Beyond Walls is a placemaking initiative that produces street art, lighting, and other public space installations in Lynn, Massachusetts. The project, which began as a volunteer-run effort spearheaded by area resident Al Wilson in 2016, became an independent 501(c)3 nonprofit organization in 2018 and by early 2019 had a full-time staff of three. It has produced dozens of creative interventions within a relatively short period of time and learned many lessons along the way. As of May 2019, the organization had produced 42 large-scale murals painted by street artists from around the globe, installed creative lighting in three underpasses in downtown Lynn, and mounted 11 vintage neon signs throughout the downtown area, along with restoring a jet engine manufactured by General Electric.

Beyond Walls describes its mission as “to activate space to strengthen community.” After completing two mural festivals and several lighting installations, the organization began expanding its work into public space development. Beyond Walls planned to mount a third mural festival, launch four “parklets” (conversion of on-street parking spaces into public spaces),

and develop a new concert venue and public park on three acres of open space on the Lynn waterfront in 2019.

CONTEXT

With an estimated 2018 population of 94,654, Lynn is the State of Massachusetts’ ninth largest city. On the shores of the Atlantic Ocean and on a commuter rail line, the city—just 3.7 miles north of Boston and a 10-minute train ride from downtown—is actively working to reinstate commuter ferry service. Lynn has historically been working class and continues to be the largest and most ethnically diverse town on the North Shore (the stretch of coastal communities north of Boston).

The area known today as Lynn was originally inhabited by the Naumkeag people. A territory encompassing what is now Lynn and other neighboring cities was incorporated as Saugus in 1629, and the City of Lynn was incorporated in 1850. Around this time, Lynn became a fashionable summer resort destination for wealthy Boston residents. The area also



The historic waterfront city has long been a gateway for immigrants.

began industrializing with two co-located and connected industries: shoe manufacturing and electricity. When General Electric was founded in 1892, its first two factories were built in Lynn and Schenectady, New York. This early history is responsible for much of the city's architecture downtown as well as the homes now listed in the National Register Diamond Historic District.

Lynn's proud union and working-class heritage is central to its identity. One of America's largest and earliest strikes took place in the shoe factories of Lynn in 1860, where at the time 234 shoe factories produced more than a million pairs of shoes each day. Jan Ernst Matzeliger, the son of an enslaved African woman in Suriname (then Dutch Guiana) and a Dutch colonial industrialist, had immigrated to the United States and to Lynn and went on to invent one of the first machines that greatly increased shoe production. He died at the age of 37 of tuberculosis and is now memorialized in one of the murals produced by Beyond Walls. Unions and other organizations that advocate for labor rights continue to play a strong role in the city's politics and culture.

Since the late nineteenth century, Lynn has also been known for its ethnic diversity. Frederick Douglass, the famous abolitionist who freed himself from slavery, settled in the part of Saugus that became the City of Lynn in 1841 and wrote his most famous work, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, there. Waves of immigration between 1880-1920 brought the city's immigrant population share to one-third, including Polish and Russian Jews, Greeks, and French-Canadians¹. Later at the end of the twentieth century, Lynn's Latinx community and Cambodian population began to grow. These trends have continued. Over 60% of students in Lynn public schools are now Latinx, with first- and second-generation immigrant families hailing from the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and many other South and Central American countries. Lynn's Cambodian population is one of the largest in

the country and is very well-organized politically; the city's first Black and Cambodian city councilors were recently elected, bucking the trend of a majority white political leadership.

Lynn's overall demographics are substantially less homogenous than other towns in the region and in the state overall. In 2014, over 30% of Lynn's population was foreign born, and 43.6% of the city identified as non-Hispanic White, 11.2% as non-Hispanic Black or African American, 34.3% as Hispanic/Latinx, 7.6% as Asian, and 3.3% as other. The Hispanic/Latinx population in Lynn is a much larger percentage of the population than the statewide average of 17.5%. According to census estimates, the non-Hispanic White population is decreasing and Black or African American, Asian, Hispanic or Latinx, and multiracial groups are increasing. Over 45 languages are said to be spoken in Lynn public schools.

Economic Challenges

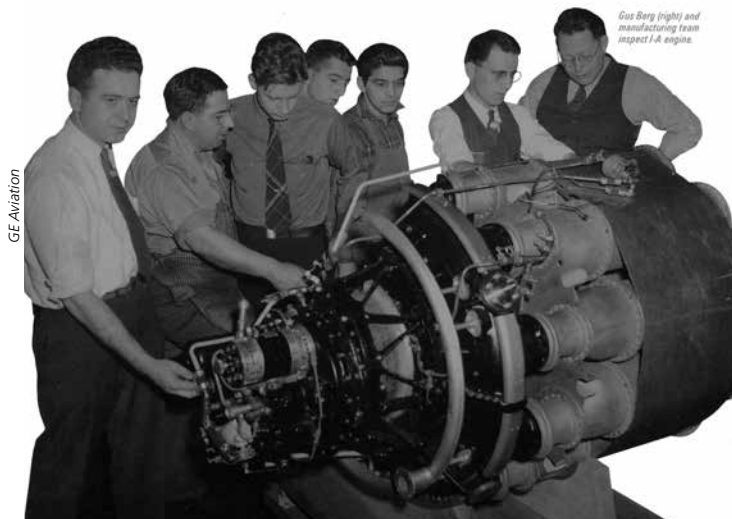
Like many other postindustrial cities around the world, Lynn's communities, its built environment, and its civic infrastructure have been negatively affected by global and regional economic fluctuations. Lynn qualifies as a Gateway City, which is Massachusetts' term for the 26 mid-size regional urban centers in the state that traditionally served as "gateways" to economic mobility but whose populations now have lower-than-average incomes and lower-than-average education attainment. The loss of its manufacturing and electric industries in the mid-twentieth century left the city without a stable local tax base, and the decline of federal and state support for municipalities beginning in the 1970s compounded this problem. The development of malls and investment in highways cut Lynn off from surrounding areas and further contributed to its downtown's decline. Bars and clubs replaced many of the daytime enterprises, and Lynn began to develop a reputation for crime, leading to the jingle "Lynn, Lynn, City of Sin." Over the past 10 years, however, Lynn's crime rates have been declining, and most believe the reputation to be unfounded.

Also, like other older industrial cities, Lynn is beginning to see the impact of the demographic and economic changes of the last two decades. The growth of global real estate investment, for example, and the interest of wealthier

¹ Unless otherwise noted, references to race, ethnicity, and nationality throughout this case study reflect the terminology used by the source. In instances where there is no direct source, we have attempted to use the most inclusive, accurate, and appropriate language possible.



The city's industrial heritage is showcased in the Lynn Museum.



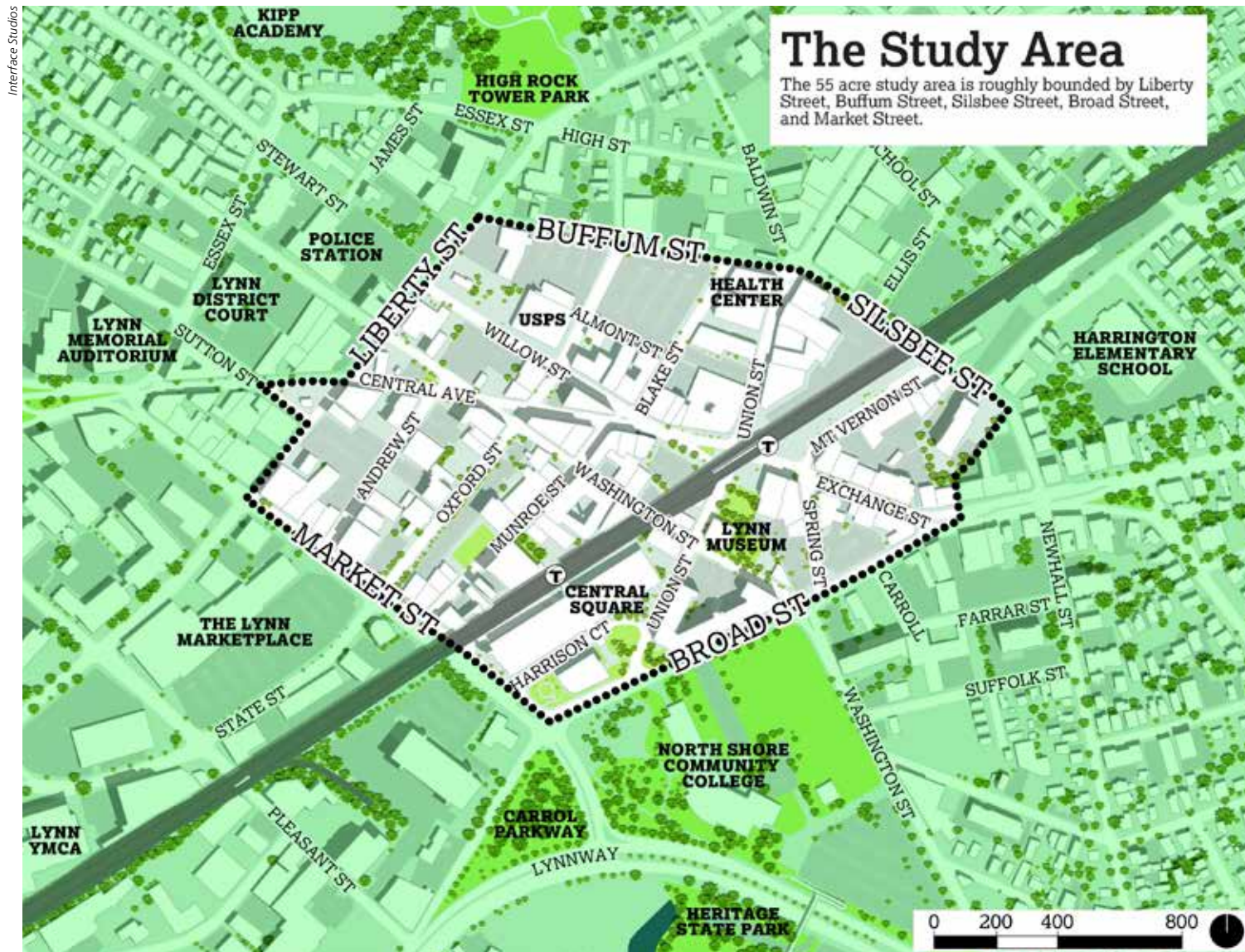
General Electric built one of the first jet engines manufactured in the US in Lynn.

populations in moving back to cities is putting pressure on the Boston region's housing market, which includes Lynn.

Despite being Massachusetts' ninth largest city, Lynn's government has struggled with significant structural budget deficits. While the city lost much of its commercial and industrial tax base between the 1970s–2000s, its number of residents continues to grow, putting additional pressure on public schools, policing, trash collection, and other civil services. Federal and state contributions to municipal budgets on the whole have declined since the 1970s, leading many elected officials to consider local economic development as one of the only ways to increase the city's tax base.

These conditions also contribute to a sense that the City of Lynn is difficult to navigate for those trying to make change, especially those groups that have been historically underrepresented and marginalized from institutionalized power. The strong majority of city leaders are non-Hispanic White and of the baby-boomer generation, thus not representative of current demographics. Over 30% of the city residents are recent immigrants—which, under the current political climate and an increasing number of raids by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, creates an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. Many racial, cultural, economic, and geographical divides sometimes create tension amongst various populations in Lynn.

The regional housing crisis impacts Lynn's residents intensely and unevenly. Lynn's overall vacancy rate is about 2%, and North Shore towns provide very little subsidized affordable housing. As of 2015, only 3.7% of housing stock in Lynn's neighbor to the north, Swampscott, was affordable subsidized housing, a percentage mirrored in other neighboring towns of Marblehead and Nahant. In addition, those qualifying for Section 8 are being priced out of Boston—all adding to the pressure on Lynn. According to PolicyLink, 56% of Lynn's renters are low income, and 78% of those low-income renters are cost-burdened by housing, meaning that they spend more than 30% of their income on their housing. A 2016 study commissioned by the Lynn Housing Authority showed that 12.5% of the city's housing stock is low- or moderate-income subsidized units, with more than half concentrated downtown.



Downtown Lynn was the focus of a MassDevelopment Transformative Development Initiatives Program (TDI) planning study.

Like many urban areas in the United States, the city is somewhat segregated by race and income. According to StatisticalAtlas.com, the census tracts northwest of downtown are predominantly non-Hispanic White with median household incomes over \$50,000, while areas in and closer to the core are more diverse (Hispanic, Black, Asian, and non-Hispanic White) with median household incomes between \$20,000 and \$30,000. The downtown census tract is currently the poorest in the city and home to many nonprofit social service organizations and subsidized housing units.

Planning and Development

Planning efforts in Lynn, as in many other postindustrial cities, are fragmented and under-resourced. As a cost-cutting measure, Lynn's municipal urban planning department was dissolved in the 1990s. There is no formal permitting process for large events or public works projects, and no design review process for new development. The Metropolitan Area Planning Commission, the regional planning agency, completed a review of Lynn's zoning code in 2014 and concluded that it is confusing, contradictory, and in great need of an overhaul. City leaders have brought in planning, design, and policymaking organizations as consultants and advisors for various recent planning initiatives, and several nonprofit organizations have commissioned independent planning studies. While these efforts have produced noticeable improvements, the lack of a centralized planning department has slowed the overall pace of change.

In 2014, Lynn was selected as one of 10 pilot cities for the launch of MassDevelopment's Transformative Development Initiatives (TDI) program. MassDevelopment is a statewide economic development agency offering lower-cost financing and funding programs. The TDI program is specifically designed for Gateway Cities to encourage development activity in downtown districts. Along with the promise of direct equity investments in real estate and other financing mechanisms, TDI pays the salary for a three-year fellow to be based and work solely in each city and provide ongoing technical assistance. Lynn's fellow is Joe Mulligan, who in spring 2019 was concluding his fellowship after being granted a one-year extension.



TDI Fellow Joe Mulligan helped connect people and organizations with resources to foster economic development in Lynn.

In 2016, the City of Lynn rezoned several downtown parcels to allow a 10-story as-of-right housing development. This made possible the first high-rise market-rate housing in downtown, which was under construction in 2019. In the same year, the Lynn Housing Authority commissioned a housing study by national economic and real estate consultant RKG Associates that, among other things, noted the potential for economic displacement to accelerate given the likelihood that those getting priced out of nearby towns would seek housing in Lynn. The study recommended that the city increase its internal planning and zoning capacity, preserve affordability for all residents, put low-income residents at the center of neighborhood revitalization, and catalyze market-rate development. Several other studies and analyses commissioned by civic organizations were published in 2016–7, including a community health needs assessment by MIT's NextShift Collaborative, which details recommendations that could help address health disparities within the city and emphasizes the need for a long-term strategy to retain and promote affordable housing, with special consideration for renters

and low-income households most likely to experience negative health and economic conditions related to displacement.

Current development in Lynn has become the subject of debate in the city, following regional, statewide, and national trends. For example, Lynn United for Change, a community-based organization founded in the wake of the 2008 foreclosure crisis, expressed concerns regarding development and displacement in a 2016 flyer, stating, “We are not opposed to development, but we [...] don’t want rising rents and homeownership costs to displace our family members, our neighbors, and our small businesses.” Affordable housing advocates criticize the City of Lynn for allowing and sometimes providing tax incentives for new developments that offer few units of affordable housing. City officials counter by citing the need for market-rate development to boost tax income for the city’s growing budget and sometimes describe Lynn as already having enough subsidized units. In addition, community development organizers, mayors in Boston-region cities, and others are advocating for the housing crisis to be addressed on a regional and state-wide level.

While several nonprofit developers are building affordable housing in nearby towns and cities, so far, none of them have built in Lynn. The city’s own housing agency, which is under the same leadership as the city’s economic development agency, has been the sole developer of affordable housing in the city. This agency recently completed a new mixed-income housing project called Gateway North, which added 71 units, 53 of which are considered affordable based on the area median income. The project opened in 2018.

In early 2019, several large, new market-rate housing projects were under construction or contract along the waterfront, transforming what has up until recently been a light industrial and retail strip mall area. Meanwhile, planning was underway to try to address new development in the area, including an update to the 2007 waterfront master plan by Boston-based Utile and an *Open Space Master Plan* completed by landscape architecture firm Brown, Richardson + Rowe. The latter establishes a vision for balancing new residential and commercial development with green space for the public and climate resiliency. These two plans will inform an update to the 2010 *Municipal Harbor Plan*.

Creative Placemaking

Placemaking generally refers to place-based tactical projects such as bike lanes, small parks, and pop-up vendors that focus on physical changes, building connections and a sense of belonging, and human-centered design. Nationally, interest in place-based, human-oriented development is growing. Beyond Walls’ founder Al Wilson was inspired by several well-known placemaking projects, including the High Line in New York City and King’s Cross in London, as well as public mural arts projects such as the Philadelphia Mural Arts program and Wynwood Walls in Miami. Beyond Walls staff report that the organization has been greatly influenced by the Project for Public Spaces, a national placemaking advocacy and technical assistance organization.

Beyond Walls identifies itself as a creative placemaking initiative. While many assert that all placemaking is creative, the term “creative placemaking” was coined in a 2010 white paper commissioned by the National Endowment for the Arts and a set of private foundations seeking to build a comprehensive planning field around arts-driven community development, increase funding for the arts, and demonstrate the powerful role and contributions that artists and cultural practices have always played in community building.

National creative placemaking trends have evolved over time. In response to growing concerns that these initiatives are unintentionally fostering gentrification and displacement, some leaders in the field, including Roberto Bedoya and Maria Rosario Jackson, have called for the need to address racial and economic equity more explicitly. Bedoya suggests framing the practice as “place-keeping” or “place-belonging” and ensuring that existing residents are engaged in the process of imagining and making. Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, one of the authors of the initial white paper, dispelled the myth that “artists are the shock troops of gentrification” but acknowledged that arts and culture are not neutral and called for artists and creative placemakers to carefully examine their role and potential complicity in inequitable development. ArtPlace America Executive Director Jamie Bennett describes the current focus on creative placemaking as “artists as allies in equitable community development” with a focus on long-term, grassroots, creative strategies led by those most marginalized by the status quo economy.

Lynn's existing artistic communities and initiatives helped lay the foundation for Beyond Walls. The city was designated as one of Massachusetts' first cultural districts in 2012, thanks to several longstanding arts and cultural organizations. Located in the heart of the cultural district, the Lynn Museum was founded in 1897 as a local heritage organization and has grown to incorporate the Galleries at LynnArts, an arts-based collaborative that showcases and supports area artists. RAW Art Works, a nationally renowned youth arts center offering free programs focused on art therapy, was established in 1988 and opened a downtown arts center in 1994. Beginning in the 1980s, artists such as Temp and Relm and others began painting and tagging, or creating graffiti named-based art, throughout the city's many walls, underpasses, and more. Their work was featured in Caleb Neelon's book *A History of American Graffiti*, and both were commissioned to create murals for Beyond Walls.

Street Art and Economic Development

Mural festivals are an outgrowth and one evolution of the street art movement, which most cite as beginning in the 1970s in New York City and encompasses often unsanctioned public art like graffiti, wheatpasting, stenciling, and more. Mural festivals—which typically invite a similar set of international artists to one location for a week or two to paint multiple murals at once—are popular around the globe, especially in cities that support the arts and seek to attract outside visitors and investment. Famous mural festivals occur each year in Montreal, Canada; Long Beach, California; Bristol, United Kingdom; Taupo, New Zealand; and Detroit, Michigan. Typically, these festivals feature murals rooted in street-art style graffiti that often utilizes spray paint, breaking from the longer history of public murals commissioned by institutions and painted by renowned studio-based commercial artists. Either way, these festivals can create value for cities by attracting new businesses and development.

In some recent cases, such as the Spotify offices at the new Freedom Tower in downtown Manhattan, street artists were given space to create art that ultimately helped to market the building, but they were not compensated. This has sparked questions among artists and others engaged in creative placemaking about the relationship between public art—especially “street



The City of Lynn was designated as one of Massachusetts' first cultural districts.



Mural festivals are used by cities across the globe to attract visitors and investment.

Interface Studios



Over 175 people participated in two community meetings held to gather input.

Creative Collective MA



Participants expressed interest in public art and lighting commuter rail underpasses.

art”—and real estate development. While many artists appreciate the increased visibility, impact, and, in some cases, funding that comes with these opportunities, some are uncomfortable with the idea that their investments of creative talent and energy are translating into large financial windfalls for developers.

Public art and placemaking projects can have significant economic impact and cultivate civic power. Who benefits from these projects can depend on their goals, leadership, process of development, curatorial choices, and more. Many murals and public art projects are funded and led directly by communities of color, lower-income communities, and the organizations working for their benefit. For example, the Punto Urban Art Museum in Salem, another North Shore community, was started by residents of public housing as a cultural preservation and heritage project and has produced 75 large-scale murals by many renowned international and local artists. The organization that currently hosts the project, North Shore Community Development Coalition, is collecting data to understand the economic impact of the murals on public housing residents and hopes to capitalize on its art works to address larger social justice issues. Other examples include the Village of Arts and Humanities (2001 Rudy Bruner Award Gold Medalist), an artist-engaged equitable community development organization in Philadelphia, and Mission Economic Development Association’s partnership with Galeria de la Raza in San Francisco. Artists who work in the public sector and in partnership with community development projects often take into consideration who is leading the project and who will benefit from it.

PROJECT HISTORY

Beyond Walls’ first public installation, the 2017 mural festival, happened just 18 months after founder Al Wilson quit his job in the technology industry to focus on this work as a full-time volunteer. Wilson had been living in New York City but maintained a residence on Boston’s North Shore since 2014 to be near his family. Initially interested in developing a shipping container project on the waterfront, Wilson began asking his local connections for help finding the right contacts in Lynn. He also began learning about arts-driven development initiatives through a talk by Mark Davy, founder and CEO of Futurecity, a London-based culture and placemaking consultancy, at the

Boston Society of Architects. A mutual friend who worked for Senator Elizabeth Warren introduced him to Lynn native Drew Russo, the executive director at the Lynn Museum and Lynn Arts, who in turn connected him with other local leaders. Wilson shifted his plans away from the waterfront after learning that MassDevelopment, residents, and business owners were focused on improving areas of the downtown. Additionally, waterfront plans were mired in several planning studies and hotly contested among the various property owners. Instead Wilson began developing the idea for a street art festival and lighting projects focused on activating downtown.

Wilson's initial inspiration and motivation related to an interest in large-scale public street art. He was excited by projects like Mural Arts Philadelphia; Arts Projects of Kings Cross, London; and Wynwood Walls in Miami, a project led by developers who created a large, free outdoor gallery of street art by commissioning internationally renowned artists. The area, a former industrial and working-class residential neighborhood called Little San Juan, has since been rezoned to mixed-use and become one of Miami's premier arts destinations. Wilson had also read about the Lynn Economic Advancement and Development Team (LEAD), which launched in late 2015 as a cross-governmental working group to promote economic development in the city. In April 2017, he was quoted by the news site Wicked Local saying that Beyond Walls' mission was to "improve the lives of people who live and work in Lynn now and to target millennials who are becoming priced out of traditional housing markets like Allston and Brighton," with the goal of bringing businesses, jobs, and market-rate development to the city. Beyond Walls' mission has evolved over time and is now described as "activat[ing] space to strengthen community," reflecting growing clarity about its goals and the larger impact of its work.

During the spring of 2016, as Wilson was beginning to formulate his ideas, MassDevelopment's TDI held community meetings to gather ideas about improving Lynn's downtown. The two May 2016 Downtown Action Strategy community meetings, hosted by TDI and attended by over 175 people combined, were facilitated by Interface Studio, a planning firm from Philadelphia. In line with TDI's theory of change, the meetings focused on asking participants what kinds of small interventions in the downtown district could

have a big impact. Recommendations from the process included the following:

- grow existing and attract new small businesses
- activate and improve public spaces
- engage and partner with local residents, community organizations, businesses, and municipal agencies
- connect with anchor institutions (academic, medical, corporate)
- eliminate vacant storefronts
- facilitate development of underutilized properties, particularly for market-rate housing

During the meetings, community members indicated a desire for better wayfinding, street grids, sidewalks, public spaces, and crosswalks; lighting under the commuter rail underpasses; more businesses/attractions; and other improvements. They also expressed an interest in arts and cultural events and public art installations.

Wilson began working on a plan to illuminate the underpasses closest to the commuter rail stations to increase pedestrian safety and to make a more welcoming environment for residents and evening visitors, encouraging commuters passing through Lynn to stop there for dinner on their way home. Throughout 2016, he navigated the bureaucracy of the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA), notorious for its culture of "no" and opacity, to understand what permissions would be necessary to illuminate the commuter rail line underpasses. After getting the lighting permit approved and raising funds for its implementation, Wilson was informed that any project would need to carry an additional, prohibitively expensive insurance policy covering a potential train derailment, even though the lighting would only impact the underside. Finally, in July 2017, Wilson lined up a call between Congressman Seth Moulton and Brian Shortsleeve, the head of the MBTA at the time, resulting in the waiver of the insurance requirement.

In 2017, with lighting approvals in place, Wilson convened a volunteer committee of 28 people who live and work in Lynn and surrounding communities to help advance the project. He received fiscal sponsorship from the city's Neighborhood Development Agency, an arm of the Lynn Housing Authority. Around this time, he met architect Parke MacDowell from

Payette, a Boston-based interdisciplinary architecture firm, who had worked on a proposal to revitalize a highway underpass in Boston. MacDowell convinced firm partners, who were initially skeptical, to allow him to donate design services, initially in the form of a visual rendering of the proposed underpass lighting and later construction drawings. MacDowell brought Dan Weissman, his friend from Harvard Graduate School of Design, and Lam Partners, an architectural lighting firm where Weissman is a director, on board. Ron Kuszmar, vice president at Port Lighting Systems, saw the rendering on a Facebook invitation for an April fundraising event and got in touch to offer his services. Kuszmar then contacted Philips Color Kinetics, which offered to donate the hardware and materials necessary for one lighting installation.

With visuals of the proposed lighting in hand and permission for three underpass installations, Wilson focused on fundraising. He organized a kickoff event on April 6, 2017, at the Lynn Museum. The event was critical in launching the project, helping to make the case for its value and secure local support. Wilson applied for MassDevelopment's Commonwealth Places program, which partners with the crowdfunding site Patronicity to fund community-based public projects in low- and moderate-income communities in Massachusetts and provides matching funds when projects meet their crowdfunding goals. Beyond Walls initially set its goal at \$50,000, which it reached in 14 days, in large part due to the success of the Lynn Museum event, and later exceeded its "reach" goal of \$80,000.

Philips Color Kinetics expanded its donation to include materials for lighting all three underpasses. Rick Jakious, district director for Congressman Seth Moulton (and later Beyond Walls' board chair), introduced the Barr Foundation to Beyond Walls, leading to a \$200,000 grant from the foundation. After another successful round of Commonwealth Places crowdfunding that raised \$93,487 from 1,405 local donors, the underpass lighting was installed in three locations over the winter of 2017-2018, with a formal dedication in June 2018.

The first mural festival took place in July 2017, producing 15 murals. The second mural festival occurred in August 2018, with 27 additional murals painted. Each two-week festival attracted world-renowned artists who



A Boston-based design firm prepared a rendering of proposed underpass lighting.



Fundraising for the installation was launched with an event at the Lynn Museum.

painted large-scale murals on building walls throughout downtown. The International Union of Painters and Allied Trades DC 35 primed walls for the murals and provided lift operation training and certifications for all of the artists.

In 2017 and 2018, Beyond Walls installed 11 vintage neon signs throughout downtown Lynn. The project was initiated by Wilson after meeting the sign owner and collector Dave Waller, who knew about the city's interest in increasing downtown lighting at night. In early 2019, Beyond Walls was working to install a restored GE jet engine (significant to the city given its longstanding connection to the company) as a public sculpture, create four pop-up vendor parklets, host a third mural festival, and create a new public open space called "The Launch" near the water.

LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Al Wilson is the key figure behind Beyond Walls, but many other local, regional, and international leaders have played important roles. Wilson's experience in business and his ability to make connections, leverage networks, and align project partners to raise money and secure necessary approvals were important factors in making the projects possible. Wilson has a degree in public relations and worked for 15 years in a variety of media, financial, technology, and start-up companies, including the Phoenix Media Group, Dig Publishing, AOL (formerly America Online), and a start-up called Kapow. He also founded and managed a website that focused on advertising sales for media publications.

Wilson quickly brought on board leaders in Lynn who did their best to pave the way for success. Drew Russo, executive director of the Lynn Museum and Lynn Arts, was an early and active supporter, using his political connections as a previous candidate for the Massachusetts House of Representatives to connect Wilson to other local leaders. Joe Mulligan, MassDevelopment's TDI Fellow, helped by lending his expertise alongside the imprimatur of MassDevelopment, which gave the project legitimacy. He was also instrumental in making the project happen—first by laying the groundwork through the *Downtown Action Strategy*, then by helping to make connections, engage local businesses, and navigate bureaucratic hurdles.



The Beyond Walls team included (pictured center, left to right): Pedro Soto, Julia Midland, and Al Wilson.



Local leaders including consultant Rosario Ubiera-Minaya (center) helped with community engagement.



The City of Lynn and Mayor Thomas McGee (center) provided critical support.



The nonprofit arm of the Lynn Housing Authority served as a fiscal sponsor.

In May 2019, Beyond Walls had a full-time staff of three, including Wilson. Lynn native and resident Pedro Soto began volunteering for the organization in 2017, first on the community advisory committee and then working nearly a second full-time job's worth of hours to produce the festival while employed as a senior planner in the neighboring City of Peabody. After eight months, Soto joined the staff full-time as associate director. Like Soto, Program Manager Julia Midland, an arts administrator who grew up and lives in nearby Swampscott, joined the staff after first volunteering with Beyond Walls in 2017. Two additional part-time positions provided support for community engagement and event management.

The City of Lynn also played a critical role. At first, Neighborhood Development Associates (NDA, the nonprofit arm of the Lynn Housing Authority) agreed to serve as the project's fiscal sponsor. The city's previous mayor, Judith Flanagan Kennedy, took a relatively hands-off approach to arts and placemaking-related projects. Mayor Thomas McGee, the son of a famous Massachusetts legislator, served as chairman of the Massachusetts Democratic Party and in the state senate and house of representatives for many years before running for mayor. McGee began his first mayoral term between Beyond Walls' first and second mural festivals. He has shifted the city government's stance to be much more proactively involved with Beyond Walls and associated initiatives, as he sees the organization as complementary to his strategy to attract market-rate development to help improve the city's tax base.

Other politicians contributed vital support. Congressman Seth Moulton's District Director, Rick Jakious, is now chair of the Beyond Walls Board of Directors, which was established as the organization pursued independent 501(c)3 status (now in place).

Three local community-based leaders—including Josie Santos, Doneeca Thurston, and Rosario Ubiera-Minaya—became involved to support Beyond Walls in its efforts to increase community engagement. Santos, who has been involved with Beyond Walls since its inception and was an original committee member, started working with the organization on a part-time basis and became its full-time community engagement director in May 2019.

Thurston, an arts administrator who grew up in Lynn, got involved with Beyond Walls to advise its community engagement and enhance community relations. She was later hired for a temporary part-time position to lead the Beyond Walls community events during the 2018 mural festival. Creative community development expert Ubiera-Minaya, owner of Cojuelos' Productions and founder of the Punto Urban Art Museum in nearby Salem, consulted with Beyond Walls in 2018 to build stronger relations with Lynn's immigrant communities and communities of color.

The Barr Foundation has also played a pivotal role, providing nearly half of the funding raised to date by Beyond Walls to support the mural festivals and lighting as well as development of a strategic planning process. The funding for strategic planning will specifically explore how Beyond Walls may work with other Massachusetts cities and support the Barr Foundation's interest in building a national and regional field of creative placemaking.

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

Beyond Walls is a combination of public art installations involving murals and lighting as well as special events and programming.

Murals

Beyond Walls has commissioned and installed 42 large-scale public murals as of May 2019 in downtown Lynn, all painted over the course of two intensive two-week periods during the street art festivals. Together the murals—many several stories tall—display a wide range of styles and subject material, showcasing large-scale human figures and abstract imagery, colors, and patterns. Mural content is up to each artist, so long as they do not depict anything that is not “family friendly” or that is overtly political. Beyond Walls seeks to hire muralists whose nationalities mirror



Large-scale murals are painted during two-week-long street art festivals.

those of the countries of origin of Lynn residents. The motivations behind aesthetic choices and subject material for the artwork are described by Beyond Walls staff on mural tours, and staff hope to create a booklet describing each piece soon.

The first 15 murals were painted during the inaugural festival held in July 2017. Only 10 were originally planned, but to build buzz and attract media attention, the team increased the number shortly before the festival after

exceeding their fundraising goal. Beyond Walls produced an additional 27 murals during the second mural festival, held in August 2018.

Muralists are selected by Beyond Walls staff and volunteer committee members. Each year a public request for proposals is posted, and some artists are invited by staff. The organization received 70 applications in 2017 and over 206 in 2018. International renown, cultural and gender diversity, and ability to complete a large-scale mural are three key criteria for selection. Beyond Walls has also focused on increasing diversity in its muralists, adding more female and international artists in 2018.

The murals are painted mainly on privately owned walls throughout downtown Lynn. A subcommittee of the larger volunteer committee identified and secured permissions for the walls, and the legal committee developed a contract process. Murals are several stories high, creating a substantial impact on the pedestrian environment. Participating wall owners are required through their contract to leave painted walls intact for one year, after which they can remove them, re-paint the walls, or demolish their buildings. Beyond Walls does not intend to maintain the murals, instead planning to place new art works when original pieces fade. To date none have been defaced or painted over.

In preparation for the festivals, the walls were primed and cleaned with volunteer labor donated by the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades (IUPAT) local division DC 35. IUPAT also provided training for the artists on the safe use of lifts, which are required for many of the murals, and helped many artists secure Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) certification (which can improve their eligibility for future commissions). Primer was donated by Sherwin Williams. Additional materials were supplied by Beyond Walls.

The Beyond Walls team coordinated the first week-long mural festival without any prior experience. Wilson and Soto gleaned what they could from Instagram feeds from other festivals, friends at Pow! Wow! Worcester, and through advice from Cambridge-based muralist Caleb Neelon. They learned by doing, refining the process during the second year.

In 2017, each artist received a stipend of \$1,000 plus \$400 on a prepaid gift card that could be used at local Lynn businesses. In 2018, stipends were increased to \$1,500 and pre-paid cards to \$500. In addition, Beyond Walls provided roundtrip airfare for each artist and an assistant, as well as lodging at nearby Salem State University, materials, lift certification, and lifts. Each artist is highlighted on the organization's website and through social media. A report from the 2017 Mural Festival details measurable economic impacts that the event generated for small businesses in Lynn.

Ghost Signs

In addition to the original artwork painted by muralists, Beyond Walls commissioned two local artists to restore two "ghost signs," faded hand-painted advertisements painted on brick walls decades ago. Chrissy Lebel, owner of Lebel Signs in Lynn and originally from the nearby town of Peabody, re-painted the "Zimman's" sign, and Lynn-based sign painter Ted Kiley restored the "Empire" sign.

RetroLit

Beyond Walls has placed 11 vintage neon street signs throughout Lynn, including three that were installed in 2017 and eight additional ones in 2018. The signs were donated by Dave Waller, a local visual effects producer and neon sign collector whom Wilson learned about and contacted about working together. The signs have been installed in downtown locations that the city identified as needing additional lighting after dark. The signs are from around the Boston region and beyond and advertise old restaurants and businesses. Wilson worked with the city to obtain special permission to install the signs, as an existing ordinance forbids neon lights at businesses.

Lynn Lights

In June 2018, Beyond Walls installed lighting in three commuter rail underpasses in downtown Lynn with 247 "smart" LED fixtures. The lights, installed between the beams of the underpass structures, create ambient clouds of color that can be changed by remote control. The lighting design and installation were provided pro bono by LAM and Payette with International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers 103 doing the bulk of the installation work over the course of 10 weeks. Hardware and operating support was



2017 MURALS AND ARTISTS

1 Cedric "Vise" Douglas and Julz Roth; **2** FONK; **3** Bruce Orr and Good 2 Go (RAW Art Works), image courtesy Creative Collective MA; **4** Miss Zukie (Alison Perez) and JPO; **5** Team ReKloos; **6** Marka27; **7** Tallboy (Chris Coulon) and Brian Denahy; **8** Don Rimx; **9** David Zayas; **10** Angurria; **11** Nicole Salgar and Chuck Berret; **12** Caleb Neelon; **13** Georgia Hill; **14** Cey Adams; **15** Temp and Relm (all images courtesy Beyond Walls except as noted).

2019 RUDY BRUNER AWARD



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



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12



13

2018 MURALS AND ARTISTS

1 Brian Beyung; **2** Imagine; **3** Bunnie Reiss; **4** Michal Maka; **5** Spiros (Wellington Naberezny); **6** Michal Maka; **7** Wasp Elder, image courtesy Erin Holly; **8** Kilia Llano, image courtesy Kilia Llano; **9** Imagine (Sneha Shrestha); **10** Chrissy Lebel and Ted Kiley; **11** Venom LMA (Lynn Mass Appeal); **12** Andrew Hem; **13** Free Humanity (all images courtesy Beyond Walls except as noted).



2018 MURALS AND ARTISTS

14 Medio Peso; **15** Ruben Ubiera; **16** Yu-Baba and Key Detail; **17** Mariela Ajas, image courtesy Creative Collective MA; **18** Leon Keer, image courtesy Creative Collective MA; **19** Free Humanity; **20** JUURI; **21** Golden; **22** Imagine; **23** Damaris Cruz; **24** Sofia Maldonado; **25** Erik Skotnes (all images courtesy Beyond Walls except as noted).

donated by Port Lighting and Philips Color Kinetics. Together, over 600 feet of covered roadway and pedestrian passage were directly impacted. The newly lit underpasses—at Central Square, Washington Street, and Market Street—are close to the city's commuter rail stations.

General Electric Jet Engine Installation

In 2017, Beyond Walls received the donation of a rare 1942 I-A jet engine from GE Aviation. One of the first jet engines made in the United States and manufactured in Lynn, it had been in storage since 1972. Beyond Walls' staff sent selfies with the engine to the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum to convince them that the engine was in their possession, and once convinced, the Smithsonian began working with Beyond Walls on a conservation plan. Over time, with support from students at Lynn Vocational Technical Institute and a conservator from Harvard Natural History Museum, the organization dismantled, cleaned, and reassembled the engine. There are tentative plans to install it at Lynn City Hall.

The Patio Parklets Program and the Launch

In 2019, in addition to a third festival, Beyond Walls planned to launch two new initiatives. The first is a parklet program called The Patio, which will host four local vendors downtown through small pop-up business kiosks. Parklets are defined by the National Association of City Transportation Officials as "public seating platforms that convert curbside parking spaces into vibrant community spaces." The second project, The Launch, is a proposal to temporarily activate a three-acre parcel of waterfront land near the ferry terminal as a concert venue, concession, and sports field. Beyond Walls has a three-year \$1/year lease (with two one-year options to renew) on the property, which is owned by the Lynn Economic Development and Industrial Commission. The space is currently in design and includes shipping containers as the main structures and a greenway double the width of the eight-foot requirement with the hope of inspiring additional waterfront development.

ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS

Events

Beyond Walls' physical installations have been accompanied by activities and programs. In 2017, the organization hosted six public events throughout the



Vintage neon signs installed throughout downtown illuminate dark areas.

10-day mural festival. The largest, a day-long "Rock the Block" festival held in downtown Lynn near the murals and underpasses and featuring food trucks, live music, DJs, and vendors, drew over 700 people according to LynnHappens.com. In addition, Beyond Walls hosted three receptions inviting members of the public to meet artists, a discussion on the history of American graffiti and street art, and an outdoor yoga class.

In 2018, the organization produced a set of community events around the second mural festival. In addition to the "Rock the Block" festival, Beyond Walls hosted a storytelling event, a community garden open house, art classes, and more through what it called "The Hive"—a set of community-based programs organized by partners and included in festival marketing. The organization's staff have indicated that while well intentioned, Hive programming proved difficult logistically.

Other activities have been scheduled around key Beyond Walls events and throughout the year. When the underpass lighting was unveiled, the organization hosted a community dedication ceremony attracting approximately

Beyond Walls



Each mural festival included a day-long "Rock the Block" event with live music.



In 2017, Artist Bruce Orr (right) partnered with RAW ArtWorks and local youth on one mural.

500 attendees. According to its organizers and museum staff, the initial fundraiser at the Lynn Museum attracted a more racially diverse audience than is typical in Lynn and helped to cement Beyond Walls' influence. The organization has made efforts to hire staff, consultants, local leaders, and artists of color and is working to ensure that increased diversity translates to organizational governance and impact.

Consulting Services

Beyond Walls is working to diversify its income streams to reduce its current reliance on foundation funding. The organization has begun consulting on other projects on a fee-for-service basis. It served as an advisor for a mural painted by French public artist Eltono on the new offices of innovation sector firm IDEO in nearby Cambridge and in May 2019 was working with the Cabot Theatre, a performing arts and movie venue in neighboring Beverly, helping to solicit proposals from artists to paint several murals on the building. Several other cities have sought services from Beyond Walls, and the organization is currently determining when and how it might scale its operations.

FINANCING

Beyond Walls' 2017 and 2018 mural and lighting installations were completed with a total budget of \$913,592, including in-kind support. This includes both funding and the value of in-kind support to facilitate the installation of 42 murals, 11 neon signs, two ghost signs, and three underpass lighting projects, along with associated staffing, overhead, and miscellaneous costs.

The development budget (Table 1) reflects revenue and expenses for all Beyond Walls activities from inception through October 2018. Fiscal Year 2017 includes a total of 17 months ending in June 30, 2017. Fiscal Year 2018 includes 12 months beginning July 1, 2017 and ending June 30, 2018. Figures for 2019 include July 1 through October 31, 2018.

Of the \$509,600 contributed by foundations, \$400,000 was from the Barr Foundation. Other foundation sources include the Boston Foundation, Highland Street Foundation, Van Otterloo Family Foundation, Eastern Bank Charitable Foundation, Salem Five Charitable Corporation, Santander Foundation, and Gerondalis Foundation.

Much of the funds from individuals was procured through the MassDevelopment Patronicity crowdfund challenge. The matching funds are included in the "individuals" line item in the development budget. A total of \$80,665 was raised from 1,388 non-unique donations.

Separate from these crowdfunding efforts, two large gifts of \$75,000 and \$30,000 were also received from philanthropic individuals in Lynn.

Government sources include contributions from the City of Lynn's Economic Development and Industrial Commission and the Lynn Housing and Neighborhood Development Department, as well as federal funding via the city's Community Development Block Grants.

Beyond Walls received significant in-kind support, which accounts for approximately 50% of its annual budget. The materials and labor for all three of the lighting installations were donated, along with a three-year maintenance contract. Paint and wall priming labor were donated, along with

TABLE 1: DEVELOPMENT BUDGET

SOURCES	FY 2017*	FY 2018	FY 2019**
Individuals	\$50,229	\$157,553	\$14,393
Corporations	\$86,105	\$80,654	\$69,555
Foundations	\$56,103	\$231,000	\$222,500
Government	\$38,500	\$117,500	\$20,000
Contribution collection fees	(\$1,497)	(\$2,180)	(\$279)
In-kind contributions	\$269,500	\$428,206	\$275,522
Other income***	\$5,377	\$5,552	\$2,522
Total	\$504,317	\$1,018,285	\$604,213
USES			
Placemaking Projects	\$329,682	\$713,984	\$530,488
Fundraising	\$21,928	\$59,116	\$6,544
General and Administrative	\$33,731	\$166,037	\$112,700
Total	\$385,342	\$939,137	\$649,731
NET INCOME	\$118,975	\$79,148	(\$45,518)

*Includes 17 months ending June 30, 2017.

**Includes the first four months of the fiscal year ending October 31, 2018.

***Includes consulting fees, interest, and merchandise sales.

training for artists regarding how to use a lift. In 2017 Beyond Walls stated that for every dollar raised, it had leveraged \$.85 in in-kind support.

The majority of expenses, approximately 75% to 85%, are direct project costs. General and administrative expenses include personnel and occupancy.

PROJECT EVALUATION

Impact

While it is too early to fully assess the long-term impacts of Beyond Walls' initiatives, they have generated an enormous amount of positive buzz and media attention. Many hope that this is the beginning of a new chapter for Lynn, improving both perceptions of the city and its economy. Many credit Beyond Walls with helping to attract interest in Lynn from start-up businesses, real estate developers and investors, and new residents. Art enthusiasts around the country have applauded the project, and images of its dynamic artworks are shared extensively on social media. The project has increased regional dialogue and excitement about the role of public art and placemaking projects in Gateway Cities.



Beyond Walls' murals and lighting have drawn local and national interest.

Beyond Walls



Once-dark commuter rail underpasses were perceived as dangerous.

Beyond Walls



New lighting has transformed them into community gateways.

As in other cities in similar circumstances across America, increased interest from developers and investors has led to concerns about rising rents and potential displacement of existing residents, social service organizations, and businesses. This, in turn, has prompted conversation about the need for policies and governance that ensure the changes that occur benefit all.

City of Lynn officials, the business community, community-based organizations, and local advocacy groups all expressed different aspirations for Beyond Walls. City officials focused on the buzz and branding generated by Beyond Walls, seeing it as good for economic development and redefining the image of Lynn. Community development and advocacy groups wanted the work to go further by seeking more inclusivity and opportunities for previously underrepresented groups to have a voice in the initiative and expanding efforts to avoid gentrification. Beyond Walls does not view these as mutually exclusive and has been enhancing its community engagement efforts in response to these aspirations.

Wilson is interested in taking the Beyond Walls model to other cities, and the Barr Foundation is supporting an exploration of the feasibility of a regional Beyond Walls expansion. Other municipal governments in the area have called to ask for advice and support in implementing similar projects. Many supporters are excited about the expansion of large-scale public art and the positive impacts it is having on the city and are excited to see more cities around Massachusetts follow suit.

Changing Perceptions of Lynn

Beyond Walls' installations have generated a significant amount of media interest, attracting attention and admiration from art enthusiasts and others in the region and beyond. The festivals' design, short and intense with the production of a large number of larger pieces of high-quality public art, is intended to make a splash—and by all accounts it has succeeded. A Webb Management Services report commissioned by Beyond Walls cited 75 articles written about the festival in the first year. The initiative is helping to bring visitors and "Old Lynn timers" alike back to downtown and create a positive impression for a city that has struggled to overcome negative perceptions and loss from decades of economic decline.

The organization seeks to engender local pride, honor local history, and engage the Lynn community in its efforts. Many feel buoyed by and proud of the work, and local property owners and residents expressed pride that their buildings were chosen for sites of new, public art painted by international artists. Some murals honor local heroes and history, such as Jan Ernst Matzeliger, the African American shoe entrepreneur and inventor, and Beyond Walls hopes that the preservation and display of the GE engine will spark more pride in the city's industrial roots.

Art as an Economic Catalyst

Wilson, Soto, and others involved with Beyond Walls have indicated that they hope the project will attract more market-rate investment and development to Lynn, citing the idea that a healthy community has a mix of incomes. Wilson shared that "part of this is economic development. We want to take a position and lean in. Lynn needs development. We hope that rising tides lift all boats. Part of what we are doing is making Lynn a safer and more vibrant place."

In terms of demonstrated economic impact to date, the Webb report found that the festival had some moderate benefits. The study found that festival visitors spent at least \$110,000 in two coffee shops during the festival, drove \$150,000 in new sales and \$30,000 in new earnings, and created the equivalent of nearly one full-time job (an estimation based on sales). Also, the study indicated that more people continue to visit restaurants downtown than they had before. In addition to the direct dollars spent by Beyond Walls on artist fees, contractors, and event-related expenses, the organization created three new permanent full-time staff positions and several temporary part-time ones. Three interns from Lynn Vocational High School who worked with the local electrician's union on the festival have now been placed in jobs, though it is unclear whether this may have happened without Beyond Walls' help (the high school has a vocational training feeder program).

Jon Olinto, the proprietor of the bakery One Mighty Mill, indicated that when he was touring the region looking for a location for his new business, Beyond Walls was one of the only initiatives that the City of Lynn's Economic Development and Industrial Corporation was able to showcase as a selling point for



The art installations have attracted new people to Lynn and generated community pride.



Additional public space improvements are planned, including a new waterfront park.

the city. One Mighty Mill supplies whole grain bread to both Lynn and the Boston Public Schools district as part of its mission to re-grow the region's local farming economy, and its downtown café offers a 50% discount to Lynn residents. Olinto helped bring another new catering business, Uncommon Feasts, to Lynn. Both businesses have social missions and bring new, outside investment and people to the community along with new activity and jobs to downtown.

Several market-rate housing projects were in development downtown in 2019. The majority of the new real estate development projects are along the waterfront, which is separated from downtown Lynn by a large highway called the Lynnway. City leaders hope that the new development will help to alleviate some of the city's financial challenges.

As is often the case, it is difficult to assess whether economic development can be attributed to any single project or initiative. The following development projects closed and/or were underway since Beyond Walls started:

- 10 Monroe: Construction began in early 2019 on a 250-unit market-rate project in downtown Lynn. The site used to be a beloved community farm run by the Food Project. According to Wilson, the project's investors were attracted to Lynn because of the attention surrounding Beyond Walls.
- Tacos Lupita Building: The first Opportunity Zone-financed project was under construction in early 2019 in downtown Lynn. Developed by Somerville-based real estate and property management company RCG, the renovation of the historic building includes preservation of the popular local eatery Tacos Lupita and conversion of the upper floors to 18 new market-rate units.
- Lynnway Mart Site: A new 550-unit market-rate development along the waterfront includes ground-floor commercial space and parking.
- Porthole Restaurant Site: Patrick McGrath, the same developer of the Lynnway Mart, purchased the revered local restaurant Porthole in May 2018 with plans to redevelop the site into 55 luxury condominiums along the waterfront, pending approval of a variance to build eight stories (the site is currently zoned for five).
- Beacon Chevrolet Site/254 Lynnway: This large-scale, 14-acre site along

the waterfront development broke ground in 2018, with 332 market-rate apartments planned. Local groups mounted a petition that asked the city to require a percentage of the units to be affordable.

- Garelick Farms Site: A.W. Perry, a Boston-based real estate investment firm, acquired this waterfront site in early 2019, initially intending it for industrial use with plans to later redevelop it for mixed use with housing, commercial space, and a hotel.

As Robert Maloney, executive vice president of Garelick Farms, said in an interview with the *Lynn Item*, "We like the real estate dynamic and resurgence in Lynn. There was a time nobody would invest in Somerville, now Assembly Row is thriving. Lynn is a natural to be next."

Growing Cultural Communities and Constituencies

Beyond Walls has supported growing arts communities in several ways. The Webb study showed that several artists featured in Beyond Walls mural festivals went on to receive several other commissions in the area, and in 2018, youth from RAW Artworks had the opportunity to help paint with an internationally known mural artist, Eltono. Local projects by Pow! Wow! Worcester and El Punto Urban Art Museum have reportedly begun paying their mural artists as well.

Results from the 2018 Webb survey indicated that overall response to the 10-day 2017 festival was positive, but respondents were not demographically representative of the city. Many community leaders and residents feel that Beyond Walls is strengthening community ties by providing jobs, creating opportunities to gather across cultural and economic divides, improving pedestrian activity in the public realm, and increasing pride in Lynn. Russo shared that "those 10 days of that first festival in 2017 was like Mr. Rogers' neighborhood. People smiled, walked around. I have not experienced that in the whole time I have lived in the city." However, a respondent to the Webb survey noted a "'lack of people of color at the event,' expressing concern about the inclusivity of the event to minority populations." As the Webb study noted, this concern is not unique to Beyond Walls and is something that peer organizations in other cities have had to address. Some affordable housing and community advocates in Lynn

have expressed concern that Beyond Walls may unintentionally be contributing to socioeconomic change that could displace existing lower-income residents and people of color.

Inclusive Economic Development

Beyond Walls has generated significant dialogue about the role of public art and placemaking in helping to revitalize post-industrial cities. Underlying the debates are competing theories of change regarding how economic development should proceed, who should lead, and how to ensure benefits address longstanding inequities. High-profile creative projects have shown significant ability to draw attention to and thus attract new real estate investment in cities and districts struggling to recover from manufacturing decline and disinvestment. City governments, which over time have come to rely more and more on real estate taxes as sources of income to provide public services, are in a position to benefit from these efforts, and communities hoping to see long-suffering cities rebound support them, too. Investing in arts activities can help boost a city's economy while also building creative communities. The hope is that new investments will help everyone live better lives in disinvested cities, with new residents spending money locally, new businesses that create jobs in order to serve these new customers, and new tax income to support city services. Observers of disinvestment and reinvestment cycles who look at data disaggregated by class and race have indicated, however, that these improvements do not automatically benefit all. Creative placemaking initiatives like Beyond Walls have choices to make regarding political alliances, leadership, decision-making, partnerships, design, curation, and more to fulfill their vision of strengthening the community. Beyond Walls has continued to host community listening sessions to increase its participatory decision-making approaches and collaboration so that local residents, organizations, and constituencies can benefit from its success.

OBSERVATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Strong, Independent Leadership Amidst Fragmented Civic Infrastructure

The story of Beyond Walls is closely tied to its founder, Al Wilson. Beyond Walls has accomplished so much largely due to his vision, tenacity, ability to bring in funders, and ability to navigate the process of securing local buy-in and



The art installations and events have helped to bring people back downtown.



Al Wilson and Beyond Walls have affected visible change in a relatively short time.

necessary approvals. This was especially valuable in a community lacking clear regulations, transparent civic processes, and a well-defined planning vision.

With a significant structural budget deficit, the city has not had the capacity to invest in long-range planning and infrastructure, leaving it in a position to appreciate volunteer efforts. Lynn is shouldering more than its fair share of an entire region's needs for affordable housing, and the city's political leadership believes that encouraging private market-rate development is a central strategy for increasing the city's tax revenue. Thus, many in the city supported the project with the hope that it could generate interest and attract private investment. As Mayor McGee shared, "We were waiting for a spark to bring us back, and Beyond Walls has tapped into that."

The Evolution of a Small, Tactical Nonprofit

Beyond Walls' work has evolved quickly over time, reflecting its self-described "baptism by fire" approach. The organization's funders and local partners have supported Beyond Walls' ability to learn by doing with the hope that the initiative will help revitalize the city. This investment has succeeded in producing a visible impact in a very short period of time. This success has been made possible, in part, by Beyond Wall's small size, nimbleness, and autonomy; it did not become a 501(c)3 with a board of directors until 2018. The organization's mission has also evolved over time, from initially seeking to attract new people and development to downtown Lynn to focusing on "activating spaces to strengthen community."

Beyond Walls uses a variety of tactical urbanism techniques, all of which share an entrepreneurial, fast-paced, learn-by-doing approach. The murals, lighting installations, and planned parklet and shipping container public space project all utilize easily acquirable and buildable materials. Projects are high impact yet intended to be temporary, with no plans for long-term maintenance of the murals or parklets.

Beyond Walls' fast-paced approach has led to many lessons along the way. The organization's staff went into the first year without any direct experience or much knowledge about the complexity of producing a mural event. They were able to broker critical partnerships with building trade unions, which

provided key pieces of labor and valuable expertise. Even so, there were challenges. During the first festival, some artists were left without the paints and brushes they had requested because others had "borrowed" them. Staff phone numbers were given out to artists who were told to call any staff person with a question or request. As a result, the staff received an unmanageable number of service calls, often duplicates. Additionally, staffing schedules did not overlap, leaving gaps at shift changes.

Adjustments were made after the first year which made things easier. Temporary staffing schedules were created with shift overlaps. A system was established to ensure that all calls were funneled through one point and tasks assigned through a tracking mechanism. In 2018, the system logged 280 requests, about 40% of which were change orders. Additional event management improvements were planned for the 2019 festival. Artists were asked to request materials by a certain date and were required to sign off on their materials when they arrived. Shipping containers were set up in various zones throughout the festival with supplies for three designated artists, minimizing any mixing of materials. Ten Lynn-based teenagers and young adults were hired as artist runners and dispatch personnel, providing opportunities for them to learn interpersonal and project management skills while helping the Beyond Walls team produce the festival and accompanying community events.

The lighting installations have also gone through several trial and error processes. During an evening mural tour in April 2019, a new feature was tested that would allow anyone to change the color of the lights using Twitter. The feature did not work as planned, and during the test one set of lights inexplicably turned off. Working through kinks like these has been part of the process of trying out new ways of encouraging public interaction with the art.

Artist Pay and Representation

Beyond Walls has also made changes to its policies for artist representation and pay. After receiving feedback regarding an insufficient number of female artists, organizers included more in the 2018 cohort and added programming for hopeful artists to learn from female muralists through a talk-back session. Beyond Walls focuses on commissioning artists whose nationality is representative of demographic and immigrant groups in Lynn,

including Cambodian, Dominican, and Puerto Rican. Advocates hope that this focus on the nationality of commissioned artists will translate into concrete partnerships with local organizations and more artists representing those demographic groups.

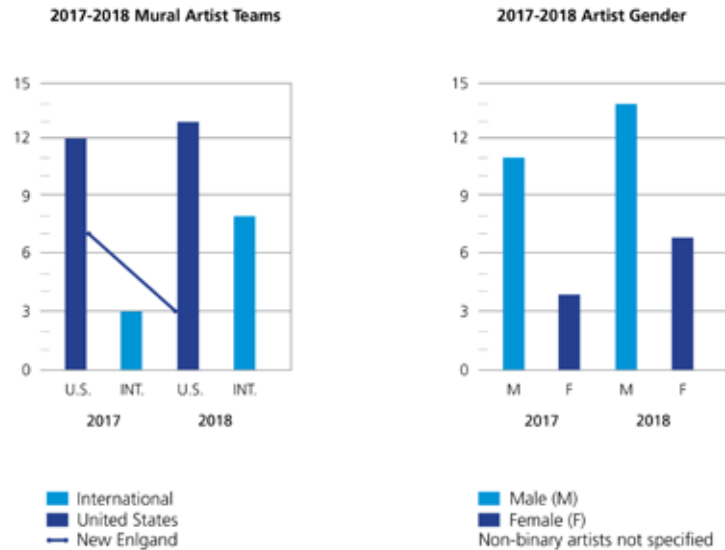
Between 2017 and 2018, Beyond Walls increased individual artist stipends from \$1,000 to \$1,500 and raised meal stipends from \$400 to \$500. According to the 2018 Webb report, the majority of artists believed “\$1,000 to \$5,000 to be a suitable starting place.” Wilson suggested that the lower stipends are made possible by allowing artists full artistic freedom to paint what they wish (with the exception of anything that is overtly political or not family friendly). Even so, the Webb report identified the issue of fees as a “high priority matter,” especially in light of the increasing number of mural festivals worldwide.

While many identify artistic freedom as a critical element of success for mural programs and public arts projects—that high-quality artistic pieces require a strong vision and implementation by the artist—some question the appropriateness and lack of site specificity of some of the imagery used by artists. Some residents feel that there is an over-representation and in some cases objectification of women in many of the murals painted by men, while others love the presence of the female form throughout the city. One mural depicts a local female business owner several stories tall, and the attention it has brought has been both a source of pride and discomfort. She agreed to be photographed for inclusion in the mural because she was one of dozens to be asked, but the artist later decided to only focus on her and did not (and was not required to) check with her to make sure that it would be okay.

Beyond Walls is also engaged in dialogue about including more local artists. With its focus on artistic excellence and “international stars” as Wilson describes it, the organization has sought to commission artists with experience on the festival circuit. Wilson expressed reservations about commissioning those with less experience to produce large-scale outdoor murals, especially given the intensity of the festival’s demands and need for artists to be largely self-sufficient, although there are artists in the region who have demonstrated expertise in this arena through recent commissions by public and private

MURAL ARTISTS

YEAR	ARTIST(S)	RESIDENCE
2017	Angurria	Dominican Republic
	Bruce Orr and Good 2 Go	Beverly, MA and Lynn, MA
	Caleb Neelon	Cambridge, MA
	Cey Adams	New York, NY
	David Zayas	Puerto Rico
	Don Rinx	Miami, FL
	FONKi	Montreal, Canada
	Georgia Hill	Australia
	Nicole Salgar and Chuck Berret	Miami, FL and New York, NY
	Marka27	New York, NY
	Miss Zukie and JPO	New York, NY and Fairfield County, CT
	Tallboy and Brian Denahy	Lynn, MA and Swampscott, MA
	Team Rekloos	Boston, MA and Dorchester, MA
	Temp & Relm	Lynn, MA
	Vise 1 and Julz Roth	Boston, MA
2018	Andrew Hem	Los Angeles, CA
	Beyung	Montreal, Canada
	Bunnie Reiss	Los Angeles, CA
	Chrissy Lebel and Ted Kiley	Lynn, MA
	Damaris Cruz	Puerto Rico
	Eltono, Bruce Orr, and Good 2 Go	France and Lynn, MA
	Eric Skotnes	Los Angeles, CA
	Free Humanity	Los Angeles, CA
	Golden	Wynwood, FL
	Imagine	Somerville, MA
	JUURI	Oklahoma City, OK
	Kilia Llano	Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic
	Leon Keer	The Netherlands
	Mariela Ajas	Buenos Aires, Argentina
	Medio Peso	Dominican Republic
	Michael Maka	Melbourne, Australia
	Ruben Ubiera	Wynwood, FL
	Sipros	São Paulo, Brazil
	Sofia Maldonado	San Juan, Puerto Rico
	Venom LMA (Lynn Mass Appeal)	Miami, FL and Lynn, MA
	Wasp Elder	United Kingdom
	Yu-Baba and Key Detail	New York, NY



Beyond Walls has made an effort to balance artist nationality and gender.



The organization seeks artists that reflect the ethnic diversity of the community.

entities outside of Lynn. As of May 2019, Beyond Walls was hoping to commission local artist and RAW Artworks alumnus Michael Agahawa after he apprenticed with mural artists in 2018. Artist apprenticeships, community partnerships, and other creative strategies may continue to improve the inclusion of local muralists.

Increasing Inclusivity, Diversity, and Accountability

Beyond Walls is committed to including a wide swath of the Lynn community in its leadership, decision-making, program design, and impact. Staff described the project as “bottom-up” with its early reliance on the community committee, response to recommendations from the TDI planning process, Soto’s role (as a Lynn native and staff member), and other community leadership (which by fall 2019 also included resident and full-time staff member Josie Santos). As of May 2019, the board, led by Rick Jakious, district director for Congressman Seth Moulton, included a total of seven members including business, political, and philanthropic professionals. Of the seven, Carolina Trujillo, publisher of the local Spanish language publication *La Voz* and the only Lynn resident and person of color on the board, was tasked with convening a community committee.

Beyond Walls is actively working to broker stronger relationships with culturally specific community-based organizations in the city by inviting them to hold yearly programming, such as the annual Cambodian festival in the planned waterfront park. As Beyond Walls consultant Ubiera-Minaya and others in Lynn have observed, when the initiative got started, its leaders were focused on establishing relationships with business and political leaders. As a result, according to Ubiera-Minaya, many residents, particularly people of color, were not apparently aware of the mural festival or its goals, allowing rumors to grow and misinformation to circulate. Ubiera-Minaya has encouraged the organization to integrate itself more deeply into the community through direct engagement, relationship building, and feedback loops. As part of this effort, she has set up one-on-one meetings between Beyond Walls staff and community leaders, and two listening sessions were held in spring 2019. In addition, Ubiera-Minaya recommended that the organization hire a staff person to focus on community engagement, a recommendation implemented with the hiring of Josie Santos as full-time community engagement director in May 2019.

Concerns about inclusion stem from the struggle of communities of color within Lynn to participate in planning for the city's future. For decades, resident-led projects in Lynn and ideas have been curtailed or stymied by lack of city resources for planning and development. Although multiple planning efforts have engaged residents in charrettes and meetings, there is frustration that the results have not been shared and at the lack of progress. Many cite "planning fatigue," especially among Lynn's communities of color and lower-income residents. From a racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic perspective, the majority of the city is underrepresented and thus without a voice regarding civic matters. As a result, Beyond Walls' ability to accomplish changes within a tight timeframe and apparent alignment with the powers that be stood out. As it moves forward, the organization will have to balance its efforts to increase local inclusivity while it pursues projects across the region and beyond.

As San San Wong, director of arts and creativity for the Barr Foundation, observed, it is not unusual for tensions to emerge when a new creative start-up begins working within an established community, especially in communities of color and where there are long-standing organizations that feel they haven't been recognized for their contributions. The emergence of a new organization and leadership can be a good time for a reassessment of the community's needs and to identify gaps and opportunities for new partnerships and services to address them.

Concerns about Gentrification and Displacement

As with many other high-profile placemaking and public art projects, Beyond Walls has received both credit and criticism for changes that are taking place in Lynn. Given growing demand for housing and office space and rising real estate prices in the Boston region, the city was poised to experience an increase in real estate development investment with or without this project. While Lynn is eager to attract new investment, there is concern about its impact on existing residents and its potential to cause gentrification and displacement.

Beyond Walls consultant Ubiera-Minaya reported that displacement was the overwhelming concern expressed in the most recent round of conversations with local groups. She noted that Beyond Walls' initial level of community



Creative Collective MA

Artists receive stipends that cover housing and travel and have the freedom to paint what they wish.



Beyond walls

Beyond Walls is expanding community engagement with local partnerships.

dialogue was not sufficient to help most residents understand the goals of the project and build trust and open dialogue with some of its leaders. In the meantime, evictions and displacement have been on the rise, even with several city-financed affordable housing developments completed in recent years.

Beyond Walls has been increasing its efforts to involve the community through partnerships and programming with local organizations and youth, especially with the leadership of Josie Santos as the new full-time community engagement director. Meanwhile, there is hope among housing advocates and others in the community that formal policies and participatory decision-making processes can be put in place by the City of Lynn to ensure positive changes in Lynn benefit all.

MEETING PROJECT GOALS

GOAL: Strengthen the community by activating downtown spaces through creative placemaking.

The Webb report mainly focused on the mural festival's economic impact and press, but the survey also revealed community impacts. Survey respondents noted that the festival had promoted civic pride in Lynn, and anecdotally, many community members have shared similar sentiments. A more complete study measuring indicators of social cohesion would be able to gauge to what degree certain communities have been strengthened or not, and to what degree that change is a result of Beyond Walls' work.

GOAL: Improve the perception of Lynn through investment in the downtown public realm.

Although Beyond Walls has attracted new visitors to downtown Lynn, it's difficult to measure its full impact on new residents and businesses and overall pedestrian activity. The Webb report indicated that more than 5,000 visitors attended the first 10-day mural festival, and Beyond Walls estimated that numbers were higher for the 2018 event. In addition, Beyond Walls' tours and programming attract residents of the North Shore and greater Boston area to the city, some of whom stay to visit its businesses and cultural venues. Beyond Walls' planned parklet projects may continue to support this trend. Mighty Mill founder Olinto said that his decision to locate in Lynn was influenced by the city's promotion of Beyond Walls. TDI Fellow Mulligan indicated

that since Beyond Walls began, business owners have come to him to ask for help in increasing beautification and pedestrian-friendly activities.

GOAL: Increase pedestrian safety and economic activity downtown with the introduction of new lighting and public art.

Given the short amount of time the project has been in place, it is difficult to measure its impact on the city's economy and safety. Beyond Walls' investments have focused on downtown Lynn in part due to MassDevelopment TDI's planning efforts and mission to make downtown Lynn a destination for arts, culture, and dining. Participants in a TDI-related charrette focused on downtown Lynn identified lighting under the commuter rail overpasses as one of its top five priorities, along with encouraging businesses to activate sidewalks and creating public art.

Crime statistics from the Lynn Police Department show decreasing amounts of crime from 2016 to the present, reflecting an overall downward trend downtown, although it is difficult to connect Beyond Walls' work to the change as it was already in progress when the project started. Areas under the overpasses were identified as extremely high in terms of crash rates, but no data was available to indicate whether there has been a change.

One of the goals of the lighting and murals is to encourage pedestrian activity downtown, both for residents and for commuters and regional visitors, but no data had been gathered to measure its impact. Several people shared that they believe the project has helped to do this, including a visually impaired woman who said that the lighting has improved downtown, making her feel safer. Other residents and stakeholders shared that they have not noticed significant differences in downtown pedestrian activity.

GOAL: Produce visible, high-quality murals that reflect the culture of the community by engaging locally, nationally, and internationally renowned artists.

The project has succeeded in bringing internationally renowned mural artists to a city in the Boston region that had previously not been well-known as a center for public art. While mural festivals have taken place elsewhere in the region, the rapid pace of production and participation of international artists

is somewhat unique to this project. Beyond Walls staff have indicated that part of the goal was to ensure that communities of color in Lynn see their cultures reflected in the murals. While the organization has made an effort to include artists representative of the community, it is unclear whether residents themselves think this is important. Some people in the community have observed that Beyond Walls' programs are more diverse than other mainstream arts programming, and the organization's staff report seeing residents taking selfies of themselves with the murals.

GOAL: Attract media attention to change the narrative around Lynn.

Beyond Walls has successfully increased positive media representation of Lynn and has attracted many new visitors downtown. With over 65 pieces of positive media and 4.5 million social media impressions, the project has generated a significant local and national buzz and made headlines, helping to offset Lynn's long-held "City of Sin" image.

SELECTION COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

The Selection Committee commended Beyond Walls for its role in generating community pride and inspiring new interest in downtown Lynn through high-quality art murals and lighting installations. They praised the project for its use of classic, tactical creative placemaking techniques to energize the community and draw attention to the city. They also noted that the incorporation of lighting through the use of vintage neon signs and underpass illumination not only helped improve pedestrian and vehicular safety but also distinguishes the project from other mural initiatives.

The committee praised the project for using art to create instant, visible results at modest costs via tactics that appear transferable to other cities with comparable issues. They saw value in a project that is relatively quick and easy to execute, inexpensive, and temporary. They agreed it provides a model for other communities, especially other "gateway cities."

The project was not an organic, community-based initiative, and the committee recognized Al Wilson's skill and effectiveness in navigating the city's power structure to make things happen quickly. They acknowledged the project's effective use of technology, including social media and crowdfunding, to

"Beyond Walls provides a model for other communities, especially other 'gateway cities' seeking quick and powerful ways to change a negative image."

promote the project and attract the interest of a broad range of people both within and outside Lynn.

While the committee commended the project's use of public art to create rapid, visible results, they acknowledged its transient nature and questioned its long-term impact on artists and the community as a whole. They noted that there are many examples of places across the United States and abroad where artists who were a part of the early stages of neighborhood revitalization were later forced out as conditions improved and property values rose. The committee also noted the importance of balancing the participation of renowned international artists with local ones.

The committee recommended the creation of robust online resources with information about the murals, lighting installations, and artists and their connection with the initiative and community.

The committee expressed concern about the lack of more extensive community involvement, especially among low-income and minority residents, and about how effectively the project spoke to or connected with people living in Lynn. Some committee members wondered if the focus on the murals as a quick means of attracting attention to Lynn came at the cost of making a broader and more lasting impact. They agreed that the project's contributions to equitable placemaking was unclear.

The project generated a good bit of discussion about the intersections of public art, creative placemaking, gentrification, and displacement. Some committee members urged caution about laying the gentrification narrative onto slow-growth cities that have experienced long decline and disinvestment. The discussion prompted the question as to what degree artists and individual initiatives assume responsibility for filling in the gap. In the end, the committee suggested that Beyond Walls' value may be as a short-term catalyst rather than a long-term vision or plan.



The project illustrates the impact of public art and artists in creative placemaking and in driving community change.

RELATED RBA WINNERS

Many past RBA winners have incorporated art and creative placemaking activities as part of broader development strategies. Few, however, utilize public art and programming as the primary driver. Like Beyond Walls, the following projects started as small-scale efforts in urban areas that experienced decline and disinvestment and sought to change perceptions of their communities through the use of public art.



THE VILLAGE OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES in Philadelphia (2001 Gold Medalist) uses arts-inspired programs to create place, build self-esteem, and foster community in north Philadelphia. The organization created series of "living sculpture" art parks and offers education and vocational training for youth and adults and other programs that serve primarily low-income Black residents.



THE HEIDELBERG PROJECT in Detroit (2005 Silver Medalist) is a series of open-air art installations created by a local artist to inspire community change by building bridges and healing individuals and communities through the creative process. Despite partial demolition by the city on two occasions, the project has become the third largest tourist destination in Detroit, attracting visitors from around the world.



ARTScorPLA in Los Angeles (1999 Silver Medalist) is a community-based program that fosters creativity by turning abandoned lots into art parks and gathering places. Its mission is to revitalize neighborhoods and empower residents by facilitating innovative land use, providing arts-related training and educational opportunities for youth, and fostering community involvement and pride.

Other RBA winners with a significant focus on public art and arts programming include Project Row Houses in Houston (1997 Silver Medalist); Artists for Humanity Epicenter in Boston (2007 Silver Medalist); the Steel Yard in Providence, Rhode Island (2013 Silver Medalist); and Inner City Arts in Los Angeles (2009 Gold Medalist).

More information about these and other RBA winners can be found at www.rudybruneraward.org.

Resources

This report was compiled from information gathered from the project application; an extensive site visit by Simeon Bruner, Robert Shibley, Anne-Marie Lubenau, Barbara Epstein, Kylie King, and Danya Sherman (lead author) in April 2019; and research and interviews conducted during those processes and throughout the writing of this report. Titles and positions of interviewees and URLs listed below were effective as of the site visit unless otherwise noted.

INTERVIEWS

Beyond Walls

- **Julia Midland**, Program Manager
- **Pedro Soto**, Associate Director
- **Doneeca Thurston**, Creative Engagement Producer, Peabody Essex Museum and Temporary Program Coordinator for Beyond Walls
- **Rosario Ubiera-Minaya**, Owner, Cojuelos' Productions and consultant to Beyond Walls
- **Al Wilson**, Founder and CEO

Design Team

- **Ron Kuszmar**, Vice President, Architectural and Theatrical Lighting, Port Lighting
- **Parke MacDowell**, Associate and Fabrication Manager, Payette Architects
- **Dan Weissman**, Senior Associate and Director of Lam Labs, Lam Partners

Local Businesses and Organizations

- **Shanel Anderson**, Owner, Soul City Yoga
- **Kit Jenkins**, Co-founder and Executive Director, RAW Art Works
- **Kurt and Jen Lange**, Land of a Thousand Hills Coffee Company and the Haven Project
- **Jon Olinto**, Co-founder, One Mighty Mill
- **Drew Russo**, Executive Director, Lynn Museum
- **Marianne Staniunus**, Co-founder, Uncommon Feasts

- **Gordon Trainer**, Property Manager, RCG, LLC

Public Agencies and Funders

- **James Cowdell**, Director of the Economic Development and Industrial Corporation (EDIC)
- **Charles Gaeta**, Executive Director of the Lynn Housing Authority and Neighborhood Development and Chairman of the EDIC Board
- **SueEllen Kroll**, Program Officer, Arts and Creativity, Barr Foundation
- **Thomas McGee**, Mayor, City of Lynn
- **Joseph Mulligan**, Transformative Development Initiative Fellow, MassDevelopment
- **Captain Chris Reddy**, City of Lynn Police Department
- **Karen Ristuben**, Creative County Initiative Program Director, Essex County Community Foundation
- **E. San San Wong**, Director of Arts and Creativity, Barr Foundation

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RUDY
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AWARD
FOR URBAN EXCELLENCE

**2019
SILVER
MEDALIST**

Buffalo Bayou Park

Houston, Texas

A resilient new public green space that
reclaims Houston's historic bayou



Overview

Submitted by: SWA Group

Completed: 2015

Total Development Cost: \$74.8 million

For most of the twentieth century, Houston turned its back on its primary waterway and most significant natural resource: the bayou on which it was founded. As the city grew and concerns about flooding escalated, Buffalo Bayou and its surrounding watershed network, relegated to drainage, became overgrown and largely forgotten.

In 2010, the Kinder Foundation approached Buffalo Bayou Partnership—a nonprofit dedicated to improvements along the waterway—with a \$30 million catalyst gift to redevelop a 2.3-mile long portion of the bayou into a new civic green space. Completed in 2015, and with a total length of about two and a half miles, Buffalo Bayou Park offers a five-mile network of pedestrian and bike paths that run on both sides of the bayou, along with four pedestrian bridges that connect to a growing trail system and link downtown and adjoining neighborhoods.

The renovated park includes visitor centers offering boat and bicycle rentals, a cafe, a skateboard park, a dog park, and event/performance venues. Public art is interspersed throughout the site along with meadows and woodlands

“Buffalo Bayou Park demonstrates how resilient public infrastructure can beautify cities and help them adapt to the threats of climate change.”

—2019 Selection Committee

featuring native plants and ecology. An 87,500-square-foot underground water cistern, dating from 1926, now serves as an art installation venue. Prior to the park’s development, amenities were limited to a very poorly maintained asphalt footpath and a series of isolated works of art that were barely accessible to park users. Because of heavy undergrowth of invasive plants, it was not possible to reach the bayou or even see it in many locations.

The park’s infrastructure is designed to withstand regular flooding and minimize the impact on its structures, paths, and amenities. After 2017’s Hurricane Harvey dropped up to 50 inches of rain on the city and flood height in the Bayou reached a record 41.4 feet at the park’s west end at Shepherd Drive, the venue’s hike and bike trails were rapidly cleared and returned to use in a few weeks.

Hosting a variety of interpretive programs and tours along with large community events all year long, the park draws residents and visitors alike for outdoor recreation and activities. Each evening at sunset, for example, people gather to watch up to 200,000 Mexican free-tailed bats emerge from their colony beneath the Waugh Drive Bridge.

Owned by the City of Houston, the park is maintained by the Buffalo Bayou Partnership with support from an annual \$2.4 million maintenance commitment from the Downtown Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone #3. The park has been a catalyst for new development as well as new thinking about open space in the city. In 2012, Houston voters passed a citywide bond initiative including \$100 million in park bond funds to support Bayou Greenways 2020,

which will transform more than 3,000 additional acres of underused land along many bayous into public green space.

“This renovation,” said Jamie Gonzales from the Nature Conservancy, “has made Buffalo Bayou Park the city’s most beloved green space in the minds of many Houstonians and has reconnected the city to the bayou that gave birth to our community.”



The resilient green space includes an extensive trail network along the bayou.



Project at a Glance

- A 160-acre urban green space along Buffalo Bayou, the city's major and most historic waterway.
- A community space that reconnects Houstonians to the bayou, nature, and each other and supports recreational and other activities, in part by connecting to a growing bike and pedestrian trail system that extends beyond the park and adding four pedestrian bridges across the bayou.
- A design that balances hydraulic, ecological, and user requirements to produce a resilient environment already proven to withstand the destructive forces of three major floods.
- A series of gardens, event venues, public art installations, and special activity areas, including a large lawn at Eleanor Tinsley Park for major events such as concerts and festivals, a skateboarding park, a dog park, and a children's play area.
- The Water Works, a flexible performance lawn, multi-use plaza, and visitor center built atop the Cistern, a repurposed historic city water storage facility converted to an 87,500-square-foot underground installation art venue.
- The product of a unique public-private partnership involving the Buffalo Bayou Partnership, the Kinder Foundation, and city and county government agencies, governed by a legal agreement that details responsibilities and ensures funding for ongoing maintenance and operations.

Project Goals

- Restoration: to restore the derelict bayou, which had become an overgrown nuisance harboring multiple homeless encampments.
- Access: to provide access to the bayou and opportunities for recreation and experiencing the unique ecological character of the site.
- Inclusion: to serve a broad cross section of Houstonians.
- Resilience: to provide a precedent for resilient open-space design, planning, and operations in climate-sensitive and flood-prone coastal areas.
- Identity: to reposition Houston as a city that promotes healthy lifestyles and embraces its unique physical relationship to the bayou system.

Chronology

1883

The Allen brothers found Houston along the banks of Buffalo Bayou. They lay out a town at the confluence of the Buffalo and White Oak Bayous, the most upstream location where boats from Galveston, Texas, and the Gulf of Mexico can turn and dock.

1935–1937

An extreme flooding event submerges downtown Houston under five feet of water and leads to the creation of the Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCD).

1950s

Additional portions of the bayou are straightened in the area that is now the park, and the HCFCD plans to line the channel with concrete. Congressman George H. W. Bush is convinced by local conservationists to reject federal funds for the project.

1986

The Buffalo Bayou Partnership (BBP) is founded under Central Houston, Inc. A task force report outlines recommendations for the preservation and improvement of the bayou.

1995

The first BBP executive director is hired.

1900

1912–1913

Arthur Coleman Comey's planning report for the Houston Park Commission contains the first proposal for improvements to Buffalo Bayou and other bayous.

1938

Federal funds are appropriated to dam the Buffalo Bayou's tributaries and straighten portions of the bayou channel. The funds are channeled through the HCFCD. These efforts replace Comey's park plans.

1966

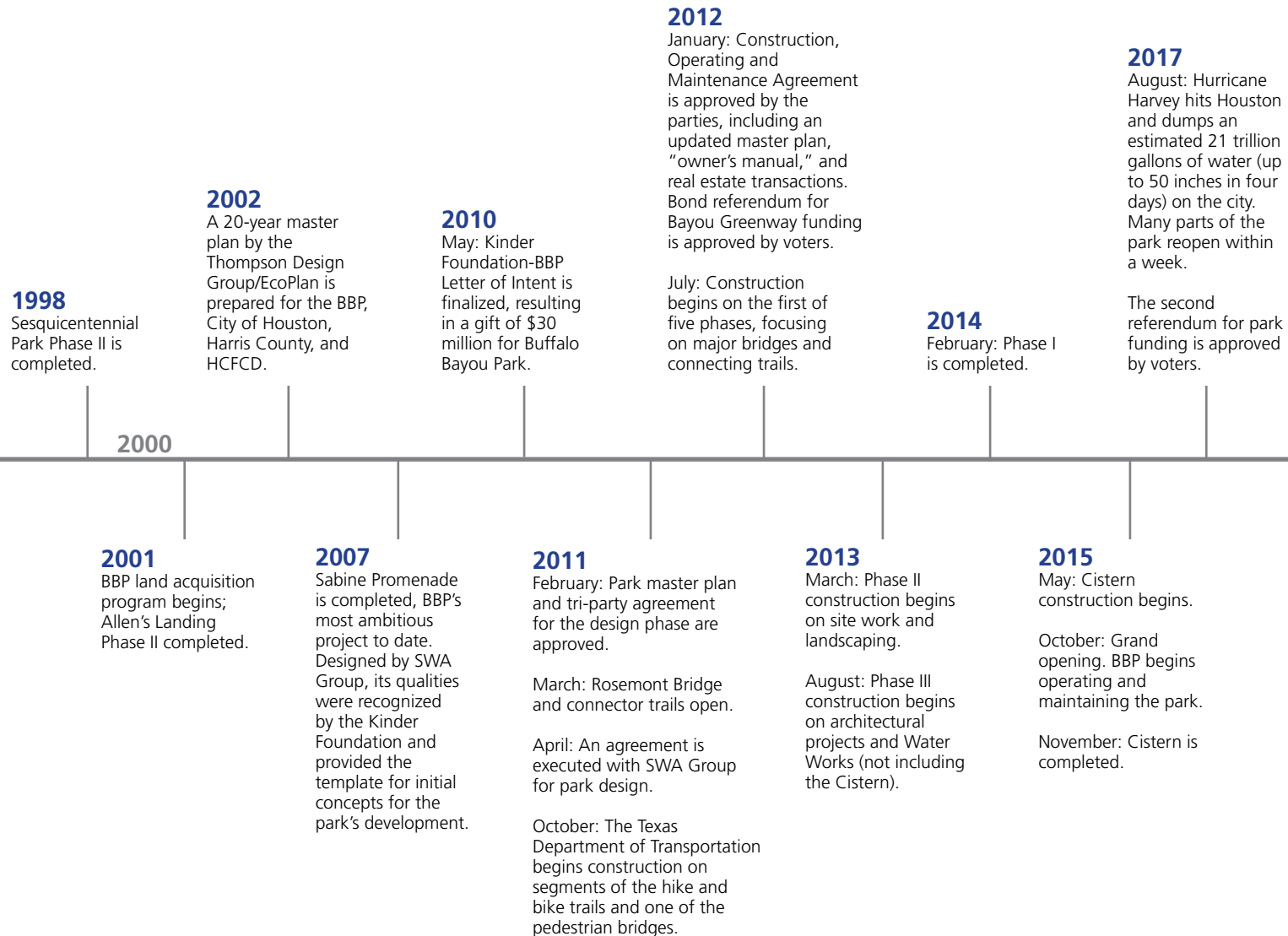
Conservationist Terry Hershey forms the Buffalo Bayou Preservation Association (BBPA) to protect the bayou.

1989

Sesquicentennial Park Phase I and the downtown Sesquicentennial Park to University of Houston-Downtown trail are completed.

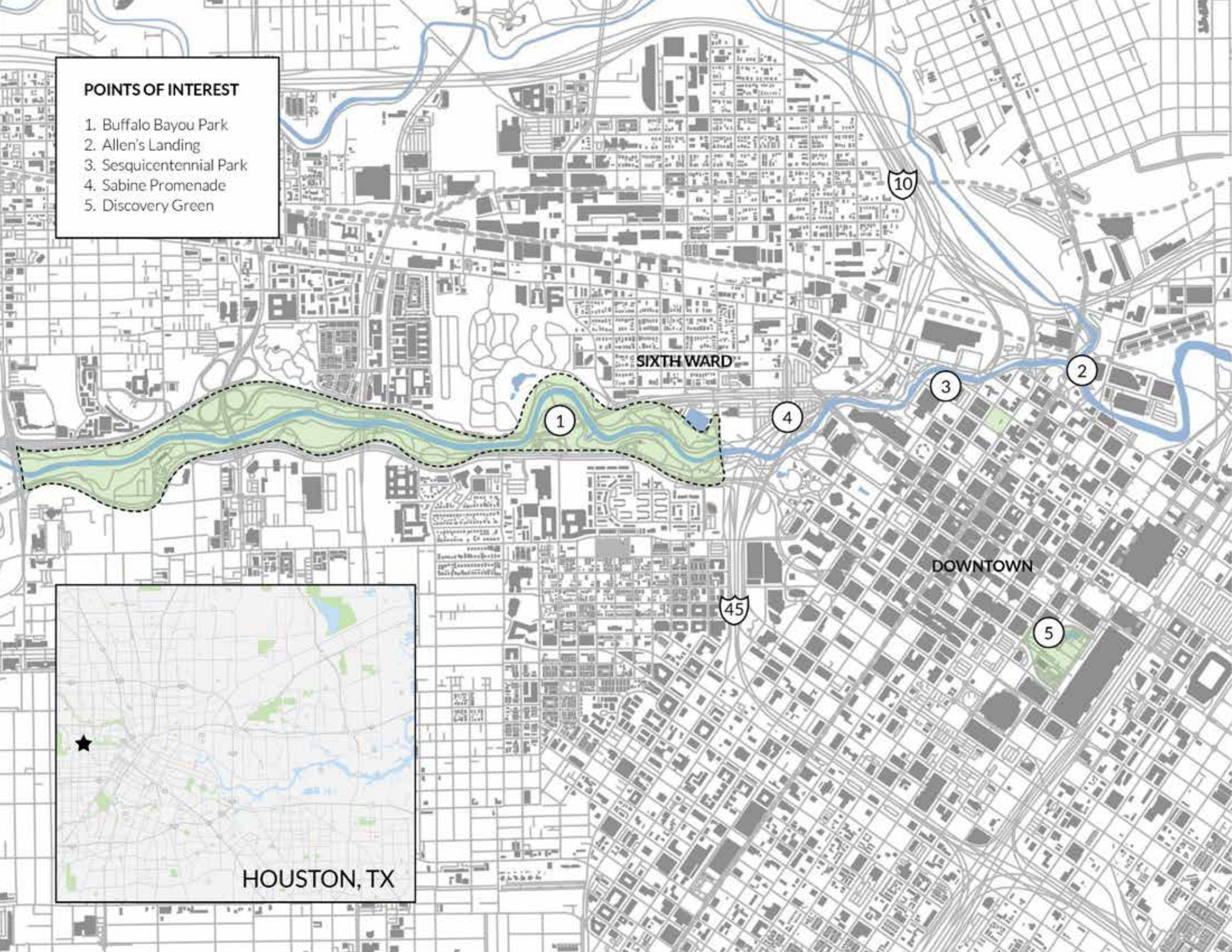
1997

Allen's Landing Phase I is completed.



POINTS OF INTEREST

1. Buffalo Bayou Park
2. Allen's Landing
3. Sesquicentennial Park
4. Sabine Promenade
5. Discovery Green



SIXTH WARD

DOWNTOWN

HOUSTON, TX

Project Description

INTRODUCTION

Buffalo Bayou Park is the remarkable transformation of a derelict urban drainage channel and waterway that had become so overgrown it attracted homeless encampments, contributing to the sense of disorder and lack of safety in the area. Now, it is a 160-acre linear park serving downtown Houston and its surrounding communities. The project required vision, coordination, and cooperation among a variety of formerly unrelated entities including the City of Houston, one of its tax increment districts, the Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCD), private philanthropists, and the Buffalo Bayou Partnership (BBP), a nonprofit organization. Unusually for such a broad public-private venture, and at the insistence of the Kinder Foundation, which wanted to be sure its investment would be protected, this arrangement was formalized in a partnership agreement that clarifies roles and responsibilities and ensures ongoing funding for park operations and maintenance.

The park supports widely varied activities, from cycling, walking, and jogging along its five miles of trails to informal picnics, large scheduled events such as concerts and festivals, arts programs, skateboarding, and a dog park.

The bayou, a main drainage channel leading to the Port of Houston and, eventually, the Gulf of Mexico, had been neglected for years despite its important role in controlling flooding over a large area of Houston. Reclamation of the bayou offered the opportunity to greatly improve its ability to handle flood waters and protect surrounding neighborhoods. Virtually the entire park is within a flood zone, hence the involvement of the HCFCD, which contributed substantially to the project for water-course improvement and realignment, factors central to its mission. This entailed detailed studies of the “fluvial geomorphology”—the interaction of flood waters and the river course and banks—for some areas of the bayou. The banks were then widened, the waterway was returned to a more meandering course, and flood benches (flat shelves) were created along the banks where sediment could be deposited and more easily removed.

Hurricane Harvey, the wettest storm ever to hit the continental United States, tested these flood management strategies in 2017, just after the park was completed, by dumping 50 inches, or an estimated 21 trillion gallons, of water on some areas of the Houston region and raising water levels above what had been the anticipated 500-year flood level. In part due to weeks of high water released from the watershed’s overloaded upstream dams, the very high level of flooding caused some trees to drown and erosion along the lower banks in certain areas. Two years later, Tropical Storm Imelda dumped 43 inches, making it the fifth wettest storm. Park design performed very much as anticipated, demonstrating its resilience and facilitating cleanup such that it reopened very quickly.

The neighborhoods that surround the park are highly varied socio-economically, ranging from historically Black communities with substantial public housing to some of the most affluent parts of Houston. It is reported (and appears) that park users reflect this diversity. There are concerns about gentrification in the areas adjacent to the park that have become even more desirable given their proximity to its amenities. BBP intends to address some of these concerns in the next phase of the park’s expansion along the bayou. Buffalo Bayou East, which was in the planning stages in early 2019, will link Eastside neighborhoods with the bayou and downtown.

Buffalo Bayou Partnership



The City of Houston was founded at the confluence of the White Oak and Buffalo Bayous.

CONTEXT

Houston

Houston was founded in the 1830s by two real estate promoters, the Allen brothers, who were seeking a town site with connectivity to Galveston Bay. This immediately followed the Texas Revolution, in which Texas gained independence from Mexico. In 1836, the Allens bought over 2,000 acres in the vicinity of the confluence of the White Oak and Buffalo Bayous. This was the farthest place upriver from Galveston where full-size steamships could turn around and dock. The first one, the *Laura*, arrived in January 1837, docking at what is now Allen's Landing.

The landing was officially designated as a port in 1870 by an act of Congress, and two years later the first funds were appropriated for ship channel improvements, opening the way for Houston to participate more fully in, and

eventually take leadership of, the petroleum industry in the region. A new deep-water port was created downstream in the early 1900s to serve the growing volume of international cargo between Houston and the Gulf of Mexico. The historic port is no longer active except for pontoon boats that offer tourist cruises and dock close to the BBP's offices.

The city itself was named for Sam Houston, elected the first president of the Republic of Texas in 1836, and was incorporated that same year. Houston grew rapidly and had strong civic leadership, including a chamber of commerce founded in 1840, whose members were not afraid of planning. They conceived of parks, a civic center, a university, and a symphony.

Yet, while not without parks, the city is generally less well provided with green space than might be expected, a situation that has been the case for

at least 100 years and likely the result of its very low tax base and historic resistance to increasing taxes. Former mayor Louis Welch, who served from 1964–1973, was even quoted as saying, “Houston doesn’t need parks, they have big backyards.”

More recently, there is evidence that this is changing, perhaps in part as a result of Buffalo Bayou Park and other recent parks and their perceived value to the public. There are also demographic and employment changes that resulted from the rapid expansion over the past couple of decades of petroleum and other industries that employ large numbers of well-educated, upwardly mobile, and younger populations, resulting in a desire by the corporate and business sectors to make the city more appealing from a lifestyle perspective.

Demographics

In 2019, Houston, the fourth largest city in the United States, was named the most diverse city in the nation by Wallethub, based on the cultural, economic, household, religious, and socioeconomic diversity of 501 cities. The City of Houston and surrounding metropolitan area are extremely prosperous, ranking second in the United States, according to *Rising Together*, a 2017 report by the Mayor Task Force on Equity. At the same time, the Houston metro area ranked only 33rd in per capita income and ranks high in income disparity (first among the 10 largest US metropolitan areas according to a 2012 Pew Research Center report).

In 2017, the population of the City of Houston was estimated at about 2.3 million, with about 43% Hispanic, 30% White (non-Hispanic), and 23% Black.¹ The demographics of the area within a 30-minute bicycle ride of Buffalo Bayou Park are much the same. The catchment area is 39% Hispanic, 34% White (non-Hispanic), and 20% Black—slightly more White, but not very much. However, the six census tracts immediately bordering the park

¹ Unless otherwise noted, references to race, ethnicity, and nationality throughout this case study reflect the terminology used by the source. In instances where there is no direct source, we have attempted to use the most inclusive, accurate, and appropriate language possible.



The confluence served as a port for steamships that traveled upriver from Galveston Bay.



Today, the area is known as Allen's Landing and was redeveloped into a park in 1997.

and within a 10- to 15-minute walk are much whiter, ranging from 34% to 71% White and averaging about 51%.

In terms of income, Houston overall has a per capita rate of \$21,587. According to data from the 2000 census, the tracts that immediately border Buffalo Bayou Park and are within a 10- to 15-minute walk range in per capita income from \$10,113 in the Near Northside to \$85,052 in River Oaks, skewing somewhat higher than the city as a whole.

Despite its relative prosperity, Houston's city services are surprisingly poorly funded and, as a result, many public improvement projects are supported by local philanthropies in association with tax increment finance and management districts. All of these factors contributed to Buffalo Bayou Park's genesis and its intensive level of use by residents and employees of downtown businesses. They also affected the form of its public-private partnership.

Flood Control and the Bayou

Buffalo Bayou, the centerpiece of the park, is the most important drainage channel in Houston. The city, and the bayou itself, are subject to flooding due to very flat terrain, high levels of precipitation including hurricanes, and development, especially outside the city limits that were largely uncontrolled with regard to rain water detention until about 1986, when the HCFCD and local jurisdictions changed policies to require on-site storm water detention and other measures to reduce runoff. Much of the runoff that accounts for flooding in Houston, including on the Buffalo Bayou, comes from dam releases upstream. The extreme flooding of the bayou from Hurricane Harvey was a direct result of these releases and flooding in watersheds below the dams.

The Houston area has an extensive network of infrastructure to manage drainage and flood control. According to the history of the HCFCD:

For more than 150 years, the people of Harris County have had a complex relationship with their bayous, cherishing them one moment but battling them the next ... The county suffered through 16 major floods from 1836 to 1936, some of which crested at more than 40 feet, turning bridges into toothpicks and Downtown Houston streets

into raging rivers ... After the tremendously destructive floods of 1929 and 1935, however, citizens clamored for solutions Losses more than doubled in 1935, when seven people were killed and the Port of Houston was crippled for months—its docks submerged, its channel clogged with tons of mud and wreckage, its railroad tracks uprooted. Twenty-five blocks of the Downtown business district were inundated, as well as 100 residential blocks.

The HCFCD was created in 1937 by the state legislature to address these problems and served as the local partner for the Army Corps of Engineers. The HCFCD identified two primary options for dealing with flood water—move it or store it—and in the early period of its work, the preferred alternative to damming streams was thought to be channelization: straightening, widening, and deepening streambanks, and sometimes lining them with concrete, to speed the water's flow. By 1950, the HCFCD had channelized 1,260 miles of streams and bayous.

As metropolitan Houston developed, raw land was built on, streets were paved and lined with curbs and gutters, and storm sewers were installed, further speeding the flow of water to the bayous. Much development took place in natural flood plains and low areas, with little or no attention to the potential impact of these issues, exacerbating downstream flooding.

By 1966, the HCFCD and the City of Houston had created the first of 11 comprehensive master drainage plans covering the area's major watersheds. The plans established uniform drainage criteria, identified existing and possible future improvements, and defined right-of-way requirements, contributing greatly to the coordinated development of watershed drainage. In 1973, stormwater management tools and design standards were added to the master drainage plan, and in the 1980s, Harris County adopted policies on flood control improvements and drainage criteria that included requirements for storm water detention (in essence, ponds that hold excess storm water runoff until peak flows pass and then release it slowly).

Despite the HCFCD's efforts, the Buffalo Bayou became overgrown, reducing its ability to carry water and exacerbating flooding during major storms. The

HCFCFCD's attempts to clear banks of their overgrowth were not always popular, to say the least. Two miles of Buffalo Bayou (the Allen Parkway area where Buffalo Bayou Park is now) were cleared in 1957, sparking outrage at the removal of trees along the banks and leading to the founding of the Bayou Preservation Association (BPA) in 1966 by a group of residents led by local conservationist Terry Hershey. The BPA was at the time devoted to watershed oversight and information dissemination.

During the 1970s, the BPA orchestrated the formation of the Harris County Flood Control Task Force, a collaborative effort that led to a report outlining recommendations for preservation and improvement of the bayou. The organization is still active and contributing to the protection and restoration of all the Houston area bayous. This group was a precursor of the Buffalo Bayou Partnership (BBP), which was founded in 1986 under the auspices of Central Houston, Inc., a downtown civic organization.

Park Planning

Houston has a long history of thinking about what to do with its parks and bayous. Over 100 years ago, the city hired Arthur Coleman Comey, who prepared his 1913 report *Houston: Tentative Plans for Its Development* for the Houston Park Commission. While the report focused on open space, Comey presented comprehensive proposals for transportation, land use, and civic facilities and made the case that "the backbone of a park system for Houston will naturally be its bayou." Some quotations from the plan are reproduced here to show how close it was, in many ways, to the park concept as realized, including the justification for doing the project in the first place. For example, Comey documents Houston's extreme shortage of park space, noting that Houston had only one-sixth the park acreage per person of other "progressive" cities: "Comparative statistics of twenty progressive cities ... show the relatively large population per acre of parks in Houston, there being 685 people per acre as compared with an average of 110 in these other cities. Park maintenance per capita is also low, being twelve cents as compared with an average of forty-four cents."

Comey's proposed plan includes economic justification in terms of the increase in the value of bordering properties:

The bayous are natural parks already. Tree-growth and grass are good even in populous sections; the valleys include the only scenery with slopes, while occasional narrow bends furnish level playfields. A relatively small acreage in park grounds embraces complete landscape units without obtrusion of the city, as the view from within the valley includes the immediate slopes and trees on the crest only. The long, narrow strips along the bayous will serve many communities; continuous walks can be laid out in naturalistic landscape; parkway drives along the banks of the bayou are capable of unusually park-like treatment; and long park frontages for pleasant homes will be provided. The effect on land values and tax returns is equally beneficial, as bayous have little value under private control, and depreciate surrounding property through their poor development, but as parks, they greatly enhance the value of their frontage and the neighborhood in general.

Sesquicentennial Park was initiated in 1986 and completed in 1998 under the auspices of the BBP and Central Houston, Inc. The nine-acre park, established to commemorate the 150-year anniversary of the founding of Houston, flanks Buffalo Bayou as it flows past the Wortham Theater Center in the heart of Houston's Theater District, featuring striking art installations visible from the bayou. A new trail connected the park to the University of Houston's downtown campus. In 1995, the BBP hired its first executive director, and in 1997, the organization completed the first phase of the revitalization of Allen's Landing, covering the portion of the bayou and its banks closest to the center of downtown Houston and the site of the original harbor. Named for Houston's founders, Allen's Landing has a variety of areas for passive activity, and boats still moor there and on- and off-load passengers, mainly for tours of the portion of the bayou that flows through the park.

It appears that Comey's plan is in the throes of being realized, both through the work of the BBP and via a much larger effort called Bayou Greenways 2020. The goal of Bayou Greenways 2020 is to create a continuous park system along Houston's major waterways, transforming more than 3,000 acres along 150 miles of bayous into linear parks and adding more than 80 new miles of hike-and-bike trails to create a trail system twice that length. Bayou Greenways 2020 is a public-private partnership between the Houston

Thompson Design Group



In 2002, the Buffalo Bayou Partnership created a 20-year master plan and vision for a park.

Parks Board and the Houston Parks and Recreation Department in close collaboration with the HCFCD.

The cost to complete Bayou Greenways 2020 will be \$220 million. Funding has come from a \$50 million pledge from the Kinder Foundation and a major bond referendum passed in 2012, thanks in part to the “Parks by You!” campaign. Houston voters overwhelmingly approved the bond referendum providing \$166 million in parks funding, \$100 million of which is set aside for Bayou Greenways 2020. Houston Parks Board is responsible for raising the remaining \$120 million from private funds, federal and state grants, and other sources. It is within a few million dollars of reaching that goal.

PROJECT HISTORY

By 2001, BBP had begun its land acquisition program for the park, and in 2002, *Buffalo Bayou and Beyond: Visions, Strategies, Actions for the 21st Century*, a 20-year master plan, was developed by the Thompson Design Group/EcoPlan for a consortium consisting of the BBP, the City of Houston, Harris County, and the HCFCD, indicating the level of cooperation and coordination that continued through the eventual development of the park. The plan established a 20-year vision that included a series of linear parks along the bayou. It identified three main goals for the West Sector, which covers the park as it is today: initiate incremental park improvements, improve bayou access, and encourage compatible bayou-front development. The plan also called for a reduction in the traffic capacity of the adjacent Allen Parkway. While there appears to be much more wetland area on smaller creeks and waterways that feed the channel and many missing features compared to the actual plan, a number of features of the concept design were eventually incorporated into the actual park plan 10 years later.

In 2010, the Kinder Foundation (a Houston philanthropy known for its support of parks) approached BBP with an offer to fund substantial infrastructure improvements needed at the proposed Buffalo Bayou Park. At the time, the 160-acre stretch along the bayou was an overgrown, neglected area with no amenities and little infrastructure beyond some sidewalks and a few trails. A letter of intent was agreed to, resulting in a gift of \$30 million for Buffalo Bayou Park. The letter covers the area that represents the actual park, from

Sabine Street at the east (where the repurposed Cistern and Waterworks are located) upstream to Shepherd Drive at the west, where the park ends just past Lost Lake.

The grant included funds for planning and design, and that same year the landscape architecture, urban design, and planning firm SWA Group was engaged to develop a more detailed master plan showing how to realize the vision articulated in the 2002 plan. Scott McCready, landscape architect at SWA, had worked on various bayou projects. In addition, SWA’s CEO, Kevin Shanley, had advocated for improvements to the bayou and related parklands and became so involved that he came to be known as “Mr. Bayou.” As expressed by Nancy and Rich Kinder, founders of the Kinder Foundation, SWA also had valuable staff expertise and was already working on areas of the park, including Sabine Promenade, completed in 2007. The firm was apparently the obvious choice, and no formal request for proposal or selection process took place.

By February 2011, the SWA plan was approved, and a tri-party agreement for the design phase was negotiated and finalized, paving the way to move forward with the design. The project was put on a fast-track, phased basis, and by July 2011, the city and the Texas Department of Transportation began construction on the long-planned main trail (which continues beyond the park in both directions). Soon after, the Rosemont Bridge and connector trails were constructed, since their funding came separately from Memorial Heights Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ) funds.

While this previously planned but long-delayed construction had started the year before, it wasn’t until January 2012 that a construction, operating, and maintenance agreement covering all proposed park improvements was finally approved by all parties. The agreement spells out each entity’s responsibilities and includes the updated SWA master plan (*Buffalo Bayou Park Master Plan Update—Shepherd to Sabine*), an “owners’ manual,” and documentation of the real estate transactions that clarified and unified ownership of the park.

In July 2012, Phase I construction began on major bridges and approach trails, and, in March 2013, Phase II construction began on site work and

landscape. By August of that year, Phase III construction began on architectural projects including the Water Works (but not the Cistern).

In February 2014, Phase I of the park was completed, and in May 2015, construction began on the Cistern, which was completed in November 2015, a month after the park's grand opening. At that point, the BBP began operating and maintaining the park.

LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS

This complex project required vision and ongoing cooperation among a variety of entities. These include the Houston Parks and Recreation Department, which owns the underlying property; the Downtown Redevelopment Authority, which contributes to its maintenance; the HCFCD, which contributed to improving the water course; a nonprofit organization, the Buffalo Bayou Partnership (BBP), which raises funds, oversees activities, and operates and maintains the park; and the Kinder Foundation, which approached the BBP in 2010 to serve as "catalyst funder" with a grant of \$30 million, amounting to nearly half the total cost and stimulating other contributions. Key players included these parties and the individuals who led each entity.

The Buffalo Bayou Partnership (BBP) had a substantial history of working to improve the bayou. Building on concerns that were championed by its predecessor, the Bayou Preservation Association, the BBP was founded in 1986 to work with Central Houston, Inc. to develop Sesquicentennial Park along the bayou at the edge of downtown. The BBP focuses on the 10 square miles of Buffalo Bayou from Shepherd Drive to the East End and onto the Port of Houston Turning Basin. The BBP became increasingly organized over the years, hiring its first executive director in 1995 and completing the development of Allen's Landing, just east of Sesquicentennial Park and immediately adjacent to downtown, in 1997.

For 25 years, BBP President Anne Olsen has provided tenacious leadership and continuity to the partnership. Her background in public relations and fundraising left her well prepared and connected to Houston's civic, political, and philanthropic organizations. The BBP itself is directly connected to all

the other parties through reciprocal board memberships. For example, the BBP's board lists the heads of most major Houston and Harris County political, business, educational, and cultural organizations. The BBP was responsible for managing the planning and design of the park and currently oversees its operations and maintenance. Guy Hagstette served as project manager for the park (under contract to BBP) and is now vice president for parks and civic space for the Kinder Foundation while also serving on the BBP board of directors. His leadership was facilitated by his background in architecture and urban design as well as his strong connections to city planning and park agencies.

The Kinder Foundation played a key role not only in providing the majority of funding for construction but offering the money at an early moment when it served to catalyze the project. This was consistent with the foundation's philanthropic focus on investment in Houston and particularly its open spaces, having previously supported Discovery Green, a downtown park converted from parking lots and developed with world-class planning and design consultants and very substantial public input organized by the Project for Public Spaces. In at least one way, Discovery Green is a model for the first phases of recent park development in Houston. That is where philanthropic organizations, including the Brown Foundation and Kinder Foundation, approached the city with an opportunity for which they then provided substantial private funding. Rich and especially Nancy Kinder were actively involved in decision-making about Buffalo Bayou Park and insisted on a formal agreement among the parties as a condition of funding.

The City of Houston, which owns all of the real estate underlying the park, was represented largely by members of its Parks and Recreation Department, including Joe Turner, who had a passion for maintenance that allowed him to provide better-than-expected services on a low budget (maintenance was ultimately delegated to the BBP). The Downtown Redevelopment Authority and the Downtown Management District (essentially a business improvement district) were also active in representing city and business interests. It is worth noting that these organizations are all led by Bob Eury, who founded the BBP in 1985. The latter three entities are also "affiliated" with each other by virtue of overlapping directorates, including leaders who serve on two or more of the entities' boards of directors.

Given the importance of hydrology and the role of the bayou as a drainage channel, the HCFCD was also an essential member of the group, providing funding and guidance for channel improvements.

SWA Group and Page also made important contributions as designers of the landscape improvements and buildings. SWA Group is a landscape architecture, urban design, and planning firm with eight offices worldwide that acted as prime consultant, providing planning and design improvements within the park. Larry Speck, an architect with Page, a multidisciplinary architecture and engineering firm which subcontracted to SWA, designed the buildings in the park.

Formal Agreements

Unusually for a project like this, the arrangement among the key players was formalized in a series of agreements that clarify roles and responsibilities and ensure ongoing funding for park operations and maintenance.

The first was the letter of intent (LOI) between the Kinder Foundation and the BBP in May 2010. Under this agreement, in order for the BBP to receive the Kinder grant, a number of conditions had to be satisfied, as did certain intentions that were expressed but not binding. Among the factors covered in the LOI were funding for (and required completion of) a master plan by the BBP; a required engineering study by the county for channel reconfiguration, completion of that work, and ongoing maintenance of the channel; city delegation of maintenance to the BBP with a long-term funding commitment; city construction of certain trails and the Rosemont Bridge (using funds from the Memorial Heights TIRZ), and many other items. Funding provided by the Kinder Foundation was to be used for additional trails beyond those being built by the city, trail lighting, irrigation work, basic landscaping and contouring, benches, and trash receptacles. The LOI also addressed other agreements, including the construction, operating, and maintenance agreement (COMA) and its development standards and owners' manual.

The second, interim agreement was the tri-party development agreement of 2011 which needed to be completed by the end of that year in order to meet the terms of the Kinder grant. The foundation's "Performance Challenge

Grant" of \$30 million to the BBP required that the City of Houston, the HCFCD (which spent \$5,000,000 on channel work), and the BBP enter into a long-term public-private partnership to enable them to meet their performance obligations to develop, construct, and operate the project. The tri-party agreement covered the development phase and included a commitment to negotiate in good faith the long-term agreement. Although the agreement was not signed by the Kinder Foundation, it made Nancy Kinder the chair of the steering committee.

The third and final agreement was the COMA, entered into by the City of Houston, the Downtown TIRZ #3, the HCFCD, and the BBP. A condition of Kinder Foundation financing for construction, it was finalized in January 2012 and covered the obligations and responsibilities of the parties during construction (including which entity would be carrying out which activities), how operations and maintenance will be managed and paid for, indemnifications and insurance requirements, and means of dispute resolution. Since master planning had been completed, a summary of the plan was attached along with an "owners' manual" for the park which defined standards for development, operations, and maintenance. The duration of the agreement had to work around the city's statutory limitations on the length of the contract it could enter into, which was 30 years for matters related to real estate. Thus, if renewed twice, it could potentially last a total of 90 years.

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

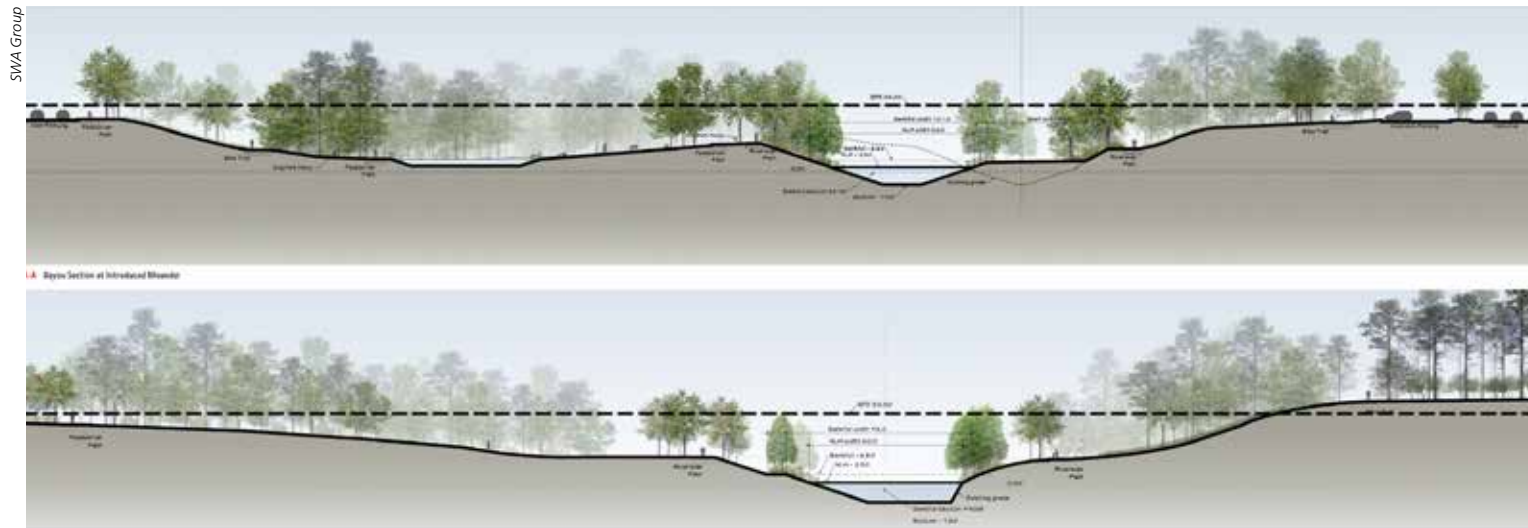
Overall Planning Concepts

Buffalo Bayou Park follows the waterway of this historically and hydrologically important bayou. Everything about the park focuses on the bayou and its banks.

While tame and attractive during much of the year, when the rains are intense, the bayou must carry increasing amounts of runoff, draining a large area of metropolitan Houston and becoming a raging and destructive torrent. Critical to understanding the behavior of the drainage channel is the cross section through the bayou, from bank to bank. It is this section that determines the maximum volume of water that can flow through the channel before it overflows onto adjacent roads and neighborhoods.



Planning took into consideration predicted 100-year flood levels and places for silt to gather.



Lower areas flanking the bayou were broadened and landscaped.

In planning for the park, hydrology was a key factor, and consultants who specialize in fluvial geomorphology—the shape of river courses—were engaged. First, efforts were made to increase the cross-sectional area, generally by broadening the lower sections flanking the watercourse. This also allowed for the creation of relatively flat, low “shelves” where the voluminous silt carried in flood water could be deposited (new park facilities are located on higher elevations to avoid having to clean around them). These shelves also make it easier to remove the silt, which can be accessed by trucks for removal. This proved crucial to the rapid recovery of the park following the catastrophic event of Hurricane Harvey in 2017, just two years after the park was completed, which “dumped more than 60 inches of rain over four days on metropolitan Houston,” according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The park was largely operational within a week of the water receding, though some silt deposits had yet to have been removed in spring 2019.

In addition to widening the bayou and providing flat shelves, the water course itself was realigned, increasing its effective length by making it more

meandering. This restored it to a configuration closer to its natural state, as it was before it had been straightened by the Army Corps of Engineers.

New improvements for park use, such as visitor centers, pavilions, seating, restrooms, fences, signage and lighting standards, pedestrian bridges, and buildings are generally located at the upper reaches of the banks, out of predicted 100-year storm flood levels (though these ratings and levels are being reconsidered based on recent events). All such improvements are designed to withstand the horizontal force of flood waters and potential erosion around their foundations, which were deepened and strengthened at an added cost estimated at about 15% over standard construction. Care was taken that all designed elements, especially the larger features like bridges and buildings, would be “quiet” and not call attention to themselves as objects in the landscape, but rather complement and even blend in with it. Buildings such as the visitor center and the facilities at Lost Lake are generally simple structures with regular, rectangular volumes and simple detailing. Glass is used to reflect the surroundings,

especially on the elevations that face the park itself (versus the street or a parking lot).

Very important features of the park's design are the continuous paths that run along the entire length of the park and beyond and on both sides of the bayou. There are separate paths for pedestrians and runners, paved in asphalt for greater comfort and safety and generally located closer to the water, and for bikes, which are paved in concrete, wider, and located closer to the top of the banks. While vehicles including bikes are not allowed on the pedestrian paths, anyone can use the bike path. These paths are very well used, particularly before and after work hours and on weekends.

Also very important is the approach to landscaping and planting. In planning the landscaped areas of the park, several different types of zones were identified: riparian edges, rambles, woodlands, lawns and groves, meadows and prairies, and perennial gardens. One goal of the plantings was to return the park to a state closer to its natural ecology so that Houstonians could experience nature—not just green or open space—within the city. The amount of turf grass was limited and reduced from pre-existing levels, and more emphasis was placed on meadows, prairie grasses and wild flowers, and wooded areas with mostly native trees. In some areas, this meant restoring sections that were overgrown to allow trees to grow larger. There are limited exceptions to these principles at the more “civilized” periphery, where some annuals and non-native plantings are allowed.

Lighting is provided along the paths so that they can safely be used after dark, and the vehicular and pedestrian bridges that cross the park have interesting blue lighting on their undersides. The latter was designed to echo the lunar cycle, becoming brighter and whiter as the moon becomes fuller and bluer during its dark phases. “Orbs” on over 450 trail lights also shift from white to blue, reinforcing the effect. The computer-controlled system was designed by artist Stephen Korns with Hervé Descottes of L’Observatoire International. Despite being installed above anticipated flood levels, it has been subject to damage when water rose beyond them. In early 2019, it was being reprogrammed and plans were being developed to better protect it from wet conditions. The BBP also plans to eventually extend this lighting



Continuous trails line both sides of the bayou.



There are separate, paved trails for pedestrians and cyclists.

system all the way to the Turning Basin at the eastern end of the next phase (Buffalo Bayou East).

A consistent wayfinding signage program is employed throughout the park, including the names of attractions, directions, and rules. There are maps at 24 locations in the park.

A Walk through the Park

The eastern edge of the park, closest to downtown, is one of the most developed areas. It begins with the Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern at the Water Works, historically an enormous enclosed water reservoir that once supplied the drinking water for the city using pumped ground water (no longer feasible due to its impact on subsidence). Built in 1926 and abandoned for decades, this structure consists of a vast space of 87,500 square feet supported by 25-foot-tall columns. It was converted into an art space that hosts changing installations curated by the BBP, which also conducts guided tours of the Cistern focusing on its history and architecture. At the time of the site visit, the second of the Cistern's installations was on view. *Spatial Chromointerference*, by the late artist Carlos Cruz-Diez, used multiple programmed projectors to shine a very complex and changing pattern of overlapping colors and geometric shapes onto the surfaces and columns of the Cistern, converting it to a magical—and sometimes somewhat disorienting—space.

The roof of the Cistern supports a large flat area called the Brown Foundation Lawn as well as the Hobby Family Pavilion with a stage used for events. During the site visit, the Water Works hosted a Palestinian festival, with booths set up on the periphery of the lawn. It appeared to be well attended, despite poor weather. There is also a shaded terrace that protects guests from the elements with a spectacular view of downtown Houston.

Adjacent to the Water Works is a visitors center that features an information desk, restrooms, and bike rental station. Next to it is a skateboard park with highly articulated features for performing stunts. Helmets are required for all skaters and provided at no charge, and lessons for beginners are available. There is also a play area with limited equipment, oriented toward young children.



Gravel footpaths provide access to wooded rambles.



Colorful "lunar lighting" illuminates the trails and bridges after dark.

Jeff Lyon, courtesy Buffalo Bayou Partnership



Rosemont Pedestrian Bridge

The Rosemont Bridge draws visitors out over the bayou along a continuous ramped surface that provides universal accessibility. The 12-foot wide bridge is supported by more than 600 feet of corten steel trusses.



Johnny Steele Dog Park

(14) The two-acre dog park includes a pond, shade structures, dog washing areas, benches, and drinking fountains complete with spigots for dogs.



Police Officers' Memorial

(19) Late Texas artist Jevon Bautista Morales' Memorial commemorates the 113 Houston Police Department officers whose lives were lost in the line of duty.



Nature Play Area

(20) The Nature Play Area features include: a boulder rock scramble, a rolling lawn, a stream and waterfall, climbing logs and stones, a 33-foot slide and a tri-level tree house/boat deck with climbing net.



The Water Works

(27) The Water Works is a major destination and park entry point including a grassy plateau framing stunning views of downtown, a pavilion popular for events, and a Visitor Center housing restrooms, food trucks and a bike rental facility.



The Cistern

(29) The 1926 Cistern was one of the City of Houston's first underground drinking water reservoirs. The 87,500 square foot expanse includes 25-foot tall concrete columns set row upon row, hovering over two inches of water.



Lost Lake // Dunlavy

(6) Lost Lake is on the site of a former pond that was lost in the 1970s when its dam across a natural ravine broke. The pond was restored and is situated near a visitor center housing restrooms, paddle craft rentals, The Dunlavy, a private event space, and The Kitchen at The Dunlavy.



Jackson Hill Ped Bridge

(8) Soaring a dramatic 40 feet above the bayou, this 345-foot-long pedestrian bridge near Jackson Hill Street connects with the existing bridge over Memorial Drive, providing access to Allen Parkway.



Waugh Bridge Bat Colony

(10) Every evening at sunset, more than 250,000 Mexican free-tailed bats emerge from crevices found in the Waugh Drive Bridge. These creatures are non-migratory and call the bayou home year-round.



Juame Plensa's Tolerance

(15) At the base of the Rosemont Bridge on Allen Parkway and Montrose are Plensa's Tolerance sculptures. The human figures representing the world's seven continents are composed of stainless steel alphabet letters from many languages.



Lee & Joe Jamail Skate Park

The Lee & Joe Jamail Skatepark is a 30,000-square-foot in-ground facility overlooking Buffalo Bayou. The park was two cradles and a kidney pool for skaters.



Eleanor Tinsley Park

(23) One of Houston's most popular outdoor spaces for recreation and relaxation, the gently sloping park with a dramatic backdrop of the Houston skyline hosts many of Houston's festivals and events.

The 2.5-mile-long park is lined with a variety of amenities and public art.

David Lloyd



The Water Works includes a visitor center, sheltered pavilion, and restrooms.

Jonnu Singleton



A 1926 water cistern has been converted into an art space.

As visitors wander through the park, they pass a small number of shelters with picnic tables and other areas with concrete seats. Such installations were limited due to the high costs of construction. Barbeques and fire pits, typical infrastructure for picnics and park parties, are not provided due to the challenges and costs of servicing them, removing the trash, and protecting them from flood waters. Scattered along the length of the park are groves and meadows that have been planted or restored to a more natural condition. There are at least nine meadows and seven groves or woodlands, all planted with native species. Public toilets, however, are only provided where larger, permanent structures are located at the ends of the park.

Visitors also pass over or under four new pedestrian bridges that connect neighborhoods on the two sides of the bayou and improve pedestrian access to various features of the park. Three of them were designed at the same time and have an intentionally lightweight structural design so that the park's green space is largely visible through them.

Progressing toward the west, visitors come to Eleanor Tinsley Park. This was originally just a large area of turf but has been improved with a pavilion and amphitheater with power and lighting for events. It now supports large gatherings for concerts and similar activities and is capable of accommodating as many as 10,000 people.

A little farther west is a large, flat grass area at street level dedicated to permanent and temporary art installations. The former is *Spindle*, a substantial Henry Moore sculpture. In May 2019, there was a temporary, traveling installation entitled *New Monuments for Cities*, consisting of a dozen or more vertical pillars, each with an image addressing contemporary urban issues.

Just down the hill from this area is the Houston Police Officers Memorial constructed in 1991 and consisting of a symmetrical pyramid reminiscent of a small-scale Mayan temple, with marble plaques and a water feature. Guarded at all times by volunteers from the Houston Police Department, it names 113 law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty.



Pavilions offer places for picnics and informal gatherings.



Pedestrian bridges provide access across the bayou.

After proceeding along a stretch of mostly natural settings, visitors find a pre-existing but recently improved dog park with a pond and other features that seem to be well used and much enjoyed by its canine guests.

Then visitors come to the Waugh Bridge, the underside of which hosts a very large colony of Mexican free-tail bats that nest in the crevices between the bridge's concrete planks. The site visit team was able to view the bats swarm at dusk from a pontoon boat on the bayou below the bridge, observing perhaps tens of thousands of bats fly off to feed (the colony is estimated at over 200,000). The nightly swarms attract substantial numbers of visitors, including herons and hawks attempting to catch the bats. Park planners preserved trees in the vicinity of the bridge specifically to give cover to the bats and provided a bat observation deck for people watching. Construction in the vicinity was avoided during the bat mating season so as not to disturb them.

Most of the features described after the Water Works are on the south (downtown) side of the park, along the Allen Parkway. The roadway was modified to reduce the volume of traffic in part by realigning and reducing the number of lanes and converting the lane(s) along the edge of the park to parking spaces for visitors who come from too far away to walk, jog, or bike to the park. A bike lane connecting to Discovery Green was also added as well as crosswalks. A suggestion of the original Comey design report, these measures to reduce and slow the traffic improves pedestrian access and makes it safer and more enjoyable to be in the park.

Finally, near the western edge of the park is Lost Lake, so named because the original lake was destroyed in the 1970s when its dam across a ravine collapsed. The lake was restored and a new building constructed above it that houses a visitor center, The Dunlavy café, and private event space that is leased out. In keeping with the other main structures in the park, it is located just above the anticipated flood level and has a simple, regular geometry of concrete pillars with abundant glass that provides views of the trees and park from the inside while reflecting the same to visitors from the outside.



Features include the Houston Police Officers Memorial.



The nightly swarm of bats at the Waugh Bridge draws visitors.

Art in the Park

Art is one of the focal features of the park, and BBP is committed to providing a mix of high-quality permanent and temporary art pieces. The first two permanent pieces listed below pre-dated the BBP's interventions and were respected and maintained. The permanent pieces include:

- *Large Spindle Piece* (1969) by Henry Moore: cast in bronze, relocated from Tranquility Park
- *The Dandelion* (1978): part of the Gus Wortham Fountain in the eponymous Wortham Grove, just west of the dog park
- *Shady Grove* (2002) by Tim Bailey: Cor-Ten steel; located in Eleanor Tinsley Park and dedicated to victims of crime
- *Open Channel Flow* (2009) by Matthew Geller: near the skate park
- *Tolerance* (2011) by Jaume Plensa: near the Rosemont Bridge; resembles transparent Buddhas that are lit up at dusk
- *Portrait of Houston: It Wasn't a Dream, It Was a Flood* (2014) by John Runnels: a 20-foot stainless steel canoe sculpture at the Crosby Outfall entrance to the park; 10 other canoes are at other bayou access points
- *Down Periscope* (2015) by Donald Lipski: an installation that provides views down into the Cistern
- *Monumental Moments* (2015) by Anthony Thompson Shumate: a series of six four-foot-tall sculptures expressing one-word thoughts (explore, pause, reflect, listen, emerge, and observe) in various areas along the asphalt footpaths
- *Lunar Cycle Lighting* (2006) by L'Observatoire International and artist Stephen Korn: Buffalo Bayou's signature lighting, integrated into trails and railings and under bridges, transitions from white to blue as the moon waxes and wanes.

Then there are areas devoted to rotating, temporary installations. The Cistern is dedicated to art installations, some of which focus on sound, taking advantage of the very long, almost cathedral-like reverberation time in the space; others focus on light, which can be projected within the semi-darkness onto the surfaces and columns within the space.

Other Buffalo Bayou Park areas can be used for public art displays. The spring of 2019 featured a major temporary installation called *New Monuments for*

Jonnu Singleton



Public art includes a series of sculptures expressing one-word thoughts.

David Lloyd



Jaume Plensa designed a series of illuminated sculptures titled Tolerance.

New Cities, the inaugural project of the High Line Network Joint Art Initiative, a new partnership among industrial reuse projects in North America. The BBP is a member of the initiative, and Houston served as the launch site for this exhibition, which featured contributions from all the participating cities including Austin, Texas; Chicago; Toronto, Ontario; and New York. Each participating site invited five local artists to create proposals in the form of posters that respond to the evolving nature of monuments in our country today. The works were meant to stimulate discussion about what it means to honor a person, an idea, or a moment in time. The resulting 25 artworks were installed in a manner specific to their site in each city. At Buffalo Bayou Park, BBP installed a series of vertical, rectangular “steles” or pillars mounted on the grass.

Planning, Design, and Community Engagement

In many ways, this project demonstrated a high level of engagement and collaboration among the agencies and entities that were responsible for the park. One could imagine that with so many entities involved (city agencies, foundations, park advocates, flood control district, etc.), each with a somewhat different perspective, that the project might have been pulled in a variety of incompatible directions. However, that does not appear to have happened. Rather, the entities and their leaders are reported to have cooperated well. And the fact that a series of clear and enforceable agreements had been hammered out, however challenging that may have been, apparently laid the groundwork for a successful collaboration under the leadership on Anne Olson of the BBP and Guy Hagstette as project manager.

With regard to community engagement, the BBP took the lead in organizing community information and input sessions and events designed to introduce the project—and the park itself—to the public. There were at least six input sessions held in the summer and fall of 2010. These included sessions with neighborhoods and special interest groups that were concerned with various aspects of the park or its use. The neighborhood groups gave the opportunity for diverse demographic interests to be represented. The groups also included the following organizations dedicated to cycling, running, preservation, livability, and ecology:

- Bicycle Advisory Group
- Houston Area Roadrunners Association
- Fourth Ward Livable Centers Study
- Federal Reserve (a neighboring office)
- Super-Neighborhood 22
- Bayou Preservation Association
- Trees for Houston
- Neartown Association

From a review of the minutes from some of these meetings, it is clear that many suggestions and requests made by the community were responded to and incorporated in the plan. These include such things as added parking at key entry points, asphaltting of the running trail (rather than concrete), provision of bike racks so cyclists could lock their bikes, better access to the water at various locations, improvements to kayak “put in/take out” locations, and enhancement of neighborhood access. In particular, residents south of Allen Parkway asked for safer and more frequent crossing points. This presented some challenges as it had to be implemented by the city, which made improvements including a crosswalk and reductions in traffic on the parkway, though it took five years. A dedicated cycle lane, the first in downtown Houston, has also been created, connecting Buffalo Bayou Park to Discovery Green. Requested items with cost or liability implications were studied and ways were found to make at least some of them work within the budget. Others, such as climbing rocks, were rejected as too dangerous.

In addition, once the park opened, the community was invited to events to introduce them to the facilities and get them engaged in its use. Examples include the “Picnic in the Park” and “Brunch on the Bayou” as well as many others.

As the BBP entered into the expansion project toward the east, leaders recognized that the surrounding neighborhoods were more diverse and complex and that a greater level of engagement, and even community development work, would be needed. The engagement plan was correspondingly expanded to include interaction with even more community

Jonnu Singleton



Allen Parkway was narrowed to create parking for park visitors.

William Tatham



The changes also helped to slow traffic and improve pedestrian access.

David Lloyd



Lost Lake houses another visitor center, The Dunlavy café, and private event space.

Jonnu Singleton



Revenue from the popular Dunlavy café supports park operations.

groups, including hosting major meetings, convening smaller focus groups, and attending community festivals and other events. More than 8,000 bilingual postcards were mailed to targeted zip codes for the community meetings, and social media was heavily used to promote the project. Among other things, this led to the inclusion of more family picnic areas and the mixed-income housing project known as Lockwood South.

Operations and Maintenance

The BBP was delegated responsibility for most operations and maintenance of Buffalo Bayou Park in the formal agreement among the parties, largely because the city parks department is underfunded and subject to further budget cuts. This arrangement transfers TIRZ revenues directly to the BBP for a 30-year period. The BBP has its own maintenance staff, supplemented by contractors and seasonal workers who beef up the BBP's crews when flood cleanup is required. The HCFCF assumed responsibility for bank stability and silt removal on flood benches while the city continues to oversee major events, the exercise of free speech, and public safety.

Wisely, the BBP commissioned the *Maintenance Plan for Buffalo Bayou Park Post-Schematic Design*, which was prepared by ETM Associates of Highland Park, New Jersey, in March 2012, giving plenty of time to establish budgets and implementation strategies. The city also required this plan and its budget to justify its commitment of maintenance funding. Operations include scheduling and managing events, managing volunteers, interfacing with park users, and the like. There is an operations manager with four field supervisors. Maintenance is carried out by a crew of 15 plus 10 to 20 temporary summer and contract staff, divided into four teams—three with responsibility for different park zones and one for weekend maintenance—as well as substantial volunteer support. Maintenance appears to be effective overall, though there are still lingering effects of Hurricane Harvey, with some silt still to be removed, and of 2019 winter storms, with banks in need of repair or restoration. The BBP has learned from its operating experience that it was more effective to contract out jobs like mowing so that more highly trained staff could do weeding and repairs.

Next Steps

Buffalo Bayou Park can be viewed as the second stage in the redevelopment of the bayou with the involvement of the BBP. The first stage was bookended by Sesquicentennial Park and Sabine Promenade just to the east and closer to downtown. Slightly farther downstream is the currently planned third stage of Buffalo Bayou's redevelopment, the East Sector extension, and there are very interesting similarities and differences compared to the main portion of Buffalo Bayou Park. The East Sector passes through a very different set of neighborhoods and past very different uses compared to Buffalo Bayou Park. The bayou itself becomes broader and carries more water, having been joined by the White Oak Bayou just above the portion of the channel that is navigable at Allen's Landing. The flanking uses are more industrial, including four abandoned concrete gravel silos, and the neighborhoods are more diverse. According to city-data.com, the Fifth Ward, on the north bank of the bayou toward the west end of the expansion area, is comprised mostly of Black residents and is growing more rapidly than the balance of the city. The Second Ward, or East End, on the south bank is predominantly Hispanic, and both of these neighborhoods are mostly low-to-moderate income residents.

To acknowledge and respond to these geographic and demographic differences, the BBP broadened its community engagement and outreach and articulated a number of objectives or strategies that are specifically targeted toward the surrounding communities. These include preserving the gritty, industrial character of the area; ensuring affordability for long-time residents; engaging local artists; celebrating local culture; developing locally owned and operated businesses; and creating paths and trails that extend north and south from the park into surrounding neighborhoods.

The resulting *Buffalo Bayou East Master Plan*, developed in 2018 by a team led by HR&A Advisors (economic development consultants) and Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates (landscape architects) with input from the community, provides a gateway to the bayou trail network. It incorporates a variety of community and recreational amenities including a cultural events and boating center with gravel silos repurposed as temporary art installations and an abandoned wastewater treatment plant transformed into botanical water gardens.

One of the BBP's most powerful strategies for addressing equity is to become the developer of affordable housing in the East Sector. The project, called Lockwood South, is a proposed mixed-income development with 51% of the housing being affordable. It also features four acres of open space, including public waterfront parkland and "green fingers" linking upland communities to the bayou. Site planning incorporates resilient design features, such as elevated parcels and over four acres of stormwater detention, with the goal of making the project a model for future development along the bayou.

ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS

The BBP has a full-time staff member plus an assistant with responsibility for organizing and coordinating activities, events, and programs. Endeavors range from walking tours with naturalists to pontoon boat cruises.

Informal Activities

More than some urban parks and appropriate to its linear nature, Buffalo Bayou Park was intended to, and does, support walking, running, and biking. The separation of pedestrian and bike traffic, the popularity of these activities among the park users, and the proximity to high-density employment and housing all contribute to strong utilization of the paths and trails, including by some for the commute to and from work. Visitors do not have to own a bike in order to cycle along the trails, as rentals are offered in front of the Cistern. They can also launch kayaks at certain locations where there is good street access.

Other informal activities include picnics and relaxation on the many lawns and the occasional pavilions and picnic areas. As stated above, barbecues are not provided due to the challenges of flood protection and trash generation, though they would have been appreciated by some park users, as expressed in planning outreach meetings.

Planned and Scheduled Activities

There are two main venues for larger-scale events: the Hobby Family Pavilion above the Water Works and Eleanor Tinsley Park. Larger-scale events in 2018 included the following:



Cyclists use the trails for recreation and commuting.



The park offers kayak rentals and boat tours along the bayou.

- New Moon Walk
- Poet-Trees installation
- Dinner at The Dunlavy (café at Lost Lake)
- Buffalo Bayou in Bloom (event hosted by The Currents, the BBP's young professionals group)
- Bayou City Music Series
- Volunteer Appreciation Brunch

Consultants had suggested that park revenue would benefit from such events and from the inclusion of a café at Lost Lake, given the park's proximity to downtown and to neighborhoods where residents had disposable income. It turned out to be a sound recommendation as The Dunlavy generates substantial revenue for the park.

In addition, there are recurring activities—some of which are free—that occur at varying frequencies, from almost daily to quarterly:

- Park tours that give an overview of the park or focus on its ecology or art works
- Cistern tours that focus on its history and art installations
- Boat rides
- Bat watching (happens almost every evening and can be either planned or informal)
- Wellness walks
- Art on Wheels tours
- Sunrise yoga classes
- Volunteer opportunities such as tree planting, weeding, etc.

Visitor Utilization and Demographics

Given its location bordering downtown and a variety of neighborhoods, while also serving all of metropolitan Houston, it is interesting to observe the demographic composition of visitors. Casual observation and commentary by park officials suggest that the park succeeds in serving a broad and representative cross-section of Houstonians.

In terms of sheer numbers, hike and bike counter information from Friday, September 30, 2016 to Monday, October 10, 2016 shows that levels of



The Eleanor Tinsley Park hosts large events.

utilization vary by location, from a low of 705 at the far west edge of the park to a high of 18,490 near the Police Memorial toward the center of the park. Seven locations counted over 10,000 users.

A 2017 in-person demographic study of over 1,000 Houston BCycle (the city's bicycle share program) users at Buffalo Bayou's Sabine Bridge and Hermann Park showed the following results regarding ridership:

- Gender: 55% female, 45% male
- Age: 42% 18-25 years, 34% 26-35 years, 13% 36-45 years, and 11% 45+ years
- Ethnicity: 44% Hispanic, 30% Caucasian, 15% Black, 8% Asian
- Annual income: 25% <\$30K, 22% <\$50K, 24% <\$80K, 17% >\$80K, 12% preferred not to answer

While representing users of two parks, the survey results reinforce the notion that park visitors are generally representative of Houston's population as a whole.

Safety and Security

Prior to the transformation of Buffalo Bayou Park, the area provided a secluded location for homeless encampments. The largely empty green space also allowed for drug dealing and the attendant crime and threats to safety and comfort for general visitors, who are reported to have steered clear of the area. In developing the park, the city's Homeland Security division placed 36 surveillance cameras in the park. Private security officers also patrol the park from early morning through the evening (but not all night). Park staff report to police if they observe suspicious, disruptive, or unlawful behavior.

Reported perceptions are that the park is a relatively safe place, and crime statistics from the Houston Police Department do show some shifts in the number and pattern of arrests from 2014 to 2018. But the overall impact is a bit unclear. Most of the crime, as shown on a map provided by the police of crimes within 200 feet of the park, occurred on the south side of the park along Allen Parkway.

While robberies were reduced by half, assaults stayed about the same. Burglaries were reduced substantially, though thefts stayed the same, the exception being thefts from vehicles, which saw a very large jump, causing most of the actual increase in total crime reports (and possibly resulting from having more vehicles parked in the area, providing targets for such crime). Vandalism also increased, but drug violations decreased. One possible explanation is that there is much more attention being paid to the area and many more visitors, so reports of incidences may have increased more than the actual number of incidences, at least for things such as vandalism and theft from autos.

FINANCING

Park development was primarily funded from foundation and other grants and fundraising efforts. The single largest grant came early on from the Kinder Foundation and catalyzed fundraising from other sources, including foundations, businesses, and individuals. Of the grand total of almost \$75 million in development costs, over two-thirds came from private sources and less than one-third from various public contributions, (see Table 1).

TABLE 1: 2019 DEVELOPMENT BUDGET

SOURCES

Through Buffalo Bayou Partnership (BBP)	
Kinder Foundation	\$30,000,000
Other grants and fundraising	\$23,595,000
Harris County Flood Control District	\$5,000,000
Private grants for the Cistern	\$1,550,000
Partner reimbursements	\$582,000
Less BBP administrative fee	(\$904,000)
Subtotal	\$59,823,000
Other sources of public funding (approximate totals)	
Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone 5	\$6,000,000
Texas Department of Transportation/ City of Houston	\$6,000,000
City of Houston Public Works	\$3,000,000
Subtotal	\$15,000,000
Total	\$74,823,00

USES/EXPENDITURES

Construction	
General site work	\$26,594,000
Buildings and Water Works area	\$13,878,000
Major bridges and approach trails	\$5,095,000
Channel conveyance restoration	\$5,000,000
Cistern	\$1,710,000
Subtotal	\$52,277,000

USES/EXPENDITURES continued

Consultants	
Master plan and design (SWA)	\$5,050,000
Specialty engineers	\$335,000
Construction phase	\$327,000
Operations	\$106,000
Other technical consultants	\$271,000
Subtotal	\$6,089,000
Project management	
Project management	\$240,000
Legal	\$166,000
Public relations and communications	\$90,000
Other BBP costs	\$164,000
Subtotal	\$873,000
Other public improvements	
Rosemont Bridge and trails	\$6,000,000
Main trails	\$6,000,000
Public works infrastructure	\$3,000,000
Subtotal	\$15,000,000
Art (less Donald Lipski work, funded by City of Houston)	\$211,000
Furniture, fixtures, equipment, and other related costs	\$209,000
Riparian plant allowance	\$164,000
Total	\$74,823,000

TABLE 2: 2019 OPERATING BUDGET

REVENUE

Foundations	\$25,000
Earned Income	
Operating and maintenance	\$2,361,000
Rent	\$182,800
Permits and fees	\$145,000
Other	\$5,000
Total	\$2,718,800

EXPENSES

Operations	
Contract maintenance and repair	\$210,000
Landscape maintenance	\$105,000
Flood clean-up	\$85,000
Site feature maintenance	\$75,000
Plant replacement	\$70,000
Waste disposal	\$17,000
Inspections (reservoir and bridges)	\$2,000
Art maintenance	\$2,000
Pest, bird, and graffiti control	\$2,000
Potable water and sewer charges	\$1,500
Subtotal	\$569,500

EXPENSES continued

Fixed Expenses	
Personnel	\$1,450,750
Insurance	\$123,200
Accounting	\$21,000
Equipment rental/office	\$12,100
Fuel (boats and equipment)	\$15,000
Miscellaneous fees	\$8,000
Telephone	\$1,500
Subtotal	\$1,631,550

Discretionary Expenses

Contract labor, equipment, supplies and utilities	\$382,100
Total	\$2,583,150

NET INCOME \$135,650

Jonnu Singleton



The sculpture Portrait of Houston: It Wasn't a Dream, It Was a Flood marks a park entrance off Allen Parkway.

In terms of where the funds were expended, about \$67 million went to infrastructure, buildings, and park and water course improvements ("hard" costs). Another \$600,000 or so went to art, furnishings, and riparian plants. Approximately \$6 million (or less than 10%) went to "soft" costs such as design, engineering, and construction managers.

Buffalo Bayou Partnership Operating Budget

The BBP's budget is mostly about operating and maintaining the park, though it has other overhead and expenses that include planning and implementation of future phases of Buffalo Bayou.

Buffalo Bayou Park's total Income in 2019 was projected to be approximately \$2.7 million. Income is derived from the TIRZ #3 for park operations and maintenance, as well as rent of facilities, park permits, and fees and donations (see Table 2).

Projected 2019 expenses total slightly less than income at about \$2.58 million, resulting in a small surplus. The largest category of expenses, at about \$1.6 million, is "fixed" and consists mainly of staff salaries and benefits as well as insurance. Park operations account for almost \$600,000 and discretionary expenses make up the balance. Excess revenue goes into a maintenance reserve to help cover cleanup after the next flood (see Table 2).

PROJECT EVALUATION

Buffalo Bayou Park represents a major achievement for Houston: the restoration of its principal waterway and the creation of a spectacular public open space amenity on the edge of downtown. One measure of its importance to the city is that photos of downtown are now generally taken with the park in the foreground, framing the skyline and tall buildings in the background.

People from all economic and ethnic backgrounds flock to the park, walking, biking, picnicking, attending events, or using its various more developed venues. Still subject to flooding, the park has proven to be resilient, surviving the floods with limited damage that allows it to bounce back quickly.

It appears that the park has had a broad and deep impact, helping to change Houstonians' attitudes about the value of open space and public amenities—including a willingness to vote for bond measures to pay for them.

IMPACT

The park appears to be highly successful in terms of its level of usage and appreciation by residents. It is having a positive impact on its immediate surroundings and, more importantly perhaps, beyond, as it expands to the east and becomes part of a much larger network of open spaces. Even more importantly, if subtler and harder to measure, it seems to be part of a transformation in how residents and agencies think about the park and bayous, recognizing the public realm as a contributor to improved quality of life through recreation and respect for the environment. Houston appears to be more receptive to planning and even funding public improvements, though it seems to remain highly resistant to tax increases (other than one-time bond issues).

Development

There are a number of major developments planned to flank the park. The Aga Kahn Center is planning a major Islamic religious and teaching center across Allen Parkway on a parcel it owns. Another much more ambitious plan is for Regent Square, a high-end multiuse project also fronting Allen Parkway and the bayou—a fact it features prominently in its marketing brochure along with its adjacency to River Oaks, a very wealthy neighborhood on its other flank. This massive project features 1,500 rental units, 300,000 square feet of retail, and 200,000 square feet of offices.

A project that had broken ground the fall of 2019 is The Allen, along Allen Parkway next to the Federal Reserve Building, which will be a mixed-use development featuring a luxury hotel, condominiums, retail, and state-of-the-art office buildings.

Property Values and Gentrification

As predicted in the 1913 Comey report based on experience even from that time, turning a derelict bayou into an attractive recreational magnet was bound to increase property values. While it is impossible to disentangle the



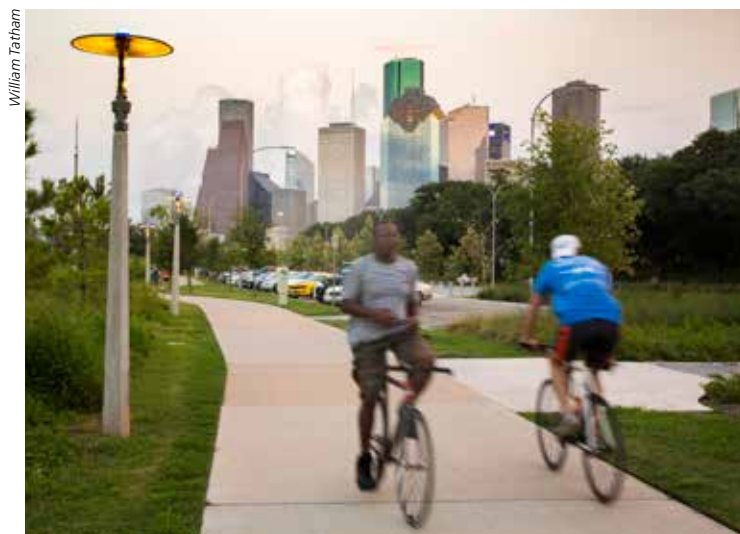
Buffalo Bayou Park transformed a neglected waterway into a public amenity.



The resilient park is designed to absorb floodwater.



The park is part of a growing network of public open space.



The popular green space draws people from across the city.

park's effect from the general increasing attractiveness of downtown Houston with its growing white-collar employment and amenities, the park has undoubtedly contributed, and Regent Square is a clear indicator of gentrification. On the other hand, looking at household income, residents abutting the park were already higher earners than the balance of Houston, so the park's contribution could be considered limited.

There is some question about the degree of gentrification that areas of the Fifth Ward are or will be experiencing as the next phases of the park are completed and whether Lockwood South will contribute to or counter that trend. The BBP, along with the Fifth Ward Community Development Corporation and Greater East End Management District, was one of the sponsors of a Livable Centers study that looked very carefully at tying together existing neighborhoods and new projects such as Lockwood South and linking them to the bayou. The plan for the East Sector of the park endeavors to address the study's recommendations.

Security and Safety

It was reported by BBP executives and in a brief discussion with two Houston Police Department officers in the area that crime in and around the bayou and park has been substantially reduced, a perception echoed by park users. In part, this is the result of the displacement of the homeless encampments following park development. Those particular encampments had issues with drug possession and sales and attendant crimes. However, as noted in Activities and Programs, crime has not actually decreased; rather, its composition has changed, and the number of less serious crimes has actually gone up substantially, reflecting the sheer number of users and increased attention to and reporting of crimes.

Ecology

Park restoration has not only respected native groves and meadows but has preserved and expanded them. Areas of turf grass have been reduced and native plantings have been expanded, including tree species, grasses, and wildflowers. This has had an observable effect on the proliferation of native animal species resulting from the improved habitat. Visitors are informed about these characteristics through guided tours.

OBSERVATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Changing Attitudes about Open Space, Lifestyle, and Planning

In some ways, the park is emblematic of the changing attitudes and image of Houston—including its self-image. Some claimed that Buffalo Bayou Park has been a game changer in showing the public the value of shared outdoor space for recreation, culture, and support for community events. It is the third in a series of city parks, all sponsored (or perhaps catalyzed) in part by major grants from the Kinder Foundation, with other private support. And perhaps most indicatively, the public has “voted with its feet” to fund very substantial bonds for other park and trail projects, clearly indicating their support. The passage of park funding bonds in 2012 and 2017 was notable. The 2017 park bond includes \$104,000,000 for:

the conservation, improvement, acquisition, construction and equipment of neighborhood parks, recreational facilities and bayous, including such green spaces along all bayous to create an integrated system of bayou walking, running and bicycle trails to enhance, preserve and protect the health of citizens, water quality, natural habitat and native wildlife and the levying of taxes sufficient for the payment thereof and interest thereon.

In addition to parks and open space, it seems that Houston—a city that eschews zoning—may be changing its attitude toward planning at both community and agency levels. City and county agencies have also partnered, in formal arrangements, to make Buffalo Bayou Park happen and apparently have since been more willing to actively engage in planning and regulation (for example, requiring runoff prevention and control in new developments).

Responsiveness to Neighbors and Surroundings

The BBP made considerable effort to reach out to interest groups and neighborhoods adjoining the bayou and responded appropriately to many concerns and requests. As it moves toward the East Sector, a much more diverse and heterogeneous part of the city, it is redoubling its community outreach efforts, applying lessons learned about planning and design along the waterway and expanding its interventions to include affordable housing, collaboration with community groups, and innovative approaches to industrial archeology and reinvention. Approximately 700 people attended five major East End and

Fifth Ward community meetings, for example; 30 selected community leaders attended a meeting to learn about the upcoming planning process; and 20 neighborhood residents, business owners, and government representatives were part of a stakeholder committee. As with the West Sector, responses to their inputs were documented and top priorities were published. They include, for example, lighting and public safety call boxes, the inclusion of local artwork, children’s play areas, sports fields, and connectivity to specific cross streets.

Improving Resilience

While the changes to the bayou’s fluvial geomorphology have apparently improved the flow of flood waters, these changes cannot prevent the inundation and flooding caused by major and increasingly severe storms, like Hurricane Harvey. On the other hand, even with Harvey, the park is reported to have reopened within about a week of the end of the storm, at least for the upper-level trails and facilities. The widened “shelves” along the channel banks did indeed collect a huge volume of silt (20 times more than any other recent major flood, and there have been two others since the park opened) and made its removal easier. Fixed park improvements did, in fact, resist the force of the flood waters with little or no damage to light standards, signage, benches, and the like. New structures including the pavilion at Eleanor Tinsley Park and the visitor center and event space at Lost Lake were placed just above the flood level and were spared damage. Some plantings had to be replaced, but more established trees survived. The verdict, then, is that the design strategies employed in the park did result in a high level of resilience. Where features didn’t work as well in the major floods—like the larger pond at the dog park—modifications have been made.

The Value of Cooperative Agreements

The three agreements between key parties involved in the development and operation of the park that govern its execution and ongoing maintenance—the 2010 letter of intent; the 2011 tri-party agreement; and the 2012 construction, operations, and maintenance agreement (COMA)—were central to the success of the project. The tough negotiations by the Kinder Foundation prior to and at the start of construction included an insistence on both clearly defined performance standards for maintenance and a standards review committee that regularly assures compliance. The COMA made it clear



Nancy and Rich Kinder (above left) provided crucial funding through their foundation.



Critical expertise was provided by (left to right) Larry Speck, Scott McCready, Guy Hagstette, and Ann Olsen.

that the foundation's philanthropy was contingent on the agreement. The committee structure also legislated a process governing compliance with the standards of care, with the flexibility to adjust standards as circumstances change. Among other things, these governance procedures involved the full and balanced representation of all parties to the agreement. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the agreement established a system that binds the parties to renewal on 30-year terms based on performance reviews, with the option to renew for a total of 90 years, in excess of the more typical legal framework of a 20-, or in the case of Houston, 30-year term.

Guy Hagstette, who has been engaged from the beginning in a variety of roles, provided interesting commentary on the "portability" of the agreements, saying that while they provide a template for other projects in Houston, they would probably have to be redone in other cities that have different institutions and cultures or operate under different state laws. He also shared that the foundation had learned from this agreement and addressed certain limitations on administrative fees and the maintenance reserve in subsequent master agreements for park projects. The lesson here is to attend to the performance outcomes of the agreements (including detailed standards, governance, and governance processes) while knowing that each municipality will likely have to respond to different contexts.

MEETING PROJECT GOALS

GOAL: Restoration—to restore the derelict bayou, which had become an overgrown nuisance harboring multiple homeless encampments.

The park includes a reconfigured and restored bayou, likely to a level it had never achieved at least since the decades-long mass suburbanization of the Houston region and the great increase in flooding that followed. With the cleanup and restoration, the homeless population relocated to other areas of Houston.

GOAL: Access—to provide access to the bayou and opportunities for recreation and experiencing the unique ecological character of the site.

The park can be reached by numerous means and points of access to its various features, facilitated by parking areas, connections to walkways,

SWA Group, Maribel Amador



Areas of the park are designed to collect silt from floodwaters.

SWA Group, David Lloyd



The resilient design allows faster cleanup and restoration of use after storms.

bike paths, and other means of transportation. More importantly, it opens up major leisure, recreational, historical, and cultural opportunities to a large sector of Houston residents and visitors. Having restored the native ecology, tours and interpretive signage (soon to be expanded) help visitors understand both riparian and prairie habitats. Great sensitivity was paid to preserving a major bat colony and making it accessible to visitors (human and avian alike).

GOAL: Inclusion—to serve a broad cross section of Houstonians.

Maps showing the income levels in surrounding neighborhoods provide a valuable tool in assessing the extent to which inclusion is provided by proximity; demographics of park users provide another measure. While the zones on the map are not a perfect reflection, they do suggest substantial levels of diversity. Entry points to the park indicate approximately similar levels of access from the southern and northeastern neighborhoods (the historic Fourth and Sixth Wards) and the northern, newly established Rice Military community and western, more affluent River Oaks neighborhood.

GOAL: Resilience—to provide a precedent for resilient open-space design, planning, and operations in climate-sensitive and flood-prone coastal areas.

As described in the “Observations” section above, the park has been successful in meeting the challenges of and limiting the damage done by what appear to be regularly recurring record-breaking hurricanes and tropical storms such as Harvey and Imelda.

GOAL: Identity—to reposition Houston as a city that promotes healthy lifestyles and embraces its unique physical relationship to the bayou system.

While it is difficult for this study to assess these kinds of changes, it was reported that they are taking place. Clearly, the park is well used by a wide demographic of walkers, joggers, cyclists, and others enjoying the amenities it offers.



The park improved access to the bayou, open space, and outdoor recreation.



The popular amenity is increasing interest in healthy lifestyles and the bayous.

SELECTION COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

The Selection Committee recognized Buffalo Bayou Park as a remarkable project that illustrates how resilient infrastructure can be done beautifully, which is especially notable in Houston, a place not known for urban planning and parks. They agreed that the park conveys the importance of addressing climate change through infrastructure and green space in cities, providing a valuable model for Houston and other cities across America.

The committee appreciated the use of the bayou to manage storm water and introduce new amenities and features that enhance its use as public space and connect it with adjacent neighborhoods. They noted how the pedestrian trails, bridges, and boat put-ins help to further connect adjoining communities with the park, each other, and downtown, providing new transportation links and reducing dependence on automobiles. The success of Buffalo Bayou Park as part of the ambitious Bayou Greenways 2020 vision exemplifies an expansive, systems-thinking approach to planning and development in Houston.

While the committee agreed that Buffalo Bayou Park is an extraordinary achievement, especially in Houston, they did not find the design itself particularly innovative, considering much of it to be rather conventional. The committee suggested the park could expand its educational and interpretive programming on environmental issues, especially in connection with Hurricane Harvey and its impact. They also wondered to what extent the park has and can influence local policies and practices, especially upriver to reduce runoff into the bayou.

The Selection Committee observed that data about user demographics and the park's impact on traffic, stormwater runoff, and pollution, as well as tax revenue for the city, was not clear. They were also concerned about the apparent lack of deep community engagement in the planning process, worrying that the place risks becoming a "rich people's park." The question triggered a discussion about the relationship between parks and gentrification. The committee was pleased to learn that Buffalo Bayou Partnership had plans to develop affordable housing as part of the next phases of work.

“The park conveys the importance of addressing climate change through infrastructure and green space in urban areas, providing a valuable model for cities across America.”

The committee recognized the amount of resources required to make Buffalo Bayou Park possible and suggested that there is significant support within the community for such work in Houston. While the project is large, the committee observed that it is interwoven with small-scale interventions that can be replicated and adapted in other places.



Buffalo Bayou Park offers a valuable model for how cities can adapt to climate change with resilient public infrastructure.

RELATED RBA WINNERS

The redevelopment of land adjacent to urban waterways has been addressed by many RBA medalists. While the opportunity to reclaim waterfront land for new uses has generally been at the forefront, expanding public use and recreational amenities has grown in importance, along with addressing ecology, resiliency, and ongoing operating costs.



BROOKLYN BRIDGE PARK in Brooklyn (2011 Silver Medalist) converted former industrial land along the East River into a new ecologically and economically sustainable park. A memorandum of understanding established at the time of its development required that funding for maintenance and operating come from revenue-producing development and uses.



SOUTH PLATTE RIVER GREENWAY in Denver (2003 Silver Medalist) reclaimed 67 miles of riverfront for recreation and development. The project introduced a continuous walking and biking path linking existing parks and neighborhoods with downtown and opportunities for boating while restoring native ecology and wildlife habitat and fostering new investment along the river.



CHICAGO RIVERWALK PHASES 2 & 3 in Chicago (2017 Silver Medalist) transformed underutilized infrastructure in the heart of the city into a new civic space. The new flood-resilient space offers waterside amenities including floating wetland gardens and vendors that offer food and boat rentals and generate revenue to pay for development of the park.

Other related winners involving redevelopment of land along urban rivers include Falls Park on the Reedy in Greenville, South Carolina (2015 Silver Medalist); Louisville Waterfront Park in Louisville, Kentucky (2013 Silver Medalist); and Hunts Point Riverside Park in Bronx, New York (2009 Silver Medalist).

More information about these and other RBA winners can be found at www.rudybruneraward.org.

Resources

This report was compiled from information gathered from the project application; an extensive site visit by Simeon Bruner, Robert Shibley, Anne-Marie Lubenau, and Jay Farbstein (lead author) in April 2019; and research and interviews conducted during those processes and throughout the writing of this report. Titles and positions of interviewees and URLs listed below were effective as of the site visit unless otherwise noted.

INTERVIEWS

Artists

- **John Runnels**, Artist, *Portrait of Houston: It Wasn't a Dream, It Was a Flood* (permanent art installation), MotherDogStudios
- **Geraldina Wise**, Artist, BBP Public Art Committee Co-Chair

Buffalo Bayou Park Project Leaders

- **Guy Hagstette**, Vice President of Parks and Civic Projects, Kinder Foundation, and Project Manager for Buffalo Bayou Park, Buffalo Bayou Partnership
- **Cary Hirschstein**, Partner, HR&A Advisors, Inc.
- **Scott McCready**, Principal, SWA Group
- **Anne Olson**, President, Buffalo Bayou Partnership
- **Larry Speck**, Senior Principal, Page (designed the buildings in the park)

City and County Agencies

- **Bob Eury**, President, Central Houston and Executive Director, Downtown Redevelopment Authority
- **Mike Talbott**, former Executive Director, Harris County Flood Control District
- **Joe Turner**, former Director, Houston Parks and Recreation Department

Community Groups

- **Zion Ashley Escobar**, Executive Director of the Fourth Ward Conservancy and Senior Project Manager, Sherwood Engineers

- **Faisal Momin**, Honorary Secretary, Aga Khan Council for the Southwestern United States
- **Henry Morris**, Development and Communications, Houston BCycle
- **Jane Cahill West**, 6th Ward resident, Representative of the Super Neighborhood Alliance, Washington Avenue Coalition, Memorial Park Super Neighborhood (SN22)
- **Jessica Wiggins**, Advocacy Director, BikeHouston

Ecology

- **Jaime González**, Houston Urban Conservation Programs Manager, The Nature Conservancy
- **Alisa Kline**, Texas Master Naturalist

Philanthropists/Donors

- **Nancy Kinder**, President and CEO, Kinder Foundation
- **Rich Kinder**, Co-Founder Kinder Morgan, Chairman of the Kinder Foundation

Programming

- **Laura Conley**, Founder, Urban Paths
- **Lulu Han**, Co-Chair, The Currents
- **Trudi Smith**, Director of Public Relations and Events, Buffalo Bayou Partnership

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OTHER AWARDS

Buffalo Bayou Park

2018

- *TripSavvy* 2018 Editors' Choice Award for Best Urban Parks

2017

- American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) Texas Chapter Honor Award, Design Realized
- Houston-Galveston Area Council On-the-Ground Project Over \$500,000
- Society of American Registered Architects Design Awards of Honor
- Urban Land Institute Development of Distinction Award, Urban Open Space
- Urban Land Institute Global Excellence Award

2016

- American Institute of Architects (AIA) Houston Design Award, Architecture Under 50,000 square feet (park architecture)
- *Architect's Newspaper* Best of Design Award, Civic Institution Category
- *Houston Business Journal* Landmark Award, Community Impact
- Keep Houston Beautiful Mayor's Proud Partner Award
- *PaperCity* Houston Design Award, Epic Award for Public Green Space
- Public Relations Society of America Gold Award, Events and Observances
- Trees for Houston Arbor Award
- The Waterfront Center Excellence on the Waterfront Award

2015

- ASLA Texas Chapter Award of Excellence in Planning and Analysis

2013

- *Houston Press* Best of Houston Award, Best Place to Canoe
- The National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution Historic Preservation Recognition Award

2012

- AIA Houston Civic Vision Award
- American Planning Association Great Places in America, Public Spaces

2011

- The Garden Club of America, Zone IX, Zone Civic Improvements Commendation
- Houston-Galveston Area Council Parks and Natural Areas Award, Planning Process, Special Recognition

Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern

2017

- AIA Austin Design Award, Renovation/Restoration
- CODAWorx CODA Award
- Public Relations Society of America Houston Grand Excalibur Award
- Texas Society of Architects Design Award

2016

- AIA Houston Design Award, Renovation/Restoration
- American Marketing Association, Venues and Parks, Marketer of the Year
- *Architect's Newspaper* Best of Design Award, Adaptive Reuse Category
- *Interior Design Magazine*, Best of Year Award
- International Interior Design Association, Chapter Award
- Society of American Registered Architects, Rehab and Remodeling



RUDY
BRUNER
AWARD
FOR URBAN EXCELLENCE

**2019
SILVER
MEDALIST**

Parite Skatepark

New Orleans, Louisiana

Youth-driven DIY creation of a new public skatepark on vacant land underneath a highway overpass



Michael Wong

Overview

Submitted by: Administrators of the Tulane Educational Fund on behalf of the Albert and Tina Small Center for Collaborative Design

Completed: July 2015

Total Development Cost: \$490,000

In 2009, a group of young skateboarders, seeking an alternative to skating on the city's uneven streets, used found materials to create a makeshift skatepark on vacant land near the intersection of New Orleans' Interstate 610 and Paris Avenue. When the popular park was demolished by the property owners in 2012, the skateboarders decided to move to an adjacent site beneath the interstate overpass and began to rebuild. They formed an organization called Transitional Spaces and reached out to the Albert and Tina Small Center for Collaborative Design at the Tulane University School of Architecture for help designing and building a replacement park and navigating the process of working with the city.

In 2014, the Small Center's staff, faculty, and students collaborated with the skaters, public agencies, a structural engineer, and a landscape architect to help realize the new skatepark. Two 14-week design/build studios led to the development of a phased master plan and construction of one phase of the park, an urban landscape that features surfaces and elements desirable for skaters and non-skaters alike. The design includes a landscaped edge to manage stormwater runoff. After extensive negotiations, an agreement with

“Parasite Skatepark is an example of how a small, allegedly powerless group of young people can fight city hall and create a win-win for everyone.”

— 2019 Selection Committee

the City of New Orleans reactivated the site as an official city park, to be managed and maintained by the skaters.

Opened in 2015 with a ceremonial 40-foot “Reuben cutting” by Mayor Mitch Landrieu, Parasite Skatepark includes a defined entrance at Paris and Pleasure Streets, landscaping, and colorful artwork spanning the highway superstructure above it. An accessible ramp leads to a viewing platform and seating area that overlooks the park and surrounding neighborhood. Inside the park, concrete and wooden ramps offer a variety of skating experiences. Interpretive signage highlights the perimeter rain gardens, which collect and filter runoff from the highway above.

Ongoing volunteer-led programming, which includes cleanup and ramp-building days, neighborhood barbecues, and all-girl skate nights, contributes to a sense of community ownership at the park. Reflecting on the project, Tulane Adjunct Associate Professor Doug Harmon observed, “Working in concert with the city through engaged and thoughtful design, urban voids can be capitalized on to transform them from perceived public nuisance to public amenity.”



The public park offers a variety of skating experiences and perimeter rain gardens.



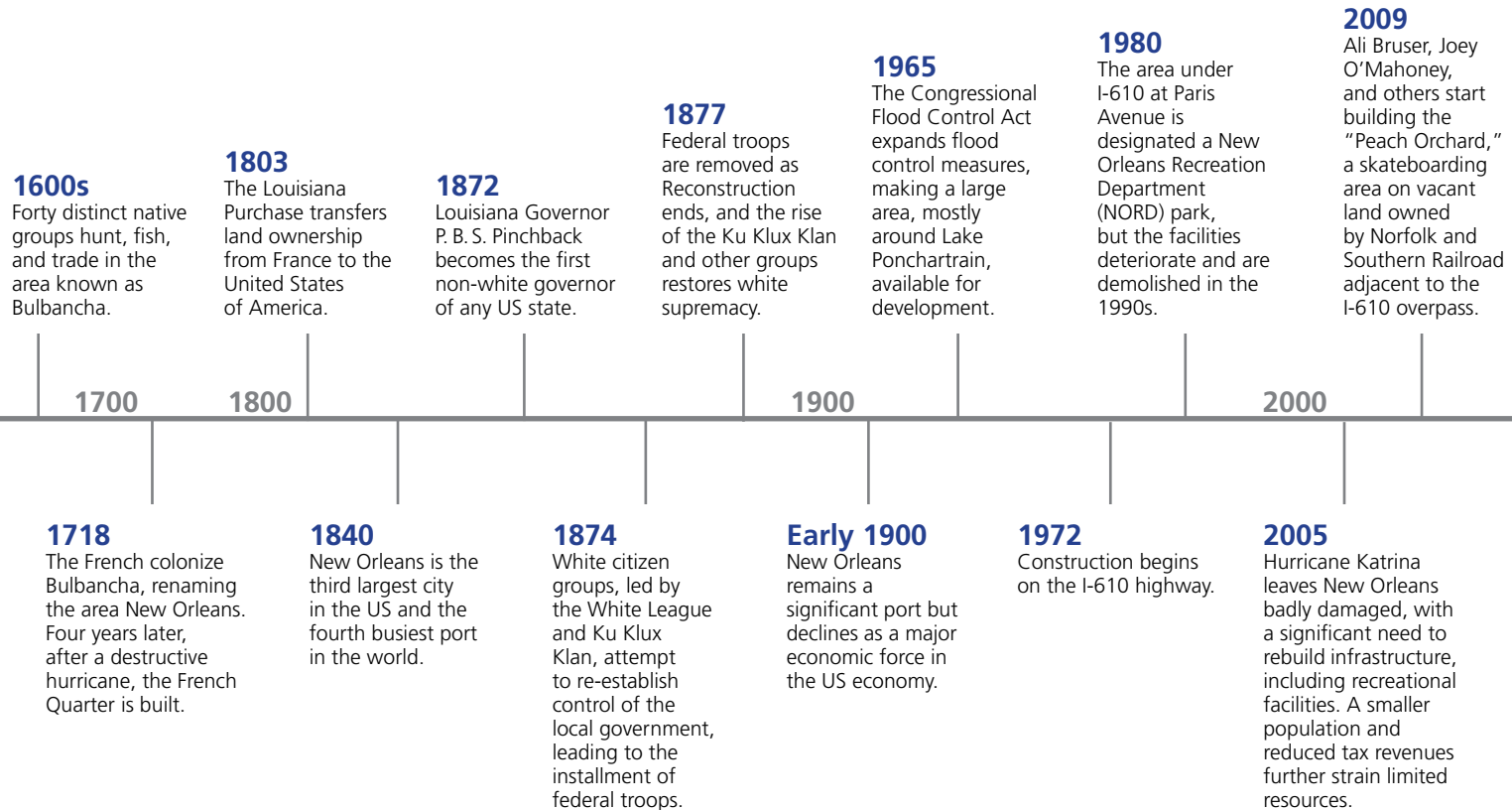
Project at a Glance

- A loose-knit, informal group of skaters who overcame many obstacles to transform an unused piece of public land under an interstate highway into an amenity that brings together people from communities throughout the metropolitan area.
- The first public, free skatepark in New Orleans.
- A DIY project that addressed several needs in an underserved neighborhood, providing the only free public outlet for skateboarding and much-needed recreational options for at-risk youth.
- A city-owned park that was built and is programmed and maintained exclusively by the park's users at no cost to the city, entirely funded with money and in-kind support from many sources and managed through a collaborative community effort.
- A landscaped entry with a rain garden that captures and filters water runoff from the highway above and a viewing area overlooking the skating bays.
- An effort that gained legitimacy from the support of the Albert and Tina Small Center for Collaborative Design at the Tulane University School of Architecture, which provided design expertise for the collaborative master planning process and design/build of the park's entryway.

Project Goals

- Create a free and open skating and recreational space for New Orleans youth that meets the desires of local skateboarders through a DIY process.
- Turn an unused, neglected piece of public land into a welcoming, inviting place for skaters and non-skaters alike, using a variety of activities to attract nontraditional skaters and residents of nearby neighborhoods divided by the highway.
- Develop a model for water capture, filtering, and retention systems in underpasses where high levels of polluted stormwater flow are disruptive and destructive.

Chronology



2010

Word of mouth spreads and the site becomes popular with skaterboarders, attracting as many as 30 to 40 a day to skate and help plan, build, and maintain the site.

2012

May 14: Early in the morning, the Peach Orchard is demolished by Norfolk and Southern Railroad. Soon after, the ad hoc group of skaters reassemble and move a few dozen yards to publicly owned land under the I-610 overpass to rebuild the skatepark.

When city officials learn skating elements are being constructed on a new site, they threaten to evict and demolish. In response, skaters form Transitional Spaces to negotiate with the city.

The City of New Orleans, in response to frequent resident requests for a skatepark, directs its Capital Projects Administration to identify sites in every district for possible skatepark construction.

September: Trukstop Park, a private, for-profit skatepark in the Lower Ninth Ward, has a grand opening but never fully opens for business.

2014

Spring: Tulane architecture studio faculty and students work with Transitional Spaces, the skateboarding community, and the neighborhood to create a master plan for Parosite.

June: The City Planning Commission approves Parosite as a city park.

Fall: Red Bull Mississippi Grind skating features are pulled from storage and installed at Parosite. NORD signs Cooperative Endeavor Agreements with Transitional Spaces. Tulane architecture studio faculty and students design and, with Transitional Spaces and skaters, build the park's entryway, seating, and stormwater retention.

2017

December: Skaters run a second Kickstarter campaign, raising \$40,000 for capital improvements.

2019

Construction of the "peanut pool" in Bay 1, Phase 4 of the park's construction, is designed, built, and paid for by park users.

2011

Concrete skating pieces created for Red Bull's Mississippi Grind floating skateboard competition are donated to the City of New Orleans for a future skatepark and put in storage.

2013

May: Transitional Spaces submits a request for design assistance to Tulane University's Albert and Tina Small Center for Collaborative Design. Their proposal is accepted and planning for the new park begins.

October: The Small Center begins a six-month-long series of public outreach meetings on the proposed design.

The City of New Orleans amends its joint use agreement with the State of Louisiana to include skateboarding as an approved activity.

2015

February 28: Mayor Mitch Landrieu cuts the "Reuben" to open Parosite, New Orleans' first official skatepark.

April: Transitional Spaces launches a Kickstarter campaign for Parosite, which generates \$51,866 for future construction phases.

2016

Fall: Skaters pay for, design, and build a concrete bowl alongside Paris Ave.

2018

New Orleans passes its first stormwater planning ordinance requiring stormwater issues to be addressed for permitting.

POINTS OF INTEREST

1. Parisisite Skatepark
2. Peach Orchard Site
3. St. Bernard Recreation Center
4. Columbia Parc
5. City Park

5

4

3

2

1

610

NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN RAILROAD

PARIS AVE.

PLEASURE ST.

NEW ORLEANS, LA



Project Description

INTRODUCTION

Parisite Skatepark is the first public skatepark in New Orleans, which had previously been, according to Transitional Spaces, the largest city in the United States without a public space for skateboarders. It is a park created by skateboarders themselves, in an extended DIY effort, at virtually no expense to the city for capital improvement or maintenance—the skateboarders clean and maintain the park themselves. The skateboarders were supported by a partnership with Tulane University School of Architecture’s Albert and Tina Small Center for Collaborative Design. Two design studios helped skaters develop a master plan that created a welcoming, multipurpose space and build a defined entrance that activated and reclaimed a disused and neglected piece of public land beneath an elevated interstate highway.

CONTEXT

New Orleans

The lower sections of the Mississippi River in Louisiana, known as *Bulbancha*, were occupied by 40 distinct Native American tribes for thousands of years before Spanish conquistador Hernando de Soto passed through in 1542. French explorers and European trappers and settlers arrived in the late seventeenth century, bringing infectious diseases that dramatically reduced the Native American population.

European settlement began in earnest after New Orleans was founded by the French in 1718, and in 1722, the French Quarter was built following a destructive hurricane. New Orleans was capital of the French territory when it was sold to the United States as part of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803

and became and remained the South’s largest city until the latter half of the twentieth century. By 1840, New Orleans—then the third largest city in the country—was also the fourth busiest port in the world. It remained a significant port through the early 1900s, though its impact on the US economy declined.

While some in the native tribes were enslaved, Africans were brought to the area in large numbers as slave labor in the early nineteenth century. New Orleans had the largest slave market in the South before the Civil War, comprising a significant portion of its economy until the city was captured by Union forces early in the war. At the same time, there was a large population of free Blacks¹ living in New Orleans and elsewhere in Louisiana, from the early eighteenth century through the beginning of the Civil War. They enjoyed a “golden age” of involvement in society, with contributions as artists and artisans, as well as having some property rights and economic success—at least until the period of greater restrictions in the decades preceding the war.

After the war, people of color, including freed slaves, became increasingly active in politics and served as elected officials, both locally and nationally—including Louisiana Governor P. B. S. Pinchback, who served as the first non-White governor of any US state in 1872. Two years later, in the aftermath of a disputed gubernatorial election, the paramilitary White League and Ku Klux Klan led an attempt to overthrow the government, which was working toward increased equality and opportunity for Black citizens. The resulting three-day Battle of Liberty Place led to the temporary installment of federal troops in New Orleans which lasted until the end of the Reconstruction era in 1877, when White supremacists re-established control of local government and institutionalized segregation. The 1891 monument built to honor the White League members who perished in the battle was finally removed from the city in 2017.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, references to race, ethnicity, and nationality throughout this case study reflect the terminology used by the source. In instances where there is no direct source, we have attempted to use the most inclusive, accurate, and appropriate language possible.

Wikimedia Commons, SE Wilco



The area where the park is located experienced significant flooding during Hurricane Katrina.

Wikimedia Commons, Infrogmaton



Population declined after the storm and demolition of the St. Bernard housing project.

New Orleans is now and has been for many years a city of diverse cultures, including English, French, Spanish, Haitian-Creole, Native American, and African, as well as many other nationalities from periods of modern immigration. A majority of the population remained French speaking through much of the nineteenth century.

According to worldpopulationreview.com, the estimated population of New Orleans in 2019 was 392,000, down from the city's peak of 627,000 in 1960 and the pre-Katrina level of 484,000 in 2000, but up from the post-Katrina decline. The city has a poverty rate of 25.36%. Though still a majority-minority city, the percentage of the population that is non-White has fallen since Katrina, though the Hispanic population has increased. The Black or African American population makes up approximately 60% of the city (down from 67% in 2000), with 34% White.

Hurricane Katrina

Surrounded by lakes and the Mississippi River with most of its land mass below sea level, New Orleans has always been threatened by flooding from storms, particularly hurricanes. While original settlers built on higher ground and made use of natural levees, the city soon spread to lower-lying areas. Responding to destruction from Hurricane Betsy, the Congressional Flood Control Act of 1965 authorized the building of an expanded floodwall system around a much broader area of the city. According to "Hurricanes: Science and Society," failure of the levees in this system was the primary cause of the flooding following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, in which 80% of the city was covered by water.

The impact of Hurricane Katrina was massive and lasting, especially for those living in the low-lying areas and the city's poor and Black population. Over one million people evacuated New Orleans and its suburbs as the storm approached and hit. Many who lost their homes and neighborhoods left New Orleans after the flood and have not returned. The city's population dropped by half down to 223,000 shortly after the hurricane but has recovered significantly, though not fully, since then to 386,000 in 2015. But, as noted by Gary Rivlin in *The Nation*, both the loss and recovery have been uneven, with the greatest impact on poor and

Black citizens, who were three times more likely to suffer flood damage than White residents.

The storm left New Orleans with significant needs for repair, rebuilding, and support in a city with much reduced tax revenues with which to address these efforts. The limited resources went largely towards critical and immediate needs for health care and living conditions. As a result, funds to restore and rebuild recreational facilities and parks were often lacking. The poorest areas, largely occupied by historically underserved Black residents, struggled the most. In the face of few resources and difficult conditions, especially for youth, it is not surprising that some people felt their only option was a DIY approach: find the space and the resources to build the needed facilities themselves.

Gentilly/St. Bernard

Parisite is located under Interstate 610 (I-610), an urban elevated interstate freeway. New Orleans, like most cities in the United States, experienced an era of highway construction through the 1970s, spurred by the passage of the Interstate Highway Defense Act of 1956, through which the federal government paid 90% of highway construction costs. A section of the interstate that was to pass through the French Quarter was stopped by preservationists, but many other neighborhoods were impacted, including Treme, the oldest Black neighborhood in the United States, which is about two miles south of Parisite. The highway through Treme split the community and resulted in the loss of many businesses, hundreds of homes, and scores of ancient oaks. It led, as noted in *The Advocate's* 2012 article "Skateboarders mourn the loss of makeshift skatepark in Gentilly," to increased crime and poverty in the area. Gentilly and St. Bernard were similarly affected by I-610, which cuts directly through residential neighborhoods and City Park.

The skatepark sits at the edge of three neighborhoods: the east edge of Gentilly, the north edge of St. Roch, and St. Bernard, the western edge of Mid-City. The area directly around Parisite consists of a mix of single-family houses, both owned and rented. According to The Data Center, the neighborhood broadly is predominantly Black, with 40-50% of the

population living below the federal poverty line. The neighborhood is centrally located in New Orleans and close to two major open spaces: City Park and the New Orleans Fairgrounds. It is also near the St. Bernard housing projects, a former 1940s public housing complex from which the area got its name.

The St. Bernard area experienced both significant flooding during Hurricane Katrina—with standing water of two to six feet—and a significant decrease in population. This population reduction began prior to Katrina with the increased use of housing vouchers and renovations to the St. Bernard Housing Project and was exacerbated by both flood damage and the demolition of the St. Bernard project following the storm. A new mixed-income housing complex called Columbia Parc was built to replace it. This and other factors have shifted the social and economic demographics of the neighborhood, including reducing the percentage of the population living below the poverty line and in female-headed households and increasing the percentage of the elderly in the neighborhood.

North of I-610 is the southern tip of Gentilly and St. Bernard, largely made up of single-family housing for lower middle-class populations. The area south of I-610 is in New Orleans' 7th Ward and is more commercial but also includes single-family housing. On the south side of I-610, between the elevated highway and the Norfolk and Southern Railroad tracks, is a barren patch of land that runs along the railroad right-of-way. It includes the paved remnants of a street that existed before the interstate was built and random pieces of trash and abandoned appliances. This was the spot first chosen for the DIY skatepark that was named the Peach Orchard.

The neighborhoods around Parisite have experienced population growth in recent years, although the population still is 30% smaller than its pre-Katrina size. As in New Orleans as a whole, the Black population has returned here at a slower rate than other groups, and the overall racial balance has shifted. According to The Data Center, though many neighborhoods are down from their pre-Katrina percentages, the areas surrounding Parisite are still primarily Black: 90.2% in St. Bernard (97.7% in 2000), 78.2% in Gentilly Terrace (69.7% in 2000), and 84.2% in St Roch (91.5% in 2000).



The I-610 elevated interstate highway bisects the community.



The area includes a mix of modest, single-family homes and commercial businesses.

While there is a bus stop near Parisite, access is not easy for many young skaters who live in other parts of New Orleans or outside the city and do not have a car. The underpass has the advantage, however, of being just several hundred yards from the St. Bernard Recreation Center, a recently built facility with an outdoor pool, full-size basketball court, meeting space, play equipment, and recreational facilities. The center is owned and operated by the New Orleans Recreation Department.

Skateboarding

Skateboarding has a history of being both an organized and governed activity as well as a freewheeling individual sport often operating outside of traffic and safety codes. Because skateboarding relies less on strict rules and organized forms and more on individual style and creativity, it is sometimes seen as appealing to an anti-establishment subculture. It is reputed to have begun in the mid-twentieth century with some very early versions noted as far back as the 1940s and 1950s. Boards designed expressly for skating were first produced in the early 1960s in California and, as the sport grew in popularity, the first organized national championship was held in Anaheim, California, in 1965, an event that was broadcast by national television networks. It soon, however, also became the focus of criticism as a dangerous activity, causing it to be banned in many places in the late 1960s, during which time some police departments confiscated boards. There are still partial skateboarding bans in many cities, including Washington, DC; Charleston, South Carolina; and Northampton, Massachusetts.

Skateboarding reemerged as a national phenomenon in the 1970s, particularly with the introduction of better boards, mostly due to better traction and control provided by polyurethane wheels instead of metal. The first official skateparks opened in 1976 in Florida and Southern California.

As skateboarding has grown in popularity, a number of well-known professional skaters, design consultants, skateboard manufacturers, and related organizations have also flourished. One such organization is the Tony Hawk Foundation. According to its website, Tony Hawk, a successful professional skateboarder and manufacturer of skateboards, clothing, and accessories, created the foundation to “help ... develop quality places to practice the

sport that gives [children] much needed exercise and a sense of self-esteem." Another is Spohn Ranch, a California design/build firm that is a leader in the field working to create skateparks in cities around the world.

Skateboarding originally developed on Southern California beaches, largely attracting surfers, and has historically not had much participation by Black youth. This has changed, however, as skateboarding has become more popular in large cities. The Sporting Goods Manufacturers and Marketers Association reported in 2001 that skateboarding was the third most popular sport in the United States, with \$5 billion in revenue and over 10 million active participants.

There are many different styles of skateboarding, with two of the most popular being street and vert skating. Street skating involves riding and performing tricks on relatively flat street surfaces, using curbs, street furniture, steps, railings, etc. for tricks. Vert or transition skating uses flat-to-vertical transitions and is reputed to have begun by people skating up the sides of empty in-ground concrete swimming pools.

The number of skateboards sold, skateparks created, and skateboarding competitions has grown tremendously in the twenty-first century, with the sport's popularity rivaling traditional individual and team sports, though skateboarding still maintains some of its freewheeling renegade cachet. As its popularity has grown, so has the number of skateparks, which now exist in most large cities in the United States and many parts of the world. As evidence of its popularity worldwide, skateboarding was to be a competitive event at the 2020 summer Olympics.

Skateboarding and Black Youth in New Orleans

As noted, for example, in stories by Reuters and journalist Bill Moyers, poor, working, and middle-class Black neighborhoods suffered disproportionately from damage during Katrina and have had the slowest recovery in the aftermath. The loss of recreational and athletic facilities has been particularly difficult for poor Black youth who had few other options, especially in light of urgent safety concerns that left parks and other recreational facilities a lower priority for use of city funds. Excessive time on the streets and a history of tension and negative interactions with the city police, rooted in a legacy

Jose Corto



"Street skating" involves riding and performing tricks on relatively flat surfaces.

Jose Corto



"Vert" or "transition skating" makes use of flat-to-vertical transitions.

of racism, can lead to arrest and dangerous confrontations for these young people. In her Vice.com article "How Katrina Sparked a Black Skateboarding Renaissance in New Orleans," Aubrey Edwards noted that, with little else to do, Black kids took up skateboarding as an easy, inexpensive but exciting pursuit. With so many empty malls, streets, and lots, there was no shortage of places to practice street skating. Skateboarding was less likely to lead to trouble than hanging out; one teenager noted that his probation officer recommended he take up the sport. By 2015, there was a large and active Black skateboarding community in the city.

In 2010, New Orleans was, according to Parisite Skatepark supporters, the largest city in the United States without a skatepark. A collaboration between Mountain Dew and rapper/recording artist Lil Wayne resulted in Trukstop, a for-profit skatepark in the Lower Ninth Ward, a low-income Black neighborhood. In spite of a grand opening in 2012, the site never fully opened to the public and later went out of business.

The freewheeling, high energy and creative aspects of skateboarding—developing personal tricks and moves—can be attractive to poor urban youth as an alternative to zero tolerance policing, schools with harsh discipline, and crime on the streets. Unfortunately, not only was skateboarding unsupported by the City of New Orleans, but some suggest that when taken up by Black youth, it was often seen as an aggressive act that vandalized street furniture and park benches and was "actively criminalized" with fines for skateboarding in public places.

PROJECT HISTORY

Ally Bruser and Joey O'Mahoney were part of a wave of young people who came to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina to help recovery efforts. Bruser was a surfer from San Diego, O'Mahoney a skateboarder from Houston. After they met, they skated together "from central New Orleans all the way out to Lake Pontchartrain," through many of the New Orleans neighborhoods depopulated by flooding. In the process, they became familiar with the challenges of street skating in New Orleans—the frequent holes, ruts, and breaks that make it difficult and risky. On one of those trips around the city, Bruser and O'Mahoney agreed that a real skatepark was badly

needed but would not come into being in New Orleans unless they built it themselves. From that point, they used their journeys through the city to look for a good site.

The Peach Orchard

In 2010, while touring the city by bicycle still looking for possible skatepark sites, Bruser and O'Mahoney found a likely candidate in an illegal dumping site with an "old forgotten slab of pavement near some railroad tracks and a freeway," which they assumed was city owned. The concrete pad was a leftover part of the street that had been there before the I-610 was built and provided a good base for skating. With others who joined them there, Bruser and O'Mahoney took the found conditions and worked to configure them for skating.

The skaters wanted a variety of skateable surfaces and areas. These included opportunities for transition skating, including skating onto ramps and broad, raised curves, as well as street-style skateboarding, which involves moving on, over, or around simple objects (chairs, boxes, etc.). They set about moving abandoned junk that was on or near the site into place—washing machines, playground equipment and the like—and covered them with dirt-filled poured concrete to create skateable ramps and other elements. It was a process, they said, of learning to build and work with concrete by trial and error.

They were soon joined by neighborhood kids and, as word of mouth spread, skaters came from other parts of the city, all relishing the chance to create their own skateboarding site. Although the core group was made up of less than 10 people, on some days as many as 30 to 40 people came out to skate and help with construction. The park was named the Peach Orchard, in a typically light-hearted fashion, because one of the founders had originally planned to spend that time picking peaches in Washington. Among those who came to skate and help with the design and construction were people with significant and valuable expertise. They included professional artists, such as Skylar Fein, who became a leader of Transitional Spaces; Heidi Tullman, a graffiti artist who painted signs for the park; architect Jackson Blalock; and others with construction and engineering backgrounds, including some with badly needed concrete expertise.



The Peach Orchard was created by young skaters on vacant land alongside I-610.

Transitional Spaces



The skaters designed and built the park using concrete and found materials.

Transitional Spaces



The park drew neighborhood kids and skaters from across the city.

Design and construction were iterative processes: build, test, skate, and then decide on the next move as a group. Some skateboarders routinely drove from as far as Mandeville and Slidell (30 miles from Parisite on the other side of Lake Pontchartrain) and occasionally from even farther away. Skaters would perform stunts as the trains went by (“tricks for trains”) and engineers would blow their whistles in response. One of the skater/builders said, “It was our utopia.” It was, that is, until May 2012, when the Norfolk and Southern Railroad, the owner of this property abutting the rail line, learned of the skatepark. On the morning of May 14, the skaters arrived to find that the site had been demolished.

Within two weeks, skaters reassembled and decided to try again. This time they chose an area under the I-610 overpass—a few yards away from the Peach Orchard—on what they (again incorrectly) assumed was a city-owned site. It was actually state land that had been leased to the city for recreational use and had been designated a New Orleans Recreational Development Commission park. Now empty and abandoned, it once had, according to local recollection, basketball courts, grills, tables, and lighting. The joint use agreement between the city and state that had made it available as a city park did not include skateboarding as an allowed activity on that site, apparently because of concerns that the city could be held liable for injuries incurred there. This earlier park deteriorated from disuse and facilities were demolished in the 1990s, leaving an unlit, neglected piece of public land that gathered garbage and was occasionally used for parking.

At the start, there was no formal organizational structure in which the skateboarders could work, although they regularly got together at the site to plan, design, build, and test skating features. As new pieces were completed, locals and others from around the region came to try them out. City officials also learned about this new park and issued an order to stop building, with an implicit threat of demolition. In response, in 2012, the skaters formed a nonprofit organization which they called Transitional Spaces to represent themselves and begin negotiations with the city to save the new park.

In addition, as they began to engage the city, the skaters recognized their need for additional support and capabilities and decided to approach the



After the Peach Orchard was demolished, skaters found a new, city-owned site under I-610.

Albert and Tina Small Center for Collaborative Design, the community design center of the Tulane University School of Architecture. The Small Center collaborates with community partners, bringing design expertise and focusing on “giving voice to residents.” Besides the expertise on staff, the center has the ability to make use of Tulane graduate and undergraduate design/build studios, which focus on planning, design, and construction.

Tulane University has a history in New Orleans that goes back more than 150 years and has a nationally respected and ranked school of architecture. Working as the service arm of that school, the Small Center uses its design expertise to help neighborhood groups “through collaboration, design education and scrappy problem-solving.” The center provides the skills of designers and students, often working through design/build studios to facilitate change. Moreover, those who work as part of the center also bring an understanding based on years of experience with the bureaucratic and political processes that underlie development and change in New

Orleans. For a small, new, ad hoc organization like Transitional Spaces, working with the Small Center not only gave the skaters access to a thoughtful and organized design process, but also lent a measure of credibility to the project.

In May 2013, Transitional Spaces submitted a response to the Small Center’s annual request for proposals. In their submission, Transitional Spaces asked for help planning and building an ambitious skatepark that incorporated “public space, rainwater gardens, DIY skate studios, children’s sculpture gardens, outdoor classrooms ... a space that is comprehensive and consistent with the needs of youth in New Orleans.” Their proposal was selected.

A “long dance” then began in the conversations between the city and Transitional Spaces, with the Small Center involved and seeking common ground. Those representing Transitional Spaces sometimes felt trapped in the middle between city officials concerned with regulations, codes, and liability and the skateboarders, whose views on organization sometimes bordered on anarchy. For some of the skateboarders, it was a difficult change. The ad lib, organic design process first used at the Peach Orchard and then at the new site—where ideas for new features were quickly implemented—made it hard for some to settle for a more traditional, slow, city-driven approach. It was more difficult, one leader said, to get people excited about issues such as permitting than in building for the future.

On the other side, city officials, even eight years out, remained overwhelmed with the massive but underfunded process of rebuilding from the damage of Hurricane Katrina. Moreover, free-wheeling skateboarders were often seen as scofflaws and vandalizers of public spaces rather than a legitimate group of park users deserving attention and response. Officials admitted having negative views of the skateboarders at the start of the process, although some became, in the end, enthralled with what had been achieved at Parisite and supporters of the project.

While some in city government were upset at the idea of a skatepark being built without proper permission or oversight, others saw the potential for important benefit to the city. Mayor Mitch Landrieu noted that he and his

staff had for years been approached by people asking for city-built skateboard facilities, so much so that in early 2012, around the time the Peach Orchard was being built and then demolished, he asked the Department of Capital Project Administration to identify sites in every city district where skateparks might be built. For officials who were seeking such sites and who had been promoting innovative public-private partnerships, the Transitional Spaces group was handing them an opportunity for a quick “win”—placing a skatepark on an unused space that could be ready quickly and at little or no cost to the city.

Moreover, the city had a large set of concrete skateboarding elements ready for a park. In 2011, Red Bull, working with the California-based skatepark design/build organization Spohn Ranch, had developed a promotional event called the Mississippi Grind. For the Grind, a floating skatepark barge made its way down the Mississippi River, stopping at St. Paul, Minnesota; Davenport, Indiana; St. Louis, Missouri; and, finally, New Orleans. At each stop, a skateboarding competition was held, with the winner getting a “Ticket to Ride” to the next stop. After the finals in New Orleans, the barge’s concrete skating pieces were donated to the City of New Orleans for placement in a skatepark. With no such park to put them in at that point, the city placed the pieces in long-term storage. Parise presented an opportunity to make use of these pieces and stop paying for their storage.

It took 18 months to get an agreement, including a memorandum of understanding (MOU), that all parties were satisfied with, for several reasons. First, city officials were overwhelmed with the number of projects underway and badly understaffed. Second, a great deal of time was spent by New Orleans officials and Tulane representatives working through responsibility for risk and liability. Third, the city had to amend its joint use agreement with the state to include skateboarding as an allowed recreational activity, which was achieved in 2013.

The agreement and approval came in the form of a new MOU between three governmental bodies—the City of New Orleans, the State of Louisiana, and the US Department of Transportation—and Transitional Spaces. The MOU reaffirmed the status of the space as a part of the New Orleans



Red Bull donated skating elements from its “Mississippi Grind” floating skatepark to the city.

Recreation Development Commission on land leased from the State of Louisiana. It also changed language in the original joint use agreement between the city and state to specifically allow skateboarding on the site. As a city park, liability would be covered by the city’s umbrella insurance policy. For its part, the federal government agreed to allow this use of the space under an interstate highway and permitted signage and decorative painting on highway columns and fences. The city took on no responsibility for costs or management of construction, operation, or maintenance—that was all to be taken care of by users, under the aegis of Transitional Spaces.

The process of getting to the MOU not only provided a legal basis for the park; it also showed a change in perception of the young people who designed it, built it, and skated there, who were now seen as responsible and capable of maintaining a safe and desired site. It was also an acceptance of the DIY model as a way to get a useful project built outside of city bureaucracy and budgeting.

LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS

The leadership that was primarily responsible for creating this park came first from the skaters who found and claimed the site and provided the energy and skills to turn it into a DIY skatepark. They were able to succeed because of significant support from the Small Center at Tulane, primarily in terms of the expertise the center was able to bring to bear in design, community participation, and negotiating city processes.

Transitional Spaces was made up of what was originally an ad hoc group of people from many parts of the city who came together informally to support skateboarding, responding to what was perceived as a distinct lack of city support for the sport as well as young skateboarders unserved by the city's parks and completely unacknowledged by city government, except when they were seen as a nuisance. It was a loosely formed association of people with similar interests, and people remained a part of the organization only as long as they felt an affinity for it and saw the park as exciting and meeting their needs for fun, creativity, and community. There was, however, a core group who took on leadership roles over time, which was especially needed once the nonprofit organization was formed and negotiations with the city began. These included Ally Bruser, Ali Rex, Jackson Blalock, and Skylar Fein, a New Orleans artist who took on significant responsibility when negotiations were underway with the city to formalize the park.

The group of skaters and builders grew organically as the initial efforts developed and included a racially diverse group of men and women. Many were lifelong New Orleans residents; others had come to New Orleans to help in the recovery from Hurricane Katrina; some were local artists and professionals. They took an abandoned and overlooked space, cleaned it up, and built the initial elements of a skateable area that became heavily used by skaters. The use of this site, however, also made this unapproved park visible to city officials and, therefore, at risk of being demolished by the city. The group leaders realized that they needed to form a legal entity in order to be able to work with city and Small Center to legitimize the space.

The mission of Transitional Spaces goes beyond Parosite to “design and implement public skateparks in Louisiana that focus on safe recreational



Albert and Tina Small Center for Collaborative Design

The skaters formed Transitional Spaces to access resources and negotiate with the city.

Jose Corto



A core group of skaters including Skylar Fein (right) took on significant responsibilities.



The Albert and Tina Small Center and Emily Taylor Welty (right) provided critical design assistance.

and educational opportunities for youth.” In reality, however, their resources are stretched thin just by seeing through the development of Parisite. No other sites are currently being addressed.

The organization’s name has meaning on several levels. The area chosen is a transitional space in between three neighborhoods. The park itself underwent a transition from a city park, to an illegal dump, then a squatter DIY skatepark, and most recently a public park of the City of New Orleans. And, finally, “transition” is the term used to describe a skateboarding move between horizontal and vertical surfaces involving ramps or large curved concrete planes.

The Albert and Tina Small Center for Collaborative Design is the community design center of the Tulane University School of Architecture. It began in 2005 as a way for the university to take part in and support the recovery of the city from Hurricane Katrina, using applied projects to help train design students and support efforts of local nonprofit and community groups. The Small Center is intended to serve people often underserved by the design professions. Operating “at intersection of design and civic engagement,” the center believes that everyone should be empowered to help shape the built environments in which they live, work, and play. As such, their role extends beyond architecture to include diplomacy, design education, and project facilitation to support community engagement and design excellence. The Small Center uses an annual request for proposals process to identify projects within New Orleans that need design expertise. Projects are chosen based on the submitting organization’s capacity, student learning and design opportunities, scale of project, and promise of project to address community needs. Once selected, projects become the focus of the center’s support and expertise and one becomes the site for a graduate and undergraduate architecture design/build studio. Transitional Spaces’ proposal for Parisite Skatepark was selected in 2013.

Key staff involved in Parisite included Maurice Cox, director of the Small Center at the time of Transitional Spaces’ application; Ann Yoachim, director of the Small Center at the time of the Rudy Bruner Award submission; Emily Taylor Welty, an architect and professor of practice at the Tulane School of

Architecture and assistant director of design/build for the Small Center; Mark Decotis and Doug Harmon, who taught the design/build studios for Parisite as faculty of the Tulane School of Architecture; and Dana Brown & Associates, a New Orleans-based landscape architecture and planning firm with expertise in stormwater management.

The New Orleans Recreation Development (NORD) Commission and the **NORD Foundation** were created by city ordinance in 2011 and supported by public referendum. The NORD Commission has 13 community leaders appointed by the mayor with a mission to “advance the physical, mental, and social well-being of New Orleanians by providing safe and welcoming environments for recreational, athletic, and cultural experiences.” The NORD Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that raises funds to support the activities of the NORD Commission. Affairs of parks and recreation centers are dealt with by several different organizations in New Orleans. Both organizations are independent of the New Orleans Parks and Parkways division, which “manages, maintains, develops, beautifies and preserves over 2,000 acres of New Orleans’ public green space.” The NORD Foundation helped organize and host meetings with members of local communities and representatives of Transitional Spaces and Small Center design teams.

New Orleans Capital Projects Administration (CPA) supported Parisite by connecting it to its mandate to find and create skateparks. The CPA transferred the Red Bull skating features that had been held in storage to the site, coordinated relationships with other city agencies, and ensured compliance with codes and other city requirements.

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

The Parisite Master Plan was informed by meetings with neighborhood groups as well as design charrettes conducted with local skateboarders and users of the park. The NORD Commission ran community meetings in 2011 and 2012 before there was any connection with Parisite, asking the public where the city should put a skatepark, including the Red Bull skating elements then in storage. A prime candidate was along a proposed new greenspace now known as the Lafitte Greenway. Once they became aware of what was being built under the I-610, as noted in a 2013 article in



Albert and Tina Small Center for Collaborative Design

The project became the focus for a Tulane University School of Architecture design/build studio.



Albert and Tina Small Center for Collaborative Design

The design was informed by input from meetings with neighborhood groups, residents, and skaters.



Albert and Tina Small Center for Collaborative Design

The Small Center organized a two-semester design/build process.

The Advocate, the NORD Commission came onboard and focused on that site as the first city skatepark.

In 2013, another series of community engagement meetings at the St. Bernard New Orleans Recreation Development Center were organized by the NORD Commission, working in collaboration with the Small Center, to discuss residents' concerns and plans for the park. There were not many active neighborhood organizations in the area at the time, so the Parisite planning team walked the neighborhood, placing meeting notices on porches.

Common issues that were voiced at meetings concerned potential noise, commotion, and crime stemming from the site. Representatives of Transitional Spaces ensured attendees that the skaters would maintain the park, including cleaning and regulating use of the site, and emphasized the availability of the park for local youth. In most cases, the responses were positive and the meetings ended with the neighborhood participants in support of the park. In some cases, neighbors who were originally opposed to the project became supporters and even helpers. Several people cited one

nearby resident who had lost a free parking spot for his truck when construction began but ended up helping, offering water to workers on site.

Transitional Space's underlying philosophy, as stated in the skatepark's master plan, is that parks should be open and free and should instill "a sense of ownership, responsibility, and pride in both their participants and neighbors" in the process of creating an important community asset. Transitional Spaces identified four principles for its skatepark mission:

- Fight blight by cleaning up and activating disused urban spaces.
- Use DIY design and build processes to support community involvement and ownership.
- "Skatejam Eco": Provide environmental benefits within the skatepark design such as stormwater overflow with the rain garden.
- Inclusiveness: Provide support and access for non-traditional skaters, such as girls, as well as the non-skating public.

The master plan for the site was developed by the Tulane University design studio. The Small Center organized two 14-week classes intended to focus on the design/build process for Parisite. The first semester involved the class collaborating with Transitional Spaces and nearby residents to develop the master plan, while the second semester largely entailed students and Transitional Spaces members working together to build the entry area (Phase Three as noted below) with its stormwater garden.

The master plan includes a skateboarding area made up of four bays defined and separated by highway support columns. Each bay was to have a distinct set of skateboarding elements, addressing both street-style skating (mostly flat surfaces with obstacles) and transitional style (steep ramps and curved surfaces). Not surprisingly, given the ad hoc nature of the Parisite effort, the way aspects of the construction were carried out, and by whom, varied for each aspect of the park. The construction plan was laid out in four phases.

Phase One focused on the DIY work done by the skaters that began weeks after the Peach Orchard site was demolished in May 2012. Building began in bay one with a massive set of concrete transitions the skaters called Pleasure Island.



A four-bay master plan (above right) was created with distinct skateboarding areas.

Phase Two involved installation of the stored concrete pieces that came from Red Bull's Mississippi Grind barge, which were taken out of long-term storage by the City of New Orleans and installed in bay four. The pieces were designed by consultants from Spohn Ranch and included ramps, stairs, and horizontal elements. Installation was carried out by professional contractors and paid for by Spohn Ranch. As a finishing touch, they added stained outlines of the states that were the start and end points of the Grind (Minnesota and Louisiana), connected by a blue outline of the Mississippi River. Bays two and three were designated for temporary elements, and they currently hold wood mini-ramps and quarter pipes.

Phase Three addressed the entry and welcome area at the northwest end of the park, along with "rain gardens and a storm water diversion system to alleviate flooding and beautify the site." The plan also included outdoor classroom, public viewing, and seating and picnic areas. The goal of the entryway design was to serve as an identifying and welcoming space for the park with elements that "provide a counterpoint to the hard, loud, and impervious materials of the highway, marking a public point of entry and announcing the space as a 'park.'" This was meant to show that the park was not only for skateboarders by providing attractive views of the park (especially desired by neighborhood residents); a raised area, reached by an accessible ramp, from which spectators could view skateboarding moves and stunts; and a contained planting space designed to catch, hold, filter, and slowly release stormwater runoff from interstate overpass scuppers. The design extends to the sidewalk with a variety of amenities, including seating and vegetation, as a way to offer a welcoming face to the neighborhood.

The designers noted that "creating a sense of landscape with a few built elements allowed for the design to economically



Construction began with "Pleasure Island," a set of large concrete transitions built by skaters.



Contractors installed elements from the Red Bull Mississippi Grind barge.

meet the scale of the residual space while softening the severity of the highway infrastructure” with berms and plantings. Faculty and students from the Small Center led the entry and stormwater garden building effort. Transitional Spaces members helped out by volunteering on weekends, video recording the effort, bringing snacks to the student team, and participating in site visits by city officials. Since Tulane University was concerned about liability issues related to ramp building, the Small Center team built platforms up to the ramps while Transitional Spaces skaters and professional builders completed the remaining ramp work. The proposed outdoor classroom and picnic areas were less exciting to the skaters and did not get built.

Phase Four, completed in 2019 and funded by a Kickstarter campaign, installed a peanut pool to fill in the area between the original ramps and Paris Avenue.

The building materials included poured concrete—used for walking areas and formed into ramps, tubes, pipes, and a variety of skateable shapes—as well as found materials such as chairs or tables that could be used as skating elements to jump over or ride along. New ideas for skating elements were often tested by building them with plywood before permanently forming them in concrete. The edge of the park includes steel and concrete ramps, railings, and walkways, along with hand-painted informational signs along the highway and on the cylindrical highway pillars.

The engineering aspects of this project were not especially complex. The requirements were, first, to create concrete forms, sometimes in complicated shapes, that were smooth, safe for skating, and lasting; and, second, to ensure that none of the elements or the work entailed with construction would interfere with highway traffic or infrastructure. The former was accomplished as the skaters learned how to work with concrete, initially on their own through trial and error, and later through training from professional contractors and by working alongside Tulane faculty and students on the construction of the entry area and rain garden. There were issues that had to be addressed with pouring concrete because the ground was so frequently wet and spongy that additional reinforcing was required, using rebar and high-strength concrete mixes. None of the park elements touch or otherwise connect to the massive concrete supports of the highway.



Students designed and built the park's entry and stormwater garden.



Michael Wong



The park includes (clockwise from bottom left): the entry and stormwater garden, the "peanut pool," an area for street-style skating, and bays offering ramps for transitional skating.

Landscaping and Sustainability

The original iteration of the park, the Peach Orchard, largely made use of discarded and found objects. Parasite also makes use of existing materials, such as the large skateboarding elements that were donated by Red Bull, and, at a smaller scale, discarded chairs, tables, and the like for street skating.

Stormwater management was an important concern at this site, as elsewhere in New Orleans. Local flooding occurs here not only during hurricanes but also after heavy rains. The problem at Parasite is exacerbated by the heavy water runoff from above—polluted water from highway scuppers that drain onto the site, bringing intense flows during heavy storms. The plan for dealing with stormwater overflow and flooding called for building three areas with layers of gravel and soil with plantings to absorb and hold water, allowing more gradual runoff after a storm.

Planting Zone 1 starts at the curb of Paris Street, at the northwest edge of the park. It provides large spaces to capture and hold water, with an emphasis on native plants with visual variety and attractiveness.

Planting Zone 2 lies along the viewing ramp off Paris Street and under the highway scuppers, where it captures the heaviest stormwater flows. According to the planting plan, this area uses a “mixture of rocks and hardy vascular plants” that can survive these flows and soak up the water, including Little Blue Stem, Coastal Love Grass, Swamp Sunflowers, Equisetum, and Bull Tongue.

Planting Zone 3 lies at the southern edge of the skateable areas and is designed to be an area for gathering and social interaction—a spot where skaters and visitors can sit (or fall) and watch the action. The plantings include porous grass pavers seeded with dwarf mondo grass, a hardy grass-like plant used for groundcover, chosen because it can survive heavy use and soften falls while allowing for drainage.

Signage

Signs are important to Parasite as a way to announce its presence, communicate rules and events to the many regular as well as occasional visitors, and



Hand-painted signs reflect the youthful, DIY character of the park.

visually reinforce the youthful, freewheeling style of the park. Heidi Tillman, a skateboarder, professional graphic artist, and sign painter, and friend of Skylar Fein, became responsible for Parasite’s signs, as well as stickers and patches promoting the park. Like many others, her interest in working on the project was piqued by the sense of community that formed around this space. Because of the proximity to the interstate highway, signs had to be approved by the federal Department of Transportation, though those officials did not interfere in the creative process.

The largest sign is the long “Parasite Skatepark” announcement on the extended horizontal beam undergirding the roadway, which Tillman painted over several days while riding in an articulating boom. This sign was painted using high-gloss and fade-resistant auto-grade paint and has an intentional dripping and melting quality.

Other signs at ground level include educational panels that describe the stormwater garden, several painted signs mounted on the cylindrical

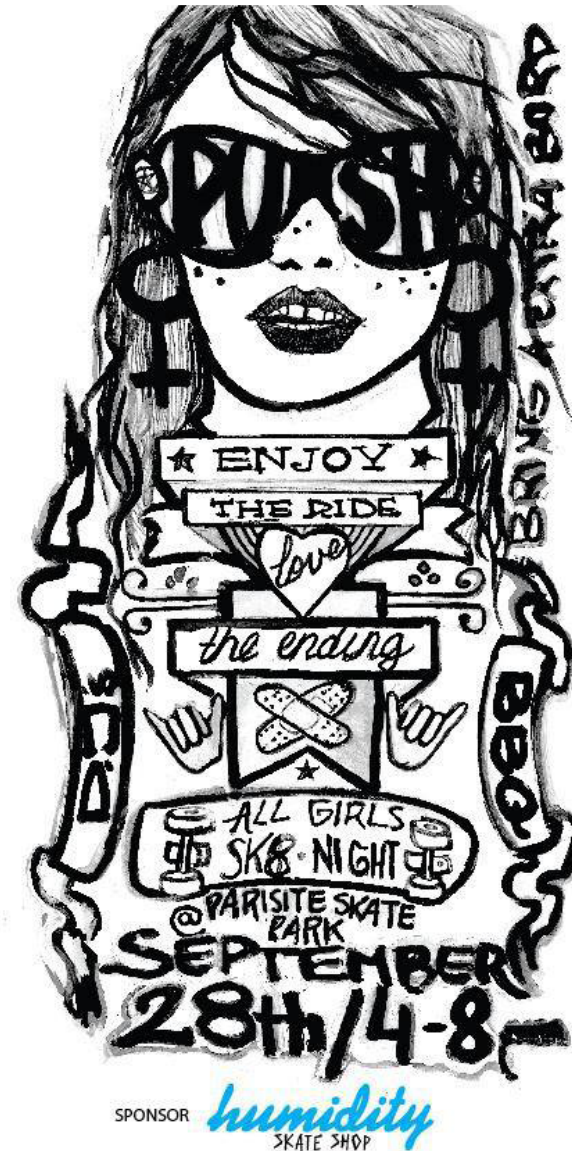


Signs announce cleanup days, events, and park rules.

highway support columns that announce cleanup days and other events, and signs that describe rules (“no drugs,” “keep it clean,” “respect our neighbors”) and special events.

Programming and Maintenance

The site is often busy and active with the intended but unprogrammed activity of skaters, especially on summer afternoons, after school hours, and on weekends. There are also many programmed events such as weekly contests (e.g., “worst trick”) and skate jam competitions. Programming, however, is not developed by Transitional Spaces, which sees its purpose and focus as limited to building skateable infrastructure. Instead, programming is created on an ad hoc basis by skaters. Recent events have included a pro skater demonstration sponsored by Red Bull, a memorial for a skater who died, and a queer skate jam sponsored by a group from California. Other events on the site have special purposes, such as to encourage skaters who otherwise might feel unwelcome or intimidated (such as the monthly girls’ skate night sessions), continue



Transitional Spaces

Programming and events are organized on an ad-hoc basis by skaters.



Mayor Mitch Landrieu celebrated the opening of Parasite Skatepark with a "Reuben" cutting.

construction (ramp-building days,) and promote positive neighborhood relations (barbeques). At cleanup sessions every Saturday at noon, volunteers pick up trash and leave the bags of rubbish at a designated point for pickup by a parks crew. The stormwater garden plantings are maintained by volunteers from Tulane University and other groups who come several times per year.

Unlike many organizations, Transitional Spaces does not use facility rental as a source of revenue. Outside groups can use the park for events and parties at no cost, but only if they don't close areas of the park or make them inaccessible to skaters.

Transitional Spaces is still trying to work through a process and set of rules to govern events held at the park, including whether and how much money to charge and cleanup requirements.

FINANCING

Parisite had a very small capital budget that was largely met with donated labor, services, and funds, cobbled together from a wide array of foundation and corporate donors as well as two Kickstarter crowdfunding campaigns. As squatters on the site, the skaters had no initial costs for the land. Later, as a result of the negotiated MOU, Parisite was recognized as a designated city park on state land, with no funds changing hands. Almost \$300,000—60% of labor, services, and materials—was donated, in addition to the nearly \$200,000 raised from foundations. Actual funds paid for materials and services totaled \$150,000. Similarly, Parisite is very inexpensive to maintain. The users—skaters and others—clean and maintain the site themselves, largely in Saturday invitational cleanup sessions.

Two Kickstarter campaigns also raised funds to support the park. The first, in 2015, was for what was called "Phase 3.5" to build additional concrete ramps and raised \$51,866 from 722 contributors. The second campaign, launched in 2017, was for Phase 4 to build a peanut pool to fill in the area between the original ramps and Paris Avenue. That campaign enlisted 318 backers who pledged a total of \$44,121. While donations ranged from \$7 to \$10,000, two-thirds were \$50 or less.

The DIY attitude of the project is reflected in funding. Payments and contracts for construction of the Red Bull ramps were managed by the New Orleans Capital Project Administration. Large donations for the skatepark included \$10,000 each from the Tony Hawk Foundation and Sheckler Foundation (both of which were founded by professional skateboarders), \$15,000 from the Arts Council of New Orleans, and \$8,000 from the Black Rock Arts Foundation, whose mission is to support and promote community, interactive art, and civic participation. Other support came from the Drew Brees Foundation and the Platforms Fund. The Small Center design/build and master planning work was supported by Johnson Controls, Inc. and the Surdna Foundation.

PROJECT EVALUATION

One of the basic lessons of Parisite is the value of a truly "bottom-up" process that taps the natural energy and creativity of a group of volunteers wanting to build something that they are passionate about and that reflects their identity and needs. Skateparks, like golf courses, don't fit a prescribed set of dimensions and geometries and are adaptable to the unique ideas and imaginations of their designers. Operating in a city still reeling from a devastating hurricane, badly under-resourced and understaffed, squatting on an unused piece of public land and building the skatepark themselves, without permissions or permits, may have been the only way such a place could have come into being.

There are distinct risks of such a DIY effort being stifled by a more formal and bureaucratic process and regulations. Negotiating with the city was a long and slow process, reflecting at least in part very different backgrounds, approaches, and goals. City officials were focused on the longer term and necessarily much more concerned with codes, uses, and liability. Those negotiating for Transitional Spaces often felt stuck in the middle—hearing city concerns for codes and processes on one hand and fielding frustration from Transitional Spaces members who thought they were being too bureaucratic and restrained on the other. The risk throughout this process was that skaters would feel less than well represented in these discussions, get discouraged at the slow pace of talks and other limitations, and walk away from the project. That the volunteer

TABLE 1: DEVELOPMENT BUDGET**SOURCES****Funds**

Kickstarter 2015 - initial ramps	\$47,000
Kickstarter 2017 - peanut pool	\$44,000
Tony Hawk Foundation	\$10,000
Sheckler Foundation	\$10,000
Black Rock Arts Foundation	\$8,000
Platforms Fund	\$2,500
Drew Brees Dream Foundation	\$2,500
Harrah's	\$1,000
Arts Council of New Orleans - skateable art piece	\$15,000
Johnson Controls Inc., Surdna Foundation - entryway materials	\$45,000
Johnson Controls Inc., Surdna Foundation - subcontractors and sign artist	\$7,000
Subtotal	\$192,000

IN-KIND (estimated value)

Red Bull - skating pieces	\$200,000
Red Bull - installation	\$50,000
Small Center/Tulane University - student and staff labor	\$28,000
Small Center/Tulane University - architect/landscape architect	\$20,000
Subtotal	\$298,000

Total \$490,000**USES****Phase One**

Red Bull skating pieces	\$200,000
Installation	\$50,000

Phase Two

Student and staff labor	\$28,000
Architect/landscape architect	\$20,000
Entryway materials	\$45,000
Subcontractors and sign artist	\$7,000

Phase Three

Initial ramps	\$47,000
Entry	\$34,000
Skateable art piece	\$15,000

Phase Four

Peanut pool	\$44,000
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Total \$490,000

Albert and Tina Small Center for Collaborative Design



Parisite Skatepark transformed an unused underpass into the city's first public skatepark.

Michael Wong



The initiative tapped university resources and significant volunteer creativity and energy.

effort survived 18 months of negotiation is testimony to the enthusiasm and dedication of the skaters.

Transitional Spaces remains focused solely on building skateable infrastructure at Parisite and, eventually, in other places. As such, it takes a hands-off approach to other aspects related to running this kind of public space, such as programming (done by skaters) and maintaining vegetation (taken care of by volunteers). Transitional Spaces sees the plants as a liability, creating a need for care that can take its attention away from its mission.

Mutual Benefit

Parasite went from being a squatter site under threat of being bulldozed to a recognized city park opened and celebrated by the mayor. The city gained a park that has become nationally known and was created quickly and at no cost to the city. Transitional Spaces gained security and a sense of permanence by having its park become a part of the city park system, eliminating the risk of demolition. The young developers, however, can no longer be so free-wheeling in their planning, design, and construction. Plans must be submitted to the city and then to the state Department of Transportation and Development, and approvals can take many months—or years.

In a resource-challenged city like New Orleans, there was particular value in this DIY process that created a new park without any city funds or facilities. Moreover, the willingness and demonstrated capability of the users to maintain and clean the site not only made the project acceptable to the city, but also keeps Parisite from suffering from the vagaries of the city budgeting process. By connecting to the Small Center at Tulane University, this DIY model was able to gain the benefit of significant professional expertise and construction (design/build), as well as help negotiating with public agencies and navigating the permitting process. Tulane's design/build students, in return, were able to work with this group and the community and gain the valuable educational experience of turning those interactions into a park design and participating in the implementation of the entry and stormwater garden.

DIY Design

With little reason to believe that the funding and effort required to create a

skatepark was imminent from the city of New Orleans, young skaters took matters into their own hands. The process, although at first ad hoc and not deeply planned, was effective in creating skateable spaces and recruiting willing participants. When confronted with the possibility that the city might want to tear down the beginnings of the second park under the interstate, skaters noted the irony that the first dollars ever spent by the city on skateboarding would have been for demolition of a useful park.

The Transitional Spaces team was effective in creating two skateparks using a simple and efficient iterative process of brainstorm, design, build, test, and redesign or move on. A democratic model of decision-making led to widespread feelings of ownership of the space, which enabled the self-maintenance approach to work and bolstered confidence that the park, the organization, and the process could survive changes in leadership over time. Several participants built upon this experience by enrolling in professional graduate training programs.

The design offers a model for stormwater management for a city that needs it. The work with the Small Center and Tulane University architecture studio led to the construction of a system for dealing with elevated highway runoff that could become a model for use in other areas of the city.

Bootstrapped Financing

Parisite's financing is unusual in that it depended largely on donated labor and services. In its earliest stages, the project was built by volunteers who planned and designed the skating elements and then built them, often using found materials. Later, as the project evolved and became a more established place supported by the Small Center and recognized by the city, the volunteer labor was supplemented with donated material and services as well as paid contractors, supported with funds from foundations and Kickstarter campaigns.

Gaining Legitimacy

By connecting to a respected local university, Transitional Spaces was able to borrow credibility and gain the ear of city officials. This extended to the development and implementation of a long-term master plan for the park.

Jose Corto



The collaborative, DIY process yielded the City of New Orleans' first public skatepark.

Albert and Tina Small Center for Collaborative Design



Tulane students gained valuable experience engaging with skaters and the community.



Albert and Tina Small Center for Collaborative Design

The design/build process gave students firsthand construction experience.

IMPACT

On New Orleans Recreational Facilities

Because of the DIY effort to create Parisite, New Orleans now has a free and public skatepark that is open to any and all skateboarders. The existence of this skatepark is, in itself, evidence of need, since it was born out of user demand and by user efforts. Other skateparks are needed in New Orleans, and officials have noted many similar unused spaces around the city that could be candidates for development.

By building this park on their own, the skaters created an unorthodox model for development that relied on citizen energy and bypassed traditional planning approaches to service specific needs in a place that was resource poor and overwhelmed with issues of recovery from a major natural disaster. City officials noted that Parisite is viewed as model within New Orleans—both specifically for skateparks and more generally as way of taking unused and undesirable spaces, such as those under elevated highways, and turning them into useful neighborhood places. They cited another under-highway



Jose Corto

The park illustrates how unused spaces beneath highways can be transformed into neighborhood amenities.

site—beneath Interstate 10—that is being programmed in a way inspired by Parisite. This site, the Claiborne Corridor Cultural Innovation District, is planned to include an open market under the highway and was supported by a 2017 New Orleans City Council ordinance that allows the city to lease land for such purposes.

Importantly, Parisite is more than a skatepark and was intentionally designed to be used by non-skaters as well. Some use the site to display and sell photographs, homemade clothing lines, and other items, again in an ad hoc fashion that is not organized or controlled by Transitional Spaces. It has become a home base for artists and crafts people and other local “creators of culture.” It is also a site where users reflect the diversity of the city and is a place for people from different neighborhoods to meet.

On the Skaters

The process of creating the skatepark helped change the lives of some of its founders. In several cases, early members of the group, inspired by their experiences at Parisite, went on to earn professional degrees and start careers related to their work on the site, such as in architecture and early childhood education.

By being able to maintain an orderly, neighborhood-friendly, clean, and well-maintained site, the project also helped change stereotypes, particularly the image held by many adults, including city officials, about the nature of young skateboarders as scofflaws and vandals.

Some have gone as far as to say that Parisite has played an important role in saving the lives of some of these young skaters. Visual Anthropologist Aubrey Edwards conducted an ethnographic study of the users of Parisite Skatepark, interviewing over 100 young people. She concluded that “Parisite was a space that allowed them to create new narratives for their lives ... outside of the culture of crime and violence so many of them were already accustomed to.” Many told her that spending time at Parisite gave them an alternative to the culture of illegal activity, including doing and selling drugs. Mayor Landrieu said that, if anything, it was an understatement. The likelihood that poor Black youth would get involved in criminal activity and have a difficult encounter with police had been fairly high here, and



Parisite Skatepark has helped to change perceptions about young skateboarders.



The park is intentionally designed to be used by both skaters and non-skaters.

providing an opportunity for these kids to connect to a positive after-school activity—in this case skateboarding and involvement with the site—has proven to be an important alternative to hanging out on the streets.

As a National Model

Organizations that promote skateparks, such as the Tony Hawk Foundation, use Parise as an example for the national audience. While there are other examples of DIY skateparks around the world, the foundation sees Parise as a particularly good example for its creativity and design and for its achieved status as a city park. Parise shows what can be done from the “bottom up,” creating a well-used space with little capital and virtually no maintenance budget.

Transitional Spaces has not, as originally hoped, been able to follow up the Parise space with development of skateparks in other sites. The organization’s capacity seems fully engaged in completing Parise.

OBSERVATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Challenging assumptions and “changing the narrative”

Parise was developed by a group of people who saw a specific need in the community, not just for a skatepark but for a place where at-risk youth could channel their energy and get off of the streets, and they wanted immediate action. There was little faith that waiting for the New Orleans city government to act would pay off, since the city’s governing body was overwhelmed with recovery efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Instead, individuals interested in effecting change found a promising space and acted, building themselves a skatepark. In doing so, they violated city codes and statutes, hoping they stayed out of sight of officials. As a result of the guerrilla nature of the construction, their first skatepark was demolished and the second threatened with a similar fate. With perseverance and by bringing in critical expertise and support through the Small Center, however, Parise was accepted, completed, and even embraced by the City of New Orleans.

Using and transforming obsolete and underutilized infrastructure to serve the demand for outdoor amenities

The skaters who built Parise had no choice but to find and use out-of-the-

way, out-of-sight, and unwanted spaces in which to build; they would have been quickly evicted from any more desirable and developable site. In the process of building the skatepark, however, they showed how this kind of undesirable urban void could be transformed into critical urban recreational infrastructure. Transforming such spaces became a key part of the mission of Transitional Spaces.

Equity, diversity, and inclusion

Equity, diversity, and inclusion were inherent in the formation of Parise Skatepark. It was begun and built by and for people of diverse genders and races, deliberately including those who are not usually considered mainstream in the skateboarding community through formal activities such as the monthly girls skate night and an informal inclusive atmosphere in what is often a male-dominated sport.

Bootstrapping and challenging the rules

The people who began to build a skatepark came with little or no financial resources or political power. They leaned heavily on the energy and optimism of their young group of supporters. Using and leveraging scraps of found material, they built places they wanted to use and enjoy. The skaters, and eventually the city, came to them. This was, by most ways of accounting, a hugely risky endeavor, in that the property owners could have (and in one case did) legally evict them and demolish the development. Even so, the level of risk was acceptable for these skaters who in many ways had little to lose and did not see waiting for the city to act as a viable option.

Changing perceptions about people and places

Many of the people involved in building and using Parise are at-risk youth, including young Black residents who, on their own and even more so on their skateboards, are often seen by city officials as anti-establishment and potential criminals and vandalizers of public space. At least some of these perceptions appear to have changed for officials who watched the skaters channel their energies into building, responsibly using, and maintaining Parise Skatepark.

Responding to social needs when the city government can’t or won’t

New Orleans was not a wealthy city before Hurricane Katrina, and afterwards



Many of the people involved in building and using the park are young Black residents.



The park is a powerful example of a grassroots approach to reclaiming urban spaces.

it was overwhelmed with soaring demands for services and infrastructure repair and replacement while funds were shrinking. Parasite is an example of residents responding creatively to their own needs and demonstrating that important innovation often occurs outside the bounds of formal programs. It is to New Orleans' credit that the government recognized the value of what these DIY builders had created and accepted and embraced the park.

MEETING PROJECT GOALS

Parasite met and in some ways significantly exceeded the initial goals of its founders in becoming a heavily used skatepark that gained official status as a city park with a diverse mixture of thoughtful and carefully constructed skating elements. While it is still unclear how much this place will be used as a model for other sites in the city and elsewhere, it provides a useful example of a grass-roots approach to recovering and reviving abandoned, unwanted, and deteriorated urban spaces.

GOAL: Create a free and open skating and recreational space for New Orleans youth that meets the desires of local skateboarders through a DIY process.

Parasite is very successful in providing a site for skateboarding youth, both local and from all over the city (and sometimes from quite a distance away). It is kept very clean by volunteers who come on regularly scheduled cleanup days. Parasite also succeeds in going beyond being a skatepark; it is used by people in the neighborhood as a park and public gathering place for barbeques and other events.

Goal: Turn an unused, neglected piece of public land into a welcoming, inviting place for skaters and non-skaters alike, using a variety of activities to attract nontraditional skaters and residents of nearby neighborhoods divided by the highway.

Parasite's design does a good job of activating a previously unused and unsafe space, though it is unclear how much it connects people from neighborhoods separated by the highway. Parasite seems successful in attracting a variety of people, including non-traditional skateboarders, through events such as the monthly girls skate night.

Jose Corio



The effort succeeded in creating a heavily used new park in a under-resourced community.

Michael Wong



The project created a valuable resource for skaters and the broader community.

GOAL: *Develop a model for water capture, filtering, and retention systems in underpasses where high levels of polluted stormwater flow are disruptive and destructive.*

The systems for water capture, filtering, and retention appear to be effective, reportedly working well in storms dumping up to one or two inches of rain in a brief period of time.

SELECTION COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

The Selection Committee found Parisite Skatepark—a small, grassroots, do-it-yourself effort that succeeded in creating a new city park that is heavily used by Black youth in a disenfranchised neighborhood—a particularly interesting story. The scrappy, “un-sanitized” collaborative effort illustrates how a small but passionate group of volunteers with no funds or infrastructure can overcome enormous obstacles to make their vision a reality. The committee was particularly compelled by the idea, as suggested by a Facebook post, that the park, built by and for at-risk youth, is saving lives.

Although the project was initiated by and for skateboarders and creates a valuable resource and community for those who use it to skate, the park was designed with the broader community in mind. It offers a variety of spaces that can be used for different purposes as well as places for people to sit and watch the people and activities there. The incorporation of the rain garden offers a small-scale, adaptable model for addressing stormwater management, particularly for cities on the front lines of climate change like New Orleans. The committee observed that the project sends an important message about what can be done, especially to people and organizations responsible for urban infrastructure like state highway systems.

The committee was impressed with the overall effort and degree to which collaboration made the project possible. They praised the project leaders for persevering for 18 months and agreed that the project provides a good illustration of how a small, tenacious group can overcome significant hurdles, including negotiating with a hesitant city government. The committee commended the Tulane University Small Center and its critical role in facilitating the design, development, and building processes that enabled the

“The scrappy, ‘unsanitized’ collaborative effort illustrates how a small but passionate group of volunteers with no funds or infrastructure can overcome enormous obstacles.”

realization of the project. The center and its staff provided essential support in helping the team engage the surrounding community, obtain necessary approvals, address liability and ongoing maintenance, and communicate and coordinate with government entities.

The Selection Committee acknowledged that the project got a lot of outside help along the way and wondered if that left the community empowered to do the work without outside help. The involvement of Tulane University prompted a broader discussion about the role and value of university outreach centers in communities. Although they observed that the project had an air of academia about it, the process yielded a tangible result. The committee lauded the Small Center’s role as “academic translators” and its ability to act as a facilitator and agitator to address community needs. Such work provides opportunities to lift up community visions while challenging and expanding the traditional perception of what constitutes “architecture.”

The committee suggested that Parosite Skatepark offers valuable lessons about the benefits of collaboration, noting how it can help government meet its responsibility to serve and help communities access resources to resolve issues. They agreed that while the project highlights the shortcomings of government’s ability to help people who need it most, it also offers hope by providing an example of how people and government can work together to overcome hurdles and create change.

RELATED RBA WINNERS

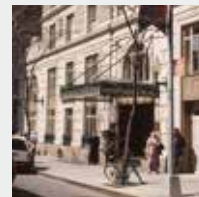
While there are many parks and recreational spaces among RBA winners, Parosite Skatepark is unusual in its focus on skateboarding and its creation of a city park constructed and maintained without municipal funding. Although unique in some respects, it shares similarities with other winners that reclaimed and improved overlooked places through scrappy, do-it-yourself initiatives and volunteer labor.



STOWE RECREATIONAL PATH in Stowe, Vermont (1989 Silver Medalist) is a five-mile greenway including a paved trail for biking, walking, and cross-country skiing created through community grit and determination. Seeking a safe recreational alternative to busy roads, a local resident led a grassroots, volunteer effort to secure donations of land and funding for the project’s implementation.



CONGO STREET INITIATIVE in Dallas, Texas (2013 Silver Medalist) engaged low-income homeowners along a forgotten city block in the reconstruction of five houses and the street. Completed in collaboration with a local community design center with significant volunteer labor, the project incorporates energy-efficient construction, a sixth house that provided temporary housing, and Dallas’ first “green street.”



TENANT INTERIM LEASE PROGRAM in New York, New York (1989 Gold Medalist) empowers renters to become owners by engaging them in the repair and maintenance of their homes. Managed by the city’s Department of Housing Preservation and Development, the initiative provides training and technical assistance to residents to gain ownership and control of otherwise ignored and abandoned buildings.

Other RBA winners that were initiated through grassroots and volunteer efforts include the Heidelberg Project in Detroit, Michigan (2005 Silver Medalist); Hunts Point Riverside Park in Bronx, New York (2009 Silver Medalist); and Quixote Village in Olympia, Washington (2015 Silver Medalist).

More information about these and other RBA winners can be found at www.rudybruneraward.org.

Resources

This report was compiled from information gathered from the project application; an extensive site visit by Anne-Marie Lubenau, Robert Shibley, and Richard Wener (lead author) in March 2019; and research and interviews conducted during those processes and throughout the writing of this report. Titles and positions of interviewees and URLs listed below were effective as of the site visit unless otherwise noted.

INTERVIEWS

City of New Orleans

- **Jared Brossett**, City Councilman, District D
- **Haley Delery**, former Project Manager, Capital Projects Administration
- **Mitch Landrieu**, former Mayor
- **Annie LaRock**, former Director, NORD Foundation
- **Vincent Smith**, Director of Capital Projects Administration
- **Emily Wolff**, Director, Office of Youth and Family Development

Community

- **John Coyle**, Project Manager, Youth Rebuilding New Orleans
- **Flozell Daniels**, CEO and President, Foundation for Louisiana
- **Aubrey Edwards**, Author, Visual Anthropologist, and Writer
- **Chris Morvant**, District Administrator, Louisiana Department of Transportation
- **Chris Prochaska**, Sergeant, New Orleans Police Department
- **Jeff Schwartz**, Executive Director, Broad Community Connections
- **Alphonse Smith**, Deputy Director, Arts Council of New Orleans
- **Jonathan Tate**, Principal, OJT

Consultants

- **Gaylan Williams**, Senior Associate, Dana Brown Associates

Transitional Spaces

- **Jackson Blalock**
- **Ally Bruser**

- **Skyler Fein**
- **Heidi Tullman**
- **Julian Wellisz**
- **Various unnamed skaters**

Tulane University

- **Matt DeCotiis**, Adjunct Lecturer, School of Architecture
- **Doug Harmon**, Adjunct Associate Professor, School of Architecture
- **Ali Rex**, graduate, School of Architecture (worked on project as a student)
- **Emilie Taylor Welty**, Design/Build Manager, Albert and Tina Small Center for Collaborative Design
- **Ann Yoachim**, Director, Albert and Tina Small Center for Collaborative Design

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Sulphur Springs Downtown

Sulphur Springs, Texas

Revival of a rural, small-town civic plaza,
adjacent streets, and Main Street



Overview

Submitted by: Ian Lockwood, PE

Completed: 2013

Total Development Cost: \$6.9 million

Like many small cities deep in rural America, Sulphur Springs (population 16,000) saw its downtown decline and development shift to be near high-way interchanges following the construction of a bypass interstate in the 1970s and the conversion of its downtown streets to one-way traffic along the old state highway. Compounding these challenges, the city's historic plaza, framed by the picturesque 1895 Romanesque Revival Hopkins County Courthouse, was a featureless surface parking lot. By 2006, the downtown center was 80% vacant with the majority of the building stock boarded up.

In 2007, seeking professional expertise to revive its public realm and improve social and economic exchange and development, the city engaged Livable Transportation Engineer Ian Lockwood, now with Toole Design Group, to develop a revitalization strategy. Over two years, Lockwood and his colleagues led the community through a series of interactive meetings, public presentations, and design charrettes. The process yielded a 100-year plan focused on a reconstructed public plaza and enhancement of the downtown's central streets as key to the city's renaissance.

“Sulphur Springs Downtown illustrates the success of traffic calming, urban design, and traditional planning in revitalizing small downtowns.”

— 2019 Selection Committee

Completed in 2013, the core of Sulphur Springs Downtown includes a new, landscaped plaza featuring the Hopkins County Veterans Memorial, a splash fountain, and two unique public restrooms with mirrored, one-way glass walls. Brick paving, on-street parking, and bump-outs slow traffic on the surrounding streets, which were restored to two-way operation. Designed with flexibility and pedestrian accessibility in mind, the curbless, flush streets can be closed to motorists to expand the plaza for special events. Broad sidewalks with trees and furnishings entice pedestrians to linger at shops in renovated buildings and sidewalk cafes that evoke small-town charm. The majority of the \$6.9 million reconstruction of the city’s four-acre plaza, adjacent streets, and Main Street was funded with tax increment reinvestment zone financing.

Now referred to as “The Celebration City,” Sulphur Springs hosts around 150 events and festivals a year. The once-deserted downtown is bustling with new residents and businesses, attracting visitors from the surrounding area and across the world and inspiring other rural towns and cities in Texas to consider similar interventions. It now boasts an occupancy rate over 80% with much of the remaining vacancies in different stages of development.

“The impact has been profound,” observed City Manager Marc Maxwell. “No longer do the locals refer to Sulphur Springs as ‘Suffering Springs.’

The citizens are elated and proud of their city now. It is incredible what the project has done for our collective self-image.”



The city’s streets and public plaza were redesigned with pedestrians in mind.



Project at a Glance

- The transformation of a four-acre area around the historic courthouse from a surface parking lot into a robust, landscaped public plaza with a new veterans memorial, splash fountain, and unique public restrooms with mirrored glass walls.
- The reconstruction of the plaza and four adjacent streets using state-of-the-art livable street design and traffic-calming measures to create a barrier-free, pedestrian-friendly environment.
- The restoration of two-way traffic on the state road running through downtown and bracketing the plaza.
- Integration of in-ground utilities and programming to support around 150 events a year.
- A \$6.9 million tax-increment-financed project that turned a once 80% vacant and boarded up downtown into a vibrant, 80% occupied destination with entertainment, restaurant, and retail venues.
- A model for the redevelopment of small towns struggling with the dynamics of disinvestment and competition related to big-box development and highway bypasses.

Project Goals

- Maximize social and economic engagement in downtown.
- Develop a 100-year vision through a planning process that engages local residents and businesses.
- Identify the community values to be reflected in the 100-year plan.
- Focus on improving the public realm to foster social and economic exchange and development.

Chronology

1839

General Kelsey H. Douglass, in service of the Republic of Texas, defeats the Cherokees inhabiting the area around the natural sulphur springs of northeast Texas.

1846

Hopkins County is created by the first Texas state legislature.

1895

The Hopkins County courthouse is rebuilt in "fireproof" Texas red limestone after the original one burns to the ground in 1894.

1957

Interstate 30 (I-30) from Dallas to Texarkana is completed, connecting Sulphur Springs to two metro areas.

1995

Marc Maxwell is appointed city manager in October.

1800

1900

1840

White settlers begin moving to the area, attracted by its 100 springs.

1870

The Texas state legislature establishes Bright Star as the county seat; the community is renamed Sulphur Springs in 1871 to capitalize on tourism related to the springs.

1937

The Carnation Milk Company establishes a new processing plant in the region, capitalizing on over 600 dairy farms in Hopkins County.

1984

The first Walmart is built at a new Sulphur Springs I-30 interchange and replaced by a Super Walmart in 1993.

2005

New Mayor Chris Brown tasks Maxwell with figuring out how to revitalize downtown. Maxwell responds with a four-page memo, and the city begins gathering input and support for a downtown redevelopment plan.

2007

After the city council rejects those proposals and directs Maxwell to “bring in an expert,” the city engages a design team led by Ian Lockwood, a livable transportation engineer.

2009

Downtown Revitalization Project and Financing Plan is approved.

Reconstruction of Connally Street is completed.

2013

Celebration Plaza is completed.

2000

2006

Maxwell and his team develop a set of initial proposals moving forward on the core principles of his 2005 memo.

2008

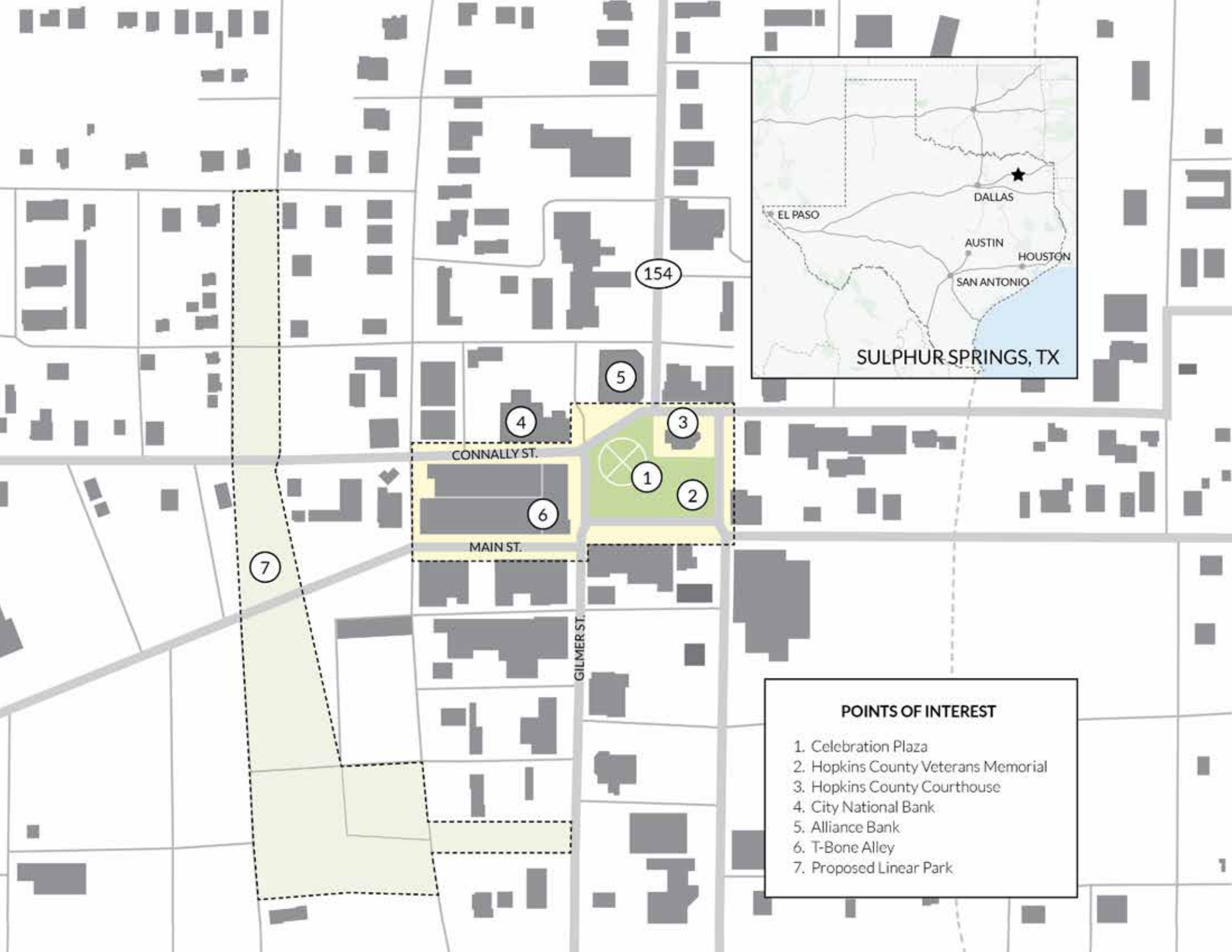
May 19: The first phase, reconstruction of Main Street, begins, funded by the city.

October 20: Tax increment redevelopment zone (TIRZ) is approved, providing additional financing for the project.

The Great Recession slows expected TIRZ performance.

2012

The city votes to allow alcohol sales in restaurants and bars downtown.



POINTS OF INTEREST

- 1. Celebration Plaza
- 2. Hopkins County Veterans Memorial
- 3. Hopkins County Courthouse
- 4. City National Bank
- 5. Alliance Bank
- 6. T-Bone Alley
- 7. Proposed Linear Park

Project Description

INTRODUCTION

Replacing a surface parking lot with an attractive and well-programmed courthouse plaza and redesigning its main and adjacent streets prepared the way for downtown Sulphur Springs, Texas (population 16,000) to change from 80% vacant and shuttered to 80% occupied and vibrant, with the remaining 20% of space in different stages of development.

Sulphur Springs' once-active downtown began its decline in the 1970s as the new Interstate 30 (I-30) bypassed the city, attracting big-box retailers to the highway interchanges and putting the locally owned shops and services out of business. The city used a deceptively simple approach to revitalization and making downtown a desirable place, including traffic calming, two-way streets, a new civic plaza, a veterans memorial, festival programming, public restrooms, pedestrian-friendly streetscaping, and attractive lighting. The project was financed largely through tax increment financing involving three taxing jurisdictions within the downtown area: Hopkins County, the City of Sulphur Springs, and the Hopkins County Memorial Hospital District.

The process was an example of the reflective practice of City Manager Marc Maxwell, elected officials at both the county and city levels, an

entrepreneurial business community, and the Hopkins County Veterans Memorial Committee. All of these participants, but especially Maxwell, were open to taking a chance on promoting walkable streets, public amenities, effective parking management, and inclusive public processes. Their process translated community values into a redesign of the downtown public realm, enabled the reversal of fortunes for the city, and offers a model for fellow Northeastern Texas small towns and other small municipalities in the rural United States.

CONTEXT

Sulphur Springs

The unique story of Sulphur Springs starts with the estimated 100 springs that contributed to the naming of the city and, of course, water and good soil for farming. In the early 1840s, pioneers camped in Northeast Texas at a place that came to be called Bright Star. They were attracted, in part, by the springs in the area where indigenous populations enjoyed the healing effects of the water. They were also attracted by the fact that General Kelsey H. Douglass, in service of the Republic of Texas, defeated the Cherokees in 1839. This encouraged additional White settlers to make the former Cherokee territory their home.

Hopkins County was re-mapped in 1870, reducing its size to its current 789 square miles and placing Bright Star in the center of the county. The new Texas constitution required counties to be as close to a square as possible and the county seat within three miles of the center of the county. This was meant to enable people to get to the county seat, vote, and return home in two days, assuming the ability to travel about 30 miles per day by horseback or carriage. This is how Bright Star became the Hopkins County seat and the reason Texas has 254 counties, most of them square and under 800 square miles. Ultimately, this approach to siting county seats led to the grid street layout of Sulphur Springs and the four-square-block configuration of most "courthouse squares" in Texas.

The city took the name Sulphur Springs in 1871 in an effort to market the local "healing waters" in what may well have been the first of several efforts to become a tourist destination. Only one year later, the railroad came

Mike Laeding



The 1895 Hopkins County Courthouse (top) remains a prominent feature of the plaza, which was once used for horses and carriages as well as large gatherings.

to Mineola (south of Sulphur Springs), enabling tourists to come by stage-coach and on horseback in what the Sulphur Springs City Historical Society described as “great numbers” to enjoy the mineral springs and sulphur baths. Those same springs and good soil underpinned the emergence of wheat and corn crops and positioned the county as early as the 1860s as a leader in agriculture. All this prompted the railroad expansion linking Sulphur Springs to new markets for its farm goods in all directions of the compass rose.

According to the City Historical Society, in the early 1880s, with a population of only 2,500 people, Sulphur Springs had a new courthouse just east of the public plaza, five churches, several schools, flour and saw mills, furniture and wagon factories, foundries and machine shops, tanneries, three hotels, an opera house, two banks, and two newspapers. A devastating fire burned its

original courthouse in 1894, and within one year the city built a new red Texas granite “fireproof” courthouse, still in use today.

The city continued to grow slowly through 1937 when the Carnation Milk Company built a new processing plant there, helping to establish the conditions for an industry-wide expansion of milk production in the county. Hopkins County was soon to be home to 600 dairy producers, making it the dairy capital of Texas.

The oil economy of the 1940s and 1950s created boomtown dynamics throughout Texas until the volatility of big oil made nearby towns like Big Spring, Paris, and Greenville approach ghost town status. Sulphur Springs, however, with its proximity to the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan region (known as the Metroplex) and Texarkana and its lower cost of living, continued

to attract residents and visitors, even in economic downturns. It was also somewhat less dependent on the oil economy while remaining very involved in the cotton and then dairy economies. While the number of dairy farms in Hopkins County has since consolidated to about 65 producers, they still produce a lot of milk—an estimated 54.6 million pounds in 2019—making the county number two in dairy production in Texas and a logical home to the Texas Dairy Museum.

Other large employers were attracted to Sulphur Springs between 1990 and 2005, including Pinnacle, Ocean Spray, Grocery Supply, Walmart, Saputo Foods, Jeld-Wen, Clayton Home Manufacturing, and Flowserve. It was people driving in large numbers from Sulphur Springs to the eastern Dallas suburbs of Mesquite or Rockwell for clothing and other retail purchases as well as entertainment that attracted Walmart. Lowes reported that 30% of the shoppers at its Rockwell store were from Sulphur Springs, prompting the company to establish a Sulphur Springs location in 2004.

The independent school district is the largest public employer in Sulphur Springs, followed by Hopkins County Hospital and county and city government. As recently as 2012, the city had less than 4.5% unemployment and has enjoyed a very modest average annual growth of 0.05% since the 2010 census. By 2017, there were an estimated 16,029 citizens, up from the 15,464 reported by the 2010 census and representing about half of the Hopkins County population.

The 2010 census showed the city as mostly White (80.8%) with 13.5% Latinx, 14.5% Black or African American, and less than 1% in all other categories.¹ Demographic trends over the current decade show a loss of about 3% of the White population and 1.5% of the Black population. These losses are accounted for by an increase of over 4% Latinx. The median income for a family in 2010 was \$36,802, with about 12.6% of families below the poverty

¹ Unless otherwise noted, references to race, ethnicity, and nationality throughout this case study reflect the terminology used by the source. In instances where there is no direct source, we have attempted to use the most inclusive, accurate, and appropriate language possible.



Interstate 30 and other roads were constructed to bypass downtown.

line. From 1890 to 2017, Sulphur Springs only posted one decade of negative annual growth (-0.26 from 1920-1930), with its highest annual rate of 2.92% growth between 1940-1950.

Transportation Infrastructure

Transportation infrastructure has played a big role in the rise, fall, and rise again of downtown Sulphur Springs. Access to the railroad to the north, east, south, and west of the city in the 1870s is part of the city's origin story. In 1872, stagecoach connections between Sulphur Springs and the Texas and Pacific Railway at Mineola improved access to Sulphur Springs to and from the south. By 1876, the East Line and Red River Railroad provided connections to Jefferson to the southeast and Greenville due west. Just a year later, the St. Louis, Arkansas, and Texas Railway connected Hopkins County to Sherman, Texas, just north of the area surrounding the Metroplex.

But it was the construction of the interstate highway system and I-30 that further propelled Sulphur Springs' growth in the 1950s and 1960s by making

Mike Laeding



By 2005, the historic plaza was paved in brick and used as a parking lot.

it easier to get to and from the Metroplex to the west and Texarkana to the east. As new interchanges were added to the interstate in Sulphur Springs in the late 1970s, big-box retail and commercial services located nearby, drawing commerce, restaurant, and entertainment business away from downtown. City leaders and long-time residents report that downtown was alive and well during the 1970s and early 1980s but began to lose its retail share of the market in a steady decline. These new interstate retailers and services include—in addition to Walmart and Lowes—a Dollar General and Walgreens, along with several hotels and a theater complex. Profits left town instead of being reinvested in town by local businesses, adding to the decline.

In the 1970s, while I-30 was being constructed, the Texas Department of Transportation converted its north-south truck route, State Highway 154, into a pair of one-way roads running through the city, exacerbating speeding and further contributing to downtown's decline.

As businesses relocated near the interstate and downtown Sulphur Springs lost its retail base, neighboring housing began to deteriorate. Downtown bottomed out in 2006 when it was over 80% vacant and the plaza was host only to municipal buildings, two banks, and the Plain and Fancy Sandwich Shoppe. The banks were considering leaving downtown, too. The decline of

downtown Sulphur Springs, contrary to the rust-belt environments of the Northeast, was not driven by the dynamics of population loss or volatile boom-bust economies. Rather, the decline occurred during a period of very modest economic and population growth.

Historically, the plaza itself was about four square blocks with the courthouse taking up the northwest quadrant. The rest of the plaza was a place to tether horses, park carriages, and hold large gatherings. As automobiles became the norm, dirt gave way to brick pavers in 1915. By 2005, the majority of the plaza had become a parking lot that served both the courthouse and surrounding businesses except for the rare occasions when cars were excluded to allow for farmers markets, flea markets, and other events. It included local veterans memorials, including a plaque and magnolia tree placed in 1928 to commemorate Civil War veterans and a Korean War sculpture by Larry Ludke, a veteran of that war, that was dedicated in 1999 at the periphery of the parking lot.

PROJECT HISTORY AND PARTNERS

The history of Sulphur Springs' downtown revitalization is best framed by the partners that made the plans a reality. While there were many, they all cohere around the city government, especially the city manager and his staff and their collaboration with Hopkins County and the Texas Department of Transportation. It is also framed by the important roles played by the local banks for investing in the proposed financial planning early on in the process and by the Veterans Memorial Committee in its stewardship and advocacy for making the memorial an integral part of the plaza development. Finally, this is a story of a consultant and his team who established a long-term and trusting relationship with the city, Hopkins County, the Veterans Memorial Committee, Sulphur Spring citizens, and the local business community.

The Banks

City National Bank made its place on the plaza in 1889, just four years after the new courthouse was completed. The bank was considering a move out of downtown to the growth areas to the south of the city in 2005, but after reviewing the possibility of tax increment reinvestment zone financing and the city's plans for downtown, its leaders chose to invest \$2.2 million in expansion starting in 2008 and finishing in 2009. City National Bank also



Downtown emptied as businesses relocated to areas along the interstate.



The Plain & Fancy Sandwich Shoppe was among the few remaining businesses.

offered to match the city's investments in street lighting used in the plaza and landscape improvements.

City National Bank's neighbor Alliance Bank had a shorter tenure on the plaza, going back over 55 years, but it was also impressed with planning for the plaza and chose to stay and make new investments in its facilities. Both of these institutions were also part of the Hopkins County Veterans Memorial planning team. As early investors in the revitalization effort downtown, the banks gave those who followed more confidence in their investments.

The City Manager and City Staff

Marc Maxwell reports that it was within weeks of his inauguration in 2005 that Mayor Chris Brown charged him to "begin thinking about how to revitalize our downtown and historic areas." By January 17, 2005, Maxwell had submitted a three-and-a-half-page memorandum in response to this charge, outlining the strengths of previous gains in planning for the city and encouraging a continued focus on land use and investment in street, sewer, and potable water infrastructure.

All of these topics were in the plan developed by the city in 2002, which Maxwell described as a road map for recovery. In his view, it had met their needs even as "just a skeleton of a plan" that needed "to be fleshed out." The city had been making steady but slow progress on the plan, but it was not focused on downtown. His memo called for a "Community Development Plan" focused on downtown as an addition to the 2002 plan. He went on to charge the Planning and Zoning Commission, which had experience with the planning already in place, to create and help implement the addition.

He also memorably proposed the following framework for planning:

When it comes to downtown redevelopment, the current thinking is that you need a lot of yogurt. That's right, yogurt! For any downtown area to thrive, it needs to be a live culture. That is, it needs all of the elements that are found in any living culture: areas to live, work, play, and shop. For that reason, downtown redevelopment projects which incorporate all of these elements are sometimes referred to as "yogurt clusters."

Maxwell went on to explain that in order for a plan to be successful, it had to address what he described as a live-work-shop-play formula. He cited the city's previous two Main Street program failures as an example of problems defined in a narrow way and argued for the need to broaden "the scope of our efforts beyond shopping to include residential, entertainment, and business/commercial elements." He was clear that no single project would be "the answer" to downtown redevelopment and argued for "many, many tools in the tool bag." And he argued for a downtown redevelopment plan that would determine when and how to use such tools:

A Downtown Redevelopment Plan should identify the tangible improvements to be made and the intangible policies which are necessary for that to occur. It should set a goal, a vision of what we are trying to accomplish. It should answer the question: What do we want our downtown to look like and feel like when we are done? It should identify the obstacles to our success and the means by which to overcome those obstacles.

Maxwell's memo further asserted the following:

- "[T]he plan should set benchmarks to measure progress and ... establish concrete objectives."
- The mayor should avoid disjointed single-project answers, stressing the relationship among such obvious needs—such as parking, sidewalks, low-interest financing, historic preservation, demolition, and more—where each consideration is part of a redevelopment tool bag to be employed systematically.
- "Balance" was critical, specifically the relationship between preservation and demolition. Here, he was introducing a process designed to avoid the kind of intense controversy that could stop the project.
- The urban culture would depend on a mix of live, work, play, shop, and worship, returning to the "yogurt" metaphor and acknowledging the three churches in the downtown, the importance of those institutions in community life, and the value of bringing them into the process as partners.
- "[I]ncentives, regulation for quality, and the consideration of allowing alcohol in a dry county would be required."



City Manager Marc Maxwell (left) engaged Livable Transportation Engineer Ian Lockwood (right).

Maxwell thought his memo would be greeted with maybe a “thank you” and was surprised when he got a clear direction from the mayor to get started. In his words, “I had hoped to scare him off the idea, but no, he just said, let’s do it!”

Maxwell began serving as Sulphur Springs City Manager in 1995 and had seen many mayors and especially council members come, go, and come again. He knew the dynamics of what is often referred to as “weak mayor” forms of municipal governance, where power was vested in the city council and city manager. Mayors are elected for one-year terms and council members for three-year terms in Sulphur Springs, and they are an all-volunteer force.

The city manager, however, is a full-time, paid staff member, and Maxwell had an impressive track record. He had already overseen the rebuilding of the airport; construction of a new sports facility at Coleman Park, a new library, and the recreational Crosstown Trail (now under construction); and upgrades at the 1914 City Hall (originally built as a post office), to name a

few achievements. He had earned trust in his leadership and accomplished a lot with relatively few professional staff members who often wore many different hats.

The two years that followed Maxwell’s memo in January 2005 were characterized by him as “Directionless. We didn’t know what we were doing ... we did not know what we didn’t know.” But Texas farm culture is rooted in self-reliance, and there is a strong do-it-yourself attitude that meant the team initially resisted expert help on the planning. The process of rethinking the plaza, parking, streetscape, and circulation options related to one-way and two-way streets were fully agreed to by the staff, boards, commissions, and Sulphur Springs citizens, and it led to the development of three alternatives. Those alternatives were vetted by the city council, and in 2007, a vote was cast approving one of the options. In hindsight, Maxwell reports that if any of the three alternatives had been built, it would have been disastrous. All had flawed dimensions, including a focus on one-way streets and parking rather than pedestrians and place. All three options were more about facilitating through traffic than encouraging pedestrian-friendly short trips.

Fortunately, Councilman Clay Walker was not able to attend the meeting of the initial vote, and when he reviewed the alternatives, he suggested that none of them would work. He came with the credibility of a project manager who had some construction experience, which led him to the conclusion that the project, as designed, would not enable the necessary clearances for traffic to move. Wisely, the council and staff listened, did a full-scale test with traffic cones, and determined that Walker was correct. This led the council to reverse its vote on January 17, 2007, and subsequently direct Maxwell to bring in expert assistance.

Consultant Team

Maxwell spent the next several months doing some homework and discovering concepts like placemaking and urban design. Some web exploration took him to the Congress of New Urbanism (CNU), to some videos by urban planner and CNU founder Andres Duany, to urbanist and planner William H. Whyte, and to a livable transportation engineer

Sulphur Springs News-Telegram



Lockwood involved the community through a series of workshops.

Sulphur Springs News-Telegram



The iterative design process included meetings with small groups to discuss and test ideas.

named Ian Lockwood. Ultimately the city engaged Lockwood, then with Glatting Jackson (since acquired by AECOM) and now affiliated with Toole Design Group. The design team commissioned by the city also included Raj Mohabeer, a landscape architect and planner, and Ken Ray, a landscape architect, both now with Toole Design.

Lockwood came to town with a quiet and understated way of working that often involved tracing paper overlays of concepts that affirmed current thinking while concurrently demonstrating how much better they could be. As a livable transportation engineer, he brought the credibility of an engineer to discussions with the Texas Department of Transportation while helping the community understand that there was more to the project than addressing parking and minimizing travel times for motorists.

The team made two visits in the early days of their commission, meeting in workshop settings with community leaders, city staff, council members, and the Veterans Memorial Committee to think about what would become of the surface parking lot in the center of downtown. In the process, they all learned about fat sidewalks and skinny streets, traffic calming, unconventional approaches to parking, and how to relate street and sidewalk infrastructure to improve pedestrian activities and access to buildings. They all literally went to school with Lockwood and through publications from the CNU and the Project for Public Spaces. They listened as Lockwood outlined how “infrastructure drives outcomes.” Ultimately Lockwood led an iterative and very public process leading to a new proposal for what became Celebration Plaza and the reconstruction of Main Street, Connally Street, and the streets adjacent to the plaza. There were many controversies related to the specifics of the veterans memorial, parking, and traffic safety. Following the initial workshops, the approach was to meet in small groups, testing new ideas against the broad vision shaped by the first team visits.

During this year-long process, Maxwell constructed a “to-do” list that he labeled “Strategy for Downtown.” It involved 17 pages of lists, starting with “Physical Improvements” including everything from getting construction plans to everything those plans needed to address on Main, Connally, Oak, and Gilmer Streets and the plaza. It went on to include “Downtown

Management” items related to special and ongoing events. Then he covered something he called “Break out of the Market Box,” which was his look at the unique retail mix that his homework told him would be needed to make the project successful. The fourth item was to “Develop Zealous Nuts,” where he outlined the recruitment of city council members, staff, members of the media, and community leaders to speak at service clubs, travel to places like the Project for Public Spaces in New York City, write newspaper editorials, develop library collections relevant to the project, and approach the Hopkins County Manufacturers Association. The fifth entry was “Promotion.” Here he wrote about the need to “time the stories well,” focusing on holidays and weekends; the need to strategically use what he called “feeding frenzies;” and the need to plan stories months in advance.

What followed in the to-do list were 50 tactics, including “visible signs of progress on a paced regular basis, more parking on the periphery, resist the temptation to tear buildings down, use people for traffic calming, comfortable seating, take traffic counts, flag poles and banners,” and so on. In addition, Maxwell developed a long list of possible funding sources, including foundations, governments, the Small Business Association, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and local sources. Finally, he listed the metrics he considered important:

1. Vacancy rates
2. Assessed valuation
3. Parking vacancy
4. The proportion of women, children, and elderly
5. Presence of public displays of affection
6. The proportion of people in groups
7. Stores by types, target vs. neighborhood convenience
8. Average traffic speeds, before and after calming

Maxwell concluded with another list of 40 ideas, including an interactive fountain, “hide the dumpsters,” and streets with no curbs. It was a comprehensive approach to downtown development in 17 pages.

In spite of the number of items on Maxwell’s to-do list, this was not a long or even complex process. Lockwood described it as involving three basic iterative



Marc Maxwell

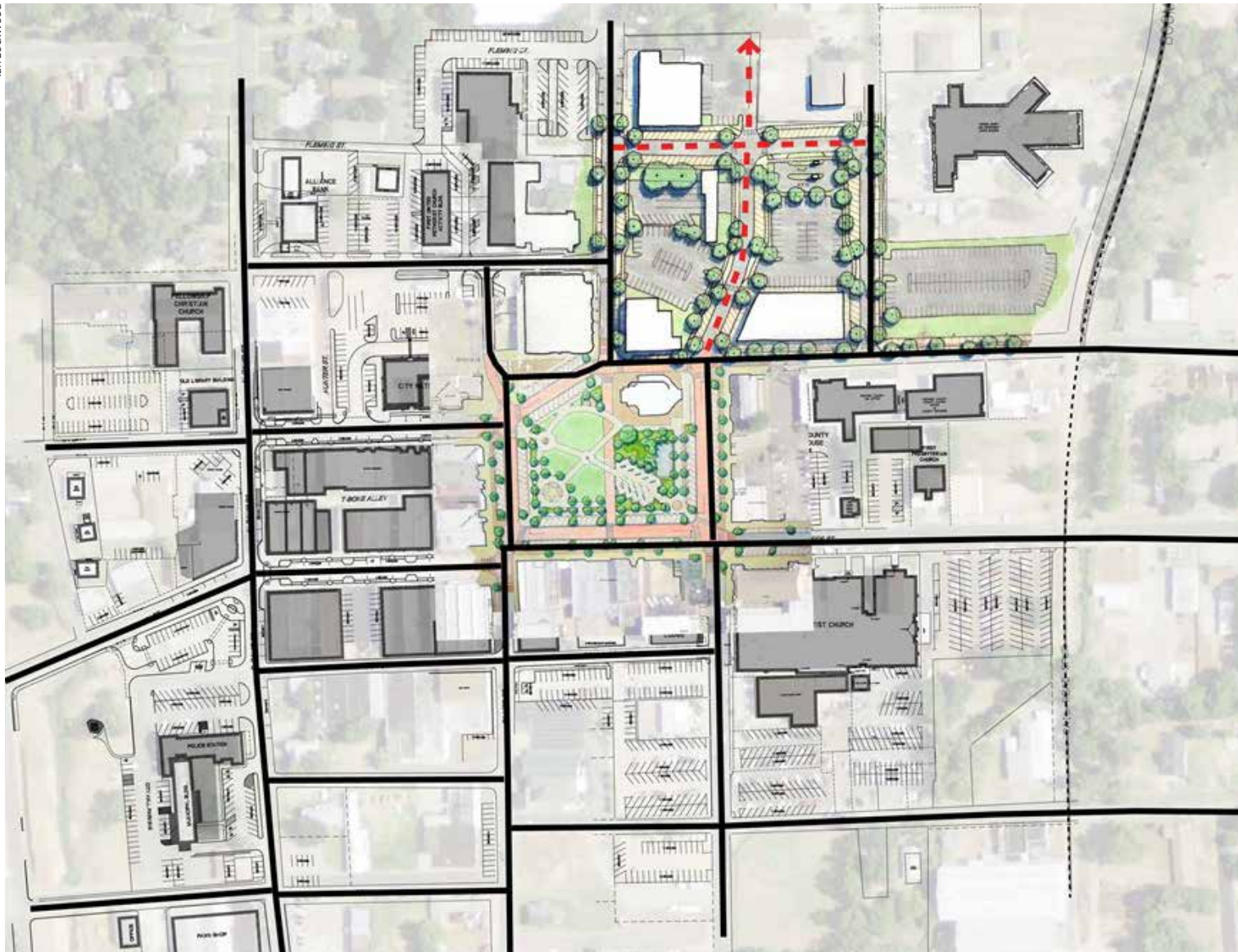
Prior to engaging Lockwood, the city spent two years rethinking the streets and plaza.



City of Sulphur Springs

Previous proposals focused on one-way streets and parking rather than pedestrians and placemaking.

Ian Lockwood



The iterative process led to development of potential scenarios for a 100-year vision for downtown.

steps: discovery, design, and decision. The discovery process initially lasted less than a week in early 2007, starting with Lockwood keynoting a large dinner with what was described as the city's "movers and shakers." Lockwood outlined the project opportunities and some basic urban design principles in the context of Sulphur Springs as well as the role of urban infrastructure in the creation of vibrant downtowns. This was followed immediately by three days of workshops and interviews with key community leaders, ending with a large community celebration. Many of the activities were held in City Hall, where maps and other contextual information were available.

Lockwood led these meetings, exploring with tracing paper and simple sketches how the principles he espoused could be applied to the plaza and streets of Sulphur Springs. In the process, those same sketches became his way of establishing "informed consent" and the physical manifestation of community values. He heard the values expressed broadly as the need to establish social exchange and economic activity downtown and then literally showed participants in real time how it might happen. Within months, the plan from Maxwell's memo was developed. Lockwood referred to it as "a 100-year plan for downtown" in an effort to get the public to think expansively about the prospects for downtown and the plaza. It laid the groundwork for what eventually became Lockwood's 2017 draft comprehensive plan for the city. As yet the plan has not been approved by the city council, but the improvements to Main Street were completed in 2007, Connally Street in 2008, and the plaza and surrounding streets between 2009 and 2013. Neither Maxwell nor Lockwood actually saw the plan as a 100-year plan, but they found calling it that to be useful in stirring the imagination of the public about what might be possible.

After the plan was created, more work and persuasion was needed to actually get the project done. The relationship between the county and the city had been troubled for some time, related to things like parking for the courthouse and the desire to give over more of the plaza to programmed events and a more profound veterans memorial. This was when Craig Johnson, then a city councilman, joined the Ark-Tex Council of Governments and rode to monthly meetings with County Judge Cletus Millsap. Johnson used the time to reinforce arguments for the project. Millsap, approaching retirement, was asked during

one of these rides, "Do you want to make your retirement speech in a parking lot or a plaza?"

Another kind of persuasion was to move the "wettest dry town in Texas" to the status of a "damp town." Sulphur Springs had been a dry city since 1920. Maxwell and his team believed the city needed to permit the sale of alcohol in its restaurants, brewpubs, and the like in addition to private clubs, but they did not push to remove all restrictions on the sale of hard liquor, instead offering a compromise to those strongly advocating to remain dry. While it was difficult, in 2012, the city voted to approve the sale of beer and wine for "off-premise consumption" along with the sale of mixed beverages in restaurants holding both food and beverage certificates. This was the first time it came to a vote in Sulphur Springs, and it was successful.

Predictions by the faith-based community and others opposed to the change were that once alcohol was allowed, there would be public drunkenness, higher crime rates, and more drunken driving. The reality, according to several members of the city council, has been fewer arrests for drunken driving, no evidence of serious public drunkenness, fewer arrests for bootlegging, and a positive impact on property values, with no increase in violent crimes. This legislative move was a controversial one that strained relationships with the religious community, but the legislators felt it was essential to the successful attraction of entertainment venues downtown. The potential revenue growth made for less risky development, and it has yielded new restaurant, wine bar, and brewpub life downtown.

The history of dry-to-wet conversions in municipalities appears to reinforce the position taken by Sulphur Springs. A 2008 study by the Perryman Group illustrated that a Texas community of 25,000 people could expect an average of \$19 million in annual spending and see 185 jobs as a result of allowing liquor sales. In response, Texas made it easier for municipalities to hold a referendum on the topic in 2011, and most dry counties changed course: the 62 dry Texas counties in 1986 dwindled to just five by the end of 2018.

Part of building vibrancy downtown according to the Sulphur Springs Business Association required the city to allow the sale of alcohol and establish the



The planning process engaged members of the Veterans Memorial Committee.



The committee is responsible for many memorials, including the Korean War sculpture.

process needed to make it happen. One solution was to zone downtown as a heavy commercial zone, thus allowing private clubs that can sell alcohol. These ordinances required a 100-yard distance between such clubs and churches. Under Texas laws, members can purchase beer, wine, and alcohol in such a club but nowhere else. Instead of rezoning the downtown, the ordinance was changed to also allow alcohol in areas zoned "central commercial," thus opening the door for the city to go "damp." This move was further codified with a council motion in 2012 assuring that commercial interests in investments in bars and restaurants would be profitable and not requiring them to take the private club route to serve alcohol. The inclusion of alcohol in downtown Sulphur Springs venues corresponds to those business owners reporting success in their new businesses.

Veterans Memorial Committee

The revitalization planning brought together a committee comprised of leaders throughout the county who focused on the Veterans Memorial. Committee members include people like Clayton McGraw, a Marine Corps veteran credited with the idea to form the Veterans Memorial Committee. Mickey Barker, also a veteran, came to Sulphur Springs in 1978 to interview for a job with GTE Phone Company. At the time he found a dead plaza, a friendly population, and the need to develop a more comprehensive memorial to veterans. Danny Davis is a 23-year veteran of the US Air Force who returned to Sulphur Springs to work at Texas A&M University College in Commerce, just 18 miles from Sulphur Springs, because his parents still lived in the area. He turned down employment options in Dallas because he preferred the "Mayberry-like" atmosphere of Sulphur Springs and believes his hometown is the best-kept secret in Texas. When he returned to Sulphur Springs, he asked for and got the appointment to be the Veteran's Service Officer for the county. He also ran for city council treasurer and won.

Since 2006, this committee has been working with legacy memorials, including the plaque and magnolia tree commemorating Civil War veterans and the Korean War sculpture in the courthouse plaza. The goals of the committee were to plan and design elements of a memorial to the veterans of all wars and oversee the maintenance of the memorial.

The process of development accelerated in 2012 when Sargent Tanner Stone Higgins, a 23-year-old Army Ranger from Sulphur Springs, lost his life in combat. Higgins graduated from the local high school in 2007, the year after initial planning for the enhanced veterans memorial began. He was killed in a firefight in Logar Province in Afghanistan. His service was recognized by several medals and honors, and his actions during the combat that took his life led to the posthumously awarded Bronze Star Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal, and the Purple Heart. Historically, the city and county governments did not always work well together, but the emotional impact of Higgins' passing was one of several catalysts for the collaboration between the two governments. It also brought together community groups, faith-based organizations, and businesses in common cause with the Veterans Memorial Committee.

Initially, many veterans opposed the redesign of the plaza. In many ways, this established an opportunity to demonstrate how well Lockwood and Maxwell listened to and translated the committee's vision into something even better. It actually created a trust in the work. And when Sgt. Higgins was killed, the hometown hero created a reverence for the memorial and its prominence in the plaza. It also attracted new supporters for the monument, including veteran volunteers and attendees at the Freedom Ball to raise money for the maintenance of the memorial.

The Veterans Memorial Committee's work includes facilitating the identification of 250 Hopkins County veterans who were killed in action and the names of the 2,500 to 3,000 veterans who served that are to be etched in the walls of the monument. The etching cost per name runs about \$50. The committee handles oversight of the memorial and consulted on the in-kind donations from the city for the initial installation, estimated at over \$250,000, including plumbing for waterfalls, electricity for lighting, security, sidewalks, and landscaping.

The committee also coordinates with the military coalition that takes care of the site where decommissioned flags are kept and with the Marine Corps League to manage the American flag at the center of the plaza and maintain the eternal flame that is part of the memorial. During the last two years, the



The Sulphur Springs Downtown Business Alliance was active in the planning process.

committee has orchestrated an annual Freedom Ball in Celebration Plaza to help cover expenses.

A new bench was provided by the Veterans of Foreign Wars in 2017 to commemorate veteran service in World War II. A life-sized wounded veteran, designed by Kansas artist John Parsons, was dedicated in the plaza on Veterans Day 2019, joining the fully integrated memorials focused on the Civil War, World War I, World War II, and the Korean War, along with other features offering more general remembrances of the sacrifices of county veterans in all branches of service in all wars since the War of 1812.

The Sulphur Spring Downtown Business Alliance

With a membership of over 62 institutions representing property owners, banks, insurance companies, entertainment venues, retail establishments, health-care providers, and both private and public office functions of all kinds, the alliance's mission is to "develop and maintain a working partnership with city and county governments as well as other advisory boards dedicated to the revitalization of Downtown Sulphur Springs."

Oscar Aguilar



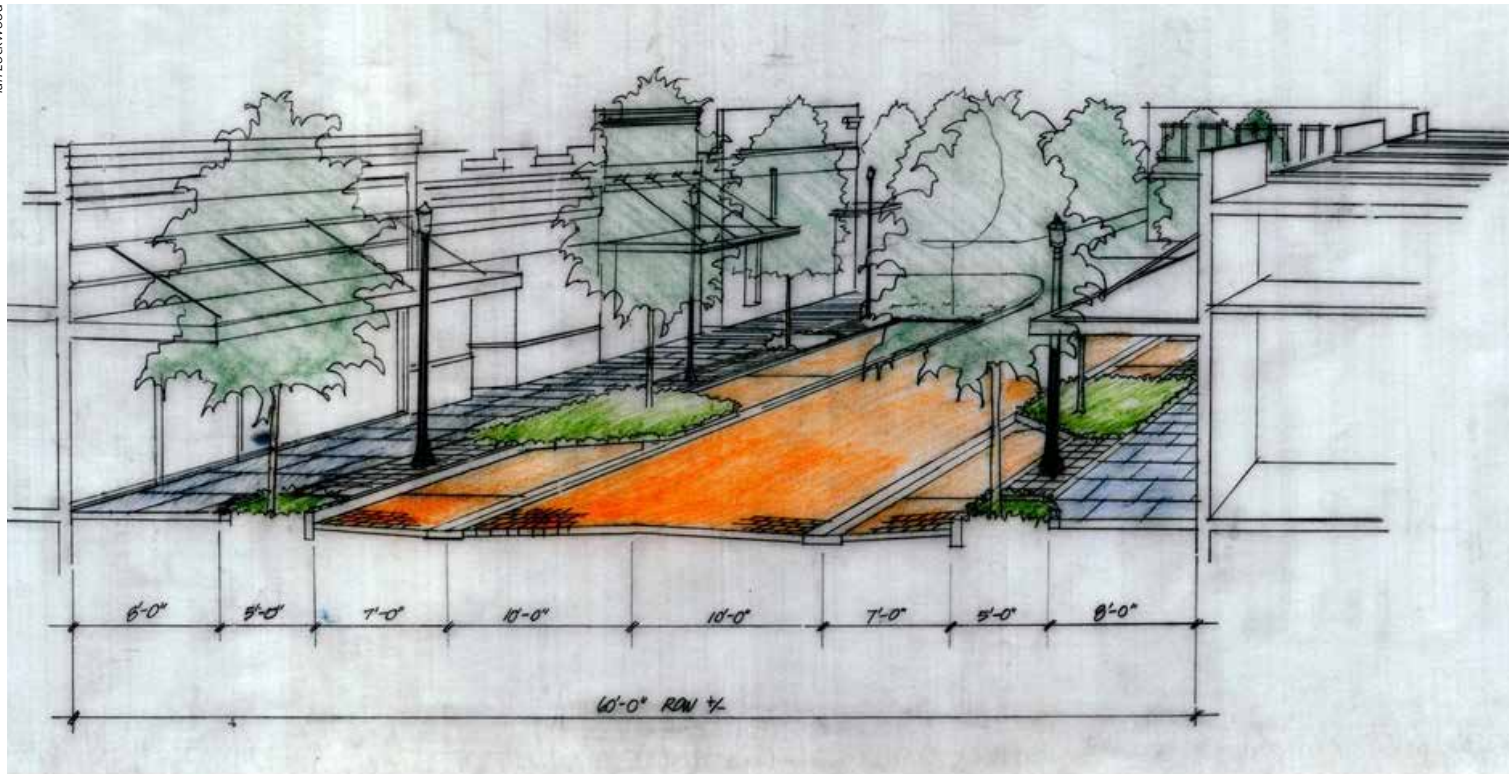
The three-phase project involved the redesign of the plaza and four city blocks.

The alliance was incorporated in June of 2005. Many of its members were part of the 2008 workshops run by Lockwood and the city and remain active participants in the ongoing planning for an improved pedestrian-friendly downtown. New members since that time represent about half of the membership today.

Alliance members were the first to invest in the new downtown, taking advantage of city programs that provided matching funds for facade restoration on buildings facing Main and Connally Streets. In so doing,

they were also leveraging investments in the street and sidewalk infrastructure designed to make downtown more pedestrian friendly and attractive. Some Business Alliance members are also developers, and by April 2019 they had created a total of 12 new apartments and lofts within the two-block project area. Three members own 23 of the buildings on Main and Connally Streets. Billie Ruth Standbridge is president of the Downtown Business Alliance and owns seven buildings. Two other members, Bethany Ashby and John Heilman, own four and 12 buildings, respectively.

Ian Lockwood



Connally Street and Main Street were reconstructed with brick paving, new street lamps, and broad tree-lined sidewalks.

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

Sulphur Springs Downtown involved the redesign of the streetscapes and plaza surrounding the Hopkins County Courthouse and the four city blocks adjacent to the plaza to the west. It was developed in three phases, with the initial stage (2008) addressing Main Street running west from the plaza for one block (245 feet). The second phase (2009–10) came along a year later to transform Connally Street, to the north of and parallel to Main Street. It also connects to the plaza. The third phase (2012–13) was the plaza itself and its adjacent streets.

The Scope of the Work

The technical description of the full scope was described in the *Downtown Revitalization Plan* implementing the Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone #1:

1. Reconstruction of the economically critical streets and sidewalks.
2. Replace all water and sewer mains ... found in any street segments.
3. Where it is economically feasible, place electric service underground.
4. Assist business owners with improvements to their building facades according to the architectural standards and style as established by the city as a part of the grant program.



Brick paving, narrow traffic lanes, and parallel parking slow traffic.



"Silly walk" signs remind drivers to watch out for pedestrians.

5. Establish within the central plaza a park including approved parking.
6. In conjunction with other public and private processes, facilitate as much as possible numerous forms of business development which will enhance progress on the redevelopment purposes of the district.
7. Design and construct on Main Street a roofed central market area/ event facility.

The last element was abandoned based on the judgment that the use of temporary tent and booth structures would allow greater flexibility and not leave an empty building when there was no market.

Phase 1: Main Street, Connally Street, and Sidewalk Infrastructure

Perhaps the most significant design move was the restoration of the one-way streets to two-way streets and introduction of traffic calming measures, including some areas of flush, curbless streets; pinch points; well-articulated crosswalks; wide sidewalks; on-street parking; and narrow travel lanes. The reconstructed Main Street includes a 60-foot right-of-way with 34 feet curb to curb, seven-foot parallel parking rows, and 10-foot travel lanes with eight feet of sidewalk and five more feet of furniture zones in strategic places. The installation of "silly walk" crossing signs, referencing a classic comedy sketch from the 1970s *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, expands the focus on pedestrians and introduces drivers to the fact that this is not your normal "speed through" intersection. This program of urban infrastructure was offered in tandem with incentives for street-facing facade improvements. The city offered to match private investments up to \$20,000. That facade grant program was also amended to enable the purchase of three communal grease traps that collect and treat fats, oils, and grease from restaurants prior to their introduction into the sewer systems. This helped to reduce individual operator costs and facilitate other property investments by downtown businesses.

New street trees, grass, and flowers were planted that accentuated the valley gutter system and help to manage the runoff. Taken together, these landscape elements optically narrow the streets even further. Wide sidewalks and repurposed parking areas invite outdoor dining when streets are closed to motorists, ornamental street lighting with wrap-around shelves at elbow height hold food and drinks during festivals, and market days are provided

at regular intervals on both Main and Connally Streets, making the area still more inviting. The alleys provide 220-volt plug-ins to support Saturday markets on the street, and all utilities were placed underground. Mural art is on display in the larger “T-Bone Alley” running parallel to and between Main and Connally Streets. The alley also provides some of the electric connections needed to support Connally and Main Street life. The alley itself was described by Lockwood as a service alley and was not actively programmed.

Other features include music broadcasts into the street, which are programmed for different audiences (daytime workers, evening entertainment seekers, etc.). Twelve new residences in new or renovated buildings along with literally dozens of shops on the street front give round-the-clock life to the street.

Many people still think of this phase of work as predominantly about the controversy of one-way to two-way street restoration; the perceived loss of parking (even though in the end there was actually one more parking space than there had been before the project); and serious debate about the head-in versus back-in diagonal, on-street parking on the streets adjacent to the plaza. The fear was that the traffic calming would not work, the city might be introducing serious safety problems, and downtown visitors would have to walk farther, thus defeating their retailing aspirations. Lockwood illustrated the absurdity of parking concerns by placing an overlay of a Walmart building and parking lot on the plan for the plaza. The Walmart building footprint alone was larger in area than the combined areas of the plaza and its adjacent streets.

In public meetings on the perceived loss of parking and the approach to the on-street parking, county representatives and members of the Veterans Memorial Committee led the charge. Some of their resistance involved accommodations the committee had already made regarding the placement of the memorial on the plaza in front of the courthouse. The county was concerned about providing parking for the jury pool. Both the county and the veterans committee were part of a three-hour council meeting where angry citizens and organization representatives argued that the proposed design would not work. The solution, after several design iterations, was to move the majority of the monument to the land bordering the plaza south of the courthouse parallel with Oak Street in a manner that screens the



Landscaped “bump-outs” help to capture stormwater runoff.



Lamp posts have shelves to hold food and drink and charge cell phones.

Ian Lockwood



The redesigned Celebration Plaza is the centerpiece of downtown.



Diagonal parking spots line both sides of the streets surrounding the plaza.



The brick-paved areas and streets are used for special events.

courthouse utility box. The surface parking lot was replaced with on-street parking on the streets adjacent to the plaza. By most accounts from retailers and from city personnel, the animosity of the 2007-2008 controversy has been replaced with pride that the right decisions were made.

Phase 2: Celebration Plaza

The plaza design avoids making either the courthouse or the Veterans Memorial the most important features. In fact, the site lacks hierarchy except for a flagpole with a very large American flag positioned at the center. It includes allocations of space for parking on both sides of the streets around the plaza as a compromise to those who sought still more parking within the plaza.

The landscape treatment includes a simple and bold color palette of plantings that are adjusted twice annually and a large lawn where evening movie nights, concerts, and festivals occur.

The infrastructure work supporting Celebration Plaza is equally effective, employing the “silly walk” crosswalk signage, wide sidewalks on Church Street to support drop-offs/deliveries at the courthouse, and curbsless streets allowing the plaza to expand seamlessly to include the street(s) when events demand it, simply by closing one or more streets to motorists.

Other infrastructure on the plaza supports its flexible use. There are widely distributed in-ground electrical outlets that provide flexibility and power for events, and the plaza was kept flat to assure accommodation of a broad mix of uses and people, including those with mobility impairments, strollers, etc. The city has two temporary stages it deploys on the plaza: a smaller one for weekend events and another one large enough to accommodate Northeast Texas Symphony Orchestra programs. Closest to Main Street in the southwest quadrant of the plaza, a large Texas star doubles as a children’s splash pad during warmer months, with underground water systems that also support public restrooms with one-way glass and sprinkler heads used for irrigation. There are also tables and benches and games, including two-to-three-foot high chess pieces on a chessboard ready to play. Lampposts with elbow-height shelves offer places to hold plates of festival food and drinks and serve as cell phone charging stations. The entire plaza is barrier-free.

Cindy Roller



The Veterans Memorial includes sandstone walls engraved with the names of service members.



Another stone wall features a bas relief sculpture and eternal flame.

Hopkins County Veterans Memorial

The east part of the plaza is more formal due to the large memorial that includes seven unpolished sandstone walls with the names of veterans etched on their surfaces; a bas relief sculpture of a train-loading platform taken from a historic postcard; an eternal flame; and eight flags, including one for service members missing in action, one for prisoners of war, the Texas state flag, and flags for each of the branches of service. These flags are arrayed in an arc with focused views onto a much larger 50-foot pole-mounted US flag that flies in the center of the plaza. Views to the courthouse, other monuments on the plaza, and the landscape are all part of the experience of the plaza.

Public Restrooms

The two public restroom facilities were a welcome addition to the plaza, offering a new and essential service and an element of delight in the mundane. The idea for mirrored glass enclosures for the public bathrooms came from Maxwell, who was inspired by the European “Don’t Miss a Sec” public toilet installation in London. As of this writing, Sulphur Springs claims to have the only functional, ADA-compliant glass bathrooms with one-way mirrors in the world. When the light is brighter outside than in, people using the facility can see out, but no one can see in. There are no lights needed inside in the daytime, and in the evening, the LED lights are turned on outside the glass enclosure, ensuring it remains brighter outside. The fully accessible facilities feature stainless steel fixtures. By all accounts, the publicity (including YouTube videos posted by users) and the delight exhibited by visitors indicate the glass boxes are well received.

Resilience

The plaza and street/sidewalk design pay a lot of attention to water and runoff conditions, using the landscape where possible to hold and slow-release stormwater. The choice of materials and landscape treatments are robust and relatively low maintenance.

What’s Next: The 100-Year Plan

The long-term revitalization plans for downtown include three key components. The first was completed with the realignment of Connally Street to create better east-west relationships and the completion of the new street

and sidewalk infrastructure. The second component, building on the success of the first, will establish a new trail system. The trail will provide an opportunity immediately west of downtown for a new linear park and dense housing. The third, also part of the trail, involves daylighting a creek and the restoration of a small stone channel bounding the west, south, and east sides of downtown with the goal of eventually creating a green corridor and a small lake. It is a new amenity that will reduce flooding and establish a site for new residential development within walking distance to downtown. All of this and more are part of an ambitious 2017 draft comprehensive plan produced by Lockwood with the city. The original idea for daylighting came from Lockwood during the design of the plaza. While Maxwell reports it was well received as a concept, it has not been formally put to a council vote and remains an item to take to the city council “when the time is right.”

Construction

For the most part, this project was completed by proud in-house public works crews and resulted in real cost savings (no profit margin and working with already-committed city overhead). The city reports it used high-quality materials, including, for example, brick paving in concrete trays to address expansive clay soils and glass restrooms with one-way mirrors and stainless steel fixtures. It also reports that it built the project with a significant amount of volunteer labor.

Construction management was described by public works staff as “organized chaos.” The bathroom plumbing was done by the city with an experiment that vented the facility into surrounding plantings using oversized vent pipes, thereby avoiding roof penetrations. The city also did the plumbing for both fountains along with the electrical work, landscaping, and concrete work for much of the whole site. Veterans themselves did the construction on the memorial, including walls and seat walls, sequencing their work to minimize disruptions from closed streets. Initially, the city relied on a Dallas-based contractor to lay the plaza bricks with a concrete tray technology: the ground was prepared, utilities were laid down, concrete trays were poured, and then a one-inch sand layer was added. The Dallas company then taught the city concrete crews how to lay an entire pallet of bricks in four minutes. Concrete crews then laid bricks at various crosswalks leading up to the plaza.



The plaza is designed to accommodate large events and temporary stages.



Mirrored glass public restrooms have become a tourist attraction.



The 100-year plan includes a proposal for a green corridor lined with housing.

One challenging aspect of the construction process was the relocation of a few original monuments memorializing veterans. *The Soldier Statue*—a soldier in World War II gear with a Korean War era rifle, meant to honor all who served in any war—was perhaps the most difficult. It was in the surface parking lot towards the City National Bank building and needed to be moved and restored in its new place on the axis of the path that runs southeast to northwest through the plaza. The approach involved blocks of ice, careful rigging, and a new foundation. The move was accomplished without damage. The sculptor, Lawrence M. Ludtke, had passed away, and the Veterans Memorial Committee believed extraordinary measures were required to align the sculpture on its new foundation, moving it to exactly match the pins that would hold it on the ice, reducing rigging pressure on the limbs of the soldier.

Maintenance and Operations

The splash pad in the form of the Texas star and the waterfall at the Hopkins County Veterans Memorial are the biggest maintenance issues for the city in the restoration project, mostly due to equipment cycling on and off, recycled filtered water, and the need to drain and refill the system once a week. Otherwise, maintenance is handled by a two-person crew focused



The corridor includes a newly daylighted creek and small lake.



The first phase of construction included the rebuilding of Main Street and Connally Street (pictured above).

on downtown. They mow the lawn, maintain the landscape, and clean the bathrooms. The same crew also tends the landscaping on Connally and Main Streets. Programming in the plaza is widely disbursed among a range of business and nonprofit organizations and is coordinated by a single staffer with the city.

ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS

About 150 events per year offer a wide assortment of activities and levels of attendance at various locations in the new downtown. Food events are especially popular on the plaza, including a Cattleman's Classic Ribeye Roundup, a Hopkins County Stew Contest, Claws for a Cause Crawfish Boil, pancake breakfasts, farmers markets, and beer and wine events. There are also flea markets, music festivals, weekly yoga, a quilt show, ladies night events, and Fotos for Freedom. The Northeast Texas Symphony Orchestra performs periodically. Event sizes range from small yoga classes with 20 to 40 people to over 5,000 people or more at concert events or holiday celebrations, including Cinco de Mayo and Independence Day, which draw

about 4,500 celebrants each. Outdoor movie nights are made possible by inflatable movie screens, and there two sizes of portable stages that can be employed according to the size of the event. Street fairs, live music, and parades are programmed on the streets, often coordinated with programming on the new plaza. While 150 calendar events may seem like a lot, the variety and attendance suggest the experience of the new downtown and plaza is that of an outdoor living room for the community with the occasional large holiday or festival party.

The Sulphur Springs Business Alliance hosts or co-hosts many events, such as the Annual Reds, Whites, and Brews (Texas wine and beer festival); the weekly Saturday night Celebration Market; family movie nights on the plaza; the Mission 22 Car Show; and the annual Corvette Club Corvette Show. The alliance website reveals it is aligned with the Hopkins County Chamber of Commerce, which shares a similar mission for the county. The business community sees these events drawing visitors from the Metroplex as well as from surrounding towns and cities and from as far east as Texarkana.



Celebration Plaza hosts a weekly farmers market from May through September.



Approximately 150 events per year draw people downtown.

The Celebration Market was originally intended to be a permanent structure on the plaza, but the plan was abandoned in favor of a more flexible range of opportunities for vendors. It is host to a weekly farmers market that runs on Saturdays from May through September and is coordinated by city staff. The 20-30 vendors on a typical Saturday are responsible for supplying what they need to operate their booths and often spill out from their covered structures in an array of umbrellas and portable pavilions on the plaza lawn. Items offered for sale include produce from nearby farms, such as honey, eggs, fruits, and vegetables. Also for sale are plants and flowers, clothing, wearables, and upcycled used clothing. There is usually an array of baked goods, canned goods, meat, and poultry as well as craft items.

All told, over 33 businesses are now contributing to the life of downtown. Restaurant, bar, and entertainment venues are in the majority, but there is also a large variety of specialty and boutique retailing.

FINANCING

Financing for the \$6.9 million project was deceptively simple. The whole of Main Street was done with city labor at a cost of \$550,000 paid for by city operational funds. This work was performed prior to the approval of the tax increment reinvestment zone (TIRZ). Connally Street was next and was able to draw on the TIRZ agreement for \$550,000. Celebration Plaza (\$880,000) and the Veterans Memorial (\$1,100,000) were in the third phase of work. Funding sources involved a TIRZ created by the city, Hopkins County Memorial Hospital, and Hopkins County that sold bonds yielding \$3.6 million, to which the city added an additional \$2,155,532 of municipal funding. An additional \$1.1 million covered the costs of the Veterans Memorial with \$900,000 from private funds and the remaining \$200,000 from the city and county. The city estimates an additional \$250,000 was invested in the plaza through its in-kind construction services. Overall the costs were about \$6.9 million, not including the in-kind contributions that were available from the city to execute the work on the two streets and the plaza or the in-kind support to construct the Veterans Memorial provided by veterans and friends.

For the first three years, facade grants provided matching funds for owners for the cost of facades facing Main and Connally Streets as well as the plaza

up to a \$20,000 limit. Larger lots and multiple stories have allowed for larger matching grants. Only a few of the grants were below \$20,000, and the largest three grants were \$40,000.

The best information on the specific uses of the outlined funds is provided in the *TIRZ #1 Project and Financing Plan* produced in April 2009. It shows a total of \$5,700,000. The TIRZ plan requires the city to fund the effort up to \$200,000 per year from its operating budget. As of 2019, the city has a line on what Maxwell calls the “Budget Page” (general fund) for \$350,000 per year supporting downtown. The funds are used for the maintenance of Main, Connally, and the four streets around the plaza: \$233,000 for maintenance, \$150,000 for programming, and the rest for contingencies, all from the city’s general fund.

The Hopkins County and City of Sulphur Springs TIRZ agreement, as well as the one with the Hopkins County Hospital, specify 2007 as the par year for establishing property values. The county and the city will pay 100% of the taxes collected above the base property value in the 2007 “par” year through 2032 or at such time as the bond is paid off or no new increments are being created. The agreement was executed on July 2, 2008, by Maxwell for the city and on June 23, 2008, by Cletus Millsap, a county judge. A similar agreement was executed between the City of Sulphur Springs and Hopkins County Memorial Hospital, except that the hospital agreed to deposit 25% of the tax increment into the fund. That agreement was executed on October 20, 2008, by Maxwell and Tim Kelty as president of the hospital board. The boundary for the TIRZ district was about twice as large as the boundary of the immediate project (four acres on the plaza and surrounding the streets and 245 lineal feet of street on Connally and Main Streets). This increase in size supports the idea that the TIRZ would affect the neighboring properties and that those properties would then influence still larger returns when the bonds were paid.

Following the agreement, a *Downtown Revitalization Project and Financing Plan* was prepared dated April 2009 and approved by the TIRZ Board on April 21, 2009, and subsequently by the Sulphur Springs City Council on June 2, 2009. The 2008 recession resulted in early returns being lower than

Marc Maxwell



Matching facade grants encouraged property owners to invest in improvements.

Marc Maxwell



Grants ranged from up to \$20,000 for single facades and as much as \$40,000 for larger or multiple facades.

TABLE 1: DEVELOPMENT SOURCES AND USES

SOURCES	PUBLIC	PRIVATE	TOTAL
Tax increment reinvestment zone (TIRZ) bonds	\$3,600,000		\$3,600,000
City operations	\$2,155,532		\$2,155,532
Veterans Memorial	\$200,000	\$900,000	\$1,100,000
Total	\$5,955,532	\$900,000	\$6,855,532
USES			
Traffic study and preliminary design	\$130,000		\$130,000
Planning and engineering	\$420,000		\$420,000
Celebration Plaza	\$880,000		\$880,000
Main Street (pre-TIRZ funding)	\$555,532		\$555,532
Connally Street	\$550,000		\$550,000
Streets surrounding Celebration Plaza	\$2,200,000		\$2,200,000
Street transitions (away from Plaza)	\$400,000		\$400,000
Oak Avenue and Gilmer Street intersection	\$120,000		\$120,000
Veterans Memorial (capital costs)	\$200,000	\$900,000	\$1,100,000
Contingency	\$500,000		\$500,000
Total	\$5,955,532	\$900,000	\$6,855,532

TABLE 2: CAPTURED TIRZ VALUE

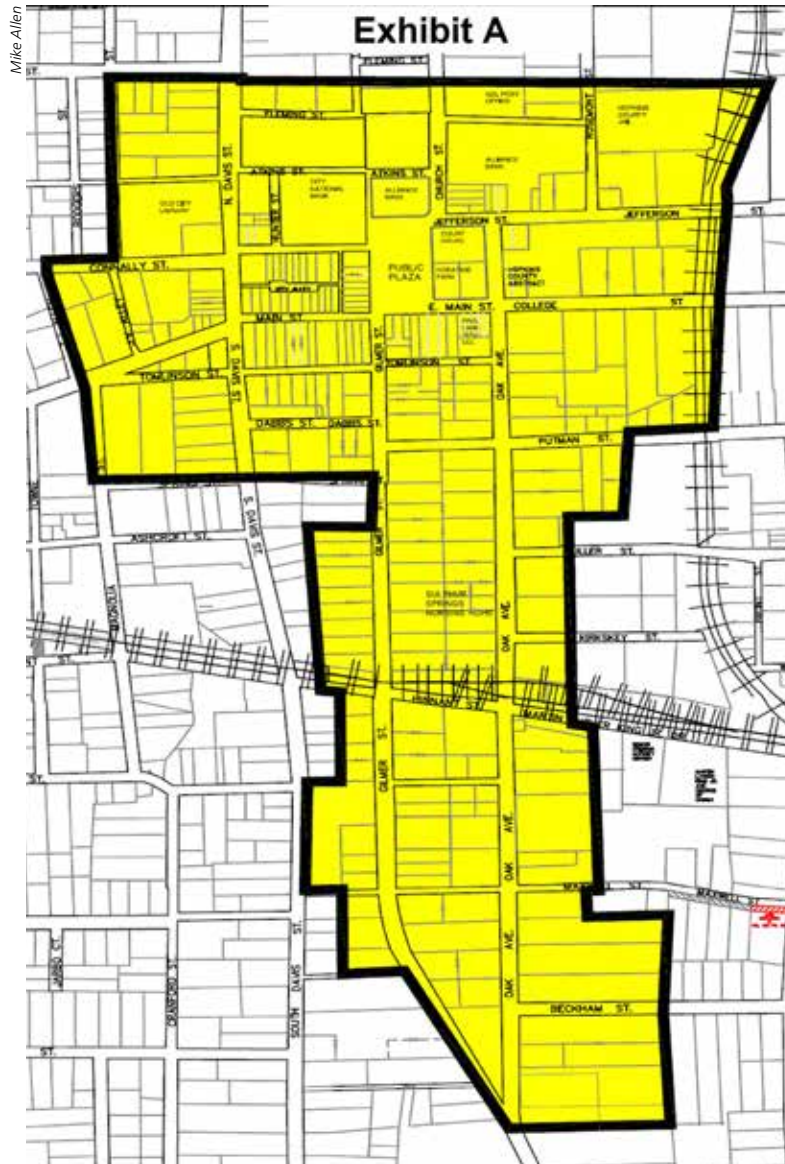
YEAR	CAPTURED VALUE	TAXABLE VALUE	CAPTURED TIRZ REVENUE
2007	\$0	\$14,147,500	0
2008	\$319,210	\$14,466,710	\$3,614
2009	\$1,239,340	\$15,386,840	\$13,101
2010	\$1,747,000	\$15,894,500	\$18,841
2011	\$2,105,830	\$16,253,330	\$22,911
2012	\$2,045,292	\$16,192,792	\$22,394
2013	\$2,554,580	\$16,702,080	\$27,765
2014	\$2,991,310	\$17,138,810	\$34,436
2015	\$3,343,150	\$17,490,650	\$38,894
2016	\$5,209,720	\$19,357,220	\$59,844
2017	\$6,716,800	\$20,864,300	\$76,955
2018	\$7,711,835	\$21,859,335	\$88,051
Total	\$35,984,067	\$205,754,067	\$406,805

anticipated. Overall, however, the TIRZ captured value has risen steadily year over year from under \$400,000 in 2008 to almost \$7,800,000 in 2018. The city claims a total return of over \$35 million. The annual tax base in the TIRZ has risen from \$14 million in 2007 base year to almost \$22 million in 2018.

Funding to continue work on greater downtown and other city street improvements was assisted in 2018 by doubling the number of dollars in funds

invested in city infrastructure and street repairs. Essentially, the city council added a street fee of \$5 per month for households and \$10 to \$12 per month for businesses to support street projects, increasing from 6 to 7 streets per year to 10 to 12 streets of infrastructure improvements.

The fruits of the Veterans Memorial Committee included in-kind donations from the city estimated at over \$250,000, including plumbing for waterfalls,



A tax increment reinvestment zone was established to raise funds for the project.

power, lighting, security, sidewalks, landscaping, and more. It included the donation of design services valued at \$150,000 by the Dallas architect Don Patterson and a local structural engineer Don Roundtree (who helped manage the memorial construction). The annual Freedom Ball fundraiser attracted over 400 people in its second year (April 2019) to support maintenance of the memorial.

The new wounded warrior memorial received a donation of \$50,000 from Mickey McKenzie, whose family founded the Sulphur Springs-based Grocery Supply Company, to support the creation and installation of the monument. In addition, the World War II bench was recently installed through a gift from the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

PROJECT EVALUATION

The project has changed the attitude of residents towards their city. Sulphur Springs citizens expect something nice rather than mediocre, and they believe they can accomplish things that heretofore were unimaginable. In a short period of time, downtown shifted from 80% vacant to 80% occupied and counting, all the while making downtown a destination when it was once a place to be avoided.

Downtown buildings that once sold for \$15,000 to \$20,000 or less are now worth up to 20-30 times as much according to city staff. There have been no foreclosures since the project started. Downtown is now a catalyst for change in other sites as well; for example, four other east Texas small towns have engaged Lockwood as a consultant, buoyed by the idea that "If they can do it in Sulphur Springs, we can do it here." With downtown now a destination, the city is attracting new industry, including Armorck, NextLink, Load Trail, My Perfect Pet, JetTribe, Plant Process Fabricators, Diversified Storage Systems, and JB Weld Epoxy, which started in Sulphur Springs and was bought by a Chicago firm that initially planned to move but decided to stay after seeing the city and its new downtown.

The project has increased tax revenue without raising taxes and is projected by the city to begin making the full bond payment within

Marc Maxwell



A surface parking lot was transformed into a vibrant public plaza.

Cindy Roller



Celebration Plaza is a popular venue for local and regional festivals.

five years. Tourism increases are measured by the more than doubled hotel bed taxes received since the project began and by the growth of tax revenues.

The project has also created an inspiring memorial to all the men and women who served in all branches of the armed forces with a special nod to those from Hopkins County who paid the ultimate price.

IMPACT

Increased Vibrancy

Year-round programming including parades and music events add life to downtown and bring business to the new entertainment venues. There is music programmed to offer different types of clientele what they like based on the time of day: one kind of music for downtown visitors during the workday lunch and afternoon, another for an older crowd in the mornings, still another to meet the tastes of the happy hour crowds, and still more variation for the younger population.

There is an eclectic range of retail and entertainment venues downtown developed as a result of the first phase of street and sidewalk redesign but certainly benefiting also from the transformation of the former plaza/parking lot into Celebration Plaza. Several downtown business owners claimed in interviews that their revenues doubled from year one to year two. Members of the Downtown Business Alliance offered that the moment the street infrastructure was in place, they committed to developing their properties, proving Lockwood's assertion that "infrastructure drives outcomes."

New or improved commercial activity on blocks of Main and Connally Streets and the plaza includes the following businesses:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| ■ Auturo's Pizza | ■ The Corner Grub House |
| ■ The Bookworm Box | ■ Everything Unique |
| ■ Brumley's Uniforms | ■ Gourmet Kitchen and Company |
| ■ Burgerland | ■ Hampton House Jewelry |
| ■ Caps & Flasks | ■ Joe's German Restaurant |
| ■ Coffee Off the Square | ■ John's Potato House |
| ■ The Connally Street Gallery | ■ Landers Creek Outfitters |

- Los Mochis
- Magic Scoop General Store and Café
- Main Street Theater
- Margo's Brush of Class
- Marlene's Sass and Class
- Merle Norman
- Muddy Jakes
- Phinessé Farms Winery
- Pioneer Café
- Redneck Bar and Grill
- Rooster Roast Coffee Bar
- Secret Garden Shop
- Simply Spoiled
- Sister Babyz Boutique
- The Sushi Guy
- Texas Art & Frame
- Town Square Antiques
- The Venue @ 219

Both banks adjacent to the plaza have worked to landscape and improve their street frontage to boost the vitality of street life. In a comparable way, Hopkins County has sold two buildings on the perimeter of the plaza in order to return them to business use, one to the Chamber of Commerce and one for retail to avoid the appearance of government uses taking over what should be a more active social space on the sidewalk.

Increased Pride

All of this activity and the successful redevelopment of two major streets and the plaza beyond what many thought was possible has helped generate a new sense of pride in the citizens of Sulphur Springs. Once dubbed "Suffering Springs," it is now proudly referred to as "Celebration City," and anecdotal accounts tell of mid-career people returning home to care for parents, open new businesses, and take up small family farming. Many business owners and community members compare Sulphur Springs to the fictional town of Mayberry from the 1960s CBS television series *The Andy Griffith Show*—a town that, like Sulphur Springs, evoked nostalgia for family barbecues, freshly baked pies, tolerance for quirky personalities, and the values of small-town life. This nostalgia has attracted new interest from outside the community, and festivals and celebrations on the plaza and new entertainment venues offer further evidence of residents' feelings of pride.

Developing and Implementing a Vision

The irony of much of this project is that many of those involved in the planning process admit they did not believe the plan outlined in Maxwell's memo to



Once nearly vacant, downtown is now 80% occupied.



Property investment and values downtown are increasing.



Downtown is now a destination for residents and tourists.



New businesses have opened, including Phinessé Farms Winery.

the mayor would actually be implemented. This included a judge, conservative legal and financial managers serving the city, businesspeople, and everyday citizens who all offered doubts but nonetheless supported the project. Some believed resistance to two-way traffic and narrow streets would stop the work; others believed the parking arrangement put cars too far from the courthouse and people would not walk that far. Others felt the faith-based community would balk at the transition from a dry to “damp” alcohol policy and erode faith in the project’s potential. Persistence, an extensive public process, and evidence-based proposals, however, allowed the project to proceed.

Economic Impact

The \$6.9 million dollar project is demonstrating a consistent rise in tax revenues year over year and created new life downtown. The tourism draw created by Celebration Plaza and events programming has increased hotel occupancy taxes from a low of \$95,000 in 2007 to \$185,000 in 2018. The city brought on line three new hotels in that time frame: a Holiday Inn Express in 2007, a LaQuinta in 2009, and a Hampton Inn in 2010 (all located by the interstate). The city estimates the total private investment catalyzed by the downtown revitalization to be over \$23 million.

Tourism, as measured by hotel stays, is up, and the number of new businesses on Main and Connally Streets as well as around the plaza is growing. Demographic data over the years indicates a reasonable minimum wage and low unemployment. While there is not a lot of eagerness to grow, there is an aspiration for the city and downtown to be better. The citizens want to maintain Sulphur Springs’ small-town flavor and have a downtown that is socially active and vital.

The Sulphur Springs story illustrates that there are small-town revitalization strategies that are not just about manufacturing. Even so, a promising agreement signed between the City of Sulphur Springs and Luminant Mining Company, LLC in October of 2018 proposes to convey 4,901 acres of land for the purposes of reclamation and reuse, including office buildings and maintenance facilities, tank farms, warehouse and warehouse yards, storage, and parking as well as rail sidings.

Increased Understanding of Urban Design

One way to evaluate the project is to see how it married a robust application of best practices in pedestrian-friendly street design and whether it has established precedents that can be applied in the future as the city continues to improve. The design of the memorial, the lawn, and the relocation of the parking from the surface lot to on-street parking has both freed up the site for more activity and enabled the memorial to embrace the whole site without forcing it to be just about the memorial. In quiet times when there is no programmed activity, the whole site is read as memorial; during active times, the memorial is experienced with the full life and vitality of the programs in the plaza with music, the laughter of children, the smell of good food, the visual excitement of quilts and the farmers market, etc. It places the memorial and the veterans it remembers in the context of the life of downtown.

Further evidence of the learning generated by the project is that Lockwood has consulted with several nearby towns including Denison, Commerce, Emory, and Paris, all of which are eager to take advantage of the success of Sulphur Springs to improve their own downtowns. He has also convinced the Texas Department of Transportation of the importance of slower and shorter trips within cities being prioritized over longer and faster trips through cities. He has demonstrated the increase in the vibrancy and economic viability of a town or city when streets are thought of this way. Traffic calming through skinny streets, wide sidewalks, angled parking, two-way streets, no curbs near the plazas, and even, in some conditions, no traffic lights have all created a precedent in Texas without any negative consequences to traffic flow or safety. Given how deserted downtown was and how lively it is now, it may seem surprising that there are no spikes in pedestrian-car accident statistics, but the traffic-calming measures require drivers to pay more attention to their surroundings, making the streets safer for pedestrians and drivers alike.

Downtown Revitalization as Catalyst

There are indications that the new investments around City Hall, Backstory Brewery, and the planned greenway are evidence of an interest in new development. Much of the rest of the area closer to and in downtown is still challenged with aging housing stock, poor infrastructure, and low levels of investment.



Investment includes newly constructed housing downtown.



Property owners are improving existing buildings.



Community partners aligned around a shared vision and core values.



Past and present city council members participated in the planning process.

OBSERVATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

In this project, the lessons learned are both obvious and worth restating. It was a “simple” project focused on very basic ideas. It embodied an appreciation for how important it is to build partnerships, to lead, and to focus on core values in project execution. All of this is clearly dependent on evidence-based design strategies that come from a rich understanding of what it takes to build vibrant places for people and to not allow transportation and parking systems to disrupt the opportunity for human interaction and public spaces.

The Value of Partnerships

It is likely the Sulphur Springs Downtown revitalization project would not have happened without the city and county partnership. Both entities shared land ownership at the beginning but not very much else as common ground. They disagreed about the primacy of parking on the plaza, about the approach to traffic calming that was being proposed, and about the importance of the paired one-way street pass-through for State Highway 154 through downtown and along the plaza. The Business Alliance and the Veterans Memorial Committee were more aligned with the county view than the city, and there were disagreements among city council members. But all agreed that if they were going to get past the “Suffering Springs” nickname and be able to claim that “Sulphur Springs is the best small city in Texas for raising a family, celebrating life, and doing business” (from their 2017 draft comprehensive plan), they were going to have to work together. They did and found some areas to compromise (how much and what kind of parking?), and some to test (how narrow can the two-way Main Street be and how wide can the sidewalks be?), and some to simply avoid (back-in diagonal parking around the plaza).

Starting with Chris Brown in 2005, mayoral leadership put out a bold charge: “It is time to do something about downtown.” Then, in one-year term successions, mayors continued to support and engage. The city manager took up the challenge, stayed strong, and was competent enough to know that he did not know what he did not know. He failed, sought help, got great help, and learned from all of it while “taking it on the chin,” according to his new partners in the business community, the city council, and the county. He learned the importance of engaging the public in all its forms, local



The City of Sulphur Springs has received local and national recognition for its downtown renewal.



Sulphur Springs is now referred to as "Celebration City."

businesses, community organizations, county officials, city officials, and the Texas Department of Transportation early on and throughout the process.

Focusing on Values and Vision

Including community values and what is important historically and culturally in design helps identify what is essential. It facilitates decision-making and implementation down the road. This project is best described as one that required careful listening about the importance of the Veterans Memorial, the desire for a vibrant downtown, and the pride citizens wanted to feel in their city. It accomplished this in spite of (or perhaps because of) what many initially believed could not be accomplished. To their credit, they gave it a try, and by most accounts from the partners, are glad they did.

During the Texas Municipal League 104th Annual Conference and Exhibition at the Austin Convention Center on October 4-7, the City of Sulphur Springs was presented the 2016 Municipal Excellence Award in the City Spirit category for cities under 25,000 in population. The award recognizes the city for the downtown Celebration District. Less than 10 years ago, the City of Sulphur Spring's downtown district suffered from high vacancy rates. According to the press release announcing the award on October 3, 2016, the district has transformed into a bustling center of economic and social activity through thoughtful design, vision, and investment.

In 2016, the Texas Downtown Association presented the Susan H. Campbell Award for downtown vision to Marc Maxwell for his part in the revitalization of Downtown Sulphur Springs. Maxwell is quick to point out he did not do this alone, yielding significant credit to the leadership of the city and county he served, to the consultant team he worked with, to his staff, and to the Veterans Memorial Committee who together helped merge their vision with a still larger public vision of what the plaza could be and make that vision a reality.

MEETING PROJECT GOALS

GOAL: Maximize social and economic engagement in downtown.

The successful programming of the plaza with some 150 events per year and the increase in the number of retail and restaurant businesses and above-the-store residential space suggests this goal has been met.

GOAL: Develop a 100-year vision through a planning process that engages local residents and businesses.

The long-term vision called for in the initial memo from Maxwell to the mayor is now codified in the downtown revitalization plan completed in 2017. The first two phases involving Main and Connally Streets and the plaza were completed in 2013 and codified in the *City of Sulphur Springs Tax Increment Finance Zone #1 Downtown Revitalization Project and Financing Plan*, which is in play through 2041. While not really 100 years, the planning does provide a direction and vision for the city that will set the tone for prosperity well into the future.

GOAL: Identify the community values to be reflected in the 100-year plan.

The project has invited people to come back downtown and do business in a pedestrian-friendly environment that is entertainment rich. Conflicts over parking, one-way streets, back-in parking, narrow streets, and wide sidewalks were all overcome without key partners walking away. Members of the community were respectful of the Veterans Memorial and focused on the fun and opportunities for connection offered by the game tables and ground-mounted chess and checker boards, the fountain, and the festivals and performance events. There is, concurrently, a respect for the history of the former plaza and the courthouse, celebrated with a careful vista to and from the courthouse and the memorial. And there is, of course, the aspiration to make all this self-sufficient, sustaining business viability and a tax base that enables the city to best serve its citizens.

GOAL: Focus on improving the public realm to foster social and economic exchange and development.

The project employs best practices in the new urbanist tool kit and what Lockwood calls “traditional” town-planning values. It privileges pedestrians over cars and the experience of people in the city on destination trips to downtown over fast through traffic on one-way streets. In a fundamental way, it is about beauty, scale, and making places that invite commerce, social interaction, and delight.

SELECTION COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

The Selection Committee recognized Sulphur Springs Downtown as a powerful example of a grassroots approach to government innovation and leadership. The project turned around a struggling downtown through the use of basic urban design, traffic-calming measures, and walkable street principles. The committee agreed that it provides a valuable model for other small towns in Texas and across America, especially where businesses and new development have shifted away from downtown to the outer edges along bypasses and highways.

The committee was impressed by the public sector’s role in driving the planning and implementation of Sulphur Springs Downtown (it is the only government-led initiative among the five RBA winners this cycle). The committee saw the project as a good example of government innovation that highlights the involvement of city workers in aspects of its development and implementation and praised the city manager as an “entrepreneurial bureaucrat.” They agreed that the idea of developing a long-range, 100-year vision was unusual in government-led development and suggested that the project could provide a road map for other municipally driven revitalization efforts.

The committee observed the combination of uses and events that take place within Celebration Plaza, noting that it manages to work, despite the contemplative nature of the memorial and wide variety of activities associated with events and festivals. They asked about the mix of downtown businesses and whether there were services, like a hardware store. One committee member observed that as more people in America do their shopping online and in suburban areas, many downtowns are becoming “jewel boxes,” occupied by upscale housing, retail, and restaurants, rather than offering services that respond to day-to-day needs. Although the number of special events held downtown was impressive, the committee wondered whether 150 was too much and if the space was working if so much programming was needed. At the same time, the committee recognized the wide range of events that are offered and the difference between one-time festival events and the plaza’s regular farmers market, movie night, and concert venues.

“Sulphur Springs Downtown elevates what is possible, providing inspiration for other cities, especially small towns in America.”

Some committee members felt that the design would have benefited from more attention to the quality of green space and less to parking. They noted the symbolic importance of the courthouse and suggested that the design of Celebration Plaza should have done more to respond to the building’s entry. The committee also highlighted the need for shared ownership of the project, especially given the critical role of the city manager in its creation and implementation.

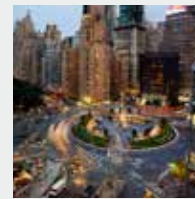
Although they appreciated the attention to urban design, committee members agreed that other, better examples of downtown plaza design exist. Even so, they agreed that Sulphur Springs Downtown elevates what is possible, providing inspiration for other cities, especially for small towns in America.



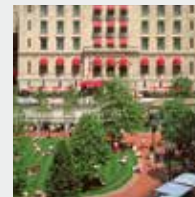
Sulphur Springs Downtown illustrates how public realm improvements can help to attract people and investment to rural urban centers.

RELATED RBA WINNERS

Several RBA winners have been “come back” stories that addressed areas of disinvestment or improvements to the public realm of their community. Like Sulphur Springs Downtown, they have included investments in alternative approaches to parking and vehicular and pedestrian circulation.



COLUMBUS CIRCLE PUBLIC PLAZA in New York City (2007 Silver Medalist) is an artful resolution to a complex traffic configuration on the southwest corner of Central Park. Improved pedestrian circulation, including a new traffic circle with a park and fountain in the center, transformed a dangerous and ugly traffic island into a beautiful urban public space.



The PARK AT POST OFFICE SQUARE in Boston (1993 Silver Medalist) replaced a 1954 parking garage in poor condition with a new public park atop a seven-story below-ground parking facility. The four-acre plaza and parking structure were completed entirely with private-sector funds, and revenues from the garage underwrite maintenance of the park.



LOWERTOWN, in Saint Paul, Minnesota (1995 Silver Medalist) includes the redevelopment of a historic warehouse area into a mixed-use neighborhood with artist live/work space, housing, offices, retail, and entertainment venues. The approach, which incorporated streetscape improvements and new and renovated parks, became a model for other cities.

Other related RBA winners that involve the revitalization of urban centers via public realm and transit infrastructure improvements include Santa Fe Railway in Santa Fe, New Mexico (2011 Silver Medalist); Downtown Silver Spring in Silver Spring, Maryland (2005 Silver Medalist); and Roslindale Village Main Street in Boston (1991 Silver Medalist).

More information about these and other RBA winners can be found at www.rudybruneraward.org.

Resources

This report was compiled from information gathered from the project application; an extensive site visit by Simeon Bruner, Anne-Marie Lubenau, and Robert Shibley (lead author) in April 2019; and research and interviews conducted during those processes and throughout the writing of this report. Titles and positions of interviewees and URLs listed below were effective as of the site visit unless otherwise noted.

INTERVIEWS

Bank Officials

- **Dwight Bell**, President, Texas Heritage Bank
- **Ricky Reynolds**, President, City National Bank
- **Craig Roberts**, President, Guaranty Bank

Chamber of Commerce

- **Kim Beck**, Board Member
- **Lezley Brown**, President
- **Butch Burney**, Board Member
- **Meredith Caddell**, former President

Downtown Business Owners, Building Owners, and Residents

- **Bethany Ashby**, building owner
- **Lara Colby**, Magic Scoop Ice Cream Shop and Celebration Antiques, Inc.
- **Marlene DeYoung**, Marlene's Sass & Class
- **John Heilman**, building owner
- **Scott Keys**, Muddy Jakes, and former publisher, *The Sulphur Springs News-Telegram*
- **Art Kunzman**, Arturo's Woodfired Pizza
- **Billie Ruth Standbridge**, President, Downtown Business Alliance, building owner, and resident
- **David and Myra Watson**, building owners and residents
- **Ben Whillock**, BackStory Brewery
- **Phil and Vanessa Williams**, Phinessé Farms Winery

Hopkins County and City of Sulphur Springs

- **Oscar Aguilar**, former member, Sulphur Springs City Council
- **Mickey Barker**, Commissioner, Hopkins County
- **Chris Brown**, Executive Director, Ark-Tex Council of Governments (former Sulphur Springs mayor and Hopkins County judge)
- **Danny Davis**, Treasurer, Hopkins County
- **Emily Glass**, Mayor Pro Tem, City of Sulphur Springs (and downtown building owner)
- **Judge Robert Newsom**, Judge, Hopkins County
- **Russ Nuss**, Public Works, City of Sulphur Springs
- **John Sellers**, Mayor, City of Sulphur Springs and County Historian
- **Gary Spraggins**, former member, Sulphur Springs City Council

Hopkins County Veterans Memorial Committee

- **Tommy Allison**, member
- **Pam Elliot**, member
- **Clayton McGraw**, member

Nearby Municipalities

- **Donna Dow**, Main Street Director, City of Denison
- **Jud Rex**, City Manager, City of Denison
- **Wyman Williams**, Mayor, City of Commerce

Press and Media

- **Kerry Craig**, Reporter, *The Sulphur Springs News-Telegram*
- **Dave Kirkpatrick**, Reporter, Media Radio
- **Jimmy Rogers**, News Director, KFBZ Television

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The 2019 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence

The Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence is a national design award recognizing transformative urban places that contribute to the social, economic, and environmental vitality of American cities. Every biennial award cycle is documented with detailed case studies about the winners and an essay summarizing the observations, discussions, and lessons learned from the process leading to their selection.

Changing the Narrative: The 2019 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence presents the five 2019 Rudy Bruner Award winners. They include the redevelopment of a former 1.5-million-square-foot Sears, Roebuck and Co. distribution center into a mixed-use vertical village in Memphis; a series of public art and lighting installations that now enliven downtown Lynn, Massachusetts; the expansion and enhancement of an existing park and historic waterway and flood control channel into a resilient public greenspace in Houston; the youth-driven, do-it-yourself creation of a public skatepark on city-owned land beneath a highway underpass in New Orleans; and the redevelopment of a civic plaza and main streets to revitalize the center of rural Sulphur Springs, Texas. Together they illustrate how urban design and development can change attitudes and perceptions about people and places, challenge assumptions about what is possible, and address some of the most critical issues facing cities today.

Since 1987, the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence has recognized and documented 88 projects in 28 states. The medalists provide valuable insight into urban development and the evolution of American cities and offer opportunities for education, reflection, and inspiration for students, practitioners, and civic leaders.

Gold Medal	Crosstown Concourse Memphis, TN
Silver Medals	Beyond Walls Lynn, MA
	Buffalo Bayou Park Houston, TX
	Parisite Skatepark New Orleans, LA
	Sulphur Springs Downtown Sulphur Springs, TX

For more information about the Rudy Bruner Award, including case studies about past winners, please visit us online at www.rudybruneraward.org.