



# Pavement to Parks

Transforming Spaces for Cars into Places for People



Urban Land  
Institute

Building Healthy  
Places Initiative



STOSS LANDSCAPE URBANISM

Around the world, cities are transforming underutilized and obsolete spaces primarily used by vehicles into places for people to enjoy. In Milwaukee, Erie Street Plaza (front cover, and above, before redevelopment) was once a leftover piece of land adjacent to the riverfront primarily used as a parking lot. Today, it provides people safe and welcoming access to nature and the water.

COVER PHOTO: JOHN DECEMBER

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# Pavement to Parks

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**Transforming Spaces for Cars into Places for People**

## The Urban Land Institute

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The Urban Land Institute (ULI) is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 45,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission of providing leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide.

ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific regions, with members in 76 countries.

The extraordinary impact that ULI makes on land use decision-making is based on its members sharing expertise on a variety of factors affecting the built environment, including urbanization, demographic and population changes, new economic drivers, technology advancements, and environmental concerns.

## ULI Building Healthy Places Initiative

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Around the world, communities face pressing health challenges related to the built environment. Through the Building Healthy Places Initiative, launched in 2013, ULI is leveraging the power of ULI's global networks to shape projects and places in ways that improve the health of people and communities. Building Healthy Places is working to make health, social equity, and wellness mainstream considerations in real estate practice. Learn more and connect with Building Healthy Places: [uli.org/health](http://uli.org/health).

## About 10 Minute Walk

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10 Minute Walk is a movement dedicated to improving access to safe, high-quality parks, and green spaces in cities—large and small—throughout the United States. Led by The Trust for Public Land (TPL), in partnership with the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and the Urban Land Institute and with support from The JPB Foundation, 10 Minute Walk is working to create a world in which, by 2050, all people live within a 10-minute walk of a park or green space. This partnership drives commitments from city leaders working to achieve this vision and transform their communities.

Learn more and connect with 10 Minute Walk at [10minutewalk.org](http://10minutewalk.org) and [uli.org/parks](http://uli.org/parks).

## About the Report

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Parks are essential building blocks for thriving places. American cities, which have historically given over prime land for automobile storage and transport, are rethinking the primacy of the car and are creating parks on land once dedicated to the automobile—including former parking lots and roadways, parking garages, and the spaces underneath highway overpasses. Pavement-to-parks conversions provide the opportunity to enhance community connection, promote environmental sustainability, and improve park access for communities that have lacked it.

This report presents stories from across the United States and around the globe of cities and organizations that have worked to transform or enhance spaces formerly dedicated to cars into parks and open spaces that support recreation, community engagement, sustainability and resilience, and neighborhood connectivity and revitalization.

The profiled projects and programs were chosen for their excellence and to illustrate various types of transformations spanning a wide range of geographies, scales, and costs. These rebirth stories require the engagement of many parties, including public-sector leaders, community members, developers, urban designers and landscape architects, and philanthropic and nonprofit organizations. Done well, pavement-to-park transformations can yield powerful dividends for real estate and communities.

**Look around. Could that pavement you see be a park instead?**

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PENNY LEE

# Introduction

**With the rise of the automobile throughout the 20th century, American cities and communities have been increasingly characterized by concrete and pavement.**

Highways cut across the landscape to allow people to live miles from their jobs, and an abundance of parking lots and parking spaces were built to make it convenient to visit retail and office buildings—a convenience eventually codified into law. Wide travel lanes on arterial roadways signaled that vehicles were the primary user of city streets—not people. Green space and trees gave way to pavement and concrete.

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**“The United States has about 2 billion parking spaces and only 250 million cars—that is eight parking spots for every car.”**

AS REPORTED BY LAURA BLISS IN *CITY LAB*, NOV. 27, 2018

However, things are changing quickly, with the rise of ride-sharing services and increased investment in public transit and bicycle systems in many urban areas. As noted in *Bloomberg Businessweek* (“This Is What Peak Car Looks Like,” Feb. 28, 2019), driving is declining and the use of ride-sharing services is increasing, which may significantly reduce demand for the vast amount of parking that has been built over the past several decades.



There is also a growing recognition of the negative impacts that automobile infrastructure such as highways and automobile parking spaces has on communities—from air quality, to stormwater, to urban heat island effects, to “dead zones” and disconnects that sap a community’s vitality. Cities are looking to reclaim space from cars and increase sustainability, health, and mobility by rethinking the primacy of the automobile in planning and priorities. Through new infrastructure and programming, cities and communities are working to mitigate the negative impacts of highways and parking lots.

Communities are seeking to repurpose outmoded, minimally used, or deteriorating roads and parking lots and parking spaces for other uses. The rising adoption of “complete streets” policies to ensure safe and convenient travel for all ages and abilities, the proliferation of bike lanes and paths, and the creation of parks and green spaces in places once reserved for cars are all examples of this trend.

Many cities are creating new gathering spaces and promoting nonmotorized travel by taking back space once reserved for vehicles and transforming it into uses for people. These efforts build upon the successful national rails-to-trails efforts (see sidebar).

The national 10 Minute Walk movement (see sidebar, next page), aspires to improve access to safe, high-quality parks and green spaces and make parks top of mind with the people who are planning the future of cities. The health benefits of parks to help combat chronic disease have been well documented, but the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic revealed that spaces where people can safely get outdoors, exercise, and play are even more essential than

## RAILS TO TRAILS

The movement to convert transportation infrastructure to parks and trails has a long history. In recent years, the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, a nonprofit organization established in 1986, has led the movement to convert former rail lines to trails, capitalizing on momentum begun earlier in the mid-20th century as travel by road and air became more common and made many railway lines obsolete.

In 1965, Wisconsin purchased a railway that would become the first rail-to-trail project in the United States, called the Elroy-Sparta State Trail. Now, the rails-to-trails movement is known for initiatives such

as the Midtown Greenway in Minneapolis, the High Line in New York City, and the Great Allegheny Passage from Cumberland, Maryland, to Pittsburgh.

Today, over 24,000 miles of railroad tracks have been converted into trails. And in spring 2019, trail advocates announced an ambitious initiative to create a coast-to-coast recreational trail, which is expected to connect more than 125 existing trails nationwide. These transformations of outdated rail infrastructure into vibrant, community-linking trails offer a powerful precedent for the conversion of pavement to parks and open spaces.

## 10 MINUTE WALK

Parks are essential to the physical, environmental, and economic health of people and communities. Parks help expand the economy by attracting homebuyers, tourists, and highly talented workers. They protect the environment, provide space for the enjoyment of arts and nature, and make people healthier, happier, and more connected.

Despite these known benefits, research shows that one in three Americans—more than 100 million people—do not have a park within a 10-minute walk of their home. 10 Minute Walk is a movement dedicated to improving access to safe, high-quality parks and green spaces in cities—large and small—throughout the United States. Led by The Trust for Public Land (TPL), in partnership with the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and the Urban Land Institute and with support from The JPB Foundation, 10 Minute Walk is working to create a world in which, by 2050, all people live within a 10-minute walk of a park or green space. This partnership drives commitments from city leaders working to achieve this vision and transform their communities.



Nearly 300 U.S. mayors have endorsed 10 Minute Walk so far. ULI, TPL, and NRPA are working with partners in select cities on measurable policies and strategies to advance the 10 Minute Walk vision. Success in this work will require the expertise, creativity, and close collaboration of public- and private-sector leaders. ULI has a powerful role to play in catalyzing its members, networks, and partners around a vision of a green, sustainable, connected, and resilient future for all people.

previously recognized. Local parks, trails, and other public spaces have been some of the only safe places for people to engage in physical activity or access nature while physically distancing from others—crucial activities for lowering stress levels, reducing symptoms of depression, and maintaining physical health.

The benefits of parks are numerous and can counteract the environmental and health impacts of pavement. Parks and open spaces bring communities together, both physically and socially, and help combat the effects of heat and stormwater runoff through green infrastructure.

The 2020 coronavirus pandemic has underscored the importance of abundant and safe parks and trails and has added urgency to efforts to address challenges of inequitable access. To provide space for physically distanced recreation, dining, and transportation, many cities are temporarily or permanently closing streets, parking lots, and other public infrastructure assets. The pandemic is spurring communities to look at streets in different ways and to try out new approaches and innovations with a speed and nimbleness unthinkable before early 2020. Through the reallocation of pavement for people, public health and community resilience can be greatly improved.

This report presents stories from across the United States and around the globe of cities and organizations that have worked to transform or enhance spaces formerly dedicated to cars into parks and open spaces that support recreation, community engagement, sustainability and resilience, and neighborhood connectivity and revitalization. The profiled projects and programs were chosen for their excellence and to illustrate various types of transformations spanning a wide range of geographies, scales, and costs.

These rebirth stories require the engagement of many parties, including public leaders, communities, developers, philanthropy, nonprofit operators, and other partners. Done well, pavement-to-park transformations can yield powerful dividends for real estate and communities.

While cities must thoughtfully analyze whether park space—rather than another type of development—is the best solution for a particular location, these stories showcase what is possible when a city or organization undertakes an effort to turn pavement into parks.

## ENVIRONMENTAL AND HEALTH IMPACTS OF PAVEMENT AND PARKING LOTS

Paved parking lots and roadways have many often-overlooked impacts on human and environmental health. With impervious surfaces that prevent water from seeping into the ground, rain that falls on pavement can pick up contaminants before running into nearby waterways. This runoff contributes to water pollution, which poses health hazards to downstream communities and has repercussions for the entire aquatic ecosystem.

Toxic materials and pollutants carried by water from impervious pavement can accumulate, polluting streams and rivers and creating dangerous conditions for fishing, swimming, boating, and other activities. Pavement with improper drainage can result in serious flooding of nearby homes and businesses or can lead to combined sewer system overflows.

Parking lot pavement is not only commonly impervious, but also is typically dark in color. As a result, parking lots absorb heat during the day and slowly release it, making cities hotter than they would be with reflective surfaces or green space instead. This is called the



urban heat island effect. Parking lots are also a source of visual blight, creating dead zones in the urban fabric and hostile conditions for pedestrians, as well as health consequences from certain types of sealcoat.

The harms from pavement and parking lots can be mitigated by strategies including the use of porous paving and low impact design approaches such as the inclusion of rain gardens and bioswales. But the sheer volume of parking lot surface area in this country means that the impacts on human and environmental health should not be underestimated.



# Insights

## **When it comes to the conversion of pavement to parks, each project and place is unique.**

This report shares insights from 15 projects and four municipal programs, each with its own particular history, context, stakeholders, financing strategy, and outcomes. Still, common lessons learned are gleaned from all the inspirational efforts to transform places for cars into places for people included in this report.

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### **Imagination**

Neglected spaces have potential. Some creativity and imagination are needed to look at pavement and see possibility, to be able to see gathering spots and nature in city hardscapes. But an appreciation for what is possible is key. Many of the projects in this report started with a reckoning that the old status quo was not serving the community well, as well as a bold idea and vision for what the future could hold. As the projects in this report show, a different future is possible if big ideas are given the opportunity to take root.

There are many different ways to engineer a park transformation, from organic community engagement like Chicano Park in San Diego, to the drive of a dogged and visionary leader, like Norman B. Leventhal Park in Boston, to the determination of a city planning department as in Dutch Kills Green and the Queensboro Bridge Greenway in Queens, New York. Regardless of the spark, the ability to look at an automobile-oriented place and see the possibilities for a greener, healthier, and more sustainable future is essential.

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## Collaboration

By their nature, many different groups and agencies have ownership stakes in the park projects in this report, from transportation departments to redevelopment agencies to community groups, philanthropy, and the private sector. All of the projects in this report required the buy-in of multiple stakeholders, and the stakeholder set may shift over time, as the needs of a park evolve from land control to design to operations. Business improvement districts (BIDs) and BID-like organizations often play indispensable roles, as do developers.

The birth of Roosevelt Plaza Park in Camden, New Jersey, for example, required leadership from the city and the redevelopment authority, as well as ongoing leadership from Cooper's Ferry Partnership, a private nonprofit redevelopment corporation. When many stakeholders are involved, it is important for partners' unique expertise and priorities to be understood and respected.

Although collaboration among multiple stakeholders is nearly always necessary, it can often be helpful for one or two groups to emerge as key champions or catalysts. In the case of Toronto's Underpass Park, for example, leadership from Waterfront Toronto, a multilevel government agency linking provincial and city governments, was essential. In the case of the Underground at Ink Block in Boston, private developer National Development has played the role of catalyst and investor.

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## Community Support

Whoever takes the lead, strong community buy-in and support will allow projects to proceed more quickly and smoothly. It is critical to ensure community engagement right from the very beginning and make sure the community is directing the project so that the park is something people want, use, and respect. Throughout the design process for Tongva Park in Santa Monica, California, five workshops engaged over 200 community members and helped inform both the design for the park and the name selected.

Sometimes the role of community evolves over time. In the case of Philadelphia's Porch at 30th Street, project developers had to build community where one did not exist before with a variety of programming and slowly engage new stakeholders—including Amtrak employees and riders—with activities and amenities that met their needs. Other times, community buy-in and ownership are strong from the beginning—as is the case with San Diego's Chicano Park and Lynwood, California's Ricardo Lara Park.

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## Data Collection

Collecting and using data can help guide decision-making and next steps. Leaders from Philadelphia's Porch at 30th Street project have used data to gain buy-in from reluctant partners and determine investment priorities. The Capitol Riverfront BID in Washington, D.C., conducts an annual survey of users of Canal Park to assess the popularity of current programming and inform future plans. Data can help ensure that users are enjoying their experience as well as help park stewards enhance people's future visits.



## Programming and Flexibility

High-quality design is essential, but successful places thrive because of their commitment to ongoing and regular programming and activities that bring people to the space, build community, and support the costs of operations. Klyde Warren Park in Dallas, Texas, hosts 1,300 events every year, ranging from large receptions and concerts to children’s bilingual storytelling. In nonresidential areas, or those without built-in constituents, programming is even more essential. Large-scale events draw lots of people from across a city and introduce new audiences to a park.

Designing for flexible uses can help ensure that a space is able to evolve and adapt over time. And, although it can feel risky, flexible furniture is a small bet that has paid off in several of the parks profiled in this report, from Klyde Warren in Dallas, to Underpass Park in Toronto, to Philadelphia’s Porch at 30th Street. People seem to appreciate and respond positively to an implicit extension of trust and expectation of stewardship.

## Funding and Resources

It is essential to determine who is responsible for programming and maintenance early on in the development of a park project. Upfront capital may be inadequate for ongoing maintenance and operations, and revenue streams must be identified or developed to ensure future success. Key sources include contributions from BID revenue, support from philanthropy (as has been the case with the Bullitt Foundation's maintenance of McGilvra Place Park in Seattle), and revenue from events and rentals.

It is important that park leaders stay vigilant in laying out plans for the maintenance of high-quality open space. Plans should ensure that resources are available to pay for not only programming but also utilities, irrigation, landscaping, maintenance, and the like. In the case of roadways and on-street parking that are converted to parks, stewardship must often be negotiated between transportation, public works, and parks departments. These decisions are critical to the ability of pavement-to-parks projects to succeed over the long term.









# Projects

The projects profiled in this report are diverse—in location, in programming, in the types of materials incorporated, and in the stakeholders involved in bringing them to fruition. All have at least one commonality: their transformations led to more community activation and connection and have created healthier and more sustainable places in their respective cities.

# Canal Park

WASHINGTON, D.C.

#### Park size

3 acres (1 ha)

#### Neighborhood type

Postindustrial

#### Completed

2012

#### Cost

\$20 million

#### Key partners

WC Smith Company,  
Capitol Riverfront Business  
Improvement District

#### Designers

OLIN, Studios Architecture,  
Vika Capitol, Nitsch Engineering,  
SK&A Structural Engineers,  
Atelier Ten, Joseph Loring  
& Associates

**Canal Park in Washington, D.C.'s Capitol Riverfront neighborhood, once a site for public school bus storage, is now a vibrant and heavily visited park featuring low-impact landscaping, stormwater capture, and seasonal activities for children—including a water play feature in summer and a skating rink in winter—along with an onsite restaurant.**

Formerly a canal used to transport coal, the aptly named Canal Park is located in the Capitol Riverfront neighborhood in Washington, D.C. Once filled in, it became a surface parking lot occupied by school buses before being considered for transformation into an urban park. After years of environmental remediation, strategic planning, and creative financing, it is now a vibrant, heavily used public park in the U.S. capital.

The development of Major League Baseball stadium Nationals Park and an economic upturn elevated the potential for open space in Capitol Riverfront. City leaders launched a major program to revitalize the former industrial base, setting the stage for new housing, offices, and residences. The city and developers recognized that green space would be appealing for employees and, increasingly, residents, and that a park would in turn contribute to the economic vitality of the area.

“Canal Park has an important role in placemaking and being the fabric where people can come together,” said Dan Melman, vice president of parks and finance for the Capitol Riverfront BID, which manages Canal Park. “If you came down here two years ago, the whole east side was parking lots. If you come down now, there are office and residential buildings that have been built and that are under construction. The surface parking lots provide a great

amenity to people who drive cars, but the park needs to be framed; it needs people who look out on it and value it, and these office and residential buildings will provide that.”

Property owners of the parcels surrounding the park led the charge for a design emphasizing green infrastructure. The WC Smith Company, owner of an adjacent office building, and JBG, builder of the federal Department of Transportation headquarters—one of the subarea’s largest new employers—were especially supportive of a plan to design the space with reused materials, incorporate advanced stormwater capture and reuse, and promote the certification and sale of stormwater tax credits. Other key partners included the DC Housing Authority, Department of General Services, and Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development. The Capitol Riverfront BID is contracted by the nonprofit Canal Park Inc. to manage park features and provide programming and marketing for Canal Park.

The land itself was originally subject to federal reservations, which protected it from development, that were transferred back to the District. It is currently under leaseback to Canal Park Inc., which generates revenue through stormwater tax credits and rental income from the restaurants, among other sources. Programming includes youth-centered events, movies at night, and a weekly farmers market; an annual survey helps guide potential future programming.

In addition to incorporating sustainable features, differentiating Canal Park from other parks in the area was important. Although some wanted play structures and carousels, nearby parks already had those amenities. Elaborate water features ultimately made this park unique and strengthened the surrounding network of parks rather than serving as a substitute for existing green space. By recalling the site’s canal origins, the water elements were also helpful in placemaking, another goal of the developers. In the wintertime, the water fountain is transformed into a popular skating rink. The variety of activities and amenities in and surrounding Canal Park create a welcoming environment for people of all ages—and their pets. A new dog park just a block from Canal Park provides some relief from the pressures created by such a pet-friendly environment.

Canal Park’s focus on sustainability and placemaking has turned it into a valuable asset for the Capitol Riverfront community. “The park helps differentiate the neighborhood from other parts of the city and bring people here,” said Melman, “and, as a BID, when we look at the whole neighborhood we can really see how the parks are creating livability.”



A former school bus parking lot, Canal Park now boasts three blocks of green features and numerous amenities for people of all ages.



# Chicano Park

BARRIO LOGAN, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

## Park size

7.4 acres (3 ha)

## Neighborhood type

Historic immigrant community

## Completed

1970

## Cost

Not available

## Key partners

Community members

## Designers

Mural artists

**San Diego's Chicano Park, located under Interstate 5, was born out of a public protest and continues to embody a spirit of organic creation, with vivid and nationally recognized murals that celebrate Chicano culture, along with community amenities including picnic tables, playgrounds, a dance pavilion, and a skate park.**

Chicano Park began with a protest in San Diego's oldest Mexican American neighborhood. In the early 1900s, Barrio Logan, also known as Logan Heights, was a middle-class neighborhood of immigrants stretching to the San Diego Bay. The community lost beach access after World War II, when the Navy and defense industries gained the space, and in the 1960s, Interstate 5 and the San Diego–Coronado Bay Bridge split the neighborhood in half, displacing residents and businesses throughout the community.

The city of San Diego promised to create a park under the bridge, but on April 22, 1970, residents noticed construction on that land for a California Highway Patrol station instead. They rallied to stop the development, occupying the space for 12 days, forming human chains around bulldozers, and planting a garden on the razed site. "During the occupation, the residents were present and defended the site of the future Chicano Park," said Josephine Talamantez, cofounder of the park. "We began bringing plants, and Delia Cacho from Cacho Farms brought tractors and began tilling the land to build the park. The Chicano Park Steering Committee was formed to be the negotiators and stewards of the park." After negotiations, the city relocated the patrol station to another site and the creation of Chicano Park was officially approved.

Chicano Park, built under a highway underpass, features more than 100 Chicano murals, the largest concentration in the world.



MATT NORRIS/ULI

This organic beginning, rooted in the reclamation of space, continued as artists from around the world—including renowned painters such as Salvador Torres, Guillermo Aranda, and Victor Ochoa—began to paint murals on the bridge's pylons, evoking themes of self-determination, mythology, immigration, feminism, and heritage. Now, with the assistance of Talamantez, 49 murals in the park have been designated as a San Diego Cultural Resource and National Historic Landmark and are listed on the California Register of Historical Resources and the National Register of Historic Places. To this day, the park remains the largest concentration of Chicano murals in the world with over 100 murals.

Although 1970 marks the first year of the park, the space has continued to evolve since then. The “All the Way to the Bay” campaign advocated for extending Chicano Park to the waterfront, where the neighborhood had originally ended. A parcel of land on the bay was added in 1987, but a three-block gap in parkland between Chicano Park and the water still exists.

In 2011, nearly two dozen murals were restored with federal funding, and the park now features sculptures, picnic tables, playgrounds, a dance pavilion, and a skate park. The Chicano Park Steering Committee oversees the 2015 Chicano Park Herb Garden, cosponsored by the nonprofit Environmental Health Coalition.

Every year, Chicano Park Day celebrates the history of the park takeover and Chicano culture. Photos and stories live on the virtual Chicano Park Museum ([www.chicanoparkmuseum.org](http://www.chicanoparkmuseum.org)), ensuring that the history of the park is remembered as new breweries, galleries, and shops enter the area. And the park itself remains a powerful source of remembrance as well: the Chicano community created this park for generations to come, reimagining the underpass both visually as a place for art and culturally as a site of history and resistance.

# Director Park

PORTLAND, OREGON

## Park size

0.5 acres (0.2 ha)

## Neighborhood type

Central business district

## Completed

2009

## Cost

\$9.45 million

## Key partners

City of Portland, Portland Parks Foundation, Portland Development Commission, private donors

## Designer

OLIN

**Formerly a parking lot the size of a city block, Director Park is now a bustling urban plaza in the center of downtown Portland. Built over a six-level underground parking garage two blocks from the iconic Pioneer Square, the park hosts a range of amenities and activities and has become a popular destination for both residents and visitors.**

Director Park, a half-acre (0.2 ha) oasis located just two blocks from Portland's famous Pioneer Square, was conceived as an urban plaza stretching from adjacent building to adjacent building. The location—in the urban core of the city and surrounded by retail, office, and cultural uses—makes the park an ideal spot for activities and events that can include the whole community. Once underused as a parking lot, Director Park now helps link downtown Portland's other parks, plazas, and public spaces.

Funding for the park, which opened in 2009, came from a public/private partnership among the city of Portland, the Portland Parks Foundation, the Portland Development Commission, and private donors. After outcry over a 1995 plan to turn what was formerly known as South Park Block 5 into a parking garage, Portland developer Tom Moyer pledged to acquire the block and turn the surface into a park, while constructing parking below ground.



COURTESY OF ZGF ARCHITECTS LLP



COURTESY OF ZGF ARCHITECTS LLP

Located in the urban core of Portland, Director Park is an active and well-used public plaza—drastically different from its past use as a parking lot.

An extensive public engagement process—which was initiated in the 1980s during feasibility studies of the block and picked up in 2006 once it was clear the block would be developed into a park—helped shape the design of Director Park. Because of the underground parking, minimal depth was available for tree roots, and adjacent tall buildings create significant shade. To meet these challenges and serve the community’s desire for a versatile public space, a “piazza” model similar to public spaces found in European cities was therefore implemented. Park amenities include a restaurant, movable tables and chairs, a water feature, and a restroom.

As well as being a popular social space, Director Park has important environmental and economic benefits. All stormwater is filtered on site, and the design uses the natural slope of

the park and adjacent streets to direct runoff to planters and other vegetation. The park location is adjacent to a light-rail stop and contains several bike racks, providing convenient car-free access. Director Park has helped stimulate local economic activity, through rentals for events, jobs created to support the park, and patrons at the park’s restaurant.

Director Park illustrates the power of reimagining a parcel of land’s original purpose and transforming it into a community amenity.

# Erie Street Plaza

MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

## Park size

0.25 acres (0.1 ha)

## Neighborhood type

Central city (adjacent to downtown)

## Completed

2010

## Cost

\$550,000 (construction cost)

## Key partner

City of Milwaukee

## Designer

Stoss Landscape Urbanism

**Erie Street Plaza in Milwaukee replaced a surface parking lot and today provides a variety of social and ecological benefits to the city. Designed to filter stormwater, the plaza is also host to numerous events that connect the city to the water.**

A former surface parking lot, Erie Street Plaza is now a flexible and sustainable public space that provides a gathering place for nearby restaurants and buildings. The plaza, completed in 2010, is located at the southernmost extension of the Milwaukee Riverwalk, which extends over three miles from Lake Michigan through downtown Milwaukee to the confluence of the Milwaukee and Kinnickinnic Rivers.

Erie Street Plaza anchors the Historic Third Ward neighborhood, close to downtown. Work on the Riverwalk System—a green corridor that promotes activity along the waterfront and reclaims the space for public use—began in 1993.

Parcels adjacent to the site, which also functioned as parking lots, were replaced by a mixed-use development. Originally, the plaza site was intended to remain a parking lot to serve the development's restaurant—even though the site was owned by the city. After working through some concerns about losing parking spaces, the plaza has become an asset for the restaurant—now a key partner in maintaining the space because of the value it has brought for patrons.

The city of Milwaukee initiated the redevelopment of the quarter-acre (0.1 ha) parking lot site through a design competition, ultimately selecting a proposal from Stoss Landscape Urbanism





A notable feature of Erie Street Plaza is the translucent fiberglass benches, arranged throughout the park, that glow yellow at night.



out of Boston. Simplicity, flexibility, stormwater management, and water quality were all important design considerations.

Chris Reed, principal at Stoss, explained that “previously, there was runoff from the street moving directly into the river. The way we designed it, some of that water can be caught and infiltrated through the ground so it doesn’t enter the river directly; it’s filtered through the soil first and cleansed. Other rainwater is used to irrigate the lower marsh area of the plaza, further cleaning the water and adding ecological diversity. In a lot of ways, this small plaza is doing its part to enhance water quality of the river and the Great Lakes system.” Plus, much of the plant area needs only annual maintenance, which cuts down on operation and maintenance costs.

The plaza was designed to be not only sustainable but also flexible, which helps maximize the usability of the space. The seating is made from translucent fiberglass that glows yellow at night, and the benches are grouped irregularly to accommodate different size clusters of people, in sun and in shade. As a result, the plaza can accommodate everything from large gatherings like art festivals, concerts, movies, weddings, farmers markets, and winter carnivals to everyday activities like boat-watching, fishing, and sunbathing. The glow also lends the space a distinct identity, making it recognizable at night for people going by in a car or boat.

The plaza now functions as the de facto entrance for the adjacent restaurant.

The Historic Third Ward Association maintains the plaza, and a tax incremental financing district has provided \$7 million for street and Riverwalk improvements along the north shore of the Milwaukee River. Key stakeholders included the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the city of Milwaukee Public Works and Community Development Departments, the Planning and Fine Arts Commissions, and community groups.

As a part of the Milwaukee Riverwalk System, Erie Street Plaza has extended healthy access to the river both ecologically and socially. The plaza’s sustainable design enhances water quality, and the flexibility of the space motivates people to visit by ensuring a choice and diversity of use. Replacing a parking lot, the park now activates the area with functional green space, a highly usable design, and clear public access to Milwaukee’s iconic riverfront.

# Klyde Warren Park

DALLAS, TEXAS

## Park size

5.2 acres (2.1 ha)

## Neighborhood type

Central business district

## Completed

2012

## Cost

\$112 million

## Key partners

City of Dallas, Texas Department of Transportation, Woodall Rodgers Park Foundation

## Designer

OJB—the Office of James Burnett

**Completed in 2012, Klyde Warren Park in Dallas spans the recessed Woodall Rodgers Freeway, which had long divided downtown and uptown Dallas. Today, it is a vibrant and heavily programmed park that delights residents and visitors alike and has spawned a new wave of park-adjacent real estate development.**

The 5.2-acre (2.1 ha) urban green space includes daily free public programs and activities for residents and visitors of all ages, a children's playground, a dog park, dining facilities, and numerous active and passive spaces. The park was the winner of the 2014 ULI Urban Open Space Award, which recognizes public spaces that have socially enriched their surrounding communities and revitalized their economies.

Klyde Warren Park is owned and managed by the nonprofit Woodall Rodgers Park Foundation, formed by the Dallas business community. Despite its relatively small size, Klyde Warren Park hosts some 1,300 activities every year, averaging more than three per day. Activities include yoga sessions on the lawn, workout classes designed for mothers and kids, children's bilingual storytelling, food trucks at lunchtime, and an evening concert series.

Built with a combination of public and private funds, including revenue from a voter-approved ballot measure, Klyde Warren Park features a flexible, pedestrian-oriented design that includes a children's park, reading room, great lawn, restaurant, performance pavilion, fountain plaza, games area, dog park, and botanical garden arranged around a sweeping pedestrian promenade. Klyde Warren provided the city with a new town square that has literally and

figuratively bridged the city's downtown cultural district with the burgeoning mixed-use neighborhoods to the north, reshaping the city and catalyzing economic development.

New development has also gravitated to the park, with projects including the Trammell Crow Company's two-building mixed-use complex, Park District, which has a 34-story apartment tower and a 20-story office tower. "Dallas does not have an oceanfront, so Klyde Warren Park is our ocean," Scott Krikorian, Trammell Crow's senior managing director in Dallas, told ULI's *Urban Land* in September 2016.

Although cap parks such as Klyde Warren can benefit communities, their price tags are often enormous and require a mix of funding strategies, including federal dollars and private and corporate donations. Still, in locations where land value is high—such as many urban cores—the opportunity to create new park acreage while simultaneously transforming an eyesore is appealing to many cities, despite their complexity. "The [freeway] deck park movement is definitely picking up speed, and the success in Dallas has been hugely influential," said Peter Harnik of The Trust for Public Land in the same *Urban Land* article.

Dallas is planning a second cap park in the economically disadvantaged Oak Cliff neighborhood just south of downtown, hoping to connect the neighborhood with amenities and services that currently exist on the other side of the highway.



SERKAN ZANAGAR

Klyde Warren Park hosts programs and activities for people of all ages, including a reading and games room with a collection of board games that can be checked out for use in the park.



BING MAPS

Before construction of the park, the freeway was a barrier between downtown Dallas and the Uptown neighborhood. Now the people-friendly park seamlessly connects the two neighborhoods and adds a large swath of green space where only concrete existed previously.



AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY, INC.

# Madrid Rio Park

MADRID, SPAIN

## Park size

360 acres (146 ha)

## Neighborhood type

Downtown

## Completed

2011

## Cost

\$5 billion

## Key partners

Madrid City Council, Madrid City Government

## Designers

Burgos & Garrido, Porras & La Casta, Rubio & A-Sala, West 8

**With the Madrid Rio Park in Madrid, a city is reconnected to its waterfront with a new network of parks created on top of an urban highway system. The courageous public project spearheaded by the Madrid city government has helped knit the city together and provided sorely needed parks and recreational opportunities for some of its most disadvantaged communities.**

Madrid Rio Park was made possible by the burial of 25 miles (40 km) of urban motorways that had separated the city's 6 million residents from the Manzanares River. Following a 2003 decision by the Madrid City Council to bury the M30 arterial, which ran along both banks of the river, construction began in 2005 and continued for a decade. With a bold stroke, the park addressed a severe shortage of freely accessible green spaces in Madrid's southern neighborhoods, creating a place where the landscape, the city, the architecture, and the urban infrastructure combine to create a greener and more livable city.

The park now occupies 360 acres (146 ha) of green space—trails and urban beaches sharing space with art centers, playgrounds, and cafés—providing a link between city and river and between the urban ecosystem and the vast Manzanares River basin.

Central elements include 12 new pedestrian bridges; 15 acres (6 ha) of public and sports facilities; 18 miles (29 km) of bike lanes; social, communal, and artistic amenities, including two restaurants and six cafés; and children's areas. The project also involved restoration of the river's hydraulic architectural heritage, including dams and three historic bridges. Matadero



By relocating Avenida de Portugal—which intersects with the river—underground, the space was converted into gardens and plazas that benefit adjacent residents.



Madrid, an abandoned slaughterhouse converted into an arts center, anchors and enlivens the park. Matadero acts as a cultural catalyst and magnet for people, attracting more than 1 million visitors and hosting 4,000 programs a year.

Nearly wholly built and maintained with public money, the project required political courage and steadfast commitment from the city's leadership, including Mayor Alberto Ruiz-Gallardón, because plans were met with public opposition from the outset. The tunneling of the motorway took more than three years to complete, disrupting traffic and daily life for residents. The complex project and its complicated engineering were also difficult to explain to city dwellers, and its \$5 billion price tag was daunting.

Despite these obstacles, today the project helps knit together the southern and northern parts of the city, benefiting some of Madrid's most disadvantaged neighborhoods, which were disproportionately affected by the motorway, the deterioration of the river, poor connections with the city, and lack of public space. In 2018, the project won the ULI Urban Open Space Award, which recognizes exemplary parks in the United States and abroad. Madrid Rio Park has fundamentally improved the city's urban fabric and is a destination for local neighbors and visitors alike.



# McGilvra Place Park

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

## Park size

0.5 acres (0.2 ha)

## Neighborhood type

City neighborhood

## Completed

2013

## Cost

\$750,000

## Key partners

Bullitt Foundation, Seattle Government, private donors, Point32 landscape design

## Designer

The Berger Partnership

**McGilvra Place Park in Seattle, created from a once-overlooked traffic median, is a neighborhood destination, amenity for nearby office buildings, and demonstration site for green features.**

McGilvra Place Park in Seattle is proof that even small parks can have a big impact. Once a leftover 2,605-square-foot (242 sq m) triangular space created where two streets meet at the edge of the Central District neighborhood, McGilvra Place Park is now a demonstration site for green features as a Living Building Challenge–certified project.

This is not surprising, given the location, adjacent to the Bullitt Center—commonly touted as the world’s greenest commercial building. The center’s owner and operator, the Bullitt Foundation, recognized the importance and value of redeveloping this space concurrently with the office building and led the effort to certify the park, which includes features such as recycled and porous concrete, reclaimed wood benches, and drought-tolerant native landscaping.

Technically considered a traffic median and owned by the Seattle Department of Transportation, McGilvra Place was once an elevated lawn, walled off and hard to use, surrounded by mature London plane trees that were protected in the project. The underused median seemed ripe for transformation to the Bullitt Foundation, as the neighborhood plan called for more publicly accessible open space. Located to the west of the Bullitt Center, McGilvra Place was also important as an undeveloped site that would protect the building’s solar panels—located higher than the tops of the London plane trees—from future shading.

The city of Seattle was a key partner in funding the redevelopment. Half the estimated \$750,000 for redevelopment was raised from private donors while the Seattle Parks and Green Spaces Levy Opportunity Fund provided the other half. The city also agreed to convert a short block of 15th Avenue—in between the park and the Bullitt Center—into a “green street.” The right-of-way exists for emergency vehicle use only, and the street closure expanded the usable public space by 20 percent while enhancing safety for pedestrians in and around the park. Although the city technically owns the park, the Bullitt Foundation manages day-to-day maintenance such as trash pickup and graffiti and leaf removal; Seattle Parks and Recreation handles major maintenance.

The Bullitt Foundation and partners learned key lessons while planning and designing the project—most important, the alignment of project plans with neighborhood goals. Said Brad Kahn with Groundwork Strategies, who serves as communications director for the Bullitt Center and as a board member for the Seattle Parks Foundation: “This wasn’t just good for the neighborhood, but it also helped the project. By

working with surrounding neighbors and aligning our project with neighborhood plans calling for more pocket parks, we were able to build support for the project. This helped us move through design review and permitting.”

It is also in a developer’s best interest to invest in nearby public spaces. “Research shows that locating near a degraded public space can drive property values down, but being located next to a quality public space, however you define that, absolutely improves property values,” said Kahn. “As a developer, you have a stake in the quality of that space, even if the only thing you care about is the bottom line. For a civically minded developer like the Bullitt Foundation, the dollars you’re putting in for the benefits you’re getting back makes it a fairly straightforward decision.”

Drought-tolerant native landscaping is a key feature of McGilvra Place Park. The park itself is key to protecting the investment in the adjacent Bullitt Center, a zero-net-energy building that relies on unobstructed solar panels to achieve its energy goals.



BULLITT FOUNDATION



BULLITT FOUNDATION



# Norman B. Leventhal Park

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

**Park size**  
1.7 acres (0.7 ha)

**Neighborhood type**  
Central business district

**Completed**  
1992

**Cost**  
\$75 million

**Key partners**  
Friends of Post Office Square,  
Boston City Government

**Designers**  
The Halvorson Company Inc.  
and Ellenzweig Associates Inc.

**Norman B. Leventhal Park at Post Office Square in Boston, a lively community gathering place and asset for adjacent buildings, was created on top of a parking garage and is operated and maintained with revenue from the garage.**

When parking generates revenue for a city, transitioning an active lot or garage into a park space may not be a widely accepted financial decision. However, building a park on top of parking can be a win/win for the city, adjacent property owners, and the public in general. Norman B. Leventhal Park is a key example of this approach.

The 1.7-acre (0.7 ha) park, opened in June 1992, was built and is operated and maintained with revenue from a 1,400-space parking garage located underneath the park. The park itself, located in a highly desirable area in downtown Boston, boasts a number of amenities including a café, public art, a variety of programming, and free wi-fi.

Masking the infrastructure for the underground parking was worth the challenge: in the park, the vehicle ramps are not noticeable. Recently, Leventhal Park has implemented sustainability principles, including solar power and a reduction in water and energy consumption, in an effort to become one of the most energy-efficient and greenest operations in the city, and offsets 100 percent of its electricity consumption through a power purchase agreement of solar power generated in North Carolina.





Demolition of a parking garage long considered an eyesore in downtown Boston allowed a 1.7-acre (0.7 ha) park to be built in its place. The park is operated and maintained through revenue from relocating the parking underneath the park.

The civic organization Friends of Post Office Square was established in 1983 to lead efforts to transform the parking garage into something more. Largely considered an eyesore, the site was home to a minimally maintained city parking garage from 1954 until the late 1980s. A group of surrounding building owners—led by Boston developer Norman B. Leventhal—formed the friends group and contributed enough money to purchase the site from the city and build both a larger underground parking garage and a park on top. But it was not without difficulty or controversy; the friends group faced a four-year battle to convince the city that it was not advantageous to keep the existing lease deal on the crumbling parking garage.

Pamela Messenger, president of the Friends of Post Office Square, noted, “It is remarkable to think that 30 years ago this was such hard work to get to the city to see a higher and better use of a property that they owned.” Today, however, the park is seen as a rousing success. The space is green and active and generates enough revenue to also help maintain smaller neighborhood parks in Boston. Not only have property values of surrounding office buildings increased substantially, but several have also changed their address to emphasize their Post Office Square location. Said Messenger, “It’s cooler to have an orientation toward the open space; it’s a good draw for prospective tenants.”





CHRIS RICHMAN, COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY CITY DISTRICT

# The Porch at 30th Street

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

## Park size

25,000 square feet  
(2,300 sq m)

## Neighborhood type

Central business district

## Completed

2012

## Cost

\$500,000 for version 1.0 initial installation

## Key partners

University City District, city of Philadelphia, Amtrak, PennDOT

## Designer

Ground Reconsidered (initial design)

**The Porch at 30th Street, created by University City District (UCD) and partners, has transformed space once dedicated to parking into a lively plaza with regular events, food trucks, and movable tables and chairs.**

The Porch at 30th Street is a parking lane turned public space located in front of the Amtrak 30th Street Station just across the Schuylkill River from Center City Philadelphia. Market Street, which runs in front of the train station, is a five-lane roadway with metered parking initially installed by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT).

In the early 2000s, the University of Pennsylvania studied the area to determine how to better use this space and attract more people to campus—located less than a mile from the train station—and realized that the parking lane where Amtrak was collecting revenue was actually city right-of-way. The city took the parking lane and installed a concrete pad—but because of funding shortages had no plans for what to do next with this space.

In dense urban environments, the responsibility for programming or improving infrastructure and places is sometimes not clear. In 2011, the city approached UCD, a partnership of nearby anchor institutions whose primary mission is community revitalization in the West Philadelphia University City neighborhood, and asked for ideas on how to activate the space.

At that time UCD had not done much in the way of placemaking. UCD leaned on the “lighter, quicker, cheaper” approach from the Project for Public Spaces. “We said we needed \$500,000

for activation, some money for programming, and we would try to teach people to come to the space,” said Nate Hommel, UCD’s director of planning and design.

UCD adopted an approach it called “iterative placemaking.” It started with planters, tables, umbrellas, and landscaping, but Hommel admits the organization had no idea what would happen or if people would use the space: “We always looked at it like ‘if we fail, it’s a half-million-dollar fail, not a \$4 million fail.’ That seemed like a smarter risk to take.”

The Porch at 30th Street debuted November 2, 2011, and daily programming began in April 2012. UCD’s marketing

and program team planned daily events the first summer—including farmers markets, miniature golf, beer gardens, acrobats, dance troupes, and music groups.

The space faced several challenges. The area at the time did not have a residential population, and Amtrak, upset at the loss of parking revenue, was not an early ally. UCD had to push to have movable tables and chairs in the space, which many people thought would disappear if not locked down. But the movable seating quickly became a signature of the park. “Nobody steals them, and people love them,” said Hommel. “We have replaced about 40 over eight years, but most blow away and are run over by trucks.”



CHRIS RICHMAN, COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY CITY DISTRICT



COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY CITY DISTRICT

A former parking lane in front of Philadelphia’s 30th Street Station is now a bustling linear plaza.

“When people ask, ‘How can this work in my city?’ We tell them ‘start small,’ especially in smaller communities. Try small things that don’t cost a lot; get in there and get feedback, to start building trust with the community.”

NATE HOMMEL, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND DESIGN, UNIVERSITY CITY DISTRICT

The transformed space is safe and welcoming for pedestrians.



CHRIS RICHMAN, COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY CITY DISTRICT



Programming at the Porch at 30th Street has included farmers markets, acrobats, dance groups, and music groups.

Regular data collection has not only helped UCD secure additional funding, but also has helped address Amtrak's concerns and turn the rail service into a key partner. In 2012, Amtrak worried that new food trucks would draw business away from the station franchises. UCD collected detailed data the first year, noting every 15 minutes the approximate age, sex, and race of visitors and customers, whether or not they had luggage, and whether they were an Amtrak employee. That data showed that Amtrak employees were frequent food truck customers, and intercept surveys showed that they liked the variety of food offered by the food trucks. Amtrak has now dramatically upgraded the dining options within 30th Street Station.

Data collection also helped UCD—which had just six months to design the first version of the Porch—learn what people liked and did not like about the initial design. Surveys showed that overwhelmingly, people wanted more plants, shade, and fun activities. UCD hired Philadelphia-based design firm Groundswell to figure out how to make those improvements for Porch 2.0. Investments led to more activity in the space, which led to more interest from funders, including local philanthropy.

UCD has used its learning—data collection; the importance of building trust with funders, regulatory bodies, the public, anchor institutions; the importance of flexibility and incremental changes; and the basic elements of success—for parklets and pedestrian plazas throughout its 2.5-mile (4 km) service area to build community, equity, and active public spaces.

Said Hommel, “When people ask, ‘How can this work in my city?’ We tell them ‘start small,’ especially in smaller communities. Try small things that don’t cost a lot; get in there and get feedback, to start building trust with the community.”

The success of the Porch has led Amtrak to explore how to prioritize pedestrians on the other three sides of the station as well as undertake a master plan to realign how people enter the station.

# Queensboro Bridge Greenway and Dutch Kills Green

LONG ISLAND CITY, NEW YORK

## Park size

Greenway: 1.3 miles (2.1 km);  
park: 1.5 acres (0.6 ha)

## Neighborhood type

Former light industrial

## Completed

2012

## Cost

\$45 million

## Key partners

New York City Department of City Planning, New York City Department of Transportation, New York City Economic Development Corporation, New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

## Designers

WRT Design (Margie Ruddick, lead landscape designer), Marpillero Pollak Architects (urban designer), Michael Singer Studio (public artist), Eng-Wong, Taub & Associates (traffic analysis)

**In Long Island City, a park and greenway replaced a parking lot and a snarl of roadways, providing a new “front door” for the neighborhood that features public open space, public art, green infrastructure, wider and landscaped medians, improved crosswalks, and a shared, protected bike and pedestrian greenway.**

For many years, the “front door to Queens”—and, for many commuters, the front door to Manhattan—was a hazardous snarl of travel lanes leading to and from the Queensboro Bridge. This multilane roadway, 250 feet (76 m) wide, encircled three parking lots and was characterized by both acute and obtuse turning movements and faded crosswalks that were impossible to traverse during one green light. Bicyclists riding east from the bridge had to ride against traffic along Queens Plaza North. Elevated subway tracks for the 7 and N lines added noise and continuous shadows.

Separating the Dutch Kills and Hunter’s Point neighborhoods, Queens Plaza was a prime candidate for a major intervention. The area was primarily used for light industry and some office space, but Queens Plaza itself—an ironic name for a roadway, given the lack of open space in the area—needed significant changes. The New York City (NYC) Department of City Planning recognized its potential to reconnect the surrounding neighborhoods—which were similar in both land use and demographics—improve pedestrian and cyclist safety, and enhance the area’s sustainability. To drum up interest, a booklet from the Department of City Planning asked in its title, “Where’s the Plaza in Queens Plaza?”

A former parking lot, Dutch Kills Green is a park that anchors the eastern end of the redesigned Queens Plaza roadway network.



NYC Department of City Planning and NYC Department of Transportation collaboratively designed the new roadway plan to ensure smooth traffic flows between Queens and Manhattan, and the area's excess parking capacity in garages and other lots has neatly absorbed the cars that used to rely on the former lot. Because the area often exceeded federal Clean Air Act standards, reduced parking availability has also helped encourage use of public transit over driving, which may lower air pollution.

Dutch Kills Green became that plaza, a significant new public open space anchoring the eastern end of the redesigned Queens Plaza roadway network between 21st Street and Queens Plaza East. The former roadways and parking lots were redesigned to create an important neighborhood park situated at the eastern end of the Queensboro Bridge Greenway—an off-road, two-way bicycle and pedestrian greenway running through widened and landscaped medians along the northern edge of Queens Plaza North, both part of the Queens Plaza Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvement Project.

Alongside improved air quality, the plans for Queens Plaza prioritized sustainability in several ways: stormwater management, carbon sequestration, lower energy consumption, fewer impervious surfaces (reduced by 20 percent), and the creation of a half acre (0.2 ha) of wetlands.

Whereas crossing Queens Plaza used to be risky because of signals that were timed to process traffic and not people, planners reorganized its 12 traffic lanes to allow space for the greenway, widened existing medians for pedestrians caught between lights, delineated clearly marked crosswalks, and added a new crosswalk to connect one of the most densely developed blocks into the pedestrian network. The

To help direct pedestrian flows, “no go” areas were established in some of the medians—generally those too narrow to safely accommodate pedestrians or located underneath the elevated tracks—using excavated concrete from the construction site, and after two 17th-century Dutch millstones left from the gristmill that used to occupy the site were excavated, the millstones were incorporated into the park's art. Public art in the form of paving and seating was infused throughout, and the park even includes a small amphitheater for performances.

The 1.3-acre (0.5 ha) park is well used by area residents, workers from adjacent office buildings, and bikers on the greenway.



PENNY LEE

Started in 1998, the Queens Plaza Bike and Pedestrian Improvement Project took more than a decade of planning and construction to come to fruition. The project was funded through the Federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program, several large earmarks from Representative Carolyn Maloney, and NYC capital budget funds. The project was conceived of and managed through preliminary design by the NYC Department of City Planning. The NYC Economic Development Corporation and Mayor Bloomberg's Office of Capital Project Development saw the project through final design and construction. The NYC Economic Development Corporation sponsored the public naming ceremony. As the NYC Department of Transportation collaborated with the design team on the roadway design, the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation collaborated with the landscape design team on the landscape design. The Dutch Kills Civic Association, Community Boards 1

and 2, and the Long Island City Partnership were the principal community leaders behind the project.

Penny Lee, the senior planner at the NYC Department of City Planning who led this effort, along with Kate Dunham, her urban design colleague, learned that to succeed with this type of complex infrastructure project, persistence and respect of the jurisdiction of other city agencies—particularly in a city government as segmented as New York's—are key, as is finding a powerful ally. "You have to bring all the agencies along," Lee said, "and you need someone—whether it's in the governor's office, or the mayor's office, or whatever that controlling entity's agency is—you need somebody there as a champion who can coordinate and lead and be your backup." Upon completion of the park in 2012, the city's Department of Parks and Recreation assumed responsibility for maintenance, with funding from the Long Island City BID.



The development of the surrounding area became more residential than expected after zoning changes were adopted in July 2001 to facilitate the city's fourth central business district. About 13,000 apartments rather than the anticipated 300 were developed, largely because of changes in the city's economy and development patterns after 9/11.

"We projected approximately 5 million square feet of office space and approximately 300 apartments, and we got exactly the reverse," said Lee. "But the park is really well used by students from two nearby high schools; there are a couple office buildings in the area with more under construction, and on the weekends it's well used by bike riders." The reorganized Queens Plaza, with the jewel of Dutch Kills Green situated at its eastern end, has benefited the entire community, leading to increased bicycle traffic, fewer pedestrian and cyclist fatalities, reduced ambient noise, and perhaps has led to higher property values.



PENNY LEE



FLORENCE/STUDIO123

The Queensboro Bridge Greenway and Dutch Kills Green took over a decade of planning and construction but were well worth it: the surrounding neighborhood has benefited from increased park space, a reduction in pedestrian and cyclist fatalities, and a reduction in ambient noise from vehicular traffic.



# Ricardo Lara Linear Park

LYNWOOD, CALIFORNIA

**Park size**  
5 acres (2 ha), 1 mile  
(1.6 km) long

**Neighborhood type**  
Suburban

**Completed**  
2015

**Cost**  
Not available

**Key partner**  
City of Lynwood

**Designer**  
SWA Group

**Ricardo Lara Linear Park transformed a vacant five-acre (2 ha) stretch of land left over from adjacent highway construction into a linear park and trail that reconnects neighborhoods, improves environmental health, and offers recreation space for all ages.**

Ricardo Lara Linear Park was created from underused land adjacent to Interstate 105, a freeway built in the early 1990s. I-105 created visual and physical barriers that separated communities. Today, the park links neighborhoods that were divided by the freeway and demonstrates how underused land can be repurposed to benefit an entire community.

The social and environmental controversy surrounding the freeway's construction is in the past, but its legacy remains through lost networks and remnants of unused space. Teamwork and creativity were key to the transformation of the vacant five-acre (2 ha) embankment land that stretched along the freeway in Lynwood into a park that advances social equity, improves environmental health, and offers recreation spaces for all ages.

The park is located in a densely populated, historically park-poor neighborhood. Opened in October 2015, the park features five activity zones that offer different amenities, including a community garden, a shade pavilion, a dog park, a children's play area, and fitness stations, plus bioswales and basins that treat runoff and act as flood prevention. Though the park is only 45 feet (13.7 m) wide, it offers something for everyone.

The nonprofit From Lot to Spot conducted community outreach, and this lively exchange of ideas contributed to the park's unique identity, structure, and function. Community engagement



Created on underused land adjacent to Interstate 105, Ricardo Lara Linear Park is helping reconnect neighborhoods, provide needed green space, and encourage physical activity.

in the project can be seen in the public art throughout the park and the mosaic tiles laid into the picnic tables and benches. The park advances Lynwood's Healthy City Initiative, connecting with the LARIO Bike Trail and promoting healthy lifestyles in what has been a community long underserved by parks and open space.

Ricardo Lara Linear Park was realized in part through a \$5 million grant from the California Department of Parks and Recreation's Proposition 84 fund. From the start of design through the end of construction, the project took 18 months to complete. The park filters stormwater runoff equivalent to six swimming pools per year and improves air quality. This small city park has transformed a vacant lot into a community treasure and showcases how to optimize infrastructure to address community needs. In 2018, Ricardo Lara Linear Park was honored with a Special Community Impact recognition from the Urban Land Institute.

Though only one mile (1.6 km) long, the new park illustrates significant progress for cities rethinking how to optimize infrastructure to address community needs. The park shows how community buy-in and creative thinking can transform infrastructure that has long divided and isolated a community into an amenity that unites it, offering much-needed environmental and recreational benefits.



# Roosevelt Plaza Park

CAMDEN, NEW JERSEY

## Park size

1.5 acres (0.6 ha)

## Neighborhood type

Central business district

## Completed

2012; pop-up programming began in 2014

## Cost

\$9 million, including \$2.4 million demolition of the Parkade Building

## Construction partners

Camden Redevelopment Agency, city of Camden, Delaware River Port Authority

## Programming partners

Cooper's Ferry Partnership, Camden Special Services District

## Pop-up programming supporters

William Penn Foundation, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, Kresge Foundation, Horizon Foundation for New Jersey

## Designers

Group Melvin Design and Sikora Wells Appel

**Today, Camden's Roosevelt Plaza Park is an amenity enjoyed by the whole city. The plaza replaced the Parkade Building, visually reconnecting the downtown to the Delaware River and providing a programmed community space in the heart of the city.**

The original plaza in downtown Camden was built in conjunction with Camden City Hall, which was completed in the early 1930s. In the 1950s, as a response to a perceived parking problem downtown and the suburbanization of retail activities, the Parkade Building was constructed on the two-acre (0.8 ha) plaza site, blocking views of city hall—as well as from city hall to the Delaware River—and eliminating its “front yard.”

The Parkade Building contained a parking garage, office space, and ground-floor retail. The five-story structure was intended to keep the downtown business and retail district thriving, providing parking spaces to make downtown shopping competitive as suburbanization was beginning to occur.

The Parkade Building was considered a failure, because it was not able to halt the rapid movement of residents and retail into the suburbs. In 2003, the building was condemned when Legionnaires' disease was discovered, though it was not demolished by the Camden Redevelopment Agency (CRA) until 2011. The space at the front door of city hall opened as a plaza once again in 2012, and a partnership of Camden stakeholders stepped in to ensure that its ongoing programming would make it a safe and welcoming space for all residents.

Lacking a formal parks department as a result of budget limitations, the city of Camden has partnered with many organizations to help program and maintain its parks. The CRA, after taking down the Parkade Building, constructed the new 1.5-acre (0.6 ha) Roosevelt Plaza Park in its place with Cooper's Ferry Partnership (CFP)—a private, nonprofit corporation that acts as a catalyst for the preservation and growth of a vibrant city of Camden—serving in an advisory role.

The success of Roosevelt Plaza Park has depended on programming. When it opened, Camden had few downtown residents, and city residents were not well connected to this central park space. Through a series of pop-up and semi-permanent installations and rotating programming, CFP has created a flexible, changeable model to bring people to the park.

Cooper's Ferry Partnership started by focusing on new projects each summer. In 2014, an interactive, motion-detecting art piece titled *Blue Hour* was installed; composed of 10 motion-activated light towers that change colors from blue to purple to orange, this concept has been replicated in other places throughout the country. The towers were repurposed the next summer as rainwater-harvesting planters to highlight the complexities of stormwater management and localized flooding. Other summer programming has included a focus on healthy living and bicycle use.

Roosevelt Plaza Park, now a front lawn for Camden City Hall, replaced a dilapidated five-story parking garage.



COOPER'S FERRY PARTNERSHIP



COOPER'S FERRY PARTNERSHIP

Programming at Roosevelt Plaza Park has focused on sustainability and healthy living.

Larger-scale events, part of the city's Connect the Lots initiative, have also helped activate the park. Popular events including Camden Night Gardens (a nighttime festival of art, light, and sound) and Camden Jam (an annual art and music festival) have attracted thousands of people to Roosevelt Plaza Park. Weekly farmers markets with concerts, Friday-night movies in the park, and lunchtime concerts are now regular events. Sarah Bryant, director of community initiatives at CFP, explained: "These are all ways to connect Camden residents to this central civic green space right downtown, right in front of city hall. And it has worked very well in terms of connecting people, and there are now many groups who come and do events at Roosevelt Plaza Park."

Because of the costs associated with remediating the site and building the foundation of the park, the plan for Roosevelt Plaza Park was to make capital investments and

complement improvements in a phased approach. This strategy opened the door for CFP and the Camden Special Services District (CSSD)—a nonprofit that serves as the business improvement agency for downtown Camden—to program and provide maintenance for the new park. Caren Fishman, executive director of CSSD, noted that CSSD has had a lease agreement with the city since 2014 to help maintain and activate the park. Said Fishman, "To ensure a clean, attractive and welcoming green public space in the middle of the downtown, the CSSD cleans the park daily, provides landscape maintenance and improvements, and offers hospitality assistance. CSSD ambassadors also support events and programs in the park that are hosted by CFP and the city of Camden. Though the extent of our activity is dependent on annual funding opportunities, we have made a positive impact in this park."

During the park's first year in operation, the CRA funded CSSD to maintain and clean Roosevelt Plaza Park, as well as provide staff to serve as hospitality ambassadors for public assistance and guidance. Since the first year, CSSD has been able to continue providing services through various funding sources associated with CFP's placemaking efforts, and the CRA no longer directly funds the park. Similarly, CFP has used grant funding from a variety of sources, including but not limited to the William Penn Foundation, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, Kresge Foundation, and the Horizon Foundation for New Jersey, for the programming and activation of the park.

Roosevelt Plaza Park is now becoming a center point in the emerging "eds and meds" downtown district, anchored by a new Rutgers University nursing school and other educational facilities, as students traverse the park regularly. The area is becoming more vibrant, with more residential development and nighttime activity, which is not only ensuring that Roosevelt Plaza Park is a successful gathering space but also helping Camden, "a city on the rise," reinvent its downtown.



The expansive lawn and pathways make Roosevelt Plaza Park welcoming to people of all ages.

COOPER'S FERRY PARTNERSHIP

COOPER'S FERRY PARTNERSHIP

# Tongva Park

SANTA MONICA, CALIFORNIA

## Park size

6 acres (2.4 ha)

## Neighborhood type

Downtown

## Completed

2013

## Cost

\$42.3 million

## Key partner

City of Santa Monica

## Lead designer

James Corner Field Operations

**Tongva Park replaced a surface parking lot in the heart of Santa Monica, providing the city with a popular gathering place, enlivened with frequent programs and views of the Pacific Ocean.**

Tongva Park sits in the civic center of Santa Monica across Main Street from City Hall and other civic buildings. The six-acre (2.4 ha) green space was formerly the site of the Rand Corporation headquarters, which relocated to an adjacent parcel it also owned to consolidate the company's offices. The city bought the site in the late 1990s and, after Rand razed the former headquarters building and remediated the land, used it as a surface parking lot for over 10 years before plans to create a new park were solidified.

Karen Ginsberg, director, community and cultural services, at the city of Santa Monica noted, "Acquiring the land for this park was opportunistic by the city, and this purchase set in motion planning and implementation of the transformation of the Civic Center in Santa Monica."

Construction of Tongva Park—named for the original inhabitants of the area—began in fall 2012 with the dedication in October 2013. The park was a \$42.3 million investment by the city of Santa Monica.

The community was engaged extensively during the initial design phase; 200 people showed up to the first of five community workshops, held on the empty site. Through the workshops, the landscape architect selected to lead the project—James Corner Field Operations—presented alternatives, residents provided feedback, and the final plan was a park designed with four hills and views of the ocean that did not exist previously.



Programming and features of the park—including a popular playground, seasonal special Saturday programs for children, evening programming for adults, and Tongva Indigenous Day—have drawn in local residents and visitors, making the park a destination for the city.

Working in collaboration, the city's public works department maintains the park, and the community and cultural services department spearheaded by the cultural affairs division is responsible for programming. The annualized cost to maintain the park by public works is about \$300,000 not accounting for utility costs. Also, now that the park is established, every three years an additional expenditure of \$25,000 is allocated for tree trimming. Park ambassadors, contracted through the nonprofit entity Downtown Santa Monica Inc., act as eyes and ears for both Tongva Park and nearby Palisades Park, helping all visitors to the park feel

welcome. The ambassador program was first piloted at these two parks in 2016 and costs \$500,000 annually.

Although the park was initially built in an area that was relatively devoid of residents, a mixed-use housing project completed in 2014—with 318 units of for-sale condominiums and affordable rental apartments—sits adjacent to the park. New residents have helped create a new community where one had not previously existed, and the park is commonly thought of as the gateway to downtown Santa Monica.

An extensive community engagement process was undertaken to determine the final design and name of Tongva Park, which is now considered a destination in Santa Monica.



CITY OF SANTA MONICA

# Underground at Ink Block

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

## Park size

8 acres (3.2 ha)

## Neighborhood type

Urban neighborhood

## Completed

2017

## Cost

\$8.5 million

## Key partners

National Development,  
MassDOT

## Designer

Landing Studio

## Boston's Underground at Ink Block, an active urban park partially located underneath a highway overpass, is helping link neighborhoods and enhance connectivity.

Boston is well known for its “Big Dig” infrastructure project, which buried a highway and created the Rose Kennedy Greenway. But in the South End of Boston—where the highway emerges from below ground—the Underground at Ink Block project is helping create connectivity using the underpass. The multilane elevated highway is a dividing line between the South End to the west and South Boston to the east, and Underground is now an active, eight-acre (3.2 ha) urban park connecting these neighborhoods.

The Ink Block area in South End was created in the 1830s by filled-in tidelands of Boston Harbor. It was a thriving, dense, mixed-use area of the city that had homes, theaters, schools, and retail, but the whole neighborhood was demolished in the 1950s as part of urban renewal. Urban renewal accelerated the decline of the neighborhood, which was widely perceived to be unsafe.

“The walk under the highway from South End to the Broadway MBTA subway station a mere quarter-mile away felt more like five miles because it felt dangerous,” said Ted Tye, managing partner of National Development, which developed Ink Block, a residential, hotel, and retail hub in South End, and which also operates and holds a 35-year lease for Underground at Ink Block.



The Underground at Ink Block created a lively space that helps better connect the South End and South Boston neighborhoods.



The seven-building Ink Block development, the first phase of which opened in 2015, started to transform the neighborhood, but the highway underpass was still a tremendous barrier for residents wanting to access the Broadway transit station. National Development ultimately took control of the area after being awarded the project through a public bid process led by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT).

MassDOT had initiated a community process with the South End and South Boston neighborhoods and heard that residents wanted to see a safe, well-lit, active place under the highway. As the owners of Ink Block, National Development found it very important to connect to public transit and create more amenities for its residents and the nearby community. MassDOT undertook the major infrastructure improvement, and National Development has further improved and programmed the space.

The success of Underground at Ink Block as an active and well-used space is owed, in large part, to the attention to programming and activities. “Spaces like this really need active management, which doesn’t happen on its own,” said Tye. “A big part is understanding what the community wants to see, and we also have a full-time person on staff who programs public spaces, at Underground and other properties we own. We are seeing this as a big trend in the development business right now, whether in residential or office buildings or office parks. Actively programming and creating both spaces and communities—that’s what companies like to see when they look to lease somewhere, what residents like to see when they choose to live somewhere, and it applies to a place like Underground at Ink Block as well.”

National Development, which manages the Underground, ensures that the community has a voice in programming and activities.



KATHY MCMANON, NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

“We are seeing this as a big trend in the development business right now, whether in residential or office buildings or office parks. Actively programming and creating both spaces and communities—that’s what companies like to see when they look to lease somewhere and what residents like to see when they choose to live somewhere.”

TED TYE, MANAGING PARTNER OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT



KATHY MCMAHON, NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Colorful murals are a notable component of the Underground at Ink Block, created by artists from around the world.



KATHY MCMAHON, NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

For other developers looking to get into the business of placemaking, Tye notes that it is critical to have a sense of the community vision and incorporate community-driven ideas into the planning process and programming. This, in part, caused the unifying theme of Underground to be art. The large concrete walls have been curated around annual events to bring in mural artists from around the world. National Development has created arts weeks where the public can watch the art as it is produced, attend lectures, and mingle at events with the artists. It has made Underground at Ink Block a “must see” on many lists of things to do for tourists to Boston.

In 2018 alone, 46 events were planned at Underground at Ink Block, concentrated in just six months of the year. “Part of the RFP that MassDOT issued had a requirement that the successful bidder provide up to 24 events per year,” said Tye. “We are required to do it, but it’s also really important to do it because it’s not a space that is naturally active.” Programs have included weekly fitness classes, family movie nights, dog-related events in the dog park, fashion shows, car shows, and an experimental beer garden.

And Underground has won awards for improving the pedestrian connection under the highway. A meandering walkway runs through it, used daily by people walking or biking to and from the Broadway MBTA station. The area is very well lit with 24-hour security on site, and investments in park management keep the space clean and well maintained. “If people see that it’s dirty or not maintained or there is graffiti, it’s going to quickly revert back to what it was,” said Tye. “It is very important to make an investment in picking up trash and keeping things looking very well managed.”

National Development recognizes that the park itself is not a net-positive revenue generator. Associated paid parking is included as part of the park, but because of the location under a federal highway, regulations prevent other revenue-generating strategies such as food trucks or a small café.

Still, National Development sees tremendous value in spending resources on activating the space. Notes Tye, “We spend a ton of money and time on Underground. But in terms of the benefits of controlling your environment and enhancing adjacent real estate assets, it is huge. As a stand-alone project it probably doesn’t make much sense financially, but adjacent to real estate it’s a positive.”

# Underpass Park

TORONTO, ONTARIO

## Park size

2.5 acres (1 ha)

## Neighborhood type

Former industrial

## Completed

2012 (first phase);  
2015 (second phase)

## Cost

C\$9.5 million

## Owner

Waterfront Toronto,  
government of Canada (C\$9  
million), province of Ontario

## Lead designers

PFS Studio with the Planning  
Partnership (landscape architect)

## Additional project credits

UCC Group Inc. (general contractor), Eastern Construction Co. Ltd. (construction manager), Paul Raff Studio (public artist), SCS Consulting Group Ltd. (civil/mechanical engineer), HV Engineering (lighting design), SMART Watering Systems (irrigation consultant), Quinn Dressel Associates (structural engineer), Hammerschlag & Joffe Inc. (electrical engineer), Golder (geotechnical engineer), Environ (environmental engineer)

## Underpass Park in Toronto transformed an underused space beneath three highways into a vibrant community hub.

Located in Toronto's West Don Lands neighborhood—beneath the overpasses of Adelaide Street, Eastern Avenue, and Richmond Street—Underpass Park, the largest such park in Canada and the first of its kind in Toronto, has given new life to a previously neglected space. Toronto's selection to host the 2015 Pan American Games provided the catalyst for the city's redevelopment, and the area under Eastern Avenue, Richmond, and Adelaide highway overpasses was identified as a key opportunity.

Bisecting the West Don Lands neighborhood, highways split the north and south by imposing a physical and psychological barrier and creating an urban dead zone. Previously a site of informal parking and illegal activity, the area under the highways was considered unsafe and unhealthy after decades of industrial use. Now, it is proof that, with careful planning and a creative vision, even seemingly desolate places can become vibrant open spaces.

The development of the park proceeded in two phases, resulting in a 2.5-acre (1 ha) space with a skate park, basketball courts, public art, a playground, and flexible areas for community programming, among other neighborhood amenities. What had been dominant, gray overpass pillars now serve as part of the design, with commissioned art making the space more inviting and the overpass itself protecting the area from inclement weather. The LED light installation has a dual purpose—to promote safety and to transform the space with a light show at night. Ribbonlike structures made out of concrete and wood weave through the park, providing informal benches and gathering places.



TOM ARBAN PHOTOGRAPHY

Pillars from the overpasses are an important part of the design of Underpass Park, which blends murals, lighting, and small green pockets in the formerly neglected space underneath several elevated roadways.



GREG SMALLENBERG, PFS STUDIO

Although this area was originally under consideration for a large city park nearly 200 years ago, it had since been used for distilling, manufacturing, and meat processing instead. Facing this legacy of industrial contamination and the threat of flooding, a productive use for the underpass seemed unlikely until Waterfront Toronto took on the project. Waterfront Toronto is a multilevel government agency that bridges the governments of Canada and Ontario and the city of Toronto to renew the waterfront area, harnessing its potential for sustainability, health, and economic development.

Because the underpass was a brownfield site, the city's environmental remediation involved paving over contaminated areas and removing some of the soil for cleaning, leading to a largely concrete park with small green spaces. The green spaces feature drought-, salt-, and shade-tolerant plants, which reduce maintenance for the Toronto Parks, Forestry, and Recreation Division. Reclaimed and recycled building materials contribute to the sustainability of the site as well. The park provides opportunities for people to exercise, buy food from local farmers markets, and get outside, turning an unhealthy and dangerous space into a health-promoting one.

Underpass Park almost immediately became a community hub, an attraction for people in all parts of Toronto, and a model for other cities. The park has stitched several

neighborhoods back together, including Corktown Common, Distillery District, and River Square, sparking new interest in expanding housing and retail in the surrounding neighborhoods.

Waterfront Toronto played an essential role in coordination of funding and mediation of intergovernmental disputes, and the agency maximized the park's co-benefits for sustainability, health, and local economic development.

Despite the underpass's history of pollution and safety concerns, Toronto's shared vision for a new community asset led to this now-cherished park.



# Programs

Across the United States, three cities and one nonprofit have run programs in each of their respective cities that all have a common goal of activating spaces formerly catering to vehicles. These innovative programs aim to take back pavement across the cities that they serve to provide more people-oriented spaces and improve overall health and sustainability.







# Depave

PORTLAND, OREGON

Lead  
Nonprofit

## Portland-based Depave promotes the transformation of “overpaved places” into parks and other spaces more beneficial for communities.

“From parking lots to paradise,” is a motto of Depave, a Portland nonprofit that promotes the transformation of “overpaved places” into spaces that have a more positive social and environmental impact. Depave focuses on the removal of impervious pavements to eliminate stormwater runoff and pollution and the creation of more space for urban agriculture, trees, native vegetation, green infrastructure, wildlife habitats, and recreation and social activities.

Depave partners with schools, churches, and community-based organizations that primarily serve low-income people and people of color, often in historically redlined and disenfranchised communities in Portland. The nonprofit is selective with sites, focusing on those that have been disproportionately affected by the negative environmental and social impacts of pavement.

Project and volunteer coordinator Katya Reyna explains: “We want people to feel invested and be part of building something for their community. Folks often feel disempowered by the city and developers just do things in their neighborhoods without asking. By having people come out and rip up asphalt, build rain gardens, and plant trees together, we are inviting them to actively create environmental and social change and be a part of something bigger than themselves.”



In the Portland area, Depave led the transformation of a parking lot at Inukai Boys and Girls Club into a play area with sustainable features.



Partnering directly with community groups to build stronger neighborhoods, Depave relies on volunteers and community partners to implement the transformational projects, such as the following:

- Transforming a 4,500-square-foot (418 sq m) parking lot at Inukai Boys and Girls Club in Hillsboro into a nature play area with an educational rain garden for 200 children;
- Ripping up 1,700 square feet (158 sq m) of asphalt from an oversized parking lot at Plaza 122, a community investment trust commercial center, to make way for rain gardens and trees; and
- Removing a total of 12,000 square feet (1,115 sq m) of asphalt from three Title 1 elementary schools in the Centennial School District, replacing it with nature play areas, educational rain gardens, and native plants.

Depave organizes the deconstruction of pavement at work parties, where community volunteers work together to rip up the pavement. Funding sources for projects vary but include individual and corporate donors and city, county, and state agencies.

In addition to coordinating transformational projects across the Portland area, Depave staff provides trainings and consulting to organizations across the world who are looking to do similar work to minimize impervious pavement and promote better social and environmental conditions in communities.



SAMUEL HELLER / SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

# Groundplay

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

**Lead**  
City and county of  
San Francisco, multiple agencies

**San Francisco’s Groundplay program, a multiagency city-led initiative that works in conjunction with residents, builds temporary installations that turn underused public spaces—including streets, sidewalks, and lots—into joyful community places.**

San Francisco’s parklet program, one of the nation’s earliest formal programs, started in 2009 as a response to transportation challenges stemming from narrow sidewalks and uneven distribution of public spaces. The program aimed to encourage nonmotorized transportation, encourage pedestrian safety and activity, foster neighborhood interaction, support local businesses, and generally reimagine the potential of city streets.

Later, the early parklet program and several other community-focused city initiatives were grouped together to form the Groundplay program, a city-led initiative that works in conjunction with San Francisco residents to build temporary installations that turn underused public spaces into places for the community to gather.

The spirit behind the program is to allow the creativity of residents and other partners outside of city government to develop new and insightful ways of addressing community needs and aspirations. This grassroots approach goes beyond improving the built environment to support enduring social capital, civic engagement, and resilience.

Groundplay is a multiagency program of the city and county of San Francisco. Led by the Planning Department, other government participants include the Public Works Department, the Arts Commission, the Mayor’s Office of Civic Innovation, and the Municipal Transportation Agency.

Public space projects are made possible by strong collaboration among these city agencies, funders, and other community partners. They begin when an individual, business, or organization—the project sponsor—comes forward with an idea for the sponsor’s neighborhood. The interagency Groundplay team works with the sponsor to identify sources of any needed funding or other support, such as design services, and to refine, permit, and implement the project.

Sponsors are typically responsible for conducting neighborhood outreach; funding all design, construction, and permitting costs; assuming liability for the space; and ensuring that it is well maintained and kept in good repair. The projects

implemented under this program include parklets, play streets, art exhibits, pop-up plaza seating areas, ping pong tables, outdoor musical instruments, and an interactive “vote with your feet” display.

Over the years, the city team has made changes to the process and requirements for Groundplay projects, primarily aimed at supporting more equity and balance in their location and sponsorship. One of the most sweeping was the passage of the Places for People ordinance in 2016, aimed at reducing the procedural and financial barriers to temporary public space projects and advancing the city’s equity goals.



SAMUEL HELLER, SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

City-led program Groundplay is installing temporary public parklets in parking spaces throughout San Francisco.

More than 75 Groundplay projects have been completed as of 2019, including the Reveille Coffee Parklet in the North Beach neighborhood.



SAMUEL HELLER, SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

“The even more powerful result is the social and political capital that is generated through the projects and sustained after they are done. That’s what leads to community resilience and engagement.”

ROBIN ABAD OCUBILLO, SENIOR PLANNER, SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT



All Groundplay projects have community sponsors, who are required to conduct robust engagement with residents and businesses to ensure buy-in and stewardship.

Previously, four or five different city agencies would review each project, each with its own applications, permit forms, and fees. The Places for People ordinance streamlined that process and created a single permit satisfying all requirements. It also clarified design and operational guidelines and changed city code to better support the financial sustainability of projects. Staff had noticed that some projects were uninstalled because the costs of operating and maintaining them were not feasible for the sponsors; the ordinance allows sponsors to generate revenue on a limited basis that they can put back into project maintenance and programming to offset costs.

The Places for People ordinance also requires robust community engagement by project sponsors. The city leaves the methods for this engagement open-ended—it can be through community meetings, town halls, online polls, design charrettes, letters of support, or other means—but is looking for evidence that the sponsor has gathered the feedback of neighborhood residents and business operators, has buy-in for the project, and has the relationships and understanding of local interests necessary to steward a public space that is used and embraced by the community.

In addition, noticing a preponderance of parklets hosted by food and beverage businesses since the program launched, the city has made intentional efforts to reach out to and encourage proposals from youth, arts, nonprofit, and educational organizations, and is exploring ways to provide financial assistance to community-based groups interested in hosting parklets.

The Groundplay program has seen great success, implementing transformative projects throughout San Francisco with more than 75 projects completed as of 2019. In addition to improvements to the built environment, “the even more powerful result is the social and political capital that is generated through the projects and sustained after they are done,” said Robin Abad Ocubillo, senior planner with the San Francisco Planning Department. “That’s what leads to community resilience and engagement.”



WANESSA HAZARY/CHICAGO DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

# Make Way for People

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

**Lead**  
Chicago Department  
of Transportation

**Established in 2012, Chicago's Make Way for People program transforms streets, sidewalks, alleys, and plazas into public spaces that cultivate community and culture, improve street safety, promote walkability, and stimulate economic development.**

In November 2018, elected officials and other community leaders cut the ribbon on a new "People Spot" in the Chatham neighborhood on Chicago's South Side. The People Spot, a parklet that temporarily replaced about two parking spaces, provided a comfortable seating area within a short walk of several well-loved neighborhood eateries along the 75th Street corridor.

The project was funded through a \$30,000 grant from AARP, which the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) used to create an off-the-shelf design for a People Spot that can be adapted by community groups to build their own parklets at a lower cost, as well as to build the modular and movable People Spot installed in Chatham. The People Spot would later be moved to other neighborhoods on the South, Southwest, and West Sides experiencing economic challenges and working to stimulate commercial economic development.

The Chatham People Spot is just one of the exciting public spaces being created through CDOT's Make Way for People program. The program is part of CDOT's Livable Streets Section, which plans, designs, implements, and programs transportation, urban design, and community building projects. A progressive urban design program—which encompasses the Streetscape and Sustainable Design, Make Way for People, and Green Alley programs—



the Livable Streets Section strives, through community engagement, sensitive design, and physical transformation, to create vital and safe public places that reflect the unique character of Chicago's diverse neighborhoods and support opportunities for Chicagoans to live, work, and play. Established in 2012, the Make Way for People program aims to transform the city's "public ways"—any city-owned property that allows for travel, including streets, sidewalks, and alleys—into public spaces that cultivate community and culture, improve street safety, promote walkability, support innovation, and stimulate economic development for Chicago's local businesses and neighborhoods.

Because the public ways represent 23 percent of the city's land area and over 70 percent of its total public open space, the city seeks to create more livable streets that support community identity and promote walkability, sustainability, safety, and better connectivity for all users. The city's programs support the range of activities that make a great community, offering spots to sit and chat with neighbors, places for children to play, event space, and places for the expression of community identity.

The Make Way for People program is a placemaking initiative that supports public/private partnerships to transform the public way through creative temporary tactical improvements and cultural programming such as People Spots (also known as parklets), People Streets, People Plazas, and People Alleys:

- People Spots, or temporary platforms in parking lanes adjacent to sidewalks;
- People Streets, which convert dead-end streets, culs-de-sac, and other areas of excess pavement into hardscape public spaces using temporary measures such as paint and street furniture;
- People Alleys, which are activated for art walks, seating, and other temporary events that support placemaking and economic development; and
- People Plazas, which activate existing plazas with new programming and retail opportunities.

Generally, Make Way for People projects are third-party initiated and funded, with community partners—often chambers of commerce, which manage Special Service Areas—submitting proposals, demonstrating support from local residents and businesses, and working through an approval process with the city. Projects require a use agreement and a \$75 Make Way for People permit and an installation permit, if applicable. The third party takes on responsibility for all maintenance and liability.

The impact on the communities surrounding Make Way for People projects has been notable. City staff noted how the program allows communities to creatively activate the public way. Each project is slightly different in response to community needs and has its own goals. For example, studies on the program's impacts have shown an increase in commercial foot traffic near People Spots, encouraging walkability and community activity.

The program emphasizes the importance of community engagement. Applicants must ask for letters of support from all businesses and residents adjacent to the project, helping assure the city that the proposed pavement-transforming projects are supported by their communities.



This People Spot in Chicago's Chatham neighborhood temporarily replaced two parking spaces with outdoor public seating near several neighborhood eateries.



# Pavement to Parks

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

**Lead**  
Seattle Department  
of Transportation

**Seattle’s Pavement to Parks program adds green space and improves the functionality of streets by changing roadway design in a low-cost, flexible, and community-driven way.**

Recapturing public right-of-way to make open spaces can be met with resistance; introducing these types of projects as temporary or demonstration efforts can help show the benefits of changing the street to more positively affect pedestrians and bikers. This was the intent of the Pavement to Parks program in Seattle. This three-year program started at the end of 2015, with funding from the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) to meet Move Seattle levy targets. Pavement to Parks helps improve the functionality of streets by reducing the width dedicated to vehicles and using quick and economical treatments to transform the pavement. The levy funding provided the city with an opportunity to plan, design, and build at least 12 projects, each with a \$70,000 budget.

Pavement to Parks allows SDOT—in partnership with community members—to test pedestrian-oriented open space ideas in underused roadway. Potential project locations are proposed by city staff, mainly from the Department of Transportation, who have worked closely with residents and identified areas of need. The program has four main features in its approach: the projects are intended to be short term, low cost, flexible, and community oriented.

The process from planning to implementation is fairly quick: within six months the city has worked with stakeholders to gauge support for the project, and designed and installed in partnership with community members. The fast turnaround is in large part because of an

annual funding cycle; the program does not require a private funding source. Projects are focused on city-managed right-of-way, because most parking lots in Seattle are privately owned. A few of the projects have fully closed streets, while others have taken over portions of the roadway; some have more of a focus on traffic calming, while others function more as neighborhood parks.

An important approach to the program is ensuring that each project has a core team of supportive community stakeholders. In the initial planning of a project, SDOT convenes meetings

with five to 10 key community members who help decide on size and design components. Next steps include a larger event with neighbors and a survey to communicate the project and obtain design input. Though there is a possibility for successful projects to become permanent, they are designed initially to be removed in three to five years. This interim time frame helps diffuse concerns and controversy.

One lesson learned during the first two years of the program was the importance of activation. For the third year, in 2018, the Pavement to Parks budget was used to fund activation



Some pavement-to-parks projects in Seattle fully closed streets to vehicles to create safe open spaces for adjacent residents. A project in the Rainier Vista neighborhood features a community-designed street mural.

SEATTLE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

SEATTLE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION



SEATTLE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

A park in the Capitol Hill neighborhood replaced parking spaces and a small through street at a busy intersection.

Though some Pavement to Parks projects become permanent installations, they are initially designed to be temporary interventions, using low-cost materials like paint and plastic bollards to define the spaces.



SEATTLE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

strategies that are largely planned by the city. Activities vary per project, depending on the residential density nearby, but city staff made sure that the decision-making process included going back to the core resident groups for each project to ask what fits their community. The goal was at least two monthly activations in five of the more park-oriented projects. The projects are maintained by the city with the exception of a few maintenance agreements with neighborhood groups.

Though funding for the program ended in 2018, SDOT still manages 13 pavement-to-park sites. Says Susan McLaughlin, urban design manager for SDOT, “We are exploring ways in which we can either transition these sites to permanent or adapt them to be more durable to sustain a longer-term installation with less funding required for upkeep.”

SDOT defines successful projects as providing useful and active neighborhood public space, allowing communities to test out new ideas, and enhancing safety for all road users. Projects made permanent will still be owned by SDOT, rather than the city’s Parks and Recreation department. Ultimately, if the project is proven successful, the goal would be to adapt the park to permanent status, which could include de-paving and/or complete reconstruction. But these low-cost, flexible, and community-driven open-space projects create opportunities for recreation and social spaces in neighborhoods that may not have equitable access to parks and help to address the future park needs of the expected expanding population of the city.

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## Pavement to Parks

Parks are essential building blocks for thriving places. American cities, which have historically given over prime land for automobile storage and transport, are rethinking the primacy of the car. Investments in transit, bicycling and pedestrian infrastructure, and new mobility options like scooters—along with decreased levels of both driving and individual car ownership—are driving changes to transportation networks. Parks and green spaces are an exciting potential reuse for land that was once dedicated to automobiles.

Across North America, this trend has caught on as parks are being created on former parking lots and roadways, on the sites of former parking garages, and in the spaces beneath highway overpasses. These pavement-to-parks conversions provide the opportunity to enhance community connection, promote environmental sustainability, and improve park access for communities that have lacked it.

**Look around. Could that pavement you see be a park instead?**



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