

THE PANDEMIC AND THE PUBLIC REALM

GLOBAL INNOVATIONS FOR HEALTH,
SOCIAL EQUITY, AND SUSTAINABILITY

Cover photo: People relax in social distancing circles at Domino Park in Brooklyn, New York. (Marcella Winograd)

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About the Urban Land Institute

The Urban Land Institute 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 shaping the future of the built environment for transformative impact in 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 80 countries.

About the ULI Building Healthy Places Initiative

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.

About This Report

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many cities have implemented quick changes to the public realm—most of them intended to be temporary—to address new challenges and meet changing needs. *The Pandemic and the Public Realm* features interviews with city officials, nonprofits, and other groups from more than 30 cities that have developed innovative public space projects since enhanced public health measures began in spring 2020. These inspirational examples from around the world provide insights on how to create safe, equitable, and desirable public spaces—even after the pandemic is over.

ULI is grateful to The JPB Foundation for its support of this research.

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INTRODUCTION

MARCELLA WINOGRAD

THE PANDEMIC AND THE PUBLIC REALM

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic began to spread through U.S. cities, sparking widespread lockdowns and other public health measures. Around the world, cities were confronting the same crisis and learning how to keep their residents safe.

As a growing evidence base showed that outdoor spaces—when combined with social distancing, wearing masks, and washing hands—were less risky than indoor spaces, the public realm became an increasingly important part of pandemic life. Parks quickly became crowded, and bicycle sales skyrocketed.

Cities looked to their public spaces to address these new challenges and meet changing needs. Whether creating public art to share COVID-19 safety information in Nairobi, opening streets to pedestrian and cyclist use in Oakland, or drawing social distancing circles at a park in Brooklyn, cities experimented with quick but often significant changes to the public realm as part of their pandemic response.*

The Urban Land Institute’s Building Healthy Places Initiative profiled more than 30 of these approaches to the public realm during the pandemic from across the globe. The examples illuminate how cities can innovate with low-cost, immediately responsive, and creative interventions that promote health and social equity.

This report documents the innovations so that, in the midst of the many devastating effects of the pandemic, cities can take inspiration from examples of adaptability and creativity around the world. Urban planners, designers, artists, city officials, and residents all can learn from these perspectives, carrying forward cities’ ideas even after the pandemic is over.

Although each profiled city is distinctive, the following main themes emerged:

- Temporary, flexible, low-cost, and iterative projects can **respond to rapidly changing needs while building support** and collecting data for more permanent projects in the future.

- The most successful public realm interventions and associated programs have **challenged assumptions**—and ultimately altered perspectives—on entrenched policies and public realm needs.
- The majority of these efforts were led by city agencies—often in collaboration with local businesses, building owners, and nonprofit organizations. The **public sector can play an essential role in cross-sector coordination** while also streamlining necessary permitting processes and project approvals.
- Cities can **maximize the impact of multiple local projects by combining efforts**. For example, creative placemaking initiatives can complement a slow streets program, making both more effective.
- Equitable, people-centric public space has been essential during the pandemic, and **continuing to prioritize equity will remain critical** in the recovery and beyond.

Notably, equity was a primary concern for many cities as they developed and implemented their projects, in part because COVID-19 has disproportionately affected some groups, such as frontline workers, people in crowded housing, and those with underlying health conditions.

In the United States, these factors often fall along lines of race and income, given the country’s ongoing structural racism and its enduring legacy. Other countries face disparities specific to their histories and contexts. Because inequities in the availability and quality of public space also exist, cities have been striving to ensure that the people most affected by the pandemic are able to benefit from public space improvements.

As city leaders learn from one another during and after this crisis, they can reflect on these public realm innovations—and their own approaches to public space throughout the pandemic—to sustain their work moving forward and to create healthier and more equitable places.

* Although some cities restricted the use of public spaces as they locked down, this type of response is not profiled here. The report instead focuses on cities that allowed some use of their public spaces.

NAVIGATING THE REPORT

This look book draws from interviews with city officials, representatives from nonprofits, and other leaders from more than 30 cities to showcase innovative public space projects and programs that were implemented between March 2020 and March 2021. The interviews represent a range of cities—small and large, on different continents, implementing pilot projects or accelerating long-term plans—to provide insights on how to create safe, equitable, and desirable public spaces. The cities were chosen to show the diversity of approaches to public space and the different contexts in which they were possible. Each example provides insight for other cities as they adapt the ideas to their own settings.

The profiles in this look book fall into four categories:

1. **Streeteries, Businesses, and Neighborhoods**

To support local businesses and community life, cities encouraged outdoor dining (“streeteries”), safe shopping, and efforts to ensure that residents could meet all their basic needs within their own neighborhoods.

2. **Slow/Open Streets and Bike Network Expansions**

By closing streets to car traffic and expanding bike networks, cities reclaimed streets for pedestrian and cyclist use.

3. **Creative Placemaking and Public Art**

Arts initiatives provided information about COVID-19 safety precautions, attracted people to local business districts, and thanked frontline workers.

4. **Innovations in Parks**

Cities made existing parks safer, such as by drawing social distancing circles, and found creative new spaces to serve as parks, such as by opening golf courses to the public.

Each profile includes an overview of the project or program, a key insight, and interviewee’s responses to a set of three questions:

- 1. The Project:** How did you gain support for and implement these changes?
- 2. Equity:** How did you ensure that everyone could benefit from the changes to the public realm equitably?
- 3. What’s Next:** Are you planning to sustain these changes after the pandemic ends? If so, how?

Each key insight represents a major idea that came out of each interview. In some interviews, the insight is specific to that project—a “lesson learned,” success, or highlighted aspect of the project. In others, the insight is broader and can be used to guide cities as they think about their own public space projects. By including a spectrum of insights, the profiles better reflect each city’s thinking about their own projects and programs.

HOW TO NAVIGATE THE PROFILES



HOVER TO READ MORE
Set mouse over this text to display a pop-up with additional information from the interview responses.

LEARN MORE
Click here to open relevant web pages about the project.

Note: The “hover over” function is not available on mobile.

PROFILED CITIES ADAPTING LOCAL PUBLIC SPACES IN A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

Streeteries, Businesses, and Neighborhoods

- Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Melbourne, Australia
- Paris, France
- Rotterdam, Netherlands
- Santa Monica, California
- St. John's, Newfoundland
- Tampa, Florida
- Vancouver, Washington
- Vilnius, Lithuania
- West Palm Beach, Florida

Slow/Open Streets and Bike Network Expansions

- Bogotá, Colombia
- Dublin, Ireland
- Duluth, Minnesota
- Montréal, Québec
- New York, New York
- Oakland, California
- Seattle, Washington

Creative Placemaking and Public Art

- Boston, Massachusetts
- Chennai, India
- Hennepin County, Minnesota
- Jackson, Mississippi
- Nairobi, Kenya
- Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- Toronto, Ontario

Innovations in Parks

- Atlanta, Georgia
- Belfast, Northern Ireland
- Brooklyn, New York
- Elblag, Poland
- Montgomery County, Maryland
- San Francisco, California
- Singapore



STREATERIES, BUSINESSES, AND NEIGHBORHOODS

As the pandemic limited indoor dining, shopping, and other aspects of community life, cities found creative ways to support businesses and accelerated the implementation of locally focused planning concepts.

Because indoor activities proved riskier than outdoor ones, many cities restricted the indoor capacities of restaurants and other businesses. To mitigate the economic impacts of these decisions, cities, downtown associations, and other partners have facilitated outdoor arrangements for small businesses, such as transforming parking spots into parklets and expediting permitting processes for outdoor dining. In cities with colder seasons, winterization assistance has helped these efforts continue year-round.

At the same time, the 15-minute city concept—the ability to meet basic needs within a 15-minute walk or bike ride—increasingly gained traction as one way to accommodate early concerns about the safety of public transportation, recommendations to make only short and essential trips, and guidance to reduce transmission by staying as local as possible. Other planning ideas similarly emphasized neighborhood life by creating multiblock, car-free areas with expanded public spaces.

By helping residents to safely eat, shop, and live locally, cities have addressed COVID-19 not only as a public health crisis but also as an economic and social challenge. During the pandemic recovery, supporting small businesses and ensuring that people can meet their needs locally will continue to be essential. In the long term, the innovative programs and projects profiled here may also change expectations of how residents can use and experience public space, shaping cities with new outdoor possibilities and thriving local life.

- BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA
- MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA
- PARIS, FRANCE
- ROTTERDAM, NETHERLANDS
- SANTA MONICA, CALIFORNIA
- ST. JOHN'S, NEWFOUNDLAND
- TAMPA, FLORIDA
- VANCOUVER, WASHINGTON
- VILNIUS, LITHUANIA
- WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA



SEAN PAUL FRANJETA



STREATERIES, BUSINESSES, AND NEIGHBORHOODS

BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

Buenos Aires pedestrianized 100 streets in 2020 to facilitate safe outdoor mobility during the pandemic while also supporting local commercial activity. As of December 2020, more than 3,000,000 square feet (286,000 sq m) of new public space had been created, more than half of which is in former vehicle travel lanes.

› **LEAD**

The Buenos Aires Ministry of Public Space and Urban Hygiene, under the leadership of Minister Clara Muzzio, guided the project in collaboration with multiple government departments.

› **KEY INSIGHT**

The project advanced the city's goals of expanding walking areas, reducing motor vehicle use, and supporting the ability of people to satisfy their basic and recreational needs within their neighborhoods rather than having to travel longer distances.

› **MORE DETAILS**

Project leads consulted with residents and representatives from shops, restaurants, cultural institutions, and sports and recreational facilities from neighborhoods across Buenos Aires to reactivate the public realm by increasing space for walking. The quick response demonstrated the versatility of public space to host new people-focused uses.



› **EQUITY**

The city prioritized equitable distribution of public space interventions and street pedestrianizations. Locations were distributed among all 15 communes of the city in consultation with local stakeholders.

› **WHAT'S NEXT**

The city is measuring the impact of the project in each neighborhood to inform future, permanent street and public-space transformations. It is likely that many of the temporary walking areas and spaces for outdoor dining will remain after the pandemic because they have been so successful.

Adapted from responses from **Luciana Tassano, Ministry of Public Space and Urban Hygiene, city of Buenos Aires.**

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STREATERIES, BUSINESSES, AND NEIGHBORHOODS

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

MOD.DAP, the Melbourne Outdoor Dining Design Assistance Program, provides pro bono assistance to hospitality venues and business owners. The program assists with obtaining required permits for outdoor dining and expanding existing outdoor dining.

> **LEAD**

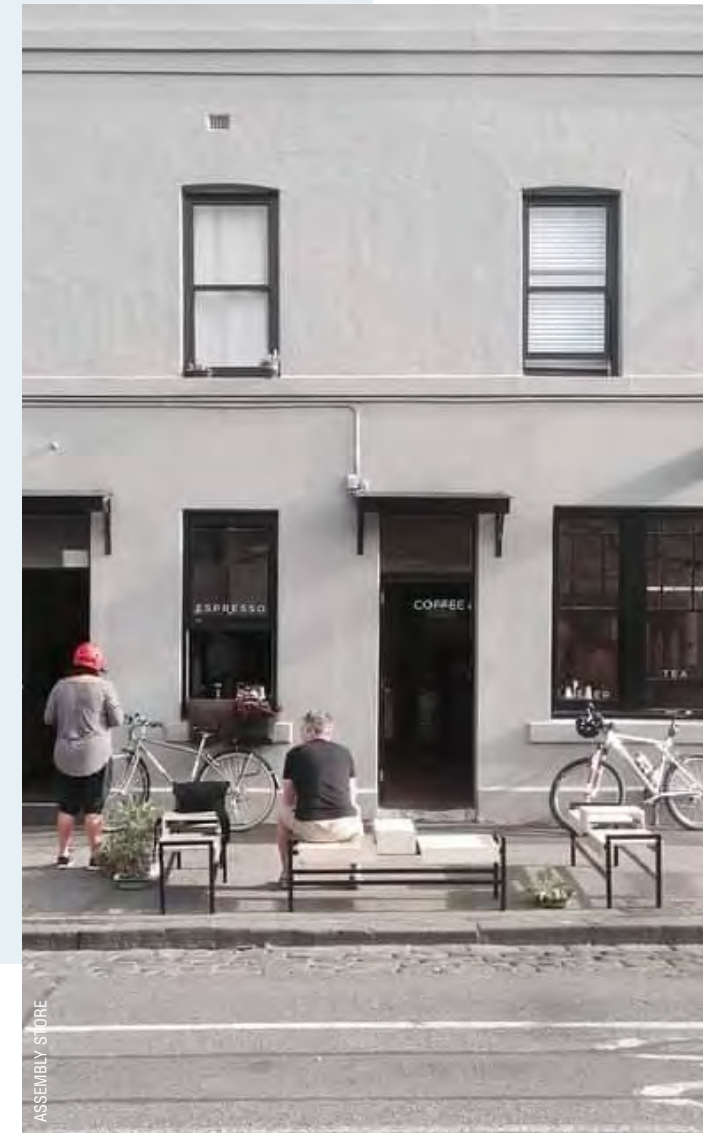
MOD.DAP was developed by urban planner Mia Zar with assistance by urban designer and planner Tim Nichols.

> **KEY INSIGHT**

Official permitting processes alone do not enable outdoor dining. Providing resources like design assistance can help small businesses take advantage of city programs and better weather the crisis.

> **MORE DETAILS**

To help businesses navigate Melbourne’s outdoor dining permitting processes in a timely manner, MOD.DAP connects them with urban design professionals who can provide design and documentation assistance.



> **EQUITY**

Melbourne developed a detailed set of design guidelines and application processes for outdoor dining permits, but a technical and knowledge gap remained for most smaller venues. MOD.DAP’s free assistance bridges this gap so that businesses with fewer resources can take advantage of outdoor dining.

> **WHAT’S NEXT**

MOD.DAP is thinking about how to learn from the pandemic and continue to use planning as a tool for—rather than impediment to—fast-paced adaptation.

Adapted from responses from Tim Nichols, senior consultant, kinetica.

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SHUTTERSTOCK

STREATERIES, BUSINESSES, AND NEIGHBORHOODS

PARIS, FRANCE

In a 15-minute city, everyone can meet their basic needs within a 15-minute walk or bike ride. The COVID-19 crisis accelerated the implementation of Paris's 15-minute city plan by advancing projects like expanded bike lanes and local solidarity initiatives.

› LEAD

Carlos Moreno, a professor at the Sorbonne, developed this concept before the COVID-19 pandemic, and a close collaboration with Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo made implementation possible.

› KEY INSIGHT

A bold concept, such as the 15-minute city, can provide a guiding framework for the projects that support the city's vision.

› MORE DETAILS

The 15-minute city was part of Hidalgo's reelection campaign, which took place during the first lockdown in France. As the lockdown forced residents to experience new constraints, the residents rediscovered the importance of proximity and short trips within the city, accelerating the demand for and implementation of neighborhood-scale public space projects.



CAMILLE GEVAUDAN/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



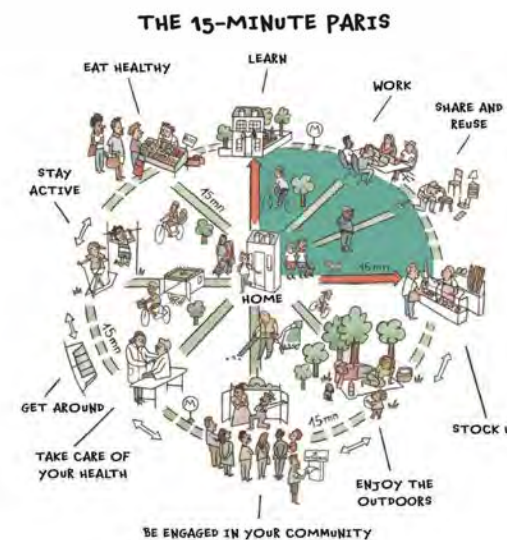
DAVID MAPLETOFT/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

› EQUITY

The goal of the 15-minute city concept is to provide a vibrant and healthy city for all. For example, an innovative solidarity initiative for elderly people has strengthened community ties during the pandemic.

› WHAT'S NEXT

To further the 15-minute city concept in Paris, new initiatives will continue to prioritize proximity and flexibility in public space. Beyond Paris, the C40 coalition, a global network of large cities addressing climate change, endorsed the 15-minute city as part of its post-COVID policy strategy.



MICHAEL

Top left: Temporary bike lanes in Paris.

Top right: Street in Paris during the first lockdown.

Bottom left: Illustration of the 15-minute city concept.

[LEARN MORE](#)



STREATERIES, BUSINESSES, AND NEIGHBORHOODS

ROTTERDAM, NETHERLANDS

Rotterdam allowed businesses to use all parking spaces in front of their buildings to accommodate customers safely and conveniently outdoors in a program that ran from June to November 2020.

› **LEAD**

Various Rotterdam municipal departments administered the program, including those in charge of safety, urban design, mobility, and urban management.

› **KEY INSIGHT**

To make use of parking spaces, businesses were able to either create their own decks or to use decks made from reclaimed wood that were provided by the city free of charge.

› **MORE DETAILS**

No permits were required for businesses to temporarily transform parking spaces into decks supporting their operations. All types of businesses were eligible, including restaurants, hair salons, and shops. As of October 2020, 1,000 decks had been created.*

* See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/12/liveable-street-show-cities-are-prioritising-people-over-parking>.



› **EQUITY**

The city provided information for restaurant and pub owners about how to create terrace spaces without permits. City staff further collaborated with businesses located on busy streets and in public squares to reach customized solutions for expanding operations in ways that could benefit everyone.

› **WHAT'S NEXT**

The program was implemented on a temporary basis, but the city is evaluating what it learned in 2020 to inform future policies.



Adapted from responses from Tristan van Rijn, spokesman for Alderman Barbara Kathmann, municipality of Rotterdam.

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STREATERIES, BUSINESSES, AND NEIGHBORHOODS

SANTA MONICA, CALIFORNIA

Santa Monica adopted temporary guidelines to allow businesses to use sidewalks, on-street parking spaces, and private outdoor property—including plazas and parking lots—for outdoor business operations.

› **LEAD**

An interdepartmental group worked closely with Santa Monica’s Emergency Operations Center and city leadership to adopt guidelines allowing for the temporary use of outdoor spaces by various types of businesses.

› **KEY INSIGHT**

A streamlined permitting process enabled approvals to be granted quickly—oftentimes on the same day as the application.

› **MORE DETAILS**

Santa Monica went from having 67 outdoor dining sidewalk patios and three parklets to over 224 outdoor activations and 65 parklets in a matter of weeks because of the program. These spaces added vibrancy to commercial districts and have helped keep businesses open during the pandemic.



› **EQUITY**

All businesses were invited to consider ways they could safely use the public realm while maintaining public access and complying with public health orders, physical distancing requirements, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. The city waived permit application fees and monthly outdoor dining license fees to ensure the opportunity would be accessible to businesses of all sizes.

› **WHAT’S NEXT**

Since the implementation of the program, the city has also created new outdoor fitness zones on the Santa Monica Pier to help support gyms and fitness studios while allowing residents to safely engage in physical activity. The city is also planning to create a more permanent parklet program citywide to support restaurants and businesses while creating a stronger sense of place.

Adapted from responses from Jennifer Taylor, economic development manager, city of Santa Monica.

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THE CITY OF ST. JOHN'S



THE CITY OF ST. JOHN'S



THE CITY OF ST. JOHN'S



THE CITY OF ST. JOHN'S

STREATERIES, BUSINESSES, AND NEIGHBORHOODS

ST. JOHN'S, NEWFOUNDLAND

The city of St. John's introduced its first downtown pedestrian mall since the 1960s. The temporary initiative—which provided safe outdoor space while assisting downtown businesses—ran from July to September 2020.

› **LEAD**

The St. John's Department of Community Services worked with other city departments to implement the pedestrian mall in collaboration with the Downtown St. John's Business Improvement Area.

› **KEY INSIGHT**

The pedestrian mall was a success with residents and visitors. Responses gathered through the city's engagement process indicated that 98 percent of the public would like to see future pedestrian malls in St. John's.

› **MORE DETAILS**

St. John's created the Water Street Pedestrian Mall by temporarily closing the central thoroughfare of Water Street to automobile traffic. Funding came from the city and the federal and provincial governments.

› **EQUITY**

The goal was to create a pedestrian mall that was inclusive and welcoming for all ages and abilities. As part of the street design, accessible parking spaces and picnic tables were created.

Once all outdoor structures were built, sidewalk ramps were added at strategic locations to improve accessibility. As outdoor decks and patios were being built, city inspectors met with business owners to assess structures and ensure accessibility requirements were addressed.

› **WHAT'S NEXT**

Because of its overwhelming popularity with residents and visitors, the City Council has committed to creating another temporary pedestrian mall in the future. The exact details, including street sections and amenities for future events, had not yet been determined as of early 2021.

Adapted from responses from Kelly Maguire, public relations and communications officer for St. John's.

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STREATERIES, BUSINESSES, AND NEIGHBORHOODS

TAMPA, FLORIDA

Tampa's Lift Up Local Economic Recovery Plan temporarily allows bars, restaurants, and retail businesses to establish outdoor capacity on adjacent privately owned and public space without having to go through the normal full application and permitting process or pay a fee.

› **LEAD**

The city of Tampa implemented the program in collaboration with the Tampa Downtown Partnership and local restaurants.

› **KEY INSIGHT**

Restaurants implementing outdoor seating on sidewalks without tents may do so without any application, permit process, or fee. Establishments must seek preapproval to install temporary parklets or covered structures—but approvals are typically granted on the same day as initial applications.

› **MORE DETAILS**

The Lift Up Local program was created to make it as easy as possible for restaurants to expand into sidewalks, streets, adjacent parking spaces, and parking lots. The program resulted in multiple streets being shut down to automobile traffic in the city's entertainment districts.



› **EQUITY**

To participate in the program, restaurants must comply with Americans with Disabilities Act requirements at all times when operating in the public right-of-way. No parking for disabled persons may be repurposed for restaurant, bar, or retail use. The city conducts periodic compliance inspections.

› **WHAT'S NEXT**

The popularity of the program led to its being expanded through April 4, 2021. After this date, establishments participating in the program will have 30 days to restore outdoor spaces to normal conditions.

Adapted from responses from Ashley Bauman, marketing and communications director, city of Tampa.



[LEARN MORE](#)



STREATERIES, BUSINESSES, AND NEIGHBORHOODS

VANCOUVER, WASHINGTON

The Street Eats Pilot Program helped downtown eateries create temporary parklets for outdoor dining along sidewalks, in on-street parking areas, and on private parking lots. As businesses reopened with limited indoor seating capacity, this program expanded safe options for supporting restaurants and cafés.

› **PROJECT LEAD**

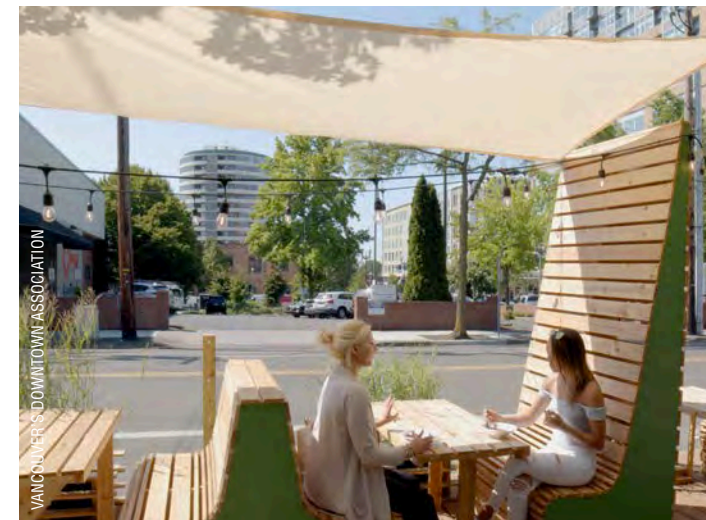
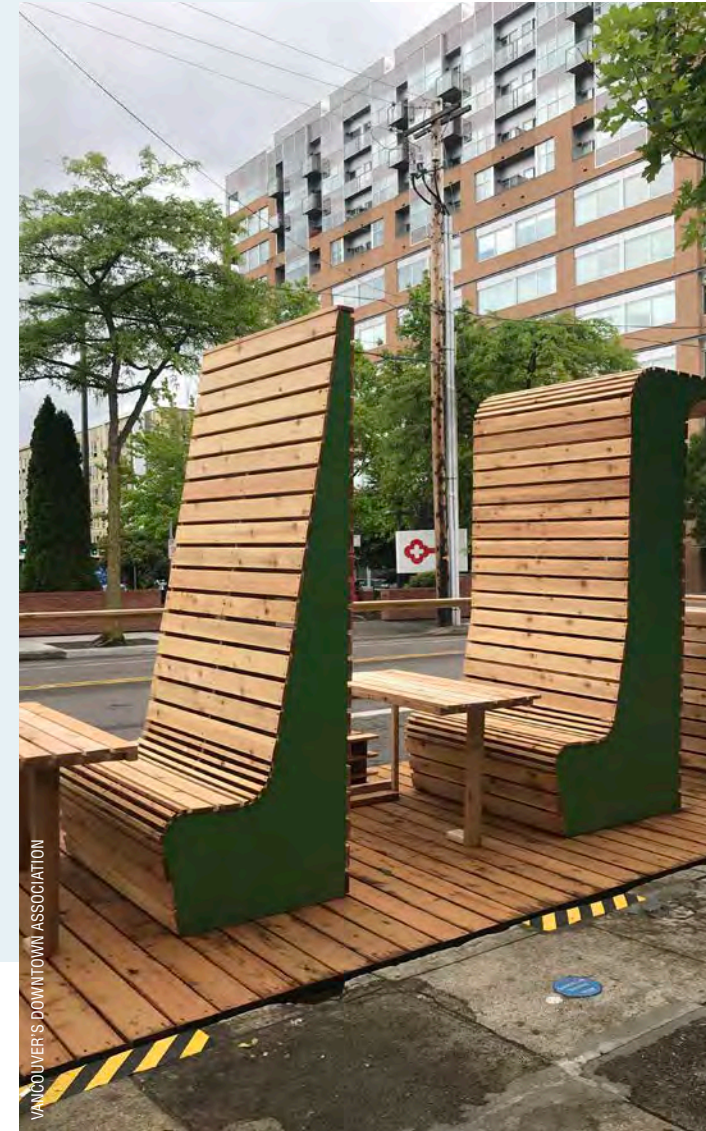
The program was a collaboration between partners from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Vancouver’s Downtown Association (VDA) is a volunteer-driven community development organization focused on revitalizing downtown Vancouver, Washington, and local businesses donated their design assistance and labor to this project. The city of Vancouver played a primary role in helping move this effort forward.

› **KEY INSIGHT**

Pilot programs are a quick and effective way to implement public realm projects. Whether improving quality of life, demonstrating best practices, or informing policies, pilot programs can meet immediate needs while looking toward the future.

› **MORE DETAILS**

When Washington state first instituted COVID-19 interior occupancy restrictions, the Street Eats Pilot Program produced two pilot parklets and six curbside pickup zones in approximately two weeks. The pilot locations were based on district location, business fit, and interest.



› **EQUITY**

After the initial locations were established, VDA partnered with the city of Vancouver to launch a technical assistance program and small grant program to aid businesses with permitting, designing, and winterizing their outdoor areas, among other forms of assistance.

› **WHAT’S NEXT**

VDA is currently conducting outreach to determine the longevity of these policy changes, and downtown Vancouver’s small business community will ultimately decide this as it moves forward into 2021.

Adapted from an interview with Michael Walker, executive director, Vancouver’s Downtown Association.

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STREATERIES, BUSINESSES, AND NEIGHBORHOODS

VILNIUS, LITHUANIA

Vilnius temporarily transformed its city center into a vast outdoor café from spring to fall 2020 to support the local restaurant industry and create spaces for people to dine out safely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

› LEAD

Vilnius administered the program by quickly issuing outdoor dining permits to restaurants: most permits were granted within a few days of initial requests made via a simple email.

› KEY INSIGHT

A survey of restaurant participants showed that 100 percent of respondents approved of the outdoor café program, 84 percent saw positive results for their business, and 15.5 percent recouped their quarantine-induced losses.

› MORE DETAILS

Vilnius allowed restaurants to set up tables at least six feet (1.8 m) apart in busy plazas, squares, and other public spaces—all free of charge. At the peak of the program, over 450 restaurants had set up outdoor tables in 18 locations, including four streets closed to car traffic in the Old Town.



› EQUITY

The administration of the program centered on balancing the needs of local businesses with those of residents, including by maintaining public access to open spaces.

› WHAT'S NEXT

As a result of its initial success, the outdoor café program will return in 2021 with a focus on further improving implementation. Updates will include defining dedicated zones for cafés and issuing permits that are valid for longer periods of time so that restaurants can include outdoor dining in their business planning.

Adapted from responses from Gintarė Kavaliūnaitė, public relations manager, Go Vilnius.

[LEARN MORE](#)



STREATERIES, BUSINESSES, AND NEIGHBORHOODS

WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA

West Palm Beach's Dining on the Spot (DOTS) program allows outdoor dining on public and private parklets, sidewalks, alleyways, and parking lots downtown. This program began in March 2020 in response to indoor seating restrictions.

> LEAD

The West Palm Beach Downtown Development Authority (DDA), West Palm Beach Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), and the city of West Palm Beach launched the Dining on the Spot program. The DDA assigned COVID-19 emergency funding to subsidize equipment rental costs (e.g., for outdoor furniture) and funded a branded signage program for restaurants.

> KEY INSIGHT

Cost waivers, such as waivers for permitting fees, and subsidies helped this program to succeed. Having survived the initial economic shock of the pandemic with the help of the DOTS program, many restaurants are now ready to invest in their spaces and continue their outdoor dining plans at their own cost.



> MORE DETAILS

This project builds on a history of tactical urbanism, strategic long-term investments in the public realm, and an existing Temporary Use Process working group in West Palm Beach. An executive order established the Dining on the Spot application permit process and guidelines. DOTS installations contributed to 20 to 25 percent of sales during the program, even after indoor seating resumed at full capacity.



> EQUITY

The Downtown Development Authority provided resources to all businesses inside the DDA boundary—not just to larger restaurants. The businesses receiving assistance were as diverse as the business ownership in the district, including many small businesses, Black-owned businesses, and minority-owned businesses.

> WHAT'S NEXT

The subsidized equipment rentals ended in October 2020, but businesses can continue to operate their outdoor spaces under the current executive order. The city and the DDA are actively working to rewrite sidewalk café seating and parklet ordinances to address needs discovered through the DOTS program, such as shade elements and more transparent barricades. By reshaping policy, the city is transitioning from the initial DOTS program to a sustainable, long-term solution for outdoor dining.

Adapted from responses from Sherryl Muriente, manager of urban placemaking, West Palm Beach Downtown Development Authority; Melissa Hege, principal, MHCP COLAB; and Raphael Clemente, executive director, West Palm Beach Downtown Development Authority.

[LEARN MORE](#)

SLOW/OPEN STREETS AND BIKE NETWORK EXPANSIONS

Car traffic plummeted at the beginning of the pandemic as people stayed home and, when possible, worked remotely. The level of risk on public transportation was unclear for months, so people began searching for alternative modes to get around. With parks becoming crowded, city residents also began to look for alternative spaces for outdoor recreation.

In response, many cities created slow or open streets programs, which closed designated blocks to car traffic and allowed pedestrians and cyclists to use the entire street while social distancing. Other cities expanded their existing network of bike lanes to help essential and frontline workers remain mobile as bus schedules become more limited and safety concerns persisted.

Although these projects were temporary and experimental—often designed with movable barriers and traffic cones—their successes have paved the way for more formal iterations in the future. After the pandemic, cities can learn from these early experiences to transform their streets into safe, accessible, and people-centric public spaces.

- BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA
- DUBLIN, IRELAND
- DULUTH, MINNESOTA
- MONTRÉAL, QUÉBEC
- NEW YORK, NEW YORK
- OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA
- SEATTLE, WASHINGTON



JENNY O'CONNELL VIA NACTO/FICKR



CARLOS FELIPE PARDO/FICKR

SLOW/OPEN STREETS AND BIKE NETWORK EXPANSIONS

BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA

In March 2020, Bogotá introduced an emergency bike network, totaling 52 miles (84 km) of new bike lanes, to help essential workers move around and to encourage cycling—a low-cost mode of transportation that allows social distancing.

› **LEAD**

Bogotá implemented the emergency bike network with support from the Mayor’s Office, the District Secretariat for Mobility, and the District Institute of Recreation and Sports (IDRD).

› **KEY INSIGHT**

Quick, temporary projects can be formalized over time and expanded into innovative plans.

› **MORE DETAILS**

The emergency bike network introduced new bike lanes that connected existing bike lanes, ran parallel to bus lanes to match commuting patterns, and reconfigured car lanes on major roads for cyclists. Given the quick implementation, many of these original lanes were makeshift, using plastic monoliths and tape to mark the lanes.



CARLOS FELIPE PARDO/FICKR



CARLOS FELIPE PARDO/FICKR



CARLOS FELIPE PARDO/FICKR

› **EQUITY**

On the city roads, safe bike lanes have always been necessary to traverse the city. However, 85 percent of the city’s public space is used by motorized vehicles, even though 65 percent of households do not own a car. As the new lanes enhance connectivity, all cyclists are benefiting from the increased opportunities for and access to mobility—regardless of their social standing or city location.

› **WHAT’S NEXT**

The city has already made some of these lanes permanent, changing the temporary materials to more permanent ones. Further planning is underway for a more permanent and ambitious project to overhaul some of the roads into green corridors, an effort that would formalize the bike lanes and complement them with pedestrian infrastructure expansion, public space interventions, heritage restoration, and public transport reorganization.

Adapted from responses from Carlos Reyes, urban designer and planner, Arup.

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OLIVIERE FRENCH

SLOW/OPEN STREETS AND BIKE NETWORK EXPANSIONS

DUBLIN, IRELAND

Dublin introduced temporary walking and bicycling routes in reallocated road space on streets around the city beginning in May 2020. As of December 2020, 11 protected cycle lanes totaling over six miles (11 km) and 6,749 square feet (627 sq m) of new pedestrian space had been implemented.

> LEAD

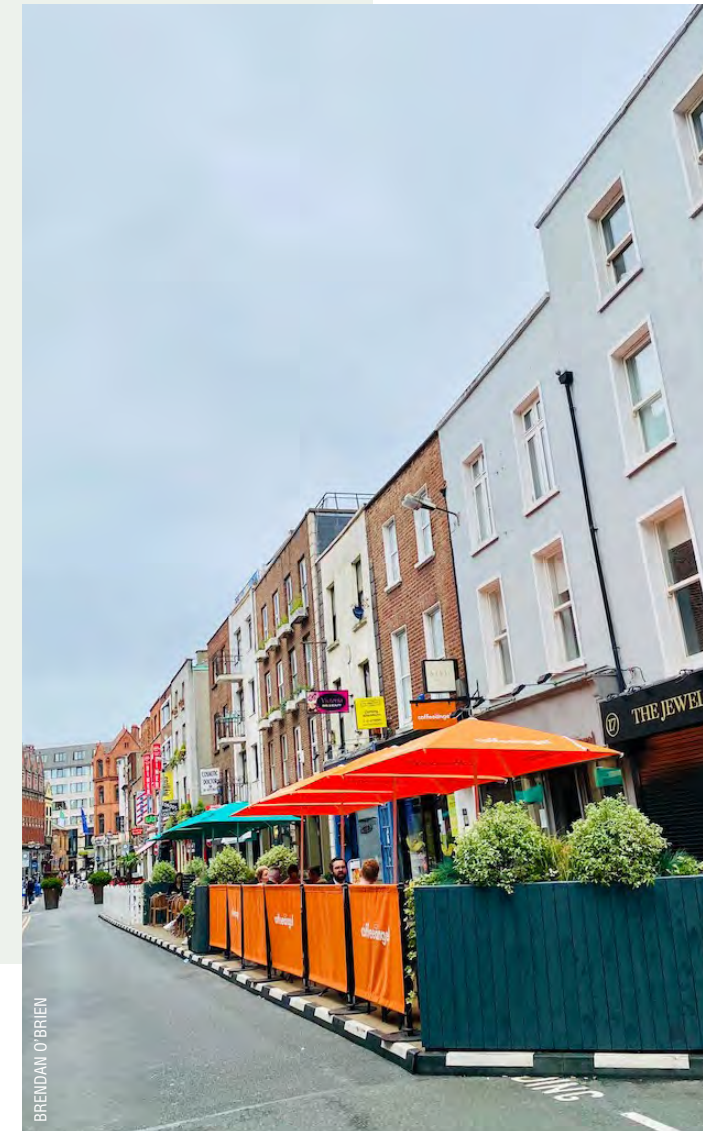
Dublin City Council and the National Transport Authority led the program, which responded to “COVID mobility requests” identified by the public.

> KEY INSIGHT

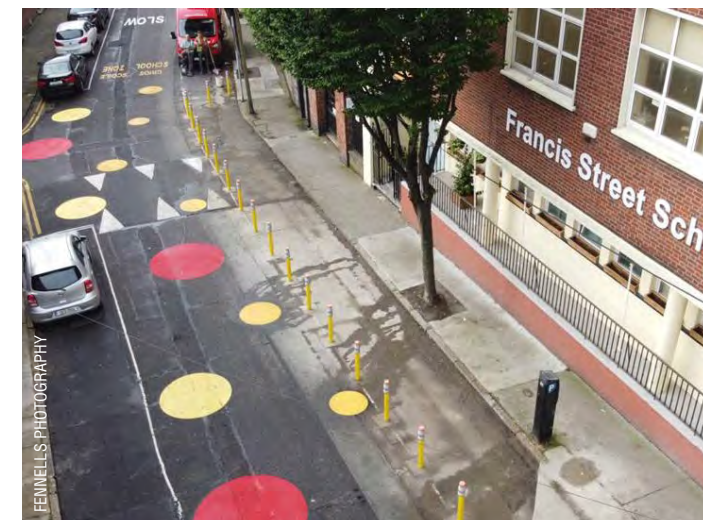
The city established a dedicated online portal, open to the public, to submit COVID-related mobility requests. As of December 2020, the city had received over 5,000 requests, with the greatest number of them being for protected bicycle lanes.

> MORE DETAILS

Dublin’s Enabling the City to Return to Work Interim Mobility Intervention Program was developed to facilitate safe mobility throughout the city while accommodating physical distancing. The program initially prioritized radial routes into the city center and several “urban villages” based on areas with high levels of walking and bicycling.



BRENDAN O'BRIEN



FENNELLS PHOTOGRAPHY



BRENDAN O'BRIEN

> EQUITY

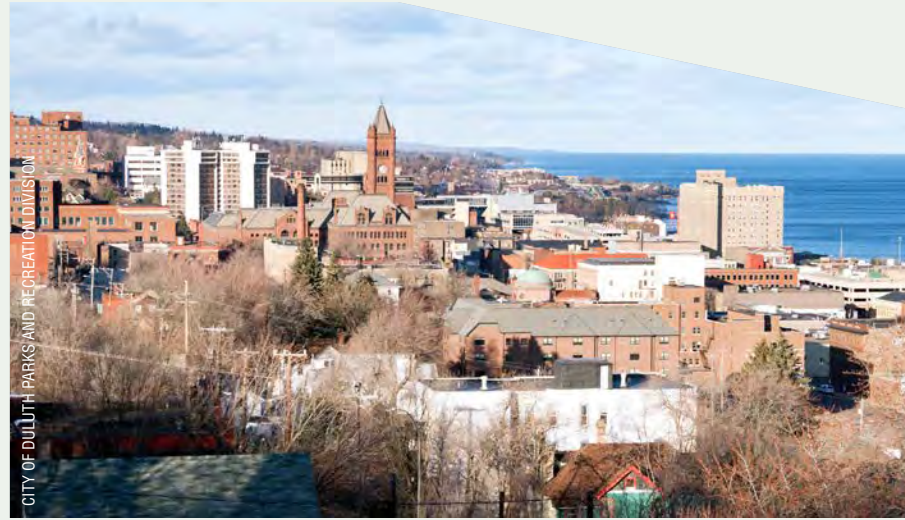
The program aims to balance quick implementation of the program with public consultation. Many of the measures are intended to support mobility for people with disabilities.

> WHAT'S NEXT

All measures are being implemented on a temporary basis with ongoing monitoring. Decisions on whether to extend or make permanent measures will be made when the pandemic has been contained.

Adapted from responses from Eric Farrell, staff officer, media relations and corporate communications, Chief’s Executive Department, Dublin City Council.

LEARN MORE



SLOW/OPEN STREETS AND BIKE NETWORK EXPANSIONS

DULUTH, MINNESOTA

In spring 2020, Duluth closed about 10 miles (16 km) of roadways to automobile traffic to make them available for walking, bicycling, and physically distanced outdoor recreation.

› **LEAD**

Duluth Parks and Recreation coordinated the project in consultation with the city's emergency services team, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), area businesses, local homeowners, and the public.

› **KEY INSIGHT**

Road closures were spread across the length of the city to provide free neighborhood walking and biking opportunities for residents during the colder spring months.

› **MORE DETAILS**

In March 2020, Duluth experienced a freeze-thaw cycle that created icy surfaces on which to walk or ride bikes. To minimize concentrating people on the few existing hard-surface trails that were free of ice and safe for walking and cycling, the city identified easily accessible, relatively flat, and wide road segments throughout the city to close to automobile traffic in order to accommodate safe outdoor recreation.



› **EQUITY**

Duluth Parks and Recreation promoted the road closures through traditional media and social media outlets, shared information at Parks and Recreation Commission meetings, and posted information and maps on the Parks and Recreation webpages to ensure as many residents as possible would be aware of the temporary outdoor recreation routes throughout the city.

› **WHAT'S NEXT**

Starting in December 2020, the city reviewed the list of spring road closures and decided to proceed with additional seasonal closures of several routes. The city will reevaluate additional options for closures once the spring 2021 freeze-thaw cycle arrives.

Adapted from responses from Jessica Peterson, manager, parks and recreation, city of Duluth.



[LEARN MORE](#)



SLOW/OPEN STREETS AND BIKE NETWORK EXPANSIONS

MONTRÉAL, QUÉBEC

As part of the health measures to protect against COVID-19, Montréal implemented temporary “safe active transportation circuits” linking neighborhoods and four city parks with pedestrian and bike paths. Routes were created by reconfiguring streets and removing parking spaces in several areas.

› LEAD

The initiative was implemented by the Montréal Emergency Coordination Center in coordination with city partners, including the regional health department, municipal transit authority, and the police and fire departments.

› KEY INSIGHT

The program includes a mix of safe cycling lanes and wider pedestrian spaces on busy streets, connections among the city’s major parks, and residential streets closed to motorized traffic.

› MORE DETAILS

Locations for safe active transportation circuits were selected using multiple criteria, including population density; concentration of shopping; proximity to office buildings, schools, and daycare centers; existing plans for bike paths; and pedestrian and cyclist volume data.



› EQUITY

Multiple stakeholders, including cyclist and pedestrian associations and accessibility and disability specialists, were involved in the planning and implementation of the safe active transportation circuits.

› WHAT’S NEXT

The safe active transportation circuits were created as temporary measures; however, the city is exploring how they could be integrated in seasonal or permanent planning in the future depending on technical and financial capacity.

Adapted from responses from Valérie Gagnon, director, Urban Planning and Mobility Department, city of Montréal.



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JENNY O'CONNELL VIA NACTO/FICKR



JENNY O'CONNELL VIA NACTO/FICKR

SLOW/OPEN STREETS AND BIKE NETWORK EXPANSIONS

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Throughout the pandemic, New York City has aimed to open 100 miles (160 km) of streets for pedestrian and cyclist use, using barriers to block off the streets to car traffic. The city has opened 67 miles (107 km), including a combination of sites requested by communities and proposed by the New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT).

› **LEAD**

NYCDOT implements the Open Streets program, selecting and approving the streets in partnership with the New York Police Department and Fire Department. The streets are managed by either local police precincts or volunteer community groups.

› **KEY INSIGHT**

Rapidly developed programs are often not perfect at first, but cities can strive to continually improve these programs by addressing initial challenges and remaining responsive to ongoing issues.

› **MORE DETAILS**

At the beginning of the pandemic, the New York City Council and other advocates campaigned for expanded outdoor spaces for safe recreation. Despite initial pushback from the city administration and a flawed test run, the city agreed to roll out the Open Streets program in phases.



BRECHTBUG/FICKR



RBS10025/FICKR



NYC DOT VIA NACTO/FICKR

› **EQUITY**

As NYCDOT's selection criteria evolved, the department developed an increasingly thoughtful and equitable approach, such as taking into account which neighborhoods were most affected by COVID-19.

› **WHAT'S NEXT**

New York City's current program has laid the groundwork for advocates and the council to continue pushing for open streets in the future, and the city administration has already announced that it will begin making some of the open streets permanent.

Adapted from an interview with Annie Levers, assistant deputy director, Office of Strategic Initiatives, New York City Council.

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SLOW/OPEN STREETS AND BIKE NETWORK EXPANSIONS

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

The Oakland Slow Streets program has created more safe, usable outdoor space during the COVID-19 pandemic by opening over 21 street miles (33 km) to pedestrians and cyclists. Movable barriers prevent car access on the designated Slow Streets.

› **LEAD**

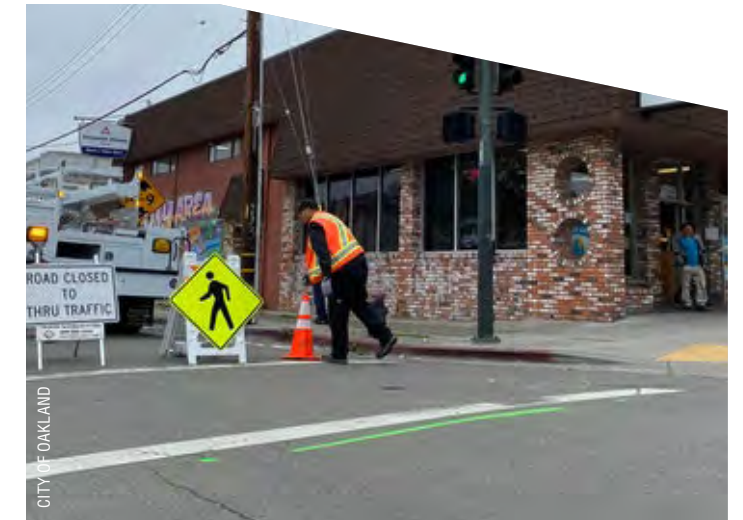
The Oakland Department of Transportation (OakDOT) developed and implemented the Oakland Slow Streets program.

› **KEY INSIGHT**

During a time of crisis, building on previous work can accelerate program implementation.

› **MORE DETAILS**

Neighborhood Bikeways, a major element of the 2019 Oakland Bike Plan, served as the foundation for the Slow Streets program. This plan had already helped residents understand what they needed—not just for biking, but for safety generally—at a time when typical community engagement was not possible.



› **EQUITY**

OakDOT is prioritizing equity, understanding that although not everyone will benefit from every Slow Street, the communities that are the focus of this program—those most in need of additional outdoor space—will benefit the most.

› **WHAT'S NEXT**

OakDOT's goal is to take lessons learned and incorporate them back into the agency's more traditional programs. According to Warren Logan, policy director of mobility and interagency relations at OakDOT, "Instead of trying to make everything permanent all of the time, we should create structures that are more responsive and flexible so that as people's needs change each day, or month, or year or decade, we are able to address them sooner instead of planning for 10 years to implement a fix that was needed 10 years ago."

Adapted from responses from Warren Logan, policy director of mobility and interagency relations, Oakland Department of Transportation.

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SLOW/OPEN STREETS AND BIKE NETWORK EXPANSIONS

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

Since April 2020, the Stay Healthy Streets program has used movable signage to close streets to car traffic, covering 25 miles (40 km) in 13 locations. People can make full use of these streets as they stay six feet (1.8 m) apart.

› LEAD

The Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) developed and implemented the Stay Healthy Streets program.

› KEY INSIGHT

Data can help guide equitable implementation, highlighting where there is a need for increased outdoor space or other changes to the public realm.

› MORE DETAILS

In the first months of the pandemic, SDOT was eager to respond to resident demand for expanded public spaces for recreation. SDOT used emergency relief funds to create the Stay Healthy Streets program, enabling people to get outside without having to drive to popular, crowded parks.



› EQUITY

When selecting the Stay Healthy Streets, SDOT overlaid an equity indices map of Seattle—including indicators like income, race, and languages spoken at home—the neighborhood greenways network, and a housing density map to see where people lacked access to open space and needed relief. SDOT prioritized communities most affected by the pandemic—namely, lower-income communities of color.

› WHAT'S NEXT

Seattle has a commitment, supported by the mayor, to retain 20 miles (32 km) of Stay Healthy Streets. Ongoing public feedback will determine which streets will be made permanent.

Adapted from an interview with Ethan Bergerson, Jonathan Frazier, and Summer Jawson, Seattle Department of Transportation.

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CREATIVE PLACEMAKING AND PUBLIC ART

Public art took on many roles during the pandemic, from supporting businesses to sharing COVID-19 safety information to thanking frontline workers. As part of creative placemaking—which uses tactical urbanism to foster well-defined and desirable public spaces—art has the power to both shape and reflect people’s experiences, while promoting safe enjoyment of the public realm and a sense of community.

During summer 2020, racial justice protests inspired public art throughout the United States, including the mural on Black Lives Matter Plaza in Washington, D.C., and a mural honoring George Floyd—whose killing by police sparked these protests—in Minneapolis. Because the pandemic underscored how structural racism drives both health disparities and experiences in public space, the movement for racial justice often informed pandemic-related improvements to the public realm. For example, a project to install artist-designed domes in Hennepin County, Minnesota, prioritized artists of color.

During and after the recovery, art will continue to be a powerful strategy for creating shared experiences, communicating information, and expressing not only the impacts of this crisis, but also cities’ visions for a healthier, more equitable future.

- BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS
- CHENNAI, INDIA
- HENNEPIN COUNTY, MINNESOTA
- JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI
- NAIROBI, KENYA
- PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA
- TORONTO, ONTARIO



MOD AND COMPANY



CREATIVE PLACEMAKING AND PUBLIC ART

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

The Mayor's Mural Crew, a summer program that employs high school students to paint murals, adapted to the pandemic by doubling its employment in summer 2020 and shifting its work away from murals and toward public space projects that better allowed for social distancing.

› LEAD

The Mayor's Mural Crew is a Boston Parks and Recreation program. High school students can apply for paid summer jobs, including with the Mural Crew, through SuccessLink, run by the Department of Youth Employment.

› KEY INSIGHT

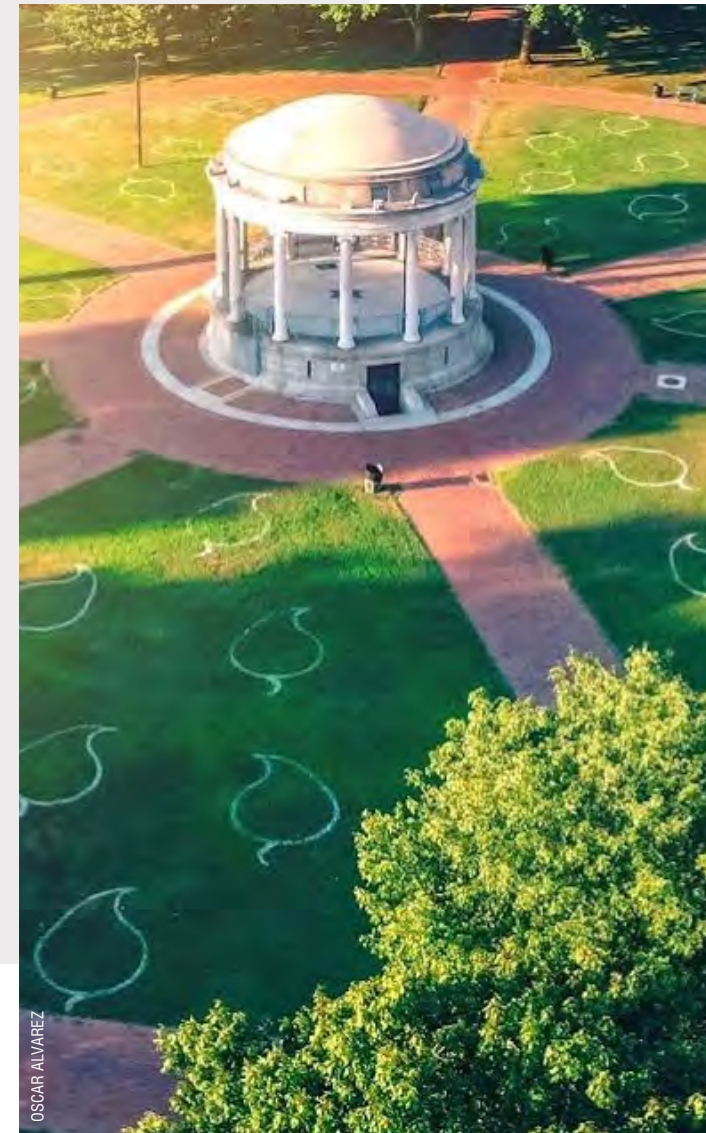
A single program can have many cobenefits, just as the Mayor's Mural Crew provided youth employment, encouraged public art, and created new outdoor spaces.

› MORE DETAILS

The projects included an imaginative play space in the woods of Franklin Park, a social distancing space in Boston Common (in partnership with the Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics), social justice quote murals, and four-by-four-foot (1.2 by 1.2 m) masked self-portraits.

Top left: The Mayor's Mural Crew created a moss quote on display in a park.

Top right: The Mayor's Mural Crew created a tree house as part of a play space in urban nature.



› EQUITY

The Mayor's Mural Crew interviews students from every neighborhood for the program, resulting in a diverse cross-selection of students each summer.

› WHAT'S NEXT

The students were community minded, engaged, and an undertapped resource during the crisis. They are continuing to bring different social issues and viewpoints to the forefront of their work, and the Mayor's Mural Crew looks forward to what they create together in summer 2021.



Top left: Designs in Boston Common mark areas for social distancing.

Top right: A tree house is part of the play space designed by the Mayor's Mural Crew.

Bottom left: Students on the Mayor's Mural Crew painted masked self-portraits.

Adapted from responses from Liz O'Brien and Heidi Schork, Mayor's Mural Crew, city of Boston.

LEARN MORE



CREATIVE PLACEMAKING AND PUBLIC ART

CHENNAI, INDIA

Tambaram, a neighborhood in Chennai, is home to the first mural at a railway station in India paying tribute to frontline workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

› LEAD

The Nalandaway Foundation, a Chennai-based nongovernmental organization (NGO), approached artist Varshini Ramakrishnan to create this mural. The project is funded by Renault Nissan Technology and Business Centre India and supported by the Southern Railways.

› KEY INSIGHT

Inclusive art in the public realm has the potential to create a shared experience, instill hope, and express gratitude.

› MORE DETAILS

Discussions for the mural began in the third week of March 2020, and the work was completed within a month. Because of lockdown constraints, Ramakrishnan could not visit or paint the site, and so she completed the entire design digitally. Once travel was possible, she used methods including vinyl pasting to create the mural.



› EQUITY

The mural features a wide range of frontline workers, including doctors, nurses, delivery people, sanitation workers, and vendors.

› WHAT'S NEXT

The artist is now working on a new series in which she continues to use old buildings and spaces to inspire meaningful conversations, foster curiosity and joy, and transform local places.

Adapted from responses from Varshini Ramakrishnan, design strategist and founder, New Folder.

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CREATIVE PLACEMAKING AND PUBLIC ART

HENNEPIN COUNTY, MINNESOTA

The Love Local Initiative provides 11 business districts with marketing support, public space improvements like wayfinding, and artist-designed dome installations to encourage safe, local shopping. The districts were selected through a competitive application process.

› **LEAD**

The Hennepin County Board approved federal CARES Act funding for this program, which provided technical assistance to business districts. Forecast was selected as the public space and placemaking consultant, and MOD was selected as the marketing and communications consultant.

› **KEY INSIGHT**

Working at the district scale to create safe, interesting, and enjoyable public spaces can support many businesses at once.

› **MORE DETAILS**

Forecast identified and implemented business districtwide strategies to create public spaces. Notably, the firm installed artist-designed domes to encourage people to stay in their district and to draw new people there.



› **EQUITY**

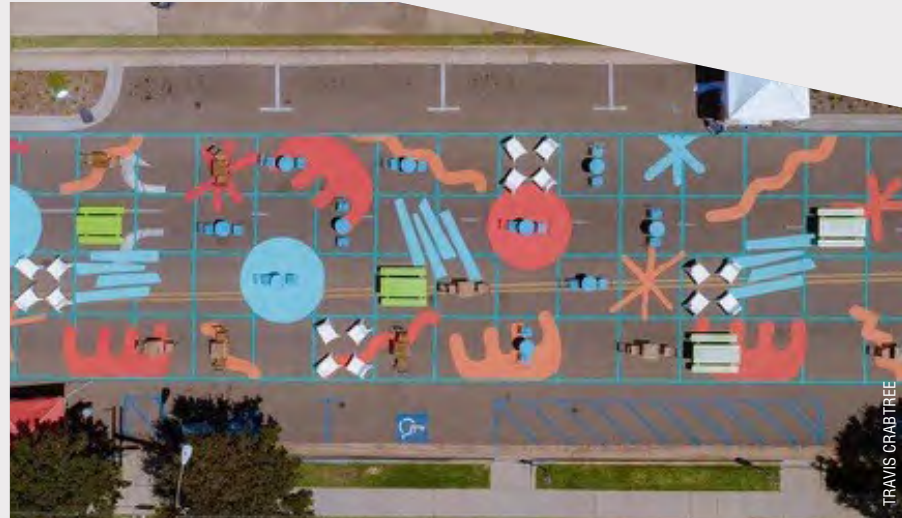
Forecast prioritized BIPOC (Black, indigenous, and people of color) artists for the dome installations and other artistic signage.

› **WHAT'S NEXT**

Because of CARES Act funding restrictions, the project was set up to last through the end of 2021. However, the districts now own all the materials and can continue to use them. Forecast will hold a reflection conversation in early 2021 to understand how each district might sustain this project throughout the winter, and what they might change or keep for next winter.

Adapted from responses from Jen Krava, director of programming and new initiatives, Forecast Public Art.

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CREATIVE PLACEMAKING AND PUBLIC ART

JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

The Common Ground mural is a bright grid of eight-by-eight-foot (2.4 by 2.4 m) squares on a street in Jackson's Fondren neighborhood that acts as an outdoor space for local restaurants to use while aiding with social distancing.

> **LEAD**

The Jackson Department of Planning and Development proposed the street mural, which was created by a local artist, with the Fondren Renaissance Foundation as the neighborhood organizer.

> **KEY INSIGHT**

Public art can serve practical purposes, such as illustrating social distancing guidelines, to help create safe community spaces.

> **MORE DETAILS**

The Common Ground mural provides a safe way for community members to patronize local restaurants. The mural was conceptualized and completed within three weeks in late May and early June 2020 in time for Dining on Duling, a program that closed the streets for outdoor dining and live music.



> **EQUITY**

Dining on Duling targeted only the local community for the event to avoid crowding. Although Fondren always has a strong sense of community, the mural and Dining on Duling enabled the neighborhood to continue fostering safe places for all.

> **WHAT'S NEXT**

The mural program continues, and the artist that created Common Ground is completing a new mural (on a wall) in early 2021. City restrictions have limited festivals, but a COVID-safe Restaurant Week and holiday celebration continue to support the neighborhood.

Adapted from responses from Rebecca Garrison, executive director, Fondren Renaissance Foundation.

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CALVIN AMBANI AND JURGEN MBALAI, HOPE RAISERS INITIATIVE

CREATIVE PLACEMAKING AND PUBLIC ART

NAIROBI, KENYA

Through the Talking Walls project, an existing youth arts program, artists created murals with COVID-19 safety messaging. The murals were strategically placed in public spaces in neighborhoods with low access to information about the pandemic.

› LEAD

The Hope Raisers Initiative worked with eight local artists—Bantu Moja, Daddo Omtiti, Swift Grafitti, Kerosh, Tanya, Chachino, Vandals, and Mizizi—and two community health workers to create the murals.

› KEY INSIGHT

Public art can bridge gaps, ensuring that everyone has access to accurate, actionable information during a time of crisis.

› MORE DETAILS

The murals depict basic COVID-19 prevention measures like wearing masks, washing hands, and social distancing to foster discussion about COVID-19, help people cope with the pandemic, and combat misinformation.



CALVIN AMBANI AND JURGEN MBALAI, HOPE RAISERS INITIATIVE



CALVIN AMBANI AND JURGEN MBALAI, HOPE RAISERS INITIATIVE

› EQUITY

The murals were installed in strategic community spaces that are accessible to a majority of community members. Hope Raisers also partnered with the community radio station, health workers, and other organizations to ensure the message reached as many people as possible.

› WHAT'S NEXT

Talking Walls will continue supporting young and upcoming community artists as they gain skills, build their capacities, and adapt to the pandemic. Hope Raisers is working with a United Nations Development Programme accelerator lab to develop content that will continue to educate communities against misinformation and myths around COVID-19.

Adapted from responses from Daniel Onyango, director, Hope Raisers Initiative.



CALVIN AMBANI AND JURGEN MBALAI, HOPE RAISERS INITIATIVE

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CREATIVE PLACEMAKING AND PUBLIC ART

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Mural Arts Philadelphia—the nation’s largest public arts program—facilitated the creation and installation of art that promotes safe physical distancing at meal distribution sites, grocery stores, bodegas, pharmacies, sanitation centers, play streets, parks, and libraries throughout Philadelphia.

› **LEAD**

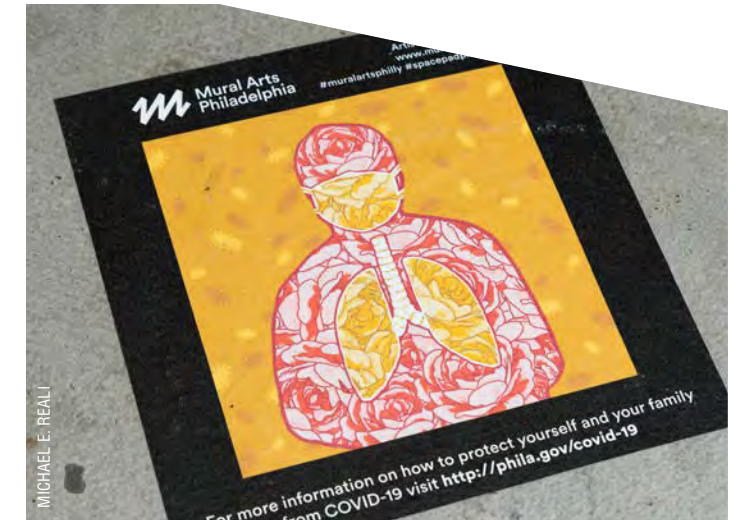
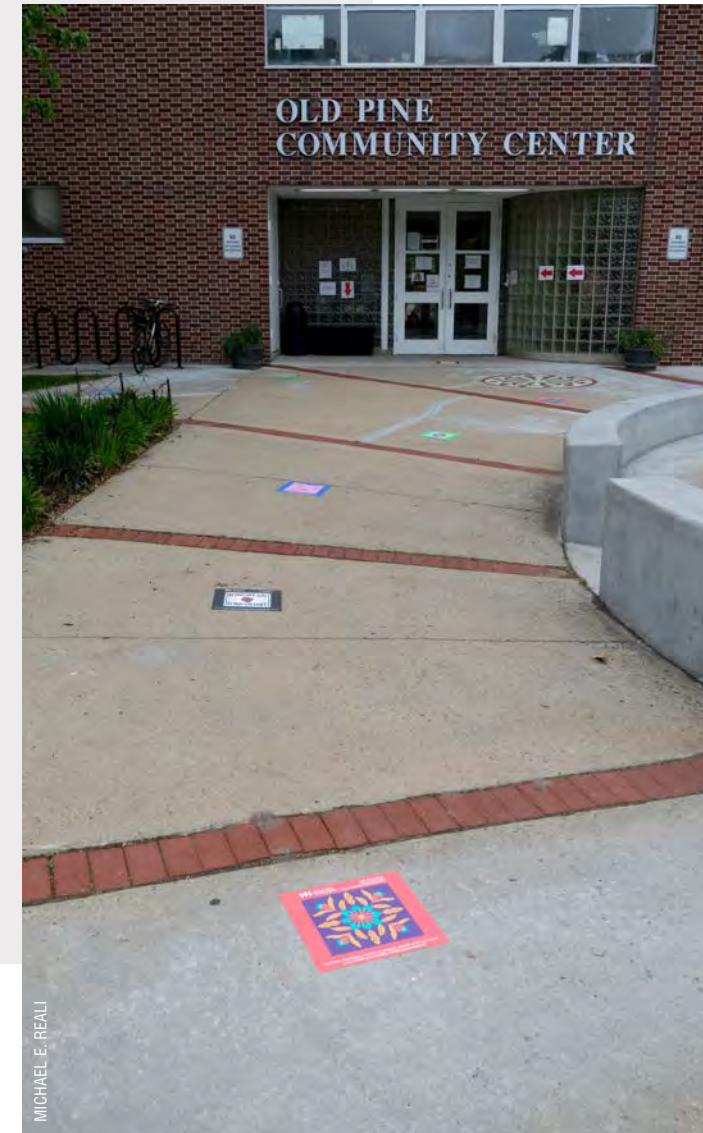
Mural Arts Philadelphia received funding from the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, supported by a grant from the Partnership for Healthy Cities global network, to implement the program. Nearly 20 community organizations and city department partners supported the project.

› **KEY INSIGHT**

As of December 2020, nearly 11,000 posters and banners and more than 2,000 outdoor space pads—vinyl decals that stick to the ground—had been placed at 255 locations throughout Philadelphia.

› **MORE DETAILS**

The project employed 24 local artists to develop messages in collaboration with community organizations. Mural Arts designed and placed space pads, posters, and banners sharing health and safety messages in “beautiful and unexpected ways.” Local artists were compensated for their work.



› **EQUITY**

Mural Arts began the project with a focus on neighborhoods with high rates of poverty and prioritized collaborating with community organizations led by and serving Black and immigrant Philadelphians. The project also recruited artists from participating communities and produced and promoted materials in Spanish, Mandarin, French, Arabic, Russian, Vietnamese, Khmer, Korean, and English.

› **WHAT'S NEXT**

All materials developed through the project are publicly available, and the materials’ reach continues to expand. Sound Health, a nonprofit health care network in Seattle, is now using the project’s “I Wear a Mask” designs in its 17 clinics.

Adapted from responses from Mica Root, Get Healthy Philly senior projects coordinator, city of Philadelphia Department of Public Health.

LEARN MORE



CREATIVE PLACEMAKING AND PUBLIC ART

TORONTO, ONTARIO

“It’s All Right Now” is a public art project that commissioned Toronto-based artists to capture and reflect on the “truths of right now” through more than 30 text- and image-based works displayed across the city from May to July 2020.

› LEAD

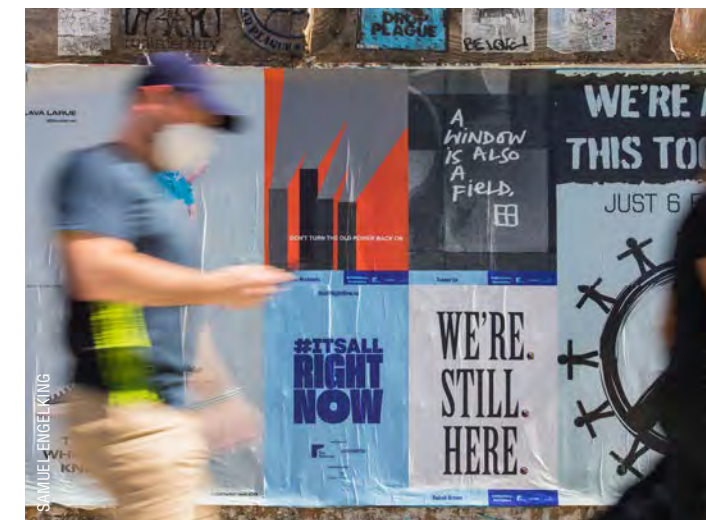
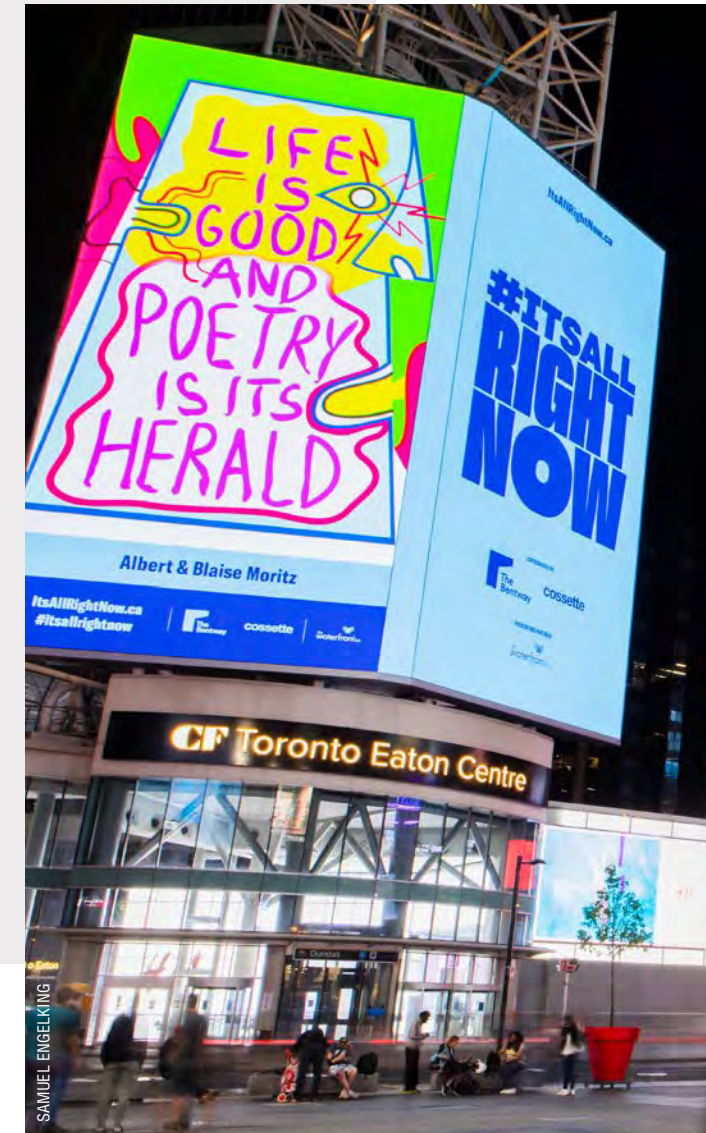
The Bentway, a public space located underneath Toronto’s Gardiner Expressway that offers a “platform for creative practice, public art, and connected urban life,” moved beyond its physical boundaries to launch the project.

› KEY INSIGHT

The project was created in response to COVID-19 and the upheavals of 2020 and illustrated how nimble, timely, and responsive art, culture, and recreation projects can and must be.

› MORE DETAILS

Art installations were displayed in spaces that are part of people’s everyday lives, including streets, walls, construction hoarding, digital billboards, and civic landmarks.



› EQUITY

The voices of BIPOC communities were highlighted through the project, including via a partnership with Canada’s Black Speculative Arts movement.

› WHAT’S NEXT

In fall 2020, The Bentway worked with the city of Toronto’s BIG Art TO initiative to bring a series of large-scale projection pieces called *The Essentials* to different spaces across the waterfront. Going forward, plans will seek to further integrate public art through interventions in all types of public places.

Adapted from responses from Kasia Gladki, senior manager, marketing and communications, The Bentway.

LEARN MORE

INNOVATIONS IN PARKS

Throughout the pandemic, parks have been popular and well-used outdoor spaces, with some becoming overcrowded. Although parks can be a safe outdoor option for socially distant gatherings and recreation, cities still had to implement public health measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

While some cities adapted their parks to promote health guidelines—such as by drawing social distancing circles or mowing checkerboard patterns into the grass—others created new parks by opening golf courses or transforming underused open spaces.

Moreover, this surge in park use demonstrated the value of parks, leading Singapore to affirm its existing plans to create more urban green spaces. As cities continue to recognize the central role of parks in vibrant, healthy communities, they can take inspiration from their innovative parks programs and projects during the pandemic.

- ATLANTA, GEORGIA
- BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND
- BROOKLYN, NEW YORK
- ELBLAG, POLAND
- MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
- SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA
- SINGAPORE



MARCELLA WINGOGRAD



INNOVATIONS IN PARKS

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

To alleviate crowding on a popular walking path in Chastain Memorial Park, the Atlanta Department of Parks and Recreation opened the park's golf course to the public. Beginning in mid-June 2020, the public could use the course as a park every Tuesday in a 60-day experiment.

› **LEAD**

Atlanta City Council Member J.P. Matzigkeit requested the opening of the golf course, and the Atlanta Department of Parks and Recreation approved.

› **KEY INSIGHT**

Testing an idea over a defined period of time can successfully address short-term needs while helping determine whether it makes sense as a long-term strategy.

› **MORE DETAILS**

When the 115-acre (47 ha) golf course reopened in June, the Atlanta Department of Parks and Recreation agreed to allow public use once a week. Activities included walking on the paved golf cart paths, picnicking, bird watching, and more.



› **EQUITY**

Sharing the course made it accessible to more people—beyond the typical golf course users—and introduced the public to new places in the park.

› **WHAT'S NEXT**

Although there is interest in opening the golf course again for one or two days a year, using the course as additional public space is less necessary now that other park amenities have reopened.

Adapted from an interview with J.P. Matzigkeit, member, Atlanta City Council, and cofounder, Chastain Park Conservancy.



LEARN MORE



INNOVATIONS IN PARKS

BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND

Cathedral Gardens Park opened in Belfast's city center in August 2020 after construction was halted because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The park transformed a poorly designed, underused open space into a colorful, fun gathering place.

> LEAD

Belfast City Council and the Department of Communities created the park in collaboration with area residents and organizations from multiple sectors.

> KEY INSIGHT

A larger park is planned for the area, but the current, temporary version of Cathedral Gardens was opened quickly because of the demand for safe, outdoor recreation space in the city center.

> MORE DETAILS

Cathedral Gardens fosters the mixing of communities and was designed to engage people of different ages, abilities, and demographics. It is the only space in the city center of Belfast with children's play equipment.



> EQUITY

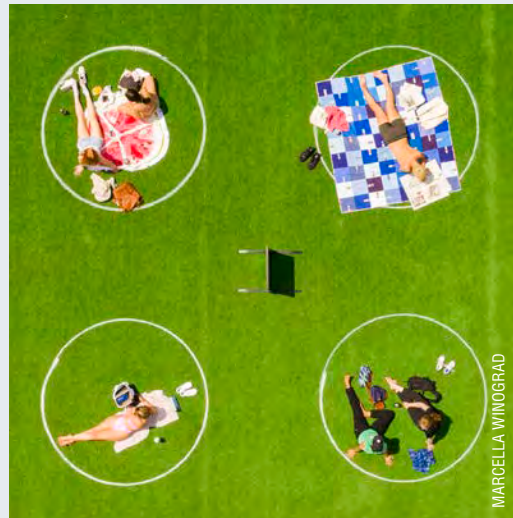
The park is fully accessible and includes lighting columns to increase use and safety. City Council gained support for the project through an intensive, cross-sector engagement process that included businesses, politicians, Ulster University, the public, and other stakeholders.

> WHAT'S NEXT

The positive public reaction to the park is spurring Belfast to take more risks and view the city as a malleable place to develop and test ideas and adjust along the way. The city will use what it has learned from Cathedral Gardens to inform development of the future permanent park at the site and is working to identify other sites to host play, relaxation, and public art.

Adapted from responses from Callie Persic, city regeneration and development, Place and Economy Department, Belfast City Council.

[LEARN MORE](#)



INNOVATIONS IN PARKS

**BROOKLYN,
NEW YORK**

Domino Park, a privately owned and operated public space in Brooklyn, installed 30 “social circles” in May 2020—each eight feet (2.4 m) in diameter and six feet (1.8 m) apart—in the popular Flex Field area of the park, which is covered in artificial turf.

› **LEAD**

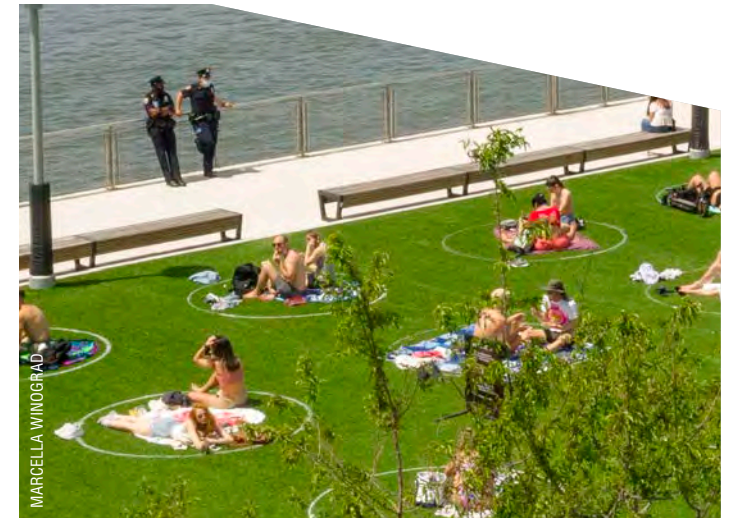
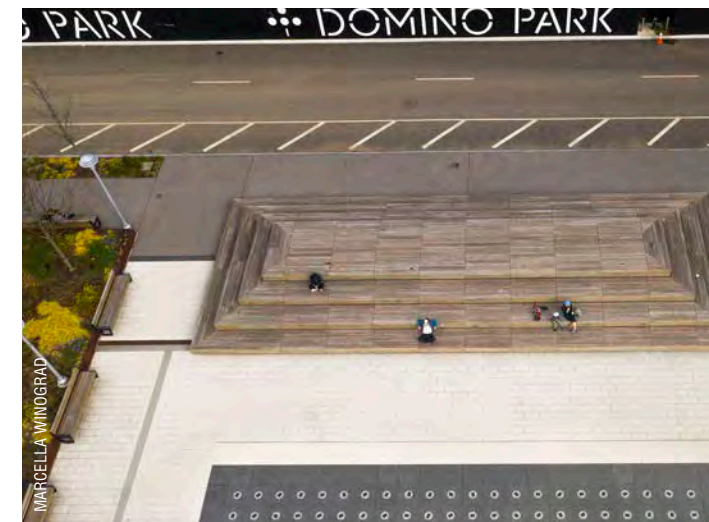
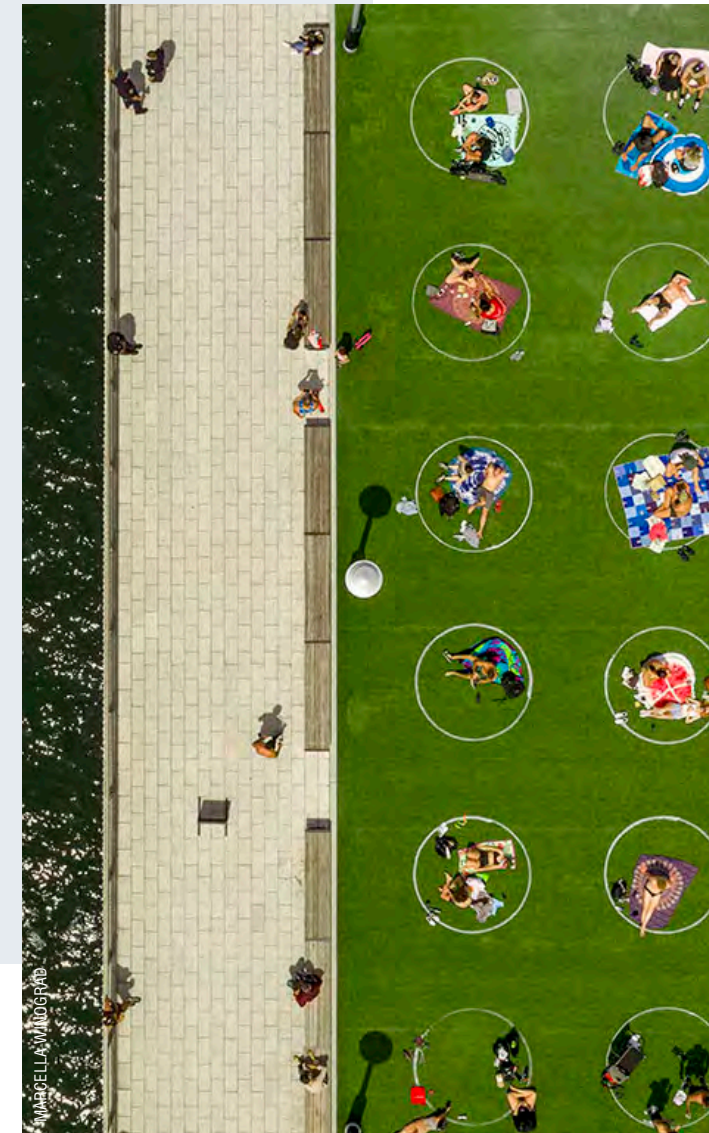
Two Trees Management, the owner and operator of Domino Park, implemented the project in consultation with the New York City Mayor’s Office and other city agencies that oversee and enforce operations for the park.

› **KEY INSIGHT**

The installation was implemented quickly and inexpensively: 99-cent cans of white chalk paint were used to create the circles.

› **MORE DETAILS**

In the early months of the pandemic, Domino Park drew attention for perceived crowding and challenges with physical distancing, but the park was also serving as a critical space for outdoor recreation. The decision by the park’s staff to install the social circles allowed the park to safely remain open. The public intuitively used the circles, which were still in place as of January 2021.



› **EQUITY**

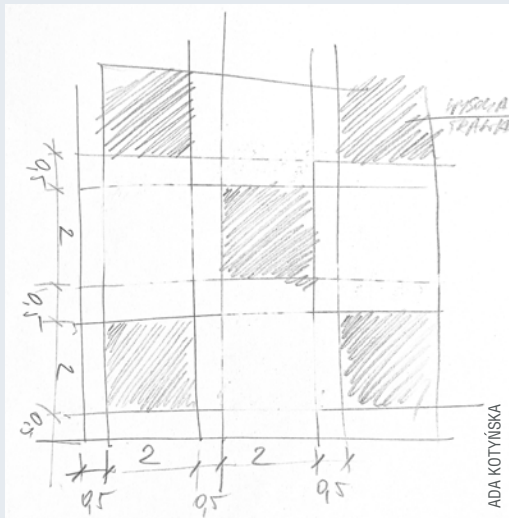
Two Trees has employed bilingual community organizers and implemented public programming strategies to ensure that the space is welcoming to the diverse surrounding community. The social circles were immediately embraced by the visitors because of years of proactive community engagement.

› **WHAT’S NEXT**

Since installing the social circles, the operators of Domino Park have fielded requests from across the United States regarding implementation of the project.

Adapted from responses from Michael Lampariello, director of Domino Park at Two Trees Management Co.

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INNOVATIONS IN PARKS

ELBLAG, POLAND

By partially mowing grass in a checkerboard pattern, an arts organization transformed this green space into what is being called a “socially distancing lawn.”

› **LEAD**

Adriana Ronżewska-Kotyńska, director of the Galeria El Art Center, designed and created the park.

› **KEY INSIGHT**

With creative design strategies, transforming public spaces can be simple and low cost.

› **MORE DETAILS**

When Galeria EL reopened in May after the first Polish lockdown, the facility faced heavy restrictions on indoor activities. Located in a 13th-century church, the arts organization has a former monastery garden on which checkerboard patches of grass were mowed to assist with social distancing.

Top left: Original design for the park.



› **EQUITY**

Although there is a small charge for admission to the Gallery building, the outdoor space is accessible for free during opening hours.

› **WHAT'S NEXT**

Even after vaccines are widely distributed, it is likely that some restrictions will remain in place. This outdoor space will continue to safely fulfill social needs, a purpose that is especially important after this period of long-term isolation.

Adapted from responses from Adriana Ronżewska-Kotyńska, director, Galeria EL Art Center.

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INNOVATIONS IN PARKS

MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND

The MoCo Eats: Picnic in the Park initiative allows visitors to nine Montgomery County parks to easily order food for picnics from nearby restaurants. Visitors scan a QR code on park signs that directs them to a website automatically populated with nearby restaurants based on location. Users can pick up food and alcohol for park picnics in designated delivery zones.

› **LEAD**

The MoCo Eats: Picnic in the Park initiative is a partnership between Visit Montgomery—the county tourism organization—and Montgomery Parks.

› **KEY INSIGHT**

Participating parks were selected on the basis of their proximity to restaurants, with the goal of supporting local restaurants and providing picnic options for park visitors

› **MORE DETAILS**

Montgomery Parks installed signage and created zones where drivers could safely deliver food to park visitors. Physical distancing circles are available in selected parks. The delivery and consumption of alcohol is allowed in participating parks under a pilot program that runs through May 2021.



› **EQUITY**

The program was implemented to create an easy way for park visitors throughout the county to connect with local restaurants and enjoy park picnics. The program was promoted through social media and signage in Spanish, Chinese, and English.

› **WHAT'S NEXT**

The county plans to continue to promote delivery to parks as long as restaurants need additional support during the pandemic. The directive allowing alcohol consumption in designated park areas is scheduled to end in May 2021 but may be extended for an additional year depending on data, including community feedback.

Adapted from responses from Kirsten Hein, parks activation manager, Montgomery Parks, the Maryland–National Capital Park and Planning Commission.



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INNOVATIONS IN PARKS

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

The Presidio, part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, created a Train-the-Trainer community access program to help safely and equitably expand access to the park at the beginning of the pandemic. The program was one of a number of initiatives implemented by the Presidio Trust, including opening the Presidio Golf Course as a public space for six weeks, designating slow streets, and temporarily closing roads.

› **LEAD**

The Presidio Trust’s newly established Community Partnerships team; San Francisco’s Department of Children, Youth and Families; and other partners offered the Train-the-Trainer program.

› **KEY INSIGHT**

Elevating equity as a priority in parks programming helps everyone to benefit from public space at a time when it is more important than ever.

› **MORE DETAILS**

Through the Train-the-Trainer program, the Presidio Trust has trained more than 70 local program leaders to create safe and special park experiences to serve the city’s highest-need youth.



Top left: People social distancing at the Presidio Golf Course, which was temporarily opened as a public space as one of many park-related responses to the pandemic.

Top right: The Presidio in San Francisco.

Bottom left: San Francisco Bay Trail in the Presidio.



› **EQUITY**

The program is designed to benefit underserved youth, including recent immigrants and English-language learners, and those living in public housing, single-room occupancy units (SROs), and the foster care system.

› **WHAT’S NEXT**

Moving forward, this “train the trainer” approach will serve as a model for community engagement in the months and years ahead.

Adapted from responses from Jennifer Petke, special projects manager, visitor engagement, Presidio Trust.

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INNOVATIONS IN PARKS

SINGAPORE

The COVID-19 pandemic has affirmed Singapore's goal of becoming a "City in Nature." With parks remaining open during the city's lockdown, people have been spending more time in open spaces, and bicycle sales have soared. Now, accelerating urban green space is even more of a priority for the city.

› LEAD

Many nature-based programs are undertaken by statutory boards—such as the National Parks Board (NParks) and Singapore's National Water Agency (PUB)—and local town councils with support from NGOs like the Nature Society (Singapore) and various cycling groups.

› KEY INSIGHT

As cities work toward a bold vision, crises can strengthen these existing priorities and further motivate implementation.

› MORE DETAILS

Singapore enhances livability by integrating the public realm with well-planned green and blue open spaces. The pandemic has underscored the benefits of this approach for health, well-being, and quality of life.

Top left: Opening in 2021, Pasir Panjang Park will be the first park developed under the NParks Friends of the Parks Initiative, engaging over 170 stakeholders for design and planning from January to June 2020.

Top right: The Therapeutic Garden at Punggol Waterway Park, opened in November 2020, features evidence-based design elements, a space for therapeutic horticulture sessions, and passive and active zones.



Top left: Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park, the ABC Programme's flagship project, was developed to provide opportunities for recreation when water levels are normal and to store water during torrential rain events.

Top right: Over 280 gardening plots in parks were released in November 2020. The total number of plots islandwide will double to 2,000 by 2021.

Bottom left: Rendering of Tengah.



› EQUITY

NParks aims for every household to be within a 10-minute walk of a park by 2030, including national parks, regional parks, town parks, neighborhood parks, and community parks.

› WHAT'S NEXT

Using integrated master planning and effective urban governance, Singapore can plan and adapt to challenges, including, most recently, the pandemic. The public realm and green spaces will continue to play an important role in the city's livability.

Adapted from responses from Khoo Teng Chye, fellow and former executive director at the Centre for Liveable Cities and professor at the National University of Singapore, and Nicole Lum, manager, Centre for Liveable Cities.

[LEARN MORE](#)

INTERVIEWEES

ULI thanks the interviewees for providing their insights and expertise for this report. All titles and affiliations reflect the individuals' positions at the time of their interviews.

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Michael Walker

Executive Director
Vancouver's Downtown Association

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many cities have implemented quick changes to the public realm—most of them intended to be temporary—to address new challenges and meet changing needs. *The Pandemic and the Public Realm* features the experiences of city officials and nonprofits and other groups from more than 30 cities that have developed innovative public space projects since enhanced public health measures began in spring 2020. These inspirational examples from around the world provide insights on how to create additional safe, equitable, and desirable public spaces—even after the pandemic is over.



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