Municipal-Supported, Citizen-led Placemaking Processes:

A Study of Successes, Challenges and Lessons Learned in Five Case Studies

A thesis submitted by

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Abstract

Local governments around the world, are working to increase the quality of public spaces as they hope to attract investment, and improve the overall livability of their neighborhoods. While waiting for neighborhood improvements, residents in some areas have taken matters into their own hands, creating changes to the urban environment, often times without official government approval. This has come to be known as tactical urbanism, or guerilla placemaking. But there are many ways that municipalities and residents can work together to provide quick transformations of public space. The five case studies in this thesis examine programs and strategies that municipalities are spearheading as they partner with residents in the transformation of public place. It explores the reasons that each municipality started their placemaking initiative, how they structured and financed the program, as well as challenges and lessons learned. While the case studies are focused on the municipal perspective, they address the themes of equity, empowerment and authentic engagement in placemaking processes. The purpose of this research is to ultimately provide municipalities with some best practices in partnering with residents in placemaking processes, and for this to be a useful tool in designing spaces that are inclusive to everyone.

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Introduction

Context

Urban areas around the United States, and globally, are constantly changing, with increases or decreases in population, demographic and economic shifts, changes in building stock with urban blight, and regeneration. With all of these shifts, municipalities have begun paying close attention to the built environment and its effect on the quality of communities.

Catalyzed by recent research and advocacy, many municipal leaders are noticing the affect that the public realm, in particular, has on many aspects of their community, including the local economy, individual health and well-being, and social cohesion. The built environment and public space can either be detrimental to a neighborhood's quality of life or a major contributor to that neighborhood being an enjoyable place to live, work, or play.

Many municipalities have gone even farther to acknowledge the benefits of including residents more directly in the transformation of public space, by engaging them in the design process, inviting participation in temporary installations, or by removing permitting and policy barriers, just to name a few methods. This bottom-up public space transformation can be named many different things, including "placemaking," "tactical urbanism," "lighter, quicker, cheaper," or "Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Urbanism." This work is being led by all sectors, not only municipalities. Private developers and firms are engaging in placemaking work, recognizing the marketability of these activities, and neighborhood residents are also taking a guerilla, or grassroots approach and

reclaiming their public spaces with, or without the permission of their municipal government.

Placemaking, one form of which is "tactical urbanism" is fast becoming a movement, and represents so much more. It can be a way for municipalities to engage residents in longer-term planning outside of traditional public process. It also represents a shift to a more inclusive style of governing, where decision-makers are heavily relying on the input, talent, and vision of residents.

Rationale

With experience in placemaking, both in a low-income neighborhood of Somerville, MA and through various trainings, and travel abroad in Denmark and Germany, I became interested in the power of placemaking as a way to both reinvigorate blighted spaces, as well as change the way municipalities engage the public in visioning and planning processes. Knowing there are limitations with an initiative being municipally-driven rather than community-driven, I still sought to focus on how city staff could use their resources to endorse or even actively facilitate community-level placemaking. I believed there may be a "sweet spot" where a city and community stakeholders could work together in a top-down and bottom-up manner. With the rise of these types of projects being publicized in planning blogs and publications, I felt it would be useful to have a study on lessons learned from the trailblazers who have been engaged in these activities so that others can learn, adapt or subscribe to similar strategies.

I personally find myself in between two perspectives, acknowledging the power of an effective municipal program or policy, and also the power of grassroots, community leadership. Being on this line between these two perspectives puts me in a position to be able to explore this topic without too much bias.

With this research, I hope to provide a resource to community organizers and planners of placemaking processes that may (or may not) work depending on a community's history, residents, character and vision for the future.

Scope and Methodology

My Master's Thesis will aim to answer the question: What lessons have been learned by municipal staff in their placemaking initiatives, including challenges and successes?

It will look specifically at several municipalities that have put processes in place not only to allow these activities but to encourage them. The methodology will be a case study format where five cases will be explored which exemplify municipal enablement and encouragement of citizen-led placemaking projects. Each case study varies significantly in geographic area, motivations for catalyzing the initiative, and general outcomes. However, every initiative, in some way, aims to remove the barriers associated with short-term placemaking activities.

There are many different aspects to explore in placemaking around the U.S., and many different catalysts, as mentioned above, but I specifically chose examples that would not be possible without the full support, involvement or

leadership of the municipality in these projects and programs, and the outcomes as well.

It is important to mention that there is a bias here in that all the initiatives included in this thesis are those that were municipal-led but that *enabled* community participation and design. The study will aim to be as rigorous as possible in exploring the impact and inclusivity of the initiatives but the intent of the thesis is to shed light on lessons learned from the municipal perspective specifically.

Content

My thesis will contain several sections as described below:

Literature Review

In the literature review I will ask some key questions that will serve as a foundation for this research. It will include a discussion of some key terminology including space, place, and relevant language describing public realm improvements. I will also cover key questions like what makes a "good" public space, what is the effect of public space on social capital and health, and lastly, what are the connections between social justice and engagement in place.

Methodology

In this section of the thesis, I outline my process for the research, explaining the specific research approach taken including the steps of doing

preliminary research, selecting case studies, conducting interviews, and drawing

the resulting conclusions, and recommendations.

Case Studies

My case studies are based on in-depth interviews and aim to provide a

clear understanding of the history of the program, its implementation,

participants, and outcomes, as well as other key project elements that will shed

light on lessons that could be transferred to other relevant initiatives. The body of

the case study contains the following parts with a few minor exceptions where

information isn't relevant or available: Summary, Context and Program Creation,

Program Launch and Implementation, Program Outcomes, Engagement and

Equity, Program Governance, Program Budget, Challenges and Lessons Learned.

Discussion

The discussion section of the thesis goes a step beyond the case study to

explore what was discovered through the research. Key themes will be revealed

that were similar across the five programs studied. Specific factors that led to

positive outcomes, as well as specific challenges will be highlighted that will help

inform the reflections and recommendations section.

Reflections and Recommendations

The thesis will culminate with some specific recommendations that will be

relevant for both municipalities and community organizations who may be

involved in a municipally-supported initiative, together with reflections on the

key themes I addressed. I will also address the limitations to this research as well

as suggestions for future research.

Literature Review

Introduction

In order to fully understand the context of place-based interventions and the municipal role in certain initiatives, it was necessary to start at the beginning and really understand the difference between "space" and "place." It was also key to explore several themes that surround public realm improvement projects, starting with academic research into the subject. For the purpose of this thesis, I will call these projects "placemaking," projects, a term used in the field to describe "an approach for improving a neighborhood, city, or region [that] inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community" (PPS.org 2015).

While the term has been used in a variety of settings, with sometimes different definitions and outcomes, this definition is one that has gained traction nationally and globally, as leaders and grassroots communities have aimed to pay more attention to public spaces and their potential for neighborhood improvement, community building and individual health.

First, in the literature review, I plan to answer the question of what *is* "space" and "place." Then I will move onto looking at public space and what makes a *good* public space? This is important to understand what is meant by public space improvement, and what the opportunities, challenges and qualitative indicators are.

With this context clear, I then focused on some general assumptions of placemaking initiatives. While this body of research can be expansive, I focused

in on three sub-categories that would be the most relevant for public realm improvement and the motivations for why municipalities might undertake this work. The areas I explored are; 1) built environment and "sense of community" and "social capital," 2) built environment and physical activity and mental health and 3) the effect of place on the local economy.

Lastly, it was important to also look at *why* people are interested in being engaged in their public spaces and inversely, why municipalities are engaging the community. This meant looking at literature around place and the inclusion and engagement of people, spatial justice, "Do It Yourself," or "DIY" placemaking.

Space and Place

While space and place both define geography (Tuan 1979, 387) the two concepts differ and their definition is important as a foundation for this thesis. The term 'space," how we currently use it, didn't come into use until the seventeenth century but the terms are now essential to the field of geography. Their differences have, however, been disputed for quite some time (Agnew 2011, 3).

The difference between 'space' and 'place' is described as the degree to which people give meaning to a specific area. 'Space' can be described as a location which has no social connections for a human being, it has no specific value, no meaningful activities and is more or less abstract (Tuan 1979, 387).

Place, or "sense of place," in its simplest form refers to "either a location somewhere or to the occupation of that location" (Agnew 2011, 6). It differs from space in that it is a unique entity, with a history and a meaning. That meaning is

ascribed by the people who give that meaning to it, and is therefore constructed by individuals and groups (Tuan 1979, 387). Place is specific and space is general (2011). The question of "scale" also contributes to the definition of these two terms with Agnew noting that "place" tends to represent the local scale, while "space" represents the global scale.

However, some argue that we are facing an increasing sense of placelessness due to increasing technology, including internet and cell-phones, etc. (Friedman et al, 2005). But as Edward Relph suggests, a "deep human need exists for associations with significant places. If we choose to ignore that need and allow the forces of placelessness to continue unchallenged, then the future can only hold an environment in which places simply do not matter" (Seamon & Sowers, 2008, 43).

What Makes a "Good Space"?

Since the case studies in my thesis are primarily public space initiatives, I needed to fully explore the notion of public space. For the purpose of this thesis, public space is defined as a space that is generally open and accessible to all people, including roads, public plazas, parks, playgrounds, and beaches (Banerjee 2001, 11). There are many different kinds of public space, with complex histories, uses and users. Roads alone, often make up a third of the public space in a town or city. And there is a great deal of tension around the need for streets to be used as places versus paths (Zavestoski and Agyeman 2014). However, it is important to note that not all "open" or "public spaces" are actually accessible, or free to the

public as might be assumed (2001). Public spaces can have varying levels of inclusivity, an issue which I will discuss later on in this literature review.

It is generally agreed by scholars that we are experiencing a decrease in the public realm (Banerjee 2001, 12). This is caused by a decline in the goods and services provided by government, the activity of local and global economies, and an increase in information and communication technology (2001). It is also suggested that this decrease in public space is "paralleled by a corresponding decline in the public spirit" (2001). This decline, in social capital, or public life, Putnam (1995, 1996) argues, has been happening since WWII and is thanks to television (and more recently, the internet), and a privatization of leisure activities. Basically, we are spending more time alone using technologies and less time contributing to public life. It is not a far leap to make to consider that this may be impacting the demand and supply of quality public spaces.

On another note, Banerjee argues, there is also an aspect of decline of public space that has to do with an overall decline in public activity – as well as weakened social control and a lack of enforcement, that leads to crime and other issues (2001). We are spending less time in public space, both because of our own habits and behaviors, and because of the quality of those spaces in general. For instance, parks and vacant spaces can become havens for gang activity or drug-related exchanges, and deter the greater public from these spaces.

There is also a phenomenon happening where public space is being privatized. While quality, social, public spaces are disappearing, there is an increase in spaces that are semi-public, such as courtyards inside of building,

certain parks or memorials, and other spaces. (Lloyd and Auld 2010; Banerjee 2001). These spaces are known as "privately owned public spaces" (POPS) and are often worked into development deals as a way to appease City officials who want more open space for the public. The interesting dynamic of these spaces is that they are very often a secret, with only a select few knowing about their existence. They are typically "socially sanitized, homogenized spaces, legally capable of excluding socially stigmatized and disruptive elements" (Lloyd and Auld 2010). Considering their exclusivity, I will not be including these spaces in my case study research.

So what makes a good public space? Carr et al argue that good public space should be meet the human needs of comfort, passive and active engagement, and also be supportive, democratic and meaningful (1992). Leaders in the field like Jane Jacobs, William "Holly" Whyte, and Jan Gehl have written well-respected literature on this subject that have created a strong foundation for place-related research moving forward. In the 1960's and 1970's William Whyte and Jan Gehl (separately) conducted several research studies that observed how people acted in public space. Their findings concluded that the life and the activity in between buildings is even more important than the spaces and the buildings alone and that people and their activities are of the greatest interest for other people in public spaces (Gehl, 1987). Jane Jacobs, activist and author of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, reflected the same findings, debating the importance of density, and a multitude of uses and activities in spaces, as well as the importance of these factors in social and economic vitality (1961).

Gehl's firm, Gehl Associates, went even further to define "12 Criteria for People Places" (Gemzoe 2011). Gehl uses these criteria in consulting work across the globe, bringing these same principles for public spaces to both small-scale villages and large cities. When trying to access whether a space is "successful" or "good," it makes sense to look at these well-respected criteria as a starting point. Rather than outline all twelve, I will just note that the criteria are split up into three categories; protection, comfort, and enjoyment.

The work of these place pioneers is the basis for the work of many organizations and initiatives that have since taken up the mission of improving public space for all. Project for Public Spaces (PPS), based in New York City, NY, is one of these organizations. They were created in 1975 to build off of the work done by William Whyte, and to "help[s] citizens transform their public spaces into vital places that highlight local assets, spur rejuvenation and serve common needs" (PPS.org 2015). In their work, all over the world, PPS uses a tool called the "Power of Ten" to show how paying attention to the human experience when building a city's destinations and districts can have an immediate and widespread impact. The idea behind this tool is that places are vibrant when users have at least ten reasons to be there – including for example, places to sit, play, and interact. In addition, PPS claims, when a town or city has at least ten of these types of destinations, the fabric of that community is improved and it makes a noticeable impact on the residents and visitors.

Placemaking and Social Capital

Good public space is important to society. Frumkin talks about the power of place, when he says "Places can evoke memories, arouse memories, and excite passions" (2003, 1451). Place can hold deep meaning both for individuals, and for the community at large. But the real value of public space, Yuen says, is in its potential to facilitate opportunity for social interaction and shared cultural value and means (1996).

Public spaces can also be a place to share resources. This is known as the "urban commons," and arises "whenever a community decides it wishes to manage a resource in a collective manner, with special regard for equitable access, use, and sustainability" (Walljasper 2010). The urban commons are key for social and cultural transformation and needs public space in order to catalyze this activity (Radywyl and Biggs 2013; Walljasper 2010). Radywyl and Biggs point out that urban commons, when connected to public space, have the advantage of fitting into the everyday culture and fabric of a city while being protected, at least partly, from market forces. Therefore, you can imagine, this sharing of resources can impact both the social connectivity of the neighborhood, as well as sustainability outcomes.

Good public space is also important for facilitating a sense of community in a neighborhood. Sense of community is defined as "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through commitment to one another" (McMillan and Chavis 1986, 9). Sense of community is important

because it is associated with feelings of safety and security, civic participation, voting, volunteering, and improved well-being (Sense of Community Partners 2004; Davidson and Cotter 1991). Society is at its best when people have a sense of community.

Another term that is used in the literature is "social capital." Social capital can be referred to as the "links, shared values and understandings in society that enable individuals and groups to trust each other and so work together" (OECD 2007). Social capital has been found to be linked to good health (Leyden 2003) but links have also been found to the effective functioning of democracy, the prevention of crime, and improved economic development (Putnam 2000). Public space can facilitate this by offering a space and a method for neighbors to run into each other, by chance (Talen 2000). This can build trust between neighbors and contribute to a sense of community, belonging, safety, and many other things. Habermas (1989) argues that the public realm is connected to the outcome of a public life, or public sphere. Gehl's work argued the same point - that public spaces can encourage or inhibit social interaction (1987).

Our public spaces have the power to create relationships, strengthen social ties and contribute to a broader sense of community. Studies also show that a stronger sense of community is associated with certain specific characteristics of the built environment – including less surface parking, higher levels of commercial floor space to land area ratios, lower levels of land use mix (Francis, Giles-Corti and Wood 2010). Interestingly, the perception itself of quality public space appear to be strongly associated with a sense of community, independent of

whether or not the spaces are actually used frequently or not (Francis, Giles-Corti and Wood 2012).

The Public Realm, Physical and Mental Health

Since the rise of the automobile in the United States, neighborhoods have been increasingly designed in a way that accommodates cars over pedestrians. Highways have replaced neighborhood streets, speeds on area roads have increased, and land use and zoning have all contributed to the current design of our neighborhoods. Semenza (2003) notes that "urban environments that lack public gathering places and are not zoned for mixed use are not conducive to walking and socializing and thus tend to foster car dependence and isolation. Most American neighborhoods lack "eyes on the street' or a diversity of uses, which Jane Jacobs advocated for (Jacobs 1961). And many neighborhoods around the country just are not walkable, according to a variety of walkability scales and measures. As a result, American adults are walking far less than they use to. Studies have shown that the built environment does indeed effect whether or not someone will walk in their neighborhood (Leslie and Cerin 2008; Gidlow 2010). This has had a profound impact on both the health and well-being of our nation and because of these studies, planners, researchers and public health professionals are taking a look at this link.

The built environment can be defined as not only green spaces, and parks, but also the presence and conditions of sidewalks, traffic flow, cleanliness and maintenance of public spaces, perceptions of safety and community security,

zoning and land use mix, and population density" (Reynolds, Smith and Hale 2010). Reynolds et al even expand on this definition, adding that the built environment also includes social networks and interactions (2010). So while the built environment is not made up of all public space, public space is one part of the built environment. So therefore, one can conclude that public space also must play a role in the health and well-being of those that interact with it.

In 2001, the Surgeon General's Call to Action notes that the environment is a contributor to people being overweight and obese (Reynolds, Smith and Hale 2010). In their 2008 study, Li et al. found that residents with more land use mix, more street connectivity, better access to public transit and more green and open spaces are more likely to meet the CDC physical activity recommendations. Similarly, Brown et al found that architectural features that facilitate social and visual contact with others, such as presence and characteristics of porches and street set back, promote observation and interaction among residents and have a positive relationship with physical functioning (Brown et al. 2008).

Mental health also has connections to the built environment (Reynolds Smith and Hale 2010). A number of researchers have proven that social networks and community involvement have positive health benefits (Leyden 2003). People who are socially and actively engaged with others live longer and are healthier physically and mentally (2003). While it is difficult to draw conclusions specifically around the psychological benefits of social support facilitated by public spaces, what is proven is that people do cope with stress by turning to other

people. And public spaces offer a means for those interactions to happen, and for people to get access to social support.

Studies show that social interaction is promoted by creating focal points or activity nodes – including neutral space, the ability to see a space without committing to involvement, and activity generators like food, etc. (Adler and Kwon 2002). These same characteristics are the ones Jan Gehl and PPS identified in their placemaking work as key factors of a successful place. So while it may be difficult to make the connection scientifically between public space and mental health, one can make the connection between public space and social interaction, and social interaction and mental health.

The Public Realm and Inclusion

Equity and inclusion are essential to the exploration of successful public spaces and how they are designed or used. It is clear that there is a link between the quality of the environment, and human equality. There are three components to this link. Torras and Boyce's 1998 study, cited by Agyeman et al (2002) states that "First, countries with a more equal income distribution, more political liberties and higher literacy levels have higher environmental quality. And, secondly, environmental problems disproportionately burden the poor. Thirdly, there is an altruistic nature of the "sustainable development" movement that makes consideration of the unseen challenging (Agyeman, Bullard, and Evans 2002). Around the world, minorities and the poor are being placed at greater risk of exposure to toxic chemicals, due to race, politics and pollution (Agyeman

2003, 143). A new definition of sustainable development must include human development as well as environmental development.

The movement towards this notion is what has become known as the environmental justice movement (Agyeman 1989). A new term has come to the surface as well – "Just sustainabilities," which describes a means for sustainability that is culturally relative and place-bound. It focuses on four conditions for just and sustainable communities of any scale: 1) Improving our quality of life and wellbeing 2) Meeting the needs of both present and future generations 3) Justice and equity in terms of recognition, process, procedure and outcome 4) Living within ecosystem limits (Agyeman et al 2003).

In his 2013 work, Introduction to Just Sustainabilities, Agyeman explores the topics of spatial justice, and the democratization of streets, noting that there is growing movement in reclaiming and reallocating space that has been dedicated to cars. Projects that aim to democratize streets are inclusive in that they make the space available to all users, regardless of income and race, rather than only car-users. Three themes can be identified that relate to spatial justice and space reallocation; space as security, space as resistance, and space as possibility (Agyeman 2013). The notion of space as security is focused mainly on crime, and the design of space to either exclude people and therefore keep out crime, or attract people, as a crime deterrent. New Urbanism argues for the former, while others may feel strongly that exclusive spaces, like Privately Owners Public Spaces (POPS) are the best means to deter crime. The second theme, space as resistance, is a concept that has been in the news often recently. With movements

around the country, like the Occupy movement, beginning in privately owned Zucotti Park (2013), and more recently, the Black Lives Matter movement, public space can be used as a means to reclaim power and bring attention to important issues. Lastly, space can be possibility. The opportunity and flexibility that unprogramed public space can provide, also known as "loose space" (Franck and Stevens (2007), can provide countless ways for residents to interact with one another, and increase the vibrancy of their neighborhood.

These themes, Agyeman argues, are seen in the most visionary of public space projects (2013). But marginalized people are often the forgotten element of public spaces. (Kurniawati 2012). "A key objective should be to create leisure spaces that are truly meaningful to residents and socially inclusive of different groups within the broader community" (Lloyd and Auld 2003). Public space should be usable by the general public, from a variety of social, cultural and economic backgrounds, as well as people with different physical abilities (Kurniawati 2012). While access is important, inclusion in the design process is also crucial for spatial justice. Carr argues that people must have the basic right to access, to both use and to change public space (1992). The kind of knowledge people have about their communities is often informal, and is not the kind of voice given power in a professional setting (Schneekloth and Shibley 1995). But, a neighborhood's residents know best what kinds of spaces they need, desire, and how to create them.

Placemaking and DIY Urbanism

Placemaking is not a new approach but has recently seen an increase in popularity among urban planners, designers and academics. The term was first used in the 1970s, possibly in critique of modernist techniques, by planners wanting a way to explain their work of creating attractive public spaces where people want to spend time (Faga 2006; Bohl 2002). However, the recent resurgence of this term within the past decade has much to do with the rise of New Urbanism, an urban design movement which grew in the 1990s and seemed to catch like wildfire among planners across the country (Shibley 2008). Its concepts aim to reinvigorate community in both urban and suburban neighborhoods to undo the isolation and degradation which suburban and car-centric development created. Under New Urbanism, the ideal neighborhood is walkable, revolves around public transportation, has medium to high density of population, and mixed use development (2008, 81). There is an emphasis on public space and public use over private. There are however, several critiques of New Urbanism. Some argue that the design is formulaic, and devoid of real culture, while others feel that the approach is tokenism since it originated out of the suburban and exurban car-centric context. Furthermore, critiques argue that New Urbanism movement ignores the social and economic realities of the modern world, including society's tendency towards individualization and isolation over community and shared spaces.

So in response to both the positive aspects of new urbanism, and also the negative, the scene was set for municipalities, community groups and residents to

again think about how public spaces could be better designed and placemaking was reborn. Now, well respected planning journals and websites are frequently covering placemaking initiatives across the country and more and more organizations are forming who specifically focus on placemaking.

Placemaking has also been highlighted in guerilla-led work referred to as "DIY Urbanism" or "Tactical Urbanism." Under these movements, residents, or community groups take urban planning issues, or placemaking issues into their own hands to transform spaces in their neighborhoods.

Methodology

Method Selection

Case study research was selected as the methodology for this thesis early on in my process. The research that I wanted to do was qualitative. I was interested in focusing on recent placemaking initiatives that did not yet have a great deal of data collected, if any. I wanted to ask key questions of those involved to determine key challenges and lessons learned. After researching appropriate methods, it was clear that case studies are the best means of research when "how" and "when" questions are being asked, when the investigator has little control over events and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context (Yin 2013).

My topic and research met each of these three criteria, so I moved forward with selecting case studies and using methods appropriate for case study research.

Case Study Selection

In the identification of case studies, a priority was placed on emerging trends in placemaking. An initial scan was done of academic literature to identify any existing studies that would provide foundational material for this study. Then, an in-depth scan was completed of relevant emerging trends through the use of news articles, journal and magazine articles from the urban planning field, and finally, blog articles and images found using the "snowball" effect. I used the key words "placemaking," "tactical urbanism," "municipal placemaking," "citizen placemaking," and similar terms.

Several characteristics were considered in the final selection of the case studies. These included:

- Municipality as a Leading Partner: Initiatives selected may have a local organization as a partner, but the local municipality acted as the main convener or facilitator of the placemaking process.

- City-wide Scale: While the case studies slightly differ in scales – with some being city-wide processes, and others being a series of neighborhood-specific interventions, all of the case studies selected are major city initiatives that aim to impact the entire city over time, rather than only one specific neighborhood.

- Resident involvement: All of the case studies selected had a focus on enabling residents to be actively involved in the place transformation. However, the method of involvement differed.

- Availability of Municipal Contact: The final case studies selected reflected not only the above criteria but also the availability of municipal employees for interviews. Two case studies were not included where a contact was not able to be made.

Initial Research

Once the case studies were selected, preliminary research was done on each initiative to gather background information. The research included a thorough reading of all project websites, annual reports and presentations posted

via project or municipal websites, and any blog or news articles. The background

research aimed to answer the questions:

- Who led the initiative?

- Who were the main partners?

- What was the project timeline?

- What outcomes have been reported?

- Who was/is the key project manager of the initiative? (to be used for

  selecting interviewees)

Interviews

   After the above stage was completed, exemption for this research was

sought and received by the Tufts Institutional Review Board (IRB). Contact was

made to key project managers with a request for an interview. Interviews were

scheduled and conducted over the phone. Interviewees were notified of the IRB

approval and were given the option of sharing their names in this thesis or being

anonymous. All interviewees chose to allow me to use their names. Project

managers were asked the same key questions, with some slight variations and

additional questions added based on the content of the responses. See Appendix 1

for interview questions.

   Once the first interview was held, interviewees were contacted again with

follow up questions.

Results

  The outcome of my Masters Thesis is a discussion of lessons learned from five different initiatives. They are categorized by key themes that were identified during the research and interview process. This study concludes with recommendations for other municipalities interested in initiating similar strategies.

Case Studies

Case Study #1: Norfolk Better Block, Norfolk, VA

Figure 1 Build a Better Block in Norfolk, Virginia (image: Virginian-Pilot) Accessed online via:
http://www.street-sense.org/streettalk/tag/norfolk

Summary

    In 2013, The City of Norfolk, Virginia formed a partnership with Team Better Block, a national placemaking technical assistance organization. Over the course of two years, the City and the organization facilitated three events in three separate neighborhoods to improve vibrancy and enhance identity in each of the areas.

Context and Program Creation

In 2012, staff from the City of Norfolk were focused, among other issues and projects, on two main concerns. First, they were looking to combat vacancies and increase vibrancy in their commercial districts. They began looking at best practices nationwide for achieving these economic development outcomes.

Secondly, they were looking to build a community vision, and social cohesion at the neighborhood level. As part of a City Managers Initiative, they developed a philosophy called Neighbors Building Neighborhoods. The focus of this framework was to increase resiliency, find ways for neighbors to connect and work together, and to enable neighborhood residents to create solutions for problems rather than for relying on municipal capacity. City staff was looking for a way to leverage the many assets that existed in the community.

At around the same time, both the City of Norfolk and a local grassroots organization began a conversation to identify an Arts and Culture District for the City. A vision was drafted by the organization to spur both cultural and economic activity in the Hampton Roads region, and the City began exploring some potential neighborhoods (Norfolk Better Block Report). However, in order to test out the zoning and infrastructure changes that would be needed, the City would need to test out the arts district concept in a pilot area.

For the City, says Ron Williams, Deputy City Manager, the arts district project presented the perfect opportunity to both experiment with economic development strategies and to work towards the neighborhood social cohesion goals as well.

One emerging economic development strategy the City identified was tactical urbanism. Specifically, city staff reached out to an organization called Team Better Block. This small team, which at the time was only two people, started in Dallas, Texas, and works with neighborhood residents and business owners to facilitate temporary transformations of public space, in order to empower neighbors, create vibrancy, and alter public perception about an area. City Staff thought the arts district would be opportunity to work with this dynamic team and achieve a multitude of outcomes.

The goals of the project fall into the following objectives (City of Norfolk, Design Charrette #2):

- Daylighting of Vacant Properties
- Pop-up Retail
- Promotion of Existing Businesses
- Complete Streets
- Public Spaces

Program Launch and Implementation

Working closely with Team Better Block, a process was established for the Granby Street Better Block project. First, in January 2013, a community Kick Off Meeting and Orientation was held and the Granby Street area was solidified by community process. Granby Street, was identified as an appropriate pilot location for several reasons. First, it was already home to several arts institutions. While these weren't in the public realm, there were opportunities to partner or to build off of the cultural that was already inherent in the districts. Second, while

there were many vacancies in the area, there were also several long time businesses that would support the initiative.

According to the Better Block Report on this Norfolk initiative, the site had all of the elements of a successful better block: urban form, an eager community ready for change, a street that can be improved by reducing auto dependence, potential for placemaking, and existing special events in the area (Better Block and City of Norfolk 2014).

A month later, a "community walk" was held with over 150 residents and business owners in attendance. Focus groups were formed at this event around public art, pop up shops, and street life. Ideas discussed at the community walk served as the inspiration for a concept map that Better Block produced with the City of Norfolk.

Next, a two-day "Community Build" was held, where residents and business owners from the focus groups worked together to build, paint, and plan the upcoming Better Block public event, which happened two days later. With the neighborhood's work on display, the Better Block two-day event was launched April 12, and 13th featuring pop up shops in vacant buildings, parklets in parking spaces, street paintings at intersections, bike lanes, and more.

As a follow up, a charrette was held, facilitated by city staff, that transferred the ideas from the Better Block event into a more permanent planning process.

Program Outcomes

Within a month of the Better Block project, the uses allowed by the zoning code were changed in city policy, and the area was officially named an "Arts District." Food trucks were allowed in the district according to the new code as well.

Since the first project, two other Better Blocks have been implemented in different neighborhoods, with the same process as Granby Street. The project has resulted in significant changes in the neighborhood in a very tangible way. Within 14 months, 90 percent of the properties that were vacant or in need of repair were either occupied or under redevelopment.

In addition, the City has institutionalized many aspects of the Better Block projects, including a pop-up shop program, which came a year later, and an upcoming parklet program, where residents can, through a process, transform empty spaces into pop up shops, and parking spaces into small public spaces for the neighborhood.

In summary, the initiative further encouraged the City to subscribe to "an attitude of rapid implementation – with smaller incremental dollar amounts, and smaller improvements that can still make a difference, rather than waiting for huge capital improvements" (Interview with Ron Williams 2015).

It also altered how the City views engagement. The active involvement early on in the process by residents and business owners in the Arts District was key to the sense of ownership that the neighborhood felt later on in the project.

Program Governance

The City of Norfolk clearly managed and facilitated the Better Block process for all of the neighborhoods. However, in each of the three Better Block projects, a solid partnership was formed between the City and the business association in the area. These organizations were key in all stages of the event, from outreach, to visioning, to implementation.

Program Budget

The City spent $40,000-$50,000 for the first Better Block pilot in the Arts District. Money was also spent on pre-analysis and post-analysis work. Staff time was used to coordinate the event, but volunteers were heavily relied upon for implementation.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

A key lesson learned in this project, according to Ron Williams, is that the success of the Arts District relied partly on an anchor pop-up shop that stayed open after the two-day event. This one shop became the "fire tender" of the neighborhood and the programming and retail activity that they held in the space created vibrancy that lasted long after the Better Block event itself.

Another gleaning from the program is that the Better Block approach is very limited if its just one event. Ideally, says Williams, these pilot events will be paired with a more formalized charrette process that turns the ideas explored into formal plans, and then more permanent infrastructure.

Figure 2 MEMFix Event "The Edge" Accessed online at http://memfix.org/galleries/

Summary

MEMFix works with Memphis neighborhoods to redesign and temporarily activate specific city blocks over a weekend to demonstrate the "art of the possible." Adopted as an initiative of the Mayor's Innovation Delivery Team (innovatememphis.com), this type of approach was branded "MEMFix." The goal was to see how Memphis residents, in partnership with local government, could transform their neighborhoods. Since then, citizens, community organizations, and city administrators have recreated similar events in four other Memphis neighborhoods.

Context and Program Creation

Funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies, a program called the Innovation Team was pioneered in Memphis in 2012 for the purpose of creating a culture of innovation within the City and building capacity within City Hall. At the time, Memphis was one of five cities that were a part of this pilot program but the program has expanded significantly since its inception (Interview with Tommy Pacello, Innovation Delivery Team Project Manager, 2015).

To do the work of this initiative, a separate non-profit was formed called the Mayor's Innovation Delivery Team, and the Mayor tasked the newly hired staff specifically with generating economic vitality. The Mayor, and other city leadership were interested in revitalizing tired commercial nodes in historic neighborhoods around Memphis.

In response to this request, three different neighborhood "types" were identified: classic, distressed; transitional neighborhood; and uptrending. The innovation team sought to deeply understand the challenges each of these areas faced and then build new programs to improve both economic and social outcomes.

The findings showed that the issues were blight, access to capital, and building code issues. In order to tackle these problems, the team developed a suite of initiatives labelled "Clean it, Activate it and Sustain it" (Pacello Interview 2015).

At the same time, the team was inspired by work that had already been done in the area, on Broad Avenue– a commercial district in Memphis that had

gone through a neighborhood planning process a few years prior but had not yet

seen any improvement. Using the neighborhood plan as inspiration, local business

owners and other neighborhood stakeholders organized to hold an event in

November 2010 called "New Face for an Old Broad." The event was coordinated

in partnership with Team Better Block – an organization out of Texas that aims to

catalyze revitalization through temporary interventions like public art, temporary

storefronts and street improvements.

The event was the first that Team Better Block coordinated outside of their

founding state of Texas, and was a roaring success. Residents painted protected

bike lanes, set up temporary businesses in vacant shops, and thousands of

Memphis residents came to participate.

As a result of this initiative, deals were being made and new businesses

and development starting coming in to the area.

Program Launch and Implementation

Inspired by the Better Block work on Broad Avenue, and as a part of a

suite of seven other programs and initiatives, the team sought out to focus in on

the "Activate It" arm of their task. They began by exploring what the City's role

could be in future Better Block type events and programs.

According to Tommy Pacello, former Project Manager of the Innovation

Delivery Team, the City saw themselves being involved in three potential ways.

1) As a tactician – The City could go out into the community to test different placemaking and revitalization approaches and engage with the neighborhood directly

2) As an active community supporter – The City could support neighborhood-based placemaking and revitalization initiatives

3) As a bystander – The City could support community-based initiatives by stepping out of the way (through lighter, permitting, and approval processes)

The model that they ultimately chose was a combination of #2, and #3. The team wanted a way to use the city budget and leverage other city resources to promote and empower small-scale neighborhood revitalization that could catalyze more permanent development, like they saw happen on Broad Avenue.

To do this, they partnered with a local organization called Livable Memphis to coordinate two other events around Memphis with the purpose of catalyzing energy and interest in a neighborhood so that more permanent actions may be taken. The Innovation Team partnered with the organization in applying and receiving a grant from the EPA to write a "Memfix Toolkit" which outlined the process for holding Better Block events in the city. This manual intends to take best practices from each MEMFix project, walk you through the planning

stages, and make suggestions for hosting your own initiative.

Figure 3 MEMFix Flyer for Cleveland Street, Accessed online at http://ilovememphisblog.com

Figure 4 Residents coordinating work in the Pinch District, Accessed online via
http://www.highgroundnews.com/features/PinchMEMFix.aspx

Program Outcomes

During our interview, Pacello reflected that there were several outcomes
from Memfix that made lasting change. The first was a temporary use and
occupancy permit that allowed for people to go into a building with their business
without it being fully up to code. The second was the manual itself. Its primary

user is the neighborhood group that wants to take action but not sure how to navigate city processes.

The specific outcomes from each neighborhood event is hard to measure, and Pacello admits that there was no specific method in place to measure outcomes. However, for each event, Pacello claims, social capital was built as people sat around the table, debating street configurations and other details of the event. For many, these events were the first time that neighboring businesses worked together to think about what they wanted to see in their commercial district. This collaboration then enables the stakeholders to make coordinated requests to the City.

Also, this coordination, undoubtedly can lead to other projects later down the line – contributing to higher occupancy rates, increased numbers of new businesses and other positive economic outcomes.

Program Governance

After the first two to three Better Block events, City leadership decided to formalize the process by assigning a contact from each city department to serve on an advisory committee. The role of the committee is to create a smooth system for which the community, with help from local partner Livable Memphis, can navigate bureaucracy and leverage city resources to spur change in their neighborhood.

Specifically, the department contacts help with permitting, make donations, like extra plants or other materials, contribute engineering expertise,

resources and collaboration for infrastructure-related projects. This could include helping a community address a street design issue, filling a pot hole, or painting a utility pole that may not have been in the immediate plans otherwise.

The model was helpful for government department and divisions since it was a means that they were comfortable with. It gave them a framework for which to operate.

In our interview, Tommy Pacello noted that typically local government is good at doing big projects, but not the small scale projects. The job of the Innovation Team, he says, was to figure out how to reorient local government to be able to operate at this smaller scale, or to support the neighborhood groups who do.

After its launch, the Innovation Delivery team was pleased to pass of the program to Livable Memphis, as well as the City advisory committee to run the municipal side of the program.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

It was important for the Innovation Delivery Team to consider that this approach is not a one-size-fits-all method that will fix all neighborhood problems. It could have different success rates in different neighborhoods, and needs to be used in combination with other approaches. There are limitations to a one-day or one-weekend event.

But on the opposite side of the spectrum, Pacello argues, it can be challenging when stakeholders do not see the potential of these events to be truly

transformative. These events, however small, could indeed be an important part of a larger approach to revitalizing a neighborhood. The team dealt with a certain amount of cynicism when launching this initiative.

Another challenge is that while there is potential in these events, they can't fix everything. There are often times very deep, historic issues in the community, including equity considerations that need to be addressed. The framing of the issues needs to be very carefully considered depending on the neighborhood you are in. For instance, one neighborhood may be very interested in improving walkability or cycling infrastructure, while another may be more considered with preserving cultural identity. The way to do this is to LISTEN to what the values are, what the assets are, set the tone the right way, and be flexible.

Another important aspect of this work is community leadership. It is essential, Pacello says, to work very closely with a community leader. This could be a local business owner, staff from a local community development organization, or the president of a neighborhood association.

Case Study #3: Neighborhood Partnering Program, Austin, TX

Figure 5 Cherry Creek Community Garden, Accessed online via
http://www.austintexas.gov/page/neighborhood-partnering-program-current-project-status-chart

Summary

    The Neighborhood Partnering Program is run by the City of Austin Department of Public Works (DPW) and aims to leverage public funding for citizen-organized projects.

Context and Program Creation

    The foundation of the program was started after a city council member attended a conference in Seattle, and learned about a neighborhood fund matching program. The City, at the time had been looking for ways to empower local residents to take ownership of projects that the department wasn't able to spearhead, as well as ways to foster a stronger sense of community. Inspired by

the Seattle model, the city council passed a resolution to explore the feasibility of a similar program in Austin.

Program Launch and Implementation

An outcome of the early program exploration is that the Director of the Department of Public Works volunteered to be the lead for the initiative and to run the program under his department. The program would be called the Neighborhood Partnering Program (NPP).

How NPP differs from other neighborhood matching programs in other cities is that city staff take the applicants through a whole process, from visioning to design to construction and use city contracts to support the projects. Other matching programs typically rely on the neighborhoods to do their own project management.

The Neighborhood Partnering Program (NPP), now in its sixth year, is made up of four parts (NPP brochure):

- **Neighborhood Cost-Share** is when you apply to the City to have your project funded.
- **Grant Assistance** is when you apply to the City for funding to meet a cash portion of a grant you have received or for which you are applying.
- **Parking Benefit Project Proposal** is when you apply to the City to develop a project proposal to expend public improvement funds earned by a Parking Benefit District.
- **Adopt-A-Median** is when you apply to the City to enter into an agreement to beautify and maintain a median or other rights of way.

For the purpose of this study, I will focus on the first, the Neighborhood Cost-Share part of the program.

   According to Justin Golbabai, Neighborhood Partnering Program Manager for the Department of Public Works, how the program typically works is through a series of steps. First, neighborhood residents approach the department with their idea for neighborhood improvement. The program manager runs the idea past representatives from several departments to determine general feasibility. If the project seems feasible, Golbabai requests that they fill out a formal application which then enables the department to get cost estimates from their project engineer. Once the application is complete it goes to a board of directors to accept the proposals, award funding, and then back to staff to create project agreements for who is responsible for different aspects of the project.

   In the cost sharing program applicants are accepted twice a year. But there is some fine print. In order to be considered, the project must be on city property, 60% of impacted stakeholders must approve of the project, the application must be submitted by a community group, and lastly, the group must agree to maintain the project for its entire life.

   As part of the very active role that city staff play in this process, they assist applicants to develop a budget for their project. If the project is under $150,000, then the neighborhood is required to come up with 30% of the costs and the city handles the other 70%. If the project is over $150,000 then the neighborhood is required to contribute 50%.

Figure 6 Application Process, Accessed online via
http://austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Public_Works/Neighborhood_Partnering_Program/update_10-
2016.pdf

What is unique about this program is the variety of ways that
neighborhoods can raise the 30% (or 50%). Options include online fundraising,
resident-donated services or materials, or actual volunteer time. Volunteer time is
valued at $24.66 per hour, based on independent sector volunteer rates.

Program Outcomes

At the point of the program's last application round (at the time of the
interview) in 2015, NPP has supported the completion of 30 projects valued at
roughly 2 million dollars. Of that $2 million, the city has spent 1.3 million
(pledged) and the community has contributed $700,000 through the cost-match.

According to Golbabai, this program fills an important need in the
community. Often times, communities have ideas for projects, but if it's not in the
City budget, then there is no outlet for them to implement those ideas. One of the
major outcomes is that there is now an outlet for the City to consider projects that

didn't make it through the formal City budget. In addition, says Golbabai, the budget process can be overwhelming – this program creates an alternative means for supporting projects that don't depend on this slow bureaucracy.

While a quantitative analysis has not yet been done for NPP, Golbabai reports that there have been many positive qualitative outcomes. The empowerment of residents is one and Golbabai has been documenting this informally through testimonials. The 60% approval criteria help ensure that individuals with ideas are reaching out to their neighbors and organizing themselves rather than working independently. This aspect of the program, he says, acts as a starting point for neighbors to work together and to later organize themselves again to get access to even larger funds. He argues that the program helps build long term ownership of projects by requiring community members to really engage in all parts of the process as well as the project implementation phase.

In addition, DPW is developing a "Love Your Block Program," a mini-grant program that disburses $1,000 grants to neighborhood leaders. The program has been piloted in other cities around the U.S. and the Mayor's Office of Austin has now passed it on to DPW because of their success with managing the Neighborhood Partnering Program. NPP staff hope that the Love Your Block Program can be an entry point for neighborhoods to get access to larger NPP funds after they have organized and made this $1,000 request.

Innovation is another important outcome. The ideas that residents pitch are ones that the DPW has been interested in, but not able to pursue. Projects like

green streets, revitalized alleyways, edible bus stops, traffic circles and street art are being pioneered by the neighborhoods themselves and have contributed to the department being known for their innovative approaches. In pursuing these projects, partnerships have been formed with universities, design associations and other organizations and individuals that would not have happened any other way, reports Golbabai. A couple of the accolades that have received are the National Management Innovation Award, by the America Public Works Association, and a Sustainability and Management Innovation Award by the National Planning Association.

Engagement and Equity

One important indicator that the DPW uses to assess the success of their program is geographic equity. Throughout the life of the program, staffers have been very cognizant of the need to disperse the projects across the city. They are intentional about overlaying income data onto this analysis as well. Through the AmeriCorps Vista program, one intern will be focused solely on reaching out to form partnerships with lower-income and historically underrepresented neighborhoods. Golbabai makes a point to share that this is done through the department's attendance at events and through personal relationships, rather than through their reliance that the neighborhoods will reach out to them.

Figure 7 Spanish Brochure, Accessed online via http://austintexas.gov/neighborhoodpartnering

Program Governance

The governance structure that has evolved since 2009 is a board of directors, made up of five city directors from the Transportation, Planning, Parks, Watershed and Public Works departments. Together, this team reviews all of the applications and then awards funding. Staff from the DPW then create a project agreement with terms and conditions.

Overseeing the day-to-day of the program is a Full-time Program Manager, and a Project Coordinator who handles the engineering details as well as the scope, design, and budget for the projects. Two AmeriCorps Vistas also support the program.

Program Budget

The program is supported by a 2-million-dollar city bond from 2012 that was put aside to be used for sustainability-related purposes. The DPW requested $600,000 for the program, and the city council doubled what was asked for. The department also has a half a million dollar operating budget.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

One major lesson learned in this project was the importance of geographic equity. Golbabai called attention to the fact that there could be some equity issues since the program is a "cost-match" program - meaning that neighborhoods that are able to match the funds provided by the City could be prioritized over those that are not. However, there have been specific attempts to make sure that this does not happen.

First, the outreach for the program has been targeted to low–capacity and low-income neighborhoods. And the outreach is done in a way that lays the foundation for positive relationships, and authentic engagement later on. For instance, program staff attend neighborhood meetings and foster relationships with community partners on an ongoing basis, rather than expecting neighborhood leaders to reach out to the City solely.

Another helpful strategy for the team has been reaching out to professional service associations, as well as Universities to create a network of volunteers that can add capacity to projects.

While neighborhoods may have funding limitations, the DPW has been intentional in valuing other kinds of capacity like volunteer hours. As part of the match, neighborhoods can count volunteer time towards the minimum – at a reasonable hourly rate. This aspect of the program helps to ensure that community members are encouraged to be engaged in a very hands-on way, and that their time is valued – leading to a sense of community ownership in the longer-term outcome of the program, according to Golbabai.

Another lesson learned is the importance of committed leadership and staff to manage the program. Without the dedication of the DPW leadership, Golbabai says, he and his staff would not be empowered to be bold, and troubleshoot issues that arise. One aspect of this Director-level support is in the issue of risk and liability. DPW leadership have assumed the liability of community involvement in infrastructure projects through the process of signing waivers. They also have an insurance policy. Without being willing to take on a certain level of risk, this program would be very limited in its reach and potential.

To tackle the concerns about equity and the gap that could have been created by the cost-match aspect of the program, the department has made a solid effort to target their outreach, by attending neighborhood meetings and forming ongoing relationships. This they have learned, takes more work, but leads to a more diverse applicant pool.

Partnerships, they have learned, are also key. A large aspect of this program is the expertise that they are able to leverage from local Universities and design professionals.

One of the biggest drivers of success, according to Golbabai, is the passion and commitment of the department's leadership and staff. There are many small challenges that the program runs into regularly, and the institutional commitment enables staff to be bold and tenacious. A part of that commitment is the decision that the department head made to cover a certain amount of liability. Residents need to sign a waiver when they participate in a project, and the department has insurance to cover potential incidents.

Another challenge is the criteria that requires that 60% of residents support the project. Building consensus among neighbors can be a difficult task, and often there are one of two very active opponents. The department has learned to be very diplomatic in addressing these conflicts.

Figure 8 Leimert Park Village Before and After People Street Plaza Project, Accessed online at http://peoplest.lacity.org

Summary

The Los Angeles Department of Transportation operates an innovative Parklet and Plaza program that aims to accelerate project development and implementation with a clear process for local organizations to follow. The program, called People Street, is both an information hub with resources, as well as a formal application process for neighborhood organizations to partner with the City in transforming public spaces. People Street includes a bike corral element, however, for this case study, I will focus only on the Parklet and Plaza parts of the program.

Context and Program Creation

The impetus for the People Street program came out of some early pilots that tested the notion of local organizations and city departments partnering to

transform public space. Prior to the first pilots in 2012, there was a confluence of city departments, and local organizations who were interested in implementing tactical urbanism projects but there were no clear guidelines to follow, or way for local residents to access to expertise of city staff (and vice versa).

There were two emphasis points for the early pilot projects and the formation of the People Street Program. First, local groups wanted to do temporary projects to demonstrate street space in different ways. With multiple groups requesting to do project like parklets or plazas, there wasn't anything in the regulatory process that allowed for these temporary, experimental projects. This surge of organizations requesting a process for tactical urbanism illuminated the need for city departments to work together to create one.

Secondly, the department was interested in exploring their philosophy for how street space is used and perceived. The pilot program catalyzed conversations and served as an incubator to experiment with different ideas in urban design and public space. The program enabled city staff and community members to engage in a dialogue that addressed the reorganization of street space in a way that strikes a balance between users.

Program Launch and Implementation

In early 2012, the first plaza demonstration project was implemented, Sunset Triangle Plaza. The plaza features tables and chairs, a bike corral, planters, and a basketball hoop. After this successful installation, the Los Angeles City Council passed a motion that requested that City departments assist with the

installation of what they called "parklet demonstration projects." As a result, four pilot parklets were launched and completed in the winter of 2013.

After these pilots were on the ground, the People Street program formalized and launched an annual application process. Each year, LADOT opens an application window for community organizations to submit an initial proposal for a project. There is a separate application for the Parklet, Plaza and Bike Corral programs. The application contains information on program goals, program criteria and responsibilities, information on the application life cycle, application steps, eligibility criteria and an application checklist.

Both the Parklet and Plaza programs emphasize the importance of the community partner applicant having the capacity to be long-term stewards of the program. According to Valerie Watson, Supervising Transportation Planner with the City's Department of Transportation, the City is open to individuals applying to the program, but they are very clear about what the financial and long term stewardship responsibilities are.

The application criteria for both programs is based on the lessons learned from the pilot projects, and national best practices in placemaking and include:

- organizational capacity
- site location
- site context
- community support
- access needs for public spaces

Both the Parklet and Plaza programs also offer several other resources for applicants. First, there is a Kit of Parts which consists of models to expedite the

application and approval process. The Parklet models are Sidewalk Café, Sidewalk Extension, and Landscape Lounge. The Plaza models are Café, Active, Lounge. These typologies help to organize the options for furnishings by thematic uses. For each typology there are required furnishings, and then optional furnishings that the Community Partner can select if they choose such as lounge chairs, game tables or exercise equipment, for example. Each furnishing option is outlined in the guide along with specifications and vendor information should the Community Partner be interested (Kit of Parts 2015).

There is also a detailed application manual for both the Parklet and Plaza programs. The manual includes further detailed information on criteria and financial responsibilities, workflow charts, information on the project life cycle (development, installation, renewal, etc.) and the application itself (People Street Plaza Application Manual 2015; People Street Parklet Application Manual 2015).

So far, says Watson, there has been a variety of applicants from Business Improvement Districts, to non-profits and other community-based organizations.

Figure 9 NOHO Plaza after People Street Plaza Project Accessed online at http://peoplest.lacity.org

Program Outcomes

One outcome, according to Watson, is that these projects have yielded a lot of useful data thanks to a robust methodology for pre- and post-installation evaluation and data collection (People St website 2015). The hope is that analyzing the data will allow the coordinators to describe "changes in safety, mobility, accessibility, and economic vitality" and to "capture perceptions of the neighborhood and the project itself from people walking or bicycling in the project area and local business operators" (2015). So far six empirical reports have been created. The reports revealed six findings that they found interesting. They are described below as outlined on the People St "Studies" page of the website.

1) **Mode of arrival:** The comparison of merchant perceptions of how their customers arrived to the sites reveals inconsistencies with responses from people who participated in the pedestrian intercept surveys–people actually visiting the site. We are interested to see if this gap shifts after post-installation data is collected.

2) **Presence of women** is an indicator of the quality and perceived safety of the public realm; differenced in weekday and weekend activity levels for women across the project sites were noticed. We will be interested to see if there is an increase in the presence of women throughout the week post-installation.

3) **Severe and fatal collisions:** Disparities between the percentage of total collisions (all severity) and percentage of collisions resulting in death or severe injury for people walking are shown. Similar to initial data analysis citywide for Vision Zero, collisions involving people walking at every site make up a disproportionately large percentage of

the fatal and severe collisions as compared to other modes. Although people walking make up a small percentage of the total collision incidence (all severity), they make up a large portion of those killed or severely injured.

4) **Daily visit frequency:** Across all sites, people interviewed in the intercept surveys reported high responses of "daily" to the "how often to you visit this area?" question. In no instance did the "daily" response make up less than half of survey responses. This shows that People St sites are serving not just occasional visitors or shoppers, but often people who may live and/or work in the area, or rely on trips to the site for daily needs.

5) **Safety and cleanliness:** Survey respondents reported generally favorable perceptions of safety and cleanliness in the People St neighborhoods, which span many different communities across the City, from a dense, urban core and commercial corridor to a historic district and residential neighborhood.

6) **Things to watch:** The amount of stationary activity in Leimert Park Village Plaza area was considerably higher than other sites (possibly attributable to the adjacent park). A dearth of stationary activity in Bradley Ave Plaza area was recorded. Will both sites see significant increases after project?

While Watson wasn't surprised by the hard data – with increases in walkability and sales tax receipts as a result of these interventions, she was surprised by the perception data. There were some interesting takeaways that illuminated how people perceive others arriving to a space, using the space, and how much they spend in a space.

Another success of the program is that it has contributed to the creation of the Great Streets Initiative. This program, coordinated by the Mayor's Office and

City Council and other stakeholders, identifies project areas across the City to receive City services to activate streets as public spaces. The initiative's staff is currently basing their program and their evaluation on the methodology and criteria of People Street. While this program is at a somewhat larger scale – a corridor scale, Watson notes that it was good to see that the People Street model was useful for this work.

The People Street program has also led to other neighborhood-led interventions. One group is currently working with partners to figure out how to do block parties – a typology that the department is likely to embrace in the future. Another idea is creating a method for implementing "play streets," – areas closed off to cars for the purpose of play. Other ideas are in the works and Watson is excited about the future of the People Streets model. People are realizing that the program serves as a way to streamline communication so that residents don't need to talk to 10 different departments individually in order to do something innovative.

The major takeaway of this program, says Watson, is again related to perception. They have seen in their quantitative and qualitative data that people are thinking about street space differently since the creation of People Street. The projects aren't the end goal but act as a catalyst to get people talking about how we use space, how people move around the City, and what streets could be.

Equity

At the time of this thesis, there were three People St projects that were located in disadvantaged neighborhoods. In our interview, Watson reflected the importance of equity in the program and noted that community partners in these neighborhoods were able to apply for the program and take advantage of it. For the City, this serves as a qualitative measure of the program's approach to equity.

Program Budget

At this time, only one staff person is officially assigned to work on the program although many different people collaborate on it.

For materials, the square feet of a potential project vary, so the department sets aside a budget to cover three times the typical square foot plaza. The City typically budgets for 3 plaza projects annually. The parklets are paid for by community partners.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

A major issue the initiative deals with is a lack of staff, says Watson. Having only one person responsible for the program causes limitations and challenges. In the future, Watson would like to see more staff, and more investment of city resources to the program.

In a City as large and diverse as Los Angeles, it has been important for the department to keep in mind the vast differences between neighborhoods. For instance, there may be neighborhoods that are risk with partnerships but need

work generating funding, and others that have resources at their disposal but might need to work a little bit harder to get coalition support. As a result, there is no one-size fits all approach. What they have learned, says Watson, is that the requirements of the program are basic enough that they can ensure long term success for projects across the resource and partnership spectrum.

The power behind this program has been the department and community leaders working together. This kind of organizing can be very time consuming, but the department has learned that sometimes just having the right people at the table to talk through potential solutions can lead to relatively easy fixes and long lasting solutions.
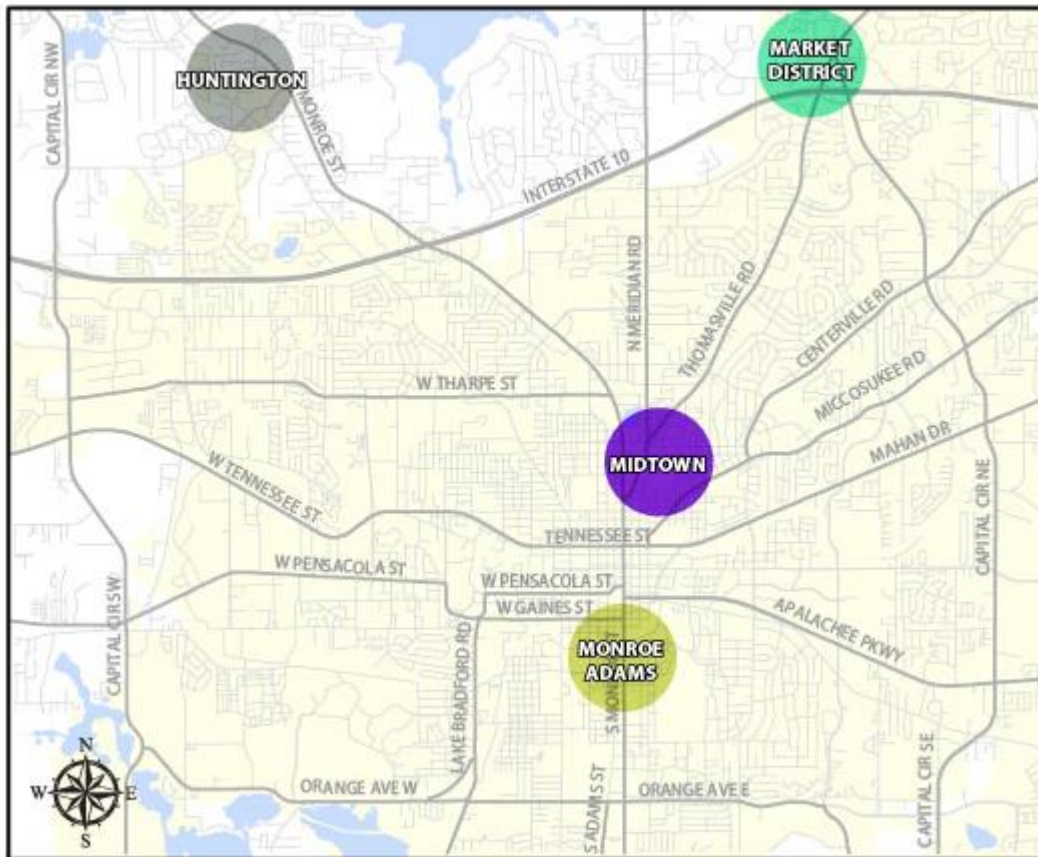
Case Study #5: Tallahassee Placemaking Districts

Figure 10 Tallahassee Placemaking Districts, Accessed online via http://www.talgov.com/place/pln-placemaking.aspx

Summary

Starting with one neighborhood, the City of Tallahassee coordinated a planning initiative that designated four areas around the city as Placemaking Districts. This initiative, a partnership with local business and neighborhood associations served as a way to leverage city resources and ignite creativity in transforming the districts.

Context and Program Creation

In 2009, a local business district called the Midtown Merchants District expressed interest in coordinating with the City to elevate the status of their commercial area. They were interested in fostering a sense of place and catalyzing activity in the district to attract customers and revitalize the neighborhood. The District organization approached the city commission with their ideas. The planning department at that time was in the process of creating plans for different neighborhoods of Tallahassee and the Commission directed them to work directly with the local neighborhood association and the Midtown Merchants District.

The Midtown District at that time was already increasing in vibrancy and was quickly becoming a vibrant commercial area. However, business owners, residents, and planners wanted to work together to take things a step further.

As a first step, planners, in partnership with the neighborhood, created a Placemaking Plan. What was unique about the planning department's approach is that rather than creating a plan that would sit on a shelf, they went a step further to create a concrete action plan for implementation. The Placemaking Plan went back to the commission for approval, and the commission allocated funding to work on tangible projects in the district.

Program Launch and Implementation

When the commission allocated funds to implementing the Placemaking Plan, they set aside a portion for events and promotion, and a portion for capital improvements. The first big project was the 5th Avenue Plaza.

A key catalyst for this initiative was active, engaged residents and business owners. They were able to work in partnership with the City and the planning department. The first big project, and the foundation for all future placemaking work, was 5th Avenue Plaza (at Thomasville and 5th Avenue). As a result of the Placemaking Plan and the Action Plan, capital improvements were made including the list below:

- Brick paving treatment
- Outdoor seating
- Electrical installed for food trucks and music
- Sidewalk and parking enhancements including a road diet, creation of parallel parking, and walkway
- A parklet that acts as a buffer to the backside of a shopping area
- New gas lighting
- Flashing signal at two crosswalks
- Tree plantings
- Road resurfacing project

Funds were also spent on events and promotion including:

- Taloofa Fest, a celebration of Tallahassee's founding. The festival, which is hoped to be held annually, features different bands, food, crafts and beer vendors.
- A billboard campaign for the Merchants Association.

- Art project featuring artistic tables and chairs, to be installed in Lake Ella Park.

All of this work was done with the funds allocated by the commission in addition to resources leveraged by creatively taking advantage of opportunities and partnerships with other City departments. For example, whenever the Department of Public Works came into the district to make improvements, the team was able to use the opportunity to implement something from their plan. Rather than only doing resurfacing work, they were able to install bump-outs and increase public space. Tree plantings and bike parking were also projects that were implemented by creatively leveraging resources.

As a result of the 5th street plaza, the Planning Department has launched Placemaking Districts in three other areas of the City that were also looking for investment – Munroe Adams, Huntington, and the Market District.

For each district, planners conducted a charrette-style visioning process with residents and business owners. The end goal of these gatherings was to identify a public space, and find ways to make those spaces more attractive, interactive and welcoming.

Program Outcomes

In response to the placemaking work and the added emphasis on urban design, the city restructured their staff and formed a new division called DesignWorks. The new division handles all of the site plan designs as well as customer service for the Placemaking Districts and other projects.

One of the first projects that DesignWorks decided to tackle is a citywide Wayfinding program. After the Placemaking Plans were created for the four districts, City staff and residents felt that their identity should be tied together through overarching, cohesive signage.

In addition, in 2014, voters approved a penny sales tax extension, which would create a pot of money to be used in the county for public improvement projects. A public process was coordinated to determine how the funds would be used. Historically, it had been used for roadway widening and capital improvements, but in this round, placemaking was identified as a top choice for how voters wanted to spend the money.

Brian Weibler, Principal Planner with Tallahassee-Leon County Planning Department, notes that the initiative changed the way the local government helps to foster investment. It's a new way of thinking about their approach and rather than a cookie cutter treatment, it is thoughtful, engages the community in asking what is special about their neighborhood and what special parts can be leveraged into something new.

Program Governance

The City of Tallahassee has been a leader in this initiative by allocating staff time and funding for the work. But what has also been key is the partnerships formed with the local business and neighborhood associations. Weibler says the city staff saw themselves as the facilitator coaching community members through

a goal setting process for their district. It was essential, he says, for the city to step back and really listen to what the community wants.

Program Budget

In total the program had just over $650,000 allocated. This was allocated through two different phases and at the time of this interview $70,000 was remaining.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

As noted above, the city staff saw their role as guiding residents through a process – so it was essential for them to really listen and empower the community through active participation and engagement. It was also important in this initiative for planners to keep in mind that every district is different and how they engage their population is different as well. For example, the Huntington neighborhood was more resident –based, with not as strong of a commercial node, so the goals of the placemaking work is really defined by this. For instance, one of the goals in this district is to work to establish a merchants' association.

The Market District on the other hand had a stronger merchants' association. One of the challenges they have experienced, according to Weibler is that since commercial and residential areas are so separated, they haven't seen as much success with their placemaking interventions in this district. Much of the open space is actually private shopping areas. So planners are looking to identify local partners for investment to create park-like amenities in these privately

owned areas. Planners would like to see more residential and permits have been

coming in for townhome developments.

Wiebler reflects that for his department, it was important that they commit

to allocating staff resources, and energy to the initiative. Building relationships

was essential, as well as having a clear plan and showing progress over time. For

the residents, this translated into trust and interest in moving the initiative

forward.

Discussion

The five case studies explore how each municipality supported the resident-led placemaking initiatives. This section discusses my findings and explores how municipalities can help create vibrant, inclusive public spaces through the successful deployment of these programs and strategies. In analyzing the interview responses, several themes surfaced as being important to the success of all of the projects studied. First, a commitment on behalf of municipal staff and leadership was key. It was very important for the municipal coordinator(s) to see the project through with the necessary capacity, endorsement by decision makers and funding. Secondly, capacity could make or break an initiative – including dedicated staff time, but also the access to resources, materials, and the capacity to build partnerships with those who can move the project forward. Lastly, and perhaps most important, a theme emerged of the city as the enabler of the projects. There is a variety of ways that the municipality, through the participating departments, and the engaged decision makers, helped propel initiatives through creative policies, removal of bureaucratic red tape, streamlined permitting, or other means.

While this thesis was qualitative, and no quantitative data was included, I believe three themes were significant factors that the field can learn from and evolve into best practices in municipal placemaking.

1. Commitment

One common factor that all interviewees reported as important to their initiative's success was the commitment of their department. So whether a specific department leader empowered their staff, or municipal staff from different departments collectively played this role, municipal commitment was noted as key across all projects. There may be several reasons why commitment was so vital to their work. First, as noted previously, the freedom to problem solve and take risks led to innovative projects.

In addition, the city and department's commitment to the initiative was translated into investment in specific neighborhood areas. Tallahassee's Brian Weibler noted this specifically in his recount of the placemaking districts action plans. And this investment was felt by residents, business owners and contributed to engagement and sustained participation.

Commitment and investment was also shown through the process itself. This included public planning meetings and charrettes that allowed for a low barrier to entry with less planning jargon than typical planning processes. In addition, most of the initiatives held interactive events that allowed residents to take part in transforming their neighborhood. And lastly, as in the case of People Streets, processed were streamlined to allow for a diverse mix of people to apply for a Parklet or Plaza. So while the investment was communicated differently across projects, in all of these case studies, the city's clear commitment to either specific neighborhoods, or the placemaking process itself led to the success of the program.

This can be broken up into three categories: bold leadership, and departmental commitment and collaboration across departments.

Bold Leadership

Four out of the five case studies explored had a strong department leader or decision maker that the interviewee expressed as being crucial to the momentum of the program. Bold leadership took many forms across the case studies.

First, several of the interviewees described the means by which the project was catalyzed. The Neighborhood Partnering program was conceived as the result of a city councilor attending a conference and learning about a similar program in Seattle. In MemFix, city leadership connected with Bloomberg Philanthropies and became part of a national pilot. In Norfolk, city planners looked outside their city to find Better Block, the organization that guided them in their placemaking success. All of the interviewees in some way noted the importance of learning from best practices in launching their initiative. And in the examples previously mentioned, a leader was particularly instrumental in bringing that information to the initiative and generally catalyzing the placemaking work in their city.

Departmental Commitment

It's one thing to start the initiative, and another to instill those values in your team. It was clear from the interviews that bold leadership was also important in empowering programmatic staff to excel in their placemaking work.

Having one department shepard the program was instrumental and seemed a success factor in Austin's Neighborhood Partnering Program. Golbabai had a poignant recount of this in saying that the Department of Public Work's Director's commitment to the initiative allowed his staff to be bold, find creative solutions to challenges and take risks. It's clear that the Director's commitment trickled down to the rest of the department and has contributed to a sense that this program is important and staff can have the freedom to challenge themselves and others as they find ways to troubleshoot issues that arise. It was no wonder that this freedom has led to the innovative projects in Austin that Golbabai outlined in the case study above.

Collaboration Across Departments

In some cases, as mentioned above, a specific department was leading the initiative, while in others, a more organic leadership model took form where staff from different departments would form a formal or informal governance body to make decisions and move the project forward.

It seems to be a common issue in local government that departments work in silos rather than working seamlessly together, collaborating on projects and programs. However, in these initiatives studied this rare collaboration seemed to contribute to the success of the project. Staff were able to regular touch base to leverage the resources and knowledge of those in other departments to work towards the goal of the initiatives. Different department leaders regularly came together, such as in the example of MEMFix, to eradicate barriers and streamline

processes. Without this collaboration, bureaucracy and its processes can be unsurmountable both for residents and often for city staff themselves.

2. Capacity

Related to staff commitment, is the issue of capacity, a key theme that surfaced in all interviews either as a factor in success, or a challenge, or both. There are several different types of capacity that were mentioned in the interviews. And it's important to note that from my analysis, a placemaking program can have one type of capacity and still be successful without having all three.

Staff time

The Austin and Tallahassee interviews attributed a large amount of their success to the fact that their supervisors empowered them to spend their time on these placemaking initiatives. While governance seemed important – having a board or coalition that was overseeing the placemaking work, it seemed much more important to have at least one paid staff member focused on the initiative. For instance, NPP had 2 Full-Time staff and 2 AmeriCorps interns. NPP is unique in that the DPW really walks residents through the process of proposing and implementing a project. This hands on approach would not be possible without the dedicated to it.

On a similar note, after the success of the first several placemaking plans, Tallahassee created a whole division to devote to urban design and project management of the placemaking districts.

Valerie Watson from People Street, Los Angeles identified staffing as a challenge, noting that she was the only staff member dedicated to the program, and that this was only a part of her responsibilities within the department. With more staff time, and more resources, she theorized, the city could do much more.

Resources

While not explicitly identified as a success factor, all of the case studies explored were supported at least in part by funds from the City, or by the use of tangible materials provided by the City. With this fact, I infer that initiatives that depend on community assets alone may not be as successful or sustainable. I will explain these two types of resource support below.

Finances

The NPP stood out as the most explicit in how the financial contribution was explained to residents. In both the cost-sharing and the grant assistance arms of NPP, the City provides some support. The City provides 70% support for proposals for "standard" projects under $150,000 and 50% for "large" projects, between $150,000 and $500,000. Rather than relying on the community for a cash match, they allow for other kinds of support including volunteer labor, materials or other services.

Tallahassee, while not as direct about the funding available for each district, has made funding accessible for placemaking projects through capital funding, and tax dollars.

Materials

People Street has made it clear in their application process that the City will provide required infrastructure for the plazas and parklets approved, but that the community is responsible for other desired additions.

All interviewees mentioned the very intentional approach that their municipality was taking in leveraging any infrastructure improvements happening already to benefit the placemaking goals.

Partnerships

While it goes without saying, the outcome of the placemaking initiatives in the communities they focused on depended on a partnership with the community itself. But with this category, I am specifically referring to the importance of partnerships with those that can provide professional expertise and guidance to the residents and to city staff as they work together on their placemaking projects.

The success of all of the projects was partly due to the partnerships they built, either with national partners, local organizations, or business associations. The Norfolk Better Block Initiative relied on the expertise of their external national partner Better Block which they paid to to assist them with their

initiative. The City was able to take advantage of the system that Better Block had put in place in other communities to engage residents in transforming the district through an event.

MemFix also relied on national partnerships, through Bloomberg Foundation, as well as Ioby, a national non-profit. People Street was able to attain useful data on their parklets through a student group that had volunteered to do this work. And all other initiatives noted the importance of working with local Universities, design professionals and other trade professionals or organizations to complete the transformation of the site(s).

3. City as an Enabler

Another theme that surfaced and was strongly emphasized as a success factor in all interviews was the role of the City as an enabler. As described earlier, all the initiatives included in this thesis are those that were municipal-led but that enabled community participation and design so there is a preconception in the design of this study which assumes that the city can and should enable community placemaking. The interviews were conducted with municipal staff, so while there may be perceptions by the municipality of their role in the scope and the outcome of their work, it may be limited, or differ from the community, or others perspective.

All interviewees expressed a similar sentiment - it was important for the City to set the scene for the placemaking work to happen but to ultimately step back and allow the community to be the expert. The staff and departments

involved seemed to truly acknowledge the delicate balance between leading an initiative, and enabling community leadership over the project outcomes.

Effective Municipal Leadership

There are several ways that the municipality helped set the scene for transformations of the built environment:

Space was made available

Most of the five initiatives made space available for placemaking activities including both unoccupied commercial space, outdoor street space, or other areas. Without the city making their own city space available, or using their relationships to make private spaces available, the placemaking activities would not be able to happen, or would be limited to spaces that aren't easily accessible or otherwise ideal.

Permitting restrictions were eased or eliminated

The municipal coordinators of the initiatives removed permitting barriers for using spaces holding events, allowing different uses and even changing outdoor zoning code. These are important policy changes that send a clear message that these initiatives should bypass the usual lengthy bureaucratic process.

<u>Typologies were created to simplify the process</u>

In several instances, municipal coordinators created typologies for places that would allow participants to make quicker decisions around what type of intervention might be most appropriate in the space and what materials may be needed. Clear applications were drafted that outlined the criteria, steps, and other useful information.

<u>Tangible action and evaluation plans were created</u>

The City of Tallahassee was very intention about creating Action Plans rather than create more plans that would sit on a shelf. The City of Los Angeles was likewise proactive around evaluating the outcome of their program in a way that would communicate the value of the interventions and the places for improvement.

Community Empowerment and Equity

There are also several ways that the municipalities interviewed empowered neighborhood leaders to take ownership over the outcomes of their projects and their neighborhoods.

<u>Staff helped guide residents through process</u>

It was essential for each of these initiatives to have the staff capacity to guide residents through the process of partnering on the placemaking initiatives. The staff capacity provided support to residents in translating more complex planning,

design, or engineering aspects of the project, and navigating the application process itself.

Online and print materials were created

Online and print materials were also an important way that the municipalities communicated the opportunities and details of their programs to the public. This included visually appealing brochures, easy to navigate websites, and online applications.

Volunteer time was counted as community "match"

The City of Austin sent a clear message that residents and their time are valued when they allowed for volunteer time to count as a "match" towards city funds for placemaking projects.

Outreach was conducted that prioritized geographic equity

All of the initiatives prioritized geographic equity by putting staff time towards outreach, partnering with on-the-ground organizations, or by directly providing funds to the disadvantaged neighborhoods who may not be able to access the opportunity without additional support. Austin even included geographic equity as a criteria and as a department goal.

Reflections and Recommendations

As mentioned previously, there are several limitations to this thesis research that are important to note. First, I did purposefully focus on the municipal perspective. I chose to examine the role of the City, so it is focused on their point of view. The community may have had a different experience entirely and a very different perspective. Secondly, I didn't collect quantitative data. The information I retrieved was from interviews so it is limited to the experience of the person I spoke with. And lastly, these projects are all fairly new – under ten years. More information may come forth over time about the impact of these projects and the process by which they were implemented.

For further research into this topic, I would recommend a study into the community perspective of these placemaking municipal-supported placemaking programs to dive deeper into the equity and empowerment questions that were initially presented in my thesis. In addition, it would also be interesting to quantify some of the outcomes of these initiatives and perhaps score the initiatives on a range of criteria.

After completing the interviews and gathering the lessons learned, I have several specific recommendations for municipalities that either have, or plan to launch placemaking programs.

Invest in staff capacity

Initiatives with the proper staff capacity to support them will have the best chance of success. There is no one size fits all staffing plan and how the program

is supported could mean a number of different things depending on the need, size, budget and goal of the program. It could be a dedicated full-time staff person, a certain percentage of a staff person's time, an Americorps fellow, a consultant, or perhaps a partnership with a local organization with the capacity. Having the necessary support in this way, not only helps tasks get completed, but also may send a message to other municipal departments, and to the community that this program is valued and the outcomes are important.

Value the community and acknowledge municipal limitations

In order to authentically partner with the community, municipalities will need to really see and value both the history and identity of the community, as well as all of the communities' assets, opportunities, skills and talents.

Placemaking can often be viewed as the transformation of an undesirable space. This approach is top-down, doesn't authentically engage the community, and after the transformations are made, often lead to gentrification and displacement. But, there is a different way – if the municipality shifts its thinking to an asset-based approach.

Just like in the previous recommendation, there are a variety of ways that this could be shown. Municipalities could count volunteer time as a match for fundraising, like the City of Austin, or closely co-coordinate the initiative with a local community partner. A community asset mapping session could be held, or a place analysis workshop where residents observe a specific spot and score it for its vibrancy qualities or lack thereof. Lastly, the community could be engaged in

the design of the space itself by crowdsourcing ideas for the space, making placemaking materials easily available, and making the process simple to navigate.

What I appreciated about all of the initiatives I explored in this thesis is the approach that the municipal employees took in getting out of the way of community residents and letting their expertise and vision shine through. Some were more hands on and in control then others, but in all cases, they acknowledged their own limitations. Local government can only do so much, and may not always be in the best position to fully understand the history of the communicate, be the leader of the initiative, or manage the maintenance of the space.

Remove barriers wherever possible

As mentioned in the discussion section of this Thesis, a common theme that the interviews revealed was the removal of barriers to rapid interventions, or placemaking projects. No matter what the program is, it will be essential for the municipality to prioritize the removal of or simplification of bureaucratic steps. In order to do so, it may be helpful to seek outside analysis of what the barriers are via a survey, focus group, or outside consultant.

The barriers that were mentioned in the interviews included access to private space (such as vacant buildings, etc.), permits for outdoor events, closing streets temporarily for events, zoning restrictions, language barriers, access to the public planning process, cost barriers, and safety issues.

Use the power of pilots

One powerful tool for municipal-led placemaking is "pilot" initiatives. Whether or not there are divisions and disagreements among the municipality and community around what should happen in a space, allowing for a temporary transformation may subdue any major conflict and allow for all involved to have some time to test out the change before coming to any permanent decisions. This approach takes the pressure off of the decision makers, and allows for some flexibility and creativity in trying new approaches until the public's approval is gained. This approach has been well documented in the transformation of New York City's Times Square, and countless other initiatives around the country.

Collaborate among departments

As mentioned in the Discussion, municipal departments do not always collaborate closely with each other. However, I would argue that it is essential in successful municipal-led placemaking programs for relevant departments to coordinate closely. Public space has so many different elements that can be matched to different municipal priorities – public safety, transportation, public health, public works and infrastructure, housing, economic development. For all of these areas to be addressed, a multi-disciplinary team is needed. Without getting hung up on formal structures and governance, which can add to an already complicated bureaucratic process, a nimble team of some sort is needed to ensure that decisions are getting made, and outcomes are being achieved. Different

departments may also have different relationships with or perceptions among the community, so partnering with different departments for this reason alone may very well be worth the energy.

Prioritize equity

If an initiative is solely catering to those communities who have the time, capacity and funds to transform their spaces, under resourced neighborhoods will quickly lose faith in the effort and trust may be broken. No matter what resources the municipality has, this thesis has shown that with some effort and creativity, one can prioritize geographic and income equity in the municipal-led placemaking initiative. Some ideas for doing this have been mentioned in the above sections but could include hiring a fellow or staff member to do community outreach to disadvantaged or under resourced communities, translating materials to the relevant languages, simplifying the process for participants via materials, or having staff on hand to ensure clarity and empower community leaders to tackle more technical elements of placemaking or design.

It is important to not only think about engaging the community in the municipal process, but to take a take step back to think about who launched the initiative, and why this group was at the table when others weren't. When possible, re-start your planning and implementing by asking key questions and having proper community representation at the table to find out what the community needs and desires are, and how the municipal team can best address those needs and desires. If a plaza transformation or open streets event isn't what

is desired, some other priorities may need to be attended to so trust can be built and progress can be made in the municipal-community partnership.

Be bold, creative and take risks

Innovation is important. The leaders of these initiatives are trailblazers who created a pathway within government and WITH community organizations and residents where none existed. They didn't focus on policy, rules, regulations, permits, or legal implications, but instead creatively tested out ways to put people first in public space. They figured out the rest of the process after. The City of Austin's Golbabai was a shining example of this when he shared the boldness of his department's leader and the resulting empowerment that the rest of the staff felt to focus on innovative work they were doing and put their passion into it.

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Interview Questions

Project and General Outcomes
- Who was the catalyst for starting this program and when did it start?
- What was the goal or intended outcome of the project? Why did it start? What problem was it trying to solve?
- What has been the City's role in the project and where has the City has to step back?
- Were any methods put into place to evaluate the success of the project and track progress against the intended outcome?
- How much has the city spent or budgetted to this initiative?
- What was the biggest challenge?
- The biggest victory?
- Is there other work happening that is leveraging the work that was done?
- What do you think was the main outcome of this project so far?
   - If it helps, Break down to short and long term outcomes.
- Has the project changed the way the city approaches either urban design, planning, or community engagement?
- What would you say to other cities who are wanting to do this work, what lessons did you learn?
- Was engagement a major goal of the project from the beginning, or was it something that evolved over time?
- Are there any existing report or anyone else I should speak with?

Community Engagement Process
- Did you do any outreach or engagement in this process?
- If yes, what kind of outreach was done, and who were you hoping to engage?
- If no, why not?
- At what point in the process were community members involved?
- What methods of outreach or engagement were used?
- Do you have an estimate to how many people were involved?
- Do you have any quantitative information on who was involved?
- If not, could you explain generally what the extent of engagement was?
- For instance, which groups were involved?
- Was it representative of the population?
- Were there any particular groups that were engaged and others missing?
- Would you call the outreach and engagement successful, and is there anything that could have been improved or done differently?
- How did this experience compare with other engagement that the City has done for other initiatives or public processes?
- Who benefited most from this initiative?
- What did you learn doing this project and what would you repeat, or do differently?

Appendix II

<u>Interviewees and Project Details</u>

<u>Case Study #1: Norfolk Better Block</u>

Location: Norfolk, Virginia

Partners: City of Norfolk, Better Block, local business associations and neighborhood associations

Project Start Date: April 2013

Website: http://teambetterblock.com/norfolk/

Interviewee: Ron Williams, Deputy City Manager, City of Norfolk

<u>Case Study #2: Memfix, Memphis TN</u>

Location: Memphis, Tennessee

Main Partners: Livable Memphis, Mayor's Innovation Delivery Team, City of Memphis, local organizations and business associations

Project Start Date: January 2012

Website: http://memfix.org/

Interviewee: Tommy Pacello, Project Manager, Mayor's Innovation Delivery Team

<u>Case Study #3: Neighborhood Partnering Program, Austin, TX</u>

Location: Austin, Texas

Main Partners: City of Austin, community residents

Project Start Date: May 2012

Website: https://austintexas.gov/neighborhoodpartnering

Interviewee: Justin Golbabai, Neighborhood Partnering Program Manager, City of Austin Public Works Department

Case Study #4: People Street, Los Angeles, CA

Location: Los Angeles, California

Main Partners: LADOT's Active Transportation Division, City of Los Angeles Departments of Public Works and City Planning, the Office of Mayor Eric Garcetti, and the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro).

Project Start Date: May 2012

Website: http://peoplest.lacity.org/

Interviewee: Valerie Watson, Supervising Transportation Planner, Active Transportation Division of the Department of Transportation

Case Study #5: Tallahassee Placemaking Districts

Location: Tallahassee, Florida

Main Partners: City Planning Department, local residents and merchants' associations

Project Start Date: 2009

Website: https://talgov.com/planning/planning-compln-placemaking.aspx

Interviewee: Brian Wiebler, Principal Planner, Urban Design Team, Tallahassee-Leon County Planning Department