

## **Small Steps in Downtown Renton: Informed Design through Community Engagement**

### **Introduction**

Located 12 miles south of Seattle, the city of Renton is undergoing rapid growth and is searching for ways to activate underutilized land in the Downtown Civic Core. This project analyzes one of these vacant parcels- a former Big 5 lot that is connected to Piazza Park and Gateway Park and has the potential to serve as a gateway to the city. In particular, I am interested in how civic engagement and participatory design can bring citizens together to form alliances and personal connections to their built environment.

**How can participatory design and civic engagement affect the design and implementation of temporary installations in public space?** To explore these topics, I researched place attachment, successful examples of temporary space activation, gathered site information about the former Big 5 lot, cultivated community relationships, and organized a series of design charrettes that involved Renton communities.

Having this series of open design charrettes gave the community the opportunity to get involved in the changes happening to their neighborhood. Participants envisioned designs for a pop-up park that will sit in an area of the built environment that they know best and in the process were able to connect with neighbors they may otherwise have never met. This is the beginnings of encouraging civic engagement and reinforcing a strong community foundation in Downtown Renton to begin the conversations for future developments to come as the city works to align with the Civic Core Plan to revitalize Downtown Renton. Below, you will find the research, methodology, and results of this project that aim to answer my questions around civic engagement and participatory design in the public realm.

# **Literature Review**

To prepare for this project, I have read several books, articles, and excerpts that shaped the path behind my decisions and reasoning for the project direction. Please enjoy my analysis of the materials below.

## **Renton: History, Context, and Resources**

Renton is a developing city that lies south of Seattle and Bellevue, sitting on the edge of Lake Washington. Renton prides themselves on their rich history, booming economy, and love of sports, which are all visible on the City of Renton logo. According to the Mayor's Message in the Business Directory and Visitor Guide 2018-19 (Renton Chamber of Commerce, nd),

“The City of Renton maintains a dynamic and thriving business climate, supported by a population that surpasses 102,700 residents. Renton provides an excellent quality of life, exemplified by our rich diversity and wonderful neighborhoods. We enjoy beautiful, well-maintained parks and recreation facilities, a nationally recognized public school system, and world-class health care services. These elements are critical components of our vision for the city.”

-Denis Law

The city is expanding and developing while being called home by many large business entities such as the Seattle Seahawks, Boeing and IKEA. Along with these large companies, there are a number of volunteer and non-profit organizations present in Renton that help the city thrive. The Renton Downtown Partnership and Chamber of Commerce are both examples of organizations that have a hand in business and communities alike.

The city recently revisited their Civic Core Vision and Action Plan (City of Renton, 2018) to reflect the new interests of the city in order to create an environment of positive

change in the Downtown Civic Core. It is with this new, recent data that I began to ask this very important question: How can the former Big 5 Lot be utilized to meet the needs of the Downtown Renton Community? This site is located next to Piazza Park and Gateway park and shares a wall with King's Chapel. It is also in close proximity to Renton Transit Center and Renton High School. When asking pedestrians near the site what they think of the area many have the same concern: safety. It is apparent that people are worried about the loitering in Gateway Park and equate that to an apprehension due to crime and how that might affect the lot. With all of this in mind, I began to look into what the city already has in store for its future. The lot has been master-planned for future redevelopment and is therefore sitting intentionally vacant by the city. This is less than desirable in the highly visible spot that welcomes you to the downtown area. This narrows down the question from earlier even further: How can a temporary installation best improve the safety and perception of the Downtown Renton area?

The answer lies within informed design through community engagement. By gathering a grassroots level of information, we can use a form of tactical urbanism to reclaim the space. Tactical urbanism is defined by citylab (Berg, 2012) as any type of urban intervention, often quick, temporary, and cheap that is meant to improve the urban environment. Although tactical urbanism suggests acting without permission in a guerilla or undercover manner, the Civic Core Vision and Action plan has documented the experience of an open house experience with citizens of Renton where they were able to identify temporary, cheap and quick ways they would like to see their city activated. One of the objectives in the Civic Core Plan specifically calls for a pop-up park in the Big 5 lot. A pop-up park fits the bill of tactical urbanism; with careful design and community input it has the potential to encourage users to interact with the built environment and instill a sense of ownership for Renton's downtown area. "[O]utdoor activities in public spaces can be divided into three categories, each of which places very different demands on the physical environment: *necessary activities, optional activities, and social activities.*" (Gehl, p.11) The current standing of this lot provides

none of these activities. By implementing a pop-up park, this gives the gravel lot a chance to become a “public space” instead of an unused parcel.

Due to the location of the site, the concern of safety is a top priority to both the City of Renton and community groups alike. In order to address the safety concerns attached to this project, I will be exploring how the built environment can affect human psychology, namely the way people interact with and use space. It is with all of these considerations that I have decided to throw a series of design charrettes to receive design and planning input from the very people that will use the space most. Although the goal of this Senior Project is to detail the process of community engagement, I will also be speaking to design in the public realm as a demonstration of my intentions with the results of these charrettes. Overall, I will be acting as the hand for which the community will direct by having me draw and describe a public pop-up park that fits the needs of those who use the space most.

### **How can safety be designed into the public realm?**

In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs speaks to her observations of cities and the way people move through them. She goes on to say that “the bedrock attribute of a successful city district is that a person must feel personally safe and secure on the street.” (Jacobs, 30) She illustrates three main principles that aid this: a clear demarcation between public and private space, eyes on the street, and the sidewalks on the street must be continuously busy to encourage people to look onto the street. Her main ideas are stating that by having people activating space and having their attention drawn to areas of activity, people will be able to feel like they are in the presence of others, and therefore safer than if they were completely alone. As a response to the work done by Jacobs, Oscar Newman began to dive into his theories of *defensible space*. Defensible space is defined as “A residential environment whose physical characteristics-- building layout and site plan-- function to allow inhabitants themselves to become key agents in ensuring their security.” (Newman, 50) Defensible

space is meant to promote citizen involvement to ensure community and a sense of ownership will result in an overall increase in safety of a space. Newman's ideas are based around a citizen's ability to maintain control over their neighborhoods, rather than relying on police interference.

Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED), became an emerging field in the US Department of Housing and Urban Development in the 70's and studies were applied to housing developments to test the effectiveness and study the theory behind the newly emerging environmental psychology. Over time, CPTED has had several iterations and expansions from the original 7 principles which were *Territoriality, Surveillance, Access control, Target hardening, Legitimate activity support, Image management, and Geographical Juxtaposition*. (Cozens and Love, p 398) The second generation of CPTED began to branch into the use of communities and user experiential design elements, which worked their way into a newer, more dynamic model for CPTED. These new branches included *Human scale, Urban meeting places, Resident participation, Community culture, Neighborhood capacity, Community cohesion, Community connectivity, Inclusion, and Identity*. (Cozens and Love, p 398) In *A Review and Current Status of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design*, Cozen and Love delve into case studies to ask the real question surrounding CPTED: Does it work? Through their many case studies, findings show there are instances of lowered crime rates, however, most studies are unable to be conclusive due to the variable factors related to the built environment. Although this may be true in the most scientific sense, it can also be said that the benefits of designing toward the latest and most comprehensive iteration of CPTED can do no harm. Including perspectives from communities and neighborhoods at a user level can only benefit a space, even if these benefits cannot be scientifically proven.

The improvements to the built environment can have a benefit from a different lens. Broken Window Theory can be applied to the specific site being analyzed in this Senior Project.

“Broken Window Theory: Consider a building with a few broken windows. If the windows are not repaired, the tendency is for vandals to

break a few more windows. Eventually, they may even break into the building, and if it's unoccupied, perhaps become squatters or light fires inside. Or consider a sidewalk. Some litter accumulates. Soon, more litter accumulates. Eventually, people even start leaving bags of trash from take-out restaurants there or even break into cars.”

-James Wilson & George Kelling

The current use of the lot is non existent. Sometimes there are nearby apartment residents that may use the lot for a puppy-restroom, and other times there may be a person eating their lunch that may leave their trash behind. Overall, putting something bright and colorful in the lot will greatly improve the perception and allow the community to invest themselves in keeping the space clean and well maintained. All of the aforementioned theories go hand in hand with a healthy built environment led by an active community.

### **How does design affect the effectiveness of public space?**

Looking deeper into the specifics of design elements, there have been studies and research done on the psychology behind first impressions of space and the natural tendencies of mankind. “Studies in the field of aesthetics more than a century ago found that when it comes to 2D and 3D objects, curves elicit feelings of happiness and elation, while jagged and sharp forms tend to connect to feelings of pain and sadness.”

(Sussman and Hollander, p 123) There are ingrained human traits that mankind tends to align to when entering and reading a space for the first time. Space, from a design perspective, should consider both programming possibilities, as well as user experience. This brings up the importance of wayfinding.

“Successful wayfinding involves knowing where you are, knowing your destination, knowing and following the best route (or at least a serviceable route) to your destination, being able to recognize your destination upon arrival, and reversing the process to find your way back out. (Carpman and Grant, 1993)” Humans tend to react to

space similarly to mice in a laboratory. Evolution and nature has brought people the need to look ahead and keep their backs to walls for survival and the surveyance of predators. "People have a bias to avoid centers and seek safety by sticking to the sides." (Sussman and Hollander, p 25) This directly translates into the way plazas and public spaces function; "Life of a public square forms naturally around its edge. If the edge fails, the space never becomes lively." (Alexander, p 600) People feel safest where other people are comfortable and safe as well. "In Scandinavia, an old proverb tells it all: 'people come where people are'." (Gehl, p.25) The theories in CPTED and the psychology behind it all tend to blend together and remind us that overall, humans will follow their instincts for self-preservation.

## **Tactical Urbanism**

As mentioned earlier, Citylab defines tactical urbanism as any type of urban intervention, often quick, temporary, and cheap that is meant to improve the urban environment. Although this project has been through the internal process of the City of Renton, it is still a community led, grassroots project. The outreach and engagement has been done on a volunteer basis, and although the City of Renton will be a potential resource, this project stands as a Senior Project in partnership with the City. This led me to read more about existing pop-up parks and examples of tactical urbanism to see how others have implemented similar ideas.

Pop up parks originated as a way to reclaim space that was underutilized. Beginning with the first parket installation "PARK(ing)" by Matthew Passmore, the innovative uses of pop-up culture to establish value in cities has grown immensely. Among other things, pop up parks are being created to help with social behavior. Pop up parks are meant to immerse users in nature and allow pedestrians to take a break in places they would not normally be able to stop at. It does not stop at a bench and sod in a parking stall. Using programming and the sociology relate to crime, pop up parks are

being created to reduce unwanted behavior in teen demographics by allowing them to take part in a community that they can feel welcome in. “What we know from research is that when kids don’t have anything to do that’s social and positive, they’ll find antisocial and negative things to get involved in,” said Sasha Cotton, Minneapolis Youth Violence Prevention coordinator.” Having the resources and extra-curricular activities for underserved demographics can lead to new relationships that “help neighbors get to know each other and invest in their community”.

There are 2 main case studies that are relevant to this project. The first project will be the most similar to this one; they are both gravel lots in a downtown that were empty due to development needs. The Pop Up Park in Downtown Wichita was meant to be a temporary way for the city to activate their downtown core. They wanted to “fill the hole” on Douglas Ave. that was left after a development plan fell through so they implemented string lights, tables, chairs, planters, and art installations to their gravel lot. The community embraced the space and it became so successful that eventually the pop up became a permanent part of Downtown Wichita. They program the space and have an active presence in their community, with regularly programmed outdoor movies and a food truck schedule. “ Transforming this eyesore into a community gathering space creates many opportunities for civic engagement. Food trucks at the site provide a vibrant, urban lunch setting for Downtown workers, while live music and occasional playground equipment engage residents and visitors in Downtown.” (Wichita Downtown Development Corporation, 2019)

The second case study is a Pop Up that occurred in Miami at Biscayne Boulevard. Biscayne Green took the place of 101 parking stalls under the Metrorail and between two large roadways in Downtown Miami. From their website: “Planned as a one-month public space intervention, Biscayne Green will create new active public space for the enjoyment of Downtown Miami residents and visitors. The various spaces proposed for this project include fun and interactive elements that will allow for people to gather and connect.” (Miami Downtown Development Authority, 2017) They

implemented seating, food, games, bike racks, concerts, and other programming that lasted a span of 20 days. Although their website is very positive and has noted they had over 20,000 visitors to the pop-up, there is a single comment that raises questions. It reads *“Why do you post exclusively positive comments ? Biscayne Green was a big fiasco ! Fake green grass made of plastic, cheap furniture and walls vandalized ! The only people happy about it were the homeless. Make it permanently? May God forbids such calamity.”* This disgruntled Miami resident may be unraveling the truth to this project. Was there a second side to the pop-up that was not seen on their advertisements? Through more research and searching the web, I was not able to find more negative comments about this project. My theory is that the park was in a primarily vehicular area and was so big that there was no sense of community ownership for the space. It wouldn't be too hard to imagine both a good and a bad side to this project, and it seems as though the people working on the website stopped updating it midway through the pop-up. There was never a second iteration, so perhaps this case study will be a good look into questioning possible outcomes.

### **How to Properly Engage the Community: “Nothing About Us Without Us”**

After understanding the case studies that will act as a backdrop to this project, the next step is to look into how to decide on a design. “Tapping into the ideas and talents of the community is crucial in deciding what will be done to improve an existing place, or in developing a vision for the new place. The people who live or work near a place know from experience which areas are dangerous and why, which spaces are comfortable, where the traffic moves too fast, and where their children can safely walk or play.” (PFPS, p.35) This is why hosting a community design charrette is the appropriate way to proceed. Gathering design insight from people who are familiar with the space is the fastest route to a successful design. “[A] vision for a place should be defined by people who live and work around it, rather than by professionals or government entities.” (PFPS, p.55)

To further delve into the process, let's take a look at social capital. Social capital is a way to measure the strength and success of relationships that form in a community. This concept is what allows societies to function properly or with ease, as neighbors are able to depend on one another for help and support. In a way, they are grassroots citizen networks that thrive on interconnectedness. Robert Putnam goes over this theory in his book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. He has a notion that "what really matters from the point of view of social capital and civic engagement is not merely nominal membership, but active and involved membership." This solidifies the overall investment and personal relationship one holds to the relationships being built. A main goal of this pop-up project is to build more social capital and through the joint efforts and interaction resulting from design, I have seen people who have never met form connections. The circle of socially active citizens in the City of Renton is diverse, yet small. This project is a platform on which neighbors can meet and feel empowered by the opportunity for participatory design.

Fred Kent mentions in his article "Whom Does Design Really Serve?" the sad idea that design "alienates everyday citizens and perpetuates the myth that architecture and planning are not things that they should be concerned with." This is a mindset that should be changed. Taking the plunge into civic engagement is daunting for those who have been less involved with their community but by including citizens in the design of their space, we can encourage the first steps into taking agency of their neighborhood. This principle of community design is not only applicable to the urban sphere. It has been shown in a thesis done by Michael Fretto that designing with the community can help foster a deeper connection and sense of understanding for end goals and achievements. Fretto's thesis, "Design for Us", is based on graphic design workshops but are easily compared to the standards for community engagement and participation for public design. The underlying message stays the same: design is empowering and helps people feel heard. These same principles are displayed in Project for Public Space's article "How to Bring Life to Vacant Lots". The page shows how projects can begin and end with community members reaching a common goal while also

demonstrating the power of non-permanent installments in communities. Ranging from pop up swings, to dance areas, to children's play areas, it can be shown that "the process is as important as the physical improvement" when designing for public use.

## Literary Conclusion

Through the aforementioned context, research, and the understanding of human interactions to design in the public realm, a conclusion has been reached to host a series of community design charrettes. By inviting the people who use the space most to share their ideas for a successful environment, while also being able to provide design solutions that encompass CPTED and general safety, citizens and community members will be able to have their voices heard and directly translated to a design. The following pages in my methods section will detail the preparation for these community events.

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## **Methods**

This project is about community engagement and participatory design. With the nature of public spaces as well as the current perception of the project site, hosting a series of design charrettes are an integral part of getting the community involved in their neighborhood and conversations about development. This project has been a long process that has led me in various directions. I will detail the path I have taken below.

### **Project History and Site Analysis**

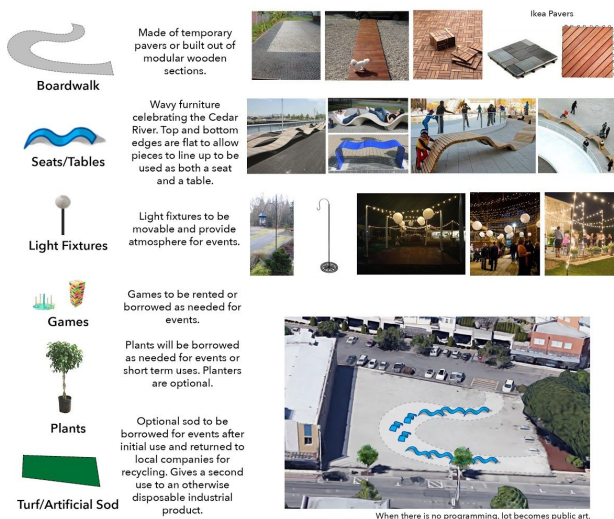
This project began in a planning practicum course, CEP 491, offered by David Blum. Through the previously established coursework and context research done in the previous quarter, I was able to join in on the project from an established starting point. The group in the class before me had picked potential sites for projects as well as the ideas of ways to represent the prompt “Art As Placemaking”. I picked the pop up park out of a group of potential projects and began to explore the ideas of how to create a space that is multifunctional and inclusive. A concern from the city was safety in the area so I chose to include elements of CPTED as a theme to explore for design. As a group, we traveled to Renton for the first time and had a tour of the city led by Jessie Kotarski from the Community and Economic Development department. We took field notes of our individual project sites and were introduced to the culture and vision of Downtown Renton.

After learning how to navigate the program Sketchup, I was able to use 3d modeling to design a basic layout of the site with lighting elements, parklet fixtures, seating, outdoor games, sun shades and planters. I chose to use these specific elements to represent my preconception of a temporary public space. At the time, I felt that lighting would create the feeling of safety at night, parklets would be movable, yet more sturdy than cafe tables, seating and games would create a reason to use the

space longer, and a sun shade would help with the comfort of the users. It is with this initial design that I did a mid quarter presentation to some employees that came from the City of Renton to the University of Washington. They recommended I illustrate my points further by showing examples of scenarios and so I decided to pick three scenes that would utilize the surrounding neighborhood and culture of Downtown Renton. I looked through materials from the city's website and different events that have been hosted to pick three scenes that I would then further elaborate on. The final presentation to the city went well and the audience enjoyed the outdoor movies, food truck cafe, and flea market ideas I had based off of existing events in Renton.

## Park Elements

Please see the following proposed elements of the pop-up park. To begin, **only the boardwalk, seats, and lighting fixtures will be necessary**. Games, plants, and turf can be optionally added if desired. Many of the elements will be built during proposed community work parties. Small Steps community coalition will do outreach to gain as many donations as possible from local or nearby businesses. Attached are scenarios using these 6 elements.



Between events, boardwalk and seats will remain as public art to mimic the waves of a flowing river. This will strengthen the branding of the space as well as provide beautification for the lot.

Seats will be open to public use and maintained by Small Steps.



Initial design concept to City of Renton, before community outreach and engagement

## Establishing a Relationship With the City of Renton

After the successful presentation, the quarter ended and summer break began. I was contacted by Anthony Marris-Swann, the then-current intern for the Community and Economic Development (CED) Department. I was invited back to Renton City Hall to give a pitch to a few members of CED and Community Services to explain my vision of the project and how it would be feasible. They replied to my pitch inquiring about details surrounding maintenance and cost so I prepared materials that were then sent back to the city and revisited. After creating a scope of work, maintenance plan, preliminary materials guide, and preliminary

design concept, I was given the opportunity to pursue the project by Kelly Beymer, the Administrator of Community Services. Through this process, I have had the opportunity

of applying to the City of Renton as an intern in the Community and Economic Development department. It is through this internship that I was able to learn more about the existing networks and communities in Downtown Renton. It is because of existing community groups and key community members that I was able to form a wide range of relationships within Renton, and this was all made possible through a strongly established relationship with the City of Renton.

## **Precedent Research**

The permission given to me was based on an understanding that I would revisit the design of the pop-up park. I had been working with ideas drawn from the Civic Core Vision and Action Plan that details Renton's future developments, however, I had not taken into account the people who interact specifically with this space every day. I began to research precedents that helped guide my interest in specific themes and design styles as well as different types of activation or tactical urbanism in large scale public settings. It became very clear that the community needed to be involved more than I had anticipated. This is where the project changed from a design based proposal to a community outreach event. I began to do more research into the effects of social capital and why getting communities invested can help a site thrive.

While doing this research and learning about all of the ways that CPTED or repurposing space did or didn't work, I wanted to learn more about parklets and to see the functionality of a business sponsored public seating area. I was put into contact with Cory Crocker of the U District Square, a group dedicated to urban improvements in the University District. He gave me a detailed recollection of the process that the Bulldog News parklet went through and gave me the advice: brand the movement. It was after this meeting I had decided to form Small Steps, a tactical urbanism group based in Renton that would be dedicated to caring for the pop-up and would become self sustaining after the project was over. Due to the popularity of the project and the possibility of repeating the pop-up concept in future years, it had been recommended to

let the Renton Downtown Partnership, an existing entity that organizes most of the community events in Downtown Renton, take ownership of the structure, design, and overall content of the project after implementation of the 2019 pop-up was complete. Although the idea of having Small Steps began to shift, creating the group was still important because it allowed more secure support to complete the project and have a core team to implement the project during the summer. Small Steps had transformed from it's ideal as a Renton based group to a volunteer coalition, dedicated to the success of the pilot project.

## Forming Small Steps

Small Steps was a concept meant for branding and identification of the project. I was using a dedicated email address and facebook page to manage the charette events, hoping to find people within the community that are in close proximity to the site that wanted to join the coalition and move the tactical urbanism throughout Downtown Renton. Through the process, it became apparent that Small Steps would need to be a combination of UW architecture, landscape architecture, and urban planning students. These relationships were more based on personal friendships and interests to helping the design and implementation of the project succeed. Although this was not the original intention of Small Steps, it was still useful to have named a



### Objective:

*"It takes many small steps to reach a goal."*

By organizing Small Steps in Renton, we can use programming and a low maintenance design pilot to create high impact urban interventions. Utilizing design, engagement, and placemaking, we can connect the community that surrounds the Big 5 Lot by creating a pop-up public space. This pop-up park will be a piece in the puzzle to complete an interconnected picture within the Downtown Renton Civic Core.

### Existing Conditions:

- Under-utilized city space
- Concerns about public safety
- Lack of consistent programming
- Disconnected from pedestrian use
- Undesirable gravel ground cover



### Opportunities:

- Activation of unused space
- Year-round programming opportunities
- Positive association of space through programming and community engagement
- Special event possibilities through "special use" park classification
- Inclusive design to incorporate all walks of life
- Creation of temporary structures that can be relocated and reused
- Creation of Small Steps coalition to continue urban interventions in Renton

Flyer created to illustrate Small Steps concept

volunteer group to be referred to by the City of Renton. I had branded the idea by introducing Small Steps as its own entity to the city and other groups that I have approached to create a legitimacy for the project. I had created flyers describing how Small Steps would become a sustainable resource for Renton, however now that the intentions have changed the flyers are no longer valid. The Renton Downtown Partnership as the main entity for the project has control of any future aspirations for pop-up events in Renton.

## Community Outreach

It is important with any community project to engage with as many different groups in order to gather a wide or varied sample of data. With this in mind, I had been doing outreach to many groups throughout Renton. The first group I met was the Renton Downtown Partnership (RDP); the aforementioned non-profit dedicated to



Myself presenting the project to the Renton Lions Club

community relations and creating vibrancy and economic growth in Renton by incorporating businesses, non-profits, and city center stakeholders to events and opportunities. Through the RDP, I was able to meet several community members that are dedicated to the growth of Renton and offered help to reach my goal. It was made apparent that the best way to approach the city for final approval to begin the project would be with as many stakeholders vouching for the project. With this in mind, I began to reach out to the Chamber of

Commerce to find ways to connect to

community groups that would be interested in learning more about the project. Each group or stakeholder I met with learned more about the project as I explained my goals

## Design Workshop: Community Charrette Series

Street view looking east down S 3rd St.

# JOIN US!



**WHEN:** Tuesday, March 26th at 5:30-7:30pm  
Sunday, April 7th at 2:00-4:00 pm

**PROJECT ADDRESS:**  
508 S 3rd St. Renton, WA 98057

**CONTACT:**  
Brittany Gillia  
(425) 430-7271

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**  
SmallStepsRenton@gmail.com

DESIGN MEETINGS	DESIGN MEETINGS	DESIGN MEETINGS	DESIGN MEETINGS
March 26th at 5:30 pm	March 26th at 5:30 pm	March 26th at 5:30 pm	March 26th at 5:30 pm
233 Burnett Ave S	233 Burnett Ave S	233 Burnett Ave S	233 Burnett Ave S
April 7th at 4:00 pm	April 7th at 4:00 pm	April 7th at 4:00 pm	April 7th at 4:00 pm
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After securing the dates for the event, flyers and advertisements were distributed to all groups that have heard about the project. Virtual invitations via the existing Pop-Up Renton Facebook account had been created as well.

Next, I wanted to look at existing events that hold similar purposes to distill what it is that worked and didn't work. After meeting with several professional planners and obtaining advice, agendas for similar events, and discussing previous outcomes, I was able to gather an idea of what to include in this workshop series. I attended two public meetings hosted by the City of Seattle to see what the difference was between a Design Review and an Open House. After attending the open house and seeing what elements were present, I was able to narrow down the activities included in the events and create an agenda and item checklist to ensure any volunteers would have the right information.

After advertising and planning the content, I needed to ensure the logistics of event planning were confirmed. I was able to meet with the event space coordinator and explain the proposed layout and preferred options. I had discussed funding for any refreshments to be purchased through the City of Renton's Economic Development department, as well as inquired about donations from local businesses to grant a feeling of investment to local stakeholders. The result of this was a mixture of donated pastries from Boon Boona, coffee from Starbucks, and cookies purchased by the City of Renton.

Finally, I drafted several presentation boards and gathered the supplies that the participants used during the events. Preparation for both events involved using the most recent information to decide what I wanted to learn from the attendees. Ultimately I decided to have the first event focus on desired themes of public space and the second

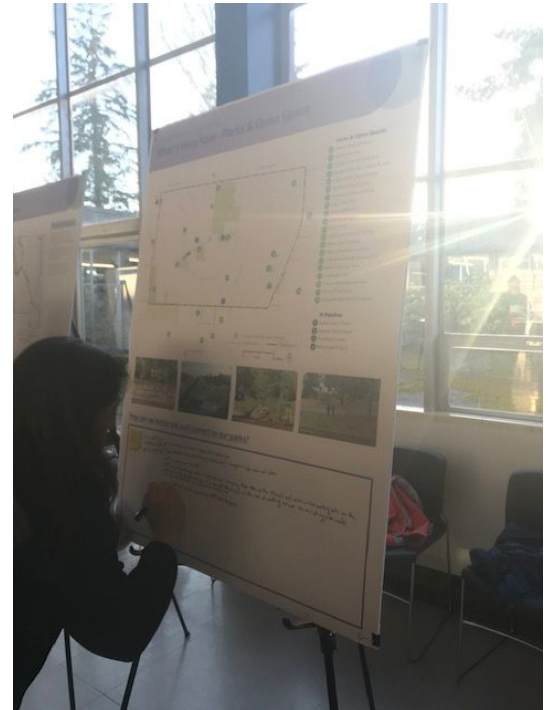
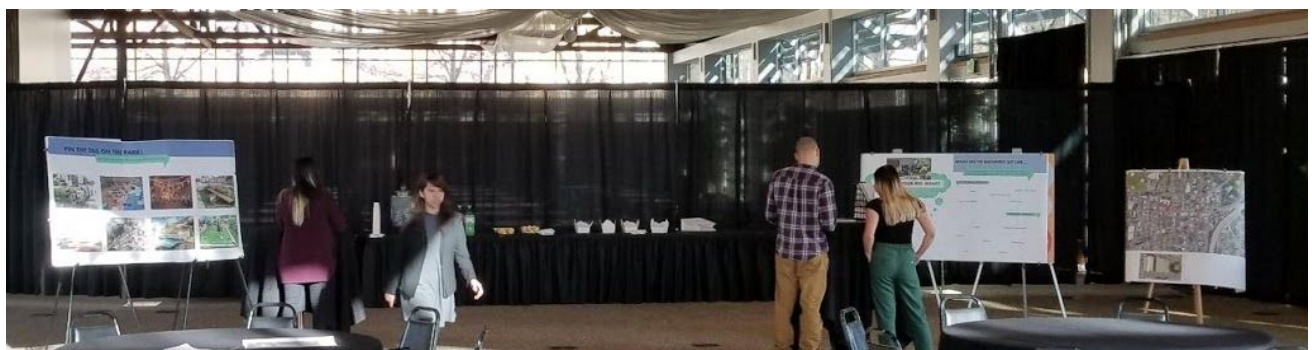


Image shown from City of Seattle Station Area Planning event

event focus on specific design elements that reflected the earlier themes. I created roles and designated them to the volunteers who were present to help facilitate events and discussions. The volunteers were briefed before each meeting and prepared to answer questions or direct attendees to the proper resources.

## **Results: Charrette 1**

The goal of the first charrette was to explore themes of public space and gather ideas for future design ideas for the pop up. This goal was met and the event was successful overall. There was a mixed attendance of people from the neighboring businesses, local community groups, and the City of Renton. In total, there were 14 attendees. Some of the attendees were local candidates running for Renton City Council, a few of them were chefs and business owners from the restaurants across the street, there were two City of Renton employees, and a lot of people who found out about the event through the city-run *Pop Up Renton* Facebook page. Not all of them chose to participate in the discussion activity, however, they were able to see the project and understand the goals of the process. I was genuinely surprised to see people in attendance that I didn't know personally; this confirmed the advertisements and outreach was successful.



Participants interacting with material prepared for event

We formed two small groups and had a guided discussion based on past experiences and how they felt about various aspects of public space from their lives. Some of the attendees were long-time Renton residents and had great insight to the

area and how people naturally use the space. They had opinions on the historic context of the site and were able to share their views during these discussions that were recorded and used for design reference. The display boards that I created were used alongside discussions to let people participate in voting exercises and to answer general questions about the site.

The takeaway from this meeting became the foundational theme for future design concepts: people wanted to see **history, nature, safety, interactive art and inclusion of different ages and abilities** in any design. The people who were in attendance were able to meet each other and see who their neighbors were in the Downtown area, which was another reason this project was so intriguing to me. The charrette became another example of relationships forming in communities due to civic engagement.

## **Personal Recap of Charrette 1**

*The meeting was held in the late afternoon to encourage attendance from high school students and individuals heading home after a 9-5 work day. I was not able to make successful contact with Renton High School prior to the event and therefore missed the high school demographic. Many people who had expressed interest in supporting the event became unavailable during the day and turn out was less than expected.*

*The event volunteer group showed up to the event center an hour before the scheduled start time. We set the room up as I had envisioned while planning the exercise but it took longer than we had allotted time for. A community member came into the room before we were done and kindly waited for us to finish setting up the last few stands. Eventually the meeting picked up and the attendees were divided into groups for activities.*

*The goal of this meeting was to get a basic level of understanding of the intentions present in the community surrounding the site. There were two activities planned, both discussion based, that were aimed at finding design goals and themes*

*that could be common ground between attendees as well as alignment with the Civic Core Vision and Action Plan. MIG|SvR had very recently held open houses to create an updated Civic Core plan and the recent data pointed to citizens wanting representation of Renton history, nature, and safe, inclusive activities. Although attendance was less than expected, the event went according to plan and the data gained confirmed that the design direction should reflect the existing data. The event ended well and there were a number of people who expressed interest in seeing the project concept come to life.*



## Results: Charrette 2

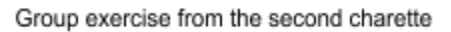
The second charrette was meant to be a continuation of the first meeting. When I had been planning the events, I had assumed people from the first meeting would be interested and engaged with the project enough to come to the second meeting. This was not the case. There was only one repeat visitor that I didn't know personally. The second meeting was also much smaller and was mainly comprised of people there to support me. The goal of this second charrette was to take the themes from the last event and turn them into physical design elements. I wanted to see how people would react to seeing their preferred themes being translated into a functional design detail. To do this, I thought it would be easiest to pick design elements that are usually in pop-up parks that also represented the desired themes of **history, nature, safety, interactive art and inclusion of different ages and abilities.**

I prepared sheets that had all of these elements and was prepared to have participants spend time arranging the space with these cut-outs to represent their



Group exercise from the second charette

Group exercise from the second charette



Group exercise from the second charette

Group exercise from the second charette

Group exercise from the second charette

events that had the capacity for sitting outside, watching movies, and having community groups with the option to decorate a part of the space to enforce a sense of ownership by community members.

## **Personal Recap of Charrette 2**

*This second meeting was held 12 days later, and this time on a weekend date. I had attempted to schedule this meeting on a weekend to reach any individuals that were not able to make it to the first meeting. Again, attendees who expressed specific interest in attending the event were not available and the turnout was less than anticipated. This event was intended on being a follow up to the first meeting; I had hoped attendees who were interested in the process would have fun taking control of the design of the space. Due to the low attendance, we shifted the meeting as it was happening and ended up forming one group where we discussed the site and its drawbacks and possibilities. There was only two return attendees present, perhaps due to the lack of distinguishing content on the advertisements and flyers, so a lot of the content began from the ground up.*

*The group decided on design possibilities and expressed interest in using the lot as a transformational event space. They wanted the outdoor area to facilitate overflow of current public events or work as a landmark space to meet or pick up goods. This meeting did not go as planned, however, new relationship links have been created between business owners. Park planning took a backseat to community engagement during the second and final charrette.*

## **Analysis of Results**

The charrettes were an important part of outreach and engagement due to the nature of public space and all of the people that share it. The information that existed about desired design details from the aforementioned Civic Core Vision and Action Plan

was a good starting point for my research, however, this was old information and I wanted to ensure that this project was as relevant and contextual to the site as possible. I wanted to make sure that this project was done at a grassroots level and that this space would be designed as closely by those who use it as possible.

The attendance of both events was a lot lower than I thought they would be. Although my senior project is about the design charrettes and how they were implemented, I found that I got more useful information from conversations I had with community groups during visits to their existing scheduled meetings. I specifically feel that the meetings I had with Luther's Table, the South Renton Connection Neighborhood Association, and a joint meeting with parts of the Piazza group and King's Chapel were the most useful information I had gotten from people. The people at these groups were all very invested in this space and had specific ideas for what they wanted to see in it. While doing research on open houses or design charrettes, I had been told this would happen; no one will come to you, but if you go to them they will be open to talking about their space.

The specific result of the design themes and the *Event Under the Tent* concept were not surprising. These are all things that had been mentioned in the previous engagement documentation done when they had done outreach for the Civic Core Vision and Action Plan. Although these results were not surprising, I felt that it was necessary to include people in a new conversation around this specific site. Even though the input I got was very expected, it was a good opportunity to gauge how people felt about the site and to get to know the community personally. I was able to confirm design ideas that I hoped would be useful in the site as well as hear new ideas that were able to inspire the final concept.

## **Personal Recap of Analysis**

*After these meetings were over, I was not sure what I had accomplished. It felt as though I had been walking in a circle. Then, an email came in. It was addressed to the*

*project-specific email account that had received no incoming emails from that point. A local community group had heard about the project and invited me to their neighborhood association to explain the project. This group was very excited about the prospect of turning the lot into a positive space and was able to offer a light maintenance to help the project gain strength and viability.*

*Although these steps felt slow and difficult, there have been many small moments that reaffirm the process to be meeting the project goals. Neighbors are meeting, relationships are being strengthened, and the pop-up park concept is helping Downtown Renton bridge the gap between communities.*

*This project, which had begun as a university-contracted concept idea and transformed into a real-world opportunity, has had to take many changes in direction and priority. It begun as a design-build project, got scaled back and turned into a design project, turned into a branding and marketing project, evolved again into a public presentation and networking project, and finally settled on a community outreach and engagement project. This senior project has accumulated to an internship and the opportunity to make real change in Downtown Renton. Although sometimes change may feel slow going, taking persistent Small Steps will eventually carry us to the finish line.*

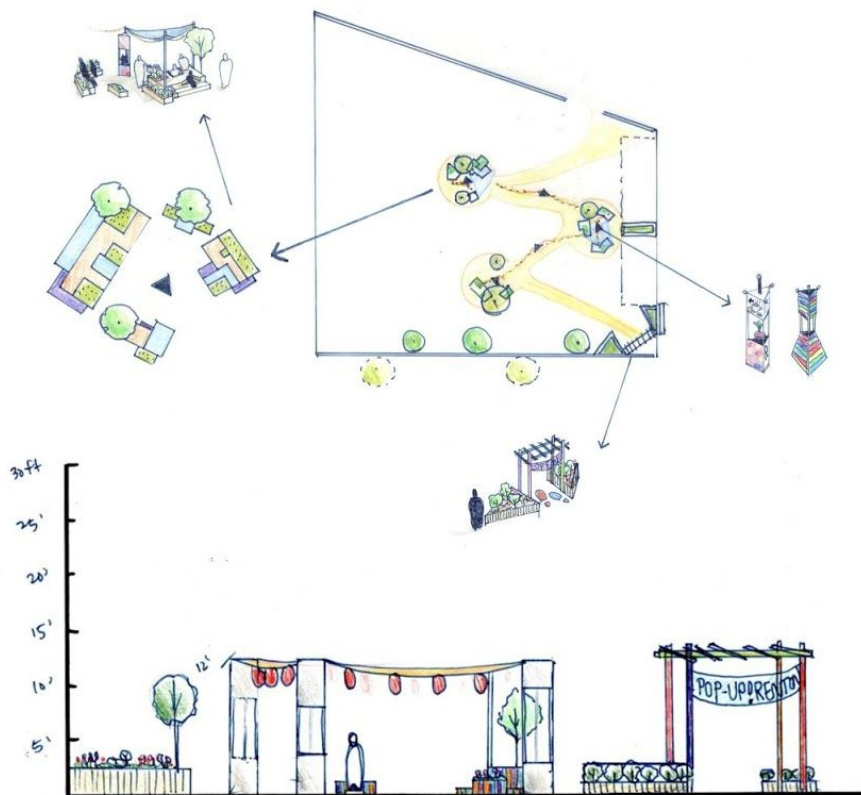
## **Design Concept**

The final design concept I drafted, although not an official part of my senior project, encompassed the themes of nature, interaction, history, and inclusivity as much as possible. The idea would be to use a fine grade of gravel to create ADA accessible pathways, and having small clusters of seating, planters, and shades that would be connected by twinkle lights lining the path. Along the path and in the clusters, there would be “kiosks” that had the possibility of wayfinding, small storage for games or tools, and display shelving for community art.

The park would be a pop-up, with an intended duration of June-September. This is also the timeframe of which the highly popular Farmers Market takes place in Piazza Park, which is adjacent to the project site. The park would facilitate extended seating for the farmers market while also increasing park use when not in session.

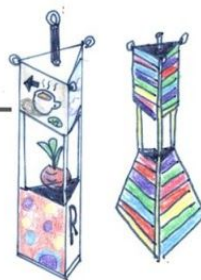
## Next Steps

# DOWNTOWN RENTON BIG 5 LOT COMMUNITY POP-UP CONCEPT



## WAYFINDING KIOSKS

- Community art
- Game storage
- Outdoor exhibits
- CPTED



## MODULAR SEATING

- Light fixtures
- Sun shades
- Community gardens

## INCLUSIVE

- ADA Accessible gravel path

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WASHINGTON



## SITE PLAN

The site will be built in phases during the weekend over the course of the farmers market. It will include temporary seating, ADA access, shades, and wayfinding tools. By having the elements in the park visible and vibrant, passers by will feel safe and invited into the space.

## SECTION

All elements in the space are meant to be tall and thin enough that they are able to be seen past, while also allowing for a height advantage to deter delinquency for upper level fixtures (lights, shades, signage)

## FEATURE

Park elements have been designed to express the needs of the communities near the site. There are possibilities for elements of: **Nature, History, Inclusivity, and Interaction** within the existing designs to

The idea overall was a success and the open houses were a platform for community members to get together and discuss possibilities for a shared public space. The design concept was highly intentional and that was recognized by the person who was ultimately able to give me permissions to pursue the project. As mentioned before, the project was presented to the Community Services committee of Renton City Council as an active summer project and there were no objections. The summer of 2019 will be an active period of community involvement and design/building of a new community space!

## A University of Washington Student Project:

# DOWNTOWN RENTON POP-UP PARK

### DESIGN-BUILD "SUMMER CAMP"

Want to learn about design, construction and public space? Join a UW-student led summer program dedicated to hands-on skill building and fostering community in Downtown Renton!





CREATE

COLLABORATE

EMPOWER

**Join us for a fun summer**  
of working together to **build a temporary pop-up installation** in the gravel lot next to Piazza Park.

The project goal is to create a community space open through the summer, designed and built by Renton community members, and there will be opportunities for all ages to participate.







For more information, please contact: Brittany Gillia (808)221-1009 SmallStepsRenton@gmail.com

## A University of Washington Student Project:

# ALL VOLUNTEERS WELCOME!

Opportunities for **family friendly, summer-long** activities

Weekly work parties and volunteer opportunities will provide you and your family with fun, outdoor summer activities while fostering a sense of pride for your community.

**Participants can gain experience in:**  
Architectural Design, Urban Planning, Small-Scale Construction, and Project Management

JUNE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Outreach</li> <li>• Design</li> </ul>
JULY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Site Installation</li> <li>• Community Painting Parties</li> </ul>
AUGUST SEPTEMBER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekly Small Scale Gardening</li> <li>• Site Clean Ups</li> <li>• Site Deconstruction</li> </ul>

For a full schedule of events and instructions on how to become a volunteer, please contact:  
Brittany Gillia (808) 221-1009 SmallStepsRenton@gmail.com

Flyer created as advertisement to community members for summer participation in design build

## Takeaway

This project as a whole has been very challenging and I've learned a lot throughout the process. I have learned things about myself, about governmental structures, community engagement and the most effective ways to do so, outreach and relationship building, and last but not least, I've now seen first-hand how participatory design can shape projects. The community interest in this project has given me hope that working at a grassroots level can be an effective and efficient way to design public space. The responses have been positive and it seems as though the pop-up project will bring people together for wholesome summer activities. I am pleased at how well received the project has been. I'm not sure if this is because groups have been approached with the idea of it being a conceptual project, or if it's because people genuinely want to work together, but overall this project has been a positive look into empowering communities. From open houses, to design, to community organizing, and finally to implementation, every aspect of this project has been a learning experience and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work with everyone that has been involved.