

Adaptive Public Space

Places for People in the
Pandemic and Beyond

A COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT OF SEVEN SITES IN
AKRON, DETROIT, PHILADELPHIA, AND SAN JOSE



Gehl

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ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

Gehl evaluated the impact of seven public spaces — each funded in part by Knight Foundation — in Akron, Detroit, Philadelphia, and San Jose. Between September 2020 and February 2021, Gehl engaged a range of stakeholders and leveraged a mix of data sources to uncover challenges and opportunities unique and common to these projects. Enclosed are the findings from this process.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study of seven flagship public spaces reveals how local leaders generated impact through their responsiveness to community needs — laying the groundwork for more equitable outcomes and greater resilience during the pandemic.

Building on its longtime commitment to public spaces, Knight Foundation commissioned Gehl — a global urban planning, design, and strategy firm — to conduct an impact assessment of seven public spaces in its portfolio. The findings illustrate the power of public space as a platform for community development: whether by building resident trust, spurring social activity, supporting economic and workforce development, or catalyzing neighborhood change.

This power makes public spaces a key ingredient in the recovery from COVID-19 — a crisis that has raised the stakes for overcoming deeply rooted, systemic challenges in our cities. For policymakers, funders, and practitioners, these findings are a call to action. By elevating public spaces, leaders nationwide can drive more equitable outcomes in the pandemic and beyond.

The Approach

Located in Akron, Detroit, Philadelphia, and San Jose, the seven projects in this study represent \$5 million in direct Knight investments. An additional \$50 million in co-funding and follow-on investments from other funders including the Reimagining the Civic Commons network went toward these sites, wider area improvements and ongoing space operations. The spaces range widely: neighborhood parks that give residents a go-to gathering spot; nature spaces that re-engage locals with the outdoors; and citywide destinations that offer art studios, beachscapes, and more.

Given the diversity of spaces, this study did not set out to measure the spaces against one another using a common set of metrics. The goal was to understand impacts related to four core themes, and to life during the COVID-19 pandemic:

Everyday Public Space: How do design and programming shape visitors' use of and engagement with the space?

Residents at the Center: How does the space reflect, welcome, and empower those who live in the community?

Community Ripple Effect: What broader impacts is the space having on the community, city, and beyond?

Sustaining in the Long Run: How does the project sustain operationally and financially over time?

COVID-19: Are residents visiting these projects amid the pandemic, and how are operators adapting to new conditions?

The Gehl team gathered pre- and mid-pandemic data from multiple sources, including: interviews and focus groups with over 50 people (including grantees, city government leaders, volunteers and artists-in-residence); an online survey of over

800 respondents near each space; existing and new observational data on space use; and an analysis of over 450 posts of geotagged Instagram activity. The findings that follow are the result of this multi-method study.

The Findings

Public spaces manifest in the physical world, but what really makes them tick is people. As such, Knight develops partnerships with communities on the ground and invests in projects that support more than design and construction — funding, for example, engagement processes, incubation of new ideas, and workforce development. In many cases, Knight and other philanthropic funding sources help absorb risk for an innovative new concept and catalyze additional investment.

This people-centered model is generating impact. A common ingredient? High-quality design and programming that reflected and adapted to local needs. This approach is what spurred resident visits and attachment, and what enabled these public spaces to weather disruptions to public life during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even still, project leaders are confronting and addressing challenges inherent to public space management: from site-specific barriers to access, to longtime resident distrust.

Impacts are organized into five key areas. Where possible, findings were compared across space types and across all projects, keeping in mind that intended project outcomes varied.

EVERYDAY PUBLIC SPACE

Projects that supported quality design, resident-centered

programming, historic character, and the arts invited regular activity. Across the board, 82 percent of survey respondents feel positively about these projects and 59 percent visit at least monthly. The two multi-functional neighborhood spaces — Detroit's Ella Fitzgerald Park and Philadelphia's Centennial Commons — had the highest rates of regular visitors. Over half of respondents visit both spaces at least weekly, suggesting they offered locals ample reasons to visit — from basketball courts and playspaces, to porch swings and warm-weather movie nights. The presence of art and historic architecture also helped drive engagement. For example, Philadelphia's Cherry Street Pier — an arts space housed in a revitalized waterfront site — had the most active Instagram engagement of all projects, with over 21,000 followers.

Challenges to everyday use centered on barriers to access. For example, the Freight Yard at Detroit Riverfront sits below-grade — a dynamic that deterred pop-up businesses from posting up at the space, and that leaves some visitors asking for more wayfinding. Upcoming investments will address connectivity challenges: the Dequindre Cut will eventually integrate into a 26-mile trail under development by the City, which will improve access and visibility to multiple neighborhoods.

RESIDENTS AT THE CENTER

Community participation allowed project organizers to build trust with residents, which in turn increased use and sense of attachment to the spaces. Across all projects, 81 percent of survey respondents felt they fit in, and

67 percent felt the spaces were essential to their neighborhoods — figures that rose for neighborhood parks especially.

Participatory engagement methods helped build this resident belonging and attachment. For example, at Akron's Summit Lake Park — which used prototypes to engage residents during the design process — 97 percent of respondents felt the project had changed their neighborhood for the better, up from 57 percent at the start of the project. Ella Fitzgerald Park and Centennial Commons, which adopted similar engagement approaches, also saw the greatest levels of weekly visitors, enthusiasm, and attachment. These projects also saw higher rates of attachment among Black respondents — indeed, near neighborhood parks, 79 percent of Black respondents agreed the space was “special to me,” compared to 70 percent of all respondents.

But for many projects, building trust among communities of color remains a challenge. This was especially true at nature spaces, for example, where 45 percent of Black respondents agreed the space was “special to me,” compared to 56 percent of all respondents. “[Local Black residents] don't always feel encouraged because they don't feel outdoor spaces or environmental work have always been for them,” says Izzy Nelson, Community Engagement Manager for Philadelphia Outward Bound School (POBS) at The Discovery Center. Over time, community-centered programming is starting to draw in more locals to the project; events include mommy-and-me workshops and a talk on environmental racism.

Continued on page 8

Top Findings

Learning from a diverse set of public spaces in Akron, Detroit, Philadelphia, and San Jose

Public spaces with a strong foundation of resident engagement helped communities address equitable access and weather the pandemic together.

1 EVERYDAY PUBLIC SPACE

Projects that supported quality design, resident-centered programming, historic character, and the arts invited regular activity.

More starting on page 20

PHOTO: BREE GANT



Ella Fitzgerald Park in Detroit (left) and Centennial Commons in Philadelphia — flexible neighborhood spaces — had the most regular visitors, with 54 percent visiting each at least weekly. Cherry Street Pier, an arts space on a historic Philadelphia pier, spurred the most Instagram activity.

2 RESIDENTS AT THE CENTER

Community participation allowed project organizers to build trust with residents, which in turn increased use and sense of attachment to the spaces.

More starting on page 30

The Discovery Center in Philadelphia has drawn locals with events including mommy-and-me workshops, an event on environmental racism, and youth programs; the project had among the highest youth visitorship rates.

PHOTO: ALBERT YEE



3 COMMUNITY RIPPLE EFFECT

Investments catalyzed funding for innovative ideas, and led to local capacity-building and community development.

More starting on page 40

PHOTO: SAN JOSE DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION



MOMENT's \$139,000 seed grant funded a first-of-its-kind retail concept in downtown San Jose, and led to over \$600,000 in funding over the next four years. Building on the momentum of Summit Lake Park in Akron, a \$15.5 million vision plan is now underway in the area.

4 SUSTAINING IN THE LONG RUN

Local stewardship, responsive processes, and trusted operators helped sites develop sustainable operating models and adapt to changing conditions.

More starting on page 50

Detroit Riverfront leverages over 300 community volunteers and data-driven decision-making to guide ongoing maintenance and improvements to the park; sensors help monitor the flow and activity of visitors.

PHOTO: RENEE RODRIGUEZ

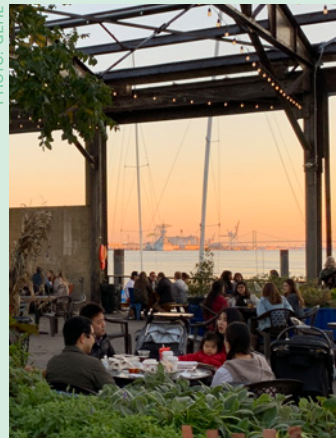


5 COVID-19

Attention to resident-centered and flexible spaces helped projects adapt during the pandemic and provide safe venues for solo and social activity.

More starting on page 16

PHOTO: GEHL



Detroit Riverfront and Cherry Street Pier in Philadelphia have seen spikes in foot traffic. Visitorship was up over threefold between November 2019 and November 2020 at Cherry Street Pier — thanks in part to the site's garden restaurant, a popular outdoor hangout.

COMMUNITY RIPPLE EFFECT

Investments catalyzed funding for innovative ideas, and led to local capacity-building and community development. Direct Knight investment of over \$5 million in these projects was about 10 percent of the overall funding for the sites, many of which saw substantial investments from other funding sources along with Knight commitments.

For example, Knight and the Kresge Foundation each invested up to \$150,000 in Detroit Riverfront's Freight Yard. For the Riverfront's Valade Park, Knight's \$225,700 investment in 2017 came with over \$900,000 in co-funding from other sources. In addition, in 2018, the Valade Family made a generous donation of \$5 million, which supported construction and operations at the park.

MOMENT's 2015 Knight Cities Challenge grant of \$139,000 funded a first-of-its-kind retail concept and led to over \$600,000 in funding over the next four years. "The [Knight grant] was the seed money to get it off the ground," says Chuck Hammers, former head of the local Property-Based Improvement District in San Jose.

At Centennial Commons, Knight's \$1 million capital investment through Reimagining the Civic Commons led to over \$1.5 million in funding from the Philadelphia Water Department — for installation and maintenance of an on-site rain garden. The funding allowed for the hiring of five local residents as part of a workforce development program; the program's success has led to additional contracts with the Philadelphia Commerce Department and the Philadelphia

Zoo to clean other parts of the neighborhood, and to fundraising for Centennial Parkside CDC to hire a Director of Sanitation and Environmental Programming. This position will increase capacity, grow cleaning services, connect the program to other workforce development opportunities, and create educational programs around litter prevention. More recently, the project received over \$500,000 in follow-on funding for a second phase of work, and for an employee to lead programming in West Fairmount Park.

For some projects, though, public space investments led to fears of resident displacement — especially if they were not paired with proactive policy and planning. To address these fears, local leaders near Summit Lake Park and The Discovery Center are now exploring measures like property tax freezes and homeownership pathways to ensure longtime residents benefit from neighborhood change. "It's going to take proactive policy intervention," says James Hardy, Akron's Deputy Mayor for Integrated Development.

SUSTAINING IN THE LONG RUN

Local stewardship, responsive processes, and trusted operators helped sites develop sustainable operating models and adapt to changing conditions. To address a lack of ongoing financial support for maintenance, Ella Fitzgerald Park embedded co-creation into the design process. This helped to foster a long-term sense of ownership: a 2018 survey of park visitors found 62 percent participated in stewardship or advocacy related to the neighborhood — participation that was vital to maintaining the space.

At Detroit Riverfront, data-driven decision making helps space managers identify how and where to adapt — leveraging sensors to monitor the flow of visitors and develop programs in response.

MOMENT's curator, SJ Made — a collective of San Jose makers and entrepreneurs — has been involved since the beginning of the project design process. With tenants in mind, it helped shape a design and operating model that eases their experience. "Any struggles that we had putting this space together would have been times ten in a real retail space," says MOMENT tenant Au Nguyen.

While no projects stated immediate concern for financial sustainability, some are actively working to diversify funding sources and secure ongoing revenue while sustaining their missions. This was especially true for larger-scale, citywide destination sites that have broad mandates and rely on a combination of philanthropic and sometimes-limited public funding. "We try to operate everything at a lower than market rate, which is so great for the community and not so great for the operating budget," says Cherry Street Pier General Manager Sarah Eberle. Lease revenue from the Pier's outdoor restaurant and bar has been a financial boon — especially during the pandemic as visitors socialize outdoors there.

Both Delaware River Waterfront Corporation (DRWC), which owns Cherry Street Pier, and Detroit Riverfront Conservancy are exploring how they can generate revenue outside of traditional sources — for example, by using value capture to benefit from nearby real estate development. In the meantime, DRWC is turning to its other waterfront properties

PROJECTS AT A GLANCE

	SPACE TYPE	YEAR OPENED	PROJECT COST (inclusive of all funding sources) ²
AKRON / SUMMIT LAKE PARK From environmental liability to beloved lakeside park. Summit Lake Park provides ample seating and shelter, barbecues, trail connections, and recreational programming on the shores of a lake that was once seen as an environmental hazard. (RCC ¹ site)	Nature Space	2018	\$714,000
DETROIT / ELLA FITZGERALD PARK From 26 vacant lots to a neighborhood living room. Ella Fitzgerald Park is the first project in a broader neighborhood planning process. It provides public art, recreational space, and an educational and workforce development program for local youth and transitional workers. (RCC site)	Neighborhood Park	2018	\$2,094,318
DETROIT / RIVERFRONT From an aging industrial area to a multi-use urban destination. The Riverfront includes the Freight Yard, a stop on the Dequindre Cut greenway that houses a beer and wine garden, and Valade Park, home to a beachscape, floating barge, and two local food businesses.	Citywide Destination	2018 (Freight Yard) 2019 (Valade Park)	\$320,000 (Freight Yard) \$5,200,000 (Valade Park)
PHILADELPHIA / CENTENNIAL COMMONS From no-man's land to parkside gateway. Centennial Commons bridges the gap between the Parkside neighborhood and adjacent West Fairmount Park, providing an inviting place for everyday activity and community-based programming. (RCC site)	Neighborhood Park	2018	\$4,474,000
PHILADELPHIA / CHERRY STREET PIER From vacant pier to buzzing arts haven. Cherry Street Pier houses 14 artist studios, interactive installations, and an outdoor restaurant and bar within a historic pier structure on the Delaware River Waterfront — a unique space for the public to interact with artists and makers.	Citywide Destination	2018	\$6,000,000
PHILADELPHIA / THE DISCOVERY CENTER From fenced-off reservoir to nature oasis. The Discovery Center sits at the edge of a long-shuttered reservoir. Philadelphia Parks and Recreation leases the 57 acres to Philadelphia Outward Bound School and National Audubon Society, which operate outdoor programming. (RCC site)	Nature Space	2018	\$18,122,000
SAN JOSE / MOMENT From parking bays to one-of-a-kind downtown retail. Once a parking garage facade, MOMENT is now a creative hub on San Pedro Square. The project provides affordable retail space to local makers, diversifies downtown amenities, and adds to the Square's public life.	Citywide Destination	2018	\$780,000

1. Indicates the project received funding as part of Reimagining the Civic Commons. For more on Reimagining the Civic Commons, visit page 12.

2. Total cost of all projects is not necessarily equal to total funding for all projects, as some funds went toward wider area improvements and ongoing operations.

Projects provided safe venues for solo and social activity during the pandemic — adapting design and programming to continue offering vital community spaces.

to help finance its public space projects. “We’re developing them in such a way that we can have a reliable source of income and rent,” says Lizzie Woods, DRWC Vice President of Planning and Capital Programs.

— COVID-19

Attention to resident-centered and flexible spaces helped projects adapt during the pandemic and provide safe venues for solo and social activity.

While the pandemic disrupted public life, two sites — Detroit Riverfront and Cherry Street Pier — observed increases in foot traffic compared to the previous year. Cherry Street Pier experienced a more-than-threefold increase in foot traffic between November 2019 and November 2020.

Neighborhood spaces were also resilient, as a greater proportion of residents surveyed near Ella Fitzgerald Park and Centennial Commons (followed closely by the Riverfront) reported visiting the parks more frequently than residents near other sites during the pandemic. For example, 58 percent of Ella Fitzgerald Park respondents said they visit the park as often as or more frequently than before, compared to a cross-project average of 37 percent. The robust community engagement processes that shaped these

projects built a local sense of ownership — inspiring locals to organize unofficial programming, from picnics with the grandparents to hula hoop troupes, throughout the pandemic.

Projects also took advantage of their flexible design to test new programming. MOMENT hosted outdoor community workshops with tenants as part of an open streets program. The Riverfront leveraged the popularity and size of the Freight Yard to hold open-air live music with enough room for distancing. Cherry Street Pier’s outdoor restaurant and bar became a popular hangout, helping drive many artists’ sales during the pandemic — with a third of artists financing their studio rent from on-site sales alone, up from 15 percent the previous year.

Conclusion

Expanding the scope of funding beyond shovels in the ground laid the groundwork for public spaces that reflect local communities and respond to changing conditions. Many projects’ ability to adapt and continue attracting visitors during the pandemic cemented this strong foundation.

Despite this, projects face challenges. Challenges most often are related to: planning around site-specific barriers to access; addressing perceptual

issues around inclusion and trust in communities of color; ensuring projects lead to equitable community development; and creating sustainable operating models that balance revenue generation with a consistent focus on mission.

To build on successes and overcome these challenges, the conclusion of this report summarizes considerations for Knight, other funders, and the wider field, including:

— To address challenges related to physical connectivity, invest in design changes that improve access to the site.

— To address challenges around inclusion and trust among communities of color, expand support of local organizations and fund ongoing community participation efforts.

— To proactively manage resident concerns around displacement, tie public space investments to broader community development processes.

— To create sustainable operating models, fund innovative new paradigms that diversify revenue sources.

Overall, to help project leaders think more boldly and address challenges to their work, create opportunities for cross-project knowledge exchange.

For those committed to ensuring public spaces meet resident needs and drive equitable community development, the lessons in this report serve as a guide.

Many thoughtful planners, designers, and community leaders know that more inclusive and responsive approaches are vital. Putting these approaches to work can be more challenging. By revealing successful strategies and tactics, the projects in this report point the way toward more inclusive and adaptive methods in public space planning — in the pandemic and beyond.

What's more, these findings demonstrate how thoughtfully developed public spaces can spark larger community change — by helping residents re-envision and embrace their neighborhoods, building capacity of local organizations, and spurring additional investment in the area. From small neighborhood parks to landmark waterfront sites, public spaces are a strong foundation for more positive and equitable community development.

OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC SPACES STUDIED

The projects studied in this impact assessment ranged widely: neighborhood parks that gave residents a go-to gathering spot; nature spaces that re-engaged their communities with the outdoors; and citywide destinations that offered art studios, beachscapes, and more.

These projects represent diverse public space investments, and were opened between 2018 and 2019. They represent over \$5 million in investment within Knight's broader public space portfolio, which has issued 180 grants in 26 cities since 2015. In addition to their grants

from Knight, the seven projects raised over \$50 million in co-funding and follow-on funding from other sources.

Four of the seven sites — Summit Lake Park, Ella Fitzgerald Park, Centennial Commons, and The Discovery Center — received funding from Reimagining the Civic Commons (RCC). RCC is a funder collaborative comprised of The JPB Foundation, Knight Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, The Rockefeller Foundation, and William Penn Foundation. The Miami Foundation serves as fiscal sponsor. A national initiative piloted in Philadelphia, RCC seeks to bring

people together, by revitalizing and connecting public spaces and countering the economic and social fragmentation that are all too common.

To guide readers, the coming pages include brief overviews of each project.

AKRON, OHIO

Summit Lake Park

From environmental liability to beloved lakeside park. Summit Lake Park provides ample seating and shelter, barbecues, trail connections, and recreational programming on the shores of a lake that was once seen as an environmental hazard.

—
YEAR OPENED / 2018

TYPE / Nature Space

WHAT KNIGHT FUNDED / Inclusive engagement process, capital construction, and programming for the space

Note: This project received RCC funding.



DETROIT, MICHIGAN

Ella Fitzgerald Park

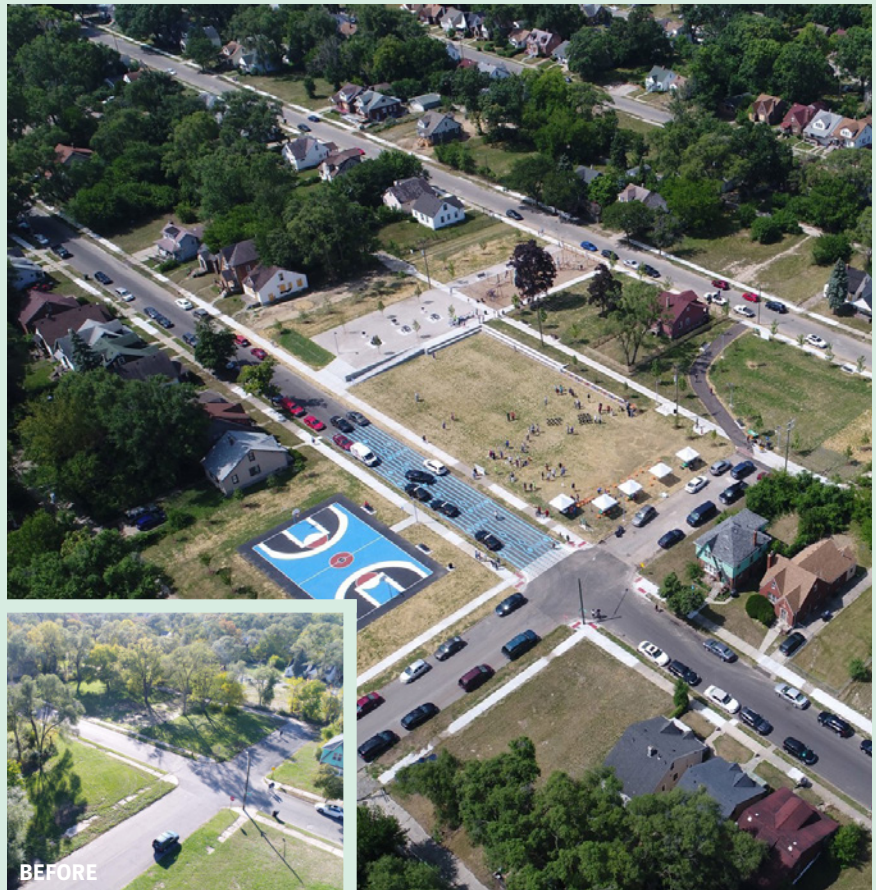
From 26 vacant lots to a neighborhood living room. Ella Fitzgerald Park is the first project in a broader neighborhood planning process. It provides public art, recreational space, and an educational and workforce development program for local youth and transitional workers.

YEAR OPENED / 2018

TYPE / Neighborhood Park

WHAT KNIGHT FUNDED / Development of first public park in Fitzgerald neighborhood, including: capital dollars; funds for ongoing programming through 2022; and a workforce development program that maintains the site and helped prepare it for construction

Note: This project received RCC funding.



PHOTOS: GOOGLE STREET VIEW (BEFORE); COURTESY OF SPACKMAN MOSSOP MICHAELS (AFTER)

DETROIT, MICHIGAN

Detroit Riverfront

From an aging industrial area to a multi-use urban destination. The Riverfront includes the Freight Yard, a stop on the Dequindre Cut greenway that houses a beer and wine garden, and Valade Park, home to a beachscape, floating barge, and two local food businesses.

YEAR OPENED / 2018 (Dequindre Cut Freight Yard); 2019 (Valade Park)

TYPE / Citywide Destination (Riverfront Park)

WHAT KNIGHT FUNDED / Development of Freight Yard — a pop-up market on Dequindre Cut, a former industrial rail line turned pedestrian greenway that connects the Riverfront to Eastern Market; Activation of Valade Park — a strategic location on the Detroit RiverWalk

Note: Knight also invested in the 2004 capital campaign for the wider Riverfront.



PHOTOS: GOOGLE STREET VIEW (BEFORE); FELICIA FULWOOD (AFTER)

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Centennial Commons

From no-man's land to parkside gateway. Centennial Commons bridges the gap between the Parkside neighborhood and adjacent West Fairmount Park, providing an inviting place for everyday activity and community-based programming.

—
YEAR OPENED / 2018

TYPE / Neighborhood Park

WHAT KNIGHT FUNDED / Capital improvements to Centennial Commons and programming support for local organizations (e.g., Centennial Parkside CDC)

Note: This project received RCC funding.



PHOTOS: GOOGLE STREET VIEW (BEFORE); ALBERT YEE (AFTER)

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

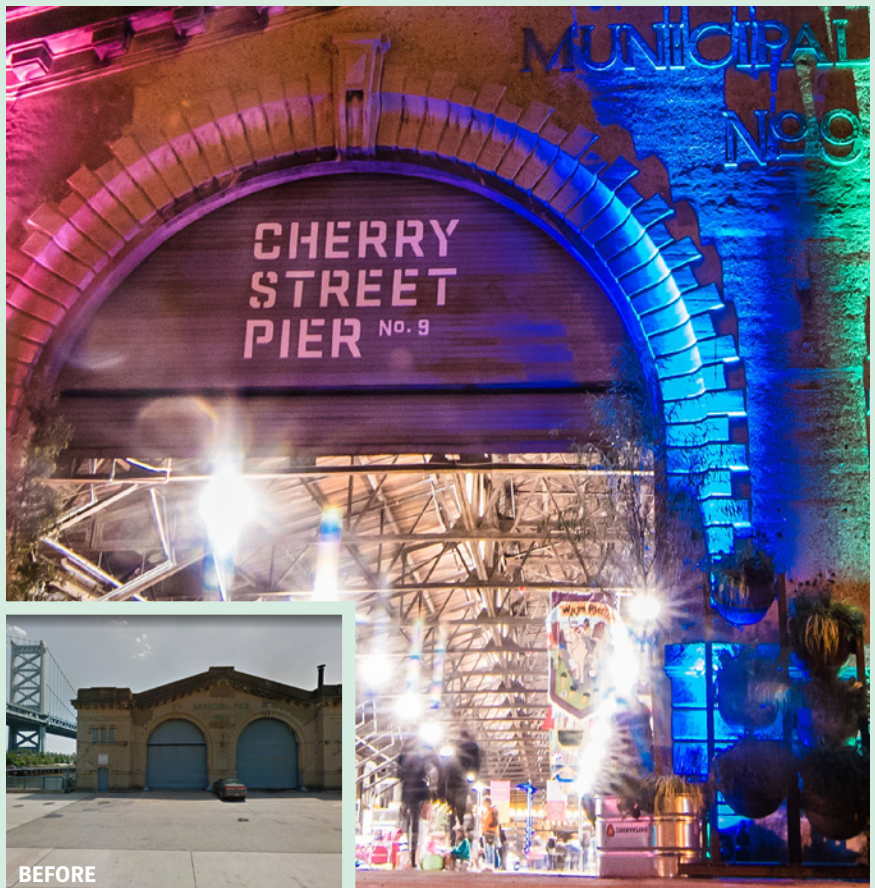
Cherry Street Pier

From vacant pier to buzzing arts haven. Cherry Street Pier houses 14 artist studios, interactive installations, and an outdoor restaurant and bar within a historic pier structure on the Delaware River Waterfront — a unique space for the public to interact with artists and makers.

—
YEAR OPENED / 2018

TYPE / Citywide Destination (Arts Space)

WHAT KNIGHT FUNDED / Development of a public space that connects a growing community of artists, makers, and entrepreneurs by repurposing a historic pier on the Delaware River waterfront



PHOTOS: GOOGLE STREET VIEW (BEFORE); DELAWARE RIVER WATERFRONT CORPORATION (AFTER)

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

The Discovery Center

From fenced-off reservoir to nature oasis. The Discovery Center sits at the edge of a long-shuttered reservoir. Philadelphia Parks and Recreation leases the 57 acres to Philadelphia Outward Bound School and National Audubon Society, who operate outdoor programming.

—
YEAR OPENED / 2018

TYPE / Nature Space

WHAT KNIGHT FUNDED / Design and construction; Resident-driven activation

Note: This project received RCC funding.



PHOTOS: GOOGLE STREET VIEW (BEFORE); HALKIN MASON PHOTOGRAPHY AND DIGSAU (AFTER)

SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

MOMENT

From parking bays to one-of-a-kind downtown retail. Once a parking garage facade, MOMENT is now a creative hub on San Pedro Square. The project provides affordable retail space to local makers, diversifies downtown amenities, and adds to the Square's public life.

—
YEAR OPENED / 2018

TYPE / Citywide Destination (Micro-Retail Space)

WHAT KNIGHT FUNDED / Transformation of a parking garage ground floor into micro-retail units, opposite San Pedro Square market; Follow-on funding also supported construction of the parklet outside the storefronts



PHOTOS: GOOGLE STREET VIEW (BEFORE); SAN JOSE DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION (AFTER)

2020 IN FOCUS

From the COVID-19 pandemic to the racial justice movement, how did public spaces navigate the challenges and dynamics of a year like no other?

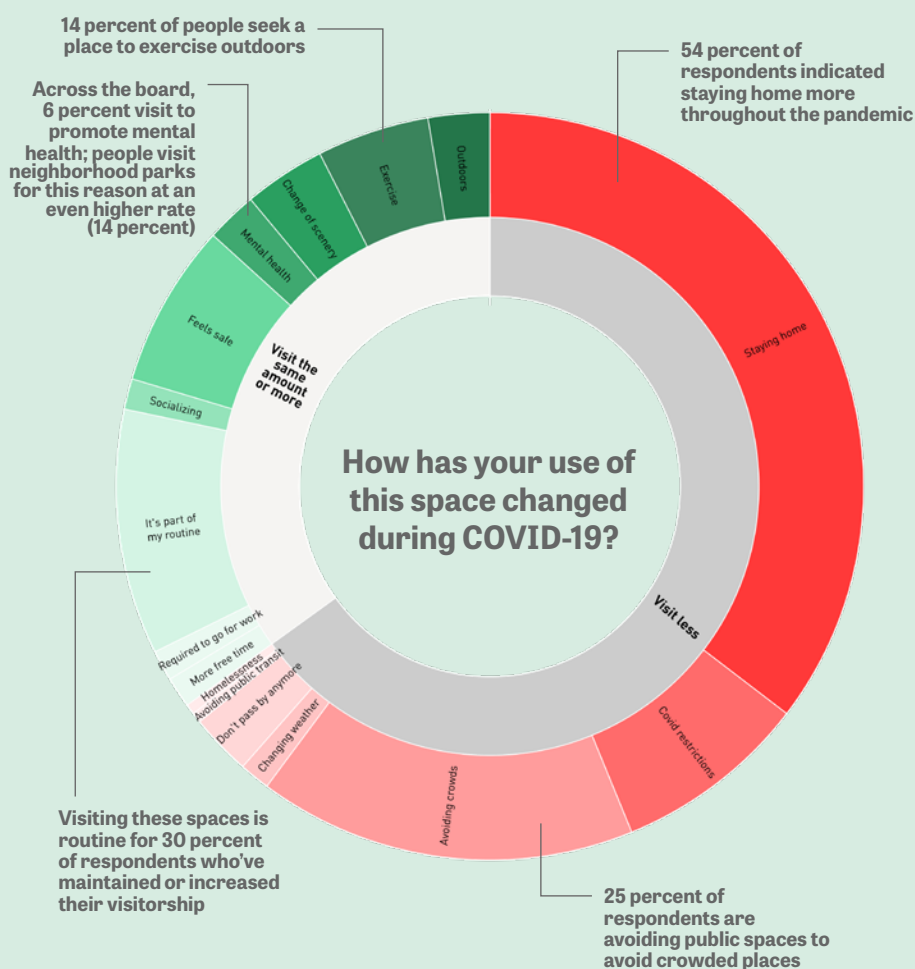
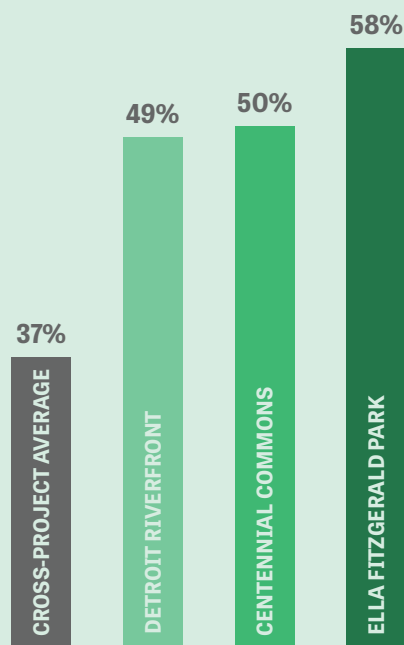


Local spaces are weathering disruptions to public life, as people seek outlets for physical and mental health.

While distancing measures and stay-at-home orders have kept many residents at home, respondents continued to seek out public spaces — whether to maintain a routine, or to sustain their physical or mental health.

Three sites in particular — Ella Fitzgerald Park, Centennial Commons, and Detroit Riverfront — had an above-average share of respondents who reported visiting these spaces more or the same amount. Ella Fitzgerald Park and Centennial Commons represent essential neighborhood spaces, while Detroit Riverfront represents a citywide destination with ample outdoor programming.

Survey Respondents Visiting Public Spaces the Same Amount or More



Why did people say they visit the same or more often?

Nature-centric projects offer visitors the greatest sense of safety in their visits — providing wide open spaces for social distancing outdoors. Neighborhood parks were more embedded in respondents' daily routines. These spaces also help visitors recharge their mental health at higher rates than the other project types.

Why did people say they visit less often?

Fear of crowds dissuades people from visiting citywide destinations, but is a far less significant factor for not visiting nature-based sites. Higher rates of people aren't visiting nature sites because they don't pass by or are avoiding public transit, indicating these sites may be out of the way from locals' routines.



Many destinations have benefited from pandemic-friendly programming and a rise in drop-in visitors.

Average Daily Foot Traffic,
Cherry Street Pier

1,272
visitors

NOV 2019

5,508
visitors

NOV 2020

PHOTO: GEHL

Many project leaders cited observational data that signals progress in making their spaces safe and inviting.

At Cherry Street Pier, project leaders and artists cite the success of new drop-in visitors and the on-site outdoor restaurant and bar. Through a reservation system and temperature checks at the entrance, it has become a safe outdoor destination.

The project saw a more than threefold jump in foot traffic from November 2019 to November 2020 — based on the site's 2019 counts and Gehl observational data.

"During COVID-19, people were stir-crazy," says artist-in-residence Jim Abbott. "Bringing their families down, their dogs, their bikes, exercise classes and coaches. The area is on the map."

This rise in pandemic-era foot traffic — along with the site's maturity and growing public awareness — have paid off for many artists; 33 percent of the latest cohort have been able to pay rent based on their on-site sales, compared to 15 percent in the Pier's first cohort.

MOMENT tenants also saw a rise in drop-ins as they held DIY workshops as part of an open streets program. "Just by having people outside, it got people passing by curious, and brought them into the store," says tenant Alyssarhaye Graciano.

At Detroit Riverfront, 2019 visitorship metrics were matched in half the time. During the 2020 summer months at Detroit Riverfront, this was especially true — more than 200,000 people moved through the Dequindre Cut in August alone. The site's beer and wine garden — about the size of a football field — also became one of the safer spots in the city for people to relax with a drink, seeing an 11 percent increase in daily revenue from the 2019 to 2020 season.

Local food vendors at Valade Park also remained active, and 78 percent of Instagram content tagged at the park documented food or promotions they generated. "Even in the middle of the pandemic when we moved in August, it was one of the busiest times we had," said Gregory "JB" Sims, owner of Smokey G's Smokehouse.

Says Rachel Frierson, Detroit Riverfront Conservancy Director of Programming, "Detroit felt that emotional trauma that New York went through. Through our programming and public spaces, we're trying to focus on how we can be there for people during these times."

PHOTO: DETROIT RIVERFRONT CONSERVANCY



PHOTO: INPIXIO



The Detroit Riverfront's large-scale and flexible Freight Yard (top) and Valade Park businesses (bottom) were especially active during the summer months.



Locals have taken the spaces into their own hands, organizing DIY programming from a safe distance.

Providing a vital form of social infrastructure to the neighborhoods they serve, these spaces offered a canvas for residents to craft their own programming.

"People would come down and see grandparents with their grandchildren, and sit under the shelter and play games or cards," says Summit Lake resident Grace Hudson. "People are still having birthday parties and family gatherings. COVID-19 slowed things down ... but people were still using the space."

At the Detroit Riverfront, this meant the addition of spontaneous, resident-led yoga and flamenco classes.

At Ella Fitzgerald Park, a local hula hoop troupe that meets weekly didn't let the pandemic stop them — thanks to hula hoops' built-in distancing function (right, pictured before the COVID-19 pandemic).



PHOTO: COURTESY OF BERNADETTE KING

Ella Fitzgerald Park's hula hoop troupe continued meeting during the pandemic.



The pandemic has compelled leaders to double down on their mission and continue meeting resident needs.

PHOTO: TASHIA RAYON



Centennial Parkside CDC launched a food share program to tackle area food insecurity.

The extensive engagement processes that shaped these projects continue to serve their communities in the pandemic. In this time of crisis, project leaders have leveraged resident trust to ensure pandemic-era responses address project missions and community needs.

In East Parkside, the location of Centennial Commons, the community has looked to Centennial Parkside CDC as a convener throughout the pandemic, a testament to their rise as a vital community organization. What's more, the CDC has necessarily deprioritized formal programming in the space, as it meets more critical community needs like food and housing security.

Cherry Street Pier also deprioritized large events for health reasons, refocusing on artists' public engagement (such as a Día de Los Muertos mural-painting workshop), and supporting displaced local businesses with vendor spots at its artisan markets.



Project leaders are reckoning with how to make Black visitors feel safe in public space.

In light of protests in support of racial justice and heightened awareness of police violence, projects are working to ensure that Black and Brown residents feel welcome, safe and supported within these public places. Centennial Parkside CDC is thoughtfully engaging on this by leading programming specifically to engage Black men amid unrest over policing: “It’s put a thumb on young people’s safety — particularly Black men.

We want to explore how the space can continue to feel safe for this group in the long term,” says CDC Program Director Tashia Rayon.

The Discovery Center is also exploring how to safely engage Strawberry Mansion’s Black community — in light of increased gun violence and a history of disinvestment. Its 2020 training on gunshot wound first-aid was a start: “We

had an opportunity to host the training and it was a great way to show folks the park,” says Philadelphia Outward Bound School Community Engagement Manager Izzy Nelson. “That it was a place where they could get away from the neighborhood, to come here and reflect ... to find a sense of healing, to clear their minds. That became one of the ways we demonstrated the value of the center for community members.”



Public spaces provided a platform for civic expression in support of the movement for racial justice.

Across the nation, and world, people have taken to the streets in support of the movement for racial justice — and these values show up in public space, which serve as vehicles for political expression.

At the Detroit Riverfront’s Dequindre Cut (right), an analysis of geo-tagged Instagram content showcases how residents express their support of racial justice on the space — through the creation and documentation of public art as well as the shared experiences of Black activists and advocates who spend time there.

At Cherry Street Pier, resident artists used their studio windows as a canvas for making visible their support of racial justice and fellow Black artists. Acori Honzo, artist-in-residence, describes an act of solidarity from a neighboring White artist: “I walked in one day, and there’s a Black Lives Matter sign hanging in Jim’s window. It wasn’t prompted, nobody made him do it. I’m used to walking around and wondering if I’m scary, how I’m being perceived,” he says. “And if I can work in an environment and see that hanging in the window and it’s not the Black shop ... I couldn’t be prouder to work here.”

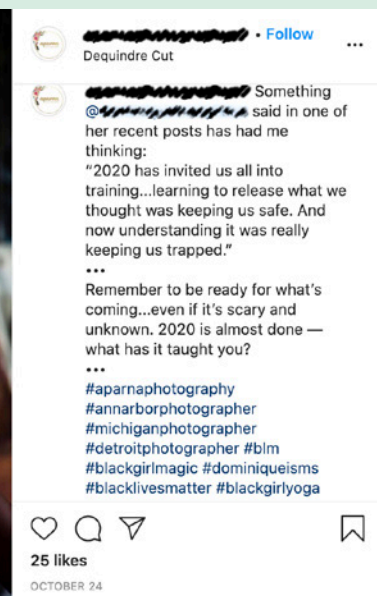
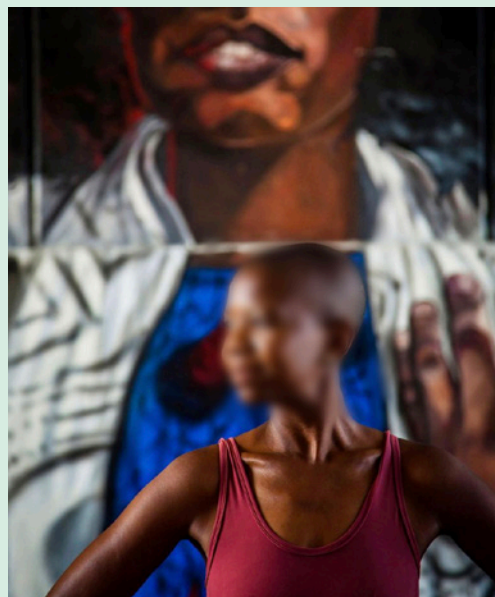


PHOTO: INSTAGRAM; NOTE: FACE HAS BEEN BLURRED OUT FOR PRIVACY

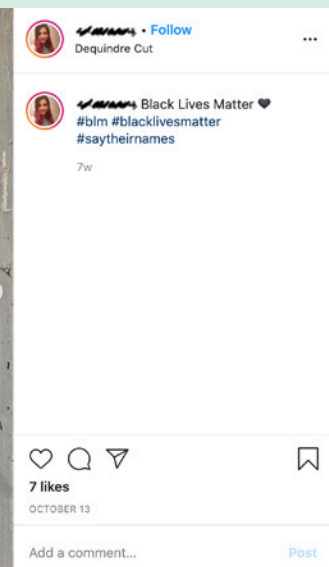


PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

1

Everyday Public Space

How do design and programming shape visitors' use of and engagement with the space?

PHOTO: KNIGHT FOUNDATION





“

**Everyone
deserves a
high-quality
public realm.**

ALEXA BUSH
DESIGN DIRECTOR
CITY OF DETROIT

Projects that supported quality design, resident-centered programming, historic character, and the arts invited regular activity.

What's Working

Projects that made sure quality design resonated with the community saw especially high resident visitorship and enthusiasm.

Projects that committed to locally oriented events and programming attracted residents.

Adapting existing infrastructure — a sustainable approach to construction — drove residents to visit these spaces in ways they would have never done before.

Integrating arts and creativity into design and programming led to more diverse resident engagement and civic expression.

What's Challenging

Projects with barriers to physical connectivity beyond site boundaries faced challenges in promoting access.

Presence of semi-public activity compelled project leaders to explore how they could make their spaces inviting to all.

FINDINGS / EVERYDAY PUBLIC SPACE

What's Working

— Projects that made sure quality design resonated with the community saw especially high resident visitorship and enthusiasm.

Across the board, 81 percent of survey respondents feel positively about these projects — each of which has transformed their contexts and communities in different ways. In the most successful cases, the look, feel, and definition of quality was driven by the local context and community — quality is not a monolith, but looks different from place to place.

At Centennial Commons in Philadelphia, that meant abandoning early ideas for a high-design playspace — instead opting for a functional park that could connect local Parkside residents to West Fairmount Park. Survey results indicate the investments in connectivity helped — 64 percent of respondents found the space “very easy” to access — compared to a cross-project average of 54 percent. The park’s porch swings give a nod to local architecture, and are now a spot for after-school snacks and Bible study alike.

Detroit’s Ella Fitzgerald Park includes mosaic tiles designed by

local artist Hubert Massey and fired at a local ceramics studio. A street-crossing songbook graphic helps calm traffic and serves as a nod to Ella Fitzgerald, the namesake of a one-time neighborhood school. The site also includes draws like a popular basketball court and playspace. Says youth ambassador Chanale Greer, “I’m most proud of the diversity of activity that the park brings. I see people doing so many things that usually you only see downtown.”

Centennial Commons and Ella Fitzgerald Park — multifunctional neighborhood spaces that reflect local character — had the highest rates of regular visitorship among survey respondents, with 54 percent visiting both spaces at least weekly.

The two sites are followed by Akron’s Summit Lake Park, where 42 percent of visitors visit at least weekly — slightly above an average of 37 percent across all projects studied. Locals there take advantage of picnic tables, barbecues, and swings for events from birthday parties to picnics. But it’s also become a place of calm, too: “I can sit on a swing and see the sunset and birds flying across — that’s a vacation view we have now,” says Sandy Saulsberry, a Summit Lake resident.

— Projects that committed to locally oriented events and programming attracted residents.

Project leaders made it clear through locally oriented programming and events that the space was there for residents to embrace.

Both Centennial Commons and Summit Lake Park have hosted events like nutrition and cooking lessons alongside fresh food markets. This type of programming was important to drawing in locals and meeting their needs.

“It’s been a long time since our neighbors have seen consistent activity that is inclusive,” says Tashia Rayon, Centennial Parkside CDC Program Director. “Events like the Healthy Edge Fresh Food Fest open up our public space and allow time for activity, conversation, and most importantly trust-building within the community we serve.” Over 2,500 residents have attended events in Centennial Commons since 2018.

The Discovery Center also evolved its programming beyond traditional birding and outdoor adventures. For example, partners held a workshop on gun violence first-aid for community members, given the challenges of gun violence in the

QUALITY / Projects leveraged quality, locally oriented design to draw everyday activity.

PHOTO: DETROIT RIVERFRONT CONSERVANCY



Riverfront's Valade Park offers an urban beachscape.



Summit Lake's barbecues, tables, and seating invite people to the shore.

PHOTO: KNIGHT FOUNDATION

PHOTO: BREE GANT



Ella Fitzgerald Park's basketball court is a popular local draw.



Cherry Street Pier's informal artist studios draw in passersby.

PHOTO: CHERRY STREET PIER

PHOTO: GENSLER



MOMENT's active facade brings people to the other side of San Jose's San Pedro Square.



Centennial Commons' porch swings echo the area's historic architecture.

PHOTO: GEHL

Strawberry Mansion neighborhood. Other community-responsive events have included line dancing, mommy-and-me workshops, and nature walks for local Black men.

Some events draw big crowds; a 2018 event focused on "Inclusion, Equity & Environmental Gentrification" drew over 300 people. More everyday events, like Discovery Days — an outdoors day — draw about 50 visitors.

According to Izzy Nelson, POBS Community Engagement Manager and a longtime resident of the neighborhood, "The more we were consistent in taking folks' ideas ... That was what built the trust and the foundation to then have people engaged and visiting."

—
Adapting existing infrastructure — a sustainable approach to construction — drove residents to

visit these spaces in new ways.

At Detroit Riverfront, a one-time industrial area, "people didn't think anyone would come down there," says Rachel Frierson, Director of Programming at the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy. "We were fighting the perception of the Riverfront being a place for people."

Now the Riverfront is a popular

regional destination. Indeed, in September, a peak month, the Riverfront's Valade Park saw an average of 10,164 people per day, and its Dequindre Cut saw an average of 3,000 people visiting per day, according to on-site sensor data.

The reimagined site now draws people from within and beyond the city who might otherwise head to state parks outside city limits for a dose of nature. Indeed, along with Philadelphia's Cherry Street Pier, it attracts more regional visitors than any other project studied, according to survey data and analysis of social media content at the site. "People are now seeing the Riverfront as a nature space within the city," says Elena Newnell, a volunteer.

Cherry Street Pier also saw a transformation in how residents engaged with the Delaware River waterfront, a once-neglected

area. "I've seen a huge evolution of people who walk toward the river. Nobody lived down here and nobody came down," says Jim Abbott, artist-in-residence.

MOMENT, too, invites visitors to San Pedro Square to engage with the space in new ways. By activating what was once a parking garage facade that interrupted street life, MOMENT adds to area vibrancy — with retail amenities and public parklet seating for passersby and shoppers.

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Integrating arts and creativity into design and programming led to more diverse resident engagement and civic expression.

MOMENT is helping imbue creativity into the downtown area — such as through tenant-led DIY workshops, some of which have continued in the pandemic as part of an open streets program.

"Downtown San Jose is not known for anything other than going to bars, a Sharks game, or work," says Angie Chua, a former MOMENT tenant. "I held a workshop every other week and brought other makers in ... including in the evening, just as a way to activate the space and bring new people in."

Observational data also shows that MOMENT invites a more diverse visitorship than the rest of San Pedro Square — attracting more seniors and children, and a more even split between male and female visitors.

Cherry Street Pier — an arts-focused project on Philadelphia's Delaware River Waterfront — didn't look to a high-design museum for inspiration. Project leaders knew the space had to feel different from a typical museum or gallery in order to attract the wider public. Retaining the unvarnished look of the historic pier and installing artist studios in shipping containers helped ground the space and drive engagement. "Fine art spaces push people away," says artist-in-residence Sharif Pendleton. "The space here is not super polished, so people are more willing to get engaged."

This approachability shows up online. The project had the most active Instagram usership, with posts highlighting art, architecture, and interactive events. Murals at Detroit Riverfront's Dequindre Cut were also a place for artistic self-expression online. The art was among the most popular content in the site's Instagram activity — with many highlighting the movement for racial justice.

PHOTO: PORTSIDE ARTS CENTER



Cherry Street Pier hosts events like this Día de Los Muertos mural-making session.

CONNECTIVITY / Sites faced barriers to visitor access beyond their boundaries.

PHOTO: GEHL



Cherry Street Pier is separated from Old City by a major roadway; connections include an unwieldy pedestrian overpass.



Centennial Commons' bike share and street crossings are a first step in improving connectivity to Fairmount Park.

PHOTOS: GEHL



PHOTO: GEHL



The area around The Discovery Center could benefit from improved walkability to the site.



Located below grade, Dequindre Cut's Freight Yard faces visibility issues that have deterred some pop-ups from posting up at the site.

PHOTO: DETROIT RIVERFRONT CONSERVANCY

What's Challenging

— Projects with barriers to physical connectivity beyond site boundaries faced challenges in promoting access.

Projects varied in their level of connectivity beyond site boundaries — hampered by basic walkability issues, unfavorable positioning, and unwieldy infrastructure barriers. Many of these challenges were out of project leaders' control and site purview, but represented challenges to access nonetheless.

Some projects face connectivity challenges inherent to their physical positioning. The Freight Yard at the Detroit Riverfront sits below-grade, for example, giving it a hidden gem quality. This dynamic

deterred pop-ups and food trucks from posting up at the spaces, and often leaves visitors asking for more wayfinding, according to volunteers.

The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy has responded through programming to introduce more Detroiters to its spaces, and upcoming investments to address connectivity challenges. The Dequindre Cut will eventually integrate into a 26-mile trail under development by the City, which will improve access and visibility to multiple neighborhoods.

The Discovery Center is a serene retreat at the edge of a one-time reservoir, but slightly uphill from the core of its Strawberry Mansion neighborhood. For locals, the space can feel tucked away. "If you're thinking about the community, you want to make sure

the community can get there," says Tonnetta Graham, President of Strawberry Mansion CDC, a local community organization.

Moving forward, The Discovery Center is exploring how to better connect to the surrounding neighborhood — through physical interventions like improved walking trails and signage, as well as programmatic interventions like neighborhood block parties and street-corner birdhouses that invite locals to visit the space.

At Cherry Street Pier, decades-old infrastructure inhibits walkable access. The site is separated from Philadelphia's Old City by a major roadway, making the Pier feel more like a destination than an everyday amenity that can be easily accessed. "Like many cities we foolishly built an 8 to 12-lane highway cutting off our hub of

commerce and connection,” says Patrick Morgan, the city’s First Deputy Commissioner of Parks & Recreation. To overcome these challenges, The Delaware River Waterfront Conservancy is now developing a \$20 million multi-modal trail to connect its sites, and transit wayfinding to connect the Pier to the Old City.

Centennial Commons confronted connectivity issues early on, by investing in traffic calming measures and pedestrian connectivity with the adjacent Parkside neighborhood; the project also secured an Indego bike station on-site. Survey results indicate the investments are improving perceived access — 64 percent of Centennial Commons respondents found the space “very easy” to access — compared to a cross-project average of 54 percent. Local leaders are continuing to invest in connectivity, through an emerging mobility study and planning process for the area.

Presence of semi-public activity compelled project leaders to explore how they could make their spaces inviting to all.

Detroit Riverfront, Cherry Street Pier, and MOMENT each balanced commercial activities with the need to ensure their spaces were inviting to all.

For example, Cherry Street Pier — while not a space dominated by private activity — is partly covered, is open during select hours, and includes a popular garden restaurant, which may signal it is private. Observational data indicate the potential impact of these factors on the site’s visitorship. For example, in the 6pm hour, Cherry Street Pier experienced just two thirds of the foot traffic of

its neighboring Race Street Pier — an open-air park. Project leaders’ efforts to invite in more users through enhanced walkability, wayfinding, and programming may help capture some of the activity on adjacent Race Street Pier — a space that could seem more public to passersby.

For Detroit Riverfront, business owners are also working to make clear their spaces are publicly accessible. According to Gregory “JB” Sims, owner of Smokey G’s Smokehouse in Valade Park, “I have a lot of people who pass by and say, ‘I thought you guys were cooking for a private event.’ Some people just didn’t know we were open to the public,” Sims says. He’s exploring signage and other tactics to invite the public into his Riverfront business.

San Jose’s MOMENT is a micro-retail concept and located in a downtown commercial district, which impacts the diversity of activities that can take place there. Indeed, only 18 percent of seating on adjacent San Pedro Square is public, and two of the top three activities observed in the area focused on commercial uses. Even still, MOMENT operators like SJ Made and its tenants are working to expand the invitations available to San Pedro Square beyond shopping and dining. As the project has evolved, it has diversified activity to include more public programming — such as tenant-led DIY workshops as part of a COVID-19 open streets initiative.

Quality matters — in design and materials, it shows commitment and makes a space more inviting, comfortable, and interesting.

Consistent programming that meets local needs helps draw people into a place.

Arts and creativity can make public space a platform for creativity and expression.

Transforming underutilized spaces inspires locals to rediscover what's nearby.

Attention to physical connectivity makes for more lively, inclusive public spaces.

Semi-public and commercial activities add vitality, but can deter from inclusiveness without thoughtful outreach.

Consider ...

Raising the bar for public space design and ensuring the design reflects community needs and identity, rather than imposing a design aesthetic

Taking the time to understand how community members want to use and activate a space

Integrating locally relevant artistic features and arts programming into the life of the space

Looking to neglected spaces and buildings as potential public space sites

Funding a wayfinding and connectivity strategy early on, as part of the design process

Balancing revenue-generating activities with creating an environment that is clearly open to non-paying visitors

2

Residents at the Center

How does the space reflect,
welcome, and empower those
who live in the community?

PHOTO: ALEXA BUSH



“

**It's made
me so much
prouder to
live here.**

GRACE HUDSON
RESIDENT
SUMMIT LAKE

Community participation allowed project organizers to build trust with residents, which in turn increased use and sense of attachment to the spaces.

What's Working

Projects that used piloting and other responsive engagement methods experienced particularly high regularity in resident visits, enthusiasm, and attachment to place.

Projects that adopted community-based governance structures built resident trust and drove visits.

What's Challenging

Projects continued to face barriers to attracting and building attachment among communities of color — especially Black respondents — due to legacies of disinvestment and distrust.

Citywide destinations faced challenges in building local resident awareness — perhaps due to the outreach challenges that come with their broader reach.

FINDINGS / RESIDENTS AT THE CENTER

What's Working

Projects that used piloting and other responsive engagement methods experienced particularly high regularity in resident visits, enthusiasm, and attachment to place.

Many project leaders conducted pilots during their design process — a step that demonstrated commitment to the project, helped overcome longtime distrust, and led to greater use of the spaces.

At Summit Lake Park — which used

prototypes and pilot programming to engage residents during the design process — pilots included a nature center as well as food nutrition programming, a service that benefited community members in material ways. “When we talk about participation and engagement in this project, we met basic needs along the way,” says Demetrius Lambert-Falconer, Chief of Community Engagement for Summit Metro Parks.

After the project, 97 percent of respondents to a 2018 survey felt the project had changed their neighborhood for the better, up from 57 percent at the outset of

the project. What's more, the space had the most diverse Instagram usership of sites studied.

Testing out configurations and programming on site allowed residents to see their input being integrated in near-real time. “We saw the manifestation of this conversation bloom into actual fruits of the conversation,” says Summit Lake resident Grace Hudson. “We saw things starting to happen.”

Ella Fitzgerald Park and Centennial Commons, which adopted similar approaches, also saw the greatest levels of regular visitorship, enthusiasm, and attachment among respondents to the survey for this impact assessment. For example, when asked if they could live anywhere they wanted, 70 percent of Centennial Commons respondents would choose to stay in their neighborhood, followed by 60 percent of Ella Fitzgerald respondents — the highest rates of all projects.

Ella Fitzgerald Park's pilots helped project leaders reach audiences that typically didn't show up at community meetings. For the Fitzgerald neighborhood, that meant exercises like a pop-up bike repair station that drew in local youth. “So many kids came out of the woodwork for this,” says Alexa

PHOTO: ALEXA BUSH



Regular pop-ups near the future Ella Fitzgerald Park helped leaders reach more residents.



PHOTO: KNIGHT FOUNDATION

Pilot events at Summit Lake Park met local needs by pairing a fresh food market with cooking lessons; the market continues today.

Bush, Design Director with the City of Detroit. “No one had said this was a need at a meeting but clearly we saw there was a huge demand for bikes for kids in this neighborhood.”

For Bush, prototyping demonstrated the City's commitment to the process after decades of stagnation: “It was our way of putting our stake in the sand. It changed how people saw what we were doing.”

Now that the park has opened, people have embraced it: 96 percent of survey respondents feel positively about the park — including 100 percent of Black respondents, who reported feeling “strongly positive.” What's more, 89 percent of respondents in the Fitzgerald neighborhood indicated they feel the neighborhood has changed for the better since the project opened, up from a baseline of 34 percent.

Reflects Detroit's Chief Parks Planner Meagan Elliott, “The Ella Fitzgerald Park and neighborhood planning process ... has been critical to that trust re-building and making sure we're never showing up unless we're able to follow through.”

—
Projects that adopted community-based governance structures built resident trust and drove visits.

Community participation helps drive engagement well beyond the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, for example, has a Community Advisory Team (CAT) that helps inform programming and improvements to the site. “I credit the Conservancy for giving us more voice than I expected,” says CAT member Bob Hoey.

Visitors are now accustomed to

seeing ongoing changes to the Riverfront, guided by sensor data and the Conservancy's ongoing engagement with visitors. “People watch design change all the time,” says Rachel Frierson, Director of Programming for the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy. “People constantly ask us to help and add things. They feel like they actually have some say in designing these spaces.”

At The Discovery Center in Philadelphia, community representation shows up in clear roles: a third of the board is allocated to community member seats; a 15-member community engagement committee helps gauge local needs; and Philadelphia Outward Bound School (POBS) and Audubon have dedicated staff to shape and launch community-centric programming.

These positions and processes help invite in more residents from



PHOTO: ALBERT YEE

The Discovery Center's locally-oriented programming is helping overcome distrust and drive more resident engagement with the space.

the local Strawberry Mansion area. "It's important for community members to see the committee members and chairperson are in place," says Izzy Nelson, POBS Community Engagement Manager. "That I can be the middle person really helped."

Guided by this outreach, the Center's extensive youth programming has made it popular among local youth — 40 percent of the Center's daily visitors are 24 or younger, according to survey results. "It's a more unified front when we have young people speaking up," says Nelson.

According to Meg Wise, Executive Director of POBS, Knight Foundation funding catalyzed these shifts toward community representation: "If the Knight grant hadn't come and forced the perspective on what a public space is and what it needs to do, the project would have continued

down the path of being a private space. It would have been a disaster."

What's Challenging

— Projects continued to face barriers to attracting and building attachment among communities of color — especially Black respondents — due to legacies of disinvestment and distrust.

For many projects, building trust among communities of color remains a challenge. After longtime disinvestment, many residents don't always positively view engagement with local governments and institutions.

At the outset of the process, some project leaders felt that more coordination would have helped project leadership understand legacies of disinvestment and interaction with communities.

"There needed to be more time built in for the organizations to understand their histories here, and to unpack their barriers to collaboration — to deal with that before bringing in the community," says Demetrius Lambert-Falconer, Chief of Community Engagement for Summit Metro Parks.

But building trust takes more than a responsive and coordinated engagement process. "As much community engagement as you have, you can't erase history," says Bronlynn Thurman, Program Officer at Akron's GAR Foundation. "There is a history of White people coming into a neighborhood and changing it — and not for the better. ... Building trust through community participation is a good step, but I think that the fear is always going to be there."

This was especially true at nature spaces, for example, where 45 percent of Black respondents

agreed the space was “special to me,” compared to 56 percent of all respondents. By contrast, neighborhood parks like Ella Fitzgerald Park and Centennial Commons had especially favorable feedback from Black survey respondents — who were more likely to “strongly agree” that a space was special to them.

“[Local Black residents] don’t always feel encouraged because they don’t feel outdoor spaces or environmental work have always been for them,” says Izzy Nelson, POBS Community Engagement Manager at The Discovery Center. Over time, community-centered programming is starting to draw in more locals to the project; events include mommy-and-me workshops and a talk on

environmental racism.

As The Discovery Center team tackles historic barriers to access in environmental work, Cherry Street Pier is also tackling historic barriers to access in arts and culture. “People of color are not sufficiently represented at Cherry Street Pier, but that is true for all arts and culture institutions in Philadelphia,” says Almaz Crowe, the site’s Director of Communications and Marketing.

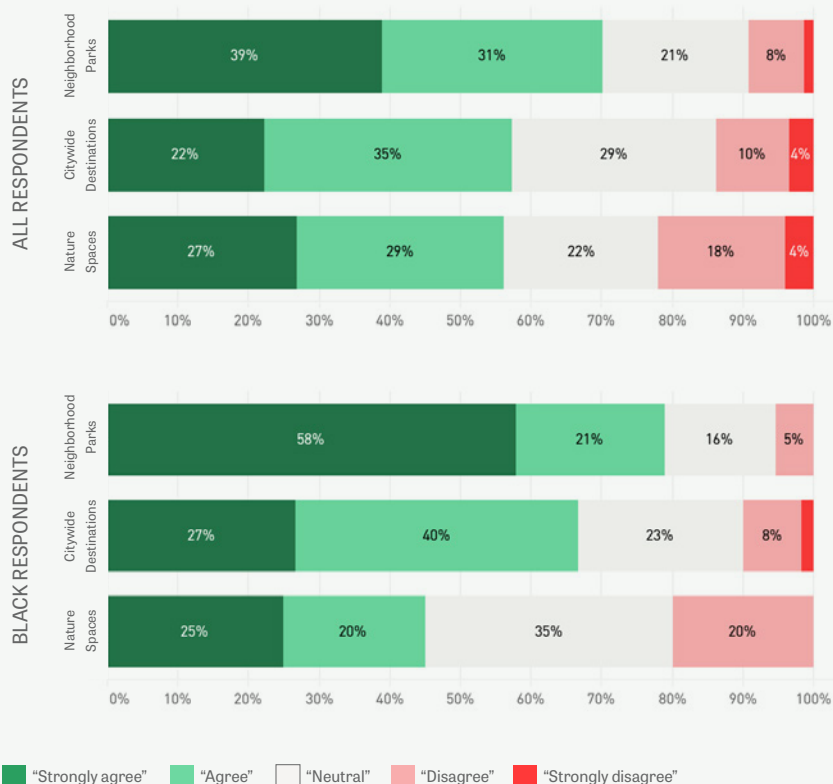
To draw in communities of color, Cherry Street Pier ensures diversity in its artists-in-residence, programming partners, market businesses, and food vendors. The project is also seeking to improve outreach to communities of color, and to improve physical

connectivity within the waterfront area and to the wider city through wayfinding on public transit.

While these sites work through these challenges, some are starting to see signs of bridging across racial lines. Acori Honzo, artist-in-residence at Cherry Street Pier, has seen his studio become a platform for building awareness. “I had a view of this White-dominated art world that wouldn’t get Black art ... [because of Cherry Street Pier,] all of a sudden there’s a White lady sitting on my couch and she’s starting to ask me about my pieces and say, ‘We need this, because a lot of us don’t know.’”

Summit Lake resident Sandy Saulsberry has seen this dialogue at work, too, as events and trail

SURVEY / While most respondents agree neighborhood spaces “are special to me,” challenges remain in building attachment among Black residents at nature spaces.



Neighborhood parks have the most enthusiasm from respondents — with 70 percent indicating they “strongly agree” or “agree” that the space is “special to me.”

At nature-related projects, Black respondents indicate ambivalence toward the projects at higher rates On the other hand, at neighborhood parks and citywide destinations, Black respondents were more likely to “strongly agree” that the space was special to them.

connections draw in more people from beyond the neighborhood. “There are people who have never had a conversation with a Black woman in their community that are stopping to talk with me and finding out ‘wow, we have a lot in common,’” she says.

Citywide destinations faced challenges in building local resident awareness — perhaps due to the outreach challenges that come with their broader reach.

Respondents for citywide draws (such as Cherry Street Pier, Detroit Riverfront, and MOMENT) were more likely to say they didn't visit these spaces because they didn't know what they could do there, or because they didn't know about the place to begin with.

For example, the most common reason that citywide destination respondents cited for not visiting the space was “I'm not sure what to do at this place” (42 percent, compared to 28 percent for nature spaces, and 24 percent for neighborhood parks). Citywide destination respondents were also more likely to cite “I haven't heard of it” as a reason for not visiting (18 percent, compared to 8 percent for neighborhood parks, and 6 percent for nature spaces).

According to Sandi McIntosh — a lifelong Detroit resident and relatively new Riverfront volunteer — “Only a year or so ago did I find out what was going on at the Riverfront and Downtown. ... Downtowners know what's happening, but it's the neighborhoods that need exposure.”

Responding directly to local needs can help overcome longtime distrust, and lead to higher rates of resident visits and stewardship.

To ensure continued use, locals should be empowered to shape a public space well after the ribbon cutting.

Successful engagement requires advance coordination, commitment, and accountability from the agencies leading the process.

A single engagement process or public space will not erase enduring legacies of racism toward communities of color.

Citywide destinations face challenges engaging all neighborhoods they reach.

Consider ...

Using pilots as a way to demonstrate commitment to the project, reach a wider audience, and gain rapid community feedback

Building in governance for consistent participation in the space after opening, rather than making community input a one-time event

Aligning on past work, capacity, and goals of each organization before showing up to the community with a request for input

Pairing public space and engagement with long-term policy and planning to dismantle racist systems

Engaging underrepresented neighborhoods through outreach or local pop-ups

3

Community Ripple Effect

What broader impacts is the space having on the community, city, and beyond?

A green-tinted photograph of a park. In the foreground, there is a body of water with several small, dark figures of people swimming or wading. The middle ground is filled with a dense line of trees. In the background, a city skyline is visible, featuring several tall buildings, including a prominent one with a pointed top. The entire image has a monochromatic green color scheme.

THE DISCOVERY CENTER / PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

“

**[The grant] was
the seed money
to get [the
project] off the
ground.**

CHUCK HAMMERS
FORMER HEAD
PROPERTY-BASED IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT
DOWNTOWN SAN JOSE

Investments catalyzed funding for innovative ideas, and led to local capacity-building and community development.

What's Working

Initial investments helped catalyze co-funding and follow-on funding necessary to activate and sustain these projects.

Public space investments catalyzed larger community development efforts by shifting perceptions and symbolizing positive change was possible in these areas.

Funding local organizations built local community development capacity, ensuring resident-centered programming and development.

Workforce development programs sustained site maintenance and led to job pathways for local residents.

Youth programs fostered local stewardship — and built community pride.

Dedicated studios and storefronts catalyzed small business growth.

Public space planning processes and convenings inspired local leaders to take on more innovative, resident-centric, and collaborative approaches to their work.

What's Challenging

Some projects are still working to scale beyond proof-of-concept, due to larger barriers to adoption.

Investments in public spaces that were not paired with proactive policy, or planning generated fear of displacement among some residents.

FINDINGS / COMMUNITY RIPPLE EFFECT

What's Working

—
Initial investments helped catalyze co-funding and follow-on funding necessary to activate and sustain these projects.

Grantees valued Knight funding for its commitment to catalyzing early-stage concepts and attracting co- and follow-on funders. Funding commitments from Knight and other funders helped many of these projects absorb risk, and build the buy-in and legitimacy needed to secure other funding sources.

Knight was an early investor in the Detroit Riverfront, donating \$1.5 million to the project's 2004 capital campaign. More recently, Knight and the Kresge Foundation each invested up to \$150,000 in Detroit Riverfront's Freight Yard. For the Riverfront's Valade Park, Knight's \$225,700 investment in 2017 came with over \$900,000 in co-funding from other sources. In addition, in 2018, the Valade Family made a generous donation of \$5 million, which supported construction and operations at the park.

MOMENT's 2015 Knight Cities Challenge grant of \$139,000 funded a first-of-its kind retail concept and led to over \$600,000 in funding over the next four years. "It was the seed money to

get [the project] off the ground," says Chuck Hammers, former head of the local Property-Based Improvement District in San Jose.

At Centennial Commons, Knight's \$1 million capital investment through Reimagining the Civic Commons led to over \$1.5 million in funding from the Philadelphia Water Department — for installation and ongoing maintenance of an on-site rain garden. More recently, the project received over \$500,000 in follow-on funding for a second phase of work at the site, and for an employee to lead programming in West Fairmount Park.

What's more, grantees valued Knight's flexibility and collaborative approach to grantmaking, especially when Knight funded early-stage concepts. "We never felt like we couldn't walk up to them and be honest about what's happening on the ground," says Rachel Frierson of the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy.

—
Public space investments catalyzed larger community development efforts by shifting perceptions and symbolizing positive change was possible in these areas.

Each project's impact has extended beyond site boundaries.

Ella Fitzgerald Park has become the first investment in a \$13 million neighborhood improvement plan — which includes a greenway, a commercial corridor revitalization, and homeownership pathways: "There are so many structural problems this neighborhood faces that the perception shifts caused by Ella Fitzgerald Park are helping with," says Alexa Bush, Design Director at the City of Detroit.

Summit Lake Park has experienced a similar dynamic. Says James Hardy, Akron's Deputy Mayor for Integrated Development: "It's not just about high-quality public space," he says. "It's that the public space becomes a platform for all these other conversations around equity, community and economic development, and housing." Building on the momentum of the Summit Lake investment, a \$15.5 million vision plan is now underway in the area.

The Discovery Center is also exploring how it can integrate with community development efforts. Under Strawberry Mansion CDC leadership, local community groups are exploring proactive measures — from stabilizing housing for longtime residents to envisioning a corridor that knits together The Discovery Center with other civic assets.

Centennial Commons has also built momentum for new collaborations. For example, the Fairmount Park Conservancy and Centennial Parkside CDC are exploring an area mobility study, and deeper collaborations with community groups and Fairmount Park cultural institutions to drive resident-centered development.

Together, these cases demonstrate how public spaces can catalyze neighborhood change, and play a role in wider community development efforts.

Funding local organizations built local community development capacity, ensuring resident-centered programming and development.

Funding for Centennial Commons and The Discovery Center helped elevate the profile of each area's community development corporations. "Strawberry Mansion CDC and Centennial Parkside CDC either didn't exist or were very much in their infancy when [Reimagining the Civic Commons] started, and have almost been meteoric in their rise," says Patrick Morgan, First Deputy Commissioner of Parks & Recreation for the City of Philadelphia.

For example, Centennial Parkside CDC has: become a go-to leader in programming Centennial Commons with local partners, developed a sustainable maintenance model for the space, and hired a program director and a director of sanitation and environmental programming.

Investments in capacity-building lay the groundwork for community transformation. "It's very much



Centennial Parkside CDC has become a neighborhood convener since its founding.

about investing in people and process — which is a challenge because you can't cut a ribbon on it. It's messy, it's complicated," says Morgan. "But in the long run, if we're serious about this work being transformational, it's the work that needs to happen."

Workforce development programs sustained site maintenance and led to job pathways for local residents.

Both Centennial Commons and Ella Fitzgerald Park embedded workforce development into their operational models.

Ella Fitzgerald Park partnered with Greening of Detroit, a local organization that hires workers with barriers to employment, whether criminal records or lack of transportation. Greening of Detroit has provided career pathways to 20 Fitzgerald neighborhood residents to date.

With a 90 percent job placement rate, Greening of Detroit far outperforms the 35 percent national average placement rate for green jobs. Through its

success in Ella Fitzgerald Park, the program's approach has become a "template for how we increase workforce participation across all our parks projects," says Meagan Elliott, Detroit's Chief Parks Planner.

At Centennial Commons, Centennial Parkside CDC runs a workforce development program to maintain the site. Since 2018, the organization's Clean and Green Team has been contracted by the Philadelphia Water Department to maintain rain gardens on site — employing five residents and picking up 21,510 gallons of trash from the area to date.

The program has led to additional contracts with the Philadelphia Commerce Department and the Philadelphia Zoo to clean other parts of the neighborhood. This success has also enabled Centennial Parkside CDC to hire a director of sanitation and environmental programming, who will be increasing their capacity, growing cleaning services, connecting the program to other workforce development opportunities, and creating



PHOTO: OHIO & ERIE CANALWAY COALITION

Summit Lake Park's youth ambassador program helps maintain the space and will continue for a second summer in 2021.

programs around litter prevention.

— Youth programs fostered local stewardship — and built community pride.

Many projects have also created opportunities for youth engagement and empowerment.

In summer 2020, Summit Lake piloted a youth ambassador program for planting and landscaping, securing commitments from the whole cohort to continue upkeep efforts in summer 2021.

Ella Fitzgerald Park also has a youth ambassadors program with Greening of Detroit. The program helps high school students secure scholarships to study forestry at historically Black colleges, provides internships, and ultimately leads to

permanent job placement.

“The youth ambassadors program lit a fire in Chanale,” says Devon Buskin, Greening of Detroit Workforce Director, of one ambassador. “She went on to advocate for coursework on community engagement in her school,” he says, adding that other alumni moved on to undergraduate and master's programs in forestry.

To their peers, ambassadors often serve as role models for community participation. “The youth ambassadors are the cool kids in the neighborhood,” Buskin says. “If the cool kids are setting the tone that this is the thing to do, then others follow. The impact is there. It's authentic.”

Bringing young people into the process and giving them responsibility as changemakers

is critical to driving generational impact. For example, Philadelphia Outward Bound School has employed a young woman from the community, Izzy Nelson, to serve as a community engagement manager for The Discovery Center. Her work engaging her peers and neighbors may be paying off: for example, whereas 100 percent of survey respondents aged 18 to 24 felt that The Discovery Center is essential to their neighborhood, just 71 percent of respondents over 54 felt this way.

For some, the impact on youth is more spontaneous. At Cherry Street Pier, for example, artist-in-residence Keni Thomas (Thomcat23) speaks of art's power to inspire young people: “I've had mothers come in with their kid and say, 'This is what your drawing can be,’” he says. “If you have a little kid who looks like you and you can

show them your process, they can feel like Superman.”

Dedicated studios and storefronts catalyzed small business growth.

Small business development is fundamental to the mission of both Cherry Street Pier and MOMENT — supporting artists and entrepreneurs by boosting exposure and minimizing their operational headaches.

MOMENT has provided a platform for local entrepreneurs — all tenants have been minority- or women-owned businesses, with all 10 run by women, and eight by women of color. They benefit from San Pedro Square foot traffic and a growing local following. “My reach has doubled in just a few weeks — that is something I’d have to pay for,” says tenant Alyssarhaye Graciano.

The platform helps them clarify their goals — whether they evolve to a larger brick-and-mortar presence, an online shop, or another model. “I was able to really understand what a scaleable business looks like,” says Angie Chua, a former MOMENT tenant. “If not I would be over a sewing machine, working harder not smarter. This was a catalyst on where I want this business to go.”

Cherry Street Pier artist-in-residence Sharif Pendleton agrees, noting how important it is to offload operations and public relations to the Cherry Street Pier team: “The more hats you can put in other places, the better,” he says. Other artists spoke of how the Cherry Street Pier model — built on collaboration and engagement with the public — gave them more room to exchange ideas, evolve their craft, and focus on the business side.

What’s more, the pandemic seems to have stimulated rather than stymied business growth for Cherry Street Pier artists, thanks to increased foot traffic from drop-in visitors and attractions like the outdoor restaurant and bar. Instagram content reflects this increased exposure. For example, 36 percent of sample posts in October shared art-centric content, three times the share of posts (12 percent) that documented social activity or landscape views from within the garden restaurant.

As visibility has grown and the Pier has refined its approach to selecting and supporting artists, so have artist sales. A third of the latest cohort have been able to pay rent based on their on-site sales, compared to 15 percent in the Pier’s first cohort.

Public space planning processes and convenings inspired local leaders to take on more innovative, resident-centric, and collaborative approaches to their work.

Beyond their communities, these projects also reshaped business as usual in city government and in public space planning. “[Ella Fitzgerald Park] was the most functional interdepartmental process I’ve been a part of for the last six years. It set a new standard for how we collaborate internally,” says Meagan Elliott, Detroit’s Chief Parks Planner.

Beyond the scope of Centennial Commons and The Discovery Center, the work of Centennial Parkside CDC and Strawberry Mansion CDC are starting to inspire a shift in the City of Philadelphia’s approach to community engagement. “We’re trying to change the way we do business and engage with

PHOTO: SAN JOSE DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION



Tenants make MOMENT storefronts their own, drawing in visitors from San Pedro Square.

residents at scale, which is very much informed by the lessons learned from these organizations,” says Patrick Morgan, First Deputy Commissioner of Parks & Recreation for Philadelphia.

Inspired by Cherry Street Pier, Philadelphia’s Parks & Recreation department is also exploring a social entrepreneur-in-residence model for its vast network of community and recreation centers.

For Akron’s Bronlynn Thurman, this mindset shift speaks to the less quantifiable impact of philanthropy — its power to convene. “Even more valuable than the money we give out is making those connections and helping grantees think farther or wider than a certain approach,” she says. “When developing communities, money is important but it isn’t everything.”

Indeed, many project leaders were able to build a knowledge base through learning across cities, in both structured and unstructured formats. “How do you quantify a cocktail hour in Chicago where you learn and are inspired by a lot of brilliant people?” says Jennifer Mahar, Senior Director of Civic Initiatives at Philadelphia’s Fairmount Park Conservancy. “Those inspirations influence your work months and years down the road. You can’t put a price on connections.”

What’s Challenging

—
Some projects are still working to scale beyond proof-of-concept, due to larger barriers to adoption.

MOMENT demonstrates how micro-retail can transform the amenity mix in a downtown to activate an area and support

minority- and women-owned businesses. Project leaders also developed a unique operating model — working across city government, the local downtown association, and curator SJ Made to bring the project to life.

The model of retrofitting a space not originally designed for retail is still gaining traction. “It’s a big undertaking for businesses to take on themselves vs. a curator or mediator [like SJ Made] to take it on. Local small businesses don’t have the same AAA rating,” says Kevin Biggers, SJ Made’s Chief Strategist. “I know that there’s not a significant incentive for developers, either. They have to build these retail spaces per policy, but there’s no incentive for them to build them outside of the big box model. Nor is there a real incentive to retrofit the spaces.”

The pandemic’s disruptive impact on retail may be shifting perceptions of the model’s viability. San Jose Downtown Association has seen rising interest from local property owners to adopt micro-retail in several area storefronts. As the pandemic further disrupts retail and drives residents to live more locally, micro-retail may be gaining momentum as a path to improving public life and supporting local entrepreneurs.

—
Investments in public spaces that were not paired with proactive engagement, policy, or planning generated fear of displacement among some residents.

Some residents view new public spaces with caution. “Strawberry Mansion is a heavily gentrified area. So when The Discovery Center came in, the space itself wasn’t problematic, but it symbolized something,” says

Izzy Nelson, POBS Community Engagement Manager. Ongoing engagement efforts are helping residents see the space is theirs to use. What’s more, the development process connected local community groups with funders — laying the groundwork for anti-displacement initiatives like a pilot program for local home repair. “Through The Discovery Center process, those connections remain,” says Tonnetta Graham, President of Strawberry Mansion CDC.

Summit Lake Park has led to a range of community investments, such as a \$15.5 million vision plan that is now underway in the area. The influx of funding has led to some displacement concerns. “Whether we like it or not, change is coming,” says resident Grace Hudson. “My main concern is that in the process the people that are here don’t get displaced.”

Such anti-displacement measures may include property tax freezes or homeownership pathways. “We need to sit down and set an agenda for getting ahead of displacement,” says Bronlynn Thurman, Program Officer at GAR Foundation. “The right players are there. We just need to empower neighborhood leaders and be honest with each other about the risks of displacement.” Adds James Hardy, Akron’s Deputy Mayor for Integrated Development “It’s going to take proactive policy intervention.”

Funding organizations that represent and are trusted by residents ensures spaces will be trusted and used by the community.

Public spaces can serve as a highly effective venue for local workforce and youth development.

Entrepreneurs and small businesses benefit from the exposure they gain in public spaces.

Innovative public space models take time to gain traction in the wider market.

Public space development must be paired with larger planning and policy efforts, in order to breed more equitable and holistic community development.

Consider ...

Identifying and funding the local organizations that can serve as community champions and co-operators of a space

Creating workforce and youth development programs that give opportunities for local residents and transitional workers

Exploring how public spaces can accommodate artists, creatives, and entrepreneurs at more affordable rates than market-rate storefronts — and engaging them in the design process

Building in funding opportunities to scale beyond an initial proof-of-concept site, to amplify the innovative concept

Taking proactive measures to tie public space design to larger community development efforts that prevent displacement (e.g., wealth-building)

4

Sustaining in the Long Run

How does the project sustain
operationally and financially
over time?

CHERRY STREET PIER / PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA



“

**We have our
own little
army of
volunteers.**

RACHEL FRIERSON
DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMING
DETROIT RIVERFRONT CONSERVANCY

Local stewardship, responsive processes, and trusted operators helped sites develop sustainable operating models and adapt to changing conditions.

What’s Working

Sites that invested in resident-centered engagement early on fostered stewardship and reduced maintenance costs.

Responsiveness to community input, observations, and sensor data helped operational teams adapt to changing conditions.

Trusted operators relieved mission-driven studios and storefronts of traditional operational challenges.

What’s Challenging

Some sites balanced the realities of needing revenue to be sustainable with the need to preserve their mission.

Complex local funding dynamics have compelled some projects to explore more sustainable revenue from methods like value capture.

FINDINGS / SUSTAINING IN THE LONG RUN

What's Working

—
Sites that invested in resident-centered engagement early on fostered stewardship and reduced maintenance costs.

For many sites, cultivating stewardship has helped them maintain and operate sites, despite public sector budget constraints — in some cases, exacerbated by COVID-19.

Ella Fitzgerald Park embedded co-creation and stewardship into the design process as a way of

ensuring long-term maintenance.

Reflects Alexa Bush, Design Director for the City of Detroit, “The city was on the mend from bankruptcy, so we created a culture of people using the park as a way to keep eyes on the park and keep it alive because the city doesn’t do a lot otherwise. We realized that the park needs to sustain its own life.”

This resident-centered stewardship approach is working. A 2018 survey of park users found 62 percent of respondents reported participating in stewardship or advocacy related to

the neighborhood.

The Detroit Riverfront also relies on a robust volunteer base for maintenance and wayfinding. In 2019, 385 volunteers contributed 8,100 hours: “We have our own little army of volunteers,” says Rachel Frierson of the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy.

At Centennial Commons, there’s value in bringing on residents to lead maintenance (whether through volunteership or local workforce development programs). “When residents see their neighbors working to keep the area clean, it creates a sense of ownership and generally draws less litter and vandalism,” says Centennial Parkside CDC Executive Director Chris Spahr. “It also builds a sense of pride in the space as a community-maintained space.”

—
Responsiveness to community input, observations, and sensor data helped operational teams adapt to changing conditions.

Many projects have adapted their approach to design, operations, and programming based on their on-the-ground experiences.

The Detroit Riverfront has developed a knack for adapting based on learnings on the ground.

PHOTO: DETROIT RIVERFRONT CONSERVANCY



Riverfront volunteers lead programming, attend cleanups, and offer wayfinding assistance.



PHOTO: MCM HOSPITALITY

Cherry Street Pier's garden restaurant has become a reliable revenue source that helps the project ensure affordable rates for artists.

Operational improvements are in part guided by the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy's extensive network of sensors on-site — developed in partnership with the University of Michigan and with Knight Foundation funding. This helps the Conservancy uncover patterns in people moving, spending time in, and more recently, wearing masks, in the space.

For Cherry Street Pier, the pandemic actually presented an opportunity to re-focus after a high-octane period of working around the clock and on the fly to accommodate event rentals and other programming. “We’d been realizing we have to do less better rather than just trying to do everything,” says General Manager Sarah Eberle. “The pandemic was a nice chance to step back and look at what was important.”

Now, the team is especially focused on supporting artists, building relationships with repeat partners in programming, and securing sustainable revenue sources from venues like its outdoor restaurant and bar.

—
Trusted operators relieved mission-driven studios and storefronts of traditional operational challenges.

At MOMENT and Cherry Street Pier, trusted operators with experience in creative retail and the arts have helped shepherd tenants through their residencies.

MOMENT's curator, SJ Made — a collective of San Jose makers and entrepreneurs — has been involved since the beginning of the project design process. With tenants in mind, it helped shape a design and

operating model that eases their experience. “Any struggles that we had putting this space together would have been times ten in a real retail space,” says MOMENT tenant Au Nguyen. Adds Kevin Biggers, Chief Strategist of SJ Made, the space's operator and curator: “Day-to-day operations aren't too onerous ... other types of pop-ups required a lot more daily upkeep. What's interesting about these spaces is that the tenants, they take over and run with it.”

Local entrepreneurs and creatives see this value, drawn to the affordability, size of the spaces, and the exposure they get on lively San Pedro Square. SJ Made currently has a waitlist of almost 100 people looking to secure one of the four storefronts.

Cherry Street Pier's management team helps market and position

artist studios on site. Over time, Pier management has learned how to better support artists — such as by meeting with artists regularly to connect them with commissioning, programming, and marketing opportunities. They have also refined their approach to curating each cohort — selecting artists-in-residence who can thrive on the public engagement opportunities available at the Pier. These lessons learned have helped the Pier to better fulfill its mission of elevating local artists that engage the public with the arts.

What's Challenging

— Some sites balanced the realities of needing revenue to be sustainable with the need to preserve their mission.

Both Cherry Street Pier and the Detroit Riverfront — citywide destinations with complex operating models — are working to stay nimble as they seek long-term sustainability.

Cherry Street Pier is committed to ensuring affordability for its artist tenants: “We try to operate everything at a lower than market rate, which is so great for the community and not so great for the operating budget,” says General Manager Sarah Eberle. “But it’s a choice we’re making, a conscious choice.”

Even still, lease revenue from its outdoor restaurant and bar has been a financial boon, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic as visitors have flocked to socialize outdoors there: “It’s helping support artists, the restaurant is supporting us financially, and in better times that could be the key to us sustaining,” says Eberle. Indeed, additional revenue sources

and funding may help alleviate burdens on tenants and ensure their longer-term operational and financial sustainability.

At its Freight Yard site, the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy tempered its ambitions to incubate small businesses with the need for financial and operational longevity. “Because it was below grade, we didn’t count how difficult it would be for vendors to thrive in the space,” says Rachel Frierson, Director of Programming.

After facing permitting, coordination, and visibility challenges, the site now houses a successful beer and wine garden, rather than an array of pop-up shops. “The idea of Freight Yard was to stop and pause and enjoy these open spaces on the Dequindre Cut. That evolution of the project is 100 percent there ... but for spurring business, that’s not a huge aim of what we’re doing right now,” says Frierson.

— Complex local funding dynamics have compelled some projects to explore more sustainable revenue from methods like value capture.

Public spaces pool funding from a complex network of philanthropy, individual donors, and tight public budgets. Some projects are working to diversify beyond these sources so they are better positioned for long-term sustainability.

Methods like value capture interest both Cherry Street Pier and the Riverfront as a way to diversify funding and benefit financially from nearby development, but they are not in place just yet.

The Riverfront attempted to secure a cut of revenue from

a nearby apartment complex under construction, and is now building partnerships with a local real estate developer and business improvement district. For long-term sustainability, such revenue sources will be especially important for the Riverfront, a \$200 million project that has a \$2 million annual operating budget. The efforts to gain income from value capture could help the project boost sustainability — diversifying its funding beyond philanthropic sources, limited public funding, and its endowment.

Delaware River Waterfront Corporation (DRWC), which owns Cherry Street Pier, is turning to development of properties it owns while it looks toward a waterfront-wide value capture agreement. “We’re developing them in such a way that we can have a reliable source of income and rent,” says Lizzie Woods, DRWC Vice President of Planning and Capital Programs.

Building community support for projects increases sense of stewardship over time.

Consider ...

Building a sense of ownership over the project through consistent and responsive engagement

Volunteer networks can help offset operational costs. They succeed when they have a say in the direction of the space.

Deploying volunteers for maintenance, wayfinding, or events, and integrating their insights into operations

Trusted operators and curators set up public spaces and tenants for success.

Enlisting seasoned curators to help design and operate mission-driven storefronts / studios

Public spaces require a complex network of funding for long-term sustainability.

Supporting operators in securing consistent revenue streams (e.g., value capture, commercial leases)

Project goals sometimes need to change based on lessons from the ground.

Staying true to the project's mission, but flexible on operations based on data and experiences from the ground

Conclusion

Considerations for public space
funders, practitioners, and city and
community leaders

CONCLUSION

Expanding the scope of funding beyond shovels in the ground laid the groundwork for public spaces that reflect local communities and respond to changing conditions. Many projects' ability to adapt and continue attracting visitors during the pandemic cemented this strong foundation.

Despite this, projects face challenges. Challenges most often are related to: planning around site-specific barriers to access; addressing perceptual issues around inclusion and trust in communities of color; ensuring projects lead to equitable community development; and creating sustainable operating models that balance revenue generation with a consistent focus on mission.

To build on successes and overcome challenges, Knight, other funders, and the broader field can consider action in five areas:

—
To address challenges related to physical connectivity, invest in design changes that improve access to the site.

While one public space alone cannot overcome barriers like highways or hills, projects can

design around these constraints. More proactive wayfinding or walkability planning would have helped Cherry Street Pier and the Detroit Riverfront improve resident access. Centennial Commons, by contrast, incorporated traffic calming into the project to invite residents to the site. Survey results indicate the investments are improving perceived access: 64 percent of Centennial Commons respondents found the space “very easy” to access, compared to a cross-project average of 54 percent. To address connectivity, funders might earmark a portion of their investments for mobility improvements, and project leaders might integrate mobility improvements into project planning from the start.

—
To address challenges around inclusion and trust among communities of color, expand support of local organizations and fund ongoing community participation efforts.

In many disinvested communities of color, investing in and building the capacity of community organizations — not just the spaces themselves — elevates trusted local leaders who can serve as champions of the project. One community leader spoke of the importance of this approach: when

local organizations shepherd the public space and signal to residents that it is theirs to use and embrace.

Inclusive engagement methods that fostered participation during the design process were also crucial to building this resident attachment among communities of color. Projects that adopted pilot processes, for example, used quick-to-install projects to respond to resident feedback and reflect their desires and concerns in something visible and tangible. Community participation can and should continue after the ribbon cutting, too; projects that had community governance structures, such as The Discovery Center and Detroit Riverfront, fostered consistent resident input over time, which contributed to program development that reflected specific activities local residents were interested in.

Expanded funding and support for community organization staff, for relatively quick and low-cost pilots, and for ongoing community representation can model more inclusive public space design and management.

—
To proactively manage resident concerns around displacement, tie public space investments to

broader community development processes.

New public spaces can be an inspiring first step toward inclusive development, but they can also generate fear of displacement among long-time residents or communities of color.

Projects like Ella Fitzgerald Park communicated investments were for local residents by framing them as the first step in a broader set of resident-centered improvements — such as homeownership pathways and a commercial corridor revitalization. Projects like The Discovery Center, on the other hand, surprised some residents who were less concerned with birding habitats than they were with issues like housing security.

From project outset, leaders can work to identify where there is opportunity to integrate site-specific work with broader community-based planning efforts or concerns — and seek funding opportunities accordingly.

—
To create sustainable operating models, fund innovative new paradigms that diversify revenue sources.

For large-scale projects catalyzing nearby real estate development,

like Cherry Street Pier and Detroit Riverfront, value capture was an enticing but elusive source of new revenue. As project leaders look to adopt such models, funders might play both a convening and a funding role — bringing stakeholders together to explore how public spaces can generate sustainable revenue (e.g., by gaining income from nearby development through value capture).

Both MOMENT and Cherry Street Pier also represent innovative new models for supporting creatives in public spaces. In both cases, interviewees were interested in scaling the model. Funders might consider investments to help scale second iterations of successful projects in other locations — in partnership with the project leaders who were successful in the first site.

—
Overall, to help project leaders think more boldly and address challenges to their work, create opportunities for cross-project knowledge exchange.

Despite differences in their projects, each grantee shared how valuable it was to discuss common challenges and generate new ideas with other public space leaders. Many of the grantees lead projects

that have no precedents. Through its role as convener, philanthropy can facilitate cross-community knowledge sharing. This process can help project leaders trade ideas, develop tactics to overcome common challenges, and build lasting relationships that serve them well after the design process.

These recommendations are a start, and more detailed considerations for design strategies, community relations, and evidence-based planning are provided on the following pages.

Closing

As Gehl and Knight Foundation take stock of the lessons from this impact assessment, they acknowledge there is much transformative work already underway in public spaces and communities — of which these projects are just a sample. For those committed to ensuring public spaces meet resident needs and drive equitable community development, the lessons in this report serve as a guide.

Many thoughtful planners, designers, and community leaders know that more inclusive and responsive approaches are vital. Putting these approaches to work can be more challenging. By revealing successful strategies

These lessons emphasize the importance of engaging, reflecting, and empowering communities throughout the lifecycle of a public space — from design to programming to operations.

and tactics, the projects in this report point the way toward more inclusive and adaptive methods in public space planning — in the pandemic and beyond.

What's more, these findings demonstrate how thoughtfully-developed public spaces can spark larger community change — by helping residents re-envision and embrace their neighborhoods, building capacity of local organizations, and spurring additional investment in the area. From small neighborhood parks to landmark waterfront sites, public spaces are a strong foundation for more positive and equitable community development.



Read on for more considerations for shaping transformative public spaces

Considerations for more transformative public spaces

What follows are actions funders and practitioners may take to build on the lessons learned in this impact assessment. They focus on three areas:



Design Strategies / Developing high-quality public spaces that meet local needs

Earmark funds for pilots and prototyping, which help projects gain real-time design and programming feedback, reach more audiences, and demonstrate commitment to the process.

Incorporate physical connectivity improvements and engagement of mobility experts to ensure access between site and neighborhood.

Ensure sites are strategically located — such as those that can drive community development, have high connectivity potential, are located in long-disinvested areas, or have historical local significance.

Use high-quality, locally resonant design and materials to demonstrate commitment to the community and reflect what people care about.

Organize convenings and knowledge sharing opportunities within and across communities, to spark new concepts and ideas, and to help teams experience and see new ways of working or designing.



Community Relations / Driving collaboration, trust, and attachment over time

Ensure the project is part of — or can drive — a broader community planning process. Take the time to understand what other efforts are underway in the community, and how the public space can catalyze, complement, and coincide.

Support and elevate community champions (e.g., CDCs, respected residents) who have the best pulse on local needs to set the public space agenda.

Stay collaborative and adaptive. Work with grantees to scope projects that are clear on mission, but flexible in tactics and timing.

Use the project to support collaborative working relationships. By engaging a cross-section of city and state departments, community organizations, and funders, projects can set a new bar for collaborative public space design.

Create governance structures to ensure ongoing local representation and outreach after completion (e.g., board seats, community outreach committees).

Support workforce development programs that can manage maintenance of the space by hiring local transitional workers.



Evidence-Based Planning / Informing ongoing learning in public space

Make evidence-based storytelling part of the project from the get-go, by creating evaluation plans that define measures of success — so grantees can more consistently monitor and share progress, and so funders can understand how impacts relate across the portfolio.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to data collection. Rather than a standard set of metrics, let project goals, desired outcomes, and grantee capacity determine data collection methods and define metrics for success.

Identify metrics that are consistently insightful across projects. Gehl found certain metrics were particularly important to gauging impact: frequency of visits, average hourly visitors, perceived access, sociodemographics of visitors, and perception (sentiment and attachment).

Add human stories to quantitative metrics, using interviews and focus groups to gain a fuller picture of impact beyond quantitative dashboards.

Experiment with new methods / tools, such as: (1) social media analysis to understand digital footprint and use, and (2) research services to understand who hasn't been to the space and why (not just active visitors). These services can add a more objective perspective, as grantee surveys often are administered by project practitioners, which can add bias.

Use broader datasets like the census selectively — to inform public space context and long-term neighborhood trends, rather than as a standalone measure to assess public space impact.

Work with existing datasets — even if they're a patchwork. Leverage sources like grantee-generated programming summaries and sensor data to triangulate different forms of impact at the sites.

Appendix 1

Overview of methodology

Methods reviewed include:

- Interviews & Focus Groups
- Observational Analysis
- Online Survey
- Social Media Analysis

Interviews & Focus Groups

Gehl interviewed 53 people involved in all projects to understand project conditions and perceptions aligned to the focus areas of this impact assessment. Interviews and focus groups lasted 30 to 90 minutes each, with some requiring follow-up conversations, and some covering multiple projects. The list of people interviewed for each project is below.

AKRON / Summit Lake

Interviews

- James Hardy, Deputy Mayor of Integrated Development, City of Akron
- Grace Hudson, Resident
- Demetrius Lambert-Falconer, Chief of Community Engagement, Summit Metro Parks
- Dan Rice, President & Chief Executive Officer, Ohio & Erie Canalway Coalition
- Sandy Saulsberry, Resident
- Bronlynn Thurman, Program Officer, GAR Foundation

DETROIT / Ella Fitzgerald Park

Interviews

- Meagan Elliott, Chief Parks Planner, City of Detroit
- Alexa Bush, Urban Design Director - East Region, City of Detroit
- Devon Buskin, Workforce Development Director, Greening of Detroit
- Chanale Greer, Youth Ambassador

DETROIT / Riverfront

Interviews

- Rachel Frierson, Director of Programming, Detroit Riverfront Conservancy
- Gregory "JB" Sims, Owner, Smokey G's Smokehouse
- Meagan Elliott, Chief Parks Planner, City of Detroit

Volunteer / Community Advisory Team Focus Group

- William Bilalkowski
- Zenola Brandon
- Deborah Hardison-Hill
- Bob Hoey
- Sandi McIntosh
- Janlynn Miller
- Elena Newnell
- Leslie Tom
- Ann Usitalo

PHILADELPHIA / Centennial Commons

Interviews

- Jennifer Mahar, Senior Director of Civic Initiatives, Fairmount Park Conservancy
- Patrick Morgan, First Deputy Commissioner of Parks & Recreation, Strategy and Engagement, City of Philadelphia
- Tashia Rayon, Program Manager, Centennial Parkside CDC
- Chris Spahr, Executive Director, Centennial Parkside CDC

PHILADELPHIA / Cherry Street Pier

Interviews

- Marcus Bush, Site Manager of Cherry Street Pier, DRWC
- Almaz Crowe, Director of Communications and Marketing, DRWC
- Sarah Eberle, General Manager of Cherry Street Pier, DRWC
- Joe Forkin, President, Delaware River Waterfront Corporation (DRWC)
- Emma Fried-Cassorla, Creative Director, DRWC
- Dave Moore, Director of Parks and Attractions, DRWC
- Patrick Morgan, First Deputy Commissioner of Parks & Recreation, Strategy and Engagement, City of Philadelphia
- Lizzie Woods, Executive Vice President of Development and Capital Projects, DRWC
- Lavelle Young, Vice President of Operations, DRWC

Artist Focus Group

- Jim Abbott
- Acori Honzo
- Kathleen Nace
- Sharif Pendleton
- Athena Scott
- Thomcat23 (Keni Thomas)

PHILADELPHIA / The Discovery Center

Interviews

- Tonneta Graham, Executive Director, Strawberry Mansion CDC
- Patrick Morgan, First Deputy Commissioner of Parks & Recreation, Strategy and Engagement, City of Philadelphia
- Izzy Nelson, Community Engagement Manager, Philadelphia Outward Bound School
- Meg Wise, Executive Director, Philadelphia Outward Bound School

SAN JOSE / MOMENT

Interviews

- Kevin Biggers, Chief Strategist, SJ Made
- Chuck Hammers, Former President of the Downtown San Jose Property-Based Improvement District
- Scott Knies, Executive Director, San Jose Downtown Association
- Nate LeBlanc, Business Development Manager, San Jose Downtown Association
- Marie Millares, Street Life Manager, San Jose Downtown Association
- Jim Ortbal, Deputy City Manager, City of San Jose
- Nathan Ulsh, Director of Policy and Operations, San Jose Downtown Association
- Blage Zelalich, Downtown Manager, City of San Jose

Tenant Focus Group

- Angie Chua, Founder and Creative Director at Bobo Design Studio
- Alyssarhaye Graciano, Founder, Designer and Knitter at BlackSheepMade
- Au Nguyen, Owner, Au La La Design

Social Media Analysis

This analysis provides a snapshot into each project studied — a glimpse into a sample of visitors at a specific moment in time. In doing so, rather than providing a holistic overview of visitorship, we're able to highlight a sample of user perspectives and their experiences and perceptions of each place.

Instagram was selected as the data source for social media analysis because of its variety in content, growth in usership, and mobile-first platform.

The platform's rich set of user-generated content includes: a text-based component; a visual, photography-based component that provides insight into preferences and experiences; and a geographic tagging component. Research suggests that this variety

differentiates Instagram from other social networks like Twitter, lending a richer and often more nuanced form of data than a tweet.

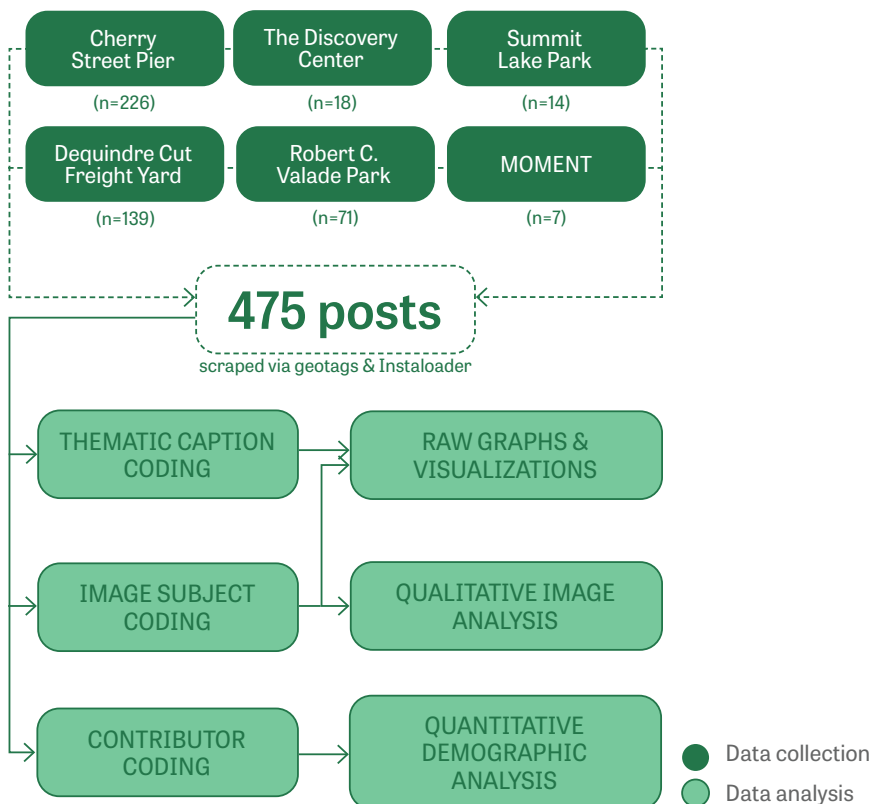
What's more, Instagram provides a large user base. It is the second-most popular social network (behind Facebook, which has stringent data access restrictions in place and thus was excluded from this study) and also the fastest growing in terms of usership.

Lastly, mobile-first content allows researchers to access data that archives users' daily events, where they document their own personal experiences, trips, and lifestyles on the go.

This snapshot contains some limitations:

- **Demographic Bias:** There are demographic trends in social media and Instagram-specific usership that have inherent bias. Social media is more widely used by women and Instagram usership skews towards a younger demographic (ages 18-49). It is also more widely used by urban residents.
- **Limits on Post Archives:** Instagram limits how many posts can be collected, which limits our ability to view data from months past. For this reason, we were only able to collect data from November and October 2020 for the most highly engaged geotags, where data is reflective of usership during the COVID-19 pandemic. For geotags with lower rates of engagement, data was collected from as far back as summer 2019.
- **Varying Number of Posts by Site:** Some projects have more Instagram engagement than others — resulting in variation across the size of each project's scraped data set. Additionally, not all projects in this study had actively-engaged or formally designated Instagram geotags. Due to this, Centennial Commons and Ella Fitzgerald Park were omitted from this analysis.
- **Inconsistent Geotagging:** We used the project's geotag location to collect data specific to each site. This means we were only able to capture data that users tagged at each project. Any posts shared at the project locations but not tagged were thus not captured.

METHODOLOGY DIAGRAM



Online Survey

Design and Distribution

Gehl distributed an online survey to understand visitorship, perception, and attachment for each project. The survey was distributed using Pollfish, an online market-research service. This service uses an “organic sampling method,” which allowed Gehl to target respondents within a predefined 1- to 5-mile geographic radius of each project site. Based on their geographic location, a random set of respondents received an invitation to participate via their mobile device. From there, invited participants could opt to respond to the survey with a chance to win a monetary incentive. The survey ran for six weeks, engaging over 800 unique respondents.

Discussion

Unlike other methods of survey distribution, Pollfish's service ensured the survey was randomly distributed to each project's local population. This form of sampling made sure the respondent pool was not biased toward an over-representation of active users and already engaged with the projects. Further, administering the survey in this way responded to grantee concerns about over-engaging their stakeholders in a way that could be perceived as a burden. Given the context of the ongoing pandemic, this research method also allowed for extensive survey distribution without requiring respondents to physically interface with the research team.

Limitations

- The survey distribution method required participants have a smartphone both for outreach

and for recording/collecting their survey responses — this skews the resulting data toward those with access to certain technologies, given the “digital divide” experienced in some marginalized groups.

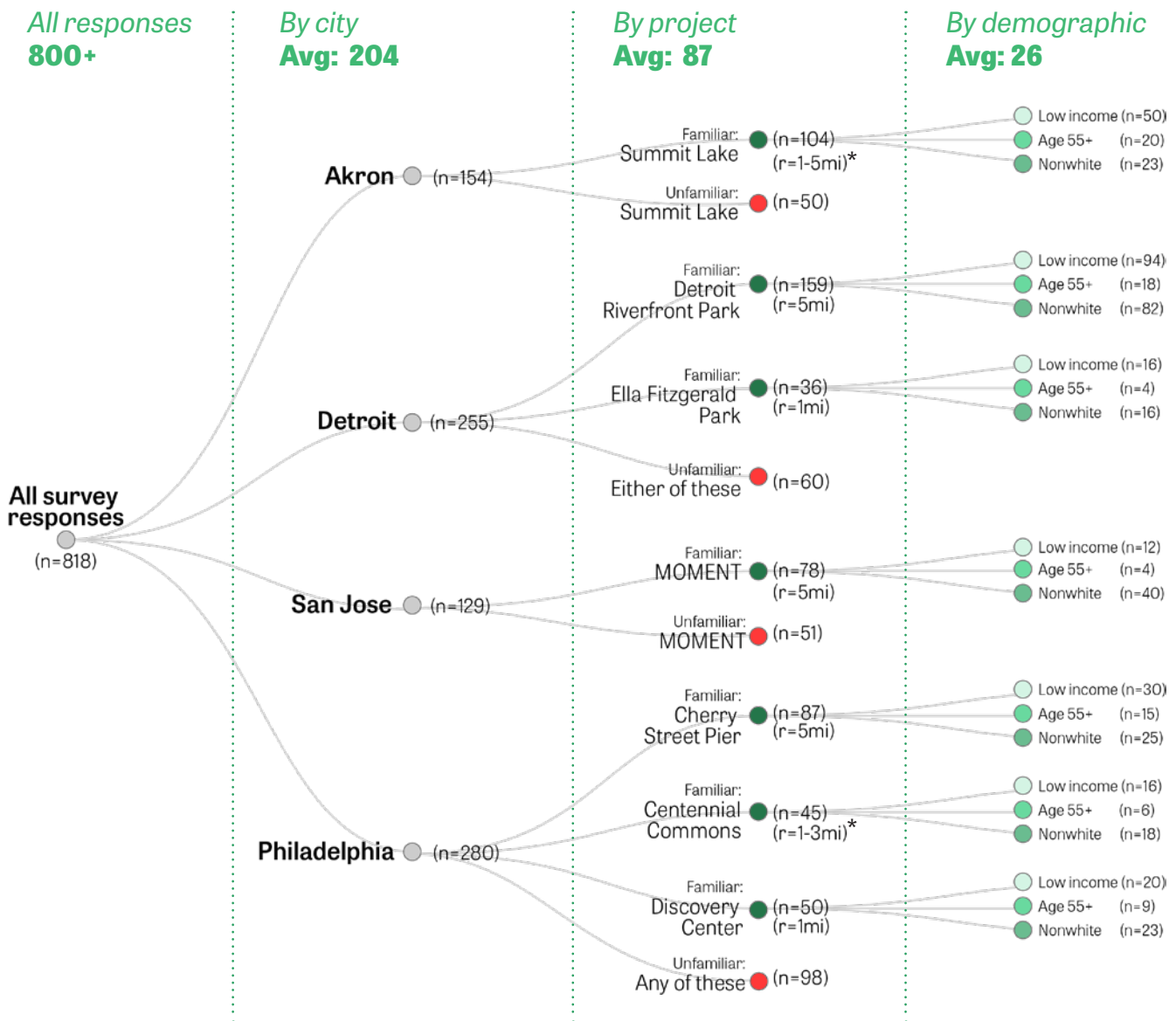
- Using the geolocation of prospective respondents, while helpful for getting place-based insight at a very granular level, also means that some respondents who participated in the survey could have been just passing through the area, rather than a local resident.
- Some projects observed higher rates of participation than others. Given the specific radii for targeting survey participants, projects in lower-density residential environments saw less traffic. In an attempt to reach a stable sample size across all projects, the radii for these lower engagement projects was slightly expanded during the survey period. While this expansion helped collect responses, it also skews the sample pool to a larger group of people who may be less aware of the project.
- Some of the distinct projects highlighted in this report are in the same city (in Detroit and Philadelphia). In these cities, respondents may have been targeted for a given project (geographically close to them) but were more familiar with another project in a different part of the city.
- Many of the projects studied are known by multiple names. This may have confused survey respondents when they were asked to identify which project

they were most familiar with, potentially leading some respondents to indicate they were unfamiliar with a project they actually were familiar with. Gehl listed projects with as much context as possible (e.g., “MOMENT micro-retail shops on San Pedro Square”)

The diagram at right breaks down the survey samples into groups as they were analyzed. Respondents were grouped based on their self-identification as being familiar with a given project. From there, their survey responses were analyzed both based on sentiment but also sociodemographically to uncover broader patterns across the sample, where applicable.

The intent of this diagram is to visualize how sample sizes decrease as more criteria is applied, ultimately resulting in smaller groups as sociodemographic filters are applied.

In the righthand column, select demographic characteristics are displayed for reference and are not inclusive of all groups included in this study.



*Radii for Summit Lake Park and Centennial Commons changed partway through the survey — from 1 mile to 5 miles and 3 miles, respectively — to field more responses

Observational Analysis

The observational analysis used in this report provides a look into public life activity at the project sites through foot traffic and stationary activity data. The public life data used in this report comes from a range of sources — data collected firsthand by the

Gehl team at Cherry Street Pier and MOMENT, data collected by sensors at the Detroit Riverfront, foot traffic totals from previous years provided by Cherry Street Pier, and public life data collected as a part of Reimagining the Civic Commons for Ella Fitzgerald and

Summit Lake. The observational data used in this report does not provide a complete picture of public life at each site, but an initial understanding of how people are using the site.

Appendix 2

Overview of online
survey findings

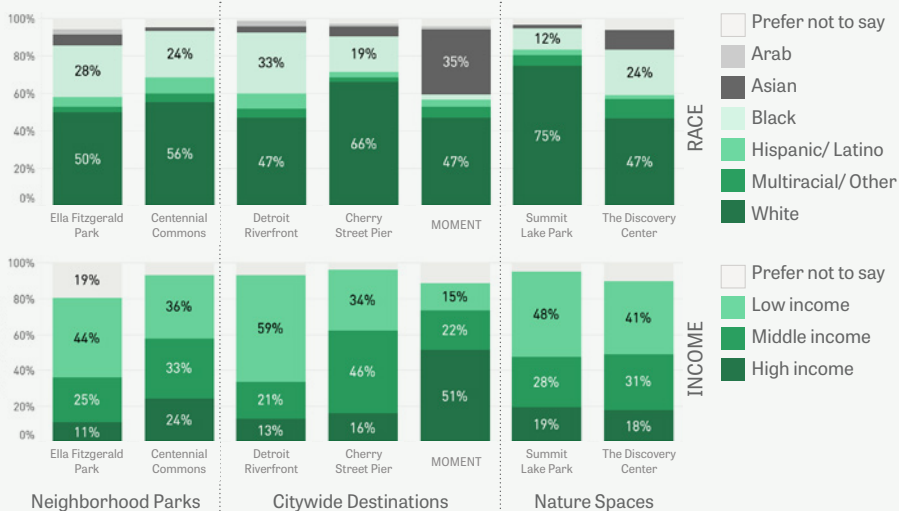
CLOSER LOOK

Survey Analysis

Gehl conducted an online survey of over 800 people within a 1 to 5 mile radius of each site. Responses reveal insights around public space use, access, perception, and attachment to place and community. For more on Gehl's methodology, visit [Appendix 1](#).

Public spaces attracted people living nearby — with variations in race, income, and frequency of visits.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF FAMILIAR RESPONDENTS



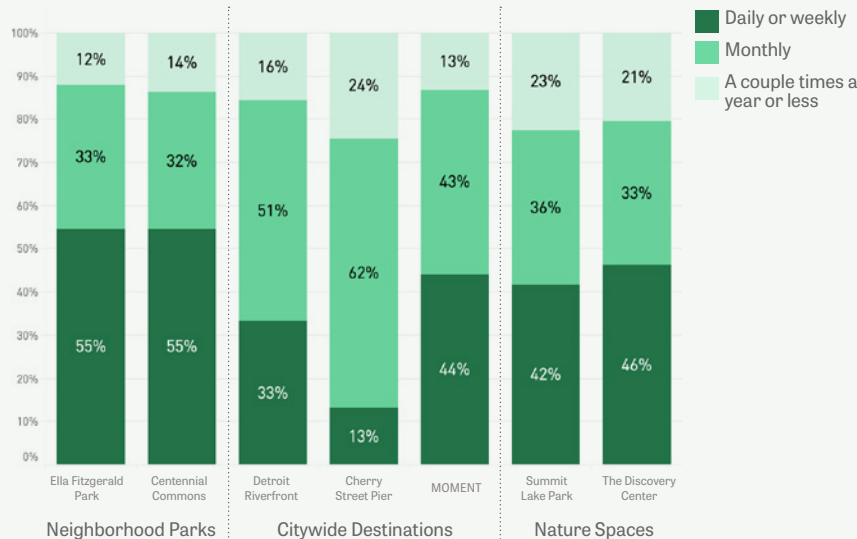
White respondents make up the largest share of respondents familiar with the surveyed projects.

Non-White respondents were familiar with Detroit Riverfront, MOMENT, and The Discovery Center at higher rates; 53% of respondents familiar with each project were non-White.

Across all but two projects, low-income respondents make up the largest share of familiar respondents.

MOMENT drew the highest shares of high-income respondents (51%) while Detroit Riverfront drew the highest shares of low-income respondents (59%).

HOW OFTEN DO YOU VISIT?



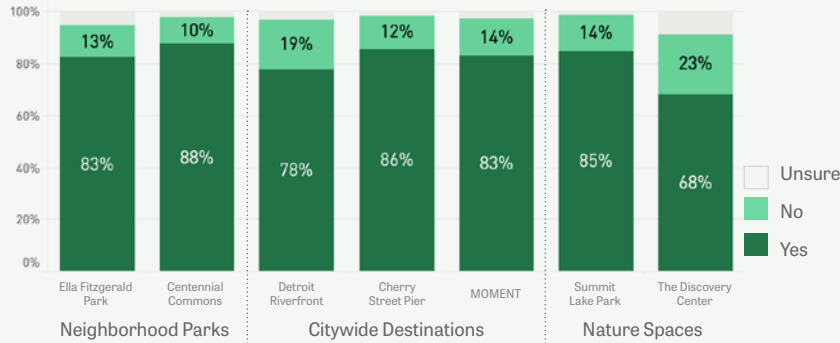
Most projects draw regular visitors.

Cherry Street Pier has the lowest rates of reported regular usership (daily, 5%; weekly, 8%) while Ella Fitzgerald Park (27% daily; 27% weekly) and Centennial Commons (20% daily; 34% weekly) have the highest — aligning to the Pier's identity as a place for special occasions, and the parks' identities as neighborhood hangouts.



Perceptual barriers impact use — especially among marginalized groups.

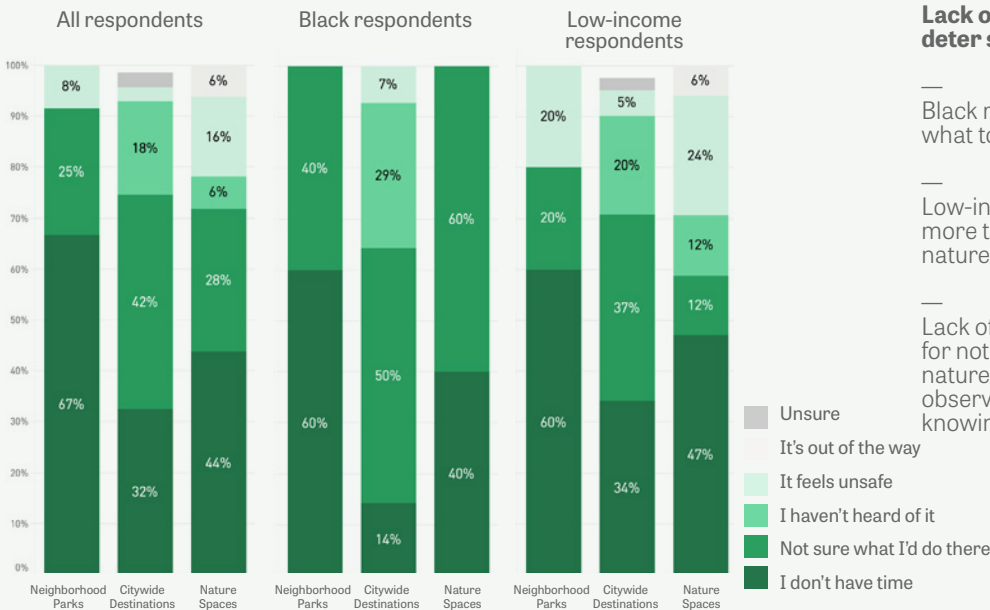
HAVE YOU VISITED THIS PLACE?



Most people who were familiar with the projects have visited them.

The Discovery Center saw the lowest reported visitorship among all projects — with disproportionately low visitorship from residents over 54, and from low-income residents. Notably, low visitorship was also observed among Black respondents, despite the fact that responses indicated non-White respondents were familiar with the project at higher-than-average rates.

WHY HAVEN'T YOU VISITED THIS PLACE?



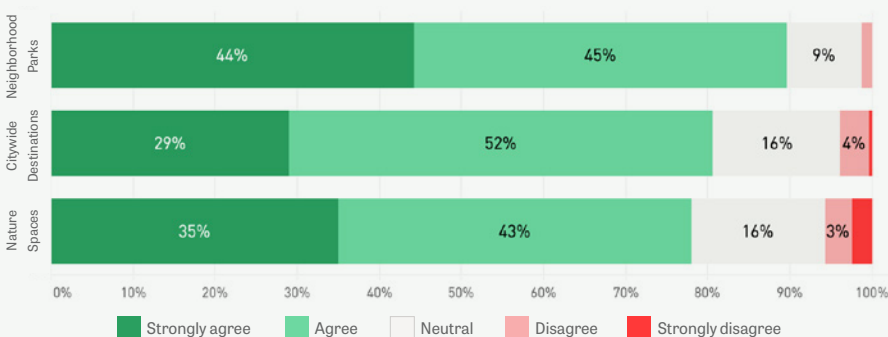
Lack of awareness and sense of safety deter some marginalized groups.

Black respondents cited not knowing what to do at a space at higher rates.

Low-income respondents cited safety more than other groups — especially at nature spaces and neighborhood parks.

Lack of time was the most-cited reason for not visiting neighborhood parks and nature projects. Citywide destinations observed higher rates of visitors not knowing what to do there.

“THIS PLACE MAKES IT EASIER FOR ME TO ACCESS AND USE OPEN SPACE AND NATURE.”



Across the board, projects are succeeding in making people feel closer to nature.

Despite their missions, nature-centric projects observed the highest rate of disagreement as well as ambivalence with this statement.

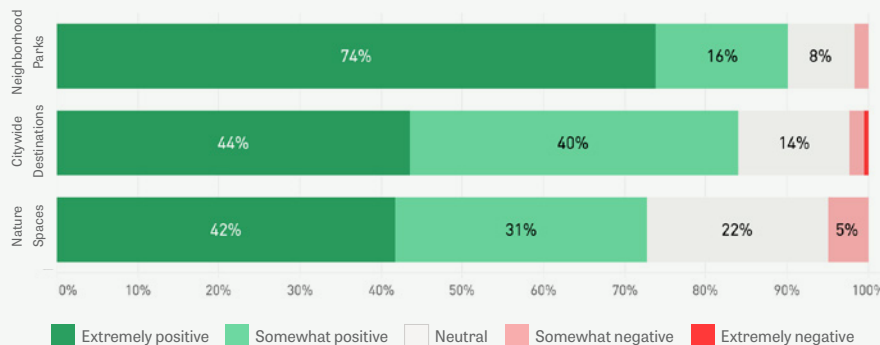


People feel positively about these spaces, to varying degrees by demographic group.

82%

of all respondents feel positively about these projects

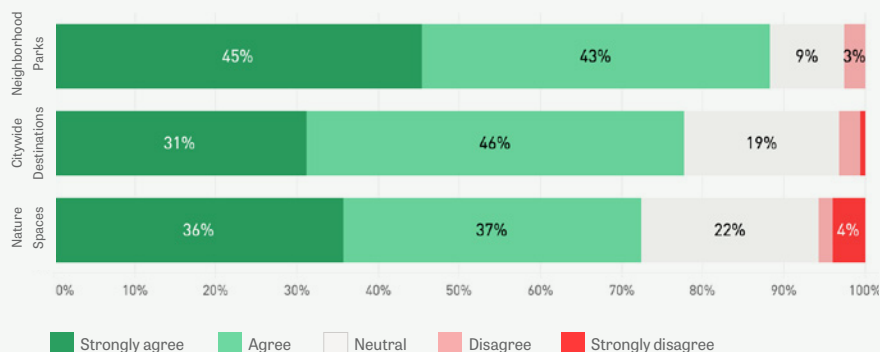
HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THIS SPACE?



Neighborhood parks have the most enthusiasm from respondents.

— Respondents at Ella Fitzgerald Park and Centennial Commons feel “strongly positive” and that the space is “special to me” at higher rates — especially among Black respondents.

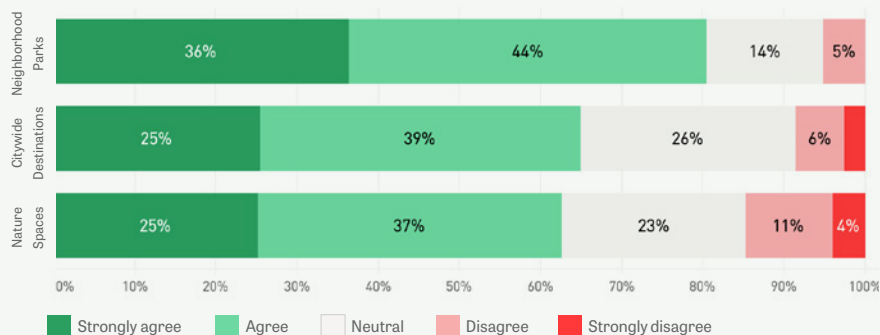
“THIS IS A PLACE WHERE I FIT IN.”



While 81% of all respondents agree with the statement, low-income respondents are more neutral.

— Low-income respondents are more likely to feel neutral about whether they fit in.

“THIS PLACE IS ESSENTIAL TO MY NEIGHBORHOOD.”



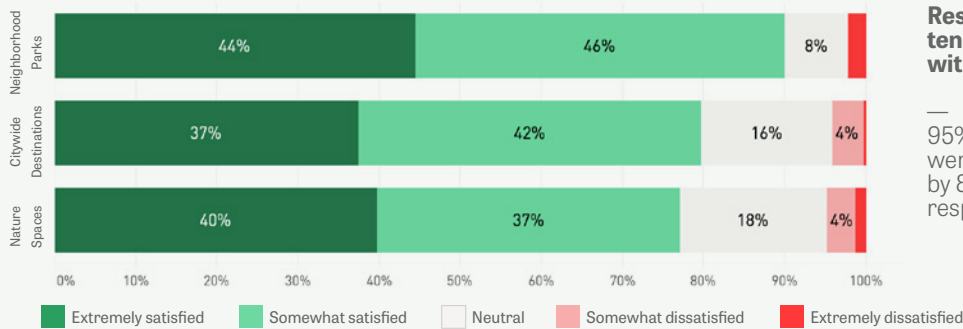
67% of all respondents agree with the statement — and 83% of respondents in neighborhood parks

— Nature spaces in historically Black, disinvested neighborhoods (The Discovery Center and Summit Lake Park) feel less “essential” to respondents. This echoes concerns voiced by grantees about distrust and skepticism among Black residents, given legacies of environmental racism.



Respondents who use these spaces have high levels of attachment to their neighborhoods and cities.

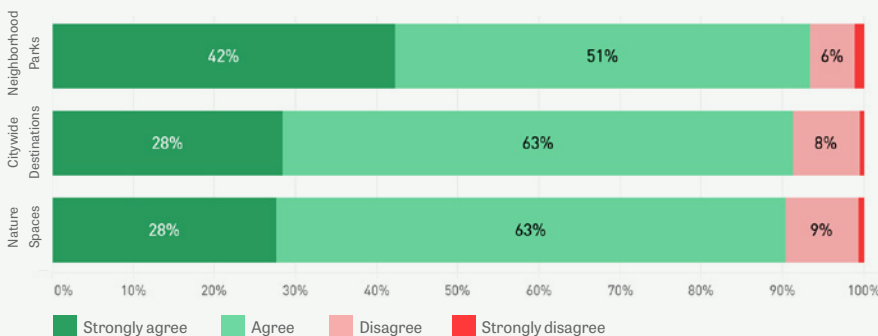
HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH YOUR METRO AREA AS A PLACE TO LIVE?



Respondents for neighborhood sites tend to have the greatest satisfaction with their cities.

—
95% of Ella Fitzgerald Park respondents were satisfied with Detroit, followed by 86% of Centennial Commons respondents for Philadelphia.

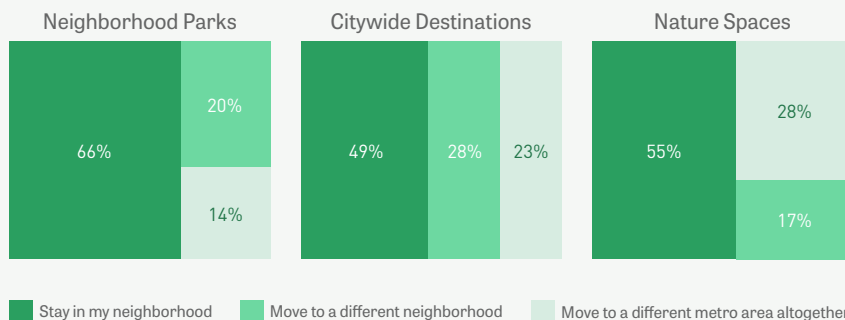
“MY METRO AREA’S CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE ARE PERFECT FOR PEOPLE LIKE ME.”



Despite being in the same city, respondents for some projects differed on their attachment to metro area.

—
For example, 91% of Centennial Commons respondents agreed, whereas 80% of The Discovery Center respondents agreed.

SUPPOSE YOU COULD LIVE ANYWHERE YOU WANTED IN THE UNITED STATES. WOULD YOU CHOOSE TO:



Neighborhood park respondents are most likely to want to stay in their neighborhood — signaling quality local spaces may help drive community attachment.

—
70% of Centennial Commons respondents would choose to stay in the neighborhood, followed by 60% of Ella Fitzgerald respondents — the highest rates of all projects.

Appendix 3

Overview of social media
analysis findings

CLOSER LOOK

Social Media Analysis

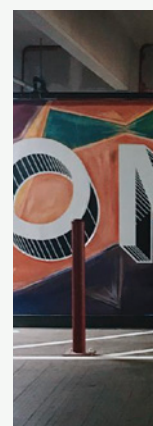
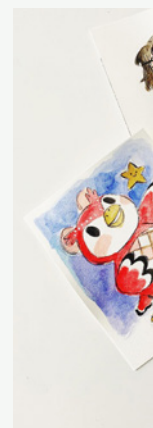
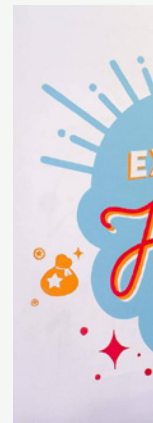
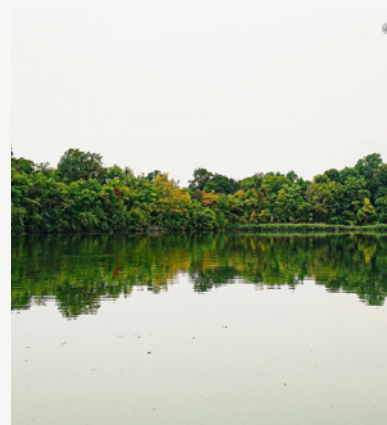
This snapshot of each public space's Instagram footprint provides a glimpse into the everyday life of these public spaces. Through analysis of photo subjects, caption content, post timing, and user information, the sites' missions come to life online. To inform the analysis, Gehl scraped over 450 posts' worth of Instagram data for select Knight Foundation projects — revealing data and stories related to place sentiment and activity. The approach is a complement to other methods that directly engaged those using or involved with the spaces.

Note: Centennial Commons and Ella Fitzgerald Park are not represented in this analysis, as they had a more limited geotagged Instagram presence. For more on the methodology, visit Appendix 1.

Cherry Street Pier



The Discovery Center



Moment



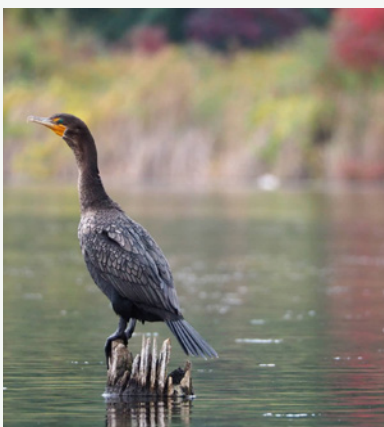
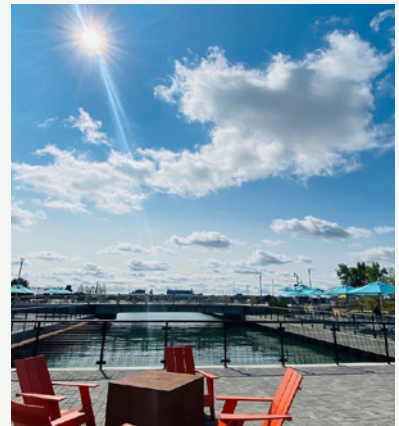
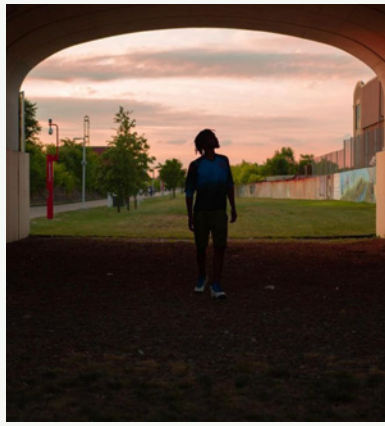
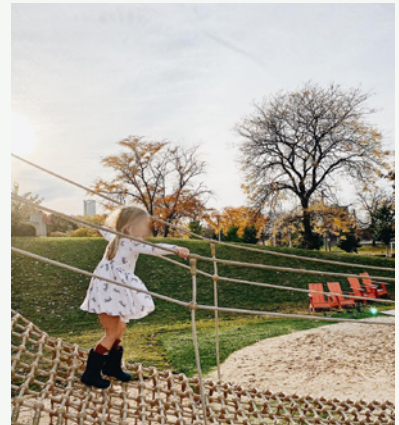
Summit Lake Park



Dequindre Cut
(Detroit Riverfront)



Valade Park
(Detroit Riverfront)



Free bowl of miso soup with any purchase!

FRIDAY SPECIAL

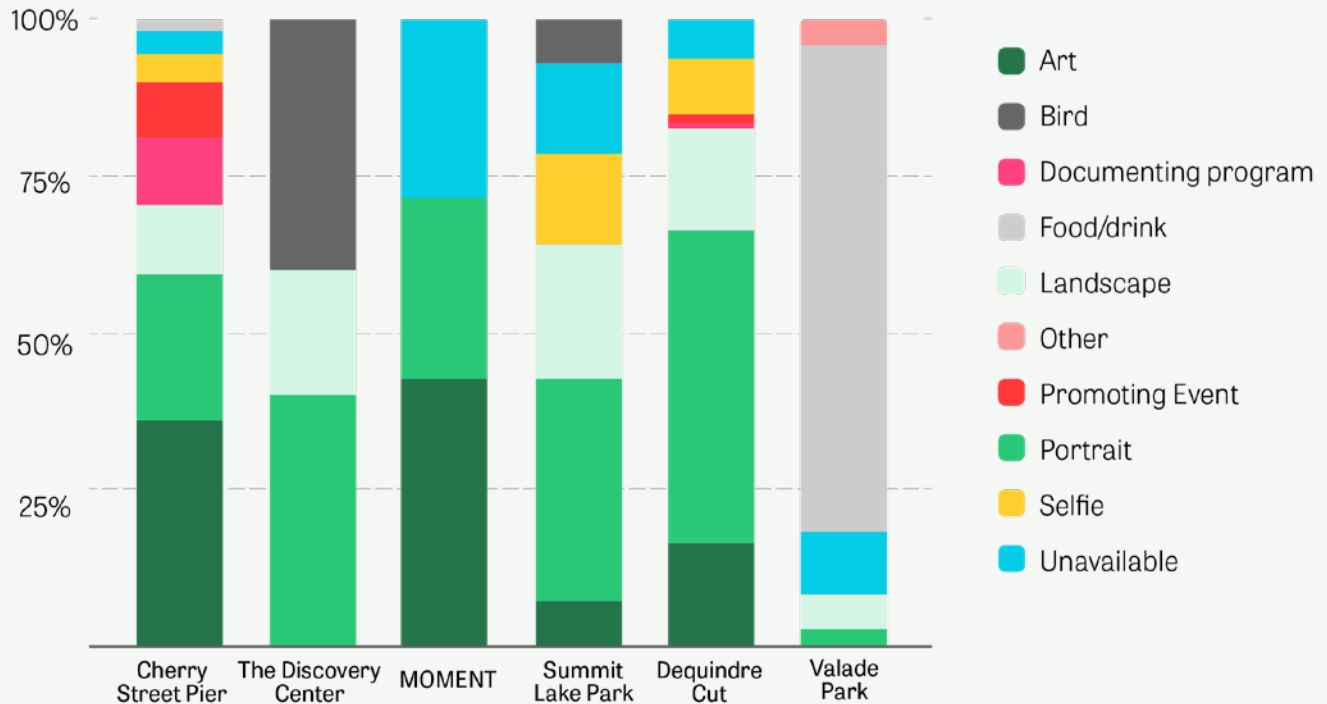
Dine in or call in to order.
313-880-0899

PHOTOS: INSTAGRAM USERS; NOTE: SOME FACES HAVE BEEN BLURRED OUT FOR PRIVACY



Projects' missions are reflected in visitors' Instagram photo subjects.

PHOTO SUBJECT BY PROJECT



Pictures of art, people, and landscapes were most prevalent. Across the most popular subject categories, photos featuring children, waterfront views and people posing for “instagrammable moments” (e.g., photo stand-ins, oversized adirondack chairs at Summit Lake Park) were widely documented.

Places with the least diverse documentation — MOMENT and The Discovery Center — are quasi-public spaces where operators guide more

specific, mission-driven activities. Cherry Street Pier and MOMENT saw the greatest share of photos showcasing art, aligning to these projects' ambitions to showcase the work and promote the visibility of local artists and makers.

Summit Lake Park and The Discovery Center, on the other hand, saw the greatest share of landscape photos, aligning to their missions to connect people to nature and once-neglected shorelines.

Research indicates that photos of self-portraits, friends, activities, captioned photos (pictures with embedded text), food, and gadgets are the six most common subjects shared on the app. By contrast, the high number of art and landscape photos — two of the top subjects in this snapshot study — indicates that these projects are succeeding in attracting visitor interest for draws like public art and green space.



Caption language in projects' geotagged posts reflects their distinct identity.

Analysis of post language indicates that visitor experiences align with project goals and missions.

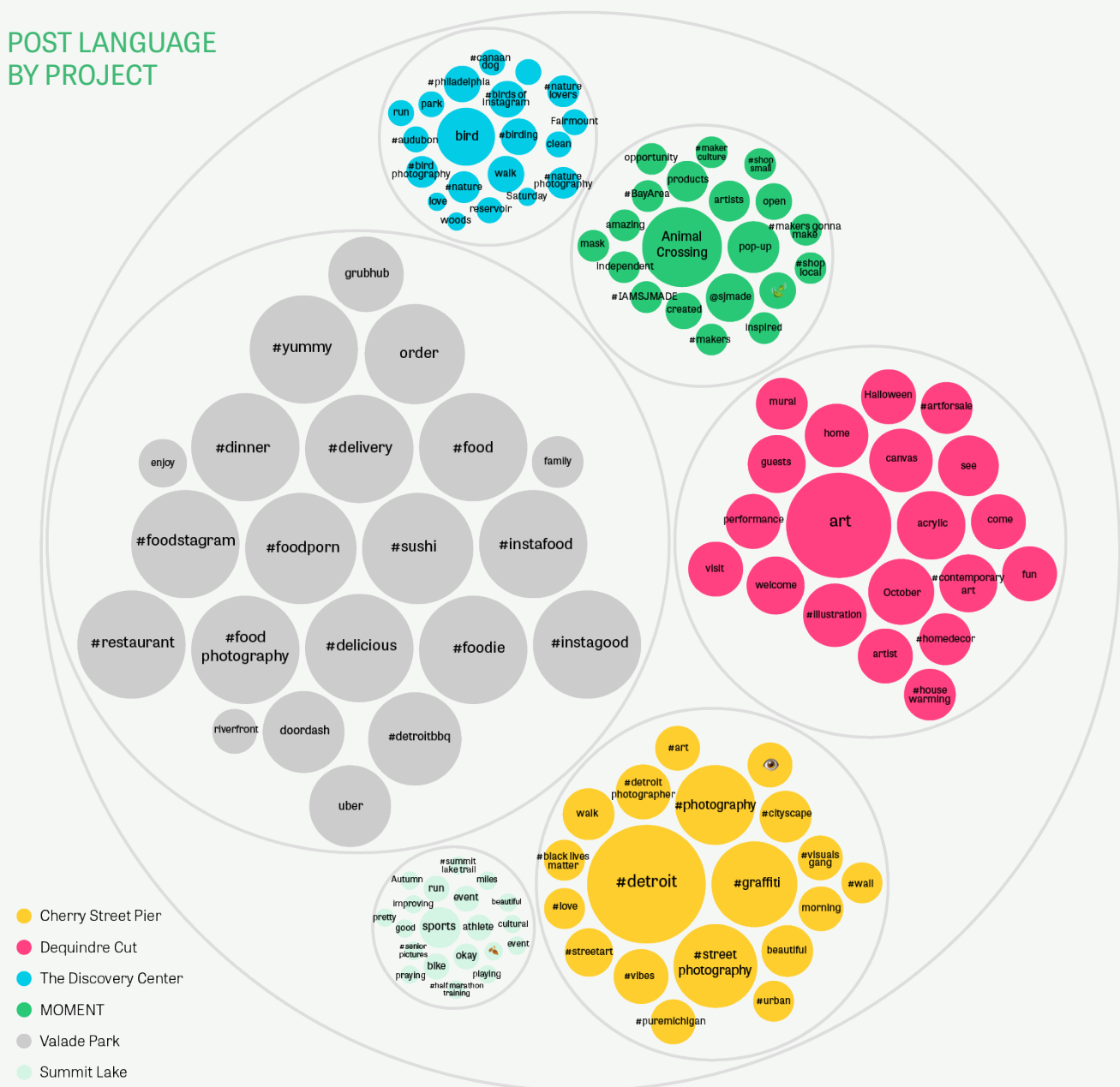
For instance, in the Detroit Riverfront's Robert C. Valade Park, the dominant voice throughout the Instagram sample is drawn from the most highly engaged actors in that network: the two resident food vendors at the park. This high level of commercial engagement on social media may shape visitors' perceptions of

the space and the most visible activities cultivated there, while reinforcing the project's ambitions to showcase local entrepreneurship.

At Dequindre Cut and Cherry Street Pier, we also observed users documenting political expression and public art. #BlackLivesMatter was a common term in the language used by Dequindre Cut visitors, who highlighted street art advocating for the movement. Cherry

Street Pier's civic Instagram activity, on the other hand, related to electoral activism — in particular, many users posted advocacy related to voting and the 2020 election. Additional research is needed to build on these findings, and further explore how public art can serve as a canvas for personal and political expression in public space.

POST LANGUAGE BY PROJECT



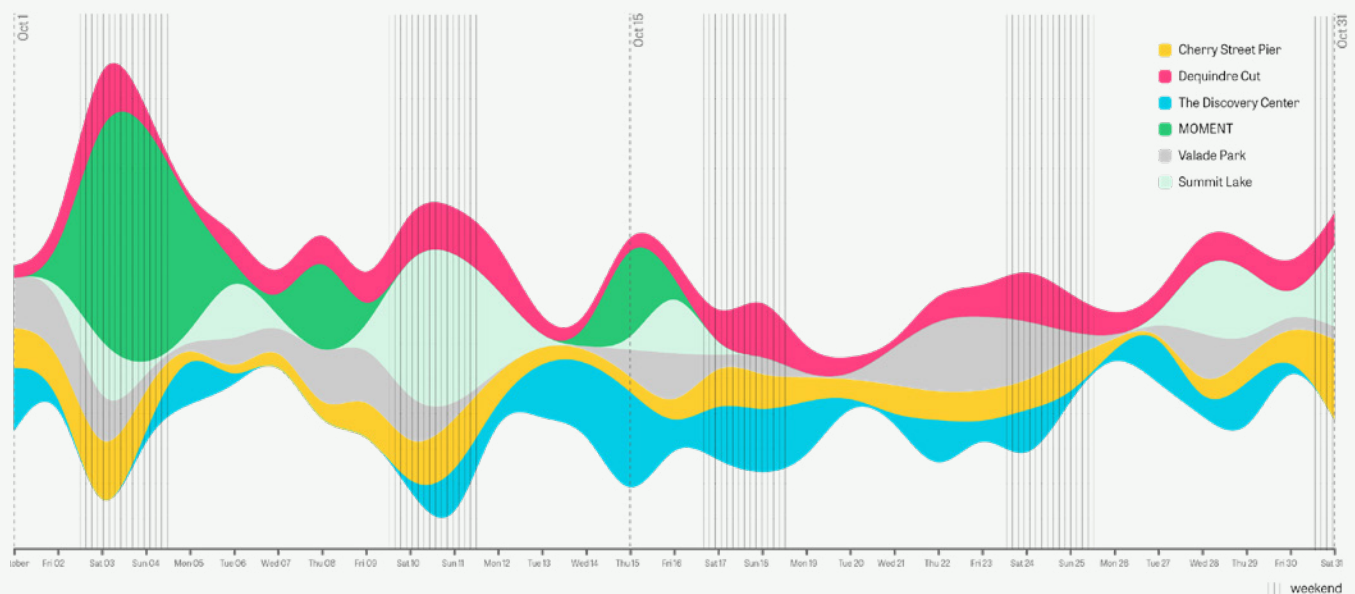


Some projects serve as everyday places, while others see more concentrated bursts of engagement.

The streamgraph below visualizes the time series of visitor posts throughout the month of October. The first two weekends of the month saw spikes in engagement across all projects, but some sites skewed toward more consistent (Cherry Street Pier and Dequindre Cut) or sporadic (MOMENT and Summit Lake) social media

engagement. In some cases, these bursts of engagement coincide with program events. For example, MOMENT's "Animal Crossing Pop-Up Shop" in early October (a warmer month), themed after the popular video game, drew many attendees according to organizers, and the event was mentioned in 71 percent of sampled Instagram posts.

POST VOLUME OVER TIME BY PROJECT





Most people posting in the Instagram sample are city residents, with some sites fielding regional visitors.

Across the project samples, local city residents comprised the largest share (over 65 percent) of Instagram users posting at the project. This is a promising sign that the projects are serving city residents first and foremost — and no doubt, it is a reflection of the hyper-local lives brought on by COVID-19 travel restrictions and distancing measures.

At Cherry Street Pier and Dequindre Cut, a portion of Instagram users came from the wider region. This dynamic reflects these sites' broader appeal beyond their neighborhoods.

ORIGIN OF INSTAGRAM USERS BY PROJECT

