

URBAN PLAY HANDBOOK

University of Washington
Green Futures Lab



CREDITS



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FOREWORD

Play brings people together, stimulates creativity, alleviates stress, and cultivates delight to both the participant and the viewer. Play can also break down social barriers that often prevent diverse groups from interacting and equitably sharing public space. Therefore, providing opportunities for play in the urban public realm is an essential tactic for creating lively, just and convivial community spaces that can be enjoyed by people of all ages and walks of life. Taking this view, the Urban Play Handbook was conceived to assist and inspire the urban designer, civic leader and citizen activist to invent playful places and to integrate opportunities for interactive play into the public spaces of our cities.

Developed by interns Jonathan Konkol and Sara Hakanson, the guide has been carefully researched to provide a framework for thinking about how and where we can integrate play into urban design practices, drawing from examples across the globe. Their sensibilities were particularly informed by living and working for a term in Copenhagen, Denmark, a city that exemplifies incorporation of play into public spaces. The Green Futures Lab is pleased to sponsor and distribute this guide, with profound thanks to the ScanIDesign Foundation for funding the internships and publication, to Jennifer Wieland and her team in Seattle's Public Space Program for their advisement, and to Sara and Jonathan for their thoughtful, creative and playful approach to preparing this urban design guide.

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1.1 THE URBAN PLAY HANDBOOK

This manual is composed of two primary elements: a breakdown of types of play that can occur in cities, and a toolkit for places where play can occur.

Play comes in many forms. This handbook organizes these activities into four general categories: streets and rights-of way, urban leftovers, pocket parks and small urban plazas, and neighborhood parks. Each type of play is described by user groups, potential locations, and requirements for special facilities and equipment.

Spaces where play can potentially occur also fall into several broad categories. This manual inventories the kind of urban spaces found in most North American cities and presents options for adapting them to facilitate a wide range of play activities.

This handbook is intended to provide inspiration for communities seeking to enhance their public realms through urban play. Through design prototypes, policy tools, and an array of precedents, this handbook helps make implementing play in our cities achievable. The types of places described are typical of most American urban landscapes and the strategies represent a range of potential solutions that communities can deploy to facilitate play in the public realm.



1.2 WHAT IS PLAY?

“Play is something done for its own sake... It’s voluntary, it’s pleasurable, it offers a sense of engagement, it takes you out of time. And the act itself is more important than the outcome.”

DR. Stuart Brown, National Institute for Play

“Summing up the formal characteristic of play, we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside ‘ordinary’ life as being ‘not serious’ but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner.”

Johan Huizinga - *Homo Ludens*

VERB

1 [NO OBJECT] Engage in activity for enjoyment and recreation rather than a serious or practical purpose:

-Oxford English Dictionary



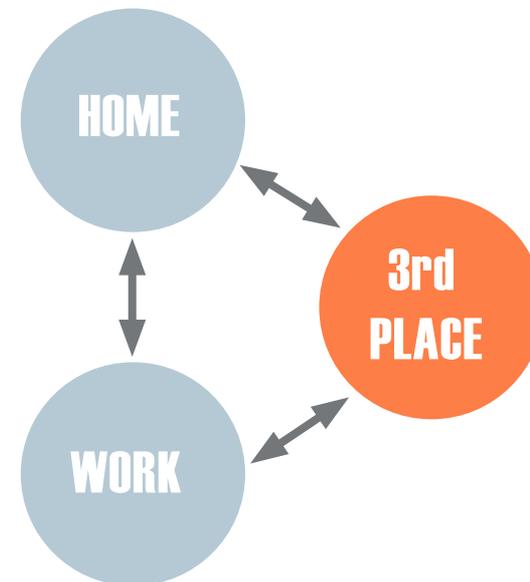
1.3 WHY DOES PLAY MATTER?

As American central cities grow, they become significantly denser. For example, within its city limits, Seattle is fully built-out, yet rapid job growth is fueling demand for significantly more housing units, and the only place to build is up. Accommodating new residents necessitates means replacing some of the central city's existing building stock, including single-family homes, with multifamily buildings.

One of the benefits of single-family homes is that they give residents all the amenities of housing and recreation in a private, self-contained unit. However, with demand for more housing and a finite amount of land, this lifestyle is increasingly out of reach of many urban residents. It is also a historical anomaly; before WWII, cities were densely built, with citizens living in close quarters and enjoying shared public spaces for recreation. As growing American cities add tens of thousands of new residents over the coming decades, the need for quality public spaces will become more urgent. In order to maintain an adequate housing supply while preserving the high quality of life for which many cities are known, significant investment must be made in our cities' public spaces.

Social psychologists and public health researchers have discovered that open-ended play is an essential part of creativity and problem solving. In cities whose growth is heavily dependant on the creative professions, the importance of play is undeniable. We go to work to earn a living, and return to our homes to rest, eat and relax. There is, however, a third kind

of place we go to for enjoyment, socialization, and rejuvenation. These "third places" are where we go for an experience that is absolutely essential for our sense of well-being and quality of life. They range from cafes to parks and often involve some form of play. Play is the act of enjoying a third space--a conversation with a friend at a coffee shop, a game of basketball in the park, or lingering for a moment at the library.



Growing cities create denser living conditions with less private space. We begin to see smaller homes and apartments.



As private living spaces shrink, quality public places become much more important for people's well-being.



Play activates public spaces by giving people ways to interact with the built environment and take ownership of spaces.



For the purposes of this manual, play can be loosely defined as any activity that people engage in simply for the joy of performing it. Play does not have a specific outcome; it is not task oriented and does not have pre-defined goals. It is a mode of activity that allows people to explore creativity and enjoyment of the senses, to engage their world without rules or requirements. As such, play describes the kind of activity any high quality, multi-use public space should aim to accommodate.



1.4 WHAT DOES PLAY LOOK LIKE?

There are as many forms of play as there are people in a city. While we typically associate play with children, there are numerous ways adults bring play into their daily lives. This chapter examines some general categories of play and ways to facilitate them in the public realm.

General categories of play

- Children's play
- Structured & Group Activities
- Individual Athletics
- Informal/Unstructured Activities
- Passive Recreation
- Grass Roots/Ad Hoc Events

These are by no means the only way to classify forms of play, but they can give us a convenient framework for consideration of the kinds of urban places where play-positive interventions might occur.

“You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation”

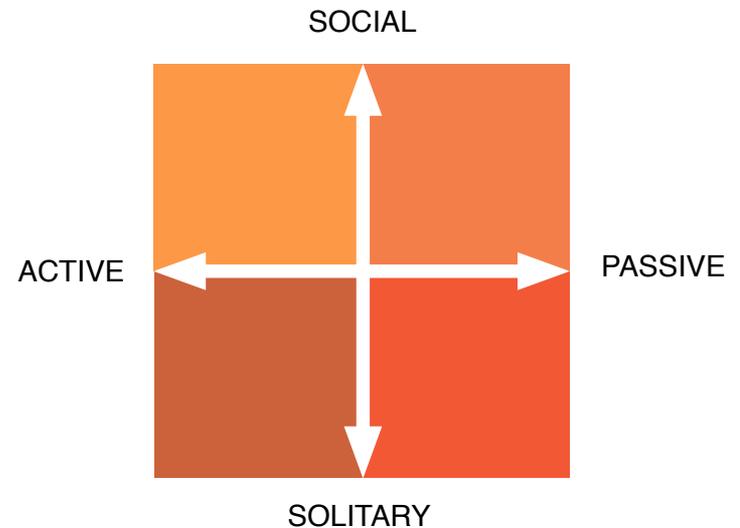
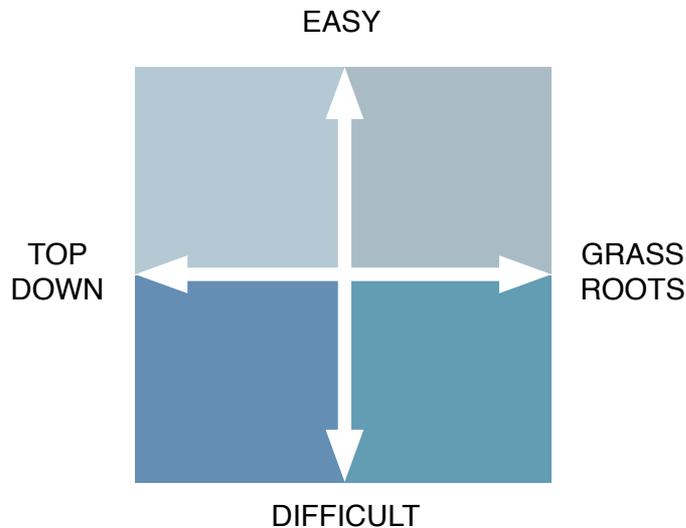
-Plato



1.5 FORMS OF PLAY

Since this guidebook is intended to inspire and facilitate the creation of places to play, it is helpful to consider the difficulty of different kinds of interventions and who might reasonably attempt them. Grass-roots community groups have employed some strategies with great success, while others require much more resources and planning, necessitating top-down intervention by public agencies.

Several categories of play are listed on the following page. Within each category, activities are listed along with where that activity can take place. Some more complex forms of play involve groups of people ranging from a couple of ping pong players to a couple of softball teams, while others are solitary activities that can easily be incorporated into an ordinary individual's day to day activities.



Activity		Park	Plaza	Pocket Park	Parklet	Linear Park	Street/ROW	Trail	Community Garden	Special Use Facility
Children	Playground Equipment	X	X	X		X				X
	Team Sports	X								X
	Individual Play	X		X		X	X			
	Small Group Play	X		X		X	X			
Structured & Group Activities	Organized Sports	X								X
	Group Yoga/Exercise	X	X	X		X				
	Small Tai Chi	X	X	X		X				
	Casual Games (Ping-pong, etc.)	X	X	X	X	X	X			
	Cards & Chess	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Individual Athletics	Jogging/Running/Walking	X				X	X	X		
	Cycling	X				X	X	X		X
	Climbing	X	X	X		X	X	X		X
	Skateboarding	X				X	X			X
Informal/Unstructured Activities	Drawing/Painting/Art	X	X	X	X	X	X			
	Playing with Dogs	X		X		X	X	X	X	
	Picnics	X		X		X				
	Frisbee	X				X				
	Catch	X				X				
	Interactive Public Art	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
	Food Production	X		X	X	X			X	
	Photography	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
	Smart Phone Scavenger Hunts/Activities	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Passive Rec	Cafe Seating	X	X		X	X	X			
	Enjoying Views	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
	Reading	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Grass Roots/Ad Hoc Events	Film Viewing	X	X							
	Performing Arts	X	X							
	Block Parties		X		X		X			
	Graffiti/Street Arts		X		X	X	X			
	Guerilla Urbanism		X		X	X	X			
	Pop-Ups		X		X	X	X		X	
	Urban Foraging	X		X		X	X	X	X	
	Public Pianos/Fixed Instruments	X	X	X	X	X	X			
	Street Happenings; hopscotch, etc.		X		X	X	X			



1.6 WHERE CAN PLAY HAPPEN?



Streets & Rights-of-Way

Streets can be much more than a conduit for moving from one place to another. They make up much of the world between buildings in a dense modern city. As such, streets can function as urban rooms, extensions of our homes, schools and workplaces. They are the places where we meet people in passing and pause on our way from place to place. Sidewalks and boulevards with street furniture and parklets are examples of play-friendly adaptations of streets.

Underpasses

Wherever elevated roads, railroads, or bridges pass through neighborhoods, small, dark underused urban spaces exist. They are public rights-of-way, yet they tend to be very uninviting to the public. With the right interventions, these neglected spaces can be creatively repurposed to accommodate all manner of recreational activities.

Small Urban Plazas

Many downtowns and commercial districts feature small plazas amongst their commercial buildings. In some cases, these were created deliberately when the city was first planned, while others are the result of programs to allow developers to get extra height or mass in exchange for a public benefit. Many of these plazas are underutilized and could be activated with new facilities, food vendors, art, or other interventions.



Pocket Parks

Pocket parks are small public spaces, typically located in less busy commercial districts and residential neighborhoods. Pocket parks are small, often less than half an acre. Because of their size, many pocket parks have been overlooked by parks departments and do not live up to their potential. Interventions can make a pocket park into a shared back yard for neighborhood play.

Neighborhood & Regional Parks

Neighborhood parks are typically located in residential neighborhoods and comprise at least an acre of land. They are ideal places for children's activities, but can also provide recreation for adults. Regional parks are the largest park typology, ranging from a few dozen acres to several hundred acres. These parks are ideal for hiking, biking and other wilderness oriented outdoor activities.

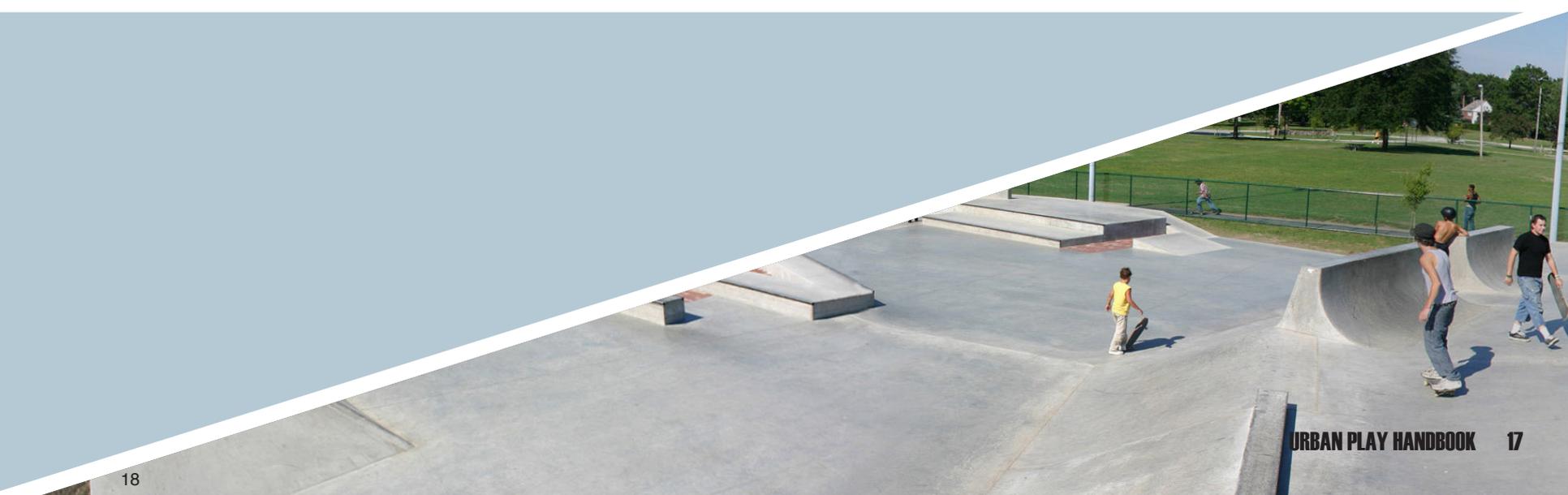
Specialty Facilities

Within a city's open space network, there are often specialized recreation facilities like mountain bike areas and skate parks. These are often good candidates for underutilized areas and bring activity to otherwise dead zones. They require careful planning and design, and legal liability must be addressed. Nonetheless, they are very popular with young people and a great asset to the community. Because most special use facilities are relatively small, they can often be integrated into other park typologies.



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2 PLACES TO PLAY



2.1 PLACES TO PLAY: STREETS & RIGHTS-OF-WAY

Streets can serve many functions besides providing a space for cars to drive. The right-of-way encompasses the entire public space from one lot line to the one across the street, and includes the sidewalks on both sides. A wide range of play activities can happen in streets and public rights-of-way. City streets can function as urban rooms, places for people to gather, stroll, and play. A public street can be a place to be, not just a place to pass through on the way to somewhere else.

Depending on the street conditions, (width of the street, volume of car traffic, the kind of buildings that face it, etc.) a variety of strategies can be used to adapt it to play and gathering.

A street right-of-way typically consists of a building frontage zone, a pedestrian zone, a street tree/street furniture zone, a parking lane and one or more driving lanes.





Adapting Streets for Play

Strategies to make streets into places for play fall into two broad categories: methods that require reconfiguration of the streetscape and thus large scale public infrastructure investments, and ad-hoc grass-roots interventions that can be done at relatively low cost.

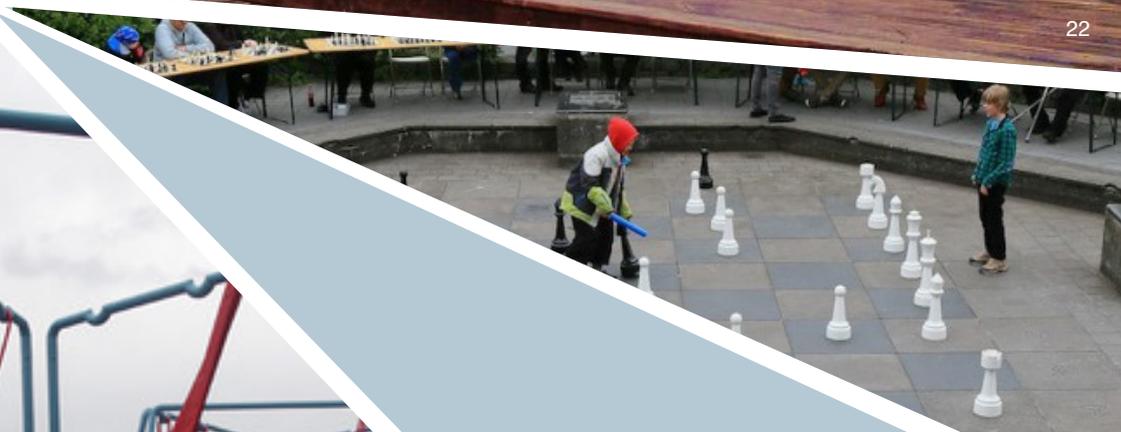
Citizens can organize temporary events in the right-of-way, and build features adjacent to the street. Business owners can create outdoor seating and sidewalk displays. Cities can reduce the area dedicated to cars and create features like boardwalks, gardens and shelters for pedestrians.



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Anatomy of a Street

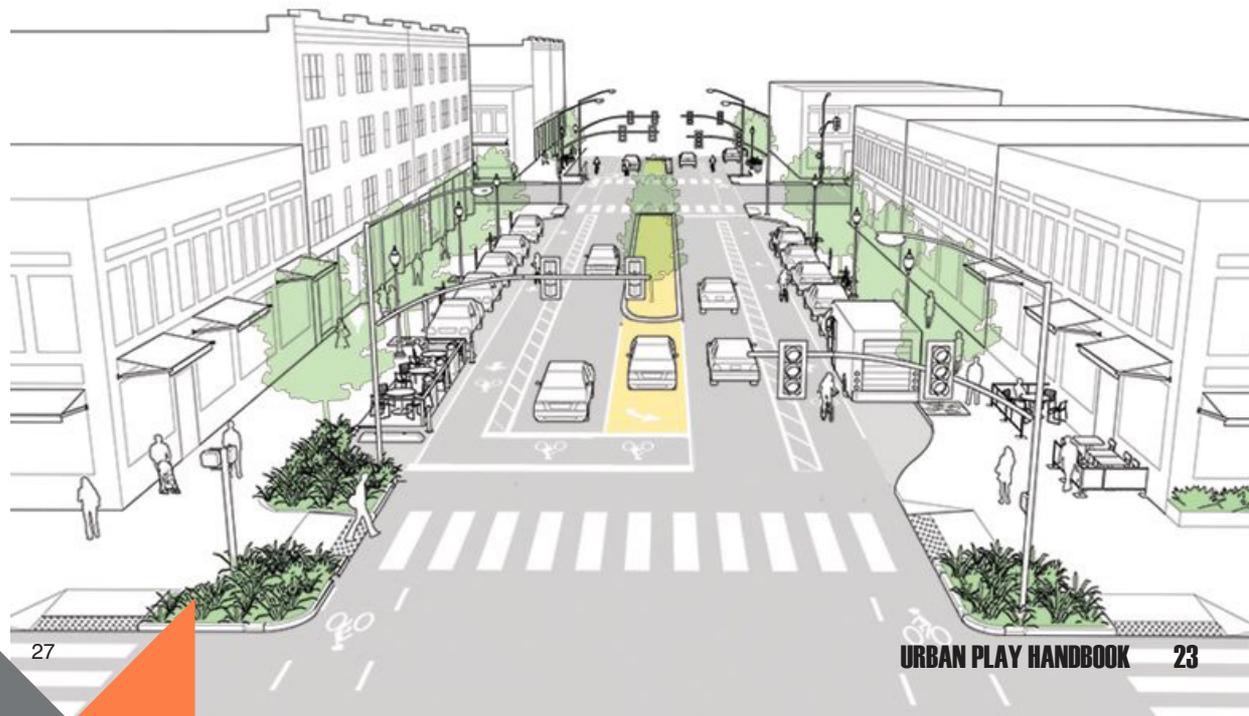
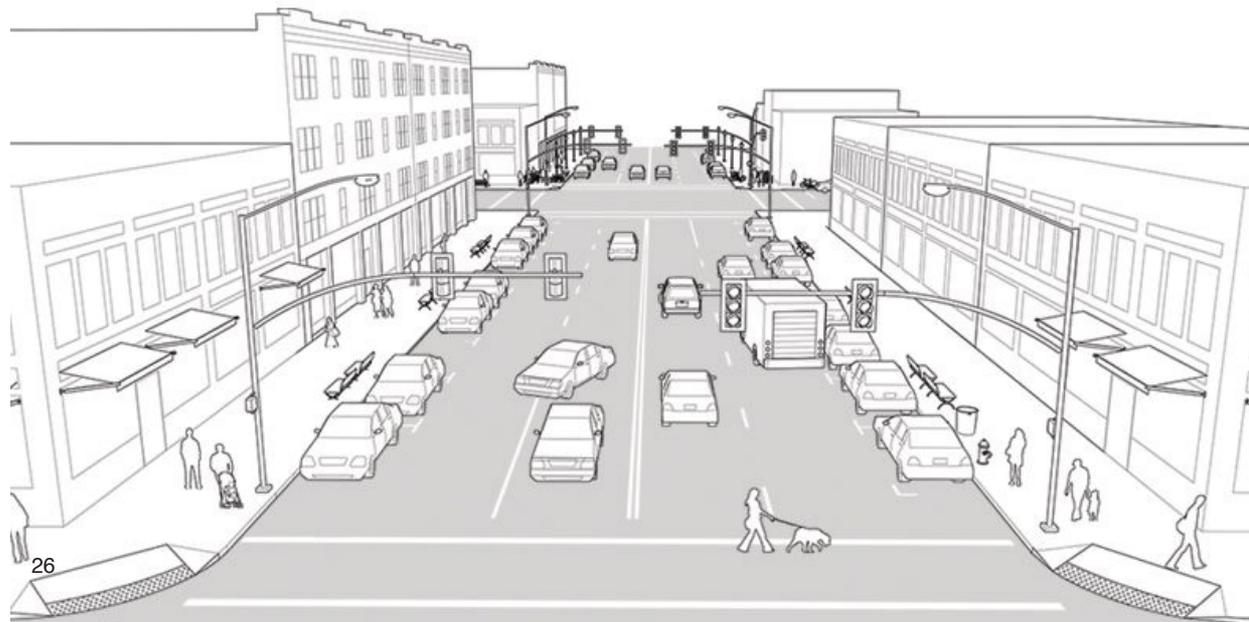
A cross section of a street is made up of several zones where different activities take place. These can be arranged in many ways depending on the needs of the street's users:

- Building frontage zone: outdoor display and cafe seating
- Pedestrian zone: walking
- Street furniture & street tree zone: benches, bike racks, trashcans, bus shelters, trees and plants, etc.
- Driving zone: cars and busses in motion
- Curb zone: curb and gutter
- Parking zone: parked cars
- Bike zone: bicycle lanes



Transforming a street: From a place to drive to a place to play

These images, produced by the National Association of City Transportation Officials, illustrate the transformation of a street from an auto-centric space to a complete street. This kind of transformation embraces the function of streets as public spaces, not merely conduits for people moving from one place to another.





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Potential Play Activities in the Street Realm

There is potential to implement urban play in all right-of-way zones. Streets are perhaps the best place for spontaneous play to occur. When streets are configured to act as urban rooms, people can stop to take “play breaks” as they go about their day. Spontaneous play opportunities can include:

- Building frontage zone: interactive storefront displays and fun cafe seating
- Pedestrian zone: hopscotch and street paintings on the ground
- Street furniture & street tree zone: interactive benches and bike racks, musical trash cans and drinking fountains, interactive bus shelters, interactive or interesting public art, kiosks and mini libraries
- Curb zone: brightly painted, musical water flow, planted swales
- Parking zone: parklets can be installed that could house activities like outdoor chess
- Bike zone: bicycle lanes with interesting or interactive signage and painted ground
- Driving zone: streets can temporarily be closed for events that involve play such as a street fair or block party



Grassroots & Community Based Interventions



There are many low-cost, easily implemented interventions that citizens and community groups can initiate. Some may require permission or special permits from city agencies such as the local department of transportation (DOT).

The measures described on this page are small- scale actions that

require little more than creativity and some basic tools and supplies. Many involve minor physical improvements to the streetscape and the areas immediately adjacent to it. The idea is to empower people to take ownership of public space. When citizens modify spaces they claim them for the community and create a new social space for the neighborhood.

A lot of do-it-yourself urbanism falls into a legal gray area, so check local regulations and consider liability before proceeding.



Temporary Events

Temporary play streets, street fairs and block parties encourage socialization and build community.



Street Furniture

Citizens can create street furniture in spaces adjacent to rights-of-way.



Painted Pavement

Neighborhoods can mark a street as a shared space with a few cans of paint. This tells drivers to be cautious and invites neighbors out to play. A permit may be required, so check regulations first.



Structures

Small structures such as teahouses and mini lending libraries adjacent to the right-of-way encourage gathering, meeting and playing in streets.



Performance Art

Wherever people gather, music brings people together and creates a spirit of congeniality.



Street Art

Art projects allow people to contribute to sense of place. They also make a generic streetscape unique and personal.





Public Agency Sponsored & Facilitated Interventions

When cities and transportation agencies want to take an active role in promoting play in public space, there are many exemplary prototypes to draw from. Cities from New York to Seattle have successfully implemented programs to reclaim rights-of-way for people. Some of these programs, like Play Streets, have a long history in the US; New York's Play Streets have been around for nearly a century.

Others such as Woonerven, or shared streets, have recently been adopted from Denmark, the Netherlands and other European countries where public space has been a focus of pedestrian life for many decades.

The examples to the right are a sampling of successful strategies that government agencies have pursued around the US. These

strategies have benefited both residents who prefer neighborhoods with streetscape improvements, and the businesses and developers who cater to them. This has ultimately benefited the cities themselves, in the form of increased tax revenue from higher land values.



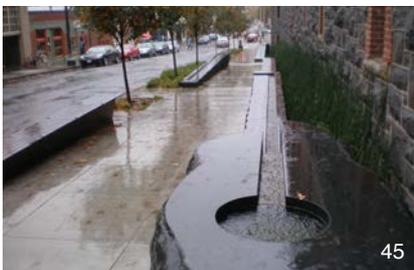
Play Streets

Organized by schools or community groups, play streets are city sponsored street closures that allow kids and families to reclaim the street space for play, often only for a few hours.



Linear Parks

Linear parks occupy part of the right of way and turn streets into urban rooms.



Street Furniture

Bus shelters, benches, bike racks and public art can all be categorized as street furniture. Cities can place these strategically to make streets serve people better. Even simple play structures can be added to the right-of-way. These structures can serve a purpose or just be aesthetically pleasing.



Rain Gardens

Bioretention gardens soften the hard landscape of the street and add beauty to any sidewalk. Besides managing storm water, they make streets more inviting to people.



Parklets

Cities' departments of transportation can lease space to businesses to turn parking spaces into urban oases.



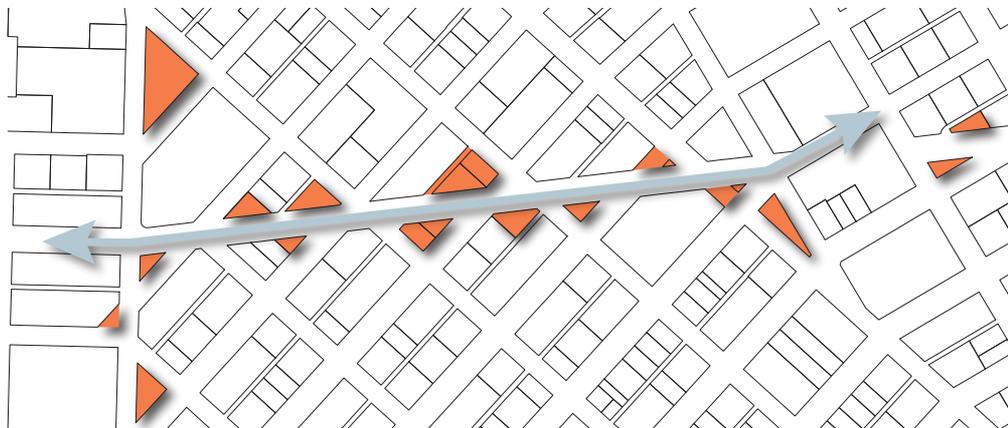
Permanent Seating

Creatively designed benches can enliven a space and make it a place to linger. Designs should be fun, but not overly prescriptive of how people use them.





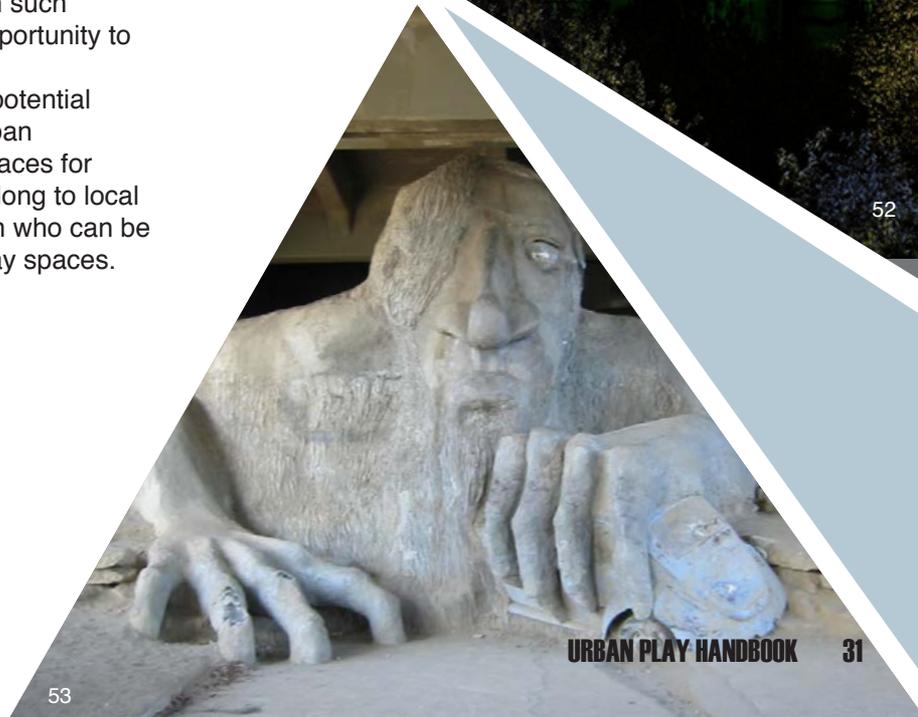
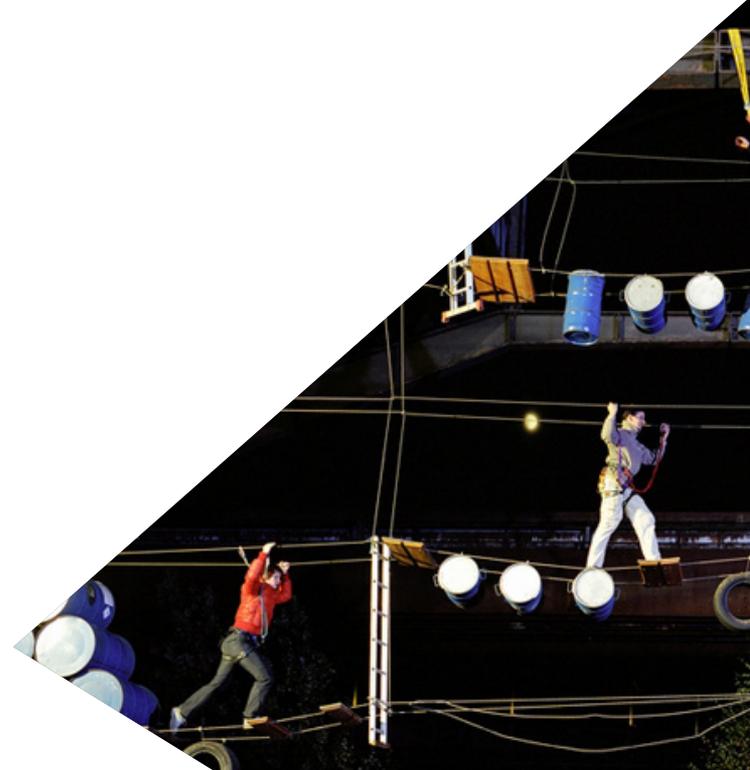
2.2 PLACES TO PLAY: URBAN LEFTOVERS



Cities in North America were typically laid out on grids. These grids, however, are full of “imperfections,” places where diagonal streets cross and create leftover triangular parcels that are too small to develop. Many cities also have multiple grids that don’t align with each other. Where they meet, small triangles are created in a regular pattern, often on alternating sides of the street, forming the seam between different grids.

The addition of freeways created more “leftover” spaces where blocks were cut up into small pieces. Elevated sections of freeways created empty spaces beneath.

No development can occur in such places, but there is ample opportunity to reclaim them for the public. This section presents some potential solutions for transforming urban fragments into fun, inviting places for play. These spaces often belong to local departments of transportation who can be partners in the creation of play spaces.



Reclaiming Underused Spaces

In most cases, creating public space from urban left-overs involves working with the local department of transportation (DOT). Small triangular parcels, the streets or alleys between them, and the spaces beneath overpasses are typically owned and managed by the DOT.

City DOTs have been increasingly willing to partner with citizens and community groups to re-purpose land for use as community open space. Public plazas and play spaces often benefit adjacent businesses because they create a magnet that draws foot traffic to the area. Therefore, businesses can also be an ally in reclaiming space for people.

Cities including New York and Los Angeles have established programs to petition for the creation of plazas in the right-of-way. These petitions can be implemented in as little as 10 months.

Interim plazas can be created with a little paint on the pavement, some street furniture, and planters or bollards to block off traffic. In time, a formal rebuilding of the space, with permanent landscaping, repaving and installation of street furniture can make the interim plaza a permanent feature of the neighborhood.



Before



After



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Transforming a street: From a place to drive to a place to play

This simulation from the National Association of City Transportation Officials describes a potential intervention at a diagonal intersection. New York City (below) has pioneered the application of these principles to dozens of urban plazas where once there was only unused asphalt.



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Strategies to initiate retrofits of urban leftover spaces vary in cost and complexity. Citizens, neighborhood groups and business associations, with the appropriate permits from the local DOT, can initiate simple interim plazas and underpass re-uses. One of the most famous skate parks in the world, beneath the Burnside Bridge in Portland, OR, was built entirely by skateboarders themselves, one bag of ready-mix concrete at a time.

Sunset Triangle Park, pictured to the right, in LA's Silverlake neighborhood, was created for a mere \$25,000 after a local arts group petitioned the city to close the underutilized stretch of road it occupies.

In many cases, projects have started by a citizen demonstrating to the DOT that the road in question is underused and a viable place for a plaza. In the case of McGilvra Park in Seattle, students monitoring cars passing through the short roadway that cut it off from the adjacent block documented that most drivers were using the street for illegal left turns. The triangle is now connected to the adjacent block.





Small Triangles

Small triangles can be connected to adjacent blocks to form larger plazas if traffic patterns permit. The street can be painted, blocked with bollards, and in longer-term projects, repaved.



Permanent Plazas

Underused right-of-ways and reconfigured spaces can allow for the creation of pocket parks and permanent gathering spaces.



Community Garden

Leftover spaces in low foot-traffic, residential areas can make great small community gardens. These can produce food for the neighborhood while educating children and adults.



Large Triangles

Larger triangles can become freestanding public places.



Interim Plazas

Low-cost, often citizen-led interventions can establish plazas on former streets with little more than a permit, some tables and chairs, paint and volunteers.



Alleyways

Alleyway activation can be low-cost and citizen-led. Alleys can be used for outdoor seating, murals, pop-up shops, or just as a place to play.

Under the Bridge

Urban freeways create unique opportunities for play space. Underpasses and colonnades make great locations for uses like skate parks and cycle tracks. Noisy uses are perfectly acceptable here.

Other potential uses include:

- Swings
- Play equipment
- Temporary markets
- Pop up businesses/kiosks
- Public art
- Pedestrian/bike paths
- Skate Parks
- Mountain Biking

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2.3 PLACES TO PLAY: POCKET PARKS & SMALL URBAN PLAZAS

Small urban places can be great gathering spots for people of all ages. Pocket parks and small urban plazas are typically spaces of about 5,000 square feet or smaller. The success of such locations as play spaces is based more on quality of function than the size of the space. Careful observation of human behavior in the public realm has given landscape architects a few simple rules that make all the difference between places that people want to be in and places that people avoid. People love to be near other people, and parks and plazas that give them the opportunity to congregate without being too prescriptive tend to succeed if they provide plenty of seating opportunities, a mixture of sun and shade, amenities like water features, visibility from the street and access to food and other services.

Children's play structures are a great addition to both kinds of spaces, and cities from New York to Copenhagen have had great success with small scale play parks grafted onto existing parks and plazas. Adults can play in these places too; in Seattle, the addition of Ping-Pong tables and programs like Pianos in the Park have created opportunities for play for all ages.



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Pocket Parks

Pocket parks are small parks and landscaped places, typically about the size of one or two single-family home lots. They are often landscaped with a lot of vegetation or are primarily pavement and tables. Some have other pedestrian features like walkways and benches. These parks are often the result of leftover space on a block and are often found in residential neighborhoods. Their small size gives them their name and distinguishes them from ordinary neighborhood parks. Vacant lots in neighborhoods are opportunities for creating new park space at relatively low cost.

Small Urban Plazas

Small urban plazas are usually found in dense areas like downtowns or neighborhood shopping districts. They are typically hardscaped, though many have trees and other natural elements. These plazas often function as an extension of the public sidewalk, a wider space where the stream of pedestrians forms an eddy and people can relax and take a break from their travels. Such plazas can be places of unexpected delight.





Because they are typically located in fairly dense areas, small plazas are great for attracting the lunch crowd, weekend shoppers or people out for the evening.

Interventions can maximize opportunities for spontaneous play by providing activities that give delight but don't require much planning or coordination on the part of the user. Interactive art and places for adult games such

as chess or ping-pong, fit the bill. Places to sit and relax are even more valuable if food and drink are available in the plaza or nearby. Small, versatile improvements can go a long way toward transforming a dull, underused space into a vibrant community gathering place. Programming and management are as important as design; an ongoing management plan and careful planning of events ensure long term success.

There may be opportunities to create new pocket parks and small plazas if vacant parcels exist in your community. Corner parcels at the ends of blocks are the best locations, but carefully designed mid-block plazas can be successful too.



Seating

Places to sit are essential for comfort in a plaza. Benches should be provided and moveable chairs give people the greatest flexibility and control of their environment.



Food

Food and drink give people a reason to gather and occupy a space. Food carts and other pop-ups can activate an otherwise dull space.

Sun and Shade

It is important to provide both sunlight and shade. Protection from the elements makes a plaza a year-round destination.



Water

People naturally congregate near water, and they love opportunities to interact with it. Water in motion creates white noise to make busy areas seem peaceful and calm.



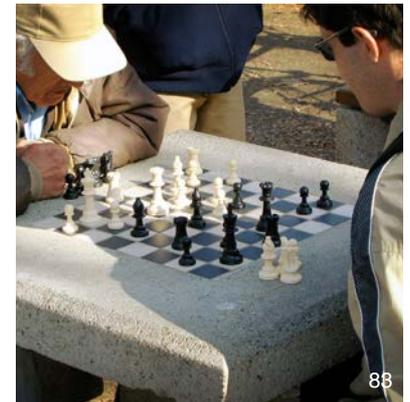
Play Equipment

Innovative play equipment can fit in even the smallest pocket park. Small parks put play in reach of more families and encourage healthy active lifestyles.



Games

Everyone needs to play! From chess to ping-pong, play equipment creates opportunities for all ages, turning public places into urban living rooms.





2.4 PLACES TO PLAY: NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

Parks come in a range of sizes and configurations, from neighborhood parks to large-scale regional parks. Neighborhood parks are usually found in residential areas, either single or multi-family. They are typically at least an acre in size, roughly the area of a small city block. In most American cities, they tend to serve as a neighborhood catchment areas of about one square mile or less. Regional parks occur much less frequently and are much larger in scale. In many communities, they include substantial amounts of wild land including forests, streams and ponds, and host native plants and animals. They are usually many acres: Forest Park in Portland is about 5,200 acres, Los Angeles' Griffith Park is about 3,000 acres, Seattle's Seward Park and Discovery Park are 300 and 1,100 acres, respectively. New York's Central Park is 843 acres.

Parks are the most versatile form of public space when it comes to accommodating play activities. All but the most intrinsically urban activities can happen here. American cities have historically consigned play to parks and ignored potential for it to happen elsewhere. By treating play as a kind of exercise, we have missed opportunities to make it an integrated part of our daily lives. Blurring the boundary between streets and parks can make play more accessible and commonplace.



Child's Play

Playgrounds for children have become a fixture of public parks in America since the beginning of the twentieth century. Accommodating play activities for children is the most literal form of urban play, and its importance cannot be overemphasized. In an era where urban sprawl is increasingly recognized as ecologically and economically unsustainable, making central cities more family friendly is essential.

Play is for People

Play is an activity for all ages. One significant way cities differ from suburbs is the relative importance of public space in the suburbs. A vibrant public realm that features ample opportunities for play attracts and retains workers.

When those workers decide to start families, a city that is child friendly will be less likely to lose them to suburban migration.



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Encouraging Play in Community Parks

Children's play areas should be organized by zones of activity where different kinds of play can occur. Following Linda Cain Ruth of Auburn University, play zones can be grouped by noisiness of play, kinds of play activities, ages of children playing, and kinds of play groups.

Quiet Zones:

- Transitional Zones - the front porch to the playground
- Water Play Zones - wading pools, spray parks etc.
- Sand Play Zones - teach motor skills to young children
- Dramatic Play Zones - facilitate role-playing, mimic spaces in the adult world
- Service Zones - support activities, picnic tables and trashcans, etc.

Intermediate Zones:

- Swing Zones
- Hard Surface Zones - space for sidewalk games; foursquare, hopscotch, etc.

Noisy Zones:

- Natural Zones - fields, trees and vegetation; let kids expend the maximum of energy
- Big Loose Parts Zones - children create their own play equipment using wood or plastic they find in infinite combinations
- Gross Motor Play Zones - slides, climbing, reaching and crossing; play structures

Additional factor that can inform good playground design:

Topography: Children see the world from a few feet off the ground. Elevating them above the ground plane offers a sense of delight and drama to play. Elevation can be achieved either with play structures or mounding the topography of the park.

Scale: Children live in an adult scaled world. Encountering objects scaled to their small bodies makes children feel they are in a world meant for them and their games.



Encouraging Play in Community Parks

Parks are ideal gathering places for a wide variety of play activities, from spontaneous and unstructured events like taking a walk to the formal and scheduled activities like a game of tennis. Parks should provide opportunities for as broad a range of play activities as possible. In large cities, a park can fill the roles of gym, backyard, and living room if planned and managed well.

Conventional park activities and facilities such as lawns and tennis courts can accommodate activities besides those they were originally designed for. Bicycle polo and ultimate Frisbee are a few examples.

Performing arts have a long history of activating parks, from Shakespeare in the Park to concerts and film screenings.





Playgrounds

Children see the world from a few feet off the ground. Elevating them adds a sense of delight and drama to play. Structures or mounding terrain change a child's perspective.



Water

Besides cooling off on hot days, water play allows children (and adults) to enjoy a very immersive experience of play. Spray parks and wading pools are examples.



Sand

Sand play is great for creativity and tactile learning in small children. Sand areas should be cleaned and maintained regularly.



Informal Games

From frisbee to bicycle polo, parks can accommodate a wide range of activities that don't need formal equipment. Cities should make it easy for citizens to use spaces creatively.



Temporary Installations

Pianos in public spaces and other programs like art and sculpture installations can activate a park space and create opportunities for creative expression and experimentation.



Film & Performance

Cities, neighborhood groups and other organizations can host film screenings and live performing arts outdoors. Food trucks and vendors can make the evening a night to remember.

3 RE-ENVISIONED PLAY



“Re-Envisioned Play” further explores each category in this handbook, re-envisioning areas in Seattle, WA that have the potential for urban play. Each example shows how urban play could be incorporated into a specific street, potential pocket park, neighborhood park, and underpass. These examples are hypothetical yet give design ideas that could easily become reality. Several of the ideas shown here could be temporary installations that bring the community together. Re-envisioning public spaces can help inspire the general public to re-envision the public spaces surrounding them.

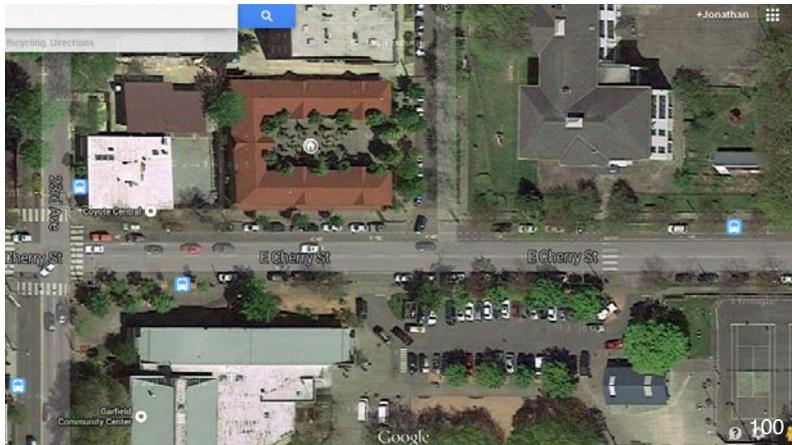


3.1 RE-ENVISIONED PLAY: PLAY STREET RETROFIT

Many streets in Seattle were built to accommodate street cars and are very wide as a result. Much of this right-of-way can be reclaimed from automobiles and repurposed to create public recreation space.

The images below show a re-imagining of two blocks of Cherry Street in Seattle's Central District. From 23rd to 25th, Cherry passes a community center, a high school, an alternative middle school, a private religious school and a youth arts education center.

Automobiles and busses can be channeled into a small portion of the street. Bright colors can create a seamless landscape from one building face to the one on the opposite side of the street. This signals to drivers that they are entering a shared space, and invites pedestrians to gather and enjoy the space.



Before



After



3.2 RE-ENVISIONED PLAY: POCKET PARK

The neighborhood of Greenwood in Seattle has several empty parking lots and spaces that could be activated into pocket parks or urban play features. In this re-envisioned open space, an empty building with a large parking lot is turned into a mini golf course. The back of the building is painted with a mural and a bench overlooks the golf course.

This is a simple, low-cost intervention that could be done by a community group or the building owner. The golf course could be movable or permanent depending on the situation. The area is automatically reactivated, and the neighborhood looks active instead of rundown. If the building is for sale or for lease, activating the space can also attract potential renters.



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Before



After

Mini Golf. Greenwood, Seattle, WA

3.3 RE-ENVISIONED PLAY: NEIGHBORHOOD PARK

In large open spaces like neighborhood and regional parks, play can go a step beyond the metal and wood playgrounds we see on a daily basis. Play can be something that the neighborhood does together as a community, such as creating a large knit play structure and hanging it from the trees. Kids can get involved by creating smaller play features out of a similar material. These could be swings or huts to play inside of, or they could participate on a larger scale project.

An intervention such as this, shown at Beer Sheva Park in Rainier Beach, Seattle could be temporary or permanent depending on the scale, upkeep, and permits necessary. Activities and interventions such as these bring the community together and keep parks new and interesting.





Beer Sheva Park, Rainier Beach, Seattle

3.4 RE-ENVISIONED PLAY: UNDERPASS PARK



Urban leftovers are the forgotten areas of the city, which are often dark and run-down. These areas have great potential for urban play. In this re-envisioned space, the I-5 underpass between Ravenna Park and Greenlake in Seattle is activated into a playground and obstacle course for kids and adults.

All materials are recycled and include tire walls and play features, a slack lining course and swings. The pillars are painted fun colors to distinguish the area from the rest of the underpass and attract pedestrians. This area has great potential for urban play since it is a wide-open space, near two parks, by the park-and-ride and on local bus lines.





After

I-5 Underpass near Greenlake and Ravenna Park, Seattle, WA

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Credit: art_inthee city via flickr.com/photos/art_inthecity/7255538338/

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24 Swinging Red Hammocks at the Danish Architecture Center in Copenhagen, Denmark.
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Image Credit: Jonathan Konkol

37 Street Painting

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39 Pike Street Performers in Seattle, WA

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61 Sunset Triangle Plaza, Los Angeles, CA

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