Visioning Voices 3-21-17 Hack > Tinker > Analyze > Design:
Nate Hommel, ASLA Director of Planning & Design, University City District, Philadelphia, PA
University City District is a partnership of world-renowned anchor institutions, small businesses and residents that creates opportunity, and improves economic vitality and quality of life in the University City area of West Philadelphia. Our primary mission is community revitalization. We work within a place-based, data-driven framework to invest in world-class public spaces, address crime and public safety, bring life to commercial corridors, connect low-income residents to careers, and promote job growth and innovation.
UCD Investment Area

Current Development

Although rapid transformation and continual growth have characterized University City’s real estate sector for the past several years, it’s clear that there is still plenty of room to grow. Thirty-two new development projects were recently advanced or completed, representing 8.3 million sq. ft. of new office, research, residential, academic, and medical facilities in addition to nearly 2.2 acres of public space. What follows is a summary of the projects continuing to transform University City’s skyline.
University City's Largest Employers
Employees based in University City

- IRS: 4,221
- Drexel University: 3,252
- The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia: 9,925
- Penn Medicine*: 14,161
- University of Pennsylvania: 16,705

*The total count for Penn Medicine in 2013 is 21,864
Source: UCD

Job Density in Philadelphia

Source: U.S. Census (LEHD, OnTheMap)
How We Are Funded:
TACTICAL URBANISM:

Is loosely defined as inexpensive, individual projects that make small places more lively and enjoyable

- Mike Lydon-

Allows for experimentation

Often leads to bigger interventions
TACTICAL URBANISM: Publications
TACTICAL URBANISM: Publications – Guide to materials and resources
“PERFECT IS THE ENEMY OF DONE”

First told to me by Ryan Russo NYCDOT
TACTICAL URBANISM: In New York City
Ok, it worked...now what?
Make it a little nicer, and if this works...
Make it permanent!
TACTICAL URBANISM: Why not in Winter?
TACTICAL URBANISM: Make Winter Fun – River Rink – Philly 2012 – Groundswell Design Group $2 Million in Annual Revenue
Placemaking, Tactical Urbanism & Trust Building at UCD
How to get these approved: The value of the words “PILOT” and “TEMPORARY”

Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3 Scenarios
Decaying Infrastructure + Tactical Urbanism = New Public Spaces!
Take Risks - 30th Street Station - 2011
The Porch –1.0 – Lots of testing...
We Learned... a lot and in 2013 we shared it all

Realizing the Potential of the Porch

A CASE STUDY IN DATA-DRIVEN PLACEMAKING

University City District WITH INTERFACE STUDIO

SEPTEMBER 2013
We Learned a lot and made some upgrades – The Porch 2.0
We Learned a lot and made some upgrades – The Porch 2.0
300 unique users on our swings – PER DAY!
5 years, 5 Lessons

The Porch
AT 30TH STREET STATION

5 Years, 5 Lessons

MONTHLY INDEX OF USERS AT THE PORCH

Use has increased substantially after UCD introduced each of the featured interventions at The Porch.

LESSON 4
The end is just the beginning (and maybe even life-changing).

UCD believes that rigorous onsite stewardship is critical, since a beautiful design and landscaping can go to the weeds if left untended. UCD runs a Public Maintenance program throughout University City, and the team keeps The Porch clean and well-maintained. We also deploy a Porch Ambassador, who is onsite five days a week to keep the space running smoothly, collect user data, answer visitors’ questions, guide food trucks, vendors, and performers onto the space, and generally serve as the eyes and ears of the site.

Most exciting is that we’ve used our commitment to stewardship as a springboard into expanding economic opportunity. As we delved more deeply into our placemaking work across University City, our landscaping fees began to pile up. So we took a hard look at our spending – as well as our organizational strengths – and made the decision to launch Green City Works, a landscaping social venture that employs local jobseekers.

The foundation of Green City Works’ job creation and employment training elements rests on UCD’s nationally recognized West Philadelphia Skills Initiative, which connects unemployed West Philadelphians seeking opportunity with...
Learning from Winter
Let’s Talk Streets as Public Spaces and Citizen Engagement
Parklets: An Origin Story

It started with Blaine Merker’s brilliant idea to put sod in a parking space in 2005.
2006 – Park(ing) Day is born
Rebar decides to make the idea Open Source, quickly evolves into a global event showing how many things you can do with an 8’x20’ piece of asphalt.
2010 – Parklets emerge in San Francisco
2011 – Parklets emerge in Philadelphia at University City District
Version 1.0 – START: SMALL. SMART. NIMBLE (We had just 2)
Version 1.0 – START: SMALL. SMART. NIMBLE
Version 2.0 – Our Parklets Expanded in 2012 (Increased to 5)
Version 2.0 – Built on Lessons Learned
TACTICAL URBANISM IN UNIVERSITY CITY: DESIGN>BUILD>INSTALL>EVALUATE

Strategies for Developing and Implementing Placemaking Devices

EVALUATION
TACTICAL URBANISM IN UNIVERSITY CITY:
DESIGN>BUILD>INSTALL>EVALUATE

Strategies for Developing and Implementing Placemaking Devices

EVALUATION

So who uses a Parklet?

What do they do there?

How long do they stay?

What’s the Economic Impact?
The Case for Parklets: Measuring the Impact on Sidewalk Vitality and Neighborhood Businesses

OVERVIEW & BACKGROUND

University City District (UCD) works to improve economic vitality and quality of life in the University City area of Philadelphia, by investing in world-class public spaces, addressing crime and public safety, and bringing life to commercial corridors. In 2011, UCD, working with the City of Philadelphia, installed the city’s first Parklets. These temporary seating platforms, placed flush with the curbs, create an extension of the sidewalk by replacing one or two parking spaces with a small new park. That dry definition belies the strikingly vibrant little flecks of activity that these new public spaces have become in our residential neighborhoods and on our commercial corridors. The Parklets have been remarkably successful at attracting users since the day they were installed. For noted urbanist William H. Whyte, when it comes to good urban spaces, “supply creates demand. A good new public space builds a new constituency. It stimulates people into new habits.” That was clearly the case at the Parklets. From early morning to late evening, many Parklets were consistently occupied by people eating, drinking, socializing, or working. Photos showed up on social media, and crucially, businesses reported impressive sales increases after their neighboring Parklets arrived. While these reports were compelling, and successful Parklets were being reported in San Francisco and elsewhere, our evidence for their positive impact remained anecdotal. Research on Parklets in New York City and Los Angeles had documented high levels of use in central business districts, but limited data, if any, were available on Parklet performance outside of downtowns and very high density neighborhoods, including:

- Their ability to attract and retain users;
- The diversity of their users and uses;
- Their impact on the sales at adjacent businesses; and
- The micro-scale environmental factors contributing to their success or failure.

In other words, how effective were Parklets at bringing more life to our public spaces and more foot traffic to our neighborhood businesses, and could we use this information to predict whether a Parklet would be successful elsewhere?

During the 2013 Parklet season, UCD conducted an intensive data collection and analysis effort to answer these questions. This report contains those results, and as cities, suburbs, and towns strive to improve their walkability and energize their public spaces, we hope that our findings can help other communities determine if Parklets are an appropriate urban design solution for them. As a relatively new form of “tactical urbanism,” Parklets are still likely to encounter some resistance, particularly as they may require a minor loss of parking. It is our hope, however, that these data can help advocates make the case for Parklets as cost-effective enhancements to the urban streetscape and quality of life, and identify the locations in their communities where Parklets are most likely to succeed.

CONCLUSION

There are few more difficult challenges in building walkable neighborhoods than overcoming the clout for parking. But as architect and urbanist Jan Gehl said, “If people rather than cars are invited into the city, pedestrian traffic and city life increase correspondingly.” Parklets, by their very nature, will almost inevitably conflict with protests over lost parking, but the data presented here illustrate the enormous gains to neighborhoods and businesses that can result from the relatively painless loss of one or two parking spaces. For modest cost, well-placed Parklets can attract huge and diverse crowds, animating sidewalks and bolstering neighborhood businesses, while truly creating “places” where none existed before. Finally, the data suggest that the success of those new places need not be left to chance; rather, good decisions in siting can increase.

Find the White Paper Here:

bit.ly/ucdparkletpaper
KEY FINDING –

Parklets on average boosted business by 20%
Paying for themselves in 18 Months
Version 3.0 – 60' Long – And we got the hosts to pay for it!
Let’s Talk Social Seating
The UCD Social Seating Challenge

University City District (UCD) is seeking a new type of structure for social seating, the design/fabrication of which will be selected through an invite only competition. This is more than just a seat; it will be an adaptable, portable, peculiar, social gathering space that may “pop-up” and entice a following.

**Design Requirements:**

- Comfortable
- Promote social interaction
- Not dangerous or harmful to the public
- Durable, light weight, high strength and weather resistant suitable for outdoor use
- Adjustable and adaptable (to work in both large and small spaces)
- Ability to be broken down for transport and to be set up in less than 60 minutes using minimal tools and suitable for a 1-3 person crew to assemble / disassemble.
- Replaceable components
- Scaled Architectural drawings must be produced to allow for reproduction of the seating element(s) if desired
- This will be a design build project with a budget not to exceed $22,000 and the project must be completed by June 14, 2013
- Seating unit(s) should accommodate groups of users in one or more units.

**Competition requirements:**

- Develop a conceptual idea or ideas to be presented to the selection committee at the University City District
- Include a brief narrative explaining your design concept

The selection committee will review the concept designs and may ask one or more design teams to make a presentation to the committee. Once the winner is selected they will meet with UCD on three (3) occasions to develop the final product(s) which will debut in University City in June at one of UCD’s signature events.
The goal of these seats is to provide spaces for social interaction. Looped In will pop-up in public spaces throughout University City for several weeks at a time. How they are used is up to you.

#LoopedIn
Social Seating – Looped In 2013
Social Seating – Looped In 2013
Social Seating – Looped In 2013
#Loopedin
Social Media Impact

Kids having Fun
Social Media Impact

Too much fun...
Damage Occurred
In for repairs
Good as New
TACTICAL URBANISM IN UNIVERSITY CITY:
DESIGN>BUILD>INSTALL>EVALUATE

Strategies for Developing and Implementing Placemaking Devices

Wait, I can do this too.
Use Museums for inspiration

I visited The Center for Art in Wood in Philadelphia in April 2013 and became very interested in finding a way to make beautiful wood benches in the public realm.
In an exhibit from Mark Gardner titled Call and Response I saw these beautiful all wood benches. But was surprised at the message I saw at their base...
A Visit to a Museum

Do NOT Sit On BENCH???
How can we make creative benches that ARE for sitting?
Office of New Urban Mechanics Innovation Grant

Summer 2013 – The Mayor’s Office of New Urban Mechanics offers up innovation grants for creative projects in the public realm.

A Matching grant that aimed to find solutions in the public realm that might not otherwise get approved.
Our social seats were a success but not great for sidewalks.

Our public space research informed us that shade is very important in summer but avoided in winter.

How can we translate these lessons learned to the sidewalks?

Maybe using the shade of street trees?
How have others tried this “all local wood” approach?
How about around a tree?
- Seats that sit under the tree canopy providing shade in summer and sun in winter.
- Implement ways to enhance the feeling of Prospect/Refuge (The longer people feel comfortable and safe, the longer they stay)
- Made of local, sustainable materials that compare to rainforest hardwoods
- Tough enough for street life
- Keep it under $2,000 per unit (ideally well below)
Tree Seats - Prototypes

Settled on 2 options in our price range

OPTION 1

OPTION 2
Let’s build them both and let the public decide
Tree Seats – Options 1 & 2

But such stale names.
The WILL or The CARLTON
Tree Seats – Lots of Media attention (because of the names?)
The Carlton – Clean, Simple, Minimalist, Strong
The Will – Funky, Encourage Skating, Beauty of the materials
PUBLIC VOTE – Physical Ballots, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, Facebook, our Blog – Received 200 total votes (74 in person votes) with some creative feedback:

For The Will:
“Comfortable!!”
“Very good ‘ergo’ design. No screws or gaps.
“Funky design.”

For The Carlton:
“Like because boards easily replaced. ‘Lighter’ curb feel.”
“Put the top of the Will on the bottom of the Carlton.”

General Feedback:
“Aesthetically the Will is superior, but the Carlton looks more resilient.”
“The Will is a skateboarders dream.”
“Go with the Will so I don’t have to pry boards off before I skate it”
“The guy (in the rendering) looks like he’s from the "Money for Nothin" video.”
“The Carlton looks like it will allow water to quickly drain off the bench and into the tree pit. It also looks as if it might be easier to weed and clean under.”
And the winner is... The Carlton
What if there isn’t a tree? – The Transit Seat – Dignity in Public Transit
What if there isn’t a tree? – The Transit Seat

All Local materials, and fabricators – EnMotion Design in Kensington and Black Locust Lumber from Lancaster County
Let’s Talk “Reversible” Public Space
Tactical Urbanism – On a 100 Year Old Bridge
Let’s Talk Permanent Public Space
Tactical Urbanism and Trust Building Has led us to:

Permanent Public Space – The 40th Street Trolley Portal
Existing Conditions
We hired Andropogon and are about to build this:

Permanent Public Space – The 40th Street Trolley Portal
Permanent Public Space – The 40th Street Trolley Portal
TACTICAL URBANISM IN UNIVERSITY CITY: The 40th Street Trolley Portal

WALL SIGN PAINTED ON LAP SIDING
WOOD FOLDING WINDOW SYSTEM
WOOD TRELLIS CANOPY WITH PLANTING
ALUM-CLAD ENTRANCE DOORS WITH FIXED TRANSOMS
HORIZONTAL LAP SIDING WITH 18" HIGH BLUESTONE BASE
TACTICAL URBANISM In University City: The 40th Street Trolley Portal
Lastly...

Let’s Talk Group Dynamics and Trust Building
We are all so busy, how can we communicate...

these complex ideas....

and turn them into action?
"In God we trust. Everyone else bring data."

-Michael Bloomberg-
William Whyte’s: The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces
UCD’s Porch at 30th Street Study – Available for Free

UCD’s Parklet White Paper – Available For Free

UCD’s 5 years, 5 lessons Document – Available for Free
stewart 5:08 PM
I'mma tweeting that

https://twitter.com/glitchlog/status/223600465462566912

Glitch Change Log @glitchlog
12 new hairstyles & 19 new skin colors have been added to the Vanity. Taste the hairy rainbow! Forum post:
http://www.glitch.com/forum/general/24360/

Thursday, July 12th, 2012 7:11 PM

myles 1:07 PM
Entering a street with a Qurazy for you now shows a pretty animated overlay where the growl used to go, for 10 seconds

liz 1:09 PM
Fixed bug #9358. Piggies shouldn't get stuck walking in place any more.

bugbot 1:30 PM
Bug #9358

Title
Piggies are stuck walking in place

Creator
mackenzie

Assignee
liz

Status
fixed

Priority
normal

eric 1:34 PM
@kristel, can you test on dev.glitch.com to see if coat sleeves are now working as expected?

kristel 1:15 PM
Indeed they are! Thanks @eric!
Ok, how do we convince Designers to listen to us?
Hack > Tinker > Analyze > Design:
Hack > Tinker > Analyze > Design:
Nate Hommel, ASLA Director of Planning & Design, University City District, Philadelphia, PA

www.Universitycity.org