CROSSING THE STREET
Building DC’s Inclusive Future Through Creative Placemaking

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**Crossing the Street: Building DC’s Inclusive Future Through Creative Placemaking** is the District of Columbia Office of Planning’s biggest and most innovative placemaking program to date.

**Crossing the Street** launched in early 2016 with a focus on creating fun and inclusive experiences in neighborhoods across the city. The projects were designed to build community in areas that are experiencing rapid change, using arts and culture to activate space, foster conversation and collaboration and highlight and support existing neighborhood assets. Each project used arts and culture to build the social capital in communities where projects were implemented.

The DC Office of Planning received a grant from the Kresge Foundation to undertake creative placemaking and civic engagement activities, which built upon recently completed work in planning, design, community engagement, and equity. Each project was led by a project curator, encouraged from the outset to think differently about place and how to engage community. The neighborhood projects followed a similar overall process but with customization to the community context and people. The diversity of communities, curators and planning contexts yielded a range of approaches with a timeframe ranging from a single day to over a month. Each project showcased the use of different types of community infrastructure (ranging from a small park to a wide sidewalk to an entire corridor), community culture and heritage (i.e., Latino, Ethiopian and African American), and design and programming (ranging from hammocks to tea ceremonies to storytelling).

**Crossing the Street** applied an arts and culture-forward approach to engaging communities in the future of the District of Columbia. **Crossing the Street** provided a platform for the DC Office of Planning to reimagine how they engage community and plan by creating moments and experiences that connect people, inspire action and creativity and celebrate the unique and important aspects of neighborhoods.

“All infrastructure is a stage, all residents are performers” is the vision of the District of Columbia’s Cultural Plan. Crossing the Street tested and affirmed this vision through 15 creative placemaking projects which embodied our history, diversity, and opportunity.

Through **Crossing the Street**, the Office of Planning defined places across the District for the convergence of Creators, Consumers, and Space.

Meanwhile, **Crossing the Street** experimented with a range of performative mediums across various spaces, which acted as stages or canvasses, for creative placemaking projects.

**Office of Planning’s mission** is to guide development of the District of Columbia, including the preservation and revitalization of our distinctive neighborhoods, by informing decisions, advancing strategic goals, encouraging the highest quality outcomes, and engaging all communities.

**The Kresge Foundation** is a $3.5 billion private, national foundation that works to expand opportunities in America’s cities through grantmaking and social investing in arts and culture, education, environment, health, human services and community development in Detroit.

**The Kresge Foundation** produced the medium

**CREATORS**
- 4 Projections / Film
- 5 Dance / Movement
- 2 Light Show
- 5 Games
- 1 Rollerskating
- 2 Interviews
- 2 Storytelling
- 3 Drumming
- 5 American Sign Language
- 3 Music
- 2 Tea Ceremony
- 3 Mural / Painting

**SPACE (Stage/Canvas)**
- Former Hospital Campus
- Plaza
- Park
- Building Wall
- Green Space
- Street Right-of-way
- Vacant Lot
- Alley
- University Green
- Parking Lot
- Museum Lawn

**MEDIUM**  
**SPACE** (Stage/Canvas)

**CONSUMERS** residents were both audience and performers

**THE KRESGE FOUNDATION**
Thank you to the Kresge Foundation for their support and trust in the Office of Planning to undertake creative placemaking and civic engagement activities in the District. Thousands of DC residents, business owners, and city stakeholders contributed to Crossing the Street, ensuring the production of fun, safe, inclusive, and authentic placemaking interventions in 15 neighborhoods.

In addition to the Mayor’s Special Events Task Group and the DC Public Space Regulation Division, Crossing the Street was made possible by the team at the DC Office of Planning: Eric D. Shaw, Director, Sakina Khan, Deputy Director Citywide Strategy and Analysis, Tracy Gabriel, Associate Director Neighborhood Planning, Joshua Silver, Lead Planner for Strategic Initiatives and Partnerships, Dan Emerine, Senior Transportation Planner, Timothy Maher, Urban Designer, and all of the individual project managers.

Finally, thank you to the following project curators and their partners who made each project not only possible, but unique and highly participatory.

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This three component project linked DC’s disco roller skate culture to pivotal points in city and neighborhood history. Participants were immersed in the historical, social, and cultural significance of style skating, roller rink communities, and artistic expression in DC across the decades with an emphasis on the era of DC Home Rule in 1973. A collaborative art installation consisting of recycled phonebooths equipped with phones that played recorded oral histories were placed throughout the historic U Street Corridor providing an opportunity to connect with the past and contemplate the future of the neighborhood.
Video portraits were used to highlight the effects of neighborhood population change and redevelopment in the Park View and Pleasant Plains neighborhoods. A series of recorded video interviews of both old and new community members in the neighborhood were turned into video portraits and displayed in vacant storefront windows and projected on the walls of neighborhood buildings. The project built neighborhood empathy and inspired an understanding that community members want to be seen, with a realization that many people living in the neighborhood are unseen.
An underutilized public park recreated a Latin American city plaza long identified as a place of connection and pride for Adams Morgan's Latino population. A unique sensory environment was created using a combination of creative programs and activities to build community and celebrate the neighborhood’s Latino culture. Neighbors enjoyed bright orange hammocks, the sounds of children reading and the taste of tamales, empanadas and pastries. The project literally lifted up the ideas of people using them to decorate the tree tops of the park.

LOCATION
Underutilized triangular public park in the commercial center of Adams Morgan (NW).

CURATOR
Ciudad Emergente

DATE
October 2016
WARD 8 CABARET / INFINITY BEACON

Public art and performance tested the potential for a vibrant local spot to showcase neighborhood pride. The project embraced an existing underutilized neighborhood node, bringing it to life with performances and a neighborhood beacon that signaled arrival into the Bellevue / Washington Highlands neighborhoods. Performances exploring the emotional sides of neighborhood change accompanied the unveiling of the beacon.

LOCATION
Large civic plaza in front of Bellevue Library and vacant green space at main point of entry into commercial area of the neighborhood (SE).

CURATOR
Gehl Studio

DATE
November 2016
Ephemeral events, long-term art, and play installations activated the public realm and built community cohesion in DC’s Ward 7. A musical bench, playable structure, and mobile storytelling porch transformed a wide sidewalk into a fun destination for play, physical activity, and community building. The project provided a space for longtime residents to bring neighborhood stories to life, engaging youth, and to bring public life for morning and evening commuters. The project used a collaborative design/build process to invest in the neighborhood and introduce a sense of place, enhance safety and demonstrate an alternative condition is possible.
The micro-communities, cultures, and traditions within the Shaw neighborhood were explored and celebrated through a series of small high-impact events set in public and private spaces that gave voice to residents and empowered community members to think creatively about their neighborhood. The project engaged older and newer residents, passersby and visitors, each highlighting the rich culture that still courses through the neighborhood as new development occurs.

LOCATION

Sidewalks, alleys, and local landmarks in the Shaw neighborhood (NW).

CURATOR

Pleasant Plains Workshop

DATE

September - October 2016
CELEBRATE IVY CITY!

A series of artistic episodes told the story of the neighborhood’s identity, from its history into the future. Residents worked with local artists to design and fabricate a large three-dimensional screen-printed plywood sign which was set in a highly visible public space and used as a backdrop to celebrate the neighborhood’s rich heritage and identity. The project stirred the soul of Ivy City and encouraged conversations about the neighborhood’s future and community needs in the face of development and demographic change.

LOCATION
Neighborhood park at the intersection of West Virginia Avenue and Mount Olivet Road (NE).

CURATOR
buildingcommunityWORKSHOP and Local Initiatives Support Corporation

DATE
November 2016
The changing narrative of the neighborhood was captured through film, interviews, and improv, that involved theater, movement, and sign language. Set on the campus green of Gallaudet University (the world’s only deaf and hard of hearing liberal arts university), an interactive and improvisational performance accompanied by recorded interviews wove together community connections that inspired residents and university students to interact with one another and understand neighborhood history and cultural differences. The project offered a new understanding of the impact of changing neighborhood demographics and linguistic barriers between the hearing and deaf communities.

Olmstead Green on the historic campus of Gallaudet University (NE).
PROJECT
A soundscape was mixed to honor the past, present, and future of three neighborhoods built from interviews, soundwalks, voice messages, and song requests. A celebratory neighborhood listening party held in a vacant lot provided a setting to play the documented sounds and stories of the community. The project aimed to both preserve what is unique about the community and empower residents to communicate their sense of identity and place connecting diverse and local audiences in a way that is both accessible and authentic.

LOCATION
Vacant lot at the intersection of North Capitol Street and Bates Street (NW).

CURATOR
Van Alen Institute

DATE
November 2016
Theater and public art were used to give Southwest neighborhood residents a platform to tell their stories as the area enters a period of growth and change. The project featured free, youth-driven theater workshops and interactive art installations to engage neighborhood youth to creatively tell their stories and make their voices heard about the present and future of the Southwest neighborhood. The project culminated with a community event consisting of performances of the youth-created monologues, music, interactive stations, games, and food. Stories and performances revealed a nuanced view of youth highlighting both the advantages and the challenges of growing up in the Southwest neighborhood.

LOCATION
Vacant lot at Waterfront Metro Station (SW).

CURATOR
Young Playwrights’ Theater

DATE
November 2016
PROJECT

Light, performance, music, live painting, and a homecoming fashion show were used to bridge communities and strengthen relationships in the Van Ness neighborhood. Using a semi-public space on the UDC campus, sidewalks and commercial storefront windows, the project produced a range of intergenerational social activities connecting people of diverse backgrounds and ages to share and enjoy a single experience. Interactive light art installations grabbed the attention of passersby generating awareness of the project while a community art project, Community Drop Cloth created a unique social experience for friends and strangers to enter each other’s personal space to mix, mingle and collaborate on a cohesive work of art reflective of the neighborhood context.

LOCATION

Large plaza and sidewalks in front of the UDC Student Center and Van Ness Metro entrances (NW).

CURATOR

Ward 8 Arts and Culture Council

DATE

November 2016
An interactive series of events presented shared stories of the Walter Reed Army Medical Center’s 100+ year history in NW Washington, DC, from the local community, veterans, and hospital workers. The results of the artist interactions brought forth a film which shared the echoes of Walter Reed’s history, through its people’s eyes; a tribute to Purple Heart heroes; the visualization of hundreds of stories on colorful ribbons; and the desires for the future, woven into a rich yarn tapestry by Ward 4 residents of all ages. The culminating event occurred on the first day the hospital campus was publicly reopened to kick-start a multi-year redevelopment following the Army’s closure and relocation in 2011.

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**LOCATION**

Central historic green space and perimeter fence on the site of the former Walter Reed Army Medical Center (NW).

**CURATOR**

Cultural DC

**DATE**

April 2017
A full-scale replica of an 1867 Freedman’s Bureau house was the backdrop to guide visitors on a reflective experience on how we live, both in the house and in the broader community. The project commemorated the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Freedmen’s Bureau community in the neighborhood, later named Hillsdale. A series of activities including community gatherings, historical presentations and dialogues helped to spur conversation and self-reflection among attendees who could draw parallels between the past and present. With anticipated development and change coming to this community, the project provided critical insight into understanding how heritage can inform the future.

Grassy open space in the front yard of the Anacostia Community Museum (SE).

The Pink Line Project

July 2017
THE LOT AT THE LIZ

The project brought meaningful, energized, and safe community gathering spaces to the 14th Street NW neighborhood by creating opportunities to celebrate the LGBTQ communities’ contributions to Greater Washington. A large, proud, pop-art style mural covering an entire block of buildings enlivened the street giving visibility to the LGBTQ community and deep connections the Whitman-Walker Health Center has with the communities it serves. Activities and events evoked the spirit of creativity and feeling of safety and acceptance by all participants. The project tested how a range of public space concepts—sidewalk installations, interactive community spaces, window art—could be incorporated into the future redevelopment of the building and creation of the center’s new cultural space.

LOCATION
Building faces and parking lot of 1701 14th Street NW, between R and Riggs streets (NW).

CURATOR
Whitman-Walker Health, Fivesquares Development and No Kings Collective

DATE
July 2017
The project raised awareness about Kingman Island, one of the District’s premier community and environmental assets, though lesser known and a largely undiscovered part of Washington, DC. Traditional African dance performances and activities engaged a wide range of residents in the natural environment providing opportunities to learn about DC percussive dance traditions and the island’s unique combination of trails, water, and wildlife that is rarely experienced by large numbers of Washingtonians. Arriving by foot, bike, car, and transit, visitors were left with a constructive image of the island, Anacostia River and surrounding community and sense of encouragement to become involved in the ongoing preservation and management of the island for future generations to enjoy.

Kingman and Heritage Islands in the Anacostia River (NE).

Step Afrika!

August 2017