

# Crossing the Street

a case study in creative placemaking

Washington, D.C.

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Special thanks in Ward 7 to superstar volunteer Mark Garrett for stewarding the Superstop; Ángel Zambrano for leading the evaluation ground-team and for living up to his name; Steve Levy and America's Kids for powering the Boombench; Larry Clark, Tiffany Majors and the front desk staff at Park 7 for hosting the project. Thank you to the Ward 7 stakeholder group. Special thanks in Ward 8 to W.B. Patterson Elementary School and their wonderful students; Jared Noe for making it come together; Charles Tohmas; Maria Perry and the Bellevue Neighborhood Library staff; and the Ward 8 Stakeholder Group.

Finally, this project would not be possible without the vision and dedication of DC's Office of Planning. Special thanks to Director Eric Shaw for insisting that this project inform tactical urbanism best practice and to Sakina Khan, Tracy Gabriel, and our tireless and talented project manager Evelyn Kasongo.

Photos in this report by: Everett Richardson, Public Workshop, Jay Coleman, Ángel Zambrano, Gehl.

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# How to use this document

This case study is geared for professionals in the planning, design, and placemaking fields seeking to learn from others doing this work. In this document you will find artist statements, project descriptions, a description of our process, and a reflection about how these projects achieved public life goals identified by the curatorial team and our stakeholder groups.

This document is one of several case studies produced by Gehl that describe the impact of creative prototypes on various public life outcomes, from perception of a place, to socioeconomic mixing, to children playing, to cultivating creativity, to a more diverse public life profile.

Read more here: [issuu.com/gehlarchitects](https://issuu.com/gehlarchitects)



**How can art spark a conversation about the role of public space in neighborhood change?**

# Crossing the Street

## Planning-by-Doing in DC

For several years, the DC Office of Planning (DCOP) has experimented with how temporary urbanism can support planning goals. Through projects like Temporiums and 5x5, DCOP (and the Commission on the Arts and Humanities) has grown their capacity to curate and leverage projects that intentionally use arts and culture to shape the physical, social and economic future of communities.

Now, with a citywide update of the comprehensive plan and the city's first plan for arts and culture, DCOP is especially well-poised to leverage the impacts of creative placemaking projects throughout the district.

Crossing the Street: Building DC's Inclusive Future through Creative Placemaking initiative is designed to promote community-building in over one dozen neighborhoods that are experiencing rapid demographic and social change. The program's goal is to engage residents in conversations on the future of the District as DCOP embarks on an update of DC's Comprehensive Plan and to demonstrate or test select placemaking recommendations articulated in OP's neighborhood plans and District Department of Transportation (DDOT) transit corridor studies and livability studies.

DCOP selected project sites that were experiencing demographic change, that had undergone recent private and public investment, and that could benefit from an effort to build community and a sense of place through culture.

↑ Walter Reed Dreams



Visit [www.planning.dc.gov/page/creative-placemaking](http://www.planning.dc.gov/page/creative-placemaking) to learn more about DCOP art and culture initiatives



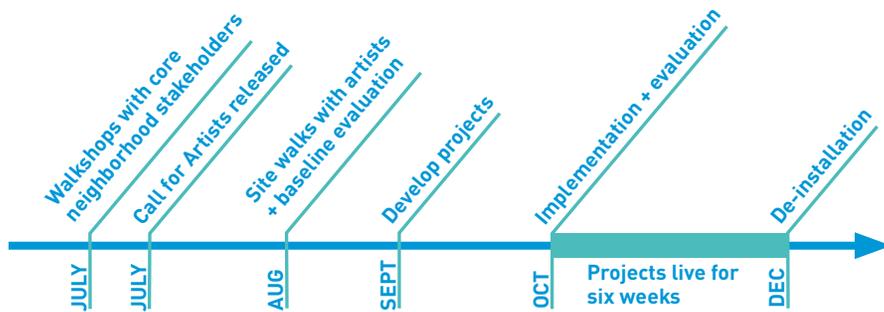
- Location of Gehl Crossing the Street project
- Other Crossing the Street project sites

## Process

Gehl was selected through a competitive process to and paired with two Crossing the Street project sites. As curator, producer, and evaluator of this project, Gehl worked with local stakeholder groups and commissioned artists in collaboration with DCOP.

We were enthusiastic about working with artists because we believe the process of neighborhood change is intrinsically emotional and cultural. Planning processes that do not pay homage to this element of the work often fall short of their goals.

We began our process by meeting with core stakeholders. To understand how interventions might explore neighborhood needs, we asked stakeholders to select and discuss photos from art interventions and great places around the world. Afterwards, we walked outside and performed a quality assessment of the spaces, rating how well they ranked in terms of protection, comfort, and enjoyment using Gehl's 12 Quality Criteria. We synthesized this engagement and site observations into a set of key pressure points and opportunities that informed overarching goals and public life outcomes. We included this in our Call for Artists, which was sent to approximately 50 people and distribution lists. We returned again to walk the sites with artists. Shortly after these visits, artists were selected and in a short timeline developed and implemented projects.

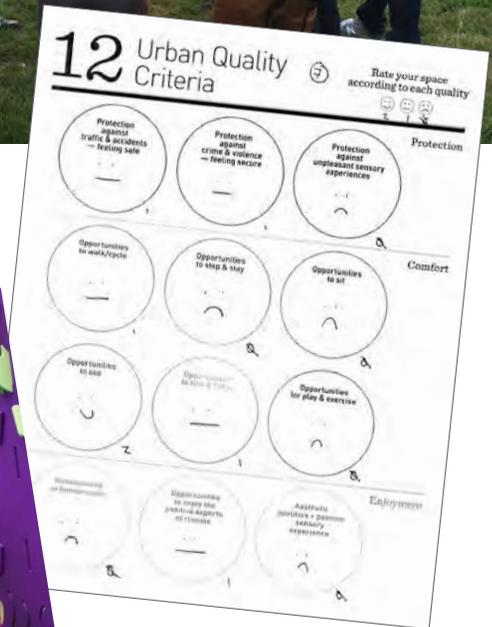


2016 Process Timeline



A "Favorite Places, Creative Spaces" Exercise

July 2016 Call for Artists



Gehl's 12 Quality Criteria as ranked by one stakeholder

## Gehl Approach

Gehl believes that good cities have vibrant public life that invites all people in a city to participate.

Public life is what people do when they live life outside of their homes, workplaces, and cars. It is one of the joys of living in the city. As cities grapple with social and economic fissures, one of the things that brings people together is public life.

Large nature reserves aside, Washington DC's public rights-of-way comprise an area much larger than its public parks and open spaces. These spaces can be used to more equitably distribute benefits and opportunities while creating a space for people of diverse backgrounds to interact.

While urban design cannot address all social and equity issues, it can provide a wider range of invitations for all people to comfortably share the public realm.

Gehl has developed a framework for defining and evaluating the quality of public spaces over 60 years of research and practice. **A high quality public space is one that provides protection from the elements, crime, and traffic; comfort in movement and spending time; and a sense of delight, belonging, and stimulation derived from the city itself.**

Our Crossing the Street interventions applied some of these universal principles to the unique context of Wards 7 and 8.

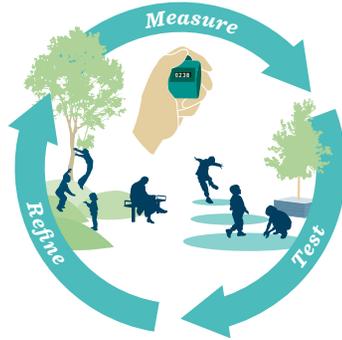


Some rules of thumb, such as a great street has visual stimuli every four seconds, help us advise and design streetlife around the world.

## Evaluating Success

Evaluating the impact of a temporary experiment is essential for informing larger processes like urban design strategies and community outreach.

The primary challenge of evaluating Crossing the Street projects was the challenge of measuring and documenting outcomes from ephemeral social and aesthetic experiences. Nevertheless, we believe certain outcomes could be measured.



We have defined areas in which these projects sought to have impact:

- **Enliven the street** with art, culture, and storytelling
- **Engage people not normally part of the planning process** in the work of neighborhood change by making it fun and active
- **Test urban design concepts and show an alternative is possible** by prototyping elements from neighborhood plans
- **Build capacity and identify new civic leaders** by engaging residents and organizations in the projects and amplifying good work already being done in these neighborhoods

Lessons learned will provide the basis for future neighborhood improvements in Wards 7 and 8 while contributing to a growing body of knowledge around public art for community development.

## Evaluation Methods



# Ward 7 SUPER STOP

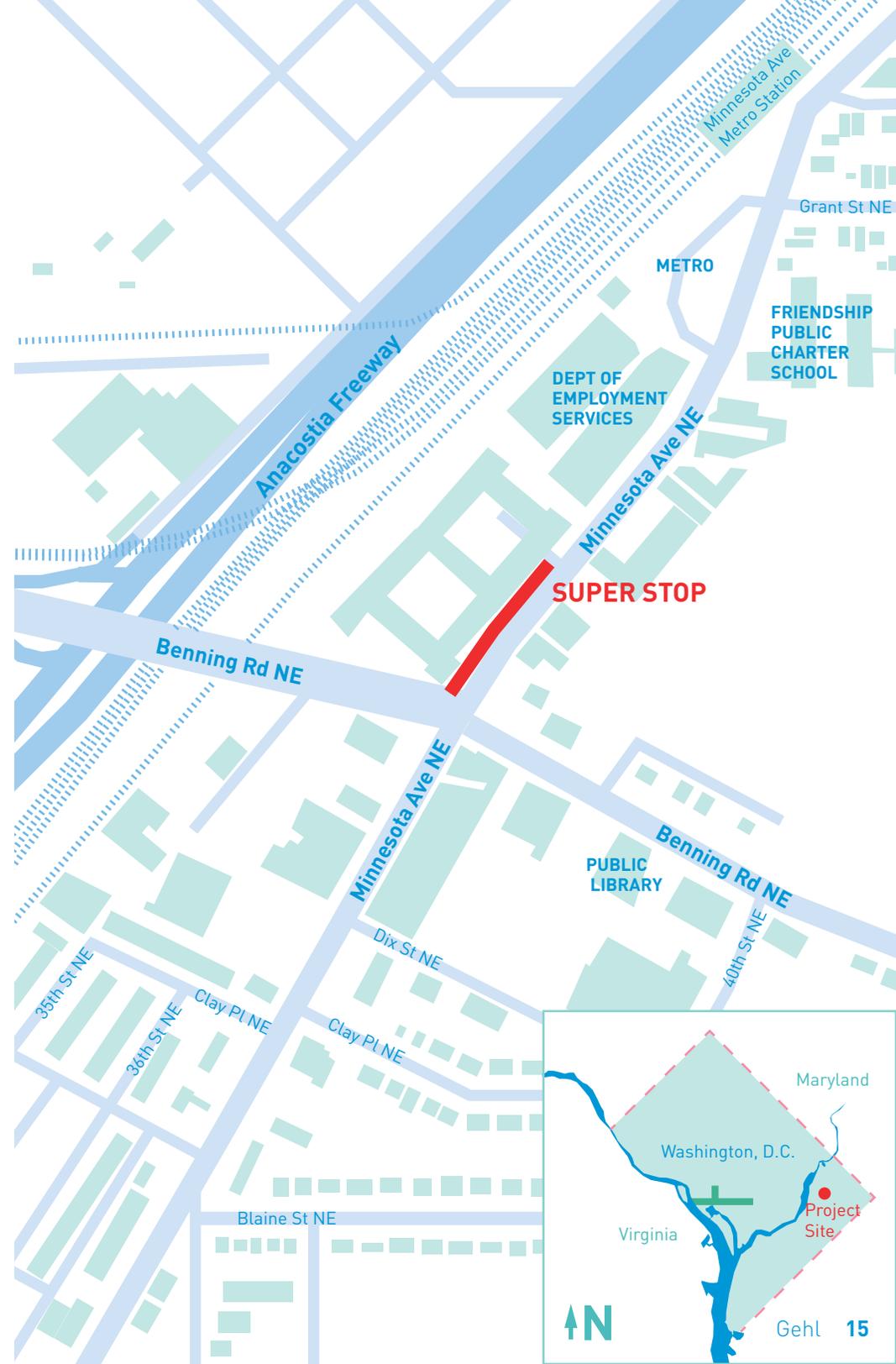
In Downtown Ward 7 the streets are wide with crowded bus stops and nowhere to sit. We asked: What might a bus stop look like if kids and arts organizations were asked to make it a SUPER(bus)STOP?

# Minnesota and Benning

## Neighborhood Context

The intersection of Minnesota and Benning is undergoing tremendous change with new infrastructure investments, new residents, and new ground-floor businesses. However, although many people - especially students and young people - pass through this place every day, there isn't a strong sense of identity or places for people to gather and spend time with one another in public. This type of meeting place for residents to meet, commiserate, converse, and build is especially important in a neighborhood undergoing rapid change. In a stakeholder meeting, participants noted lack of shade, seating and other missing amenities as an issue inhibiting this type of place from existing.

Wide public right of way with few amenities for bus riders



## Engagement

Two meetings were held at Park 7 to discuss the project, and several one-on-one meetings occurred with neighborhood organizations and schools.

## Ward 7 Profile

**8,400** People per square mile

**94%** Black

**20%** Completed Bachelors

**55%** Households with vehicle

**70%** Renters

**19%** Unemployed

**24%** Poverty

SOURCE: 2010-2014 American community survey 5-year estimates, (Census Tracts 009604, 009603, 009602, 007803)



1



4



5



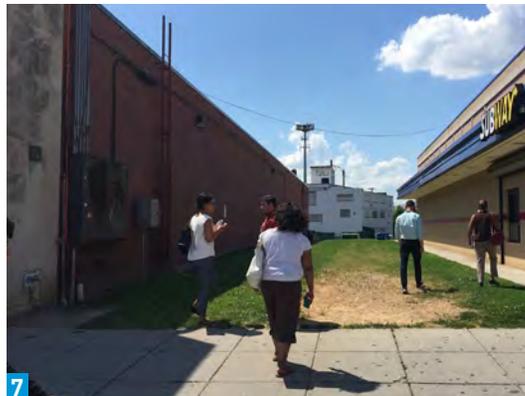
2



3



6



7

1. Strong African American heritage
2. Demand for more activities and services on the street
3. High bus-rider population
4. New investment

5. Lack of seating
6. Lack of seating
7. Some vacant lots

## Public Life Goals

### Ward 7, Crossing the Street

- **Waiting for the bus is dignified and fun** - More people comfortably sitting down while waiting for the bus or walking down the street - create a sense of place
- **Create a comfortable micro-climate** during the day - this area of the street can get hot
- **People of all ages** - in particular teens and children - choose to spend time on the street
- **Incorporate play** into the everyday activity of walking down Minnesota Street
- **Create a sense of safety at night** - this area of the street can get dim at night
- **Sense of protection** from the intensity of adjacent traffic
- Use a collaborative design/build process to **invest in the neighborhood** by hiring local craftspeople, teach skills, engage youth in the street to build a sense of connection and ownership to place.

## Project Overview

The Superstop was installed for six weeks. It was designed and built by the people that use the bus stop with guidance from design/build champions Public Workshop. More than two dozen people ages 4-74 made the Superstop come to life - many of them learning how to use power tools for the first time. The Superstop included ephemeral events as well as longer-term art/play installations. It was stewarded by the artists, volunteers Mark Garrett and Ángel Zambrano, The Hope Foundation, neighbors, and Park 7 Apartments.

# Boom Bench

## Process

Over 100 people in DC and in Public Workshop's Philadelphia studio contributed to the design and build of the Superstop.

The days working out there were so important. Some people were skilled but between work. Having the opportunity for them to feel like they were serving their community was meaningful.

-Mark Garrett, Superstop Volunteer



The Boombench was designed over three weekends and built in two days in public.



Listen to the Playlist here:  
[www.mixcloud.com/kymonefreeman/](http://www.mixcloud.com/kymonefreeman/)  
[tinyurl.com/qejqhe](http://tinyurl.com/qejqhe)

The design conceived of by Park 7 resident, Ms. Jade.



I love it. It's somewhere to sit, there are no seats at the bus stop, it's perfect. Just where it's at, the size, the shape, the form—it's perfect. Six weeks isn't long enough! We need this here every day! 365 days a year.

- Diane Jones, Ward 7 resident

# BOOMBENCH

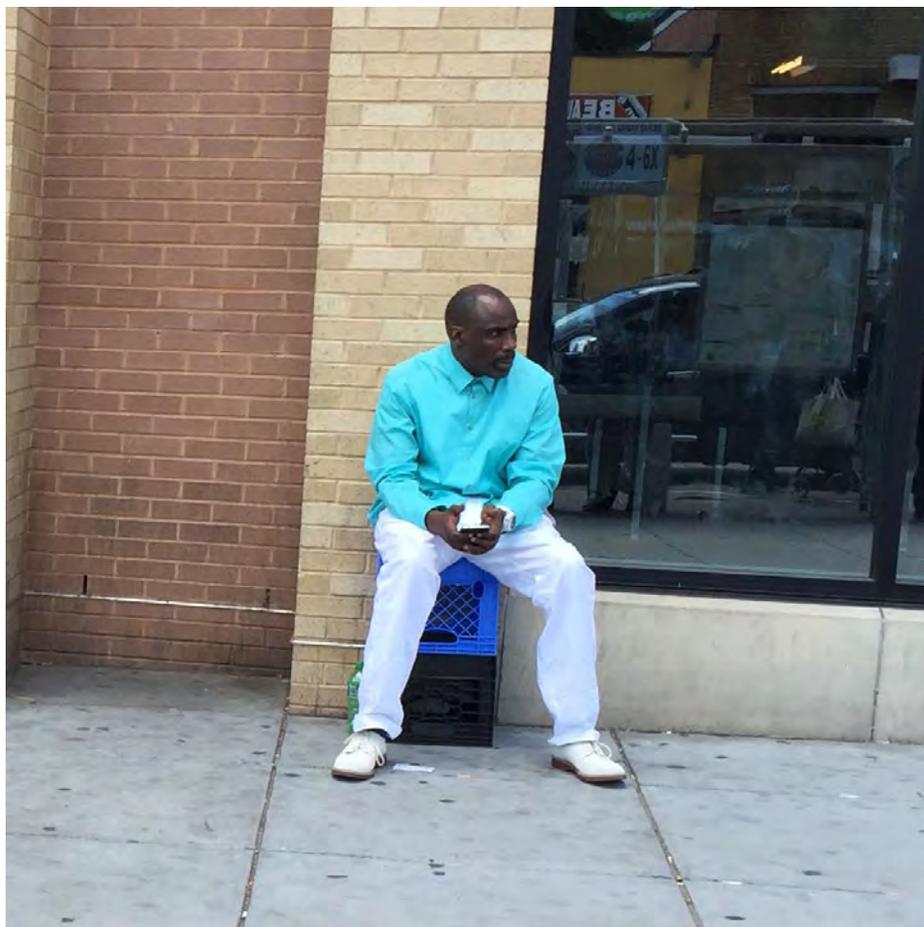
The Boombench Sit-In is a musical bench that broadcasts an 8-hour loop of music that matters from local We Act Radio. Weatherproof speakers hidden in the bench connected wirelessly to a playback device inside the adjacent business.

## About the Artists

A cheerleader of possibility, **Public Workshop** creates uniquely engaging opportunities for youth and their communities to shape the design of their cities. [www.publicworkshop.us](http://www.publicworkshop.us)

**We Act Radio**, DC's only independent radio station, celebrated its 5th anniversary by extending its broadcast range from its Anacostia studio to the Superstop. [www.weactradio.com](http://www.weactradio.com)

## MINNESOTA + BENNING



■ ■ This convened a lot of conversations. At a traditional bus stop, we have this blinder mentality where I sit here and I look straight ahead. And if I can't, I'll plug in and tune out to my own world. But the bench forced people to look and talk to each other. I heard a younger dude telling an older dude, "You should have heard it when they played Nicki Minaj and Malcolm X at the same time!" And the older dude was like, "What time is that? I've got to come back!" Would these two people have ever said anything to each other? I don't think so. This was in essence, a community stoop.

## BEFORE



## AFTER

# Play Stop

## Process


 We were able to engage people from the neighborhood - some of whom were largely considered a problem on that corner. They stuck around for hours and hours to design the project and came back again and again to build.

- Alex Gilliam, Public Workshop



Teaching youth to use power tools



The Playstop was built in just over one day by neighbors and volunteers




 The residents and bus riders are having a blast on the benches especially the one that you can climb! I've witnessed people taking pictures and having fun on them all times of day.

- Tiffany Majors, Community Manager at Park 7

# PLAY STOP

Climb here, climb there,  
climb everywhere!

During their design/build weekends Public Workshop asked kids what they wanted to do at the bus stop.

They said CLIMB.

This playable bus stop was constructed from wood and cardboard tubes. The ambiguity of the design meant kids used it to climb - but also to bang on to make music, and as a seat.

**Artist:** Public Workshop





# MOBILE STORYTELLING PORCH

Double Nickels is a reminiscence theater focusing on storytelling with people over 50. The Wildflower Porch is a traveling porch that invites residents to share history across generations and culture to celebrate the experiences that make community. Using the vernacular architecture of storytelling, the mobile porch popped up twice at the Superstop for longtime residents to bring neighborhood stories to life, and to engage with youth walking home from school.

#### **About the Artist:**

Founded in 2006 by Antoinette Ford, **Double Nickels Theatre Company** is a community theatre whose focus pays tribute to the legacy of seniors and veterans by highlighting and sharing their true life stories.

# Mobile Storytelling Porch

People enjoyed having something to do while waiting for the bus



In between performances Double Nickels urged the audience to join their Porch Sitter's Union



The Mobile Porch unpacks quickly: laying down the green carpet



**SUPERSTOPS**

October 27  
7:00am to 5:00pm

October 29  
12:00 to 2:00pm

4020 Minnesota Ave. NE at Benning Rd.

#crossingthestreet #w7superstops

We asked local youth and artists to build a SUPER bus stop - come see what they came up with!

The Mobile Porch packs up to 12' x 7' x 12.5' and is transported on wheels by truck.



# COMMUTER JAZZ

In honor of the 100th birthday of American jazz greats vocalist Ella Fitzgerald, trumpeter John “Dizzy” Gillespie and pianist Thelonious Sphere Monk, East River Jazz curated a program of Jazz for Commuters.

## About the Artist

Incorporated in 1973, for the past seven years **East River Jazz** has produced the East River Jazz series of cultural conversations and performances. Since 2011 East River Jazz has partnered with the DC Jazz Festival to present EAST RIVER JAZZ Fest annually in mid-June. East River Jazz presents in community venues where, typically, people gather for reasons other than listening to jazz programming. [www.eastriverjazz.net](http://www.eastriverjazz.net)

# Commuter Jazz

For two days, commuters were serenaded with bold and beautiful music.

Opening Weekend Celebration featured: Gillespie/Monk Duets  
 Inside the Loop: Morning Rush Be-Bop East River Jazz; The Giants of Jazz featuring The Timeless Trio



Commuter Jazz took place on the Porch



Passersby stop to watch the music



During the performances Gehl asked people what a Superstop means to them.

# Superstop Evaluation



# Superstop Evaluation



## Goal: Enliven streets

**Outcome:** The Superstop was successful in diversifying the public life of the street by giving more people a place to sit, and especially giving kids a place to play.

After the installation we found a 100% reduction in secondary seating: instead of sitting on the ground, milk-crate, stoop, or planter edge, people had a comfortable, creative, community-designed place to wait.

How has activity changed?  
Ward 7 Bus Stop, Weekday

20 October (Before)



1 November (After)



The Superstop is an idea that needs to be broadened. As a neighbor and resident of Ward 7, it was really nice to see the positive hustle and bustle. We even had a marriage proposal on the porch!

- Toni Ford, Double Nickels Theatre

- Standing (+19.3 percentage point change, aka "pp")
  - Waiting for Transit (-26.3 pp)
  - Bench Seating (+7.0 pp)
  - Cafe Seating (+1.7 pp)
  - Secondary Seating (-5.0 pp)
  - Lying Down (-0.8 pp)
  - Commercial Activity (-0.4 pp)
  - Cultural Activity (+4.5 pp)
- \*not mutually exclusive

## Goal: Engage people not normally part of the planning process

**Outcome:** Around 7,000 people walk by the Superstop each day on average. Over 100 people voiced their opinions about their version of a Superstop. Several dozen people came together to draw, drill, carry, paint, hoist, and build the Superstop itself. Some of these people learned hard construction skills for the first time. Some of these people spend their days working in the underground economy and were grateful for an activity where they learned about and contributed to their neighborhood.



Toni Ford reconnects with an old ensemble-member on the street during the performance.

Dozens more came out to listen to jazz and tell neighborhood stories. While participating in a cultural event isn't planning per-se, experiencing a transformed street builds the demand for more activities like this in the future, and is a form of community participation.



Gathering ideas for the Superstop



Goal: Test urban design concepts, show an alternative is possible

Outcome: The Ward 7 stakeholder group was supportive from the beginning. By the end, Park 7 and the other stakeholders we spoke with unanimously wanted a more permanent version of the Superstop. The intervention crystallized desires for art, culture, and comfort on the street rapidly in physical form, making it easy to point to and say “I want that.” Concerns about graffiti and maintenance issues largely did not materialize.

The design of the Superstop proved one of our hunches: this bus stop, and the streetscape around it, is severely underperforming in terms of how it serves customers and public life on the street. This bus stop has the potential to be

Above Diane Jones tells a surveyor how she uses the bench.

In nice weather you would see people sitting down, waiting for the bus, having a cup of coffee, it did add something to the street... People really enjoyed the music and jazz combo. That was a nice turnout from the neighborhood... In the future, I'd like to see some type of structure that has benches. That bus stop only seats 2-3 people. It certainly made a case to expand the size of the bus stop.

- Steve Levy, America's Kids manager

↓ What would you like to do while waiting for the bus that you can't do right now?



\* According to respondents in Ward 7

a community touch-point as it is located in an area with high pedestrian flow, high visibility with a mix of visitors coming to shop and work, and a community of nearby residents - all on an extremely wide sidewalk.

The Superstop demonstrated that a bus stop can be so much more: it has the capacity to host morning jazz concerts, storytelling events, climbing, and community radio. In fact, the duration of a bus stop wait - 5-15 minutes - is the ideal idle time for doing something new.

The Superstop changed how people saw the neighborhood: before the intervention, 36% of people felt positively about this neighborhood, compared to 59% during the intervention.

## Goal: Build capacity and identify new civic leaders

**Outcome:** This site was initially selected for its potential to catalyze a small neighborhood group. Although they did not participate, several other neighborhood leaders did rise to the challenge: a local designer became the unofficial neighborhood champion of the project, participated in numerous build days in DC and Philadelphia, stewarded and de-installed the project. In turn, working with a nationally-recognized design team elevated his ambition as a designer and craftsman.

Donatelli Development built their own capacity

The Superstop brought a humanity to waiting for the bus. Often times riding the bus is a dehumanizing experience. This brought more dignity to it because it was pleasant to look at, it was comfortable, and there was content being provided that gave them something to listen to and think about while they waited. It's often said that you spend 1/8 of your waking hours waiting. Well, for people who ride public transportation it has to be significantly more. There is an inequity of time spent waiting. I think that's one of the other costs of poverty, that you have to spend twice as much time doing what other people do.

-Kymone Freeman, We Act Radio



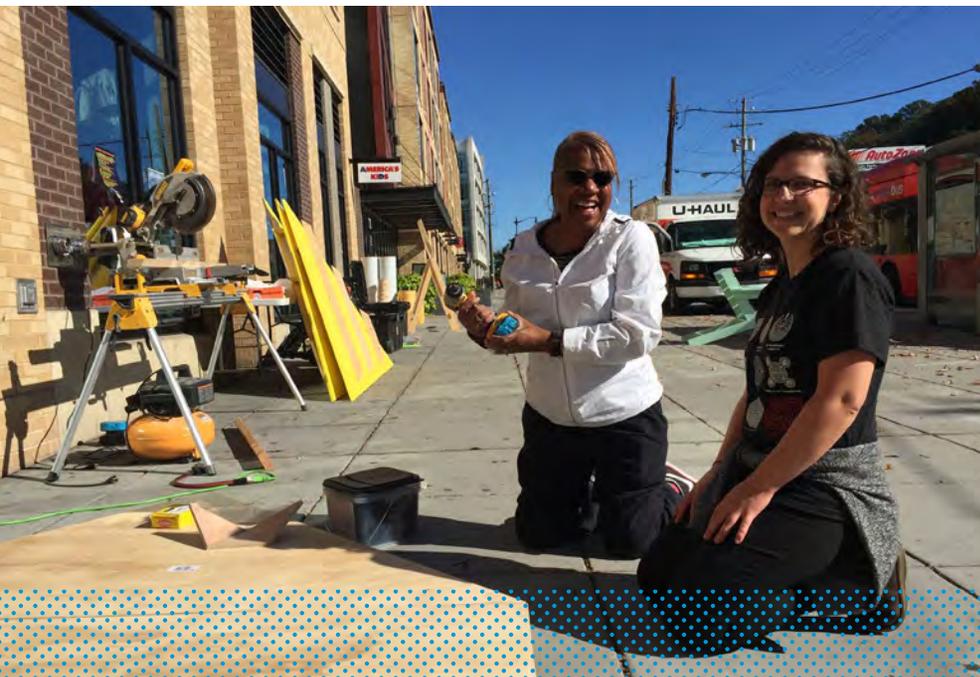
Hope Foundation youth cleaning up the Playstop

working with neighborhood artists and community groups, an important habit in a neighborhood way of change. Local business owner Steve Levy enabled Donatelli to be supportive by adopting the Boombench and providing it power.

The project also built the capacity for DCOP to work hand-in-hand with community groups, who are the eyes and ears for the DCOP planning process.

Left: Teen Programs Manager at the National Building Museum teaches DCOP Ward 7 Neighborhood Planner how to use a drill

The project was less successful in building the capability of low-capacity organizations. With a longer timeline less focused on rapid implementation, a future project might allow these organizations to rise to the occasion.



# Ward 8 BEACON + Cabaret

Bellevue is a neighborhood with pride and history. Its main intersection is full of life with people fixing their cars and waiting for the bus. It is the point of arrival for people coming into DC from Maryland. Neighborhood stakeholders are breathing new life into the intersection, but it doesn't highlight neighborhood identity or celebrate arrival into Ward 8. We asked artists to make a beacon that transformed this underutilized node and signaled arrival into Ward 8.



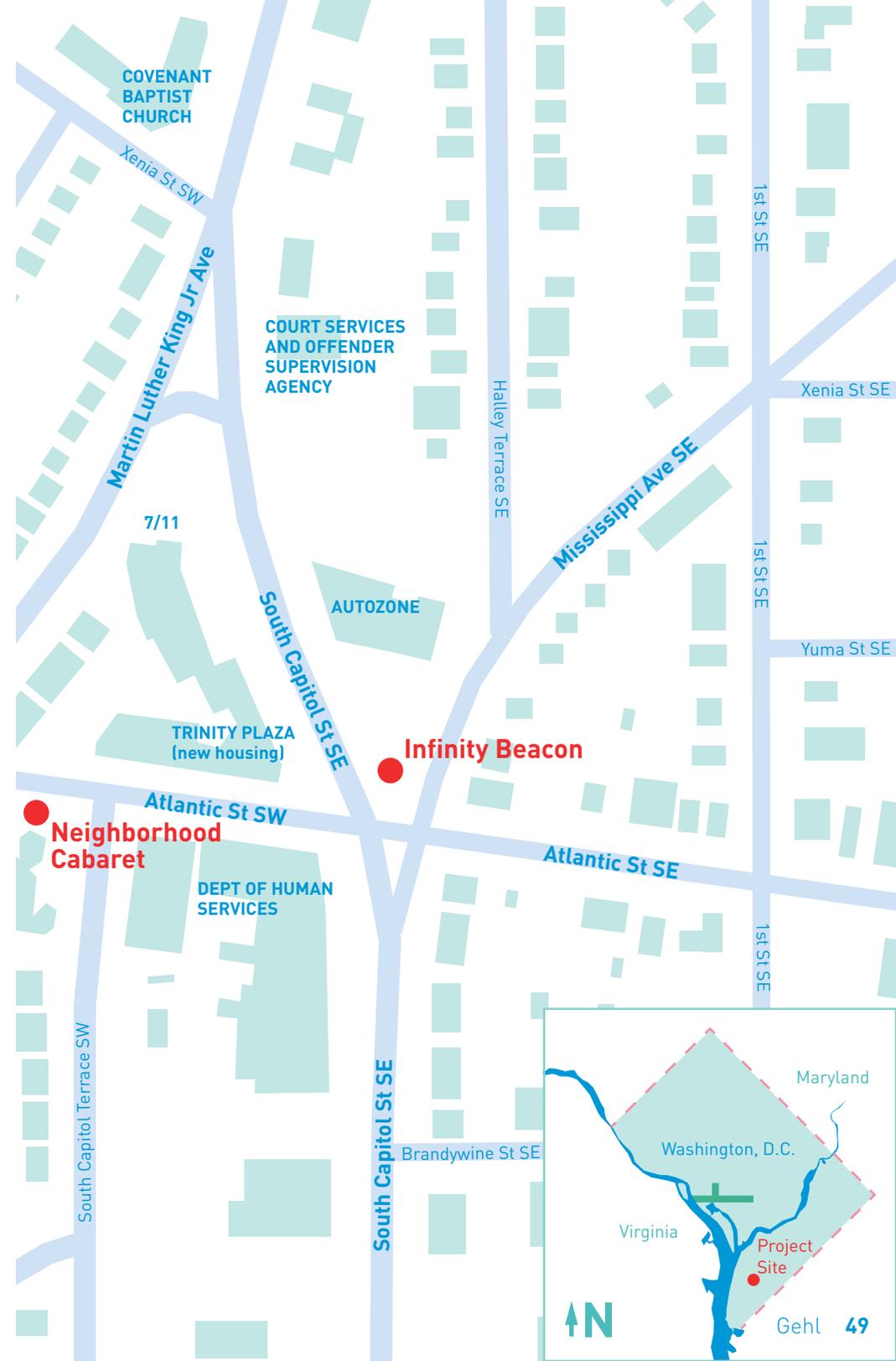
# Bellevue / Washington Highlands

## Neighborhood Context

The Bellevue neighborhood is challenged with disinvestment and high rates of poverty, which result in, among other things, poorly stewarded public spaces. Yet, the neighborhood has fierce pride, which shows up in well-maintained newer buildings and vibrant public art in some neighborhoods, especially nearby Anacostia.

In a stakeholder meeting, participants highlighted the need for something unique and creative at the intersection that engaged youth and explored the culture of the neighborhood that also provided illumination at night.

Wide sidewalks, neighborhood retail, and many streets converging make this a natural meeting point



The Crossing the Street project site has great potential: The natural southward slope of the landscape and its location at the intersection of three major thoroughfares makes this place good for people watching. The people fixing their cars and hanging out in the Autozone parking lot know this intuitively. This intersection is also the first commercial node for motorists driving north into the district.

### Engagement

Gehl and DCOP convened two meetings at Trinity Plaza, a housing development directly adjacent to the site, to meet with stewards of the neighborhood including Neighborhood Commissioners, managers of affordable housing, and leaders of religious and neighborhood organizations.

### Ward 8 Profile

**11,200** People per square mile

**98%** Black

**13%** Completed Bachelors

**58%** Households with vehicle

**78%** Renters

**31%** Unemployed

**37%** Poverty

SOURCE: 2010-2014 American community survey 5-year estimates, (Census Tracts 009810, 009807, 009803)



1. Publicly-owned land around the Autozone parking lot needs stewardship
2. Vacant commercial buildings
3. New investment in Bellevue - affordable housing



4. Autozone parking lot

5. Disinvested public space



6. Bellevue Public Library, new building opened in 2012

For more neighborhood context visit: [www.planning.dc.gov/page/about-ward-8](http://www.planning.dc.gov/page/about-ward-8)

## Public Life Goals

### Ward 8, Crossing the Street

- **Give voice** to the creative people and organizations in the Bellevue and Washington Highlands neighborhoods through performance and creative expression
- **Create an outlet** for residents to express their hopes for the neighborhood
- Amplify and support the **positive public life** that already happens in this area. Create a sense of community on the street - people choose to spend time here.
- **Invite people of all ages** to spend time in public
- **Make sitting down a comfortable** and dignified experience
- Create a **sense of safety at night**
- Create a **comfortable micro-climate** during the day
- **Sense of protection** from of adjacent traffic

## Project Overview

The Ward 8 Beacon and Cabaret embraced this existing underutilized neighborhood node and brought it to life with performances and a beacon that signaled arrival to the Bellevue / Washington Highlands neighborhood.

The project tested this site's potential to be a public gathering place and a site for public art.

The change underway in this neighborhood is emotional. Playback theater and cabaret forged a new type of conversation on this difficult subject while activating the plaza in front of the Bellevue neighborhood library.

# INFINITY BEACON

The Infinity Beacon was a 6-week temporary art project by Charneice Fox Richardson, Kimberly C. Gaines, and Noah Williams celebrating children of the Ward 8 community.

## About the Artists

### SNC Productions / Charneice Fox

**Richardson** has for over 10 years been collaborating with artists and youth in DC to create projects that inspire. We believe in the power of art to teach young people what is possible in their communities. [SNCFilms.com](http://SNCFilms.com)

**Kimberly C. Gaines** is an arts administrative professional with a background in film, photography, arts education and development. She is dedicated to bringing the arts to under-served communities. [sondaiexpressions.com](http://sondaiexpressions.com)



# Infinity Beacon

## Process

Photographs taken by students at Patterson Elementary comprised a photomosaic of their fellow students. Many people were involved in designing and installing the Beacon. During the installation, numerous people voiced their support of something positive and creative in this location.



"The autozone guys", men who spend time in the Autozone fixing their cars and talking, helped lift the Beacon in place



The Beacon features photos from W.B. Patterson Elementary School's B.R.O.S. program, Project Create, RichFox Photography and Kuroji Patrick.

The Beacon incorporates balls from "The Beach" from the National Building Museum donated courtesy of Dupont Underground.



**BEFORE**



**AFTER**



# NEIGHBORHOOD CABARET

To celebrate the unveiling of the Beacon, a neighborhood cabaret was held at the Bellevue Library.

Hissing Black Cat Theatre lead an interactive performance exploring the emotional side of neighborhood change. In a guided conversation, performers responded to audience voices through performance.

Sometimes funny sometimes poignant, this method of engagement opened up honest conversations in a way that traditional engagement often cannot.

# Cabaret

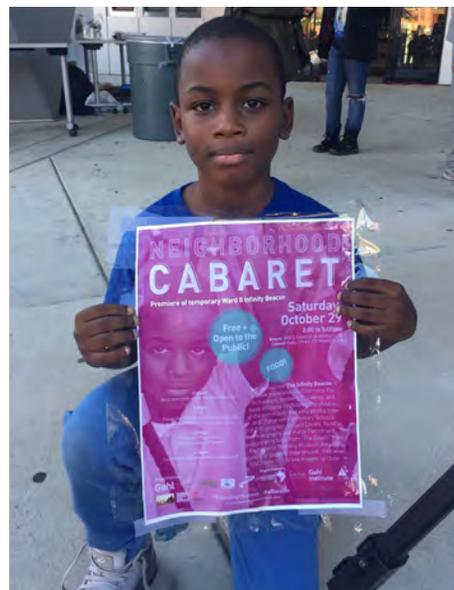
**About the Artist**  
**Hissing Black Cat Theatre's** mission is to create high quality storytelling performances; provide stimulating experiences and awareness-centered workshops to the public and preserve an oral tradition in a way that speaks to and enriches our community's standard of living. They aim to provide a safe environment for participants to express their needs through the retelling of personal experiences.  
[www.thehbctheater.com](http://www.thehbctheater.com)



East River Jazz  
 curated music  
 from Karen  
 Lovejoy Group



Students from Patterson elementary came out to see their faces on the Beacon. Library staff organized games for kids



## Stewardship Partner

The Hope Foundation lead landscaping of the Beacon as well as ongoing stewardship for both six-week interventions.

**Hope Foundation/ The Hope Reentry Network Inc.** is dedicated to providing community transitional and rehabilitative services to promote youths' successful reintegration into society. The Hope Foundation Reentry Network is a 501 c3 non-profit tax exempt organization and the fiscal sponsor for the Just2 Campaign. The Just 2 Campaign will inform, educate and emphasize the need for a strategic method to save and empower our youth population. Our program staff take the time to get to know our youth and their individual challenges, so we are able to support them based on individualized assessment and relationships. In the long run, the program builds youths' self-worth. It also encourages them to see beyond themselves and consider the world around them. Just 2 encourages them to focus more on building their futures rather than struggling against present circumstances.

[www.hopereentrynetworkdc.org](http://www.hopereentrynetworkdc.org)  
[www.just2campaign.org](http://www.just2campaign.org)

Hope Foundation youth kept the Beacon and Superstop sites tidy



# Beacon + Cabaret Evaluation



# Beacon + Cabaret Evaluation



Goal: Engage people not normally part of the planning process

Outcome: 1500 people walked by the Beacon every day during its installation. Approximately 60 people attended the community cabaret. The project process engaged neighborhood stewards and boosters at many levels: Beacon artists worked with students at nearby Patterson Elementary; the steering committee was comprised of neighborhood landowners, advisory neighborhood commissioners, and a neighborhood church. However, limited public engagement during project development meant that when the Beacon was unveiled, the number of boosters for the project was limited. Opening up the process could have been a way for more supporters to make themselves known.

Goal: Enliven streets

Outcome: The Beacon enlivened the discussion of the street, sparking conversation about what it was, and what it should be in the future. However, it was only moderately successful at bringing more public life to the street.

Our public space public life survey revealed that there were slightly more women than men at the site after the intervention. Women represented 13.2% of people before versus 26.8% after. Similarly, people over 65 years of age represented 12.7% of people in the space versus 19.4% after.

A future installation here that invites people to spend time in this place like seating might bring more life to the street.



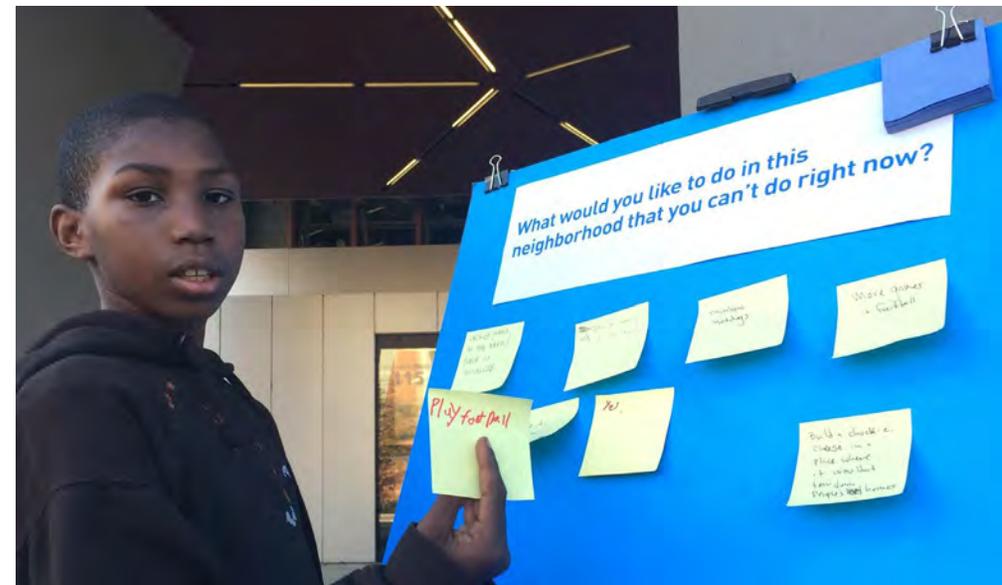
"Autozone guys" help construct the Beacon



Goal: Test urban design concepts, show an alternative is possible **Hissing Black Cat Theatre**

Outcome: In a neighborhood rocked by fears of gentrification, the very idea of change can be threatening. We encountered this sentiment in the form of pushback to public seating and in the aesthetics of the temporary project in general. However, this pushback created space for conversations about role of art and public realm improvements in the neighborhood.

As with the Superstop, community concerns of loitering, graffiti and other negative social elements did not materialize. In fact, the Beacon artists even engaged the very center of these community members' fears but asking the "parking lot guys" to be active members of the



construction crew for the Beacon. They credit this decision with why there was no graffiti or tampering with the structure. Community members reported that weeks after the Beacon was removed, there was noticeably less trash on the site.

Although sentiments about the Beacon were mixed, there was broad agreement that the corner of South Capitol and Atlantic Streets is a great place for people, and a fitting site for a landmark.

Seventy-five percent of respondents at Ward 8 reported wanting to see either a permanent version of the installation or something similar to it in the future.

Patterson elementary has adopted the photomosaics and is in discussions to adopt the Beacon as well.

For us, an ensemble, this opportunity was huge. We have since discussed collaborations with people from the audience, who weren't aware we were available as a resource for them. Including friends from the Office of Planning and some ANC Commissioners. Basically expanding our reach of service.

- Maryam Foye, Hissing Black Cat Theatre

## Goal: Build capacity and identify new civic leaders

Outcome: This site was selected with the hope that the project would catalyze a nascent neighborhood organization. The implementation-focused timeline of this project did not allow that to happen in the way we had hoped. However, the Hope Foundation, a neighborhood skills-training nonprofit that works with at-risk youth and formerly incarcerated persons, stepped up to provide the crucial role of neighborhood steward. Compensated for their effort, this organization incorporated landscaping of the Beacon site and periodic maintenance of interventions at both sites into their ongoing youth programs.

The project built DCOP's capacity to engage in



conversations about the role of public space in neighborhood change. “Ward 8 had a few vocal individuals who played a key role in defining the parameters of the installation, yet, were not pleased with the execution,” said DCOP Planner Evelyn Kasongo. “The challenging part with this group was the inability to determine where this degree of dislike stemmed from. Was it disdain for the Office of Planning? Was it feelings of resentment for past instances of being disenfranchised as a community? Or was it simply not liking the art installation?” DCOP is using stakeholder concerns and survey data as a springboard to focus on how to channel public realm investment in this neighborhood.



# Key Findings



# Key Findings

Key findings are derived from reflection and data analysis. They are intended as lessons for other creative placemaking practitioners working at the intersection of art, design, and community development.

## Design + Curation

### **Temporary is tough in disinvested communities - establishing resource pipelines and follow up are essential**

Starting small is often good for projects to “fail fast”, adjust goals to community needs, and to build community and political buy-in. But, if “starting small” doesn’t go anywhere and becomes a stand-in for meaningful investment, it deteriorates instead of builds the bonds of trust between communities and city planning agencies.

The temporary nature of this project with no follow-up program to take interventions to the next level was a challenge in obtaining buy-in from community leaders in these neighborhoods. Unfortunately, one-off projects with little long term commitments are hallmarks of some social-impact projects in low income communities.

An iterative approach should always be tied to a bigger strategic focus – with funding earmarked for implementation. Happily, based on the success of these projects, programs such as “Places to Dream” through the Deputy Mayor’s Office of Greater Economic Opportunity and conversations with nonprofit institutions like the National Building Museum may step in to

There are people who feel forgotten in the realms of luxury. They would speak with a blank curiosity as to why someone would invest in a their area with non-commercial interest. Nevertheless their reactions spanned from confused, to immediately welcomed, to exploitative...Clearly this project was made by the community for the community however the community was whisked back to reality with the removal. I deeply insist on something replacing it soon.

- Mark Garrett, Superstop volunteer

follow-through on the opportunities created through this project. It is our hope that DCOP and the stakeholders assembled will continue to leverage this initial investment into future projects on these sites.

Within the context of the project, our team focused on how these temporary interventions could give back to the neighborhood. To this end, Public Workshop was successful in hiring and mentoring a local craftsman during the project, and dozens of young people in DC and Public Workshop’s Philadelphia homebase learned how to build through the Superstop.

### **Balancing usefulness with art was a successful tactic**

We wanted the projects to meet a need and also resonate with neighborhood culture. In implementation, the Ward 8 Beacon was more of an aesthetic expression that evoked the identity of the place through art. The Superstop met a universal need for seating and play, and also had a cultural component. In our surveys, the Superstop was more well-received than the Beacon by the public, with nine out of ten people (out of 39 people we spoke to) saying that they would like a more permanent version of this installation in this place in the future. The Beacon was the subject of some community push-back, mostly based on the way it looked. Expressing culture and belonging is crucial for sense of place. However, art is more subjective than design and therefore sparks more debate. Our takeaway as curators is to balance universal design excellence with aesthetics.

Who is it for? Is it for the people that live here or those who are eventually going to come simply because this area is being ‘transformed’?

- Kenneth Stewart, Ward 8 resident

### High quality design (but not necessarily high quality materials) and clean finish are essential for temporary projects

People responded to designs and interventions that were high quality and met their needs. Ward 7 Superstops were aesthetically appealing, met people's needs for seating and were designed and built by community – all of which contributed to them being beloved. In Ward 8, local artists working with youth created a dynamic but not universally-beloved sculpture which had little invitation to interact with it on the street. In this case issues with implementation and design detracted from the real impact of deep community engagement at a neighborhood school. The Superstop's simple materials with a clean finish and high quality design (but modest materials) seemed to allay these concerns.

This is not an either/or equation, but a reminder to consider the optics of temporary materials and design in historically disenfranchised communities where this approach can be interpreted by some as yet another sub-par investment in the neighborhood

One of the most disturbing things that

I encountered was there were people customarily sitting on these potted plants in front of the Park 7 Apartments, and I would say “Yo, you can sit on the bench,” and the response was always a hesitation. One particular time someone said to me, “Oh, I though it was art.” Another lady said, “I thought it was private property.” There's this stigma that if it looks nice it must not be for them.

- Kymone Freeman, We Act Radio

### Building together is a way to build trust quickly

The fact that Gehl selected people outside of the city to come where they reside and help them to help themselves was amazing. As you know outsiders/gentrification has quite a rep. But I'm sure a lot of the community felt as though finally someone/ anyone has come to address a problem. (Not to mention actually asking for our input.) If gentrification looked like this it would be a lot easier for everyone to start with a sense of community.

- Mark Garrett, Superstop volunteer

Collaborating, hauling, helping, cutting, problem-solving, laughing, and getting exhausted: building something on-site is an immersive and emotional experience that builds trust. Public Workshop traveled to DC for three weekends in a row to prototype and then build the Superstop with neighborhood residents. Their barn-raising approach helped diffuse tension inherent in being from outside this neighborhood. “When people see that something is “emergent”” says Alex of Public Workshop, “they feel like they can have a say in it, they feel like it's theirs.” With a quick timeline, the building schedule went late into the night, another bonding experience, “The visible effort of working when everyone else has left is a really powerful knife for cutting through these different layers of lack of trust.” Co-creation gave back to the project: Collaboration with local residents including people who spend much of their time in the space lead to strong stewardship with relatively little graffiti or tampering with all projects during their 6-week installation.

### Communicate the key message: “It's temporary! What do you think?”

In many ways the temporary projects spoke for themselves. However, in retrospect, a clear message indicating that the project was temporary and that we wanted public feedback would have helped bring home the message and invite others to suggest their own ideas for next iterations. It would have also made the projects' removal less surprising and perhaps organized the team around a follow-up plan.

### Lingering vs Loitering: good ideas still needed for re-introducing seating to neighborhood stewards fearful of “loitering”

Our Ward 8 project initially proposed seating around the Beacon. However, in stakeholder meetings it was clear that without significant active stewardship, invitations for seating remained too risky for them. A public seat in a neighborhood gathering place should not be controversial. Yet, this is the reality in Ward 8. We recommend looking carefully at the assumptions behind these sentiments and experimenting slowly and carefully with how to make neighborhood gathering places more comfortable and inviting for all, while addressing concerns for neighborhood safety.

 A drug dealer can still deal standing up!  
Taking away a public seat doesn't disrupt his business - we need to think about how to provide seating for everyone else.

- Ward 8 resident, paraphrased

### A close working relationship with DCOP was essential

Gehl's community outreach, artist selection, permit applications, and promotion relied heavily on a close working relationship with DCOP. Relationships built through this process will continue to be nurtured by DCOP and will infuse important concurrent planning efforts like the Comprehensive Plan and Cultural Plan currently underway.

### Don't over-think the permitting process

In the case of Ward 7, we found a loophole and ran with it. Rather than wait on the city design review process, we received the verbal permission of the neighboring landowner to place the intervention on his private property, sidestepping a public space encroachment, assembly, or construction permit.

 Oftentimes with social impact projects in low income neighborhoods either the process is totally missing and a project is just plopped down or the process is over-valued or overwrought and the product is overlooked. Crossing the Street hit that middle ground where process and product came together.

- Alex Gilliam, Public Workshop, Ward 7 artist

### Adding a dedicated youth-oriented community partner to the team would have been even better

Although the team included local artists and steering committees comprised of neighborhood advocates, a partner organization with youth programming and “skin in the game” could have brought more people into the process - in particular to Ward 7's design-build Superstop. This obstacle was a catch/22: one of the goals of the project was to build the capacity of local organizations yet we had trouble connecting with organizations with enough capacity to participate in the given timeframe.

### Curate stakeholder groups

In Ward 8, the project was challenged after implementation by the very stakeholder group that helped shape it, despite support from the neighborhood. Diversifying the voices of a steering committee beyond the usual suspects would have been a great way to empower quieter voices and ensure that a diversity of viewpoints shaped the project. Organizers shouldn't eliminate combative stakeholders, but counter-balance these voices. If stakeholders don't make themselves known it is crucial to reach out to them.

## Key Findings: State-of-the-Place Survey

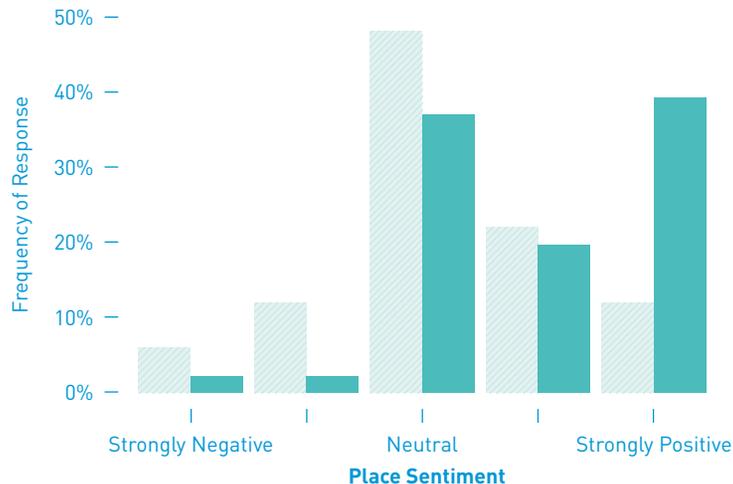
In order to understand the impact of our projects we surveyed the public life and place-based sentiments of people moving through and spending time in our two project sites before and during the projects were live. See page 11 for a description of research methods. What follows is our analysis of this data.

### We found a meaningful improvement in neighborhood perception after the installation of the Superstop

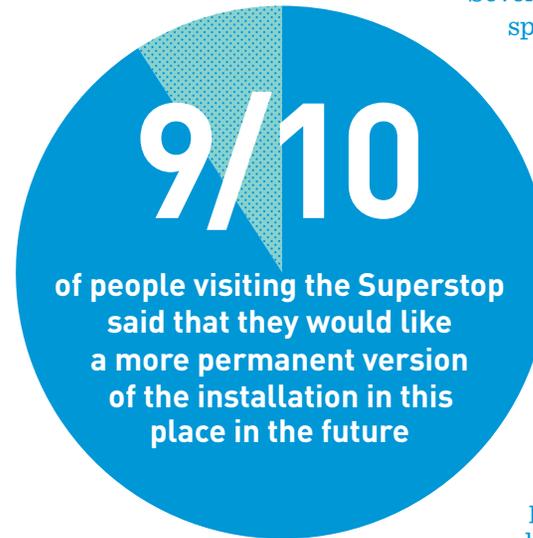
In Ward 7, we found a statistically significant improvement of residents' perception of their neighborhood during the installation (at a 99% confidence level), from neutral/negative to positive/strongly positive. See chart below. Before the intervention, 12% of people felt strongly positive about the neighborhood, whereas during the intervention 40% of people felt strongly positive about the neighborhood.

Positive place sentiment grew substantially after the Superstop interventions were installed

● Before  
● After



### Most people want the interventions to be permanent



Seventy-five percent of people we spoke with in Ward 8\* and 90% of people we spoke with in Ward 7\*\* would like to see a permanent version of the Crossing the Street interventions in their place. Although there was some disagreement about the aesthetics of the Beacon, there was broad agreement that the site that was chosen for the Beacon is an important place in the neighborhood and should be the focus for a future, more permanent public realm and public art intervention. (Number of people surveyed in each ward: \*N=46, \*\*N=39)

### We found a positive relationship between having a community safety net and a positive perception of place.

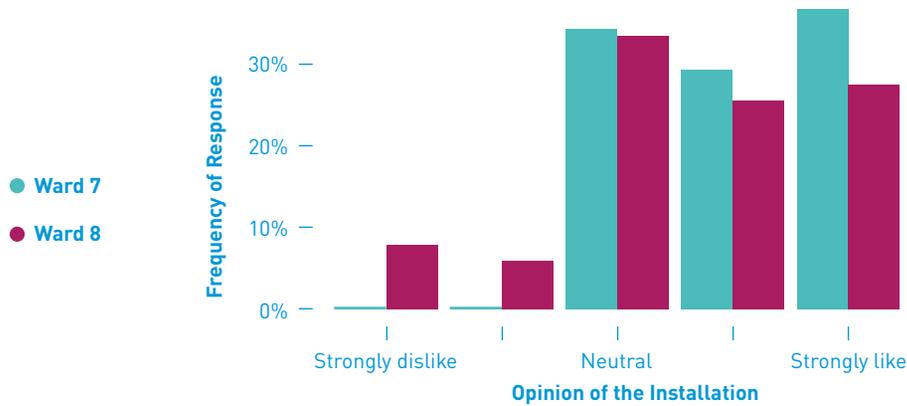
This matters because our projects seek to build more reasons for neighbors to know each other - which our findings suggest is a major driver of positive sense of place. We asked residents if they felt they could rely on neighbors in times of need. Those who responded Yes were the most likely to report a more generally positive sentiment toward the place itself. And, that relationship was stronger in Ward 8--a neighborhood with higher rates of poverty and unemployment that may have more need for this safety net.

## Key Findings: State-of-the-Place Survey

### Pride in Wards doesn't always translate into pride in public places

In our survey, we asked residents about their sense of neighborhood identity. We found that people have neutral sentiments about neighborhood identity. We were surprised by our findings, since there is clearly a strong sense of pride East of the River. Where does pride for Wards 7+8 express itself in the public realm? This finding underscores the need for more placemaking work East of the River.

### Opinions of installations in both Wards 7 + 8 were overwhelmingly positive



At first, lot of people could not understand why we would do this because they're so used to profiteering. The only way something nice happens is if they're looking to make a buck. A lot of people were like, "Why are you here, this is too nice for our area." I would have to tell people, "I'm only here because somebody believed in me. We all lift each other up: my community should serve me as I serve my community"

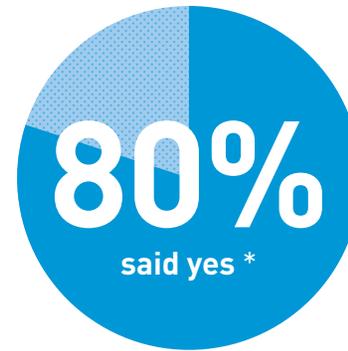
- Mark Garrett, Superstop volunteer

The Superstop was a very tangible way to start a conversation about how we can use semi-public space behind the bus stop. People didn't need to know who designed it or who was responsible for the initiative, they just needed to know they could use it, and they knew it automatically.

- Ángel Zambrano, volunteer and survey manager

### Most people feel these places have potential to be neighborhood gathering places

Does this place have the potential to be a neighborhood gathering space?

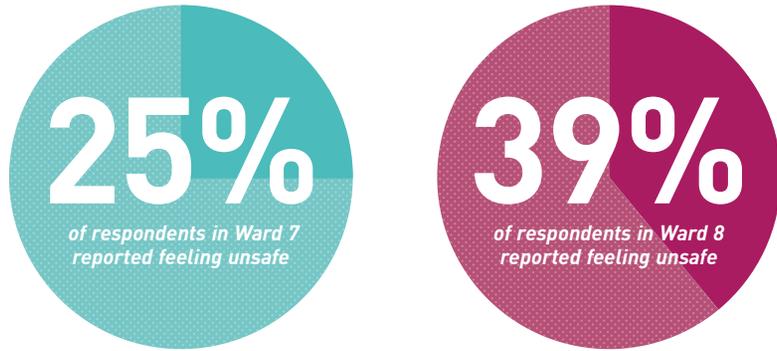


### People would spend more time if this place had a more active and attractive public realm



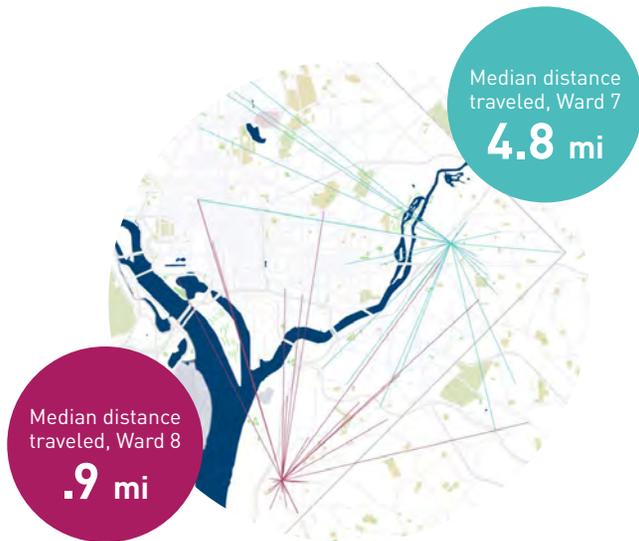
\* According to respondents at the sites in both wards to the question, "What would make you enjoy/visit this place more often?"

### Some people feel unsafe in the neighborhood



### People traveled farther from their home to arrive at Ward 7 than 8

Home location of visitors to projects in Ward 7 and 8

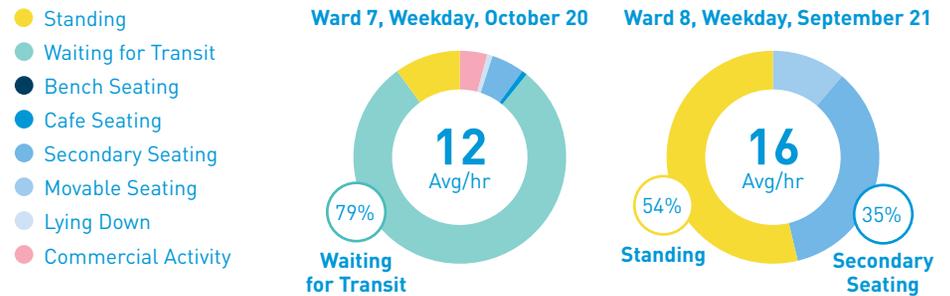


### These sites are neighborhood meeting places

In Ward Seven, 36 % of people recognized someone they knew in the space when we interviewed them. In Ward Eight, 46% of people recognized someone.

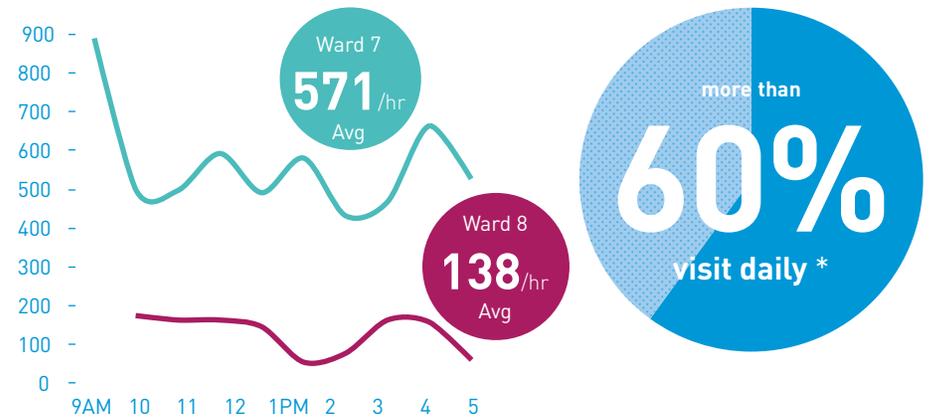
### Waiting for the bus or simply standing is what most people do when they spend time in these places

Stationary Activities

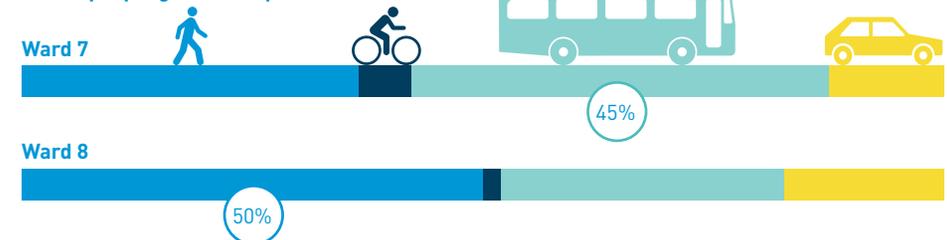


### Much higher pedestrian volumes in Ward 7, but both places serve daily users

Pedestrian volumes



How to people get to the space?



# Next Steps

## Reflections from DC Office of Planning:

Creative placemaking is broader than just one organization or one artist—it's about community transformation. There are three primary features of placemaking: strategic action by cross-sector partners, place-based orientation, and a core of arts and cultural activities. The Infinity Beacon, Neighborhood Cabaret, and Superstop accomplished all of these components. Creative placemaking is an ongoing process with key outcomes that serve to ensure the vitality of the process.

Creative placemaking advocates and prospective leaders need to assess their own readiness and that of their community and of some key organizations, including local community-based organizations and government entities. To make partnerships work, each body must understand and take seriously the priorities of its partners. Each must acknowledge resources it doesn't possess, share their strengths and lean on others to fill gaps.

The success of the Superstop was in the positive response from the general public and the active collaboration of community stakeholders.

The Infinity Beacon is successful because community leaders felt empowered to demand more for their neighborhood from a creative placemaking perspective. The Beacon stirred a



lot of discussion from Ward 8 stakeholders and residents- both positive and negative responses, which is often an outcome of art.

After the six-week lifespan of the Infinity Beacon's construction, we conducted a follow-up meeting with Ward 8 Stakeholders. Rather than focus on the shortcomings of the Infinity Beacon, meeting participants were asked to provide additional feedback on future placemaking elements/ installations. Collaboration with District agencies such as the DC Commission of Arts and Humanities and the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Greater Economic Opportunity will be essential in fulfilling the desired goals of the neighborhood, from a creative placemaking perspective, based on the resources available. In the case of the Bellevue/Washington Highlands neighborhood, stakeholders asked to draw on local stories to set their sights on a vision for a future that is consistent with its past.

In Ward 7, community members are carrying forward a conversation about how to make the Superstop permanent and replicate the process at other high-need bus stops. The National Building Museum has discussed using the Superstop design/build framework in their teen programs.

Effective creative placemaking must commit to building holistic and sustainable places that are of, by and for the people- all people.

