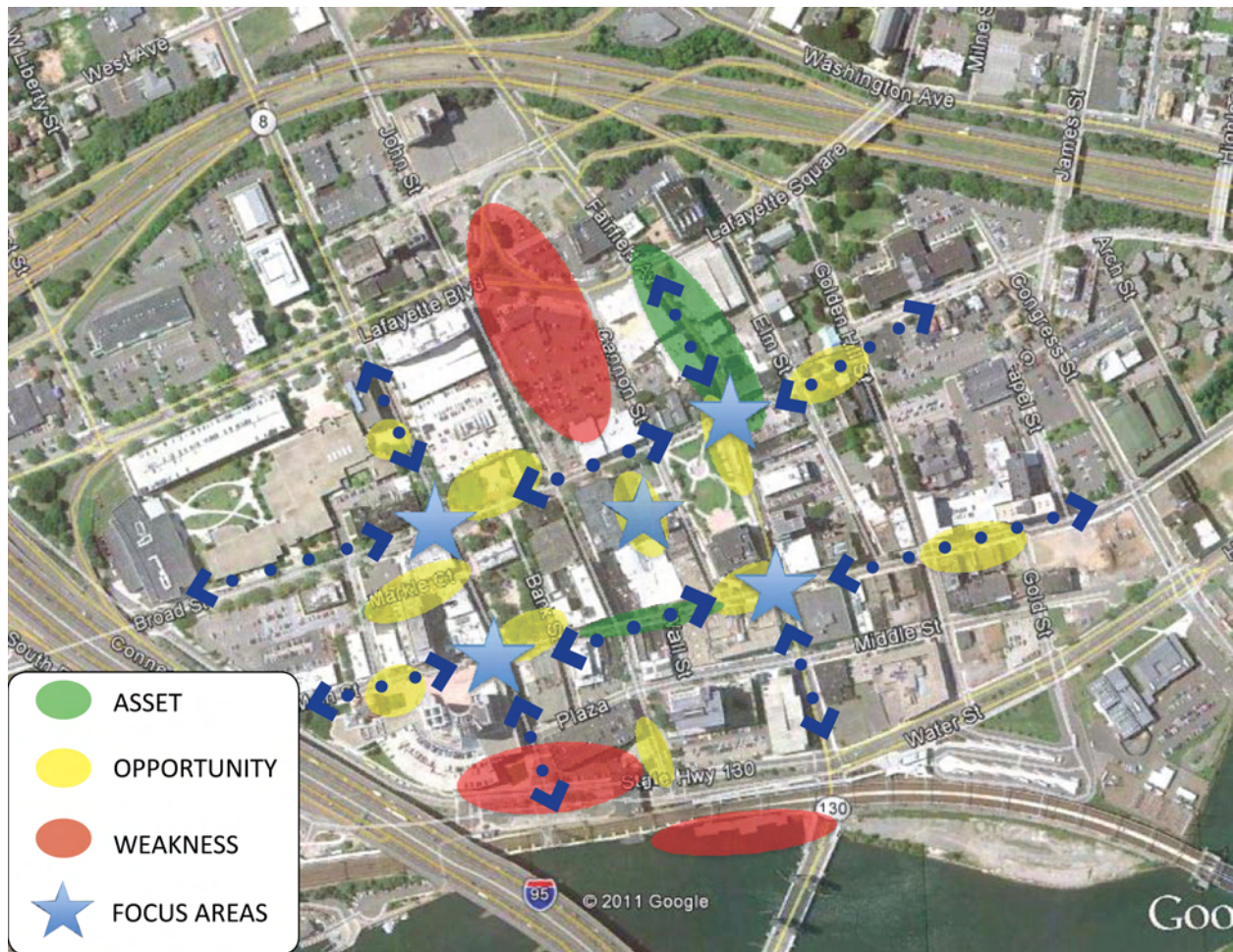


What If We Build Bridgeport Around Places? A Creative Placemaking Agenda for Bridgeport



Bridgeport is poised to be a leader in Creative Placemaking. With a strong arts community, engaged developers, flexible public spaces and streets that unimpeded by traffic, and a defined downtown core, Bridgeport is ripe to pull these assets together to create great places. With appropriate support from local leaders, focused on a series of “Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper” (LQC) projects, Bridgeport could become the next hotbed for urban innovation. We are increasingly finding these kinds of authentic, interactive and flexible demonstration spaces to be one of the most enticing means for the citizenry to engage in and develop a sense of ownership with their city.



PPS sees “LQC” demonstration Placemaking projects as integral parts of larger economic development, downtown management and planning efforts. Such projects can transform the cityscape into a laboratory for refining the community vision and identity, experimenting with programming and providing a boost to areas in need, all with minimal upfront costs. This approach has the capacity to excite unlikely partners who would not typically engage in a formal planning process and build community buy-in around an energy of transformation. Ideas are implemented, assessed, then tweaked and customized based upon the community’s reception.

Objectives:

- Enhance existing destinations through low-cost interventions
- Incubate new destinations in opportunity areas identified by the community
- Excite community interest and partners
- Ensure Placemaking becomes integrated in the short term, but also in a way to ensure ongoing application

After touring downtown Bridgeport we have made a preliminary public space asset, opportunity and weakness map, and have identified five areas that should be focused on to jump start momentum for Placemaking.

By cultivating gateway destinations at four central intersections of downtown Bridgeport and activating the alley in front of the atrium and artist housing, the DSSD can have a significant impact with targeted investments that can be leveraged by surrounding partners and additional matching money. Through “LQC” interventions, these gateways can uplift and revitalize their surrounding areas catalyzing significant revitalization potential throughout downtown.



Fairfield and Main: Referred to as the 100% corner for downtown Bridgeport, this intersection features major potential anchors through the Court House, Holiday Inn, Woolworth Building and Mixed-use Office Building, yet vacancies and insular uses undermine the synergistic potential of this potential destination.

Holiday Inn: Pop-up plaza in the portico with potential rooftop uses including – garden, mini-golf, and/or a pop-up “beach”

Office Building Plaza – The bus stop and food court offer tremendous opportunities for triangulation with this important civic building. By adding seating, shade, busking, info, and public art, a sum greater than the parts could be achieved.

Woolworth Building – While the vacancy yields a significant void, the space could quickly become a pop-up market, art incubator and/or event space.



Fairfield and Broad: The Broad St steps create a compelling connection to the northern and southern portions of downtown yet Baldwin Plaza plaza falls short as an anchor for public life, which is further under-mined by the surface parking on two adjacent corners. With additional programming, amenities and low-cost façade treatments this corner could create a hub that draws upon and enhances the new development on Fairfield.



State and Main: City Hall, the Public Library, historic architecture, key cultural and retail uses, two plazas and the adjacent college and McLevy green collectively offer tremendous potential, yet the vitality falls short because these uses fail reach beyond their buildings to animate the surrounding public realm. If instead these institutions treated the wide sidewalks as stages for public life. The wide sidewalks should become stage for these civic anchors—from book kiosks to blood drives.



State and Broad: The scale of the built environment surrounding McLevy green is somewhat intimidating for pedestrian comfort, particularly the People's Bank, but there is still significant opportunity to create bustling urban plazas that draw office workers out for lunch and keep them downtown for evening concerts, festivals and games.



Read's Artspace & Atrium: The atrium and the Artspace development are two the biggest assets of Bridgeport that set the city apart. Neither asset has presence or impact in the public realm. Activating the pathway to the Atrium with the participation of the resident artists offers a simple way to leverage these assets and create a dynamic destination in the very center of the city. A weekly arts and crafts market can bring a larger group to this area that would be anchored by artist created amenities.

PLACEMAKING PROCESS

Phase I: Concept Development

Task 1.1: Gather Information and Prepare for Placemaking Workshop

In preparation for the February Workshop, we propose to:

- Review existing documentation, master plans and existing conditions
- Host preparatory conference calls with DSSD and other key stakeholders
- Prepare PowerPoint presentation describing PPS principles for successful public spaces and illustrating our initial ideas with images of comparable models

Task 1.2 Placemaking Workshop

PPS will conduct a participatory visioning workshop to obtain the input of a broad representation of stakeholders, including neighboring property owners or local business owners, city agencies, and other potential partners.

Drawing from PPS's extensive archive slides and the photographic documentation of the existing site and context, a PowerPoint show will be presented that depicts relevant examples of public spaces elsewhere. PPS has found this to be an effective approach in showing participants the potential for positive change, getting people to think about what types of improvements might be accomplished and eliciting ideas and discussion.

The slide presentation and discussion will be followed by small breakout groups that will evaluate the designated intersections, using PPS's Place Performance Evaluation form. These groups will then discuss individual issues in depth and develop their vision for the spaces and the surrounding uses. The small groups then report back on their ideas to the full group. Emphasis will be given to short-term activation strategy and implementation partners.

Products: PPS will prepare a summary of the workshop findings and a diagrammatic concept plan to be reviewed by the DSSD and key stakeholders.

Phase II: Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper Placemaking Activation Plan

Task 2.1 Key Stakeholder Workshops

In an effort to further community buy-in and implementation capacity, PPS will return to Bridgeport to further refine the activation plan and develop implementation committees for each key task. This can be done with meetings with each of the stakeholder groups for each site.

Participants: **PPS, DSSD, Key Stakeholders**

Product: **Refined activation plan**

Task 2.2 Prepare Activation Plans



Building upon the DSSD recommendations and priorities, PPS will further develop the LQC activation recommendations including a Vision Statement, short term recommendations, and a diagrammatic concept plan that graphically illustrates the initial concepts and vision for each.

Participants: **PPS, DSSD**

Product: **Working document featuring diagrams, concept plans and preliminary programs**

PHASE III: Placemaking Master Plan, Participatory Budgeting, Placemaking Capacity Building, Advisory Phase

Task 3.1: To be determined

PPS can continue to work with the DSSD, in an advisory capacity during implementation of the LQC interventions to inform next steps and long-term Placemaking plans. The fee for this phase will be determined.



ABOUT PLACEMAKING AND PPS

Project for Public Spaces is a nonprofit, educational and technical assistance organization with an international reputation for its success in the creation of more livable communities. Place-based initiatives are the best way to promote vitality and prosperity in cities everywhere. Our experience helping people in more than 2500 towns around the world improve their communities shows that mobilizing people to make great places strengthens neighborhoods, cities and entire metropolitan areas.

Placemaking Principles

PPS's Placemaking approach strives to create places where people want to be. Every project we plan is rich with vibrant destinations: parks, squares and streets should feel comfortable and offer a wealth of amenities; waterfronts should provide access to an abundance of water-related and other activities; and cultural attractions should contribute to a place's unique identity. Equally important is how these destinations connect and interplay, supporting and complementing each other rather than struggling in isolation.

"The Power of Ten" can be a framework to elevate Placemaking to a neighborhood, city or regional level. Our experience of physical environment is most defined and enhanced by great places and the things we do in them, yet we seldom focus on creating great places and defining them around uses. A great place typically has at least 10 things to do in it; a great neighborhood or district has at least 10 great places; and a great city or region has at least 10 of these great districts, plus other major destinations. By having people think about their special places and greatest opportunity places, a community can quickly determine its strengths and prioritize a path forward. This simple, common sense idea can be transformative for evaluating and strategically improving an entire city or region.

The Community is the Expert. "Placemaking" has its greatest impact when applied through the people who know a place best—the local community. Despite their intimate knowledge of a community's assets and needs, the local stakeholders are rarely empowered to formulate their own transformative agenda for their communities. Too often professionals are engaged to impose solutions rather than facilitating a community vision. Moving beyond narrowly defined disciplines, Placemaking cultivates a collaborative campaign grounded in the community's aspirations.

Comfort and affection. One knows immediately whether a space is warm and welcoming or not. When a place provides a sense of comfort, patrons naturally relax, become part of their surroundings and feel free to be affectionate and at ease with others. It is this goal of creating happiness that has been all but forgotten in shaping the public realm for communities of all levels of the economic scale.

Zealous Nuts. Almost every great place is the product of the passionate work of a zealous nut, or a group of them. Zealous nuts can take many forms—community residents, shop owners, school officials, librarians, police officers – the Placemaking process invites these vital stakeholders to take a leadership role in injecting the soul into a place.



Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper describes a hyper-local development framework that is tried and tested; one that is lower risk and lower cost that capitalizes on the creative energy of the local community and that efficiently generates new uses and revenue for places in transition.

It has to be a Campaign. Based upon Harvard Business School professor John Kotter's book, *People Who Make Dramatic Change*, we have realized that a successful transformation of place requires a holistic campaign. It starts by developing a vision and opening lines of communication. Impediments must be acknowledged and strategies to overcome these challenges must be determined. Through this initial process a strong team can emerge to attack complacency and produce short term wins, then move on to bigger challenges, all while keeping the vision grounded in and driven by the community.