

Re-imagine local public spaces to better support community life and expand the utility of our parks and public realm system

LOCAL PLACE

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Local Places re-imagine local public spaces to better support community life and expand the utility of our parks and public realm system

Thinking creatively about local places is critical to capitalizing on our current land resources, shifting the balance toward a liveable city.

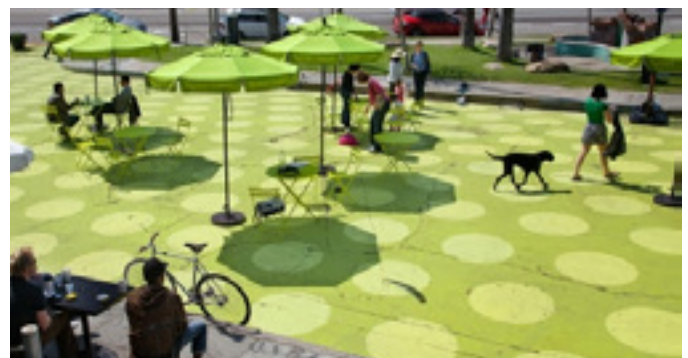
Local places provide an opportunity to re-imagine the physical design – and policy framework – of the constellation of small spaces that form our everyday experience of the public realm. Where we lack larger parks to gather, or where they are simply too far away to experience on a day to day basis, we must look to the places in between to support Toronto's public realm transformation.

In recent years, a new generation of parks and open spaces have sprung up in places that we had previously forgotten. These include playgrounds and skate parks beneath underpasses, urban beaches opposite industrial port facilities and linear parks alongside, underneath and even overtop of infrastructure corridors. There is untapped potential in the city's vacant lots, rail and hydro corridors, remnant infrastructure, spaces underneath overpasses, waterfront slips, Toronto Parking Authority lands, schoolyards, church yards and cemeteries. We must transform these spaces to better address the needs of a growing Downtown population.

Here is the opportunity to re-imagine the local places that form our everyday experience of the city that are not being used to their full potential. Through design, programming, and policy, these spaces can contribute to a more vibrant public realm at the local scale.



Park am Gleisdreieck, Berlin, Germany



LA DOT People St, Los Angeles, United States



Corporate Forecourt as Playground, Hamburg, Germany



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- 4 *Churchyards*
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Torontonians appreciate fine grain, small urban spaces. Because of their small scale, these spaces can be responsive to local needs. This flexibility makes them a huge asset to the core’s neighbourhoods, which will continue to change as the population grows. Laneways, parkettes, and schoolyards are found in all Downtown neighbourhoods and hold immense untapped potential. These spaces are uniquely positioned to provide the urban qualities Torontonians value and to address some of the key public life challenges and opportunities that emerged from the Public Space Public Life Survey (*refer to companion document, Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan: Public Space Public Life Survey*). These local places can serve as the Downtown’s ‘test spaces’ for public life.

Parkettes



Sculpture Garden, Toronto, Canada

Programs to reclaim under-utilized spaces can give communities the tools to shape their neighbourhood and leverage existing open spaces. Local groups and collaborators can support parkettes to improve greenery and programming, and create safer spaces for all to use.

Churchyards / Cemeteries



Metropolitan United Church, Toronto, Canada

Churchyards and cemeteries can be stronger community assets by welcoming the public into their open spaces to host community events, serve as educational facilities, or become quiet leisure spaces that still respect and preserve heritage elements and the sanctity of the space.



Over half of Toronto’s Quality Criteria uniquely relate to local places (Toronto Favourite Places Survey, 2016)

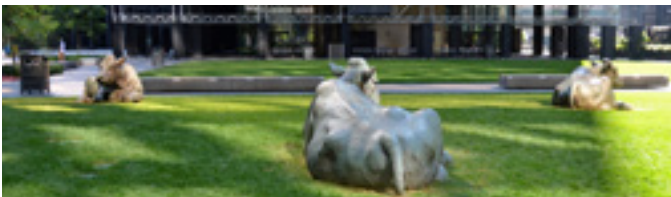
Laneways



Graffiti Alley, 'Love Your Laneway' event, by the Laneway Project, Toronto, Canada

Partnerships with local businesses and artists can transform these arteries into a secondary fine grain pedestrian network, providing new and exciting forms of public life.

POPS



The Pasture (POPS) at TD Centre, Toronto, Canada

POPS can offer accessible and inviting urban pockets in which to sit, relax and enjoy the urban landscape. When properly designed and implemented, POPS can enrich public life as a complement to publicly-owned space.

Schoolyards



Ogden Junior Public School, Toronto, Canada

Explore partnerships to improve existing infrastructure and policies to utilize schoolyards as public spaces during non-school hours. Such partnerships can make play space accessible to more families in the core, and enhance sustainability with environmentally innovative designs.

Overlooked Places



Underpass Park, Toronto, Canada

Overlooked places such as infrastructure corridors and spaces underneath overpasses provide opportunities to better connect parks and improve the public realm.

Parkettes

Parkettes are small spaces – less than 0.5 hectares. While they are well distributed throughout Downtown neighbourhoods, they are generally under-utilized. When understood as part of a larger parks system, parkettes represent an opportunity to improve and enhance the utility of the public realm network at the local scale.

In Downtown Toronto, parkettes that are well-programmed see excellent use. They demonstrate the latent potential of parkettes as important neighbourhood assets. Because of their small scale, parkettes can be nimble and adaptable to support local public life in ways that larger parks and natural features cannot. There is potential to re-imagine these spaces, improve their design, and bolster stewardship. Tapping this potential, however, demands a different process of design and operation, based on highly local needs. For example, a process that partners local groups and collaborators with a program facilitator and a young designer could foster specific, intentional designs for our parkettes, and

cultivate young design talent for our future city.

Many existing models can inform this type of process. In Toronto, the Public Space Incubator, administered by Park People, is providing access to funding and professional networks to support tangible pilots that test new ways to bring under-utilized public spaces to life. In New York City, the Plaza Program and GreenThumb Program re-imagine under-utilized spaces and work to ensure meaningful stewardship. These programs only provide capital funds to projects that have identified a local merchant, business or resident association to manage, maintain and program the space. The city provides material support and training, and local groups carry out the maintenance and programming. In San Francisco, the Pavement to Parks Program has formalized ways for the city to work with local communities to test new ideas in the public realm by testing design interventions before funding permanent improvements.

Incentivize local champions to manage and program parkettes with capital design support from the city.



Sculpture Garden, Toronto, Canada



(right) Margaret Fairley Parkette, Toronto, Canada



Showing parkettes in Downtown Toronto, Canada

Opportunity 1: Parkettes as places of discovery



Parkettes that spark neighbourhood curiosity and discovery through compelling installations, events, workshops and guest speakers.

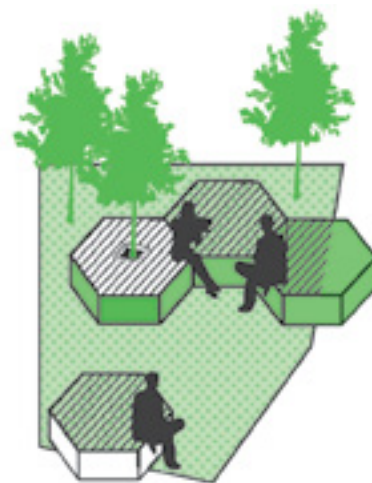
Getting It Done

Partner with nearby creative stakeholders, such as universities, museums, young designers or residents and park users. The key is to make the space feel renewed, compelling and accessible to all by rotating installations and communicating what is coming next.

Physical: Provide spaces for curated installations. Ensure that the edges of the parkette are welcoming in order to draw people in. Provide consistent and eye-catching communication design and signage.

Policy: Create incentives (e.g. adopt a parkette programs) and make it easier for cultural institutions to test programs and initiatives in these locations, either alone or in partnership with community groups.

Opportunity 2: Parkettes as 'green oases'



Parkettes that use lush greenery and horticulture to offer a rich, calm sensory experience in a small space can provide relaxed, contemplative spaces and act as places of respite.

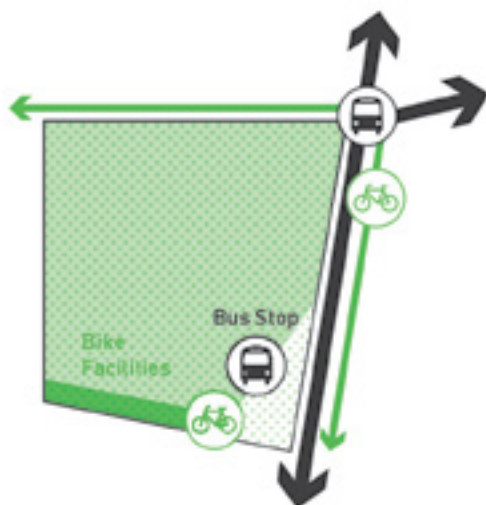
Getting It Done

Focus on creating lush, high quality spaces that are not overbuilt with hard surfaces. Maintain good sight-lines to ensure people feel comfortable enough to relax. Provide seating and furniture to encourage an inviting, accessible environment where people will want to linger.

Physical: Create a comfortable micro-climate with trees, canopies and awnings. Offer a variety of permanent and moveable seating (e.g. lounge seating, porch swings,). Ensure visibility with an at-grade perimeter and lighting.

Policy: Incentivize local stewardship, including programs where communities apply for 'green oases' elements. These elements can be provided by the City and programmed and maintained by residents.

Opportunity 3: Parkettes as 'waiting for transit' hubs



Parkettes that are nearby to transit stops and bike infrastructure can provide a better 'waiting for transit' experience for commuters.

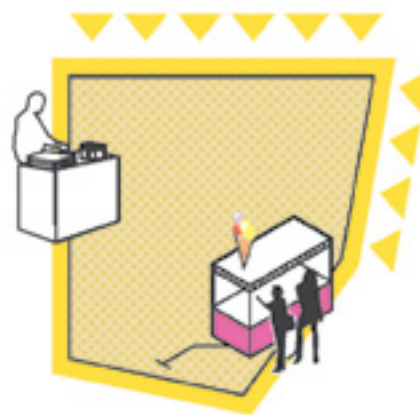
Getting It Done

Ensure that these parkettes are directly adjacent to transit stops to maximize comfort and convenience for commuters.

Physical: Provide clear signage. Create a comfortable micro-climate with canopies and awnings. Offer comfortable seating and services suitable for commuters (e.g. charging stations).

Policy: Coordinate investment, maintenance and oversight between the City Divisions and the Toronto Transit Commission.

Opportunity 4: Parkettes as evening destinations



Parkettes that provide space for a night out, filling the gap in public life Downtown after 6:00 p.m. by offering a communal space to spend time after school or work.

Getting It Done

Identify parkettes near hotspots (e.g. ice cream shops, restaurants). Install great lighting and provide programming for all ages. Be considerate of neighbours by having a 'lights out' time.

Physical: Develop a program of evening activities (e.g. movies in the park, ice cream kiosk, concert series). Provide creative and pedestrian-scaled lighting, and seating that promotes social interaction.

Policy: Create mechanisms to document and act on community interest and demand for programming. Streamline permits for users or establish a City-led program to activate parkettes at night based on community interest and demand.

NYC Plaza Program – New York City

To ensure that all New Yorkers live within a 10-minute walk of quality public open space, the Department of Transportation (DOT) created the Plaza Program to transform underused streets into active public spaces. DOT works with selected organizations to create neighbourhood plazas that are vibrant, social public spaces. Today, there are 61 plazas in all five boroughs.



- Community groups must demonstrate local support and ability to maintain and operate the space
- Neighbourhoods with pre-identified insufficient access to open spaces are prioritized

Gansvoort Plaza – New York City, United States

GreenThumb – New York City

GreenThumb was launched in the 1970s in response to New York's financial crisis. The crisis left the city with abandoned public and private lots. Under GreenThumb, volunteers transformed these vacant lots into community gardens. The gardens are managed by community members and act as an important shared resource in dense neighbourhoods.

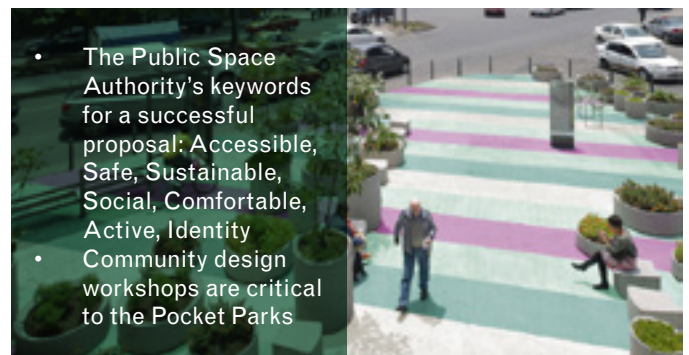


- The gardens provide green space that supports well-being, air quality, and biodiversity
- City support enables community members to maintain the space and engage with one another

The Creative Little Garden – New York City, United States

Pocket Parks – Mexico City

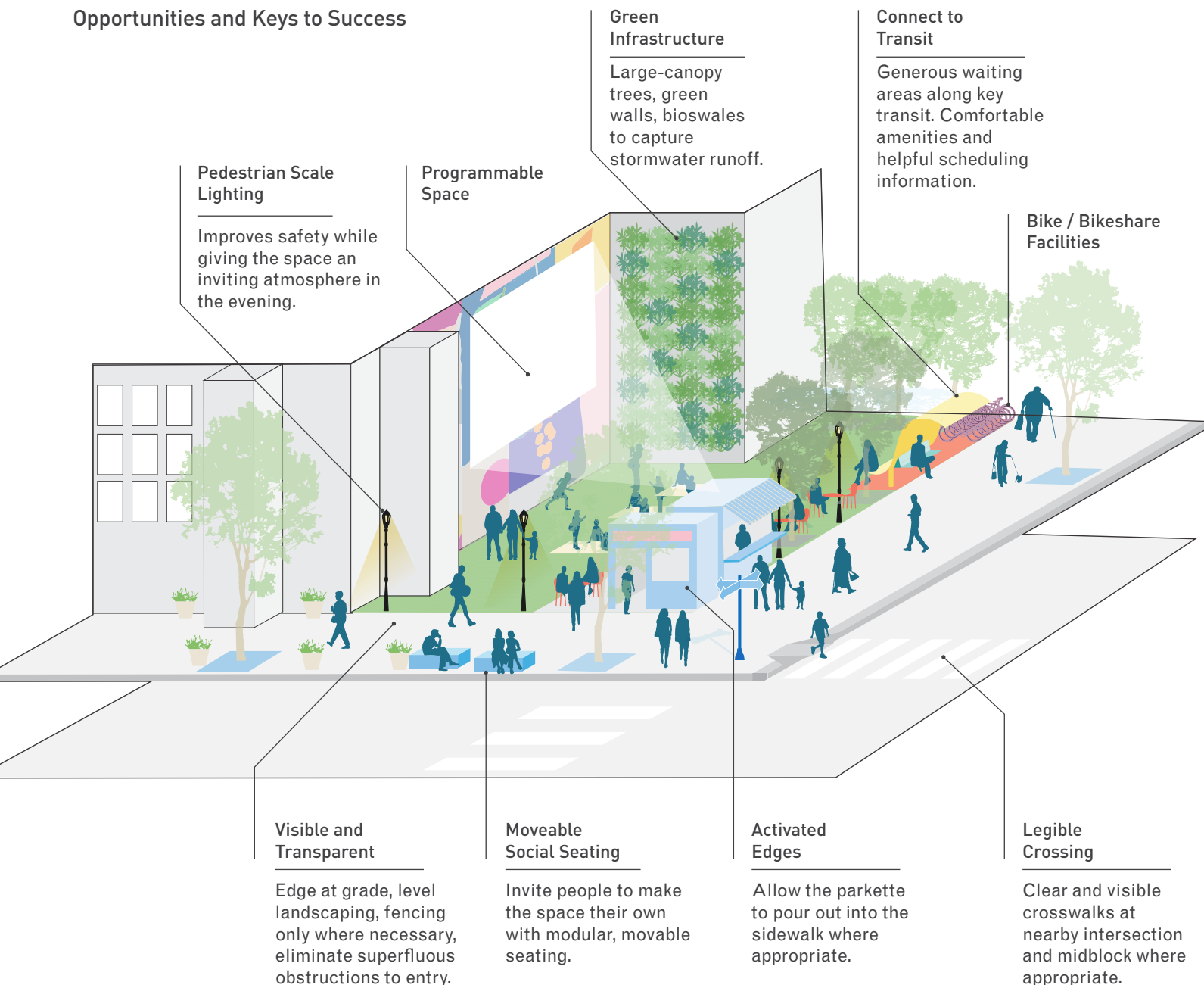
The Pocket Park Program was created to address the need for more public spaces. It incentivizes the creation of new parks by recovering under-utilized urban spaces, transforming them into areas of enjoyment for the community. Partnerships between the city, non-profit sponsors, and the community are created to ensure the success and maintenance of the Pocket Parks.



- The Public Space Authority's keywords for a successful proposal: Accessible, Safe, Sustainable, Social, Comfortable, Active, Identity
- Community design workshops are critical to the Pocket Parks

Parques de Bolsillo – Mexico City, Mexico

Opportunities and Keys to Success



Parkettes: Opportunities and keys to success, Toronto, Canada