PITTSFIELD BETTER BLOCK

FINAL REPORT

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Team Better Block

TeamBetterBlock.com

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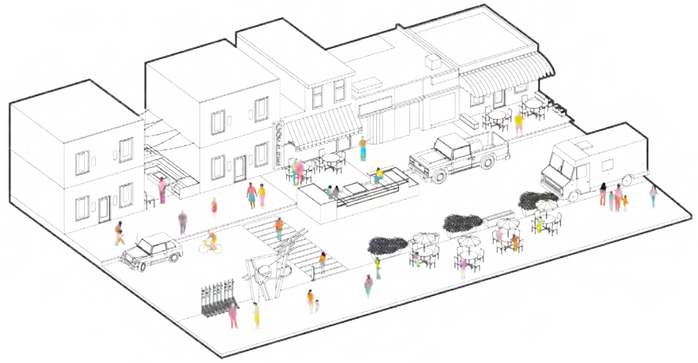


WHAT IS A BETTER BLOCK?

To city makers, the Better Block model can be viewed as a vehicle to unlock the interest and creativity of the public. Better Block is a process that designs for community, connection, and commerce from the ground up. Team Better Block specializes in the rapid transformation of public and private places using the open-sourced process developed by its founders.

The fundamental unit of culture, of group connection, is the block. Neighbors are bound by them. Neighborhoods delineated by them. Highway exits don't define communities. Blocks do. Whether we're conscious of it or not, the design of any block tells us whether or not we're welcome in a community.

The Better Block approach has been used by cities around the U.S. to illustrate rapid street changes and community revitalization. These cities have reported greater understanding and urgency by elected officials, leaders, and citizens for permanent change.

INTRODUCTION

MassDevelopment's Transformative Development Initiative (TDI) is a place-based development program for Gateway Cities designed to enhance local public-private engagement. Leveraging grassroots cross-sector connections, TDI helps strengthen community identity, stimulate an improved quality of life for local residents, and spur increased investment and economic activity. Along with new tools in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Transformative Development Fund, MassDevelopment and its Pittsfield partners (the City of Pittsfield, Tyler Street Business Group, Berkshire Health Systems, Berkshire Community College, and the Pittsfield Economic Development Authority) coordinated with private- and public-sector partners and engaged with the community to organize Pittsfield's first Better Block project in the Tyler Street corridor.

The partners analyzed and determined a focus area that would encourage programming activity for the project. This would potentially place new entrepreneurs in vacant storefronts with new ideas that would better serve the Morningside neighborhood. TDI's goal is to concentrate efforts, resources, and investments in a compact area to create a critical mass of activity that inspires investments by local residents, entrepreneurs, businesses, and private development.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

The report provides a summary of the Pittsfield Better Block and recommendations for future activity in the corridor. The report is complimented by the Better Block Field Guide, which dives into details of how to build a Better Block. The Appendix provides background planning done for the project and tools for next steps.

This report comprises 7 sections:

1. EVENT SUMMARY
2. BETTER BLOCK ELEMENTS
   I. Street Infraculture
   II. Public Space
   III. Pop-Up Programming
3. RESULTS
4. RECOMMENDATIONS
5. NEXT STEPS
6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
7. APPENDIX

TIMELINE

WALK & TALK

6.7.17

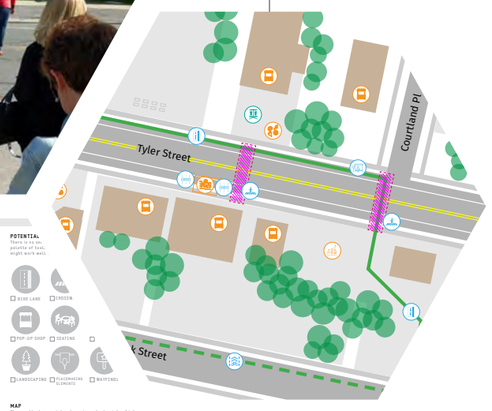
SITE SELECTION

of the buildings, the pedestrian scale, and the public spaces created by the

	DESCRIPTION	SCORE (1-5)
	Building edges that define space and dimensions of spaces respects the human dimensions of movement	
	Leasable/rentable buildings which present opportunities for temporary business	
	Easily accessible from neighborhoods nearby	
	Potential for multi-modal street infrastructure	
	Adjacency to existing public spaces, potential to be a destination space	
	Mix of residential, commercial, retail and other uses	
experimentation	Recent or ongoing City planning projects	
		PHYSICAL SCORE

al for a Better Block event's success. Determine if the residents are ready for changing their urban environments.

	DESCRIPTION	SCORE (1-5)
ality	Diversity amongst the residents, including economic, social, ethnic, and demographics	
	Neighborhood's adaptation for change and support for future change Access to community leaders, neighborhood associations, other entities	
ition	Business owners support change and investment to the neighborhood Relationship with business organizations	
	Potential synergy with already scheduled festivals, parades, open air markets etc.	
	Variety of interesting activities and uses that create a varied streetscape	
	Pedestrian activity is high during different times of the day	
	Existance of elements that reflect the local culture or history	
		SOCIAL SCORE



POTENTIAL
There is no on-
palette of feat
might work well.

BIKE LANE
CROSSW
POP-UP SHOP
SEATING
LANDSCAPING
PLACEMAKING ELEMENTS
WAYFINDI

MAP
Please attach as aerial and map important points of int

6.7.17

CONCEPT PLAN

7.11.17

TIMELINE

BUILD WEEK

8.23.17-
8.25.17

BETTER BLOCK EVENT

8.26.17

AFTER

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01. EVENT SUMMARY

On Saturday, August 26th, 2017, one block of Tyler St., between Smith St. and Courtland St., was transformed. For one day, the street became a place of entertainment, comfort, conversation, walking, biking, listening, learning, watching, and much more.

STREET INFRACULTURE

9,800 sq ft of public right-of-way temporarily became a two-way cycle track for bicycles, a parklet, bulbouts, public transit stops, and new mid-block crosswalks.

PUBLIC SPACE

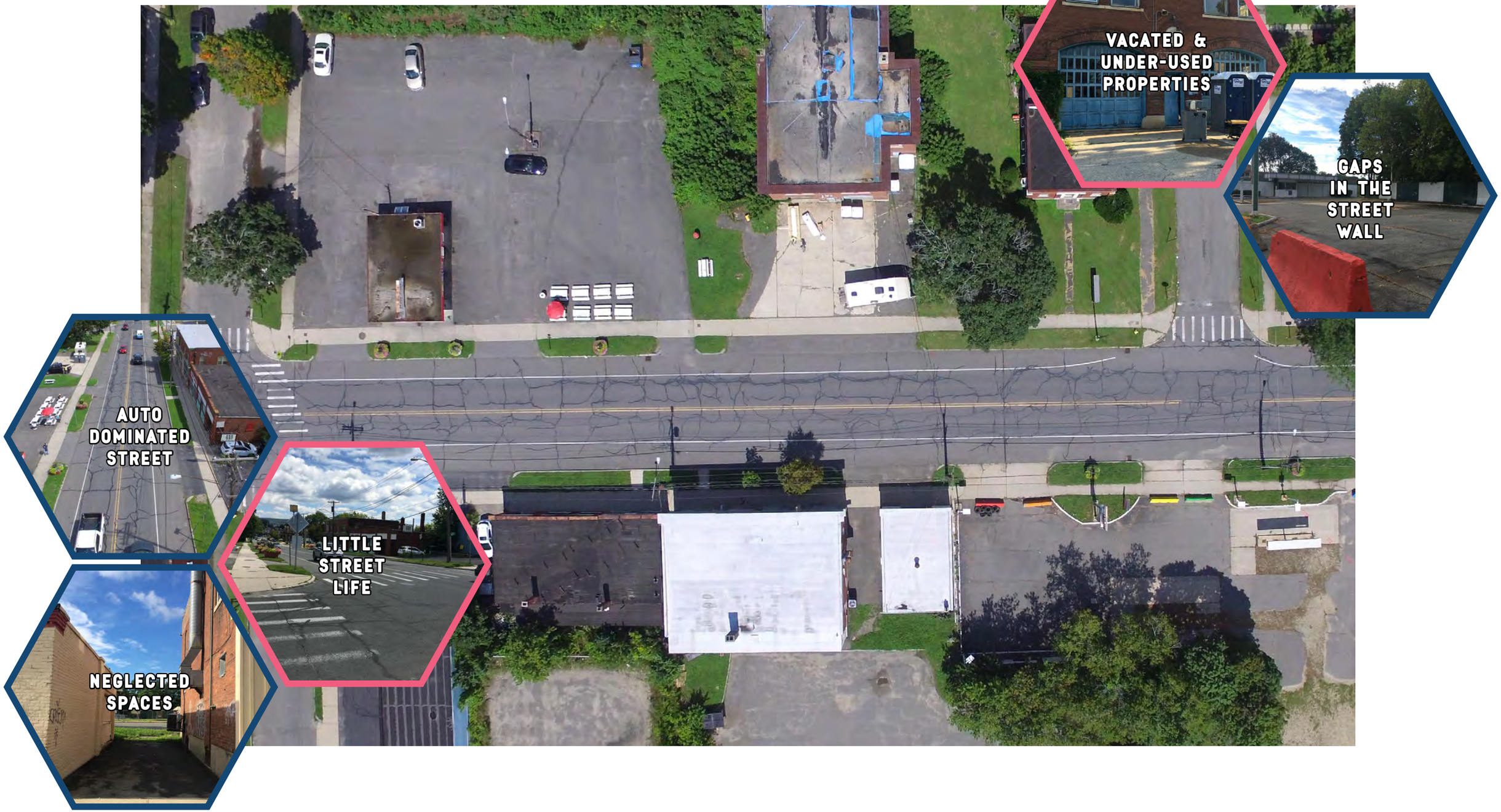
Vacant lots and a graffiti alley became a biergarten and food court, a put-put golf park and basketball court, a comfortable seating area, a kids play plaza, and a community space.

POP-UP PROGRAMMING

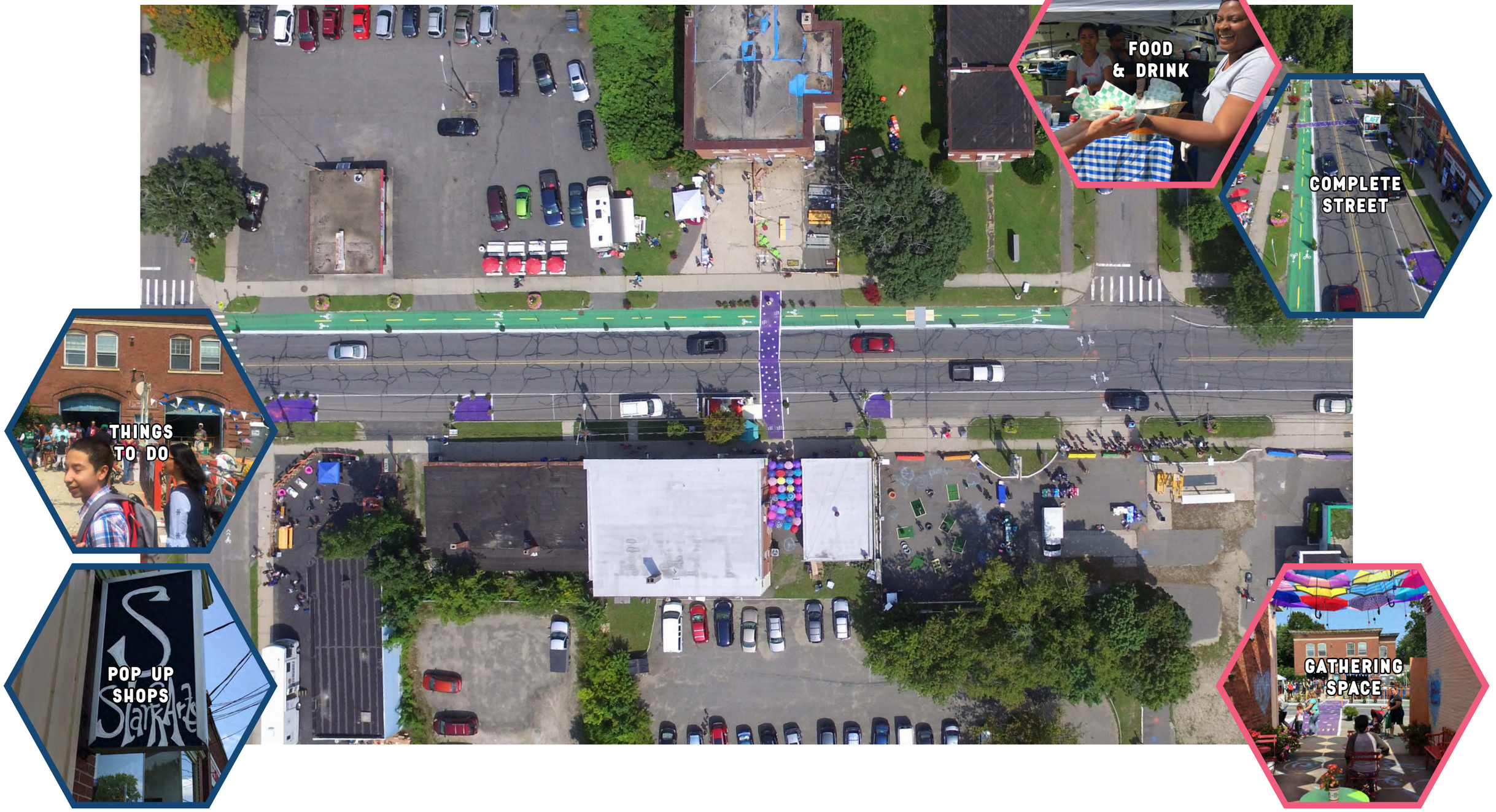
Five vacant buildings became a fresh market, a realtors office, a café, a community gathering space, and an art gallery.

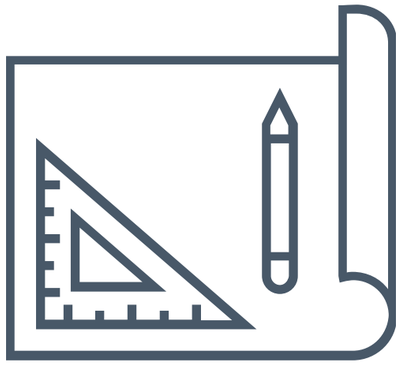
Project elements took three months of planning and hundreds of volunteer hours to create. Over 100 Pittsfield residents attended planning meetings, and 60 volunteers showed up to build the project elements. On the day of the event, 500-plus attendees enjoyed music, dance, shops, games, food, beer, and the beautiful Berkshire weather to see how the temporary transformations could make incremental steps to improve the area in economic development, traffic calming, art, and culture.

01.
BEFORE BETTER BLOCK



01. AFTER BETTER BLOCK





BUILD A BETTER BLOCK

Better Blocks use several techniques to create a safe and inviting place:

1. STREET INFRACULTURE

2. TRIANGULATED PUBLIC SPACE

3. POP-UP PROGRAMMING

The definitions of these techniques and how they were applied in Pittsfield will follow. For a more in-depth understanding of these techniques and the Better Block process, see the Better Block Field Guide.

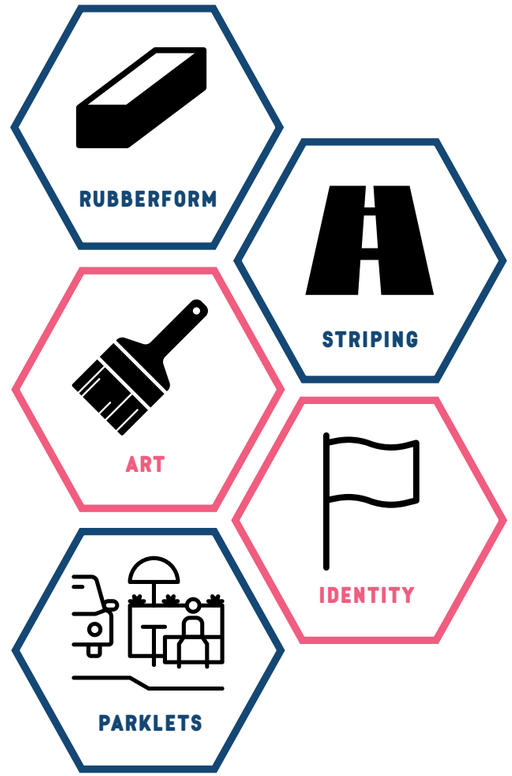
STREET INFRACULTURE

Street infraculture* is a technique of calming streets that combines standard traffic engineering elements with public art and DIY urbanism. Pioneered in New York City, this approach to streets has now been used to quickly and inexpensively make streets friendly for people of all ages. See the Better Block Field Guide for further definition of street infraculture.

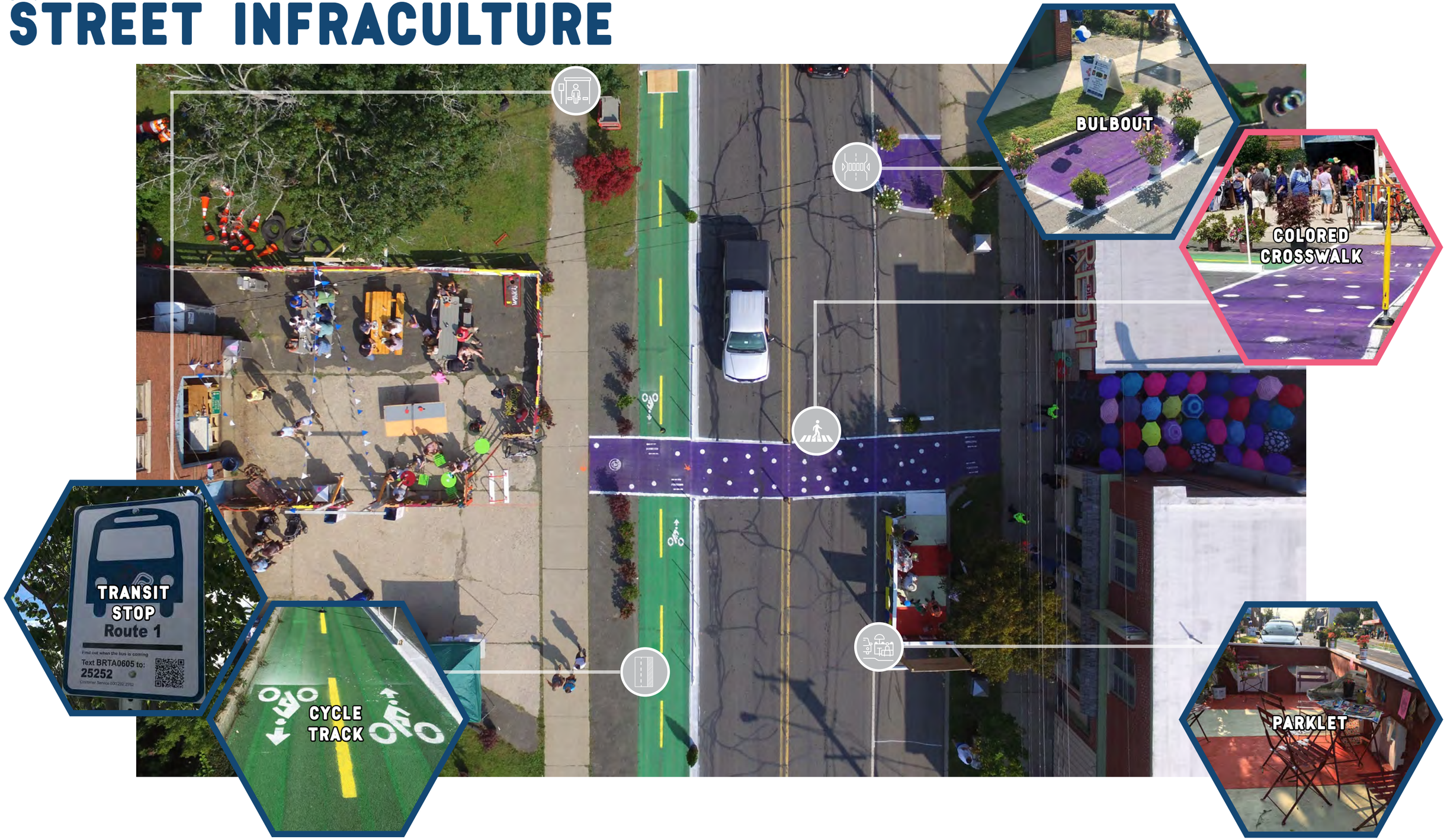
In Pittsfield, the technique was used to test a cycle track, colored crosswalk, bulbouts, a parklet and transit stops. The street was transformed from a place you typically just drove through, to one a passerby would want to stop and experience. See the page 47 for how this technique was performed.

Street Infraculture is a term used by Team Better Block

What makes a street more vibrant and improves quality of life?
Street infraculture is a combination of:



02. STREET INFRACULTURE



02. STREET INFRACULTURE

TRANSIT STOP

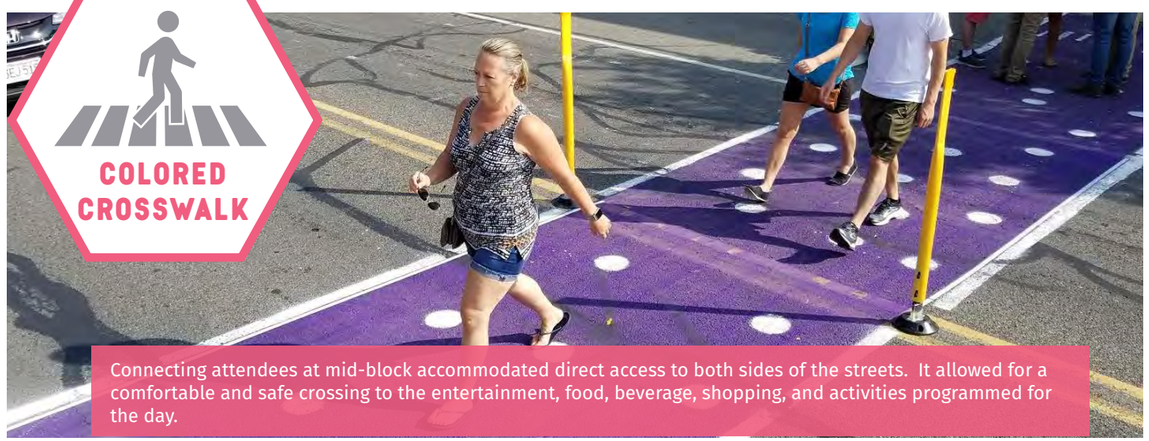
A unique design, this transit stop required additional infrastructure to allow movement for pedestrians and cyclists. Adding a platform with directional ramps kept cyclists moving when a bus wasn't picking up passengers. When there was a bus, the design allowed the bus driver to safely load passengers using ADA assistance without disrupting bicycle traffic flow.

CYCLE TRACK

After observing bi-directional bicycle traffic on the north side of Tyler street, a two-way cycle track was tested to accommodate people riding a bicycle. It also is a part of the traffic calming strategy that helped to lower overall speeds within the corridor while the infrastructure was in place.

BULBOUT

COLORED CROSSWALK



Connecting attendees at mid-block accommodated direct access to both sides of the streets. It allowed for a comfortable and safe crossing to the entertainment, food, beverage, shopping, and activities programmed for the day.

PARKLET

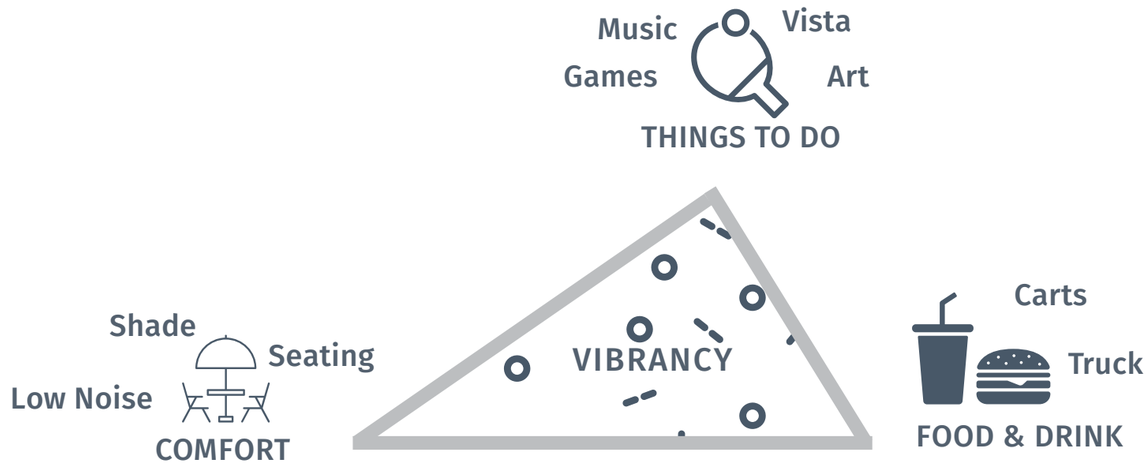
Following NACTO design standards,* a parklet allowed for public seating for cafe patrons and was apart of the overall traffic calming strategy. This design also accommodated ADA patrons since it abutted grass. It was built with an open end next to the mid-block crosswalk.

Can be found in appendix under 'Build Plan'

PUBLIC SPACE

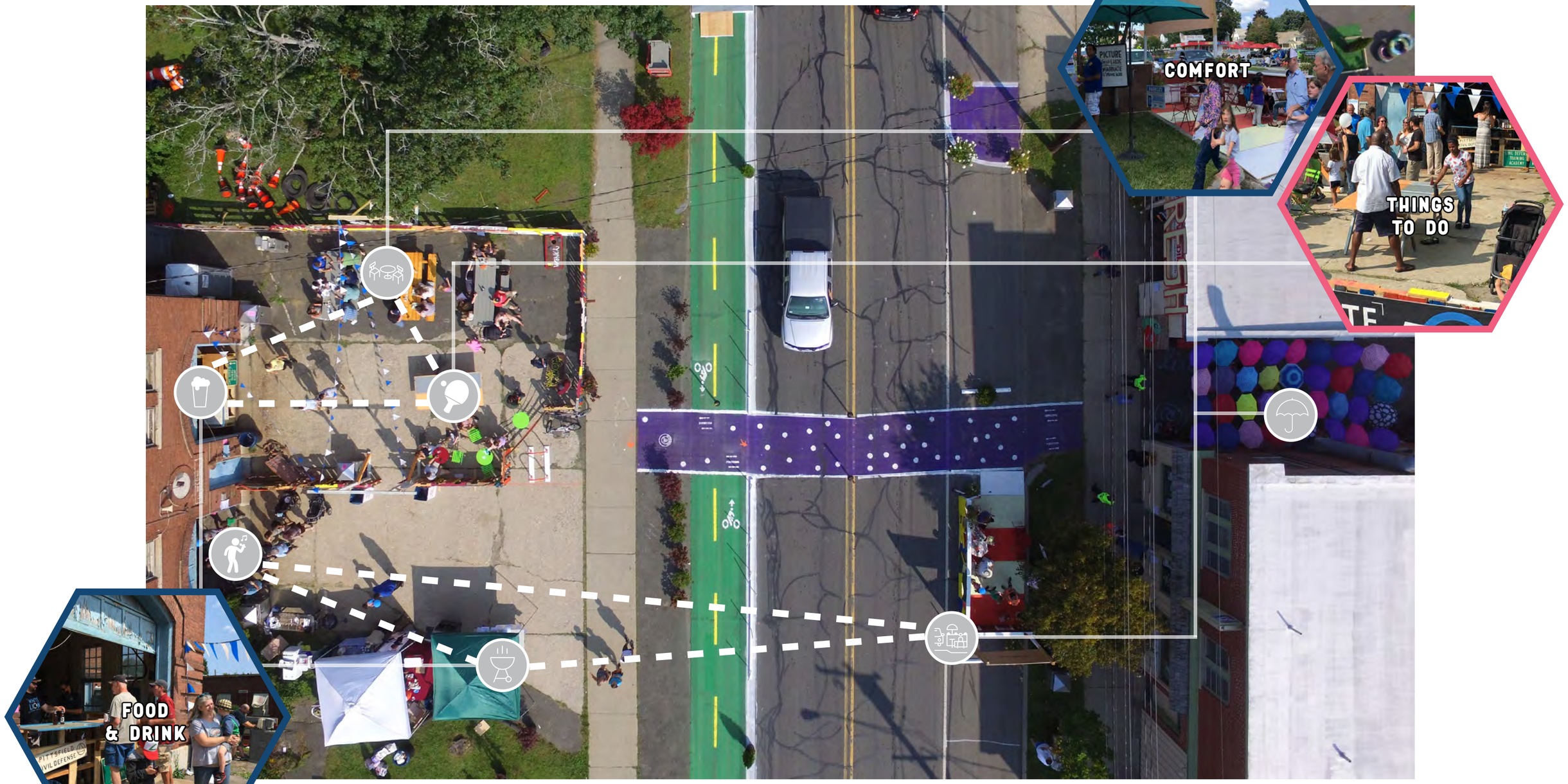
Public spaces often lack fundamental elements to make them active. Triangulating comfort, activities, and refreshments is proven to be a recipe for activating public spaces. Better Block uses these in combination with programming sourced from local talent to create vibrant public spaces. For further defintion on placemaking triangulation, see the Better Block Field Guide.

Pittsfield perfectly executed the triangulation in two areas, as described below.



PLACEMAKING TRIANGULATION

02. PUBLIC SPACE



02. PUBLIC SPACE

02. PUBLIC SPACE

COMFORTABLE SEATING

BIERGARTEN

Re-imagining the firehouse into a new purpose for the community to enjoy was a great success. A trend in many communities now is crafting beer locally. Based on past Better Block projects, partnering with a local craft brewery creates a unique and communal space for beer lovers and their friends and family to experience. Adding picnic tables, games, and live music to the space, along with food vendors, completed the transformation and provided a template for future development.

UMBRELLA ALLEY

Often times the most overlooked and hidden spaces are the most obvious after a passionate advocate's vision becomes reality. This was the case with the now coined moniker, "umbrella alley." Local resident Kate Lauzon created a warm and inviting space for sitting, conversing, eating, or simply people watching. It was the show stopper of the project!

PARKLET

02. PUBLIC SPACE

THINGS TO DO

PING PONG

Ping pong has the unique ability to create a conversation between two people through the action of play. It is a game for all ages and generations, and is a perfect placemaking tool for any community.

LIVE MUSIC

Intimate and cozy venues for live music are rare, but when a perfect building creates a setting unlike most, its easy to see. The firehouse could be transformed into something similar with the right, passionate developer to take on the project.

MINI GOLF

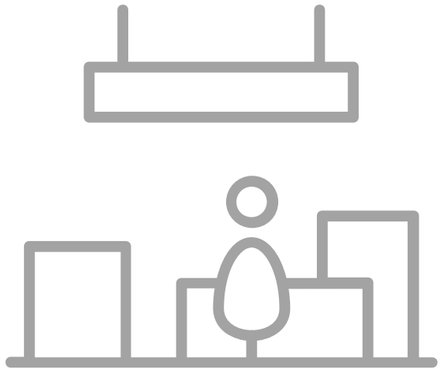
Focusing on activities geared toward young people, the Hess Station property was transformed into a basketball court and miniature golf family plaza. Future public investment could transform the space into a trail head and pocket plaza connection for the Morningside walking loop and future on-street bicycle infrastructure.

BASKETBALL

02. PUBLIC SPACE

FOOD & DRINK

Pairing certain foods and beverages together is an essential placemaking technique. Two local favorites served up some tasty BBQ and craft beer while patrons listened to live music in the biergarten.



POP-UP PROGRAMMING

Complete streets and active public spaces rely on private sector investments to be vibrant. The edge of streets and public spaces where they abut private property are vital to the health of an area. Filling vacant storefronts, abandoned buildings, and empty parking lots are main tenets of any Better Block. It is best done by asking the community what is missing from the neighborhood and then mining local talent to pop-up venues to match.

Pittsfield followed this formula well by activating 14,041 sq ft of vacant property with:

5 Pop-Up Shops | 2 Food Vendors | 1 Beverage Vendor | 5 Performers

These pop-ups fulfilled what the community asked for, which included a fresh food market, art, coffee, kids activities, entertainment, and professional offices.

PITTSFIELD BETTER BLOCK

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Morningside Fire Station, 235 Tyler Street
Saturday, August 26th | 12PM - 7PM

FIREHOUSE SCHEDULE OF EVENTS LIVE MUSIC, COMEDY & DANCE

12:00PM - 7:00PM
White Lion Brewery Biergarten

12:00PM - 12:30PM
Youth Alive Dance and Drum Line

12:30PM - 1:00PM
"What's Going On - A Social Movement" Community Dance Celebration by Jacob's Pillow

2:00PM - 3:00PM
Saturday Night LIV Hosted by Liv Cummins

3:00PM - 4:00PM
Chad Tarves

4:00PM - 5:00PM
The Riverside Brothers

5:00PM - 7:00PM
The Matchstick Architects

POP UP SHOPS SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

11:30AM - 12:00PM
Tyler St. Mural Project Unveiling
(Goodwill, 158 Tyler St.)

12:00PM - 7:00PM
Hopeseed Cooperative
(Cafe Reva, 236 Tyler Street)

12:00PM - 7:00PM
Stark Arts Artist Residence & Fine Art Gallery
(J&J Locke, 238 Tyler Street)

12:00PM - 7:00PM
Goodwill KIDZ Zone
(Fin & Feather, 214 Tyler St.)

12:00PM - 7:00PM
Lion's Club Mobile Eye Clinic
(Fin & Feather, 214 Tyler St.)

12:00PM - 7:00PM
Dream Center's Backpack and Haircuts
(Tyler Welding, 240 Tyler St.)

12:00PM - 7:00PM
Morningside Market
(Tyler Welding, 240 Tyler St.)

12:00PM - 7:00PM
Berkshire Realtors Pop Up Realty Office
(Randall's Trophy, 224 Tyler St.)

HESS GAS STATION SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

12:00PM - 7:00PM
Mini Golf Plaza

12:00PM - 7:00PM
Youth Alive's Basketball Clinic and Art

12:00PM - 7:00PM
Berkshire Health Systems

12:00PM - 7:00PM
Berkshire Community College

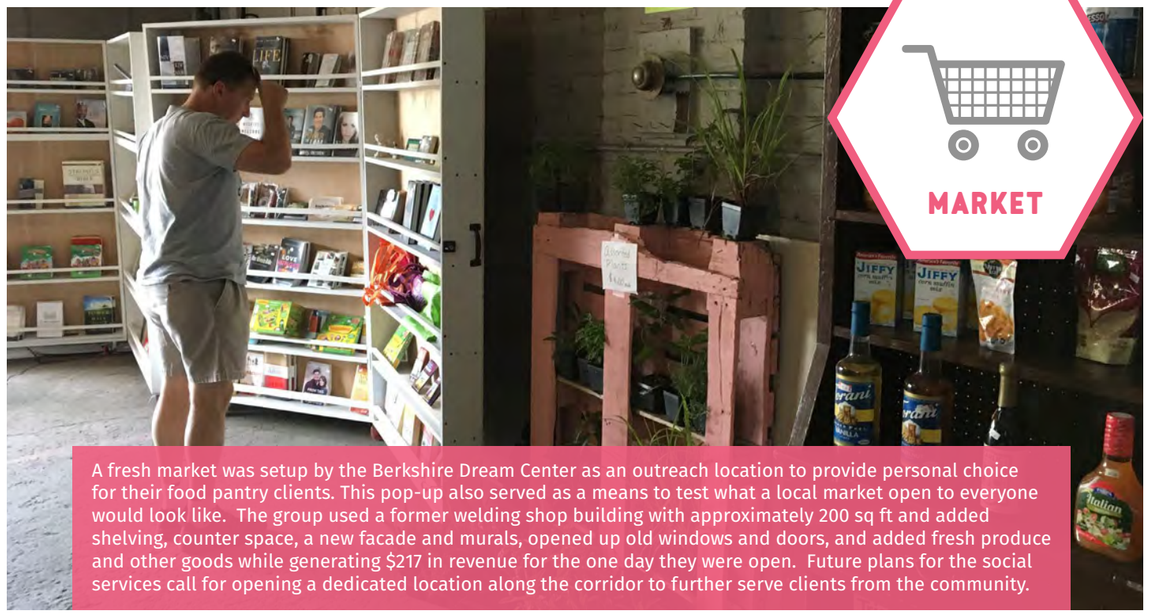
BEFORE BETTER BLOCK

AFTER BETTER BLOCK

BEFORE BETTER BLOCK

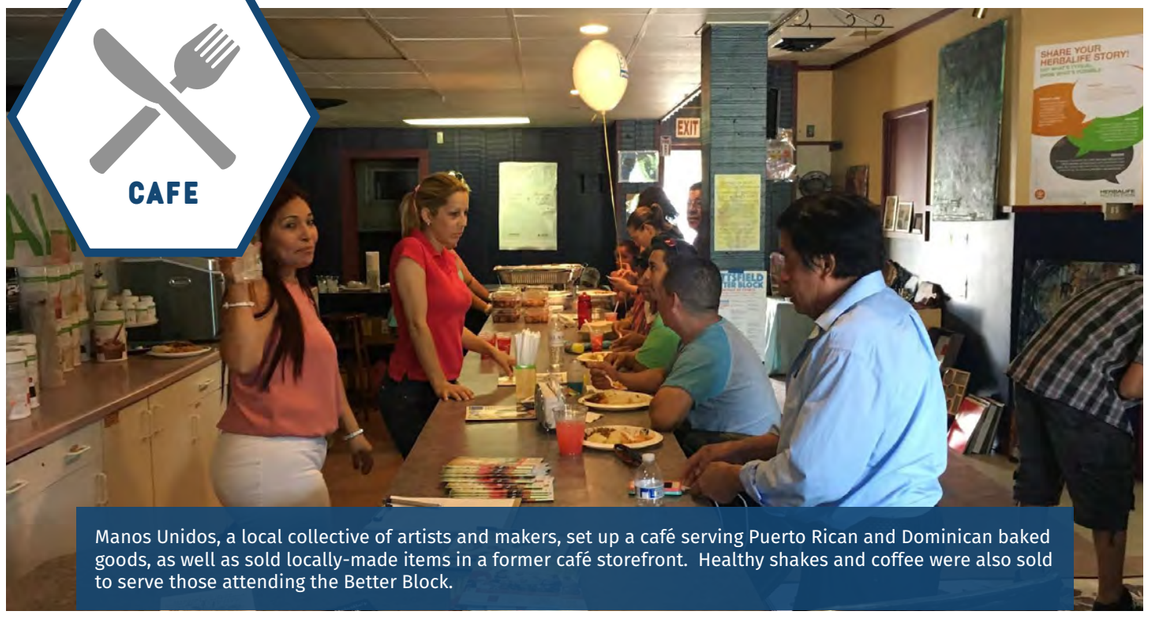
AFTER BETTER BLOCK

02. POP-UP SHOPS



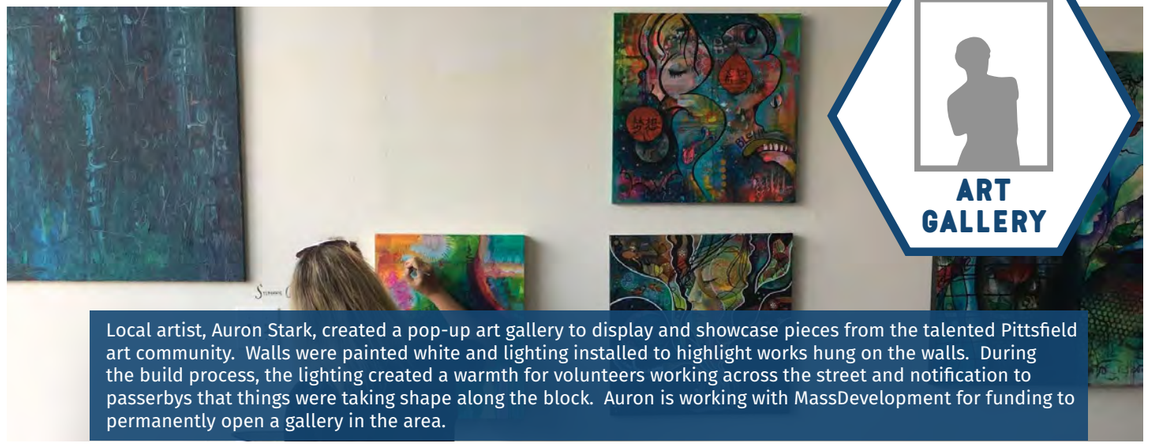
MARKET

A fresh market was setup by the Berkshire Dream Center as an outreach location to provide personal choice for their food pantry clients. This pop-up also served as a means to test what a local market open to everyone would look like. The group used a former welding shop building with approximately 200 sq ft and added shelving, counter space, a new facade and murals, opened up old windows and doors, and added fresh produce and other goods while generating $217 in revenue for the one day they were open. Future plans for the social services call for opening a dedicated location along the corridor to further serve clients from the community.



CAFE

Manos Unidos, a local collective of artists and makers, set up a café serving Puerto Rican and Dominican baked goods, as well as sold locally-made items in a former café storefront. Healthy shakes and coffee were also sold to serve those attending the Better Block.



ART GALLERY

Local artist, Auron Stark, created a pop-up art gallery to display and showcase pieces from the talented Pittsfield art community. Walls were painted white and lighting installed to highlight works hung on the walls. During the build process, the lighting created a warmth for volunteers working across the street and notification to passerbys that things were taking shape along the block. Auron is working with MassDevelopment for funding to permanently open a gallery in the area.

KIDZ ZONE

Goodwill partnered with the Better Block project to host a fun and active game zone targeted at the local youth in the neighborhood. More services for kids are being planned for the district.

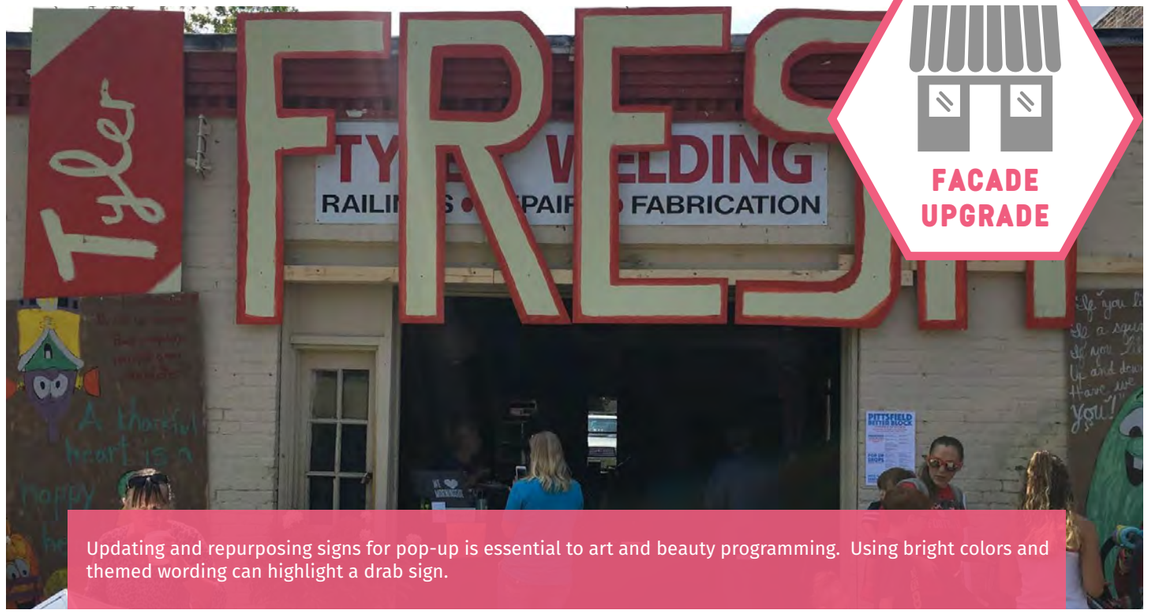
REALTY OFFICE

Berkshire Realtor's took over a trophy shop for the day to advertise local listings within the Morningside and adjacent neighborhoods. The outreach office was a huge success, and the group is looking at other ways to continue these pop-up efforts.

02. ART & BEAUTY

MURAL

Partnering with an existing mural project greatly benefited and enhanced the art and beauty treatments made. Scale is a factor, so bigger isn't always best. Adding smaller and removable murals to accent and promote pop-up shops is an important tool for creating a rich and artistic environment.



FACADE UPGRADE

Updating and repurposing signs for pop-up is essential to art and beauty programming. Using bright colors and themed wording can highlight a drab sign.

MURAL

LANDSCAPING

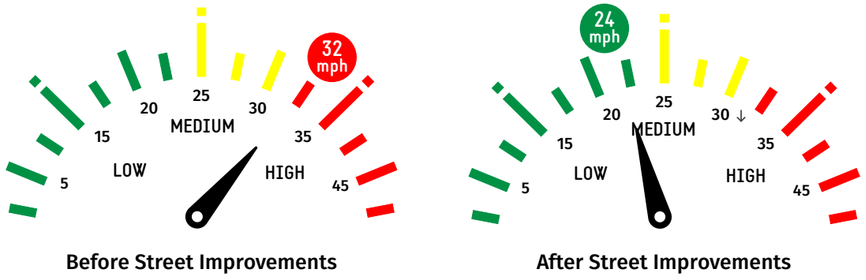
Without plantings like shrubs and flowers, a place feels less connected to the outdoors. Shrubs were used as buffers in the bulbouts, and flowers, added to the parklet and storefronts as an inviting element.

03. RESULTS

EVALUATION

TRAFFIC CALMING EVALUATION

Probability of Pedestrian Death or Injury



Before Street Improvements | **After Street Improvements**

"Traffic calming impact of the streetscape is evident. We (the TDI volunteer crew) have been pulling down different elements of the streetscape throughout the week. The process has involved us walking the street which used to be a harrowing experience. Vehicular speeds have reduced by at least 8 mph, making the street a less hostile pedestrian environment."

-Amewusika Sedzro, TDI Fellow

SOUND EVALUATION

When speed and sound volumes are reduced to comfortable levels, people will linger longer, spend more money, and have a better and longer-lasting impression of an area. A target sound decibel is 60 dB. This is the equivalent to normal conversation at a three-foot distance, as opposed to 70dB, which is like standing in the middle of busy traffic or next to a phone ringing. When the sound is at a normal, comfortable level to have a friendly conversation with your mother, that lends to a better economic experience for consumers and businesses.

Before Street Improvements

AVERAGE

72.6 DB

Can be compared to a police siren

HIGH

83.5 DB

Can be compared to a rock concert

After Street Improvements

AVERAGE

64.4 DB

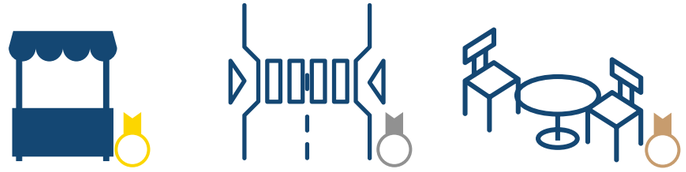
Can be compared to a conversation between two people

ATTENDEE SURVEY

Of the attendees surveyed, 36% were male and 66% were female. 84% were registered voters and their ages ranged from 25-59 years old. 44% of the attendees identified as Caucasian, 28% Hispanic, 12% African American, and 4% Asian.

99%

99% of attendees surveyed had an overall favorable, general impression of the street interventions.



Top 3 demonstrations that attendees wanted to see more of were pop-up shops, street improvements, and seating/parklets, in that order.

Top physical change to the area surveyed were repairing the Fire Station and developing the Hess Station.

Top communications attendees heard about the event were word of mouth, social media, and flyers.

03. RESULTS

IMPRESSIONS

"One of the biggest and most immediate successes of the Better Block process was the engagement of both residents and property owners. Until we embarked on this process, we were unable to get TDI stakeholders to unite around a project. The Better Block process has jump-started some very promising pilots and partnerships on the street."

Amewusika Sedzro
TDI Fellow
MassDevelopment

Thanks to the TDI and the support of Mass Development we had an opportunitys with Better Block, to develop a focus area of Tyler. Thanks to all the volunteers and participants. It was an amazing event! We were able to personally feel and see the interest and motivation of our community, and the desire to make it a success. This event will keep us on track with all of our future planning and will help us to create an outcome that is community driven. You just can't get those results from reading a piece of paper.

Diane Marcella
President
Tyler Street Business Group

The project was key in engaging local residents in important community decision-making processes. It was amazing to see how these decisions about the design of the site had an impact on things like traffic speed, noise level, and creating welcoming spaces. Everyone learned something, and several volunteers continue to stay involved because they know they can make an impact. It's an important step in the development of the Morningside neighborhood.

Alisa Costa
Initiative Director
Berkshire Bridges Working Cities

"[With] a lot of work by a lot of people, the Better Block event was a success, and the enthusiastic and strong response from the community was very rewarding."

Deanna Ruffer
Community Development Director
City of Pittsfield

"I came across the umbrella alley in Portugal and I thought it would be really cool to do it in Pittsfield. It was literally Jonathan Braddick (TBB Project Manager) telling me "Do it." They saw the same vision I saw and just empowered me to "just do it." It was really awesome."

Kate Lauzon
Morningside Initiative Chair

I was amazed at the ingenuity, spontaneity, and resourcefulness of the coordinators and volunteers who worked all summer, and especially the week leading up to Transformation Day. Even more than I learned about the logistics of getting such an event off the ground, I learned about how much we as volunteers and coordinators could rely on each other and empower each other to get a task done, whether that be collecting and storing fifty wooden pallets in one night, or finding neighbors happy to donate supplies or equipment at seemingly the last minute.

One of the biggest lessons I learned as a volunteer for Better Block was the power of pitching an idea, and just having another person in the room say, "OK, go for it."

Nick Russo
Pittsfield Better Block Organizer

03. RESULTS

POST BETTER BLOCK

UMBRELLA ALLEY

Following the success of the Better Block, local resident of Morningside, Kate Lauzon, became a mini-celebrity after a photo of the umbrella alley she built with volunteers from the project was recently used in a Boston magazine. The local State Representative Tricia Farley-Bouvier reached out personally to encourage her efforts, and she became a chair of the Morningside Initiative that brings more togetherness into the community. She continues to work with the TDI and was offered a job as Community Navigator from Working Cities. Her idea to build the beautification project was a direct result of the community engagement process used—with open source channels directly with anyone interested in the project. She followed up her success and applied for a $2000 grant from the Pittsfield cultural commission so that another Pittsfield alley can beautified next year.

TRASH CAN RIBBON CUTTING

Following the event, the Tyler Street Business Group had a ribbon cutting for the new trash receptacles that were used at the event. Ten bins, made locally by Tyler Welding, with designs by Dr. Vinyl of Western Massachusetts, were installed on both sides of the street, continuing to make permanent changes and updating aged perceptions of the area.

(PARK)ING DAY

Nick Russo showed up at the beginning of the project, and immediately stood out as an advocate for placemaking and transportation issues. He led the effort of building the mini golf elements for the event and later partnered with Kate Lauzon, builder of the umbrella alley, and submitted a grant application for a more permanent one downtown. He led and built a Parking Day installation using Better Block techniques, as well as organized weekend social bicycle rides in the neighborhood. This has led him to submit an application for funding under the Community Preservation Act for phase one of a bicycle boulevard that will pass through the Better Block district. He's continuing to work with the TDI's working groups to further explore branding for community outreach on Tyler Street.

NEWS COVERAGE

The day after the event, the Pittsfield Better Block project made the front page of the local Berkshire Eagle newspaper, permanently etching a new view of Tyler Street and a beginning to changing its negative perception.

04. RECOMMENDATIONS

STREET INFRACULTURE

Team Better Block highly recommends that a center delineation line be considered to further calm traffic on this street. The optimal street infraculture will not be achieved without this element. It is also recommended that further testing be done during the cross-section configuration outlined below.

New design priorities should be established that target:

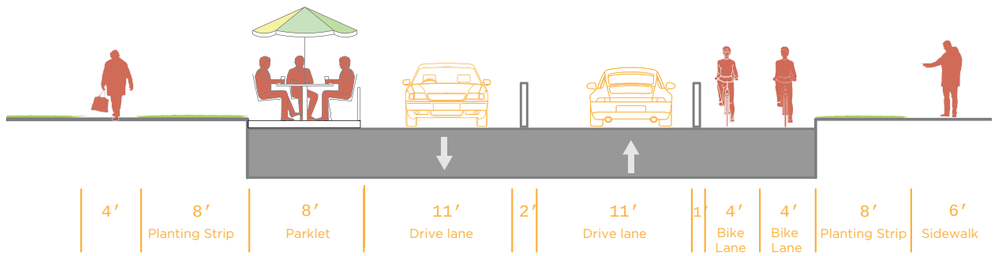
An Average Speed of: **25** MPH

Sound Decibel Level of: **60** DB

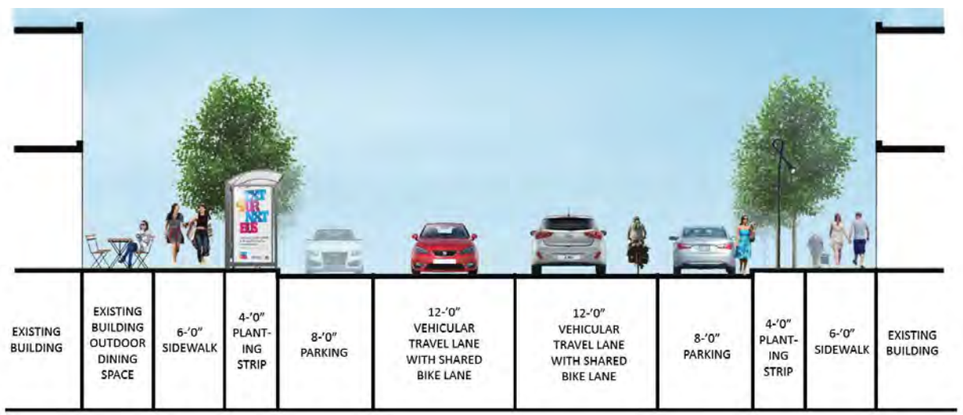
The 2017 TDI Corridor Implementation Plan made traffic calming recommendations that follow complete street design such as installing parklets and curb extensions. The Pittsfield Better Block built on this by recommending that reduced speeds will facilitate noise reduction along Tyler Street, making it a more attractive to people wanting to stay, linger, and contribute to the fabric of the area.

During Better Block, lane sizes weren't reduced for traffic calming, but it was the combination of repurposing the parking lanes, the mid-block crosswalks, the bulbouts, the parklet, and the increased pedestrian and bicycle activity that contributed to these results. All factors lead to the lowering of the overall average speeds and noise to comfortable levels.

BETTER BLOCK CONCEPT PLAN CROSS-SECTION



2017 TDI CORRIDOR CROSS-SECTION



BETTER BLOCK PROJECT ELEMENTS

The Better Block activated and tested proven traffic calming measures studied by the 2017 TDI Corridor Implementation Plan. This included installing a two-way cycle track on the northside of Tyler St. by using the parking lane. Bicycle traffic was observed during the site analysis using the existing right-of-way (ROW) for two-way traffic, which helped guide our decision-making process for the design of Better Block elements. Bulb0uts (curb extensions) for traffic calming were painted using temporary paint, bus stops and signage were coordinated with the local transit authority, bicycle parking was temporarily installed for use during the event and for later study by the TDI, and better pedestrian lighting was coordinated and installed by the City of Pittsfield. Additionally, the Better Block used traffic calming tools such as building a parklet within the parking ROW to provide café seating for pop-up retail and installing a mid-block crosswalk with center-line delineators to further help calm traffic. The TDI report recommended installing bus shelters along the Tyler corridor. Better Block contacted and worked with BRTA to install two planned transit stops to work as the first bus stops within the corridor that buses would stop at whether or not a waiting passenger was at the stop. At the time of the event, buses only stop if flagged at any point along the corridor. TBB tested infrastructure for loading and unloading passengers that would accommodate cyclists traveling within the cycle track and provided a more ADA friendly loading access to passengers while a bus was stopped. A benefit of this was that it allowed buses to stay within the ROW, which provided additional traffic calming on the street.

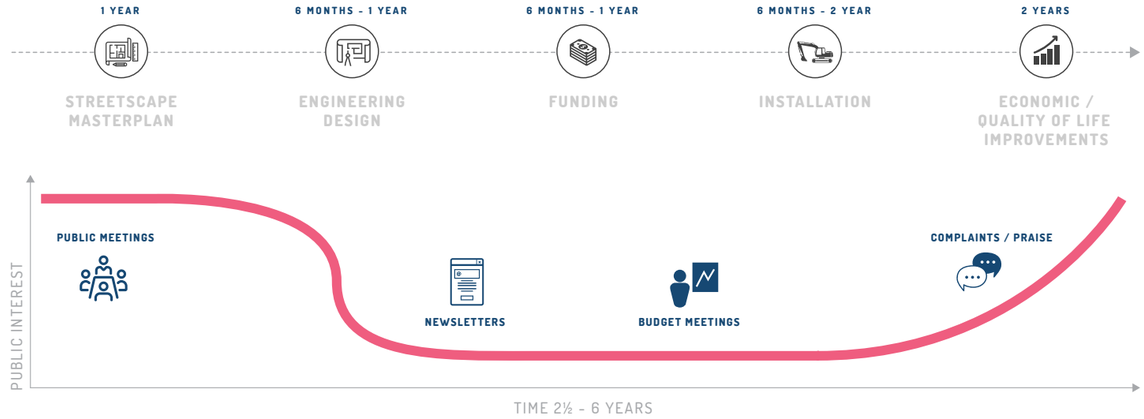
04. RECOMMENDATIONS

BETTER BLOCK PLANNING PROCESS

This graphic visually compares the TDI plan with the Better Block plan to showcase further the different street recommendations that were recommended and tested. Field testing elements of a plan should be a design and planning standard set for future infrastructure and streetscape projects within the corridor.

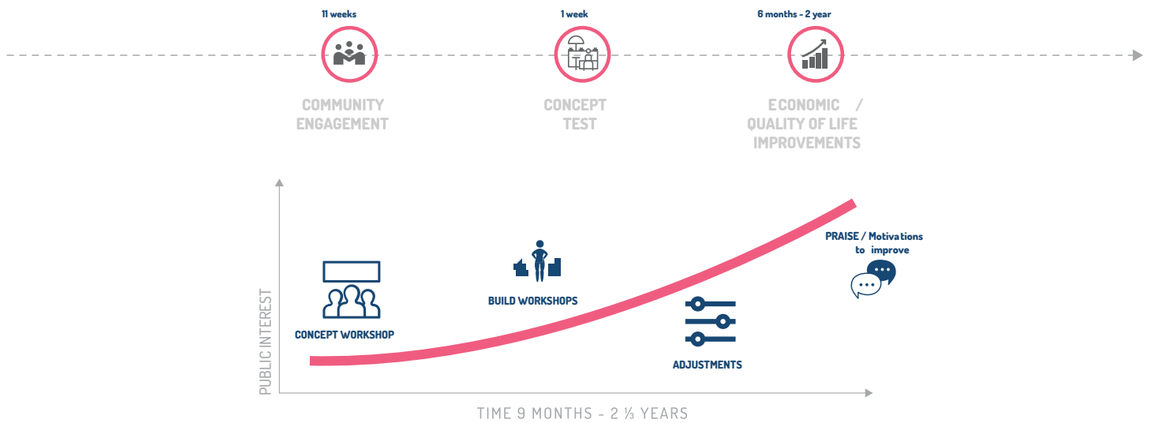
	TDI PLAN	BETTER BLOCK PLAN	BETTER BLOCK TEST
BICYCLE SHARED SPACE	✓		
BICYCLE DEDICATED SPACE		✓	✓
PARKLETS	✓	✓	✓
BULB OUTS	✓	✓	✓
LIGHTING	✓	✓	✓
CENTERLINE DELINEATION		✓	✓
MID-BLOCK CROSSWALKS		✓	✓
TRANSIT STOPS	✓	✓	✓
TRANSIT RAMPS		✓	✓

TRADITIONAL PLANNING PROCESS



Traditional planning is often drawn out and lacks iteration. The public's interest levels rise and fall like the tides, peaking during the public meeting process, and then waning while the engineers design it and funding is secured - only to increase later with vocal opposition with complaints during construction or subpar support after a brutal public meeting process. The average public improvement project can take anywhere from two and half years to six years to complete, sometimes much longer. For example, Pittsfield's downtown remake of North Street took 10 years to complete.

BETTER BLOCK PROCESS



04. RECOMMENDATIONS

BETTER BLOCK PLANNING PROCESS

TYPICAL PROCESS

per linear foot **$425.00**

includes:

SIDEWALK

CROSSWALK

excludes:

roadway repaving, conflicting utility, drainage costs, engineering drawings and public engagement.

BETTER PROCESS

$200.00 per linear foot

includes:

ADA CROSSWALK

BIKE LANE SEPERATOR

BULBOUTS

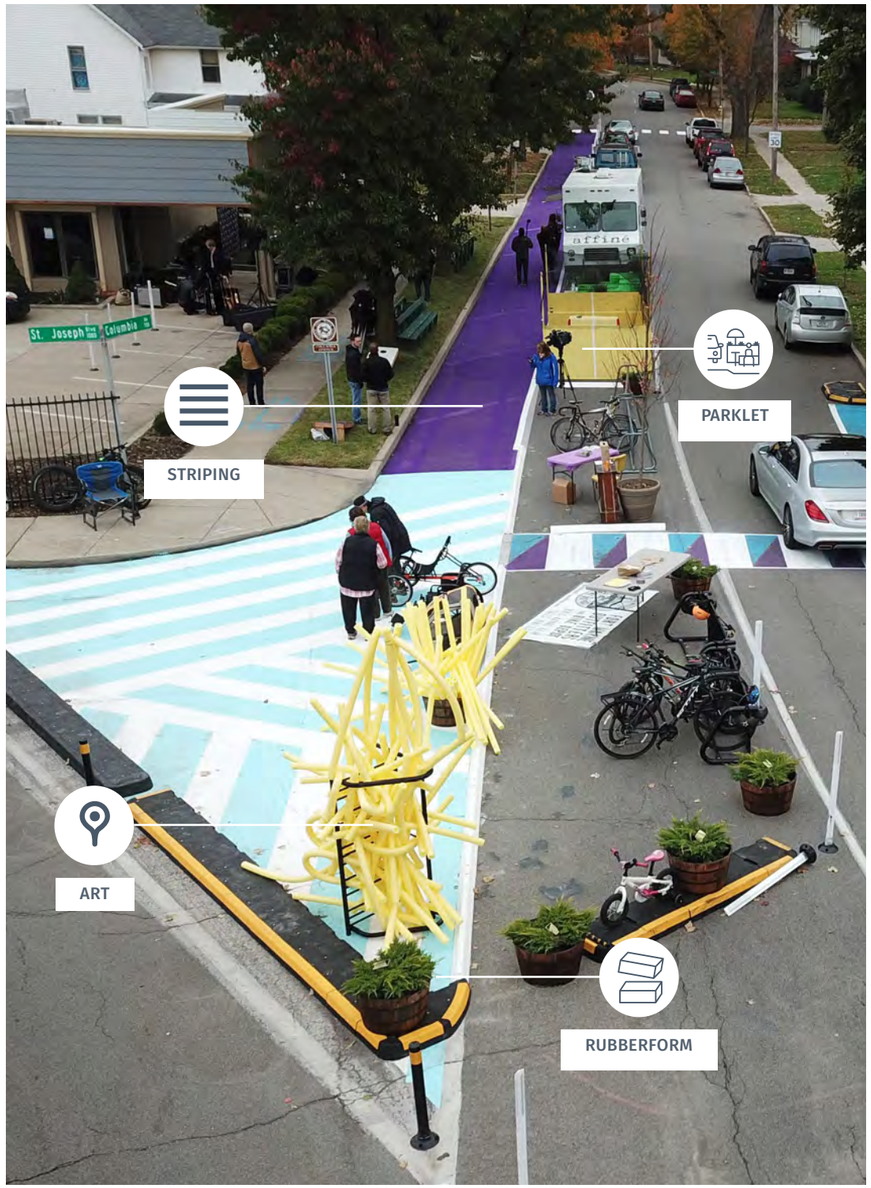
PEDESTRIAN ISLAND

LOW MAINTENANCE LANDSCAPING

DATA COLLECTION & MONITORING

SOLAR ENERGY

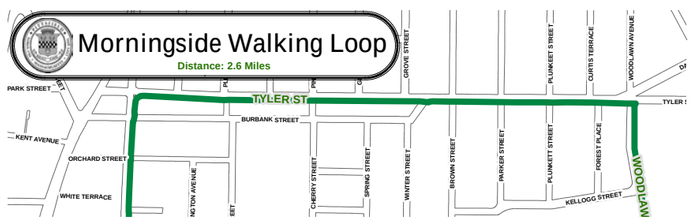
Public funds are scarce in many communities. Using temporary or semi-permanent materials, following NACTO designs standards, and testing a concept is a better and more efficient use of tax dollars for many types of public improvement projects. Rubber form material, can be used like Legos, to construct medians, bulbouts, and other traffic calming elements for testing for permanency rather than traditional construction methods that take much longer to implement. For more information on street infraculture, see the Better Block Field Guide.



05. NEXT STEPS

PUBLIC SPACE

PRESENT DAY



FUTURE POSSIBILITY

One of the most spoken about and passionate issues this project encountered was the former Hess Gas Station property. Over the years since its demise, it has become a sore spot—a trash-ridden place of blight and crime. This location has been a focus of conversation between the City and residents, for quite some time. Residents have taken it upon themselves to beautify the area, even before the Better Block project.

Now is the time to integrate this space into the public realm as a gateway pocket park, connecting to the Morningside walking loop and future bicycle infrastructure on Burbank St. During the Better Block, the space was programmed as a basketball and miniature golf space. The space is already being used as a cut-through space to the local school and Tyler St. Given this proximity and a nearby public park, public funds should be allocated for the creation of this space as a trailhead and pocket park for the use of the neighborhood.

Creating a seamless environment between home, neighborhood, and public space has become the new normal. How can cities help resident's live balanced, healthy lives within the space that exists? The answer lies in creating connections to great public spaces.

05. NEXT STEPS

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City of Pittsfield was a great partner in working with property owners and Better Block organizers during the building inspection process. Establishing a good, working relationship with staff was key in accomplishing the temporary use of the properties. The project acquired the use of the old firehouse, and City staff and resources were given to clean and secure the building for its use during the build and storage process. While the building is firmly a part of the historical neighborhood vernacular and culture, its upkeep has been less than stellar and has contributed to the emotional decline of the neighborhood. While under the care of the City, funds should be used to bring the building up to code so that it can be used. If the City does not have the capacity to do this, the firehouse should be sold to a private entity that is willing to restore it. Its existence is too important and must be dealt with as soon as possible. Setting up a vacant property registration ordinance will help with all unused and vacant properties in the corridor.

Pop-Up Shop Permit

Streamlining the traditional process of certifying occupancy for a space, by creating a pop-up shop permitting process to help encourage reuse of vacant properties is a great way to activate unused space while also allowing residents to have the opportunity to test out business concepts. A process that can be created for pop-up shop permits is outlined below.

• Begin by determining the length of time for the permit. Pop-ups work best in short increments, of 30, 60, or 90 days.

• Develop a checklist of items for an applicant to review in the space to get it quickly up to code for short-term occupancy. For example, having lighted doorways and emergency signs posted visible to a patron. Categorize each item by priority so the applicant can quickly work through them. Offer up tips to help them get these items completed to meet the minimum standard. For instance, can an LED light screwed to the wall suffice instead of a hard-wired fixture?

• Next, create a short and simple timeline for submission and approval that works for all departments involved. Making the applicant go to each department is time consuming and inefficient.

• Assign one staff member to oversee each application and be the point person throughout. This will help make communications easy and quick.

• Determine if certain districts in your city should be allowed to have the permitting process available to owners.

• Target blocks for redevelopment using this important tool for revitalization efforts in a commercial block of a neighborhood.

06.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Pittsfield's first Better Block project would not have been possible without plenty of help from the community. Funding was provided by MassDevelopment and leadership for the project was lead by TDI Fellow Sika Sedzro and a team of partners including Tyler St. Business Group, the City of Pittsfield, and Berskhire Health Systems. An army of volunteers and sponsors gathered to create an economically viable, pedestrian-friendly block in the Morningside neighborhood on Tyler St. in Pittsifield, MA.

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07. APPENDIX

1. Concept Plan
2. Build Plan
3. Site Survey
4. Volunteer Forms
5. Marketing Material

GLOSSARY:

Street Infraculture: Street infraculture, a termed used by Team Better Block, is a technique of calming streets that combines standard traffic engineering elements with public art and DIY urbanism.

Placemaking: Placemaking capitalizes on a local community's assets, inspiration, and potential, with the intention of creating public spaces that promote people's health, happiness, and well-being.

Project Elements: Temporary builds facilitated by Team Better Block that were tested during the Pittsfield Better Block.

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