

# DOWNTOWN BELLEVUE PLACEMAKING

Stakeholder Workshop Series Report  
December 3, 2021



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# Overview

The Bellevue Downtown Association (BDA) partnered with the City of Bellevue's Cultural and Economic Development team to host a series of workshops with BDA members to examine downtown's placemaking strengths, gaps and potential.

## Why examine placemaking?

Growth brings many benefits, but it also adds stress to the public realm. Evaluating downtown's public spaces is a proactive step to identify how we can program the right placemaking projects to serve and manage growth as well as understand what type of public space improvements can support businesses operating during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Effective placemaking adapts spaces to seize opportunities and overcome shortcomings. So, what are the opportunities and shortcomings to consider when planning placemaking projects in downtown? We gathered a group of downtown stakeholders to answer this question over a series of four meetings and a walking tour session in early 2021. These stakeholders heard from subject matter experts, participated in exercises, and discussed how placemaking can improve the pedestrian experience and stimulate economic activity. Their key takeaways are reflected in this report.



## WHAT IS PLACEMAKING?

Placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value. More than just promoting better urban design, placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution.

**People for Public Spaces**, *What if we built cities around places?*

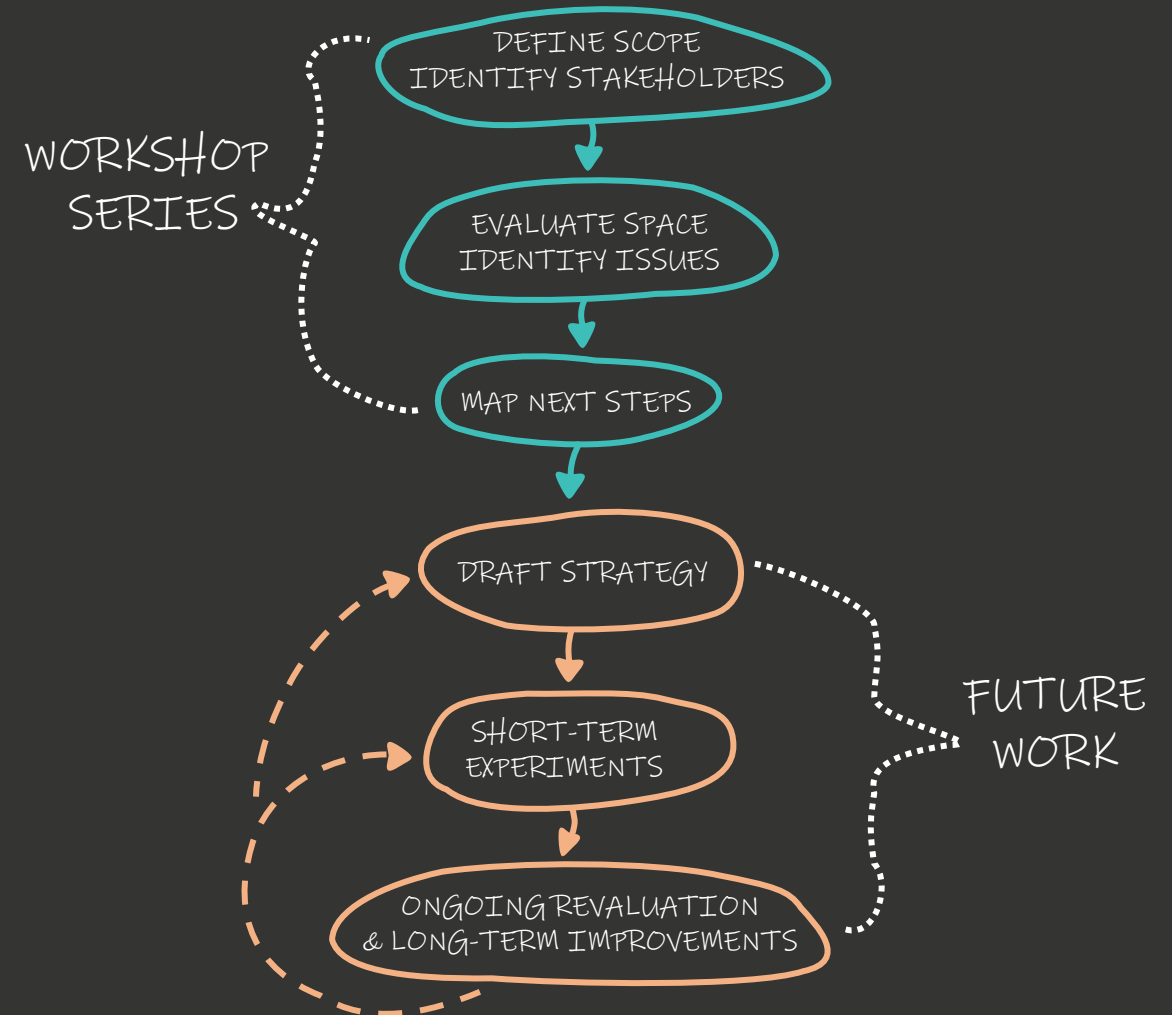
# Workshop Format

We modeled aspects of the workshop series after the community-based process offered by Project for Public Spaces (PPS) and its published work, *"What if we built our cities around places?"* We also relied on the attributes defined by PPS for making a great place to prompt discussions on evaluating our spaces and identifying key issues.

## Four Attributes Evaluated

1. **Sociability** – aspects that inspire people to gather again and again.
2. **Access & Linkages** – awareness, ease of entry, and connectivity to other important places.
3. **Uses & Activities** – attractions that invite people, encourage participation and support creativity.
4. **Comfort & Image** – public perception and feeling of the physical and emotional traits.

## DOWNTOWN BELLEVUE PLACE LED, COMMUNITY-BASED PROCESS





# Objective & Scope

The objective was to gather a diverse set of stakeholder input on downtown's placemaking strengths, gaps and potential. To achieve this objective, Downtown business leaders across a range of industry backgrounds and locations were invited to participate in the workshop series. These participants represent BDA member organizations who rely on a vibrant urban experience for attracting and retraining people to support their businesses. Perspectives in the workshop reflected:

- Commercial and residential developers
- Commercial and residential property owners
- Cultural institutions and attractions
- Finance and energy employers
- Hospitality
- Restaurants and retail
- Small, medium, and large businesses
- Technology and gaming employers



# Stakeholders Voices

Stakeholders demonstrated knowledge of local issues, community investment, and an understanding of how their business relates to the public realm.

## **Jared Axelrod**

Sr. Government Affairs Manager  
Amazon

## **Marlene Bailey**

Development Manager  
Skanska

## **Putter Bert**

President/CEO  
Kid's Quest Museum

## **Blaise Bouchand**

Founder & Owner  
MAISON DE FRANCE

## **Cynthia Breen**

Director, Sales & Marketing  
The Westin / W Bellevue

## **Elaina Herber**

Founding Partner & President  
Ascend Hospitality Group

## **Ben Heywood**

Executive & Curatorial Director  
Bellevue Arts Museum

## **Cathy Lalley**

Director of Marketing  
John Howie Restaurants

## **Jennifer Leavitt**

Vice President Marketing  
Kemper Development Company

## **Michael Mattmiller**

Director, Government Affairs  
Microsoft

## **Patrick O'Kelly**

Chief Operating Officer  
Bungie

## **Beth Osborne**

Director, Local Public Affairs  
Symetra

## **Leslie Smith**

Director of Government Affairs  
Vulcan

## **Monica Wallace**

Sr. Vice President  
Wallace Properties

## **Andy Wappler**

VP, Comms & Customer Operations  
Puget Sound Energy

## **Meghan Wright**

Director of Operations  
Su Development



# Workshop Contributors

Meetings leveraged the online venue to bring subject-matter experts from across the country to share placemaking insights.

## Speakers

### **Tracy Sayegh Gabriel**

President  
National Landing BID (Arlington, VA)

### **Priti Patel**

Project Manager  
People for Public Spaces (New York, NY)

### **Hon. Lynne Robinson**

Mayor  
City of Bellevue

## Facilitators

### **Patrick Bannon**

President  
Bellevue Downtown Association

### **Kris Goddard**

Manager, Public-Private Partnerships  
City of Bellevue

### **Jesse Canedo**

Chief Economic Development Officer  
City of Bellevue

### **Matt Jack**

Director of Public Policy  
Bellevue Downtown Association

### **Anthony Gill**

Economic Development Program  
City of Bellevue

### **Mason Luvera**

Communications Manager  
Bellevue Downtown Association

# About Workshop Series

## How Information Was Collected

Meetings were structured for work to build upon itself. Each gathering consisted of one or two breakout sessions staffed by facilitators who guided discussions and took vigorous notes. These notes were then compiled into key themes ranked by mentions and then reported back to check for accuracy. Information represented in the following pages was sourced by this process.

### Breakout Session 1

Feedback was collected on what does and doesn't work in downtown's public realm. Themes were categorized into the four attributes\* and then organized by the following two descriptions:

- *Strengths – Notable Qualities*
- *Weaknesses – Missing Aspects*

\* See page 5 for descriptions of the four attributes.

### Breakout Sessions 2 - 5

Each session focused on one attribute. Prompts encouraged stakeholders to identify issues and solutions. Input from these sessions was categorized as *Actionable Improvements*.

### Breakout Session 6

Stakeholders shared input on what is necessary to support *Actional Improvements* identified in the previous sessions. Feedback was organized into an order of operations that supported a sequence of steps.

## Walking Tours

Four stakeholders paired up with facilitators to walk different areas of downtown collecting examples of opportunities and issues identified in earlier discussions. Feedback from this exercise served as supplemental evidence for this report.

## Schedule

### (Jan 07) *Placemaking First Impressions*

- *You and placemaking matter to downtown* – Mayor Lynne Robinson
- Breakout Session #1 – What does and doesn't work?

### (Jan 21) *Placemaking Broken Down*

- *Placemaking fundamentals* - Priti Patel
- Breakout Session 2 – Sociability
- Breakout Session 3 – Access & Linkages

### (Feb 04) *Right Activation for the Place*

- *Transforming a place* – Tracy Sayegh Gabriel
- Breakout Session 4 – Uses & Activities
- Breakout Session 5 – Comfort & Image

### (Feb 18) *Downtown Walking Tours*

- Evaluate spaces
- Collect examples

### (Feb 25) *Placemaking New Impressions*

- Review previous breakout session input
- Breakout Session 6 – Answer the "how"



## Sociability

### ***Aspects that inspire people to gather again and again.***

Discussions on sociability focused on achieving a vibrant, 18-hour downtown that served office employees beyond the day job. The group recognized that street-level activity varied greatly in downtown. There are higher volumes of recreational activity in old Bellevue, the Downtown Park and the Bellevue Way. This is a noticeable contrast to the office core on 108th Ave NE, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Stakeholders noted downtown has strong public spaces that continue to improve with new amenities, but character is often celebrated inside of the buildings. They expressed a desire for cultural spillover into the public realm. However, they explained regulatory, financial and physical barriers exist for businesses and organizations who want to do more in the public realm.

The group suggested more active programming in line with the character of the community could create a cultural spillover which would result in more pride in the place. Two steps were identified for supporting this approach:

1. Define and celebrate neighborhoods based on community attributes and elements of pride and character.
2. Find and support champions who can build partnerships within defined areas to help distinguish neighborhoods through placemaking.

Feedback noted the prospect of linking the creative spirit and history of an organization to the adjacent public spaces by highlighting the “makers” in the buildings as “makers” and ambassadors of that neighborhood.

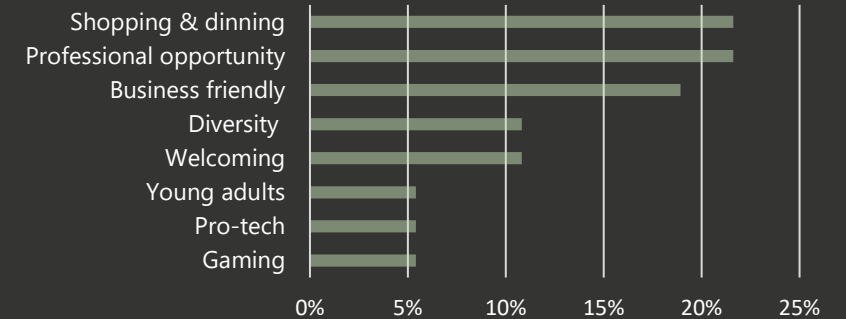


*Inside activated spaces → Bungie Headquarters*

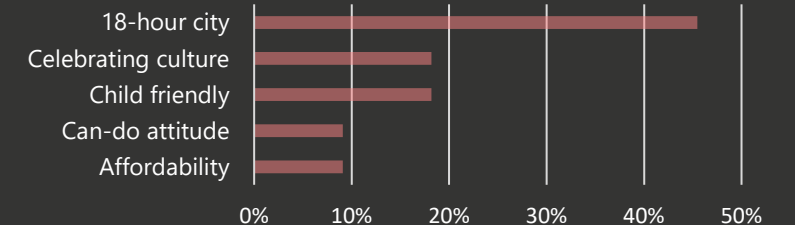


*Inside activated spaces → KidsQuest Children's Museum*

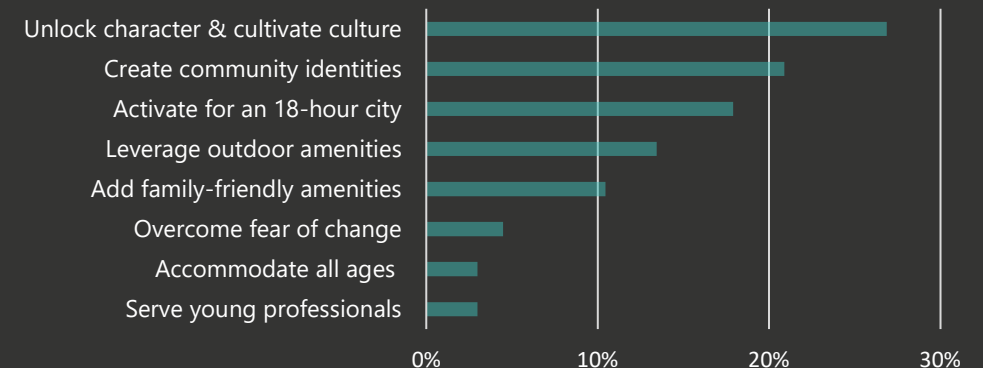
### Strengths – Notable Qualities



### Weaknesses – Missing Aspects



### Actionable Improvements



## Access & Linkages

**Awareness, ease of entry, and connectivity to other important places.**

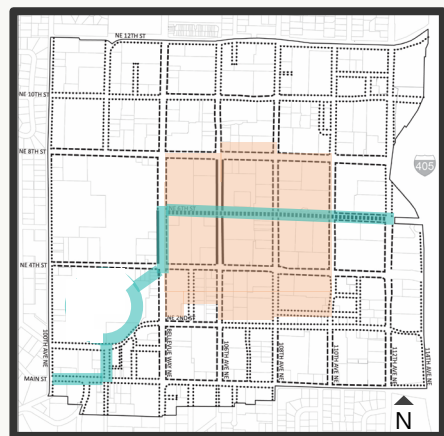
For different reasons, the stakeholders voiced the lack of wayfinding as a key issue. Restaurants and retailers are challenged to promote themselves at the street level. Commercial businesses located away from high foot traffic areas are disconnected from potential customers. And businesses want their office employees to be exposed to all the amenities and services offered as a means of retaining talent. Updated public signage and removing restrictions on temporary signage were noted as desired improvements.

Discussions also revealed how wayfinding improvements can be more than just signage. They spoke to the benefit of establishing “breadcrumbs” – thematic projects that connect places through a daisy chain effect leveraging artwork, lighting, cultural elements or color.

Regarding walkability, stakeholders note the pedestrian experience is comfortable within blocks and along certain corridors like the Grand Connection. However, stakeholders

discussed how large intersections or the perceived barriers between superblocks stymie access and interest for pedestrians. The group agreed creative approaches need to be explored for addressing large intersections and stimulating greater foot traffic in all areas of downtown.

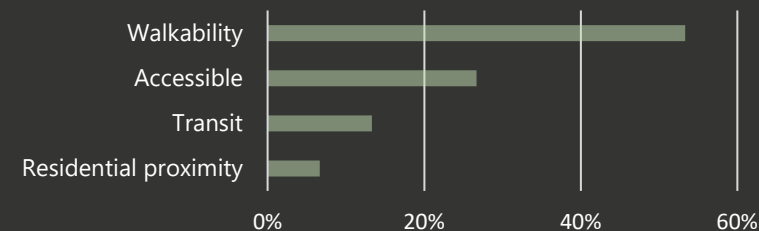
Creating linkages to the Grand Connection as the central corridor was identified as an approach to overcoming superblock barriers. Stakeholders also noted that wayfinding and gateway projects could be used to improve linkages.



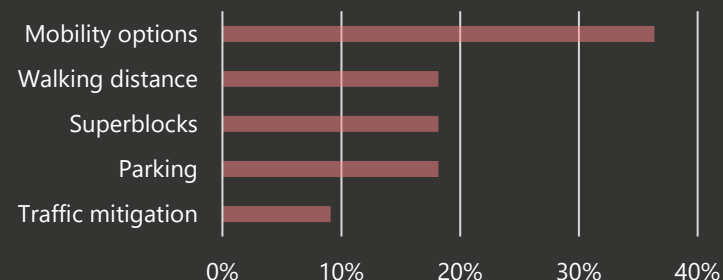
Downtown map of superblocks

■ Grand Connection route  
■ Area zoned for high density office use

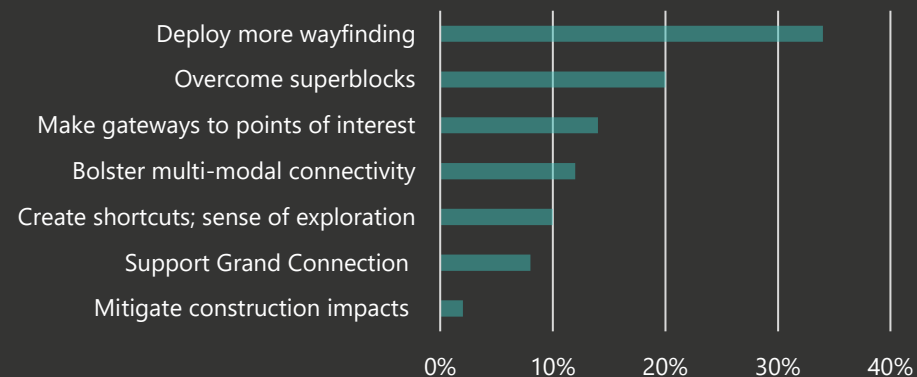
## Strengths – Notable Qualities



## Weaknesses – Missing Aspects



## Actionable Improvements





## Uses & Activities

***Attractions that invite people, encourage participation and support creativity.***

Stakeholders reflected that some public spaces were incomplete without sufficient amenities for attracting activity. A downtown-wide evaluation, backed with programming strategies for public spaces could advance future efforts. This idea was reiterated during different stakeholder walking tours.

Feedback on uses and activities also focused on lack of guidance and support for businesses to initiate placemaking projects. Some stakeholders shared past experiences about how rules and permitting stopped an effort. Others voiced reluctance because of not knowing what is allowed. They all agreed that working with the City to establish a system that enables and encourage placemaking would resolve these challenges. Desired outcome include:

1. A playbook that outlines where, what, and how public spaces can be managed and programmed.
2. Updated rules and permitting process to consider and encourage good placemaking.

### WALKING TOUR EXAMPLES

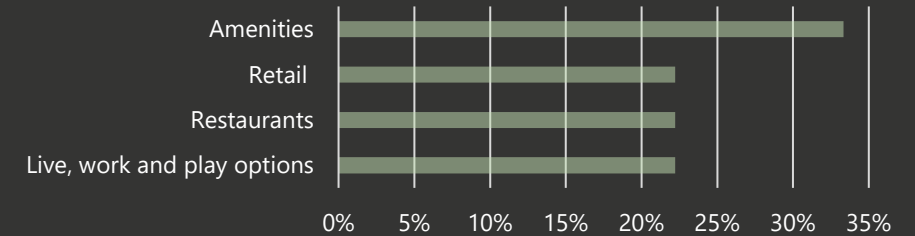


The south access point to Downtown Park was identified as an underutilized space with potential for a stronger link between Main Street activity, nearby residents, Downtown Park and Inspiration Playground.

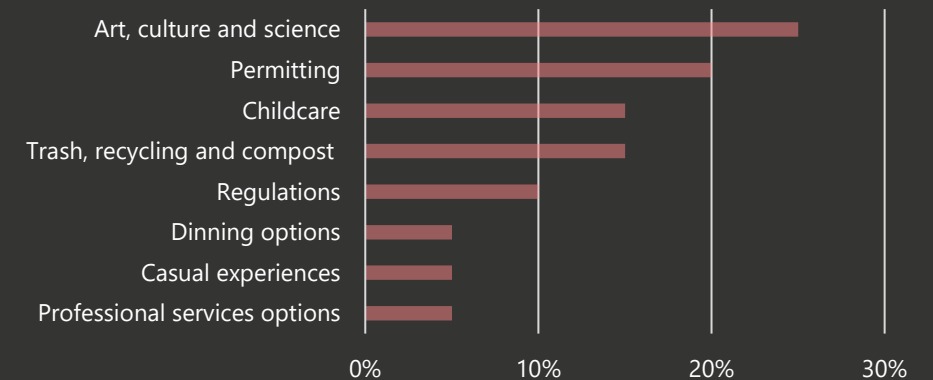


Ashwood Park was identified as underutilized and disconnected from downtown. Input noted this area would benefit from a stronger link to the downtown core and activation that leveraged the vicinity of KidsQuest Museum, library and residential nodes.

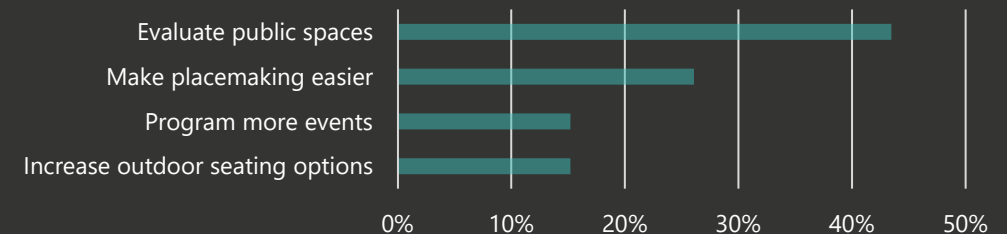
### Strengths – Notable Qualities



### Weaknesses – Missing Aspects



### Actionable Improvements



## Comfort & Image

### ***Public perception and feeling of the physical and emotional traits.***

Stakeholder identified temporary and permanent lighting elements as placemaking tools for blending character, improving safety and linking places. Feedback further explained that more lighting would add vibrancy and create a more comfortable pedestrian experience during the fall and winter seasons.

Stakeholders stressed the need to reinforce clean and safe practices as Bellevue continues to grow. However, they emphasized while “clean and safe” is critically important for the public realm experience, it is not the most compelling draw for attracting people to an 18-hour downtown.

The group agreed that clean and safe are foundational aspects from which to build. This acknowledgment led to questions that can help downtown define an identity beyond clean and safe, such as:

- Is the downtown welcoming, connected and accessible?

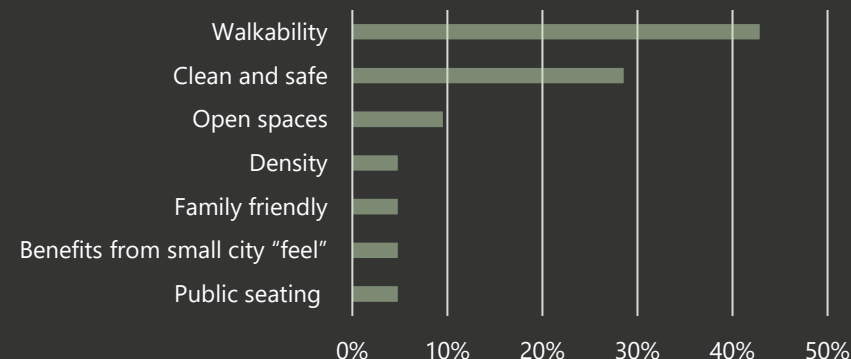
- Are there more interesting “things and experiences” to see and do?
- Are there thoughtful activations and regular programming that celebrate the community?

### **WALKING TOUR EXAMPLE**

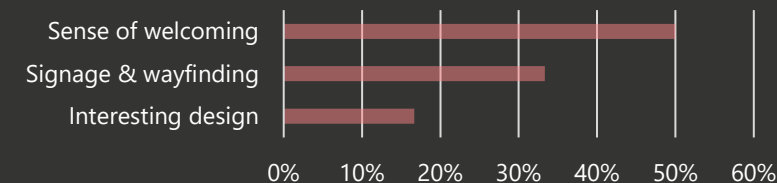


Molly Moon's installed a weather-protected compost receptacle outside its storefront because sustainability is part of its mission statement. This example shows how placemaking can define a public space element as fun and purposeful while maintaining clean and safe practices.

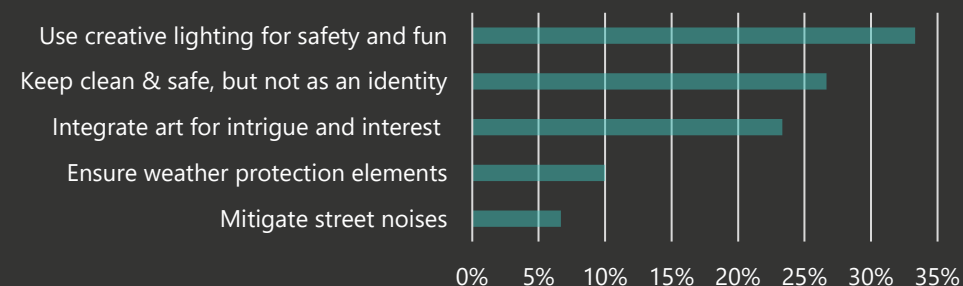
### Strengths – Notable Qualities



### Weaknesses – Missing Aspects



### Actionable Improvements

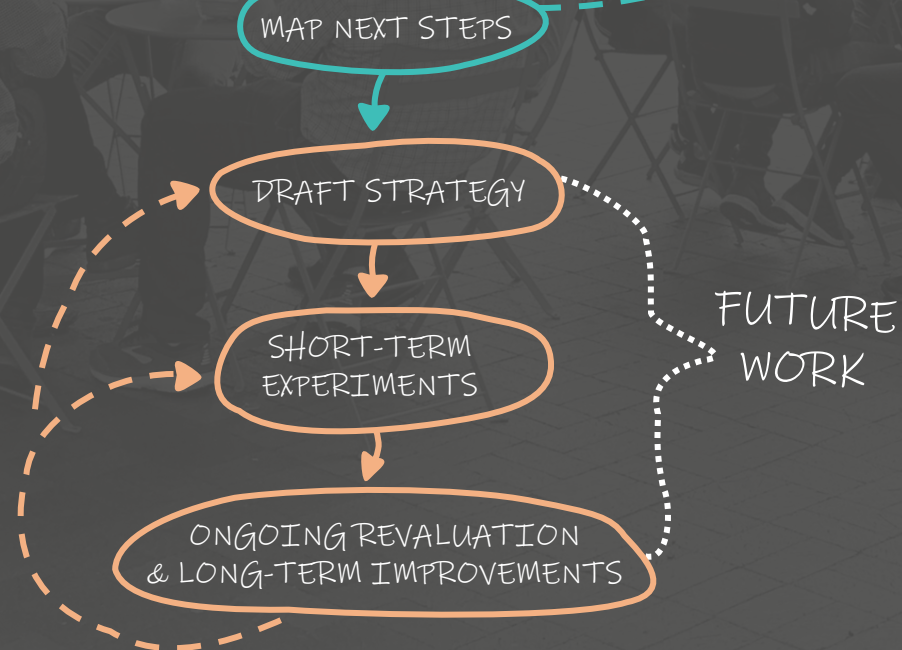




## Next Steps

The final workshop focused on how to start and sustain a downtown placemaking effort. Input stressed that evaluating of public spaces and gathering feedback from other stakeholders were needed to build momentum, but their comments also emphasized that they and other community members are eager to support placemaking if given the chance.

The group proposed several recommendations for how to rally a community-wide effort to develop and implement a placemaking strategy. This feedback was organized into a series of tasks.



ESTABLISH A PLANNING GROUP OF DOWNTOWN CHAMPIONS TO DRAFT AND ACT ON A PLACEMAKING STRATEGY THAT ACCOMPLISHES THE FOLLOWING TASKS.

- 1 EVALUATE OPEN SPACES AND TAKE INVENTORY OF AMENITIES.
- 2 DEFINE CRITERIA FOR PRIORITIZING PLACEMAKING OPPORTUNITIES & PROJECTS.
- 3 CONDUCT MORE COMMUNITY OUTREACH TO GAUGE INTERESTS AND GATHER INPUT.
- 4 BRAINSTORM PROJECTS BASED ON FINDINGS, CRITERIA, AND STAKEHOLDER INPUT.
- 5 MODEL PROSPECTIVE PROJECTS FOR COSTS, LABOR AND TIME.
- 6 EXPLORE REVENUE SOURCES, INCLUDING PARTNERSHIPS OR BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT AREA.
- 7 ACT ON AND CONTINUALLY EVALUATE THE PLACEMAKING STRATEGY.





## DOWNTOWN BELLEVUE PLACEMAKING

### Stakeholder Workshop Series Report

#### Prepared by:

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#### Acknowledgments:

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#### Heart of Bellevue Partners:

