

A river to forgive the town: resilience and reclamation of public space in South Park
through temporary activation and community empowerment

Marta Suzanne Olson

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Landscape Architecture

University of Washington
2017

Committee:
Benjamin Spencer
Jeffrey Hou

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:
Landscape Architecture

©Copyright 2017
Marta Suzanne Olson

University of Washington

Abstract

A river to forgive the town: resilience and reclamation of public space in South Park
through temporary activation and community empowerment

Marta Suzanne Olson

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:
Associate Professor Benjamin Spencer
Department of Landscape Architecture

Every person in Seattle has the right to equitable access of quality public green space and a healthy living environment. As a designer I have the ability and the duty to help implement this imperative. The South Park neighborhood has long endured environmental injustice, home to low-income, immigrant, and people of color populations who are exposed daily to environmental contaminants and suffer from a lack of quality green space. This document follows my exploration of community engagement and negotiations with public agencies in order to activate a temporary park on a land-banked site that will eventually be developed as the South Park Plaza Park. I have created a community tool-kit that synthesizes the various interests and feedback I received into an actionable set of steps that allows the community to utilize the space in different configurations for different purposes. Activating the site in the near-term will benefit community physical, mental, and social health as well as ecological health. Through hands-on activation, the community will be empowered to take ownership of the place and explore options that will inform their goals for the permanent park. The lessons learned can also be applied to future park development and interim activations of unused public property.

Contents

Part one: INTRODUCTION	2
Time to live up to its progressive reputation: Seattle and environmental justice	3
South Park, Seattle	7
Taking responsibility: the role of a landscape designer in community empowerment	8
Part two: ABANDONED: a natural and unnatural history of the Duwamish Valley	12
“The sliver by the river”: a site history	13
The importance of linear vs. cyclical thinking	25
Part three: LITERATURE REVIEW	34
Community generative design and pro-active interventions: an argument for small scale projects	35
Reclaiming post-industrial landscapes as community space: an argument for creative redevelopment and environmental justice	43
Building green spaces for better health: an argument for more vegetation and public space in urban areas	50
Part four: WELCOME TO SOUTH PARK	58
A shot in the dark: community outreach and engagement in South Park	59
South Park Green Space Vision Plan	62
Other previous visioning documents	63
Health Impact Analysis	64
Building trust and following through: stakeholders and potential partners	67
Environmental Coalition of South Seattle: a non-profit partner	67
South Park Retail Merchants Association: engaging business owners	69
Duwamish Valley Youth Corps: empowering teenagers	70
South Park Green Spaces Coalition: bringing everyone to the same table	72
Seattle Parks: delicate negotiations	73

Part five: SITE DESIGN	76
Challenges	77
Opportunities	79
Base site design	81
Part six: REFLECTION	90
Negotiating with public agencies and setting the stage for community stewardship	91
Evaluating my community process	94
Is better support for this kind of project possible?	99
Projected next steps, the future of South Park Plaza	102
Conclusion	104
Appendix: COMMUNITY TOOLKIT	108
part one: BACKGROUND	114
Project background	115
part two: HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE	122
Where do I start?	123
What about funding?	123
How will this all play out?	126
part three: BASE SITE DESIGN	128
Challenges	129
Opportunities	131
Base site design	133
part four: COMMUNITY EVENTS	142
Community market and Lucha Libre event	143
Games day and movie night event	144
Works Cited	152

Figures

part one

Fig. 1.1 South Park race and ethnicity demographics	3
Fig. 1.2 South Park social demographics	6
Fig. 1.3-1.4 South Park signage	7
Fig. 1.5 Placemaking in action	8
Fig. 1.6-1.7 Ongoing community workshops in SP	9

part two

Fig. 2.1-2.2 Channelized Duwamish 1922, Sliver	13
Fig. 2.3-2.4 Salmon weir White R 1903, County Line	14
Fig. 2.5 A riverfront community	15
Fig. 2.6 Industrial influences	17
Fig. 2.7 Neighborhood parks and green spaces	19
Fig. 2.8 Community amenities	21
Fig. 2.9 A linear timeline of South Park	23
Fig. 2.10 South Park cyclical processes	25
Fig. 2.11 Duwamish Valley transformation	28
Fig. 2.12 South Park transformation	30

part three

Fig. 3.1-3.2 Union St. Urban Orchard, LentSpace	36
Fig. 3.3-3.4 Gap Filler Pallet Pavilion & Dance-o-mat	37
Fig. 3.5 Gas Works Park Seattle	39
Fig. 3.6 Times Square Closure 2009	40
Fig. 3.7 guerrilla crosswalk painting in Brazil	41
Fig. 3.8 Chair bombing Brooklyn, NYC	42
Fig. 3.9-3.10 Duwamish River Waterway	44
Fig. 3.11-3.12 Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord	45

Fig. 3.13-3.14 High Line before and after	46
Fig. 3.15 Duwamish River clean up dredging	47
Fig. 3.16 South Park environmental challenges	48
Fig. 3.17 SP Community Center playground	49
Fig. 3.18 Discovery Park, 3.19 Fig. Highway 99	50
Fig. 3.20-3.21 South Park Green Wall installation	51
Fig. 3.22 Childhood asthma hospitalization rates	53
Fig. 3.23 Activists block Microsoft Connector bus	54
Fig. 3.24-3.25 Who is 'sustainable' design for?	55
part four	
Fig. 4.1-4.2 Community workshops in Peru	59
Fig. 4.3 Duwamish River Festival 2016	60
Fig. 4.4-4.5 Duwamish Revealed! events	61
Fig. 4.6-4.7 South Park Green Spaces Vision Plan	62
Fig. 4.8 Duwamish Riverfront Revival, Fig. 4.9 HIA	63
Fig. 4.10-4.11 Industrial South Park	64
Fig. 4.12 Design plan for Marra Farm	65
Fig. 4.13-4.14 ECOSS restoration & RainWise	68
Fig. 4.15 Businesses along 14th Ave	69
Fig. 4.16-4.17 DVYC workshop	70
Fig. 4.18-4.19 DVYC workshop drawings	71
Fig. 4.20-4.21 Parks' ideas for early activation	73
part five	
Fig. 5.1-5.2 Standing water and vehicles	77
Fig. 5.3 Existing Site Conditions	78
Fig. 5.4-5.5 Possible park extension & rain garden	79
Fig. 5.6 Neighborhood connections	80
Fig. 5.7 Base site design	82

Fig. 5.8 Tree box planter	83
Fig. 5.9 Community work party	83
Fig. 5.10-5.11 Rain garden planter & drums	86
Fig. 5.12 Rain garden section	86
Fig. 5.13-5.14 Potential partners: DVYC & Dirt Corps	87
part six	
Fig. 6.1-6.2 Tactical Urbanism projects	91
Fig. 6.3-6.4 South Park community	94
Fig. 6.5-6.6 South Park neighborhood murals	95
Fig. 6.7 Thesis process	98
Fig. 6.8 Thesis Audiences	100
Fig. 6.9 Next Steps	100
Fig. 6.10-6.11 Community Events	101
appendix	
Fig. 1.1-1.2 South Park Plaza current conditions	119
Fig. 2.1-2.2 South Park Plaza current conditions	123
Fig. 2.3 Unincorporated King Co	124
Fig. 2.4 Tianguis market, Mexico	125
Fig. 3.1-3.2 Standing water and vehicles	129
Fig. 3.3 Existing Site Conditions	130
Fig. 3.4-3.5 Possible park extension & rain garden	131
Fig. 3.6 Neighborhood connections	132
Fig. 3.7 Base site design	134
Fig. 3.8 Tree box planter	135
Fig. 3.9 Community work party	135
Fig. 3.10-3.11 Rain garden planter & drums	138
Fig. 3.12 Rain garden section	138
Fig. 3.13-3.14 Potential partners: DVYC & Dirt Corps	139

Fig. 4.1 Temporary Play Street	145
Fig. 4.2 Community market & Lucha Libre event	146
Fig. 4.3 Games day & movie night event	150

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the many people who made this thesis possible, folks who graciously gave me their time so that I could gain a better understanding of what I was getting myself into. These included landscape architects, professors, students, non-profit organizations, South Park community members and business owners. Special thanks to Ben Spencer and Jeff Hou for guiding me through this process and always encouraging me to follow my heart. Thanks to everyone who agreed to meet me for coffee and share their wisdom: Meredith Hall, Michelle Benetua, Brian Gerich, Jonathan Childers, Paulina Lopez, Stephen Reilly, Bill Pease, Jose Vasquez, Cheryl Eastberg, Rocio Ariaga, Joann Ireland, Gilberto Vargas, Kendra Wight, Michael Lewis, Eric Higbee, Chip Nevins, Nancy Huizar and Reynaldo Franco. And a huge thanks to the Duwamish Valley Youth Corps for providing me with their great ideas and to the South Park Green Spaces Coalition for their kindness and partnership. And lastly, thanks to my family for their unwavering support during this thesis and the entire graduate school experience.

Part one

INTRODUCTION

*The river is there to forgive the town
and without a river a town abuses the sky.
The river is there to forgive what I did.
Let's name my river: Duwamish.*

Richard Hugo

from "The Towns We Know and Leave Behind, The Rivers We Carry with Us"

Cities are born of rivers. They are the conduits for our desires and our dreams of progress. We seek redemption in their placid waters and fear their implacable and capricious power to reorganize and destroy. The Duwamish River in Seattle has forgiven every abuse of engineering and industry: its banks constrained and armored, its flow diverted, its sediments polluted. And yet the gently rippled green-black waters continue to drift ever northward. What we once asked the river to forgive, we now seek to forgive in ourselves. We are removing contaminants and restoring habitat, and seeking to right years of wrongs.

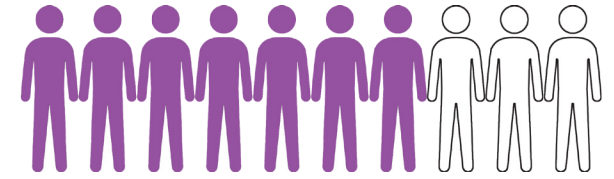
But, the time has also come to examine the damage done through environmental exposure, neglect, and inequitable planning practices to the people who have lived and continue to reside along the river's banks. Restoring the community will not be as simple as removing the river's toxic sediments. It will require novel approaches to address the systemic injustices that have historically marginalized the population living in South Park. As Seattle seeks forgiveness for its treatment of the Duwamish River, it has the opportunity to also right the wrongs of environmental injustice by prioritizing immediate interventions to increase public space that will improve both human and ecological health.

Time to live up to its progressive reputation: Seattle and environmental justice

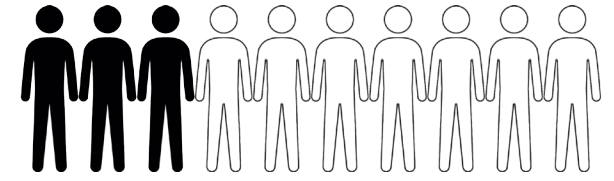
The South Park neighborhood of Seattle sits on the historic floodplains of the city's only river, but residents there have few opportunities to safely engage with or enjoy their environment. At the beginning of the 20th century the winding Duwamish river was channelized into the Duwamish Waterway and the neighborhood on its banks became a center for industry. The legacy of this past endures in the contaminated sediments that have led portions of the neighborhood to be designated an EPA Superfund site.

Industrial production continues today and the neighborhood is subject to heavy truck traffic on its streets. In addition to the Duwamish, two terrestrial highways bisect and constrict the neighborhood. Public green spaces are limited in size and quality and

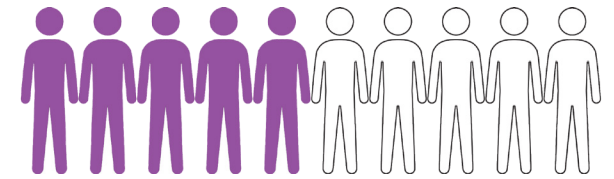
Opposite:
Fig. 1.1 South Park race and ethnicity demographics
Source: US Census Bureau



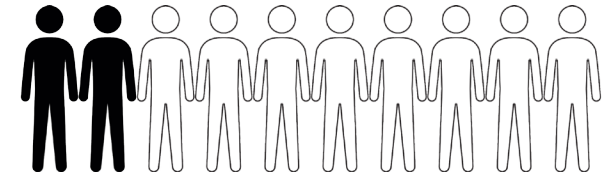
South Park: 73.8%



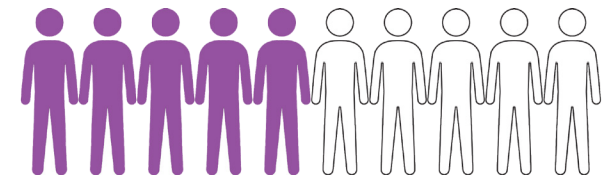
Seattle average: 29.4%



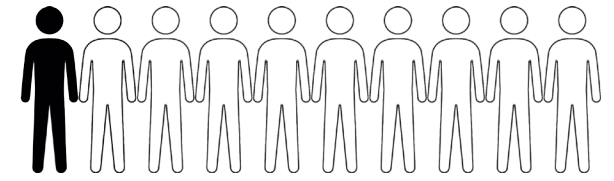
South Park: 54.1%



Seattle average: 22.4%



South Park: 46.3%



Seattle average: 6.4%

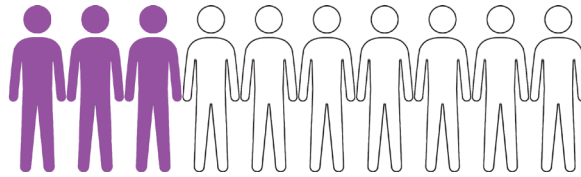
street tree density is about half of the city average (“Seattle’s Canopy Cover”). Air and water contamination beyond the scope of the Superfund cleanup effort are also concerns and contribute to health inequities. Residents of South Park live, on average, 8 fewer years than residents of other Seattle neighborhoods and endure more than double the King County rate of asthma hospitalizations (Daniell et al. 15).

South Park is one of the most ethnically diverse neighborhoods in the city; nearly three quarters of residents identify as people of color. In Seattle as a whole that figure is only 29.4% (US Census Bureau). About a third of the community are immigrants with more than half of residents speaking languages other than English at home. The median income is well below the city average, with 28.3% of people falling below the poverty line and 27.0% of adults lacking health insurance (ibid.). A large cohort of children is growing up in this challenging environment; almost a third of residents are under 18 years old, more than twice the city average (ibid.).

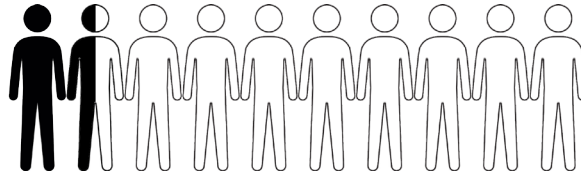
Despite its challenges, the neighborhood is well-organized and vocal about its needs and its dreams for the future. Community-led groups meet regularly to discuss South Park’s direction. They including the South Park Neighborhood Association, South Park Area Redevelopment Committee, South Park Retail Merchants Association, South Park Green Spaces Coalition, Duwamish Valley Safe Streets, and the Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition, which also functions as the official Technical Advisory Group to the EPA. This has led to several green space visioning and action plans. In response, Seattle Parks has committed to improving existing park properties and has acquired land for future green spaces as well.

However, the pace of progress in South Park is especially slow due to complex land ownership situations, the need for multiple government agencies to work together, and a lack of funding. This means that planned improvements may be many years away from implementation. In the interim, there is great potential for small-scale and temporary design interventions to have significant positive impacts on community health and ecological wellbeing. These interventions, if executed with community support and participation, can inspire residents to explore the possibilities for their public spaces in a fun, low-pressure, and hands-on atmosphere. Once the community

Under age 18

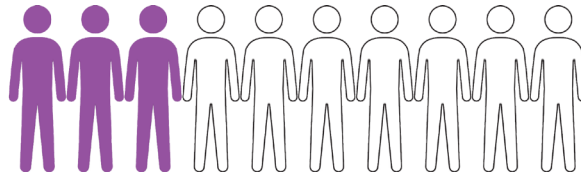


South Park: 31.4%

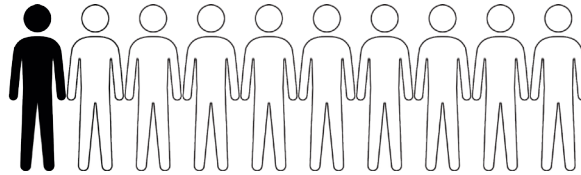


Seattle average: 15.4%

Live below the poverty line

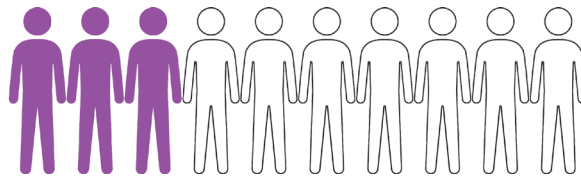


South Park: 28.3%

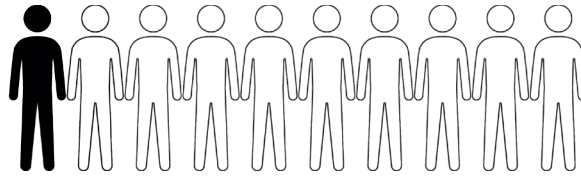


Seattle average: 13.6%

Adults lacking health insurance



South Park: 27.0%



Seattle average: 11.3%

Fig. 1.2 South Park social demographics
Source: US Census Bureau



has experienced the options first hand, they will be better prepared to advocate for the right permanent solutions for their neighborhood.

South Park, Seattle

Despite a general awareness of the toxicity of the Lower Duwamish River due to over a century of dumped industrial waste, garbage, and sewage it was not listed as a Superfund site until 2001. It took the EPA 14 years to complete its analysis of the situation and issue a *Final Report and Action Plan*. It will be another two decades before the EPA completes its work, at which time most seafood taken from the river will still not be safe to eat. The State of Washington Department of Health has known for years that many health risk factors, likely tied to environmental exposures, are higher in the neighborhood than in the rest of Seattle and King County (Daniell et al. 15). The City of Seattle and the Seattle Parks Department have made equity a major priority in recent years through the *Race and Social Justice Initiative* and *Equity & Environment Initiative*. Additional funds and planning have been directed at the South Park neighborhood, but the pace of progress remains painfully slow.

Due to its industrial history and status as the only residential riverfront neighborhood in Seattle, issues of land ownership are particularly contentious in South Park. The City of Seattle, Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), Seattle City Light, Port of Seattle, Seattle Public Utilities, King County Roads, and private businesses and citizens all have claims on land here. Seattle Parks and Recreation has purchased over an acre of land immediately west of the recently replaced South Park Bridge, at the northern end of the 14th Avenue business district as the future home of the South Park Plaza. This should be a major asset to the community that will provide gathering space for large, public events and festivals, a venue for everyday use by residents and potential public access to the river. However, this project will not be complete until at least 2020 and while the community waits, the site remains a mostly level, unused, gravel lot. There is enormous opportunity here for an interim solution.

LOWER DUWAMISH RIVER ADVISORY

EAT SALMON. It's the healthiest choice. 12 meals per month.

OR

Limit: 4 meals per month.

OR

Avoid: 2 meals per month.

DO NOT EAT crab, shellfish, or bottom-feeding fish due to pollution.

Washington State Department of Health
 Toll-free 1-877-485-7316 • www.doh.wa.gov/fish

Fig. 1.3-1.4 South Park signage
 Photos: top South Park Arts, bottom WA DOH

Taking responsibility: the role of a landscape designer in community empowerment

Communities, especially those as established and well-organized as South Park, are the best arbiters of their own needs and priorities regarding public space design in their neighborhoods. My role as a designer on this project has been to act as a lens to focus the community's voices into an actionable project. Engagement has been a critical element of my thesis and involved listening to as many community voices as possible beginning with the careful study of past neighborhood Vision Plans, Action Agendas, and Health Impact Assessments. I deepened my understanding by conducting personal interviews with community organizers and non-profit organizations in order to identify a steering committee who can carry the project forward when I step away.

Community-based projects are generally approached in one of two ways. One approach, championed by groups like the Project for Public Spaces, insists that every idea and decision should be generated by community members without outside "professional" interference (Kent). However, this approach willfully ignores designers' potential skills, innovation, and knowledge of both feasibility and ability to move a project forward through implementation. The other approach, and far more common in landscape architecture, is for the designer to do their research and site analysis and then present their proposal to the community for approval. This gives too much power to the designer and has the potential to result in a park with aesthetic value, but of little use or connection to the community. Such projects do not empower the community, but instead may make them feel even more alienated from public spaces in their neighborhood. My goal has been to walk the fine line between these approaches, to capitalize on my skills in design and communication and my access as a student to government agencies in order to best serve the community's needs and desires without requiring a huge time and energy commitment on their part.

Instead of subjecting South Park residents to yet more rounds of community workshops and participatory design exercises, I have built upon the existing data to develop a simple base design that addresses the site challenges and acts as a usable



Fig. 1.5 Placemaking in action
Photo: Project for Public Spaces

Duwamish Waterway Park Design Workshop



FIX IT FIRST

SOUTH PARK COMMUNITY CENTER PLAY AREA NEEDS TO HEAR FROM YOU!

We need your input! Seattle Parks and Recreation is renovating the play area at South Park Community Center. Please join Seattle Parks and Recreation's Planner and Cascade Design Collaborative's design consultants to discuss ideas about the new play equipment.

We will have an open house at the Duwamish River Festival to show design options and gather your input. We encourage families, neighbors and park supporters to attend. Lemonade and children's activities will be provided.

This project will replace play equipment, provide access for people with disabilities and improve safety and other features at the park. South Park Community Center Play Area is located at 8319 8th Ave S, Seattle, WA 98108. Funding for this park improvement is provided by the Seattle Park District.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 20, 2016
1-3 P.M.

DUWAMISH RIVER FESTIVAL, DUWAMISH WATERWAY PARK
7900 10TH AVE S, SEATTLE, WA 98108

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PROJECT OR IF YOU NEED AN INTERPRETER OR ACCOMMODATIONS PLEASE CONTACT:

✉ Karimah.edwards@seattle.gov

☎ 206-233-0063

🌐 www.seattle.gov/parks/projects/south_park_cc/play_area.htm



park space on any day of the year, with the flexibility to adapt to use by community events and celebrations. This will facilitate voluntary, unstructured, dynamic, and tactile community engagement with an underused public space in the neighborhood. Not only does this approach generate feedback that can be applied to the park's final design, but it also empowers residents to take an active role in place-making in their community and to take ownership over their neighborhood public space.

There are municipal projects currently underway and in process at Seattle Parks and Recreation to improve the quality and greenness of public space in South Park. But, government agencies have limitations in terms of time, available funds, practicality of execution, and the depth of public input solicited. The goal of this project is to provide a means for communities to get the most out of public spaces in their neighborhoods. It will also act as a precedent for an alternative approach toward the management and activation of vacant and underused sites owned by public agencies.

This thesis develops a community-based design project for the South Park neighborhood in order to create an implementable plan for a temporary intervention in the vacant and underutilized site slated to become the South Park Plaza Park several years from now. The goals of this project include increasing usable community space in the short-term, building social capital, and encouraging a sense of community ownership. I have discussed my plan at length with community groups and the Seattle Parks Department.

The following section provides an introduction to the site as well as exploring neighborhood context and history. The differences between linear and circular approaches to design and how they relate to this project are also explored. My literature review serves to carefully select a design approach, demonstrate the significance of this project, and to predict what the immediate and lasting results to the neighborhood will be. I discuss the significance of community-based participatory design and the potential implications for a temporary, low-cost intervention at the Plaza site. I explore reclaiming unused space in a post-industrial landscape and implications for future

9 **Fig. 1.6-1.7 Ongoing community workshops in SP**
Photos: top, Seattle Parks Foundation, bottom SPR

urban development. Finally, I examine the interactions between green space and human health as well as assessing the potential for using this project as a means to study neighborhoods in transition and the corresponding health impacts. Each topic section also includes precedent studies in order to understand theory in practice and identify the successes and failures of past projects.

Following the literature review I outline my community outreach experience with South Park residents, businesses, and non-profit organizations. I also explore the ecological, social, and engineering history of the neighborhood and the significance of the Plaza site in particular. The likely partners for moving the project forward are identified and techniques are identified for activating the site in the short term. I then present my base site design followed by the community toolkit, which details how the neighborhood can transform the base design to fit the various needs for community events. Finally, I reflect on my experimental community process and consider how the lessons I learned can help inform how Seattle Parks manages other land-banked sites and how thesis projects like this one can be better facilitated by the UW in the future.

I strongly believe that projects like this one, which are wrapped up in issues of social equity and environmental justice, are great opportunities for landscape architects and necessary for the discipline to attend to. I hope that my exploration of this thesis project adds a new chapter to the existing body of knowledge and the discourse on the role of landscape architects engaging in social justice issues. Design may not save the world, but as designers we must use it to make the world a better, more equitable, greener, and healthier place.

Part two

ABANDONED: a natural and unnatural history of the
Duwamish Valley



“The sliver by the river”: a site history

The town of South Park grew up around the southwestern border of an oxbow lake, once a bend in the river’s course, now cut off from the main channel due to a disturbance that forced the river to find another route to the sea. The outlines of its banks are still visible on street maps as Dallas Ave S and S Orr St, built along the lake’s northern and southern boundaries, arcing across the neighborhood’s otherwise orthogonal grid. Ethnographic studies were first conducted in and around Georgetown and South Park from 1910 to the early 1920s and this information was reassembled with modern Lushootseed speakers and tribal members in 2004 as part of the construction of the Sound Transit Central Link Light Rail corridor. The oxbow lake was called *Lwalb* or *abandoned* by the local Duwamish people, recognizing that it was once part of the river, possibly within the memory of tribal elders in the early 20th century (ENTRIX 24). The concentration of place names in the lower Duwamish valley indicate that the South Park and Georgetown areas were a major resource for native people’s gathering, harvesting, transportation, and fishing activities (ibid.).

The South Park Plaza site is located in the middle of this former oxbow lake and an archaeological survey conducted in 2007, as part of the bridge replacement, revealed pre-historical layers of shell middens, fish and mammal bones, as well as charcoal and fire-modified rock (ENTRIX 50). The findings indicate that the area was used as a temporary, seasonal salmon camp over many years. This sustainable, long-standing use responded to the cyclical processes of the place. People adapted as conditions changed and were able to utilize the malleable environmental conditions to their benefit.

After the oxbow lake was filled with about 8 feet of fill, Burdic’s feed store was built on what is now the future Plaza site and operated serving the neighborhood’s agricultural community until 1957. The building later became the County Line Bar & Grill and the site gained a reputation for drug sales and prostitution over the years. When the oxbow lake was filled, South Park had already been annexed to the city of Seattle, but this newly created land became part of unincorporated King County.

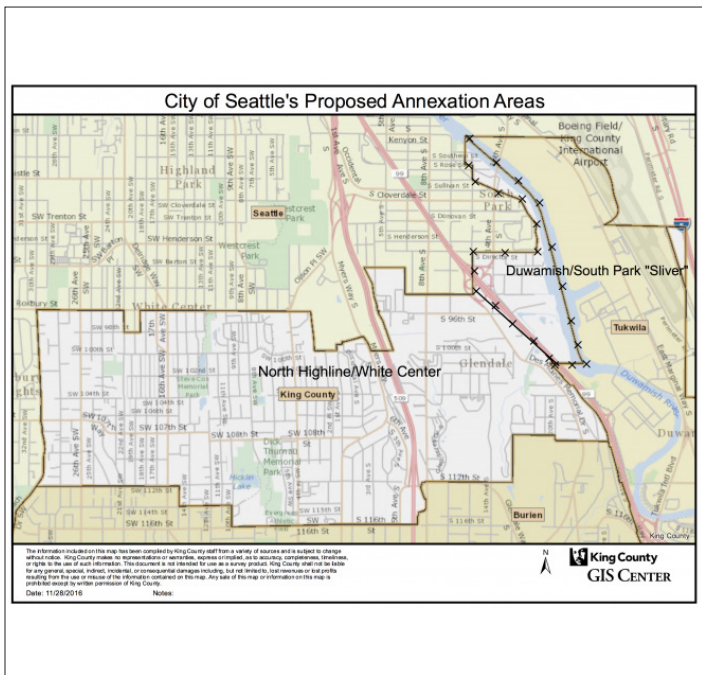


Fig. 2.1-2.2 Channelized Duwamish 1922, Sliver
 13 Photos: top Seattle Times, bottom King County

Most of the surrounding residential lots, including others on top of the former oxbow lake have been incorporated, but the “sliver by the river” just around the bridge has remained unincorporated, likely due to Seattle’s desire to avoid the costs of bridge replacement. This municipal peculiarity meant that when police arrived on the scene in the bar’s parking lot, criminal participants would simply flee to either side of the county line in order to avoid the jurisdiction of either the Seattle Police or the King County Sheriff as the situation required.

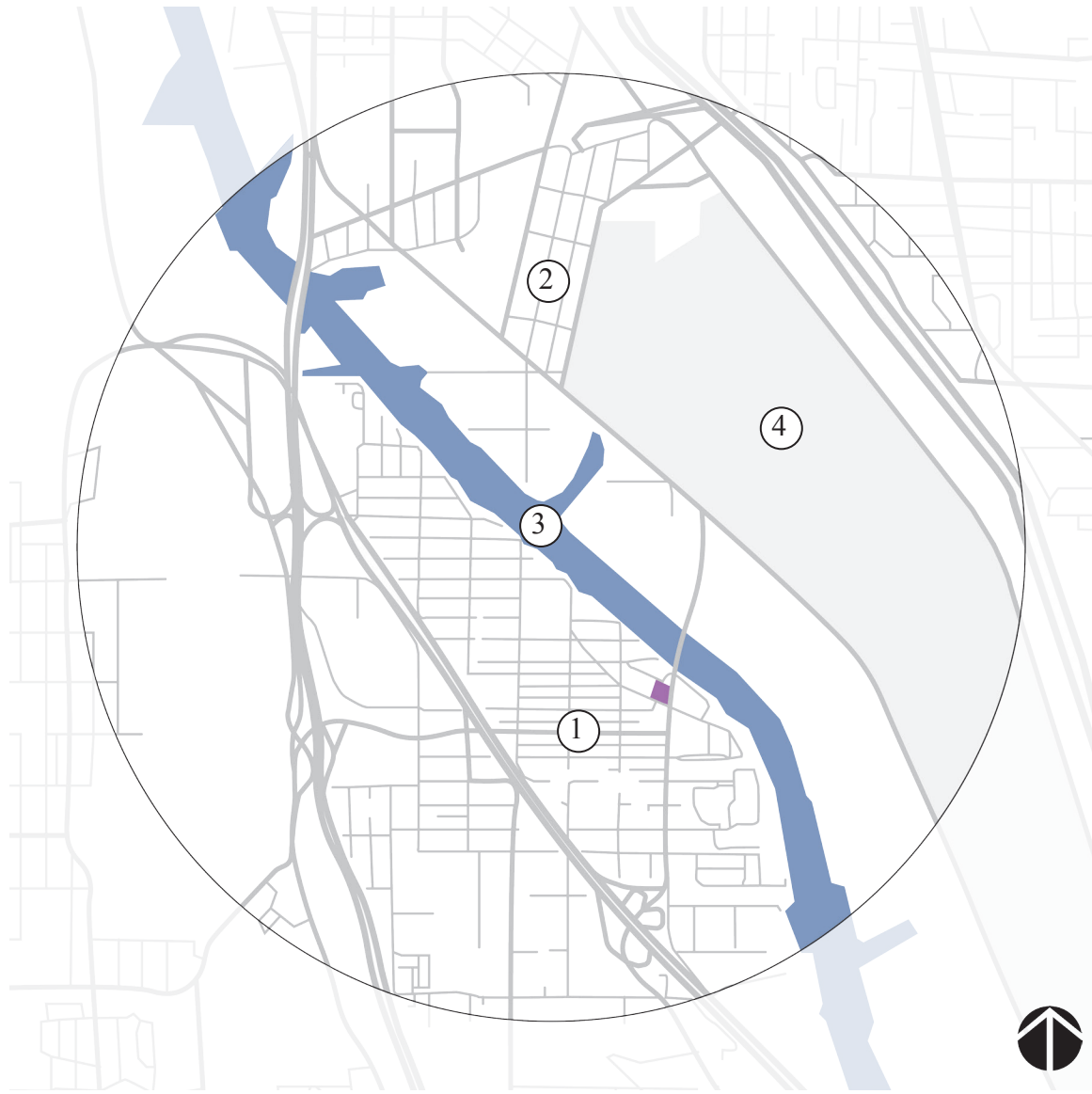
Seattle Parks has purchased the site under the assumption that it will soon be annexed by Seattle, a vote is scheduled for 2017, and with the understanding that it serves Seattle residents regardless. However, the technicality of where the boundary lines are drawn means that Seattle Department of Neighborhoods Community Matching Funds grant money is not available to it. This is unfortunate because the CMF is a well-established, consistently funded, and organized program that supports community generated projects and ought to be available to South Park residents for the temporary activation of their public park.



Fig. 2.3-2.4 Salmon weir White R 1903, County Line
Photo: top Elmer E. Patten, bottom Joe Mabel

Fig. 2.5 A riverfront community

South Park lies across the river from the industrial portion of the Georgetown neighborhood and Boeing Field. It was originally built on the southern edge of an oxbow lake, still visible in the street grid. Industrial development brought highways, rail lines, and arterials to the banks of the channelized river throughout the neighborhood.








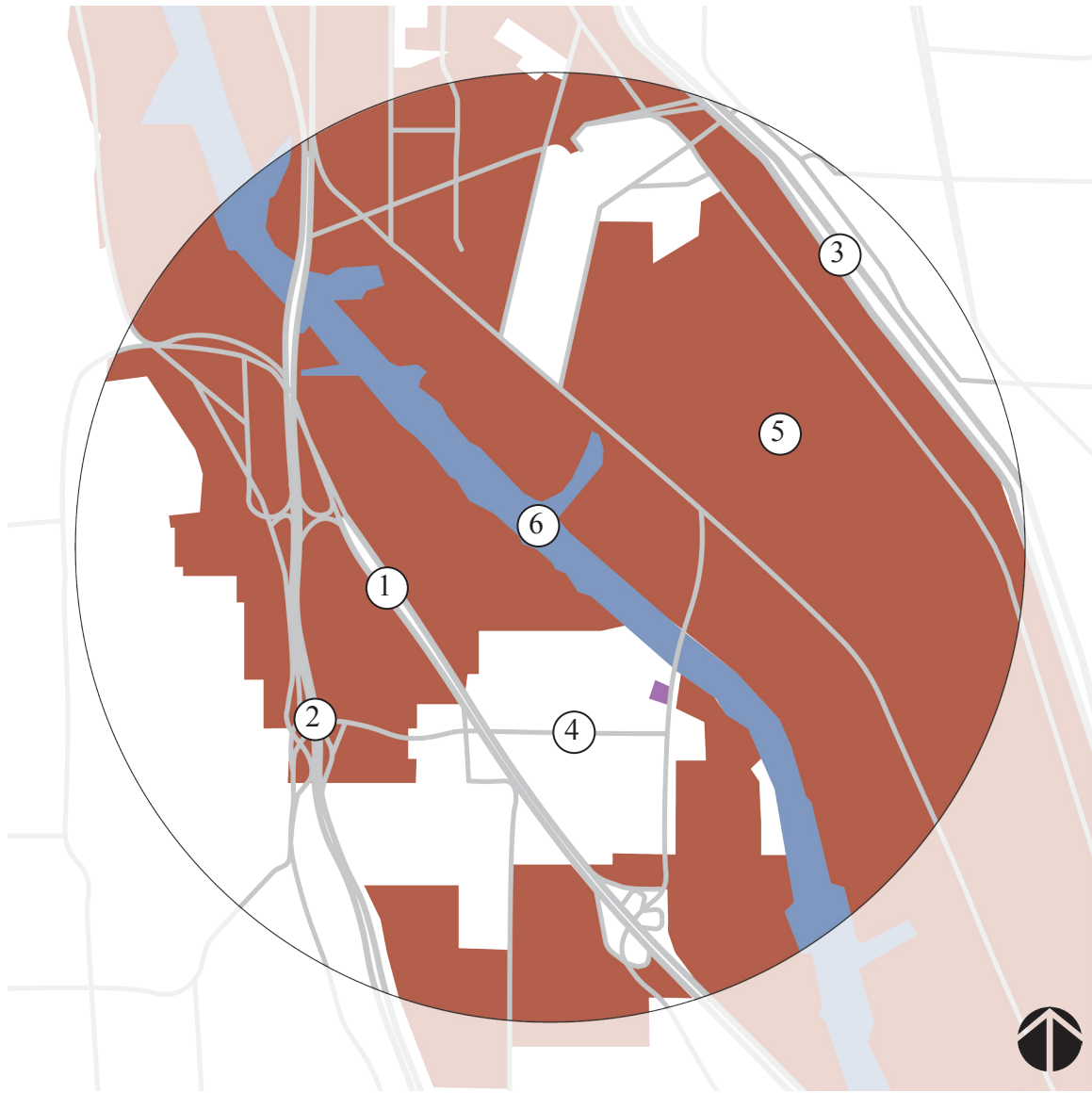
-  South Park Plaza
-  South Park Neighborhood
-  Georgetown Neighborhood
-  Duwamish Waterway
-  Boeing Field

Fig. 2.6 Industrial influences

Pollution affects the community from many sources. The residents of South Park are surrounded by industry and industrial production is responsible for the lower Duwamish waterway being listed as a Superfund site. Contaminated post-industrial sites are also a health concern, but with the EPA cleanup underway, many of these sites have been identified and toxic sediments are being removed.

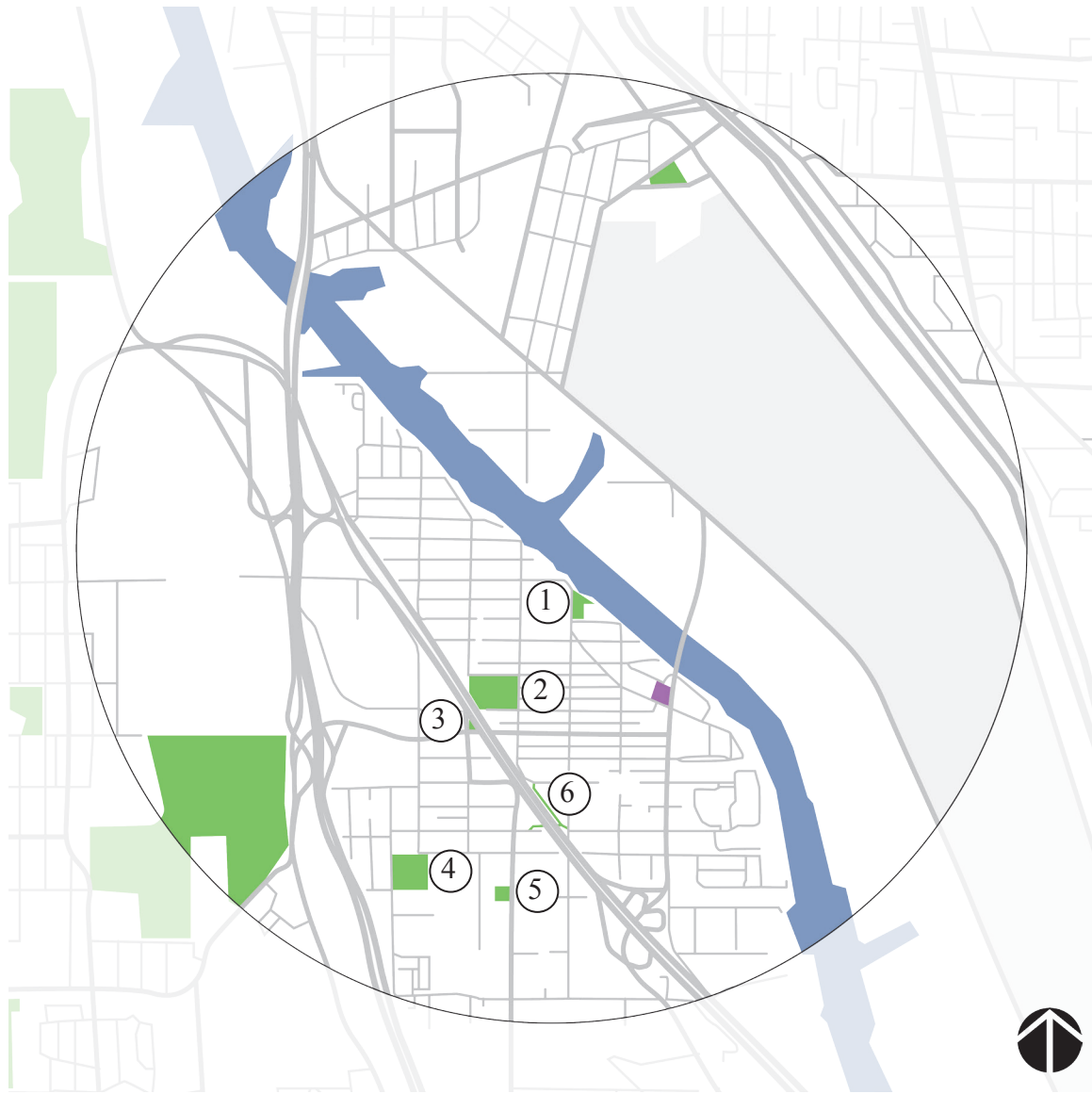
Although current industrial production emissions continue to be a cause of hazardous environmental exposure to contaminants, the infrastructure put in place to facilitate that industry has the greatest daily impact on residents. Freeways and arterials constrict the neighborhood and slice across it. Of particular concern is the exposure to diesel emissions from trucks, ships on the river, and construction equipment. Inhalation of diesel can cause or aggravate cardiovascular disease, asthma and other respiratory diseases, and cancer; all risk factors that are considerably higher in the Duwamish Valley than in the King County average (Daniell et al. 15). As the Seattle-area population increases, so too does vehicular traffic, and the additional congestion increases the duration of exposure to idling vehicles.



-  South Park Plaza
-  Zoned Industrial
- ① WA State Route 99: exhaust
- ② WA State Route 509: exhaust
- ③ Interstate 5: exhaust
- ④ Arterials: truck & vehicle exhaust
- ⑤ Boeing Field: jet exhaust
- ⑥ Duwamish Waterway: ship exhaust & Superfund site

Fig. 2.7 Neighborhood parks and green spaces

One means of mitigating the negative impacts of air pollution is through expanded access to green space. As previously mentioned, South Park residents have less access to green space in their neighborhood than the Seattle average and many of their parks, including the community center playground, abut the retaining walls of WA Highway 99. Studies indicate that people who spend significant amounts of time within 200 meters (650 feet) of highways are at increased risk of serious health impacts (Brugge et al. 12).





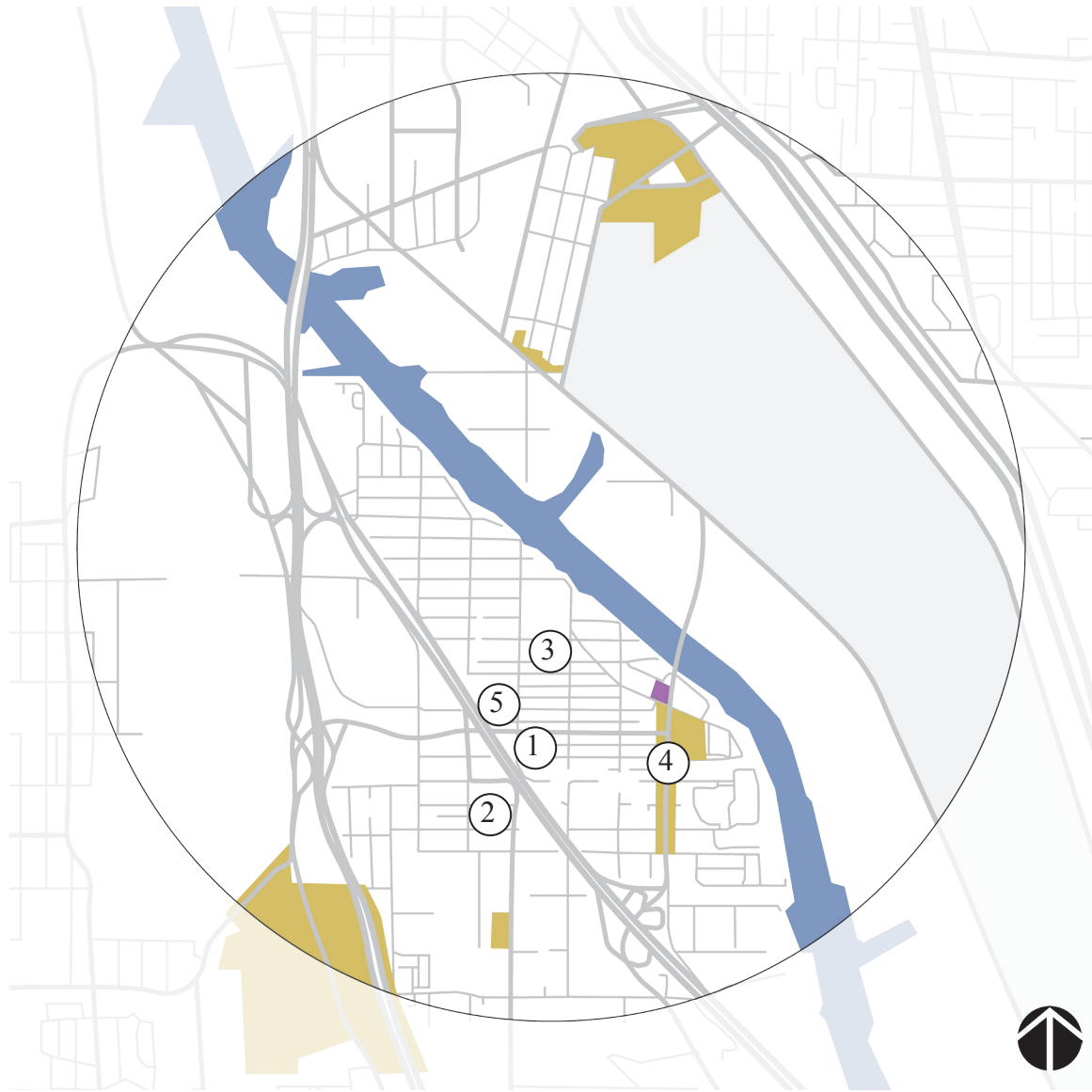
-  South Park Plaza
-  Seattle Public Park
- ① Duwamish Waterway Park
- ② Community Center & Playground
- ③ Cesar Chavez Park
- ④ Marra-Desimone Park
- ⑤ South Park Meadow
- ⑥ 8th Avenue “Scary Trail”

Fig. 2.8 Community amenities

Increased recreation opportunities, access to vegetation, and gathering space have the potential to significantly improve community physical, mental, and social health. The future South Park Plaza park may also offer public access to the river, currently only possible at Duwamish Waterway Park, increasing its community impact.

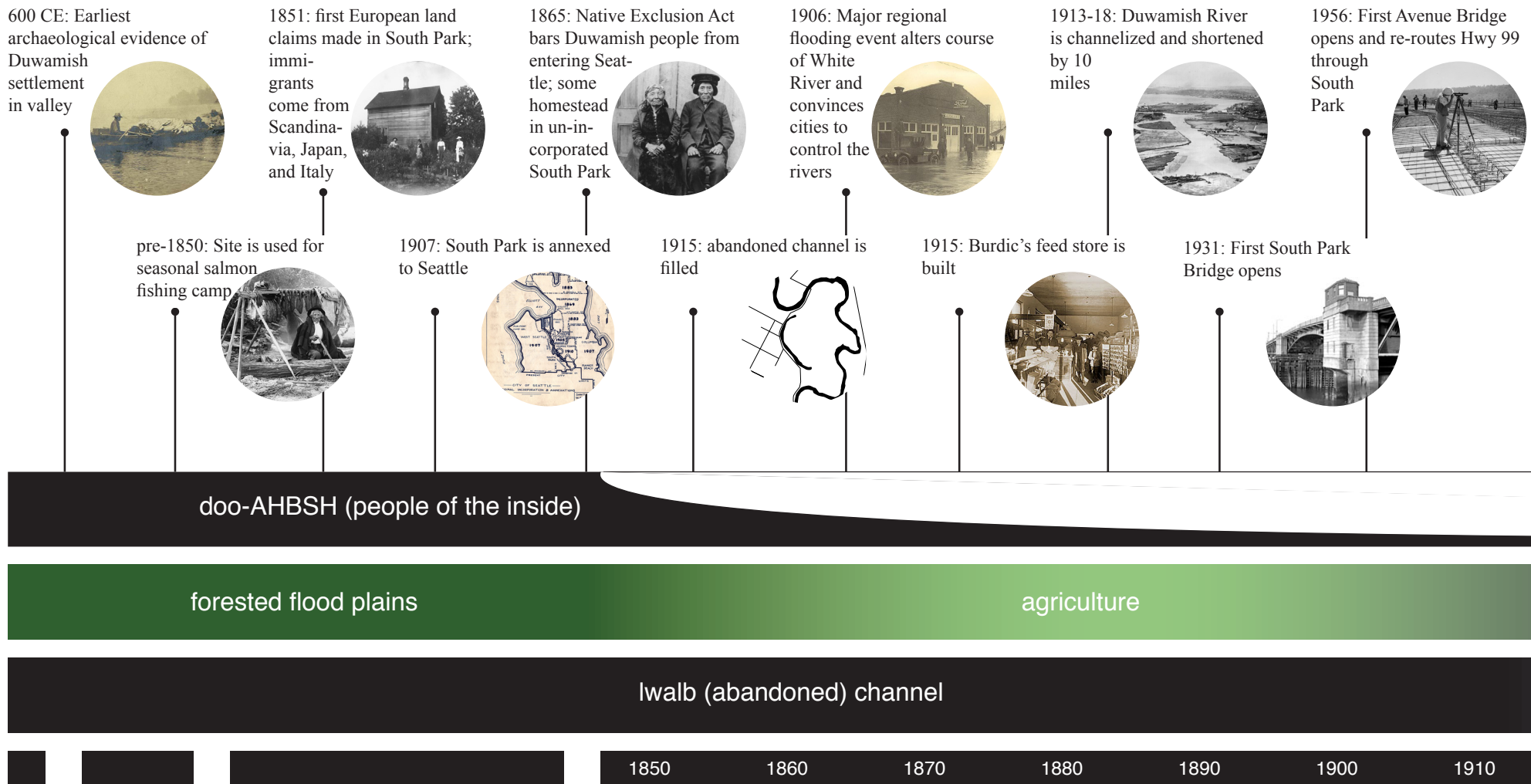
South Park has a number of community hubs, including the library, neighborhood center, and community center, but none of these is located near the 14th Avenue business district. The Plaza has the opportunity to become the most public and inclusive community gathering place. Its proximity to the business district means potential for economic opportunities like markets and celebrations, as well as the potential to draw in new customers through Plaza programming.



-  South Park Plaza
-  Zoned Commercial
-  South Park Branch Library
-  Concord International School
-  South Park Neighborhood Center
-  14th Avenue Business District
-  River City Skate park

Fig. 2.9 A linear timeline of South Park

There are several ways to approach the history of a site, but by far the most common is to do so linearly. Past. Present. Future. Cause and effect. Problem and solution. This can only give a cursory retelling of events.



1936: Boeing opens Plant 2 across the Duwamish Waterway from South Park



1970s: South Park is largely abandoned by city government; no loans are granted; neighborhood falls into disrepair



2001: Lower Duwamish Waterway is added to Superfund list



2010: South Park Bridge is permanently closed due to extreme safety concerns



2014: New South Park Bridge opens



2017: South Park is home to a large Latinx community and immigrants from Latin America and SE Asia



1957: Burdic's feed store closes



1965: South Park is rezoned industrial; residents march on Seattle City Hall; zoning remains residential/industrial



1986: County Line Bar opens in old feed store



2009: County Line closes; Dow Constantine signs mural pledging to find funding for new bridge



2012: community approaches Seattle Parks to purchase Plaza Park property



2020?: permanent South Park Plaza Park will finish construction



immigrants

industry

feed store

bar and grill

bridge construction

park

1920

1930

1940

1950

1960

1970

1980

1990

2000

2010

2020

The importance of linear vs. cyclical thinking

Linear thinking and problem solving immigrated to the Duwamish Valley along with the settlers of European descent in the mid-19th century. This belief that improving the past for a better future is deeply entwined in the human construct and fetishization of permanence. As will be discussed further in the literature review, in modern society we have come to associate permanence with wealth, power, and success. It is a uniquely human belief that if we just make the right decisions we will enjoy perfect, permanent solutions. This way of thinking continues to permeate city planning decisions to this day and is responsible for the denigration of temporary actions and uses. However, temporary and cyclical thinking is more representative of the experience of life on Earth and more comprehensively reflects the ebbs and flows of processes over time.

A linear accounting of the development of the Duwamish Valley would show that after the most recent glaciation it was rich flood plain for thousands of years, which sustained the well-being of aquatic and terrestrial plants, animals, and human inhabitants. When settlers arrived, the land was divided up into homesteads and the fertile soils were put to use growing agricultural products that sustained the growing city of Seattle. The frequent flooding, however, made life difficult and uncertain for these newcomers, so they tamed the rivers, constricted their wandering, and put them to more productive use for the greater good of industry. Industry flourished and overtook the land from the farmers, over time resulting in the degradation and impairment of aquatic and terrestrial life.

The channelization of the Duwamish River between 1913-18 is the ultimate example of linear decision-making in action. Engineers shortened the lower portion of the river by 10 miles, exchanging shallow, wide meanders navigable only by shallow-bottomed canoes for a uniform, deep, straight line (Reese et al. 21). This one decision was responsible for setting a series of land-use practices in motion that continue to result in the marginalization and oppression of the human population living near the rebranded Duwamish Waterway today. The deepening of the channel and the armoring

Opposite page:

Fig. 2.10 South Park cyclical processes

Although they are less visible today, cyclical natural processes continue: salmon migrate, tides ebb and flow, and seasonal changes bring flood and drought.



day

night

till plant weed fertilize thin bloom

absorb water light flower fruit grow

spring

summer

pick protect

flood

fall

rest plan wait
celebrate
store smoke cure
consume

rain hunt camp gather harvest conserve glean winnow dry

high tide

low tide

high tide

low tide



of its banks was intended to solve the flooding and channel migration “problems” once and for all. It is worth noting that South Park still experiences frequent flooding, not from the river overflowing its banks, but from stormwater washing down the hills of West Seattle, searching for the river or the spongy earth of the forest floor and finding only pavement. The one thing the new channel was best suited to supporting was industry; large ocean-going ships could now reach all the way upstream to South Park and the dark, flowing waters were a convenient dumping ground for industrial waste, effluent, garbage, and sewage.

The now unnecessary meanders, sliced through with surgical precision, were filled in, along with wetlands, and an oxbow lake in South Park, that were standing in the way of easy development. The transformation of water into new flat land allowed for the construction of Boeing Field and Boeing’s Plant 2 in 1936 across the channel from South Park (ENTRIX 29). There was enough new space for the construction of rail lines and Marginal Way allowing for all varieties of transportation to reach the industrial production. The goal of facilitating freight traffic led to the 1956 opening of the 1st Avenue South Bridge and rerouting of Highway 99 through the middle of South Park, cutting off many residents from Concord Elementary School (Seattle Parks Foundation 3-6). The city’s disregard for South Park’s human population was made clear through its planning decisions. In the mid-1960s the neighborhood was rezoned as industrial, but when 4,200 South Park residents marched on City Hall the zoning was returned to a combination of low-density residential and industrial (Wilma). Despite winning that battle, questions about the neighborhood’s future and the potential for more zoning changes resulted in banks refusing to give loans in the neighborhood for renovations or new construction, resulting in structures that fell into disrepair (Seattle Parks Foundation 3-6).

The linear history of South Park has relentlessly degraded the quality of life for its residents. The first victims were the native Duwamish people whose population had already been reduced by more than 80% before settlers set foot on shore, owing to the relentless spread of European disease (Updegrave). The river channelization further destroyed the Duwamish people’s connection to their land; plants they had gathered

1909

1918

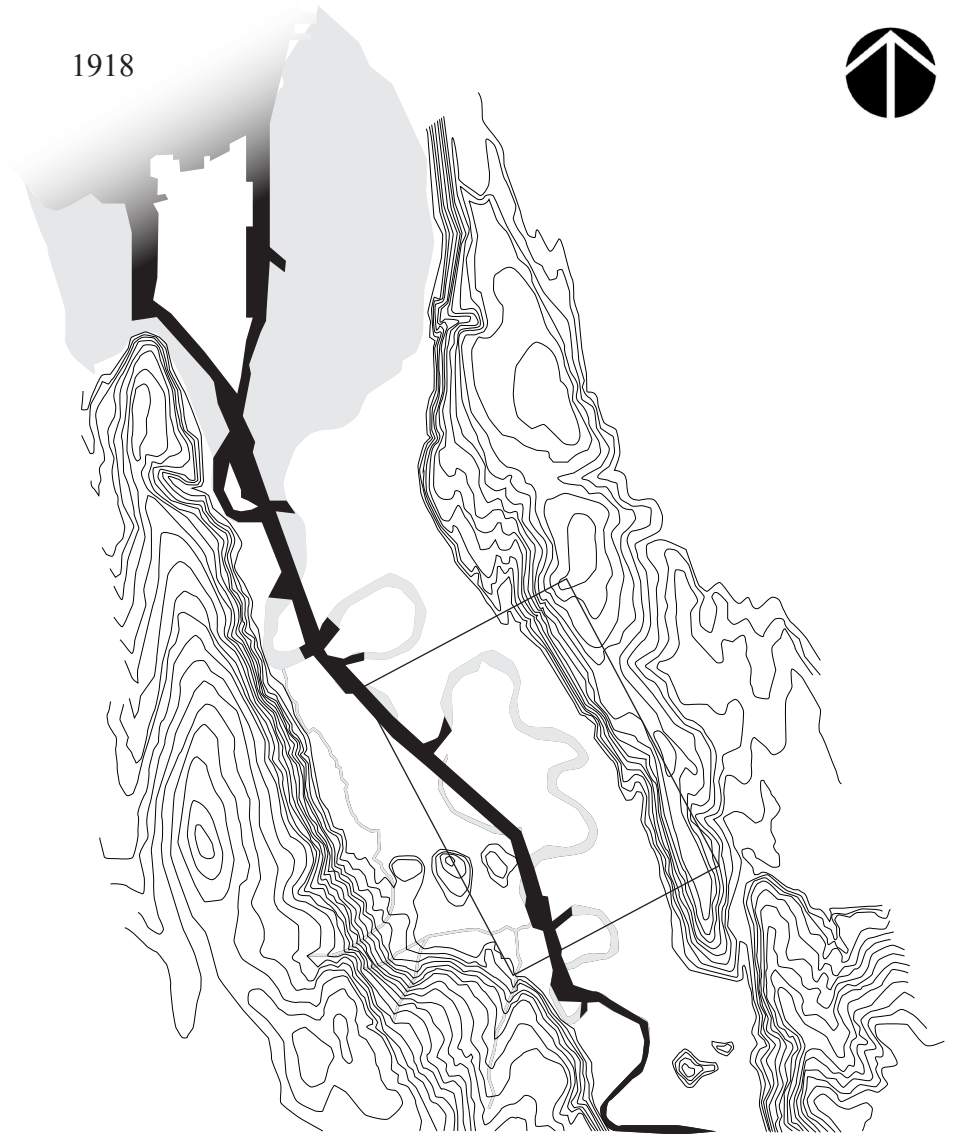
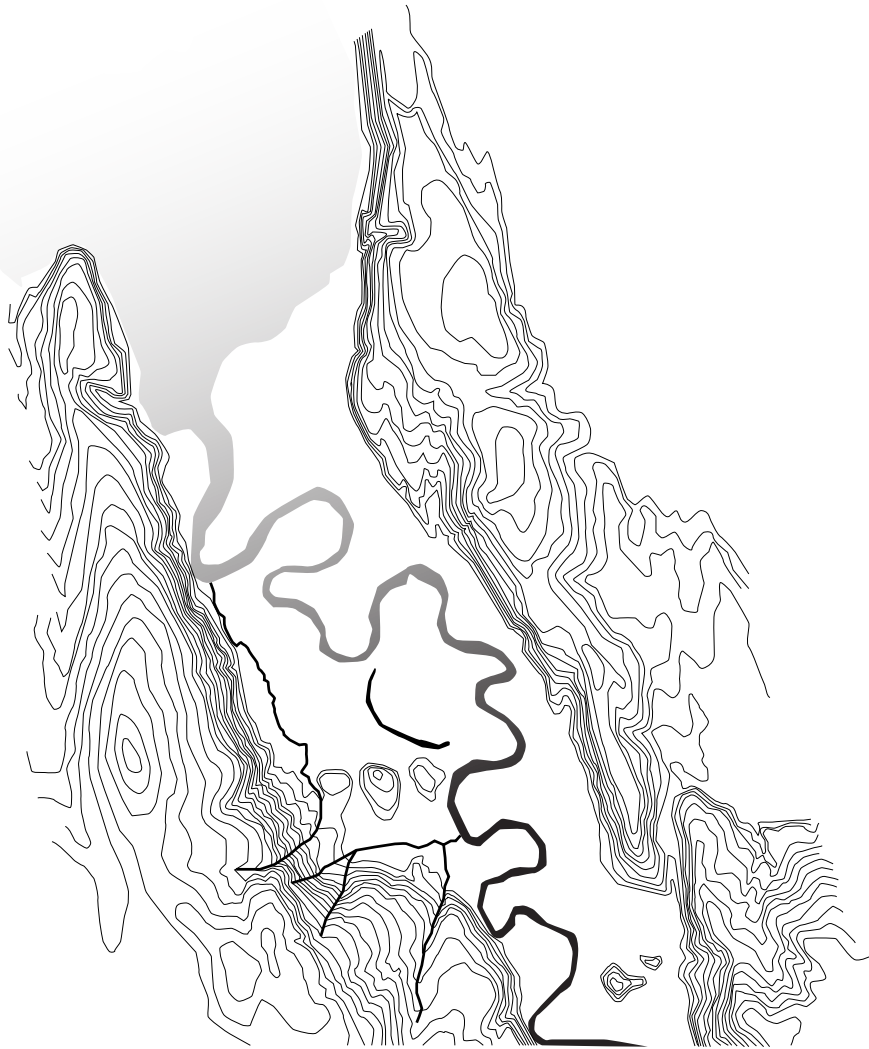


Fig. 2.11 Duwamish Valley transformation

After channelization, the river was 10 miles shorter, the mudflats at the mouth were filled and developed, and Harbor Island was constructed.

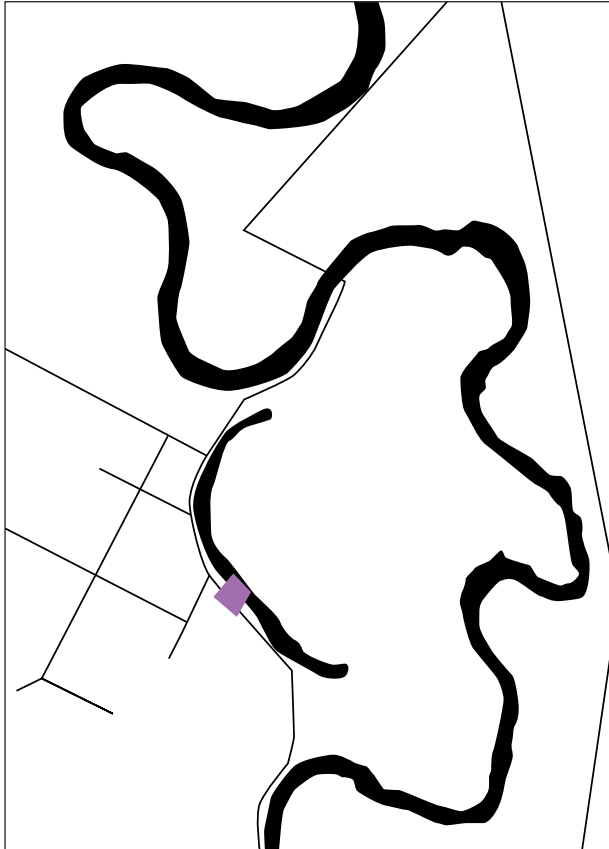
for food, medicine, and building materials no longer grew in the valley, game animals were no longer attracted to the river's waters, and salmon and other seafood struggled to survive against the barrage of pollutants and physical alterations to their habitat. The lack of floodwaters meant that the formerly nutrient-rich soils became depleted and farms were replaced by the sterility of industry. South Park has long been home to vulnerable and marginalized residents: displaced Duwamish pushed out of the city limits, poor and working-class European-Americans, and more recently Latinx and Southeast Asian immigrants. They continue to shoulder the burden of side-effects from the industrial boom that brought wealth to the city and great profits to a selected few.

The cyclical history of the neighborhood is less obvious, but still visible in processes that continue whether they are observed or not. The conditions that fostered human, animal, and plant life in the Duwamish Valley were dependent upon the ongoing changeability of the environment. Seasonal flooding brought nutrients that fertilized the soil and ensured water levels high enough for the large Chinook salmon to navigate upstream to spawn. Snow melt out in the spring guided the small salmon fry back out to sea while the shallows of the winding river allowed for places to rest and hide from predators. The yearly summer drought and coincident lower water levels allowed for seasonal fishing camps and easy hunting of the animals drawn to the remaining water source. The mild climate allowed people to people to gather roots, fruit, nuts, leaves, and plant fibers at different times year round. High tides allowed for navigation by canoe and low tides allowed for the harvest of shellfish.

The cycle of tides continues, the moon as-yet unswayed by human engineering, although their influence no longer reaches as deep into the estuary. The salmon still migrate to and fro, although in much fewer numbers and without the former river's gentle protections. Winter still brings rain, but the water fills streets, lots, and basements instead of wetlands. The summer drought is when the community gathers together out of doors to celebrate the temporary suspension of winter's threat. The human population continues to grow and change, drawn in or forced out by economic, political, and cultural factors. There is great uncertainty in the community's future. Will



South Park - 1894



South Park - 1915



South Park - 2017



Fig. 2.12 South Park transformation

The channelization of the Duwamish river filled in the oxbow lake (abandoned channel) and added developable land to South Park. Boeing Field was constructed on top of the newly filled meanders to the east.

gentrification mean residents and businesses have to relocate? Will undocumented kids be able to attend college; will their families be deported? Will the Superfund cleanup mean that the river will someday be clean enough to swim in and eat from?

A temporary park activation is not simply a stop-gap measure to offer a lesser version of the eventual, perfect, permanent park solution. Developing a dynamic, flexible park space that can meet the community's changing needs and grow with them has the potential for positive community empowerment and stewardship impacts that go beyond the immediate benefits. My goal for this project is to be a catalyst for change and to design for a place and a community that will be resilient to changing conditions in the future.

Part three

LITERATURE REVIEW

Community generative design and pro-active interventions: an argument for small scale projects

City planners and landscape architects operating within the urban fabric often look well into the future for the opportunity to re-imagine urban systems at massive scales. As noble and as needed as master-planning is, it can lose sight of the fact that there are real communities in the here-and-now in need of intervention today. Although they too can benefit from the re-imagined cityscape of 30 years time, it is unjust and unnecessary for them to endure the status-quo until then. This is the thinking behind the concept of *Now Urbanism*, that change can be wrought one intervention at a time and by “selecting those interventions that suggest a path towards the increased health of coupled human and natural environments” (Hou et al. 7). This means a bottom-up approach that focuses on human-scale interventions that add up to cumulative change.

One approach to this kind of immediate intervention is what Mike Lydon of *The Street Plans Collaborative* has christened *Tactical Urbanism*. This refers to a neighborhood-based approach for activating underused, misused, or ignored spaces with projects that can be accomplished quickly and on minimal budgets. Elsewhere, design collectives, community groups, and highly motivated individuals world-wide continue to explore the potential of “pop-up” and temporary uses for underutilized, under-performing, and vacant sites. Other groups, like the *Project for Public Spaces*, focus on community generated *placemaking* techniques that greatly privilege community knowledge and imagination over the expertise of design professionals. These approaches are a direct response to the opaque bureaucratic process, coldness of institutional design decisions, and slow pace of government-level change. South Park residents have been enduring political stasis for many years despite having some of the greatest needs for environmental improvements in Seattle.

The reliance on master planning has created an environment where all projects large and small must pass through so many layers of bureaucracy, with so many onerous steps, that it is nearly impossible to get anything done. Lydon and Garcia

describe the situation succinctly: “our cities are suffering because there is simply too much process and not enough doing” (83). Instead of communities waiting years for cities to make projects happen in their neighborhoods, cities should be empowering organized community groups and individuals to take an active role in improving their neighborhoods today.

City planning in general tends to revere the permanent solution at the expense of less prestigious, temporary interventions. However, Bishop and Williams point out in their book *The Temporary City* that permanence is a peculiarly human construct that has become revered as a symbol of a successful society and a demonstration of wealth, political power, and stability. In fact, “temporary activities are generally considered to signify a time of crisis or a failure to develop” (19). Although changes in natural and human systems may be difficult to detect in the course of one human lifetime, they are always in a state of flux. This idea has permeated into the field of ecology as well, which no longer focuses on returning sites to a historical baseline, but rather focuses on site resiliency in response to both internal and external influences and disturbances (Rottle and Yocom 30). So then, it becomes easier to accept that consciously temporary or interim solutions do not necessarily result in a second-rate substitute and can produce creative, dynamic, and revolutionary interventions that would be “inconceivable if considered for the long term” (Temel 55).

One approach to the immediate need for public space is the temporary or “pop-up” use of a vacant, underused, or interstitial space. This technique became especially popular following the 2008 collapse of the real estate bubble and subsequent Great Recession, which resulted in a glut of unrentable properties, unfinished construction projects, a stasis in generating new projects, and “undermined our faith in perpetual growth” (Bishop and Williams 23). Although many people suffered negative consequences, the recession produced the void that spurred the genesis of the temporary urbanism movement which “provid[es] an outlet for innovation and experimentation” (ibid. 23). Temporary interventions can also respond to disturbances in the urban fabric caused by natural disasters. After devastating earthquakes in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2010-2011 destroyed many buildings and community

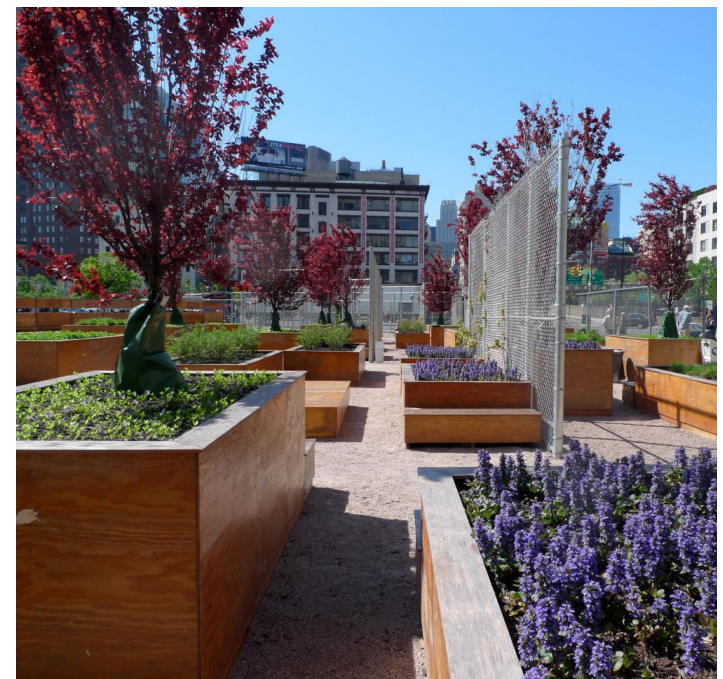


Fig. 3.1-3.2 Union St. Urban Orchard, LentSpace
Photos: top Mike Massaro, bottom Interboro Partners 36



gathering places a new organization called Gap Filler emerged. The design collective has focused on temporary, interactive, and playful installations that encourage community gathering and celebration.

There are myriad benefits to the temporary public use of spaces including greater freedom and creativity, which should not be minimized; Bishop and Williams go so far as to argue “[i]t is the opportunity for creativity that is real empowerment” (31). Through temporary projects, communities are encouraged to actively “redefine their boundaries or ‘turf’” (ibid. 48) instead of waiting for opaque government process to dictate the boundaries to them. Temporary interventions also require less capital to implement and are therefore more inclusive and accessible to more members of a society. This concept of community generated designs and community implemented projects as the means of empowerment is further explored through the examination of Tactical Urbanism and the Project for Public Spaces later in this chapter.

Another reason to abandon the illusion and reverence of permanent solutions is that the demographics of cities and neighborhoods is constantly changing, especially in growing cities like Seattle. In fact, Seattle has been among the top 5 fastest growing big US cities for the past 3 years (Balk) and with ongoing expansions in the technology sector there is no end in sight. Temporary places allow for flexible programming in this dynamic city landscape, particularly for immigrant groups who may bring novel cultural uses and perspectives to public space that are different from the city’s status quo (Bishop and Williams 90). Nearby businesses and the local economy can also benefit from temporary interventions, since any use is preferable to a vacant site and decreases the likelihood of unwanted behavior like squatting, vandalism, and illegal dumping (ibid. 40). A temporary intervention also has the potential to attract more community users and more people to surrounding businesses.

Eric Reynolds of Urban Space Management argues that vacant sites located within a city, especially one that is lacking in open space, that are publicly owned should be unacceptable to its citizens (373). He goes on to suggest that municipalities ought to be responsible for developing a “straight-forward framework” for regulating

Fig. 3.3-3.4 Gap Filler Pallet Pavilion & Dance-o-mat
37 *Photos: Gap Filler*

and encouraging “interwhile use” (ibid. 374). Seattle’s progressive city government is not unaware of the potential value of getting small-scale, temporary projects underway and has made attempts to address the situation. In 2010 the Seattle Design Commission launched a design competition, “Holding Patterns,” with the purpose of generating temporary interventions for stalled construction sites. Although the competition generated 83 design entries and the Design Commission awarded 13 finalists (SDCI Community Engagement), the projects were never implemented. The Design Commission did not have funding to support implementation and since many of the designs were not site-specific, agreements with property owners and developers had not been made.

It is interesting that the city chose to focus on sites owned by private developers instead of its own publicly held lands. Certainly stalled private construction sites provided a great opportunity for temporary use, but the city and its departments hold many vacant “land bank” sites that are awaiting the funds to develop. Focusing on temporary uses for these sites would be more realistic and attainable and could potentially create just as much positive impact. However, the fatal flaw of the “Holding Patterns” initiative was likely its top-down organization. Instead of working with communities to identify likely sites and appropriate uses, the Design commission relied solely on the expertise of designers and planners. This resulted in only a few people being invested in whether the projects succeeded or failed, so it is not surprising that the projects quietly disappeared.

The previous example highlights the disconnect that often exists between designers, implementers, and users of public space. Landscape architects are sometimes guilty of creating hollow projects that prioritize aesthetics over user experience and use vegetation to “green-wash” a site with only a superficial understanding of ecology. These spaces are often beautiful, but cold and belong more to the designer than to the neighborhood in which they are located. Fred Kent, founder of the Project for Public Spaces, is particularly critical of the designer-centric approach to projects which result in design accolades and awards from professional organizations, even when the projects are impractical and underused. He argues that designer knowledge is



Fig. 3.5 Gas Works Park Seattle
Photo: Joe Mabel

“infinitely more resonant when it is used to help everyday citizens articulate their needs and create public spaces that are responsive to the communities they serve” (“Whom Does Design Really Serve?”).

However, Kent underestimates the skills, knowledge, and the sometimes inherent necessity of designers. He insists that “[c]ommunities do not think ‘we need to talk to a designer’ when they want a new park”(ibid.). However, I would argue that individuals and communities are often prevented from taking action because they fear that they lack the necessary professional skills or knowledge. A lack of experience with project feasibility also means that community members are unsure of how to go about implementing a good idea. Kent goes on to insist that any park without community building as its expressed purpose is fundamentally flawed. Certainly there are parks whose ecological, economic, or aesthetic impacts are just as valuable, even if those parks serve a different purpose.

It is important to recognize that many quality public spaces have been designed by intuitive and thoughtful designers without the benefit of extensive public input. In the case of controversial or revolutionary projects, relying heavily on community support has the potential to derail the entire process. A local example is Richard Haag’s design for Gas Works Park, which retained many of the decommissioned industrial structures over the vociferous objections of the neighborhood (Russell). The project is now lauded as visionary and has become a precedent for the treatment of post-industrial landscapes worldwide, as well as a heavily used and beloved neighborhood park. Although not every project requires deep community engagement, there are certain situations where participation is extremely beneficial or even necessary. This is especially true in historically marginalized communities, whose voices are generally not represented in the design fields or government, and who are particularly vulnerable to displacement due to the gentrifying effect of neighborhood improvements.

Tactical Urbanism provides many benefits to communities that are interested in immediate actions to help build their neighborhoods and activate unused spaces. The scalability of the approach means that there is not one single solution to every project.

The focus is on “short-term action to create long-term change” (Lydon and Garcia 34). This results in resilient projects that are adaptable to change and projects that embrace the “dynamism of cities” (Lydon and Garcia 3).

An example of this strategy in action is the closure of New York City’s Times Square to vehicles by the NYC Department of Transportation in order to improve safety and allow more opportunities for pedestrian-scaled experiences in the city. Although there were vocal complaints and objections to the proposal, NYDOT was able to provide proof of concept in 2009 with a temporary closure of the space and the addition of cheap folding lawn chairs. With minimal expense they were able to demonstrate that not only would the new public space be attractive to users, but also that Midtown traffic was less congested, there were fewer injuries to both motorists and pedestrians, and that foot traffic in the retail area had increased (Lydon and Garcia 152). The result of this modest experiment is that the pedestrian plazas in Times Square have become permanent and the approach has expanded to 58 other sites throughout the city.

The New York City example shows what governments can gain from the *Tactical Urbanism* approach instead of relying on the more traditional technique of formal public meetings. First, it engages a more representative swath of a community than the demographic who are comfortable attending public meetings. The technique also “creates tactile proposals for change” (Lydon and Garcia 6) that may be experienced rather than relying on two-dimensional plans, specifications, and drawings that can only be discussed theoretically. Three-dimensional, “real” representations are critical to understanding the proposals under consideration, especially for members of the community who are not designers, planners, or engineers. Even a temporary installation can be experienced by vastly more people, as they are able to interact with it on their own time and in their own community, than can attend a series of public meetings.

Another benefit of the *Tactical Urbanism* approach is that citizens are empowered to contribute to decisions that directly impact their own lives. This is especially powerful for groups who are typically disenfranchised and marginalized



Fig. 3.6 Times Square Closure 2009
Photo: Damon Winter/NYT



Fig. 3.7 guerrilla crosswalk painting in Brazil
Photo: ApocolipseMotorizado

by governmental processes, particularly low-income residents, people of color, immigrants, and non-native English speakers. Sometimes this can take the form of a means to protest unfair or unsafe government policy or delay. This includes actions like “guerrilla crosswalks” and “chair bombings,” in which citizens take it upon themselves to add street safety infrastructure or furniture to a underused public space. These activities are technically against the law, but often expose failings on the part of government to adequately protect or listen to its people and in many cases can actually spur institutional change. Engaging people in decision-making in their communities, especially for those who feel that they do not usually have a voice, and galvanizing communities to organize for a common cause has been shown to “empower communities, foster ties and shared norms and help build social cohesion, as well as providing benefits to personal development such as increased self-esteem and new skills” (Bishop and Williams 139).

The Project for Public Spaces argues that the mere installation of amenities (seating, public art, a parklet, etc.) does not result in an equitable public asset embraced by the community, or in their terms: *placemaking*. Rather, *placemaking* should be thought of as a means to an end, “[i]t is the process by which a community defines its own priorities” (“Equitable Placemaking”). Governments and planning agencies should not only focus on the implementation of neighborhood-scale projects, but also, and perhaps more importantly, on the engagement of communities in that process. Somesh Kumar encourages practitioners and anyone working with marginalized communities to view participation as the end goal and not just the means to getting a project completed. This ensures that participants have active rather than passive roles (26). Kumar identifies other advantages of meaningful community participation as increasing the feasibility of a project through efficiency, effectiveness, and most powerfully a sense of ownership that is key to ensuring project sustainability (ibid. 28).

The key to *Tactical Urbanism*’s community empowerment is in the process and not simply the result. By working together on a small, but meaningful project in their neighborhood, community members can experience the empowering act of having control over the quality of their environment. A potential strategy for the site in

South Park is to use it as what Lydon and Garcia refer to as a “phase 0 implementation project” (15). This can be an excellent tool for a space that is awaiting final design because a small-scale temporary project can “bring immediate benefits while providing the opportunity for qualitative and quantitative data to be collected and integrated into the project design before large capital expenditures occur” (16). This means that even a small project, if it is innovative, can lead to institutional changes on a larger scale. Exploring potential temporary uses at the Plaza site will provide the opportunity to argue for a different approach to the treatment of publicly-owned “land bank” sites. In Seattle these sites currently sit vacant, unmaintained, and attract mainly illegal uses while waiting for the funding that can turn them into parks. This thesis demonstrates that these sites can become neighborhood assets without the need for long-term planning and budgeting decisions.

Seattle Parks is limited by their three public meeting format for community input on design decisions. This limitation is compounded by the inability or unwillingness of community members, particularly those in the Latinx and Southeast Asian communities to attend such meetings. A temporary intervention made possible with community input and support would be an opportunity to test ideas for the final project and also a way to keep community members interested and engaged in the lengthy process of creating the final result. This approach would allow for an iterative design process that could allow residents and visitors to experience different options in the actual space and adapt to changing conditions over time.



Fig. 3.8 Chair bombing Brooklyn, NYC
Photo: Spontaneous Interventions

Reclaiming post-industrial landscapes as community space: an argument for creative redevelopment and environmental justice

As the global population continues to increase exponentially - the UN predicts that it will exceed 8.5 billion people by 2030 and exceed 11 billion people by 2100 (Raftery et al. 58) - more people are living in cities than ever before. Today more than half of the world's people live in urban areas and by 2050 that figure is projected to rise to 66% (Population Division 7). In order to prevent this surge in urban population from bursting cities at the seams and sprawling out indefinitely toward the horizon, designers and city planners will need to rely on novel and creative approaches. This means efficiently putting to use all vacant, unused, and abandoned sites within the urban core. Post-industrial sites hold major opportunities for development: they are often located near downtown districts, the sites are often large – especially in the modern urban context, and they are often in or surrounded by low-income and immigrant communities.

Some authors have argued that redeveloping post-industrial sites should be a priority in order to serve the goals of sustainable cities by reducing sprawl, adding green space, and revitalizing depressed neighborhoods (Loures 74). Studies have identified potential benefits to wildlife habitat, public open space, and reducing air and water pollution (Loures 76), although human mental, physical, and community health benefits are usually ignored. The challenges of these projects are not insignificant, however, and include concerns from the public over contamination issues and the uncertainty of clean up efforts and fears from potential developers about the uncertainty of remediation and construction costs (Loures 78).

The conversion of post-industrial landscapes into public parks has become popular in recent years with notable examples including Seattle's Gasworks Park (1975), Germany's Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord (1991), and Manhattan's High Line (2009-14). There are noble reasons to continue this trend because the communities surrounding post-industrial sites usually have less access to public green space, live with a degraded environment, and "are affected by the very processes

of industrialization and deindustrialization that created such sites in the first place” (Langhorst 1113). Residents of these neighborhoods are more likely to be people of color and low-income and face inequitable exposure to toxicity as well as increased cancer risks (Anguelovski 25). Certainly people living in these neighborhoods can benefit from the ecological and social benefits these projects can offer, and from an environmental justice perspective they have the right to demand it. Langhorst extends Lefebvre’s idea of the “right to the city” to include the “*right to urban nature*” (1113). This goes beyond the traditional focus on the ability to freely congregate and participate in city processes to argue for the necessity to mitigate environmental pollutants and reduce exposures for all city residents.

Why bother inserting a public green space into South Park’s jumble of industrial, residential, and commercial land uses? Some people would say that we should just abandon the neighborhood to industry and relocate the residents to other areas more conducive to public health and green space - proposed rezoning along these lines was proposed by the City of Seattle in the 1960s and rejected (Wilma). Other people would argue that industry should be relocated so that the Duwamish River valley can be restored to its pre-channelized glory and so residents can live in harmony with nature. Beyond the fact that both approaches would be infeasible, each misses the opportunity to recognize and celebrate the union of both the human-made and the ecological.

Joern Langhorst insists that post-industrial landscapes allow us to see that the realms of “natural” and “cultural” are not dichotomous as is generally accepted because these sites are clearly the “simultaneous ruins” of both (1115). When looking through the traditional lens of ecology it appears that the agents of culture, including urban expansion and development, have only negative impacts on the natural world and usually succeed in supplanting it. When looking through the traditional lens of landscape architecture, “nature” is the insidious force that seeks to undermine our perfectly conceived and contrived designs when left unsupervised. However, Langhorst contends that this division is completely artificial and that in fact the “natural” and the



Fig. 3.9-3.10 Duwamish River Waterway
Photos: top Patrick Robinson, bottom Tom Reese



“cultural” are always in the process of destroying one another; there is no stable state. This perspective frees us from the dichotomy of good and bad; these sites are “neither utopian or dystopian, but heterotopian” (1117).

Developing a new public green space in a post-industrial area does not guarantee that surrounding communities (human and ecological) will benefit. Although the act of transforming post-industrial landscapes into public parks has the potential to positively impact the lives and ecological functionality of the surrounding communities, the specifics of the design approach and implementation are critical. In fact, this approach can mean the difference between “active participation in the production of urbanity” and “disabl[ing] all potential for involvement, marginalizing already marginalized people even more” (Langhorst 1126). Langhorst identifies this as the difference between the *aesthetics of ecological performance* and the *performance of aesthetics* (1111) and utilizes two well-known projects in order to demonstrate the difference.

Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord in Duisburg-Meiderich, Germany is a public park built on the remains of an abandoned coal and steel production plant. When the plant closed down the 8,000 steelworkers who were laid off, predominantly chose to remain with their families in the neighborhoods surrounding the site (Langhorst 1116). Peter Latz’s design retained as many of the existing industrial structures as possible. It also chose to preserve and celebrate the early successional plant communities, pioneer species, invasive weeds: the “emergent and transgressive ecologies” (Langhorst 1111) that had moved in since the plant ceased operations.

The completed park celebrates both the “cultural” and the “natural” and recognizes that each is constantly evolving with the other. Since nature is “a pre-existent and inevitable co-author of the site” the park user is compelled toward an “ongoing critical reflection on the relationships between human and non-human processes” (1117). Even further, the visitor is invited to become a co-author of both the place and her experience in it. The changes that occur in the park over time: seedlings growing into thickets, metal corroding, cement crumbling are all central to the design. This is what Langhorst refers to as the “*aesthetics of performance*,” a design

Fig. 3.11-3.12 Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord
 45 Photos: top Alice Chodura; bottom © Raimond Spekking

that welcomes change by internal and external forces. The imprint of humans, both intentional and accidental, will continue to alter the place as well as the ebbs and flows of natural processes. It is a design that refuses to be static or ever complete.

The High Line in New York City was born out of a similar genesis point; its goal was to reclaim an abandoned industrial relic (the West Side Line of the New York Central Railroad) and re-imagine it as a public park. The elevated rail line was decommissioned in 1980 and was quickly transformed by the “emergent and transgressive ecologies” of both natural and human agents. Drought-tolerant grasses took hold and thrived amongst the rusting steel rails and neighborhood kids and artists alike found a place of respite and inspiration.

The premise to create an expansive new public park space in an incredibly dense city with almost no remaining unused land seems a noble pursuit. However, support for the project was co-opted by rich and powerful interests “aligned with the agendas pushing further urban renewal and gentrification in the surrounding neighborhoods” (Langhorst 1121) of Chelsea and the Meatpacking District. The result is a lovely, but artificial picturesque landscape, “a promenade with a sequence of tableaux designed to be seen, but not otherwise interacted with” (1123).

Unlike Duisburg-Nord, the High Line user is not free to experience the park in a unique and individual manner and visitors are certainly not encouraged to become “co-authors” of the design. In fact, any activities other than walking on the set path, sitting on the designated benches, or looking passively at the tirelessly maintained plantings is expressly forbidden and policed accordingly. The High Line maintenance budget is approximately \$50,000 per acre per year, grossly higher than the average for New York City parks (1122). This maintenance is an ironically onerous task, since the planting design seeks to recall the pioneering species that had effortlessly colonized the structure for more than 30 years. Langhorst defines this project as an example of the *performance of aesthetics*: the visual representation of ecology without any substance and a hollow representation of historical use.

No doubt the High Line’s backers are pleased with the result; the project is world renowned and numerous cities are now attempting to create their own High



Fig. 3.13-3.14 High Line before and after
Photos: top Joel Sternfeld; bottom Beyond My Ken 46



Fig. 3.15 Duwamish River clean up dredging
Photo: EPA

Lines. Property values for surrounding buildings have soared, lining the pockets of building owners and real estate moguls while “cleaning up” the neighborhood of any deviant behavior, or persons, that might frighten the tourists. Visitors, particularly from out of the city, enjoy the peaceful promenade through the undoubtedly beautiful, picturesque landscape. But, it is clearly not a community-focused project nor the most dynamic realization of post-industrial ecologies.

What lessons can be learned from these projects for designers seeking to engage in community-driven projects in post-industrial landscapes? And what should be done with sites possessing a rich ecological and industrial past, but lacking massive charismatic structures like rusting storage tanks or miles of abandoned rails? Is the superhuman scale of these sites central to their success? Most discussion of post-industrial landscape design concerns itself with projects that contain massive visual and experiential features that act as elements of the *sublime* because of their incongruity with the present reality: vast steel complexes of towers, chimneys, and scaffolding; enormous concrete wastewater channels; or ambitious earth moving projects that result in post-modern pyramids. These elements combined with ecology, either “transgressive” or contrived, allow the users to ponder the interactions between human will and natural processes and to feel small in the face of it.

Not all sites with a deep industrial past still bear such obvious features. Some, especially those located within urban areas and near city centers like South Park, are on land that is too valuable to simply abandon. Industrial uses have been stacked on top of each other; structures are built and torn down and sometimes all that remains is a visual void: stark and unnatural, but unremarkable. In many post-industrial areas the only real legacies are the invisible contaminants bound in soil, water, and air particles and gradually accumulated in the tissues of plant and animal inhabitants. To represent this history in the landscape is much more challenging than on a site with iconic structures. But, demonstrating that even a site with no visible traces remaining is still a “simultaneous ruins of nature and culture” (Langhorst 1115) is a potentially significant and worthwhile endeavor.

Seattle is in a position similar to many other cities in the U.S. which experienced a boom period of industry and manufacturing throughout the 20th century, but whose economies have since moved on and whose industrial area infrastructure has become obsolete. These post-industrial sites certainly possess their challenges; they are often so polluted with contaminants that they are labeled Superfund sites by the EPA. But they also offer the best hope for creating new public green spaces in neighborhoods where that was historically not a priority. These are opportunities not only for improved public spaces, but also for repairing and strengthening the ecological functionality of post-industrial areas.

In South Park, sites either continue as places of active industry today or have been remade for other purposes. Most large-scale totems to the industrial past, like Gasworks Park's iconic towers, have been destroyed. There is, however still the legacy of superhuman earth-moving and water management: the Duwamish Waterway. Human intervention transformed a shallow, sinuous river estuary with expansive mudflats and flood plains into a straight, deep, liquid highway tailored to cumbersome barges and effluent disposal. The river may be the only real opportunity to reference an element of the *sublime*, a super-human scaled relic of the past, in a post-industrial landscape design for the Plaza site.

Conditions in South Park are an example of the kind of inequity that can develop in and around these post-industrial landscapes. The neighborhood is home to a high population of low-income immigrants and people of color who endure considerably bleaker environmental conditions than their fellow Seattleites living in whiter, more affluent communities. In Seattle as a whole 12.4% of all land is devoted to park space, with an average of 3,587 square feet of parks per person (Trust for Public Land). Whereas in South Park just 1.8% of land is park space which means that for every resident there are just 116 square feet per person ("Seattle's Canopy Cover"). Quite a difference, especially if you consider that many residents in affluent areas north of the Ship Canal enjoy considerably more park space than the average.

But South Park is not only an inequitable environment due to its lack of public green space; it also exposes residents (and people who come to the neighborhood to

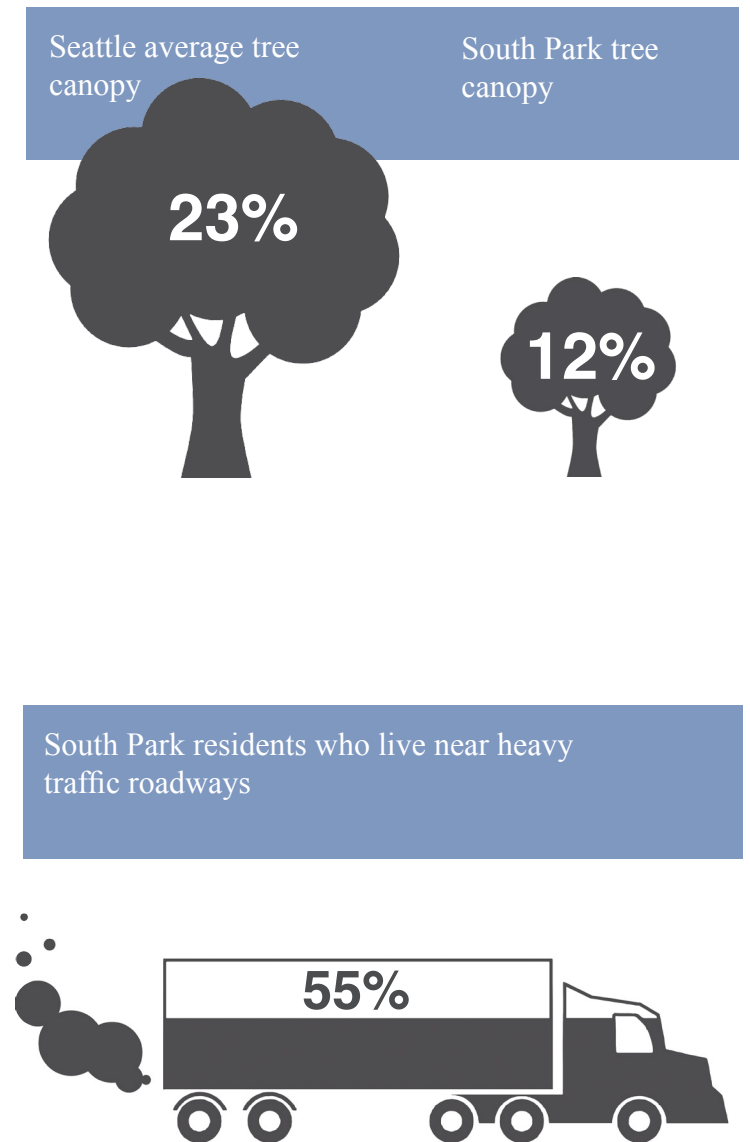


Fig. 3.16 South Park environmental challenges
Source: City of Seattle, Seattle's Canopy Cover



work or visit) to more significant environmental hazards than elsewhere in Seattle. In 2013 the EPA-mandated *Health Impact Assessment* related to Superfund cleanup found that residents of South Park and Georgetown experience higher rates of heart disease, childhood asthma, lung cancer, diabetes, and death from stroke than the county average. They also live for 8 fewer years (Daniell et al. 15). The study points to the combination of environmental stressors like air pollution from vehicular traffic, the legacy of industrial contaminants, and a lack of tree canopy.

As the research in the following section will show, there is a strong body of literature that demonstrates the positive impacts that urban green space has on human physical, mental, and community health. However, there is nothing linking the green space poor conditions of South Park directly to the poor health outcomes so many of its residents experience. Since the neighborhood is poised to undergo significant changes to the quantity and quality of its parks, street trees, and riparian habitats, now would be an ideal opportunity to begin a longitudinal study to measure the impacts to human health over time and learn more about the consequences of redeveloping post-industrial landscapes.

Fig. 3.17 SP Community Center playground
Photo: Marta Olson

Building green spaces for better health: an argument for more vegetation and public space in urban areas

In recent years, researchers have become more aware of the untapped potential for examining the relationship between the built environment and health. Studies over the past 20 years have shown that urban parks and vegetation have positive effects on psychosocial health, increased physical activity, and reduced rates of obesity (Ulmer et al. 55). Kathleen Wolfe has made it her mission to analyze cross-disciplinary research in order to discover the links between nearby “metro nature” and benefits to human and ecological health. In “Metro Nature, Environmental Health, and Economic Value,” she and her co-author digest the current literature, identify research gaps, and quantify economic values for these benefits in the hopes of generating more public and governmental interest and potential resources for policy change (395). Health impacts of metro nature include benefits to “environmental fitness,” including reduction in air pollution and stormwater runoff (392), “wellness support” including access to active recreation, reduced stress and ADD symptoms (393), and “community” health including reduced crime and increased local spending at retail merchants (394). The current research clearly shows that urban green space has positive impacts on human mental, physical, and community health.

Studies have shown that living within 200 meters (650 feet) of highways can significantly increase exposure to pollutants that increase the incidence of pulmonary and cardiac risk factors (Brugge et al. 12). This exposure is responsible for greater risk of asthma and reduced lung function in children and associations with cardiac and pulmonary mortality (ibid.), especially if children move to an area before the age of 2 (ibid. 18). At greatest risk are people spending significant amounts of time within 30 meters (100 feet) of major highways (ibid. 16). This would include South Park’s Cesar Chavez Park, River City Skate Park, and Community Center. The literature on this topic is incomplete, largely because the EPA assesses air quality on regional, rather than local scales (ibid. 20), so specific risks based on proximity to heavily trafficked roadways are not entirely known. However, there is plenty of evidence to convince



Fig. 3.18 Discovery Park, 3.19 Fig. Highway 99
Photos: top Discovery Pk Staff, bottom Raymond Yu 50



Fig. 3.20-3.21 South Park Green Wall installation

Photos: Just Health Action

municipalities of the risks and compel them to implement mitigating actions in neighborhoods like South Park.

The potential impacts of neighborhood green space on respiratory health are especially intriguing because the effect appears to be observable in short time frames. However, the conclusions being drawn are somewhat contested in the literature. A study conducted in New York City found that street trees were associated with lower incidences of childhood asthma (Lovasi et al. 648) whereas a study in Texas found no significant relationship between vegetation, canopy cover, and childhood asthma rates (Pilat et al. 636), however this study relied on a small sample size. Some studies have shown that trees increase risk of allergen sensitivity in children and that canopy above roads may actually trap pollutants, while other studies have shown that trees can be a means of reducing airborne pollutants (Ulmer et al. 55).

Increasingly, research is being done on the specific impacts of highly urban vegetation on human health. One study looked specifically at the impacts of street level vegetation and green roofs on particulate matter in the air in “urban canyon” conditions (street level between tall buildings). The researchers found that vegetation at street level can serve as a fast-acting and efficient urban pollutant filter by absorbing particulate matter in the air (Pugh et al. 7692). Plants are uniquely suited to this purpose because of their metabolic uptake of air, the stickiness of their leaves, their large surface area, and their aerodynamic properties (ibid.). The research indicates that the use of green walls can reduce nitrous oxide levels by 40% and particulate matter by 60% at street level (ibid. 7697). This increased vegetation has other benefits as well, including reducing surface temperatures and noise pollution, and increasing biodiversity, habitat, and neighborhood amenity value (ibid). This study is especially relevant to South Park, whose residents experience serious cumulative exposure to air pollution due to vehicle exhaust. Community organizations have focused in recent years on increasing tree canopy and adding green walls along streets. This study suggests that there is good reason to continue these efforts in the development of the South Park Plaza site.

A recent study has shown a positive relationship between the amount of tree canopy cover near a person's home and their overall health, including obesity, social cohesion, and asthma rates (Ulmer et al. 58). The authors relied on survey responses to the California Health Interview Survey for their health data and compared respondents answers to LiDAR tree canopy data within 250m of their homes. Overall, the researchers found that increased neighborhood tree cover was significantly associated with a 13% greater odds of reporting better overall health (58). Tree cover also was significantly associated with less overweight/obesity rates and higher social cohesion, marginally associated with less type 2 diabetes and asthma, and weakly associated with less high blood pressure (58).

This study contributes additional convincing data to the existing body of evidence supporting the benefits of nearby nature in urban areas. However, I am concerned about the broad generalizations drawn from these types of studies from an environmental justice perspective; in cities, wealthier and whiter neighborhoods typically have more tree canopy cover, as well as better access to health care, fewer environmental hazards, and higher levels of education. I would be interested in seeing a study that better addresses the confounding socioeconomic variables linked to health and the environment.

There are numerous cross-sectional studies demonstrating the mental, physical, and community health benefits of greater amounts of green space. However, there are very few that are concerned with the gain or loss of green space over time. One such longitudinal study was made possible by the catastrophic emerald ash borer invasion in the upper Midwest of the United States. The beetle feeds on all species of North American Ash trees and, once introduced to a county, causes near universal tree mortality within 2-5 years (Donovan et al. 142). It was therefore possible to use the borer's presence as a proxy for loss of tree canopy and compare health data from affected counties. Specifically, mortality rates and cause of death were obtained from the National Center for Health Statistics from the years 1990 to 2007, covering years both before and after the emerald ash borer's introduction in 2002 (141).

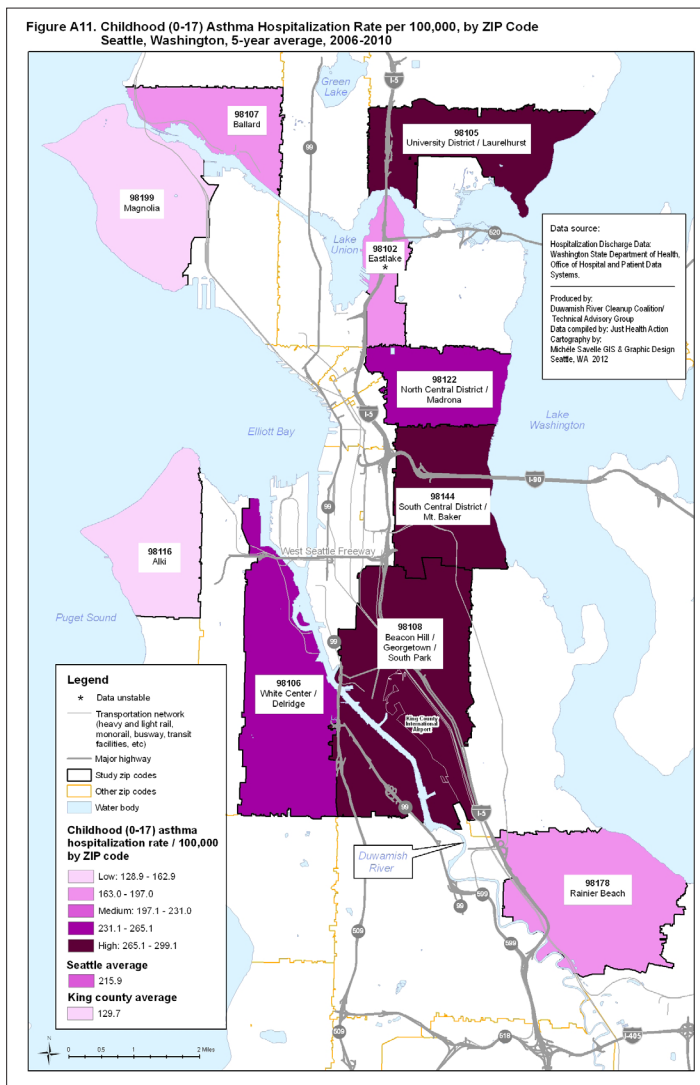


Fig. 3.22 Childhood asthma hospitalization rates
Image: Just Health Action

Through their literature review, Donovan et al. demonstrate that vegetation has been linked to better physical and mental health in multiple studies. In order to support their hypothesis that a significant loss of tree canopy would lead to higher mortality rates, they cite previous work showing that access to the “natural environment” has been shown to reduce stress, increase physical activity, and improve air quality - all factors that when degraded have been linked to increased cardiovascular and lower-respiratory disease (140).

After completing their analysis, the authors determined that there is indeed a relationship between tree loss and human mortality rates over time. The presence of the borer in a county was associated with 6.8 additional lower-respiratory disease deaths per year per 100,000 adults and 16.7 additional cardiovascular disease deaths per year per 100,000 adults (142,143). For respiratory-related mortality, the borer’s impact was significantly greater in wealthier counties – likely due, the authors suppose, to wealthier counties containing a higher amount of tree cover to begin with (142).

Although the quasi-experimental nature of this study allows for some strong conclusions to be drawn about the impact the sudden removal of trees has on human cardiovascular and respiratory health, the mechanism of this interaction is unclear. Based on prior research, the authors surmise that trees’ impact on these diseases is linked to their ability to improve air quality, reduce stress, increase physical activity, and regulate air temperature (144). However, more studies need to be done in order to quantify the effect trees have on cardiovascular and respiratory health in order to better understand the implications of this paper. Although there is a growing body of research showing that green space has positive impacts on human health there is little explaining the mechanism by which parks or street trees create that benefit.

This research gap seems particularly relevant to South Park, where residents experience a higher risk from environmental health hazards. The Washington State Department of Health contributed data to the 2013 EPA-funded *Health Impacts Assessment* which was completed before cleanup of the Superfund site began. It found that people living in zip code 98108 (which also includes Georgetown and south

Beacon Hill) have significantly higher risk of being hospitalized for asthma compared to the rest of Seattle and King County, especially children, who are hospitalized at a rate more than twice the county average (Daniell et al. 15). South Park also experiences higher crime rates than the city average and the risk of being hospitalized for assault is higher. At least one study has linked anxiety and violence to asthma attacks suggesting that air pollution from highways and industry may not be the only danger to respiratory health (Wright et al. 629).

One way to better understand the causation between vegetation and human health will be to observe the impacts on a community over time after the addition of green space. South Park is poised at the cusp of major redevelopment measures: the Plaza site will mean over an acre of additional park space, Duwamish Waterway Park is in the process of being redesigned, and ecological restoration continues along the river banks. Understanding how these changes in the built environment impact community health could help inform urban planning, policy, and design elsewhere. And for South Park, excellent baseline health data exists from the *Health Impact Assessment* completed before the Superfund clean-up began. The challenge of such a study would be to ensure that the health data is actually measuring the same population over time. This is certainly not guaranteed, especially as the neighborhood redevelopment improvements will likely attract wealthier, whiter residents.

Although it seems logical that long neglected neighborhoods with poor quality built environment would benefit from additional green space and vegetation, those very improvements are often responsible for displacing vulnerable populations. The people who inhabit post-industrial landscapes are most often low-income people of color and this demographic is disproportionately affected by the environmental harm caused by industrial production, storage, and waste (Anguelovski 24). Studies have shown that this group also receives less environmental protection due to the unequal enforcement of laws and regulations than those who experience *environmental privilege*, especially affluent whites (24). But, improvements to these neighborhoods, especially those done with a *green* or *sustainability* agenda, often result in the “environmental and social



Fig. 3.23 Activists block Microsoft Connector bus
Photo: Tides of Flame



Fig. 3.24-3.25 Who is ‘sustainable’ design for?
 Renderings: top NBBJ, bottom Mithun

clean-up of entire neighborhoods” (28). As affluent whites move into these suddenly more desirable neighborhoods they can displace “less desirable” groups of people.

Anguelovski argues that the cause of this environmental injustice is the fact that governments treat *sustainability* as a universal good, a “moral imperative without considering racial inequities, social hierarchies, and environmental privilege” (29). The result is that no “debate, dissent, or disagreement” (29) is allowed to discourage or even augment this goal. Giving a free pass to any projects that promote the green or sustainability agenda is a boon for real-estate investors. They are able to purchase property while the values are still low and then once neighborhood improvements have been made, rent or sell units for considerably more. The new residents continue to compound the problem; affluent whites attracted by the new amenities enjoy more privilege, voice, and connections in the civic process and are often able to co-opt and keep marginalized groups out of the new environmental improvements who are often the long-time residents who worked for years to get the improvements completed.

Superfund sites are particularly vulnerable to this kind of environmental gentrification. After the sites are de-listed, studies have shown that property values increase, and eventually the makeup of the neighborhood changes with increases in average income and proportion of college graduates (Anguelovski 28). This effect is now well-known and many neighborhood groups attempt to block *green* initiatives, particularly bike lanes and “healthy” food stores (30) that they believe are targeted to make the gentrifying demographic more comfortable. Some neighborhoods are adopting a “just green enough” strategy, modest improvements to improve quality of life, but not enough to cause real estate speculation.

Bishop and Williams caution against changes that attract a “creative class” to a location; artists and creative organizations are drawn to areas with low rents, large spaces, and regulatory freedom (163). Over time this colonization has been shown to spark intricate social and physical changes across whole neighborhoods, which evolve into “a place of creative consumption” (164). This creates a domino effect where the commercial success of early pioneers attracts more developers, who attract more

affluent residents and force out lower-income generating activities and the people (long-term residents) associated with them.

This condition is especially common when neighborhoods are served by top-down decision making (master plans and rezoning), which lays the groundwork for neighborhood colonizers. Master plans usually lack flexibility and take so long in development, approval, and adoption that by the time they are implemented they may be well out of date (182). Bishop and Williams emphasize the difference between making conditions attractive to a new “creative class” and “nurturing home-grown creative start-ups” (167). Promoting temporary activities in interim spaces has the potential to do the latter since it empowers a neighborhood’s current residents. The resulting interim projects can stimulate economic activity, stabilize struggling neighborhoods, and reactivate vacant sites (179). This approach allows for much greater flexibility and assigns value to building on what is already present in a neighborhood rather than looking to replace and eliminate perceived negatives (182). “[T]he city is in a process of continuous creation,” but too often designers and planners design for an illusory static state (185).

In the context of South Park, it is important to consider that environmental improvements done for their own sake are not objectively good for the neighborhood. In order to create a design that actually addresses the inequities and human health concerns, members of the community will need to be deeply involved in the process. I believe this is an argument in favor of the *Tactical Urbanism* approach, where new public space is conceived of, constructed, and owned by the existing community. A space that is specifically tailored to the needs and desires of the current users will be less likely to be co-opted by newer residents. Even though there is a risk of contributing to gentrification by installing new green space in South Park, the potential benefits to ecological and human health and equity are great and the current state of environmental health is unacceptable.

Part four

WELCOME TO SOUTH PARK



Fig. 4.1-4.2 Community workshops in Peru
Photos: Marta Olson

A shot in the dark: community outreach and engagement in South Park

As I approached this thesis I knew that I wanted to get involved with a community-based public space project in a marginalized neighborhood in Seattle. My contributing interests of environmental justice and design for improved ecological and human health quickly led me to the Duwamish Valley and area surrounding the ongoing Superfund clean-up. As the city's only residential neighborhood physically bordering the lower Duwamish Waterway, South Park became my focus. I continued to learn more about the neighborhood's environmental exposures to toxins, the lack of public green space, and residents whose ethnicities, income level, and primary language have historically been linked to marginalization and under-representation in public process. I came to believe that this was an opportunity to have a positive impact through my thesis work.

My previous experiences with participatory design had been as part of University of Washington design studios working with the Informal Urban Communities Initiative which seeks to support and improve the well-being of vulnerable urban communities worldwide through designed and built interventions. These projects were highly organized by multiple experienced professors and funded through grants and the tuition payments of the 12-15 students who carried out the work. Weekly community workshops were organized and marketed, designs were developed with consistent community input, materials were purchased, and construction was quickly completed by many busy hands. Although there is much to praise about this method of participatory design, particularly the depth of community engagement and commitment as well as the impressive results, it was clear this was not a tenable approach for my thesis project.

Beyond the logistical difficulties of attempting comprehensive, workshop-based engagement was the fact that there are major differences between a neighborhood in Seattle, WA and unsanctioned slum communities in the outskirts of cities in developing countries beleaguered by poverty and systemic corruption. Although South Park suffers from major inequities perpetuated by institutionalized racism and

classism, concerted efforts are underway by government and non-profit organizations to invest in the neighborhood’s future. The city of Seattle has been operating its *Race and Social Justice Initiative* for more than a decade, which has primarily addressed inequities within city government in terms of hiring and awarded contracts. In 2014 the city introduced its 3-year plan to expand the program to include city services to communities with the ambitious goal of “working together to end structural racism and achieve racial equity” (“Race and Social Justice Initiative”). In 2015 the mayor introduced the *Equity and Environment Initiative* that promises to empower community leadership, create healthy environments for all Seattleites and to include more people of color in environmental careers and decision making (“Equity and Environment Initiative”). These initiatives have created more opportunities for funding in neighborhoods like South Park, but major disparities continue to exist between the Duwamish Valley and wealthier, whiter neighborhoods.

Bound by the constraints of the academic calendar, a lack of funding, and without a supporting labor force I decided to pursue an exploratory and experimental approach to community outreach in South Park. My lack of experience both in doing solo community engagement and negotiating Seattle’s governmental process, policies, and permissions led me to my “shot in the dark” technique. I contacted as many relevant people as I could find, set up meetings over coffee, asked questions, listened and absorbed as much information as I could about the current state of public space in South Park.

I began making connections at the Duwamish River Festival held at Duwamish Waterway Park in August 2016, which was hosted by the Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition/Technical Advisory Group (DRCC), the EPA recognized Community Advisory Group for the lower Duwamish Waterway Superfund site. The booths at this festival were overwhelmingly dominated by public agencies and non-profit organizations educating residents about available programs and services. This is where I first realized that South Park’s struggles are not being ignored and that there are many entities pledging to improve the situation for the neighborhood’s residents. Although



Fig. 4.3 Duwamish River Festival 2016
Poster: DRCC



food and entertainment were provided by the community, the event felt much more like a job fair than a neighborhood celebration.

The Duwamish River Festival seemed to be the municipal response to the Water Festival!/Festival de Agua! which had occurred in the same location as part of *Duwamish Revealed!* in the summer of 2015. *Duwamish Revealed!* was a truly community organized festival that celebrated Seattle's only river and local artists with outdoor exhibitions and events. The project was funded through a Seattle Department of Neighborhoods Matching Fund grant, with some funding from other municipal sources, but was community organized and focused. I attended one day of the Water Festival! and it seemed to me one part community and cultural celebration with food, entertainment, and performers and one part act of political protest with speeches and activities highlighting the degradation of the Duwamish river resource and the state of environmental injustice in the neighborhood.

My original approach for developing a design in South Park was to locate a project already in the planning stages with identified stakeholders and existing networks within the community from which to draw from. The Duwamish River Festival included a booth for the Seattle Parks Foundation who was soliciting community input on schematic designs to renovate Duwamish Waterway Park. I was able to speak with representatives from the non-profit organization and plan a meeting to discuss other potential projects in South Park with their Duwamish Valley Program Manager. Over coffee in September, I learned that they were just coming to the end of their 6 month community meeting process for the Duwamish Waterway Park project and were moving towards a final design and construction documents. She mentioned that the driving factors behind the redesign were the sense of unsafety residents experienced due to poor sight lines and illicit activity and a desire to attract more positive, year-round users. This would become a familiar refrain as I learned more about the challenges and concerns for other public space projects in South Park.

Fig. 4.4-4.5 Duwamish Revealed! events

Photos: top Robert Zverina, bottom Vansica Sun

South Park Green Space Vision Plan

The Project Manager drew my attention to the 2014 *South Park Green Space Vision Plan*, generated by the Seattle Parks Foundation with contributions from many community organizations, in which community members identified priority sites and programs for the neighborhood. Although community engagement was an important element of the plan, the authors chose to reduce the time commitment burden on residents, many of whom work multiple and evening shift jobs, and rely on their organized participation only in focused times when it was most needed (Seattle Parks Foundation 5-2). One key finding of the report was that visual materials and one-on-one conversations were the most effective forms of communication, especially for working with language barriers (ibid.). Overall one of the community's priorities is to create and maintain parks and open spaces that are "welcome, safe, and accessible to all" (ibid.). There was also an agreed upon need to provide access to the river for everyone and a desire for the community to contribute to the restoration and cleanup efforts.

One major concern is connectivity and way-finding between sites, both within the neighborhood and external links to Georgetown and downtown Seattle, which is currently only safe and convenient by car. The Vision Plan stresses that creating new and improving existing green space amenities will only benefit the community if they can safely access them (Seattle Parks Foundation 3-16). South Park residents are much less likely to commute by single occupancy vehicle and much more likely to take the bus than the city of Seattle average, but the neighborhood's streets and traffic signals prioritize vehicle and industrial truck traffic over pedestrians (ibid.). Compounding this problem is the lack of crosswalks and sidewalks on many streets and the difficulty and danger inherent in crossing WA Highway 99, necessary for most of the neighborhood's children walking to reach their elementary school. Although this is clearly an important issue in the community, I did not feel that my skills, experience, and interests were best geared to tackling this project in my thesis. The project already had a committee devoted to it, Duwamish Valley Safe Streets, which, upon reflection, may have allowed

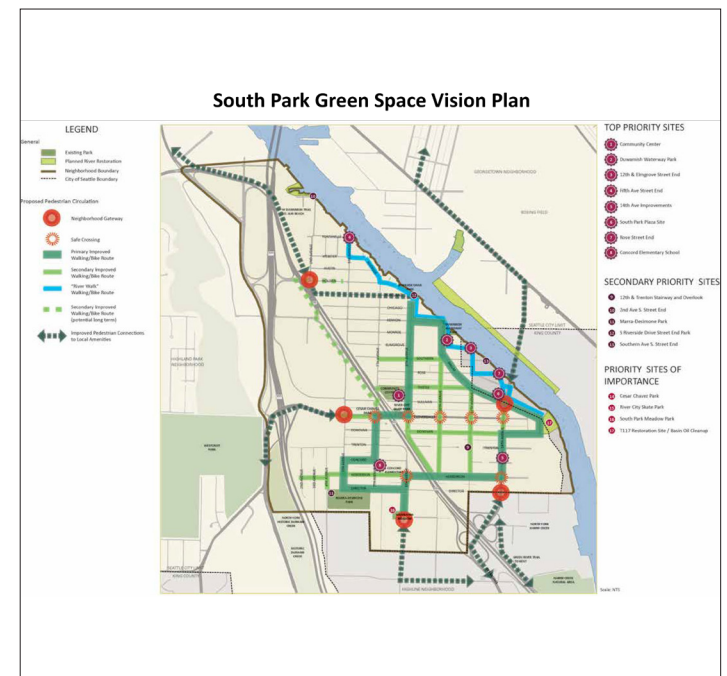
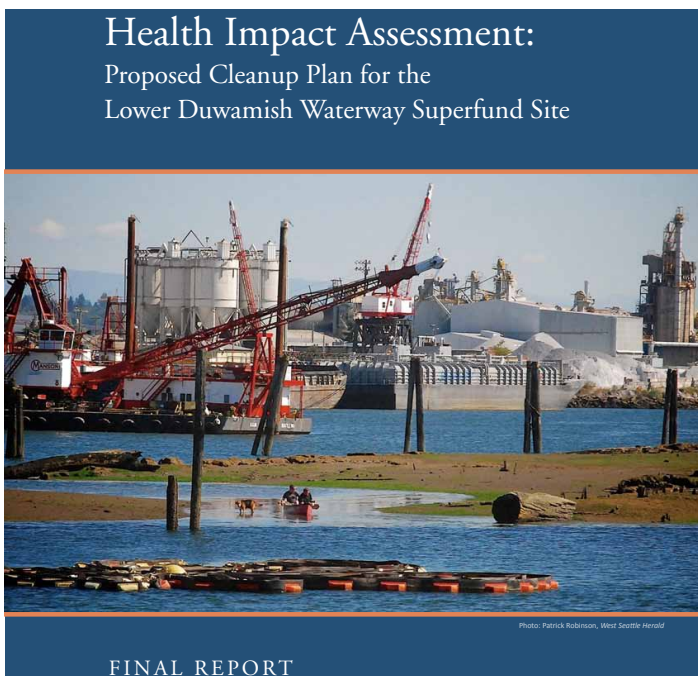


Fig. 4.6-4.7 South Park Green Spaces Vision Plan
Graphics: Seattle Parks Foundation



me to act more as a collaborator instead of a sole project organizer. But, I was more interested in a smaller, actionable project that had a chance of being implemented before my thesis document was completed.

The other site that the Project Manager drew my attention towards was the future South Park Plaza; the site had just recently been vacated by King County Roads, who had used the space as the staging area for the South Park Bridge replacement project, and was potentially available for an interim use. I was initially hesitant about this site because *plaza* to me conjured up a sweeping expanse of hardscape and would hardly seem likely to provide the ecological and human health benefits or connection to the river that I was interested in. Also, although the community had identified the site as a priority project, there had not yet been any serious organization for moving the project forward and I would be taking on that responsibility. However, the prospect of creating an interim use or pop-up park was intriguing and seemed like a good potential fit for a thesis project: something that could be accomplished with limited inputs of time and money.

In October I sat down with the president of the South Park Area Redevelopment Committee (SPARC), who is also a landscape architect and South Park resident. She also drew my attention to the 2014 *South Park Green Space Vision Plan* and to the planning, design, and visioning documents that had come before it in order to better understand the site and neighborhood context.

Other previous visioning documents

As early as 2001, the same year the Lower Duwamish Waterway Site was added to the EPA Superfund list, the Environmental Coalition of South Seattle (ECOSS) completed the *Duwamish Riverfront Revival* plan with the goal of increasing riparian restoration efforts on private property and to facilitate both human and salmon users of the waterfront, particularly at city-owned street ends (Seattle Parks Foundation 4-3). Since then major riverfront restoration projects have continued both as part of the EPA-

Fig. 4.8 Duwamish Riverfront Revival, Fig. 4.9 HIA
 63 Authors: top ECOSS, bottom William Daniell et al.

led cleanup, such as at Boeing's Plant 2, and at new sites like the replaced South Park Bridge and city-owned street end parks. Assisting in the clean up of the river in order to allow people to safely interact with it and improving habitat conditions for wildlife and health outcomes for residents continues to be a driving motivation in the community today.

Focusing more on community engagement and empowerment, a *South Park Action Agenda* was drafted first in 2006 and then updated in 2011. It was a community driven neighborhood assessment convened by the mayor and his staff that called for ongoing collaboration with government, NGOs, and community organizations to improve conditions in the neighborhood (ibid.). This visioning document focused on 5 key areas of greatest concern: youth development, environmental and physical improvements, community engagement, business and transportation, and public safety (ibid.).

There has also been considerable visioning and neighborhood impact analysis completed recently as required elements of the Superfund cleanup. The 2009 *Duwamish Valley Vision Map and Report*, authored by the DRCC, engaged neighborhood residents, workers, businesses, visitors, and river users in a thorough participatory visioning process (ibid. 4-5). Participants were asked to project their goals for the neighborhood out 10, 20, and 50 years into the future as a means to ensure that the EPA cleanup, which will likely continue for the next 20-50 years, meets the future needs of the community (ibid.). It is important to note that some of the community's desires are not being addressed by the EPA's chosen cleanup plan. For example, making the river safe for children to play in and the fish safe to eat for subsistence and tribal fishers were two desires I heard expressed by speakers at the Water Festival.

Health Impact Analysis

Another Superfund required document was the 2013 *Duwamish Valley Cumulative Health Impact Analysis*, which was intended to analyze potential health impacts from the cleanup efforts, but in practice quantified the existing environmental



Fig. 4.10-4.11 Industrial South Park
Photos: Marta Olson



Fig. 4.12 Design plan for Marra Farm
Author: J.A. Brennan Associates

exposure and health risk factors present in the community. This data has helped to fuel arguments for prioritizing interventions in South Park and also compelled the city of Seattle to create the Duwamish River Opportunity Fund (DROF) in 2014 to provide monetary support to programs that address the issues raised in the HIA. That same year the EPA produced their *Environmental Justice Analysis for the Lower Duwamish Waterway Cleanup* to determine cleanup construction impacts on vulnerable populations. The report especially identifies decreasing the health risks from fish consumption as a major priority, especially for tribal populations who consume higher than average amounts of fished seafood and retain treaty rights to fish in the lower Duwamish. The EPA's intention is to limit the use of institutional controls, like the signs that currently exist along the riverbanks announcing that the river's seafood is dangerous to eat.

After taking in the breadth of these varied visioning and analysis documents, I became more convinced that engaging in yet another round of in-depth community engagement for my thesis project was not likely to raise any novel issues or concerns and was not a valuable use of community members' time. It was also enlightening to see that many issues raised by the community have been reiterated time after time in these documents spanning over the past two decades. Some major projects, like replacing the ailing South Park Bridge, have been successful, but others seem promising and then have languished for years. The Marra Farm master plan redesign has been in the works for the better part of a decade, still with no definite start date for construction. Similarly, plans to improve the Community Center have long been a neighborhood priority, especially to move the adjoining playground that abuts WA Highway 99, a present and continuing human health hazard. But, negotiations and planning continues without real action.

This analysis of past documents has reaffirmed my resolve that the problem is not that the community's priorities are unknown, or that they lack organization, or even that local and federal governmental agencies are unwilling to help. The major problem seems to be the glacial pace of progress and complex machinations involved

with implementing actionable steps to address these issues in a permanent way. My perspective is that the community has grown weary with visioning and endless talk over what the best solutions might be and are anxious for something they have been promised to actually happen.

During our conversation, the SPARC president reiterated the opportunity of a temporary intervention at the South Park Plaza and provided me with some additional background. She had been integral in the South Park Design Lab's proposal, with support from ECOSS, asking Seattle Parks to purchase the site and create a new public park for the community. Although this bid was successful, the park will not be complete for at least 3 years. The reason is that Seattle Parks and Recreation process dictates that new parks will be completed in the order each property is acquired. This means that the Plaza will need to wait for 14 other projects to be completed first, including the ambitious new Waterfront Park downtown. Although this practice seems fair on the surface, it is hardly equitable. It is difficult to imagine that conditions in the South Park neighborhood will ever become on par with other Seattle neighborhoods when their needs are not prioritized. Furthermore, since Seattle Parks must continue to maintain, clean, restore, and staff its existing properties, disproportionately distributed in wealthier and whiter neighborhoods, more money continues to be spent there and the system continues to perpetuate the institutionalized racism that prevents positive change from occurring in neighborhoods like South Park.

Building trust and following through: stakeholders and potential partners

I have had the opportunity to connect with multiple community groups and organizations who have an interest in moving the temporary activation project forward and particularly in programming events for the Plaza space. My original hope was to partner with other community groups or organizers early on in the planning process. There is no lack of support or enthusiasm for the project, but I have grown to understand the limitations of time and energy. There are many existing community organizations, which means that the folks who serve on them are already quite busy and have little bandwidth to take on one more organizational project. Many residents are working multiple jobs and caring for children, so spare time is precious and planning for a project that may or may not happen is a bit of a hard sell. As I have continued showing up to meetings and following up with residents I have earned a greater sense of trust and buy-in from the community. Although I would have liked to have had community engagement throughout the design development, working on my own and basing decisions on community conversations and feedback has allowed me to streamline the design process and move the project forward under the accelerated timeline of a Master's thesis. As my design proposals have become more concrete so too has the support of community organizations. I feel confident that I will be able to pass off my work to the community to implement and alter over time as they see fit.

Environmental Coalition of South Seattle: a non-profit partner

ECOSS provides education and technical assistance to businesses and communities in order to implement environmentally sustainable practices with a particular focus on addressing stormwater and flooding challenges in the Duwamish Valley with rain gardens. They have deep connections throughout the South Park community and were also instrumental in advocating for the Plaza site's purchase by Seattle Parks. In meeting with two of their representatives I learned that Parks has plans (and budget available) to purchase an adjacent property north of the gravel lot

that will connect the site to the river. There are very few public access points to the Duwamish river in South Park and the city's only riverfront residential neighborhood is almost entirely disconnected from this major resource. Since the riverfront parcel has not transferred ownership and is still owned by King County Roads, it will not figure into my immediate plans for temporary activation. But, this opportunity will likely impact the final park design and potentially benefit the Duwamish Rowing Club and create the opportunity for businesses to rent out boats.

ECOSS's main goals for the Plaza project are to keep pressure on Seattle Parks to acquire the riverfront parcel and prevent the industrial marijuana grow operation, across 14th Avenue from the site, from expanding its operations by activating the space as a park in the interim. The grow operation has a reputation as a poor neighbor and many community members share these goals. The smell of marijuana is strong most days and the blacked out windows of the storefront do not make an inviting impression as the first building someone encounters upon entering South Park over the bridge. The fear that the business could expand operations or even open a retail location is also driving Seattle Parks' interest in the project; using the site as a park would prevent any future marijuana businesses within 500 feet and a park with a playground would require a 1,000 foot buffer. Seattle Parks' mere ownership of the site is not enough to invoke these statutes, which has generated incentive for Parks to support the temporary activation project and could result in a unique opportunity for the community.

ECOSS is especially interested in programming community events like holiday celebrations, markets, and temporary art installations that serve the current residents of the neighborhood. ECOSS periodically hosts popular Lucha Libre wrestling events, including one at the Plaza site when the new bridge opened, and has interest in continuing these events at the temporary Plaza in the future. This approach of building for the people who are there now strongly appeals to me because it allows the current residents to take ownership over the place and its programming instead of designing something that has the potential to attract new and gentrifying users. However, using the site as a dedicated event and gathering space would mean that it would only be active a few days of the year and each event would require its own funding and



Fig. 4.13-4.14 ECOSS restoration & RainWise
Photos: ECOSS

organization. Although community events are a natural fit for the large, open site, I hope to encourage community organizations to think beyond the few events a year and pursue the implementation of a temporary park that can accommodate many different users and uses.

South Park Retail Merchants Association: engaging business owners

Made up of primarily Latinx small business owners, the South Park Retail Merchants Association (SPRMA) is another group that is interested in activating the Plaza. They were key advocates for the *plaza* concept: a central gathering place that acts as the heart of the neighborhood. The merchants' businesses are concentrated along 14th Avenue starting about a block south of the Plaza site. A meeting with the group revealed that they are hopeful that a park amenity nearby will improve the appearance and reputation of the business district. The closure of the South Park bridge from 2010 to 2014 during its replacement starved the businesses of customers, especially the daily lunch crowd coming from Georgetown. Since then SPRMA has successfully applied for grant money to beautify their buildings and are currently looking into "Welcome to South Park" signage and painting crosswalks. The group clearly feels a sense of ownership over their section of the neighborhood.

SPRMA seems like a natural partner for this project. Having a park nearby, especially one that hosts large events, has the potential to bring customers to the business district. Like ECOSS, they will do anything in their power to prevent the industrial marijuana grow operation from expanding; it certainly does not fit into their vision for beautifying the neighborhood. There has also been interest from the merchants in holding a *tianguis* or Latinx style outdoor market (more of a flea market than a farmers market) and they are looking for an appropriate space. Events would provide the additional opportunity for restaurant owners to provide food to new customers. Although SPRMA is enthusiastic about the opportunity, the members have businesses to run and are not able to commit significant time or resources to move the project forward. They are however still key stakeholders in the temporary activation



Fig. 4.15 Businesses along 14th Ave
Photo: Jennifer Wing/KNKX

project and would no doubt utilize the site once there is the framework for doing so in place.

Duwamish Valley Youth Corps: empowering teenagers

Because of my interest in addressing environmental justice, I also reached out to the Community Engagement and Outreach Manager at the DRCC. The DRCC is responsible for ensuring that the EPA Superfund cleanup meets the community's needs. It also supports other projects that improve the health of the river, community health, pollution source controls, and improving air quality. The Outreach Manager reiterated the desire for a community market, especially one that offers fresh fruit and vegetables (South Park has no grocery store), and the need for a central community gathering place for cultural celebrations important to the community like Fiestas Patrias and Vietnamese New Year.

The DRCC also supports the Duwamish Valley Youth Corps (DVYC), which provides paid environmental job training for local teenagers. They improve the health of their environment through ongoing neighborhood cleanup and restoration efforts and improve the health of the community by increasing tree canopy and building and installing in-home air filters. They are continuously cleaning up used needles and garbage from the “scary trail,” which elementary students use to pass under WA Highway 99 on their way to Concord International School. The Youth Corps has also been involved in the implementation of the South Park Green Screen, designed to use vines to absorb vehicle exhaust pollution, along S Cloverdale St in front of the library. The group is clearly active and enthusiastic about improving their neighborhood environment and could be excellent partners for the temporary Plaza project.

Through my connection at DRCC I was able to organize a Saturday workshop with the DVYC members. They met me at the Plaza site and after I briefly described the project, I passed out large paper and markers for the youth to draw their ideas for a future park. I intentionally kept the restrictions to a minimum, simply telling them that the gravel lot they were standing in had been purchased by Seattle Parks,

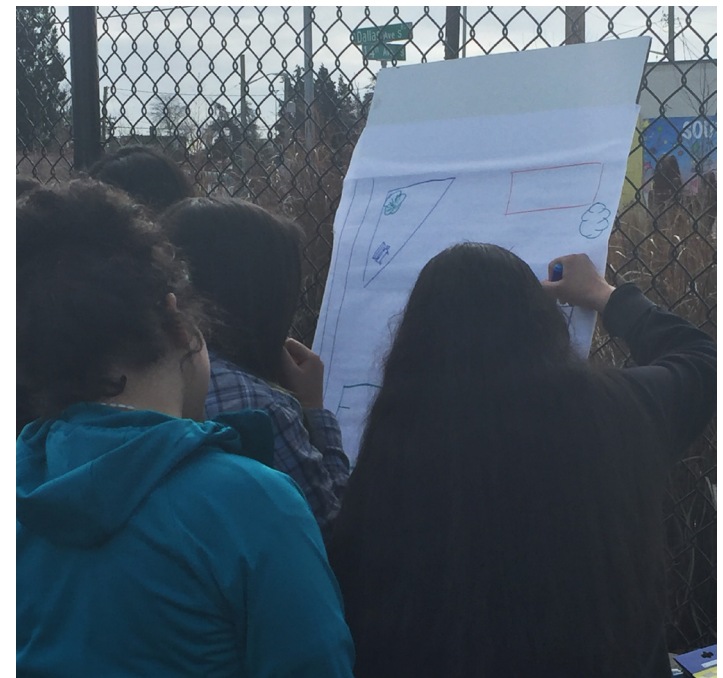
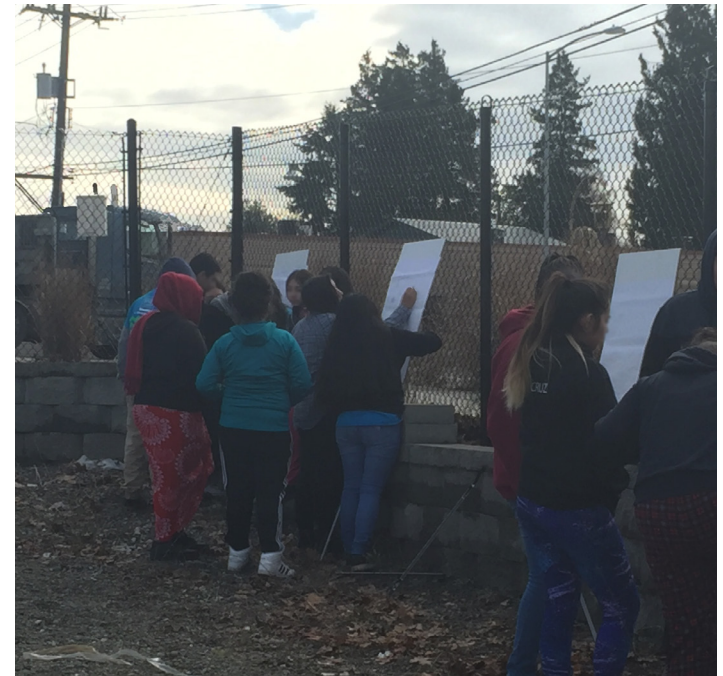


Fig. 4.16-4.17 DVYC workshop
Photo credit: Marta Olson



Fig. 4.18-4.19 DVYC workshop drawings
 Photos: Marta Olson

would become a permanent public park in about 3 years, and that I was working on a temporary intervention that would allow the community to use it as a park in the interim. I was hoping to find out what the youth would want if they could choose anything, and was especially interested in hearing from an age range that is generally left out of the planning process. Since I was also hoping to partner with the DVYC to activate the site, I was curious to discover their interest level in the project.

Approximately 35 youth between the ages of 13-18 participated in creating 6 group drawings. One of the first concerns I heard reiterated from multiple members was that locating a park next to the bridge and 14th Avenue “highway” was not a good idea because of the air pollution and safety concerns. This is a valid criticism, especially in a neighborhood where multiple parks and the community center (with a playground) abut the retaining walls of WA Highway 99. However, since South Park is bordered and crisscrossed by highways and industrial traffic, few locations in the neighborhood are far away from busy roads. Also, it is my opinion that the availability of the site and its potential to serve as a significant community asset is a unique opportunity that should not be overlooked. In any case, the concerns about air quality and pedestrian safety need to be addressed as part of any temporary or permanent design.

Overall, the youth were interested in play and recreation space for kids of all ages, who make up about one third of the South Park population. Most wanted separate recreation spaces for older and younger children, making sure the young kids were kept safe from traffic by fencing or other barriers. The most popular ideas were trees and benches, shown in 5 out of 6 of the drawings. Next in popularity were trash/recycle/compost bins, swings, fountains or water parks, and places to purchase food, shown in 4 out of 6 drawings. Half the drawings showed rain gardens, flowers, soccer fields, tables and chairs, and bathrooms or honey buckets. Other ideas included playground toys, basketball courts, grassy areas, and food trucks. I was very impressed at how quickly the youth jumped into drawing with very little prompting and generated thoughtful and creative ideas. Some designs combined all the ideas from every group member and other designs started with an overarching concept, like healthy food

market or water park. My hope is that by holding the workshop at the site, the youth were able to imagine taking ownership of the space with their designs. I plan to continue encouraging the DVYC to experiment with the site's potential by partnering with them on the temporary intervention construction and implementation.

South Park Green Spaces Coalition: bringing everyone to the same table

My contact at the Seattle Parks Foundation is also responsible for leading the South Park Green Spaces Coalition (SPGSC) meetings and has been tasked with finding ways to implement the findings and recommendations of the 2014 *South Park Green Space Vision Plan*. This group acts as a focus for all the individual green space projects that are underway in the community and provides a forum for updates, input, and assistance in moving forward. Meetings occur every other month and members include my contacts from SPARC, ECOSS, SPRMA, and DRCC as well as other interested residents and business owners. It is also an opportunity for people like myself, who are organizing new projects, to present and gather feedback. The group members have connections throughout the South Park community and are knowledgeable about neighborhood history and opinions. They also have experience with grant funding opportunities, especially those directed towards the Duwamish Valley, which should prove valuable in implementing the temporary design. I have presented my designs several times at these meetings and have received positive buy-in from many of the members. Seattle Parks Foundation is committed to moving the temporary project forward and making the SPGSC the fiscal sponsor for any grant applications and the official community stewardship group of the temporary park. My hope is that I will be able to hand off my work to this group when my thesis is complete so they can continue engaging with the community to activate and transform the temporary Plaza.

Through the SPGSC meetings I was introduced to a planner and project coordinator at Seattle Parks who focuses on the Duwamish Valley. She told me that Parks is interested in an early activation of this site and could potentially make



Fig. 4.20-4.21 Parks' ideas for early activation
Photos: top Ryan Reiter; bottom Petr Kratochvil

in-kind donations or loans to the space, although she did not want to commit to anything specifically without getting approval. I learned that Parks is also interested in preventing the expansion of the marijuana grow operation across the street and that they have been experimenting with “early activation” of other land-bank sites awaiting development. Many of these sites were parking lots or former building lots that are blocked off with chain link fencing that is opened for food trucks or occasional events. This was not exactly what I was envisioning, but I found it encouraging that Parks is taking steps to allow communities access to these new public spaces in their neighborhoods.

Seattle Parks: delicate negotiations

After subsequent meetings with Seattle Parks I learned more about what they would and would not support. Their biggest concern is maintenance; since this site is not yet in the budget there is no money for workers to clean, water, or mow. Another concern is liability; since they are the landowners Parks could be liable for any injuries on the site. This means that any construction or use of power tools will need to happen elsewhere. The fear of liability also means that any furniture or built structures, whether or not they are intended to support people, will need to meet existing design standards or go through a permitting approval process. This has encouraged me to simplify the design, especially the built components. It has also pushed me to consider what Parks could donate (e.g. standard benches and picnic tables). Although they may not be what I would have designed, they have the benefit of coming to the community at no cost as well as acting as totemic markers of a Seattle public park. Visibly marking the space as *park* instead of vacant lot is the first step in encouraging community use and stewardship.

My major hurdle with Seattle Parks is that they are deeply afraid that anything temporary will influence the final design plan. In practice this means that they paradoxically do not want me designing anything that the community will like or enjoy so much that they insist it go into the final park. Parks is comfortable supporting events

and food trucks, but little else that would make a space into a park on a daily basis. In Seattle's climate, outdoor events are generally restricted to 3 months of the year and this is exactly what I have been pushing the community to look beyond. In a meeting with a planning manager I showed a design with a rain garden, a solution to focus and manage the persistent standing water spreading across the site. This was met with significant skepticism despite the fact that there is nowhere else to direct stormwater water to, the Duwamish River is about 200 feet away, so the choices are between a rain garden or a big mud puddle. Even the mention of benches raised eyebrows, as if their presence could put the idea into people's heads that they might want a place to sit in a public park. Meeting Parks' needs will be a challenge, but I believe that it is logistically necessary for this project to succeed. Engaging Parks in the conversation could prove beneficial in the long run and encourage them to explore temporary uses on other public lands in the future.

My hope for this project is not to totally circumvent Parks' community process, but rather to add to it and make it more meaningful and inclusive. I believe that exploring temporary uses that support the current community's needs, desires, and hopes will contribute to a final park design that represents the experiences of the current residents better than a generic green space and will also reduce the risk of gentrification. With these complex considerations weighing heavy on my mind, I have approached the design with the goal of satisfying the needs of both Parks and the South Park community. The result is a very simple installation that will mark the space as a park and allow for public access until the final design is built. At the same time this design is flexible and adaptable in order to allow the community to use the space for a wide variety of events, celebrations, and community gatherings.

Part five

SITE DESIGN



Fig. 5.1-5.2 Standing water and vehicles
Photos: Marta Olson

Reclaiming an abandoned site with a simple and cohesive design

Challenges

Although the Plaza site looks like a blank slate, there are a number of challenges currently preventing its use by the community as a park. During bridge construction the site was re-graded in order to contain all stormwater on site and prevent its discharge onto other properties or into the Duwamish just 200 feet away. The use of heavy machinery and the weight of bridge sections as they were built on the site have significantly compacted the soils. These conditions have resulted in persistent standing water and puddles, especially on the north end of the site, which also bears the remains of an asphalt parking lot. The largest flooded area is 6-12" deep in places; it has persisted since I began visiting the site last September and shows no sign of disappearing now, at the end of May.

There are few options for dealing with this water; directing it off site would allow it to sheet flow into the Duwamish River. Draining it into stormwater infrastructure on Orr St would be costly and infeasible for a temporary project. There is the additional issue of South Park's overtaxed stormwater infrastructure; existing pipes are unable to handle the water from storm and flooding events and combined sewer overflows into the river are common. The water's shifting and spreading nature would make programming around it challenging and uncertain. Increasingly, local government and non-profit organizations like ECOSS are advocating for the construction of rain gardens on public and private property in order to improve water quality and reduce the volume and velocity of stormwater discharged into the river. The east side of the bridge has an extensive rain garden that handles the stormwater from the southern half of the bridge and surrounding streets (King County).

At the very least, water will need to be directed and contained in a designated portion of the site. Despite the standing water, vehicles including semi-trucks, minivans, and forklifts use the gravel lot as a cut-through. Designating the site as a

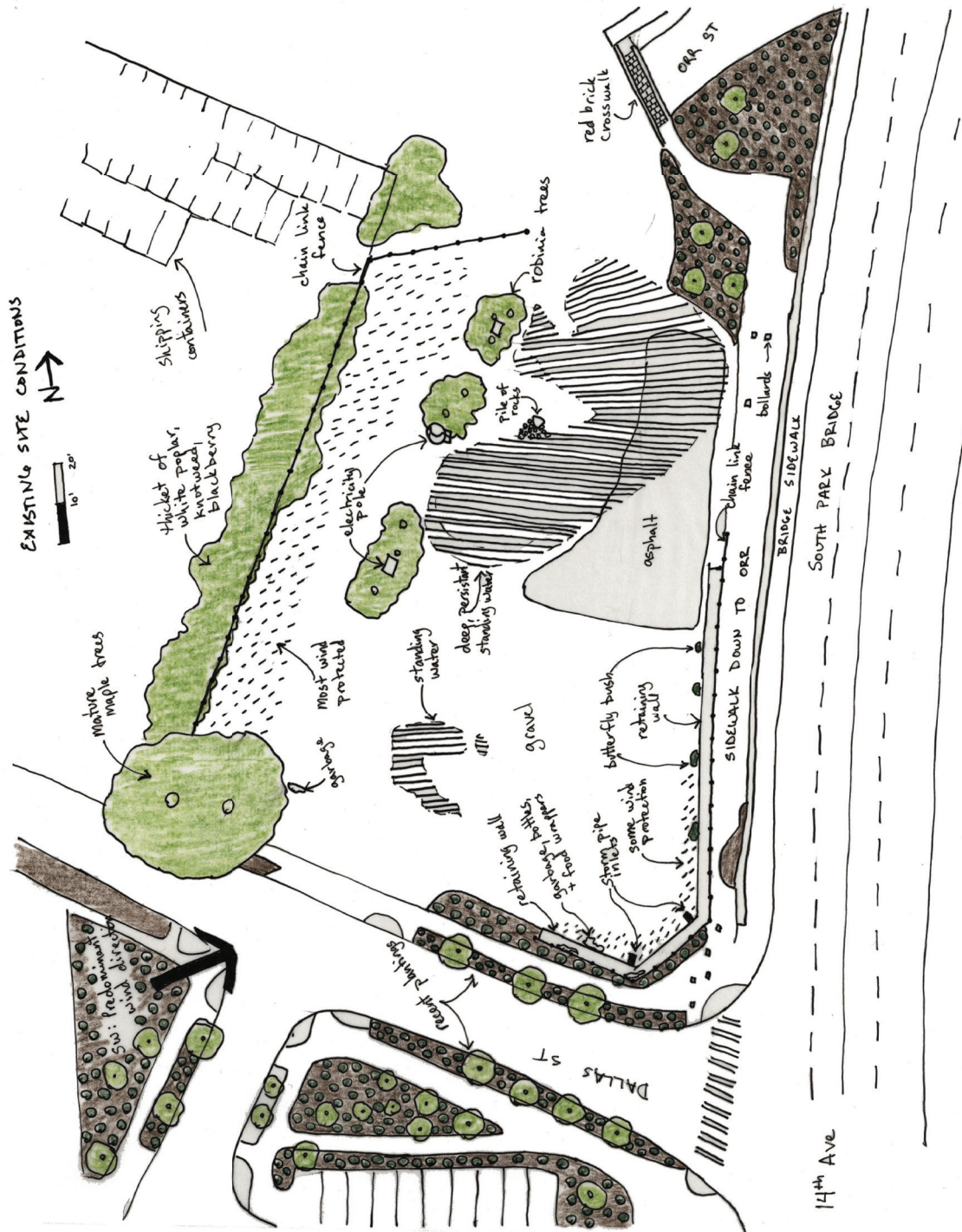


Fig. 5.3 Existing Site Conditions

The major challenges on the site currently are persistent standing water, especially covering the asphalt area on the north-eastern corner, and vehicles using the site as a cut-through. The site is predominantly flat and open.



Fig. 5.4-5.5 Possible park extension & rain garden

Photos: Marta Olson

place for pedestrians will begin with blocking vehicle access while creating clear entrances for people.

The largest design challenge may be to create a meaningful park intervention that is simple enough to satisfy Seattle Parks, significant enough to claim the space for the community, and cost-effective enough to cover the site's homogeneous expanse. Currently the site's flat and open character feels very exposed and is likely preventing crime and covert activities. Retaining sight lines and a feeling of safety will be key in ensuring the community feels comfortable using the temporary park and that a potential amenity does not turn into a neighborhood liability by attracting unwelcome uses.

Opportunities

Although the site conditions and political climate at Parks pose challenges, a temporary use of the future South Park Plaza space still has the potential to be a real asset for the community. Lively neighborhood activation of the site will help keep the pressure on Parks to negotiate for the purchase of the adjoining lot across Orr Street, currently still owned by King County Roads, in order to connect the future Plaza to the river. That acquisition would provide much of the missing link to create the Duwamish river-walk pedestrian route proposed in the 2014 *South Park Green Space Vision Plan*. A temporary activation can also galvanize the community and keep enthusiasm for the project going while the neighborhood waits for the final park design to get underway. Neighborhood advocates and residents have spent much time and energy participating in visioning workshops, applying for grants, and pressuring city agencies to pay attention to South Park. It would be a powerful message to reward the neighborhood for their hard work by facilitating a flexible park space in the immediate future that supports community events.

The site is surrounded by residential, light industrial, and local businesses, providing a wide variety of potential users, events, and support. Community organizations already have good connections to industrial businesses in the



Fig. 5.6 Neighborhood connections
The Plaza site is adjacent to existing commercial, industrial, and open space uses; it is also on the proposed river-walk neighborhood pedestrian and bicycle greenway.

neighborhood and could deepen those relationships through in-kind donations of tools, equipment, or labor. The business district on 14th Avenue is anxious to see the site activated, with particular interest in an outdoor market, and has suggested raising funds for the temporary park amenities by charging market vendors rent. The site is also adjacent to the South Park Bridge, the main gateway into the neighborhood for visitors. This could provide the perfect opportunity for public events that draw people from surrounding neighborhoods into South Park.

Base site design

Through the planner at Parks who has been the champion for this project, I have received preliminary pledges for in-kind donations. The most critical of these is the potential that Parks can have their crew grade the site so it is level and ADA-accessible and add a fresh layer of gravel on top. They may also be willing to install a trash can and periodically pick up bagged trash and provide standard-issue benches and picnic tables. Using materials already approved by Parks will mean that they do not need to worry about permits or liability concerns for new furniture.

This land was purchased specifically to become the South Park Plaza, in the model of Latin American plazas which act as the central gathering spaces for their communities. My design references the traditional design of those plazas which usually feature a city block or square crossed by orthogonal paths intersected by a central circular fountain and/or statue. This design is simple, classic, and culturally relevant. But, it also symbolizes the history of the landscape and the channelization of the Duwamish Waterway in particular, which drew straight lines through the organic curves of the original river.

With the ground surface leveled by Parks, adding paths on top seemed redundant, so I instead chose to create paths out of allées of arranged, movable wooden tree planters. The planter boxes also serve the function of blocking vehicular traffic from entering the site while still allowing for a permeable barrier that invites pedestrian



Fig. 5.7 Base site design

The base site design is a simple and cohesive approach that solves the existing site challenges and allows for a usable community green space every day of the year. The standing water is directed to a new rain garden surrounded by Seattle Parks benches. Vehicle entrances are blocked off by movable tree planters that can be arranged to divide up the space in many different configurations.

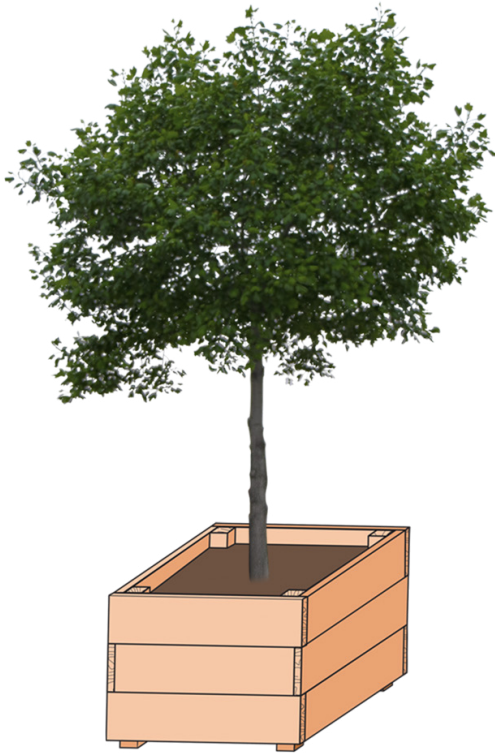


Fig. 5.8 Tree box planter

Sturdy wooden planters constructed and painted in a community work party act as temporary nursery pots; they can be moved from any side by fork lifts.

Opposite page:

Fig. 5.9 Community work party

Members of the DVYC lead a work party to construct, paint, and plant new trees in the movable planters.

access. These allées intersect a circular water feature in the form of a rain garden rather than a fountain. If the Parks crew has the equipment to grade the site, they should also be able to also excavate the rain garden area as a place to consolidate and redirect the standing water.

The planter boxes are large enough to accommodate trees growing for several years and are built at the dimensions of a standard pallet (48”x40”x36” tall) in order to facilitate moving them at any time and from any direction by a fork lift. My proposal for an opening kick-off Plaza event is a tree box building, decorating, and planting work party. This would be an excellent opportunity to partner with the Duwamish Valley Youth Corps, who are committed to increasing neighborhood tree canopy, and could provide the youth with a sense of ownership over the space. Although South Park is about 1/3 children there are few places that kids can call their own, and even fewer for teenagers. Building the wooden planter boxes would also be an excellent opportunity for local industrial businesses to donate materials and labor.

Once the planters are built, there is no limit to how they can be arranged in the space. Some could be moved in front of the businesses on 14th Avenue to act as street trees, which are lacking in the block closest to the Plaza. This would physically and symbolically connect the temporary use at the Plaza site to the business district and potentially expand its reach. The planters can also be moved out into Dallas Avenue in order to temporarily block vehicular traffic for large events and create a pedestrian corridor from the Plaza to the business district. Another option is moving the planters around within the site in order to divide spaces for different uses. Some of these possible options are explored in the in the following section.

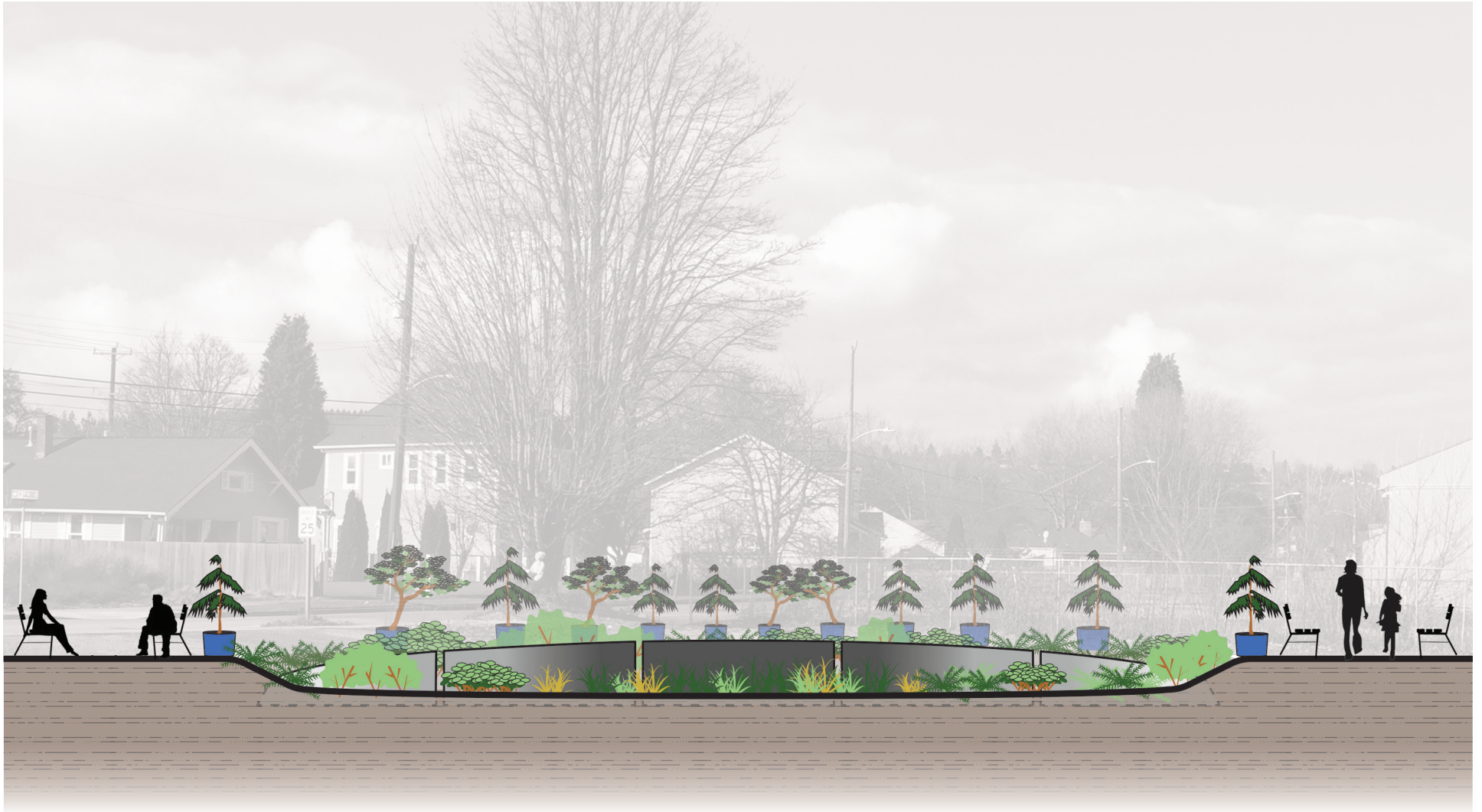




The rain garden is an opportunity for a public demonstration project that can also improve the native habitat for wildlife living adjacent to the river. Although ecological restoration sites are becoming common along the lower Duwamish River and in South Park, these projects do not invite human participation. Many of these restoration projects grow into thickets that are ideal for animal habitat, but offer little in the way of human experience. With the Plaza project there is an opportunity to provide a demonstration project that can educate the community about the importance of native vegetation and green stormwater infrastructure with the aesthetic and experiential benefits of a lush garden on a fairly barren site. This could also be an opportunity to provide interpretive signage that gives an overview of the unique history of human uses at this location and publicize the current opportunity for the community to re-imagine the site for the future.

In order to connect the new garden to the natural history of the site, the wettest zone of the rain garden will be planted with native riparian and flood plains species that were present before the river was channelized. This will include common estuary species like slough sedge (*Carex obnupta*), Pacific rush (*Juncus effusus* ssp. *pacificus*), and Henderson's checker-mallow (*Sidalcea hendersonii*). The transitional middle zone will be planted with species that can tolerate both inundation and drier conditions including camas (*Camassia* sp.), sweet gale (*Myrica gale*), and dwarf red-twig dogwood (*Cornus sericea* 'Kelseyi'). The upper driest zone will include primarily low-growing species to preserve sight lines and a sense of safety, punctuated with a few larger species for habitat and visual impact. This will include some montane species like shrubby cinquefoil (*Dasiphora fruticosa*), sub-alpine spiraea (*Spiraea splendens*), and beard's-tongue (*Penstemon* sp.) which are sun and drought-tolerant and reference the landscape of the river's headwaters. Other species that represent the transition from mid to low elevations include salal (*Gaultheria shallon*), kinnikinnick (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*), red elderberry (*Sambucus racemosa*), and ocean-spray (*Holodiscus discolor*).

Surrounding the planted rain garden will be benches (donated by Parks) and planters with native tree seedlings. These planters will be made by cutting repurposed 55 gallon drums in half, creating temporary storage for young nursery trees from SDOT



Opposite:

Fig. 5.10-5.11 Rain garden planter & drums

Temporary planters made out of 55 gallon drums cut in half act as nursery pots for small native conifer seedlings.

Photo: Marta Olson

Fig. 5.12 Rain garden section

The garden features native plants and an arcing concrete weir surrounded by potted native tree seedlings and benches.



or Dirt Corps. These planters will be extremely low-cost and also provide a connection to the industrial nature of the neighborhood. It is also an opportunity to showcase the tree species that would have been present on the site before channelization like Western redcedar (*Thuja plicata*), Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*), red alder (*Alnus rubra*), and big-leaf maple (*Acer macrophyllum*).

The garden is bisected by an arcing concrete weir cut through with vertical channels. This architectural element will provide observers with the opportunity to visually assess the height of the water flowing through the weir and reflect on seasonal fluctuations and natural processes. The weir channels also recall the river's history of taking a broad and spreading waterway and coercing it into an unmoving, straight-sided channel. This element also differentiates the project from other purely restoration plantings and will identify it as a temporary art installation instead of a permanent planting project.

Seattle Parks has concerns about a temporary rain garden that park users will become attached to and will force them to retain in the final design. However, the planning manager I spoke with admitted that rain gardens will need to be a part of the final design because of the site's location near the river. The temporary rain garden plants could be transplanted into whatever final rain garden configuration Parks favors. The current choice on site is between a large, potentially hazardous mud puddle or making the water into an amenity with a rain garden. The workshop I held with the Duwamish Valley Youth Corps demonstrated their interest in incorporating rain gardens into a public park, and this interest has been reiterated by numerous other community agencies and individuals. It would also likely be the easiest aspect of the design to fund. Sustainable Seattle has a *De-pave Duwamish* grant that can provide \$5,000 to convert paved areas into rain gardens; the South Park community would need to decide that this site would be their priority for that project. The Duwamish River Opportunity Fund grant could also be a potential funding source and DIRT Corps is a likely partner for the construction.

Although the design at the South Park Plaza must be temporary and simple, it still has the potential for significant ecological and human health benefits. The

Fig. 5.13-5.14 Potential partners: DVYC & Dirt Corps
87 Photos: top DRCC, bottom Seattle Parks Foundation

tree canopy created by the planter boxes will benefit community physical health by capturing particulate matter in the air, the rain garden will benefit community mental health by providing access to a stress-relieving piece of nearby nature, and the community participation in building park elements as well as the events facilitation will benefit social health.

My primary goal for this project was to use my skills and connections as a design student to provide something of value to the South Park community. By listening to a variety of community members and organizations, as well as revisiting past community visioning documents, I have synthesized what I heard into an actionable guide of potential uses for the temporary Plaza site, located in the Appendix to this document. My hope is that the instructions in this guide will allow South Park residents and businesses to feel empowered to use the valuable public amenity in their neighborhood and provide materials that can help them to apply for grant funding in the future.

Part six

REFLECTION

Negotiating with public agencies and setting the stage for community stewardship

I was uncertain of how supportive Seattle Parks would be of a temporary use at one of their land-bank sites and whether I should be going through official channels at all. One of the benefits of the tactical urbanism approach of guerrilla interventions that ask for forgiveness later instead of asking for permission first is that it empowers community members to take ownership over public space in their neighborhood, a significant impact for an historically marginalized community. This approach would also bypass the entrenched government planning process whose glacial pace and concern for budgets and liability too often results in projects that are standardized, watered down, and boring. A guerrilla pop-up park would be an act of protest against Parks refusing to do anything on these kinds of interim sites, which could influence future city policy.

It all came down to logistics and funding. Early in the process, holding a series of guerrilla pop-up park events figured heavily into my design thinking. Community design engagement usually relies on 2-dimensional, and necessarily abstracted, graphics to solicit input. Non-designers generally do not have the experience to translate these graphics into real-world applications and must provide input without a clear impression of the project. A pop-up park approach would allow community members to interact with and contribute to design interventions in three-dimensions, giving them physical control over the site.

But, I realized after suggesting this idea to various groups, including the Green Spaces Coalition, that no one was jumping at the opportunity. People were much more interested in giving feedback to more concrete design proposals than they were participating in an abstract design exercise. The practical time constraints of many community members' lives - jobs, kids, commitments to other organizations - meant that any such event I held would likely have been myself and the young "artsy white people," as one community member put it. To put it another way, the folks interested in a pop-up park event would likely be those who already enjoy the privilege of having their voices heard by government planners.



Fig. 6.1-6.2 Tactical Urbanism projects
Photos: top RealLifeSTL, bottom Eric Sehr

Any guerrilla event would also need to be self-funded, since no grant funding organization will approve giving money to a project without the property owner's permission. I was unwilling to use my own money or ask the community to do so for something that would be super-temporary. Other potential solutions could have used repurposed or donated materials and volunteer labor, but I began realizing the potential for a more lasting impact. This site will likely sit empty for the next three years and I am not confident that a few pop-up events would generate the greatest community benefit. A previous UW design project took place at the end of the South Park bridge when it was still closed. Students and residents built wooden furniture from repurposed pallets in a community work party. A community member told me that the chairs were soon after pulled together and burned in a bonfire. I want my work to have more lasting significance and the potential to lead to future neighborhood-driven improvements. Having Parks' permission means that the community will be able to apply to many different funding sources for events, pop-up or otherwise, in the future.

Convincing any large government agency to reevaluate their deeply entrenched processes and try something new is always a hard sell, and Seattle Parks seems especially hesitant. Some of this resistance is understandable. Parks has thousands of acres of property throughout the city all of which must be maintained to equal standards with very limited resources. Embarking on a new approach to land-banked sites (which they currently do not spend any money maintaining) that requires more of Parks' time or money has the potential to open a Pandora's box of new responsibilities. However, the fear of setting a precedent they may not want to repeat means that they are paralyzed in the face of new challenges or opportunities. It also reinforces the stability of the status quo, which I and others find to be unacceptable. Because park space has been continually allocated to wealthier and whiter areas over the course of Seattle's history, those neighborhoods continue to benefit from a disproportionate amount of Parks' resources through maintenance costs. Meanwhile, land-banked sites that Parks is acquiring in park-poor neighborhoods sit fenced-off and unusable for years until they are developed.

Seattle Parks' attempts at early activations of these sites, installing a bench or occasionally allowing in food trucks, are a step in the right direction, but still underwhelming in their potential for community impact. These uses are generic and not geared to appeal to a specific community and their needs; the food truck owners may be the real beneficiaries. In my discussions with Parks they have been downright vocally opposed to more dynamic and potentially popular temporary uses. They have repeated the assertion that they do not want any temporary use that the community will enjoy and use so much that they will ask for it to be incorporated in the final design.

This seems to be missing an enormous opportunity to allow the community to try out different uses and configurations on the ground in the future park space and then give informed feedback when the time comes for the final park community design meetings, instead of asking people to look at an abandoned gravel lot and consider the abstract design possibilities. I understand the concern that it would be unfair to grant a temporary use to niche interest group, who does not represent the greater community, and so prioritize their desires over others' in the final design. Potential (and past) examples of this would be an off-leash dog park or individual P-Patch garden plots that would only be used by a certain segment of the community. Public parks, especially those in neglected areas like South Park, should be inclusive of the entire community's needs and I believe Parks' heart is in the right place.

However, the flat out denial to allow anything that could be popular in a temporary design is extremely frustrating. Their hard-line attitude on this issue also assumes that Parks' standardized process of 3 public community meetings will ensure that everyone's voices will be heard. People willing to speak up at public meetings are those who are already comfortable making demands of their government, people who have experienced the privilege of government listening to and responding to their concerns. However, people who have long been marginalized and ignored by city government due to their economic status, ethnicity, or primary language spoken are much less likely to speak up and make demands. Then there are the people who are unable to attend public meetings due to work or family obligations and those who would not feel welcome due to their lack of English language proficiency or immigration status.

Evaluating my community process

Reflecting back on the total of my community engagement strategy over the past 9 months, I believe that my commitment to responding to community needs and concerns was very strong. I was able to generate a considerable amount of community feedback and participation without relying on formal community engagement methods like multiple design or visioning workshops. The time commitment required for such a strategy would have placed onerous pressure on both community members and myself to attend, organize, and analyze, and I am unconvinced that the result would have been vastly improved. Such a strategy would also have required funds for workshop materials, refreshments, and potentially space rental. Choosing to instead build upon previous visioning reports and focusing on interviews with interested community residents, organizations, and business owners has provided a solid case to back up my design decisions and recommendations.

However, my community engagement strategy was not perfect and I will analyze it within the context of the biases identified by Kumar in his *Methods for Community Participation* developed for evaluating outsider development professionals interacting with poor and marginalized communities. I will also speculate on how these biases may be more or less present in Seattle Parks' standard community participatory process.

Spatial Bias refers to the reality that professionals are more likely to visit communities and subsequent projects are more likely to happen in easily accessible locations. The fact that South Park is difficult to reach by any mode of transit other than car and its distance from the University District likely means that it may be overlooked as a site for UW studio or thesis projects. However, the combination of proximity to the Duwamish River, environmental contaminants, and social justice issues has meant that South Park has received more academic attention than other marginalized areas, particularly in South Seattle. Seattle Parks suffers from this bias more acutely; high-profile sites and neighborhoods located near the downtown core have a long history of receiving more attention and park space. I sought out the South



Fig. 6.3-6.4 South Park community
Photos: top Lena Costa, bottom Daniel Berman



Fig. 6.5-6.6 South Park neighborhood murals
 Photos: top SPNA, bottom Erika Schultz

Park neighborhood because of the challenges it is experiencing (though as someone without a car I was compelled to purchase a Car-2-Go membership after experiencing the 1.5-hour one-way bus ride from the University District).

I was able to mitigate *Timing Bias*, the condition where community visits happen when it is convenient for the outsiders visiting and not necessarily for the residents, affecting whose voices are heard. Since my schedule as a student has been flexible, I was able to meet with people and organizations when it was most convenient for them, day, night, and weekends.

Elite Bias refers to the reality that the community members who interact with outsiders are more likely to be better off financially and hold more power than others; for this reason they are also more likely to drive the project outcomes. *Active, Adult, Present and Able-bodied Biases* are related and refer to the fact that the most vulnerable members of a community (the disabled, elderly, youth, or migratory members) are the hardest to find and speak with. This means that they have little opportunity to present their problems or be involved in finding solutions. I was aware of these biases in action during my community engagement and took some steps to engage the more vulnerable community members, but the reality is I mostly spoke with community members who already had experience making their voices heard.

Although 73.8% of South Park identify as people of color (US Census Bureau), the majority of community members I was in contact with and observed serving on most of the community organizations were white. Some organizations have deep connections to more vulnerable members of the community, like ECOSS with the Southeast Asian community, but the administrative heads still tend to be more affluent than the neighborhood average and white. I have been successful at working with the South Park Retail Merchants Association, who are predominantly Latinx, and holding a workshop with the Duwamish Valley Youth Corps, who are a diverse group of teenagers from a variety of economic backgrounds. However, I am left with some concerns that the South Park Green Spaces Coalition, which will be the most instrumental force moving my designs forward, primarily consists of professionals, business owners, and leaders from non-profit organizations. It is clear that anyone

with an interest is welcome to join those meetings; as someone who benefits from educational, racial, and economic privilege I found it easy to be included. People with less experience having their voices heard, however, may find joining the committee extremely intimidating if they are even aware of the opportunity.

This group of biases is almost willfully ignored by Parks in their generic and standardized public process of 3 community meetings per project. This format not only excludes people who are unable to attend at the times decided on by Parks employees, but also people who are intimidated by such a process. People who are unable to leave their homes alone because they are elderly, disabled, or under 18 years old or those who may feel unwelcome because of their lack of English language proficiency, lack of permanent housing, or immigration status are being systematically left out of the conversation. In communities like South Park, I believe the Parks Department has an obligation to employ special techniques designed to hear from the marginalized and vulnerable populations and at least give them the opportunity to have their voices heard.

Another issue that has come up during this process is *Professional Bias*, which Kumar uses to refer to outsiders who enter a project with blinders on and insist on only focusing on the issues that fall within their interests. I would include both myself and some community interest groups under this heading, who were only interested in seeing one possible solution for the Plaza. I would argue that being trained as a landscape architect makes me more adept at synthesizing different viewpoints and interests into a cohesive design than someone with a highly specialized profession. However, my own interests and experiences have undoubtedly impacted my designs and recommendations to the community. I feel that I have done my best to both incorporate the specific ideas members of the community are attached to and to push them to consider alternate possibilities that can address the overall needs and desires of the neighborhood. My hope is that by creating a flexible use space and generating a preliminary set of temporary events, the community will see the possibilities expand in front of them and take the initiative to experiment with ideas for the Plaza site that have not yet been imagined.

Playing to different audiences

This thesis has been an incredible learning process and a great opportunity for me to dive head first into the logistical challenges inherent to making a community-based public space project happen. One of my ongoing challenges has been tailoring my communications and graphical products to three different stakeholder groups: the Seattle Parks Department, the UW Department of Landscape Architecture, and the South Park community (which is comprised of many different organizations, interests, and individuals). Each of these groups has approached this project differently and at times translating between them has been difficult.

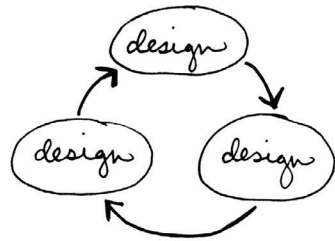
The Seattle Parks Department sees projects happening in a linear, generic, and replicable fashion. A site is purchased, design happens with the standardized acceptable amount of community engagement, the permanent site is built, and then Parks maintains it in that final form until the end of time. Although the Parks Department deserves credit for efficiently making many different projects happen across the city in many different situations, I believe that in some cases this streamlining has gone too far. The direct, linear approach resists experimentation or novel techniques. It also resulted in my feeling that I needed to have design plans and construction documents in order before Parks would even consider giving permission or support to the project. This was frustrating since my hope was to engage in a collaborative, iterative process with all stakeholders.

The UW Department of Landscape Architecture takes almost the opposite approach: encouraging students to engage in a never-ending, iterative design process that ends only when a due date approaches and beautiful renderings are dutifully spat out. Since the UW focuses on primarily hypothetical projects without the constraints of budgets, permitting, or community buy-in; this approach is difficult to apply to the real world. I do believe there is great value to an iterative design process that allows for flexibility and encourages multiple possible correct solutions for a site design. As a designer I have found aspects of this approach extremely useful during this project; I never got so attached to any one design element that I refused to change it or lose it

SEATTLE PARKS DEPARTMENT PROCESS



UW LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE PROCESS



MY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

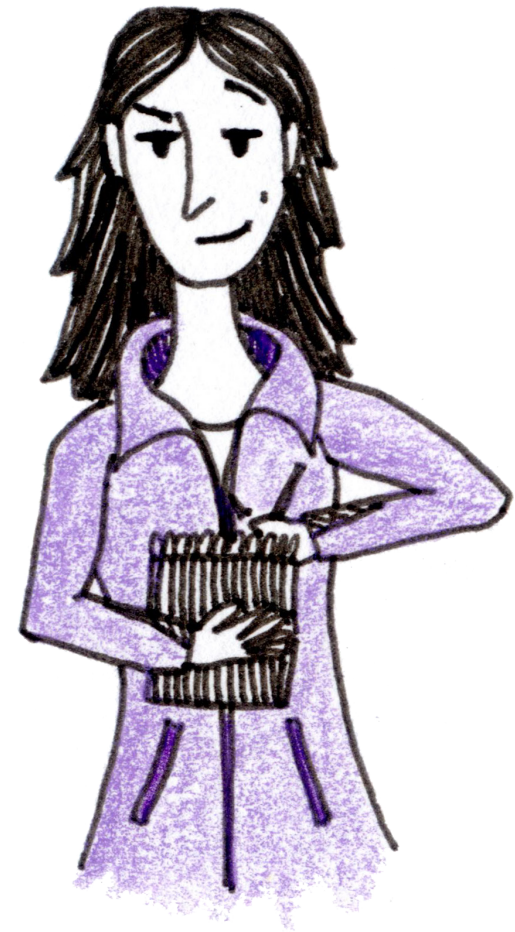
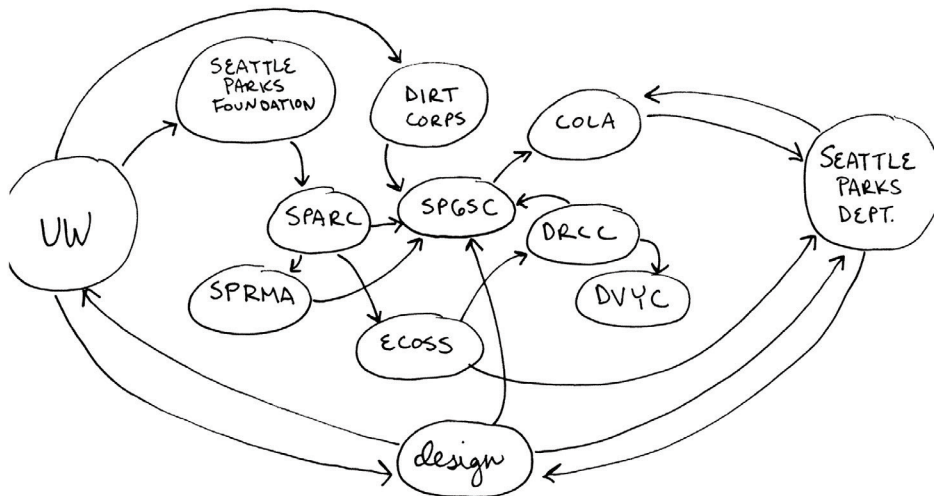


Fig. 6.7 Thesis process

My approach to this project did not fit neatly into either the Seattle Parks or UW Department of Landscape Architecture paradigms

completely. After every meeting and conversation with community members or Parks I was able to tweak my designs in order to respond thoughtfully to the more complete understanding of the situation.

My approach to design and community outreach does not fit nicely into either of the above examples. I strove to not enter the community with preconceived notions of what the design was going to be. Instead, I chose to reach out to as many people as would return my emails and phone calls in order to gather as much community input as possible. Although it was great experience to hear from so many different individuals and groups, I naively thought that folks would be interested in collaborating in the design process from the very beginning. What I learned was that most community members and organizations, like the Parks Department, wanted proposed ideas in front of them to respond to rather than having the responsibility for generating them. I believe this attitude is due to several factors: a lack of time and energy to devote to ethereal imaginings, not wanted to become invested in a project without seeing concrete signs that it will actually happen, and a belief that design work can only be done by design professionals.

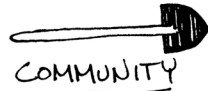
Is better support for this kind of project possible?

Ironically, the stakeholder group that is the most demanding of design specifics, assigned responsibilities, and inflexible to new or different ideas, Seattle Parks, is the one with the least amount of commitment and involvement in the temporary activation. They want to limit their potential for liability or expense as the property owners, which is understandable. Although Parks wants to downplay their involvement in the project as much as possible, they remain almost belligerently fearful of what the community might do in the space on their own. Parks could instead take this opportunity to expand their community engagement paradigm, live up to the city's *Race and Social Justice Initiative* by providing a marginalized community with a novel approach to land-banked sites, or even simply as a chance to try something new and perhaps

DIFFERENT MESSAGES FOR DIFFERENT AUDIENCES



I have fulfilled the requirements necessary to graduate.



I have ideas for a park and can make it happen with your help



I can temporarily activate this site without making Parks responsible for maintenance and without subverting their (one-size-fits-all) design process (that may reinforce the institutional racism that has left this neighborhood without quality greenspace to begin with)

NEXT STEPS

UW

TURN IN THESIS document by June 9

COMMUNITY

PROVIDE BASE SITE DESIGN

- Events Guide
 - o contacts
 - o materials
 - o permits
 - o grant opportunities

MOA STEWARDSHIP AGREEMENT with Parks ↔ Stewardship

SEATTLE PARKS

GET BASE DESIGN APPROVED

- understand Parks' responsibilities
- materials + services



Fig. 6.8 Thesis Audiences

Different audiences had very different expectations for the results of this thesis project.



Fig. 6.9 Next Steps

Different stakeholders required different products



Fig. 6.10-6.11 Community Events

101 *Photos: top Erika Schultz, bottom Latino Cultural*

learn lessons to apply to the future. But, they are so resistant to change that they are unwilling to even let the community try an experiment on a low profile site like the South Park Plaza.

Land-banked sites like this one are potentially fertile ground for community experimentation and stewardship. Allowing community members to see their ideas in action in three dimensions, even if only temporarily, imparts a powerful sense of ownership and a more meaningful community engagement experience. It is in Parks' best interest to allow communities more freedom over shaping the public places in their neighborhoods. People with a sense of ownership over a park will do the work of stewarding, monitoring, and even maintaining a space. And it seems obvious to me that people who are able to try out different park uses on the ground and in person will be able to give better feedback to final design proposals and will be happier overall with the permanent outcome.

The UW Landscape Architecture Department could also do a better job of supporting and encouraging this type of community-based project, especially in the context of the MLA thesis. I was repeatedly cautioned that the constraints of the academic calendar as well as the unpredictability of working with real people on a real project could make for a disappointing thesis project. I am proud of the progress that I have made on this project since I started, and excited that elements I have worked on may well become a reality, or at the very least inspire the community into action. But even if getting anything done on the site had proved to be impossible, I still would have gained invaluable insights and skills negotiating with public agencies, presenting designs to varied audiences, and working with a community. My project was certainly more difficult to control than a hypothetical one, but I would argue, much more meaningful, at least for me personally. And since we will be entering a profession that operates with real people in the real world, encouraging this kind of work makes practical sense.

There are many neighborhoods like South Park, with marginalized communities who have inequitable access to green space who have experienced years of neglect from public agencies. Even governments with good intentions, like Seattle's, have

limited resources and painfully lengthy planning periods for new projects. Getting more design students involved in real community projects would give them extremely valuable experience while they are still building their skills and could result in new, exciting, and meaningful public places.

Projected next steps, the future of South Park Plaza

Unlike a hypothetical design exercise, this thesis project will not be complete when the document is submitted or upon my graduation. However, I have decided that it can no longer be my full-time (unpaid) job, but that I can continue contributing as a consultant. This transition is extremely important; by choosing to work on a project with an actual community I have ethical obligations to follow through and deliver on the work that I promised. Although the project is not at an ideal stopping point, I feel like I am providing sufficient documentation and support and that there are people in the community who will carry the project forward.

I am leaving the community with the Plaza activation toolkit, which synthesizes the knowledge I have gained relating to public process and neighborhood dynamics; it also identifies community partners and provides instructions for facilitating different events. My plan is to present my findings to a wider audience at a South Park Neighborhood Association meeting in the coming months. Pushing forward on this project through my thesis has galvanized support from ECOSS, SPRMA, and SPGSC to keep the pressure on Parks and make the temporary design happen, including events that may begin as early as this summer. Parks is moving forward on the basic elements of grading and providing furniture that will make the site a usable event space at least. I will continue to be in contact with them and hope to attend the Proview meetings necessary to approve the base design.

The major hurdle to implementation is not interest or enthusiasm, but funding. The Retail Merchants Association has suggested the idea of charging a fee to vendors, if an outdoor market is established at the Plaza site, that could be used to fund future

design elements. This approach would take time, but would be completely initiated and controlled by the community. The other likely option for funding would be grant writing. I have told the community that I am willing to collaborate on writing grant proposals, since I have already have the answers to many of the essay questions in this document. If the community decides to wait on applying for grants, I hope that the community toolkit can be useful at that later time. I intend to continue attending the Green Spaces Coalition meetings every other month as I am able and use my connections to continue facilitating the process.

My real hope is that my months of continuous work have opened the community members' minds to the possibilities of a temporary park at the Plaza site and helped them to see past the existing gravel lot. With my commitment and follow-through I have uncovered the steps necessary to allow the community to start using the site immediately and take ownership over it. They may choose not to implement any of it, but I hope that by exploring some of the possibilities, the community will be better prepared to advocate for their interests in the final park design.

Conclusion

*I forget the names of towns without rivers.
A town needs a river to forgive the town.
Whatever river, whatever town –
it is much the same.
The cruel things I did I took to the river.
I begged the current: make me better.*

Richard Hugo

from “The Towns We Know and Leave Behind, The Rivers We Carry with Us”

When I began this thesis process nearly a year ago, I simply knew that I wanted to make a community-based design project in South Park happen. My idealistic goal was to design and implement a temporary park intervention that provided a green space that would benefit community and ecological health and empower residents to take ownership over a public space in their neighborhood. Although nothing yet has been implemented, this project has had a significant impact on the future of the site and on the neighborhood's relationship to it. My largest impact may be simply, but significantly, holding Parks accountable. I have been fortunate to have found a champion for the project in Parks, without her I am not sure we would be receiving any support from the agency, but my continued efforts keep the pressure on them to follow through.

I have also realized what a privileged position I enjoy as a landscape architecture student. It has been easy for me to find, contact, and schedule meetings with people at Parks and act as a liaison between the South Park community and Seattle government. This is a position that most community members would likely not be able to imagine being in. Through my position of access I have discovered much about the process for using public spaces owned by Parks and am now able to share this knowledge with the community. Dealing with governmental process and a site of this scale has been a daunting challenge. My hope is that the base design and community events guide I provide will allow the community to clearly understand the steps necessary for using the Plaza as a neighborhood asset.

I have learned many lessons through this process that would likely impact how I would approach a project like this in the future. Overall, since I began with no experience in Seattle-based community engagement or partnering with public agencies, I believe that my approach of just talking to as many people as possible and being open to possibilities as they presented themselves was powerful and effective. I quickly learned that funding is an extremely important consideration for this kind of community project. Not only does identifying funding sources demonstrate seriousness and feasibility to community partners, it also provides valuable design parameters; a

\$5,000 intervention may look very different from a \$50,000 intervention, though each might be just as practical and exciting.

I also learned that trying to organize a project of this scale as an individual is extremely challenging. It has been a sometimes more than full-time job and even so, I feel like there are still other opportunities and avenues to explore. Having a small group of people to act as a design and planning team would make the work more manageable. I have an admittedly difficult time delegating work, but it is especially challenging to give work to community members who already donate most of their precious free time making their neighborhood a better place. Coming in as an outsider was also challenging, as someone who has never lived near South Park nor spent much time there before this project. I walked a fine line between giving my design suggestions and allowing the community to make their own decisions. Although I love the idea of empowering marginalized communities to design and implement their own projects, it is hard to believe that inequity can be addressed unless people in privileged positions of education and professional connections, like myself, are involved in some capacity, at least early on.

As I transition out of school and into the professional design community, the question I am left with is: what is the place of landscape architecture in environmental justice communities and how can we best support projects like this one? I believe that every person has the right to quality public green space and a neighborhood environment that supports their health and well-being. Especially in a city as prosperous as Seattle, there is no reason this should not be true. Neighborhoods like South Park have been abandoned for too long and, as designers of the built environment, we must bear some responsibility for either perpetuating or ameliorating these conditions. Most people believe that design is not going to save the world, but this project demonstrates that even a student thesis has the potential to inform public policy and to help enable a community to take ownership over a publicly owned space in their neighborhood.

Appendix

COMMUNITY TOOLKIT

SOUTH PARK PLAZA COMMUNITY PARK ACTIVATION TOOLKIT

June 2017



Photo Credits: left - Marta Olson, top - Joshua Trujillo Seattle PI, bottom - cindyadventures.com

©Marta Suzanne Olson 2017

Designs and guide materials prepared by:

Marta Olson

as part of a Master's thesis in Landscape Architecture from the University of Washington

South Park residents and organizations may use, copy, or alter this guide including its graphics and text for non-commercial purposes as they see fit.

For questions, contact:

Marta Olson, martaolson@gmail.com

Follow South Park Green Spaces Coalition on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/SouthParkGreenSpacesCoalition/>

Contents

part one: BACKGROUND 1

part two: HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE 9

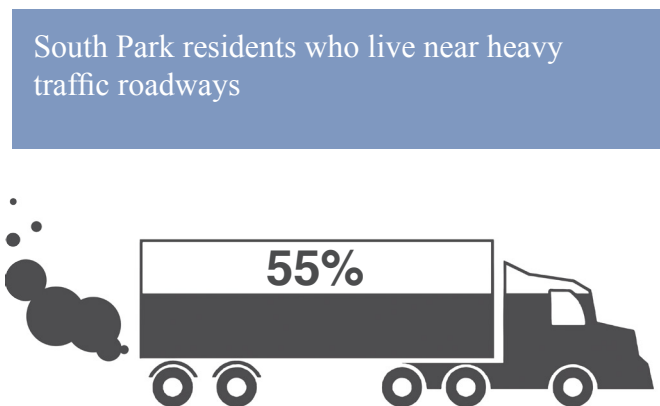
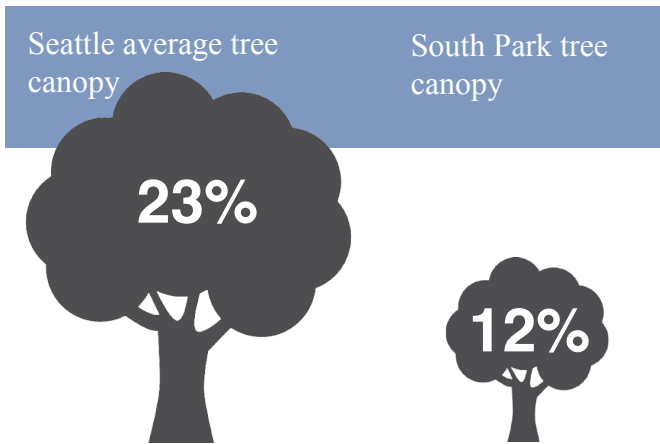
part three: BASE SITE DESIGN 15

part four: COMMUNITY EVENTS 29

part one

BACKGROUND





Project background

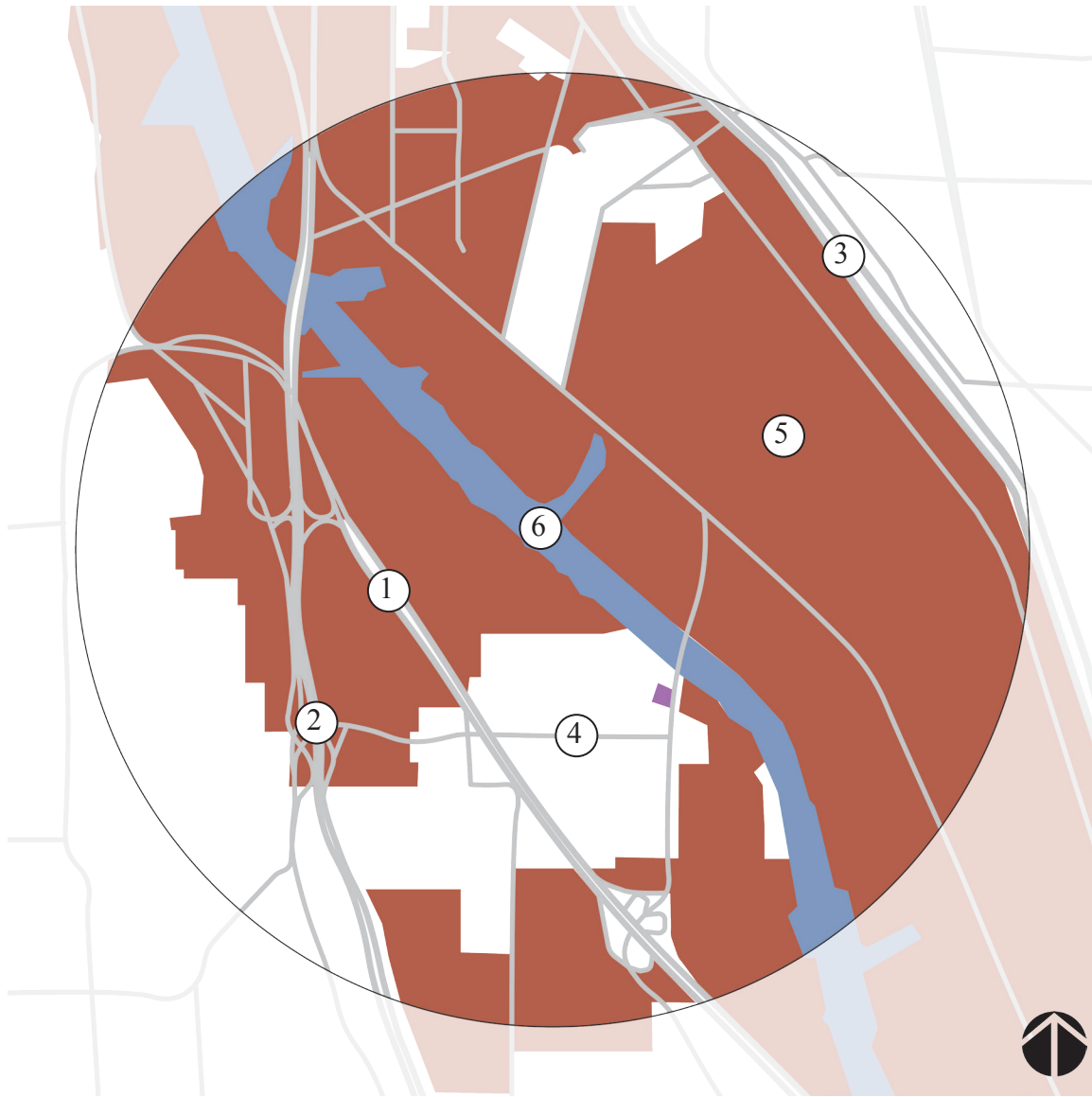
As a landscape architect, I believe that all people have the right to quality public green spaces in their neighborhood and a healthy living environment that sustains physical, mental, and ecological well-being. Although Seattle views itself as a progressive city, the distribution of green space and environmental health risk factors is not equitable.

The South Park neighborhood’s proximity to the channelized Duwamish River made it a hub for industrial production throughout the 20th century. One hundred years of pollution through the dumping of garbage, effluent, and sewage has left the river sediments so contaminated that the lower Duwamish Waterway has been declared a Superfund site. Although some of this industrial production has ceased, or been cleaned up, residents and visitors to the neighborhood are still impacted by the infrastructure and relics of an industrial past.

Industrial production continues today and the neighborhood is subject to heavy truck traffic on its streets. In addition to the Duwamish, two terrestrial highways bisect and constrict the neighborhood. Air and water contamination beyond the scope of the Superfund cleanup effort are also concerns and contribute to health inequities. In 2013 the EPA-mandated *Health Impact Assessment* related to Superfund cleanup found that residents of South Park and Georgetown experience higher rates of heart disease, childhood asthma, lung cancer, diabetes, and death from stroke than the King County average. They also live for 8 fewer years (Daniell et al. 15). The study points to the combination of environmental stressors like air pollution from vehicular traffic, the legacy of industrial contaminants, and a lack of tree canopy.

Public green spaces are limited in size and quality and street tree density is about half of the city average (“Seattle’s Canopy Cover”). In Seattle as a whole 12.4% of all land is devoted to park space, with an average of 3,587 square feet of parks per person (Trust for Public Land). Whereas in South Park just 1.8% of land is park space which means that for every resident there are just 116 square feet per person (“Seattle’s Canopy Cover”). Quite a difference, especially if you consider that many residents

Source: City of Seattle, *Seattle’s Canopy Cover*

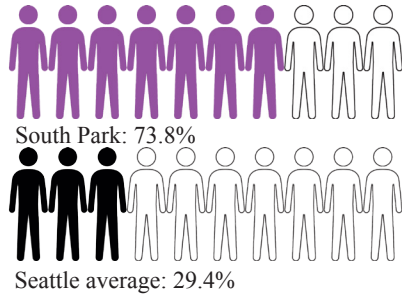


-  South Park Plaza
-  Zoned Industrial
- ① WA State Route 99: exhaust
- ② WA State Route 509: exhaust
- ③ Interstate 5: exhaust
- ④ Arterials: truck & vehicle exhaust
- ⑤ Boeing Field: jet exhaust
- ⑥ Duwamish Waterway: ship exhaust & Superfund site

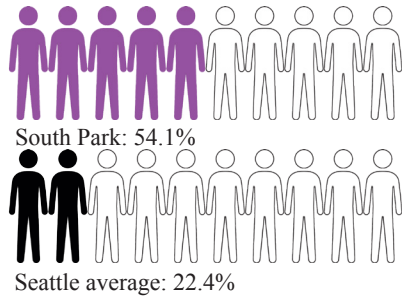
pollution sources



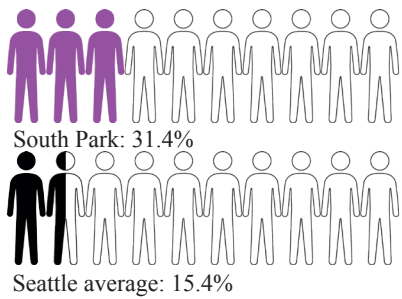
Identify as a person of color



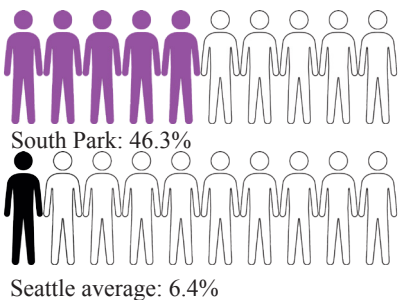
Speak a language other than English at home



Under age 18



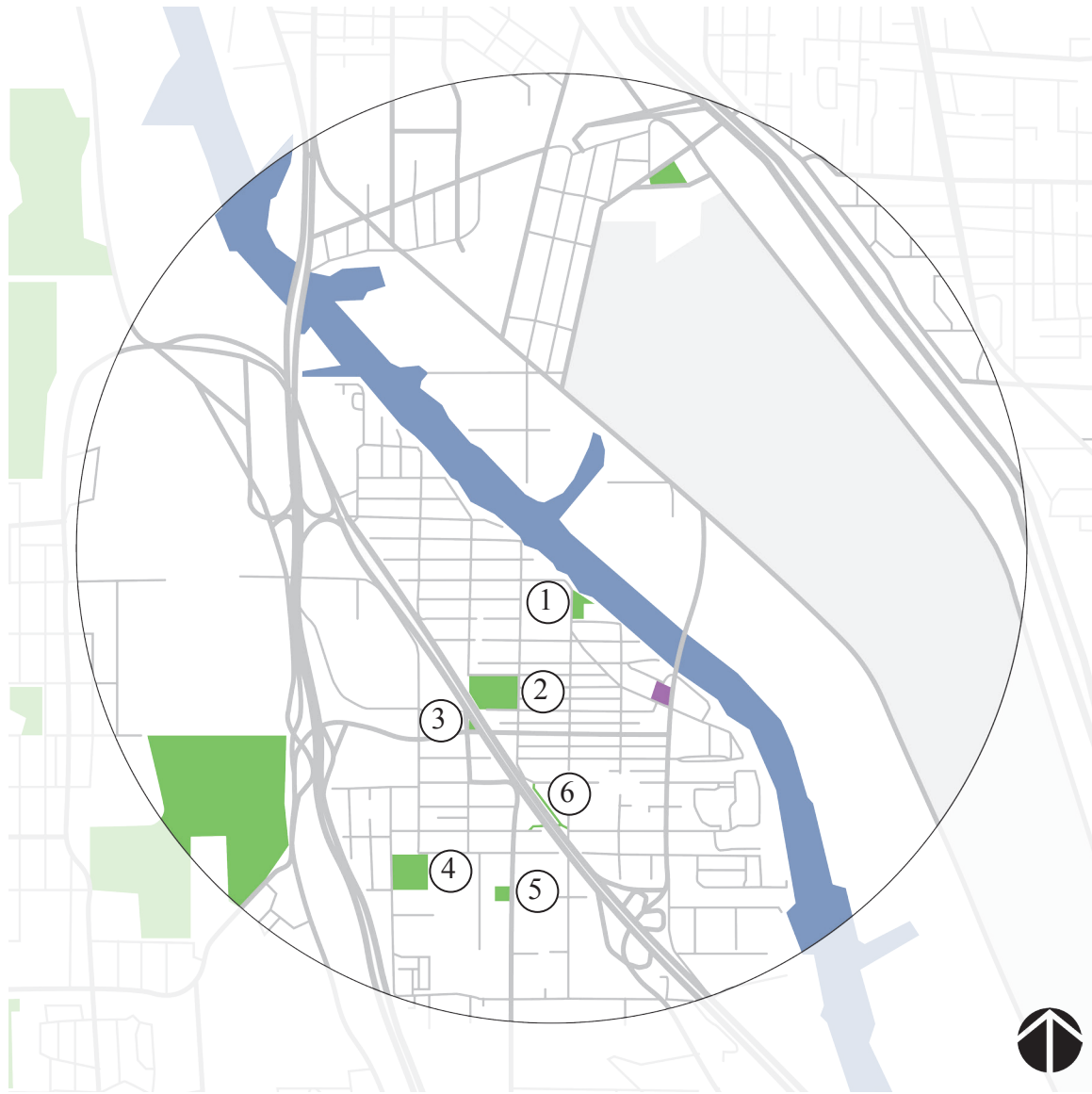
Identify as Latino or Hispanic



in affluent areas north of the Ship Canal enjoy considerably more park space than the average. It is important to note that many of South Park’s existing neighborhood parks, including the community center playground, abut the retaining walls of WA Highway 99. Studies indicate that people who spend significant amounts of time within 200 meters (650 feet) of highways are at increased risk of serious health concerns (Brugge et al. 12).

South Park is one of the most ethnically diverse neighborhoods in the city; nearly three quarters of residents identify as people of color. In Seattle as a whole that figure is only 29.4% (US Census Bureau). About a third of the community are immigrants with more than half of residents speaking languages other than English at home. The median income is well below the city average, with 28.3% of people falling below the poverty line and 27.0% of adults lacking health insurance (ibid.). A large cohort of children is growing up in this challenging environment; almost a third of residents are under 18 years old, more than twice the city average (ibid.).

Despite its challenges, the neighborhood is well-organized and vocal about its needs and its dreams for the future. Community-led groups meet regularly to discuss South Park’s direction. They including the South Park Neighborhood Association, South Park Area Redevelopment Committee, South Park Retail Merchants Association, South Park Green Spaces Coalition, Duwamish Valley Safe Streets, and the Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition, which also functions as the official Technical Advisory Group to the EPA. This has led to several green space visioning and action plans. In response, Seattle Parks has committed to improving existing park properties and has acquired land for future green spaces as well. The City of Seattle and the Seattle Parks Department have made equity a major priority in recent years through the *Race and Social Justice Initiative* and *Equity & Environment Initiative*. Additional funds and planning have been directed at the South Park neighborhood, but the pace of progress remains painfully slow. This means that planned improvements may be many years away from implementation.











-  South Park Plaza
-  Seattle Public Park
-  Duwamish Waterway Park
-  Community Center & Playground
-  Cesar Chavez Park
-  Marra-Desimone Park
-  South Park Meadow
-  8th Avenue “Scary Trail”



Fig. 1.1-1.2 South Park Plaza current conditions

Photos: Marta Olson

In the interim, there is great potential for small-scale and temporary design interventions to have significant positive impacts on community health and ecological wellbeing. These interventions, if executed with community support and participation, can inspire residents to explore the possibilities for public space in a fun, low-pressure, and hands-on atmosphere. Once the community has experienced the options, they can be better prepared to advocate for the right permanent solutions for their neighborhood.

Seattle Parks and Recreation has purchased over an acre of land immediately west of the recently replaced South Park Bridge, at the northern end of the 14th Avenue business district as the future home of the South Park Plaza Park. This should be a major asset to the community that will provide gathering space for large, public events and festivals, a venue for everyday use by residents, and potential public access to the river. However, this project will not be complete until at least 2020 and while the community waits, the site remains a mostly level, unused, gravel lot. There is enormous opportunity here for an interim solution.

This guide is a synthesis of 9 months of community engagement that targeted South Park non-profit organizations, business owners, and residents active in neighborhood committees and included a workshop with youth from the Duwamish Valley Youth Corps. All ideas and suggestions for temporary uses of the site have been included as much as possible. However, this guide is not intended to be a comprehensive or static document, it is simply a starting point that welcomes additional voices and fresh ideas.

Works Cited

- Brugge, Doug, John L. Durant, and Christine Rioux. "Near-Highway Pollutants in Motor Vehicle Exhaust: A Review of Epidemiologic Evidence of Cardiac and Pulmonary Health Risks." *Environmental Health* 6.1 (2007): 23. Web.
- City of Seattle. "Seattle's Canopy Cover." *Trees for Seattle*. 2007. Web. Accessed 16 Jan. 2017. <http://www.seattle.gov/trees/canopycover.htm>
- Daniell, William et al. "Health Impact Assessment: Proposed Cleanup Plan for the Lower Duwamish Waterway Superfund Site: Final Report." Sept. 2013.
- US Census Bureau. "American Community Survey." 2009-2013. Web Accessed 11 Dec. 2016. <http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/cityplanning/populationdemographics/acs/5year/default.htm>



part two

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE



Fig. 2.1-2.2 South Park Plaza current conditions

Photos: Marta Olson

Where do I start?

After hearing from the South Park community and analyzing past neighborhood visioning documents, it was clear that people want more green space and a place for community gatherings and events. The goal of this design is to create a simple, usable, temporary park that can be enjoyed everyday, but is also flexible enough to support a wide variety of community events. In the following sections, you can find details on implementing this base design and examples of arranging the space for different community events that I have heard interest in. These examples are just a beginning; I hope they inspire you to consider how your ideas for a temporary event or celebration could be realized in the Plaza site.

What about funding?

Good question! There are several options for getting the money for site construction and event costs. Grants that anyone can apply for are a great source of funding for projects like this one and have successfully funded other community projects in South Park. In order to be awarded this money, projects must have the property owner's approval in advance. This means that any plans would need to go through Seattle Parks before writing a grant application. The base site design that follows is currently in negotiations with Parks for approval, but they would welcome other ideas as well. Parks has indicated that they are especially open to approving temporary (1 or 2 day) events that do not require on-site construction.

Here are some relevant grants to check out if you are looking for funding:

Duwamish River Opportunity Fund (DROF): this fund is administered by the City of Seattle in partnership with King County and the Port of Seattle. It specifically targets challenges faced by communities living in the Duwamish Valley and seeks to make quality of life improvements. The fund has \$250,000 total available for 2017.

For more information on DROF see: <https://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/programs-and-services/duwamish-river-opportunity-fund>.

Neighbor to Neighbor (N2N): this fund is administered by the Seattle Foundation and targets communities impacted by poverty and racial disparities. It seeks to support opportunity and equity for all Seattle residents by increasing community engagement, power, and influence.

For more information on N2N see: <https://www.seattlefoundation.org/nonprofits/Neighbor-To-Neighbor>

Depave the Duwamish: this fund is administered by Sustainable Seattle and funded by King County and the King Conservation District. It is focused on removing asphalt in the Duwamish Valley and replacing it with rain gardens, trees, or other plants. This grant is currently looking for another site in South Park. The northern section of the current site is covered in asphalt (the former parking lot of the County Line Bar) and would be eligible for this program.

For more information about Depave the Duwamish see: <http://www.sustainableseattle.org/programs/stormwaterdepave/depave/>

Neighborhood Matching Fund (NMF): this fund is administered by Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods and gives out both the Small Sparks Fund (up to \$5,000) and the Community Partnership Fund (up to \$100,000). This grant focuses on community-generated projects and awardees must provide a match in community volunteer hours, donated materials, or donated professional services.

Unfortunately, the DON is currently unwilling to fund projects at the Plaza site because it is technically not located in Seattle, but in unincorporated King County (part of the

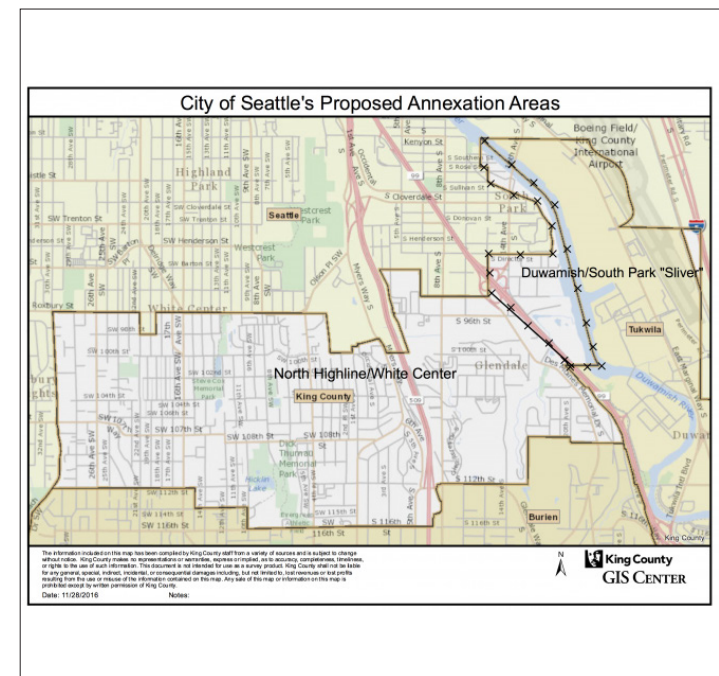


Fig. 2.3 Unincorporated King County
Image: King County

sliver by the river), even though it is surrounded by South Park. The site will likely be annexed to the city of Seattle soon and would become eligible for this grant.

For more information on NMF see: <http://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/programs-and-services/neighborhood-matching-fund>

Another option for funding would be to generate money from within the South Park community. This would give the neighborhood greater control over the planning and implementation of small-scale projects and would not require as much oversight or approval from outside grant administrators or Seattle Parks. One option would be to start with using the Plaza site as a venue for a regular outdoor market organized by the Retail Merchants Association. Participating vendors could be charged a fee for the opportunity to sell their goods at the market and those fees could be used to pay for future improvements. This approach would take more time and might mean that the site is used as a market for some time before enough money is raised to implement the proposed base design.

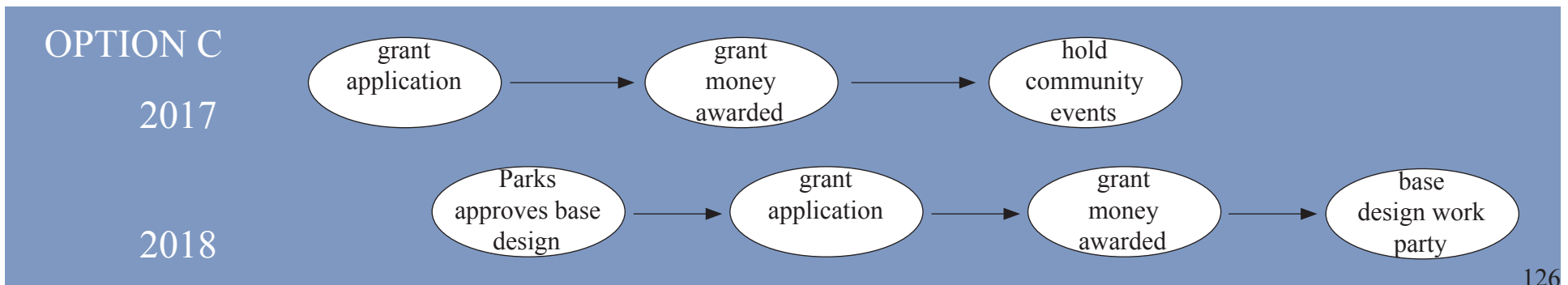
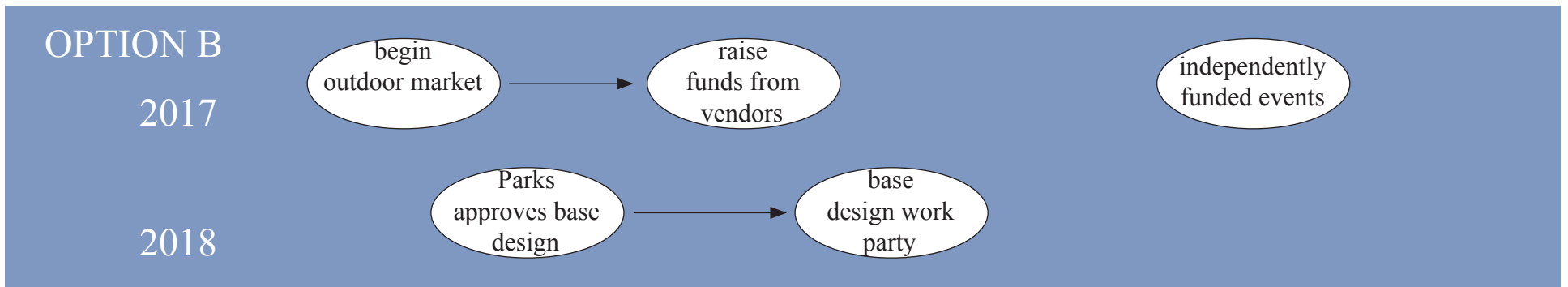
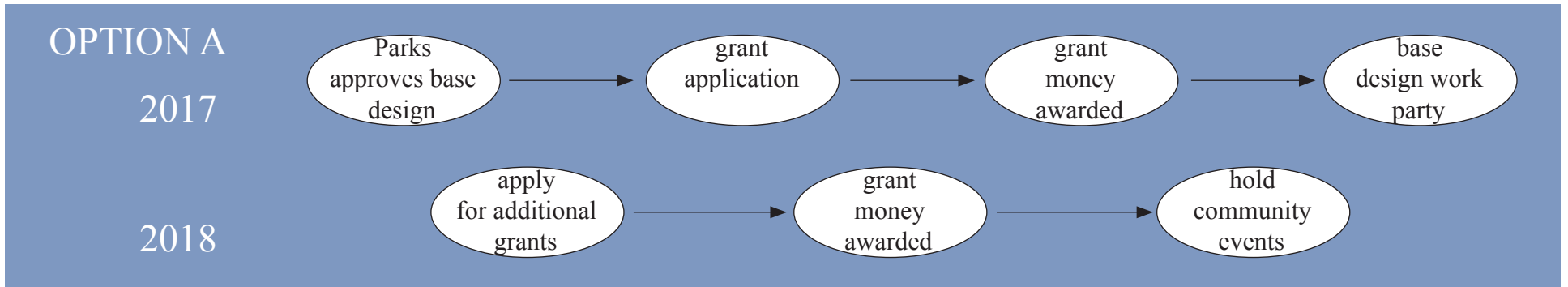
Money could also be raised specifically for each individual event by interested parties. For example, before or during a concert, or performance, or community meal an individual or community group could fundraise just enough to cover costs. A few of these types of events could provide proof of concept that might make applying for larger amounts of grant funding more feasible. This approach would also allow for the greatest degree of community freedom, independence, and flexibility for experimentation.



Fig. 2.4 Tianguis market, Mexico
Photo: PeterKTravels

How will this all play out?

There are several different timelines that could describe how the activation of the Plaza site potentially takes place. The possibilities depend on funding, Parks' agreeability, and community interest.



part three

BASE SITE DESIGN





Existing Site Conditions

Challenges

Although the Plaza site looks like a blank slate, there are a number of challenges currently preventing its use as a park. During bridge construction the site was re-graded in order to contain all stormwater on site and prevent its discharge onto other properties or into the Duwamish just 200 feet away. The use of heavy machinery and the weight of bridge sections as they were built on the site have significantly compacted the soils. These conditions have resulted in persistent standing water and puddles, especially on the north end of the site, which also bears the remains of the County Line asphalt parking lot. The largest flooded area is 6-12” deep in places; it has persisted since I began visiting the site last September and shows no sign of disappearing now, at the end of May.

There are few options for dealing with this water; directing it off site would allow it to sheet flow into the Duwamish River. Draining it into stormwater infrastructure on Orr St would be costly and infeasible for a temporary project. There is the additional issue of South Park’s overtaxed stormwater infrastructure; existing pipes are unable to handle the water from storm and flooding events and combined sewer overflows into the river are common. The water’s shifting and spreading nature would make programming around it challenging and uncertain. Increasingly, local government and non-profit organizations like ECOSS are advocating for the construction of rain gardens on public and private property in order to improve water quality and reduce the volume and velocity of stormwater discharged into the river. The east side of the bridge has an extensive rain garden that handles the stormwater from the southern half of the bridge and surrounding streets (King County).

At the very least, water will need to be directed and contained in a designated portion of the site. Despite the standing water, vehicles including semi-trucks, minivans, and forklifts use the gravel lot as a cut-through. Designating the site as a

Fig. 3.1-3.2 Standing water and vehicles

Photos: Marta Olson



Fig. 3.3 Existing Site Conditions

The major challenges on the site currently are persistent standing water, especially covering the asphalt area on the north-eastern corner, and vehicles using the site as a cut-through. The site is predominantly flat and open.



Fig. 3.4-3.5 Possible park extension & rain garden

Photos: Marta Olson

place for pedestrians will begin with blocking vehicle access while creating clear entrances for people.

The largest design challenge may be to create a meaningful park intervention that is simple enough to satisfy Seattle Parks, significant enough to claim the space for the community, and cost-effective enough to cover the site's homogeneous expanse. Currently the site's flat and open character feels very exposed and is likely preventing crime and covert activities. Retaining sight lines and a feeling of safety will be key in ensuring the community feels comfortable using the temporary park and that a potential amenity does not turn into a neighborhood liability by attracting unwelcome uses.

Opportunities

Although the site conditions and Parks' hesitance to approve daily interim uses pose challenges, a temporary activation of the future South Park Plaza space still has the potential to be a real asset for the community. Lively neighborhood activation of the site will help keep the pressure on Parks to negotiate for the purchase of the adjoining lot across Orr Street, currently still owned by King County Roads, in order to connect the future Plaza Park to the river. That acquisition would provide much of the missing link to create the Duwamish river-walk pedestrian route proposed in the 2014 *South Park Green Space Vision Plan*. A temporary activation can also galvanize the community and keep enthusiasm for the project going while the neighborhood waits for the final park design to get underway. Neighborhood advocates and residents have spent much time and energy participating in visioning workshops, applying for grants, and pressuring city agencies to pay attention to South Park. It would be a powerful message to reward the neighborhood for their hard work by facilitating a flexible park space in the immediate future that supports community events.

The site is surrounded by residential, light industrial, and local businesses, providing a wide variety of potential users, events, and support. Community organizations already have good connections to industrial businesses in the



Fig. 3.6 Neighborhood connections
The Plaza site is adjacent to existing commercial, industrial, and open space uses; it is also on the proposed river-walk neighborhood pedestrian and bicycle greenway.





neighborhood and could deepen those relationships through in-kind donations of tools, equipment, or labor. The business district on 14th Avenue is anxious to see the site activated, with particular interest in an outdoor market, and has suggested raising funds for the temporary park amenities by charging market vendors rent. The site is also adjacent to the South Park Bridge, the main gateway into the neighborhood for visitors. This could provide the perfect opportunity for public events that draw people from surrounding neighborhoods into South Park.

Base site design

Seattle Parks has made preliminary pledges for in-kind donations for this project. The most critical of these is the potential that Parks can have their crew grade the site so it is level and ADA-accessible and add a fresh layer of gravel on top. They may also be willing to install a trash can and periodically pick up bagged trash and provide standard-issue benches and picnic tables. Using materials already approved by Parks will mean that they do not need to worry about permits or liability concerns for new furniture.

This land was purchased specifically to become the South Park Plaza, in the model of Latin American plazas which act as the central gathering spaces for their communities. My design references the traditional design of those plazas which usually feature a city block or square crossed by orthogonal paths intersected by a central circular fountain and/or statue. This design is simple, classic, and culturally relevant. But, it also symbolizes the history of the landscape and the channelization of the Duwamish Waterway in particular, which drew straight lines through the organic curves of the original river.

With the ground surface leveled by Parks, adding paths on top seemed redundant, so I instead chose to create paths out of allées of arranged, movable wooden tree planters. The planter boxes also serve the function of blocking vehicular traffic from entering the site while still allowing for a permeable barrier that invites pedestrian



Fig. 3.7 Base site design

The base site design is a simple and cohesive approach that solves the existing site challenges and allows for a usable community green space every day of the year. The standing water is directed to a new rain garden surrounded by Seattle Parks benches. Vehicle entrances are blocked off by movable tree planters that can be arranged to divide up the space in many different configurations.

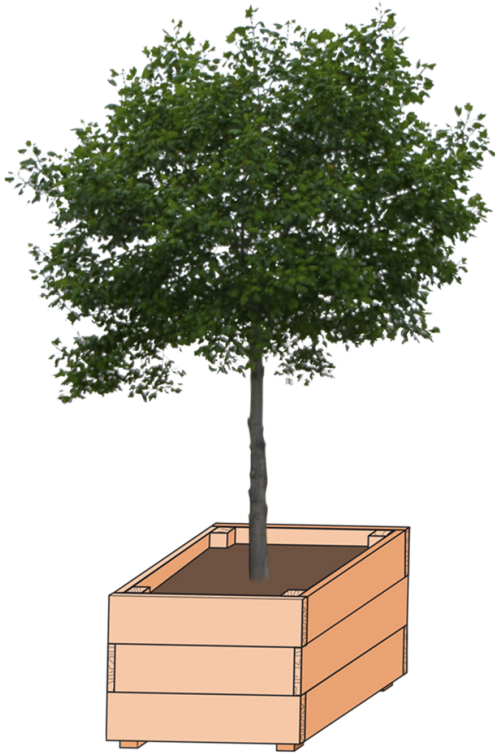


Fig. 3.8 Tree box planter

Sturdy wooden planters constructed and painted in a community work party act as temporary nursery pots; they can be moved from any side by fork lifts.

Opposite page:

Fig. 3.9 Community work party

Members of the DVYC lead a work party to construct, paint, and plant new trees in the movable planters.

access. These allées intersect a circular water feature in the form of a rain garden rather than a fountain. If the Parks crew has the equipment to grade the site, they should also be able to also excavate the rain garden area as a place to consolidate and redirect the standing water.

The planter boxes are large enough to accommodate trees growing for several years and are built at the dimensions of a standard pallet (48”x40”x36” tall) in order to facilitate moving them at any time and from any direction by a fork lift. My proposal for an opening kick-off Plaza event is a tree box building, decorating, and planting work party. This would be an excellent opportunity to partner with the Duwamish Valley Youth Corps, who are committed to increasing neighborhood tree canopy, and could provide the youth with a sense of ownership over the space. Although South Park is about 1/3 children there are few places that kids can call their own, and even fewer for teenagers. Building the wooden planter boxes would also be an excellent opportunity for local industrial businesses to donate materials and labor.

Once the planters are built, there is no limit to how they can be arranged in the space. Some could be moved in front of the businesses on 14th Avenue to act as street trees, which are currently lacking in the block closest to the Plaza. This would physically and symbolically connect the temporary use at the Plaza site to the business district and potentially expand its reach. The planters can also be moved out into Dallas Avenue in order to temporarily block vehicular traffic for large events and create a pedestrian corridor from the Plaza to the business district. Another option is moving the planters around within the site in order to divide spaces for different uses. Some of these possible options are explored in the in the following section.

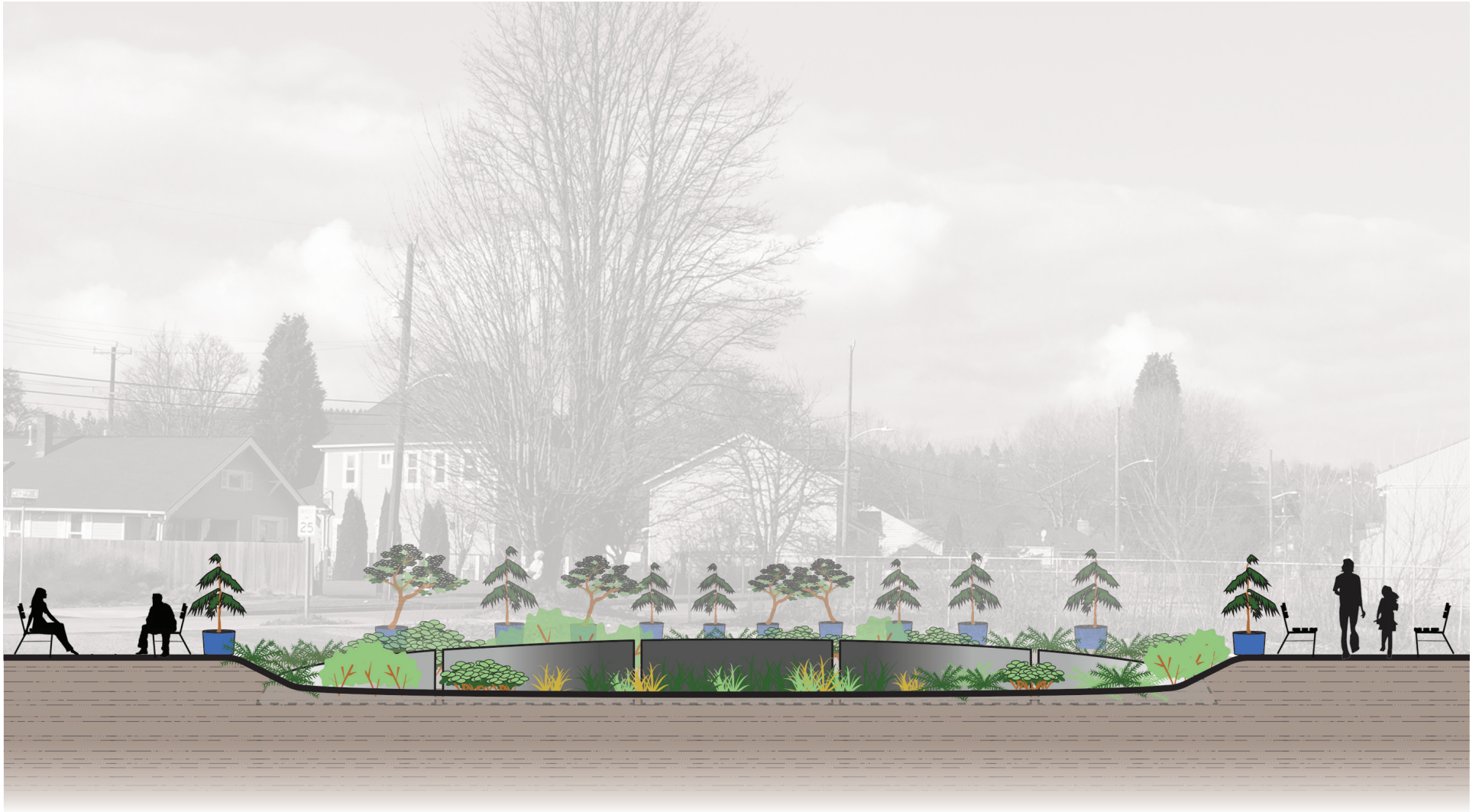




The rain garden is an opportunity for a public demonstration project that can also improve the native habitat for wildlife living adjacent to the river. Although ecological restoration sites are becoming common along the lower Duwamish River and in South Park, these projects do not invite human participation. Many of these restoration projects grow into thickets that are ideal for animal habitat, but offer little in the way of human experience. With the Plaza project there is an opportunity to provide a demonstration project that can educate the community about the importance of native vegetation and green stormwater infrastructure with the aesthetic and experiential benefits of a lush garden on a fairly barren site. This could also be an opportunity to provide interpretive signage that gives an overview of the unique history of human uses at this location and publicize the current opportunity for the community to re-imagine the site for the future.

In order to connect the new garden to the natural history of the site, the wettest zone of the rain garden will be planted with native riparian and flood plains species that were present before the river was channelized. This will include common estuary species like slough sedge (*Carex obnupta*), Pacific rush (*Juncus effusus* ssp. *pacificus*), and Henderson's checker-mallow (*Sidalcea hendersonii*). The transitional middle zone will be planted with species that can tolerate both inundation and drier conditions including camas (*Camassia* sp.), sweet gale (*Myrica gale*), and dwarf red-twig dogwood (*Cornus sericea* 'Kelseyi'). The upper driest zone will include primarily low-growing species to preserve sight lines and a sense of safety, punctuated with a few larger species for habitat and visual impact. This will include some montane species like shrubby cinquefoil (*Dasiphora fruticosa*), sub-alpine spiraea (*Spiraea splendens*), and beard's-tongue (*Penstemon* sp.) which are sun and drought-tolerant and reference the landscape of the river's headwaters. Other species that represent the transition from mid to low elevations include salal (*Gaultheria shallon*), kinnikinnick (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*), red elderberry (*Sambucus racemosa*), and ocean-spray (*Holodiscus discolor*).

Surrounding the planted rain garden will be benches (donated by Parks) and planters with native tree seedlings. These planters will be made by cutting repurposed 55 gallon drums in half, creating temporary storage for young nursery trees from SDOT



Opposite:

Fig. 3.10-3.11 Rain garden planter & drums

Temporary planters made out of 55 gallon drums cut in half act as nursery pots for small native conifer seedlings.

Photo: Marta Olson

Fig. 3.12 Rain garden section

The garden features native plants and an arcing concrete weir surrounded by potted native tree seedlings and benches.



or Dirt Corps. These planters will be extremely low-cost and also provide a connection to the industrial nature of the neighborhood. It is also an opportunity to showcase the tree species that would have been present on the site before channelization like Western redcedar (*Thuja plicata*), Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*), red alder (*Alnus rubra*), and big-leaf maple (*Acer macrophyllum*).

The garden is bisected by an arcing concrete weir cut through with vertical channels. This architectural element will provide observers with the opportunity to visually assess the height of the water flowing through the weir and reflect on seasonal fluctuations and natural processes. The weir channels also recall the river's history of taking a broad and spreading waterway and coercing it into an unmoving, straight-sided channel. This element also differentiates the project from other purely restoration plantings and will identify it as a temporary art installation instead of a permanent planting project.

Seattle Parks has concerns about a temporary rain garden that park users will become attached to and will force them to retain in the final design. However, they have also admitted that rain gardens and permeable surfaces will need to be a part of the final design because of the site's location near the river. The temporary rain garden plants could be transplanted into whatever final rain garden configuration Parks favors. The current choice on site is between a large, potentially hazardous mud puddle or making the water into an amenity with a rain garden. The workshop I held with the Duwamish Valley Youth Corps demonstrated their interest in incorporating rain gardens into a public park, and this interest has been reiterated by numerous other community agencies and individuals. It would also likely be the easiest aspect of the design to fund. Sustainable Seattle has a *De-pave Duwamish* grant that can provide \$5,000 to convert paved areas into rain gardens; the South Park community would need to decide that this site would be their priority for that project. The Duwamish River Opportunity Fund grant could also be a potential funding source and DIRT Corps is a likely partner for the construction.

Although the design at the South Park Plaza must be temporary and simple, it still has the potential for significant ecological and human health benefits. The

Fig. 3.13-3.14 Potential partners: DVYC & Dirt Corps
139 Photos: top DRCC, bottom Seattle Parks Foundation

tree canopy created by the planter boxes will benefit community physical health by capturing particulate matter in the air, the rain garden will benefit community mental health by providing access to a stress-relieving piece of nearby nature, and the community participation in building park elements as well as the events facilitation will benefit social health.

My primary goal for this project was to use my skills and connections as a design student to provide something of value to the South Park community. By listening to a variety of community members and organizations, as well as revisiting past community visioning documents, I have synthesized what I heard into an actionable guide of potential uses for the temporary Plaza site. My hope is that the instructions in this guide will allow South Park residents and businesses to feel empowered to use the valuable public amenity in their neighborhood and provide materials that can help them to apply for grant funding in the future.

part four

COMMUNITY EVENTS



Photo credit: Joshua Trujillo Seattle PI

Community market and Lucha Libre event

South Park has a community of merchants who have been looking for a space to hold a *tianguis* style outdoor market. The Plaza site would be perfect; it is large and flat and located near the business district. This would mean that residents would have the opportunity to purchase fresh food, fruits and vegetables, and other products that they currently have to travel outside the neighborhood to access (the closest supermarket is almost a mile away). The market would also provide economic opportunity for community members, especially those in the Latin American immigrant community who cannot afford to rent a storefront. Since the market stands will be generating revenue, part of profits could be used for improvements to the temporary Plaza space or for supporting events or entertainment.

A Lucha Libre wrestling event would be an excellent partner event to add to a market day. Some of the tree planters can be moved out into Dallas Avenue in order to block off vehicular traffic and allow for the wrestling ring and crowd to spill out into the street, creating a pedestrian corridor from the business district to the Plaza site. A portion of the site can be used for parking for vendors, customers, and food trucks, while the market is separated by the tree planters that signify pedestrian space. Temporary tables and chairs can be set up so visitors can enjoy a meal or snack in the park.

The market configuration is extremely flexible and can allow for many types of vendors and the space can grow or shrink if additional vendors are added or move away. This design will serve the current needs of the community and can respond to future conditions, which may change. A regular, ongoing use of the site will claim the space for the community and help encourage stewardship and sustain interest in the ongoing park design process.

Duration

One day event; market reoccurring weekly or monthly in late spring-early fall



Partner Organizations

South Park Retail Merchants Association (SPRMA)

Responsibilities: organize vendors; set up market stalls and temporary seating and tables; apply for Park Use Permit and cover fees (\$75 per day)

Contact: Rocio Aariaga, sprma@hotmail.com

Environmental Coalition of South Seattle (ECOSS)

Responsibilities: set up wrestling ring and book luchadores; schedule fork lifts to move planter boxes

Contact: Bill Pease, bill@ecoss.org

Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR)

Responsibilities: deliver temporary seating and tables

Contact: Cheryl Eastberg, cheryl.eastberg@seattle.gov

Materials and Equipment

Fork-lift and operator to move planter boxes

Cost: Free (donated by local business)

Market tents and tables

Cost: Free (provided by vendors)

Plastic folding chairs and tables

Cost: Free (donated by Seattle Parks for the day)

Lucha Libre ring, set up, and luchadores performers

Cost: \$20,000 (estimate provided by ECOSS)

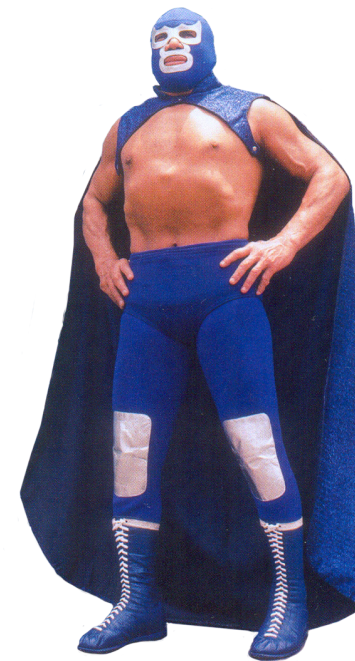




Fig. 4.1 Temporary Play Street
Photo: SDOT

Step 1: Permits

At least 14 days in advance:

Fill out SDOT Play Street Application at: <http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/publicspacemanagement.htm>

At least 7 days in advance:

Apply for Park Use Permit for market at: <https://www.seattle.gov/parks/reserve/park-use-permits>

Step 2: Rearrange tree planters

Day of event:

Fork lift operator from local business moves planters into Dallas Ave to block traffic, and away from the Plaza entrance to allow for market parking.

Step 3: Set-up for event

Day of event:

Market vendors set up tents and tables

SPRMA sets up folding chairs and tables

ECOSS sets up Lucha Libre ring

Step 4: Market and Lucha Libre Performance

SPRMA: parking lot attendants help arrange vehicles & food trucks

ECOSS organizes security for ring area

Step 5: Clean-up

At end of event:

Market vendors take down tents and tables

SPRMA returns chairs and tables to Seattle Parks; cleans up garbage on site

ECOSS: takes down Lucha Libre ring

Forklift operator moves planters back into place on Plaza site



Fig. 4.2 Community market & Lucha Libre event
Movable planters block Dallas Avenue to traffic allowing for a Lucha Libre wrestling ring to be set up in the street and connecting the Plaza to the business district. Community run market stalls sell a variety of goods.

Games day and movie night event

An event geared towards inclusively engaging the entire community is a games day followed by a movie night. The community asked for recreation opportunities for all ages and abilities to be included in the Plaza design during the 2014 South Park *Green Space Vision Plan* and this sentiment was reiterated by the Duwamish Valley Youth Corps in our workshop. With synthetic turf borrowed from Parks, different recreational activities can be set up based on community interest. This might include: soccer, whiffle ball, badminton, volleyball, bocce, mini-golf, horseshoes, and corn hole. A larger turf area can be used for picnicking and sunbathing until dark, when it becomes seating for an outdoor movie. If merchants are interested in selling food and drinks, an area can be denoted by the movable planters either in the site or in the street on Dallas Avenue. If the event is popular, a stewardship group could be organized to take care of the materials and create recurring games days in the future.

Duration:

summer weekend event



Partner Organizations

South Park Retail Merchants Association (SPRMA)

Responsibilities: supply food trucks and food stands

Contact: Rocio Aariaga, sprma@hotmail.com

Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR)

Responsibilities: supply synthetic turf and temporary seating and tables; grant permission to use site without paying Park Use Permit fees

Contact: Cheryl Eastberg, cheryl.eastberg@seattle.gov

Duwamish Valley Youth Corps (DVYC)

Responsibilities: plan and set up games and recreation activities

Contact: Carmen Martinez, Carmen@duwamishcleanup.org

Materials and Equipment

Synthetic athletic field turf

Cost: Free (donated by Seattle Parks)

Games and recreation supplies (badminton/volleyball set, horseshoes set, Wiffle Ball and bat, bocce set, 2 soccer balls and 4 goals)

Cost: \$195-\$265

Plastic folding chairs and tables

Cost: Free (donated by Seattle Parks for the day)

Movie screen and projector rental

Cost: \$600-\$2,000 (depending on screen size)



Step 1: Planning

1-3 months in advance:

SPRMA arranges movie projector and screen rental

DVYC decides on games and orders supplies

Step 2: Set-up for event

Day before event:

DVYC gets turf from Seattle Parks, cuts to size and arranges in Plaza

Day of event:

Seattle Parks delivers plastic folding chairs and tables

Rental company delivers and sets up movie screen

SPRMA sets up food stands and food trucks

Step 3: Games day/ movie night

DVYC distributes play equipment and introduces visitors to event, make sure equipment stays on site, collect play equipment at sunset

Step 4: Clean-up

At end of event:

DVYC collects and stores games and turf

SPRMA returns chairs and tables to Seattle Parks; cleans up garbage on site

Rental company takes down movie screen





Fig. 4.3 Games day & movie night event
Planters can remain in their base position. Artificial turf is rolled out throughout the site allowing for soccer, lawn games, and passive recreation. Merchants bring food stalls or food trucks. At sunset everyone gathers to watch an outdoor movie.

Works Cited

- Anguelovski, Isabelle. "From Toxic Sites to Parks as (Green) LULUs? New Challenges of Inequity, Privilege, Gentrification, and Exclusion for Urban Environmental Justice." *Journal of planning literature*. 31.1 23–36. Print.
- Balk, Gene. "U.S. Census: Seattle Now Fourth for Growth among 50 Biggest U.S. Cities." *The Seattle Times*. 19 May 2016. Web. 31 Jan. 2017.
- Berger, Alan. *Drosscape: Wasting Land Urban America*. New York, US: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007. Print.
- Bettencourt, Luís M. A. "The Origins of Scaling in Cities." *Science* (New York, N.Y.) 340.6139 (2013): 1438–41. alliance-primo.com. Web.
- Bishop, Peter, and Lesley Williams. *The Temporary City*. 1 edition. London ; New York: Routledge, 2012. Print.
- Brugge, Doug, John L. Durant, and Christine Rioux. "Near-Highway Pollutants in Motor Vehicle Exhaust: A Review of Epidemiologic Evidence of Cardiac and Pulmonary Health Risks." *Environmental Health* 6.1 (2007): 23. Web.
- City of Seattle. "About Seattle - Race & Ethnicity - Seattle Office of Planning and Community Development." *Seattle.gov*. 2012. Web. 17 Jan. 2017. <http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/cityplanning/populationdemographics/aboutseattle/raceethnicity/default.htm>
- City of Seattle. "Equity & Environment Initiative - Environment | Seattle.gov." Web. 4 Apr. 2017. <https://www.seattle.gov/environment/about-ose/equity-and-environment>

- City of Seattle. "Race and Social Justice Initiative - RSJI | Seattle.gov." Web. 4 Apr. 2017. <https://www.seattle.gov/rsji>
- City of Seattle. "Seattle Parcel Data - Search." 2015. Web. 11 Dec. 2016. <http://web6.seattle.gov/dpd/parceldata/default.aspx>
- City of Seattle. "Seattle's Canopy Cover." Trees for Seattle. 2007. Web. Accessed 16 Jan. 2017. <http://www.seattle.gov/trees/canopycover.htm>
- Daniell, William et al. "Health Impact Assessment: Proposed Cleanup Plan for the Lower Duwamish Waterway Superfund Site: Final Report." Sept. 2013.
- Donovan, Geoffrey H. et al. "The Relationship Between Trees and Human Health Evidence from the Spread of the Emerald Ash Borer." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 44.2 (2013): 139–145. Web of Science. Web.
- Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition Technical Advisory Group. "Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition/Technical Advisory Group (DRCC/TAG)." Web. Accessed 4 Apr. 2017. <http://duwamishcleanup.org/>
- Environmental Protection Agency. "Environmental Justice Analysis for the Lower Duwamish Waterway Cleanup." Feb. 2013. Web. 5 Accessed Apr. 2017. https://www3.epa.gov/region10/pdf/sites/ldw/pp/ej_analysis_ldw_feb_2013.pdf
- ENTRIX, Inc., and BOAS, Inc. "Cultural Resources Survey for the South Park Bridge Project." June 2008. Print.

- Gould, Linn, and B. J. Cummings. Duwamish Valley Cumulative Health Impacts Analysis: Seattle, Washington. The Coalition, 2013. Google Scholar. Web. 20 Nov. 2016. <http://justhealthaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/CHIA-EPA-TRI-Conference-DC-May-2014.pdf>
- Hou, Jeffrey et al. Now Urbanism: The Future City Is Here. Routledge, 2014. Print.
- Kent, Fred. "Whom Does Design Really Serve?" Project for Public Spaces. 3 Oct. 2012. Web. 25 Jan. 2017. <https://www.pps.org/reference/whom-does-design-really-serve/>
- Kumar, Somesh. Methods for Community Participation: A Complete Guide for Practitioners. New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 2002. Print.
- Langhorst, Joern. "Re-Presenting Transgressive Ecologies: Post-Industrial Sites as Contested Terrains." *Local Environment* 19.10 (2014): 1110–1133. EBSCOhost. Web.
- Lefebvre, Henri. Writings on Cities. Cambridge, Mass, USA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996. Print.
- Loures, Luís. "Post-Industrial Landscapes as Drivers for Urban Redevelopment: Public versus Expert Perspectives towards the Benefits and Barriers of the Reuse of Post-Industrial Sites in Urban Areas." *Habitat International* 45 (2015): 72–81. EBSCOhost. Web.
- Lovasi, G. S. et al. "Children Living in Areas with More Street Trees Have Lower Prevalence of Asthma." *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health* 62.7 (2008): 647–649. EBSCOhost. Web.

Lydon, Mike, and Anthony Garcia. *Tactical Urbanism: Short-Term Action for Long-Term Change*. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2015. Print.

King County. "South Park Bridge - King County." *kingcounty.gov*. 27 Mar. 2017. Web. 20 May 2017. <http://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/transportation/roads/south-park-bridge.aspx>

Parlin, Michaela. "Seattle, Washington Urban Tree Canopy Analysis, Project Report: Looking Back and Moving Forward." 7 May 2009. Web. 16 Jan. 2017. http://www.seattle.gov/trees/docs/NCDC_Final_Project_Report.pdf

Pilat, Monica Ann et al. "The Effect of Tree Cover and Vegetation on Incidence of Childhood Asthma in Metropolitan Statistical Areas of Texas." *HortTechnology* 22.5 (2012): 631–637. Print.

Population Division: Department of Economic and Social Affairs. "World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision." 2015. Print.

Project for Public Spaces. "Equitable Placemaking: Not the End, but the Means." Project for Public Spaces. 19 June 2015. Web. 25 Jan. 2017. <https://www.pps.org/reference/equity-placemaking-gentrification/>

Pugh, Thomas A. M. et al. "Effectiveness of Green Infrastructure for Improvement of Air Quality in Urban Street Canyons." *Environmental Science & Technology* 46.14 (2012): 7692–7699. *alliance-primo.com*. Web.

Raftery, Adrian E., Leontine Alkema, and Patrick Gerland. "Bayesian Population Projections for the United Nations." *Statistical Science* 29.1 (2014): 58–68. CrossRef. Web.

- Reese, Tom, James Rasmussen, and Eric Wagner. *Once and Future River: Reclaiming the Duwamish*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016. Print.
- Reynolds, Eric. "Interwhile Uses." *Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal* 4.4 (2011): 371–380.
- Rottle, Nancy, and Ken Yocom. *Basics Landscape Architecture 02: Ecological Design*. Lausanne: AVA Publishing, 2011. Print.
- Russell, James S. "Enough of Bogus 'Placemaking.'" 8 Apr. 2015. Web. 10 Jan. 2017. <http://jamesrussell.net/enough-of-bogus-placemaking/>
- SDCI Community Engagement. "Holding Patterns: Cascade of Ideas for Stalled Construction Sites." *Building Connections*, Seattle Department of Construction & Inspections. 30 June 2010. Web. 24 Jan. 2017. <http://buildingconnections.seattle.gov/2010/06/30/holding-patterns-cascade-of-ideas-for-stalled-construction-sites/>
- Seattle Parks Foundation. "South Park Green Space Vision Plan." June 2014. Web. https://www.seattleparksfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/South-Park-Green-Space-Vision-Plan_6.17.14_Final-with-Appendix.pdf
- Temel, Robert. "The Temporary in the City." *Temporary Urban Spaces: Concepts for the Use of City Spaces*. Ed. Florian Haydn and Robert Temel. Basel: Birkhäuser, 2006. Print.
- The Trust for Public Land. "2015 City Park Facts." Apr. 2015. Web. Accessed 11 Dec. 2016. https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/files_upload/2015-City-Park-Facts-Report.pdf

- Ulmer, Jared M. et al. "Multiple Health Benefits of Urban Tree Canopy: The Mounting Evidence for a Green Prescription." *Health & Place* 42 (2016): 54–62. ScienceDirect. Web.
- Updegrave, Cynthia. "Duwamish-Green Watershed - HistoryLink.org.", 31 Dec. 2016. Web. 14 May 2017. <http://www.historylink.org/File/20272>
- US Census Bureau. "American Community Survey." 2009-2013. Web. Accessed 11 Dec. 2016. <http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/cityplanning/populationdemographics/acs/5year/default.htm>
- Wilma, David. "Seattle Neighborhoods: South Park -- Thumbnail History - HistoryLink.org.", 16 Feb. 2001. Web. Accessed 24 Jan. 2017. <http://www.historylink.org/File/2985>
- Wolf, Kathleen L., and Alicia S.T. Robbins. "Metro Nature, Environmental Health, and Economic Value." *Environmental Health Perspectives* 123.5 (2015): 390–398. EBSCOhost. Web.
- Wright, Rosalind J. et al. "Community Violence and Asthma Morbidity: The Inner-City Asthma Study." *American Journal of Public Health* 94.4 (2004): 625–632. Print.