



# CATALYZING COMMUNITY CAPACITY

How Philadelphia Can Create Equitable Right-of-Way Stewardship

Prepared by the Lindy Institute for Urban Innovation, July 2019

## About the Lindy Institute

The Lindy Institute for Urban Innovation at Drexel University forges innovative strategies to equitably advance cities, drawing inspiration from Drexel's commitment to civic engagement and experiential education to train the next generation of engaged urban strategists to solve complex and dynamic, cross-disciplinary urban challenges; and creates new knowledge and practices to enable our cities to function, prosper and thrive in a complex and dynamic global society.

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Publicly-stewarded right-of-way improvements in Philadelphia from left to right: Bike corral at Tattoed Mom on South Street, Grays Ferry Triangle pedestrian plaza at South and 23rd, and the parklet at Green Line Cafe on Baltimore and 43rd in West Philadelphia (Photos by The Lindy Institute for Urban Innovation, 2019)

# STUDY GOALS

## AND BACKGROUND

The Lindy Institute for Urban Innovation began this study in 2018 through the generous support of the William Penn Foundation, the Wyncote Foundation, the Knight Foundation, and Poor Richard's Charitable Trust to document the current state of, and understand the potential for, community-based stewardship processes related to public right-of-way (ROW) improvements in Philadelphia. Our goals were to:

- 1** Develop a shared understanding of current barriers to community-based stewardship of the ROW.
- 2** Identify best practices in peer cities and comparable research conducted previously.
- 3** Document existing conditions for selected ROW stewardship processes in the City of Philadelphia and gather feedback.
- 4** Develop recommendations for the City to improve the ROW stewardship processes, expand programs and increase stewardship opportunities.





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## **EXISTING CONDITIONS IN PHILADELPHIA**

The Lindy Institute for Urban Innovation at Drexel University began this study in 2018 to document the current state of right-of-way (ROW) improvements in Philadelphia, understand barriers and pain-points associated with their community-based stewardship model, to analyze relevant best practices, and synthesize these inputs. The outcome of this research was a series of recommendations to increase stewardship opportunities, particularly in underserved communities, including:

- Streamlined processes and improved communications and marketing related to program requirements
- Greater attention paid to equity indicators and increased transparency to best serve communities with the greatest need but low capacity
- Building capacity within the City administration to support the ROW Stewardship program through dedicated staffing at leadership levels
- Designing support programs to work within or alongside city staff to bolster community capacity

This study focused on processes for the public to implement and steward pedestrian plazas, parklets, and bicycle corrals. Philadelphia initiated parklet pilots in 2012 in University City and formally created its ROW stewardship program in 2014, but relatively few projects created in the intervening years, and the numbers reaching a plateau of less than 30 overall improvements. This lack of momentum was the premise for this study.



## RESEARCH PROCESS

The study was conducted through a series of in-depth interviews with stewards of current ROW interventions, users who did not successfully complete the application process, experts on ROW programs and processes both locally and nationally, and city employees and stakeholders involved in ROW processes. In addition, local and national data was gathered and analyzed, and research was conducted on ROW elements and their impact. The various ROW applications, review and approval processes were critiqued, and case studies from neighborhoods in Philadelphia, and national best practice examples of ROW programs in San Francisco, Boston, Chicago, Seattle, Portland, and New York City were developed.

## NATIONAL CONTEXT

ROW stewardship programs are common in large cities across the country, with cities like San Francisco and New York City blazing trails on parklets and pedestrian plazas, respectively. While Philadelphia is competitive with some of its peers in number of ROW amenities, it's important to acknowledge that it's not always easy to prioritize ROW improvements as city addressing deep and widespread poverty. Because of this, the case studies were selected to show exemplars Philadelphia can aspire to match while focusing resources on the study's overall goal of building equity in ROW stewardship.

Nationally, it's clear that there is no standardized process for a ROW program. Philadelphia has an opportunity to break new ground, particularly in making ROW stewardship more inclusive by catalyzing a sense of ownership for ROW space in low-income communities. Cities like San Francisco, New York and Chicago offered lessons on dedicated internal capacity, the importance of visible leadership, and making process streamlined and implementation turnkey.



The popular parklet at Green Line Cafe near Clark Park was one of the first installed in Philadelphia. (Photo by The Lindy Institute for Urban Innovation, 2019)

## CURRENT STATE OF PHILADELPHIA ROW STEWARDSHIP

City Departments within Philadelphia lack capacity to foster a nurturing environment for increased ROW stewardship, despite positive intentions and support from municipal staff. This deficit frustrates community development leaders looking for quick, cost-effective improvements to the ROW because of the opportunity for placemaking, increased neighborhood ownership of public space, and potential for high impact in reaching residents where they are. Limitations of capacity mean that ROW stewardship is largely the province of well-resourced BIDs or CDCs with staff or volunteers experienced in design, law, insurance, or other fields helpful to navigating the ROW approval process, limiting geographic impact to only the most well-resourced neighborhoods. Community leaders reported pain-points caused by lack of capacity in the form of time and expertise, lack of capital due to an inability to raise funds for either initial construction and/or ongoing maintenance, and confusion or lack of helpful information created uncertainty for applicants daunted by the guidelines.

## FINDINGS

Despite being viewed highly positively among stakeholders who have engaged with ROW processes, the following barriers were identified as significant for the city to address:

### Systematic Struggles

- ROW programs are viewed as “inherently inequitable”
- Citizens would like to see a complete streets overhaul
- Philadelphia lacks a civic figurehead for ROW stewardship

### Programmatic Problems

- Insurance and overall cost of materials and design are seen as key barriers of entry
- ROW program guidelines are inconsistent and confusing
- The City's rules for some other ROW elements are unclear or nonexistent

### Community Consternation

- Organizations and staff tasked with spearheading these projects are over-worked
- There is a hunger among existing users for the City to champion these projects
- There is a desire for the city to vocally support tactical urbanism in its streets.
- Activists would like to collaborate with the city to improve its programs but are concerned about reprisals for speaking up or for their voice to fall on deaf ears.

### Internal Workflow and Communications

- Internal process varies depending on context and personnel, and transfer of information is largely informal,
- There is support for a more robust ROW program across city departments
- Capacity is cited as a persistent problem, especially in the form of necessary time among various city staff members required to review applications.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Institute recommends the City focus on the following recommendations to better equip community stakeholders to steward ROW projects:

- **Streamline ROW Processes:** Streamline ROW review and approval processes by identifying primary points of contact and consolidating responsibility for review and approval, include a “kit of parts” and/or preapproved open-source designs, among other refinements
- **Create ROW Stewardship Program Guidebooks:** Guidebooks should be created to improve usability, as shown effective in other cities.
- **Increase stewardship through education and outreach guided by equity indicators, data-driven prioritization and data transparency:** The city should develop an education and outreach strategy using data indicators focused on identifying communities that have the capacity but are otherwise underserved, uninformed, and/or underfunded, providing a foundation for incremental improvement using data to tailor and target information and services to meet equity goals.
- **Build capacity within the City administration to support the ROW Stewardship program through a dedicated staff member focused on ROW stewardship, building toward increase ROW capacity through additional staffing, overseen by a senior level staff member in the Streets, OTIS or OCS hierarchy.** This will require support at the highest levels of the administration.
- **Explore the creation of a ROW Stewardship-focused organization** focused on gathering and distributing resources to manage, promote, and process ROW requests in collaboration, not competition, with additional city staff.

We are optimistic that with clearer, more efficient processes and increased, strategically deployed capacity, Philadelphians will benefit from this report's recommendations and the city will serve as a model for others trying to maximize the impact of limited resources. With adequate support and clear expectations, we have no doubt Philadelphia's neighborhood stewards will harness their civic power to lead and innovate in shaping their streetscape in decades to come.

Opposite: Clark Park, adjacent to the nearby parklet. (Photo by The Lindy Institute for Urban Innovation, 2019)



# RESEARCH OVERVIEW

## EXISTING CONDITIONS IN PHILADELPHIA




Nationwide, community-led right-of-way (referred throughout this report as “ROW”) stewardship programs received a jumpstart in 2005 as Rebar, an architecture firm in San Francisco, implemented the original PARK(ing) Day project, which transformed a single metered parking space into a temporary public park in an area that had been devoid of public open space. Formal public parklets in San Francisco began in 2010 as cities across the country followed suit, most notably in New York City with a trailblazing pedestrian plaza program. Philadelphia initiated its own parklet pilots in 2012 in University City and formally created its ROW stewardship program in 2014. In order to spur increased stewardship, Philadelphia then established a one-time micro-grant program for construction of parklets intended to encourage others to participate and showcase the potential of these public space improvements.

One of the first and most high-profile community-led ROW stewardship projects was the Grays Ferry Triangle pedestrian plaza - a formerly underused slip lane transformed by local neighborhood and business associations with the capacity to conceive and create a much-needed community amenity. This project exemplified the opportunities of pedestrianizing a street for residents in need of a public gathering space and demonstrated how a community could facilitate ROW improvements in cooperation with the City. Together with plazas developed by University City District (UCD) along Baltimore Avenue in West Philadelphia, it helped shape the City's guidelines and process to review community-designed, -implemented and -stewarded pedestrian plazas. These rules formed the basis of the current set of ROW improvement processes for the City, which were most recently updated in 2016.

Unfortunately, the pilot projects' impact as a catalyst has been limited, with relatively few projects replicating their success. This lack of momentum has helped inform the questions explored in this study, including:

- What prevents residents from utilizing the City's ROW stewardship program to its full potential?
- Why aren't businesses along the city's many commercial corridors providing more seating and gathering places for the public through parklets?
- Why haven't more portions of underused streets been reclaimed by the people for vital civic plazas?
- With more bicycle commuters than any other city with over 1 million residents in the United States - why are there not more bicycle corrals in parking spaces to support them?

Almost all ROW improvement projects implemented in Philadelphia since the program began were conducted by or in association with a place-based organization like a Business Improvement District (BID) or a local Community Development Corporation (CDC), reflecting their capacity and willingness to make and maintain community improvements and assume liability. While Grays Ferry Triangle had strong support from the neighboring community, it is also a community with means, expertise, and time to plan and implement the project while navigating procedural hurdles. In University City, where more than 50% of the city's parklets are installed, the neighborhood benefits from UCD, a partnership supported by anchor institutions with a robust public space improvement program that allows them to assume the cost and liability of installing parklets in the district. Despite these interventions being inexpensive compared to permanent improvements, the costs are still prohibitive for most communities without grant assistance and sweat equity from volunteers with time and expertise to share. Resources like this are not available in every community and the City's aspirations for equity demand that means not dictate whether and where these kinds of public spaces are implemented.

-  Parklet
-  Bike Corral
-  Pedestrian Plaza

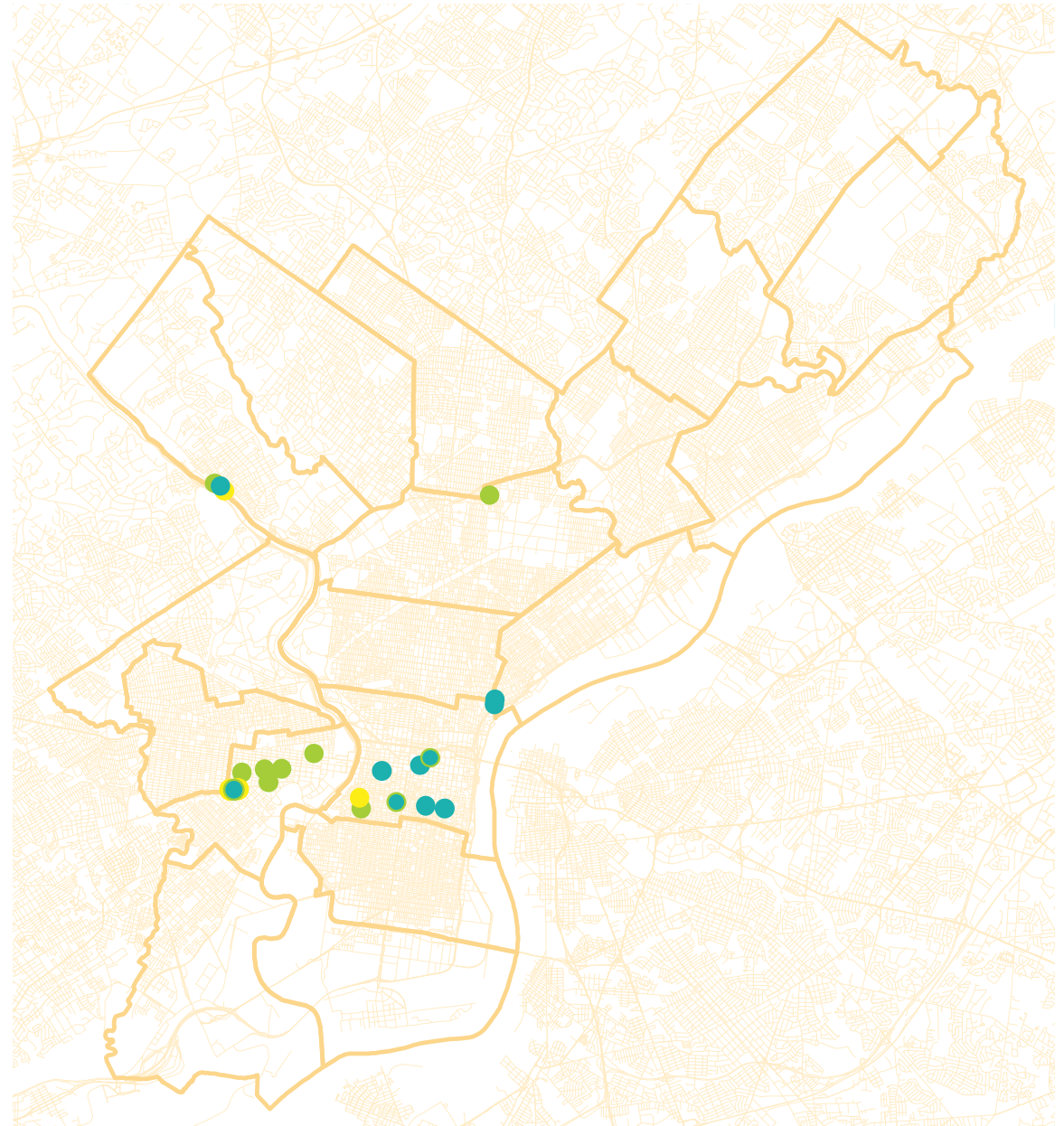


Figure 1: Map of existing ROW improvements in Philadelphia, as of March 2019

The appetite for a public space renaissance in Philadelphia is palpable. This report comes after three years of successful PhillyFreeStreets open streets programming, where miles of city streets, even main arteries, are open only to pedestrians and bicyclists one day a year; an annual PARK(ing) Day event 11 years running that attracts over 50 high-quality pop-up public spaces by notable architecture firms and city agencies alike; and an extremely popular traveling beer garden Parks on Tap that activates parks throughout the city in the summer (to say nothing of the various other temporary activations like the “Oval+” at Eakins Oval, Spruce Street Harbor Park, and the Porch at 30th Street Station, to name a few).




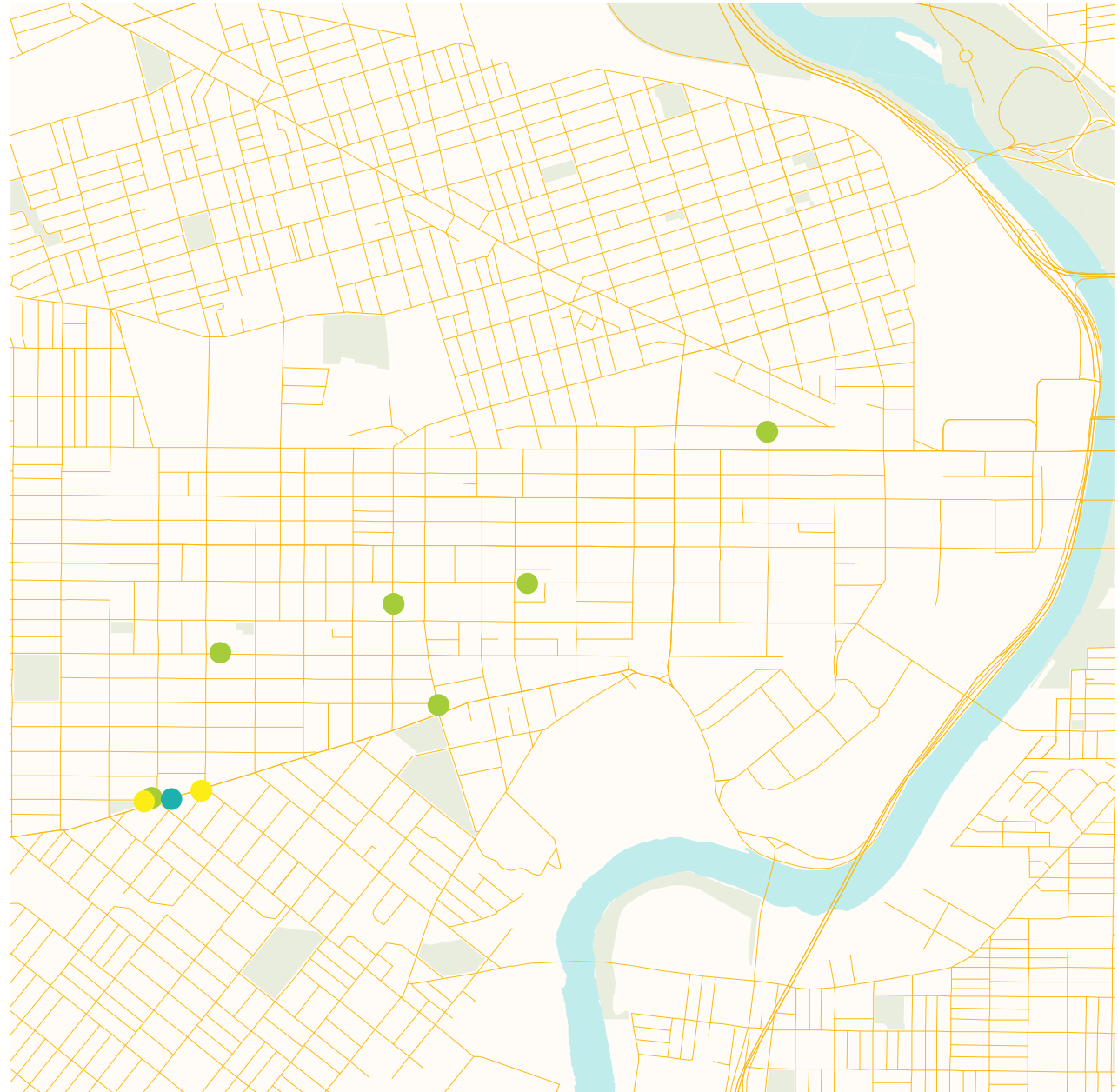
-  Parklet
-  Bike Corral
-  Pedestrian Plaza

Figure 2: Map of existing ROW improvements in West Philadelphia, as of March 2019



To further explore how community-led ROW stewardship might be increased and made most equitable, we studied four processes where the public has an opportunity to apply for a permit to steward part of the ROW in Philadelphia. They include the following:

### PEDESTRIAN PLAZAS

Areas of the ROW usually located in an unused or underused portion of a street, required to be public and often furnished with moveable seating

Philadelphia count: 4

### PARKLETS

Seasonal installations, usually occupying 1-2 on-street parking spaces and providing public seating; required to be public; typically built and maintained by an adjacent business

Philadelphia count: 11

### BICYCLE CORRALS

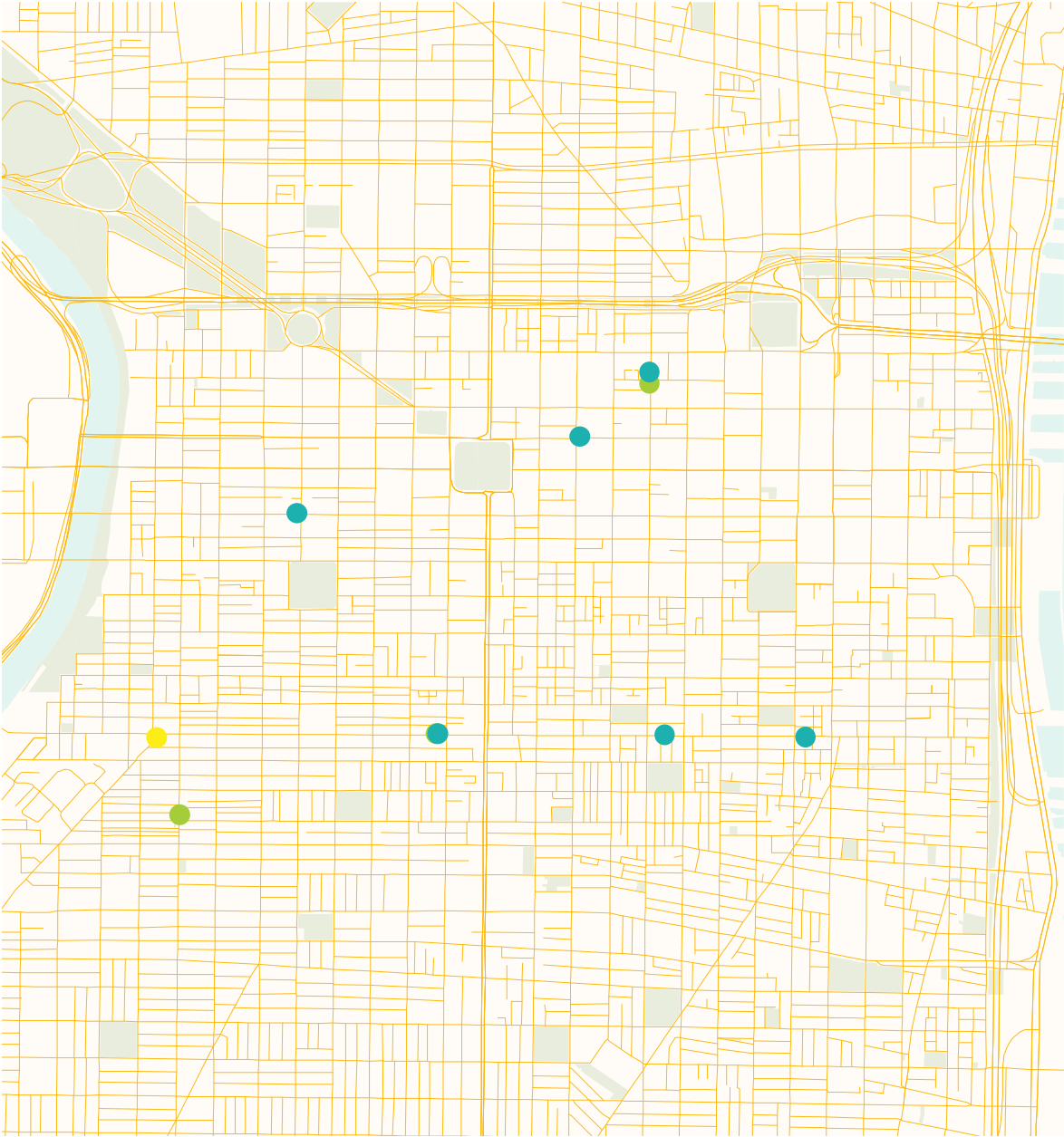
Large-scale bicycle parking units placed in an on-street parking space for public use and typically sponsored and maintained by an adjacent business

Philadelphia count: 10

### SMALL-SCALE ADDITIONS

Additional interventions in the public ROW that provide public space and placemaking to the neighborhood, such as a bench or banner

Figure 3: Map of Existing ROW improvements in Center City, Philadelphia, as of March 2019



# METHODOLOGY

## MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH METHODS

This report documents current ROW stewardship practices and analyzes how they might be improved by examining national best practices. The study was conducted using a variety of research methods and driven by the Institute's interest in understanding current processes, applicant and administrator "pain points", and best practices that might be applied to resolve them:

1

**In-depth interviews with stewards** of current ROW interventions, as well as users who did not successfully complete the application process.

2

**In-depth interviews with experts** on ROW programs and processes both locally and nationally, including staff members of other cities' ROW programs.

3

**Interviews and workshops with city employees and stakeholders** involved in ROW processes from the Office of Transportation, Infrastructure, and Sustainability (oTIS), Office of Complete Streets (OCS), Department of Streets, and other City departments.

4

**Review of prior research** conducted on local ROW elements and their impact, including research done on parklets in Philadelphia by city officials and the University City District, as well as research done nationally by other cities and universities.

5

**Analysis of ROW stewardship programs and case studies** from San Francisco, Boston, Chicago, Seattle, Portland, and New York City, as well as various neighborhoods in Philadelphia.



## IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

### LOCAL AND NATIONAL

A total of twenty-eight in-depth interviews were conducted with individuals experienced in ROW stewardship projects locally and in other cities in the United States. These experts also have experience with various aspects of the ROW from all perspectives, from city staff to business owners, BID members to tactical urbanists. Interviewees in Philadelphia were selected to ensure an equitable distribution of input across the city, with concerted effort to reach communities outside of Center City and University City. National outreach focused on peer cities with mature and innovative ROW stewardship programs, with a focus on national leaders. Participants were drawn from four different broad categories of expertise:

### LOCAL EXPERTS

Local experts on the ROW and other public space improvements, including professionals experienced with the creation of special assessment districts, members of the City of Philadelphia staff, and tactical urbanism consultants.

### NATIONAL EXPERTS

National experts on the ROW and public space improvements ranging from officials from other cities with ROW stewardship programs (such as San Francisco, New York City, Memphis, and Chicago), nationally recognized experts (like The Street Plans Collaborative), and researchers with publications on these improvements from UCLA and UC Berkeley.

### LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

Program participants from local place-based organizations like business improvement districts (BIDs), neighborhood associations (NAs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community development corporations (CDCs).

### LOCAL PARTICIPANTS

Local participants in the process from the public, such as local business owners with successful or failed ROW stewardship projects and a commercial real estate developer looking to include ROW improvements into their capital projects.

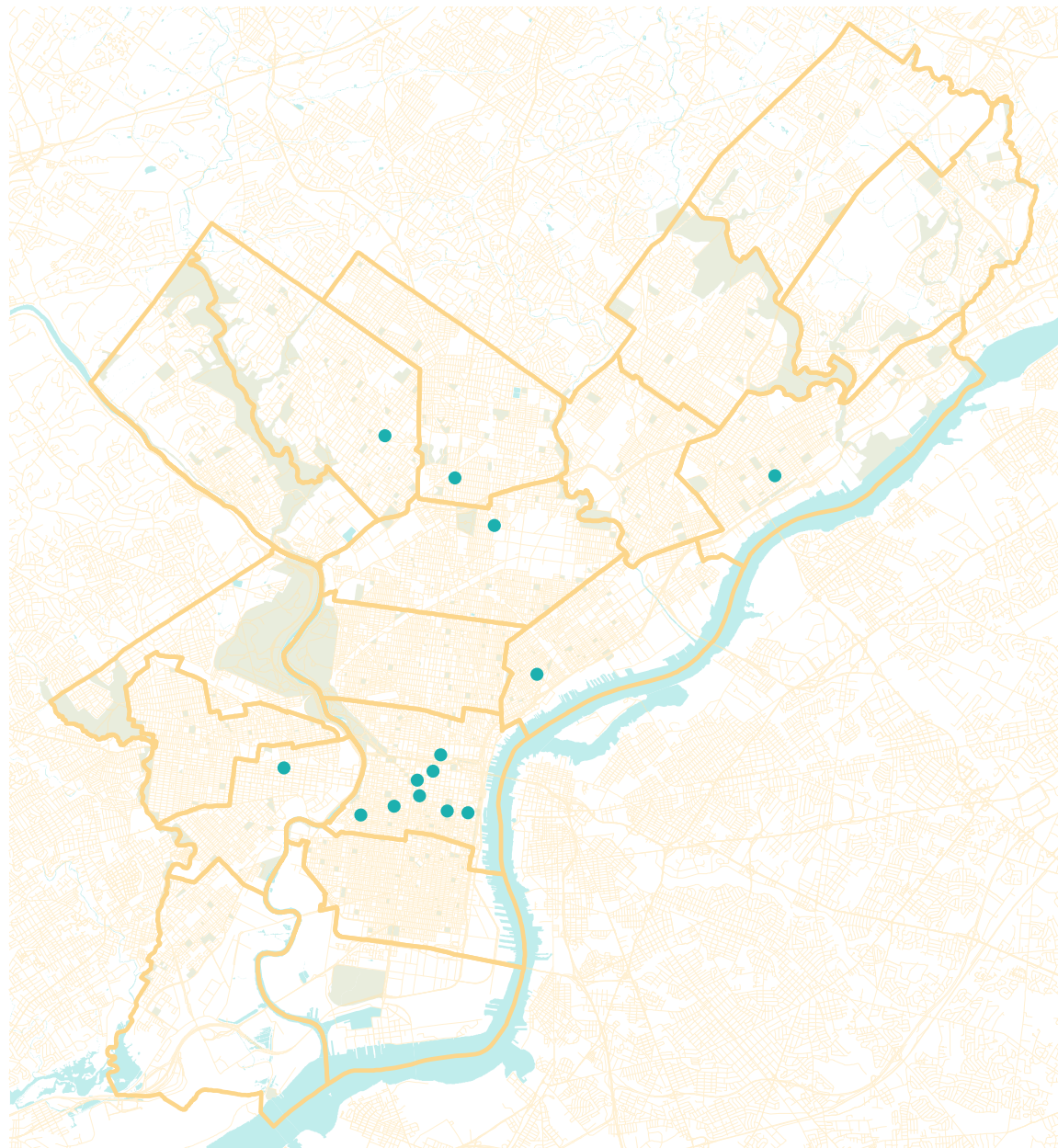
The research team shadowed a City team of ROW reviewers from the Office of Transportation, Infrastructure and Sustainability (OTIS) to approve reinstalled parklets in University City as shown in the photo to the right. (Photo by The Lindy Institute, 2018)



Two workshops were conducted with City of Philadelphia staff, including members from the departments of oTIS, Commerce, City Planning, Water, Streets, Complete Streets, Citizens Planning Institute, and Rebuild, to explore internal processes and better understand how workflow might be improved. In all, these consultations formed the basis for the evidence-based approach for our results throughout this report. (See Appendix B for a complete list of individuals and organizations interviewed for this project.)

“There’s no long term strategy or vision [for ROW stewardship] with the city.”  
– Anonymous Interviewee

Figure 4: Location of origin for local Philadelphia participants recruited for this study



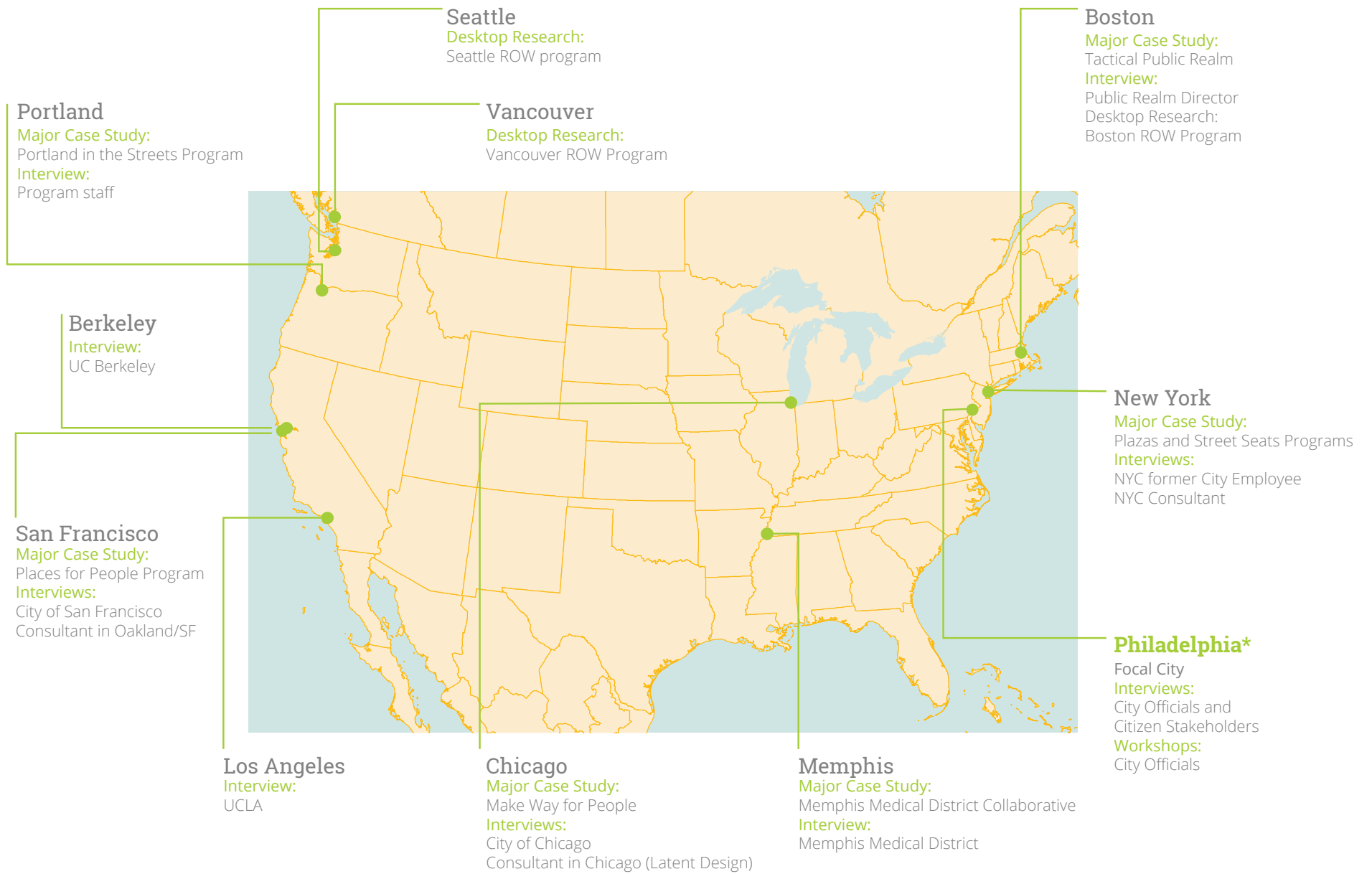


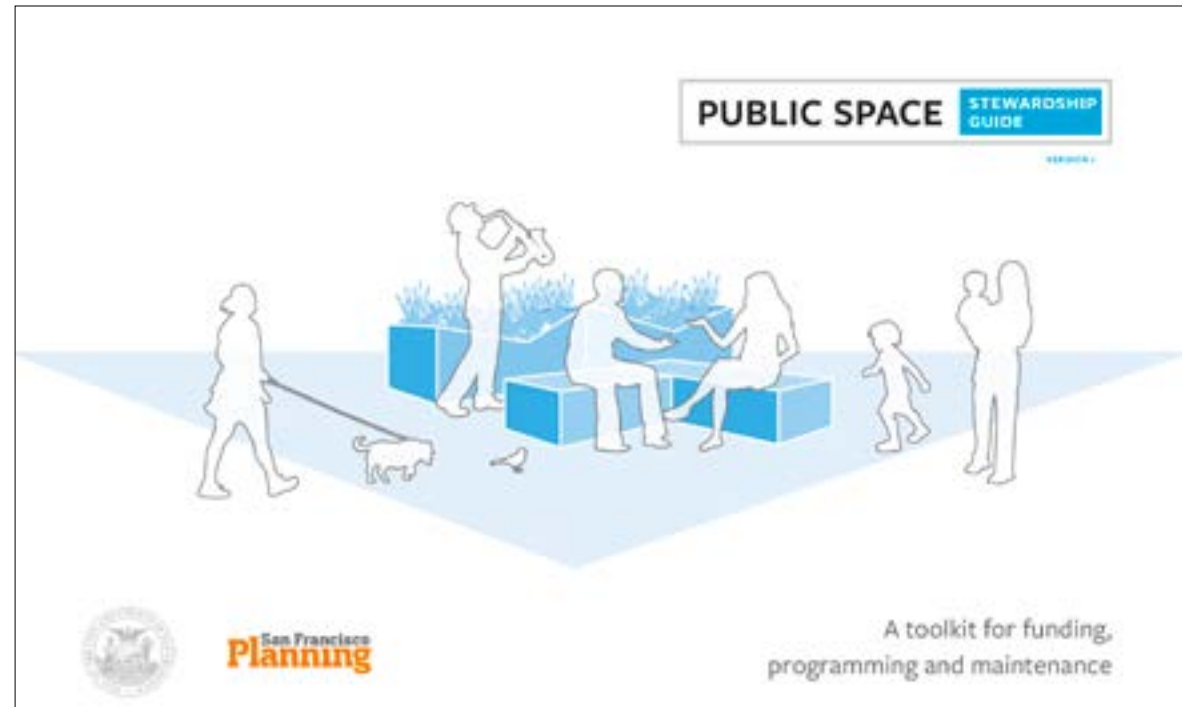
Figure 5: Location of origin of interviewees and case studies used for this report

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Additional research on right-of-way

There are few studies on parklets and the public realm, and those conducted mostly centered on an individual city or district's performance, or were completed in an effort to review and revise a City's processes (similar to this report). These reports were reviewed in order to compare other cities' assessments and suggestions. Some of this research also speaks to the benefits of public space and activating the public right of way, most notably in the areas of commercial activity and civic engagement.

Notably, there were two studies conducted in Philadelphia which assessed the benefits of parklets and the challenges in implementing and maintaining them. In 2015, the University City District (UCD) surveyed its own parklets to measure their effectiveness, demographics of users, and impact on surrounding businesses and neighborhoods. Through behavior mapping and intercept surveys, they found a diverse range of people using their parklets, a variety of uses and lengths of stay, and on average a 20% increase in sales for the adjacent business and sponsor of the parklet (University City District, 2015).



Cover of the Public Space Stewardship Guide produced by The Street Plans Collaborative and MJM Management Group for the City of San Francisco in 2015.

Following this study, members of the Philadelphia Water Department and the Office of Transportation, Infrastructure, and Sustainability (oTIS) collaborated with UCD to assess parklets throughout Philadelphia to “examine the political, organizational, and demographic factors associated with the successful establishment of parklets”. This significant survey of neighborhood demographics and business owners and organizations that have implemented parklets shows a distribution based on an existing multi-modal community in areas that are young, educated, and employed, but less diverse. The survey concluded parklets have succeeded mostly in places where place-based organizations were not only present, but well-funded, with enough staff members (and interest) that provide the capacity to take on this type of work (Ben-Amos, et. al., 2016).

While relatively little comprehensive research on ROW stewardship improvements has been conducted, two recent national studies stand out in their thoroughness and approach: The Public Space Stewardship Guide (Prepared for the San Francisco Planning Department by The Street Plans Collaborative and MJM Management Group, 2015) and Assembly: Civic Design Guidelines (Center for Active Design, 2018). In the former, various models for funding and staffing are outlined using placemaking case studies to illustrate approaches from different cities (including the aforementioned pop-up beer gardens in Philadelphia). Assembly, on the other hand, presents the results of a large-scale national survey on civic engagement and perception and the relationship to access and elements in public spaces. This seminal study outlines suggestions for making successful public spaces with an evidence-based approach, providing the scientific case for investing in public spaces both large and small. (See Appendix A for a full list of references.)



The bicycle corral in Chinatown takes up one parking space in the right-of-way while providing much needed space off the sidewalk for bike parking. (Photo by The Lindy Institute, 2018)

# ANALYSIS

## PROGRAM CHALLENGES

With this work premised upon ROW stewardship providing public benefit on multiple levels, identifying inhibiting factors were key to understanding why relatively few ROW stewardship projects exist in Philadelphia. As shown in Figure 1, despite the City's efforts to make the program accessible and to support community organizations in navigating the process, relatively few improvements have been implemented. Currently there are 11 parklets, 4 pedestrian plazas, and 10 bike corrals. What has been accomplished is largely the province of well-funded BIDs or sophisticated CDCs able to utilize volunteer expertise. These improvements happen almost exclusively in the fastest-growing communities in the city with high levels of social capital, leaving large swaths of neighborhoods untouched by ROW stewardship improvements. The dearth of ROW stewardship improvements in low-income communities is the result of compounding barriers to community entry, limited city administrative and marketing capacity, and lack of prioritization, which is unsurprising due to scarce resources both in the community and the City administration.

As the number of publicly stewarded interventions has plateaued, this study sought to understand what could be done, either within the City administration itself or in community leadership, to build momentum. As a foundational step, identifying barriers to entry and "pain-points" in the ROW processes, from the application, to review and approval, to implementation - was at the core of this study.

Multiple pain-points - process steps that inhibited progress - were identified by applicants and city staff reviewing the existing process. Pain-points could be caused by lack of capacity or capital, or confusion due to lack of clarity of information or decision-making guidance, both for the public and internally within the City's approval process. Overall, these were caused by shortfalls in three main areas:

### 1. CAPACITY

**Capacity**, in the form of time and expertise, was a consistent issue for both the city staff and applicants.

### 2. CAPITAL

Lack of **capital** due to an inability to raise funds for either initial construction and/or ongoing maintenance, also reflected in the city's limited ability to provide resources for the programs in general.

### 3. CONFUSION

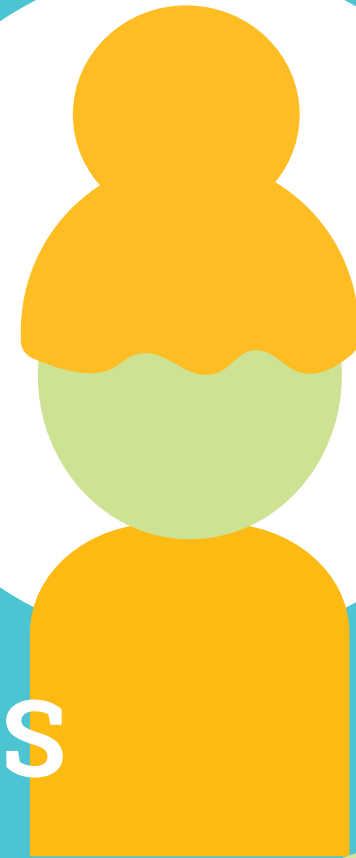
**Confusion** or lack of helpful information often affected the early stages of the process, creating uncertainty for applicants daunted by the guidelines.

The project manager at a local, large scale developer, wants to develop the city in an ethical way. She hears the concerns about gentrification from the residents of the neighborhoods they buy property in, and wants to improve the area for the people moving in as much as the people who reside there now. When coordinating capital projects, she sees the opportunity of incorporating “quick wins” in the form of streetscape improvements like planters, benches, and trash cans. Her company has the privilege of having the capacity to not only be stewards of these changes, but also take on leading the designs and construction in-house. However, after working with the city on what they thought would be a quick process, they come to find that getting permits approved for private property is much easier than for anything - even small changes - if it's in the public realm. They've found that submitting permits to generic “departments” without a key point person is like a vacuum - you never know where in the process you are or how long it will take. With no easy application for something as simple as a bench, she even withholds “big ideas” during her charrettes with the community so she doesn't disappoint them when they want something she knows is almost impossible to get. She wishes there was a single representative at the city to help guide them through the process who can help coordinate with larger projects, and a unified application for small ROW improvements they can apply for while constructing their larger projects.

**“THERE ARE SO MANY PROGRESSIVE THINGS GOING ON IN OTHER AREAS OF THE COUNTRY – IT JUST MAKES SENSE FOR US TO GET ON THAT, TOO.”**

*- Interviewee on the subject of the desire to have more improvements to the right-of-way in Philadelphia*

User Type 1: **The Large Scale Developer**



## PEDESTRIAN PLAZAS

Transforming streets into places for people

“The plaza was our effort to make more public space for the community.”

– Anonymous  
Philadelphia  
Chinatown  
Development  
Corporation Associate

Pedestrian plazas, like Grays Ferry Triangle, close sections of underutilized or unused streets and open them to public use. Often, these are as simple as demarcating a portion of a street for pedestrians only, often with barriers such as stone blocks and/or large planters, frequently furnished with movable tables and chairs. Pedestrian plazas may include painted treatments to the asphalt. These temporary improvements are sometimes a prelude to making the plaza permanent, typically making it level with the sidewalk with more durable materials.

The City of Philadelphia’s guidelines states, “pedestrian plazas can dramatically improve the vitality of city public space and reinvigorate our streets, while calming traffic and clarifying intersection geometry.” Pedestrian plazas, when reclaiming asphalt at an intersection in particular, not only provide public space but also narrow the crossing distance for pedestrians as well. This calms traffic and creates a safer intersection by giving pedestrians enough room to see past parked cars before crossing. In University City, the Baltimore Crossing pedestrian plaza shortened crossing distances by up to 50%, not only creating a safer environment, but a more pleasant one created by an abundance of planters in the bumpouts (University City, *ibid.*).

Pedestrian plazas can provide necessary public space in the neighborhood for play, socializing, and programming community events, as Grays Ferry Triangle has shown on South Street West. In these instances, research has shown the value that public seating brings to notions of civic trust (Assembly, 2018). The impact of Grays Ferry Triangle on the neighborhood can be seen in the everyday utility it brings to local residents as a regular gathering place and festival spot. Its programming and sense of place have come to feel like such a neighborhood asset that the local steward is seeking funding toward making the plaza permanent. Along with UCD’s Baltimore Crossing plazas, the Triangle served as a proof-of-concept for the city’s ROW program and was seen by its supporters as a harbinger of greater community-driven ROW stewardship across the city.

Challenges to implementing pedestrian plazas are numerous, however, regardless of the streetscape and community context, including issues of traffic flow, pedestrian safety, and appropriate commercial or organizational capacity to program and maintain the space for the neighborhood - independent of any City support. It may come as no surprise then to find that Philadelphia is only host to four pedestrian plazas, all of which are managed by either

district or neighborhood associations, two of which are in University City. Additional challenges arise when considering the limited number of locations that a pedestrian plaza can be situated, especially in a city where an orthogonal grid system permeates much of the space available. Further, in a city with so many small streets that are car-free or “car-light” (a remnant of its colonial past) there is sometimes less of a need for what is ultimately a costly and time-consuming alteration to the street. Both Portland and Chicago have included alleyways, a small street comparable, in their ROW stewardship strategies, detailed below.



## LESSONS LEARNED: PLACEMAKING

Pedestrian plazas can provide necessary public space in the neighborhood for play, socializing, and programming community events, as Grays Ferry Triangle has shown on South Street West. In these instances, research has shown the value that public seating brings to notions of civic trust (Assembly, 2018). The impact of Grays Ferry Triangle on the neighborhood can be seen in the everyday utility it brings to local residents as a regular gathering place and festival spot. Its programming and sense of place have come to feel like such a neighborhood asset that the local steward is seeking funding toward making the plaza permanent. It also served as a proof-of-concept for the city's ROW program and was seen by its supporters as a harbinger of greater ROW stewardship across the city.



Grays Ferry Triangle located at South Street West, during an especially busy day during the first Open Streets event in Philadelphia, 2016 (Photo by The Lindy Institute, 2019)

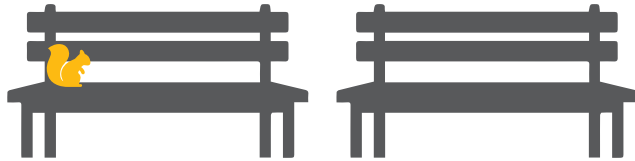
RIGHT OF WAY IMPROVEMENTS

# PEDESTRIAN PLAZAS

IN PEER CITIES

## ENTRY LEVEL

Seattle: 13  
San Francisco: 5  
Philadelphia: 4  
Los Angeles: 4  
Boston: 1

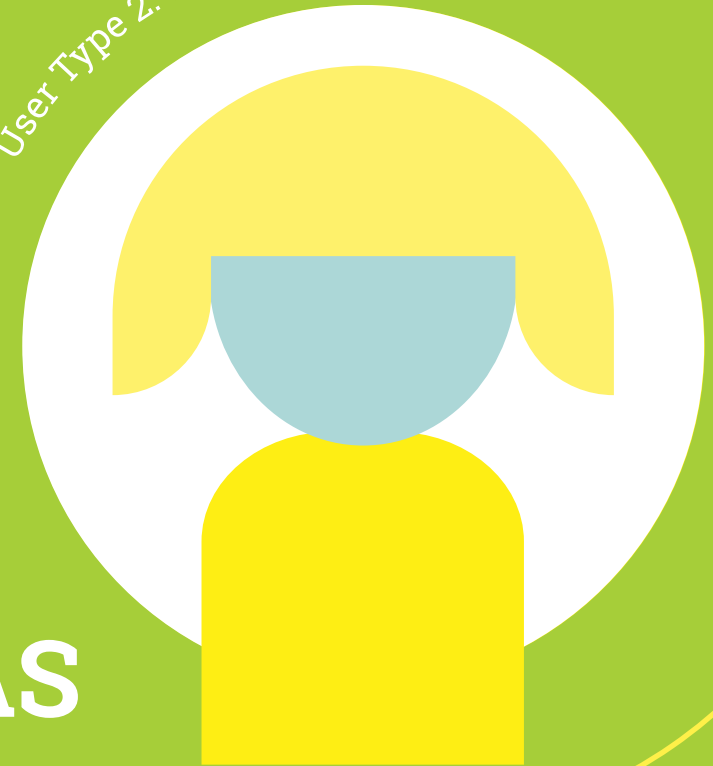


## ASPIRATIONAL

New York: 73



## User Type 2: The District Director



The director of a local community development corporation is passionate about improving her neighborhood. Not only is it a personal interest, but a part of her job as well to think about her community's streets and how people view the district from the outside. Typical to her everyday work putting on events and cleaning the commercial corridors, she already has experience implementing things like banners and trash cans specific to their local brand identity. However, her budget is relatively small, and she sometimes relies on volunteers to get things done, or does things under the radar to avoid the cost and hassle of going through the formal processes. Often, residents are more concerned about things being "clean and safe" rather than thinking about transforming parking spaces into "mini parks" for people to sit in. That said, she understands the value of investing in small ROW improvements - including providing more places for people to gather in a neighborhood that otherwise has little in the ways of public spaces. Several years ago her district was one of the first areas of the city to apply for a micro-grant from the city to install a parklet - the same parklet that proudly still stands there today. She loves that she has the ability to move the parklet to a better location if needed, but that the local business it sits in front of can take care of the day to day maintenance. As time goes on, though, the parklet has fallen into disrepair and she worries it will soon be too worn out to repair. She would like to see the City enact another micro-grant program to repair or replace it, or even provide her community with more ROW improvements. If the city could come and educate her residents on the benefits, it would be greatly appreciated considering her limited time and budget to improve the neighborhood.

**“IF EVERY DECISION WAS  
MADE BY ASKING THE  
NEIGHBOR NEXT DOOR –  
THEN NOTHING WOULD GET  
DONE, WHATEVER IT WAS.”**

*- Interviewee on the subject of the requirement to gain support from adjacent property owners for right-of-way improvements in Philadelphia*

## PARKLETS

### Tiny parks in a parking space

“As opposed to one parked car or two parked cars – it’s a difference of return on investment.” – Matt, Owner of The Quick Fixx

Intended to occupy the area of 1 to 2 on-street public parking spaces and typically installed by a place-based organization or adjacent business, Philadelphia’s parklets are exclusively public spaces (i.e. non-commercial) and meant to provide seats and tables to “offer residents and visitors alike new opportunities to stop, sit, and enjoy the surrounding neighborhood street life”. Parklets can act as supplemental public spaces, especially in commercial corridors with narrowed, crowded sidewalks. Parklets in Philadelphia are permitted from April to November and are expected to be stored in winter months. Though open to the public, parklets often provide extra seating for the adjacent business, increasing their customer base. According to UCD’s study in 2015, parklets created an average of 20% more profit to the adjacent business. Providing public seating, too, has been shown to increase levels of public trust, including trust in local government agencies and police, and to increase community pride (Assembly, 2018).

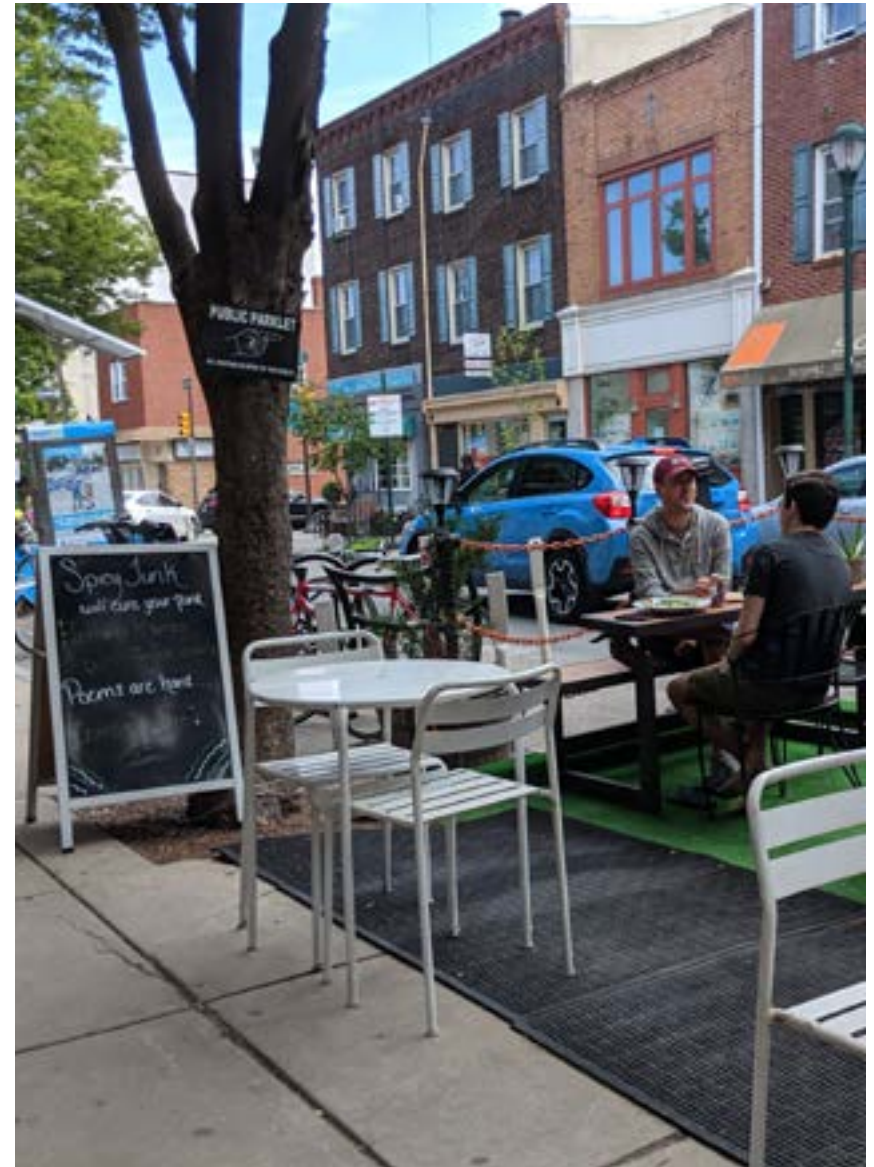
Though typically stewarded by businesses along commercial corridors, only two of eleven parklets currently installed in Philadelphia were independent ventures by an individual business owner. The rest were initiated and managed by various place-based organizations, including those in Chinatown, Kensington (Esperanza),

Manayunk, and University City District (UCD). UCD installs and maintains six parklets in its boundaries (more than 50% of the City’s total), approaching businesses for their approval to ensure the parklet is installed in the best location possible. Once approached, however, the benefits of parklets is abundantly clear due to the District’s evidence gathered on the usage and impact - incentivized further because UCD is responsible for the insurance, construction costs, and burden of seasonal installation and removal, and storage.

A rare example of an independent business owner successfully implementing a parklet is at The Quick Fixx at 1511 South Street. There, the owner is also a volunteer member of the business association and is seen as generally civically engaged in the community, advocating for Philadelphia as a place to walk and bike and purposefully aligning his business with these goals. Without an affiliation with the South Street West Business Association (SSWBA) however, and his proximity to another pilot parklet, the owner stated that it’s possible that he wouldn’t have known what a parklet was let alone how to implement one. Now that his parklet has paid for itself, he’s an advocate for the program and a willing supporter for more parklets in the area, though few businesses have gone through with the program, despite showing interest.

## LESSONS LEARNED: STREATERIES

Other cities including Portland and Seattle have developed a class of “streatery” parklets which allow private businesses to expand capacity where sidewalks are constrained. While these are different in allowing for private use in a public parklet, it can free up much needed space for pedestrians on streets and encourage traffic calming. Philadelphia would need to closely study how a program could be administered to ensure public benefit through removing restrictions on private table service in parklets, while complying with all state laws governing commercial eateries (such as alcoholic beverages). Ideally this would be explored as an overall effort to expand room for pedestrians, with the privatization of public space only considered as a possible revenue stream for expansion of other non-commercial parklets and other public ROW improvements.



The parklet at The Quick Fixx on South Street provides supplemental seating for the nearby business as well as traffic calming due to the joint impacts of the nearby bicycle corral and Indego Bike Share kiosk (Photo by The Lindy Institute, 2019)

RIGHT OF WAY IMPROVEMENTS  
**PARKLETS**  
IN PEER CITIES




The Philadelphia small business owner is a local with an incentive to invest. He's civically engaged as a resident of the neighborhood where his business is located, and volunteers his time with the local BID. Because of his understanding of business improvement, he's already gone through the process of a storefront improvement grant and can navigate a city permit fairly well. Working with others at the BID also introduced him to the ROW improvement programs, like the parklet down the street from his shop, and he helped with the location of an Indego bike share station on his street. In addition to these elements, he's supportive of cycling and wants to provide more parking for his bike-friendly customer base through a bicycle corral. Having lived in Philly for some time, he's seen the difference a few years makes in people cycling - especially in Center City - and fully expects that the bicycle corral will pay for itself in no time. Since he already has insurance, and the design connections to help with the drawings (through the storefront improvement process), he's not too worried about fulfilling the requirements outlined in the guidelines. However, after trying repeatedly to get support from the adjacent building owner, he can't get passed the first phase of the process and assumes that means it won't be possible to get approval. He'd like to see an easier process for things like this, and the ability to impact the parking spot directly in front of his business if it's of benefit to his customers.

**“MY CUSTOMERS  
ARE YOUNG ENOUGH  
THAT THEY DON'T  
FEEL ENTITLED TO A  
PARKING SPOT.”**

*- Interviewee on the desire to install a bike corral in front of their business*

User Type 3: **The Small Business Owner**

A stylized illustration of a person with a light green dome-shaped head, a light blue circular face, and a yellow rounded rectangular body. The person is centered within a white circle, which is itself inside a larger yellow circle. The text 'User Type 3: The Small Business Owner' is written in white, curved along the top right edge of the yellow circle.

## BIKE CORRALS

### Promoting cycling through bike parking

“The city is trending toward more bikes less cars.”  
– Anonymous Interviewee

In comparison to pedestrian plazas and parklets, bike corrals in Philadelphia are more likely to be implemented and stewarded by businesses than place-based organizations. Of the ten installed city-wide, only four were installed with the support of a local organization like a BID or CDC. And even in those locations, adjacent businesses have still been the driving factor in their installation. Most of the time this is viewed as a business decision to accommodate customers: bicycle corrals provide practical on-street parking for people arriving by bike and are implemented by businesses expecting a large proportion of its customers to arrive by bike, so it only makes business sense to cater to that customer base. And in a city where since 2005 cycling has risen 260%, it responds to a documented need.

Though they remove an on-street parking space for vehicles, bike corrals provide parking for up to 12 bikes - a boon to businesses who are otherwise swamped with bikes locked to nearby signs, fences, or trees, which can cause damage and block the sidewalk. As the City's bicycle corral guidelines notes, “cycling is growing in popularity in Philadelphia”, and corrals' role as part of an ecosystem that encourages cycling is significant in developing patterns for commuters and business patrons. The 2018 Assembly

study reference previously demonstrated that individuals with bike lanes in their neighborhood have a higher level of civic trust, participation, stewardship - and even voting - than those without, highlighting how connected bicycle infrastructure overall is to possibly catalyzing interest in stewardship more broadly.

The process for a business to initiate its installation is nearly as complicated as installing a parklet due to various siting and community support requirements. Without approval from adjacent property owners, and later a petition from at least “one-half of the addresses which are (a) within 75 feet of the proposed bicycle corral and (b) in the Applicant's Block Face or the Applicant's opposite Block Face”, it may not get approved. One business owner interviewed in the process assumed that without the approval of an adjacent property owner whom he had difficulty contacting, his application was a non-starter, and never reached out the City in the first place. While he was willing to pay the costs and take ownership of the corral itself, he assumed based on the language within the guidelines that there would be no other option.



## LESSONS LEARNED: INSURANCE

Rather than having an individual business owner apply for a bicycle corral, one organization in Philadelphia attempted to coordinate a pool of local businesses to manage and insure a bicycle corral as a collective. The non-profit received funding for ROW improvements, including bicycle corrals, and decided to attempt this new approach because of the perceived shared benefits to the commercial street. After negotiating with the different businesses in the neighborhood, it was agreed that the corral would be an asset to the wider area - meaning that the burden, risk, and cost to insure the corral could be split between the parties. After discussing it with their respective insurance companies, however, the project stalled and eventually fell through - despite wide support from everyone involved.



The newly installed bicycle corral at Tattooed Mom on South Street incorporates bicycle imagery into the custom-designed barricades, and an artist's work into the pavement painting adding to the vibrant street (Photo by The Lindy Institute, 2019)

RIGHT OF WAY IMPROVEMENTS

# BIKE CORRALS

IN PEER CITIES

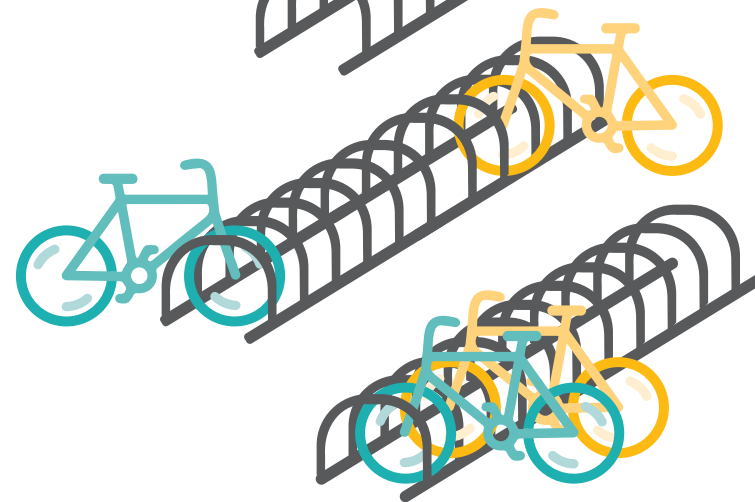
## ASPIRATIONAL

Seattle: 90  
Portland: 154



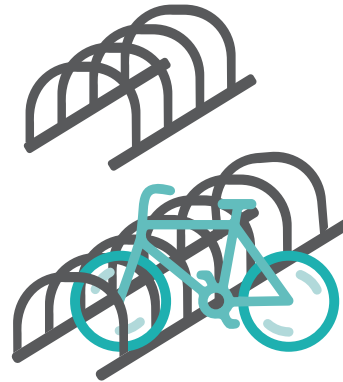
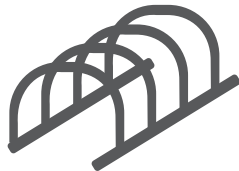
## THRIVING

New York: 55  
San Francisco: 67



## ENTRY LEVEL

Philadelphia: 10  
Los Angeles: 16

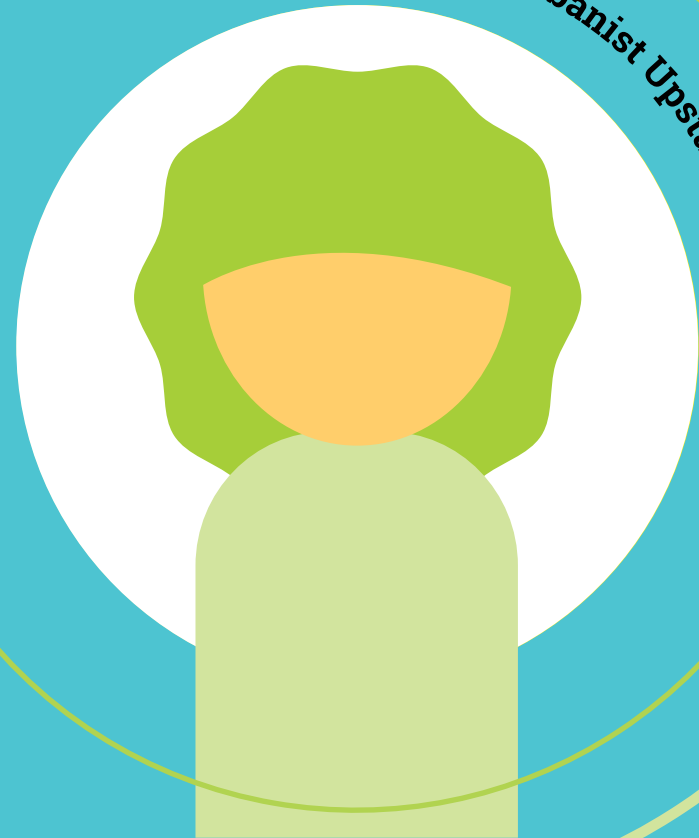


The urbanist upstart is young, energetic, and educated - eager to make the City a better place for people. He moved to Philly to make a difference, finding its quality of life and low cost of living ideal for settling down and starting a family (the city's DIY culture is a plus). He's well travelled, and has been to many cities in the US and abroad which have enacted innovative changes to their streets to encourage walking, biking, and people-centered public spaces. When not as his full time job, he's volunteering with the local Neighborhood Association and planning urban protests with the local group of like-minded urbanists. After experimenting with "tactical urbanism" by planting small trees in otherwise abandoned tree pits (AKA "guerilla gardening") in an effort to improve the neighborhood, he jumped at the opportunity to volunteer with the Neighborhood Association to get signatures for a proposed pedestrian plaza at an unused triangle by a popular cafe. After getting excited about a successful petition, he was frustrated to find that a small group of residents were unsupportive of the changes, worried that it would remove parking spaces or block traffic flow. Despite having the required percentage of signatures as per the city issued pedestrian plaza guidelines (at least one-half of the addresses within 75 feet of the proposed plaza), and even a letter of support from the local councilperson (which is suggested, but not required), the city has put the project on hold until it can more fully address the concerns of the unhappy residents. He's frustrated after spending so much of his free time on trying to improve his neighborhood, on the verge of burnt out, and feels like the city has "moved the goalposts" on the guidelines for approval. He knows the city supports these projects, and would like to see a "champion" emerge to voice their support and stand behind the activists in the face of "not in my backyard" (NIMBY) backlash.

**"IT MAKES ME VERY  
HESITANT TO TRY  
TO IMPLEMENT  
ANOTHER PROJECT  
LIKE THIS AGAIN."**

*- Interviewee on the subject of an attempted pedestrian plaza process  
which ultimately was put on hold due to neighbor complaints*

User Type 4: **The Urbanist Upstart**



## SMALL-SCALE ADDITIONS

Other elements installed in the right-of-way

“I don’t rely on the city for anything.”  
– Anonymous Interviewee

While conducting this study, other small-scale ROW stewardship improvements were also raised without prompting, either in case studies or in interviews with program participants. Though found to be a lesser concern for interviewees, the overall theme of making all ROW stewardship opportunities easier was heard from large scale developers to average residents alike. Benches in particular were often referenced for their convoluted and unclear processes, often requiring an ordinance from City Council. Banners, street trees, stop signs, crosswalks, storefront improvements, tables/chairs, planters, and even bird feeders and “little free libraries” were also cited as having confusing or arcane processes too complicated for the average resident to navigate.

Even for organizations that otherwise manage their community’s public realm, the approval and installation of a simple bench can be arduous even by comparison to larger ROW amenities. One developer mentioned in referring to installing a bench that it’s “easier to get a permit for the inside of the building than the outside”. In some areas of the city, interviewees confidentially recall the placement of benches by themselves or others in the public realm without even attempting to get permission by the City - knowing full

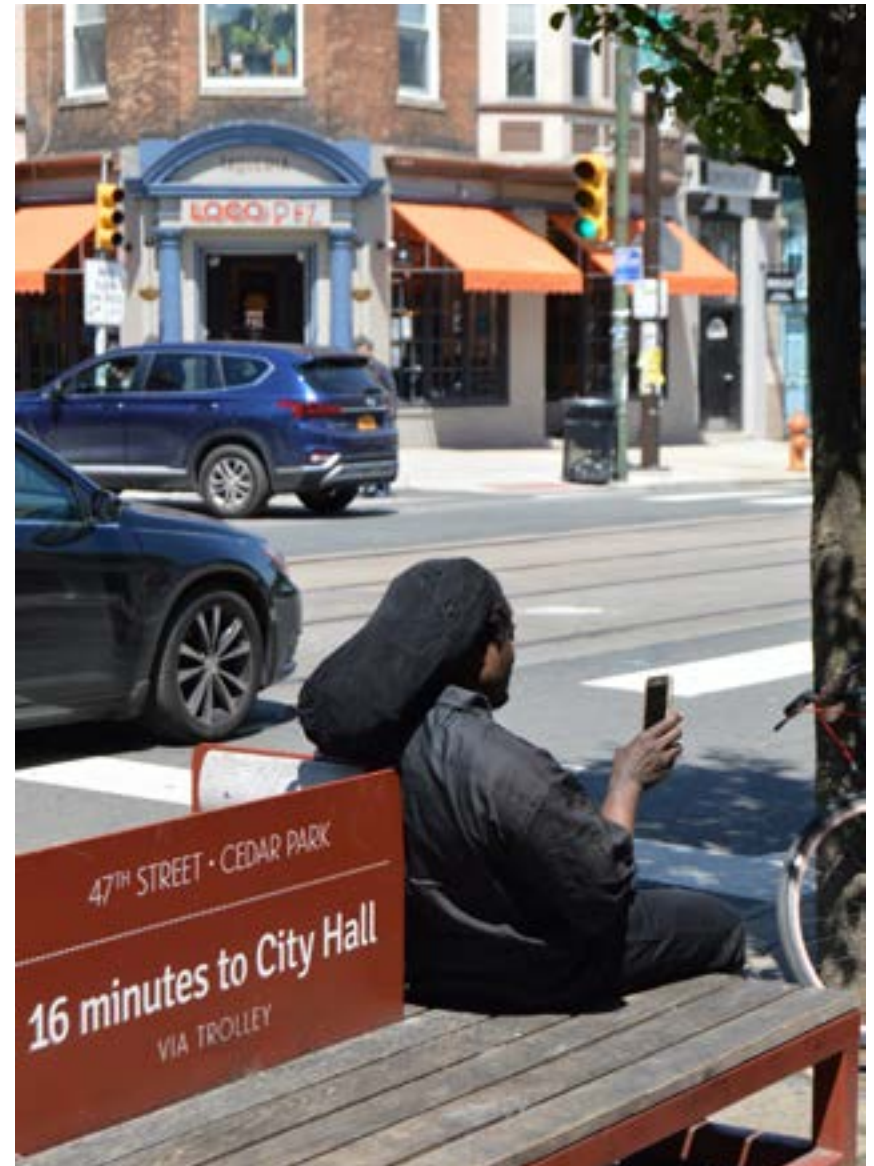
well it could be reported, but would take entirely too long to get approved. Another participant at a local district organization reported relying on the local fire department to assist, technically covertly, in hanging banners or decorations that would otherwise require complicated city approval. Another reported to have planted greenery in unused tree pits, and know of people who have filled in crosswalks with spray chalk or added a few cones to a particularly dangerous intersection to help with turning radii or to buffer bike lanes. In a city where it’s common to see planters overflowing with flowers and tables and chairs for “public use” hugging private property or lining its car-free alleyways, the desire for a formal process was equally expressed in these interviews, if only more streamlined - and importantly - reliable.

While the placement of benches can be contentious depending on level of activity and use (or conversely users and their activities), at the very least the provision of seating in a city is a public good, especially when connected to transit networks. In Chicago for instance, anything from benches to trash cans can be requested through a streamlined process not dissimilar to the ROW stewardship application process in Philadelphia. Depending on its placement, these

elements fall within a “grant of privilege” or “public way use permit” that encompasses anything that extends over, under, or is in the public way. In a similar format to Philadelphia’s sidewalk cafe license, permitting is managed by Chicago’s city business affairs interface, rather than the Department of Transportation, streamlining the process.

## LESSONS LEARNED: TACTICAL URBANISM

Philadelphians' DIY interest and spirit does not stop at the curbline, with interviewees eager to extrapolate the permissions that exist for ROW to all aspects of the public realm. Of particular emphasis was interest in overall activation of vacant land, with some participants expressing a desire to more easily create pop-up public spaces like other formalized (and celebrated) programs in the city currently do. Other cities, including San Francisco, incorporate vacant land into their public realm strategies.



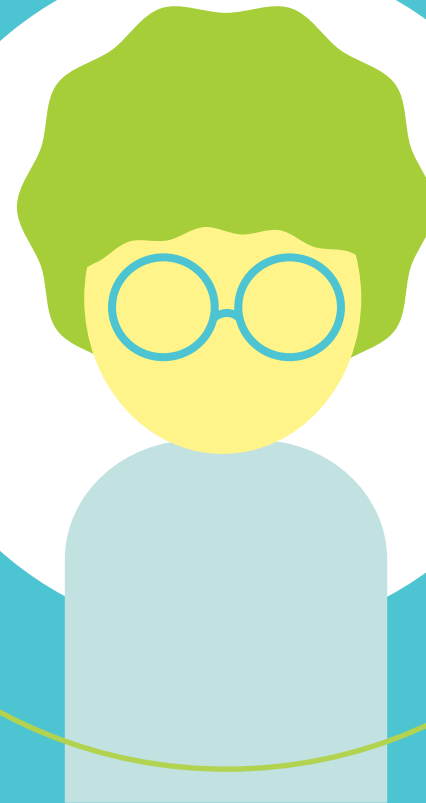
Benches provide needed respite in the right-of-way (Photo by The Lindy Institute, 2019)

A lifelong resident of Philadelphia, the neighborhood activist is the queen of her block. She knows everyone in the community and is a staple at her local church and recreation center. Though not formally trained on the subject, she's a graduate of the Citizens Planning Institute - the education and outreach arm of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission that conducts biannual 7-week courses aimed at providing the public a greater understanding of city planning and the steps involved in development projects. After completing the program, however, she was disappointed in the lack of urgency behind the on-the-ground changes needed so desperately near her local bus stop when after two years a bench had still not been installed. When she heard about the National Street Service project - and the tactical urbanism interventions it espoused - she jumped at the opportunity to volunteer and learn from a national expert in public space and placemaking. Over the course of five weeks, she took part in a street-survey of her neighborhood, devised a plan to improve her street, and designed and implemented an intervention at her local bus stop. Though technically illegal improvements, she got up the courage and took it upon herself to install a bench for the elderly in her community (including herself!) who need a place to sit. With the addition of some fake flowers on the trashcan and a chalkboard on the fence, she beautified the bus stop turning it into a place that's pleasant to be - young or old - while waiting for the local line. Though she would rather do things the official way, she was willing and able to take on the initiative of making the improvements needed where she lives and sees the need every day. As for her next project? There's a faded crosswalk at the intersection she's got on her mind...

**“YOU LIVE IN A CITY, THIS IS A COMMUNITY.”**

*- Interviewee on the subject of implementing right-of-way improvements with community benefits in the face of neighbor opposition*

**User Type 5: The Neighborhood Activist**



# ANALYSIS

## Pain Points

Challenges were identified across all ROW processes reviewed, summarized below as seven over-arching pain-points:

### 1 LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

Before the application process begins, there is a potential barrier to entry for applicants who either don't know about the ROW stewardship programs, understand that they can implement these improvements, and/or how to begin. It's difficult to estimate what percentage of the population is included in this category without a large-scale survey of residents.

### 2 LACK OF CAPITAL

Cost of materials, design consulting, and off-season storage (for parklets) are a barrier to entry early on in the process, especially for community groups and businesses in low-income neighborhoods. A lack of clarity around estimated costs was cited as a persistent mental barrier as well.

### 3 INSURANCE REQUIREMENTS

While most businesses and many civic organizations already have the requisite insurance or a policy which might be amended, this can intimidate potential users unsure of their provisions or concerned with liability. Costs can range from several hundred to several thousand dollars in additional insurance fees, depending on the type of project and organization.

### 4 LACK OF CLARITY ON LOCATION CONSTRAINTS AND TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Despite best intentions, some projects run the risk of stopping before they start if the interested applicant has issues working through the restrictions on siting ROW improvements near bus stops, hydrants, trees, and other objects. There is lack of clarity on when these requirements will be waived, creating uncertainty in the process. Design and engineering specifications, including ADA requirements for parklets, can be a barrier for those without access to design expertise as the applicant is generally tasked with producing designs individually. It was frequently cited that individuals in organizations with successful applications were architects or urban planners and volunteered their design expertise for the cause.

### 5 UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS

Beyond technical specifications, the process timeline and required tasks can be confusing to those unfamiliar with how city agencies work, especially without a clear estimated timeline and cost estimates (currently not included in Philadelphia's pedestrian enhancement programs guidelines). This is especially problematic for processes without published guidelines (like benches, for instance), or for steps in the published process that were unclear in their requirement (i.e. whether it was "highly recommended" or "required", like in the case of a letter of support by the local councilperson).

### 6 COMMUNICATION CONCERNS

For some, the need to contact the City in the first step of the process can be a barrier, especially for those uncomfortable engaging city government officials or who have specific language needs, including non-English speakers. This can also impact community support requirements, especially in diverse or changing communities, where language and cultural barriers are of key concern.

### 7 TAKING ON THE MAINTENANCE RESPONSIBILITY- KEEPING IT CLEAN AND SAFE

Some communities express concern about the capacity to maintain the ROW improvement, expressing desire for the city to assume greater responsibility for ROW improvements.

**These pain-points helped inform our analysis of the City's application processes and shaped our recommendations for process improvements. Detailed pain-points for each step of the process for parklets and pedestrian plazas in particular are included in the flowchart diagrams within each ROW process. Pain points for bicycle corral process were found to be similar to parklets and plazas, and were omitted in this report.**

# 1 INQUIRY PHASE

**APPLICANT** Call or e-mail OCS  
Do you have insurance?  
Can you create a design?  
Preparation:  
1. Determine location  
2. Prepare a detailed site plan  
3. Get letters of approval from adjacent property owners and commercial tenants abutting the planned plaza (2/3 if three or fewer, 3/4 if four or more)

**OCS** May consult with Streets/Traffic/ROW  
OCS Internal Process:  
Ask applicant:  
- Do you have insurance?  
- Can we help you with rendering your vision?

# 2 SUBMIT PROPOSAL

**APPLICANT** E-mail PDF to OCS  
Include photos, maps, letters of support (Letters are only needed from abutting property owners)

# 3 LOCATION REVIEW

**OCS** OCS Coordinates with:  
**STREETS** Streets ROW  
OCS waits for Streets review (timeline for this is undefined and dependent on capacity)  
Coordinating with ROW means:  
OCS reviews a check-list  
OCS sends email to distribution list of streets and OCS  
Response comes within 10 days - feedback arrives via letter to Casey  
OCS may recreate rendering to comply

## APPLICATION DENIED

Location deemed unsuitable and/or community support insufficient.  
Can work together with OCS to find alternatives if possible.

# 4 COMMUNITY OUTREACH

**APPLICANT** Applicant required either/or:  
1. Petition with signatures from at least 50% of residents & businesses within 75' of proposed location  
2. Public meeting as per outreach discussion with OCS  
Recommended (but not necessary): Letter(s) of support from Council

## LACK OF SUPPORT

**APPLICANT** Discuss next steps with OCS

# 5 PLAN REVIEW

**APPLICANT** Send detailed design and plan to OCS  
**OCS** Coordinate with: Streets Design  
**STREETS** OCS internal: email goes to Streets engineers (1 of 5 people)  
OCS/Streets/Applicant may work together through informal workshop to develop more detailed plan.  
Deliverable is approved when Streets design signs off with signature and date.

## REVISE & RESUBMIT

**APPLICANT** Send revised design and plan to OCS  
**OCS** Coordinate with: Streets Design  
**STREETS** What does coordinate with Streets Design mean?  
More details needed.

## DESIGN REJECTED

**APPLICANT** Discuss next steps with OCS

# CURRENT PHILADELPHIA PEDESTRIAN PLAZA PROCESS

FOR YEAR ONE

### KEY

- APPLICANT** The individual, group or business applying for Pedestrian Plaza
- OCS** The Office of Complete Streets
- STREETS** Philadelphia Streets Department

**INTERNAL PROCESS**  
All interior process points are in blue

STEPS 4 AND 5 ARE CONCURRENT

## APPLICATION APPROVAL

- STREETS** Issue permit
- APPLICANT** Fabricate and install
- OCS** Inspect and approve

**FINISH!**

Streets paints lines at uncertain time  
OCS inspects post-installation and gives possible changes if needed

# 8 SUBMIT EVIDENCE OF COMMUNITY SUPPORT

**APPLICANT** Before a permit may be issued, applicant must submit the documentation described in #4:  
Signed Petition  
Additional materials  
Evidence of additional outreach/meetings  
Recommended: Letter(s) of Support from Council

**OCS** Combine materials into PDF  
Submit to Streets ROW Unit

**STREETS** Streets to review final packet

# 7 PROVIDE PROOF OF INSURANCE

**APPLICANT** Submit PDF to OCS

# 6 SUBMIT TEMPORARY STREET CLOSURE

**APPLICANT** Fill out Pedestrian Enhancement Permit Application  
Pay \$125 fee  
Submit to OCS no later than 15 days prior to planned installation



# PAIN POINTS

the below challenges in pedestrian plaza stewardship application and implementation processes were identified by stakeholders

## STEP 1 \*

### APPLICANT

#### CAPACITY (EXTERNAL)

Draw a site plan to scale by self or via consultant.

#### COST (EXTERNAL)

There is no cost estimate for any of the above (corral, posts, screws, etc.) ahead of submitting the application.

#### CONFUSION (EXTERNAL)

Lack of certainty; unclear process details such as timeline.

Timeline: this could take 24-48 hours or a year depending on applicant.

Application isn't clear: Applicants feel the need to be detailed but OCS only needs a sketch at this phase.

### OCS

#### CONFUSION (INTERNAL)

Timeline: every project is at the mercy of capacity, there is not a regular review cycle and timeline for process.

## STEP 2 \*

### APPLICANT

#### CONFUSION (EXTERNAL)

Unclear how much community input is needed this point and how it relates to future community outreach.

## STEP 4 \*

### APPLICANT

#### CAPACITY (EXTERNAL)

Gathering evidence of community support is made easier with access to volunteers and/or organizational support. Time intensive.

#### CONFUSION (EXTERNAL)

Unsure whether additional outreach will increase likelihood of success and if what is requested is sufficient for guaranteed approval. Lack of information regarding what a public meeting is and what it entails.

## STEP 5 \*

### APPLICANT

#### CONFUSION (EXTERNAL)

Logistical details regarding design elements are complicated and their impact on the process unclear.

### OCS

#### CAPACITY (EXTERNAL)

Gathering evidence of community support is made easier with access to volunteers and/or organizational support. Time intensive.

#### CONFUSION (INTERNAL)

Internal Streets process is unclear.

## STEP 6 \*

### APPLICANT/OCS

#### CONFUSION (INT/EXT)

Mistitled in guide: Applicant actually only pays fee at this point, which they submit to ROW. OCS then submits permit.

## STEP 7 \*

### APPLICANT

#### COST (EXTERNAL)

Multiple types of insurance are required. You must obtain Workers Compensation and Employers Liability, General Liability Insurance, and Automobile Liability Insurance.

#### CAPACITY (EXTERNAL)

Multiple types of insurance are required. Larger footprint means larger perceived risk and liability.

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#### CONFUSION (EXTERNAL)

Logistical details regarding design elements are complicated and their impact on the process unclear.

### OCS

#### CAPACITY (EXTERNAL)

Gathering evidence of community support is made easier with access to volunteers and/or organizational support. Time intensive.

#### CONFUSION (INTERNAL)

Internal Streets process is unclear.

## STEP 6 \*

### APPLICANT/OCS

#### CONFUSION (INT/EXT)

Mistitled in guide: Applicant actually only pays fee at this point, which they submit to ROW. OCS then submits permit.

## STEP 7 \*

### APPLICANT

#### COST (EXTERNAL)

Multiple types of insurance are required. You must obtain Workers Compensation and Employers Liability, General Liability Insurance, and Automobile Liability Insurance.

#### CAPACITY (EXTERNAL)

Multiple types of insurance are required. Larger footprint means larger perceived risk and liability.

# KEY FINDINGS

## BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

Both locally and nationally, ROW stewardship interventions are viewed highly positively among stakeholders who have engaged with ROW processes and greater access to stewardship opportunities is seen as desirable, particularly in underserved communities. However, as the process challenges described indicate, the workflow for stewarding ROW and the context in which potential stewards make decisions, likely inhibit the number of projects across the city, particularly in communities without the mix of capacities - capital, time, and knowledge - necessary to navigate the system. It is unclear how many missed opportunities there have been over the years due to this and other key barriers to success to the ROW stewardship programs.

From the interviews and workshops conducted with stakeholders, applicants, and experts in ROW stewardship programs, the following barriers to success were identified as significant for future recommendations:

**1**  
**Systematic Struggles:**  
Themes regarding the system or city more broadly

**2**  
**Programmatic Problems:**  
Issues with the ROW programs and guidelines

**3**  
**Community Consternation:**  
Local feedback and frustrations on the ground

**4**  
**Internal Issues:**  
Concerns expressed by city staff from different agencies



A parklet in University City at the intersection of Market and 36th Streets (Photo by The Lindy Institute, 2019)

## 1. SYSTEMATIC STRUGGLES

### Problems with the broader system itself

#### ROW PROGRAMS ARE VIEWED AS “INHERENTLY INEQUITABLE” IN THEIR IMPACT AND ACCESS

Whether in Philadelphia or elsewhere, it is concerning that well-resourced communities are more likely to implement these improvements despite the programs being available to all residents. Even those who successfully implemented these projects were dismayed by the concentration of ROW improvements in Center City and University City, and noted their own privilege in having the capacity and capital to execute these projects themselves. This doesn't ease inclusion in these privileged communities. In UCD, it was described that some residents don't feel as though the parklets are “for them”, but instead are for “other people”, indicating their prevalence toward coffee shops more frequently patronized by younger, mostly white, residents of the District. In addition, there was a consensus among interviewed stakeholders that parklets in particular are great for business owners with a lack of sidewalk seating (despite their “public” status), but their value isn't always demonstrable to residents.

Peer city practices:

- In San Francisco, the parklet distribution is still heavily weighted toward neighborhoods with a greater level of design capability and means to create more artistic installations.
- To address inequitable distribution, NYC's Neighborhood Plaza Program provides additional maintenance funding to select plaza participants in neighborhoods with fewer resources, and conducts capacity mapping to assess which neighborhoods have the greatest need (if they are able to find a steward).

#### INTERVIEWEES WOULD LIKE TO SEE A COMPLETE STREETS OVERHAUL WITH ROW STEWARDSHIP SUPPORTED BY THE CITY AS A PART OF THESE SYSTEMIC IMPROVEMENTS

Philadelphia participants see the ROW stewardship programs included as a part of a larger push for safer, healthier, and more equitable streets for people in accordance with Vision Zero and the Complete Streets improvements overall (including bike lanes, slower speed limits, and open streets programs). Some stakeholders and residents perceive current interventions are insufficient to achieve safety goals, especially in relation to the City's new Vision Zero initiative. However, there is a lack of data from the City around these initiatives that shows the benefits of ROW improvements, which could assist in the push for a comprehensive effort toward this end - and little in the way of the City making the case to state the benefits.

“These are things that are strategies for Vision Zero, and when you start charging communities for these things it can strangle the progress.” – Anonymous, staff member of local non-profit organization

#### PHILADELPHIA LACKS A CIVIC FIGUREHEAD OR DEDICATED EMPLOYEE/STAFFING FOR A ROW STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Particularly with communication and coordination on stewardship projects, inhibiting potential growth of ROW stewardship. Philadelphians involved in the ROW stewardship community interviewed in this process noted that the City lacks a public champion for ROW improvements who is able to extol the benefits of ROW stewardship - something which other cities say is crucial to ROW stewardship program success more broadly. Some in other cities reported that Mayoral support was critical for showcasing support and implementing a more comprehensive city-wide program. While Mayor Kenney has been supportive of Vision Zero and strategic investments in public space, ROW stewardship has not been promoted as prioritized strategy.

“I think what's really amazing is that when you have a strong and capable person connecting the dots and listening to the stakeholders and bringing in the community as well – that's where the magic can happen.” – Alex Feldman, U3 Advisors

## 2. PROGRAMMATIC PROBLEMS

Difficulties navigating the ROW program in particular

### INSURANCE AND OVERALL COST OF MATERIALS AND DESIGN ARE SEEN AS KEY BARRIERS OF ENTRY

For some communities, making ROW stewardship most accessible to either large-scale special services districts or neighborhood associations that have the capacity (often in the form of volunteer time), meet insurance requirements, and possess agency to implement the project/s. University City is the most successful area for parklets in the city, not only because University City District (UCD) assisted in spurring on the creation of the ROW programs, but because the organization has the capital and interest in taking on upfront costs, providing insurance, constructing/deconstructing parklets, and liaising with city departments with whom they have a long-standing relationship. Insurance for a location-based organization or a business can be as low as several hundred dollars or up to \$3,000 in addition to their existing insurance, which can be out of reach for a smaller organization. Average residents looking to implement a ROW improvement must hold insurance for a property adjacent the site of the improvement, restricting who and where these improvements can be implemented. Positive experiences with insurance agencies were reported and attributed to existing relationships with local insurance agents who understood what the ROW stewardship improvement was and how to translate that risk to an insurance cost that was reasonable.

### ROW PROGRAM GUIDELINES ARE INCONSISTENT AND CONFUSING

Guidelines are lacking clear expectations on timing, cost estimates, or clarity on whether requirements are necessary or just highly recommended. There is no list of approved elements that are allowed in these spaces, or examples of past (or possible) projects and how much they cost to implement, unlike other cities' guidelines. Some interviewees reported an inability to understand the logic in the required tasks, and were ultimately denied for what they saw as arbitrary decision-making outside of the expectations posted in the official guidelines. Some experienced applicants who knew how to navigate permitting and insurance requirements acknowledged not using the guidelines if they had existing relationships with the city, opting instead to coordinate their project more informally.

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“More clarity on the subject would be good – what is right of way? What is possible? How can we beautify our space and who should we talk to?” – Anonymous, Member of Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation

### THE CITY'S RULES FOR SOME OTHER ROW ELEMENTS ARE UNCLEAR OR NONEXISTENT

(i.e. curb markets, chairs/tables outside of residences, the Italian Market stalls, benches, crosswalk treatments, etc.), creating confusion around what is and is not covered by different departments and programs. Above all, stakeholders sought consistency, even if that meant making it clear that certain ROW elements aren't allowed without formal permission (such as “little free libraries” or tables/chairs outside of private residences). Some sought clarity on tactical urbanism elements that have either been “grandfathered in” and allowed, despite their lack of formal process, and/or interventions that are otherwise “overlooked” but also supported by the City if only unofficially. One interviewee expressed frustration in how going through formal channels for installing a bench meant waiting for years. Another reported placing a bench in public space without alerting the City of their installation, noting that unless L&I (Licenses and Inspection) receives a complaint, it's not a problem.

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“Our thought was, if this is laying out the threshold, if we hit the threshold, we can do the project.” – Anonymous, Activist in Philadelphia

### 3. COMMUNITY CONSTERNATION

Things we heard from activists on-the-ground

#### APPLICANTS TASKED WITH SPEARHEADING THESE PROJECTS ARE OVER-WORKED

This leads to a sense of burnout and pessimism toward the City agencies and process. Implementers yearned for a show of support for ROW stewardship from the City or a transition to a program that shifts the burden and/or provides greater support to their initiatives, volunteer or otherwise. Applicants called for more well-defined guidelines to provide certainty that if they meet requirements they won't be let down by ambiguities in city processes. In short, they want to know their efforts will be supported and make a difference in the city as per their stewardship request.

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“This isn't my day job, I'm trying to make a living. I took time out of my day to do the patently obvious.” – Anonymous, Volunteer of South Street West Business Association

#### THERE IS A HUNGER AMONG EXISTING STEWARDS FOR THE CITY TO CHAMPION THESE PROJECTS

Activists yearn for the City to spur on an entrepreneurial spirit, urban innovation, and equitable access to public space. Among implementers, there was resentment: despite following rules, users felt the process was arduous because it put an unfair burden on them to be successfully completed, rather than having a champion shepherd the process along. Frequent references were made to Janette Sadik-Khan in NYC and the way in which she was able to promote and build support for projects and be seen as a champion for more humane streets - with the desire for a similar figure in Philadelphia to turn our streets around.

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“No one in the city speaks for this.” – Anonymous, Member of a neighborhood association in Philadelphia

#### THERE IS A DESIRE FOR THE CITY TO SUPPORT TACTICAL URBANISM IN ITS STREETS

Stakeholders felt that residents are ready for (and already using) tactical urbanism in order to make a difference in the city outside of the formal ROW stewardship processes and projects. In some cases, residents even had informal support from City officials to implement these changes themselves, with buffered bike lanes or repainted crosswalks having been completed in the past with little to no alarm.

Peer city practices:

- In Portland, the tactical urbanism group Better Block Portland started more informally but now works closely with the city to install “pilot” projects that are then formalized to become permanent by the official departments.

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“The city's expectations for their citizens are so low.” – Anonymous, Member of Grays Ferry Triangle volunteer team



**ACTIVISTS WOULD LIKE TO COLLABORATE WITH THE CITY TO IMPROVE ITS ROW STEWARDSHIP PROGRAMS, BUT ARE CONCERNED ABOUT SPEAKING UP AND SKEPTICAL OF BEING HEARD**

Participants in this research very often chose anonymity in order to express their frustrations with the city freely. However, nearly all of them expressed a willingness to come forward in future development because of their support for making their city a better place to live. Rather than just express frustration, dedicated activists sought an opportunity to be heard for this study and use their experiences to help the City see things from their perspective as supportive users of the program. They understand the City is supportive of improving these systems, as are they, and would welcome an opportunity to come together as a formal stakeholder group or submit feedback to collaborate on solutions.

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“What happens at the grassroots stays at the grassroots.” – Robin Abad, Places for People Lead Policy Planner for San Francisco



Public life at the parklet at The Green Line Cafe in West Philadelphia (Photo by The Lindy Institute, 2019)



Baltimore Crossing in West Philadelphia shortens crossing distances and provides places to sit  
(Photo by The Lindy Institute, 2019)

## 4. INTERNAL ISSUES

### Workflow and communications concerns within City Hall

#### INTERNAL PROCESS VARIES DEPENDING ON CONTEXT AND PERSONNEL

The internal process has no “master checklist” for more streamlined approval across the various agencies involved in ROW depending on the elements included in the ROW that need approval. Transfer of information is largely informal, based on interpersonal connections and opportunistic interactions without a formalized tracking or recording process. There is support internally to route applications (which includes approvals from specialized sections of the Streets division) after the applicant has submitted their proposal to the Office of Complete Streets. No comprehensive database exists currently to centralize this, although both city staff and residents expressed a desire for such a system to integrate the tracking of large scale projects with small scale improvements.

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“It’s like a vacuum – you turn your plans in, you never know where they are.” - Anonymous, Parklet creator and staff member of development organization

#### CITY STAFF SUPPORT MORE COLLABORATION ACROSS DEPARTMENTS

Including OCS, Philadelphia City Planning Commission, and the Commerce Department, staff members felt there is an opportunity for collaboration with the public to disseminate information through trainings or information sessions, lend financial support through microgrants, and target marketing toward communities with high capacity and high need. Stakeholders suggested program marketing materials be more audience focused, with information being tailored specifically to them and how they should interact with the city and neighbors, lending support for the request there be a dedicated staff member tasked with overseeing outreach and relationship--building with communities.

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“You’d think it would be NIMBYism and neighborhood opposition, but really the biggest challenge can be the culture within the bureaucracy itself.” – Robin Abad, Places for People Lead Policy Planner for San Francisco

#### CAPACITY IS CITED A PERSISTENT PROBLEM

Especially in terms of time required among various city staff members to review applications, “capacity” came up again and again. Some city department leaders assured they have the capability to review more applications despite managing more complicated projects and reporting limited bandwidth. Lack of capacity may be exacerbated should the ROW stewardship programs scale up and see a greater number of applications. Some suggested opportunities for partnership with outside organizations to take on maintenance and community engagement and support because the city does not have capacity to grow the program on its own. It should be noted that capacity was also referenced frequently by local implementers (i.e. they were or were not able to implement ROW improvements because of city “capacity”) as well as by other cities who cite staffing capacity as a persistent issue in managing ROW programs.

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“None of us will be able to change the system overnight.” – Anonymous, Member of Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation

# BEST PRACTICE CASE STUDIES

## **LEARNING FROM AFAR**

In analyzing ROW stewardship processes in Philadelphia, programs in cities across the United States were reviewed for replicable practices. ROW stewardship programs are common in large cities across the country, with cities like San Francisco and New York City blazing trails on parklets and pedestrian plazas. While Philadelphia is competitive with some of its peers in number of ROW amenities, it's important to acknowledge that it's not always easy to prioritize ROW improvements as a city addressing deep and widespread poverty. Because of this, the case studies below were selected to show exemplars with levels of success Philadelphia can aspire to match while focusing resources on the study's overall goal of building equity in ROW stewardship. Some case studies were derived through interviews with individuals familiar with and/or managing the program (see full list of interviews in Appendix B), others included a cursory look at the cities' programs and applications via the provided website and online documents (i.e. desktop research, outlined in References in Appendix A).

## SAN FRANCISCO

### Places for People Program and Groundplay program



**Relevance:** Integrated, comprehensive ROW model for internal city system and citizens

**Successes:** 60+ parklets in the city and oldest parklet program

**Challenges:** Long-term reorganization of government departments to centralize ROW improvements of all kinds

**Key Takeaway:** A single agency, point of contact, and champion for all ROW projects (incl. vacant lots and temporary street closures)

Image from: <https://groundplaysf.org/>

### PARKLET PIONEER

San Francisco is home to the largest parklet program in the United States with over 60 parklets installed since the inception of its Pavement to Parks program in 2009. Since then, the program has evolved, leading to a Placemaking Ordinance which, according to the website, “established the Places for People Program and a comprehensive, interagency permitting framework that streamlines the community-based development of public space demonstration projects and programming activation in those spaces across San Francisco.”

According to Robin Abad Ocuillo, Senior Planner of Urban Design & Open Space in the SF Planning Department, this program is the first of its kind and unified ROW projects of varying sizes and complexity under one application process and is the result of years of championing public space improvements in the city. Ocuillo’s consultation on this ROW Stewardship project was paramount to understanding best practices from not only the current leader in parklet projects in the U.S, but also the most innovative transformation of a “standard” right of way program into a comprehensive new system entirely.

After further development, the program also incorporates temporary activations in places like vacant lots and city streets, through events like the Market Street Prototyping Festival, Open and Playstreets, Private Lot Pop-ups, and other programming that prioritizes people in the right of way. Importantly, Robin emphasizes the need for mayoral support in any internal programmatic changes. He warns that without clear mayoral support and top-down leadership at a high level, a comprehensive program will not succeed. Having the authority he has within the city structure gave him the ability to change the culture from within. “You’d think it would be NIMBYism and neighborhood opposition, but really the biggest challenge can be the culture within the bureaucracy itself,” Robin explained.

## NEW YORK CITY

### Plaza and Street Seats programs



**Relevance:** Innovative comprehensive pedestrian plaza program for a major U.S. city

**Successes:** Created 74 pedestrian plazas in ten years, most in the U.S.

**Challenges:** Up-front costs and coordination for plaza stewardship

**Key Takeaway:** A strategic effort for neighborhood priorities by the City based on need

Image from: 2019 NYC Plaza Program Guide

## STREETS TO PLAZAS

New York City has perhaps the best example of a plaza program in the United States. Through a combination of bottom-up stewardship and top-down support and strategy, the program aims to ensure that every New Yorker is within a 10-minute walk to a quality open space as per Mayor Bloomberg's 2007 strategic plan, PlaNYC. In a city where space is at a premium, this program capitalizes on active streets and existing stewards to create plazas in the ROW due to the availability of underutilized asphalt. Importantly, NYC prioritizes high need and low income areas that have proximity to the factors common to a successful plaza, such as nearby retail and transit stops, as well as an organization who can manage and maintain the space for the community.

Ed Janoff, formerly of NYC DOT and presently working with the Street Plans Collaborative, recalled the early days of the plaza program, spurred on by the mayor's commitment to public space. DOT's first public spaces were built using experimental "quick-build" materials, a technique that eventually became a formalized, iterative process to rapidly deploy and test out anything from an initial phase of a pedestrian plaza to a curb bump-out. The incredible thing about the creation of the program was that all of this happened during a time when reclaiming streets for public spaces was an unusual activity in the United States. Times Square, one of the most notable and impactful public space reclamation projects in the world, was actually pitched as a "traffic improvement" project to convince the public that removing a street from the network at this infamous intersection would not put the city at a standstill.

NYC, like San Francisco, employs an open period of time for the call for applications as opposed to accepting applications year-round. This allows for a predictable rhythm in outreach, application processing, and installation, for all parties involved. To solicit applications, the city did need to scope out organizations in these priority areas and reach out to them to see if they would be interested in taking on the stewardship of a future plaza. For these neighborhood plazas to be a success, Ed explains, the city needs to be a developer and administrator - but not the steward - deferring instead to a local "champion" who can lobby for the space, execute day-to-day maintenance, and even assist in programming based on the local culture and need. Once a project site is approved by the city and local community board, the city deploys a package including tables and chairs, planters, bollards, and a pavement treatment to denote that the street is now a public space for people, all installed and funded by the city's program. Over time, as the plaza is used and tested, the city can review its progress and determine whether or not the space can then be upgraded to a more permanent design, or adjust as necessary.

If New York City has anything to teach Philadelphia, it's that a pedestrian plaza can be anywhere that a commercial street creates the necessary foot traffic and management to implement it. Another aspect of NYC's recent changes to its streets is the clear division between three types of plaza development: the larger projects that the city initiates (such as Times Square), the neighborhood plazas managed by an anchor institution or organization, and the smaller curb bumpouts which reclaim space through "quick build" installations of paint, boulders, and planters (without the added maintenance burden of movable seating) where the city sees fit. Unfortunately, a culture of parking is still prevalent in Philadelphia, and such large scale implementation by the city is challenging, especially politically. However, as NYC proved through its iterative process in Times Square, bold changes can even improve traffic flow - if given the opportunity to prove their value to the people.

## MEMPHIS

### Memphis Medical District Collaborative (MMDC)



**Relevance:** Comprehensive district improvement model (similar to UCD in Philadelphia)

**Successes:** Rapid deployment of tactical urbanism improvements in streets, public spaces, etc.

**Challenges:** Reliant upon “eds/meds” in a disinvested area

**Key Takeaway:** Collaborative approval for changes with the City’s blessing via a “playbook” of goals and quick-wins for ROW improvements

Image from: MMDC Annual Report 2017

### DISTRICT LESSONS

The Memphis Medical District Collaborative emerged as a comparable case study to the University City District in Philadelphia. It is a multi-agency public/private partnership (utilizing anchor institutions in the region) to holistically improve the district in Memphis. One of the key innovations for the agency was the creation of the “Memphis Medical District Streetscape Improvement Playbook”. The Playbook is a back of envelope sketch of what could be possible in the region, not to design the work but to outline a series of potential interventions. Once they pick an approach, they redesign it based on a detailed study, emerging technology and materials, and past learnings.

Through the initial creation of the Playbook, they were able to map out what desired improvements should be prioritized and came up with rapid implementation methods for the public realm and created multiple semi-permanent interventions (meant to last 8-10 years) ahead of any permanent development. Tommy Pacello, President of the MMDC, explains that by taking on the risk and burden of redesigning the public realm, the city can then allow for more experimentation through basic oversight. The City’s Chief Operating Officer is on the board for the district and the district works closely with city agencies to make these improvements happen. As experts in agile infrastructure, MMDC has the know-how necessary to make the right kind of quick improvements in the right way. But because of city involvement, the projects are also done with the intention of the city’s larger goals, such as Vision Zero, and not only to simply beautify the area. In a city with little in the ways of spare capital, this leaner approach and close working relationship works well for both parties involved.

“A lot can happen ad hoc but unless it’s done comprehensively and somebody thinking about how it all works together, you can’t really leverage the full potential,” says Alex Feldman, Vice President of U3 Advisors who helped set up MMDC. Tommy echoes this sentiment in his advice for others looking to start similar ventures and emphasizes the need to establish clear goals for the project, coordinate with the city from the beginning, and find a champion to support the work. “Just get it done and the rest will follow.”

## CHICAGO

### Make Way for People Program



**Relevance:** Similar program to Philadelphia with additional ROW improvement elements

**Successes:** Open source parklet design and easy to understand application process

**Challenges:** Inequitable distribution of ROW improvements and limited city capacity

**Key Takeaway:** An opportunity for iterative improvements and ongoing research as the ROW program in Philadelphia is reviewed and improved

Image from: [City of Chicago Press Release](#)

### OPEN SOURCE DESIGN

The City of Chicago Department of Transportation's (CDOT) Make Way for People program is a placemaking initiative that supports public-private partnerships to transform the public way through creative temporary tactical improvements and cultural programming such as People Spots, People Streets, People Plazas, and People Alleys. Additional information on the program can be found in the program's website at [makewayforpeople.org](http://makewayforpeople.org).

People Spots, sometimes called "parklets," are temporary platforms that turn a parking spot into an outdoor space for public enjoyment. They improve the walkability and vibrancy of neighborhoods by extending the sidewalk and creating additional pedestrian space. In 2018, a \$30,000 AARP grant made it possible for CDOT to create a standard People Spot design and construction assembly manual that can be utilized by neighborhood groups across the City. This will save local groups the cost of paying for the custom design of a People Spot, which could be a substantial expense for a neighborhood group. The plan is pre-approved by the city and allows for unique modifications, but doesn't require a certified stamp for approval thereby lowering the barrier to entry. The design work is now open-source and available for free and should lower the cost of building a new People Spot.

Consulted for this case study was Katherine Darnstadt, founder and principal of Latent Design, who worked with CDOT to develop the standard People Spot design as a part of an ongoing contract with the City. Staff of the City's Livable Streets program were also consulted for this project. In the coming years, the city plans to track the development of People Spots to see if the open-source design creates a more equitable distribution and works well for community organizations over time.

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## BOSTON

### Tactical Public Realm Program



**Relevance:** A new program established based on an assessment of a similarly underperforming ROW program

**Successes:** Establishing funding and accessible forms for greater access to ROW stewardship

**Challenges:** Newly established and not yet evaluated for success

**Key Takeaway:** Openness to the public through outreach and education, an accessible staff member, and a culture of contribution from the residents on the ground

Image from: [Tactical Public Realm Guidelines](#)

### ALL IN ONE ROW

Only just recently created, the City of Boston brought several ROW elements under the same umbrella, including public plazas, parklets, outdoor cafes (either directly adjacent to the restaurant and/or in the sidewalk/street), and even street murals. Following the implementation of Go Boston 2030, it was established that finding new ways of improving the public realm was a high priority to improve the city. This led to a new form of ROW stewardship through soliciting public input via a simple one-page online form that includes fields for type of public realm project, location, potential partners, and a description of what you'd like to see in that place. The city then selects several projects to fund each year based on this input and works with the individual or suggested agency to implement it. In 2019, they expect to implement three pedestrian plazas and eight or nine parklets.

According to Jacob Wessel, Public Realm Director for the new program, this program aims to keep the barriers to entry as low as possible and is inspired by other best practice programs in the US (including NYC's plaza program). The incentive for the changes came from analyzing the prior public realm program - one that, like Philadelphia, relied on private funding and those who felt they should spend their own money for the public good. A lot of similar projects had been happening in an unsanctioned way, and they wanted to find a way to work together with these well-intentioned activists. Moreover, Jacob says, it was important to have the community lead the placement of these civic assets, rather than having the city prescribe where they think it's best. Once suggested, the city then determines the feasibility of the proposal, establishes local partners, and then coordinates internally to see how it lines up with repaving, traffic studies, or other local plans - and even whether it would be better as a different type of ROW project.

Notably, the program doesn't include bicycle corrals, though Jacob splits his time between this and block party/open streets temporary activations. He stands by the city's goals, acting as a liaison between the city and the public - conducting community workshops and the like, though he emphasizes the importance of the department head and mayor as vocal supporters as well. It was critical to ensure that overlapping projects were always taken into consideration, which means working closely with Vision Zero initiatives, like the slow zones in residential neighborhoods, but also the larger capital projects that run the risk of getting in the way - or being mutually beneficial instead. Most importantly, however, is the motivation behind the program, as the Tactical Public Realm Guidelines puts it: "Rather than just serving vehicles as transportation networks, our streets can be spaces in which to convene, create, and experiment" - without the need to explain the economic benefit or convince the public of its importance. As the program progresses, goals are set, and the city is working on the best way to evaluate their progress through the lens of equity and access.

## PORTLAND

### Portland in the Streets



**Relevance:** A new program that brings many elements of the ROW under one program

**Successes:** Providing grants to communities and streamlining community input

**Challenges:** Bringing together many different departments/permit processes under one

**Key Takeaway:** Broadening the scope of ROW to include other elements, including short-term tactical improvement projects

Image from: [Portland in the Streets Website](#)

### CROWDSOURCED OPPORTUNITIES

Similar to Boston, Portland, Oregon follows the trend in consolidating its ROW elements under the umbrella department “Portland in the Streets”. Unlike Boston, however, Portland’s program includes not only parklets, cafe seating, pedestrian plazas, and painted crosswalks and intersections, but also includes play streets, events/programming, farmer’s markets, vacant lots, block parties, vending carts, banners, signs, Park(ing) Day, pathways, publication boxes, and what they call “street prototype” - or essentially short-term tactical urbanism projects (there’s even a pink barricade rental program available to block party permittees!). Similarly, they also have an “idea form” online for the public to submit their recommendations or start a conversation with a member of the city to see what works best for their situation.

Despite not being advertised or marketed, the “Spaces to Places” program has been gaining a lot of interest - where anything from an underused gravel road to a vacant lot can be turned into places that people want to be. Examples include pop-up parklets, community gardens, or a community play space. The most popular program (by volume of permits issued) is their block party program with 776 permits issued in 2018, a 38 percent increase from 2017. Additionally, “street prototypes” are flexible enough to include anything from traffic diverters or temporarily closing a street to traffic to test a bike lane or pedestrian plaza. The city became amenable to these projects in part due to an advocacy group dubbed “Better Block Portland”, which began by implementing extended Park(ing) Day projects and eventually started working with the city on larger, formal projects like pedestrian plazas and protected bike lanes to test them out with the city’s approval.

Importantly, the city is dedicated to ensuring these programs are accessible, do not have fees for many of the permits (including block parties, play streets, creative crosswalks and curb extensions, street painting, Portland Pathways, Spaces to Places, etc.), and focus on targeted areas that do not have these improvements in place (though insurance and other items are still required for permit acceptance). For projects that require funding, the city has provided grants to further reduce barriers to entry, with about ten projects utilizing these funds so far. Though the program as a whole is still new, the city continues to monitor progress, streamline all permits, and are revising the guidelines to match. In the meantime, the feedback from surveys done on-site has been positive, and the city continues its outreach to community groups.

Bicycle corrals are one of the only things not included in this program, but notably are one of the most successful programs in the country with 154 installed city-wide as of 2019. The reason for its success probably lies in the low cost - the city owns the corrals and installs them. All the applicant needs to do is request one and sign on to maintain it, thereby again reducing the barrier to entry. Regular bike racks and other right of way elements like benches can also be applied for online through the department. Though the city does not necessarily provide them in all cases in the same way as bike corrals, once approved for an encroachment permit, the resident is permitted to purchase and install them individually.

**“IF THE AGREEMENT IS  
YOU’RE GOING TO HAVE AN  
INDEPENDENT STEWARD,  
THEN YOU NEED TO REDUCE  
THE COST TO HAVE BUY-IN.”**

– EMALEIGH DOLEY,  
GERMANTOWN UNITED CDC

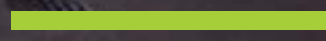
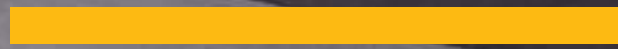
# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In developing recommendations, an emphasis was placed on working within the overarching social compact that defines ROW stewardship, with the City striving to provide stewardship opportunities efficiently, and stewards agreeing to create, accept responsibility for, and take temporal ownership over an asset. In this study's assessment, the current programs do not produce enough ROW stewardship, but this doesn't mean that all barriers should be removed. For instance, proof of insurance, evidence that interventions won't interfere with necessary city functions, and even the effort required to execute the intervention, are necessary checks to ensure that the asset created will be sustainable over the life of the permit and be properly stewarded.

Our focus, therefore, is on making policy recommendations which better equip community stakeholders to adopt and steward ROW by recommending enhancements to capacity both within the city and stakeholder groups while maintaining a balance to ensure a shared responsibility. This may mean providing catalytic capacity in some communities to account for structural inequities like poverty rate and civic infrastructure or strategic alignment with other public realm investments like commercial corridor revitalization, streetscaping and park or trail enhancements.

In this spirit, the following recommendations are presented for consideration by the city to increase and improve the stewardship of the public realm.

Opposite: The parklets and porticos at The Italian/9th St. Market are not a part of the official list of right-of-way stewarded projects in Philadelphia, but are stewarded and provide a pleasant environment for market-goers (Photo by The Lindy Institute, 2019)



# REDESIGNED ROW PROCESSES

Based on our assessment of inefficiencies in current ROW processes and best practices drawn from exemplar cities, ROW review and approval processes should be streamlined by identifying primary points of contact and consolidating responsibility for review and approval. Individual intervention processes could be reorganized in the following ways:

1

- Parklets and plazas should be revised to include a “kit of parts” and/or preapproved open-source designs that do away with the need for costly or intimidating design processes (while leaving room for creative expression for groups seeking to do so).
- Benches (and other small-scale ROW improvements) should have a simple process for review/approval that prevents barriers to entry for communities that have a lack of seating for transit and socializing or a need for a creative expression on place.
- The processes should have an annual calendar for application, review and installation to streamline the process internally and create a focal point for marketing efforts and a sense of urgency among community members.
- Pedestrian plazas should be split into two separate categories, one for general streetscape improvements that assist in Vision Zero goals that the city can implement at will, and the other that involves community stewardship and act as a true public space.
- Parklets should be allowed to remain in the ROW for the entire year, rather than requiring the steward to deconstruct and store the parklet during the winter.

# UPDATED ROW GUIDEBOOKS

2

Following a review of ROW processes, accompanying redesigned guidebooks should be created for each to improve usability and illustrate the updated information. Case studies from other cities referenced in this report can work to inform these updates, as would additional input from experts in the city and elsewhere who have successfully implemented ROW projects. The presentation of the guides online should accentuate what potential stewards should expect in terms of cost and timing and, as much as possible, reflect a simple step-by-step approach.

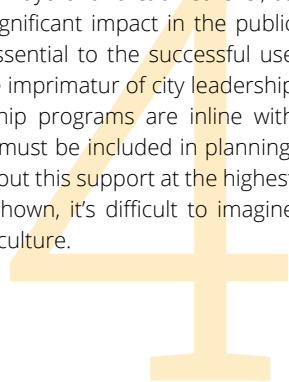
3

The city should develop an education and outreach strategy using data indicators focused on identifying communities that have the capacity but are otherwise underserved, uninformed, and/or underfunded. These communities should be the focus of a campaign to receive outreach/support to address inherent inequities in capacity for implementing and stewarding ROW improvements. Data should also be used to develop equity goals for ROW improvements, inform how it can achieve them, and track progress and impact. Longer term, the City can also identify and designate areas which might best support stewarded interventions, hopefully easing the review and approval process and possibly allowing for proactive outreach and marketing to community groups to initiate an application process. This can be coordinated with Vision Zero goals and other strategic city plans for maximum efficacy across administration goals for public safety, open space, transportation, and inclusion.

# EQUITY AND EVIDENCE-BASED INDICATORS

# BUILDING CATALYTIC CAPACITY

The following steps aim to build capacity within the city administration, and are predicated on ROW stewardship being prioritized, ideally at the mayoral and cabinet level, as a cost effective way to have significant impact in the public realm of all neighborhoods. Essential to the successful use of any additional capacity is the imprimatur of city leadership to convey the ROW stewardship programs are inline with the administration's goals and must be included in planning, budgeting and evaluation. Without this support at the highest level, as our interviews have shown, it's difficult to imagine sufficient impact on policy and culture.



## STEP 1: DEDICATED STAFF SUPPORT

This staff member should be public-facing and accessible to facilitate open communication with the public, champion successful ROW improvements internally and externally, coordinate all approvals and project phases, and conduct outreach to and build relationships with communities. Internally, this person should collaborate with other city agencies and share resources, particularly important in securing funding to support increased stewardship.

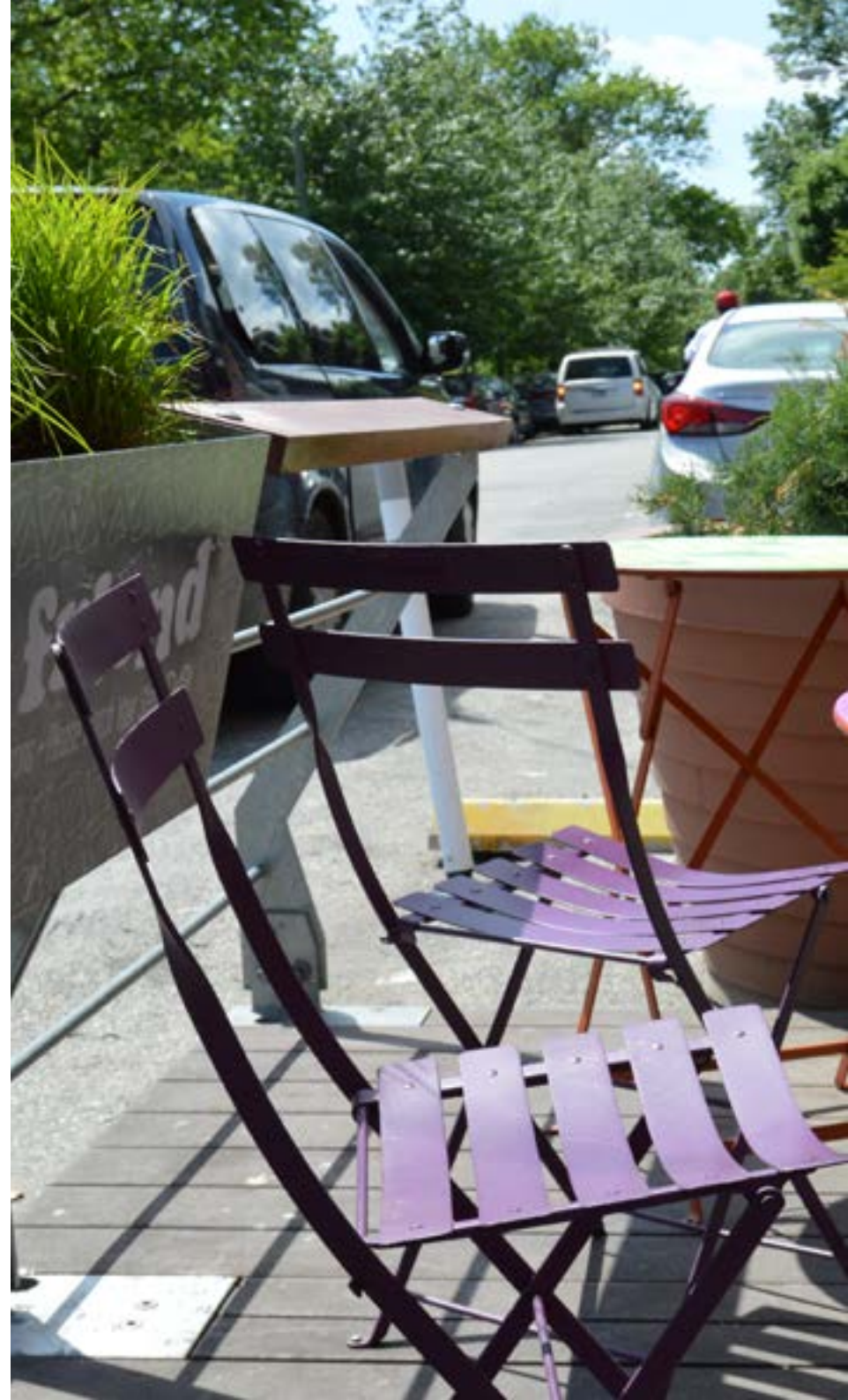
## STEP 2: ESTABLISH ROW LEADERSHIP

As the potential for ROW stewardship opportunities increases, the city should seek to add a team of dedicated staff members like that described in step one, working as a team under the leadership of a senior-level staff member. Ideally this person would serve as a recognizable champion and an architect of bolstering the program, including overseeing the streamlining of ROW processes. To succeed, this position should be sufficiently high-level to put ROW-amenities on equal footing with other divisions and be able to guide resources. San Francisco and Boston are two examples of cities who have created this type of position to the benefit of their respective ROW programs. It's important to note that this person will need scaleable staff support to back up his/her evangelism of ROW stewardship with on-the-ground staff who can help to implement.

# LONG TERM PLANNING: SCOPING A SEPARATE ORGANIZATION

## 5

On a parallel track with staffing upgrades, ROW stewardship leaders in the City administration and community development should scope a support organization that can work alongside the city and communities to catalyze ROW upgrades. This could take the form of a new city agency, a city-affiliated non-profit, or a public-private partnership to focus on gathering and distributing resources to manage, promote, and process ROW requests. This organization and its dedicated staff could use its focused mission and aggregated resources to create efficiencies, such as manage insurance, amenity design, and sourcing materials for all communities, regardless of their RCO status. The organization could also serve as a hub to create benchmarks that can be measured and publicized and oversee the creation of a “playbook” with prioritized areas of focus and seek pre-approval for tactical urbanism projects for quicker deployment. Philadelphia has a great tradition of city-affiliated entities like Mural Arts and the Delaware River Waterfront Corporation making public realm improvements, but the city and interested funders must be intentional in structuring this organization to ensure accountability and transparency, and to successfully collaborate, not compete, with the City.





## OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

The scope of this research was focused on exploring ways that other cities have effectively administered their ROW stewardship programs, and extrapolate potential best practices for aligning the City of Philadelphia's programmatic and administrative ROW processes and structures. While additional interviews and more in-depth, on-site investigations of ROW improvements would have proved informative, resource and time limitations dictated a specific line of inquiry.

A need to investigate the cultural, economic, and environmental impacts of transforming parking spaces into places for people remains, if even at an incremental pace in coming years. Further study of ROW improvements that evaluate the benefits of these interventions from a public health, economic, and civic perspective could provide additional support, and political rationale, for city-led long-term stewardship of ROW improvements. This research could focus on elements such as their impacts on civically-engaged activities, impacts on social determinants of health, traffic calming effects, and effects on business' gross sales receipts, to name a few.

The City should also consider tracking these metrics over time as new pedestrian plazas and parklets come online, establishing an ongoing review process to measure success against established goals and periodically update the program as necessary. Other divisions of the city could collaborate on the future program planning, including Commerce, Planning, Water, Citizens Planning Institute, and Rebuild.

N.B.: Please note that the above were limited by the study's strict focus on resident-stewarded interventions. Proposals to fund ROW interventions without community involvement were not the subject of this study, but are certainly worthwhile for further study since it is doubtless that pedestrian and bike amenities bring multilayered benefits to communities.

# CONCLUSION

As Philadelphia experiences more development than at any time in recent memory, its streets are a near-constant, an inheritance from earlier generations, some given to us at its founding. Streets that once supported commerce by wagons and carriages now juggle autos and their need for parking, as well as transit, bikes, scooters, and the smallest but most essential unit, pedestrians. City dwellers from all of Philadelphia's neighborhoods, rich, poor, dense or decentralized, seek to order the rights-of-way that serve as the arteries that bring life to their communities through commerce, social connection, public safety or just more eyes on the street.

In today's Philadelphia, with its twinned trends of increasing property values in invigorated neighborhoods within blocks of entrenched poverty and intractable wage and wealth gaps, our streets are an equalizer and an opportunity to create focal points for realizing common goals. If the City is able to elevate its ROW stewardship programs to reach communities city-wide and stir civic infrastructure to accept this challenge, it will deepen ties both between Philadelphia and its residents and within communities themselves. As this report emphasizes, any city program deserving of critical resources must address Philadelphia's inequity head on, and it is our hope that this research process has produced a roadmap to streamline current processes to benefit lower-capacity communities and build catalytic capacity to scale improvements to reach every neighborhood across the city.

We commend the city for its interest in nurturing right-of-way stewardship and support of this study and we hope it's a harbinger of the focus required to make strategic decisions to not only expand ROW stewardship programs but to do so equitably and with impact that creates self-perpetuating momentum in communities. In a city with myriad challenges, ROW stewardship may seem like a luxury, but we believe it's a sign of Philadelphia's health at the community level that access to high quality public space be a priority. We believe Philadelphia and its leadership are poised to meet this challenge and look forward to benefits to communities and the city as a whole that it will inevitably yield.

# CREDITS

## **THE RESEARCH TEAM INCLUDED THE FOLLOWING LINDY INSTITUTE MEMBERS:**

Ryan Debold, Associate Director, Project Lead  
Katrina Johnston-Zimmerman, Project Manager, Lead Researcher  
Michael Greenle, Project Consultant  
Sarajane Bradley, Graphic Design

The research team would like to thank all of the individuals interviewed for this project, from the City of Philadelphia to the advocates on the ground, both of which are working every day to improve this city's streets and public spaces. Additionally, we would like to thank all of the project managers and experts around the country who generously donated their time to our exploration - and hopeful improvement - of Philadelphia's ROW program. Your hard work in your respective cities is a continuous source of inspiration, and we sincerely hope that this research impacts your own work as well. We would also like to thank the researchers who have come before us and contributed to the general knowledge and understanding of the public realm that we inhabit every day.

We would especially like to thank our City stakeholder group who worked with us during the entirety of this project: Angela Dixon, Ariel Ben-Amos, and Kelley Yemen, as well as the Complete Streets staff members Charlotte Castle, Casey Ross, and Andrew Simpson.

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Please note the opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funders.

## APPENDIX A

### References

The following documents were referenced specifically for the purposes of investigating prior research, evaluations, and best practices that cities (including Philadelphia) have explored in the past. Many of the interviews conducted for this project include authors of the documents below. This is in addition to the city-specific programs which were referenced for this study as listed above.

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**Bicycle Corral economics:**

<http://planphilly.com/articles/2014/11/03/the-economics-of-bike-corrals-could-have-us-singing-yippie-ki-yay>

**Connect: Philadelphia's Strategic Transportation Plan**

<http://www.phillyotis.com/portfolio-item/connect-ph/>

**Press release on Chicago's People Spot prototype:**

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## APPENDIX B

### Interviews

The following individuals were consulted for this report. Participants were given the option to remain anonymous in order to promote open feedback.

#### EXPERT INTERVIEWS BY CATEGORY

##### Representatives from Local Place-based Organizations:

- University City District
- South Street West Business Assoc.
- Fishtown Neighborhood Assoc.
- South of South Neighborhood Assoc.
- South Street Headhouse Square District
- Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation
- Tacony Community Development Corporation
- Esperanza (Neighborhood non-profit)
- Logan CDC (formerly operational)
- Germantown United CDC

##### Local Participants in the ROW process:

- Commercial Real Estate Developer
- South Street (East) Business Owner
- South Street (West) Business Owner
- Clean Air Council Non Profit Organization

##### National Experts on ROW and public space:

- Street Plans, NYC
- San Francisco GroundPlay Program
- Memphis Medical District Collaborative
- NYC Former DOT Members
- Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies, UCLA
- Chicago Parklet Architect (Latent Design)
- Goldman School of Public Policy, UC Berkeley
- The City of Chicago's Make Way for People Program
- Former member of Rebar, San Francisco
- City of Boston, Tactical Public Realm program
- City of Portland, Oregon, Portland in the Streets program

##### Local Experts on ROW and public space:

- U3 Advisors
- OTIS Members, City of Philadelphia
- Citizens Planning Institute, City of Philadelphia
- Tactical Urbanism Consultant

#### FULL LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

*Special thanks to the many participants who volunteered their time to be interviewed for this project*

**University City District**  
Philadelphia

**South Street West Business Association**  
Philadelphia

**Fishtown Neighborhood Association**  
Philadelphia

**Mike Lydon**  
**Street Plans**  
New York City

**Robin Abad Acubillo**  
**Places for People Lead Policy Planner, City of San Francisco**  
San Francisco

**Alex Feldman**  
**Vice President, U3 Advisors**  
Philadelphia

**Tommy Pacello**  
**President, Memphis Medical District Collaborative (MMDC)**  
Memphis

**Ed Janoff**  
**Street Plans, Formerly NYC DOT**  
New York City

**South of South Neighborhood Association**  
Philadelphia

**Charlotte Castle and Casey Ross**  
**City of Philadelphia, OTIS**  
Philadelphia

**Madeline Brozen,**  
**Deputy Director, Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies at UCLA**  
Los Angeles

**James Weber**  
**South Street Headhouse Square District (SSHD), business owner**  
Philadelphia

**Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC) Staff**  
Philadelphia

**Matt Levinson**  
**The Quick Fixx**  
Philadelphia

**South Street Headhouse Square District**  
Philadelphia

**Katherine Darnstadt**  
**Latent Design**  
Chicago

**Meredith Sadin**  
**UC Berkeley, Goldman School of Public Policy**  
Berkeley

**Justin Ackerman**  
**Formerly with Rebar**  
San Francisco

**David Ortiz**  
**Vice President of Housing and Economic Development, Esperanza**  
Philadelphia

**Tya Winn**  
**Formerly of Logan CDC, currently Habitat for Humanity Philadelphia**  
Philadelphia

**Emaleigh Doley**  
**Corridor Manager, Germantown United CDC**  
Philadelphia

**Vanessa Irazzary and Lubica Benak**  
**City of Chicago, DOT Coordinating Planner and Livable Streets Project Director**  
Chicago

**Portland in the Streets Program**  
Portland

**Jacob Wessel**  
**Public Realm Director, Tactical Public Realm Program**  
Boston

**Nick Zuwiala-Rogers and Will Fraser**  
**Clean Air Council**  
Philadelphia

