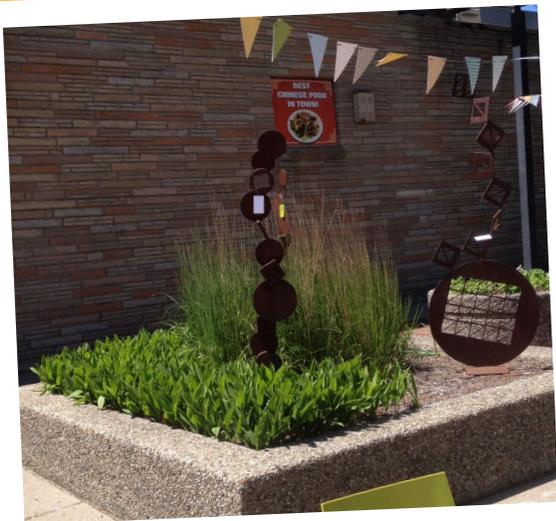


Michigan Municipal League

Experimenting with Place in Berkley



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Better Communities. Better Michigan.



PROJECT DETAILS:

NAME:

Experimenting with Place in Berkley

DATE:

May–August, 2014

LOCATION:

Berkley, Michigan

THE GIST:

Pop-up placemaking sparks creativity and community engagement.

Experimenting with Place in Berkley

PROJECT SCOPE:

Challenge:

The intersection of Robina and Twelve Mile in downtown Berkley has the potential to be a great public gathering space. Twelve Mile is full of shops and restaurants, and Robina has some small businesses and parking before quickly transitioning to residential one block north and south of Twelve Mile. However, the space is poorly maintained, the physical environment is outdated, and the sidewalks are in bad condition. City officials were planning on doing minor improvements to the sidewalk anyway, but wanted to explore the idea of placemaking and see if residents might want to invest in enhancing the public space.

Overview:

As part of the Michigan Municipal League's PlacePlans initiative, an effort funded by the state and led by the League and Michigan State University, the city of Berkley was selected to undertake a civic engagement pilot project. In an effort to engage the community in placemaking at the Robina and Twelve Mile intersection, the city decided to initiate a short-term planning process and tactical placemaking pop-up project during the Berkley Art Bash, an annual art fair in downtown Berkley. The city planner organized a community stakeholder group to guide the project, including residents, business owners, representa-



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tives from the planning commission and the Downtown Development Authority, council members, and the city manager.

The goal of the project was to show residents possible uses for the space, collect feedback and ideas, and to promote the findings as a way to guide the next steps of the intersection's future. The stakeholder group set up the following elements during Art Bash:

- An outdoor seating area with moveable patio furniture, fake hedges, and umbrellas to block the sun;
- A giant checkerboard painted in the street with Frisbees as the checker pieces;
- Sidewalk chalk for kids to draw with;
- A local artist's metal sculptures in planters and student art displayed on an exterior brick wall;
- Colorful flags strung through light posts and trees;
- An hour dedicated for a yoga class to practice in the street; and
- A long piece of paper posted to an exterior wall to collect feedback and ideas on activating the space from Art Bash patrons.

Accomplishments:

- The stakeholder group collected more than 150 responses to four questions about how the space should be used throughout the one-day Art Bash event. Residents and visitors also generated more than 30 new possible uses for the space.
- 96% of respondents expressed a desire to see the block closed more frequently for events and participants generated 16 more ideas for what to do during these closures, such as bringing in food trucks, hosting school concerts, or creating a beer garden.
- 71% of respondents agreed that Robina could be closed permanently to create a public plaza. The question collected comments like: "Would make it more of a 'downtown' feel," "Berkley could use a consistent meeting place," and "All of the most popular and quickly growing communities in the country have areas designated to public events. Please promote the idea of valuing our city and our neighbors!"
- At the beginning of the project, one council member thought permanently closing the street was a terrible idea because of concerns over parking, traffic flow, and the impact on local businesses. After seeing the overwhelmingly positive response from residents and visitors, he was excited to promote the project and help guide the next steps.
- The community and city leaders are now more informed of residents' desires and can use information collected through the project to share with the mayor, councilmembers, architects, business owners, and residents as the city plans upgrades to the downtown.

Participation:

- The stakeholder group to guide the process
- City officials to act as project champions
- A skilled facilitator (provided by the League)

Budget:

It cost under \$2,000 to rent patio furniture, purchase materials for the giant check-board, print photos of placemaking ideas, and other miscellaneous supplies.

Funding:

The city dedicated part of its budget to purchase materials and the League's staff time was paid for by the PlacePlans grant, which is funded by the Michigan State Housing Development Authority through the MiPlace placemaking initiative.

How-To:

1. Identify an area in need of rejuvenation, preferably one near other attractions and amenities. The Robina and Twelve Mile intersection was selected because of its proximity to shops, restaurants, and other downtown assets. The city was planning on improving the space's sidewalks anyway but wanted to explore the possibility of spending more money to really enhance the area as a public gathering space.
2. Convene a community stakeholder group to guide the process. City staff and elected officials led the initiative but created a stakeholder group of active residents, business owners, and others who joined early in the planning process. The League's facilitator hosted four meetings with the stakeholder group to help guide the process. The goals of each meeting were as follows:
 - a. Initial meeting – Introduce concepts of placemaking, share potential concepts to test at Art Bash, generate ideas, and recruit community members to join the planning committee.
 - b. Committee planning meeting #1 – Share examples of how other communities have implemented popular ideas generated at the first meeting, narrow the project's focus, and secure volunteers to further develop selected project elements.
 - c. Committee planning meeting #2 – Report progress and information from responsibilities from the previous meeting and decide on key project elements.
 - d. Committee planning meeting #3 – Finalize unfinished plans, determine final arrangement of project elements, finalize public input questions, and secure volunteers for the Art Bash event.
3. Host the event! Volunteers helped set up the placemaking pop-up before Art Bash began and participants were present all day talking to visitors, sharing information about the project, and collecting ideas. Volunteers also took pictures and posted on social media to document the event.
4. Debrief findings and compile a report to illustrate what happened, key findings, and ideas generated at the event. Access the entire report [here](#).

5. Keep the momentum going. As a result of the Art Bash placemaking pop-up, Berkley stakeholders and public officials were excited to continue moving forward on the project. The League outlined a number of immediate and short-term action steps to continue to promote placemaking and explore options for a permanent structural change. See the League's full report for more detailed information.
6. Prepare for future planning. Incremental changes to the intersection can help keep costs low and keep up excitement around the project. Permanent changes to the physical structure will need additional funding and planning. The city is exploring funding opportunities and discussing plans with designers and architects interested in working on the project.

One potential funding opportunity is through crowdfunding, which is an online platform to raise money for a specific venture. People excited about the project contribute varying dollar amounts until a final goal is met or timeframe runs out. Patronicity is a Detroit-based crowdfunding site that raises support for community projects across the state. The Michigan Economic Development Corporation is offering a matching grant, Public Spaces Community Places, for projects crowdfunded on Patronicity that are focused on public plazas, green spaces, access to public amenities, farmers markets, alley rehabilitation, and other place-based, public projects.

Lessons Learned:

- **Host a placemaking pop-up at an existing community event.**
The Berkley Art Bash was a great way to test ideas and engage with residents about potential uses of the Robina and Twelve Mile intersection. Using an existing public event was a great way to take advantage of people already gathering in downtown Berkley.
- **Let people experience placemaking to make more educated decisions.**
People are most willing to reconsider physical design and use of public infrastructure when they are shown or can experience possibilities. Allowing new ideas to live temporarily at the site gives people the opportunity to reach beyond what they would normally consider possible.
- **Test ideas before making large, expensive changes.**
Temporarily testing proposed changes allows the community to experience aspects of the project before making big decisions. It's much cheaper to test ideas than to spend money on a space the community won't use.
- **Use photos of great public spaces to educate the public about placemaking.**
Rather than getting bogged down in technical descriptions of placemaking, showing photos of great spaces allowed people to imagine what is possible for Berkley.
- **Use programming to attract people to the public space.**
The Art Bash placemaking project provided opportunities for multiple constituencies to enjoy the space (kids playing with sidewalk chalk, seniors using the café, yogis doing yoga, etc.). Adding programming or creating joint programming contributes to the richness of the space and to the diversity of input gathered.



- **Keep kids in mind.**
Kids have great ideas and are outside-the-box thinkers. Children and families freely participated in the engagement wall at Art Bash. Having specific ways to make sure they are engaged can help generate some of the most creative ideas.
- **Start small.**
As illustrated with Art Bash, it's possible to explore big ideas and get people excited about a project in just a few hours with a limited budget.

Contact the Experts:

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Additional Documents:

<http://placemaking.mml.org/berkeley-placemaking-2/berkeley-robina-final-project/>

The Center for 21st Century Communities

Building 21st century communities

Experts from around the world—in academic, business, and public sectors alike—agree that investing in communities is a critical element to long-term economic development in the 21st century. Michigan’s future depends on its ability to attract and retain knowledge-based workers. Central to attracting this priceless commodity is *place*. Research proves that successful 21st century communities effectively leverage the assets summarized in this brochure. Learn more and stay engaged at mml.org.

Who we are...

The Michigan Municipal League is the one clear voice for Michigan communities. We are a nonprofit, but we act with the fervor of entrepreneurs; our people are dynamic, energetic, and highly approachable, passionately and aggressively pushing change to achieve better communities and a better Michigan.

What we know...

Never before have so many diverse interests, from academic researchers to the business community to government leaders, shared a single conclusion: Michigan’s future depends on its ability to attract knowledge-based workers. And what is central to attracting this priceless commodity? *Place*, specifically vibrant 21st century communities.

What we offer...

Through its Center for 21st Century Communities (21c3), the League provides education, technical assistance, public outreach, and unprecedented access to experts and resources. The 21c3 is a “one-stop-shop” for communities interested in creating and sustaining livable, desirable, and unique places that attract the highly skilled, creative, and talented workforce of the next century.



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