# An Assessment of the Design for Distancing Project, Baltimore, MD

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October 19, 2021

## Abstract

The immediate effects of COVID-19 created a burden on existing public space in urban communities as public health guidelines recommend people to maintain physical distance and spend time outside to minimize the risk of airborne transmission. In Baltimore, the city responded by committing \$1.5 million for the Design for Distancing initiative to implement 18 public space interventions on main streets and in business districts between July 2020 and June 2022. This study examines three Design for Distancing sites which represent a diverse cross section of communities and site designs. This study considers design features and site context, existing neighborhood conditions, and includes site observations to determine if the selected public space interventions accomplish the stated program goals. The goals of the program include creating spaces that people actually use; that are inclusive, healthy and equitable; support a return to thriving business; and enable physical distancing. Research methods include site observations supplemented by interviews with community stakeholders. The intent of this study is to identify what elements of the Design for Distancing project were successful in order to make recommendations for future interventions that can add vitality to public spaces and enhance neighborhood business districts beyond the time of pandemic restrictions.

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## Introduction

The effects of COVID-19 have impacted nearly every facet of our lives and communities. In urban environments, the new focus on physical distancing and being outside creates a burden on existing public space in densely populated communities. In response to community needs during the pandemic, cities around the world have identified ways to reorganize the public realm to provide more space for pedestrians while maintaining physical distance. In Baltimore, the city committed \$1.5 million for the Design for Distancing (D4D) initiative to implement 18 public space interventions on main streets and in business districts between July 2020 and November 2021. Design ideas for the D4D public space interventions were solicited through a competition brief published in May 2020 and selected designs were made publicly available in a community guidebook.

The Design for Distancing site interventions are new to Baltimore, but the program's design is similar to other city sponsored placemaking initiatives instituted in many U.S. cities over the past decade, including Philadelphia, New York, San Francisco, and Seattle. While the placemaking movement has steadily gained traction since the mid-1990's, its theory and approach to designing cities and places for people, not just cars and shopping centers, is an outgrowth of the work of Jane Jacobs and William H. Whyte who sparked the conversation about creating vibrant public places in the 1960's. Municipalities often invest in project evaluations to determine the impact of their investment. These studies seek to determine if the space is well utilized and if local businesses benefit from increased foot traffic or sales post-implementation (Brozen et al., 2019; Loukaitou-Sideris et al., 2013; University City District, 2013). These assessments draw their methodologies in part from public life study theory pioneered by Whyte as well as Jan Gehl. Gehl and Whyte identified design and site qualities associated with thriving public spaces such as welcoming edges, safety from harm, and opportunities to sit (Whyte, 1980; Gehl, 2013). Other independent placemaking studies seek to determine if placemaking efforts are implemented equitably.

This area of study assesses how designers engage with the residents, both before and after site implementation, and whether placemaking efforts are implemented for existing residents or as a marketing tool to attract new residents (Montgomery 2016; Fincher 2016; Harrison 2018; Gehl Institute, 2018).

This capstone project will utilize many of the methods pursued by placemaking studies in other U.S. cities to answer the following questions for the Design for Distancing initiative in Baltimore: Are the spaces well utilized? Are the spaces inclusive and equitable? Do the public site interventions support local businesses? In the environment of COVID-19, this study diverges from previous placemaking and public life studies as I will also consider the question: does the space enable safe gathering during COVID-19? The measure of a successful public space may look different in the midst of a pandemic, so this is an important consideration for this study.

It will be valuable to have an assessment of what benefit the Design for Distancing project brings to the city's diverse neighborhood business districts during this critical time. This assessment will be useful for small business district stakeholders such as business owners, main street managers, and community-based organizations to better understand what elements are associated with successful placemaking in neighborhood business districts. The City of Baltimore and project partners such as the Baltimore Development Corporation (BDC), Bloomberg School of Public Health, and the Neighborhood Design Center will benefit from increased knowledge about the impact of their investment.

The Design for Distancing initiative was created for the purpose of supporting small businesses and business districts during a public health and economic crisis, but in addition to providing a solution to an immediate problem, the Design for Distancing projects are an opportunity to experiment with reorganizing public space in a way that prioritizes the pedestrian over the car. Ultimately, the study will make recommendations for future public spaces that can enhance neighborhood business districts based on successful elements of the Design for Distancing initiative.

# **Literature Review**

# Introduction and Definitions

The Design for Distancing Competition brief and guidebook uses the terminology "public space interventions," but by any measure these public space interventions fit under the umbrella of placemaking. Project for Public Spaces, which has been a leading authority on public space research and implementation since 1975, defines placemaking as an action that "inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community" (2018, p. i). Design for Distancing emphasizes designs that are temporary, quick to install, and use inexpensive materials. This "lighter, quicker, cheaper" method of placemaking also fits in the category of tactical urbanism. Lydon and Garcia define tactical urbanism as "an approach to neighborhood building and activation using short-term, lowcost, and scalable interventions and policies" (2015, p. 2). Tactical urbanism is often citizen-lead, and it provides a response to the gridlock of intensive and siloed planning processes by taking action that is temporary, feasible, and experimental. Examples include pop-up parks, open streets initiatives, or painting temporary pedestrian infrastructure. The goal of tactical urbanism is that small incremental actions can provide a catalyst for lasting community change (Lydon & Garcia, 2015).

A common feature of the Design for Distancing installations is incorporating parklets into the site plan in order to increase space for pedestrians and customers of local businesses to be outside. Parklets were first conceived in San Francisco in 2005 by the design firm, Rebar. The firm fed a parking meter for an afternoon but rather than using the space to store a personal vehicle, the group brought in a bench, turf and a tree to create a temporary public park using a single parking space. In the years that followed that event grew to become a global Park(ing) day movement where parking spaces are temporarily converted to public gathering spaces the third Friday in September (Herman & Rodgers, 2020). Parklets typically repurpose one to three parking spaces into a public gathering space. Frequently the parking space is raised up to be level with the sidewalk, and planters, seating, and other furniture is added (Smart Growth America, 2013). Park(ing) Day and Parklet installations are now widely sponsored by city governments. This institutionalization of parklets and the permitting process enable these reimagined parking spaces to be installed on a semi-permanent basis, usually for a season or up to a year, as is the case for the Design for Distancing Project.

This review of literature will explore research on placemaking, tactical urbanism, and parklets through the lens of the four goals selected from the Framing + Vision of the Design for Distancing project (included in Appendix A). That framework prioritizes designs that are inclusive, healthy and equitable; enable users to gather safely during COVID-19; support a return to thriving business; and places that people actually use. In addition to exploring literature in these four themes, this review will explore best practices in carrying out a public life study and methods used to evaluate parklets and other small public spaces.

#### Public Space that People Actually Use

One of the primary goals in the Design for Distancing competition brief is to create places that people actually use. An enormous amount of space in cities is given to facilitate the movement and storage of cars, at the expense of pedestrians who are left with places that are less safe and less interesting. A thriving street life depends on a built environment that is constructed on the human scale. Researchers William H. Whyte and Jan Gehl have contributed to a body of work that guides designers and planners on how to study of public life and create successful public places.

William H. Whyte initiated his Street Life Project to study the use of public plazas in New York City in 1970. At the time, the City of New York was providing incentives for building developers to add public

plazas to their site design, but many of the plazas were vastly underutilized. Whyte used observations, interviews, and time lapse video footage to assess the way people were utilizing public plazas. This was a new area of research at the time and helped to establish the research techniques of studying public spaces. Many of his findings may seem obvious in retrospect, but the results lead to a modification in the zoning code to ensure that newly created plazas could better serve the people of New York (Whyte, 1980).

In his research of New York City plazas, Whyte identified a number of design elements that were associated with greater use. Whyte's first finding is "people tend to sit most where there are places to sit" (p. 28). Movable chairs are preferred to benches, and any surface that is 1-3 ft tall can be a sitting ledge. Access to the sun, protection from the wind, shade from trees, and the presence of water (preferably to splash in, listen to, or look at), were all attributes associated with highly utilized public space. Whyte's research also found that the presence of food vendors increased use and that "a good plaza starts at the street corner" with easy access to and from the street (p. 54). Whyte's final finding was the importance of triangulation, which he defines as the presence of a stimulus that can encourage people to interact with each other. Triangulation may come from an object or a person that delights or surprises such as street performer or public art. One of Whyte's foundational points is that people are attracted to places that have other people. Whyte argued that the social life of public spaces is fundamentally important to the quality of life of individuals and the larger society. He urges us to create spaces that can invite people in and facilitate community interaction.

Jan Gehl, a Copenhagen based architect and planner, builds on the work of William H. Whyte and has developed a practical toolkit for assessing the vitality of places. Gehl advocates for planning and understanding the city at eye level and he outlines 12 quality criteria (see Figure 1) in his work that can provide a useful checklist or evaluation tool when assessing the quality of a space.

#### Figure 1

Gehl's 12 Urban Quality Criteria



Gehl considers protection and safety the most important quality of a space (criteria 1-3). If people do not feel protected from traffic, crime, and unpleasant climates, none of the other steps taken to create a good public space will make a difference. The next step is to create spaces that provide comfort and invite people to do activities associated with public space such as walking, sitting and talking (criteria 4-9). The final imperative is to delight (criteria 10-12). This last step is associated with good design and should be considered in tandem with the criteria associated with safety and comfort. The research of Whyte and Gehl provides a framework of design and site qualities that are important to encourage use and enjoyment of a public space. In order to create spaces that people use the Design for Distancing sites should provide for the safety and protection of users, provide comfort and seating, and create the opportunity to enjoy and delight in the space and the surroundings.

#### Public Space that is Inclusive, Healthy, and Equitable

While placemaking doesn't directly address the systemic challenges that face underserved communities, it can still create a valuable resource where it's most needed and be a source of pride for communities. Tactical urbanism is an important tool in high need communities where the only viable investment is lighter, quicker, cheaper. According to the Gehl Institute, "inclusion efforts at the intersection of public space and public health should focus on populations and neighborhoods that have experienced disenfranchisement and disinvestment or that have access challenges" (2018, p. 5). Access challenges here can refer to a community intersected by a wide highway that is difficult to cross or a neighborhood that doesn't have access to a park. Existing literature focused on equity in placemaking often centers around the question of whether initiatives are being implemented for existing residents or as a marketing tool to attract new residents (see Montgomery 2016; Fincher 2016; Harrison 2018). Harrison describes the phenomenon in this way, "tactical urbanism has attracted city leaders and the development community seeking opportunities to promote gentrifying neighborhoods with an allure of hipness. Installations become nothing more than a marketing tool, stealthily reversing the grass roots ethos of the [tactical urbanism] movement" (p. 32). Harrison goes on to point out that placemaking initiatives are often implemented to activate underutilized spaces in otherwise healthy neighborhoods, rather than targeting resources in the highest need communities where lighter, quicker, and cheaper is likely the only viable investment.

While there is an identified need for placemaking in underserved communities, two major recommendations arise in the literature surrounding how to create inclusive, healthy, and equitable places. The first recommendation is ensuring designers and placemakers pursue a genuine understanding of the community needs and neighborhood context through respectful and participatory engagement with residents. (see Harrison, 2018; Gehl Institute 2018; Coburn 2016). The second recommendation is to continue to adjust designs with (and not for) the community. Ongoing maintenance of the space is a critical factor in perception of safety and pride in the space. A greater commitment to evaluating site design and use, making adjustments, and ensuring proper maintenance is needed in communities that don't already have a thriving, healthy, and safe street life (Harrison, 2018; Coburn, 2016).

The Design for Distancing design brief suggests designers to reference the "Inclusive, Healthy Places Framework" by the Gehl Institute when considering the design of public space. Factors identified with designing healthy and inclusive places include the "quality of the public space, its accessibility and access, its use and diversity of users, and the sense of safety and security it advances" (2018, pp. 29-30). Quality of a public space is associated with higher use. Good public spaces encourage both active and passive use, can foster a sense of community, and facilitate social interactions. All of these attributes are associated with better health outcomes for people. Accessibility asks the question of whether ADA and universal design principles facilitate ease of use for diverse individuals, while access concerns who can reach the public space and by what means. A sense of safety and security in a space is important. Designing places that feel welcoming to all people and maintenance and demonstrated care for the space all help to create a sense of safety (Gehl Institute, 2018). Creating places that are inclusive, healthy and equitable can be understood by considering the neighborhood and residents being served by the public space investment, the design and planning process- both pre- and post-installation, and the implementation of the public place.

#### Public Space that Supports Neighborhood Businesses

A primary goal of the Design for Distancing initiative is to support local businesses. The design competition brief requested entries that would provide spaces for outdoor dining, outdoor services such as haircuts or health services, outdoor retail, or outdoor entertainment. The brief also specifies that the public space interventions shouldn't be limited to a particular business but should be implemented in commercial areas where improvements can serve any nearby business (2020). The prominent program goal of supporting businesses is reflective of a trend in parklet programs and also the impact that COVID-19 has had on neighborhood businesses. The San Francisco parklet program, which was the first of its kind, implements parklets in both residential and commercial areas and the parklet manual emphasizes that parklets are for public use and open to any passerby, not just customers of local businesses (City of San Francisco, 2020). Though parklets are considered part of the public, rather than the commercial realm, there is a clear relationship between parklets and neighborhood businesses. Many parklet programs are implemented in partnership with host businesses who sponsor and maintain the parklets as is the case in Philadelphia and Seattle. Even when programs are not realized with a business sponsor, many parklets are implemented in commercial, rather than residential, areas.

Research on the impact of parklets on sales and foot traffic to local businesses has shown mixed results. In an evaluation of parklets in Philadelphia, researchers found that parklet success was associated with nearby businesses whose products were well suited to consume in a parklet setting (such as takeout or sandwiches). Among host businesses that were able to provide sales data comparing the two weeks prior and the two weeks after parklet installations, sales increased by an average of 20% (University City District, 2013). A survey of pedestrians at parklet sites in Main Street Santa Monica found that 94% of users had purchased something at a nearby business compared to 57% of main street visitors surveyed at the site prior to installation (Brozen et al., 2019). Conversely, in an evaluation of parklet installations on

Spring Street in Los Angeles, ten ground floor business operators reported mixed results when asked whether parklets impacted sales or foot traffic. Business operators surveyed responded that they would recommend parklets to merchants in other districts, though many interviewees also cited concerns over loss of parking (Loukaitou-Sideris et al., 2013).

### Public Space for Physical Distancing

The challenge at the core of the Design for Distancing project is to "quickly activate public spaces to support safe, physically distant gathering and the reopening of local businesses" (Design for Distancing, p. 2). Foundational to the success of this project is to create spaces that align with public health recommendations intended to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in public spaces.

Beginning with the onset of the pandemic, early research and reports have stressed the importance of adapting streets to help people better maintain physical distance when moving around urban areas (see NACTO & Global Designing Cities Initiative, 2020; Sharifi et al., 2020; Honey-Roses et al., 2020). The National Association of Transportation Officials published a guide to street design to aid in COVID response and recovery. Recommendations for community main streets for COVID response include parking space or lane removal for outdoor restaurant seating, markets or other commercial activity; widened sidewalks to facilitate queuing outside of businesses; designated zones for drop off and pick up delivery; bike and micro mobility parking corrals; and street closures for school, religious, and community functions (2020).

In addition to reconfiguring public space, public messaging is another component of creating safer spaces during a pandemic. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advises community facilities to post signage to promote preventative behaviors such as washing hands frequently, staying home if you are sick, wearing masks, and physically distancing. CDC guidelines also recommend that people recreate close to home. Parklet program evaluations in New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles all found that a parklets are neighborhood amenities and that the majority of parklet users are from the immediate vicinity (Loukaitou-Sideris et al., 2013). As a neighborhood-based amenity, parklet programs such as the Design for Distancing project have the potential to be an apt solution to create additional outdoor space for local residents to enjoy.

Cities have used a multitude of policies to respond to the pandemic and support safe communities. COVID Mobility Works, a research initiative of non-profit and university partners, has been tracking local policies to support COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. Of the 276 policies recorded for United States jurisdictions, 102 are responses that create changes to public space. Tracking local policy initiatives is a challenging endeavor and this list represents only a portion of the public space initiatives in response to COVID-19. A number of cities implemented interventions in business districts to expand public space including Boston, Cincinnati, Dallas, New Orleans, Orlando, Pittsburgh, and Portland, Oregon (2020).

### Methods for Evaluating Public Space

A common method for assessing the quality of a public space is by using a public life study. Public life studies use primarily observational methods to understand how people are using or moving through a public space. As municipalities have invested in parklet programs over the last decade, public life studies have become a common way to assess the success of these programs. By exploring the methods used in parklet and other small public space evaluations I hope to develop study methods that are consistent with best practices for my assessment of the Design for Distancing spaces.

The city of San Francisco is a leader in public life studies and provides a manual of methods and best practices for carrying out a public life study. The first step identified in undertaking a public life study is to define the study area. For a parklet study, the study area often includes the parklet as well as the adjacent sidewalk for each site. The manual recommends collecting data in late spring or early fall when the weather is pleasant and students are in a normal school routine. It's recommended that data is gathered on a variety of days and ideally on at least two weekdays and one weekend day. Tuesday and Wednesday are identified as ideal weekday days and Saturday is recommended for weekend collection. Peak weekday hours are identified as 8-10am, 12-2pm, and 4-6pm. Peak weekend hours are from 12-6pm. When possible, parklet evaluations often asses the study area both pre- and post-implementation. When an evaluation occurs both pre- and post- installation, data should be collected on the same days and times of the week and the same season (San Francisco Department of Planning, 2019).

Public life study methods are divided into two categories: passive techniques and active or invasive techniques. Passive techniques include observing pedestrians and may include recording the number and volume of users, the location and behaviors of people, and any identifiable demographic information. Observations may also include recordings of the physical conditions of the space. Invasive or active data collection includes interacting with and surveying users of the public space or interviewing local business operators (San Francisco Department of Planning, 2019). At the intersection of these two methods is participant observation. A participant observer may interact with the public space and other users in order to get closer to the data and obtain first-hand knowledge of the site and the way it works (Herman & Rodgers, 2020).

In addition to site observations, additional secondary data can be helpful to evaluate parklet success and best practices. Collecting data on the existing community context such as neighborhood demographics and conditions, density, local support, transportation choice of neighbors, and placement of the site are all factors that provide insight on the role and success of a parklet in a community. Other important factors are the maintenance strategy and the public, private, or non-profit partners available to maintain the site. This information can be gathered through surveys, interviews, and research of census and other public datasets (Ben-Amos, 2017).

# Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to determine if the Design for Distancing public space interventions are well utilized; inclusive, healthy, and equitable; enable people to spend time outside safely during COVID-19; and support neighborhood businesses. Existing research provides ample examples of best practices in site planning, design, and implementation as it relates to these program goals. The frameworks and evaluation methods used by existing literature provide a strong foundation to build my evaluation framework for the Design for Distancing project. In the next section I will outline my methods of data collection and map the metrics and indicators that will be used to measure these four goals.

# Methods

#### Figure 2

Selected Design for Distancing Observation Sites



*Note.* Map from Design for Distancing Competition Brief, edited by author

To assess the success of the Design for Distancing sites, I will conduct site observations, supplemented by open ended interviews with stakeholders and additional desktop research on the community context. I selected three out of the 18 Design for Distancing sites for this study (see Figure 2). Selected sites are representative of the diversity of economic districts and communities in Baltimore, are geographically dispersed, and showcase varied site designs and utilization of space. To inform the selection of research sites, I made exploratory visits to a number of installations to assess the suitability of conducting site observations. I found that some sites weren't set up with sufficient space or furniture to conduct a socially distanced observation. Additionally, several of the installations aimed to activate a district with public art or communicate public health guidelines, but the installations didn't create community gathering spaces. The three selected sites include "Curbside Commons" on Hamilton-Lauraville Main Street in Northeast Baltimore, "Waverly Commons" on Waverly Main Street in Central Baltimore, and "The Meadow," in the Bromo Seltzer Arts and Entertainment District and the Market Center District near downtown. These three installations had sufficient seating to enable observations, utilize varied site designs and activate different types of spaces, and are located in diverse neighborhoods and economic districts.

Interviews were conducted in March and April of 2021 and site observations were conducted in May and June of 2021. While assessing the four identified goals of the Design for Distancing Project will be at the forefront of this research, information gathered from desktop research and stakeholder interviews will enable a more in depth understanding of the overall process and community conditions beyond what can be gathered through observations alone.

#### **Desktop Research**

Desktop research was conducted to gain a deeper understanding on the community context surrounding the Design for Distancing sites. Demographics, commuting patterns of residents, residential density, traffic volume, and local crime patterns are all indicators that can be correlated with the usage of a public space or parklet. An inventory of public assets such as parks and other public spaces as well as number and type of businesses provides insight to community needs and parklet performance. Data sources included the American Community Survey, the City of Baltimore, google maps, and site plan and design materials. Adjacent census tracts were used as the geographic basis for neighborhood demographics, density, and commute behaviors. Desktop research metrics are summarized in Table 1.

# Table 1

# Desktop Research Metrics

	Metric	Primary Associated Goal(s)	Rationale and Supporting Literature
1	Residential Density	Places people actually use	Previous studies have correlated parklet usage with higher residential
2	Local Commute Behaviors	Places people actually use	(Ben-Amos & Simpson, 2017)
3	Neighborhood Demographics (race, age, gender, income, etc.)	Inclusive, healthy, and equitable	Neighborhood demographics will be used to understand if site users are representative and inclusive of the surrounding community.
4	Incidents of Crime within 1/4 mile radius	Inclusive, healthy, and equitable; Places people actually use	High rates of crime within the surrounding blocks may compromise safety of the space which is a critical pre-requisite for healthy and well utilized public spaces. (Gehl, 2013)
5	Inventory of public assets with 1/4 mile radius	Inclusive, healthy, and equitable; Places people actually use	If there are ample public spaces and parks nearby it could indicate that the site did not fill a critical community need (Gehl Institute, 2018)
6	Diversity and types of businesses adjacent to space	Supports a return to thriving business; Places people actually use	Understanding the businesses surrounding the site will help inform how the space supports them. Research shows that availability of food vendors supports public space usage (Whyte 1980) (University City District, 2015) (Brozen, Loukaitou- Sideris, & Laborde, 201)
7	Size of Design for Distancing Site	Places people actually use	Size of the site will help in measuring maximum usage and comparing usage across sites

8	COVID-19 gathering and business restrictions during the week of observation	Safe gathering during COVID-19	Local restrictions may limit size of outdoor gatherings or business operations which could impact parklet usage.
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### Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholder interviews were conducted with main street and district managers who served as the lead community partners on implementation of the D4D sites. The purpose of the interviews was to gain more information about the site design, build, programming, and maintenance beyond what can be gathered through observation alone. Outreach to potential interviewees was done by email and the open-ended interviews were conducted over the phone or by Zoom. Appendix A. contains the list of interview questions asked to each interviewee. The questions aimed to provide insight on the planning and implementation process as well each of the four goals for the design for distancing sites. To supplement information gathered through stakeholder interviews, additional information and insight was gathered through virtual panel discussions hosted by local chapters of the American Society of Landscape Architects, the American Institute of Architects and the Baltimore Architecture Foundation, and a community "Bike the Sites" event hosted by the Neighborhood Design Center in April 2021.

## Site Observations

Each of the three sites were observed three times, on one weekend day and two weekdays, for two-hour sessions. Existing literature provides ample direction and best practices for conducting public life studies to inform the methodology of this study. The Meadow and Waverly Commons observations were carried out 12-2pm and 5-7pm on weekdays and 12-2pm on weekends. At Curbside Commons, observation hours were adjusted slightly to better coincide with peak business hours which included a coffeeshop as well as small stores that closed at 6pm. Curbside Commons observations were conducted from 11-1pm and 4-6pm on weekdays, and 11-1pm on the weekend. Weekend observations were conducted on Saturday for all sites and weekday observations were primarily conducted on Tuesday or Wednesday as these days have been identified as most representative of the week (San Francisco Department of Planning, 2019). One exception was a Thursday observation for Hamilton-Lauraville in order to coincide with the limited business hours of a local boutique adjacent to the site.

Observations were carried out on days when the weather was comfortable for spending time outside. One inconsistency is that for observations at Curbside Commons it had rained earlier in the day when I completed by weekday evening observation, and it started raining just as I was finishing my weekday midday observation. The threat of rain can discourage people from finding a place to sit and linger and rain earlier in the day will discourage users as people don't like to sit on wet seats (Gehl & Svarre 2013). Indeed, on the evening observation day at Curbside Commons, many of the tables, chairs, and umbrellas were not set up for use, but the more permanent benches and picnic tables were available. These rain events likely contributed to fewer users than typical during both weekday evening observation at Waverly Commons, there was a demonstration staged at the space which I hadn't been aware of prior to my planned observation. While the demonstration wasn't set to start until later in the evening, participants arrived to help with set up and a mobile barbeque stand showed up at the space to provide food for attendees. This event contributed to higher usage than a typical weekday evening. Table 2 shows the schedule and weather conditions during site observations.

Observations focused on the physical aspects of the site as well as the presence and behaviors of individuals using the space. Identified metrics are based on existing literature and parklet and public space assessments including the Gehl Institute's Framework for Inclusive Healthy Places. It's important to note that identified goals are

# Table 2

Site Observations Schedule and Weather

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
					May	1 <b>Meadow</b> 12-2pm 59°
2	3	4 Waverly 12-2pm I 81° – – –	5 <b>Curbside</b> 4- 6pm 77°	6	7	8 Waverly 12-2pm 54°
9	10	11	12 Meadow 12-2pm 57° Waverly 5- 7pm 66°	13	14	15
16	17	18 <b>Meadow</b> 5-7pm 77°	19	20	21	22
	June	1	2	3	4	5 <b>Curbside</b> 11-1pm 75° – – –
6	7	8	9	10 <b>Curbside</b> 11-1pm 75°	11	12

interconnected. For example, qualities that make a place healthy and safe and inclusive may also be prerequisites for the spaces being well utilized. Additionally, research shows that availability of food is correlated with well utilized public spaces (Whyte, 1980; Brozen et al., 2019; University City District, 2013). Therefore, for D4D sites near food serving establishments, there is an intrinsic relationship between the two goals of supporting a return to thriving business and places that people actually use. While this tool attempts to identify the primary goal or goals associated with each metric, there is overlap and interconnectedness between the unique program goals and the overall success of the site. Table 3 outlines the metrics collected through site observations and site observation field tools located in Appendix B show how these metrics were captured in the field. In addition to the formal observation data that was collected over the course of three site visits to each site, I made additional site visits between April-September 2021 to deepen my understanding of how the places were being used and observe the spaces during programming.

# Table 3

# Site Observation Metrics

	Metric	Primary Associated Goal(s)	Rationale and Supporting Literature
1	Number of users + number of parties	Places people actually use	
2	Average duration of user stay	Places people actually use	
3	Rate of use per hour	Places people actually use	Counting users and observing user behaviors are foundational to assessing
4	User behaviors + activities, percent of users engaged in a social activity	Places people actually use	public space through a public life study. The presence of places to sit is directly related to the number of people able to
5	Number of Pedestrians	Places people actually use	use and linger in the space (Whyte, 1980; San Francisco Planning Department, 2019).
6	Presence of site furnishings and materials that provide for diverse types of use and invite people to linger (formal and informal seating, play space, water features, shade, etc.)	Places people actually use; Inclusive, healthy, and equitable	different uses (Gehl Institute, 2018).
7	Presence of nature or greenery	Places people actually use;	According to the Gehl Institute, the presence of nature can improve the sense of place (2018). Whyte asserts that

		Inclusive, healthy, and equitable	opportunities to enjoy the sun, trees, and water is correlated with higher usage (1980). Positive sensory experiences based on good design, nature or views make for good public spaces according to Gehl (2010).	
8	Opportunity to enjoy the sun, sounds, sights, and surroundings (positive sensory experiences)	Places people actually use		
9	Presence of design elements that delight or surprise; a stimulus that creates triangulation	Places people actually use	This element is something that can make users feel they're sharing an experience together (Whyte, 1980). The Design for Distancing design brief encourages designs to "surprise, delight, and reimagine" (2020)	
10	Presence of racial, age, and gender diversity	Inclusive, healthy, and equitable	Inclusive spaces invite a diversity of users into a space and provide for a variety of different uses (Gehl Institute, 2018).	
11	Percentage of women and percentage of children using the public space	Inclusive, healthy, and equitable	Safety features and perception of safety are necessary to encourage use. Studies	
12	Visible care, maintenance, and investment in the space (lack of graffiti, lack of litter, etc.)	Inclusive, healthy, and equitable	show that demonstrated care of a space is correlated with a reduction in crime and that women and children are more discerning when it comes to feelings of	
13	Incidence of injury, crime, or violence documented at site	Inclusive, healthy, and equitable	safety in a space (Gehl Institute, 2018).	
14	Presence of ADA required features	Inclusive, healthy, and equitable		
15	Quality and maintenance of pavements and surfaces	Inclusive, healthy, and equitable	Access and accessibility enable all people, regardless of their ability, where they live,	
16	Absence of obstructions along pathways and access points	Inclusive, healthy, and equitable	or their age, to use and enjoy public space. Welcoming edges helps to facilitate use	
17	Safe and attractive routes to/from residential homes to public space	Inclusive, healthy, and equitable	Gem institute, 2018).	
18	Street and Sidewalk width	Inclusive, healthy, and equitable; Places people actually use	Narrower streets and sidewalks can increase perceptions of safety and create welcoming edges to encourage use (Whyte, 1980), (Gehl, 2013) (Gehl Institute, 2018) (Ben-Amos & Simpson, 2017)	
19	Speed limit and traffic conditions	Inclusive, healthy, and equitable; Places people actually use	Heavy traffic and fast-moving cars can impact feelings of safety and can create unpleasant sensory experiences. (Gehl, 2013)	

20	Percent of users who purchase something from a nearby business	Supports a return to thriving business	These are common measures of economic
21	Number and types of businesses whose customers are observed using the space	Supports a return to thriving business	development goals used by existing parklet studies.
22	Elements that aid in business operations operating safely during COVID-19 (outside queuing, curbside pickup lanes, etc.,)	Safe Gathering during COVID-19; Supports a return to thriving business	These elements are described in the Design for Distancing design brief. Whether these design features are used as intended will be assessed in user behaviors.
23	Presence of signage and messaging that encourages preventative behaviors to slow the spread of COVID-19	Safe Gathering during COVID-19	These recommendations are based on the
24	Availability of bathrooms, handwashing areas, or sanitizer	Safe Gathering during COVID-19	Centers for Disease Control guidelines for managing parks and public space during COVID-19 (2020).
25	Layout of space enables physical distancing amongst users	Safe Gathering during COVID-19	

# Data Analysis Procedures

The neighborhood context (gathered through desktop research), implementation processes (understood through stakeholder interviews), and site design and usage data (recorded through site observations) will be used to create a profile for each Design for Distancing site and assess how each site performed in relation to the program goals. Content analysis and descriptive statistics will be employed to analyze the data gathered for each metric, though qualitative, anecdotal information collected through observations and interviews will also be considered to help tell a complete story about each of the three sites. Special consideration will be made to focus on program outcomes, and to identify whether actions and designs led to the intended result. I will also make comparisons across the three sites to enrich the analysis. Results will be used to summarize site performance related to accomplishing the four primary identified goals and to inform recommendations.

#### Conclusion

Existing literature on the study of public life and public spaces, existing parklet studies, and additional details from the Design for Distancing Design Brief were used to develop a set of metrics to assess the four goals for the D4D sites. Stakeholder interviews and desktop research provide background information on the implementation process and neighborhoods. Observations will be used to assess usage of the space and success of program goals.

# Results

These research findings will combine data collected through desktop research, interviews, and site observations to evaluate the success of the individual sites and to inform recommendations for future public space interventions. First, I will share a high-level summary of the planning and implementation process for the Design for Distancing Initiative. This discussion was informed by community interviews and is focused on the initiative as a whole rather than the selected sites. Next, site profiles for each of the selected sites will provide an overview of the neighborhood conditions, a description of the site design and implementation process for the specific site, and an overview of the observations and site usage. The site profiles are primarily informed by desktop research and stakeholder interviews. After the site profiles, I will assess how each site performed in relation to the four identified project goals. The site performance will draw most heavily from data collected during site observations, though information gathered through desktop research and stakeholder interviews bolsters the discussion. To conclude, I will summarize the results and the performance of each site and tie in some recommendations for the future.

While this analysis will make comparisons across sites, the vast differences in site designs, sizes, and other conditions limits the conclusions that can be drawn through site comparisons. A noted limitation of this study is that observations were only conducted post-installation. Pre-installation

observations would have helped to assess how the D4D installation impacted the volume and behaviors of pedestrians in the business district. Formal observation data was collected over the course of 18 hours, but I made additional site visits between April-September 2021 to deepen my understanding of how the places were being used and observe the spaces during programming. In addition to the collected data points outlined in the methodology, anecdotal experiences and qualitative observations will be shared in my analysis.

#### Planning and Implementation Process

Information on the D4D planning and implementation process was gathered through interviews with community partners for each of the observation sites as well as through local conferences and lectures that featured panels on the Design for Distancing initiative. A few recurring themes surfaced through this research regarding the overall process and implementation of the Design for Distancing project. Some of the most significant observations from these conversations was the importance of city-wide coordination, the strengthened partnerships that resulted from the project, and the need for long-term investment.

The large-scale, coordinated effort of the Design for Distancing Project was a critical factor for its success. Staff from the Baltimore Development Corporation played a significant project management role from the first outreach to community organizations and the initial brainstorming phase through navigating city processes to secure the necessary approvals and permits. Every community partner interviewed emphasized the importance of the supportive role that BDC played throughout the process. The large-scale, city-wide effort made processes easier to navigate and helped to streamline the permitting and approval process. Relatedly, the public health crisis created a sense of urgency that translated into a can-do attitude across city agencies and program partners. As one of the community

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partners commented "without the stamp from Design for Distancing I think it would have taken double the amount of time." The city-wide scope of the project was critical to its success.

A related impact of the project was the strengthening of partnerships through this process. Community organizations were able to strengthen relationships with business owners, designers, fabricators, Baltimore Development Corporation staff, City agencies, the Neighborhood Design Center, as well as each other. These partnerships open doors for future collaboration and build the capacity of community organizations to pursue future public site interventions or partnerships. The process and exercise of the Design for Distancing project helped to build the capacity of all stakeholders and partners involved. The strengthened networks and experience of these stakeholders can position the City to build on this initiative and pursue creative placemaking interventions in the future.

Funding for main street programs, commercial districts, and public space interventions is scarce and rare. For community organizations, local business owners, and residents; investing so much time, energy, and resources on a temporary installation felt impractical. The original program implementation period was defined as July 1, 2020- June 30, 2021, but community organizations and project leaders were successful in collectively pursuing permission for the sites to stay up through June 2022. One designer who was working with an under resourced main street district commented at a Baltimore American Institute of Architects and Baltimore Architecture Foundation lecture that the community stakeholders found that committing to just a "temporary installation felt disrespectful" given the lack of sustaining investment available for the district. However, from the Design for Distancing Leadership perspective, using the word "temporary" enabled the program to bypass long term planning initiatives and use the site implementations as a proof of concept which can be adjusted and improved after gaining buy-in (2021).

# Site Profiles

Figure 3 summarizes basic data and location of the three selected sites and shows the adjacent census tracts that were used as the basis for data about community demographic information, commuting behaviors, and residential density.

# Figure 3

Design for Distancing Observation Sites



Curbside Commons is located on the 4700 and 4800 blocks of Harford Road on Hamilton-Lauraville Main Street (HLMS) in northeast Baltimore. At nearly 1.5 miles, HLMS is the longest of Baltimore's eight designated main streets. The D4D installation falls at the edge of the neighborhoods of Moravia-Walther, Lauraville, Waltherson, and Beverly Hills. The community around the site is diverse, with 50% of residents identifying as Black or African American, 42% white, 5% Hispanic and 4% other. At \$76,137, the median annual income in the surrounding neighborhood is significantly higher than the citywide median of \$50,117 and is the highest income community included in this study. This neighborhood also has the

#### Figure 4

Aerial View of Curbside Commons, looking north



Note. Graham Projects via GrahamProjects.com

lowest population density and is the most car-dependent of any of the study communities with 83% of workers commuting by car.

According to the community partner, the 4700 block of Harford Road was selected for the installation to help support the businesses adjacent to the site and build off the asset of a brand-new mixed-use building that opened just before the pandemic. Hamilton-Lauraville Main Street had worked with the D4D designer, Graham Projects, to develop a plan for pedestrian improvements along Harford Road a few years prior. The plans were shared and presented at community association meetings at that time, but grant funding for implementation never materialized so the plans were put on hold. When the Design for Distancing program was announced, Hamilton-Lauraville Main Street was able to repurpose and adapt those existing plans to fit the D4D program design.

The main feature of the Curbside Commons Design in Hamilton-Lauraville included a parklet implementation on the east side of Harford Road on the 4700 and 4800 blocks and improved pedestrian

infrastructure adjacent to the parklet. The installation removed a traffic lane to accommodate the parklet. The parklet is protected from the busy corridor's traffic by painted Jersey barriers and moveable planters as well as a lane of parked cars. The installation also included colorful pedestrian islands for easier crossing of the main thoroughfare as well as painted crosswalks along side streets on the adjacent blocks. In addition to the primary installation on the 4700 and 4800 blocks of Harford Road, sidewalk stencils designed by a neighborhood artist were painted throughout the main street corridor to help unite the district. To help engage the community, community members voted on their preferred stencil designs on social media.

# Figures 5-6



Seating at Curbside Commons; Sidewalk Stencils at Curbside Commons

Note. Graham Projects via Grahamprojects.com

Adjacent businesses on the 4700 block includes a coffeeshop, bookstore, hair salon, boutique, and marketing studio. On the 4800 block, the adjacent businesses include a sushi restaurant and wellness center which are on the first floor of the brand-new three-story apartment building. Of the three parklets observed in this study, Curbside commons in Hamilton-Lauraville was most clearly in service to the directly adjacent businesses. Staff from the coffee shop were observed actively maintaining the space and on the weekend observation day, the adjacent boutique set up an outdoor pop-up shop within the parklet that included a house plant vendor and other home wares. Curbside Commons was used as a space to help facilitate commercial activity and main street promotional events including Hamilton-Lauraville Main Street's long standing first-Friday event, pop-up markets and events hosted by the adjacent businesses. The space was active and busy during the weekend observation time, but there was limited observed usage during weekday observation times.

# The Meadow

The Meadow is in the Downtown neighborhood within the Downtown Partnership improvement area, the Bromo Seltzer Arts and Entertainment District and the Market Center District which includes the anchors of Lexington Market and Mt. Vernon Marketplace as well as over 300 other businesses. The Meadow is in Baltimore's central business district which creates a much different environment than the other selected sites which support neighborhood main street districts. Its downtown location provides a greater opportunity for the space to attract visitors and downtown workers, as opposed to primarily

residents. Downtown residents are 37% white, 30% Black or African American, 17% Asian, 10% Hispanic, and 6% other. The neighborhood is home to assets like the Central Enoch Pratt Library, The Walters Art gallery, and Lexington Market in addition to over a dozen local theatres and art galleries. The district also has many transit assets including access to the metro, light rail, and major

### Figure 7

Aerial View of The Meadow, looking southeast



Note. Evan Woodard via Brookings

bus lines. According to community partners, despite a lot of positive development, high vacancy and concerns over safety remain a challenge in this area.

The joint installation of Bromo Seltzer Arts and Entertainment District and the Market Center District was implemented on a site commonly referred to as Stewart's Lot. The community partners selected the implementation site for the Meadow after conversations and information sessions with business owners and community members. The site was selected as a space that could support the whole district rather than being more exclusive to directly adjacent businesses. The design and placement of the space was influenced by a desire to provide a peaceful oasis, access to nature, and support local businesses. The site takes up an entire city block, which is privately owned by a developer. Prior to the installation, the lot was secured by a black fence with locked gates and no trespassing signs. The existing black fence helps to create defined edges to the space, but the entrance gates now remain open and new signage at the entrances welcomes people into the space. The installation included picnic tables, a play space, an amphitheater made from pallets, shade sails, and solar lighting. In peak season, wildflowers

bloomed between a pattern of mowed walkways. Trees line the edge of the space and the shade sails and open field provide plenty of opportunity to enjoy both the shade and the sun.

The Meadow is surrounded by primarily inactive facades and vacant store fronts and buildings. The only active business directly adjacent to the site was a discount store. During observation times, The

#### Figure 8

Two women Having Lunch at the Meadow



Meadow was popular amongst downtown workers taking a break, people gathering to use the space socially, and as a place for the unhoused to rest. The space is large enough to comfortably accommodate all types of users. Events hosted at the space included outdoor art exhibits, food giveaways, theatre performances, and live music.

### Waverly Commons

Waverly Commons was implemented on Waverly Main Street at the intersection of the neighborhoods of Abell, Better Waverly, Waverly, and Oakenshaw. Of the three communities included in this study, the community around Waverly Commons has the highest residential density at nearly 12,500 people per square mile, compared to 7,332 residents per square mile city-wide. The neighborhoods around Waverly Commons are 58% Black or African American, 31% white, 5% Hispanic, 2% Asian, and 4% other. According to the community partner, this site was selected due to its protection from ongoing road construction on the district's principle commercial corridor, Greenmount Avenue. Waverly Main Street had originally pursued a privately owned site that would have been in more direct support of a commissary kitchen but coordinating with the private owner proved to be a major roadblock. The

#### Figures 9-10

Newly painted and closed alley; Waverly Commons during the Farmer's Market



Waverly Commons lot was already owned by the Main Street organization, so that enabled complete flexibility in design and implementation. Prior to the Design for Distancing installation, the space included a storage container and a perennial garden on the northside of the site. The goal of the design was to create a space that could support the district by providing a destination for people to eat and relax while they are in the Waverly Main Street district. Electric cable spindles were installed as high-top tables and fabricated immoveable benches were selected for the site to dissuade large gatherings and extended lingering in the site as a health precaution. Planters and a pergola with solar power lighting were also added. The site installation incorporated closing and painting an alley street that runs adjacent to the vacant lot owned by Waverly Main Street.

Most buildings adjacent to the site are vacant or have inactive façades, but the site is centrally located within the main street district and accessible to patrons of a variety of businesses. The only active business directly adjacent to the site is a carry out kabob restaurant across the street. The site also provides extension space for vendors and patrons of the Waverly Farmer's Market, which occurs every Saturday morning year-round. The presence of this programmed activity created a very different mix of users on the weekend compared to weekdays. Other events hosted at the site have included a Thursday night bi-weekly concert series throughout the summer.

# Parklet Performance

This section assesses how each of the three sites performed in relation to the four project goals: creating places that people actually use; creating places that are inclusive, healthy, and equitable; creating spaces that support a return to thriving business; and creating spaces that enable people to gather safely during COVID-19. As had been highlighted earlier, these program goals are interrelated in nature. Comparisons will be made across sites not to rank the sites' performance but to help contextualize the metrics included in this study.
The most universal measure of a public space is people using it. There are a variety of ways to measure space usage: total number of users, duration of stay, and by calculating an occupancy score. User behaviors and postures in each of the sites will also be considered as a measure of how the sites invite users to interact with and enjoy the space. Table 4 shows several usage metrics for the three sites.

Over the three observation periods for each site, I observed 104 total users at Waverly Commons, 73 total users at the Meadow, and 44 total users at Curbside Commons. The average length of observed stay for users at Waverly Commons and the Meadow was 31 and 30 minutes respectively, and 21 minutes for Curbside Commons. The average

### Table 4

#### Usage Metrics

	Curbside	The	Waverly	
	Commons	Meadow	Commons	Average
Total Users	44	73	104	74
Total Parties	32	56	68	52
Average length of observed stay				
(minutes)	21	30	31	27
Occupancy Score	2.6	8.4	9.0	6.1
Total users per square foot	.023	.002	.007	.010
Percent of Time				
in Use	77%	100%	98%	91%
Percent of Pedestrians	18%	23%	51%	31%

length of observed stay is shorter than the true average as there were frequently users at the site when I arrived and who stayed longer when I left for whom I didn't capture their actual total length of stay. The occupancy score for each site is calculated by dividing the total number of observed minutes for every site user divided by total observation time. The occupancy score can also be thought of as the average number of site users in the space at any given time. Waverly Commons had an occupancy score of 9.0, The Meadow had an occupancy score of 8.4, and Curbside Commons, 2.6. Utilization rates of publics spaces vary significantly throughout the day, week, and year. Figures 10 and 11 show the number of users over time during the observation periods. Usage over time for Curbside Commons remained low throughout the observed weekday times and was the only site that had periods of no utilization during the week. As noted earlier, weather conditions on the weekday observation periods contributed to lower utilization for Curbside Commons. Usage of Waverly Commons

#### Figure 11



Occupancy Over Time: Weekday

rose precipitously in the observed evening. The increase in users was a result of the demonstration that was staged on the site and is probably not reflective of typical evening usage. At the Meadow, usage was consistent throughout the midday observation period, but clearly declined throughout the evening observation time.

Curbside Commons and the Meadow both experienced higher usage rates on the weekend than on the weekdays and usage over the course of the Saturday observation period remained constant for both sites. Waverly Main Street usage was highest at the start of the observation period at noon

#### Figure 12.





and decreased steadily throughout the day. The weekly farmer's market adjacent to the site ends at noon and as vendors and visitors vacated the site following the close of the farmer's market there were limited additional users who used the site. When the observation period ended at 2pm, the site was empty. The Meadow was the only site that was occupied for 100% of the observation periods.

When comparing these usage metrics across sites, Waverly Commons overall had the highest utilization. The Meadow had the second highest utilization and Curbside Commons, third. However, as was noted in the site profiles, the protest at Waverly Commons contributed to higher than typical utilization on the evening observation time, and rain during the day contributed to lower than typical usage on both weekday observations at Curbside Commons. It's also critical to consider that these sites varied widely in size and overall capacity. Curbside Commons, which has a significantly smaller footprint than the Meadow and Waverly Commons, had the highest number of users relative to the square footage it occupies. The Meadow, which at 33,000 SF is the most expansive space, had the lowest number of users per square foot. Pedestrian screen line counts were taken during each observation period to assess the typical number of pedestrians passing by the site. The screen line count helps to control for how busy the block is with pedestrians who are the most likely pool of site users. A street with a higher number of pedestrians might correlate with a more utilized parklet. Each site had a moderate amount of pedestrian traffic. Notably, Waverly Commons had the lowest pedestrian traffic, but the highest overall utilization. An estimated average of 34 pedestrians passed by Waverly Commons each observation hour, 52 pedestrians passed by the Meadow, and 40 pedestrians passed by Curbside Commons each hour.

Existing literature suggests that neighborhoods with higher density and lower percentage of the population commuting by car will have parklets with higher usage. This trend proved largely accurate for the Design for Distancing sites. Curbside Commons had the lowest overall site usage and also has the lowest residential density at 6,831 residents per square mile and 83% of workers commuting by car. The neighborhood around Waverly Main Street, which had the highest site usage had the highest density at 12,463 residents per square mile and 64% of residents commuting by car. The neighborhood around the Meadow has a density of 8,623 residents per square mile and the lowest rate of car commuting at 47%.

Existing literature suggests that spaces that are well utilized (as well as inclusive, healthy, and equitable) incorporate design elements that enable diverse types of use. Each of the sites' unique design, furniture, and siting facilitated different user experiences and invited users to participate in different activities. Tracking behaviors and site usage can help share the story of how the sites are being utilized. The activity maps in Figures 13-15 show a snapshot of location and posture of users for each site on both 12:30pm on a weekday and 12:30pm on a weekend. Twelve-thirty pm was chosen as a midway point during each of the site observations, and because it was a peak time that could be used as a comparison point across all sites.

# Figure 13

# Curbside Commons Activity Map

# Curbside Commons Weekday at 12:30pm



Curbside Commons Weekend at 12:30pm



Note. Activity Map adapted from Curbside Commons Plans, by Graham Projects

While there was limited usage of Curbside Commons on weekdays, on Saturday site users were dispersed throughout the site, with about half of the users at the seating area in front of the coffee shop and half of the users at the pop-up market either selling or buying crafts and plants. Users on this day were frequently observed moving umbrellas around as the sun changed position to ensure a shady seat. One of the users captured on this activity map chose to stand and eat lunch in front of the coffeeshop in order to stay in the shade, rather than moving the heavy umbrella. Curbside commons had the highest percentage of users eating or drinking in the space, due its proximity to the coffee shop. The Saturday pop-up shop created an added buzz of commercial activity in the space. On the weekend observation

time, Curbside Commons provided a space to meet and be social. A father and son enjoyed a game of Candyland over breakfast, a couple met for a first date, and friends met for coffee and shopping. On the weekday observation times, Curbside Commons was most utilized by coffee shop workers taking a break. Across all observation times, 77% of observed users socialized with others while in the space.

# Figure 14



The Meadow Activity Map

Note. Activity Map adapted from The Meadow Design Plans by PI.KL Studio

At the Meadow, observations show that there was a preference for the formal seating at picnic benches over sitting informally on the play structures or pallets. Ample opportunities to enjoy both the shade and sun throughout the site encouraged users to spread out and use every available space. Space usage was similar when comparing weekday to weekend. The Meadow was the only site where users were observed laying down as is shown during the weekday activity map.

Site users were also observed using the space to write, feed the birds, and walk their dogs (sometimes without leashes). A group of men gathered to play chess on the weekend observation time. Other space users were drawn in to watch the lively games creating a shared experience for site users. An interview with the community stakeholder confirmed that the chess meet-up was a regular weekend activity. Downtown workers enjoyed a break and a meal there and friends gathered for lunch or to take a smoke break. The Meadow had the highest rate of smoking with 26% of users smoking. For comparison, at both Curbside commons and Waverly Commons, only 11% of site users smoked in the space. The Meadow's expansiveness made this behavior less of a nuisance. The space's expansiveness also provided comfort and privacy for unhoused people to rest and sufficient anonymity for some users to openly use drugs, particularly during the evening observation time. While, the Meadow was the least social space, with 66% of users engaging in a social activity, of all the spaces, there was a vocal sense of appreciation for the space and the opportunity it provided to enjoy the day. Comments like, "Nice place to chill, isn't it" Or "Beautiful Day!" were sentiments shared between strangers at the Meadow. While some planters were incorporated into the design of the other sites, the Meadow was the only site where it was possible to truly enjoy nature. The existing trees and spacious grassy field that were already present enabled the Meadow to succeed in becoming a restful urban park that provides users an opportunity to enjoy the sights and sounds of the city and of nature.

The behaviors and placement of site users varies widely when comparing a weekend at Waverly Commons to a weekday. On the weekday midday session, no users were sitting formally in the provided furniture, but instead crowded together on the edge of the site where there is some shade. Users sat informally in their own lawn chairs, sat on the curb, or stood. Waverly Commons invites a group of regulars on the weekdays who hold a largely private party in the public space. The group had been using the vacant lot for gathering even prior to the Design for Distancing installation. Users bring their own furniture and plug into electric on the site to play music. During the weekday midday observation, they also filled up a water basin from a nearby fire hydrant and brought a power washer to wash cars in the alley next to the space. During the weekday midday observation, every user observed using the site was a part of the same gathering. The same group was present in their usual spot during the weekday evening observation, however, there were additional users at the site who were not socializing in the same group

# Figure 15



### Waverly Commons Activity Map

Note. Activity Map adapted from Waverly Commons Plans, by Younts Design, Inc.

On the weekends, users spread out throughout the space. Though some weekend users did utilize the fabricated benches at the site, informal seating and standing was just as commonly observed. Given that many of the users are part of the same party, it's no surprise that Waverly Main Street was the most social of the three sites, with 96% of users interacting with others in the space.

Events and programs help to activate and welcome new people into a public space. By providing a space for diverse programs, stewards of public spaces have an opportunity to welcome new and diverse

people to the space. Each of the spaces were well programmed over the late spring and summer months of 2021 which helped the Design for Distancing sites to fulfill their role as public gathering spaces. Curbside Commons was used as a space to help facilitate commercial activity and main street events including Hamilton-Lauraville Main Street's long standing first-Friday event, pop-up markets, and promotional events hosted by the adjacent businesses. Events hosted at the Meadow included outdoor art exhibits, food giveaways, theatre performances, and live music. At Waverly Main Street, in addition to the protest that was observed during the weekday evening observation time, as well as the weekly farmer's market, other events hosted at the site included a Thursday night bi-weekly concert series throughout the summer.

# Figures 16-17

Protest Banner at Waverly Commons; A smoker at Waverly Commons for the observed Protest



#### Figures 18-19

An art exhibit curated by Hot Sauce Artist Collective at the Meadow; Street Market at Curbside Commons



Note. Photo from Tortuga via Instagram @GetTortuga

# Public Space that is Inclusive, Healthy, and Equitable

To measure whether the Design for Distancing sites succeed in creating places that are inclusive, healthy, and equitable, metrics explored in this section will compare the demographics of site users compared to the surrounding neighborhood and consider other factors such as maintenance, accessibility, safety conditions, and community input in the planning process.

By comparing demographics of site users to the demographics of the neighborhood we can assess whether users are representative of the community and if the site is welcoming and inclusive. Baltimore is a diverse city of incredibly segregated blocks and neighborhoods. Successful public spaces will be welcoming and inclusive to the racially diverse neighbors around the sites. Additionally, research shows that a higher rate of women and children in a space demonstrates perceptions of safety as women are more discerning of safety and comfort conditions and parents are sensitive to safety when bringing their children to public spaces (Gehl Institute, 2018). A certain amount of observation error should be assumed when it comes to passively identifying race, gender, and age of parklet users. Personal identities of race and gender are far more nuanced than what can be identified by sight alone and estimating a person's age is imperfect. Figures 20-22 compare gender, age, and racial diversity across site users and site neighborhoods.

# Figure 20

Gender of site users compared to site neighborhoods



Curbside Commons is the only observed site that had a higher usage of women than men. Fiftyseven percent of parklet users were women, compared to 54% of the surrounding population. This indicator may suggest that the space feels safe. It's also likely that adjacent commercial uses such as the small boutiques, salon, and Saturday pop-up market vendors attracted more women than men and that the target market of these commercial uses impacted overall parklet utilization.

Notably, at both the Meadow and at Waverly Commons, there was a higher rate of usage of seniors aged 65+ compared to the residential makeup of the neighborhood. This phenomenon was most significant for the Meadow, where 18% of users were seniors compared to just 3% of neighborhood residents. Users under the age of 18 made up a smaller share of site users compared to the surrounding neighborhood for all sites. These spaces were not immediately successful at creating places for children and youth.

# Figure 21

# Age of site users compared to site neighborhood



While each of the Parklet sites are in relatively racially diverse neighborhoods, none of the sites attracted site users that were wholly representative of the surrounding neighborhood. Based on collected observation data, Curbside Commons appeared to be the least welcoming to Black/ African American

# Figure 22





users. While 50% of the surrounding neighborhood is Black, only 14% of observed parklet users were Black. For the Meadow and Waverly Commons, the spaces had higher utilization among African American users compared to the surrounding neighborhoods. Public space, which is a necessary public heath asset, can provide an opportunity to address the systemic inequalities of our communities – yet public spaces aren't always considered welcoming or safe places for communities of color. The success of the Meadow and Waverly Commons of providing a safe place particularly for Black men- is an important triumph. While for the Meadow and Curbside Commons.

# Figure 23

#### Waverly Commons users by gender



# Figure 24



#### Waverly Commons users by race

demographic usage data was consistent between different observation times, there was a significant difference in the demographics of parklet users on weekday vs weekend observation times at Waverly Commons as seen in Figures 23-24. The majority of the visitors observed on Saturday were vendors or visitors to the Waverly Farmer's Market, and this programmed activity impacted the site user population. There was more racial and gender diversity observed on the weekend compared to the weekday observation. Weekday lunch had the least diverse and representative users with 97% of users being Black (compared to 68% of the surrounding neighborhood) and 77% male (compared to 48% of the surrounding neighborhood).

Another key metric for evaluating whether a space is inclusive, healthy, and equitable is observing the overall accessibility of the site. ADA features such as curb ramps may be necessary, as well as smooth surfaces and well-maintained pathways within and leading to the site. All three sites appeared to be reasonably accessible to a person with physical disabilities. Sidewalks leading to each site were well maintained. A mid-block curbside ramp was included in the design of Curbside commons so that users could make the step down into the parklet. While the meadow was generally cleanly mowed, there was one observation day where the grass was slightly overgrown and it would have been difficult to navigate with a stroller, wheelchair, or walker. Users were observed at all three sites who were using canes or had visible physical disabilities.

A well-maintained space contributes to feelings of safety. Curbside Commons was well maintained by the adjacent coffee shop. Employees wiped down tables and set up and took down furniture based on the weather and business hours. There was no litter or graffiti observed in the space during any of the site observations and site planters were maintained. The Meadow was also generally well maintained. There was no graffiti in the space and minimal presence of litter during observations. The private owner of the site continued to pay for the site mowing, and the Downtown Partnership supported maintenance by emptying trash cans that were installed at each entrance. Volunteer days and diligent community partners also helped to maintain the space. By comparison, there was less evidence of maintenance and care at Waverly Commons. A significant amount of graffiti was present in the space. The landscaping had not been maintained. Large planters remained unplanted and were filled with weeds and a large pile of un-spread mulch was present at the site for all three observations. One pedestrian passing by Waverly Commons entered the space for the sole purpose of dropping off a pile of trash on

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one of the tables. By late summer 2021, the planters had been planted and the mulch spread, but the perennial gardens were filled with tall weeds and some of the benches were broken.

### Figures 25-26

#### Litter at the Meadow; Graffiti and unkept landscaping at Waverly Commons



One consideration for the equitable implementation of public space is the community need based on existing public spaces and parks nearby. If there are other public spaces or parks accessible to community residents, there may be lower utilization of a new parklet and implementation may not be the most equitable use of resources. Within a quarter mile of Waverly Commons, there are two Parks and Rec spaces including the 32<sup>nd</sup> Street Park, also known as the Abell Open Space, as well as the Montpelier and 30<sup>th</sup> street park. Preston Gardens and Liberty Dog Park are located within a quarter mile of the Meadow and there is also a green courtyard area, known as Center Plaza, located at nearby Charles Center. There are no Baltimore City parks or other known green spaces within a quarter mile of Curbside Commons.

Meaningful community engagement and utilizing local artists and fabricators are two ways to center equity in the implementation of a public space. According to stakeholder interviews, community engagement and input into the designs seemed to be largely limited to existing networks available to the implementing community partners, with limited outreach to the general public. This limited planning process was necessitated by the accelerated nature of the design process for the emergency implementation as well as other pandemic and capacity related constraints. Community engagement was achieved through direct outreach to business owners and other stakeholders and community associations in the vicinity of the Design for Distancing sites. In the case of the sites on Waverly Main Street and Hamilton-Lauraville Main Street, designs were workshopped through existing committees that are made up of community members and local business owners. In the case of Curbside Commons, because the Design for Distancing design was adapted from an earlier proposal that had never been implemented, there had been prior engagement and input into the concept. Hamilton-Lauraville Main Street also engaged the community with the design process by asking residents to vote on their preferred sidewalk stencil designs through social media. Each of the sites worked with Baltimore City- based designers, artists, and fabricators. In the case of Curbside Commons and the Meadow, local, neighborhood-based artists were employed by the project and community volunteer days were hosted for community members to help with implementation.

Users feeling safe is a foundational quality of an inclusive, healthy, and well utilized space. Crime and traffic conditions are two factors that are related to both comfort and safety for site users. During the months of May and June when site observations took place, Baltimore Police data shows three documented crimes within a quarter mile of Waverly Commons, six crimes documented within a quarter mile of the Meadow, and zero documented crimes within a quarter mile of Curbside Commons. Within the site, one weekday drug sale was observed at Waverly Commons. At the Meadow, multiple users were observed using drugs and one user stole a decorative flag that was part of the site design. No crimes were observed at Curbside Commons. Another critical factor that influences safety is speed limit and traffic conditions and street and sidewalk width. Of the three sites, Curbside Commons was implemented on the busiest corridor. The parklet design removed one lane of traffic and added pedestrian islands and enhanced sidewalks which improved the overall traffic conditions and feelings of pedestrian safety in comparing the site to conditions prior to implementation. Traffic on adjacent streets to Waverly Commons and The Meadow was moderate and the spaciousness of both sites lessened the effect of traffic conditions on user experience.

# Public Space that Supports a Return to Thriving Business

Intrinsic to the Design for Distancing Program design, each of the observed sites were located in established commercial districts. However, the placement of the sites had a significant impact on how directly supportive the space was to adjacent businesses. Table 5. provides a summary of the business district landscape and associated metrics.

# Table 5

Site Business Districts and Metrics

	Curbside Commons	The Meadow	Waverly Commons
Business District(s)	Hamilton- Lauraville Main Street	Market Center District, Bromo Seltzer Arts and Entertainment District	Waverly Main Street
# of businesses in district	124	330	123
# of adjacent businesses	7+	1	1
Type of adjacent businesses	Coffee shop, bookstore, boutique, salon, sushi restaurant, gas station and mechanic, wellness center, marketing firm	Discount Store	Kebob takeout
Percent of Parties who purchased something	94%	32%	38%

Curbside Commons in Hamilton-Lauraville had the highest percentage of users participating in commercial activity with 94% of parties purchasing something from a nearby business. Nearly every site user purchased something from the coffeeshop, though many users also purchased items from the adjacent bookstore, boutique, and pop-up stores that were taking place in the parklet. On a weekday evening, one user was observed using the parklet while waiting for his car to be finished at the nearby auto shop and on Saturday came outside to enjoy the space and purchase a plant from the pop-up market in the middle of her hair appointment at the adjacent salon. Unlike the other sites, Curbside Commons' adjacency to active storefronts made it easier to observe and identify Parklet users patronizing local businesses. Curbside Commons included some features for the specific purpose of supporting businesses, including a free parking area for carry out orders and space for vendors to set up shop outside. Outdoor vending was observed on the Saturday observation day and regular pop-up events were hosted in the space throughout the summer.

In the Meadow, at total of 18 parties or 32% of total parties purchased something. Supported businesses included take out restaurants and convenience and package goods stores. The Meadow was the most separated from active businesses and storefronts, which made it most difficult to identify the connection between the space and specific businesses within the district. In Waverly, 26 parties purchased something, or 38% of the total parties. Most frequently supported businesses include the Farmer's Market vendors on Saturday, as well as package goods stores, and a chain convenience store. One weekday afternoon user brought a carry out meal to consume on site, and one weekday evening party waited in the space while their order was being prepared at the adjacent kabob restaurant.

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#### Public Space for Physical Distancing

Site observations were conducted between May 1- June 10th, a time when COVID-19 positivity rates and hospitalizations were steadily declining. Maryland residents aged 16 and older were eligible for vaccines beginning on April 6, 2021 and during site observations vaccine rates in the city climbed from less that 40% of city residents being at least partially vaccinated to over 55% of residents being at least partially vaccinated. The city's outdoor mask mandate was lifted on April 30<sup>th</sup> therefore negating any need to assess whether individuals were following mask protocols while using the sites.

All three sites had adequate spacing of site furniture to facilitate social distancing. Hand sanitizer stations were included in the site plans for all three design sites but appear to have been only implemented at the Meadow. I observed one user try to use the hand sanitizing station at the Meadow but it was empty. Signage to encourage safe distancing and following of safety protocols was implemented most prominently at the Meadow where signs were posted at each entrance to the site. Street stenciling was utilized in Hamilton-Lauraville Main Street to markate safe distances within the parklet and on the adjacent sidewalk. There was no signage to encourage preventative behaviors set up at Waverly Commons during site observations.

Facilitating human connection and providing a space for social interaction is an important function of all public spaces, whether there is a public health crisis or not. All three of the sites were successful at creating gathering and social spaces. At Curbside Commons 77% of observed users interacted with others in the space. At the Meadow, 66% of observed users interacted with others in the space, and at Waverly Commons, 96% interacted with others in the space. Interactions included meeting up with others in the space, arriving to the space with a party of more than one, or making conversation with strangers who are also using the space. These spaces succeeded at created places where people could be social outside, where transmission of COVID-19 is less common.

#### Summary of Results

While these three sites were funded and implemented under the same directive and program and there was evidence that each site aspired to accomplish the stated goals of the project, in practice, the three observed Design for Distancing sites serve different purposes and have different strengths based on a number of different factors.

Curbside Commons – creating a neighborhood shopping destination. No site was more impactful in achieving the goal of supporting a return to thriving business. The adjacency to existing main street businesses helped to solidify this intention. Nearly all site users purchased something from an adjacent business, most commonly the adjacent coffeeshop. While the evidenced commercial purpose of the site could have made the site feel more private than public, a few design and programming factors helped the site feel like a public space. The installation extended beyond just the parklet to include pedestrian improvements including a colorful pedestrian island and adjacent cross walks. Incorporating public, pedestrian infrastructure into the design with coordinating colors helped to make the café seating feel like part of the public realm. Additionally, the site stretched along nearly two blocks with at least 7 adjacent businesses fronting the parklet. The siting provided sufficient scale so that the parklet didn't feel like simply an extension of one business. By supporting multiple businesses and by providing space for some businesses to set up pop-up shops outdoors, Curbside Commons was successful at creating a public space that enhanced the main street district and accomplished the goal of supporting a return to thriving business.

While Curbside Commons was the most effective in its ability to support a return to thriving business, the site had some success in accomplishing the other study goals. Usage for Curbside Commons was the lowest of any of the three sites, though this was partially impacted by weekday weather conditions. Despite low weekday usage, the space was successful at creating a gathering place on the weekends. When it comes to the goal of creating a space that is inclusive, healthy, and equitable, Curbside Commons exceeded in creating an environment that was perceived as safe as evidenced by its high utilization by women, it was less effective in creating a welcoming and inclusive space. Despite comparable neighborhood demographics across the study neighborhoods, Curbside Commons had the largest disconnect between Black residents (50%) and Black site users (14%). An important differentiating factor between Curbside Commons and the other sites is that the site was actively maintained by staff at the adjacent coffeeshop. Curbside Commons was free of litter, graffiti, and there was evidence that the space was cared for.

The Meadow – a new downtown retreat. The Meadow's abundant access to nature in the middle of a dense downtown streetscape sparked triangulation and delight for its users. Varied summer programming helped to create new energy in the space and welcome a diverse group of people to enjoy the Meadow. Its downtown location helped the Meadow to feel the most welcoming and inclusive of the three spaces. While Curbside Commons was most inviting to those engaged in commercial activities on the main street and Waverly Commons at times was most welcoming to members of a single occupying group, the Meadow was for everyone. It's relationship to supporting downtown businesses may not be as outwardly evident as the relationship between Curbside Commons and its business district, but by creating a space for downtown workers, visitors, and residents to relax and enjoy their surroundings, the Meadow has an opportunity to contribute to a thriving downtown. The Meadow excelled at providing space for diverse activities and was also the only site that was never empty during site observations. In general site usage was the most consistent of all the sites over the course of the six hours of observation.

The Meadow adds to the Market Center and Bromo Seltzer Arts and Entertainment Districts by creating a unique place to rest and enjoy downtown. The Meadow fills a void in downtown public spaces by providing an urban park where it's possible to delight in the special confluence of the city and nature.

Waverly Commons – A well utilized space that thrives when programmed. Waverly Commons had the highest overall usage rates and was the most thoroughly programmed thanks to the year-round Saturday Farmer's Market. In general, the presence of graffiti, the lack of shade, the inability to sit down at a table, and the lack of landscaping didn't contribute to creating a welcoming public space. During nonprogrammed times, the site was largely used by a single occupying group, and those regular site users do little to interact with the furnishings and design of the space. The regular site users used the vacant lot as a gathering spot prior to the Design for Distancing installation and based on observations, the design did little to attract new users or welcome non-affiliated parties to the space except during programmed events. Given the high level of usage during the week and at the weekly farmer's market, Waverly Commons has the potential to create a great public space for visitors to Waverly Main Street with enhanced maintenance, some tweaking to the design to improve long term viability, and a commitment to regular programming in the space. It's central location in the dense commercial landscape of the Waverly Main Street district and its proximity to the Farmer's Market provides an opportunity to create a better space that could be not just well utilized, but also inclusive, healthy, and equitable – as well as a boon to commercial activity in the district.

# Recommendations

The Design for Distancing Project created a terrific opportunity for experimentation in Baltimore's public realm in support of creating a thriving street life in small business districts. The D4D sites contributed to creating a sense of place and invited people to gather and enjoy spaces that were formerly underutilized in commercial districts. The program design and goals represent a worthy ambition to improve public spaces that in no way needs to be predicated on a public health crisis. The Design for Distancing project was an ambitious program that helped to build the capacity of the many stakeholders, designers, program partners, and city staffers who worked on site implementation. The city is well

positioned to build off of the first iteration of the Design for Distancing program to continue to invest in placemaking. In the immediate term, a small carve out from the city's \$641 million American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds should be used to support a second phase of Design for Distancing as part of the city's economic recovery plan. However, the city should be actively pursuing new sources of funding to support public space interventions when ARPA funds are no longer available. These five recommendations for the next phase or iteration of the Design for Distancing project are informed by the challenges and successes identified through this research.

- 1. Establish effective and transparent processes and get buy-in from relevant city agencies that are involved with approval processes. The urgency of the public health crisis was a key factor in enabling community partners to work through government systems efficiently. Systems need to be improved so that it's possible to experiment with public space when there is no state of emergency. The role that BDC program officers played in supporting community organizations navigate approval processes was a major success and should be incorporated into the next phase of the project in some capacity.
- 2. Establish realistic timelines for implementation and processes for extensions. The Design for Distancing schedule was accelerated due to the perceived urgency of the public health crisis, but permit approvals were extended throughout the period- first from June 2021 to November 2021, then to June 2022. An established implementation timeline will help community organizations design spaces and select materials that are the right fit for the period needed. That the sites are originally approved for permits on a temporary basis is an important feature of the program that enables communities to experiment with placemaking without going through a comprehensive and onerous planning process. However, building in options for renewing temporary permits or pursuing a permanent installation would give cash-strapped community organizations a chance to make the investment of time and resources really count for the community. Permit extensions

for site installations could be predicated on the site sponsor demonstrating maintenance, collecting community feedback post-installation or completing site observations or another form of evaluation. The City should provide technical assistance and funding for program evaluations.

- 3. Continue to focus on site implementations that support multiple businesses. While many city's parklet programs are dependent on businesses sponsoring sites, the Design for Distancing model of using merchant associations and main street organizations as site sponsors helps the project sites to be implemented in support of multiple businesses as opposed to a single business. When a site is located in support of just a single business the site becomes an extension of the adjacent operating business in feeling and association. This, in effect, privatizes a public space and shouldn't be a priority for effective use of implementation funding for the City.
- 4. Invest in maintenance. The most well maintained of the three sites was Curbside Commons, which was actively maintained by the adjacent coffeeshop. Leveraging the partnership of adjacent businesses ensures daily maintenance. However, other options could be pursued. Both Waverly Main Street and The Meadow were implemented in the service areas of special benefits districts- the Charles Village Benefits District and the Downtown Partnership, respectively. These groups area already running daily clean, safe, and green initiatives in their districts and should be included as partners in public space interventions. A future program could support communities by providing template Memorandums of Understanding that could be pursued with these maintenance partners to establish a regular maintenance strategy. Leadership from these special benefits districts should be included in planning stages of site implementation and should be included as community partners. Program administrators should provide additional support to districts who don't have the resources of a capable small business or special districts as these under-resourced communities shouldn't automatically be excluded from public space interventions.

5. Prioritize sites that are committed to programming and events. Each of the three sites included in this study thrived during programmed events. Community organizations should be encouraged to work with diverse partners to help program the space, which in turn will help the spaces feel inclusive and support high utilization. Events also have the potential to increase economic activity in the spaces and around the district. Community sponsors should offer vending opportunity first to locally-owned businesses in the district to provide pop-up outdoor vending or providing popup vending space for startup entrepreneurs that are interested in setting up a permanent shop in the district

# Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to assess the success of the Design for Distancing program, and in particular, the three sites selected for observation. The limited scope of this study precludes me from making any concrete declarations regarding the success of the program or the individual sites. Additional stakeholder interviews, intercept surveys with site users, longer observation hours, a higher number of selected sites, and conducting both pre- and post- installation observations are a few ways where future assessments could build on the limited scope of this project. Site observation data, which was the focal point of this research, was collected during the first spring of these sites in May and June of 2021. Subsequent visits throughout the summer showed that the spaces continued to evolve and change as programming increased and the spaces became more integrated in their communities. With the right support, including a commitment to maintenance and programming, these spaces will continue to change and reach their full potential as community spaces as they welcome more users.

The Design for Distancing Project created a terrific opportunity for experimentation in Baltimore's public realm in support of creating pedestrian-oriented places that can contribute to a thriving street life in small business districts. While the pandemic provided the circumstances to catalyze the Design for

Distancing program, the city need not rely on a public health crisis to invest in public space interventions that support strong neighborhood commercial districts. The process of implementing the Design for Distancing program built the capacity of stakeholders across the city, including community organizations, city staff, local designers and fabricators, and other partner agencies. The city-wide learning experience of implementing the Design for Distancing project positions the city to build off the initiative's success, learn from any shortcomings or challenges in the program design, and continue to invest in improving public spaces.

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# Appendix A.

# Stakeholder Interview Questions

- Who were the partner organizations and individuals that had a voice in the planning and implementation of the site? What was each partner's role and contribution? Were there any partners that you would have liked to have seen play a larger (or smaller role) in the process? (Was anyone missing from the table?)
- 2. How were community members engaged in planning and implementation?
- 3. How did you select the site for implementation? What factors went into that selection?
- 4. What was the cost of implementation (design, materials, and build)?
- 5. How long did the design and build process take? When did the site open?
- 6. Were there any bottle necks in the process and if so, what were they? Do you have any recommendations for how the process could have been smoother?
- 7. What is the maintenance plan for the site? (Cost, partners, volunteer involvement, etc.) Have there been any significant maintenance challenges?
- 8. Have there been complaints of nuisance behaviors in the space (litter, drug dealing, smoking, vandalism)?
- 9. What feedback has been received from residents on the space? Through what means has that feedback been received?
- 10. What feedback has been received from business owners on the space? Through what means has that feedback been received? Have any business owners reported that the design for distancing site has had a significant impact (positive or negative) on their business?
- 11. Do you use the space? If so, how many times a week? What sorts of activities do you do in the space? (people watch, eat or drink, meet a friend, etc.)
- 12. Was there any commitment to involving local artists, makers or designers?

- 13. The Design for Distancing Brief encourages designs to "reflect and amplify the existing character of the surrounding neighborhood." In what ways do you think the design accomplished or failed to accomplish this goal?
- 14. Have there been any planned or impromptu events in the space? Are there plans to use the space for community events?
- 15. Did this project help strengthen any partnerships or relationships for you or your organization with neighbors, artists, or other community groups?
- 16. How did the pandemic impact the site design, process, or implementation of the space?
- 17. Hindsight being 20/20, is there anything you would change about the design/build process or site design?
- 18. Is there anything else you'd like to share or comment on?

# Appendix B.

# **Design for Distancing Site Observations**

# Steps:

- 1. Use the People Observation tool to record people + behaviors in the space for a two-hour period.
- 2. Use each site's design plan to complete activity mapping to show the location of observed site users.
- 3. At one point during the observation period, complete a pedestrian screen line count for a 10minute period (page 1).
- 4. Use the Place Observation tool (pages 4-5) to record conditions of the physical environment in the space and of the surrounding block and pathways

Site:		Street:	
Date:	Time In:	Time Out:	
Tally of Pedestrians:			
	<b>T</b> ' I	T' O I	
Date:	_ I ime in:	Time Out:	
Tally of Pedestrians:			
Date:	Time In:	Time Out:	SAMPLE STREET BLOCK
Tally of Pedestrians:			
,			
			ΞΞ
			0
			SCREENLINE: COUNT PEDESTRIANS CROSSING

# **Pedestrian Screen Line Count**

Site	2											Da	y aı	nd D	)ate	:														
Tim	ne In: Time Out: Weather:																													
	gender age											rac	е		Oł	osei	ved	l Ac	tivi	ties		Pos	ture	5	ac	othe tivit	er ties		Additional Notes	
#	Time enter	Time depart	group size	Male	Female	Unsure	9	age 6-17	18-64	65+	Black	White	Asian	Latino/a	Unsure	eating/drinking	socialization	cultural	people-wathcing	electronic device	commercial	sitting - formal	sitting - improvised	standing	lying	smoking	intoxication	sleeping	Purchased something	Identify business patronized if possible; COVID- 19 Protocols (hand sanitizer, maintaining distance, etc.); Other Notes
1																														
2																														
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Site Observation - People

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	gender age race												Oł	oser	ved	Ac	tivi	ties		Pos	ture	e	ac	othe tivit	er ies		Additional Notes			
#	Time enter	Time depart	group size	Male	Female	Unsure	9	age 6-17	18-64	65+	Black	White	Asian	Latino/a	Unsure	eating/drinking	socialization	cultural	people-watching	electronic device	commercial	sitting - formal	sitting - improvised standing lying		smoking	smoking intoxication sleeping		Purchased something	Identify business patronized if possible; COVID- 19 Protocols (hand sanitizer, maintaining distance, etc.); Other Notes	
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	Site Observation - People Continued																													
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#	Time enter	Time depart	group size	Male	Female	Unsure	92	age 6-17	18-64	65+	Black	White	Asian	Latino/a	Unsure	eating/drinking	socialization	cultural	people-wathcing	electronic device	commercial	sitting - formal	sitting - improvised	standing	lying	smoking	intoxication	sleeping	Purchased something	Identify business patronized if possible; COVID- 19 Protocols (hand sanitizer, maintaining distance, etc.); Other Notes
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## Site Observation - Place

Site \_\_\_\_\_ Date and Time\_\_\_\_\_

*Circle the best fitting description of conditions and add notes with additional details.* 

#	Metric	Assessment + Comments
1	Presence of ADA required features	Yes/Partially/No
2	Quality and maintenance of pavements and surfaces	Well Maintained/Adequate/Poor
3	Absence of obstructions along pathways and access points	Well Maintained/Adequate/Poor
4	Safe and attractive routes to/from residential homes to public space	Very Safe/ Somewhat Safe/ Somewhat Unsafe/ Very Unsafe Very Attractive/ Somewhat Attractive/Somewhat Unattractive/Very Unattractive
5	Presence of design features and site elements that promote diverse types of use	Y/N
7	Sufficient lighting for the space	Y/N
8	Visible care, maintenance, and investment in the space (lack of graffiti, lack of litter, etc.)	Presence of graffiti: A lot / Some / None Presence of litter: A lot / Some / None Space is: Very well cared for / Somewhat well cared for/ Not cared for at all
11	Presence of signage and messaging that encourages preventative behaviors to slow the spread of COVID-19	Y/N

12	Availability of bathrooms, handwashing areas, or sanitizer	Y/N
13	Layout of space enables physical distancing amongst users	Y/N
17	Elements that aid in business operations operating safely during COVID-19 (outside queuing, curbside pickup lanes, etc.,)	Y/N
22	Presence of site furnishings and materials that invite people to linger (formal and informal seating, play space, water features, shade, etc.)	Y/N
25	Presence of nature or greenery	Y/N
26	Opportunity to enjoy the sun, sounds, sights, and surroundings (positive sensory experiences)	Y/N
27	Presence of design elements that delight or surprise; a stimulus that creates triangulation	Y/N
28	Street and Sidewalk width	
29	Speed limit and traffic conditions	Significant traffic / Medium traffic / Low Traffic Speed Limit: