Why do we prioritize and invest in public space?

How do we select our public space investments?

How did WPF’s local efforts set stage for Reimagining the Civic Commons?
Great Public Spaces: Strategy Evolution

William Penn Foundation
CAPITALIZING CHANGE
Our Vision and Grantmaking Priorities

Great Learning
Creative Communities
Watershed Protection
Great Public Spaces: Strategy Evolution

Creative Communities

Arts/Culture Core Support
($9,000,000/yr.)

Arts Education
($3,000,000/yr.)

Great Public Spaces
($16,000,000/yr.)

New Audiences/
New Places
($7,000,000/yr.)
“Implementation is policy” Jeremy Nowak
Great Public Spaces: Strategy Evolution

Independence Mall

Logan Square

Franklin Square

Ben Franklin Parkway

Schuylkill Banks

Chestnut Street Park

Sister Cities Plaza

Dilworth Park

Race Street Pier
"The making of an urban outdoor oasis."

- New York Times

‘New York Times’ ranks Philly no. 3 in list of places to go in 2015
The success and impact of the Foundation’s past public space investments between 2001-11 laid the groundwork for the Great Public Spaces strategy that was launched in 2013.

WPF invested over $25 million in public space improvements in Center City between 2001-11.
The early premise going forward was to build on the historic public space framework of Center City and leverage the success of our own investments over the prior decade...
Great Public Spaces: Strategy Evolution

…and extend that success outward into the rapidly changing urban core beyond Center City…
What emerged was a very place-based and targeted public space planning framework seeking to create a system of interconnected public space investments extending out to the communities surrounding Center City.
Great Public Spaces: Strategy Evolution

Through a planning process aided by a consulting firm we identified a series of targeted major project areas or “landscapes” for potential future investment.
Great Public Spaces: Strategy Evolution

Initial Strategy Goal/Aims:

• Invest in the development and revitalization of parks, trails, and public spaces that enhance the *quality of life in neighborhoods outside of Center City*

• Support the planning and development of new and revitalized public spaces that *increase green space in under-served communities*

• Support high quality programming to *activate and animate existing public spaces*

• *Enhance the performance* of existing public space and support the repurposing of existing public assets as new public space amenities

• Encourage the *use of data to improve public space management* as well as sustainable operations and maintenance best practices
Great Public Spaces: Strategy Evolution

Parisians build parks for Parisians and tourists love them...
Philadelphians build parks for tourists and Philadelphians hate them...Laurie Olin
The planning process documented the challenges and obstacles to achieving the vision of a new system of interconnected public amenities.
We studied all prior planning (much of which we funded)…
Great Public Spaces: Strategy Evolution

...and our planning consultant to help us identify...
Great Public Spaces: Strategy Evolution

...and prioritize priority projects (with and emphasis on readiness)...
Great Public Spaces: Strategy Evolution

...and sequenced them on what we thought was a reasonable and realistic schedule at that time (strategy goal: complete the “system”).
However, for a range of reasons, more than half of our original priority projects are now in various stages of implementation, including some “reach” projects that we thought were much longer term.
Great Public Spaces: Strategy Evolution

Why we got it wrong…

- Imaginative, strong, and effective public sector leadership (Deputy Mayor Michael DiBerardinis; First Deputy Commissioner Mark Focht)

- Foundation grantees demonstrated an unexpected degree of fundraising prowess and ability to leverage WPF funding (Fairmount Park Conservancy, DRWC)

- The unanticipated passage of the new state transportation funding bill, Act 89, in 2013

- The Knight Foundation-sponsored Civic Commons Initiative injected significant and, again, unanticipated, supply of capital funding into a several GPS priority projects

- New gubernatorial administration has prioritized the $250MM Penn's Landing Redevelopment project – an effort that we thought was entirely aspirational

- Finally, it is a worth noting that the GPS strategy planning occurred in 2011-12 when the economy was still just emerging from the Great Recession and the general feeling was one of scarcity and significantly lower expectations
Great Public Spaces: Strategy Evolution

What we probably got right…

- The strategy (*it was really a “plan”*) was result of an extensive and detailed planning process

- We focused on a narrow set of targeted priorities

- We said “no” a lot in the early going

- We picked projects that already had some degree of momentum or a constituency

- We highly ranked “project readiness” as a key prioritization factor

- We created a investment framework that was highly legible and rationale (people “got it”)

- We extensively tested the idea with other funders, experts, and decision makers
Strategy Evolution and Maturation: What We’ve Learned Through Practice
Strategy Evolution and Maturation: What We’ve Learned Through Practice

A Few Framing Thoughts:

We started out with an interest in promoting public space, but in reality what we ended up really doing is promoting public life.

We have been building parks, trails, and public spaces, but what we really have been building is community.

The biggest thing we missed was undervaluing the power of the relationship between community space and community identity.
What We’ve Learned Through Practice

• Leveraging public space to promote greater connectivity and reduce community isolation; shifting from exclusive goal of “connected system” to “community connectivity”.

• Accompanied by a somewhat subtle shift from a generalized goal of enhancing local quality of life to a more specific focus on equity of access.

• A more explicit focus on the creation of “shared civic spaces” that function as platforms that promote greater social and community integration (Knight Fdn, Reimagining the Civic Commons)
What We’ve Learned Through Practice

• Recognition that public space design, civic engagement processes, and placemaking and historic preservation activities themselves can all be important tools in promoting community empowerment and civic leadership (Surdna, Community-based Design)

• Building on roles in promoting shared civic spaces, community empowerment, and community organizing there seems to be a real and important role for GPS to play mitigating the negative impacts of community change and conserving community identity by helping to manage its (inevitable) evolution in a positive way.
What We’ve Learned Through Practice:

• Neighborhood **school campuses** are potentially powerful opportunities for **community organizing** and engagement *(Trust for Public Land, organic examples)*

• Growing research on the relationship between **play and learning**, creating a major opportunity to enrich GPS outcomes *(Solomon, Hirsch, Nature Play)*

• Themes relating to play and learning and a city for all ages point to a focus on the value and development of **multi- and inter-generational** public spaces as an important, ultimate *(Solomon, Karlawish)*
What We’ve Learned Through Practice:

- Potential to exploit the **Circuit as an “urban amenity”** and a unique, competitive asset for the city *(Greenberg; Resort Cities)*

- Expanding access to the Circuit for underserved communities; it can also serve as way to promote **community connectivity** and be an **active transportation** option

- Can’t ignore growing research linking access to **public space and public health**; the Urban Circuit could play an important role in promoting community health *(Rand, Nat’l Academy of Sciences; Review Team)*
## GPS 2.0

### Great Public Spaces

- **Expanding Access to Great Public Spaces**
  - Increase access to high quality public space and open spaces for underserved communities (original strategy)

- **Community Building & Neighborhood Identity**
  - Support the use of public space design, civic engagement processes, and placemaking and preservation as community organizing opportunities and to conserve community identity

- **Play & Learning**
  - Activate public spaces with learning-oriented play spaces that advance the educational mission of local schools and ECE centers and result in inter-generational community hubs

- **Connectivity & the Urban Circuit**
  - Improve access to the Circuit for underserved neighborhoods to promote community connectivity, enhanced recreation, and as an active transportation option
Expanding Access to Great Public Spaces (Original Strategy)

*Increase access to high quality public space and open spaces for underserved communities*

- Invest in the development and revitalization of parks, trails, and public spaces that enhance the quality of life in neighborhoods outside of Center City
- Support the planning and development of new and revitalized public spaces that increase green space in under-served communities to **promote equity of access**
- Support public space investments that promote greater connectivity, social and economic inclusion, and **reduce community isolation**
- Promote the development of multi-generational and inter-generational public space toward creating a city for all people and all ages
- Support high quality programming to activate and animate existing public spaces
- Encourage the use of data to improve public space management as well as sustainable operations and maintenance best practices

**Measures of Success:** Priority project completion; evidence of increased social and community inclusion; enhanced community perceptions.
Play & Learning (A Learning Strategy)
Activate public spaces with learning-oriented play spaces that advance the educational mission of local schools and ECE centers and result in inter-generational community hubs.

- Fund research, model projects, and demonstrations that surface and identify best approaches to incorporating learning into public and community space.
- Support advocacy efforts to promote the incorporation of learning orientated design into city, parks, and school district facility planning and development.
- With GL and WSP, expand green school yards citywide that promote enhanced stormwater management, with a new emphasis on supporting learning.
- Support the development of green school yards, parks, and public spaces that function as community hubs by promoting intergenerational play and multi-generational recreation.

Measures of Success: Model learning-oriented play space designs implemented; evidence of positive student impacts and outcomes documented; practices adopted by PPR and SDP and replicated citywide.
GPS 2.0

Connectivity & the Urban Circuit

Improve access to the Circuit for underserved neighborhoods to promote community connectivity, enhanced recreation and as an active transportation option

- In partnership with WSP leverage the Circuit as an urban amenity that promotes community connectivity, recreation, and public health for city residents
- Promote the Circuit as a form of active transportation in the city
- **Identify city neighborhoods located more than a ¼ mile from the Circuit and implement strategies to extend physical access to those communities**
- Promote programming that encourages access to and use of the Circuit in underserved communities
- Support the development of Safe Routes to Schools as “capillaries of community connectivity” that also potentially promote connectivity to the urban Circuit

**Measures of Success:** Completion of specific projects designed to expand access to underserved communities; evidence of Circuit utilization by residents of underserved communities
Community Building & Neighborhood Identity (A Learning Strategy)

Support public space design, civic engagement processes, and placemaking and preservation as community organizing opportunities and to conserve community identity

- Support the planning and development of public spaces that function as platforms for community building, organizing, and engagement
- Deploy community-engaged design and other innovative engagement techniques in public space planning as community empowerment strategies
- Promote innovative multi-generational and inter-generational public space planning and design practices
- Leverage civic design excellence, design innovation, creative placemaking, and historic preservation to conserve and reinforce community identity as a further way to manage the negative impacts of community change

Measure of Success: Model efforts implemented that utilize planning and design process as organizing and engagement activities in communities experiencing change; evidence of effectiveness documented
GPS 2.0

Reimagining the Civic Commons
Philadelphia, PA.

Lovett Library & Park
Discovery Center
Centennial Commons
Reading Viaduct
Bartram's Mile
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WPF Great Public Spaces</th>
<th>Knight Fdn Reimagining the Civic Commons</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connectivity</td>
<td>Diminishing Social Isolation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Equity of Access</td>
<td>Social/Economic Integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Civic Space</td>
<td>The “Civic Commons”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conserving Community Identity</td>
<td>Engendering Pride of Place</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enhance Performance; Repurpose Assets</td>
<td>Next Generation Synergies</td>
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