

# Public Domain

A GUIDE TO PUBLIC SPACE DESIGN  
AND DEVELOPMENT

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*A designer's ability to impact the world around them is often not afforded to them by their own will but rather through others that bring ideas into reality. The disconnect seen between concept and reality in civic landscapes is not something that can be continued to be pushed aside in a time with such great pace of redevelopment and growth of urban environments. Rather it is imperative not only to architects and urban designers but also the public that something be done to reconcile such a divide. Not only through design itself but the entire relationship of architect and developer must be reconsidered in the creation of public space in the modern era of urban development. Through greater community and public interaction and realignment of the value proposition on public space, I believe it is possible to begin to shift the narrative of private urban development to create civic spaces of greater social, cultural and fiscal equity.*

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Fig. 1



Fig. 2



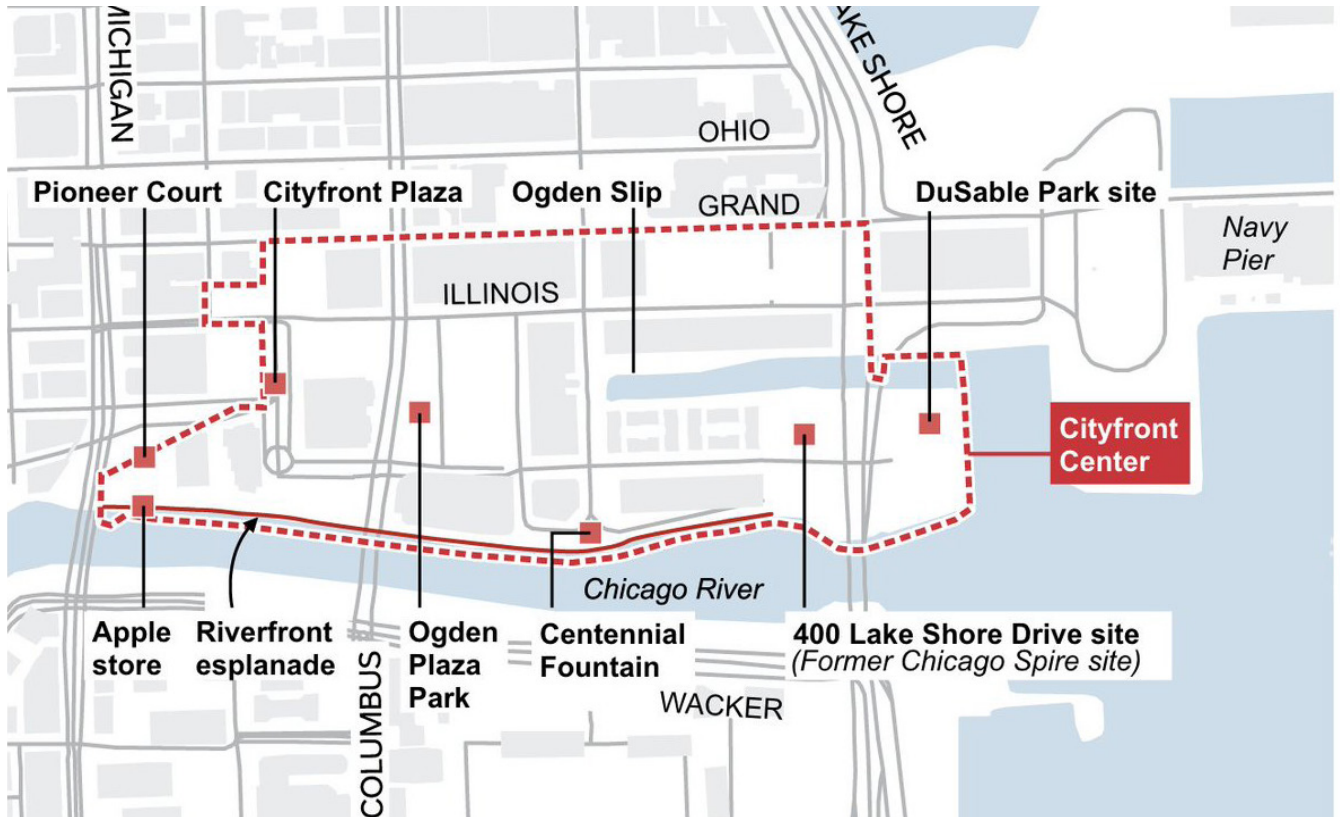


Fig. 3

## CityFront Center Development 1983-Present

50+ Acre Mega-development

Developing industrial and vacant land into high density urban landscape

13.5 million sq ft planned

Cost of \$6 billion (adjusted)

Came with the promise of beautiful, interconnected plazas, promenades and parks

Real estate success but a failure in urban design

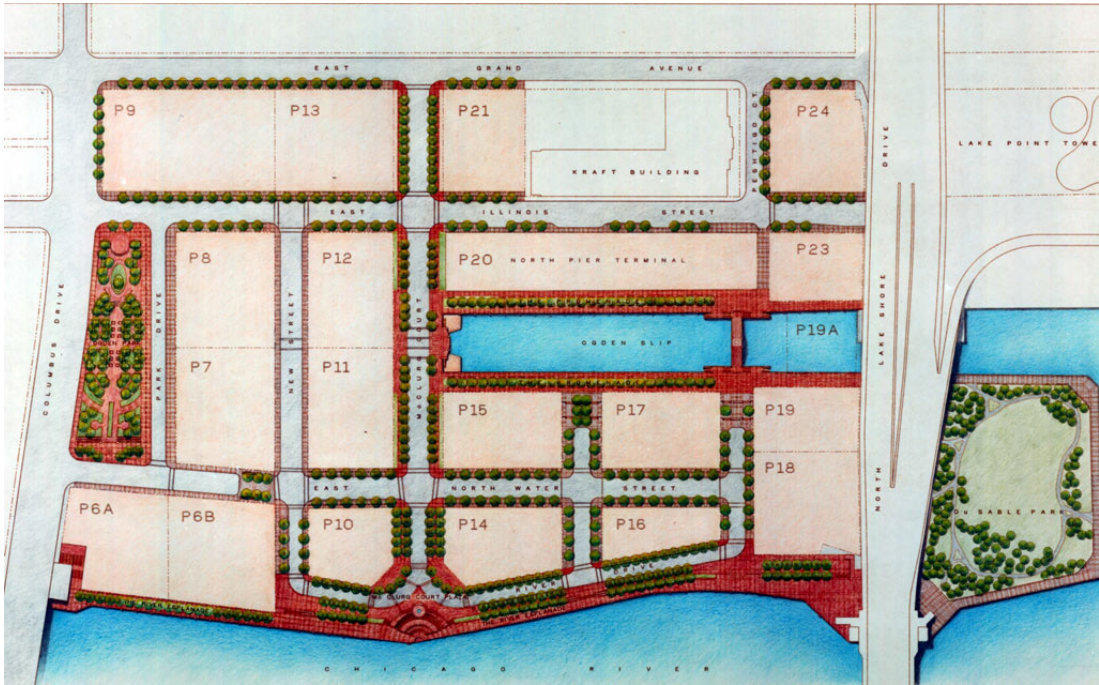


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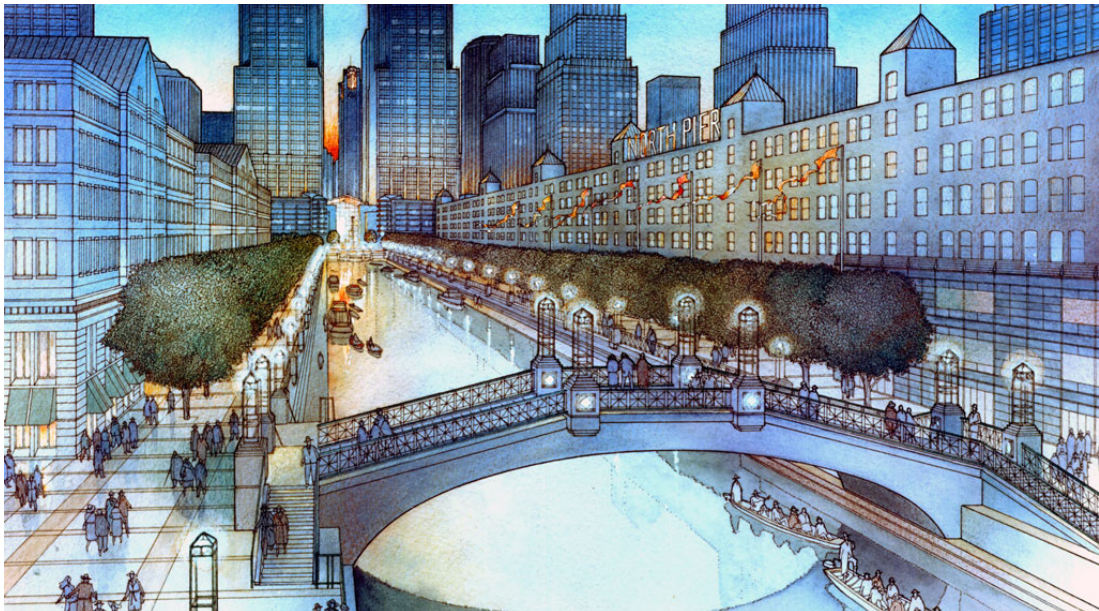


Fig. 5





*Fig. 6*

## Original Design Intent

Comprehensive Master Plan was developed by Lohan Associates in 1984 for Chicago Dock and Canal Trust

Included design standards for individual projects and designs for public spaces and infrastructures

Street-scape elements included paving, seating, lighting, and intensive landscaping

Public space design for the development called for street-scape, two urban parks, and the Centennial Fountain





Fig. 7

A primary driver of urban and city development comes from the private sector through large developers with ambitious plans of grand civic spaces and towering buildings. In the last few decades these have manifested further into “mega-developments,” as many could call them, in the form of entirely new neighborhoods and city centers being formed by a single entity. Proposed developments in Chicago alone include Lincoln Yards, The 78, Riverline, One Central, and others. Many such developments however embody the hypocrisy of creating new urban landscapes for the betterment of the public when in fact they do more to alienate the public than invite it. However, while many of these developments are new the issue is not. The CityFront Place development in Chicago’s Streeterville neighborhood which first began around 1990, promised similar civic spaces that would be enjoyed by all city residents including large parks and plazas. However, today Ogden Plaza Park remains a bleak landscape uninhabited by all but the transient few. This is not an unfamiliar narrative for many private developments where images and plans of beautiful civic space are often nothing more than a marketing tool utilized in gathering public support and public funding, only later to be watered down or taken away all together.

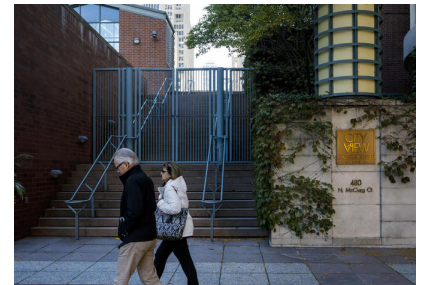


Fig. 8

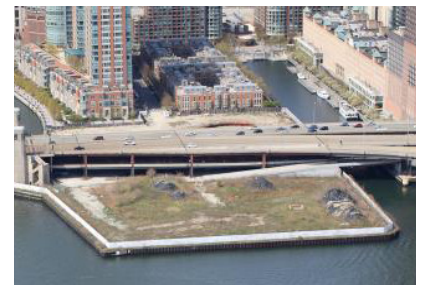


Fig. 9





Fig. 10



Fig. 11

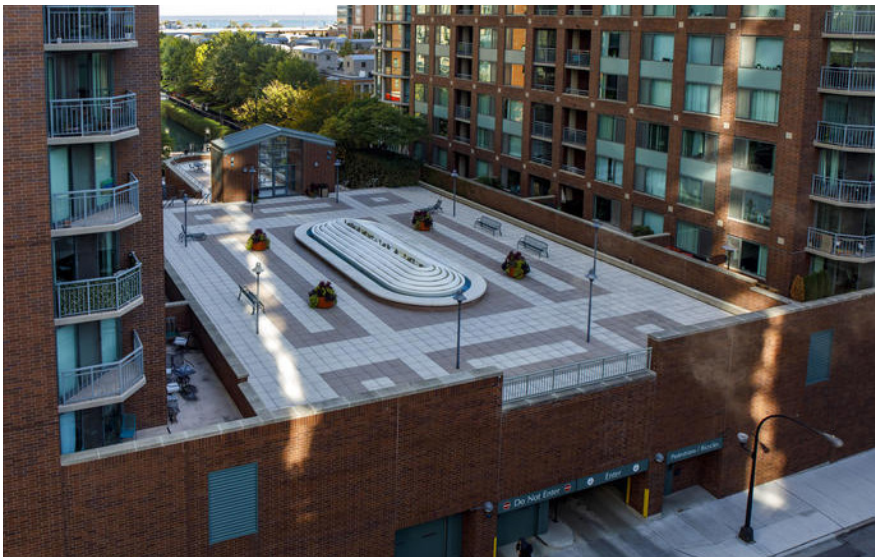
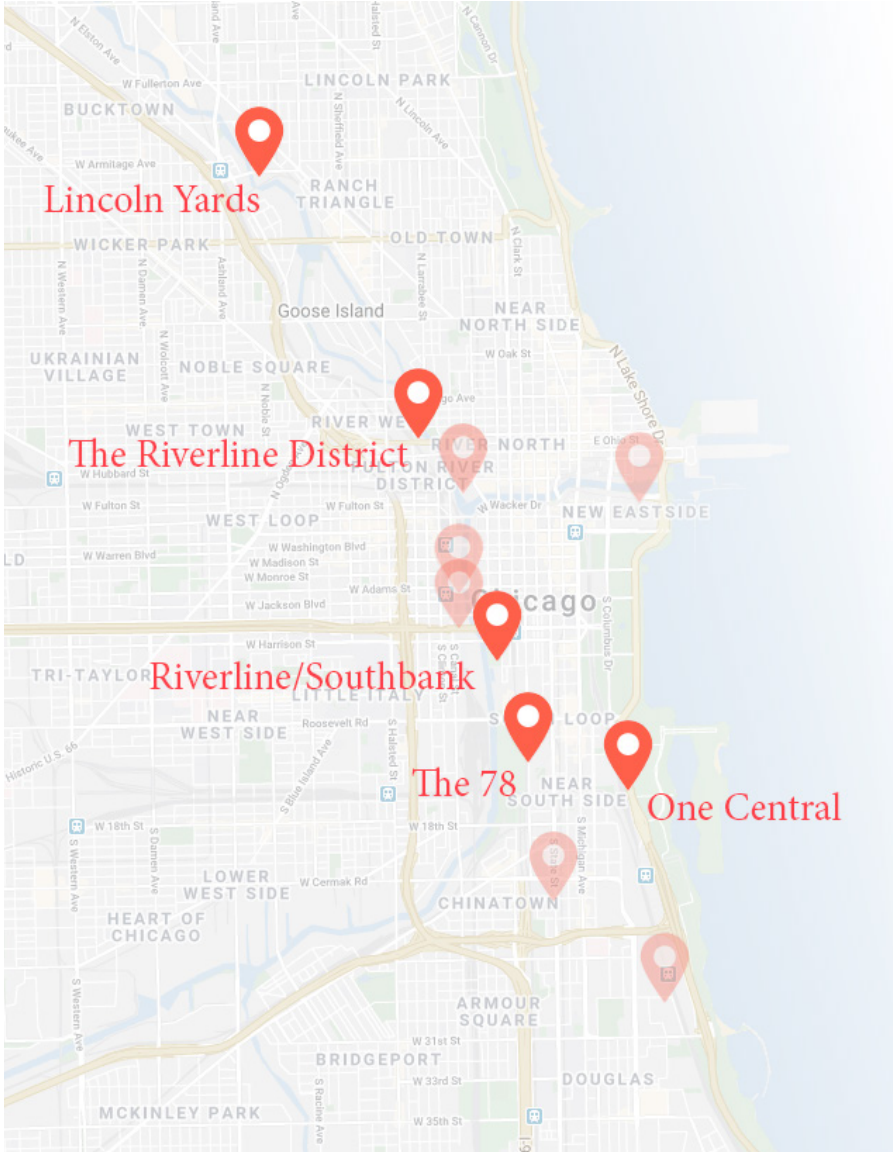


Fig. 12





# Prospective ‘Mega-Developments’ in Chicago

In most cases large architecture firms dream of grand civic spaces that might one day coalesce into reality. These grand images we often see in proposals and marketing materials for large developments but rarely seem to find their way to reality. One reason for this is that the relationship between developers, architects and urban planners often does not yield what was proposed or even conceptualized. In part this can be broken down to a difference in value proposition to all the parties involved. Changing the narrative on the value of good public space can lead to a greater outcomes for all parties involved.



*Fig. 13*



*Fig. 15*



*Fig. 14*



*Fig. 16*

# Lincoln Yards

## 2016-Present

50+ Acre Mega-development

Developing industrial and vacant land into high density urban landscape

12 million sq ft mixed use

Comes with the promise of beautiful, interconnected plazas, promenades and parks

13+ acres of added public green space

New River walk and extension of the 606 bike path

Substantial TIF-supported infrastructure improvements including new train station, 3 new bridges and road and utility repair/ construction



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



# The 78

60+ Acre Mega-development

Developing industrial and vacant land into high density urban landscape

13 million sq ft mixed use

Comes with the promise of beautiful, interconnected plazas, promenades and parks

12+ acres of added public open space

New River walk

Substantial TIF-supported infrastructure improvements including new Red Line Station, realignment of Metra tracks and an extension of Wells Street

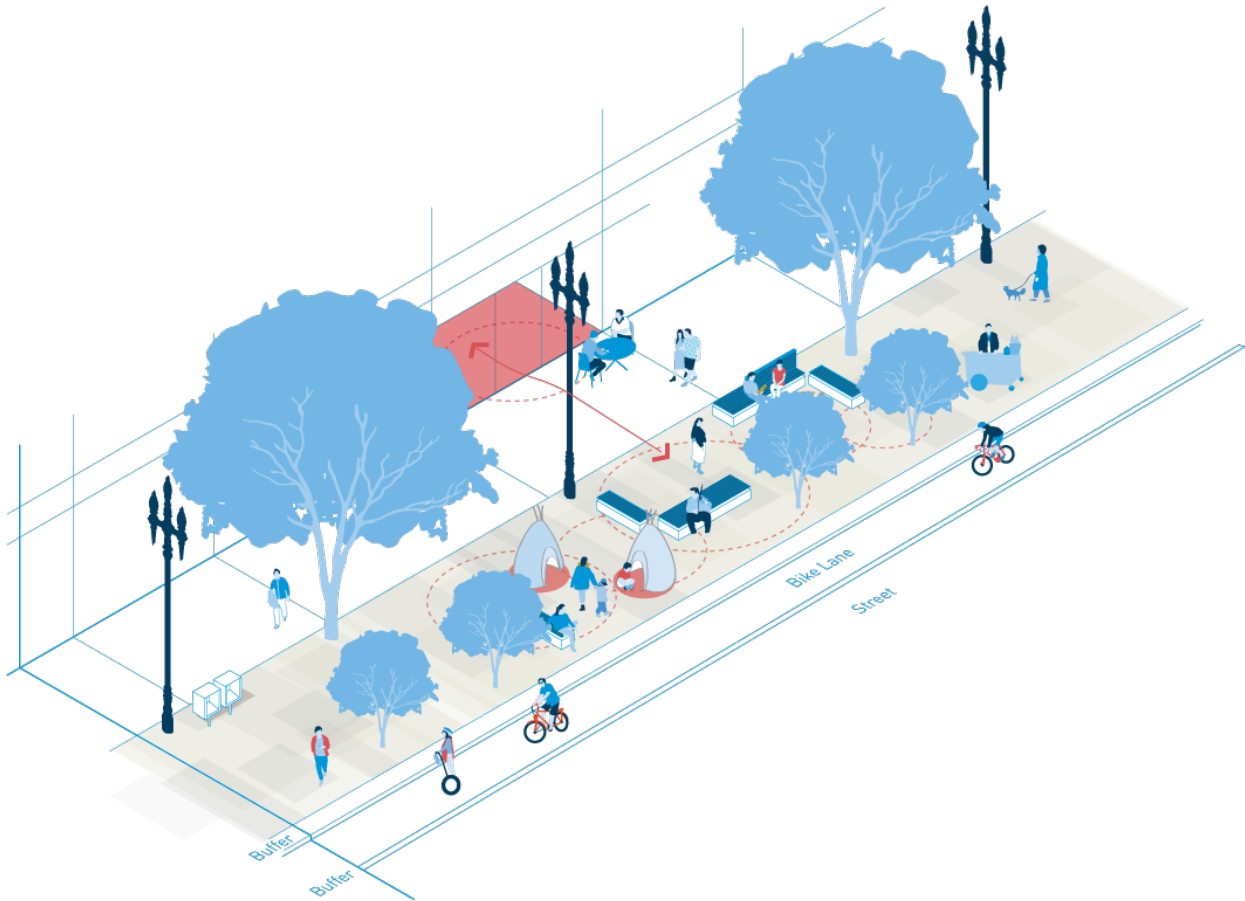


Fig. 19



Fig. 20





# Background

Investigations of public space  
and its implementation

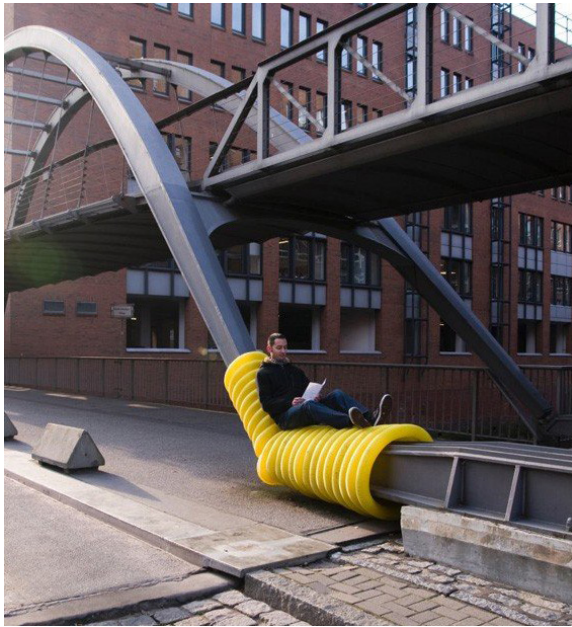


Fig. 22



Fig. 24



Fig. 25



Fig. 23



Fig. 26

## Reactive Interventions

Temporary/reactive interventions, while often not practical or sustainable long-term, bring attention to the issue and provide a starting point for how to adapt public landscapes.



Fig. 27





Fig. 28

## Tactical Urbanism

Grassroots and community level intervention into urban public spaces improves local neighborhoods and city gathering places



Fig. 29



Fig. 30





Fig. 31

This form of urbanism and approach to public space is often a stepping stone to more permanent change. Since it is often organized and executed at the community organization or individual level it is often completed in whatever manner that is quick and cheap but accomplishes the end result. Often the results of this appear as painted surfaces, temporary barriers and lightweight street furniture.





## Multi-modal Connected Street Design

The planning and design of street-scapes intends to distribute priority amongst all users and program types. This approach to street design takes priority away from passenger automobiles and puts equal emphasis on many different types of transportation that are better suited for dense urban environments. Some of these physical elements include protected bike lanes to separate cyclists from cars and buses, buffer zones with vegetation and pedestrian programming such as outdoor dining and retail zones.

Embracing this strategy for urban streets promotes alternative means of travel that are more efficient within cities and increases safety and comfort for all users.



Fig. 32



Fig. 33





Fig. 34

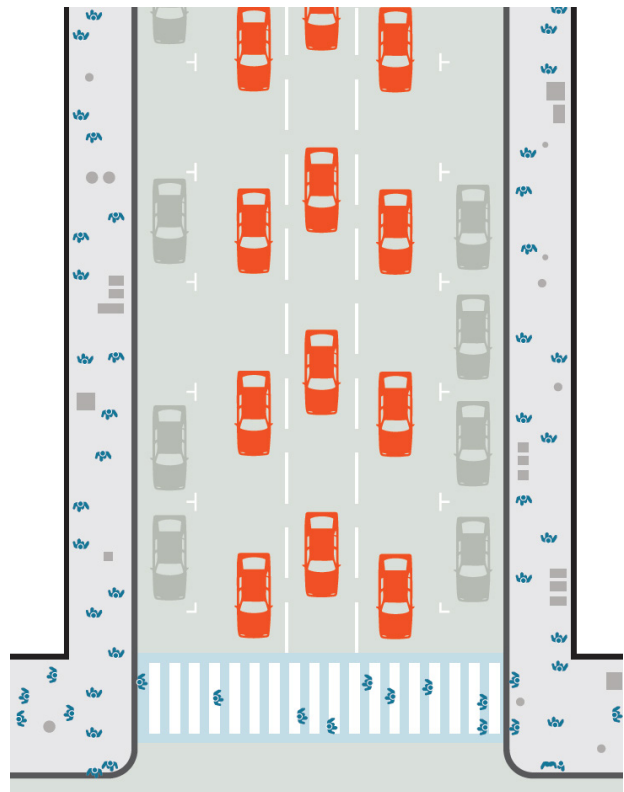


Fig. 37



Fig. 35



Fig. 36

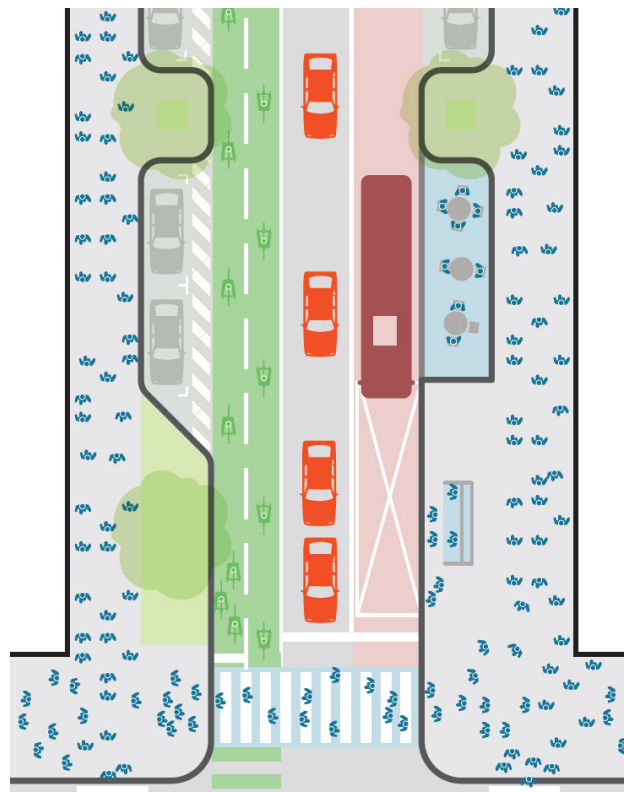


Fig. 38





Fig. 40





Fig. 39



Fig. 41

# Development and Management

Types of development and management structure for public spaces and semi private zones.

Various types of public places are developed and maintained in different ways. Community Gardens are often organized and maintained through grassroots initiatives (Fig. 40). Plazas such as the one shown in Figure 41 can often accompany a private development and serve the passerby as well as the patrons of adjacent businesses within the development. This particular example is the sunken plaza located in front of the former John Hancock Center in Downtown Chicago and is supported by a variety of restaurant and retail vendors that utilize the adjacent storefronts. Large parks such as Millennium Park are developed and managed by the city or another public entity. Public places like these are what immediately come to mind when thinking about public space and are important as attractions for tourism, large events and providing large open spaces for city-dwellers (Fig. 39).

Implementation	Ownership	Management	User Access*	Examples
Developed by government	Owned by government	Managed by government or outsourced	Public or limited	Public parks and facilities
Developed by private sector	Transferred to government or public entities	Managed by government or outsourced	Public or limited	Public amenities in large-scale developments (e.g., schools)
Developed by private sector	Privately owned	Managed by government or outsourced	Public or limited	Library space leased from private property
Developed by private sector	Privately owned	Privately managed	Public	POPS and easements
Developed by private sector	Privately owned	Privately managed	Limited or private	Roof gardens in private commercial property

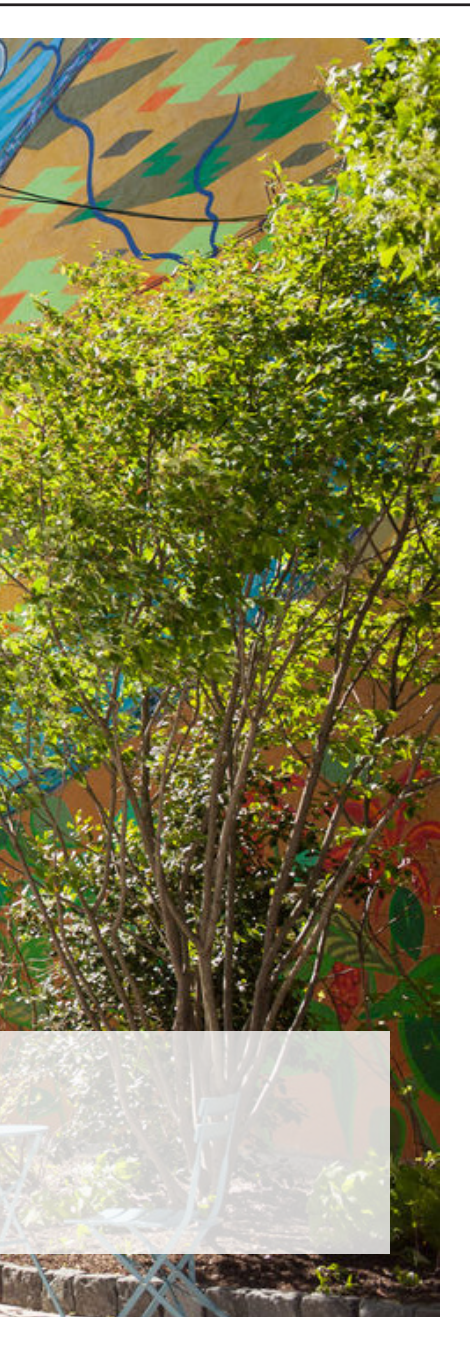
Fig. 42





## Best Practices





*Fig. 43*

## 10 Principles of Public Space Design

The following are 10 areas of focus when considering the design and development of urban public space. While not comprehensive of all of the factors that go into the creation of successful public space, following these best practices will set the development of any public space on the right track.

# 01 Diversity of Uses

Introducing multiple adjacent program types such as residential, office and commercial

Each use provides foot traffic and activity at different times of the day leading to greater amount of activity throughout the entire day rather than just at certain times

Coexistence and permanence of people is a way of investing in security



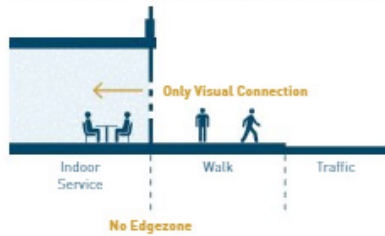
Fig. 44



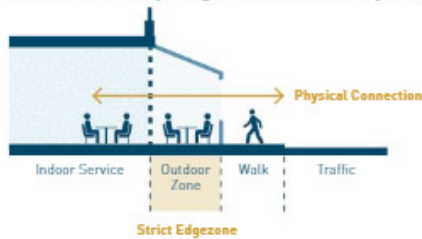
### 3 DEGREES OF CAFE EDGE ZONES

Diagrams of lively edges by cafes/restaurants

#### Weak Edge - only visual connection



#### Medium Lively Edge - restricted by barrier



#### Very Lively Edge - soft transition in to out

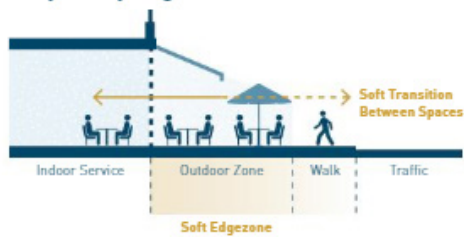


Fig. 45

## 02 Active Facades

Creating connection between ground level of buildings, sidewalk and the street

Contributes to the overall safety and attractiveness of the urban area and more visually interesting streets are often used by more people

It is mostly quality of streets and sidewalks that indicate how public space is perceived and used

# 03 Social Dimension and Urban Vitality

Public space as an aggregator of people

Factors that encourage interaction between people and environment and can generate positive use of space and greater urban vitality

- Wide accessible streets, squares, parks, sidewalks, and bike paths
- Urban furniture
- Gathering spaces

Also need to consider public spaces in the peripheries of cities not just high density city centers



Fig. 46



TOWARDS A 'PEOPLE' PLACE

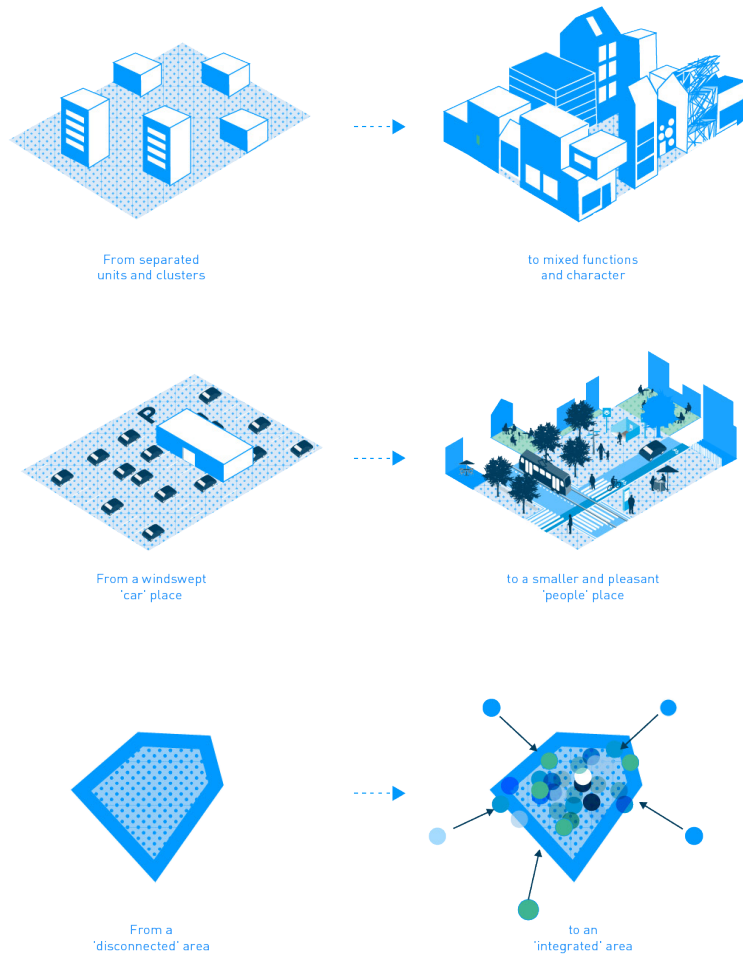


Fig. 47

## 04 Human Scale

High-scale, high-density construction can negatively affect people's health

People want to feel considered in the planning process of a space

Jan Gehl notes that people tend to walk faster through empty or inactive areas as opposed to livelier active environments with architectures at human scale and detail

# 05 Lighting

Efficient, people-oriented lighting facilitates occupancy of public spaces in the evening and night

Conditions for pedestrians and cyclists to move in safety when there is no natural light

Blue tinted street lights could help in reducing street crime and suicides as they have been shown effective in Japan and Scotland



*Fig. 48*





Fig. 49

## 06 Stimulating the Local Economy

Safe attractive conditions for walking and cycling can lead to easy access and increased traffic to local commerce

Public spaces can be utilized as extensions of space for businesses including dining patios, street food vendors, coffee shops and art and culture exhibitions



Fig. 50

## 07 Local Identity

Create a strong relationship between people and place taking into account social dynamics and cultural specificities

Small businesses and ventures have significant long-term impacts beyond economic contribution and add to the personality and identity of place

Public spaces should be planned for local small businesses and residential developments that characterize the neighborhood



# 08 Complete Streets

Streets designed to ensure safe circulation of all users and transportation methods including pedestrians, cyclists, drivers and public transport

- Sidewalks in good condition and ample width
- Infrastructure for bicycles including racks, protected bike lanes, and shared bikes
- Street Furniture
- Signage for all users



Fig. 51

# 09 Green Areas

Trees, plants and flowerbeds are strategic for urban drainage, user comfort and climate considerations

Direct benefits: improved air quality, ease temperatures in summer

Indirect benefits: humanize cities and attract people to outdoor activities

Urban forestation can lower peoples stress levels and enhance well-being



Fig. 52





Fig. 53

## 10 Social Participation

Involve residents and users in the design, planning and administration

Public spaces can have different uses and meanings in each community and involvement ensures that the nature and use of public space will meet the community's distinct needs

If demand and desires of local population are not met, it will not be used or maintained



**Design Study**





*Fig. 54*

## Incremental Development

Improvements made over time allow for greater use and adaptation of space. This model of incremental development was implemented in a housing project in Chile by Elemental and experiments with the idea of incremental building in which the project delivers all of the bare necessity spaces for a house while leaving room for future expansion. In the construction of low and middle class housing this is very effective as it allows for construction of more units overall and on a lower cost basis while still providing plentiful space.

Utilizing this model applied to public spaces allows for public space on a budget while improving and further developing the space over time. Incorporating this could cut down on overall delivery time and allow for upgrades and maintenance to happen over a longer timeline ensuring more usability and value created.



Vacant city lot overgrown with weeds and underkept property edges

## Zones of Opportunity

Many cities possess a great amount of density and life however inevitably pockets of space that have tremendous potential go unkempt and underutilized. City lots such as these can go years or even decades unused and serving little purpose. One of the biggest restrictions on the development of public space is cost. With the concept of incremental development however sites can be improved over time spreading out cost.



# Phase 01

For relatively little upfront investment a derelict property can be quickly made into the usable green space seen below. Some simple landscaping clean up, mulch, wild flowers and a new fences can turn an eye sore into a pleasant picnic spot. These sort of simple pocket parks can be mainstays for everyday urban residents.



Phase 01 - Cleanup and make habitable

# Phase 02

Introducing an element of economic activity such as a small coffee shop pop-up can activate and populate the space. Further improvements can be made to the site over time such as more permanent landscaping, seating elements and hard-scape paving. At early stages this can provide a vibrant and permanent public space within the existing community.



Phase 02 - Add coffee shop, seating and permanent landscaping.



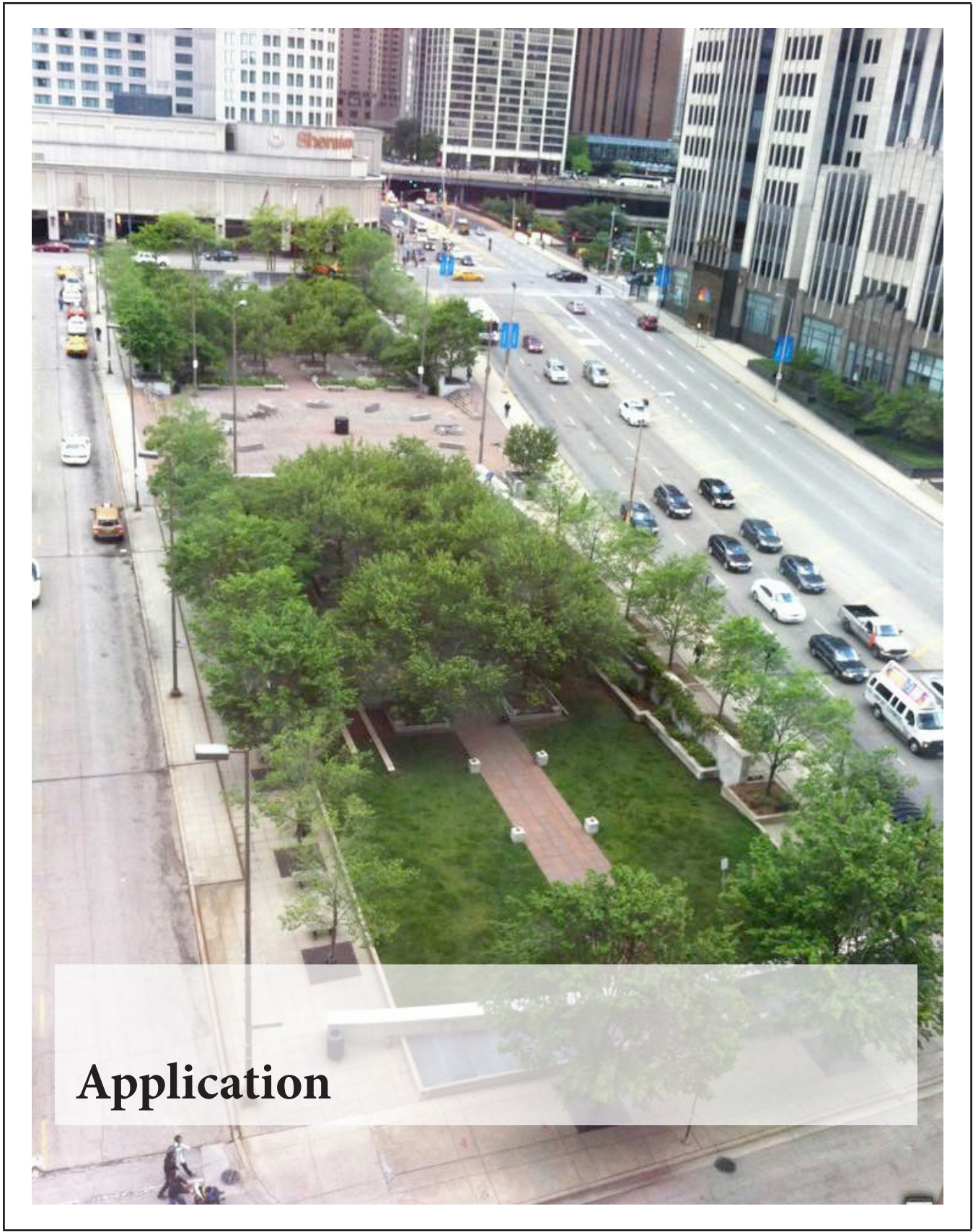


Phase 03 - Mural artwork, plant growth and robust programming.

## Phase 03

Over time added landscaping grows in and the space can take on character through further improvements, local art murals and establishing itself as a unique and loved public space to be used and appreciated by visitors and local residents alike.





# Application

Fig. 55



# Ogden Plaza Park

Original design done by Lohan Associates in 1990 the stepped design houses a parking garage underneath

The centerpiece, Floor Clock II, by Vito Acconci acts as the focal point of the existing landscape



Fig. 56

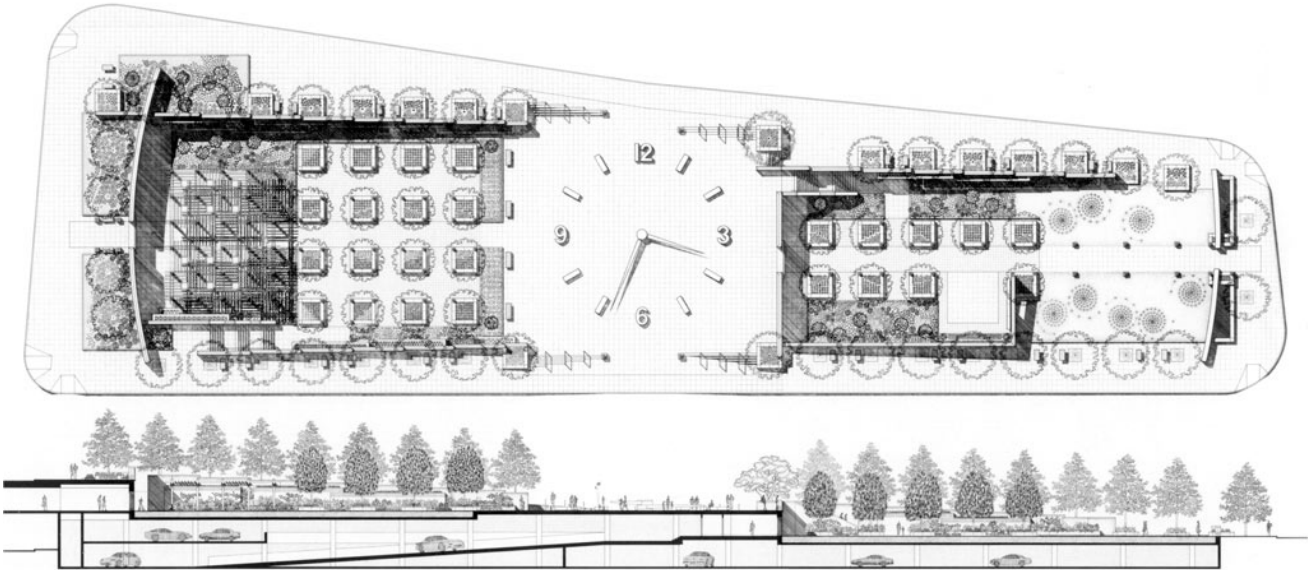


Fig. 57



# Ogden Plaza Park - Current Conditions

Ogden Plaza Park is perhaps one of the more unfortunate examples of poorly utilized space. The space is largely un-occupied and in rough condition. However, many of the buildings around it are new and full of activity. The park itself though is largely unoccupied even during the daytime and is frequented by homeless individuals, many of which use the more secluded areas of the park to sleep. Most of the physical features and circulation routes have degraded over time or have even been chained off as seen with the stairway in the image to the right. What was once a bright open plaza has become cold, dark and lifeless despite its bustling location.

With some care--and a fresh approach--Ogden Plaza Park can take on a new identity. An identity that not only connects it to adjacent spaces but, more importantly, establishes Ogden Plaza Park as a true attraction in and of itself.



Fig. 58



Fig. 59



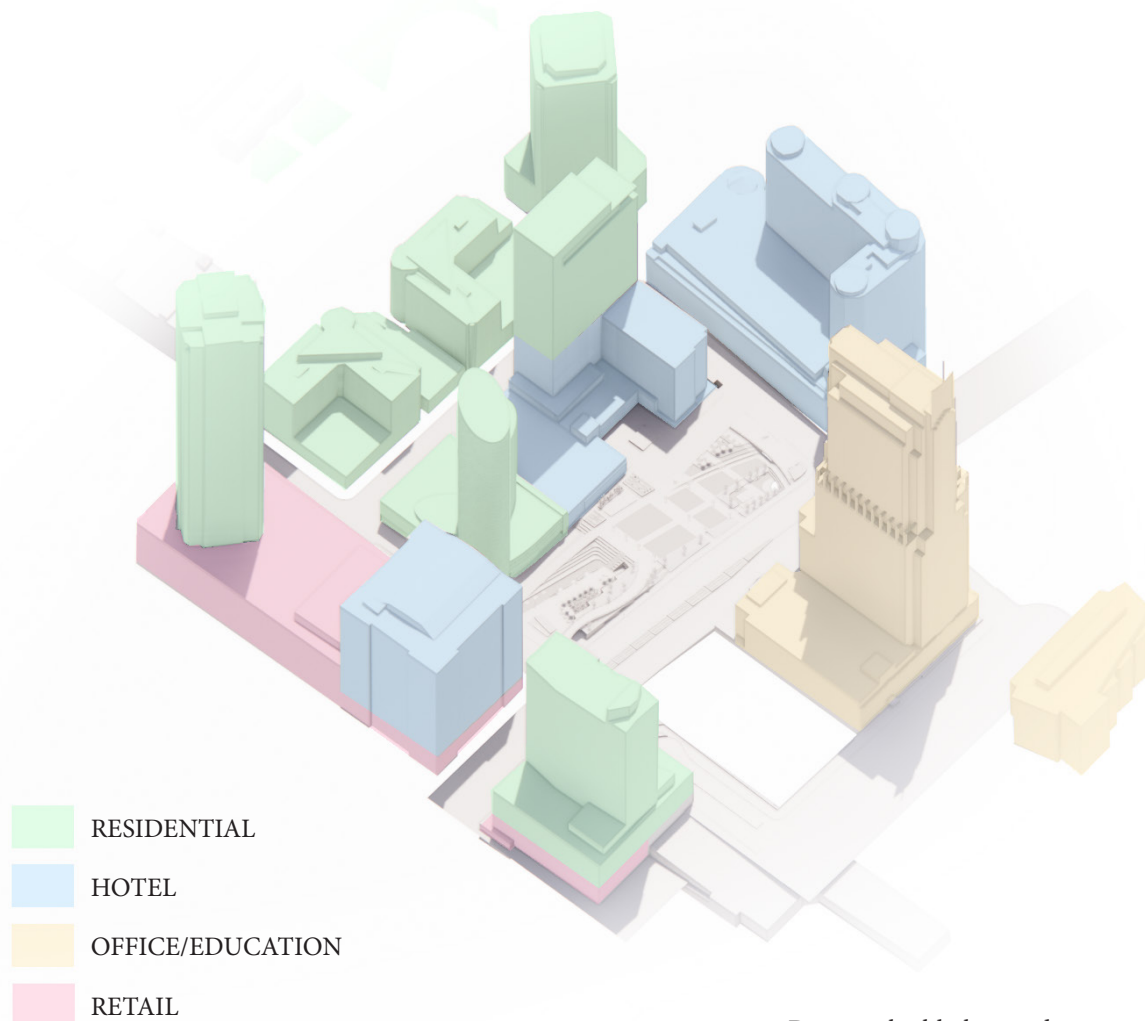


Diagram highlighting adjacent program types

Many of the properties in the immediate vicinity of the site contain a variety of uses that lend themselves well to active public environments. Hotels make up a large amount of the bordering program on three sides of the site. For properties such as these, focused on hospitality and customer experience, a new and fresh plaza/park can be a sort of shared amenity for guests to use without straying far away from their rooms; not to mention contribute positively to the overall look and feel of the area. For the more permanent residential buildings in the neighborhood, the new Ogden Park Plaza is a resource and a reprieve from unrelenting street-scape right outside the front door.

Renowned urbanism expert Jane Jacobs' concept "Eyes on the street" puts forth the idea that good urban spaces are often characterized by high amounts of activity especially when that activity happens at all times of the day. The unique combination of program types surrounding the site have that potential to capture this concept. Office, educational, retail and hotel pedestrian flows often provide ample activity during the day while restaurant and entertainment programs within and around the site offer evening and nighttime activity. This regular activity provides a level of safety and attractiveness to the area, vital to its long term success.

# The New Ogden Plaza Park

The existing version of Ogden Plaza Park is an island surrounded on all sides by pavement and automobile traffic. The new version seeks to remedy this through the conversion of a portion of North Park Drive away from automobile traffic and a pedestrian bridge linking to upper East Illinois Avenue. Additionally, adding a green buffer as a new median in North Columbus Drive helps eliminate traffic noise and improve pedestrian comfort along the western edge of the park.







Aerial perspective view from the northwest overlooking the redeveloped Ogden Plaza Park

# Site Plan

## PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE

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The existing two-layer street system in the southern side of the Streeterville neighborhood doesn't always yield the best pedestrian experience, especially when it ends abruptly into a large, narrow stairway. A new pedestrian bridge connecting upper Illinois St. to the ground level allows for a safer and more pleasant pedestrian experience which is especially important as this area exists as a primary connection point between the Magnificent Mile shopping district and Navy Pier, two popular tourist attractions.

## RETAIL PLAZA

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Interjecting retail and restaurant elements into a public space can help increase activity throughout the day and provide an attraction point. Additionally including an economic component can help offset development costs in providing open public space and increase the project's overall viability.

## OPEN RECREATION AND GREEN SPACE

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Existing public spaces within the CityFront Center Development such as the River Esplanade and various other plazas lack true open green space in which to relax and participate in recreational activities. An important factor in a new Ogden Plaza Park is reducing the overall hard-scape and introducing greater levels of greenery to provide a natural respite within the city.

## DOG PARK

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Introducing a pet-friendly and contained environment for dogs to enjoy some off-leash fun is an essential amenity for residents in the area. Areas in which dogs can play freely are rare in densely populated downtown areas and the inclusion on site creates a reliable and regular participation of local pet owners.





Overall site plan of redeveloped area calling out specific new programmatic elements



Perspective view approaching the park via the new pedestrian bridge from Upper East Illinois Avenue





The intersection below consists of a six-lane, two-way road (Columbus Dr) meeting a four-lane, one-way road (E Illinois St) both of which are often filled with heavy traffic. This environment is hardly a pleasant place for pedestrians. By providing a bridge over the intersection it not only improves the pedestrian experience but also guides people into the heart of the park and encourages both moving through and stopping to enjoy the many points of interest it has to offer.



Enlarged site plan of retail zone and plaza space at the north end of the park





NEW PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE CONNECTING  
TO UPPER ILLINOIS ST

CLEAR PATH CIRCULATION  
THROUGH PLAZA

COVERED PATIO SEATING

FLEXIBLE SEATING SPACE

PEDESTRIAN ACCESS TO  
GARAGE AND PEDWAY



Ground level perspective view of a new restaurant space with outdoor seating incorporated within a pedestrian plaza









Pedestrian walkway and plaza space with seating elements and active retail storefront





CONTINUOUS ACCESSIBLE  
CIRCULATION ACROSS SITE

CENTRAL LAWN WITH FLEXIBLE  
PERFORMANCE SPACE

BUFFER ZONES TO SEPARATE  
TRAFFIC FROM USERS

OPEN RECREATION  
AND GREEN SPACE

SECURE PET-FRIENDLY AREA

PEDESTRIAN ACCESS TO  
GARAGE AND PEDWAY







Enlarged site plan highlighting new programmatic elements in the southern portion of the park

Open green space offers endless opportunities for recreation, entertainment and rest/relaxation. It also is a type of space lacking within this neighborhood due to wide roads and a high density of development. The space seen in the figures to the right and below acts as a flexible zone in which a variety of activities could commence at different parts of the day. A platform located on the eastern edge of the central area can act as a stage platform for entertainment and performances in addition to acting as a flexible open space in which to have street furniture, hold yoga classes, etc. Plenty of tree cover bordering the paved paths and lawn provides a protective barrier from street noise and divides up the park environment.

View of central open green space looking northwest towards North Columbus Drive







View of central open green space looking southeast towards the Loews Hotel



People aren't the only ones that need a place to hang out and play though. Seen on the next page a dog park, located the the southwest corner of the park, provides a dedicated space to let pets play freely and includes features such as a splash fountain and play structures in addition to plenty of seating space for owners accompanying their pets.





Perspective view in the secure pet-friendly area







Upper green space with entrances to pet-friendly area and shaded seating areas





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Note: Any figures not cited here are original illustrations by the author.

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