Peer Reviewed

Title:
Making Streets that Work [Streets: Old Paradigm, New Investment]

Journal Issue:
Places, 11(2)

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Publication Date:
1997

Publication Info:
Places

Permalink:
http://escholarship.org/uc/item/75s9s8ks

Acknowledgements:
This article was originally produced in Places Journal. To subscribe, visit www.places-journal.org. For reprint information, contact places@berkeley.edu.

Keywords:
places, placemaking, architecture, environment, landscape, urban design, public realm, planning, design, streets, work, seattle, Streets that work, Dennis Sellin

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Making Streets That Work

What makes a street great?

In spring 2014, Seattle residents had a chance to answer that question. The Seattle Design Commission presented a workshop designed to engage the public in discussing and designing streets that work for Seattle. The goal was to create streets that are safe, vibrant, and inviting, and that reflect the values of the community. Participants were divided into project teams to work on issues of street design, including sidewalks, crosswalks, and street furniture.

The workshop was a success, with over 100 people participating in the event. The Design Commission will use the feedback and ideas from the workshop to inform future street design projects in Seattle.
Utility pole—City Light

Street lighting—SED, City Light

Pedestrian scale lighting—City Light and owners

Bollard or hanging baskets—SED

Overhead trolley wire and poles—Metro

Traffic signs/SED

Trash cans/SED

Newspaper rack

Bike rack/SED

Concrete sidewalks/SED

Street drainage/SED

Paving—replacement

Tree planting/replacement

New power poles, new City Light

Note

OCUL—Department of Construction and Land Use

SED—Seattle Engineering Department

Traffic signs/SED

Traffic signal/SED

Crosswalk markings/SED

New curb and sidewalk

New power poles, new City Light

Cash range for wheelchair/SED

Bike rack/SED

Underground power cables/City Light

Gas, sewer, telecommunications

Underground power vaults/City Light

Bus shelters/Seattle

Parking signs and meters/SED

Placard 1/2

12
Revuea Alley

This alley is linked to the wonder-ful pedestrian ambiance of the Revuea Park ravine and the surrounding neighborhood. A great place to be—neighborhoods live in the alley—they plant flowers, play basketball, receive their mail and enter their homes through the alley. It is a sociable space where neighbors can congregate.

involving people from public agencies, designers and neighborhood advocates. We brainstormed characteristics of good streets (vegetation, comfortable for residents and users, low traffic speeds, variation in streetscape materials, mixed uses were mentioned most). And we thought of categories we might seek out, such as "best play street," "best alley," "best sociable street," "best community involvement in street design." Ultimately, the commission gave awards to 15 streets that represented a cross-section of types and uses; profiles of some of those streets accompany this article.

Streets and Neighborhood Planning

Seattle's comprehensive plan predicts solid population and employment growth for the city and directs it to urban villages and centers. This plan is linked to a neighborhood planning initiative, which gives neighborhood residents some power to chart their own future. In 1995, the city established a Neighborhood Planning Office, providing neighborhoods with staff assistance and a toolbox of background material, covering hundreds of topics from economic development to zoning. Already, several dozen neighborhoods have begun planning work.

But when the neighborhood planning program began, the toolbox did not include material about streets or street design. The design commission, following on the interest generated by the awards program, developed a workbook and video as a primer on streets. The city's engineering department (now Department of Transportation), its Office of Management and Planning and its Pedestrian Advisory Board collaborated on the project.

The workbook and video, both called Making Streets that Work, seek to demystify streets without obscuring their complexity. They help the public recognize the value streets have in commu-

Frederick Law Olmsted believed that urban residents deserved a little country in the city. For Seattle, a city possessing "extraordi-

ary landscape advantages," the Olmsted brothers envisioned a system of green pathways, boule-

dards linking parks and bodies of water. That vision became reality between 1900 to 1909. Today, Seattle has one of the largest and best-preserved Olmsted boulevard systems in the United States, a legacy of beautiful and elegant boulevards.
nities and provide useful information on ways to improve neighborhood streets.

The workbook begins by explaining the role of local streets in the regional transportation net-
work, the role streets play in urban form and the
relationship between transportation and land use.
It also includes a section drawing of a street,
showing components as varied as street lights,
trash cans and underground sewer mains. The
entities responsible for each component are listed
on the drawing; by one count, some 48 agencies
and organizations have a hand in designing or
maintaining Seattle streets.

The workbook also gives residents tools they
can use to get involved with the design of their
local streets. It shows them how to profile their
streets by identifying problems and opportunities.
It offers 35 strategies for improving streets and
helps residents determine which might be most
appropriate for their neighborhoods. Then it pre-
sents information on how to implement projects
and case studies of completed street improvement
projects in Seattle (including budgets).

Making Streets That Work has been success-
ful because it is accessible to a general audience
and because it is comprehensive—a single
source of reference for information on streets
and strategies for making them better. Append-
dices include a list of commonly asked questions
(“How do I drive around a traffic circle?”) and

a glossary, bibliography and contact list.
Just as important, both the awards, book and
t виде офер a perspective on streets that people
aren’t used to hearing. These projects treat streets
as significant public open spaces, not just trans-
portation corridors or utility conduits. This
emphasis reinforces the point that streets are
places; recognizing that is the first step towards
making streets great places to be.

For more information on these programs, please
contact Marcia Wagener, Executive Director, Seattle
Design Commission, 170 Second Avenue, Suite 200,
Seattle WA 98101. Telephone (206) 684-0444.
Email: Marcia.Wagener@sei.ck.seattle.wa.us

“Making Streets That Work” is available from the
Local Government Commission, 144 K Street, Suite
350, Sacramento, CA 95814-1519. Fax: (916) 448-8246.
Website: http://www.lgc.org/uk/street.html

Broadway
This is one of Seattle’s best-
known and—Avondale streets. The
people are what make it special;
the sidewalks are filled with all
types of people, day and night.
Making Broadway a safe place to
be. The street balances all modes
of transportation—bikes, cars,
trains and pedestrians. And it is a
vital shopping street, with plenty
of storefronts and retail living
the street. Sidewalk-tiles, art and
streetcorners are distinctive markers.