



Aerial view of downtown Nashville, TN. Encircled area depicts location of intersection with under-utilized right-of-way and potential transit infrastructure. Image source: NCDC

Reclaiming Public Space

Like most cities, Nashville's streets and public right-of-way make up a significant portion of open space in the city. Far too often these spaces are under-utilized, unfriendly to pedestrians and unsupportive of surrounding developments.

New York and San Francisco's *Pavement to Parks* programs have been hugely successful in transforming these types of under-utilized spaces. These programs have helped add to the quality of the public realm while also contributing to redevelopment efforts within the communities. Often these projects begin as temporary installments meant to give the city and public an opportunity to test and refine the designs prior to permanent installation.

In Nashville, a prime opportunity exists to reclaim an under utilized right-of-way at the intersection of 21st Ave and Broadway. This highly visible site would serve as an excellent demonstration project—helping better connect the Midtown Neighborhood with Vanderbilt University, increasing pedestrian safety and public transportation usage, and promoting urban infill development in the large surrounding parking lots.

This report examines the potential impact reclaiming public space could have in Nashville.



Pedestrian Plaza with Streetcar line, Portland State University, Portland, OR. Image source: NCD

As plans for Nashville's future public transportation infrastructure develop, new ideas for creating urban infill development incorporating unique public spaces are starting to emerge.

To transition from "big idea" to reality, a project should involve study of recent successful examples in other cities that have achieved similar outcomes. The area of focus at the split of 21st Ave + Broadway resembles similar street conditions in other cities, where diagonal streets cut through the traditional grid, creating unique triangular-shaped spaces. In some cases, these are filled by corner buildings, however, many sites are characterized by an abundance of asphalt with no specific use.

Several organizations and cities across the United States have begun addressing these unused spaces, converting them into functioning outdoor pedestrian plazas. San Francisco's *Pavement to Parks* is one successful example. The program identifies the following criteria for selecting appropriate sites:

- Sizeable area of under-utilized roadway
- Lack of public space in the surrounding neighborhood
- Pre-existing community support for public space at the location
- Potential to improve pedestrian and bicyclist safety via redesign
- Surrounding uses that can attract people to the space
- Identified community or business partner



Photographs of reclaimed intersection, Castro Commons plaza, San Francisco, CA. All images above by NCDC

“Castro Commons”

San Francisco, CA

“After being evaluated for over a year, the Castro Plaza has been made permanent by request of the community. Marking this milestone, the plaza was upgraded using grant funds awarded to the Castro/Upper Market Community Benefit District.

Building off lessons learned during the trial, Seth Boor of Boor Bridges Architecture designed this new space, providing a greater sense of enclosure, more seating, and more greening opportunities. In collaboration with Flora Grubb Gardens, a beautiful palette of low-water, wind tolerant plants have been added, including a variety of palms, olives, and succulents. Seth contributed his design services pro bono while Flora Grubb provided materials at a significant discount. Paul Cesewski fabricated the movable gates over the unused Muni tracks using surplus rail and other metal donated to the project by the Port of San Francisco. And finally, Nibbi General Contractors, who installed the concrete planters, provided their services at reduced cost to the CBD.

Building off the community partnership model common to all *Pavement to Parks* projects, much of the labor was volunteered by people in the community. The Castro / Upper Market CBD provided invaluable help in organizing these volunteers (many of the member businesses were even out with shovels) and has graciously accepted responsibility for maintaining this beautiful public space.”

- Pavement to Parks SF



Photographs and renderings of Pearl Street Triangle, Brooklyn, NY. All images above by NCDC

“Pearl Street Triangle”

Brooklyn, NY (DUMBO)

The Pearl Street Triangle between Pearl Street and Anchorage Place was a parking lot before the city and Improvement District transformed it into a green-themed public plaza three years ago. On Sundays it is home to the Improvement District’s Farmers’ Market.

An “ideas” competition intended to get people interested in creating a long-term strategic plan for the Pearl Street Triangle and the use of public space in the neighborhood was sponsored by the DUMBO Improvement District.

Eight sets of designs were entered, and panelists representing both the private and public sector selected a winner.

‘The Tracks plaza takes its inspiration from the myriad of rail lines that at one time weaved their way through the industrial streets of DUMBO. As these tracks emerge from beneath the pavement surrounding the triangle, they become the armature for a series of tiered seats that wind through the site to create three amphitheater-like spaces: the first, facing the Manhattan Bridge, is delineated by seating for films projected onto the masonry wall that encloses the arch beneath the bridge; the second, a performance and display space enclosed by two opposing tiers; and the third, where a low tier hugs a series of in-ground fountains. Shallow alcoves are molded underneath the higher tiers, welcoming local artists to display their creations.’

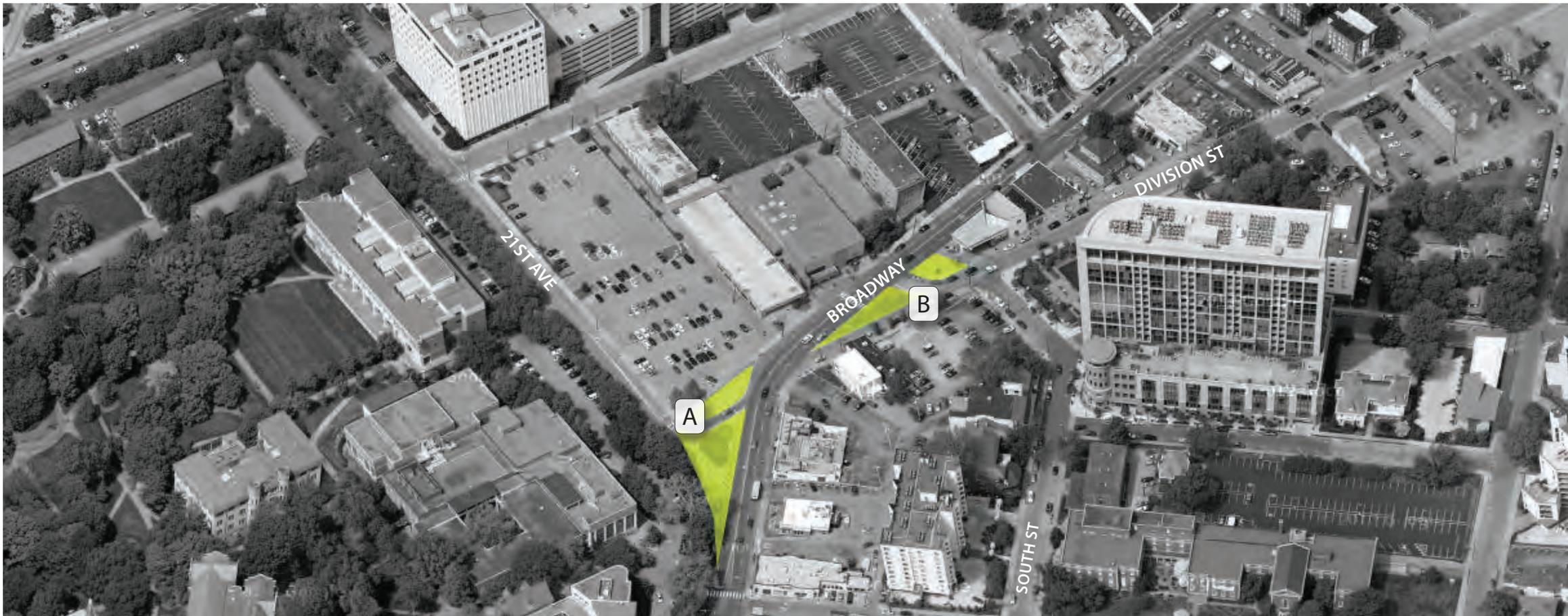
- New York Post

A BROADWAY+21st TRIANGLE

Currently, this large traffic island has no pedestrian connections even though it is home to a bus stop. The site's proximity to Vanderbilt University, existing restaurants, businesses and residential units, as well as potential mixed-use development parcels, will provide sufficient activity to sustain its pedestrian focused programming.

B BROADWAY+DIVISION TRIANGLE

Coined "Broadway Park," this under-utilized sliver of space will serve as a key element in the new streetscape plan. The park space could offer outdoor dining opportunities for restaurants or possibly a pocket park for residents of the Midtown neighborhood.



Bird's eye view of existing conditions. Image source: © 2012 Google + NCDC

Site Information:

- 1 Bus Stop
- 10 Parallel Parking Spaces
- 4,300 sq ft of "Park"/Green Space
- 10,000 sq ft of Unused Paved Surface

The zones highlighted in green at the intersection of 21st Ave, Broadway, and Division St., indicate areas suitable for new public spaces, becoming key features in the future growth occurring on adjacent parcels. With more commercial and residential development materializing, these new areas will receive an increasing amount of foot traffic, justifying the transition from striped-off pavement to welcoming pedestrian parks and plazas.



Bird's eye view of existing conditions with proposed development locations (in white). Image source: © 2012 Google + NCDC

Envisioning a Pedestrian Plaza

Location:
21st Ave + Broadway
Nashville, TN

The process of reclaiming public space should involve a site study (utilizing the bullet points identified on page 7) to determine the best way to integrate multiple functions. The goal is to create a new place that successfully incorporates pedestrians, cyclists, transit users and automobiles.

The concept for 21st Ave + Broadway is to create a transit hub, incorporating a proposed new streetcar or BRT line from the Broadway/West End corridor, a bicycle station, cafe/restaurant space with abundant outdoor seating and public art.

Mixed-use development adjacent to the plazas should include a mixture of retail, office and residential uses. This will ensure an activated space throughout the day and night, improving its overall function.

The result is a new public space that becomes the heart of the Midtown/Vanderbilt neighborhood.



Panorama view of existing conditions looking West on Broadway. Image source: NCDC

Transforming this unusable traffic island into a functioning public space, requires several significant changes to the existing conditions. Traffic calming is an important tool in creating a pedestrian-friendly environment. Creating a more defined edge to the site, with new barriers, landscaping and different paving materials will serve to drastically alter the relationship between vehicle and pedestrian.

A more dramatic change at the Division Street intersection is called for, including the removal of the one-way portion of the street. The new plaza space integrates the existing pavement, connecting sidewalk to outdoor spaces. This enables and encourages people to use the space more frequently.

Adding a variety of new programs to this urban plaza will promote activity throughout the day and evening. Examples could include a bike station, cafe, outdoor seating, and public art. Incorporating these components into one space, flanked by new mixed-use development, stimulates a unique dynamic to the spatial quality and daily use.

Overall, this series of pedestrian plazas can begin to realize the potential of relationships between the built form and open space.

- 1 EDGE DEFINING PLANTERS
- 2 PUBLIC TRANSIT
- 3 CAFE/BAR/BISTRO
- 4 BIKE STATION
- 5 TRAFFIC CALMING
- 6 OUTDOOR SEATING + PLAZA
- 7 MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT
- 8 PUBLIC ART
- 9 PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIONS
- 10 PERMEABLE PAVING



Rendered plan showing added amenities and improvements. Image source: NCDC

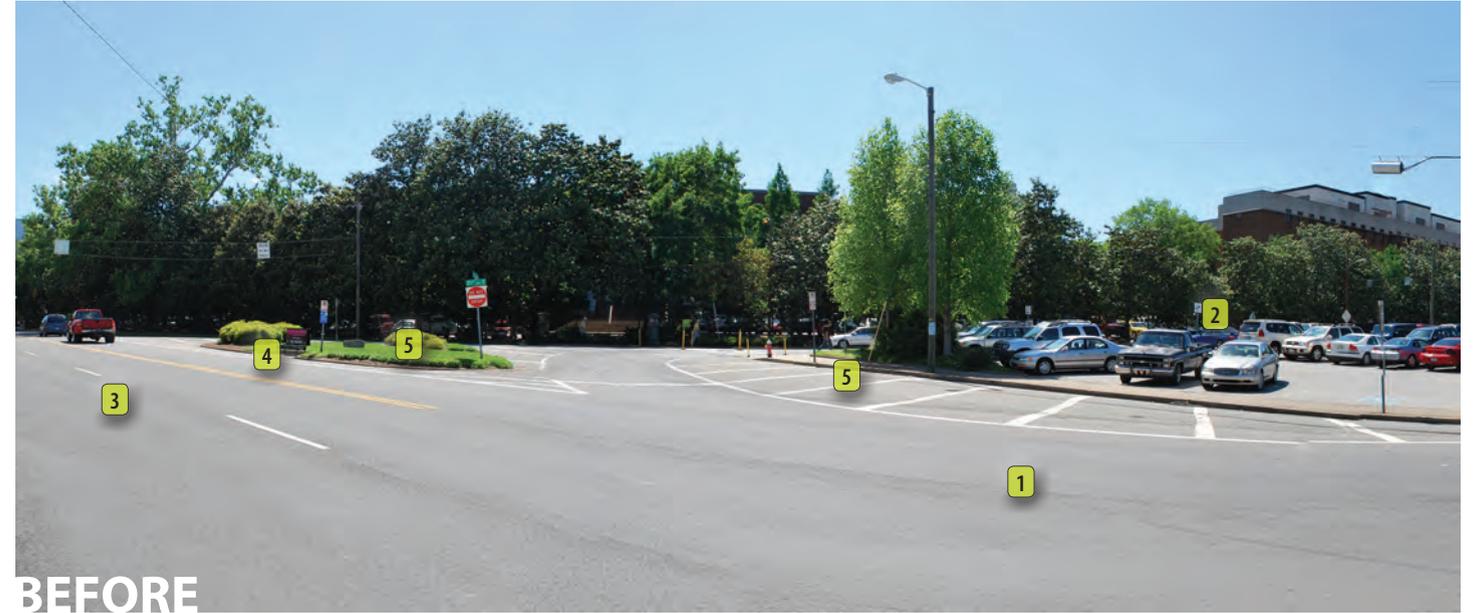
- 1 LACK OF STREET CALMING
- 2 LACK OF DEVELOPMENT
- 3 POOR PEDESTRIAN ACCESS
- 4 POOR TRANSIT LOCATION
- 5 UNDER USED R.O.W.

Catering to Alternate Transit

Currently, the location shown in the adjacent photo serves as a landscaped traffic island as well as a bus stop for the MTA route 7, though lacking any adequate connectivity. With an influx of students, professionals and residents circulating between the Vanderbilt campus and private developments, the foot traffic around this area already proves the need for an increase in pedestrian spaces. Enhancements to this site also means a drastic improvement to the existing bus stop, creating a well-connected and accessible destination.

This site could be an integral part of the recommendations proposed in the *Broadway/West End Corridor Study* as it is the point where the West End line connects with Broadway. The site is envisioned as a compact multi-modal transfer hub. To expand upon this scenario, it will be crucial to include cycling as a third mode of transit. Installing a bike station would allow for a secure transition between modes and encourage cycling as a means of daily transportation and circulation.

- 1 TRAFFIC CALMING
- 2 MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT
- 3 PEDESTRIAN-ONLY ZONE
- 4 SLOW TRANSIT LANE
- 5 OUTDOOR SEATING
- 6 DEDICATED BICYCLE LANE
- 7 PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIONS
- 8 CAFE/BAR/BISTRO
- 9 BICYCLE STATION
- 10 EDGE DEFINING PLANTERS



BEFORE

Existing View of Broadway + 21st Ave split. Image source: NCDC



AFTER

Rendering of a potential scenario for the Broadway + 21st Ave split. Image source: NCDC

Pedestrian Plaza

An important quality of a good pedestrian plaza is safety. Several methods can be applied to obtain a high level of secure space. Separation of vehicular traffic and pedestrian-only zones becomes crucial, with a variety of techniques to employ. Creating barriers, usually in the form of bollards, help to maintain a clear boundary. In some cases, a combination of planters and low concrete walls serve as edge defining barriers while creating semi-private outdoor rooms protected from moving vehicular traffic.

The atmospheric qualities of an urban plaza assist in activating the space and attracting new users. Allowing a small cafe to occupy a portion of the site provides a service to the increased foot traffic and adds a consistent usage throughout the day. Provisions of outdoor seating, both for dining and leisure, encourages a mixed utilization.

This new plaza should be seen and felt as an extension of the sidewalk, the only existing pedestrian space currently. Raising the plaza surface to be on grade with the sidewalks will improve the accessibility, as well as assist in the separation of vehicular traffic from pedestrians. Applying stone, brick, and other textured materials will also improve the pedestrian zone qualities, but also can be used for traffic calming devices to ensure safer connectivity across streets.

- 1 LACK OF STREET CALMING
- 2 LACK OF DEVELOPMENT
- 3 POOR PEDESTRIAN ACCESS
- 4 POOR TRANSIT LOCATION
- 5 UNDER USED R.O.W.



BEFORE

Existing view of Broadway + 21st Ave split. Image source: NCDC

- 1 TRAFFIC CALMING
- 2 MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT
- 3 PEDESTRIAN-ONLY ZONE
- 4 SLOW TRANSIT LANE
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- 10 PERMEABLE PAVING



AFTER

Rendering of a potential scenario for the Broadway + 21st Ave split. Image source: NCDC



OUTDOOR SEATING



BIKE STATION



SPACE DEFINING PLANTERS



PUBLIC ART



CAFE/BAR/BISTRO



TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE



MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT



TRAFFIC CALMING



PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIONS

Top: Times Square, NY, NY. Image source: Sitephocus
Middle: Mission Bay Plaza, San Francisco, CA. Image source: NCDC
Bottom: Mixed Use Development, Seattle, WA. Image source: Joe Mabel

Top: Bike Station, Washington D.C., Image source: Sitephocus
Middle: Greenley Square outdoor cafe, NY, NY. Image source: Sitephocus
Bottom: Traffic calming methods applied to Octavia Blvd, San Francisco, CA. Image source: NCDC

Top: Castro Commons, San Francisco, CA. Image source: NCDC
Middle: Castro Commons, San Francisco, CA. Image source: NCDC
Bottom: Crosswalks, Portland, OR. Image source: NCDC

Toolbox

The components that create successful public plazas can be likened to a “kit of parts” that, when used correctly, produce vibrant public spaces. Careful attention must be given when applying these various tools, ensuring quality of design and functionality. These components can function together in a cohesive plan, creating a new type of an urban room, catering to a wide variety of users in this area.