

# Placemaking Blueprint

Downtown San Diego Partnership  
Placemaking Committee  
February 2021

DOWNTOWN  
**SAN DIEGO**  
PARTNERSHIP



# Acknowledgements

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# CHAPTER 01

**“From street configurations to plaza dynamics to community engagement activities, placemaking is concerned with not only the spaces in our cities but the human interactions that make cities great. It’s all about people, place and connection.” - Rethink Urban**



# Overview

## Background and Purpose

Since 2011, the Downtown San Diego Partnership (Downtown Partnership) has been proactively engaged in placemaking activities with the purpose of enhancing the vitality of Downtown's public realm. These efforts have included advocating for a streamlined placemaking permit process with the City of San Diego, activating Downtown's public spaces through special events, and enhancing the walkability of Downtown's primary pedestrian corridors.

In early 2020, the Partnership convened its inaugural Placemaking Committee, a group of key Downtown stakeholders tasked with developing a strategic plan or "Blueprint" to guide the Downtown Partnership's placemaking efforts through 2025. The Blueprint is intended to be a living document and provide a starting point for how the Downtown Partnership can collaborate with stakeholders and community partners to foster vibrant and memorable public spaces. As circumstances change, the Blueprint is expected to evolve to reflect and address new information and needs.

Four overarching priorities and six broad goals provide the overall structure and direction for the Blueprint. Each goal is associated with specific strategies for implementation over the next one to five years.

NOTE: This Blueprint was developed during the COVID-19 pandemic and reflects the challenges and opportunities associated with activating public spaces during and immediately after the pandemic. However,

the priorities, goals, and strategies identified also look at the recovery period and beyond.



**Anthony Tyson, Artist, Black Lives Matter Banners**

## Why is placemaking important to Downtown San Diego?

Downtown San Diego's parks, plazas, sidewalks, and promenades (the public realm) are where people from diverse backgrounds and experiences meet and interact daily. These spaces are Downtown's front porch and communicate to the world our values and priorities as a community.

Over 60 years ago, urbanist and visionary, Jane Jacobs, made the pronouncement that "downtowns are for people" during a

period, when in her hometown of New York City, leaders were bulldozing neighborhoods to prioritize cars over people.

Like cities around the world, San Diego has had to acknowledge and address the consequences of limited community participation in the planning process. Transforming our public realm into engaging, welcoming places for all San Diegans is one of Downtown's biggest opportunities.

The Downtown Partnership is committed to collaborating with all of Downtown's stakeholders to identify a shared vision for our public realm.



**East Village Mural Installation in Partnership with Concrete and Canvas**



## Downtown San Diego Partnership's Role in Placemaking

The Downtown Partnership - a 501(c)6 member-based nonprofit - is the principal voice and driving force behind the economic prosperity and cultural vitality of Downtown. Our work is guided by the following core values which enable us to effectively achieve our mission.

- Be fun and open-minded with a quirky sense of creativity.
- Pursue growth and learning.
- Build honest relationships and communication.
- Nurture a safe work environment.
- Strive for inclusiveness and diversity.

The Downtown Partnership is a strong advocate for improving the quality of life in Downtown's neighborhoods by creating moments of color, whimsy, and joy through placemaking, and inviting residents and

visitors to find new and exciting reasons to enjoy Downtown. Projects recently completed include Black Lives Matter Broadway Banners, Curbside San Diego COVID-19 pandemic response and Get Out the Vote murals in partnership with Facebook. Additionally, the following Downtown Partnership entities actively engage in placemaking in Downtown.

### Clean and Safe

The Downtown San Diego Partnership provides a public service on behalf of Downtown's neighborhoods (City Center, Columbia, Cortez, East Village, Gaslamp, and Marina) as the managing organization for several special districts in Downtown including the Property and Business Improvement District otherwise known as the Downtown Partnership Clean & Safe Program. Clean & Safe provides essential services beyond those otherwise available from government entities to keep 275 blocks of Downtown neighborhoods clean, safe, and thriving and has done so for more than 20 years.



**GET OUT TO VOTE MURAL**

Clean & Safe includes a homeless outreach team that is committed to reducing Downtown homelessness through connections to appropriate interventions. With funding from the San Diego Housing Commission, the homeless outreach team also administers the successful Family Reunification Program which reconnects unsheltered individuals with their loved ones as a diversion from homelessness.

As an additional benefit to Downtown neighborhoods, the Clean & Safe Program includes a robust community enhancement portfolio of beautification and placemaking projects to enhance the walkability and livability of Downtown.

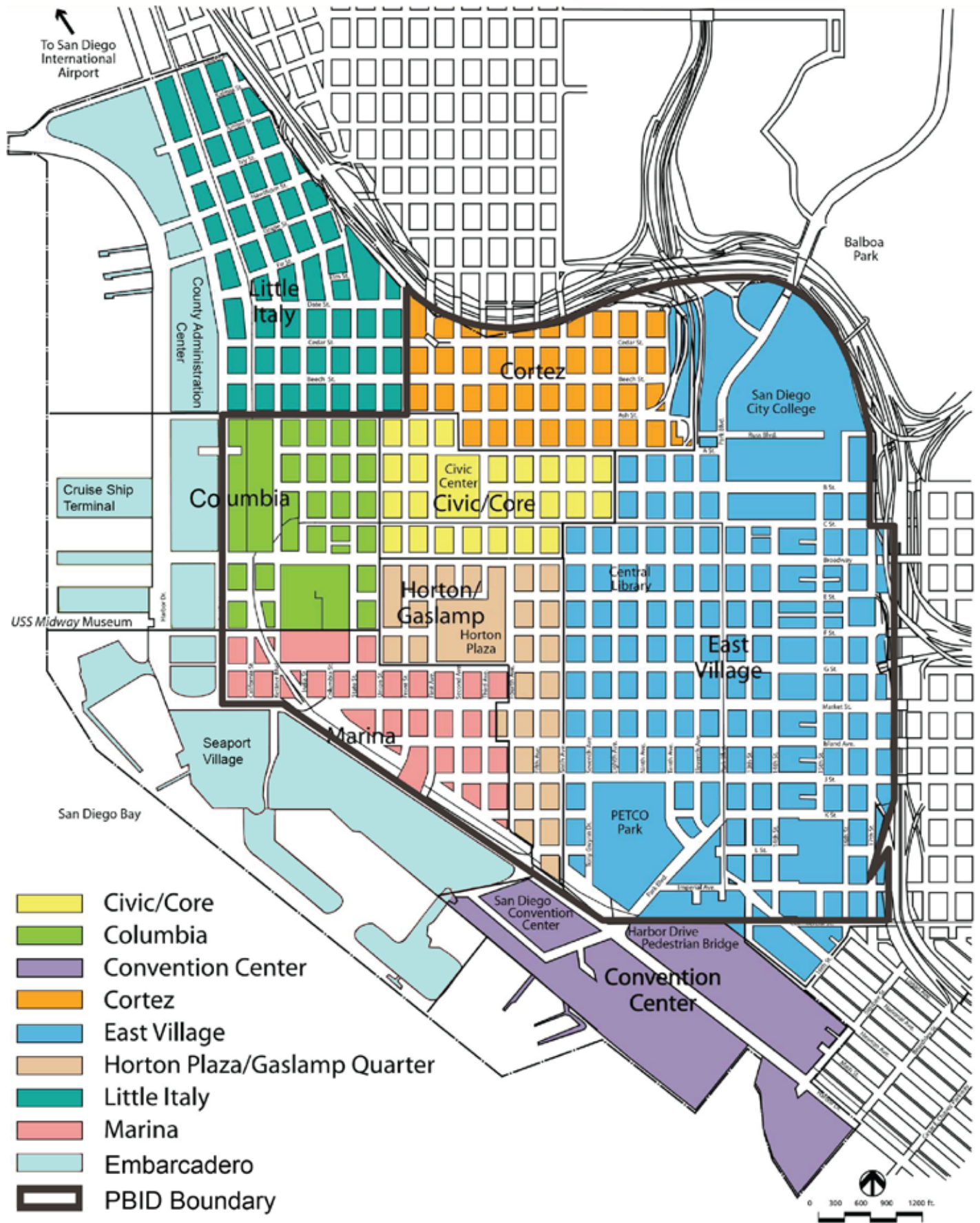
Clean & Safe placemaking projects currently underway include:

- Major Corridor Streetscape Enhancements - Market Street (Marina), Broadway (City Center and Columbia District), and Sixth Avenue (Cortez)
- Downtown Gateways Enhancement
- Holiday Decorations (Marina and Gaslamp)
- Murals (All neighborhoods)
- Storefront Murals (All neighborhoods)
- Neighborhood Banners (City Center, Cortez, Columbia, and Marina)
- Utility Box Art (Columbia, City Center and Marina)
- Utility Box Historical Wraps (Gaslamp)
- Downtown Architectural Walk Interpretive Signage
- Corner Planters (Columbia, Cortez, Marina, and Gaslamp)



**Clean and Safe Landscape Maintenance**





## Downtown Neighborhoods



## City Center Business District

The City Center Business District is one of the special districts managed by the Downtown San Diego Partnership, capitalizing on the Downtown Partnership's resources and connections to bring additional value to City Center businesses. The City Center Business District provides the resources necessary to improve the quality of life and create a vibrant destination for shopping, dining, nightlife, and tourism in the 53 blocks of the district. City Center Business District placemaking projects currently underway include:

- B Street Pedestrian Plaza
- Neighborhood Banners
- B Street Holiday Decorations
- Creative Crosswalks
- Storefront Activation



**City Center Holiday Decor, 2020**



**Proposed B St. Parklet Between 6th and 7th Avenues**

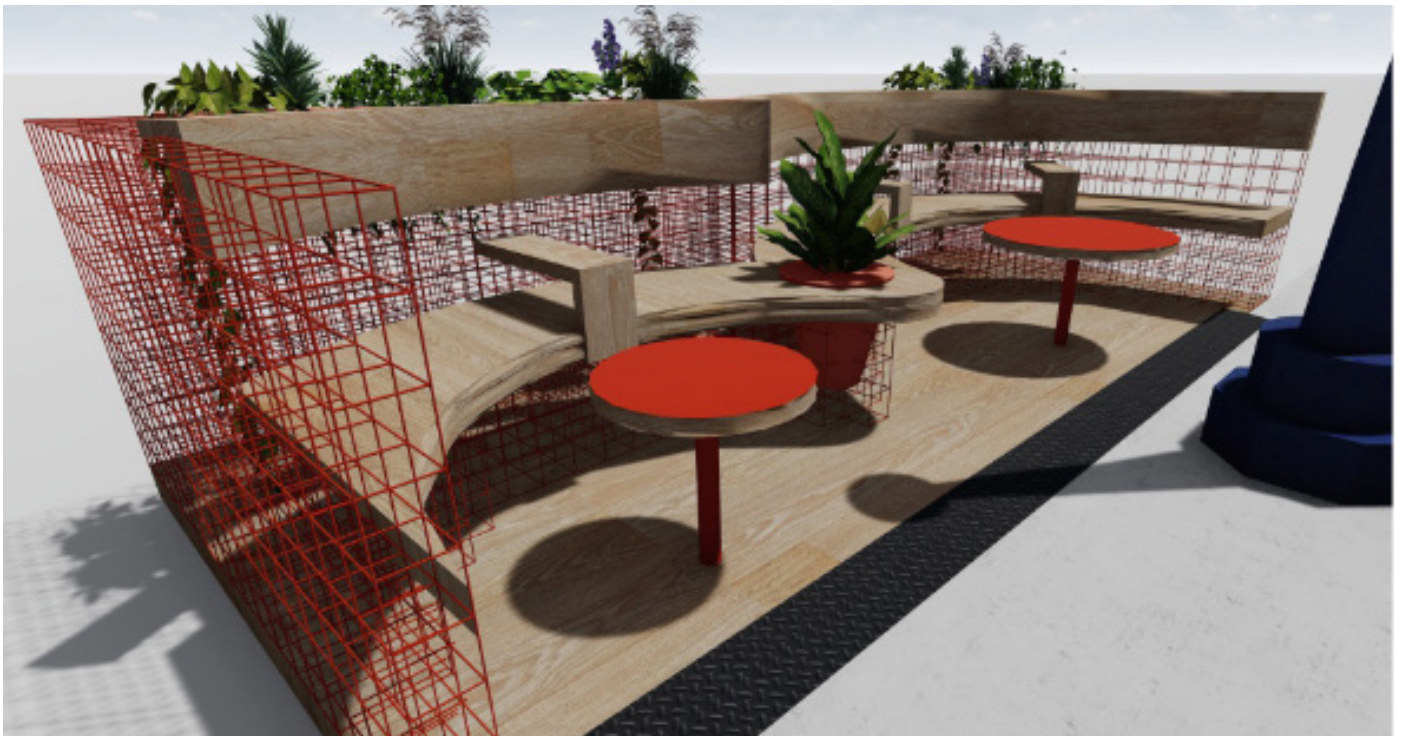
## Columbia Community Foundation

The Columbia Community Foundation, a 501(c)(3), is committed to leveraging the diversity of the Columbia District's commercial, residential, and office uses to create a unique, vibrant, and livable District. Over the past three years the Columbia Community Foundation has initiated place-based strategic initiatives that include:

- Columbia Street Pedestrian Plaza
- Creative Crosswalks
- Art Inspired Bike Racks
- Corridor Pole to Pole Lighting
- Mobility Study



**Columbia District Lighting & Banners**



**Proposed Columbia St. Parklet Between A and B St.**



## Downtown San Diego Partnership Foundation

The Downtown San Diego Partnership Foundation (Foundation) provides staffing and expertise in the management of mobility projects for the Cortez and Marina neighborhoods through the City of San Diego's Neighborhood Parking Program (NPP). The NPP is the mechanism by which parking meter revenue from the Downtown Parking District is disbursed to neighborhood organization for improvements to Downtown parking and mobility.

Foundation placemaking projects currently underway include:

- Curbside San Diego Pedestrian Plaza Program
- Cortez Mobility Study and Implementation
- Sixth Avenue Pole to Pole Lighting
- Discover Cortez Walking Loops
- Cedar Street Corner Planters
- 3rd and Cedar Intersection Mural



**Cortez Corner Planters**



**Discover Cortez Signage**



## Community Partners

The Partnership regularly works with the following Government agencies and neighborhood organizations on the implementation of placemaking projects:

- City of San Diego
- Commission for Arts and Culture
- Civic San Diego
- San Diego Association of Governments
- Metropolitan Transit Agency
- Port of San Diego
- Gaslamp Quarter Association
- East Village Association
- Little Italy Association
- Cortez Hill Active Residents Group
- East Village Residents Group
- Makers Quarter Neighborhood Association
- Balboa Park Conservancy
- Circulate San Diego
- San Diego County Bicycle Coalition



**Curbside Columbia sponsored by U.S. Bank**

## Downtown Planning Framework

Over the previous 20 years several planning initiatives and public open space projects have been undertaken that sought to improve the public realm in Downtown San Diego. Many of those efforts have made successful contributions to creating a vibrant public realm. This section outlines planning initiatives and major public realm projects currently underway or soon to begin. As the Downtown Partnership implements the Blueprint we will seek to build upon the successes of these prior initiatives.

### Downtown's Public Realm Guiding Documents

- [Downtown Community Plan, 2006](#)
- [Downtown Design Guidelines, 2011](#)
- [Downtown San Diego Mobility Plan, 2016](#)
- [City of San Diego 2008 General Plan Update](#)
- [City of San Diego Municipal Code and associated Council Policies](#)
- Centre City Planned District Ordinance (PDO)
- [Marina District Planned District Ordinance \(PDO\), 2007](#)
- Gaslamp District Planned District Ordinance (PDO), 2014
- [City of San Diego Street Design Manual, 2017](#)
- [Centre City Streetscape Manual, 2012](#)
- [Centre City Redevelopment Plan, 2011](#)
- [Neighborhood Design Guidelines, 2003](#)
- Centre City Development Corporation (CCDC) Downtown Focus Plans
- [Comprehensive Parking Plan for Downtown San Diego, 2009](#)
- [Downtown Sustainability Plan, 2010](#)
- [Downtown Lighting Plan, 2012](#)

- [City of San Diego Public Art Master Plan, 2004](#)
- [Civic San Diego Wayfinding Signage, 2013](#)
- [Facade Improvement Program](#)

### Other Reports

- [Imagine Downtown, 2013](#)
- [Update: Imagine Downtown, 2015](#)
- [Port of San Diego Master Plan Update, 2020](#)
- [Downtown Public Open Space Implementation Plan, 2011](#) (Not Adopted)
- [African American Heritage Study, 2004](#)
- Balboa Park Brand Ambassador Guide, 2018
- [San Diego International Airport Arts Master Plan, 2017](#)

### Major Public Space Projects

- [East Village Green \(Estimated completion of Phase 1 - 2022\)](#)
- Children's Park (Estimated completion – 2021)
- [14th St Greenway](#)
- E St Greenway
- Horton Plaza
- [Fifth Avenue "Gaslamp" Promenade](#)
- Broadway Medians Re-Visioning

# Placemaking Survey Results

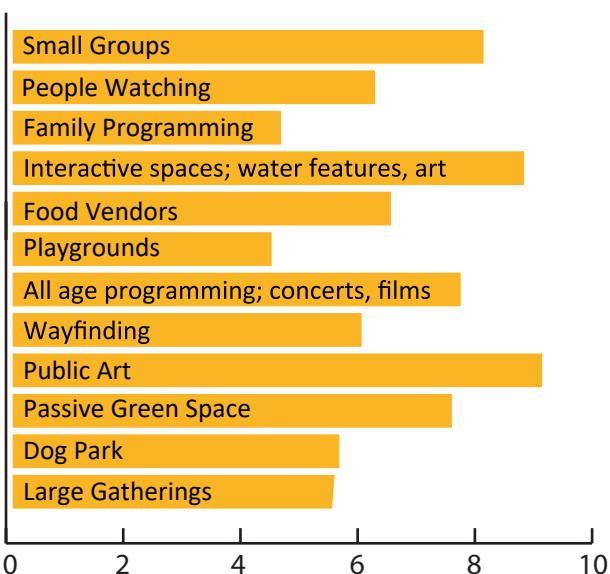
In February 2020 the Placemaking Committee participated in a survey centered around Downtown’s public realm to better understand the Committee’s priorities and help shape the development of the Blueprint.

## Analysis

It is important to note the limited sampling of results, as there are 18 members in the Placemaking Committee who participated in the results and that results could differ with a wider population.

### Question 1

Participants were asked to rank certain activities in order of importance. Overall, no activity appears to be of great or little importance, and all answers are more or less equal. This helps to inform the Blueprint that no activity should be left out or significantly shine over another.

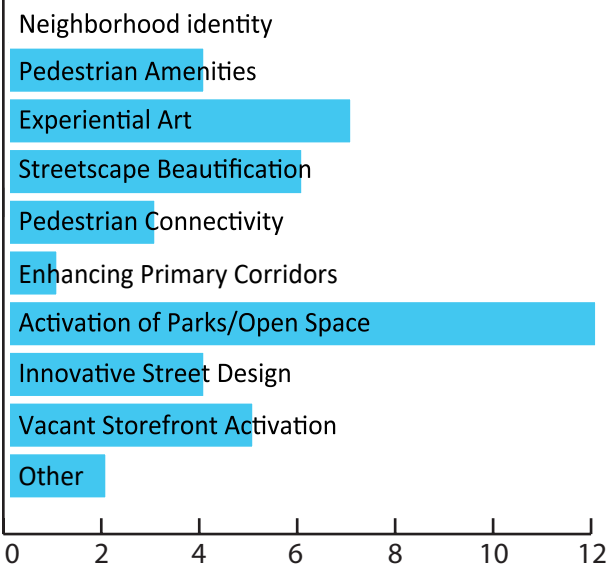


**Question 1. Rank these activities in order of importance to downtown public spaces.**

### Question 2

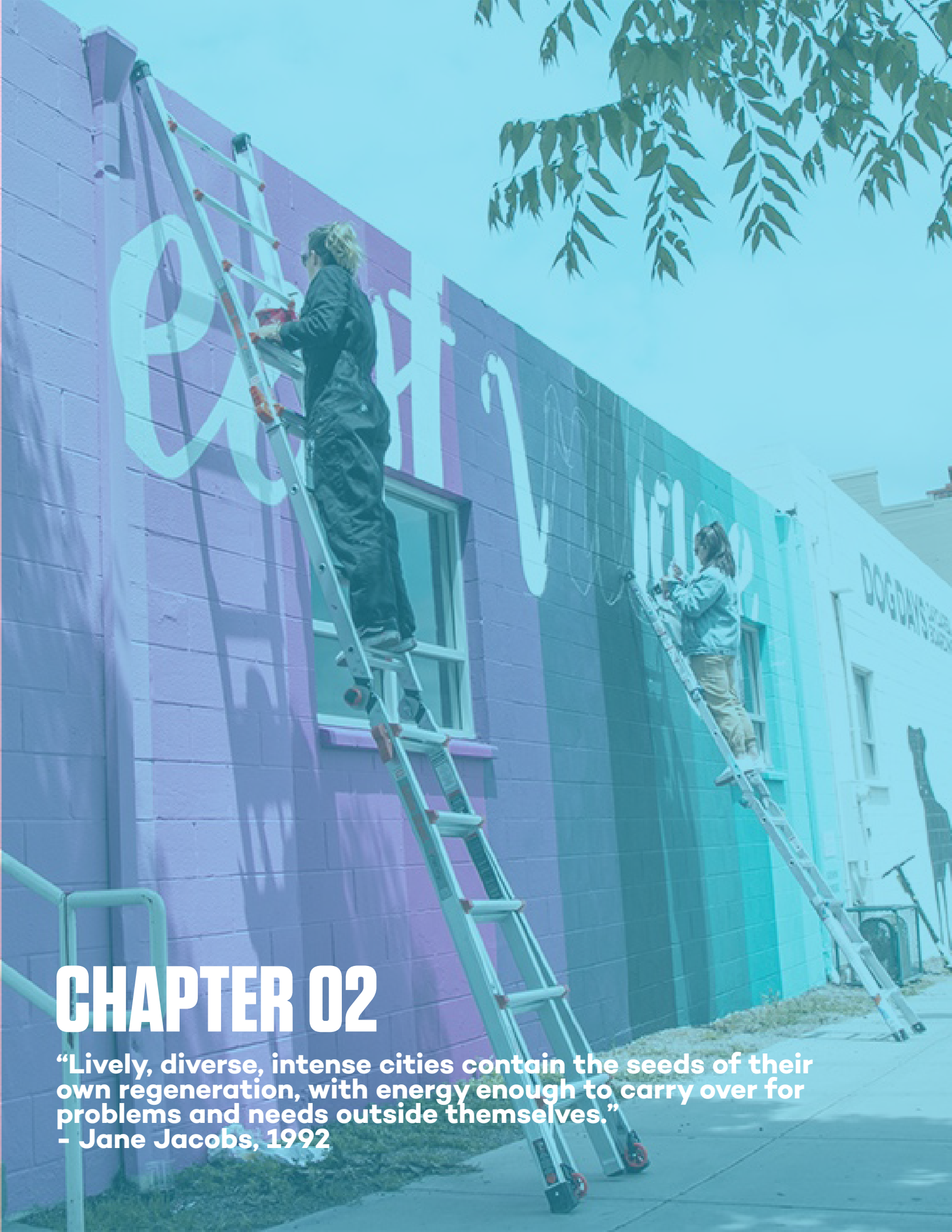
This question was especially important to the development of the blueprint, as committee members give their input as to where they feel the Downtown Partnership can make the greatest impact to the community. Their input is especially valuable. As property owners, board members, and residents they are naturally leaders in the downtown neighborhoods and have a significant voice in community enhancement. Because of our longstanding relationship, committee members are familiar with the Downtown Partnership’s services and what is reachable.

Based on Placemaking Committee input, the Downtown Partnership should heavily focus on parks and open spaces, while also placing importance on experiential art and streetscape beautification. Only two participants selected ‘other’ and specified a focus in a child-friendly city and a focus in sidewalk cleaning.



**Question 2. What placemaking opportunities should DSDP prioritize?**





## CHAPTER 02

**“Lively, diverse, intense cities contain the seeds of their own regeneration, with energy enough to carry over for problems and needs outside themselves.”**  
- Jane Jacobs, 1992

# Goals and Strategies

The priorities, goals, and strategies outlined in this section form the foundation for the Downtown Partnership's placemaking efforts through 2025. The four overarching priorities and six broad goals provide overall structure and direction for the Blueprint. Each goal is associated with specific strategies for implementation over the next one to five years. The Partnership believes the success in achieving these goals will be through adhering to our organization's core values mentioned earlier.

## Priorities

Based on input gathered from the Placemaking Committee, Downtown stakeholders, and previous planning efforts, four priority areas surfaced which are highlighted below.

1. Create a joyful, whimsical, and interesting public realm.
2. Highlight and share the uniqueness of Downtown and its neighborhoods.
3. Improve connections with adjacent communities.
4. Promote inclusivity and social equity in placemaking.

These priorities are reflected in the goals and strategies outlined in the next section.

## Goals

The goals are presented independently; however, they are interconnected and designed to work together towards achieving the key priorities above. The strategies are intended to be illustrative and will be refined by the Downtown Partnership in collaboration with the Placemaking Committee, community partners and Downtown stakeholders.

### Goal 01

Ensure Downtown's parks, plazas, and green spaces are highly amenitized, well maintained and comprehensively programmed.

### Goal 02

Create vibrant and walkable streets.

### Goal 03

Incorporate arts, music, culture, and creativity into the public realm.

### Goal 04

Share the stories of Downtown's unique neighborhoods and diverse people and places.

### Goal 05

Leverage the waterfront and Balboa Park as an integral part of the Downtown experience.

# Goal 01

Ensure Downtown's parks, plazas, and green spaces are highly amenitized, well maintained and comprehensively programmed.

As Downtown continues to grow, its parks, plazas and green spaces must respond and reflect the aspirations and needs of all who do and will call Downtown home. The reimagination of Children's Park and the first phases of the 14th Street Greenway will debut in 2021, and new developments such as Park & Market and Horton Plaza will bring inviting privately owned public spaces to Downtown. As a Downtown, we must support and build upon these important investments to the public realm. Refer to the Strategies table on the next page.



**Grow Urban in partnership with URBAN INTERVENTIONS**



**Movies in the Park, Pantoja Park**



## Strategies

A. Conduct a needs assessment and inventory to identify the types of facilities and venues needed to support a variety of programming in Downtown's parks, plazas, and green spaces.

B. Identify best practices and successful operational models needed to ensure that existing and future parks, plazas, and green spaces in Downtown have a coordinated, sustainable, and high-quality programming and maintenance plan.

C. Advocate for Downtown's parks and open space access through the City of San Diego's Parks Master Plan Update process.

D. Support family-friendly interactive learning features throughout Downtown's public spaces by promoting existing programs, initiatives, and activities, while also creating new ones.

E. Continue support for the Grow Urban tree planting campaign in partnership with URBAN INTERVENTIONS and other community partners.

F. Continue to advocate for the creation of additional public spaces in Downtown, including the Fifth Avenue pedestrian promenade in the Gaslamp Quarter and St. Joseph's Green in Cortez, and identify creative approaches for the creation of additional gathering spaces throughout Downtown.

G. Send out annual survey to residents to learn their perceptions of connectivity, inclusivity, neighborhood identity, and the public realm to help pinpoint our efforts.

H. Engage with the regional placemaking working group and other groups and organizations involved in placemaking, both regionally and nationally, to exchange best practices.

# Goal 02

## Create vibrant and walkable streets.

All Downtown streets should foster an engaging and inspiring walking experience that addresses safety, comfort, shade, and seating. Active, engaging storefronts, along with events and activities, can also help enliven the street scene. Downtown has made great progress in the implementation of the Downtown Community Plan and Mobility Plan. Further efforts to enhance the walkability of Downtown are shown below.



**Columbia Creative Bike Racks**



**Third Avenue and Cedar Street Intersection Mural**

## Strategies

A. Identify specific corridors in each neighborhood for intensified placemaking activities.

B. Continue to implement opportunities for the reimagination of the public realm through creative initiatives such as Curbside San Diego and Discover Cortez wayfinding.

C. In partnership with the City of San Diego and Downtown stakeholders, identify recommendations to improve on the current Placemaking Ordinance, including the ability for pedestrian plazas to be used by businesses for outdoor dining.

D. Partner with property owners to activate vacant storefronts along key corridors.

E. Utilize available Storefront Improvement Program funds to enhance commercial building facades.

F. Continue to implement creative mobility projects, such as creative crosswalks and pedestrian plazas, through the Downtown Parking District's Neighborhood Parking Program.

G. Advocate for continued maintenance and enhancements to Downtown's wayfinding system.

H. Enhance hardscaped and abandoned areas, especially along Downtown's gateways.

I. Continue to advocate and support the implementation of Downtown's green streets network along 14th Street and E Street.

J. Continue to inventory the street tree canopy in support of Grow Urban.



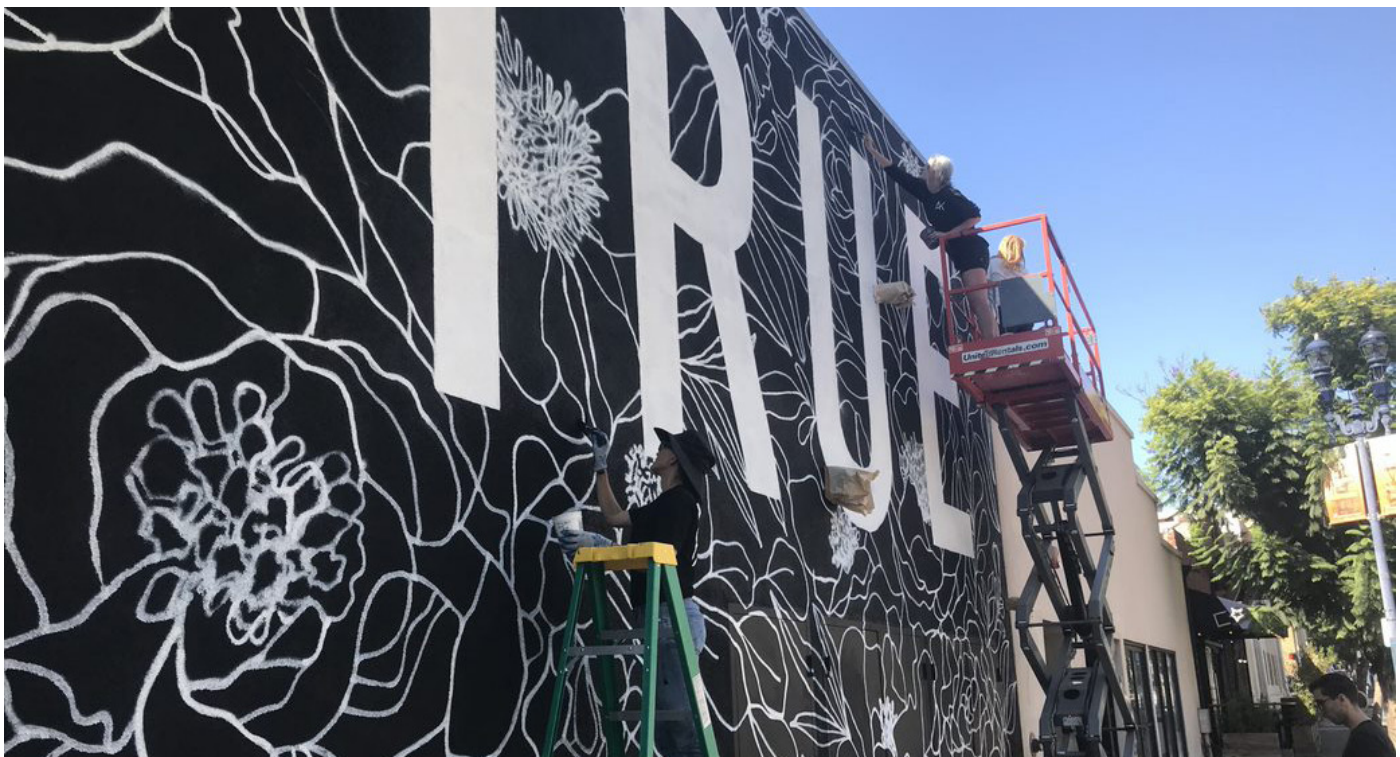
# Goal 03

## Incorporate arts, music, culture, and creativity into the public realm.

Downtown's mix of residential and commercial uses along with its cultural institutions and performing arts venues make it ripe for an arts-rich, creative public realm experience. However, it often is challenging for arts and cultural institutions to successfully navigate the permitting process and create these experiences. An integrated approach to activating Downtown's public spaces will be key to fostering cultural diversity and showcasing San Diego's creative talent.



**Temporary COVID-19 Storefront Mural**



**Ladies Who Paint Mural**

## Strategies

A. Work with the City of San Diego to develop a pilot program that would streamline the approval process for arts and culture programming at specific public spaces in Downtown.

B. Promote and advance an inclusive public realm through highlighting local artists and culturally diverse programming, beginning with implementation of a banner program commemorating the lives of prominent and influential Black San Diegans along Martin Luther King Jr. Promenade.

C. Engage Downtown business organizations, cultural institutions and private entities to identify a comprehensive approach to activating Downtown's parks and privately-owned public spaces. The planning process should address the following:

- Identify the needs of cultural and arts organizations in the programming of public spaces.
- Identify a sustainable program management model.
- Identify a community outreach and communications strategy.
- Identify a sustainable funding model.

D. Advocate for additional artistic opportunities using advertising as a primary funding mechanism.

E. Support the development of a contemporary art and performance festival.

F. Leverage existing initiatives and collaborate with community partners, ranging from hyper-local non-profits, arts and cultural institutions and groups, and businesses to program and activate open spaces.

G. Engage and partner with Downtown's educational institutions (e.g., Urban Discovery Academy, e3 Civic High School, San Diego City College, and NewSchool of Architecture) on placemaking.



# Goal 04

## Share the stories of Downtown's unique neighborhoods and diverse people and places.

Each of Downtown's neighborhoods (Columbia District, City Center, Cortez, East Village, Gaslamp Quarter, Little Italy, and Marina) have a unique history and identity. It will be critical that each neighborhood's qualities and character be reflected in marketing and communications by the Downtown Partnership. As part of

the development for the Blueprint, the Placemaking Committee has begun initial outreach to key stakeholders in each neighborhood. Additional community input will be needed to have the best picture of both what defines our neighborhoods now and how the community hopes to see them in the future.



**Columbia District Gateway Landscaping**



## Strategies

A. Conduct an online community stakeholder survey to seek input and challenge assumptions gleaned from initial stakeholder outreach.

B. Using the community input gathered from Strategy A above, develop neighborhood identity profiles that articulate the brand identity and unique characteristics of each of Downtown's neighborhoods (City Center, Columbia, Cortez, East Village, Gaslamp, Little Italy, Marina, Balboa Park and the waterfront) with the goal of creating greater consistency when marketing Downtown as a whole.

C. Integrate the unique identity of Downtown's neighborhoods into placemaking projects and programming such as the creation of a "Discover Downtown" initiative to highlight "hidden gems" in all Downtown neighborhoods.

D. Use the Partnership's communications platforms to document and tell the story of Downtown's cultural assets and unique neighborhoods, to help cultivate a shared understanding and appreciation of Downtown San Diego.



**Marina Utility Box Art**



**Gaslamp Utility Box Wrap**

# Goal 05

## Leverage Balboa Park, the waterfront and Little Italy as an integral part of the Downtown experience.

Balboa Park is one of the city's most cherished and iconic assets, the waterfront is a magnet for residents and visitors year-round, and Little Italy is a neighborhood with a strong identity populated with

restaurants and bars. However, these three neighborhoods are not optimally integrated into the Downtown experience. There is great potential to improve connections and expand enjoyment of both places.



**Seaport Village Beach Lounge**



## Strategies

A. Support the Port of San Diego's Master Plan Update, North Embarcadero, with added pedestrian and mobility enhancements.

B. Support the continued implementation of the Park to Bay Plan and similar projects that improve pedestrian access between Balboa Park, Downtown and the waterfront.

C. Collaborate on placemaking activities with cultural institutions and private entities located adjacent to Downtown including but not limited to Balboa Park Cultural Partnership, San Diego International Airport, Seaport Village, IQHQ, and Port of San Diego.

D. Collaborate with adjacent neighborhoods such as Barrio Logan, Sherman Heights, and Bankers Hill on placemaking initiatives.



**Bayshore Bikeway**





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