



Montgomery County's Unique Places

Analysis of public places and buildings in the county with a unique expression of design, arts and culture



Analysis of Places with unique expression of Design, Arts, and Culture

Goal

To explore places across the county where design, arts and culture are expressed in unique ways. By analyzing these places, we outlined principles for the design and implementation of public spaces and civic buildings that can be used to create great places in different environments throughout the county.

Methodology

Inspired from the "North of the Water" study about Toronto's public realm, we analyzed how people use space and navigate within and around it. We identified behaviors shared by multiple participants. By looking at how participants behaved in public spaces, we gained insight into their motivations and objectives, as well as what was driving their decision-making. We used the following techniques for our analysis.

Understanding Behavior Modes

A combination of the following six behavior modes were observed amongst users, despite differences in age, gender etc. Users in each space displayed a different subset of these behavior modes.

1. **Serenity seeking:** When I'm serenity seeking, public space is an escape from the everyday.
2. **Discovering:** When I'm discovering, public space is a way to have new experiences and learn new things.
3. **Gathering:** When I'm gathering, public space is a place where I got to meet other people.
4. **Spectacle seeking:** When I'm spectacle seeking, public space is where I go to take part in an event.
5. **Wearing kid goggles:** When I'm wearing kid goggles, public space is my favorite babysitter.
6. **Trip chaining:** When I'm trip chaining, public space is a one-stop shop for me to run errands, rest and get to my next destination.



2. Outlining Place Observations

We documented what makes a place what it is. What is unique about it. How is it composed and what are its essential elements.

3. What works well?

We identified ways in which design, arts and culture were successfully expressed in a place. What made the space or building attractive to users and allowed them to spend more time within it.

4. What is missing?

We noted what could be added, improved or removed from a space to make it more attractive to users.

5. Summary of Lessons Learned

We noted what could be added, improved or removed from a space to make it more attractive to users. These lessons can be broadly applied to several types of public spaces and civic buildings.



Analysis of Places with unique expression of Design, Arts, and Culture

With a goal of observing places representative of the range of cultures and experiences within the county, the following locations were identified as locations for analysis:

Park:

Brookside Gardens

Urban Center:

Silver Spring Civic Plaza and Ellsworth Drive

Agricultural Land:

Rocklands Winery
Homestead Farm

Institutional Building:

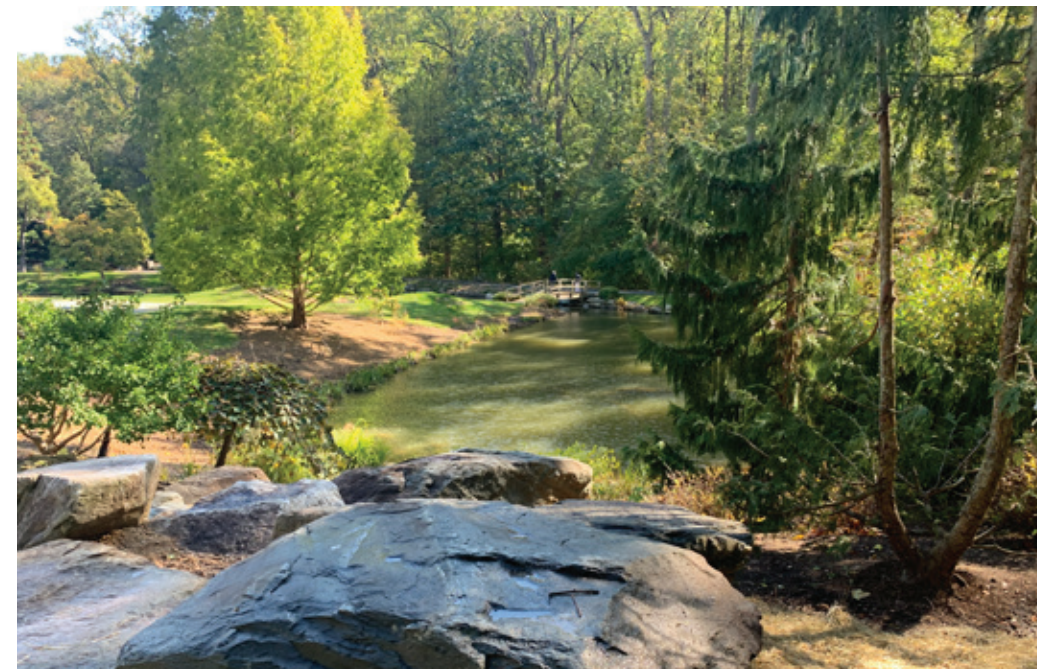
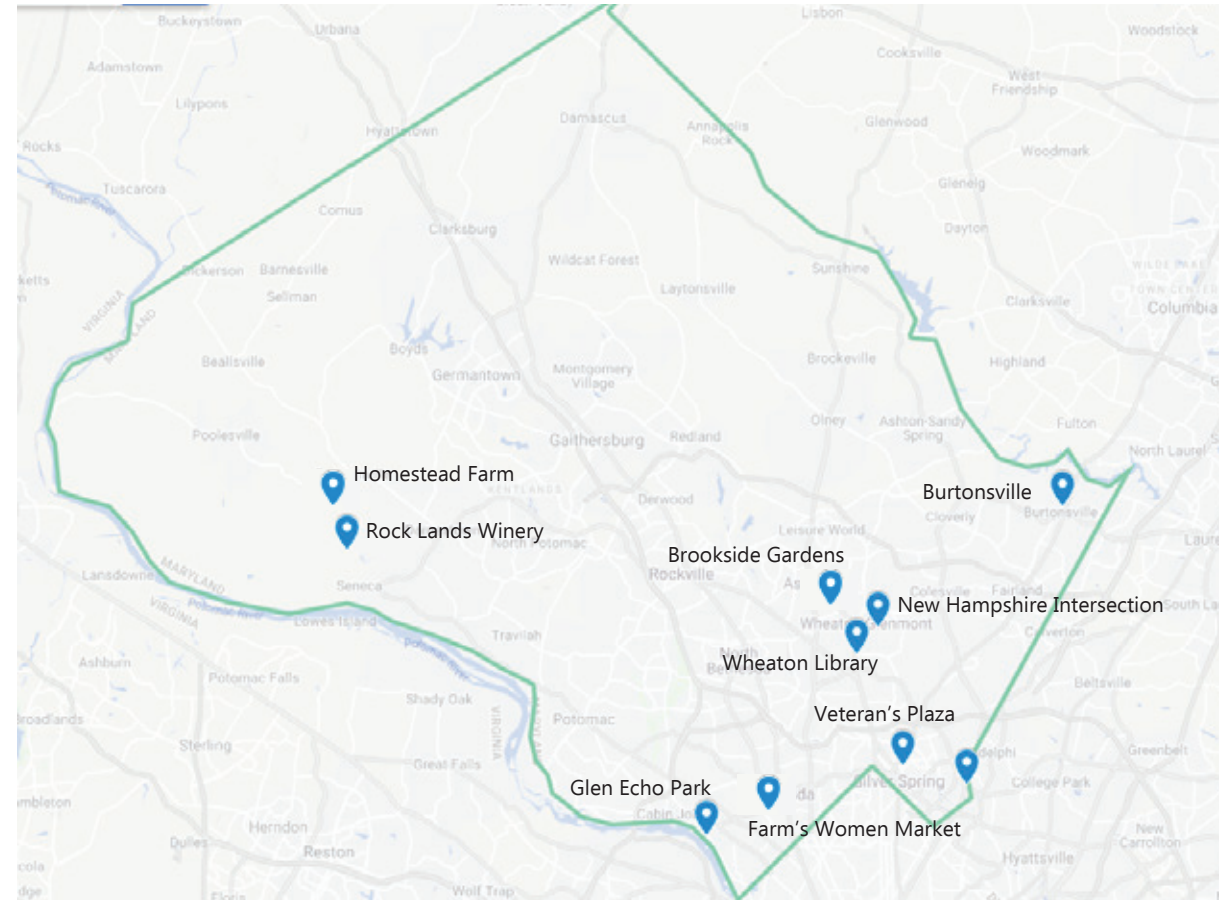
Wheaton Library and Recreational Center

Historic Places:

Glen Echo Park
Bethesda Farm Womens' Market

Informal Gathering Places:

Burtonsville Placemaking Event
Intersection of University Boulevard and New Hampshire Avenue.



Agricultural Land: Rocklands Farm/ Winery

SUMMARY

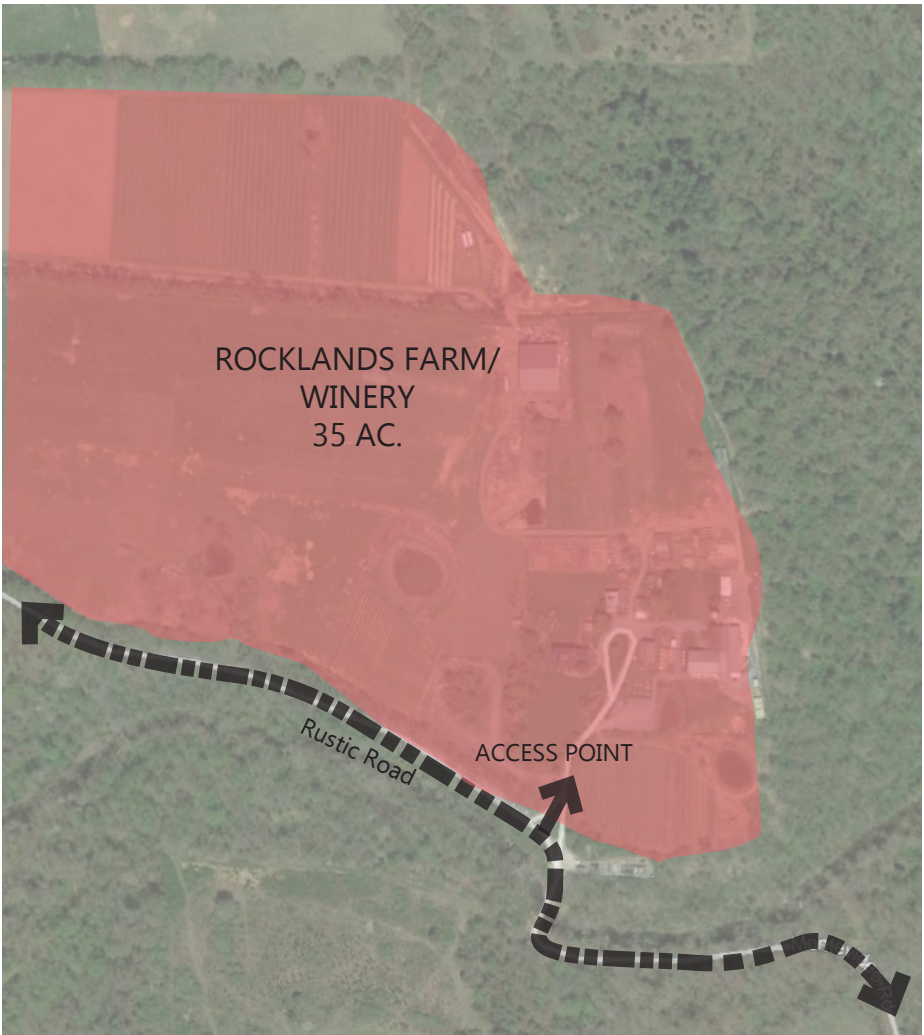
Rocklands Farm is a small-scale, multi-faceted working farm/ winery that encourages connection and exploration to local agriculture, nature, and culture. Through a diverse assortment of programming and activities, visitors are invited to relax and linger in a family friendly space, connect with agriculture and nature, and escape to a serene and unique space.

BEHAVIOR MODES OF USERS

- Serenity seeking
- Discovering
- Spectacle seeking
- Wearing kid goggles

PLACE OBSERVATIONS

- An operational farm that includes livestock, waterfowl, an extensive flower garden, winery, food trucks, and communal gathering areas.
- A diverse and interesting space that engages with its history via the utilization of historic farm buildings for commercial use and through active farming operation.
- An extensive series of outdoor rooms that invite visitors to explore and linger in varied environments.
- A diversity of programming options and business ventures to cater to different needs and desires for both visitors and the farming operation.



Aerial Photo



Site Context



Rocklands Access Point



Montevideo Rustic Road and its Bridge

Agricultural Land: Rocklands Farm/ Winery

WHAT WORKS WELL

- The novelty of exploring and experiencing a working farm and winery.
- An interesting and varied environment invites the visitor to explore, while also providing amenities (bathrooms, food options, etc.) that allow visitors to extend their stay.
- The scale and design of the space is intimate and allows for engagement with the narrative of the place.
- Diverse programming of space draws in a wide variety of visitors.

WHAT IS MISSING

- No commercial kitchen space for more permanent food offerings.
- No hard sewerage infrastructure, making expansion of operations difficult.
- No transit access or pedestrian connectivity; limited bike access.
- Lack of informational signage that tells users about the history of the farm.

LESSONS LEARNED

- A diversity of programming is good for both, the efficient use of a place and businesses that operate from it.
- Educational programming enhances the business and paints a story of modern-day agriculture that allows visitors to engage with farming and nature.
- Unstructured exposure to nature creates an interesting and unique experience for visitors.
- Vernacular design and adaptive re-use of buildings creates and preserves a unique aesthetic that enhances the visitor experience.



Wine Production Area



Wine Tasting in the historic barn



Historic Farm House - wedding venue



Flower garden

Agricultural Land: Homestead Farm

SUMMARY

Homestead Farm is a large pick-your-own farm with a diverse array of agritourism elements including a farmers market, country kitchen, petting zoo, hay rides, and others. The farm can accommodate large groups of people and is structured to create a specific experience for visitors (engagement and exposure to the farming industry, paired with pick-your-own experiences).

BEHAVIOR MODES OF USERS

Serenity seeking
Discovering
Spectacle seeking
Wearing kid goggles

PLACE OBSERVATIONS

- A large working farm with an extensive commercial operation geared towards public participation in agriculture via apple & pumpkin picking and other seasonal activities.
- Large marketplace full of fall fruits and vegetables.
- Large crowds of people from all age groups participating in pick-your-own activities and engaging with farm animals in the petting zoo area.

WHAT WORKS WELL

- Consistent architectural style and public space design contributes to the aesthetic of the place.
- Lightly structured exploration of the farm allows visitors to experience the farm in personal ways.
- Exposure to the working farm creates an interesting and unique experience, beyond the more commercial offerings.
- Large communal areas allow for mixing and mingling between visitors.
- Layout of parking and circulation can handle large crowds successfully.



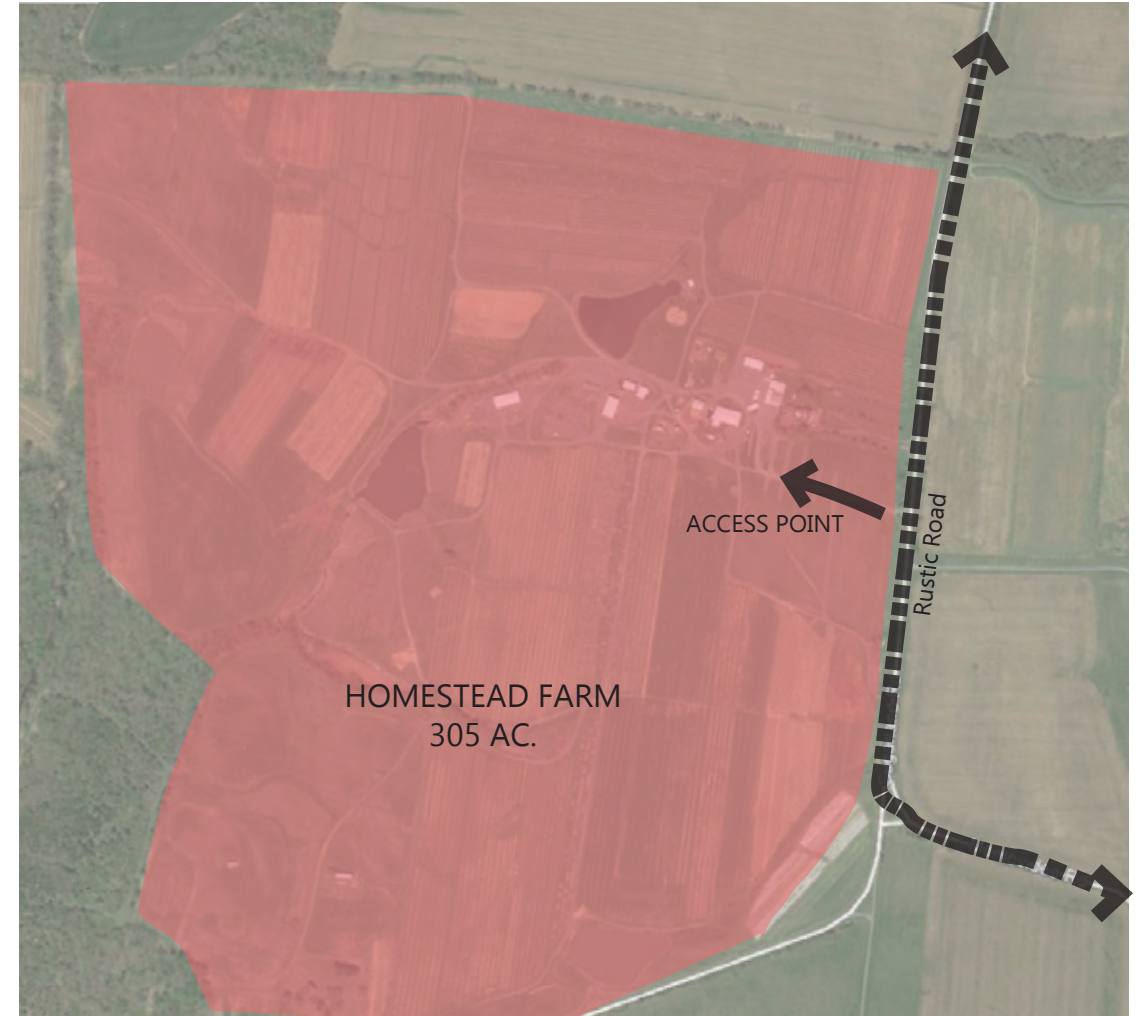
Homestead Parking Entrance



Chickens cage



Portable Rest Rooms



Aerial Photo



Homestead Entry Point

Agricultural Land: Homestead Farm

WHAT IS MISSING

- Pedestrian movement throughout the area is not overtly clear.
- A singular focus on activities for young children prevents older visitors from staying longer at the farm.
- Lack of a historical narrative of the farm.
- Few shaded spaces or visitor areas of refuge around the farm and there is a lack of specific outdoor “rooms”.
- Initial arrival point from Rustic Road is dominated by parking and does not create a sense of arrival.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Consistent design creates a unified space and helps create an identity for the overall farm.
- Exposure to nature and unique elements (i.e. farming) creates an interesting experience for all visitors.
- Arrival points are key in curating an experience, particularly to create an immediate “sense of discovery” in a place.
- Diverse activities for different age groups are important .
- Large spaces can quickly become overwhelming and cause visitors to lose interest. Smaller, more intimate spaces that have “rooms” create a more welcoming experience.
- Structure, organization, and programming of a space impacts how people perceive it. The way a space is laid out can impact whether people rush through it or stay longer.



Hayride and Animals



Indoor Market



Outdoor Market



Pumpkin Patch

Park: Brookside Gardens

SUMMARY

Brookside Gardens is a 50-acre public garden located in the Wheaton Regional Park. Brookside consists of multiple designed gardens in a variety of styles and themes. The gardens are free to the public and invite visitors to explore the varied landscapes, connect with nature, and relax in a quiet and bucolic space. Brookside also hosts various events throughout the year and runs a plethora of educational programs for all ages around nature, plants, and gardens.

BEHAVIOR MODES OF USERS

Serenity seeking
Discovering
Gathering

PLACE OBSERVATIONS

- An elegant organization of space that creates balanced serene experiences and quiet moments.
- "Garden rooms" that create a sense of intimacy and connection to nature, while simultaneously inviting visitors to continue exploration of the space.
- A wide-ranging sensory environment that engages visitors through a diversity of plant types and natural exhibits.
- Multiple event and educational spaces that can be utilized for a variety of different event and educational programs.
- A well designed parking lot where cars can be stored within a garden like setting.



Aerial Photo



Conservatory's Entrance at 1500 Glenallen Ave.



Brookside Gardens Map



Main Parking Lot and Drop off area

Park: Brookside Gardens

WHAT WORKS WELL

- Walking paths that guide visitors through the gardens and invite them to explore the varied environments.
- A variety of educational programs for all ages and events that engage visitors in seasonal activities.
- Nature as the main element of art and design in the space.
- Different garden styles and design elements that create varied aesthetics and provide reasons for repeat visits.

WHAT IS MISSING

- General activities for children in the gardens, outside of the structured education programs.
- A more detailed and standalone narrative of the gardens, plants, and history of the space and garden design.
- Multi-modal transit connections that bring visitors to the gardens.

LESSONS LEARNED

- A variety of programming is needed to engage users of all ages. Without specialized programming, naturalized parks mostly attract older adults.
- Interesting designs entice visitors to explore while connected spaces encourage longer stays through continuous discovery.
- Looped circulation is particularly effective in getting people to walk longer in park like settings.
- An environment that engages visitors' senses of sight, sense, smell and touch invites people to have fun and engage in a space.
- Strong advertising campaigns can help to bring people to a space and engage a different population than may normally be reached.



Japanese Tea Garden Pavilion



Perennial Gardens



Visitor Center Outdoor Seating Area



Conservatory

Urban Plaza: Ellsworth Dr. & Veteran Plaza

SUMMARY

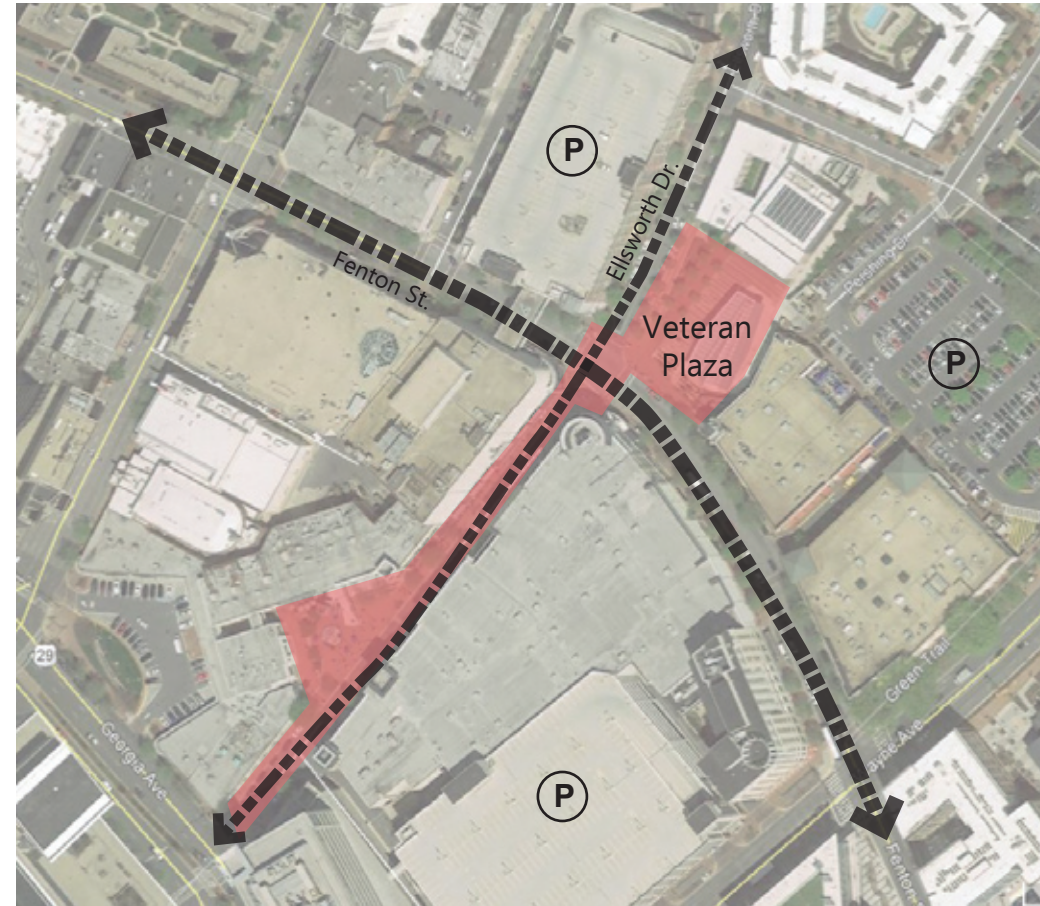
The Silver Spring Civic Plaza and Ellsworth Drive corridor is the center of Downtown Silver Spring. Through a variety of shops, restaurants, programming, and open space, the space caters to a diverse array of people who access the site via car or public transit. Observing the interactions within these spaces reveals a strong sense of community amongst people of diverse backgrounds enjoying all that the space has to offer.

BEHAVIOR MODES OF USERS

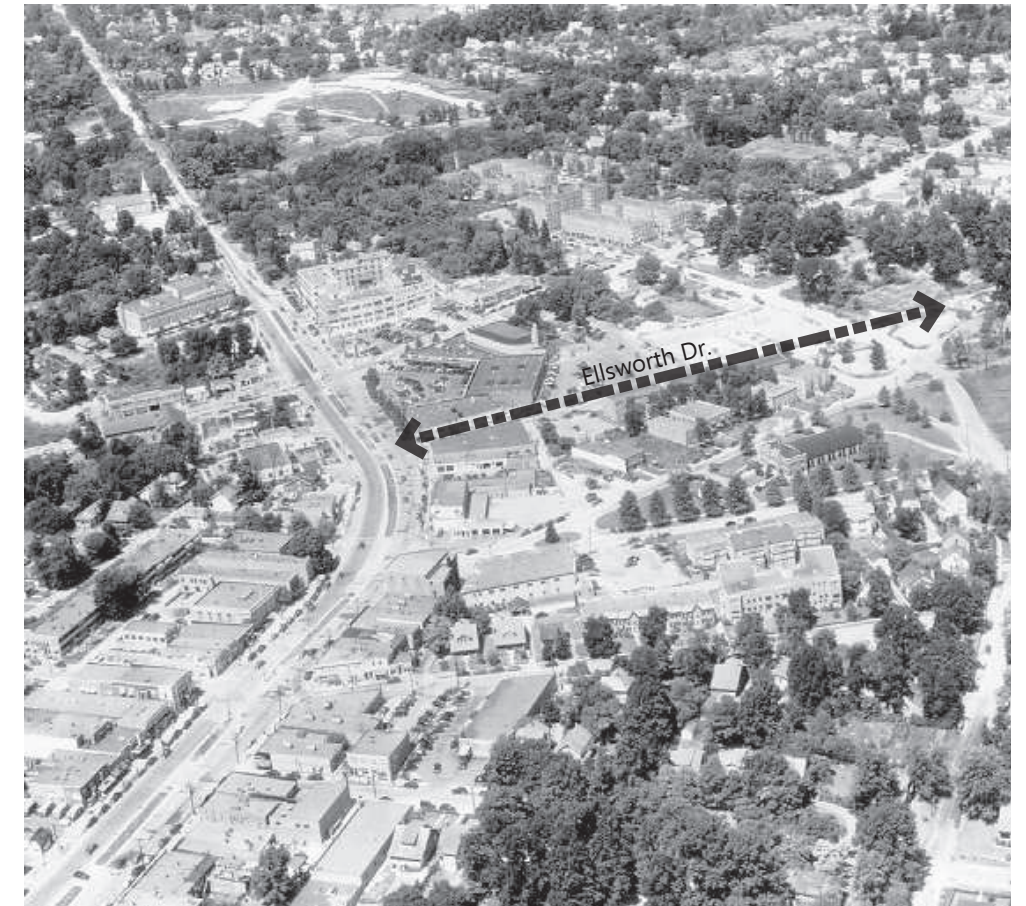
Spectacle seeking
Trip Chaining
Gathering

PLACE OBSERVATIONS

- A civic building and plaza that accommodate public programming, gathering and community events.
- A retail corridor that values the pedestrian experience and offers a variety of shops and restaurants. Vehicle access is restricted, though the space remains very accessible.
- Ellsworth Drive provides connection to nearby mall, civic plaza, and kid friendly activities.
- A diverse set of users cohabiting the space while running errands, resting in shaded seating areas, and enjoying the recreational activities such as the splash pad and ice rink.



Aerial Photo



Historic Image from the 1960's



Summer Festival



Ice Skating Rink

Urban Plaza: Ellsworth Dr. & Veteran Plaza

WHAT WORKS WELL

- The variety of activities and retail make this a one stop, trip chaining space that has something to offer for everyone.
- The location enables the space to be highly accessible, while keeping traffic from dominating the pedestrian experience.
- Diversity of users and a sense of community while using the space is very evident.
- People from different backgrounds feel comfortable expressing their cultures and interests within the public space.

WHAT IS MISSING

- Hardscape dominates – not much green space for kids and adults.
- When a major event is not happening, the plaza can feel empty and uninviting.
- Civic Plaza space is underused during the summer.
- Blank walls along Ellsworth Avenue make parts of the experience less desirable. Large stores contribute to inactive frontages.
- Lack of bike parking.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Continued programming over time can help create a sense of community within an area.
- Successful public spaces are accessible by multiple modes of travel, including walking, biking, transit and driving.
- Car parking does not have to be a central feature of a public space to make it appear accessible to all.
- Co-locating commercial uses with civic buildings can help anchor public spaces and make them successful.



Ellsworth Plaza and Water Fountain



Ellsworth Drive Pedestrian Areas



Festival in Veteran's Plaza



Civic Building

Civic Building: Wheaton Library and Recreational Center

SUMMARY

Wheaton Library and Recreational Center is a newly opened public facility. The building has a strong presence along Georgia Ave with underground parking as well as a drop-off area at the back. A large park and playground are co-located near the facility. The building itself consists of a large public library and recreation center with classrooms and meeting spaces on the upper levels.

BEHAVIOR MODES OF USERS

Spectacle seeking
Discovering
Gathering
Wearing Kid Goggles

PLACE OBSERVATIONS

- Clear circulation from front to back of the building with lobby and information desk located in a tall central volume.
- Large groups of people of all ages participating in sporting activities as well as patronizing the library.
- Lots of kids and their parents using the outdoor playground area.
- People arriving on foot, using the bus or driving to the location.



Aerial Photo



Drop off area at the back and stairs to underground parking



Rendering Showing Building Along Georgia Avenue



Co-located Wheaton Park

Civic Building: Wheaton Library and Recreational Center

WHAT WORKS WELL

- Presence on a major corridor (Georgia Ave) with architectural frontage that creates a better pedestrian experience as well as a strong urban corner at the intersection.
- Co-location of library and recreational center as well as an open space/ park with playground equipment.
- Easy parking as well as the drop-off area at the back of the building do not detract from the building's civic presence.
- Use of vibrant colors in the building façade and playful architecture and landscaping elements.

WHAT IS MISSING

- No outdoor seating arrangement in the park located on north side of the building.
- There is almost no buffer between this civic use and the adjacent existing single-family homes.
- There is no special streetscape along Georgia Ave to create a protected spaces for pedestrians and bikers.
- There is no reference to local culture and history of Wheaton in the design of the building and landscape.
- Lack of public art.
- There are lot of traditional classroom spaces, but building lacks flexible spaces for multi-purpose activities.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Civic buildings must celebrate local culture and history through their architecture, landscape and public art elements.
- Old and mature trees when saved can anchor public spaces.
- Playgrounds for kids should include naturalized elements that expose children to nature and instill a sense of discovery.



Library



Multi- purpose Athletic Facility



Playground and Green Area along Georgia Ave.



Main Entrance Lobby

Historic Places: Glen Echo Park

SUMMARY

Glen Echo Park is an arts and cultural center located in Glen Echo, Maryland. A national park, Glen Echo was originally founded as part of the Chautauqua movement in the 1890s, and later became a popular local amusement park. In recent history, Glen Echo has become a local arts and culture center that includes 13 local resident artists, a multitude of arts and culture programming, as well as activities for children with a petting zoo and discovery area, as well as a restored 1920s carousel. Today, Glen Echo Park allows visitors to engage in arts and cultural activities in a historic setting that connects visitors to the areas past.

BEHAVIOR MODES OF USERS

Serenity seeking
Spectacle Seeking
Discovering
Gathering

PLACE OBSERVATIONS

- A thriving local arts scene that includes 13 local resident artists and arts organizations that offer classes and events to the general public.
- Historic re-use of original Glen Echo Park buildings and rides, including a 1920s era carousel.
- A unique setting where public spaces and activities are tucked and nestled into the natural landscape.
- Communal gathering places for large groups in mixed settings and locations.
- Connection to the adjacent Clara Barton National Historic Site.



Aerial Photo



Historic Image



Historic Image



Historic Image

Historic Places: Glen Echo Park

WHAT WORKS WELL

- The continued use and maintenance of historic buildings and culturally significant areas in a natural setting.
- An immersive arts experience that allows visitors and patrons to participate in art, music, dancing and other cultural activities.
- Storytelling of the park's past and its significance to the region.
- The layout of the historic park invites visitors to explore and creates a sense of discovery when moving through the space.

WHAT IS MISSING

- Outdoor programming for children and activities for young adults. Current programming is geared towards an older audience.
- Some buildings have a weathered look which, while contributing to the historic character of the place, make parts of the park appear shabby and uninviting.
- Despite its presence along MacArthur Boulevard and Clara Barton Parkway, the space does not draw in motorists and the parking for both the Park and the nearby Clara Barton House is hard to find.
- While the facility is located in a natural setting, the broader connection to the surrounding parkland and water is unclear.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Historic assets in Montgomery County need continued support and assistance to both grow and thrive.
- Historic places can become anchors for broad community development.
- Arts and cultural activities need to be accessible and affordable for all.
- Historical areas are often in obscure places which requires special attention to marketing and wayfinding to ensure their successful operations.
- Support for local artists creates opportunities for people to engage in cultural activities that may otherwise be inaccessible.



Playground



Picnic area



History Plaque



Glassworks Studio

Historic Places: Bethesda Farm Women's Market

SUMMARY

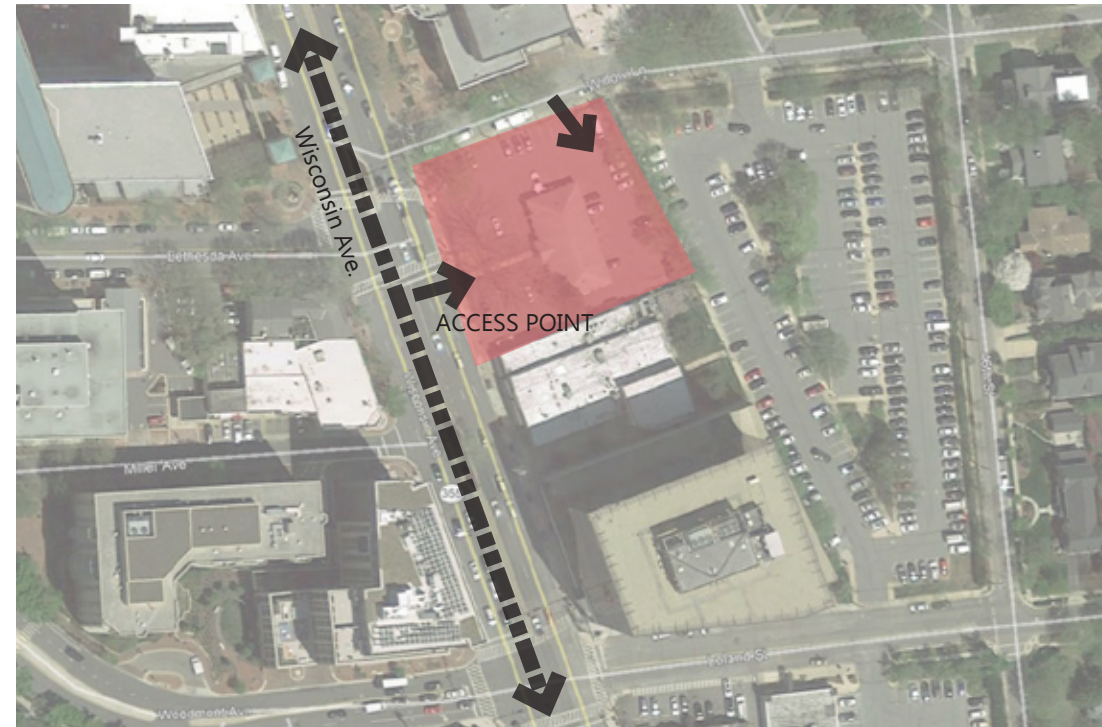
The Bethesda Farm Women's Market is a small, 1-story building on the edge of a growing Downtown Bethesda. This market, founded in 1932, hosts a flea market in its front lot, and stalls for local vendors and farmers within its walls. Local workers are also welcome to food trucks that are stationed in its parking lot during the week. The local vendors have regular interactions with their patrons, which lends to the strong sense of community within this place. Due to both its form and history, the Farm Women's Market stands out from its surroundings in more ways than one.

BEHAVIOR MODES OF USERS

Discovering
Trip Chaining
Gathering

PLACE OBSERVATIONS

- A historic building that hosts local vendors who have a long history within the community.
- Shoppers who lined up for fresh food and mid-morning meals within the market; They valued this shopping experience over many other options available steps away.
- Vendors and directors know that change is coming to the market, but are aware that new life is needed in order to keep the establishment alive.



Aerial Photo



Potential development with restoration of the historic market and expansion



1935



1968



2019

Historic Places: Bethesda Farm Women's Market

WHAT WORKS WELL

- The prime location attracts a large population made up of residents and workers of all types. Proximity to parking, bus routes, and metro accessibility are key.
- The scale creates immediate contrast to its surroundings. The Market does well to not overcrowd its intimate indoor space.
- Through tradition and diligent local vendors, history has been kept alive here despite the drastic change along Wisconsin Avenue. Elder members of the community still value this experience over many other options.

WHAT IS MISSING

- Areas for gathering and sitting in the space are limited.
- Hardscaped and landscaped areas that provide a front door for the building.
- Signage is old and easily overlooked, which makes attracting new visitors drawing people in difficult.
- The market and its site does not have activities for children.

LESSONS LEARNED

- It is important to retain historical places within the growing fabric of a community. In order to do this, we must find ways to allow the historic buildings and spaces to evolve over time.
- Local vendors help forge a connection between a place and its users.
- Places that highlight and celebrate their historical context are more likely to be cherished and preserved.



Signage along Wisconsin Ave.



Inside the market



Long term vendors of the Market



Back side of the historic structure

Informal Gathering Place: Burtonsville Placemaking

SUMMARY

The Burtonsville Placemaking Festival was a community led event that temporarily transformed an empty shopping center and its parking lot into a gathering space for the Burtonsville community. Residents worked with the Planning and Parks Departments as well as the Better Block Foundation to activate the empty parking lot and storefronts with outdoor seating, performance stage, pop up vendors and lots of programming focussed on music and fitness.

BEHAVIOR MODES

- Spectacle seeking
- Gathering
- Wearing Kid Goggles

OBSERVATION

- A temporary public space offering programming, public gathering, and community events.
- An empty retail center activated with temporary pop-up retail and food trucks.
- Activities offered for kids, teens, adults and older residents brought various demographic sets into the same place and encouraged people to spend more time in the space.
- Event demonstrated pent-up demand for community gathering spaces in Burtonsville and highlighted a collective vision for a hub for the neighborhoods surrounding the shopping center.



Aerial Photo



Local Vendors and Non-Profits



Placemaking Diagram



Entrance Gateway

Informal Gathering Place: Burtonsville Placemaking

WHAT WORKS WELL

- The variety of activities and retail made the space attractive for different types of users.
- Signage and public art were integrated into the design of the space to celebrate Burtonsville's identity.
- Space was programmed with different activities through the course of two days, encouraging users to return.
- Activities for kids and adults were in close proximity, allowing each group to explore and stay longer in the space.

WHAT IS MISSING

- Hardscape dominates – not much green space or softer surfaces.
- The edges of the space were not well contained, making it feel less defined as one moved away from the center.
- Longer term utilization of the space.
- Space was too large to continuously fill with furniture and programming sufficiently to create a vibrant atmosphere.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Temporary placemaking can be used to create a common long term vision for gathering spaces for communities.
- Placemaking efforts should include longer term improvements to a space to the greatest extent possible.
- Robust programming is a critical ingredient for successful community gathering spaces.



Fire Pit and Gathering Area



Temporary Signage



Bandshell



Kids Play Area

Informal Gathering Place: Intersection of New Hampshire Ave and University blvd.

SUMMARY

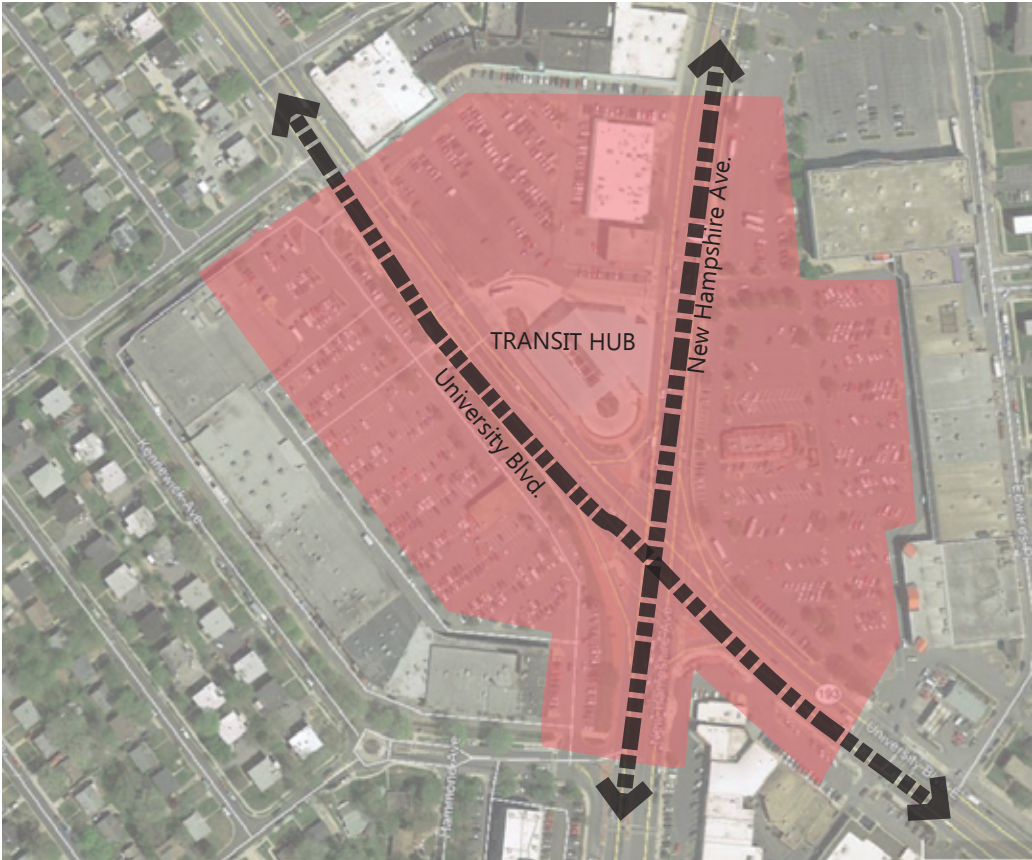
The Takoma/Langley Crossroads and Transit Center can be found at the busy intersection of New Hampshire Avenue and University Boulevard. It consists of 6-8 lanes of pass-through traffic, which pedestrians must navigate to get to destinations. The new transit center shows investment in the community and provides connection, security, and many needed services to the area, but the area still caters strongly to cars. Current construction of the Purple Line Metro will bring change to the area, but as of now it serves to further congestion. There are some signs of placemaking and attempts to cater to pedestrians, but more efforts are needed to make walking safe and appealing.

BEHAVIOR MODES OF USERS

Trip Chaining

PLACE OBSERVATIONS

- The intersection is busy even at off-peak hours. Congestion is increased due to construction of the Purple Line Metro, which will be routed through this area in the future.
- Lots of pedestrian activity comes from residents navigating from the nearby shops and apartment homes to the transit center.
- With no formal gathering areas, people are forced to either stay in their cars or stand in the sparsely green parking lots.
- The transit center itself provides shelter, has clear signage, and has a staffed information desk and indoor area with restrooms.



Aerial Photo



Takoma Langley Crossroads Transit Center



Signage



Pedestrian Crosswalk

Informal Gathering Place: Intersection of New Hampshire Ave and University blvd.

WHAT WORKS WELL

- Public investment in the transit center has made a great impact. The facility feels safe, is clean, and uses design elements such as rain gardens to aid in runoff capture in the heavily paved area.

WHAT IS MISSING

- Beyond the transit center, the area does not feel pedestrian friendly.
- There is a lack of green space. Spans of brick and asphalt are only momentarily broken up by turf grass or small, neglected shrubs.
- Gathering spaces beyond the transit center is limited.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Transit infrastructure is important to communities, but without pedestrian friendly design, its ability to create a "place" is still limited.
- Car dominated built environments often leave gaps where residents and shoppers must make the best of areas not designed with them in mind. Identification of these gaps can be a first step in retrofitting these places into more walkable environments.



Shopping Center Parking Lot



New Hampshire Ave.



Entrance to the Transit Center



View of Transit Center From Across The Street

Principles for Public Places in Montgomery County

Based on our analysis of various place types across the county, we distilled the following principles that offer a framework for the design, implementation and management of public places. Public places may include a public space, a privately owned destination, a civic function or a combination of these elements. The following principles represent overarching concepts related to layout, location, access and features. Each public place must respond to its local context as well.

1. Public places should be accessible by multiple transportation modes including walking, biking, transit and personal automobile, irrespective of their location in the county.

2. Public places should blend commercial uses, transportation infrastructure and civic amenities into a unified experience that creates a strong identity.

3. Public places should include activities for different ages, gender, cultural backgrounds and physical abilities.

4. Public places should be freely accessible, with activities and programming open to all without cost or a minimal fee for select offerings.

5. Public places, both natural and man-made, should be designed as a series of outdoor rooms that are human-scaled and make the user feel comfortable and safe.

6. Public places should provide basic amenities like seating, shade, bathrooms etc. to encourage people to stay longer and socialize.

7. Public places should be flexible, with the ability to accommodate a variety of users and events.

8. Public places should build upon historic assets and celebrate the culture and heritage of the communities within which they are located.

9. Public places should integrate public art and education into their design and programming, be interactive, engage multiple senses, and give users the ability to adapt them to suit their needs without much effort.

10. Streets should be designed as public spaces to be enjoyed by all and as such, should seamlessly link to other public places.



