



Chapter 5:

# Community Led Placemaking



## 5.1 Community Led Placemaking

This chapter serves as a how-to guide for community groups, developers, public agencies and anyone who is undertaking a collaborative placemaking effort in Montgomery County.



*White Flint Placemaking Festival's Wikiblock bandshell and long tables*

In 2018, the Montgomery County Planning Department contracted the Dallas-based Better Block Foundation to help implement the White Flint Placemaking Festival and show how public space recommendations in the White Flint 2 Sector Plan could be quickly implemented. The Better Block Foundation is an urban design nonprofit that educates, equips and empowers communities and their leaders to reshape and reactivate built environments to promote the growth of healthy and vibrant neighborhoods. The goal of the White Flint Placemaking Festival was to work with community members from the Randolph Hills neighborhood to create Montgomery County's first pop-up park and hold a weekend festival in the space.

This project was undertaken in partnership with

Montgomery County Planning, Montgomery County Parks, Montgomery County Department of Transportation, the Randolph Civic Association and AR Krondstadt Realty. Approximately six months of design and planning culminated in a community built, public gathering space on an underutilized grassy area and parking lot in the Randolph Hills Shopping Center. The weekend celebration, held in the newly created park during mid-October 2018, attracted more than 1,000 people and the space continues to be used for community events.

## 5.2 Steps to Organize

The following section explains the stages necessary for implementing a community-led placemaking event. This guidance can be adapted to improve and create a variety of venues, such as gathering spaces, street designs, transit stations and dog parks. Potential sites determined by the community can range in size and use. Examples include a parking space, a sidewalk, a street, a plaza or a building. The steps provided may need to be adjusted depending on the placemaking effort.

Additionally, sample surveys and evaluations used for the White Flint Placemaking Festival are included at the end of the chapter. The surveys provide a range of questions asked of community members prior to, during or after the placemaking effort. Questions may need to be revised depending on organizer needs.

### Step 1: Select a Site

In selecting a site for the placemaking event, look for areas that meet the following requirements:

- Edges that define the space:
  - Consider the boundaries of the site. Does the site have edges, such as those created by buildings, fences or structures, that make it feel enclosed, well defined and safe? Will edges have to be created as part of the project to create an enclosed space?
- Interest in the event from local partners to generate financial and logistical support.
- Leasable and available buildings that present opportunities for temporary business development.
- Potential for multi-modal street

infrastructure to accommodate pedestrians, bicyclists and drivers during the event.

- Proximity to a neighborhood where residents and businesses can participate in placemaking and attend the event.

For example, to host the White Flint Placemaking Festival, Montgomery Planning and the Better Block Foundation chose the Randolph Hills Shopping Center based on recommendations from the White Flint Sector 2 Sector Plan. The Randolph Hills Shopping Center was identified as a place within the plan area that would benefit from the creation of a neighborhood-oriented green space. Within the shopping center, an underutilized lawn and part of the parking lot proved to be the best options for the project because of their proximity to the neighborhood and potential for long-term use. Allen Krondstadt, the property owner, was very supportive of the project and the community's vision of the site. The local Randolph Civic Association was another very important partner.

### Step 2: Kickoff and Survey

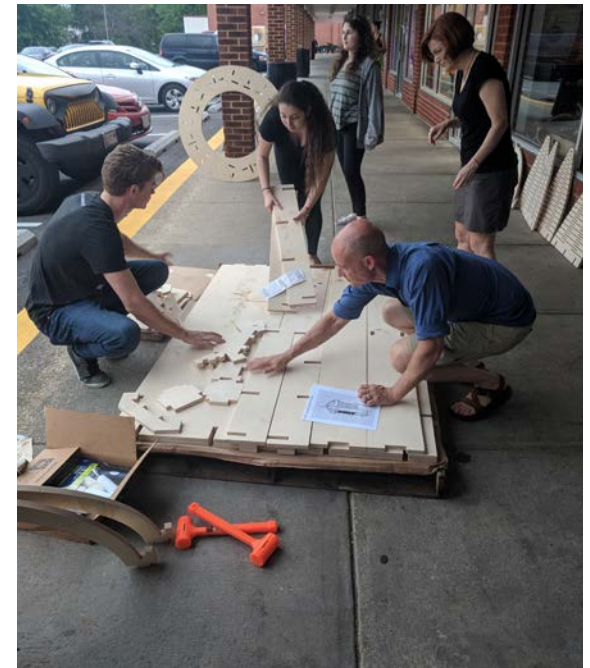
Once the project dates are set and the site is chosen, the organizers should host a kickoff event. This meeting will serve as the community's introduction to the project, help garner excitement and identify community organizers and potential partners for the project.

At the kickoff, the survey of the community should be ready to go. Bring short-form paper surveys to hand out to attendees and make sure the long-form online survey is posted and can be filled out. Ask the community what works well, what is missing, what kind of skill sets are available in the community, and those not at the table who need to be engaged. These results will determine committee heads, volunteers, interventions and project partners.

During the surveying process for the White Flint Placemaking Festival, residents overwhelmingly responded with requests for a community green



*Touring the site with Randolph Community Members*



*Community members building the Wikiblock Morris Column during Kickoff Event*



space. They also pointed out during site design discussions that a green space already exists on the property, but it is underutilized. That reality led to the design of a pop-up park to welcome neighborhood residents. During the process, Montgomery Planning and the Better Block Foundation encouraged and supported the Randolph Hills stakeholders to work with the property owner to realize a new vision for the space and create a more community-centric park.

*For reference, a sample survey has been provided at the back of this chapter. The sample questions were developed for the White Flint Placemaking Festival. Questions may need to be revised for future use depending on organizer needs.*

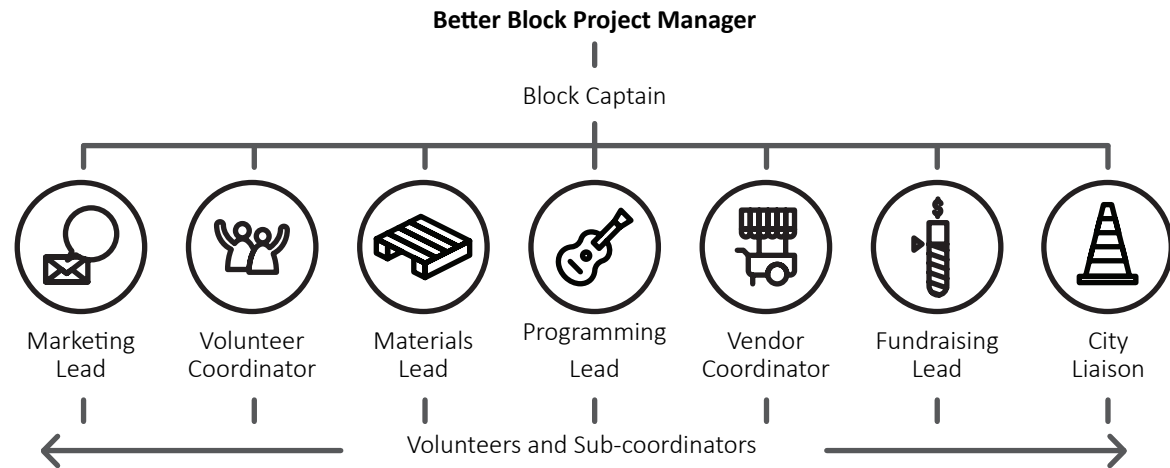
### Step 3: Organize

After the site has been selected, a team must be organized to execute the project. Community-led placemaking efforts require substantial input, team work and volunteering efforts by the community. Identifying stakeholders who are engaged with the local community is crucial to the success of the project. Typically, engaged stakeholders and neighborhood organizers can be found at community and town hall meetings and in neighborhood associations. They are frequently involved with organizing farmers' markets, game nights and local concerts. Assign committee roles to such team members to ensure that all of the tasks are covered.

For the White Flint Placemaking Festival, members of the Randolph Community Association served as the local team. Each team member lived in the neighborhood and had close personal relationships with many of the vendors and partners. They provided recommendations for programming, resources, site design, marketing and coordinating volunteers. The community's engagement, enthusiasm and ownership of the project were the reasons why the White Flint Placemaking Festival was so successful.

For the White Flint Placemaking Festival and similar

Community-Led Placemaking Event Organizational Chart



community-led events, the following committees are recommended:

#### A. Vendor Recruitment

- Find and track vendors for the event to host pop-up shops.
- Develop a plan for vendors in conjunction with the concept plan for the space.
- Determine the permitting needs for each vendor.

#### B. Programming

- Work with partners to determine activities and schedule programming (art, theater, music, etc.).
- Develop a program for the placemaking event that can be marketed to the community.
- Handle all communications and outreach to the community.
- Run social media and reach out to media

and press.

- Coordinate the recruitment of volunteers.
- Organize and manage volunteer schedules and tasks during the build week.
- Ensure a team presence onsite to help food vendors and performers set up and provide everything needed for the event.

#### C. Community Public Agency Outreach

- Work with local government agencies on permitting.
- Identify resources and roadblocks to the event early in the process.

#### D. Property Owner Representative, Site Preparation

- Represent the property owner's interest.
- Help with logistics on-site (electricity, bathrooms, storage, etc.).

## Step 4: Design

One of the most important steps of the process is the design of the site and the creation of the concept plan. Based on the results of community surveys, determine what kind of designs and activities would be most effective in the space and accepted by the community.

When designing the site, keep in mind the following factors:

### E. Nodes of activity

- Consider the types of activities that will be the most appealing to the community and possible to support on the site.
- Think about how different nodes of activity will be located in relation to each other. For example, will music programming be near food and drinks?

### F. Sightlines within the space

- Ensure the nodes of activity are visible from multiple vantage points within the space.
- Consider where the photos of the event will be taken.
- Pay attention to sightlines that compel people to move through the space to see what is on the other side or around the corner.

### G. Flow of pedestrians through the space

- Consider how attendees will move throughout the space and interact with each design element and activity.

#### H. How to incentivize interaction and increase safety

- Think about the kind of spaces and activities that bring people together to talk

and interact.

- Encourage more interaction and life on the street that will help to increase safety in the area.

### *1. Efficiency for pedestrians and alternative modes of transportation*

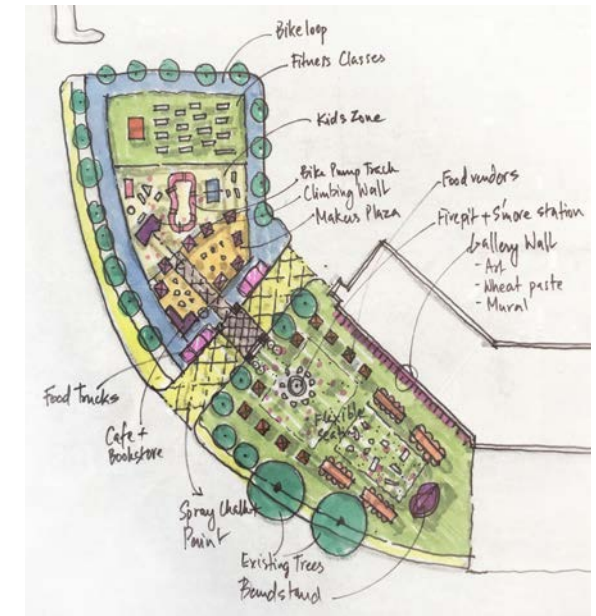
- Examine how the site can be remodeled to more safely accommodate cyclists, pedestrians and public transportation.
- Work with the local public agencies to test possible design ideas during the event and consider how they could be made permanent should they prove successful.

Building and designing around a theme for the event will help to orient and structure the space. For the White Flint Placemaking Festival, the theme was music for the grassy section and kids' play for the parking lot. Structuring the programming around these two themes helped focus the design of the space to facilitate these two activities effectively.

For the design of the pop-up park, two sections were created and visually connected with a street mural across the driveway. The grassy area was designed based on the tenets of traditional German beer gardens. The space was filled with long tables, rows of trees donated by Montgomery Parks and string lights hung at 12-feet-high to create an artificial ceiling at human scale. Fire pits and swing sets were built to provide an area for people to congregate. These elements helped create a relaxed, human-scaled atmosphere within the previously empty space.

The other half of the park design was more activity focused. Montgomery Parks Department brought out toys and games for kids, including Kaboom's Rigamajig set, ping pong and hula-hoops, which were extremely popular. Rockville Bike Hub and the Washington Area Bicyclist Association provided bicycle workshops and education, promoting cycling

in the DC area. KOA Sports organized games for kids on the pop-up basketball court, while Dynamite Gymnastics, MyGym, and Badlands Playspace created pop-up obstacle courses for kids. Working with these partners, the parking lot was transformed from a space solely for cars to a safe play area for kids and families.



### Concept Plan Sketch for White Flint Placemaking



*Sketchup rendering for White Flint Placemaking*



## Programming

For the placemaking event, careful consideration must be given to the types of programming and activities that will be most successful on the site. Community surveys play an important role in revealing what the community would enjoy most in their neighborhood. Use the community as a resource to find local performers, host classes, organize races and other events.

Consider the following when creating the programming schedule for the placemaking event:

- Organize races and classes for all age groups.
- Hold exercise and sport classes, such as zumba, crossfit, basketball tournament, etc.
- Consider highly physical activities, such as ballet, rock climbing, gymnastics, etc.
- Include passive activities, such as interactive art and art classes, book reading, etc.
- Add events involving local community artists, etc.



*Outdoor games for all ages*

## Music

- Cater to a variety of ages and taste.
- Utilize local musicians who are known by the community as much as possible.
- Schedule music and other programming so different performances will not compete with or be distracting from each other.

## Vendors

- Invite vendors that are local and connected with the community.
- Consider vendors that are consistent with the theme and messaging of the event.
  - For example, for a bike-themed event invite bicycling advocacy groups, bike shops, etc.
- Prioritize entrepreneurs with business ideas and provide space for them to test their products.



*Fire pit located by food and music*



*Cafe and library area for book reading*



*Active recreation class at entrance to pop-up park*



*Flexible seating options*

## Step 5: Gather Materials and Build

From the concept plan for the event space, create a materials list for the design elements. Determine how much wood will be needed; what kind of tools; how much paint; if there will be machine fabricated elements, who will be doing the cutting and shipping; what kind of landscaping will be needed; etc. Have all these materials staged and ready to go for the build week. Ask the community for links to resources for materials and tools. Borrowing and purchasing materials from community members and local businesses helps to continually engage them throughout the build process and give them a stronger sense of ownership for the project.

For the build week, work with the Volunteer Committee to organize workshop times to build the designs, including performance stages and furniture. Start building workshops 2-3 days before the project launch. Workshops typically last two to three hours and can be hosted twice a day. Host workshops at times when there will be the most volunteers available.

The following table is the schedule of the first day of build workshops for the White Flint Placemaking Festival. Use this table as a template to help organize volunteer build activities.

Sample Build Day Schedule

TIME	TASK	ASSIGNED TO	LOCATION	# of VOLUNTEERS
9 AM - NOON First Volunteer Workshop				
9 am - 11 am	Sand Wikiblock elements	Olivia	11601 Boiling Brook Parkway	4 volunteers
9 am - 11 am	Build fire pits	Dylan		2 volunteers
11 am - Noon	Build swingsets	Dylan		2 volunteers
11 am - Noon	Build Wikiblock elements	Olivia		4 volunteers
Mid-morning	Trees delivered	Colin		
1:30 PM - 3:30 PM Afternoon Workshop				
1:30 pm - 3:30 pm	Misc, tape out mural	Colin/Dylan/Olivia		
4 PM - 7 PM Second Volunteer Workshop				
4-7 PM	Paint Wikiblock elements	Dylan/Olivia		4 volunteers
4-7 PM	Arrange trees	Colin		2 volunteers



Spreading mulch to create the pop-up park



Painting Wikiblock rocking chairs



## Step 6: Evaluate and Document

Gather as much data from the event as possible to help determine its success. Community-led placemaking projects are undertaken in various stages of project delivery but are most often used as testing exercises prior to final implementation. Use the findings and momentum discovered to create a final design that is both challenging, yet achievable.

Some of the most useful metrics typically collected during placemaking events include:

- Speed of cars passing by the site.
- Noise of passing traffic and onsite activities measured in decibel counts.
- Environmental criteria following 12-quality environmental criteria to measure perception of space.
- Dot map of activity to determine the most active and popular areas of the event space.
- Numbers of pedestrians and bicyclists attending the event.
- General demographic data of attendees.
- Post-event surveys of attendees to determine what was successful and what requires tweaking.

Some metrics will change depending on the scope of the project.

Demographic data of the event can help determine who the most likely users of the space will be going forward. For example, at the White Flint Placemaking Festival, 40 percent of attendees Saturday evening at 5 p.m. were kids. This data shows that child-centered play elements should be an essential part of any future plans for the space.

During the event, capture as many pictures and videos as possible. Consider using professional photographers and videographers to document the event. If possible, use a drone or a rooftop to

capture overhead views of the layout. Take plenty of before pictures of the site to compare and show the long-term potential of the space.

*For reference, a sample survey has been provided on page 134. The sample questions were developed for the White Flint Placemaking Festival. Questions may need to be revised for future use depending on organizer needs.*



Top: Wikiblock bandshell at the White Flint Placemaking Festival

Above: Night view of White Flint Placemaking Festival

Left: Flyer used to promote the White Flint Placemaking Festival

## 5.2.1 Logistics and Things to Consider

Throughout the community-led placemaking process, there will be many roadblocks and logistics to overcome to ensure a successful project. The following considerations, links, and resources are intended to provide support for parties undertaking similar efforts within Montgomery County.

### Permitting

If the placemaking effort is on private land, organizers must coordinate with the property owner to secure a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to allow the event on the property. If the installation is on public right-of-way, they need to work with the local transportation agency officials to obtain a special-event permit. In Montgomery County, contact the Department of Transportation for right-of-way related permitting requests: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/dot-traffic/special-events.html>.

Organizers need to work with the local health department and vendors to ensure each food vendor has a temporary food service license. In Montgomery County, each permit costs approximately \$70 and is good for up to 14 days in that specific location. Be sure that the applications are submitted a week before the event, ensuring plenty of time for the license to be mailed in and processed. Contact the Department of Health and Human Services for food permitting requests: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/hhs-special/LandRLicensingSpecialFood.html>.

If alcohol is to be served, organizers will need to work with vendors and secure a one-day special license from the Montgomery County Department of Liquor Control. For White Flint Placemaking

Festival, a wine and beer festival license was obtained for the duration of the event. The cost was \$30 for the applicant and \$30 per day per vendor. Be sure the applications are submitted and ready a week before the event. Contact the Department of Liquor Control for alcohol vendor requests: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/dlc/licensure/license/one-day/>.

### Site Preparation

To prepare the site for the event, make sure to keep in mind the following elements:

- Electricity
  - How will power be provided to vendors and performers? Will there be generators or accessible buildings?
- Storage and shipping of materials
- Lighting
  - What will the space feel like at night? Will there be enough light to feel safe?
- Restrooms
- Landscaping
- Traffic flows

### Marketing

Appoint a marketing chair to advertise and circulate news of the placemaking event. Be sure to be active on all social media, develop and update webpages, and create press releases to send to local media. In-person marketing is also an effective tool to garner interest and recruit partners. Create and print flyers to hand out at local businesses, attend similar community events, go door knocking and visit residents of large apartment complexes near the area. Engage the partners and vendors in the marketing strategy by having them advertise to their followers. Also encourage local neighborhood groups and organizations with newsletters to include

the details of the event in their publications.

For the White Flint Placemaking Festival, a variety of methods for marketing were used. The event was promoted on Facebook pages and volunteer signups were created online. Multiple flyers that showed the concept plan and vendor and programming lists were distributed online and to local area destinations. Circulating the flyers with a press release to local media outlets helped to spread the word about the event. The Randolph Civic Association also used its newsletter and email lists to reach out to local residents.

The following is a list of media outlets used to help market the White Flint Placemaking Festival:

#### Bethesda Beat

<https://bethesdamagazine.com/>

#### My Montgomery Media

<https://www.mymcmmedia.org/>

#### Just Up the Pike

<http://www.justupthepike.com/>

#### Washington Post

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/>

#### Visit Montgomery

<https://visitmontgomery.com>

#### Coalition for Smarter Growth

<http://www.smartergrowth.net/>

#### Friends of White Flint

<http://www.whiteflint.org/>



# Sample Community Survey

Hello there! We're working to bring your ideas about the community to life and make a more walkable, vibrant place to live and work. We hope to bring these ideas to reality through a community led placemaking activity.

Please fill out the survey below and share with anyone else you think may be interested!

1. Full Name

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2. Email address

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3. Phone number

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4. Do you live in or near White Flint?

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

5. If not, where do you live?

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6. What are your favorite places in Montgomery County and the larger DC area?

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7. Do you frequent White Flint or the Randolph Hills neighborhood in your free time?

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Sometimes

8. Why or why not?

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9. Do you feel safe walking the sidewalks in White Flint and Randolph Hills?

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Somewhat

10. If not, why?

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11. How do you usually get around?

Mark only one oval.

☐ Car  
☐ Bike  
☐ Walk  
☐ Public transit  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

12. What would make you walk or bike more to or around White Flint and Randolph Hills?

Check all that apply.

☐ If it felt safer  
☐ If the distances were shorter  
☐ If the weather were different  
☐ I wouldn't walk or bike more  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

13. Do you work in Montgomery County?

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes  
☐ No



**14. If not, where do you work?**

We only need the location, not the actual business name.

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**15. What's your average commute time?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ 0-10 minutes  
☐ 10-30 minutes  
☐ 30 minutes - 1 hour  
☐ Over an hour

**16. How do you feel about your commute?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Great  
☐ Good  
☐ Indifferent  
☐ It could be better  
☐ It's terrible  
☐ Other:

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**17. What businesses do you frequent in White Flint and the Randolph Hills?**

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**18. Is it easy for you to get to these businesses?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Other:

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19. **What businesses do you wish existed that don't?**

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Places to eat
- ☐ Places to shop
- ☐ Entertainment venues
- ☐ Services (laundromat, dry cleaners, banks, etc.)
- ☐ Kids' activities/shops
- ☐ Bars
- ☐ Galleries/art spaces
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

20. **As part of the project, we're looking to install pop-up businesses. Are you interested in testing out one of your business ideas? If not, do you know of someone who would be?**

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21. **Which public amenities do you think the residents need the most?**

*Select up to three.*

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Green space
- ☐ Places for kids to play outdoors
- ☐ More/better street seating
- ☐ Public art
- ☐ Better lighting
- ☐ Better sidewalks
- ☐ Bike lanes
- ☐ More parking
- ☐ Street trees
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

22. **Would you like to be involved in improving and re-imagining the Randolph Hills Shopping Center?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No



23. **If so, what skillsets could you share?**

This can be anything -- photography, graphic design, marketing, woodworking, community connecting, painting, recruiting volunteers, starting a pop-up business, etc.

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24. **Do you have any contacts or know any organizations that we should be reaching out to?**

These can be local artists and makers, interested neighbors, relevant nonprofits, etc.

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25. **If you could change one thing about White Flint and Randolph Hills, what would it be?**

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# Better Block

## 12 Quality Criteria



Date:  
Time:  
Weather:  
Notes:

Observe the space around you, and rate it on each of the categories below. Fill in the circle completely if the space meets the criteria, half way if it partially meets, and leave it blank if it doesn't.

	PROTECTION	COMFORT	ENJOYMENT
feeling safe – protection for pedestrians against cars	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
feeling secure – protection against crime and violence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
micro climate – protection against the elements (rain, cold, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
connected – space is connected to surroundings and resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
walkable – room for walking, interesting facades, accessible for everyone	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
sit & stay – opportunities to sit in the space and reasons to stay	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
seeing – good sight lines, pleasant views, and reasonable viewing distances	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
talk & listen – space is conducive to talking and listening	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
activity & function – varied range of activities and functions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
human scale – things are at eye-level, you can recognize faces across the space, you don't feel small in the space	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
identity – space has a strong visual identity senses – good design, rich sensory experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

# Better Block

## Counting



Date:

Time:

Weather:

Notes:

Set a timer for 10 minutes, and count the number of people you see by age and gender. It helps to draw an invisible "line" and when someone crosses it, you count them. Use an "M" for male and an "F" for female.

0-15

15-30

30-60

60+

## Date:

Weather:

## Notes:

[illegible]



# **PARKING LOTS *TO* PLACES**

## **Urban Design Guidelines for Rock Spring & White Flint 2 Sector Plans**

**Approved July 2019**

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