



## capitol hill: public space pilots

a guide to testing ideas for public space activation

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## introduction

a continuation of public space analysis

*Capitol Hill: Public Space Pilots* is a continuation and companion of *Capitol Hill: Public Spaces + Public Life*. This public space analysis visualized public space data collected in summer 2019 across Capitol Hill's key corridors and spaces, with the objective of providing foundational data on the public realm built environment to stakeholders for future planning processes. *Capitol Hill: Public Space Pilots* has a similar aim, providing

ideas to stakeholders for activating public spaces that would benefit from additional stewardship. The specific spaces highlighted in this booklet were chosen based on their potentials to contribute significantly to connectivity, wellness, and environmental resilience in the neighborhood—but the interventions could be implemented in a wider variety of spaces that serve as important parts of the public realm.



## why pilots?

a step-wise approach to activating the public realm

The public spaces highlighted in this document all can be better places for people, but the process to improve them can be long and challenging. Along the way, the people who might champion improvements need to engage with the potentials of these spaces.

A pilot project is an effective and low-cost intermediate step to test ideas for a site. It brings visibility to the importance of the public realm, asking community members,

stakeholders, and planners the questions, what can and should this public space be? Before and during the pilot, planners and designers collect data and feedback in response to those questions, which can help justify next steps. Through this process, the people who use the site and the stakeholders who would support changes can better understand what improvements are best suited to the site, and why they should happen.





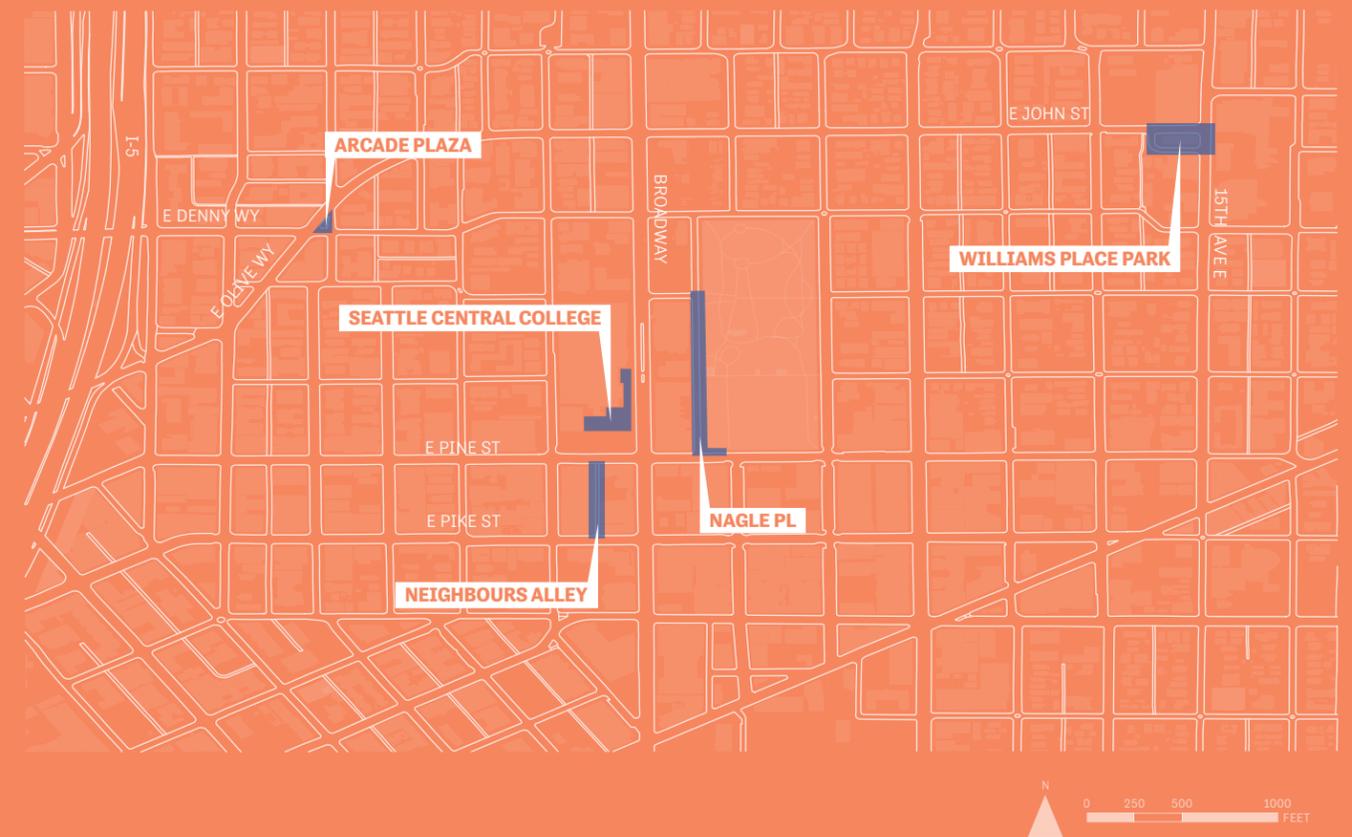
## introduction to sites

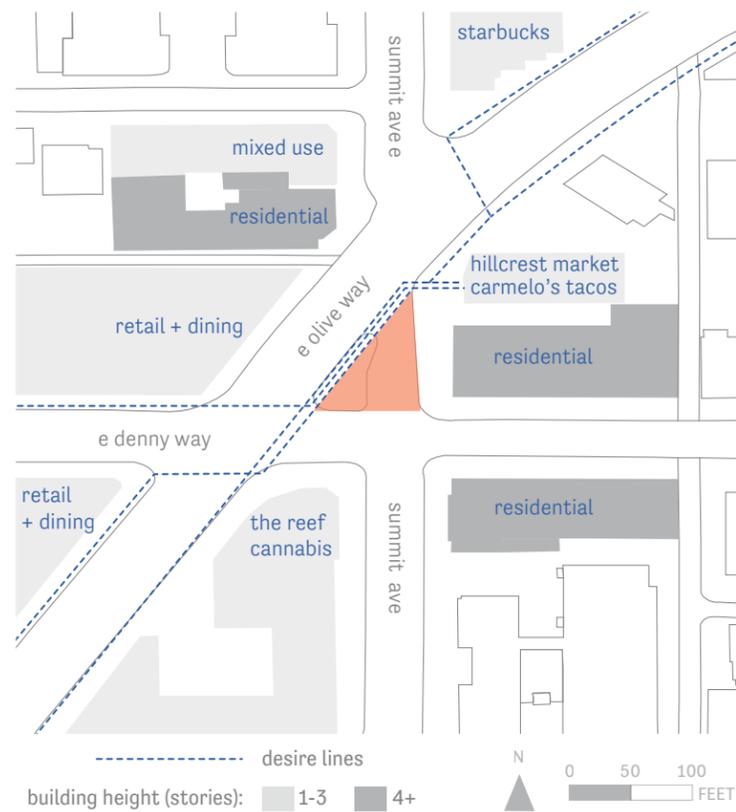
five opportunity areas on capitol hill

The five sites proposed in this document as opportunity areas for testing pilot ideas are distributed throughout Capitol Hill. Varying in scale and type of space, they include a pocket park, an SDOT Pavement to Parks space, a college plaza, an edge of a major park, and an alley.

For each site, there are distinct challenges and opportunities that make them well suited to test public space activation through a pilot. Some of these qualities are shared

by all sites, such as a need for more invitations to stay and to play. Some are unique to specific sites, such as a lack of pedestrian scale lighting or a low presence of trees. The following analyses identify the most prominent opportunities and challenges for each site, as well as relevant precedent images.



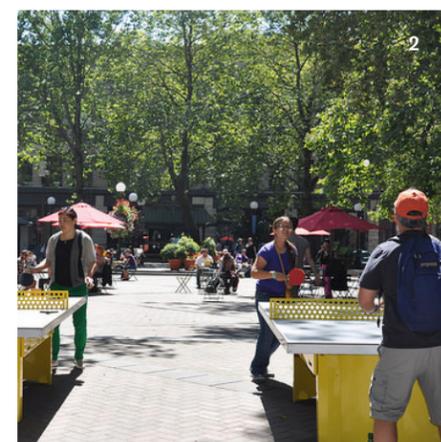
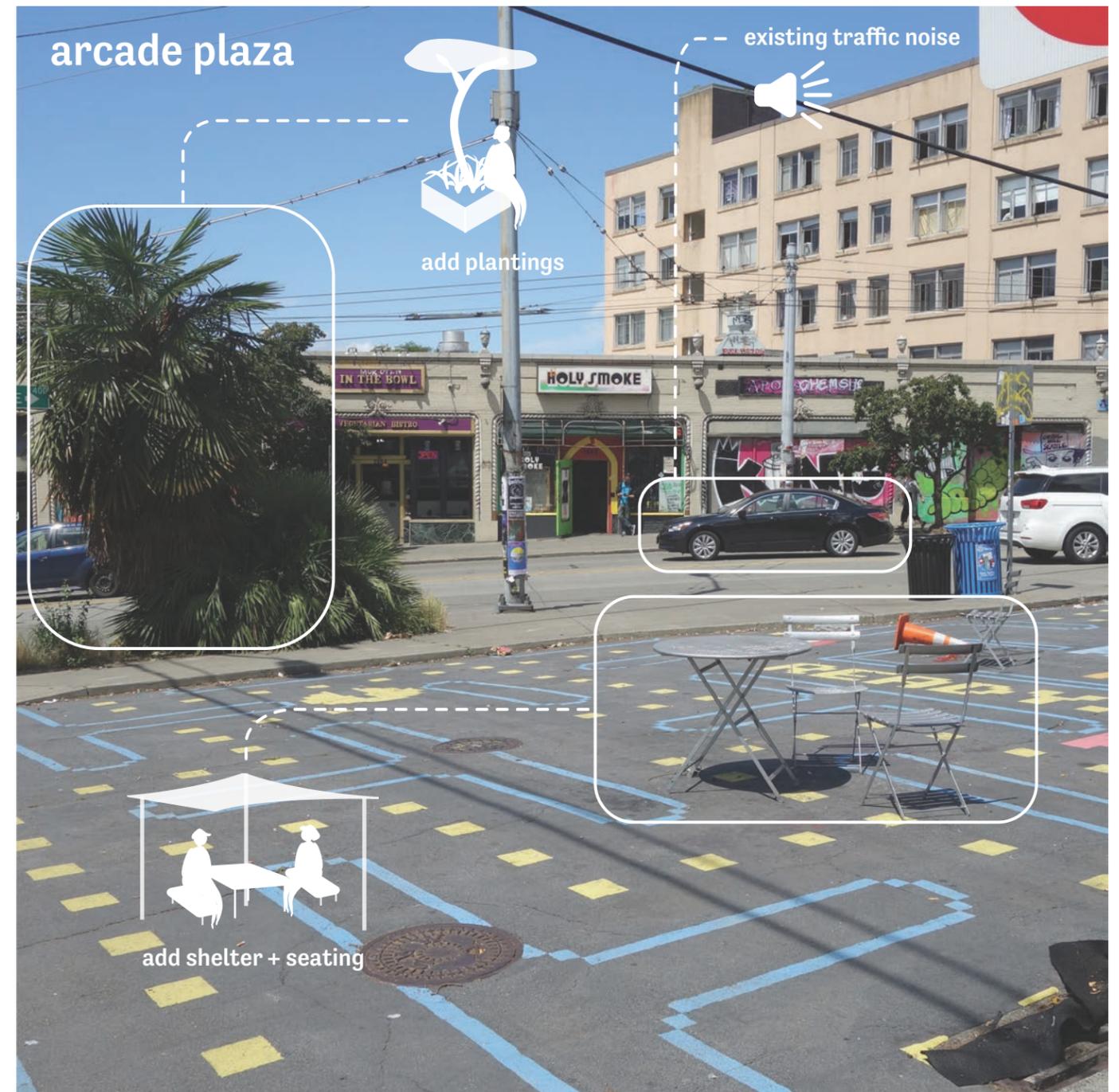


## arcade plaza analysis

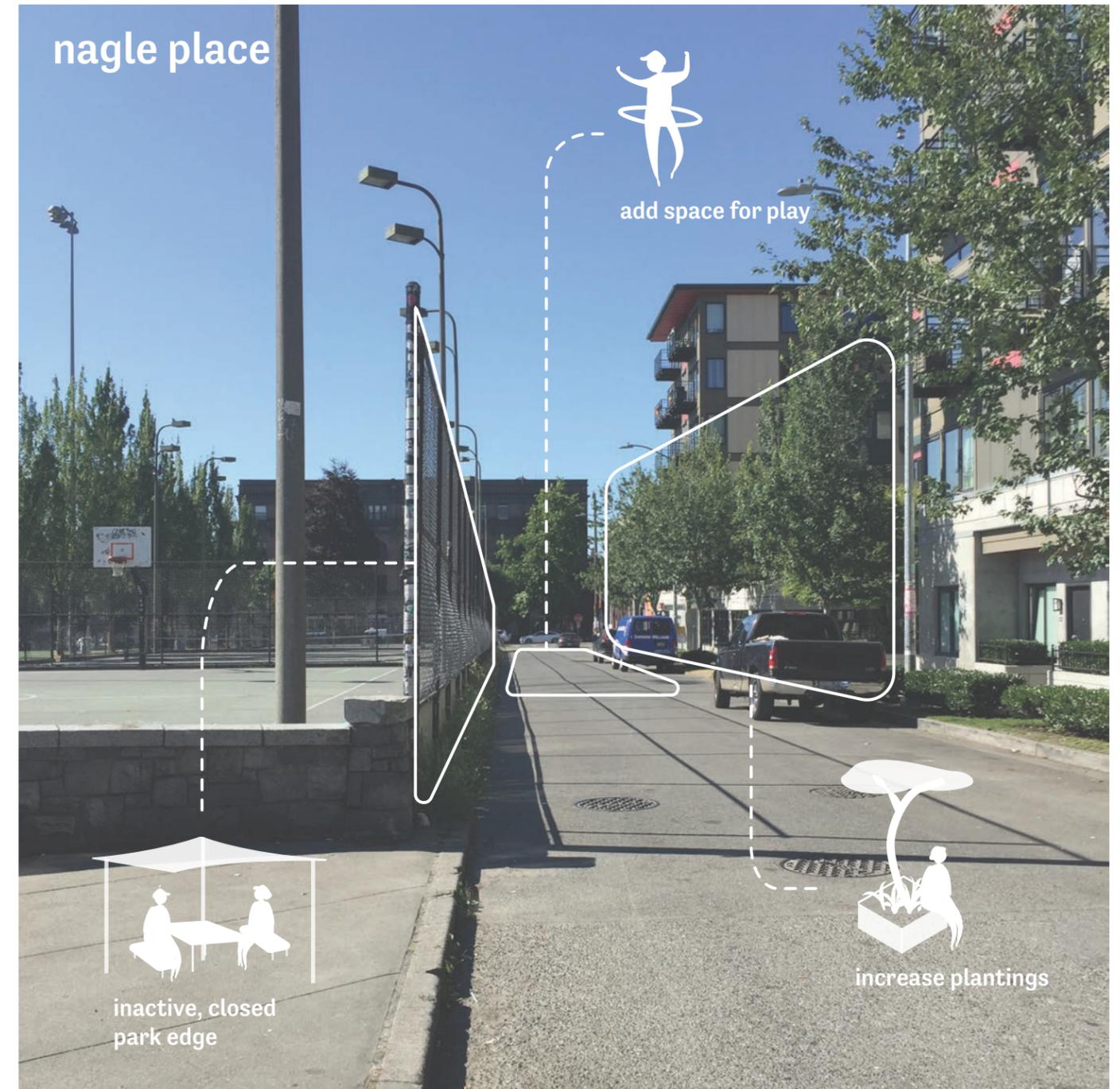
Arcade Plaza is an SDOT Pavement to Parks project at the intersection of E Olive Way and E Denny Way. It is surrounded by residential and commercial uses, including diverse retail and dining options. In 2018, SDOT hosted a number of events on site that included food trucks, giant games, and free bike repair. However, Arcade Plaza today has little evidence of consistent activation. There are limited seating opportunities without overhead

cover, sparse plantings, and high car traffic noise. Given the proximity of restaurants and residents to this site, there is an opportunity to invest in creating a more active and inviting place for people at all times of the year.

*Precedents, left to right: Occidental Square Park (Seattle), Bell Street Park (Seattle), and Pearl Street Triangle (Brooklyn)*



## nagle place analysis

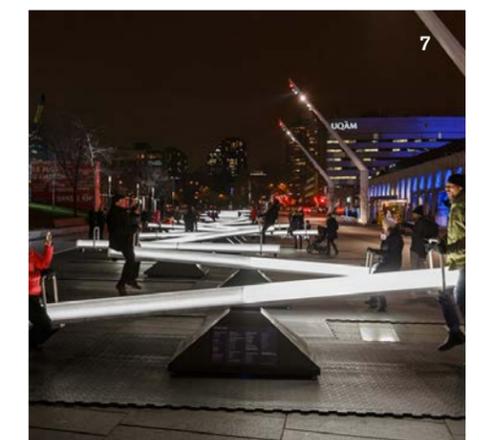


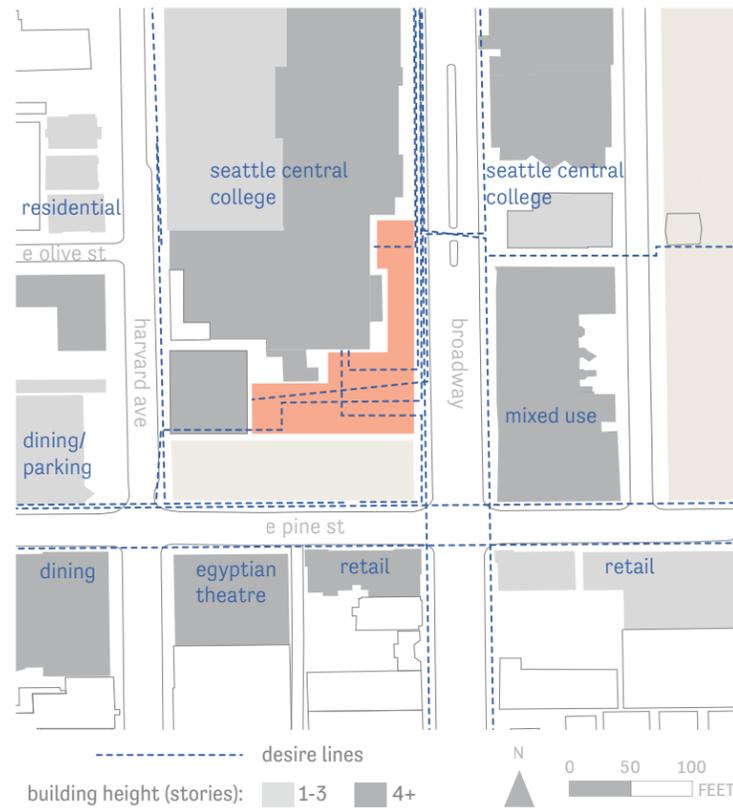
Nagle Place is a complex public space, serving both as an important edge of Cal Anderson Park and as the de facto back door for multi-story buildings that face onto Broadway. The street itself is car oriented, with few opportunities or invitations for pedestrians to spend time.

In many ways Nagle feels like an alley. It lacks a sidewalk along the park side of the street, and there are few opportunities to feel connected to the activity happening on the

basketball and tennis courts along this edge. This is an opportunity area, where plants and pedestrians might take greater priority, softening what is currently a long, inactive edge.

*Precedents, left to right: Rue Leon Cladel Skatepark (Paris), Spice Alley Hollywood Farmers Market (Los Angeles), "Impulse" Installation (Montreal)*



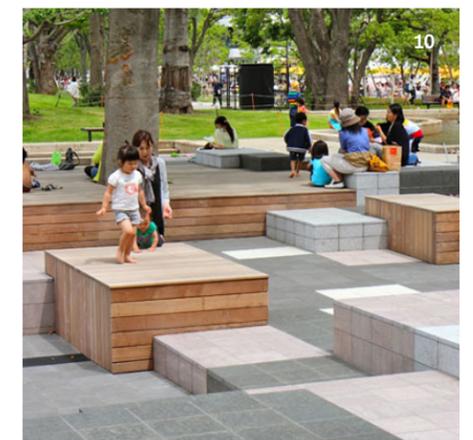


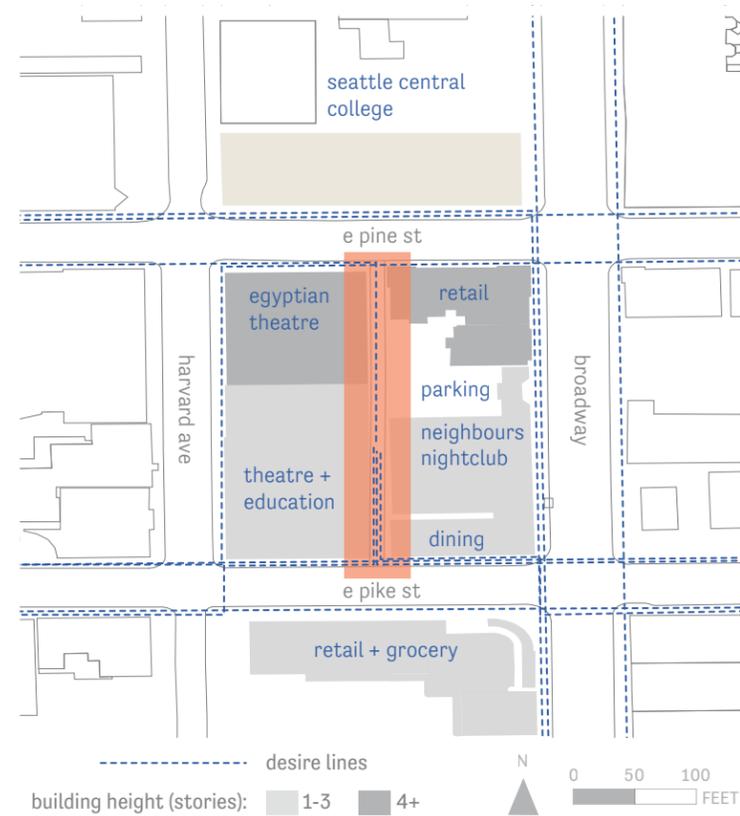
## seattle central college analysis

Seattle Central College is centrally located in Capitol Hill, with a large brick plaza that faces Broadway and currently serves as the host for the year-long Capitol Hill Farmers Market. Surrounded by diverse commercial and residential uses, as well as bus, light rail, and streetcar infrastructure, this site offers great potential for continued activation. There are limited comfortable seating opportunities, a lack of overhead shelter, and dominance of

brick hardscape. Creating a more inviting and dynamic edge, where the campus meets the rest of the community, could expand on current uses and clearly designate this as a place for people to stay.

*Precedents, left to right: Westlake Park (Seattle), Harvard University Plaza (Boston), Teikyo Heisei University (Tokyo)*





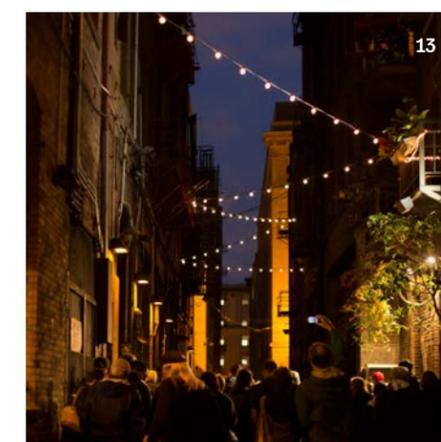
## neighbours alley analysis

Neighbours Alley has high potential to become a model for what alley activation might look like on Capitol Hill. In evening hours, the back entrance for Neighbours Nightclub draws people into this alley. Despite this activity, it lacks lighting and is an uncomfortable place to linger. The alley also serves the functions of waste pickup and access to parking.

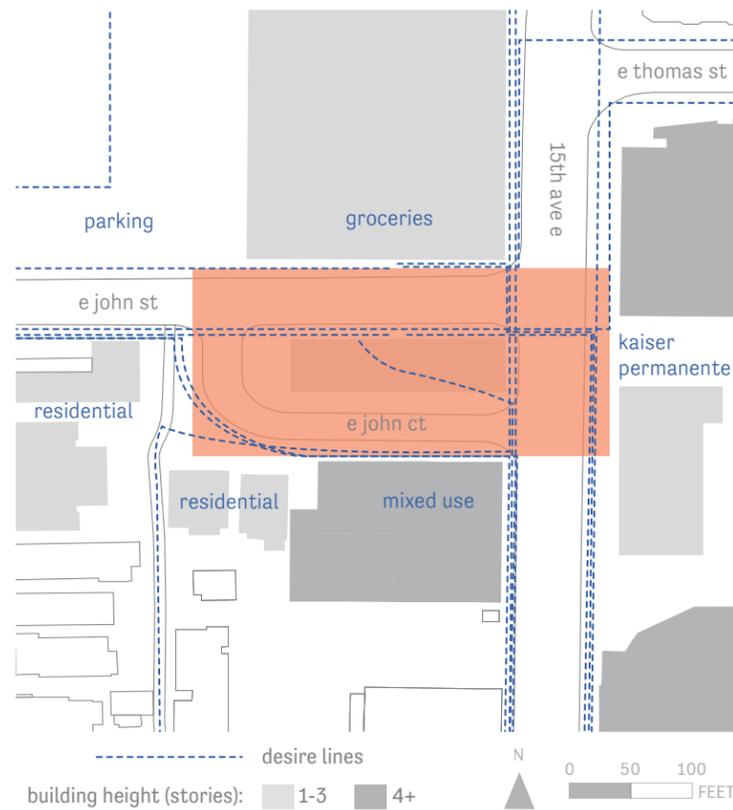
Seattle has a storied history of reimagining alleys as spaces for people. Given adjacent businesses

that attract pedestrians to the area during both daytime and nighttime, Neighbours Alley is an intuitive fit for testing alley activation on Capitol Hill.

*Precedents, left to right: Post Alley (Seattle), Nord Alley (Seattle), Nihonmachi Alley (Seattle)*



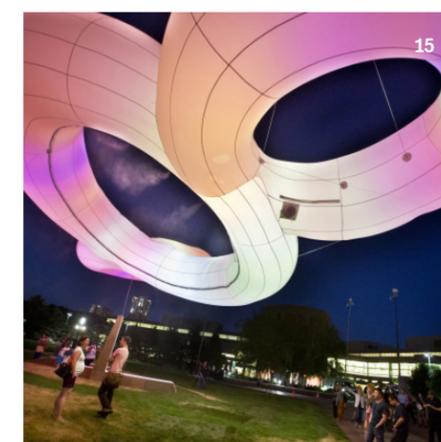
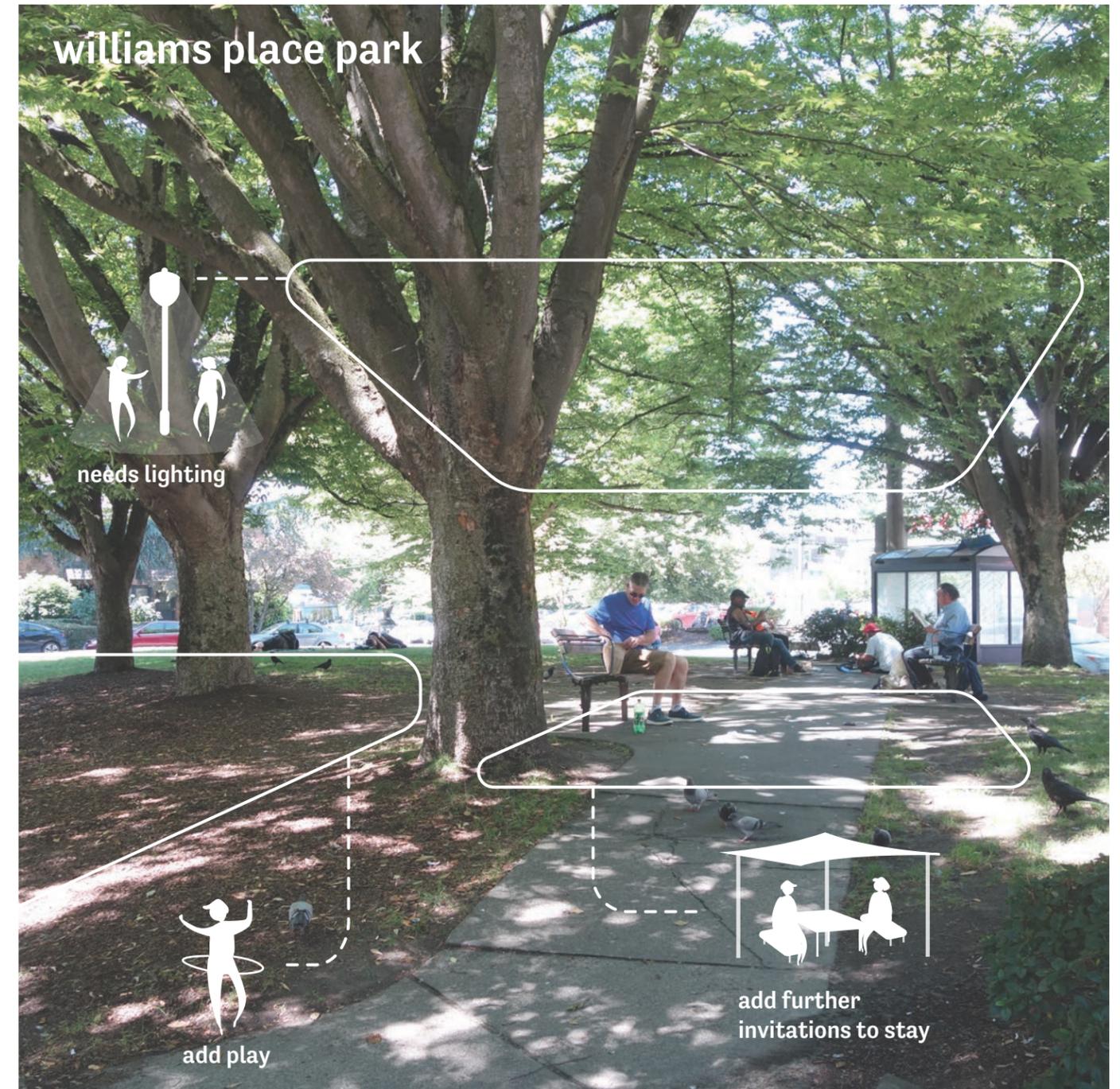
## williams place park analysis



Williams Place Park sits at the intersection of E John St and 15th Ave E, an active corner for car, bus, and pedestrian traffic. It is surrounded by Kaiser Permanente, apartments, and commercial uses that range from a dry cleaner to Safeway. A prominent transit stop is located on the E John Ct edge. Currently, Williams Place Park has limited opportunities to stay, and also lacks pedestrian-scale lighting and invitations to play.

Creating a comfortable meeting, resting, and play place for all people could help establish a more welcoming and legible gateway to the 15th Avenue neighborhood and Kaiser Permanente campus.

*Precedents, left to right: Mimmi Interactive Sculpture (Minneapolis), The Lawn on D (Boston), Multi-Sensory Pathway (Boston)*



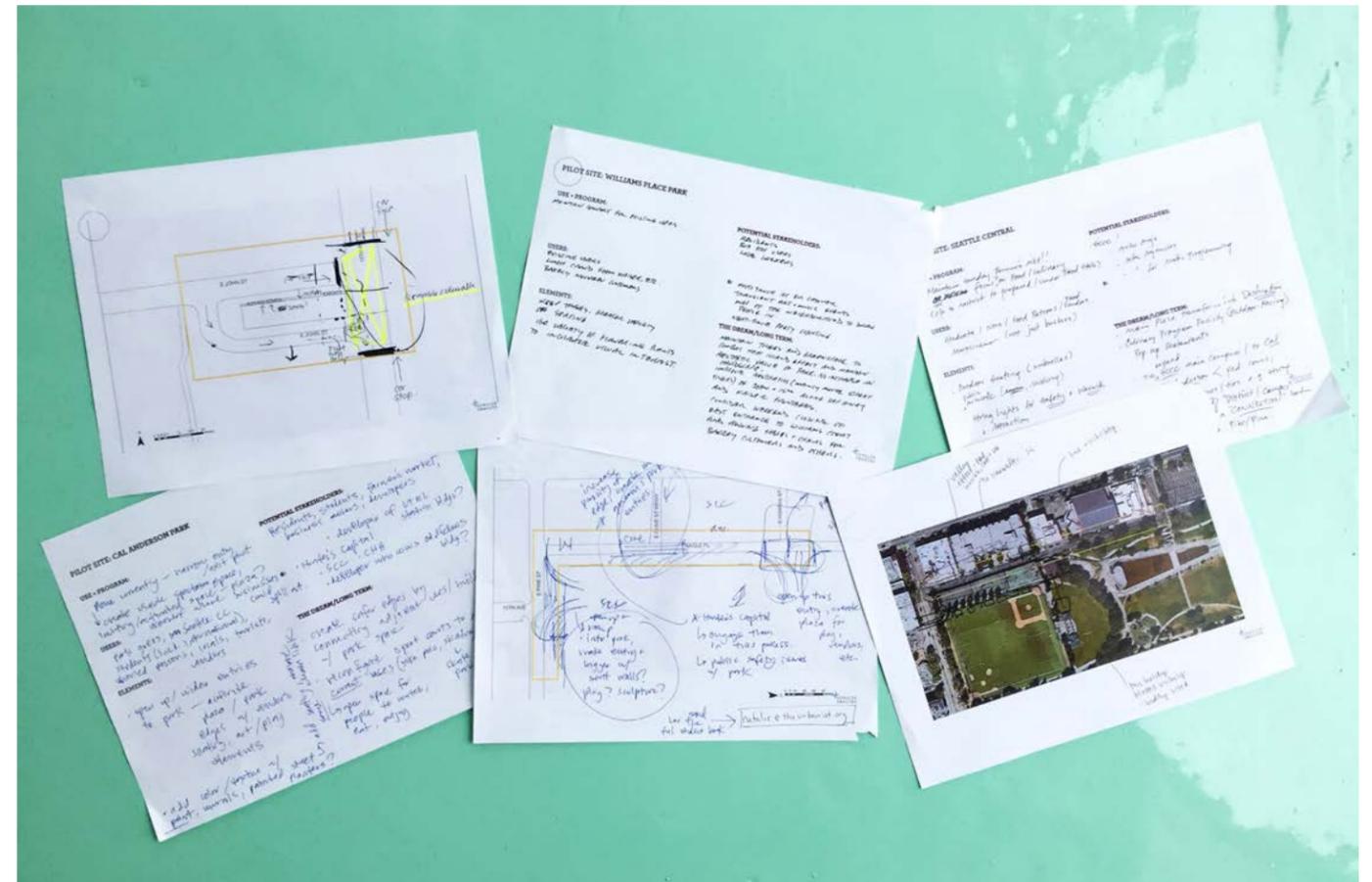
## workshop feedback

collecting perspectives

In November 2019, Louise Grasso led a workshop at Seattle Central College to gather feedback from stakeholders who work or live on Capitol Hill. Stakeholders were invited by Community Roots Housing (formerly Capitol Hill Housing) staff. In the main exercise, participants worked in small groups to describe what a pilot might look like at one of the sites. They described and mapped existing stakeholders, challenges, potential uses, elements to include

in a pilot, low budget solutions, and long-term visions.

Feedback varied, but often suggested ways to create senses of destination and safety. Participants also focused on existing activities and stakeholders, such as the farmer's market at Seattle Central College's plaza. This feedback was a critical intermediate point between analyzing the five sites and designing the pilot concept that is presented in the following chapter.



## additional precedents

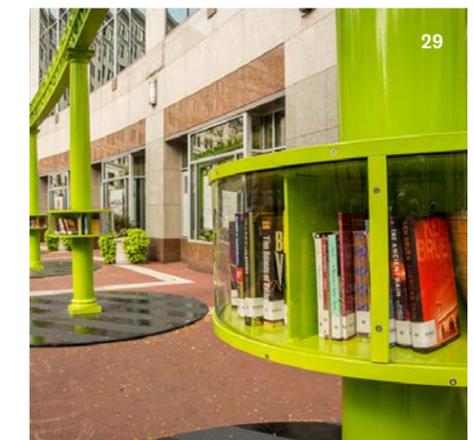
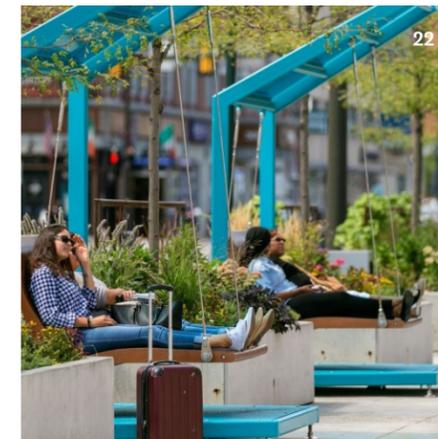
inspirational projects and approaches

Additional precedents provide inspiration for play, seating, feedback, and community sharing elements in the public realm. In row 1, colorful scaffolding and netting structures, illuminated swings, and repurposed pool noodles suggest a sense of play through their bright colors and user responsiveness. In row 2, different seating opportunities expand the concept of public seating beyond the standard park bench. In row 3, various feedback mechanisms are

creative and eye-catching, inviting community members to leave their marks and contribute to collective musings. In row 4, free offerings like food pantries and libraries provide opportunities to give and receive goods.

24-26, left to right: *Before I Die Wall* (San Francisco), *String Survey* at Northern Spark festival (Minneapolis), *Hollywood Pop* (Los Angeles)

27-29, left to right: *Little Free Pantry* (Concord), *Little Free Library* (New York City), *Sharing Library* (Indianapolis)





## pilot concept

physical design improvements for public realm activation

All five sites have potential for physical improvements to their spaces. Adding more seating, more play, and more plants aims to benefit all existing and future users of public space. These design changes can bring greater awareness to the importance of the public realm as an inviting place for everyone.

Given the temporary and flexible nature of pilot projects, we designed a legible kit of parts that could be assembled at all five sites. This

consistency in form and function across sites assists with larger neighborhood wayfinding, drawing attention to important pockets of the public realm that have been overlooked or underutilized. Late spring to early summer, approximately April to June, would be an ideal time for implementation. The inclusion of overhead shelter and pedestrian scale lighting help sustain this pilot in periods of rain and at night.



## kit of parts

a flexible system

The design of each pilot is informed first by the inclusion of six central programming elements. Each element tests ways the sites might be improved, and aims to inspire people to take ownership and begin envisioning what these places might be. The modular design creates consistency across pilot sites while also allowing for units to be arranged according to the needs of each site. Inherent is an ability to assemble and disassemble, move,

relocate, and reuse.

The materials and their dimensions were chosen for their availability, scalability, and low cost, while also paying mind to several key aesthetic details. The primary materials are wood, powder-coated scaffold tubes, and powder-coated steel sheets. Custom cutouts in steel sheet elements suggest placemaking while also discouraging theft of movable items like benches.



play



rest



sharing



ownership



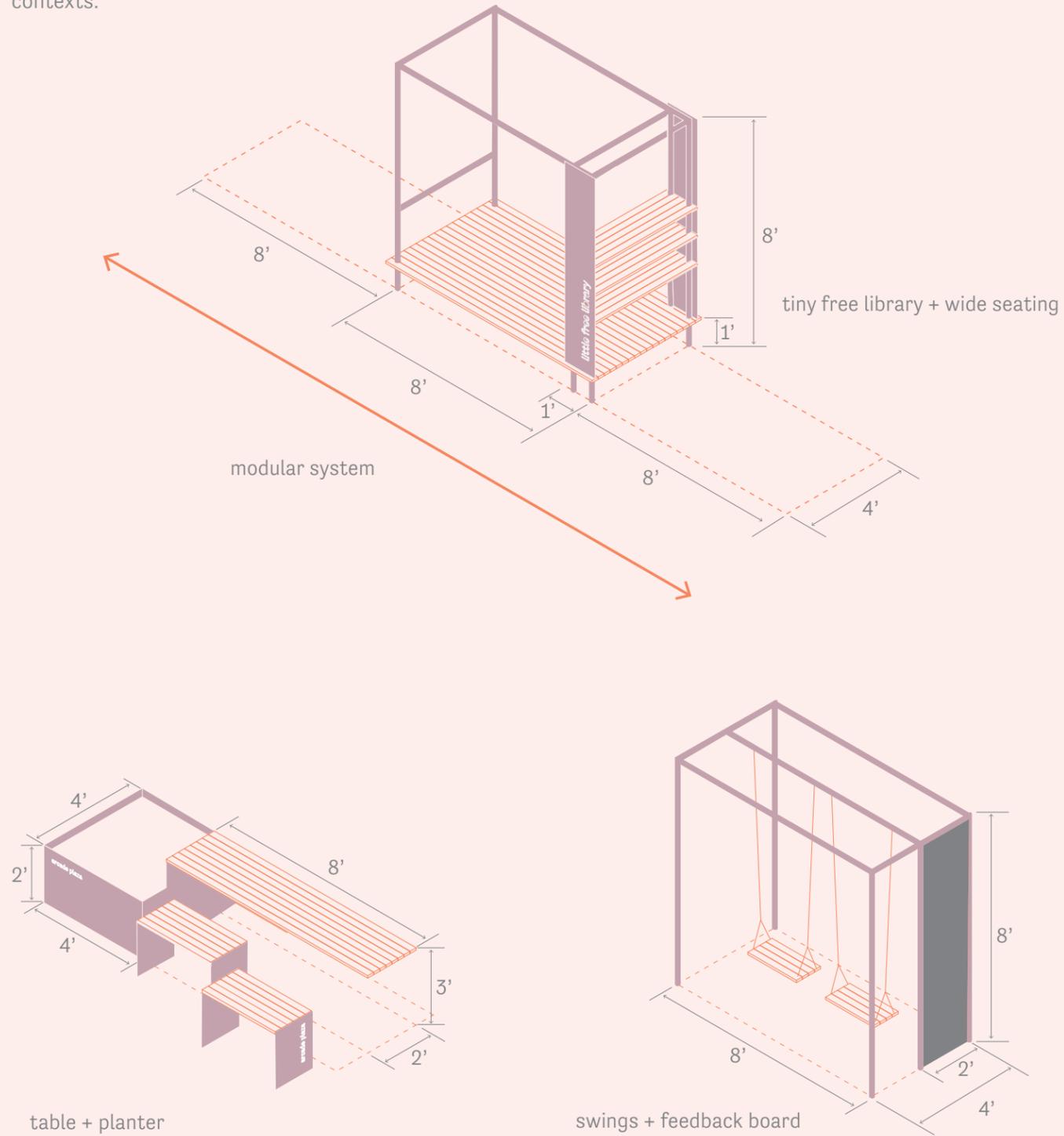
visibility



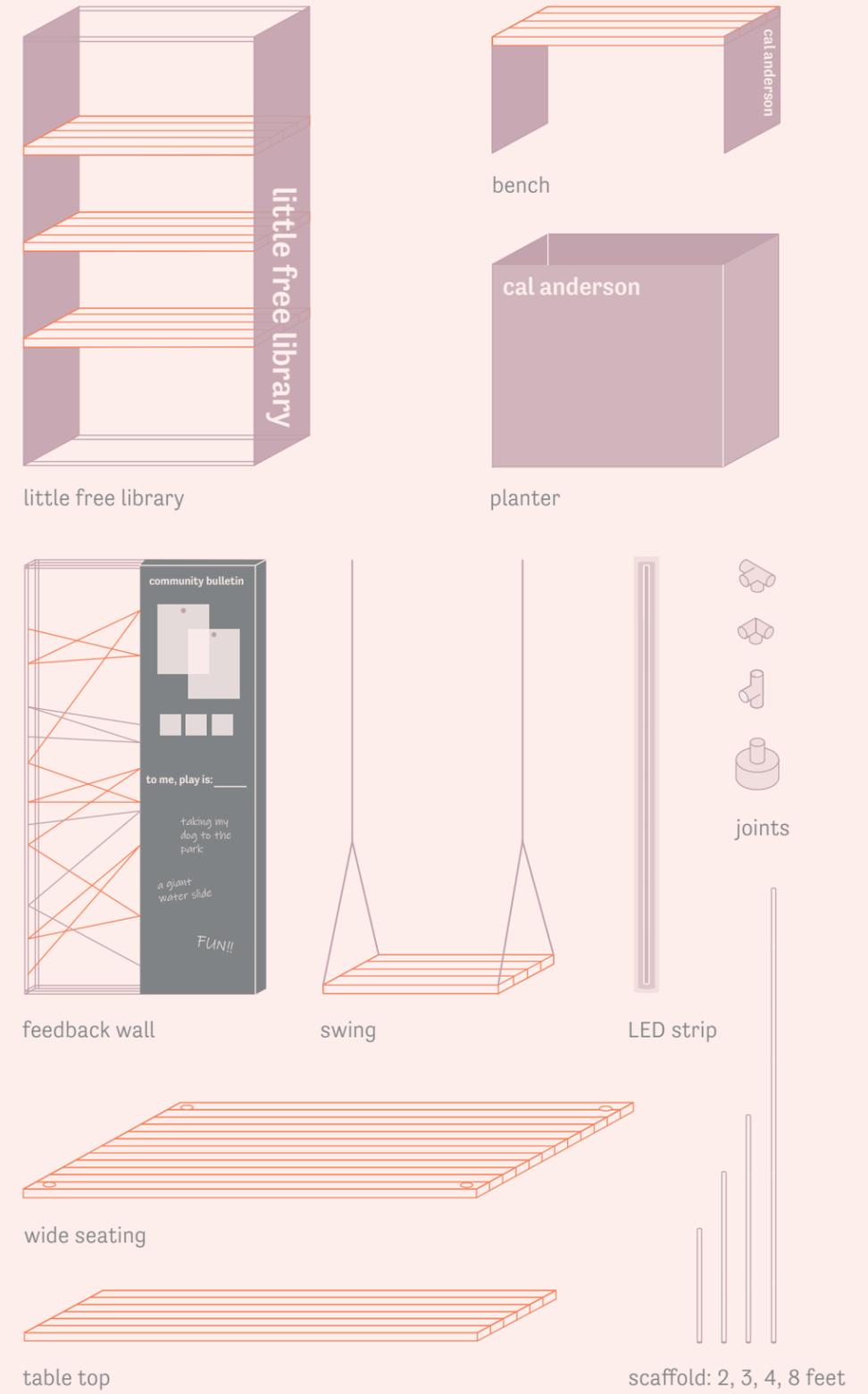
plantings

## base modular system

This concept includes a foundational series of three units. Additional units can be added to address different contexts.



## kit of parts



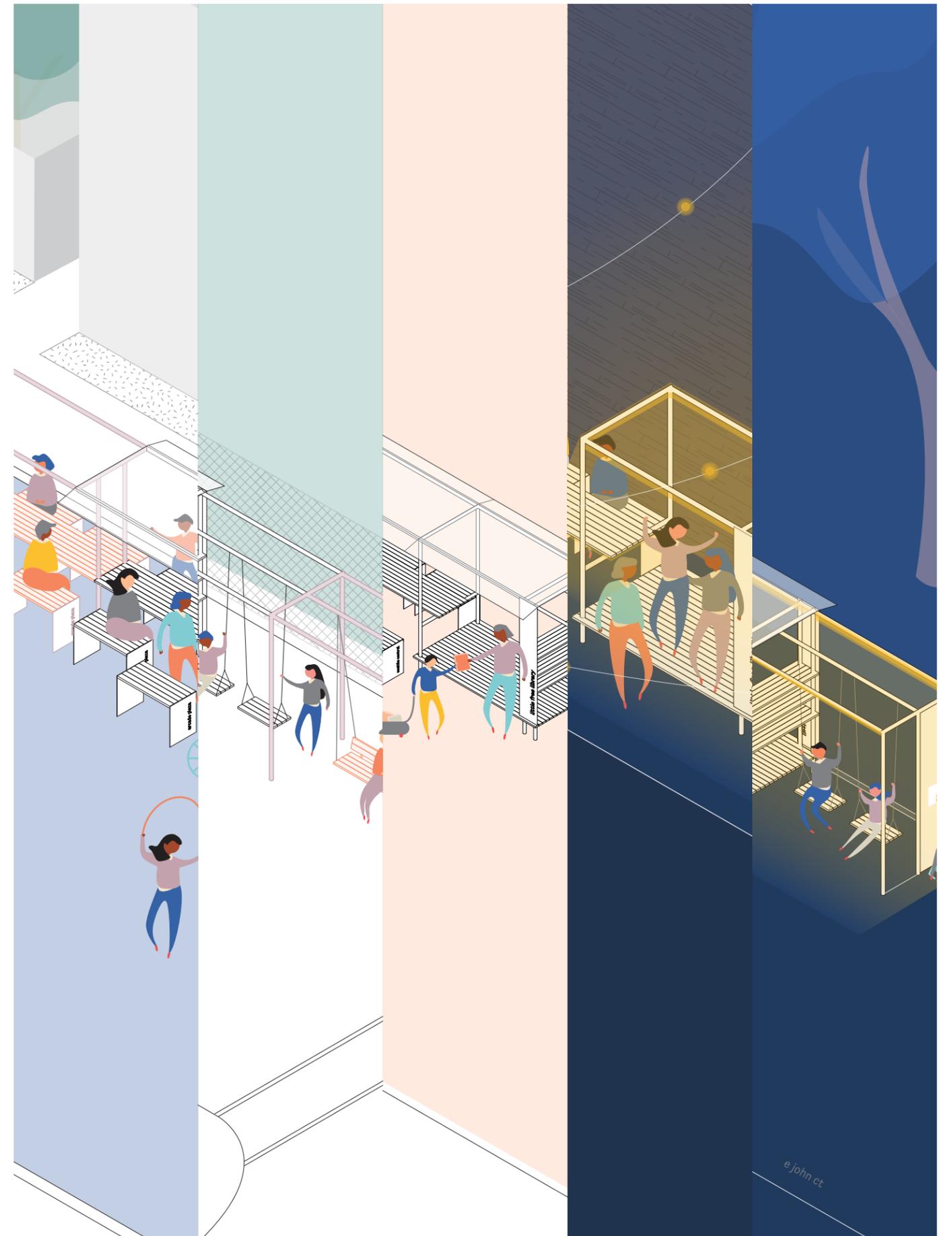
## application at sites

addressing site specific needs

While the five sites share many opportunities and challenges, there are some specific site needs that merit additional design elements. A site that is already bordered by dining options may benefit from more seating modules, while a site at a prominent park may be enhanced by more play modules. For each site, we build upon the base kit of parts—planter, seating, library, swing—and suggest additional modules relevant to the context. Users and stakeholders are identified, where

stakeholders are seen as users who may have capital capacity to invest in creating and sustaining a pilot project.

Each site details two options for pilot placement. The preferred option suggests what could be most successful in inviting passersby and activating the site. Some preferred options are within the right of way; collaboration with SDOT and other entities would be needed to help shift the priority from cars to people.





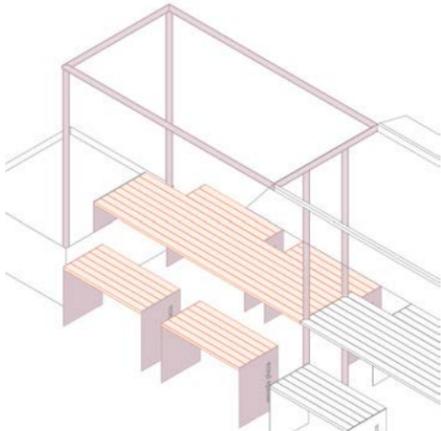
Building upon SDOT's efforts and existing uses, create a more active and inviting neighborhood place.

## arcade plaza



### Preferred + Secondary Locations

Both preferred locations at Arcade Plaza allow for tie-in to adjacent dining establishments, including Carmelo's Tacos. The first location is along the eastern edge of the site, away from car traffic and nearer existing trees, while the second location is sited nearer pedestrian traffic and the taco restaurant.



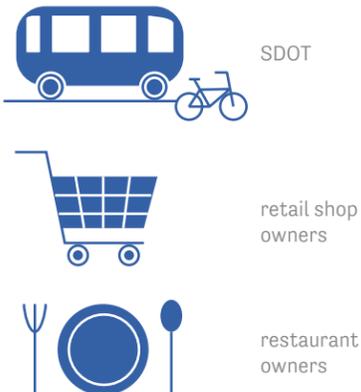
### Unique Site Elements

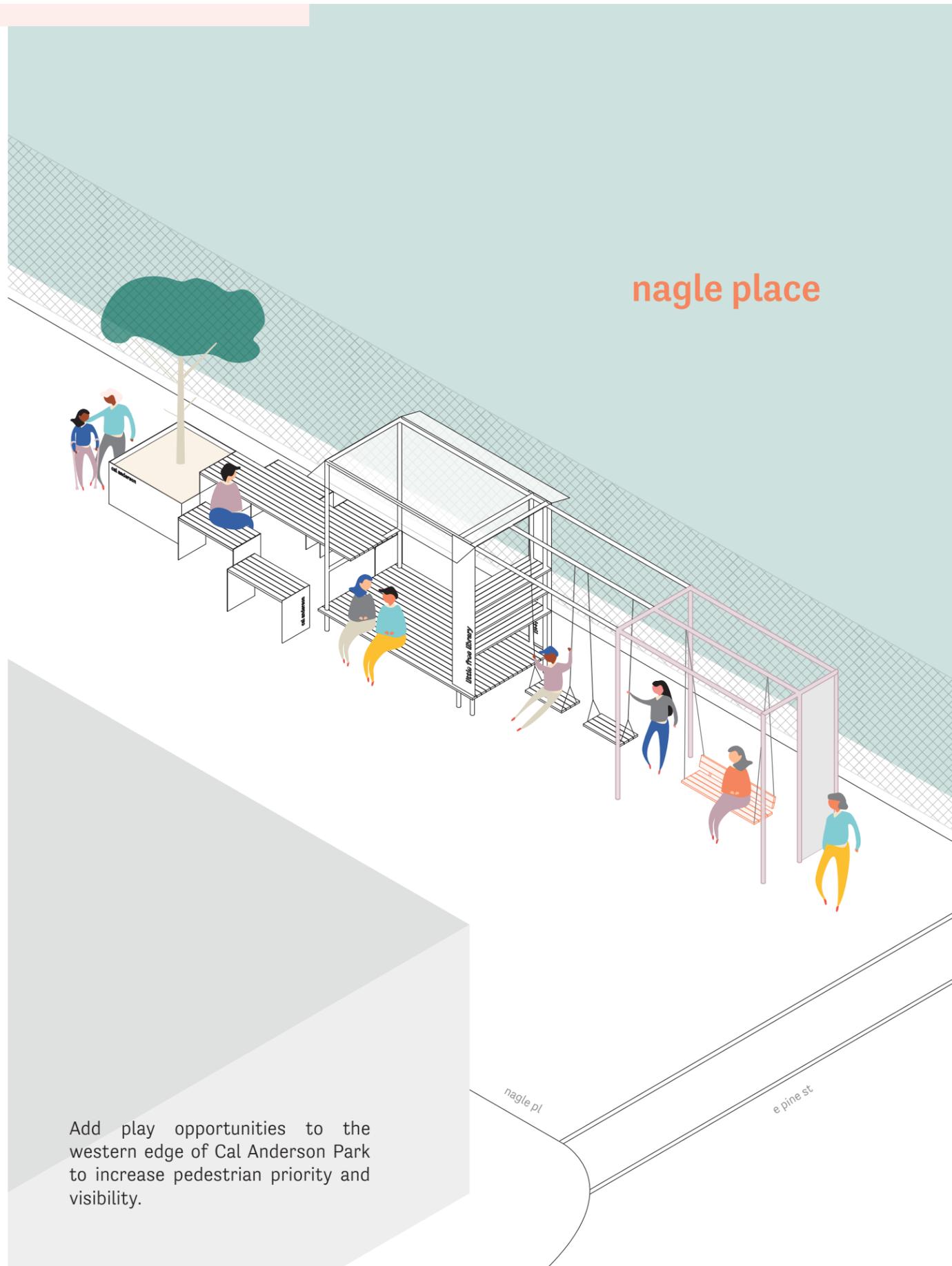
An additional table responds to the site's high potential to serve as a gathering place for dining and meeting throughout the day. The lack of street trees at this site informs the choice to include a tree in the pilot unit.

### Arcade Plaza Users



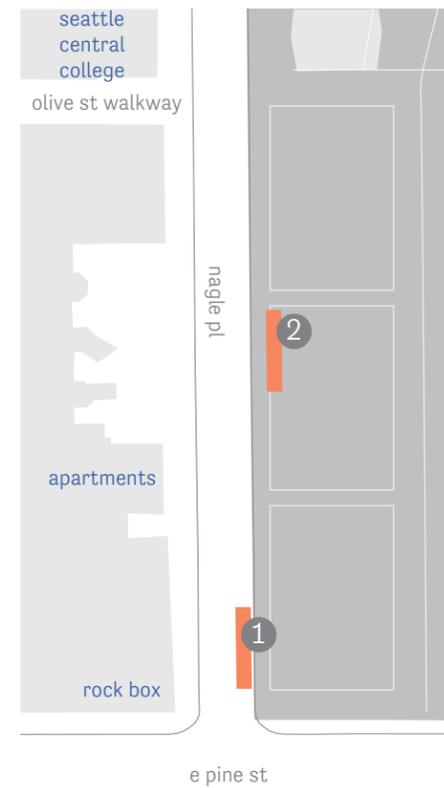
### Arcade Plaza Stakeholders





Add play opportunities to the western edge of Cal Anderson Park to increase pedestrian priority and visibility.

## nagle place



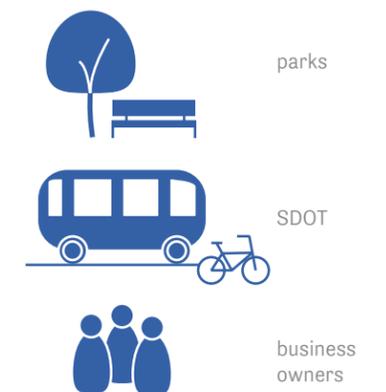
### Preferred + Secondary Locations

The preferred location for this pilot is near the corner of Nagle and Pine, given the proximity of pedestrians on Pine and high use of adjacent tennis courts. This may require temporary closure of the southern portion of Nagle, but could increase activation of an important edge of the park. The second potential location is on the tennis courts.

### Nagle Place Users



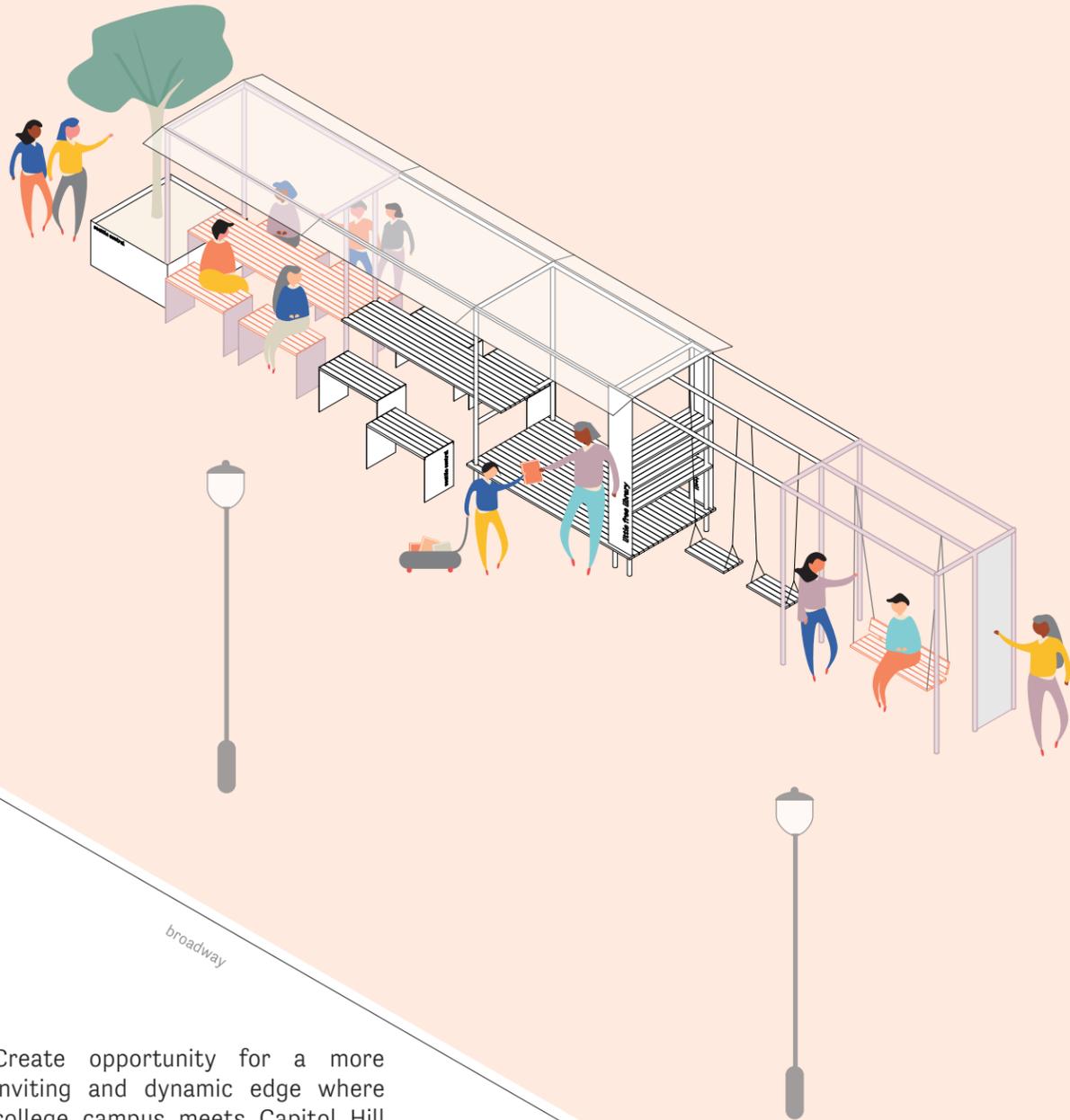
### Nagle Place Stakeholders



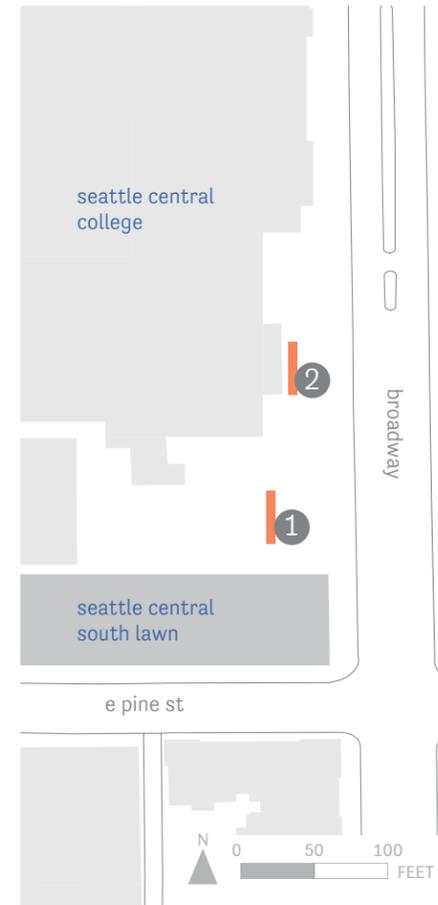
### Unique Site Elements

Nagle Place is the least vegetated edge of Cal Anderson; adding a tree could provide some needed texture and shade. An additional swing adds greater capacity for play or rest, as there are few opportunities to stay along this edge.

# seattle central college



Create opportunity for a more inviting and dynamic edge where college campus meets Capitol Hill community.



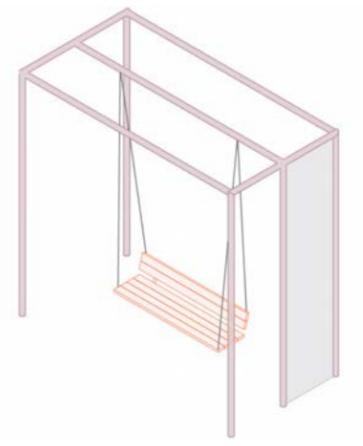
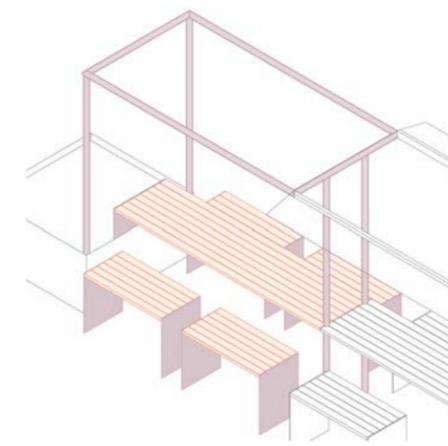
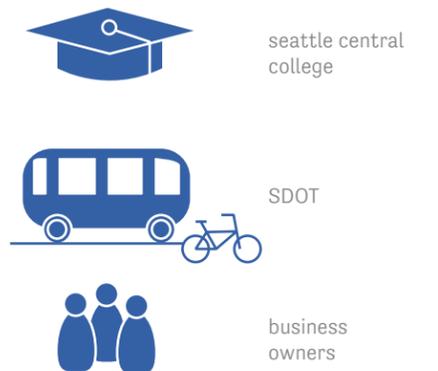
## Preferred + Secondary Locations

The central plaza has high potential to be a destination public gathering space. The preferred location draws people into the heart of the plaza, while the second choice location activates the wide sidewalk between the campus' two main entrances and can tie in with farmers market booths.

## Seattle Central Users

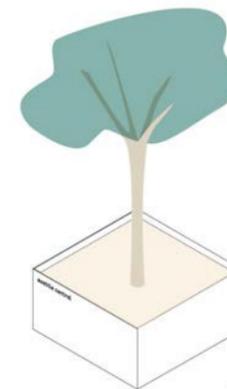


## Seattle Central Stakeholders



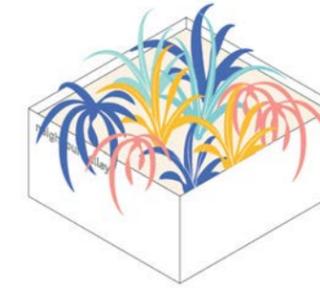
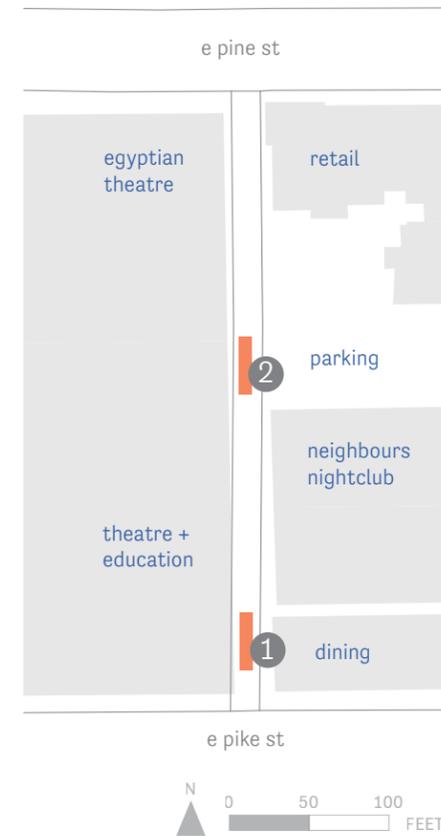
## Unique Site Elements

The pilot at Seattle Central responds to the plaza's large scale and highly varied user groups by adding play elements and additional seating. The addition of a tree in the planter unit suggests what additional trees might add to the hardscape dominated plaza area.





Increase wayfinding to Neighbours Nightclub and foster a greater sense of invitation, safety, and visibility.



### Unique Site Elements

A planter of shade-tolerant species adds texture and visual interest to an otherwise non-vegetated space. Given the space constraints of the alley, there are no additional modules added at this site.

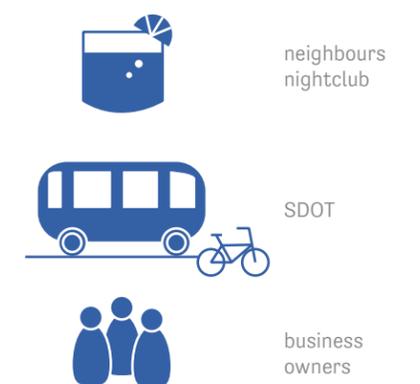
### Preferred + Secondary Locations

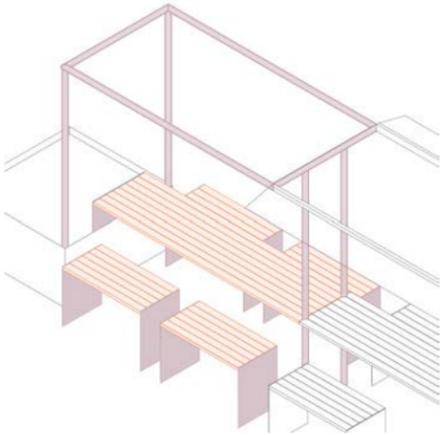
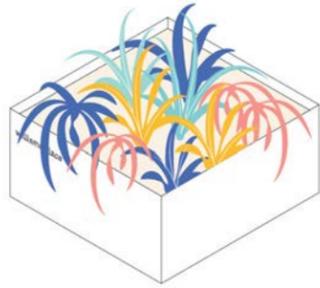
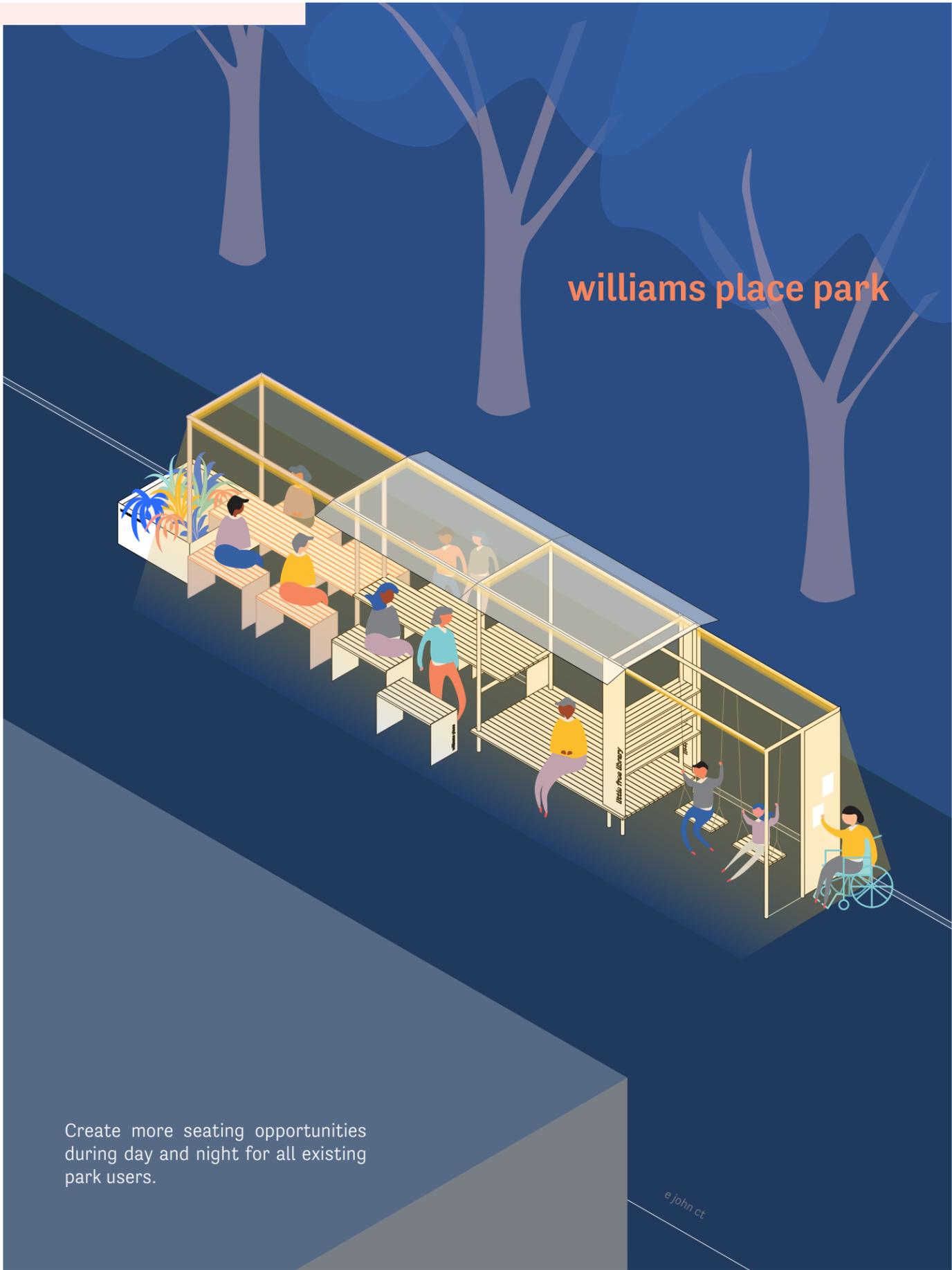
The preferred location is near the corner of Neighbours Alley and Pike, given the high volume of commercial activity on Pike. The second location is adjacent to Neighbours Nightclub, serving as a welcoming wayfinding installation. Both these locations may require temporary partial closure of the alley or temporary rerouting of garbage pickup.

### Neighbours Alley Users



### Neighbours Alley Stakeholders

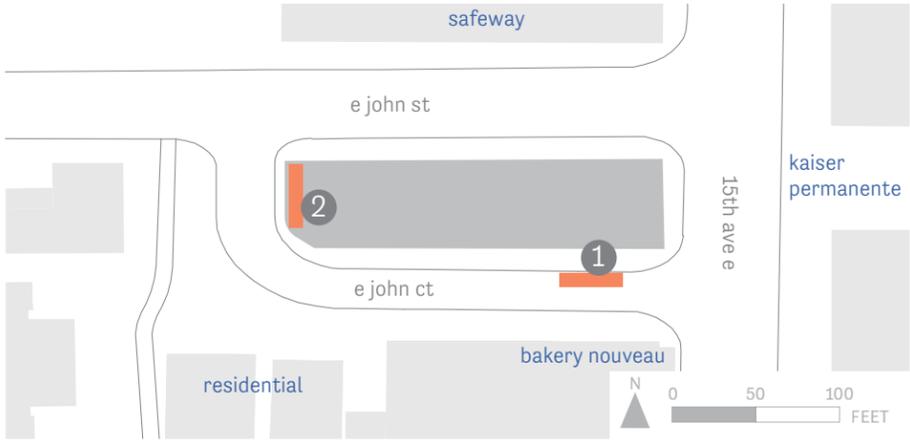




Unique Site Elements

An additional table provides needed outdoor dining and resting space for the area. The planter responds to the high presence of trees, but low presence of shrubs and other plantings at Williams Place.

Williams Place Park Users



Preferred + Secondary Locations

The preferred location requires temporary closure of part of East John Court adjacent to the park's main pathway, 15th Avenue, and Bakery Nouveau, an ideal lunch break location for area users like Kaiser employees. The secondary location places the pilot within the park's western edge, which is currently an open lawn lacking activating elements.

Williams Place Park Stakeholders



## moving forward

supporting a public realm for all

The process to improve public spaces is a long one, and it requires consistent public engagement, capital investment, and support for the champions of those spaces. Pilots are small steps in that process that enable stakeholders to engage community visions and concerns around these public spaces, and subsequently use data to leverage further funding in order to realize those visions.

The pilot projects proposed in this document are oriented toward collecting data about how public

spaces can ultimately serve not just some, but all, community members. Better designed public space, in tandem with good planning, can help discourage physical and cultural displacement, while also meeting multiple goals of increased connectivity, wellness, and environmental resilience. Moving forward, our hope is that stakeholders pursue pilots in high potential spaces, keeping mindful of their values and serving the different communities in which they are embedded.



# image credits

## chapter 1: introduction

- 1 Urban Land Institute

## chapter 2: the sites

### arcade plaza

- 2 <https://www.seattle.gov/parks/find/parks/occidental-square>
- 3 MIG|SVR Design
- 4 [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pearl\\_Street\\_Triangle\\_in\\_DUMBO.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pearl_Street_Triangle_in_DUMBO.jpg)

### nagle place

- 5 <https://www.skatein.com/skateparks/france/paris-france/rue-leon-cladel-alley-skatepark/>
- 6 <http://allspicecafe.com/blog/events/spice-alley-at-the-hollywood-farmers-market/>
- 7 <https://www.thisiscolossal.com/2015/12/impulse-light-seesaws-montreal/>

### seattle central

- 8 <https://www.picfair.com/pics/07469875-macy-s-and-cafe-in-westlake-park-on-a-sunny-day-downtown-seattle>
- 9 <https://www.asla.org/Guide/Site.aspx?id=40957>
- 10 <https://land8.com/reinterpreting-nature-in-design-teikyo-heisei-university-nakano-campus/>

### neighbours alley

- 11 <https://www.capitolhillseattle.com/2018/12/chs-pics-neighbours-alley-celebration-and-chs-pics-pledge-drive/>
- 12 <https://www.trover.com/d/1Mklx-post-alley-seattle-washington>
- 13 Alliance for Pioneer Square
- 14 Purple Gate Design

### williams place park

- 15 <http://www.startribune.com/go-ahead-vote-on-some-public-art/244357451/>
- 16 <https://www.signatureboston.com/lawn-on-d/community-activities/open-lawn-games>
- 17 <https://uneven-growth.moma.org/post/113958744383/the-multi-sensory-pathway-focuses-on-raising>

### additional precedents

- 18 <https://www.designboom.com/design/city-yeast-basurama-swings-park-re-create-taipei-04-12-2016/>
- 19 <https://raiviobumann.com/>
- 20 <https://www.mas.la/rio-vistas>
- 21 <https://www.dezeen.com/2013/05/31/roaming-market-by-aberrant-architecture/>
- 22 <https://www.artplaceamerica.org/funded-projects/porch-30th-street-station>
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- 25 <https://mcadsustainabledesign.com/string-survey-northern-spark/>
- 26 <https://www.mas.la/hollywood>
- 27 [https://www.independenttribune.com/news/little-free-pantry-offers-food-for-those-in-need/article\\_eae7708c-343f-11e8-b10a-5ba0aaae253b.html](https://www.independenttribune.com/news/little-free-pantry-offers-food-for-those-in-need/article_eae7708c-343f-11e8-b10a-5ba0aaae253b.html)
- 28 <https://www.citylab.com/design/2013/05/worlds-tiniest-library-pops-new-york-city/5742/>
- 29 <https://www.thisiscolossal.com/2015/10/public-collection-libraries/>

“As we create cities of the future, the human experience should always be at the forefront of design.”

-Louise Grasso

