
Downtown Community Plaza

12.21.2009

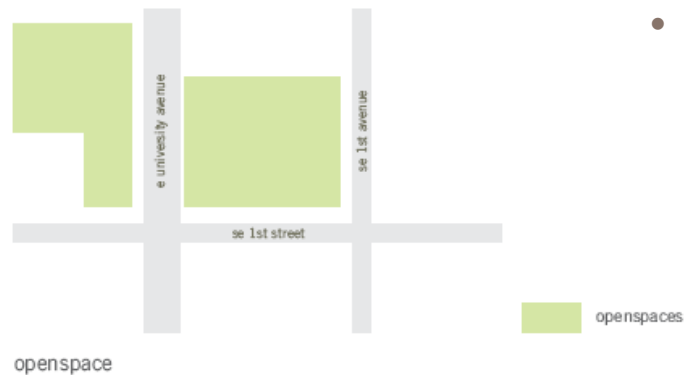
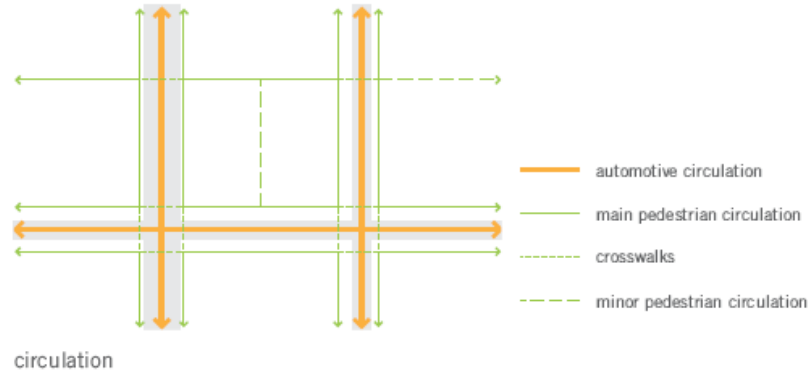


Background

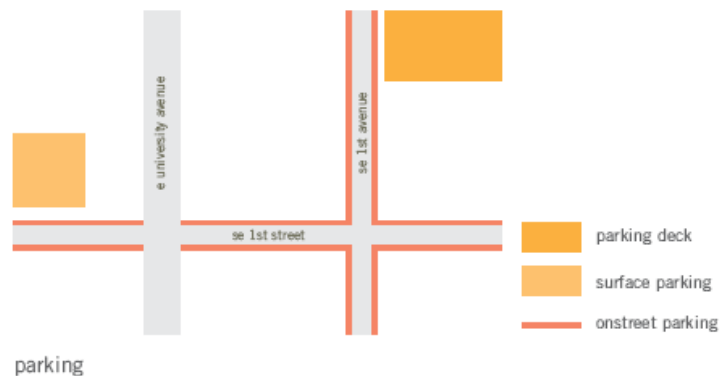
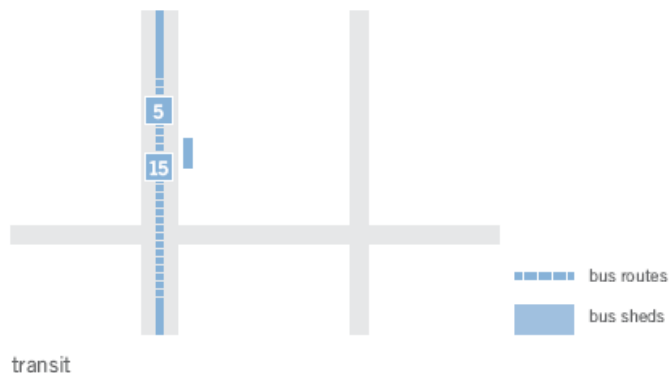
- The Plaza is located in the heart of Downtown's busiest pedestrian area
- Yet throughout its history, the Plaza has never been a place people want or choose to visit
 - In trying to fix this issue, Gainesville has always focused on design elements, but that approach has not yet succeeded
 - The issue is simple: The Plaza is a place, and a part of Downtown as a whole.



What kind of place is the Plaza?



- On quick observation, appears to have many elements crucial to a great public place...yet the space is not active



What kind of place do we want the Plaza to be?

- A great place!
 - A place people want to visit
 - A place people choose to visit
 - An authentic, functional part of our city's urban space
 - An amenity that contributes to Downtown
 - A lively, funky, fun, friendly place that embodies the best "Gainesville-y" qualities all in one location



What is a Great Place – How do we get there?



How do we make the Plaza a great place?

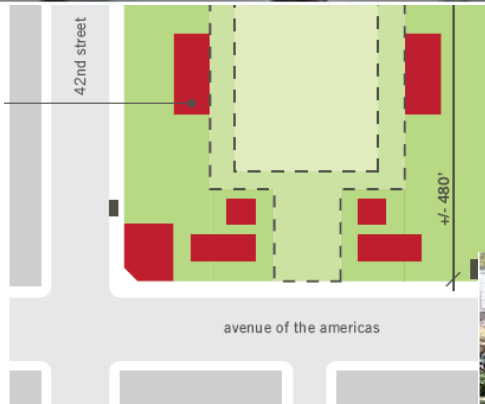
- The Plaza is a public place. Its purpose should be:
 - A place to get to know your community and your neighbors
 - A civic gathering place
 - An extension of the Downtown environment and downtown activities
 - A true part of Downtown, not a separate sort of place
 - A constant source of people, activity, and commerce
- Consider other public plazas – are there lessons to be learned?
 - Previous sessions examined dozens of plazas from other cities
 - Identified likes and dislikes, and made comparisons to our own Plaza
 - Discussion largely focused on activity levels, built environment and physical design
 - Many issues/concerns identified with the design of our own Plaza



The role of design

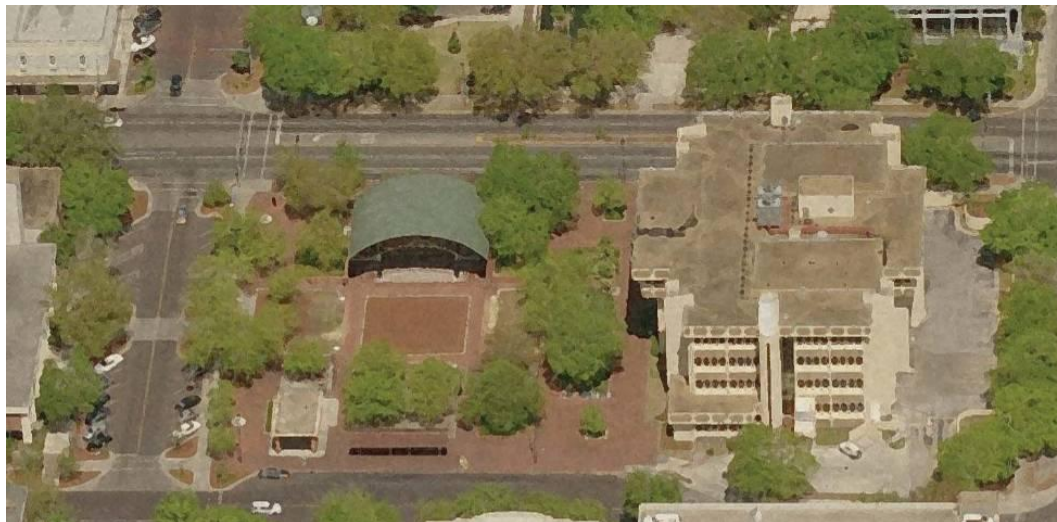
- Design is very important, but it is not the sole determining characteristic in creating a great place
- There is nothing intrinsically wrong with the core framework of the Plaza site
- A precedent study of a Bryant Park, one of the best public places in the country, provides a good comparison to our Plaza
 - At the urban design scale, the built environment, site, and surroundings/edges, the two places are very similar
 - However Bryant Park is very successful, and our Plaza is not – so what is the difference?

The way the space is utilized!



The Importance of Site Utilization

- Improved site utilization is essential to fostering activity on the Plaza
- Great public places have regular/daily utilization across the entire site
 - *Because they are physically set up to accommodate and encourage specific types of activity!*
- Site utilization – make sure the Plaza serves a real purpose and that the Plaza's physical configuration encourages and reinforces this purpose
 - Plaza must be part of and contribute to Downtown, not be a nondescript, ancillary feature
 - We know that we want increased activity at the Plaza, so we need to make sure there is no wasted space at the site.
 - Reposition the Plaza not only as a site of Downtown open space, but also as an urban market that can grow over time and create a unique downtown amenity
 - The layout of the entire site should maximize its ability to accommodate daily usage and activity
 - The layout should also accommodate programmed events and additional events/concerts at the Plaza



Site Design/Site Utilization

- The Plaza already has many elements crucial to a great public place
 - Open space, central location, lots of adjacent pedestrian activity, transit stops, surrounding retail/office/hotel/restaurants, active citizens, band shell for concerts, etc.
- Yet it is currently a vacant, neglected space
 - Workers don't utilize it during lunch hours
 - Residents and students don't gather there before going out in the evenings
 - Concerts are well attended, but programmed only 8% of overall time. Outside of this, the band shell is a vacant shelter
 - Except during sponsored activities, the Plaza is absent of pedestrians, highlighting serious issues in the design
- However, there is evidence the space can be successful, if properly utilized
 - Concerts, though infrequent, are well attended
 - Farmers market successfully showcases local products and businesses
 - Lunchtime and evening crowds provide constant pedestrian activity around the Plaza, and support adjacent businesses/restaurants
- We need to capture this market of users on a regular basis, through better site utilization of the Plaza
 - Utilization and design are iterative, and better utilization of the Plaza will result in physical changes to the site layout/design/details
 - Goal is prioritization of daily, regular activity, and strong support/expansion of programmed events such as concerts



Site utilization – making the most of the Plaza

1. Emphasize the significance of the corners
2. Clearly define the edges of the Plaza
3. Improve the central gathering space
4. Increase visibility into the interior of the Plaza



