

# Family-Friendly Urban Neighborhoods!



City of Seattle

**DRAFT**



Places and Spaces for Families and  
Children in Seattle's Center City

A WORKBOOK FOR CITY STAFF

December 2006



**CITY**  
PLANNING  
city**design**



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# Introduction

The Family-Friendly Urban Neighborhoods Initiative (FUN!) is about making Center City neighborhoods more supportive of and attractive to families and youth. The Initiative is part of the City's "Center City Seattle" strategy which focuses on encouraging new housing, economic growth, efficient transportation and great urban neighborhoods in Seattle's downtown core and nine adjacent centrally-located neighborhoods. The FUN! initiative stems from the belief that the presence of children and families is a necessary component of sustainable and healthy communities, and that the Center City is no exception.

The FUN! Workbook identifies family-friendly places and spaces in greater detail and is meant as a starting point for City staff to discuss policy and project opportunities and to prepare for a family-friendly work plan for 2007 and beyond. It is also designed to be a source of inspiration and a guide to creating a safe and attractive Center City where families and children feel invited not just to visit but to live, work, and play.

While the average percentage for households with children of all major U.S. cities is 26%, Seattle ranks second lowest with 15%, and the Center City neighborhoods have substantially less (5%). One long walk around the Center City, however, and it is obvious that each neighborhood within it has many existing strengths and outstanding potential,



*A whale of a time at the Seattle Center.*



*Streets designed to accommodate children's play. Manchester, England*

and that all are undergoing dramatic transformation. New development is turning small pockets of activity into full-fledged neighborhoods; high-quality civic and urban design have complemented ongoing open space improvements; and strategic transportation investments are improving circulation and creating safer, more pleasant connections. All these changes have contributed to the emerging neighborhood "fabrics" that represent exciting new opportunities for attracting and supporting families with children.

## Why Focus On Children In The Center City?

There are many reasons to encourage children and families to live in the Center City. From reducing our impact on the regional environment to encouraging greater physical activity among youth, the benefits of family-friendly urban neighborhoods are wide-ranging. Making Seattle's urban center amenable to families with children is a socially responsible choice towards building an inclusive, sustainable Seattle.

### Accommodating Children Creates a Better Environment for All

Spaces designed with kids in mind work well for everyone. It is often a challenge to distinguish what represents kid-friendly design specifically versus quality design for the public at-large. Great pedestrian streets, accessible and easy-to-use transit, and clean, comfortable public spaces are kid-friendly assets that all citizens can enjoy.



*Particularly with children, the smallest design details can make the difference between a playful, safe place and a space to be avoided. Not originally meant to be a wading pool, this fountain in the Seattle Center (left) has become a summertime oasis because of its inviting design and natural rock details. Shadows cast upon a tree pit grate at City Hall (below) are an irresistible combination to a curious young toddler.*



### More Stable, Civically Aware Communities

Some of the best arguments for fostering families in the Center City are some of the most difficult to measure. One argument suggests that providing “cradle-to-grave” housing is vital for strong social networks and stability within communities – both in and outside of the city. Communities that retain families throughout their various life phases experience less turnover and are more cohesive as a result.

Family urban neighborhoods also offer opportunities for young people to engage in community and civic life and broaden their understanding of how cities work. Living within an urban public realm exposes kids to a greater variety of racial, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds as well as the community facilities that represent and serve them.

### Healthier, More Mobile Young Adults

By virtue of a dense street system and transportation infrastructure, urban neighborhoods provide excellent options for family and youth mobility. The presence of safe and viable routes for kids to walk and bike, together with a wider variety of destinations and activities, encourages more physical activity and can reduce childhood obesity.

### Family Urban Neighborhoods Reduce Sprawl

To reduce our impact on the natural environment, experts have promoted highly walkable, transit rich, and compact mixed-use communities – exactly those found in the Center City. Moreover, Seattle’s core neighborhoods have expressed a desire for increased residential development and family services in their neighborhood planning processes, and have positioned themselves to absorb a significant share of the population increases projected for the region, making family urban neighborhoods a good opportunity to reduce sprawl.

### Creating A Center City for All

Home to many of the iconic images that represent Seattle, the Center City is everybody’s space, and thus should reflect who Seattleites are and what we value. Over the years, residents and businesses have repeatedly articulated a civic vision built on the principles of sustainability, diversity, and livability. While these principles are evident in the Center City, the addition of more children and families – and the types of spaces they demand and create – will lift the qualities of Center City to more closely match that vision.

# Places & Spaces

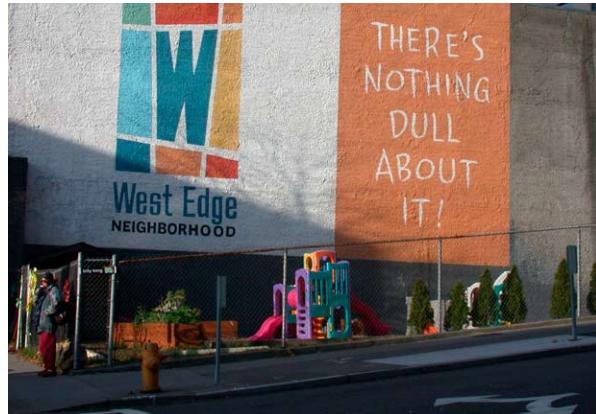
Family-friendly urban design is found in many forms and at many scales throughout the city, from small details and individual spaces to entire neighborhoods and corridors. Kid-friendly design can be age-group specific or it can be a matter of universally improving the overall safety and comfort of city sidewalks and streets. Most importantly, designing for kids and families means providing more places and spaces to play, learn from the city, and be safe while taking advantage of the cultural and social amenities of urban living.

What follows is an overview of six categories of spaces and places that make the Center City attractive and supportive to youth and families:

- Schools
- Housing
- Open Spaces
- Streetscapes and the Public Realm
- Interior Public Spaces
- Programmed Activities and 'Temporary' Places

Within each category, this Workbook provides examples of successful places around the country and world that may provide direction and inspiration. We then highlight places or areas within the Center City that may be particularly good candidates for family and youth-related enhancements. There is also a set of questions at the end of each category and room for notes to facilitate feedback, and we encourage you to write down any and all ideas.

*The International Fountain, part of the Seattle Center, is a particularly popular spot during the summer - and another reminder of the power of water to attract families and children.*



*Signs of family life in the heart of downtown.*



*Places and spaces that attract kids and families are not always fixed and permanent (above). In fact, the novelty and temporary nature of programmed events, street performers, and exhibits/displays are often what bring about excitement and surprise to local residents.*





*Seattle's quality of life is unmistakably connected to its regional environment as well as its neighborhood character. Policies and investments that create inclusive neighborhoods in the downtown core - particularly with families and children - act to both relieve pressure on the suburban fringe and build a more desirable, sustainable city.*

# Places & Spaces: Schools

## Importance and Potential of Urban Schools



The most obvious and important place for children outside of their homes are schools. Schools are critical for peer-to-peer interaction and healthy emotional and social development. Because it is a daily destination, an urban school's location and relation to housing and public amenities such as parks are critical factors contributing to its success and attraction for families.

Urban schools face many challenges including limited financial resources, declining enrollments, debate over curriculum content and quality, and uneven public support. Nonetheless, many cities--including Seattle--have responded with resourceful and innovative solutions and have managed to create urban schools that meet the needs of families and communities.

There are reasons to be excited about investment in Center City schools. Two public schools already exist downtown that can be improved or expanded, while two private high schools, several private elementary schools, and three dozen daycare centers offer additional options for families. With an abundance of resources and particularly strong ties to the cultural arts and business communities, the Center City has greater potential for private/public collaboration than most other neighborhoods. Together with coordinated streetscape and park improvements, collaborative efforts to use schools to anchor a family urban neighborhood are an opportunity not to miss.

## Examples of Innovative Urban Neighborhood Schools

### Penn Alexander School – Philadelphia

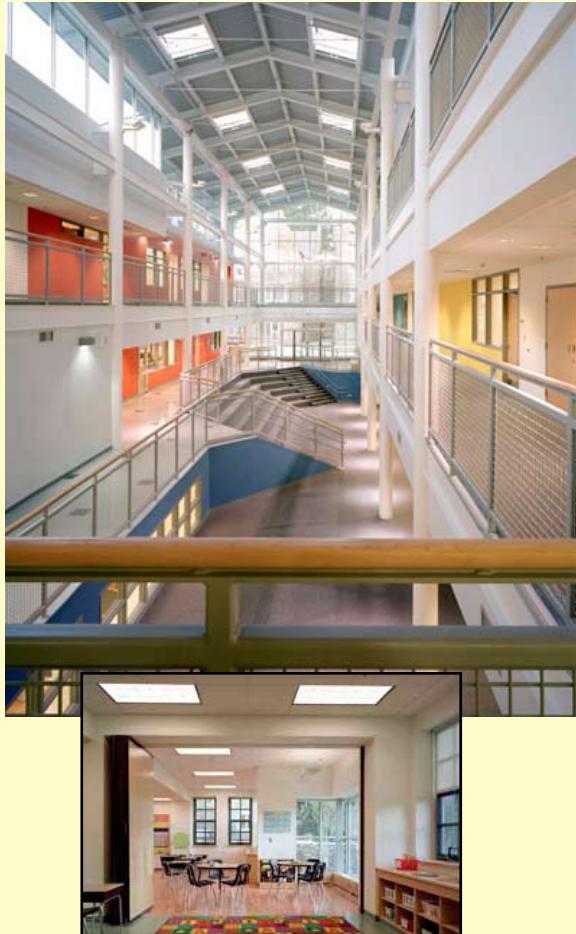
A unique collaboration between the University of Pennsylvania, the School District, teachers and community groups, this pre-Kindergarten through 8th grade school is a best-practices example of public/private collaboration, curriculum design, and building design. The 5-acre campus and 83,000 sq. ft. building are located in the heart of an urban neighborhood and designed for active community uses once the school day is over. The school, which draws students from the local neighborhood, features a non-traditional layout with atrium, specialized teaching and age-specific play space, and an outdoor rain garden and science classroom.

### Elsie Roy Elementary – Vancouver, B.C.

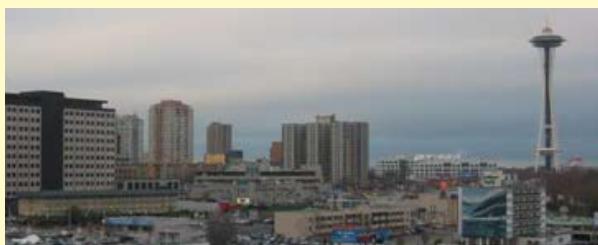
The first school to be built in downtown Vancouver in 50 years, the opening of Elsie Roy in 2004 was largely the result of parents' lobbying efforts. Located adjacent to a burgeoning high-rise residential community, a large public park and daycare center, many of the attending students walk, bike, or rollerblade to school. The building is currently at capacity, and the school has already had to turn away hundreds of applicants – prompting plans for additional schools downtown.

### The New School at Southshore - Seattle

One of the most innovative public elementary schools in the city, the New School at Southshore represents a highly disciplined yet flexible approach to urban education, and is a unique collaboration of public and private funding. Catalyzed by a large donor, this collaboration allows for private funds to bolster public aid, which keeps class sizes down and cultural arts programs intact.



*Natural light, quality materials, and flexible spaces characterize the interior of the Penn Alexander School in Philadelphia.*



*View from the rooftop play area, or “playground in the sky” of the Spruce Street School, a successful private elementary school in downtown Seattle. Teachers often utilize the many resources of the city through day trips, while the school just recently recommitted to its urban location with a new building.*

## Areas of Opportunity

### Bailey Gatzert Elementary School

The only public elementary school within Center City boundaries, Bailey Gatzert is located in an area targeted for significant housing and economic growth. Potential new investments in transportation and open space would complement several existing resources, which include a nearby P-Patch and state-of-the-art community center with after-school activities.



### The Center School

Located in the Seattle Center, the Center School is viewed by many as one of the most innovative high schools in Seattle. It acts as a ‘magnet’ for advanced learning students and is supported by a strong arts program. With changes and new investment planned for

the Seattle Center, an expansion of the school and greater integration with public/private facilities and nearby neighborhoods seems both likely and desirable – as does greater marketing to potential new families.

### A new school

As part of an emerging South Lake Union community, a new public school partnered with the biotechnology/life-sciences industry is worth exploring. Large new developments in the Denny Triangle have also generated talk of a new school, while opportunities along a reinvigorated and increasingly residential waterfront may also arise. A collaboration that finds creative solutions to funding and building design issues could be a high-profile example of sustainable neighborhood development in the Center City.



*The Bailey Gatzert Elementary School surrounds several active and growing neighborhoods, including Little Saigon and the historic Central District. Adjacent to some of the busiest arterials in Seattle, there are many pedestrian safety issues, particularly with students having to walk and bike across and along Boren Ave (above).*



### **Higher Standard School Zones/ Safe Routes to School**

Safe Routes to Schools is a popular program that encourages walking and biking to school through outreach and education, crossing guard programs, and infrastructure improvements. Currently, Bailey Gatzert is the only school in Center City to have the program, and perhaps expansion of the program to private schools could be explored. Higher standards for school zones might also encourage greater investment in pedestrian safety and comfort.



*Intense residential and mixed-use development in South Lake Union, combined with new transportation and streetscape improvements, existing resources like Cascade Park (above), and potentially a host of willing sponsors and partners could make a new quality downtown school become reality.*

# Lessons for Seattle

- Capitalize on good transit access and proximity to parks, community services and high-density residential development.
- Explore non-traditional school campuses/buildings with efficient but flexible spaces
- Encourage public/private funding and institutional collaboration
- Integrate schools with neighborhood activities beyond the typical school day
- Ensure safe pedestrian access to and from nearby residential and after-school destinations.

## Questions for City Staff

- Is there an ideal location for a new school in Center City? Should it be an elementary or secondary school?
- What organizations in the downtown area could potentially lend themselves to an education partnership with the Seattle School District (or private schools)?
- Do any of these organizations/institutions currently have an educational component to their work/program?
- What City projects are currently underway or in planning for the SLU/Denny Triangle/Waterfront areas that have potential benefit to families and children?
- What other potential projects are there?

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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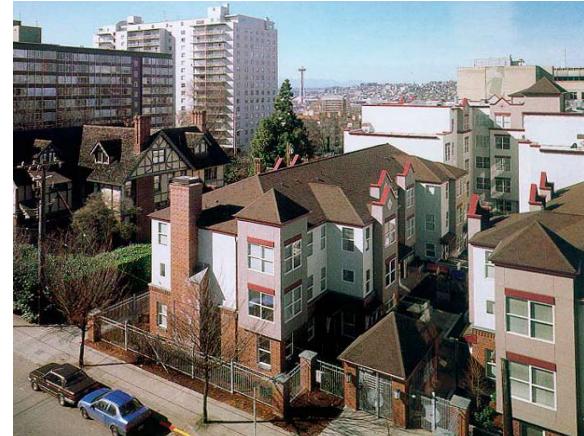
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# Places & Spaces: Housing for Families

While school quality ranks high on the list of factors influencing parents' decisions on where to raise a family, housing is an equally--or more--important factor for families in many cities across the country. Like its peer cities, Seattle's greatest challenge is creating housing options that are affordable and amenable to middle-class and growing families. This Workbook focuses on issues of housing design and integration with context, recognizing that affordability is fundamental to family-friendliness but beyond the scope of this document to address.

## Housing Trends

There is evidence that increasing numbers of families with infants and young children are beginning to cluster within Center City neighborhoods - including near Pike Place Market, Belltown, Chinatown/I.D. and the emerging "West Edge." However, current trends suggest that many will move out when their kids reach school-age and the housing stock no longer supports the needs of a growing family. With projections of more than 20,000 new housing units in the next 20 years, the good news is that Center City neighborhoods will only become more vibrant and active as time goes by. If Seattle is to retain maturing young families, however, developers of new housing and renovated units must creatively respond to this nascent but growing market demand for family-friendly design.



*Cascade Court Apartments, First Hill, Seattle. One of the relatively few affordable housing developments in Center City that was specifically designed for families.*

## Design Considerations

Design and spatial considerations of family-friendly housing operate at various scales from the intimate (design details and material choices), through unit and building configuration, to the more expansive neighborhood context. Unlike affordability where external influences play a much larger role in dictating housing prices, the City has several ways to positively affect housing design and integration through regulatory and incentive tools. In a city blessed with many civic-minded developers, even a family-focused set of design guidelines could genuinely improve the design quality of new housing development.



*201 Turk and 101 Jones St., San Francisco (right). This affordable family housing development focused its play spaces in the interior courtyard and utilized open exterior accessways to facilitate visual access. Other details such as human-scaled entrances with weather protection, durable yet attractive landscaping, strategically-placed common areas, and seating for parental supervision reveal a commitment to family-friendly design.*

# Family-Friendly Design Elements

A critical factor that helped guide the residential housing boom in downtown Vancouver, B.C., was the “High Density Housing for Families with Children Guidelines” adopted by the City Council in 1992. While not absolute requirements, the robust political and legal structure of the city’s regulatory system challenged developers to incorporate design principles and think creatively to accommodate

families. In San Francisco, a similar effort to complement inclusionary housing regulations with family-friendly design guidelines is underway and represents one of the city’s strategies for retaining and attracting families with children. The following elements were collected and distilled from those family-friendly design documents to provide concrete examples.

## Design Details

- ✓ Non-toxic and durable finishes for walls, cabinetry, floors, and outdoor landscaping
- ✓ Window placement, ventilation, and wall construction to retain visual and acoustic privacy
- ✓ Outlets and water faucets in garage for car upkeep
- ✓ Bathtub (as opposed to stand-up) showers
- ✓ Larger kitchens and eating spaces
- ✓ Sufficient storage space, including space in units and within secure common areas for play equipment, bicycles, and tools
- ✓ Greater attention to railing height and spacing; door handles and ease of egress; and placement of windows and heating that are appropriate for young children
- ✓ Age-specific considerations in the design of common play areas. Location and landscaping that maximize sunlight access and ensure visual access from units

## Unit Design and Configuration

- ✓ Sufficient size and number of rooms, i.e. providing adequate square footage for more than 2 bedrooms
- ✓ Visual, verbal, and direct physical access to a common play area from each unit.
- ✓ A sufficient number and clustering of family units in building to minimize noise complaints and foster peer-relationships for children
- ✓ Family units located on lower floors for greater ground access, and away from parking or loading areas and heavily-used streets
- ✓ Flexible interior spaces to encourage individualization of units

- ✓ Individualized unit entries to facilitate distinct sense of ownership, privacy, and visual interest. In the case of common entries or corridors, design solutions include a minimal number of sharing units, variation in corridor width, different door types and staggered spacing, and a combination of recessed and flush entries

## Building Design and Context

- ✓ All common areas designed to accommodate children’s activities, whether or not their primary purpose is play. This could include wider- than-normal hallways and elevators with durable and safe materials
- ✓ A variety of common spaces, including indoor recreation spaces and covered sections of outdoor play areas.
- ✓ Well-defined hierarchy of public-to-private spaces to minimize vulnerability to unwanted intrusion. Private outdoor play areas should be gated and/or grade separated.
- ✓ High-quality customer service, design, and circulation in lobby spaces to offer security, ease of maintenance, and familiarity for families with children.
- ✓ Clustered family-friendly buildings to capitalize on streetscape and park improvements and build ‘strength in numbers’
- ✓ Priority for housing located within reasonable and safe walking distances to daycares or school facilities, parks, grocery stores, and transit stops

## Examples of Family-Friendly Housing

### 201 Turk and 111 Jones St. - San Francisco

Located blocks from City Hall in the heart of the Tenderloin this 9-story affordable housing project contains over 80 2- and 3-bedrooms units that are clustered together and have views of the interior courtyard. In addition to a variety of play areas and structures, the courtyard contains smaller-scaled buildings and entrances with awnings that provide intimacy within a contained playspace, while stairs to and from the courtyard are left open for visual and verbal access. Key-operated elevators and two-way intercoms in the parking garage add further convenience and safety.

### Harbor Steps - Seattle

Providing spacious 2 bedroom rental units, and with a host of amenities including lap pool, sports courts, rock climbing wall, fitness centers, pet areas, a car wash, ample common space, and a daycare center – the Harbor Steps development has become an increasingly popular home for young families. The development is also a positive example of private investment helping to create a pedestrian oasis and hill climb assist along a public right-of-way.

### Cascade Court Apartments - Seattle

Built in 1994, the 100-unit Cascade Court Apartments contains 14 two-bedroom and 12 three-bedroom units which are clustered together in townhouses and flats around a protected central courtyard. For additional security and convenience, the front office is centrally-located with visual access to the entrance, lobby, mail room, and common laundry area.

*The Village Square developments are a success in the International District, in no small part due to the activity generated by the library branch, community center, and daycare facility. By supporting a strong age mix, the Domingo/Viernes apartments are also a prime example of housing that encourages a stable, multi-generational community.*

### Village Square I and II

#### (Domingo/Viernes Apartments) - Seattle

A mixed-use, phased development in Seattle's International District, these two buildings contain 132 affordable housing units (including 14 2-bedroom and 17 3-bedroom units) and include a library branch, community center with gymnasium, senior center, health clinic, job training center, childcare center, underground parking, and retail space. The award-winning development, spearheaded by the Seattle-Chinatown International District Preservation and Development Authority, is a best-practices example of community collaboration and a multi-cultural, multi-generational neighborhood facility.



## Areas of Opportunity

### **Qwest Field North Lot Redevelopment**

King County's preliminary proposal to develop the north section of the football stadium parking lot would add 950 units of much-needed housing in Pioneer Square along with a significant amount of retail space and a grocery store. The County has plans for at least 140 affordable units and family-friendly design features like townhouses with ground-floor access and gardens, rooftop and outdoor open space, a childcare facility, gym and fitness center, and some three-bedroom rental units.

### **Redevelopment of Yesler Terrace**

Seattle's first public housing project from the early WWII period, this 22-acre complex has 582 ground-related housing units that are affordable to families making well below median income. Due to its age, large size, and relatively low density for being so close to downtown, the Seattle Housing authority has expressed a desire to redevelop the site in the near future. Adjacent to a new community center, the Bailey Gatzert School, and potentially a streetcar

line, and with numerous daycare facilities and stunning views of Puget Sound, Yesler Terrace represents a unique opportunity to add high-quality family-friendly housing to an area that is already perhaps the most affordable in the Center City.

### **Convention Place Station TOD**

King County has identified the air-rights above its full-block bus station at Olive and 9th Ave for a potential major transit-oriented development project. With a host of quality urban amenities at its doorstep, the emerging residential area of the Denny Triangle nearby, and significant opportunities to help improve the pedestrian realm across I-5, this is an ideal location to highlight family-friendly design and affordability.



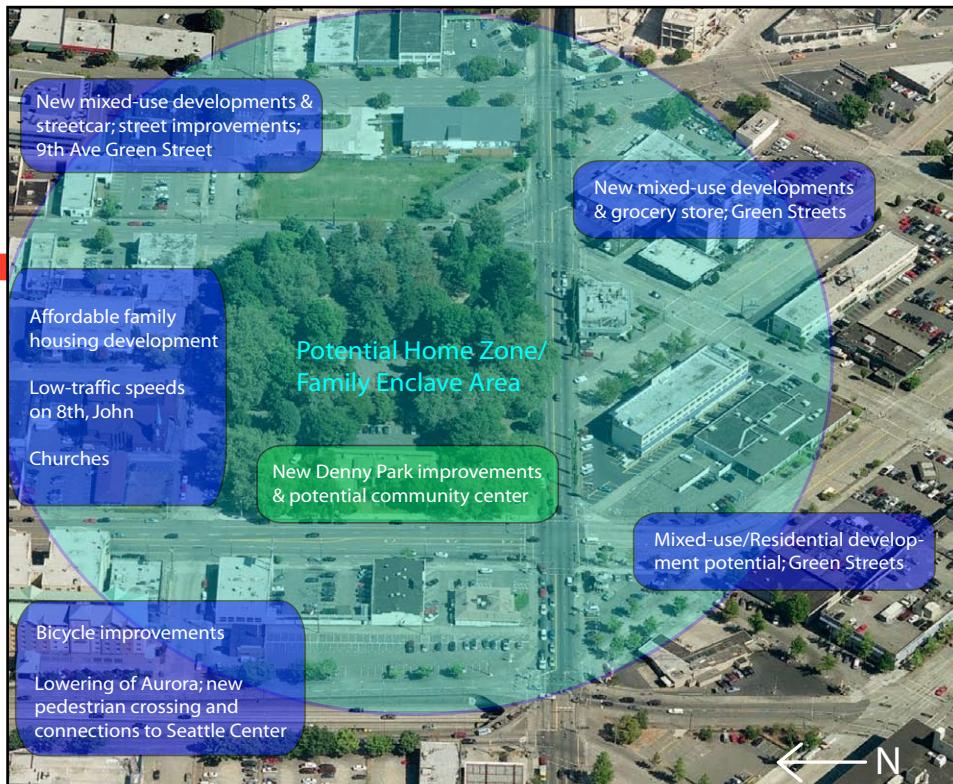
*Concept design rendering for the "North Lot Development" in Pioneer Square. Essentially doubling the residential population of the neighborhood, many expect this proposed development to become an anchor and catalyst for a revived Pioneer Square - making its success for families and children all the more important.*

## Inclusionary Zoning

Early in 2006, the state legislature passed enabling legislation that bolsters Seattle's ability to require affordable housing in major new developments. Together with an expanded affordable housing bonus program that came with recent downtown zoning changes, significant new capacity and funding for affordable housing may become available.

## Family Enclaves/Home Zones

A recent phenomenon in England, Home Zones is a neighborhood-based strategy for reclaiming urban streets for residential use thereby providing the open space that families need without costly land acquisition for private yards. Through traffic calming and urban design, streets are reprioritized to accommodate children's play. Opportunity areas in Seattle include South Lake Union and the Denny Park area, Belltown, North Capitol Hill, and the International District.



Strategies to foster family urban neighborhoods must look at how housing and various nearby spaces and places can be integrated to complement one another. One approach may be to combine affordable family housing incentives (such as a priority bonus program) with Green Streets and other infrastructure improvement projects to specifically target promising developable areas, such as around Denny Park and the Seattle Center.

## Lessons for Seattle

- A strong policy framework will be necessary to ensure the development of family-oriented housing.
- Immediate vicinity streetscape and open space improvements are often vital to family-oriented housing.
- Special attention must be paid to the “hierarchy” of public, semi-public, semi-private, and private spaces.
- Thoughtful design details can add up to play a significant role in shaping family-friendly developments.

## Questions for Staff

- Can we better quantify or articulate the demand for more family-oriented market housing?
- Are there more “desirable” areas for family housing within the Center City than others, and if so, what can the City do about it?
- How should the City balance regulation for family housing (inclusionary approach) vs. incentives and design guidelines?
- How much burden should the City and County take on trying to house families with children in public developments (e.g. Yesler Terrace, King County bus depot site)?
- What potential policies, projects, or incentives can you think of which should be looked at to expand housing for families in Center City?

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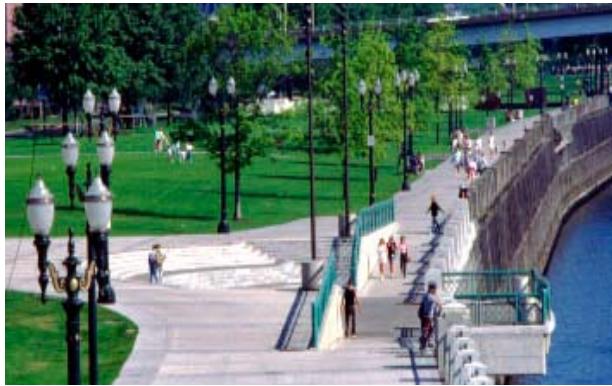
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# Places & Spaces: Open Space



Open space is critical to meeting the needs of children for active play, and is especially important in dense urban neighborhoods like those found in the Center City. Child development literature is clear about the necessity for daily exercise and play for the physical, social, and mental development of children.

Children are but one group among many who use Center City's open spaces. While not every space needs a climbing structure or other traditional play feature, children should be factored into open space planning and all spaces should meet some basic design standards that satisfy the needs of children and youth. This might result in design detailing such as kid-sized water fountains and durable landscaping; tactile or kinetic art to facilitate imaginative play; sufficient traffic buffers along a park's edge; or electrical outlets to accommodate seasonal programming such as theatre, concerts or winter carousels. Such features ensure the spaces work for children and youth, whether or not they include kid-specific features.

*False Creek beach and seawall promenade. Vancouver, B.C.*



*Tom McCall Waterfront Park, Portland. Portland and Vancouver, B.C. have much easier, safer, and more pleasant connections to their waterfront parks. Portland's Willamette River provides a splendid backdrop for family-friendly activities, while a bicycle ride or stroll along Vancouver's seawall and beachfront (below) is becoming an iconic experience for visiting and local families.*

## Types of Open Space used by Families and Children

**Large Public Parks.** Large parks are an obvious amenity for all urban residents including families, with opportunities for unstructured and organized play, and visual/auditory relief.

**Small Parks and Gardens.** 'Pocket' parks can provide for impromptu playdates among kids living nearby, and satisfy a child's need to quickly get outside without having to travel great distances or make advance plans. Such spaces can also be welcome rest areas for families shopping in or exploring Center City on foot. Community gardens are similarly places of sociability and respite, while also offering those without private yards a chance to "get their hands dirty."

### Athletic Facilities

While high land costs render large outdoor athletic fields unlikely in the downtown, an underutilized parking lot or low-traffic street could serve similar functions - albeit on a temporary or intermittent basis - if appropriately designed and permitted.



*The increasing popularity of skateboarding and sanctioned skateparks has created new open space demands for cities and urban neighborhoods.*

### Beaches

Beaches are tremendous community assets and tend to attract diverse crowds, including families and youth. They also provide excellent opportunities for kids to explore both their natural and social environments, and for recreation.

### Playgrounds and Climbing Structures

Increasingly, cities and towns are foregoing traditional playground equipment in favor of alternative play structures and "learning landscapes." One example is the adventure playground, first developed by a Danish landscape architect who noticed that kids preferred playing in dirt and lumber from post war rubble over static play grounds. As the name implies, adventure playgrounds allow kids to design, build and manipulate their play environments by incorporating found materials into "forts" and other creative themes.

### Skateparks

Once relegated to industrial areas, parking lots, and the off-hours of urban plazas, officially sanctioned skateparks are a growing phenomenon. Parents of skateboarders and park designers stress that great skateparks are safe for all kids, accessible by transit, and close to lively urban areas to encourage an audience of passersby.



*One interpretation of an adventure playground, a less static and increasingly popular alternative to the more traditional playground.*

### Public/Private Plazas

Corporate plazas are often created in exchange for height and density bonuses granted by a city. The most successful ones are accessible throughout the day, filled with seating and relaxing areas, and integrated into the surrounding streetscape. Plazas that are self-contained and somewhat insulated from the street can be excellent choices for parents of toddlers who desire mobility but need limits.

### Rooftops

Roof parks and gardens are an increasingly popular green building technique, and can offer dramatic views in an enclosed, controlled setting. These spaces have great potential to attract families and children, and are also often the location of play spaces for urban schools.

### Viewpoints

Panoramic viewpoints - of which Center City has many - are great places for children to experience and grasp the vastness of urban living. Interpretive elements and features such as viewscopes can also create interactive, "learning" landscapes.

## Examples of Family and Youth-Friendly Open Spaces

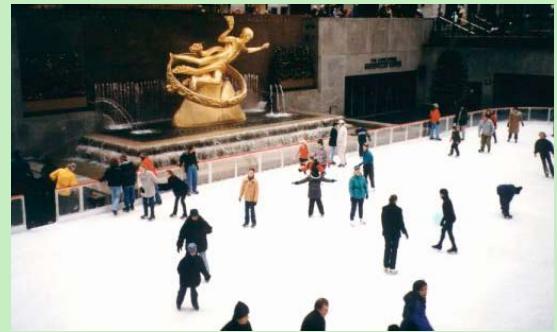
### Boston Commons

This large historical park has many family-friendly features that include a massive wading pool (called the “frog pond”), youth-oriented art, and many flexible, usable green open spaces. Transit stations on all sides of the park and underground parking provide incredible access without compromising the pedestrian experience. Adjacent theater, shopping, and residential districts and a public garden activate the park’s edges.



### Tom McCall Waterfront Park - Portland

Once a four-lane freeway, now a waterfront promenade and green open space, Portland’s Waterfront Park has become an essential and iconic public space. Summer concerts and festivals, year-round recreation opportunities, water features, and easy transit access are but a few of its family-friendly features.



### Rockefeller Center Plaza - New York City

Located within a large office complex in midtown New York City, this public plaza is known worldwide for its seasonal ice skating rink and Christmas tree, fronting shops, art exhibits, and people watching. Constant programming, pedestrian comfort, and attention to detail have made this space a prime family-friendly example of great urban design.

*Rockefeller Center Plaza's constant attention to programming helps reinvent the space many times throughout the year, keeping it relevant for families and visitors.*



*Landscaped open space in Powell Barnett Park.*



*Splendid design focusing on family and youth-friendly spaces has been a large part of the success of the Cal Anderson Park/ Bobby Morris Playfield complex. Beyond its borders, however, new condominium and cottage housing developments, robust retail activity, and nearby colleges have all played an important role as well. A LINK Light Rail station is planned to occupy one of its corners which should increase accessibility, while a well-designed 12th Ave (with bicycle lanes, generous sidewalks, and angled parking) also borders the park to add safety and encourage walk-through activity.*

### **Cal Anderson Park/Bobby Morris Playfield - Seattle**

Along the border of Seattle's Center City planning area at Broadway, the 7-acres of sports courts and playfields and 4-acres of open space have been consistently active since the park's renovation and expansion in 2005. Several water features, play structures and game areas, grassy hills, and wandering promenades invite a variety of fun activities; while pleasant and plentiful lighting, seating, and a "shelter house" with restrooms and multi-purpose room add welcome comfort features for families. The park's mix of neighboring uses – a community college, shopping district, and residential neighborhood – help make it one of the liveliest parks in the city.

*Best known for its "volcano" and playful use of water, Cal Anderson showcases its pull for both adults and kids alike.*



## Special Attention: Water Features



Typically within an open space, water features are nonetheless highlighted separately because of their seemingly magnetic pull on children. Accessible fountains that encourage 'getting wet' are almost always a major family attraction, while the fate and function of fountains in the winter can pose significant design challenges and opportunities for improvement. Playful water elements are one of the most important features

for families with children in a dense urban setting, particularly in Seattle where water has such great potential to be a unifying theme. Clockwise from top left: Frog Pond, Boston Commons; Rose Center, New York; public plaza, KCTS building Seattle; Park Citroen, Paris; Salmon Street Spring, Portland, OR.

## Areas of Opportunity

## Central Waterfront

As Seattle looks to replace the Alaskan Way Viaduct, there is an opportunity to develop new family-friendly open spaces along the Waterfront. Safer and more interesting connections between the Aquarium and Pike Place Market, a public beach, and livelier promenade designs could significantly improve the waterfront connection and residential attraction of the City's "front door."

## Seattle Center

In many ways the Center City's most successful family destination, the Seattle Center still has significant unmet potential. As nearby residential development increases, and with continued pressure for more accessible green spaces downtown, the Seattle Center is a prime candidate to serve family and youth open space needs.

## Civic Center Campus

Redevelopment of the former Public Safety Building (PSB) site adjacent to City Hall will be the final element of a cohesive civic center in the heart of Seattle. With plans including a large central open space, the design and programming of this space may include high-quality kid-friendly features. Additionally, the fountain in the City Hall Plaza could be a wonderful family amenity if there were more active uses and benches close by where adults could relax while supervising their kids.

## South Lake Union Park

Upon its expansion and rehabilitation, this major open space in South Lake Union is certain to be an anchor for the burgeoning residential neighborhood. Featuring the kid-friendly Center for Wooden Boats, a model boat pond, community gathering spaces,



*Concept rendering of a post-Viaduct central waterfront, where endless opportunities would exist to design spaces and places with families and children in mind.*



*Site of the former Public Safety Building. A huge opportunity to showcase the City's commitment to a family-friendly downtown will be the development of this full city block. Plans call for a significant civic open space - the character and details of which will resonate throughout the Center City,*

and opportunities to connect people with the water, future development could protect, integrate, and expand upon these features.

### International Children's Park

This park serves the growing population of kids in the International District/Chinatown and provides much needed green space in South Downtown. Continued dialogue with park users will ensure that the space continues to meet family needs.

### A New Skatepark

Downtown's only skate park – currently in a small portion of the Seattle Center – has to relocate due to the development of the Gates Foundation campus. Originally slated to move to Myrtle Edwards Park, City Council has requested the park remain in the Seattle Center. While not originally called for in the City's first Skatepark Advisory Committee proposals and draft master plan, a fresh effort to having an easily-accessible skatepark downtown could result in a premiere kid-friendly destination.



*IBM Building plaza, Seattle*

### Public/Private Plazas

There are numerous corporate plazas within downtown, most of which are underutilized but comfortable, safe spaces. Applying a family-friendly design 'filter' could transform these lunch-time plazas into attractive all-day destinations for kids and families. The City may want to consider identifying those with the greatest potential for improvement and work with owners and downtown business groups on retrofit strategies and funding.



*Memorial Stadium, Seattle Center Aging badly and underutilized, the stadium area is located in the heart of the Seattle Center and is a prime location to begin the reconfiguration and transformation of Center City's grand public space. A new vision for the site, which is owned by the Seattle School District, may want to prioritize youth and family-oriented activity space, while the overall vision for the Center should include ways to improve neighborhood connectivity and pedestrian safety.*

## Lessons for Seattle

- Abundant, high quality open space is vital to attracting significant new numbers of families and children to the urban core.
- The usability of open spaces for children and families is greatly tied to the quality of connections and safety of the adjacent streetscape.
- Families and children can be important activators of open space.
- Traditional play structures are only one of many ways an open space can be child and family-friendly.
- Water – both along the shoreline and in fountains/features – acts as a magnet for families and children.

## Questions for Staff

- How can departments formalize a methodology that ensures the development of family friendly public spaces?
- Should the City prioritize certain parks to be more kid-friendly than others. Which ones would those be?
- How can the City best leverage improvements to transit, streetscape, and other public facilities to improve open spaces and attract families with children?

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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# Places & Spaces: Streetscapes and the Public Realm

City rights-of-way—the sidewalks, streets, and streetscape amenities within them—are vital connections linking kid-friendly places within the Center City. These corridors play an important role in the relationship children and youth have with their city, and often act as social destinations in themselves.

A streetscape that is family-friendly is one that can be negotiated safely and comfortably by parents and children of all ages. Traffic speeds, crossing distances and corner radii should be minimized whenever



*Inlaid art near Nordstrom's,  
Downtown Seattle*

possible. Where they cannot be minimized, sidewalks should be wide in order to insulate and protect people from fast moving traffic and well furnished with pedestrian-oriented features like street trees, bollards, lighting, weather protection, interesting paving and seating. Seating is especially important for small children – and the elderly – as they tire easily and may need to stop and rest. Youth surveys often cite a lack of street and sidewalk cleanliness, indicating that better maintenance of the public realm would go a long way to improving kid-friendliness.

## Types of Family-Friendly Public Realm Spaces

### Green Streets/Shared Streets

Whether they are called Green Streets (a Seattle designation), Woonerven (a Dutch term meaning 'living yard'), Home Zones (a recent development in England), or simply shared streets, the goals are the same: multi-purpose streets designed to accommodate local pedestrian and play activity as well as moving and parked automobiles. Because they are designed for residential streets with light traffic volumes, shared streets are ripe candidates for kid-friendly interventions.

### Bicycle Paths

There are many different types of bicycle paths with varying levels of comfort and safety: unmarked streets commonly used by cyclists, shared lanes, striped bike lanes, grade-separated lanes, bicycle boulevards, and too often in Seattle - pedestrian sidewalks. Because cycling is a healthy, efficient, and inexpensive way to move about a city, bicycle routes are particularly important to youth who cannot drive.



*Research has shown that kids, particularly small children, tend to play within close proximity to entrances of their homes. Such "doorstep play" will inevitably spill out into the public realm, increasing its importance for young families.*

### Sidewalks

Sidewalks are typically considered as having three realms: a frontage zone next to the building, a pedestrian zone, and a landscape/furniture zone adjacent to the curb. There are many opportunities to greater develop and realize this multi-zone concept on the ground in order to create safe and engaging kid-friendly spaces even in constrained spaces. Furthermore, there remains a great deal of potential to explore and define a sidewalk's role as an urban open space.

### Alleyways

Alleys are typically service streets whose intimate

scale and lack of traffic often make them (or have the potential to be) vital pedestrian connections and urban spaces. Conversely, improvements to improperly designed and maintained alleys can remove safety concerns and increase the family-friendliness of adjacent streets.

### Public Steps/Staircases

Whether leading to a civic building, part of a public plaza, or simply connecting steep-sloped areas, public steps are often wonderful places to sit, eat lunch, and to watch the drama of city life unfold. The best ones usually contain multiple sizes of steps and attractive landscaping and public art to accommodate kids and adults alike.

### Transit Stops

It is only natural that transit stops are one of the most heavily used spaces within the public realm. Most often simply a place to wait for the next ride, the best transit stops are also pleasant open spaces, and potentially attractions and vibrant places themselves.

*Sufficient bicycle parking, traffic calming measures, separated bike lanes, and bicycle buffers at busy intersections all represent family-friendly streetscape investments. Photos (clockwise from top left): downtown bicycle parking in the Netherlands; bicycle boulevard in Berkeley, CA; separated bicycle path and traffic island in England; a wide, well-marked bicycle lane in Chicago.*



*A shared street, or woonerf, in the Netherlands.*

## Examples of A Great Public Realm



*Las Ramblas, Barcelona's main pedestrian thoroughfare.*

### **The Ramblas - Barcelona, Spain**

Connecting the city's main square and transportation hub to its waterfront, the Ramblas reverses the norm by giving over the center of the right-of-way to pedestrians. Framed by local side streets, this wide linear open space is filled with vendors, artists, and performers; newsstands, shops, and cafés; and stimulating public art and urban design. Defined by a rhythmic canopy of London Plane trees and classic European buildings with varied, transparent facades, the 1.7 km long street is considered one of the most successful public spaces in the world.



*Harbor Steps, Seattle.*

### **Mid-Levels Escalator - Hong Kong**

Connecting a downtown mall to an enclave of residential high-rises atop a steep hill, this half-mile stretch of covered outdoor escalators and pedestrian walkways climbs nearly 400 feet and carries over 50,000 people a day. Buoyed by the throngs of people, restaurants and shops have revitalized the corridor and created a monument to people-watching. This commitment to pedestrians is especially helpful to parents negotiating strollers and small children across town and provides year round access in a city that averages about 2 1/2 times the annual rainfall of Seattle.

### **Post Alley/Harbor Steps - Seattle**

The hillclimb adjacent to the Harbor Steps apartments has become an iconic open space in the heart of downtown. Shops, cafés, an accessible water feature, and temporary art exhibits encourage activity throughout the day. The steps physically and visually connect 1st Ave to the waterfront, and extend the Post Alley pedestrian corridor – a favorite spot for teenagers and children.

## Capitol Hill's Residential streets

Extensive use of traffic circles, chicanes, double-sided street parking, and strategic street blockages have successfully discouraged through-traffic and reduced average auto speeds along these streets. Service alley garages keep sidewalks free from excessive curb-cuts and turning vehicles, allowing pedestrians to freely admire the well-kept lawns and mature trees of this historic neighborhood. The intact alley network also provides important pedestrian and play spaces with basketball hoops and bicycles prominent throughout.



## Belltown P-Patch/Growing Vine Street

Combining one of downtown's Green Street designs with a neighborhood garden, "Growing Vine" features various projects that creatively reveal and collect running stormwater, provide valuable urban horticulture space, and protect and promote pedestrian activity.

*Unique ecological function, art, and urban design make Vine Street the iconic Green Street of Seattle (below). Together with the Belltown P-Patch (right), Growing Vine Street is the type of infrastructure needed to develop a family urban neighborhood.*



## Special Attention: Streets for People



In Holland, the city of Delft along with the International Institute for the Urban Environment have created a report and checklist for analyzing the kid-friendliness of urban streets. For its criteria they list eight aspects of streetscapes and their integration with housing that contribute to child-friendly spaces:

- Social Safety
- Traffic Safety
- Criss-Crossability
- Cyclability
- Walkability
- Space for Walking
- Enjoyability
- Playability



These criteria are scored through careful observation and traffic counting to measure and compare city streets. While Seattle need not measure all its streets the same way, this type of analysis shows that much more can and should be done to consider the impact of traffic and street design on families with children and urban neighborhood livability.

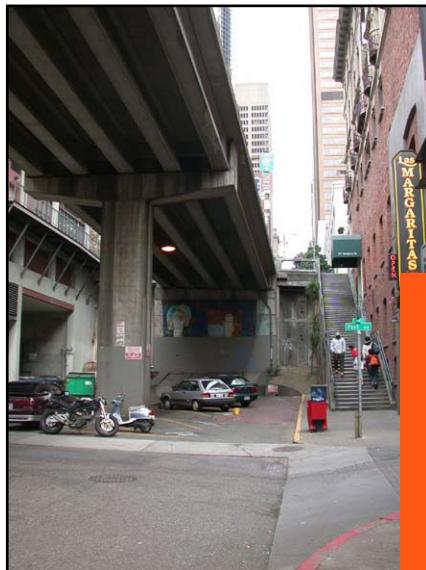
# Areas of Opportunity

## Green Streets

Center City Seattle has designated several streets, mostly in Belltown and Chinatown/ID, as Green Streets where greater attention to pedestrians, ecological function, and urban design are meant to foster a sense of open space and safety within the streetscape. Establishing new funding mechanisms beyond private contributions for implementation would enable more Green Streets to be developed.

## Post-Viaduct Alaskan Way & Western Ave

As the city's front porch and vital pedestrian promenade, Alaskan Way is an ideal location for kid-friendly interventions. The development of the Waterfront Public Realm Plan is an opportunity to address how waterfront infrastructure provides recreational and educational facilities for kids. Western Avenue south of Lenora Street offers another opportunity. The street's current configuration of human-scaled buildings, transparent facades and low traffic volumes – and its adjacency to Post Alley and the emerging "West Edge" neighborhood – make it an ideal corridor to develop kid-friendly streetscape amenities and spaces.



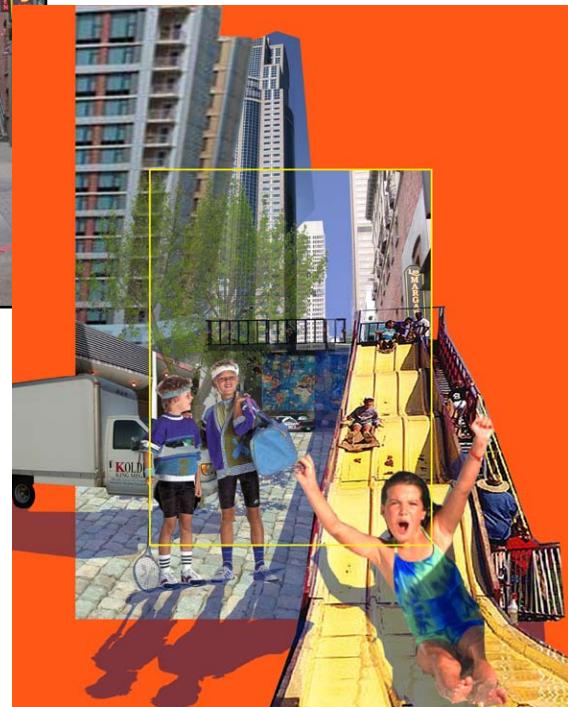
## Future Bay to Lake Trail

While much of the Center City's current bike infrastructure is oriented to the adult urban commuter, a Bay to Lake Trail between South Lake Union and the waterfront could potentially connect three kid-friendly anchors – the waterfront, Seattle Center, and South Lake Union Park. Designed appropriately to protect young cyclists and walkers, this trail could be a fundamental transportation connection and active recreation amenity.

## Connections Across I-5

Current pedestrian access over I-5 along Denny, Olive, Pike/Pine, Madison, and Yesler provide key connections between Downtown and many of Center City's core neighborhoods. Knitting Center City's neighborhoods together through general streetscape improvements addressing safety, design quality and comfort along these connectors would hugely bolster family-friendly design goals.

*Reclaiming downtown for families at Post Alley and Seneca St. (center, right). A host of opportunities for family-friendly streetscapes would emerge from the removal of the Alaskan Way Viaduct. Focus on waterfront connections should include Post Alley, Western Avenue, and hillclimb assists along steep east-west streets.*





## Intersections

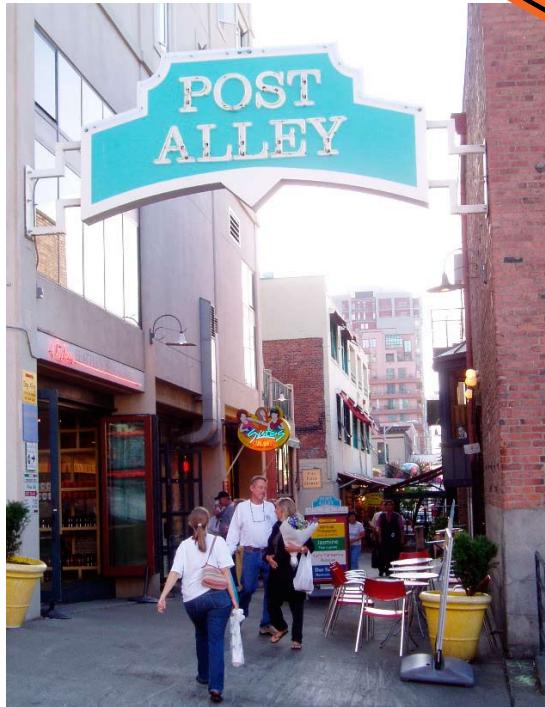
Under appreciated as social places, intersections are nonetheless one of the most heavily used spaces in the Center City and prominent areas for family-friendly design interventions. Longer pedestrian crossing times, more traffic buffers including bollards, more interesting street furniture, and/or wider, more prominent and attractive crosswalks are just a few of the improvements that could increase the attractiveness and safety of Center City intersections for families and other pedestrians.

## Alleyways

The historic alleys of Pioneer Square, Belltown, Capitol Hill, and the Chinatown/International District have a comfortable human scale similar to streets found in older European cities. Many are identified in neighborhood plans as areas of opportunity to improve streetscape cleanliness/image, pedestrian connectivity, and integration with surrounding buildings.



*Post Alley in Seattle circa 1970s: Proof that alleys can change to be successful places.*



*Post Alley today.*

## Lessons for Seattle

- Other cities' experiences demonstrate that streetscapes in the urban center can be wonderful greenspace, public art, water feature, and public amenity opportunities in addition to a transportation setting.
- Providing safe pedestrian routes between major destinations is one of the most effective ways of attracting families and children.

## Questions for Staff

- What range of streetscape improvements are desirable and how do we implement them?
- What are some of the major policy impediments to innovative streetscape design and what - if any - changes should we explore?
- How can streetscape and transit improvements better coordinate with open space destinations and investments?

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# Places & Spaces: Interior Spaces



*Kids' playhouse and tea room at a neighborhood intersection in Portland, OR.*

Publicly-accessible buildings are as important to a family-friendly city as the streets and open spaces they front, and often help define and enliven the urban streetscape. While they need not explicitly serve children all the time, the portions of buildings that are publicly accessible – just like our parks and open spaces – should be designed to meet some basic needs. Given Seattle's infamous soggy climate, interior spaces are particularly vital for families and children looking to get out of the house and enjoy the city under cover from the elements.

## Interior Spaces that Work for Families and Youth

### Libraries

Libraries are natural places for kids. Most libraries contain separate children's sections or rooms which afford a degree of protection and safety for parents and young children to explore out of the flow of general library patrons.

### Public Atriums/Shopping Atriums

Interior shopping and other atriums are popular places for kids to hang out during inclement weather and for socializing. In some cases, these atriums approximate the scale of a street and serve a similar purpose for pedestrians, enabling them to shortcut from one street to another through an interior public passage.

### Museums

Apart from the value of the collections themselves, museums often have generous lobbies, casual cafes, public restrooms, and even playrooms that are eminently attractive to families and children.

### Community Centers

For some a home away from home, for others a place to meet and play on a rainy day—community centers provide social, educational, and recreation spaces for

children and peace of mind for parents who work late. Within a safe and supervised location, children can be semi-independent as they attend after-school programs, meet friends, surf the internet, or exercise.

### Fitness/Recreation Facilities

An increasingly popular phenomena catering to urban professionals are downtown fitness centers. Some offer babysitting and youth-oriented activities so parents can be free to workout. Others include climbing walls and sports courts that can be an attractive option for athletic youth.



*Yesler Community Center, Seattle.*

## Types of Interior Spaces (cont'd)

### Transit Stations

Transit stations typically provide places to sit, public art and respite from bad weather – all features which are useful for families and kids. Many teens and pre-teens depend on public transit for most or all their travel needs making transit stations magnets for youth. Features to ensure their safety and comfort are therefore paramount, and may include emergency phone access, clear sightlines (no “dead ends”), easy-to-understand maps, schedules, and fare charts/machines.

### Restrooms

Without a doubt, restrooms are one of the features most sought out by families when in public places! The best are well-maintained and include unisex changing rooms for babies and toddlers; toilets, sinks, soap dispensers, and hand towels low enough for kids to reach; and proper lighting, circulation, and nearby seating to minimize dark corners and facilitate parental supervision from outside.



*Passage de Panoramas, Paris--one of the oldest shopping arcades in the world - is a great example of an interior space that remains ‘urban’ while providing cover from the elements and protection from fast-moving traffic.*

## Examples of Family-Friendly Interior Spaces

### Yerba Buena Center - San Francisco

A multi-building complex that houses a convention center and art museum, the Yerba Buena Center also includes Zeum: an interactive digital arts and cultural center for kids, a year-round ice skating rink, 12-lane bowling alley, and childcare facility; and it is adjacent to a children's garden, renovated antique carousel, and a large theater and video game complex popular with teens – all in the heart of downtown and out of the flow of traffic.



Map of Yerba Buena Center complex. San Francisco's convention and entertainment center devotes nearly 1/4 of its space to family and youth activity space. While not without its flaws, Yerba Buena balances the fine line between street permeability and safe, protected spaces.



### Seattle Central Library

The new Central Library is one of downtown's most prominent kid-friendly destinations. The library hosts numerous kid-oriented events and is a popular field trip destination for daycares, day camps and school groups.

### Pike Place Market

The farmer's market offers kids unlimited stimulation and people-watching. Whimsical public art, eccentric performers, seas of tourists and men throwing fish make the Market a wonderfully frenetic urban experience for all ages, while public restrooms and a daycare center further attract families.

### Experience Music Project

There is little argument as to the kid-friendly nature of this interactive music and pop culture museum. Located within the Seattle Center, the EMP is readily accessible by transit and a Monorail-ride away from another popular teen destination – Westlake Center.

## Special Attention: Kid's Corners

A few forward-thinking commercial establishments provide small spaces for children to play while their parents or guardians attend to their business. Vios, a popular establishment in Capitol Hill, is a great example. Set in the back of the restaurant and enclosed by a low wall, this play space saves young children from having to stay at the table all evening and allows young families more opportunities to experience fine dining without the extra cost of a babysitter. These spaces need not be expensive investments; a small table with paper and crayons can, from a parent's perspective, enhance and simplify everything from dining and shopping to banking or working out. While likely not a policy opportunity, City staff may nonetheless find it useful working with developers and local business associations to promote these kid-friendly spaces.



## Areas of Opportunity

### Seattle Center House

While the Center House provides flexible interior space for hosting a variety of events and activities throughout the year, its age, utilitarian design (it was built as an armory) and proximity to underutilized spaces in the heart of the Seattle Center signal an opportunity for refurbishment.



*The “center of the Center,” many see Seattle’s Center House as an opportunity to make a good indoor space even better.*

### Colman Dock

A portal into the City’s waterfront and downtown, any redevelopment of Colman Dock and its ancillary facilities should have ample indoor space amenable to families with children.



### Seattle Transit Tunnel

As light rail increases accessibility to and from downtown, transit stations will become vital gateways within the Center City. Regular maintenance, lighting, activation and supervision of these spaces, and amenities such as restrooms and seating are critical factors in accommodating families and children.



Colman Dock is the main terminus of the country’s largest ferry fleet and one of the key pieces of a re-envisioned Seattle waterfront. Especially busy on the weekends, waiting times for a ferry can extend to several hours. A concept drawing by Allied Arts, above, features shops, restaurants, and a hotel, and suggests the potential to create a flagship indoor space.

# Lessons for Seattle

- Many popular spaces for kids have used interactive technologies for entertainment and education.
- Since most kids and teenagers rely on transit to independently access the City, interior spaces both near and within the transit system provide key opportunities.
- Not all interior spaces need to feel disconnected from urban streetlife.
- It takes just a little investment and effort to make typically “adult” spaces such as restaurants, banks, or fitness centers amenable to children and young families.

## Questions for City Staff

- Seattle already has several excellent interior spaces that attract and entertain kids--how can these be better connected?
- What role does marketing and/or programmed activities play in the success of existing facilities?
- What other facilities exist that might also serve families and youth with some addition of amenities or programming?
- What are the commonly used corridors families and youth use to reach these destinations--are they also family-friendly or do they need improvement?

## Notes:

# Places & Spaces: Programmed Activities & Temporary Spaces

FUN! places need not be fixed and permanent, and with a little creativity can emerge from the most unlikely of places. Organized events and activities, roaming art, street vending, and other 'temporary spaces' can be important strategies to facilitate neighborhood connections, highlight the cultural advantages of urban living, or provide variety to interior spaces, parks and the public realm. As Seattle looks to make downtown more attractive to families, these events/spaces should be a key strategy, as should making it easier for private residents, merchants, and artists to do the same. Programming might also be a great way to enliven parking lots and other areas that are particularly underutilized or 'dead' once the workday is over.



*Temporary street closures, like parades and neighborhood block parties, are major attractions for families and children.*

## Types of Activities and Spaces

### Out-of-School (OSP) Programs

Before and after-school programs – both inside and outside – have long been vital for many young children who need tutoring, organized play, or whose parents simply work late. Programs are often aligned with a school to provide project-based activities and exercises that complement the students' curriculum.

### Temporary Street Closures

There are many activities that call for temporary street closures – parades, neighborhood block parties, street festivals, and other activities. Most are usually on the weekends and during the summer, although some could also take place during weekday evenings when traffic is light. All serve to increase pedestrian safety and comfort and encourage street play. Some events and activities can act as low-risk "trial runs" for open space features that are ultimately made a permanent part of the streetscape.

### Installations and Exhibits

From art pigs and carousels placed downtown to storefront window displays and holiday lighting/décor, exhibits and temporary installations are major family attractions. Due to their temporary and often recurring nature, these elements usually stay "fresh" for local residents and are looked forward to by many families.

### Shows and Concerts

In addition to larger shows and summer concerts that are regional draws, smaller sets by local artists are a great way to enliven parks and plazas during summer weekday evenings after work.

### Markets and Festivals

Open air farmers' markets and cultural festivals are but two of the many possible activities that can attract large groups of people in areas that might not otherwise be natural destinations – like parking lots.

## Vendors and Street Performing Areas

Hot dog and taco stands, street musicians and performers, and sidewalk sales all add 'eyes on the street' and make for visually interesting and interactive walks through the city, not to mention less-expensive venues for family dining and entertainment.

*Street performers, artists, and vendors can make almost any space family-friendly by their interesting behavior and street presence.*



## Examples of Great Programming and Temporary Spaces

### Red Ink Studios - San Francisco

In the San Francisco Bay Area, artists and landlords have formed an unusual partnership called Red Ink Studios, which temporarily provides free art studio space in unleased portions of office/commercial buildings until a new tenant is found. In addition to helping stabilize and revive the image of depressed downtown areas, artists have returned the favor by volunteering at local schools.

### Neighborhood Farmers Markets - Seattle

Thanks to 6 weekly markets staggered throughout the week, Seattleites are able to purchase fresh seasonal produce, rub elbows with neighbors, and help support small regional farmers in the process – all in parking lots or other spaces that have little to offer on their own. Cooking tips, live music, and children's games are additional activities that create a family-friendly temporary oasis. The Center City boasts one of these markets off of Broadway in Capitol Hill, in addition of course to the everyday Pike Place Market.

### Seattle SummerStop Festival, or Sandfest

In its 4th year of operation, this August festival is a family-friendly “ode to the summer” in the very heart of downtown. Importing enough sand to turn parts of downtown into an urban beach, the festival is highlighted by giant sand sculptures, a chili cook-off, live music, beach volleyball, and other family-oriented events.

### Seafair

A collection of over 25 community events related to boating and aviation spanning over a month in the summer, Seafair



*Sandfest - creating a temporary beach in Westlake Center.*

includes a parade, pirates and clowns, kid's races, and even stunt-performing pigs – all of which give kids and their parents great entertainment opportunities.

### Family-First Sundays

While the Seattle Aquarium is already a family destination, this program on the first Sunday of the month offers free admission to the Aquarium and special arts and crafts events to encourage repeated visits.

### The Vera Project

The Vera Project is a youth-run music, arts, and cultural programming organization that will be moving into the Seattle Center soon. A breeding ground for young artists, the Vera Project also sponsors events at venues throughout the city and has instant cache with young teens.

## Areas of Opportunity

### Downtown Parks Programming

The 2005 Downtown Parks Renaissance Report identified enhanced programming as one of the keys to revitalizing underutilized urban parks.

### SDOT Street Use Online Permitting

Seattle's Department of Transportation recently moved its permitting system online, allowing right-of-way permit applications and payment processes to be handled remotely. Continued efforts to simplify and promote the permitting system could allow more activity and greater pedestrian ownership of the rights-of-way.

### Recurring Playdate Downtown

Similar to the Aquarium's "First Sunday" and other recurring events, a monthly playdate for young families would facilitate neighbor and peer-youth interaction, and could begin highlighting various family destinations throughout Center City.



*In San Francisco, a mobile outreach van provides fun activities and games in addition to health services outreach and education. Perhaps Seattle could utilize a similar strategy to facilitate a monthly "playdate" for young families and children at different locations throughout Center City.*



*Park(ing) - a temporary exhibit of open space, downtown San Francisco. Considering a metered parking space as a "temporary lease" of public space, the Rebar artist collaborative group turned heads with their mini-park in November 2005. Such creativity and spontaneity could be further encouraged by a simplified and less restrictive event permitting process.*

## Lessons for Seattle

- Not all kid- and family-friendly spaces need to be permanent and fixed.
- Programmed events, permitted vending, and street performances add 'eyes' on the street, visual variety, and a sense of urban spontaneity that especially appeal to families and children.
- Programming underutilized spaces such as parking lots and quiet streets can represent quick, low-cost actions to enliven the urban experience.

## Questions for City Staff

- Where is programming and temporary street use most needed in Center City?
- How else - if at all - can the City make creative and vending activities easier to undertake on Seattle's sidewalks and streets?
- What organizations or institutions can provide increased funding for programming or fresh ideas for temporary events?

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# Next Steps...

This Workbook showcases the range of possibilities for creating spaces in the Center City that embrace and attract families and youth. It also contends that such efforts are crucial to the vibrant, sustainable downtown envisioned for Seattle. The Workbook is intended to provide inspiration as the DPD FUN! team begins a dialogue with City staff over the next several months.

We believe there are opportunities at both the project and policy levels worth exploring. At the project level, kid-friendly design offers a new and exciting lens through which the City can incorporate features and facilities into new and specific capital improvements. The inclusion of just a few design features and elements geared to families and youth as projects arise will - over time - make a big difference in elevating the attractiveness and inclusivity of Center City neighborhoods.

At the policy level, more specific language in the City's design review and land use planning processes about accommodating families and youth would set the stage for actions long into the future. This policy focus may also spur creative ideas as yet unforeseen that ultimately lead to new approaches for Center City and beyond.

The FUN! team invites you to use this Workbook to jot down answers to the questions we've posed, to note successes we may have overlooked, and to begin thinking of specific actions toward a more family-friendly Center City for 2007 and beyond. The Workbook will be the primary resource document for upcoming focus group sessions with City staff to develop and refine the ideas contained in this report with the goal of creating a multi-year work plan.

*"Seattle's Center City Through Kids' Eyes" event, July 2006. FUN!'s initial effort to engage and incorporate youth involved handing cameras to a small group of children and teens and asking them to photograph places and spaces that they enjoyed or disliked. As the FUN! Initiative looks to expand its efforts, youth and family involvement will play a strong role in helping develop and review new policies and programs.*

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The FUN! team and ensuing interdepartmental focus groups shall continue to ask the questions "How does this project promote kid-friendly design?" and "Could these policies specifically address the needs of families and children?" It is our belief that by capitalizing on as many opportunities as possible, Center City will be that much closer to being a successful and accommodating collection of family-friendly urban neighborhoods. Let's have some FUN!



# Select References

## Documents:

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**“High Density Housing for Families with Children Guidelines,” City of Vancouver, BC.**  
[www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/guidelines/H004.pdf](http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/guidelines/H004.pdf)

**“Homezones: Changing the Future of Our Streets,” UK Department of Transport, 2005.**  
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**"Housing as if People Mattered: Site Design Guidelines for Medium-Density Family Housing,"** Clare Cooper Marcus and Wendy Sarkissian: University of California Press, 1986.

**“Naturally Not! Childhood, Urban and Romanticism,”** Owain Jones: *Human Ecology Review*, 2002.

## **“Report by Mayor’s Task Force on Seattle Center Sustainability,” May 2006.**

[www.seattlecenter.com/images/media/pdf/Mayors\\_Task\\_Force\\_Report\\_May\\_2006.pdf](http://www.seattlecenter.com/images/media/pdf/Mayors_Task_Force_Report_May_2006.pdf)

**“Reversing the Trend: Strategies to Make Center City Seattle Livable and Attractive to Families with Children,”** Dara P. O’Byrne, Urban Design and Planning Master’s Thesis: University of Washington. 2006.

## **"Vibrant Cities Find One Thing Missing: Children,"** Timothy Egan, *New York Times*, May 24,

2005.

## Websites:

[www.childfriendlycities.org](http://www.childfriendlycities.org) A project of the United Nations that focuses primarily on children's rights issues and youth participation and inclusion.

[www.colorado.edu/journals/cye/index.htm](http://www.colorado.edu/journals/cye/index.htm) Children, Youth, and Environments is a peer-reviewed research journal focusing on improving the lives of children. Most back-issues are free, and the site includes book reviews, a calendar of events, a database of individuals and organizations, and an extensive bibliography.

[www.eya.ca](http://www.eya.ca) Environmental Youth Alliance, a youth-driven organization in Vancouver, B.C.

**[www.designadvisor.org](http://www.designadvisor.org)** The affordable housing design advisor website, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Housing and Development (HUD), offers concrete case studies and design guidelines for affordable and family-friendly housing.

[www.kompan.com](http://www.kompan.com) Kompan is a global leader in the research and design of playground equipment based out of the Netherlands. The companies equipment has been used exclusively in Seattle's Powell Barnett Park.

[www.theveraproject.org](http://www.theveraproject.org) Based out of Seattle, a youth and volunteer-run organization dedicated to “fueling personal and community transformation” through arts, music, and culture.

[www.urban.nl/index.htm](http://www.urban.nl/index.htm) Based out of the Netherlands, the International Institute for the Urban Environment's focus on sustainability has included several studies and conferences on child-friendly streets and cities. Their website has many links to other international efforts on kid-friendly design as well.