

From Urban Form to Community Health: An Intervention Approach

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Does urban form influence our well being and health? If so, what are the features of urban design that makes a healthy society? How can urbanites be engaged in neighborhood stewardship to address urban design issues in the interest of the common good?

This paper describes a community-based intervention that has been developed by The City Repair Project, a non-profit organization based in Portland, OR . The aim is to create an attractive and vibrant urban fabric based on local culture and identity. The strategy engages residents to reclaim the public right of way and to collectively construct structures and features that improve the quality of life in the city¹. The process has been approved by Portland City Council and field tested there and other cities, nationally and internationally. Epidemiologic panel studies have documented a statistically significant improvement in social and health indicators in the population adjacent to the intervention site. In light of the emerging epidemics of chronic diseases that are sweeping the U.S., such as obesity, diabetes, and depression, a critical analysis of urban planning is warranted in order to advance public health.

Urban Health

Between 1988 and 1998, diagnoses of depressive disorders increased across ethnic groups in the U.S. with prescription for antidepressants escalating three-fold². Observational studies have documented neighborhood effects on mental health: urban blight has been associated with negative emotions and a sense of hopelessness^{3,4}. A direct link between the environment and mental health has been established in a variety of urban settings^{5,6,7,8,9}. Social disorder such as crime, public drinking and drug use, also negatively affect well-being and neighborhood satisfaction^{10,11,12}. Physical incivilities in neighborhoods such as damaged homes, trash accumulation, abandoned vehicles, and graffiti, adversely influence mental health of residents over and above personal risk factors^{13,14,15,16}. However, is it the demographic composition or the environmental context that accounts for these associations? Observational studies of urban environments can be confounded by poverty, unemployment, pervasive crime, or high proportions of families receiving welfare, for example. This potential limitation can be addressed with an elegant epidemiologic study design that alters the environmental context but maintains the demographic composition of the neighborhood, similar to the intervention approach discussed below. A recent experimental study randomized subjects to different living environments and found neighborhood effects on mental health both in adults and children¹⁷. Subjects who moved to low-poverty neighborhoods reported fewer mental health problems than subjects in high-poverty neighborhoods. Conversely, environmental features such as public gathering places and worthwhile destinations for pedestrians that facilitate social contacts and support, such as those discussed here, can improve mental health^{18,19}.

Another issue of major public health concern is the obesity epidemic. Urban design determines daily activity patterns in urban populations: one third of all trips in American metropolitan areas are shorter than one mile (a comfortable walking distance) but 66% of these trips are made by car.²⁰ In fact, only 6% of trips in urban areas are made on foot in the U.S., compared to a quarter in most European countries (figure 1). Physical inactivity is in part responsible for the increasing obesity prevalence rates, in addition to the abundant availability of high-fat, high-sugar, processed foods. The U.S. epidemic of obesity cuts across all demographic groups²¹ and has been increasing over time nationwide: within one year alone the prevalence of obesity increased over 5% in the U.S., and diabetes



Figure 1: Mixed use urban design in Switzerland where cars and public transportation share the same space with the pedestrians.

increased more than 8%, both risk factors for cardiovascular disease^{22,23,24}. Obesity tends to persist from childhood into adulthood due to the lack of efficacious weight-loss programs²⁵ while medical interventions are costly and of questionable safety²⁶. Being overweight is a serious health hazard with staggering medical, social, psychological, and economic costs²⁷ and is a serious health hazard also responsible for sleep apnea, hypertension, low self-esteem, and depression. Obesity is particularly grave in children; today over 15% of all American children exceed the body mass index for their age and sex, while 26% of black and Hispanic children meet the definition of being overweight or obese. These children are much more likely to become obese adults. In many metropolitan areas motorized transportation is not a choice, but a necessity, while walking and cycling as modes of transportation have been engineered out of American life. Neighborhood of residence is associated with elevated body mass index, even after adjusting for age, sex, class, smoking, and material deprivation²⁸, and it is proposed that the built environment affects physical activity^{29,30,31}. Thus, City Repair aims to create pedestrian friendly neighborhoods that encourage physical activity that may help to control the obesity epidemic³².

The Transportation City

The current urban land-use and transportation infrastructure in many American cities is based on the rectangular grid system in which streets are designed for efficient transport, and intersections function as overlapping or colliding corridors (figure 2)³³. Such a simple network of orthogonal streets that intersect in a regular manner creates rectangular or square city blocks. The rationale of city planning to shape the urban environment with this pattern of vertical and horizontal streets lies in increased connectivity: the number of possible routes between any given two points is maximized. Short of diagonal connections (which are missing in a rigid grid layout) the distance between the starting point and the destination is minimized, diversifying the transportation options and improving the transportation system. In contrast, with the hierarchical traffic pattern found in more recent development designs such as urban sprawl, trip lengths increase because the residential streets with few connections feed into arterial streets that move traffic out of the neighborhood³⁴. In this model, a trip across the neighborhood is very difficult, while a trip around the neighborhood is very easy and fast. Thus, the grid is the geometric form of choice for a planned network with high connectivity for efficient movement of goods and services.



Figure 2: The grid city with a predetermined rectilinear layout; Portland OR. Reproduced with permission, City of Portland, OR.

Inherent in the principle of the classic grid design applied to the city is the uniform distribution of traffic circulation: there are no major arterial roads that are at the top of the hierarchy of high volume traffic and conversely there are no residential streets that are spared the high volume travel of cars. Residential neighborhoods can therefore fall victim to a constant stream of through traffic which negatively impact the quality of urban life³⁵. The strict grid design does not provide for public centers, parks, or open landscapes since it is superimposed over the landscape and carves the land into squares of private property and virtually omits the public realm, except streets. The monotony of the rectangular pattern does not consider topography or the natural curvilinear layout of the land and is imposed over the undeveloped landscape to neutralize the environment. The lack of open space deprives the urban population of recreational sites with fresh air and abundant light, and fosters monotonous housing standards. Furthermore, the omission of public squares, ceremonial places, and public structures as nodes of community life is a serious limitation of the relentless grid design; it could potentially be the source of social isolation and alienation in urban centers. The grid layout fulfills a number of technical goals, but

falls short of taking into account a number of human qualities. The human dimension is frequently missing from this urban layout which leads to a decline of the urban core, manifest in the numerous abandoned American downtowns that lack economic and social vitality. Many of these American cities suffer from dilapidated physical environments and degraded infrastructures, which have been linked to alienation and social ills which in turn negatively impact public health outcomes and the mental and physical health of their residents.

Intersection Repair

A successful intervention within the city limits of Portland, Oregon has been conceived by The City Repair Project³⁶ (a local non-profit organization in Portland, OR) initiated by community members and supported by City officials. The intervention aims to retrofit the urban orthogonal grid to create public gathering places for human interactions. This approach illustrates both the importance of public participation in neighborhood design as well as the relevance of urban amenities and art to improve the qualities of urbanity. The City Repair Project was born out of a grassroots initiative in 1996 that legally converted a street intersection into a public square. Over its nine years of existence the organization has created over 30 public gatherings and events that engage people to connect with the community and place around them. This placemaking approach entitled “Intersection Repair” has been field tested and approved in Portland, OR as well as in Ashland, NC; Ithaca, NY; Minneapolis, MN; Olympia, WA; and Ottawa, Ontario.

The objective of these health-promoting neighborhood interventions is to engage residents in neighborhood stewardship in the interest of public health³⁷. What is it that stops Americans from walking in the first place? Among the biggest hurdles for pedestrians are the unsafe roads and the unpleasant and inconvenient walking conditions in our cities. American pedestrians are over 6 times more likely to be killed by a car than their European counterparts, per mile and per trip walked; pedestrian injuries fare not much better³⁸. Intersection Repair designs urban environments with the pedestrian in mind. The community-initiated neighborhood-enhancement projects are intended to dynamically connect individuals by involving them in the planning and implementation of creative and attractive urban places. These interactive communities intentionally design vibrant places that are restorative to mental and physical health. Improvements in the physical environment have positive ripple effects across social indicators, such as changes in the social fabric of the community and expansion of social networks after the intervention. Working together on ecological construction, particularly building with cob (a natural building material), which relies on collective physical labor, stimulates social interactions and increases physical activity. Other activities, such as community organizing and design workshops contribute to expanding social ties as well.

The Process

Community Organizing

The hallmark of City Repair’s work is community organizing around engaged urban revitalization. This approach can reverse alienation and foster a sense of responsibility in urban neighborhoods that counteracts urban blight; it encourages residents to take initiative against social disorder and physical deterioration³⁹. In contrast, urban neighborhoods with a low degree of community stewardship are inundated with a multitude of neighborhood stressors and reflect a very low sense of community⁴⁰. Neighborhood stewardship manifested in physical improvements of the urban environment is a direct consequence of the community organizing capacity; it can directly be translated into concrete action such as physical improvements to solve local problems⁴¹. Often residents have little control over the demographic composition of their neighborhood or over transient populations that may be involved in drug trafficking and crime; however, residents can nonetheless revitalize their built urban environment in the face of these challenges. Factors that determine participation in such community efforts to reverse urban decay are sense of social connectedness and sense of community^{42,43,44,45}. Once a more inviting place has been created that is aesthetically pleasing, friendly and safe, such as the public squares as

implemented through the intersection repair process, social interactions are facilitated which in turn increases the sense of community and participation in community efforts⁴⁶.

Social Capital

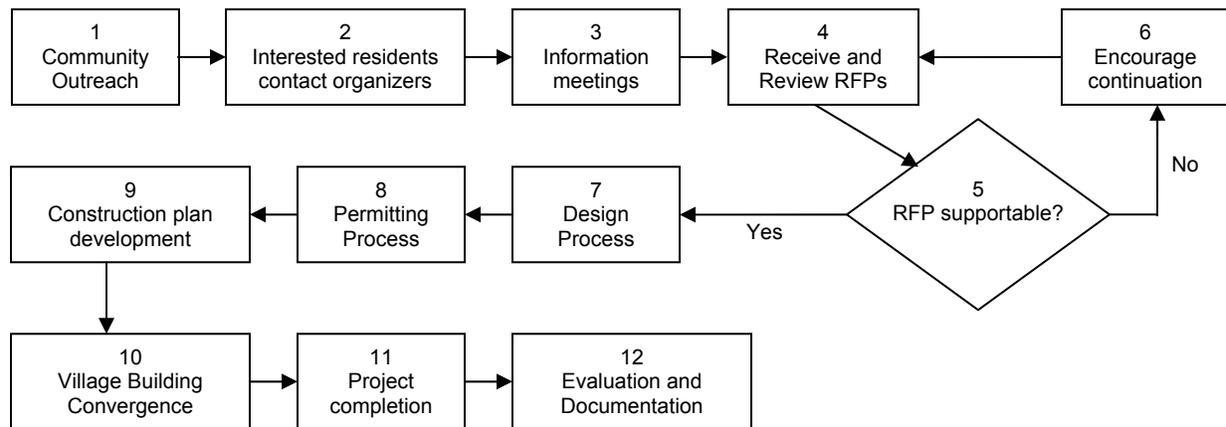
The work of City Repair aims to increase social capital which refers to the potential and resources inherent in social networks or social cohesion⁴⁷, comprises the web of social relationships and their characteristics⁴⁸. Social network ties have been associated with decreased rates of mortality among adults and increased sense of well-being^{49,50,51}. Social capital relies on such networks for cooperation between residents of dilapidated urban environments to initiate collective problem solving. Social capital can be seen as a by-product of social relations that promote trust and mutual cooperation and is therefore not a characteristic of one particular individual, but rather a collective characteristic. As such, social capital can facilitate remedial action in an urban setting and promote specific steps necessary for local problem solving. Therefore it can be defined as: “The norms and social relations embedded in the social structure of societies that enable people to coordinate action to achieve desired goals”⁵².

There are two components of social capital: localized and bridging capital. Localized capital, inherent in existing social or religious groups, is necessary but may not be sufficient for community problem solving, because it may produce redundant information not pertinent to improving inner-city neighborhoods⁵³. Although certain communities have extended social contacts, these contacts may not reach beyond the limits of the social group and thus do not infuse the group with new ideas and expertise. In contrast, bridging social capital connects various groups and can reveal new information for local problem solving and create new opportunities. Therefore, a public health intervention that sequentially builds social networks to augment social capital and facilitates bridging capital should result in collective efficacy that would engage residents in direct social action⁵⁴. The City Repair Project aims to realize community projects that build community capacity and governance skills for consensus decision-making and community stewardship. Community capacity is defined as “characteristics of communities that affect their ability to identify, mobilize, and address social and public health problems.”⁵⁵ The dimensions of community capacity include: “participation and leadership, access to and prudent application of resources, social and inter-organizational networks, sense of community, community history of collective action, community power, shared core values, and capacity to engage in critical reflection”.

Although building social networks and social capital to solve community problems has merit on its own, it can also indirectly improve public health: social support and friendship ties reduce mortality and morbidity^{56,57,58}; conversely, lack of trust between neighborhood residents is associated with increased risk of death from cardiovascular diseases⁵⁹ and in U.S. states with lower levels of social capital, self-reported health is poorer, controlling for individual risk factors^{60,61}. Poor social capital has also been associated with poor mental health in adolescents⁶², increased adolescent birth rates⁶³, and more firearm deaths⁶⁴.

In summary, voluntary involvement in organizations and institutions is crucial for local problem solving⁶⁵, disease prevention⁶⁶ and mental health⁶⁷; however, it has proven challenging to realize such programs⁶⁸. City Repair has institutionalized a procedure that builds both localized and bridging social capital, through ecologic interventions. City Repair encourages residents to improve the urban landscape **physically** (streets and public squares) in order to stimulate walking; supports neighbors to build worthwhile destinations for pedestrians in the public realm that are inviting **socially** in order to improve social networks and cohesion; and engage participants to beautify the neighborhood **symbolically** in order to create a sense of belonging and pride.

Figure 3: Flow-diagram: A Health-promoting Neighborhood Intervention



See text for details; RFP: Request for Proposals;

Reproduced with permission Cowan, S., Lakeman, M., Leis, J., Lerch D., and Semenza, J.C. *The City Repair Project: Creating a Culture of Cooperation*; in *Belltown Paradise/Making Their Own Plans*. Brett Bloom and Ava Bromberg, editors. WhiteWalls, Inc. Chicago, IL, 2004. (pp 8-23).

Community Outreach

Community organizers initially reach out to neighborhoods with low to moderate income and a high representation of minority populations in Portland, OR (figure 3; step 1). Particular attention is placed on involving underrepresented populations such as groups of different socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, age, sexual-orientation, etc. To begin the process of site selection City Repair communicates with a wide range of residents and collect information about potential sites (figure 3; step 2). Informal meetings are held at a residence close to any site where an intervention project is anticipated to be implemented (figure 3; step 3). At an initial meeting residents socialize with each other and social networks are initiated. In subsequent meetings, information is provided about mechanisms for improving the built urban environment.

Design Process

Following these meetings, interested neighborhood groups receive a “request for proposals” and are asked to provide information about their motivation to initiate such a project, the depth of neighborhood participation, and their vision (figure 3; RFP; step 4). From the pool of these applications, the sites are selected (figure 3; step 5) for formal development. As a result of the community outreach, a core group of residents has formed in these neighborhoods. The neighborhood core group serves as leaders that will organize planning meetings and encourage participation in the design process from residents within a two block radius. The neighborhood core group also determines the schedule for community involvement, organizational structure, design workshops, installation dates, and plans for maintenance and future development of the project. The group ensures that all voices are heard, that the decision-making process is accessible, and that there is a process to address concerns, such as consensus decision making. The neighborhood core group is responsible for regularly communicating with their neighborhood associations and with affected neighbors. Neighbors are be provided with information about the project, results of recent meetings, next steps, how to get involved and/or respond. This process involves: door to door outreach, flyers, listservs or websites, activating neighborhood phone trees, posting information either in a temporary "communication station" at the intersection or in someone's front yard, hosting small gatherings, etc.

In collaboration with trained facilitators and design professionals, a base map of each of these sites is developed with critical landscape features and architectural structures. Suggestions for worthwhile destinations for pedestrians and other improvements are discussed and incorporated into preliminary drawings. Designs for the public place reflects the local culture and public art and may incorporate features such as seating areas, lighting, signage, paths, landmarks, water fountains, and information centers/information kiosks. These design workshops involve a series of steps with feedback loops, where ideas are turned into designs, moving from the general to the specific (figure 3; step 7). Neighborhood skills are assessed and supported by architects and design professionals. Design concepts are disseminated by the core group as part of the outreach activities, and feedback is incorporated into technical drawings for permitting and building. At least two design workshops per neighborhood are held to develop artistic destinations for pedestrians and other features and structures. The design workshops focus on the public participation process. In these workshops neighbors share ideas and concerns and together produce both the design and process for creating the project. Workshops are as accessible as possible, including choice of time and location, and providing translation, childcare, food, etc. A workshop design team assists in the development of technical drawings. The team will be composed of design professionals, trained facilitators, and providers of technical assistance in the areas of natural building, permaculture design, and relevant forms of public art. Each project site is affiliated with a workshop design team charged with guiding the design process. The final plans is presented at an informal community gathering and routed for signature within a two block radius of the project, as required by City of Portland Ordinance #172207 (see below) prior to obtaining permits and approval. At least 80% of residents as well as all four corner houses at the intersection need to approve the project. The Neighborhood Core Group and volunteers from the City Repair Project jointly present the proposal to City traffic engineers for evaluation and authorization.

Permitting Process

The City of Portland allows street painting and construction in the right of way, according to City Ordinance #172207 (September 19, 2001), which regulates the implementation of such activities. The Portland Department of Transportation (PDOT) has established a precedent for these projects by granting revocable permits (figure 3; step 8) for ongoing intersection modifications, if the two streets can be classified as Local Service Streets and carry less than a combined 2,500 vehicles on an average day. A petition of support is required by the city; the petition will have signatures from each of the residents adjacent to the site and at least 80% of the residents on the project street frontage(s) within two standard city blocks of the proposed project. The City Traffic Engineer has the authority to modify the petition boundaries when considered appropriate. The residents will provide a written description of the proposed changes, including diagrams depicting how the intersection will look when completed. The residents will demonstrate how the project will improve, or at least maintain, traffic safety and the safety of individuals at or in the vicinity of the intersection. Issues of concern include the following:

Pedestrian, Bicyclist and Automobile Safety. Concerns for safety must be incorporated into all designs, as outlined by PDOT requirements and the technical expertise of the design professionals involved. Concerns may also be addressed by reviewing statistics for car-to-person collisions at the sites, or inviting representatives of existing sites to speak at neighborhood meetings to discuss pedestrian safety issues.

Vandalism and Crime. City Repair reports whether vandalism and crime has been a problem at any of the existing sites and whether the problem has been ameliorated by the intervention. Reported offenses (burglary, assault, vehicle theft, robbery, etc) within a two block radius of one site (the Sunnyside Piazza; discussed below) were improved. In two years prior (N=364) to the first community intervention and for two years following (N=308) we found a statistically significant decrease in crime ($p < 0.001$) compared to two unimproved, adjacent control sites. In the same time frame there was a reduction in calls for service at this site (N=922 compared to N=1,029), while there was an increase in service calls at the two control sites.

Disability Accommodation. Concerns for disability accommodation are incorporated into all designs, as outlined by PDOT and ADA requirements and technical expertise of design professionals involved. Concerns may also be addressed by inviting a representative from organizations such as Independent Living Resources to the neighborhood organization to discuss disability issues and how to develop a space that is safe and inclusive for people with disabilities.

Maintenance. The Neighborhood Core Group at each site is committed to overseeing the long-term responsibility, maintenance and development of the Intersection Repair project.

Neighborhood Intervention

An organizing committee is formed of volunteers, neighbors, students, professionals, builders, designers, activists and artists who oversee project implementation and coordination of all project aspects (figure 3; step 9). Implementation of projects provides many opportunities for individuals and organizations to contribute their resources, expertise and vision. The media is used to alert the public to the upcoming event and how to get involved. The organizing committee helps the neighborhoods to mobilize and to build the community public places that they have envisioned, designed, funded (at least in part) and will maintain for themselves. While all of these projects build community in similar ways, they vary according to each neighborhood's expression of their local culture. Most projects are located in or adjacent to the public right of way in prominent locations.

In order to assist the community with the implementation of their construction plans, a workshop (Village Building Convergence) is held (figure 3; step 10). Natural and ecologic builders assist in the construction of artistic destinations for pedestrians, developed by the communities (for examples, see Table 1). Several thousand neighbors, volunteers, and visitors have participated in the building of physical elements in the public realm as a showcase of neighborhood improvement.

Table 1: Community Initiated Physical Improvements in Portland, OR Neighborhoods.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) neighborhood kiosks with bulletin boards for the community to exchange information about local events, services, parties, births, yard sales, etc. These information kiosks have been built by the community for the community to exchange pertinent local information. These structures have been permitted and built in the parking strip to make them accessible to the public. b) benches in the public right of way that are intended to invite pedestrians to rest and socialize. Such structures are particularly important for the elderly that need pedestrian destinations to go to for a break before continuing their walk. These benches and stools have been decorated with stained glass mosaics by the residents with themes that represent the local identity and culture. c) trellises in the corners of intersections have been constructed to create an overarching structure for hanging gardens. These gardens create a more inviting urban environment and create shade in the hot summer months. All structures are fully permitted by the City. d) street murals in intersections. These street paintings have been approved by City Council through an ordinance and have been implemented throughout the City. These paintings are designed by the community and while they tend to beautify the neighborhood they also bring the residents together and help to form social ties. e) solar powered lanterns that light up the street scape for people to sit in the evenings. f) planter boxes in the non parking zones of intersections to increase vision clearance. These planters or barrels are safety features that enforce the non parking rules and thus tend to slow down traffic. They have been turned into community gardens. The Department of Transportation has approved these new features in the street. g) additional structures in public areas have been designed by the communities.
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Example of an Intersection Repair Project

In 2000 the Sunnyside neighborhood in SE Portland, OR suffered from a number of urban problems including heroine, crack and alcohol abuse, social disorder, and crime. A number of residents started discussing creative approaches to neighborhood stewardship and connected with the Intersection Repair Project.

During nine months of meetings, discussions, workshops, designs plans, outreach and block parties the community conceived of a plan to paint an intersection (figure 4). While the benefits to the community of painting the streets seemed obvious to some, others pointed out that the streets main function is to be driven on. With a considerable amount of outreach and mediation, skeptics gradually became convinced. The community painted a large sunflower in the middle of the intersection and created arguably the most beautiful intersection in town. The pattern resembles two spirals, mirror images of each other, and mathematically represents a Fibonacci series. The Sunnyside Piazza was inaugurated on September 22, 2001, with a celebratory party of residents and homeless alike.

After another nine months of preparations a second phase of community art was realized at this location: a cob art wall was built with colorful mosaics, shapes, and niches; a cob information kiosk was installed to exchange messages and notices intended to facilitate social interactions; and a solar-powered fountain tiled with glass mosaics was constructed to invite by-passers to pause to the sound of running water and to interact with each other. As part of the Village Building Convergence the community erected a metal dome, towering 13 feet over the Sunnyside Piazza. A local artist created the artwork for the dome sculpture and trellises and coordinated the construction. The dome sculpture was designed according to the scheme of a sunflower: iron rods spiral out from the center with 5 spirals in one direction and 8 in the other, according to the Fibonacci Series. The structure was welded together in a nearby driveway and carried to the Piazza. As part of a dome raising ceremony (analogous to an Amish barn raising ceremony) the 300-pound dome that mimics the sunflower design painted in the middle of the intersection, was raised onto wooden pillars over one of the corners (figure 4); three wooden trellises were installed in the other corners of the intersection. Over 100 residents, friends of the Sunnyside Piazza and workshop participants of the Village Building Convergence joined forces to lift the structure onto its new home. In this metaphorical act, the large dome was raised onto ladders and installed over the sidewalk, secured to the hatches and bolted to the footings.

Over the past 4 years the Sunnyside Piazza has become a destination for pedestrians and a place for people to meet. There is epidemiologic evidence that this successful example of community organizing has had a beneficial impact on social networks and well-being, and crime data suggest that there has been a significant decrease in reported offenses⁶⁹. These data vindicate the merits of public participation in urban design with cost-effective benefits to the community.

Program Evaluation

In order to quantify the outcomes of Intersection Repair interventions on local communities epidemiologic investigations have been conducted. In May 2003, the City Repair Project engaged three communities in Intersection Repair projects to create community-designed, environmentally-beneficial neighborhood gathering places, which encourage social interactions. As part of the epidemiological study, residents within a two block radius of each of the three intersection repair projects were included in the sampling frame and surveyed prior to (N=325) and following (N=349) the intervention as part of a prospective longitudinal study. Of these respondents, 265 subjects completed a detailed questionnaire both before and after the intervention with multiple questions concerning sense of community,

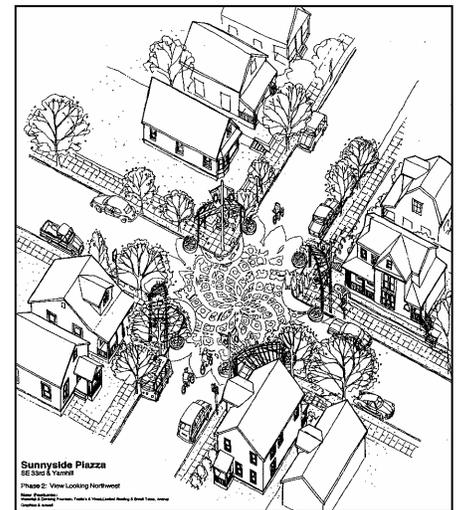


Figure 4: Plan for an intersection repair project; Sunnyside Piazza, Portland, OR. Reproduced with permission: Semenza, J.C. (2003). The Intersection of Urban Planning, Art, and Public Health: The Sunnyside Piazza. *Am. J. Public Health* 93(9): 1439-1441.

neighborhood social interaction, perceived control at the neighborhood level, and neighborhood participation, as well as general and mental health.

The benefits of improvements in the physical environment had a positive ripple effect across all social indicators tested. The measured changes in the social fabric of the community documented an expansion of social networks after the interventions. The Intersection Repair interventions improved subjects' sense of community ($p=0.01$), social interactions ($p=0.02$), and social capital ($p=0.03$) as well as mental health ($p<0.001$). For many community members working together on ecological construction, particularly working with cob, a natural building material, which relies on collective physical labor, seems to have stimulated social interactions. Written comments from participants were collected as part of the study, including: "I have never seen so many active, creative, awesome people from one community gathering together and having so much fun making their home such a wonderful place." "It is not only aesthetically pleasing but it clearly demonstrates the community involvement and dedication to a united and sustainable future." "I love seeing so many of my neighbors getting together, taking pride in their community. The [Sunnyside Piazza] is a place of beauty, and I am glad to have it in my neighborhood."

In summary, the Intersection Repair projects created human-scale urban landscapes that are more conducive to walking and biking by placing community art in the public realm. Such aesthetic improvements encourage residents to stroll and engage in conversations.

Conclusion

City Repair has succeeded in having a tremendous impact on urban improvement and neighborhood enhancement in Portland and beyond. City Repair has addressed significant urban concerns including homelessness, alienation and neglect and its creative approach to Intersection Repair has been described in the peer-reviewed literature such as the American Journal of Public Health and in numerous book chapters and national magazines. The City Repair Project has over nine years of experience creating public events and gathering places and helping residents to creatively transform the places where they live. The organization draws on expert skills from a variety of professionals, including architects & urban planners, public artists & graphic designers, writers & researchers, organizers & coordinators, public health practitioners, etc. City Repair has an excellent working relationship with city officials and has helped to set new city policies and ordinances for intersection repair. The City of Portland (Development Commission, Department of Transportation, and Environmental Services) recently contracted with City Repair to redesign an intersection in NE Portland; this process has involved community outreach to create a remarkable public gathering place with more neighborhood identity.

The City Repair Project has taken the initiative to programmatically address some of the limitations of American cities. Intersection Repair is an urban revitalization strategy that directly engages communities in urban design, a field that has traditionally been dominated by professional planners, architects, and developers. Intersection Repair creates sustainable communities by creating gathering places with environmentally conscious construction that benefits both the livability of the neighborhood and the well-being of its residents.

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