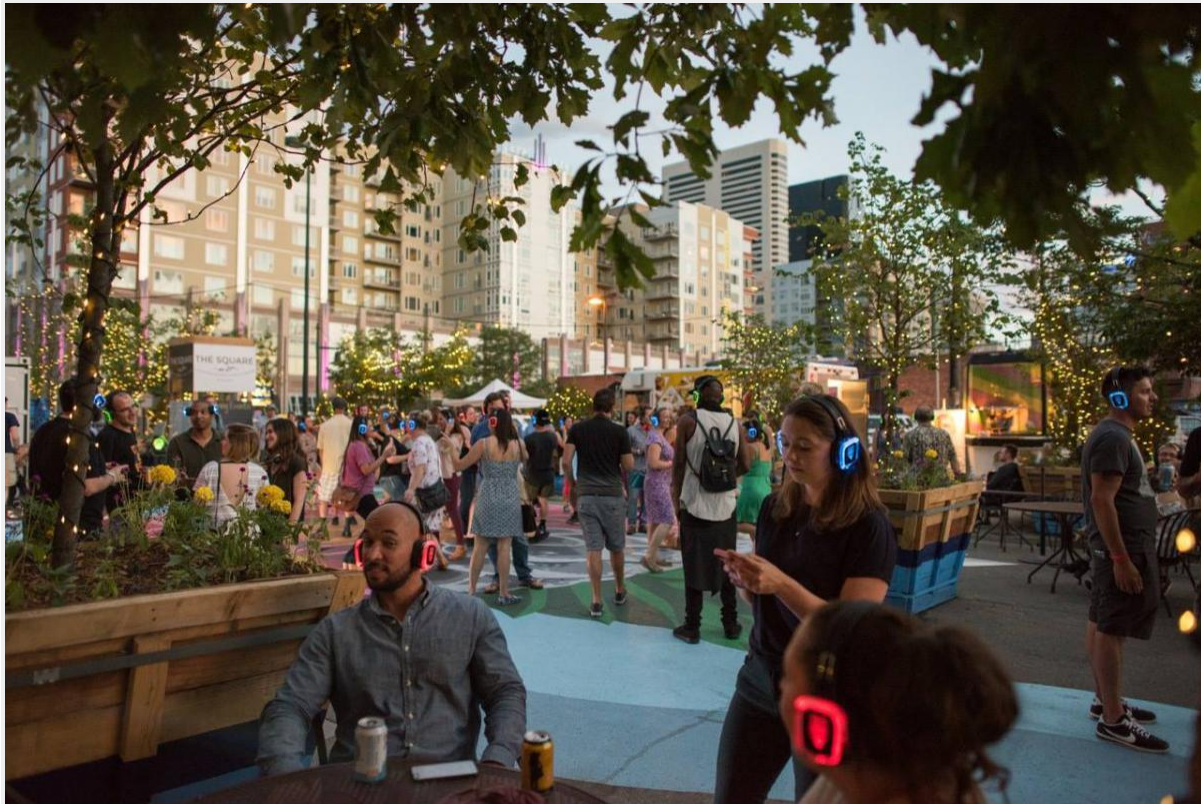


The Square on 21st

By: Steven E. Chester, Senior City Planner, City and County of Denver

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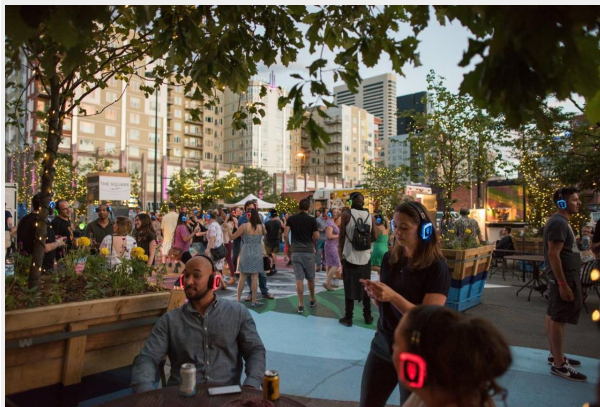


The Square on 21st Pop-Up Park, the first pop-up park in Denver, brought the vibrancy of a public “square” to the Ballpark Neighborhood, one of the most underserved by parks and open space in the entire City. Although full of diverse retail, major residential infill development, and nearby Coors Field, the neighborhood is devoid of a true public meeting space. This project aimed to fill a void of neighborhood parks and capture the adjacent pedestrian activity to create an energetic new public space that celebrates the local climate and culture. The project was a demonstration project for 2 months to test the feasibility and design for a permanent park space in the area.



The vibrant community space provided an ever-changing roster of special events within an “instant street park,” completely transformed with cafe seating, public art, overhead cafe lights, boxed trees, turf, lawn games, a dog park, and flowers. The park occupied approximately one half-acre, filling a single street block with amenities such as a 3,000 s.f. dog park, lawn and flexible shaded areas, outdoor games, food vendors, public art, and a performance stage.

The project was community driven from its inception. The park was designed and programmed by the immediate community, led by a dedicated group of stakeholders, since they were the ones who would ultimately be the main users of the space. A robust set of data was collected to measure the success of the space. Businesses surrounding the Square on 21st reported a 30% increase in revenue during the duration of the pop-up, showing the economic benefit of energized and programmed public spaces. While not many children or families live in the immediate area, nearly 10% of park visitors were under the age of 14, showing the space was in fact family friendly and attracted a diverse population of guests. One of the main goals of The Square on 21st was to “put the square in Arapahoe Square” and create a true central meeting place for the neighborhood. Based on data collected during the summer, nearly 70% of visitors to the park were from the immediate neighborhood, achieving the goal of creating a true neighborhood park.



The main challenge overcome by the project was the fact that nothing like it had ever been done before in the City of Denver. There was no set process or guidelines to follow, nor a blueprint for success that had been laid out by prior projects. Additionally, it was also a true example of governmental collaboration, with many different city departments coming together to make the project a reality. While it may be cliché, silos were broken down in order for community planning and development to build the park in the right-of-way.

The vitality of the design of The Square on 21st suited both organized and spontaneous events and activities – creating a fun, safe public place that engaged people from the surrounding neighborhood and beyond. City dwellers enjoyed a break from their normal routine outdoors in an area of the city that was previously devoid of open space. After two months, the experimental space’s success prompted requests for an extension and assured the city that their plans for a park in this location will be well received in the future.



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