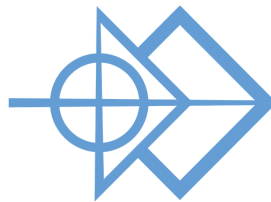


## PARKLET BEST PRACTICES GUIDE



### Developing a Parklet with Bicycle Parking and Seating

April 2020



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Development

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### Designing a Parklet with Bicycle Parking and Seating Area

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A parklet is a raised platform with seating, plantings, and other features which converts one to three parallel parking spaces along the sidewalk into a space for people to gather, essentially expanding the sidewalk.

This guide will assist any neighborhood interested in installing a successful parklet which includes bicycle parking, seating, and greenery. Included here are best practices for working with municipal government for regulatory permission, as well as identifying appropriate locations for the parklet, and the value of specific design components in achieving the highest metrics of success.

This guide details the important factors we encountered while working through the Pilot Parklet Application process with the City of Dallas, as well as best practices from parklet programs across the U.S.

Amanda Popken Development lead the team with DSGN Architects, Urban EcoPlan, and Stash Design, working under a Green, Blue, Grey grant from the North Central Texas Council of Governments to support pilot infrastructure projects which will integrate transportation projects with environmentally sensitive designs.



## Parklet Function

This type of parklet is designed to balance multiple priorities and meet many needs. With this module design, it can fit in one or up to three parallel parking spaces.

The modules are designed specifically for use within a walkable neighborhood retail district. These walkable districts are often relics from the past, built before the age of cars and often unable to accommodate the number of vehicles needed to bring the amount of customers necessary for all shops to thrive. Therefore, the integration of a highly-visible, well-designed, and inviting bicycle parking area is intended to inspire nearby residents (who may live too far to walk but just a short bicycle ride away) to try biking to the district instead of driving.

The rainwater absorption of the plants and the eco-friendly operation of bicycles serve as an educational opportunity for visitors to the district to learn about our daily impacts on our stormwater systems and local rivers and streams. A parklet with greenery will also be a more inviting addition to the hardscape of a typical retail center.

In cities across the globe where parklets have been installed, this type of addition to the public realm is most successful when it creates a gathering place. A seating area in the right location will tend to attract people, making the place appear more lively and also feel safer for pedestrians. Placed next to the right businesses, this gathering space can create synergy, bringing more customers into the businesses. As the San Francisco Department of Public Works put it, “Parklets provide an economical solution to the desire and need for wider sidewalks...”



## Parklet Operation

This parklet, with the objective of adding greenery to the area, will require additional maintenance than a parklet without plants, both in the short-term and the long-term. Best practices here are based on policies established by the City of San Francisco, whose parklet program has grown to more than 38 parklets since program inception in 2010.

- Parklet substrate should be power washed as often as necessary to prohibit the nesting of rodents or insects, especially when near restaurants.
- Responsibility for refinishing, repainting, or replacing worn-out or broken components should be clearly defined.
- Partnerships with surrounding business owners, staff, and property owners can spread the burden of frequent maintenance for plant watering and replacement if/when plants need to be replaced.
- Responsibility for insurance coverage should be clearly defined.
- If the municipality requires that the parklet be easily removable for right-of-way work in the parklet location, partnerships with neighborhood civic and community organizations can ease the labor burden.

## Design Considerations

- This parklet design is modular to enable flexibility in the installation of future parklets of this design, enabling it to fit within larger or smaller spaces (1-3 parking spaces) and to include more or less bicycle parking or seating, as desired for each location.
- Careful consideration contributed to the bicycle lock design and placement, to enable locking various styles of bicycles to be solidly attached as well as supported if there's no kickstand.
- Substrate under the platform should be open and clear of obstructions to facilitate regular cleaning and prevent nesting of rodents and insects.
- If near an intersection, sight lines will necessitate that planter boxes and plants in the seating area have a height no taller than 2 feet, 6 inches above the platform, and that shade sails be mounted above 7 feet.
- Municipal regulations may specify that parklet must be able to be disassembled in the event that maintenance work must be done in the Right of Way underneath the parklet location. For ease of disassembly, parklet segments must weigh less than 200 pounds each.





- Trex composite decking will be light weight and will wear well over time in the outdoors.
- Each bicycle parking space is designed to be a seating space when no bicycles are parked.
- The City of Dallas does not allow advertisement or signage within the public realm. Information about the parklet and its impacts on stormwater systems was therefore integrated into the parklet's existing surfaces as a simple plaque.



Bicycles lock to directly to the side of the bench, right where the frame comes down behind the front wheel. This design works with many styles of bicycle, from foldable commuter bikes to cargo bikes. This steel portion of the bench is metal to withstand continual use over time.

### Benefits, Concerns, & Metrics of Success

Parklets around the world have demonstrated the potential to increase the number of pedestrians in the vicinity and increase sales figures for nearby businesses. According to a 2011 study of the impacts of parklets in San Francisco, published by the National Association fo City Transportation Officials (NACTO), parklets influence pedestrian traffic, behavior, and perceptions. The study concludes that “Parklets and the increase in activity they attract make nearby businesses more viable. The number of businesses applying for parklet permits clearly indicates that they see an economic benefit to investing in these new public spaces.”

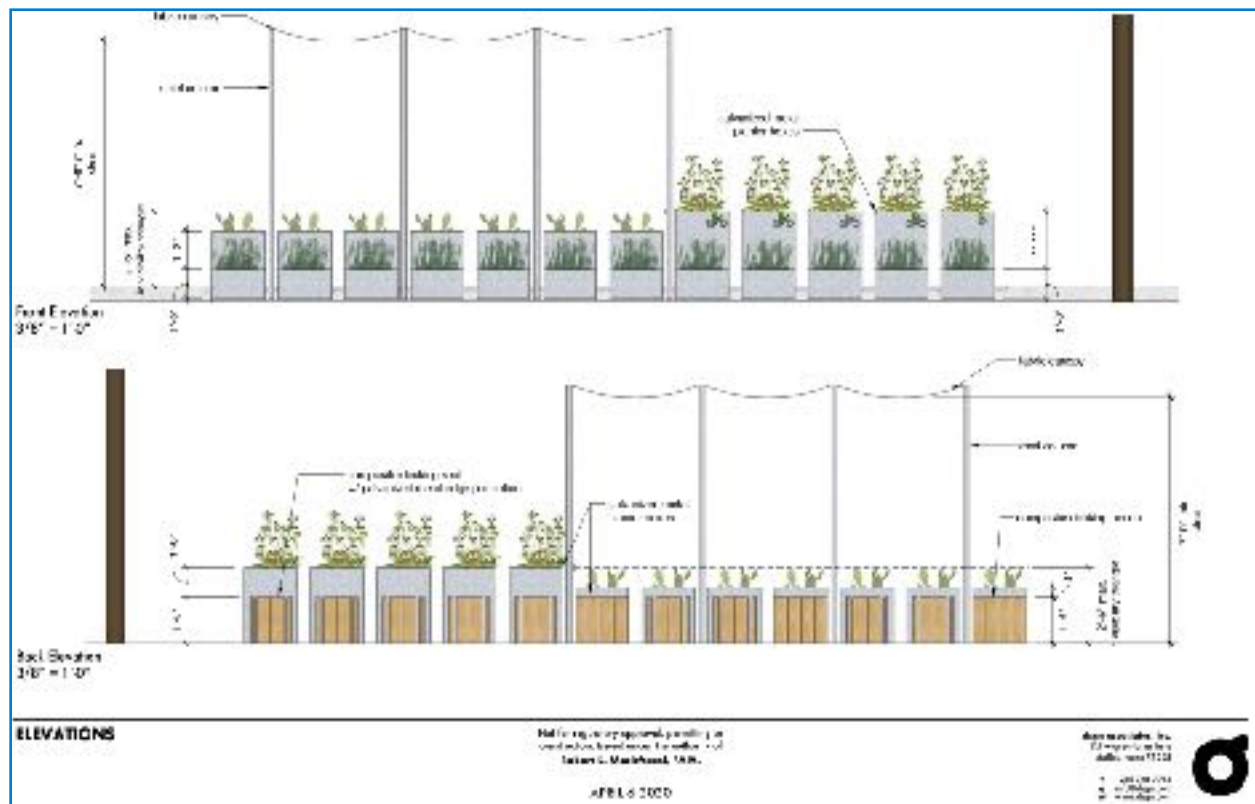


## Benefits

- Parklets contribute to the sense of safety on sidewalks by expanding the area designated for pedestrians and creating another layer of protection from automobile traffic passing by.
- Urban Planners who study the usage patterns in public space, such as William Holly White, have determined that simply the presence of people will attract more people. By creating this small gathering space, the parklet creates this indicator of demand, driving the decision for more people to come see what is so attractive about this space.
- These mini-parks and mini-plazas created by parklets enhance the pedestrian experience by making streets more walkable and more interesting, creating a sense of place in the neighborhood and bringing a heightened sense of safety with more “eyes on the street.”
- A parklet provides a place for stationary activities to occur such as talking, eating, and window-shopping all of which increase the perceived sociability of an area, enhancing its sense of place, and thus commercial attractiveness. When placed adjacent to cafes and restaurants, there is often an increase in business.
- Humans also love to “see and be seen.” The parklet provides this opportunity for social gatherings, and a well-designed parklet with attractive “moments” will also attract opportunistic visitors looking for a beautiful backdrop for a nice photo.
- In the 2011 study of San Francisco parklets “The number of people stopping to to socialize and engage in positive behavior increased significantly...especially on weekdays” at all three locations studied. “The greatest impact was on Polk St where the average nearly tripled from four to 11 people at any given time.”
- A 2015 study of six parklets in Philadelphia by University City District (UCD) found that “In particular, two parameters emerged as the strongest predictors of parklet success. The first was modest interior seating capacity within a main adjacent business, coupled with high turnover of that same interior seating. The second was large windows on the main adjacent business, which tend to increase the sense of connection between the business interior and the exterior parklet space.”
- “What UCD found is that parklets located directly outside the right types of businesses can create a dynamic that brings a neighborhood together—picture families stopping for dinner or treats, lingering to socialize, and attracting passing acquaintances to stop and chat. The most successful parklet in the study, a 240-square-foot space located outside a taco shop and a popsicle store in a medium-density residential area, attracted as many as 150 individual users in a single day.”



- In the 2015 UCD Philadelphia study, “Owners reported a 20 percent increase in sales in the two weeks following a parklet installation... One business owner said sales were up so much he had to hire new workers.”
- The very first parklet in San Francisco had a simple design with planters, tables, chairs, and three bicycle racks. The 2011 San Francisco study found that “community response was positive. Observations before and six weeks after installation showed a 37% rise in weekday evening pedestrian traffic (approaching weekend levels), 14% increase in the number of people walking their bikes within the study area, and a 10% rise in positive public perception of the area’s community character.”



Shade sails strategically cover the seating area and the sight line at the intersection is preserved with seating instead of bicycle parking and by lowering the height of planter boxes.

## Concerns

Every analysis of the benefits of success must include the potential threats to success for evaluation and appropriate management:

- Removing parking: By attracting more potential customers to the business’ front door, the parklet expands access to the storefront and creates more social benefit and more value to the location than as a parking space. Some cities recoup lost fees from a parking meter



through the parklet permit fee, while others see the return in the increased tax revenue created by a boost in nearby business.

- Removing street space from the public realm for the sole benefit of a private business: The 2015 Philadelphia study found that 20 to 30 percent of users were not customers of an adjacent business. In fact, the busiest parklets in UCD's Philadelphia study attracted the most non-patrons. In San Francisco and in Dallas, parklets must be open to the public, not reserved for a specific business' customers.
- Negative impact on businesses: None of the business near parklets in the 2011 San Francisco study nor in the 2015 UCD Philadelphia study cited any negative impact on business from the parklets. Parklets may not have success attracting people or attracting new customers for nearby businesses but that hasn't detracted from business.

Site Characteristic	Direction of Association	Strength of Association
Customer turnover per interior seat	+	Very strongly associated
Building transparency (percentage of façade)	+	Strongly associated
Sidewalk width	-	Moderately associated
Presence of bicycle lane	+	
Presence of parallel parking (both sides of street)	+	
Population density (residents within 500 feet)	-	
Food conducive to onsite consumption	+	
Crime (robberies within 500 feet)	-	
Pedestrian volume	+	
Availability of takeout service	+	
Traffic volume	-	Weakly associated
Availability of shade	+	
Street width	-	Not associated
Presence of bicycle parking	NA	
Interior seats	NA	
Pre-existing outdoor seats	NA	

The 2015 University City District (UCD) assessment of Philadelphia parklets, though not a large enough study to be statistically significant, found correlations between each of the above site characteristics to determine which characteristics may predict a successful parklet as measured by: the average number of guests at each parklet and number of unique guests per hour.

- Attracting vagrancy, begging: The Smart Growth America parklet assessment found that "The popularity of well-designed, well-maintained parklets makes them a poor choice for vagrancy. In the vast majority of cases, parklets have been very successful in attracting the general public and have not become havens for misuse."



- Nuisance activities (drunkenness, bullying): Similar to vagrancy, the popularity and family-friendly nature of well-designed and well-maintained parklets make this a poor choice for nuisance activities. As with any public retail and restaurant district, especially where alcohol is served, there may be instances of this behavior with or without the parklet. In general, any shop employee, management, or visitor to the district is empowered to ask misbehaving patrons to leave and, if necessary, call for security to de-escalate a situation.
- Overcrowding: The most popular parklets have the most people gather. Often neighbors and friends walking along the sidewalk will stop to chat while standing on the sidewalk. This popularity did not create a negative impact, rather the activity appears to attract more clientele for nearby businesses by creating the appearance of bustling, popular businesses.

### **Metrics**

- Increase in the number of pedestrians within a block
- Increase in stationary activity near the parklet location (window shopping, sitting, conversing with others, children playing, etc)
- Increase in sales at adjacent and nearby businesses
- Increase in number of transactions at adjacent and nearby businesses
- Average number of unique guests per hour in the parklet
- Number of bicycles parked at the parklet
- Increase in the number of people walking with bicycles or biking in the area

### **Determining the Best Location**

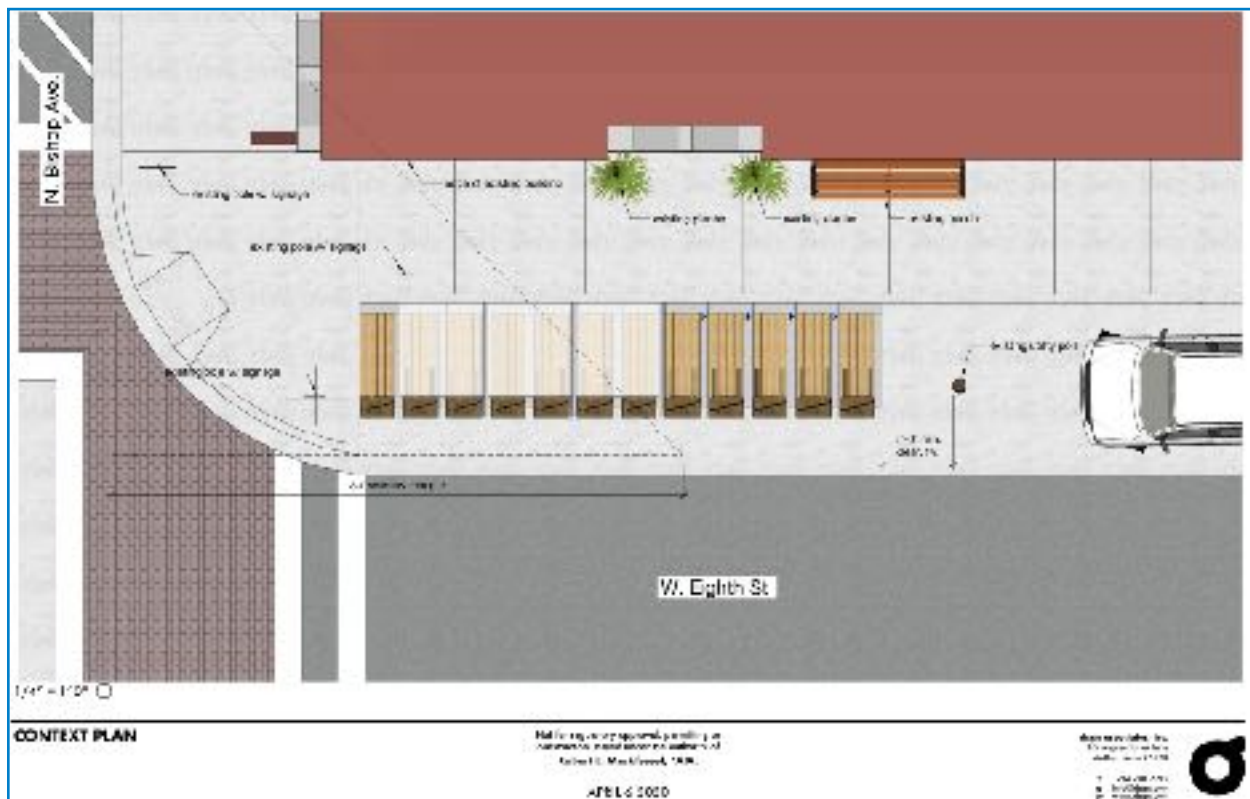
The ideal location for this type of parklet will develop synergy with nearby businesses, create an opportunity for education about the direct impacts of our mobility choices on the stormwater drainage and surrounding natural environment, and will inspire nearby residents to bike to the retail district instead of driving a personal automobile.

- Identify a walkable retail district with either a strong nearby bicycle community or a high density of easily accessible residential neighborhoods nearby with a strong demographic of families and youth.
- Identify a few potential locations based on topography and visibility. Ideally, the parklet is located:
  - in a highly visible parallel parking space near the main street of the district





- away from a storm drain where stormwater may pool during a heavy rain event (where the parklet will not exacerbate stormwater pooling)
- It will be necessary to have a private sector champion as a partner in the project. Many walkable retail districts have a merchants association or management organization overseeing the district. If there is one in place, meet with board members or leaders to gain their support. If unknown, business owners or retail staff may be able to assist in connecting with the right individuals.



Placing the parklet near the entrance to the adjacent business, near additional outdoor seating and windows into business interiors will create synergy between the parklet and businesses.

- Meet with business owners and property owners adjacent to each potential location. Identify business owners and property owners who understand the value of placemaking and the value of this parklet in front of their business (See the section Benefits, Concerns and Metrics of Success.) It will be necessary to have the adjacent stakeholders in support and have their participation in the daily operations and long-term maintenance (See the section Parklet Operation.)
- Analyze water flow either during a storm or by looking at angles of the street to determine whether or how parklet substructure may need to be adjusted to allow stormwater to flow without impediment. Most likely, stormwater is intended to flow



adjacent to the curb, except where parallel parking is inset into the sidewalk, in which case water may be intended to flow between the parking space and the street. The latter is preferable. The former may simply require an opening in the Parklet substructure along the curb to allow water to flow under.

- If deciding between multiple equally appealing sites which meet all the criteria thus far, another consideration may be seasonal solar impact due to
  - Shade offered by nearby trees (also consider impact from birds in the trees)
  - Shade created by nearby buildings in hot seasons or sunlight opportunities during winter months

## Municipal Regulations

Wherever the parklet will be located, the municipal government will likely need to have an approval process to install the parklet - either permanently, temporarily, or as a pilot project. A smaller and less-bureaucratic municipality may simply allow installation with permission from a City Manager or a departmental Director of Economic Development or Transportation.

- Meet with city staff (the City Manager, or departmental Directors of Transportation, Economic Development, or Real Estate departments) to determine the best process for allowing placement of the parklet in the public right of way, whether through an established process such as real estate licensing, or by creating a pilot parklet program or another unique process for approval - even if temporary.
- Note: City staff may have different recommendations based on whether the structure is at street-level or is raised as an extension of the sidewalk. A defining characteristic of a Parklet is that it is flush with the sidewalk as an extension of the pedestrian realm providing additional space for various uses.
- If no established regulatory process exists, it may be preferable to create a Pilot Program. A Pilot Program has many benefits, most importantly as a test process for highly regulated cities to move forward with a new program in a manner which is regulated yet is also open to adjustment. A good process will include metric gathering before and after parklet installation as well as a determined point for reevaluation of the process for codification if successful. See the Smart Growth America parklet study for examples and recommendations of parklet policies.
- Summarize conclusions and next steps by email following all city staff conversations.



*Sources:*

San Francisco Great Streets Project, Parklet Impact Study, 2011. [https://nacto.org/docs/usdg/parklet\\_impact\\_study\\_sf\\_planning\\_dept.pdf](https://nacto.org/docs/usdg/parklet_impact_study_sf_planning_dept.pdf)

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