




# ACTIVATING URBAN COMMONS

A prototype waymaking kit for public spaces.

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For the Faculty of Information,  
Knowledge Media Design Institute  
University of Toronto



The term 'waymaking' was first coined by Justin Scherer in his fall 2012 study of the Medical Health Science Building at the University of Toronto.



**WAY**

**H**

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**A**

Exploring waymaking in new neighbourhoods

# kit description

Imagine you had a guide to making your city a better place to live and work. What would it contain? Genius ideas for arts & culture fundraising? The ultimate transportation solution for cyclists & drivers? A perfect plan for turning that brownfield into a soccer field? Or perhaps, just a pair of magical scissors to cut through all that red tape at city hall?

We'll be honest: our Waymaking Kit doesn't show you how to do those things. But it does propose something that might be better than perfect plans and magic scissors: it tells you how to get out and meet your neighbours and fellow city-dwellers. So you can **Activate the Urban Commons** by animating and enlivening our shared spaces together.

The kit is a guide for thinking about and exploring places and spaces in the city. The activities suggested here are to help you—and your neighbours and fellow city-dwellers—think about **5 facets** or features of place. We'll get to those in a few pages. We also provide a little theory about why we think each facet is important to conceptualizing place and space.



Waymaking is about finding your way through space and time with purpose. It's about attaching meaning to particular places, dropping a mental marker on that street corner because you heard an amazing street musician there once. Or ran into an old friend you hadn't seen in years. Or had your bike stolen. Waymaking is easiest to do with places you know, so this kit uses a place we know as a case study. With each new idea, we held it up and thought about how it would fit Lisgar Square, a west-end Toronto park-in-progress. But just because Lisgar Square is rooted here in our city doesn't mean that the ideas won't fit your city—so go ahead and try them on.

This Waymaking Kit is in beta. The activities included here are still a little rough, so there is room to add your own colour and ideas to the outlines sketched here.

If you like what you see here, let us know. If you have suggestions or improvements, let us know. And if you have a lead on a pair of magic scissors, definitely let us know.

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# facets of inquiry

**facet**, n. [fæsət]: A particular side or aspect of something.  
- *Oxford English Dictionary*

Even in an empty space, something is happening to make it stay that way. This Waymaking Kit is structured around **five facets** which can help conceptualize the layers that make up space and place. The facets are a way of connecting the concrete sidewalk underfoot, with the political decision to post that No Ball Playing sign, with the GPS coordinates on your phone.

**The facets are:** the built environment, public space, mapping and digital representations of space, activating space, and governance and shared management of public space.



**the built environment**



**public space**



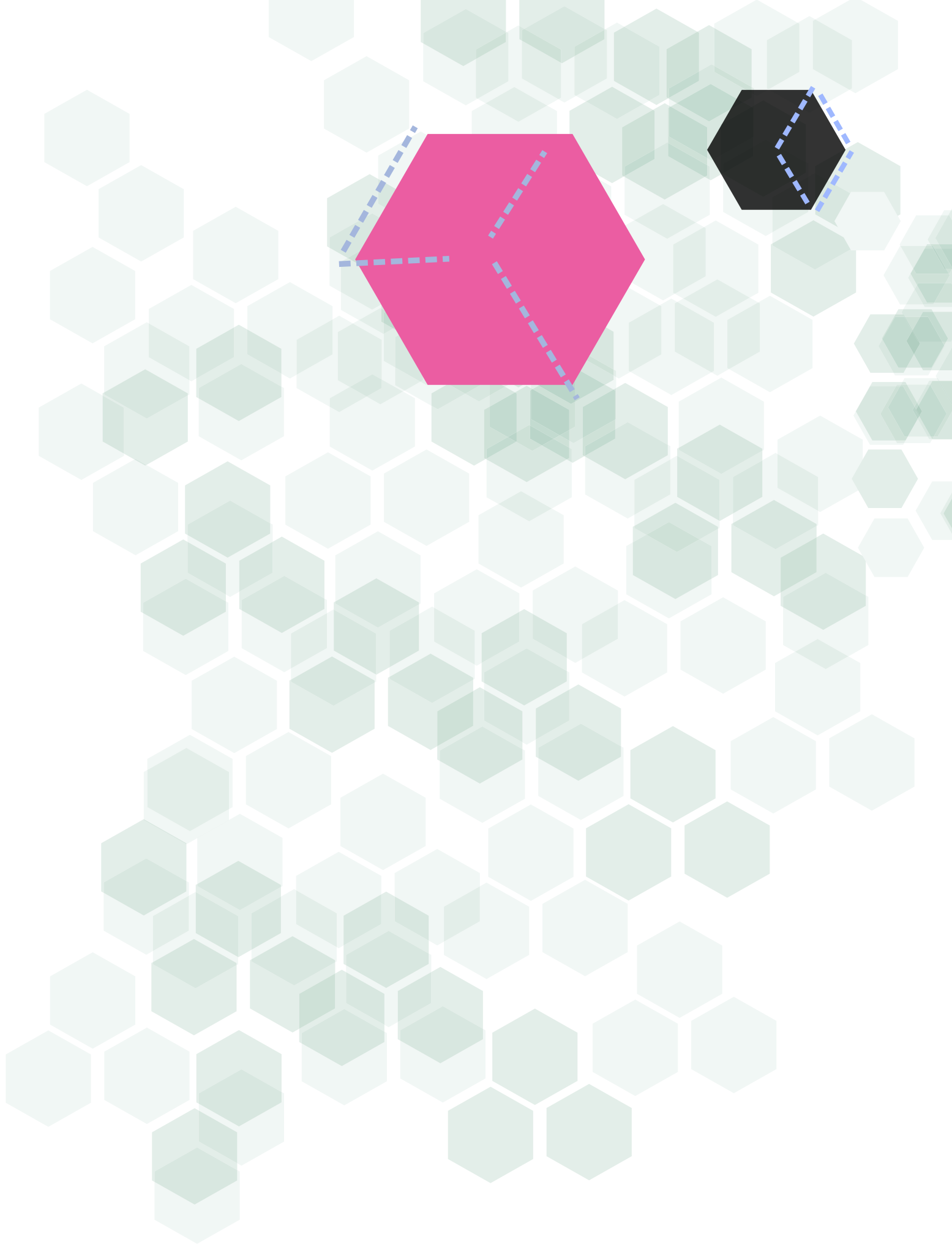
**mappping**



**activating space**



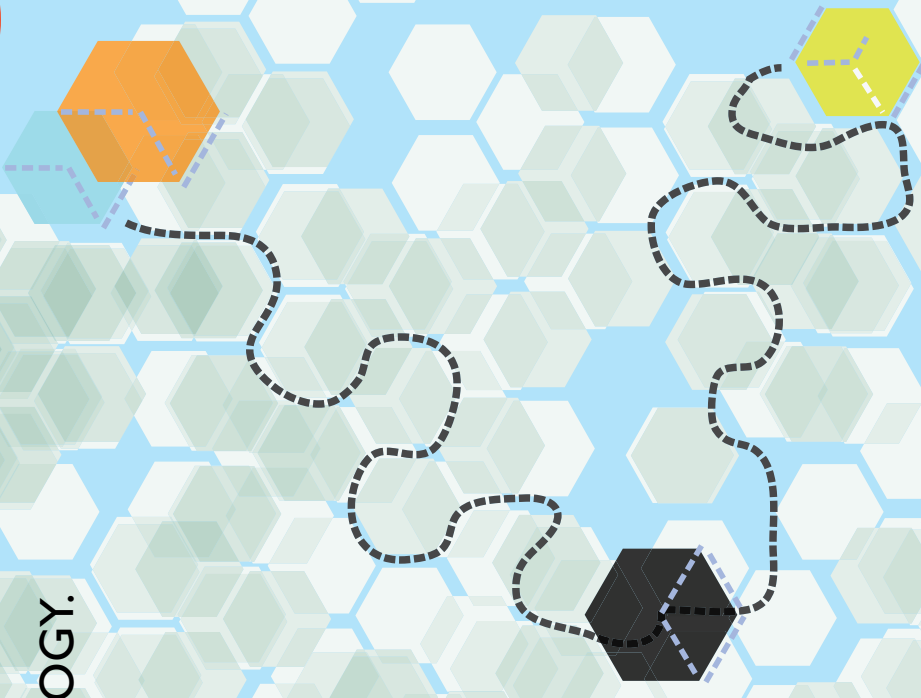
**governance**





# WAYMAKING

WHAT IS WAYMAKING? WAYMAKING AS METHODOLOGY.





# WAYMAKING concepts

**Waymaking** is defined as “a multidisciplinary/knowledge media design methodology and a constellation of values for human engagement with the built environment that combines **Wayfinding** with **Placemaking** and helps users of the space in question to build and share meanings of their experiences with space managers and other space users”.

- *Justin Scherer*

Waymaking is different from hacking in that it aims to increase the appreciated quality of the space/place rather than re-purposing it.

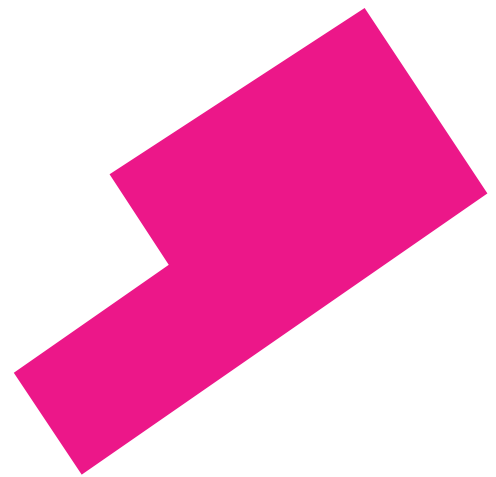
Here quality is defined as the degree to which the built environment space/place is meeting all of the specified and aspirational goals for which it was created.

- *Peter Pennefather*

## The Design Challenge

Waymaking has no key informants or textbooks. No solemn treatises to read, and only a few other examples to consider. So the challenge (because we like a good challenge) is to take this wonderful, concretely abstract idea and create a kit that embodies waymaking for users of the built environment (that's all of us).

The focus is on public spaces/  
places linked to a specific  
community; specifically, our  
**Lisgar Square** case study.



# CASE STUDY

LISGAR SQUARE - A NEW PUBLIC SPACE BEING BUILT IN THE WEST QUEEN WEST AREA OF TORONTO. TO BE BUILT BY 2015.

Our aim for the kit is to imagine waymaking interventions that promote public engagement with the space/place and that acknowledge the multiple facets of influence determining how the built environment location was imagined in the first place & how it might be maintained and managed in the future.

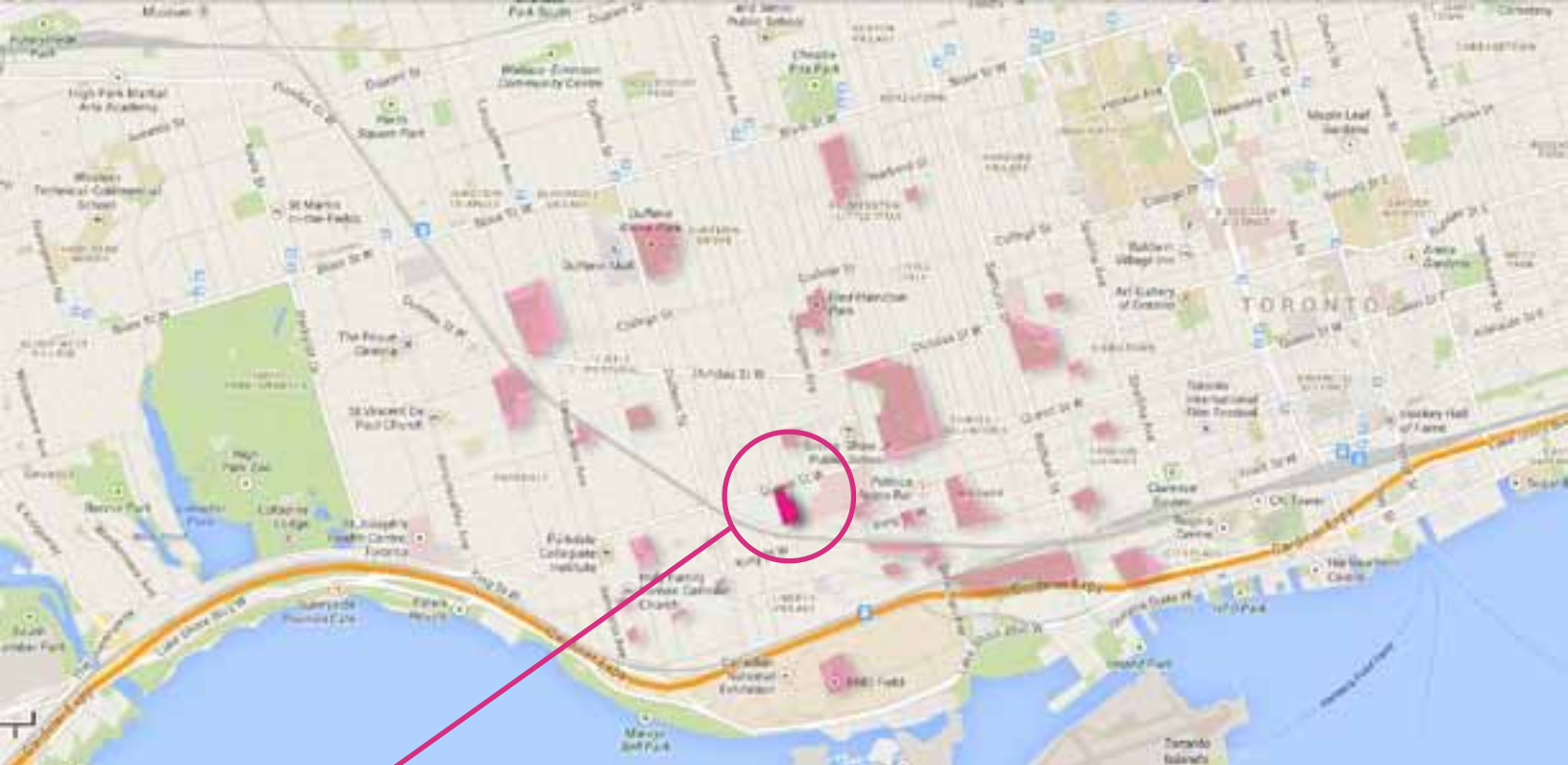
## CASESTUDYCONTEXT

Yellow dots indicate new condo buildings in the case study neighbourhood.

Urban plan diagram by  
Giannone Petricone Associates.

Queen Street West, Toronto



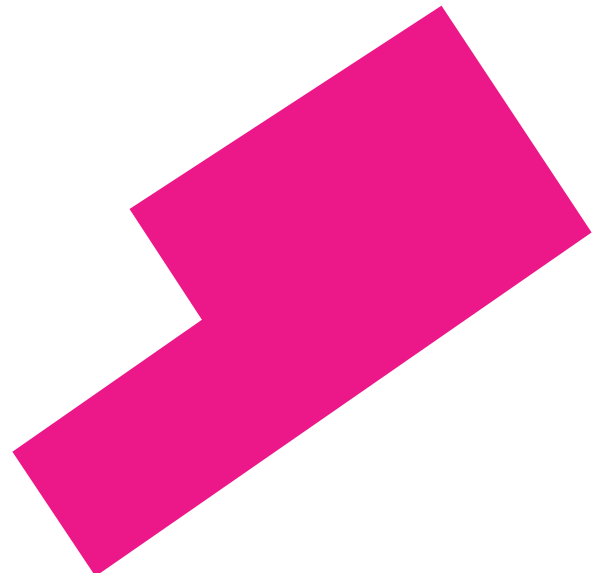


Lisgar Square and other urban commons in the precinct

**Lisgar Square** is a 4000 m<sup>2</sup> (.4 hectare) park-in-planning, which will be located in the West Queen West neighbourhood of Toronto (scheduled completion date is 2015). It is the only public space to be designed for the contentiously overdeveloped land area known as the Queen West Triangle.

The public square will serve the existing neighbourhood residents as well as the thousands of new residents expected from the insertion of 15 + high rise (between 8-26 storeys) condominium buildings added to the area.

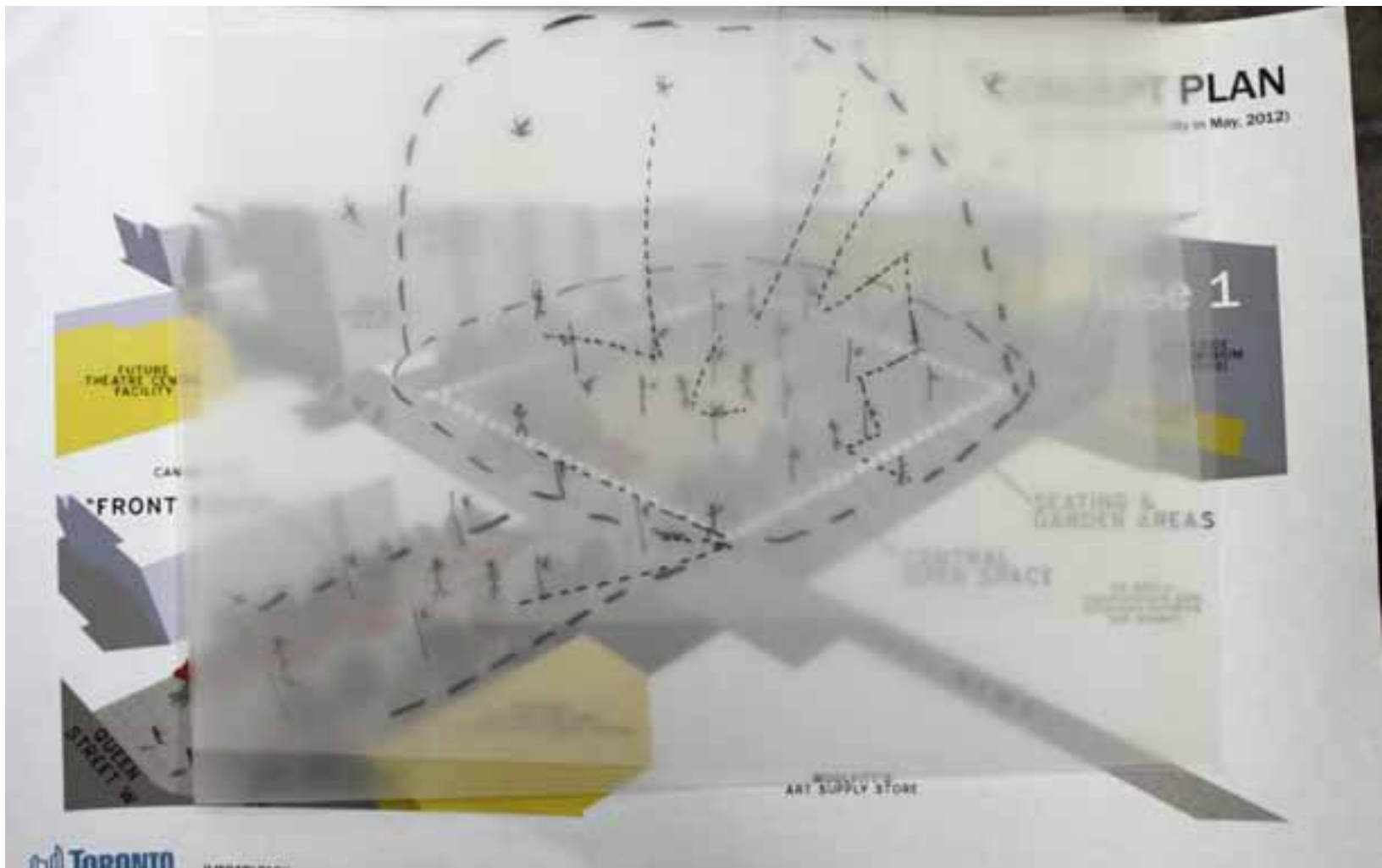
The future Lisgar Square provides a backdrop against which we interpret the meanings of our **five facets of inquiry**, and ground the creation of our waymaking kit.





Park design sketch by Victor Ford Associates

Sketch: Lisgar Square imagined as a contemporary Pnyx, Stoa, Agora (4 dimensions)



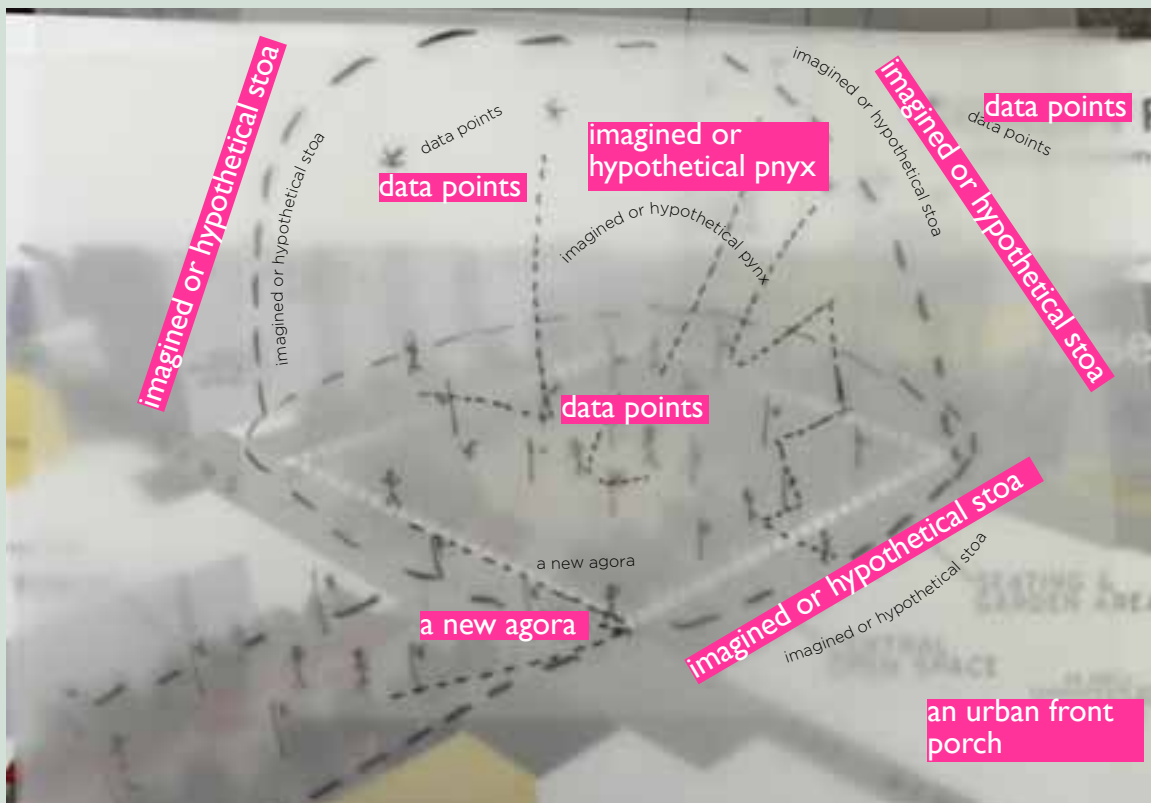
## Early ideas of public space

The **Pnyx** is a hill in central Athens, the capital of Greece. Beginning as early as 507 BC, the Athenians gathered on the Pnyx to host their popular assemblies, thus making the hill one of the earliest and most important sites in the creation of democracy.

**Stoa** is a term defining, in ancient Greek architecture, covered walkways or porticos, commonly for public usage. Early stoas were open at the entrance with columns lining the side of the building; they created a safe, enveloping, protective atmosphere. Later examples were built as two stories, with a roof supporting the inner colonnades where shops or sometimes offices were located. These buildings were open to the public; merchants could sell their goods, artists could display their artwork, and religious gatherings could take place. Stoas usually surrounded the marketplaces of large cities.

The **agora** was a central spot in ancient Greek city-states. The literal meaning of the word is “gathering place” or “assembly”. The agora was the center of athletic, artistic, spiritual and political life of the city.

- Source:Wikipedia. 2013





A number of activities occurred simultaneously in the **agora** - commerce, religious rituals, casual hanging out. In the open space there was also a rectangular law court surrounded by a low wall, so that citizens going about their business or making an offering to the gods could also follow the progress of justice.

The **stoa** helped resolve this confusion. As one moved from the open space into the stoa, one moved from a public realm in which citizens freely intermingled into more private spaces. The rooms at the back of the stoas were used for dinner parties and private meetings. Perhaps the most interesting feature of the stoa was the transition space just under the shelter of the roof on the open side; here one could retreat yet keep in touch with the square.

- *Richard Sennett, The Spaces of Democracy*

The ancient Greeks' stoa offered a 'liminal space,' neither private nor public but both of these at once (Parkinson, 2012). Surrounded on three sides by canyons of condominiums, Lisgar Square may come to embody a modern-day stoa for the residents both new and established. A space of contention or connection, the square may function as an **urban front porch** for the buildings at its borders.



## CASESTUDY

Images documenting the area surrounding the case study lands. Queen Street West, facing west at the edge of the new development and Lisgar Square.



## CASESTUDY

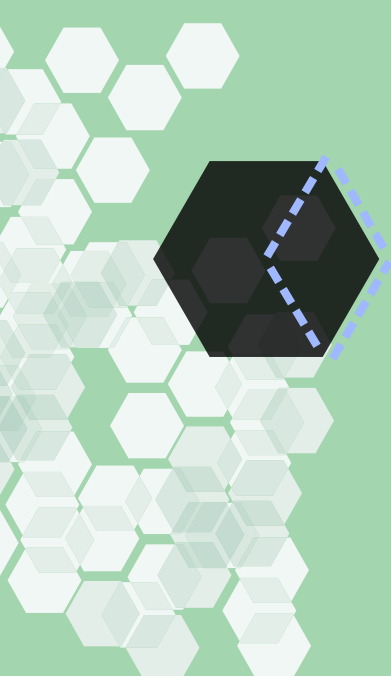
Images documenting the area surrounding the case study lands. A wall of condominiums still in progress. West face of the Lisgar Square.





# the built environment

How  
would you  
explore and  
contribute to  
shaping our  
shared built  
environment?



# the built environment facet

“Not only is the city an object which is perceived (and perhaps enjoyed) by millions of people of widely diverse class and character, but it is the product of many builders who are constantly modifying the structure for reasons of their own. While it may be stable in general outlines for some time, it is ever changing in detail. Only partial control can be exercised over its growth and form. There is no final result, only a continuous succession of phases.”

- Kevin Lynch,  
*The Image of the City*

# concept

the built environment

The built environment is the body of the city, replete with concrete and glass bones, a network of transit veins running from the heart to the extremities, patches of green parkland, orderly public squares. This facet uncovers the links between health and urban planning, contemplates the paths and edges of the urban fabric (Lynch, 1996), and explores triangulation - two people, one neutral object- in public space.

# activities

## do a location or street audit

Visit a place you think you know and re-discover it by really looking. How do people use the space? Is it friendly? It is more welcoming for cars or for people? Take a camera, capture images, investigate the details.

Projects For Public Spaces has a great Street Audit resource. Find it at [www.pps.org](http://www.pps.org)

When investigating a place, they suggest looking for attributes such as sociability, access & linkages, comfort and uses & activities.

the built environment





# activities

## **seek out and join a local citizen planning group - or start your own**

Help shape your neighbourhood by joining in public discussions, note new development proposals in your area and attend all the community meetings. Send your local city planner a letter or email with your opinion of the new developments.




# activities

**enliven your precinct by working with local arts + cultural groups to secure physical spaces that keep creative industries (people) in your area**

There is a lot of pressure on the city to build new buildings, most of them private condo residences. Forward thinking cities have been recognizing the importance of securing *affordable* spaces for local cultural production.

the built environment



This building was a gift to the city of Toronto from philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in 1908

What will your legacy be?

# key informant

## **John Danahy,**

Coordinator of Research and Co-Director,  
Centre for Landscape Research;  
Associate Professor, University of Toronto

## key ideas from our interview

- the city through the senses
- the great Jan Gehl, architect
- everything happens at the edges
- “frameworks for social negotiation”
- the built environment on a human scale
- we’re horizontal animals—think about the surface
- William H. Whyte & triangulation  
(you + me + neutral object = conversation)

## useful reading

1. “Between Health and Place: Understanding the Built Environment,” (Lisa Marie Williams. Wellesley Institute, 2013)

2. “The City Image and Its Elements,” (Kevin Lynch, from *The Image of the City*, in *The City Reader*, eds. R.T. LeGates, F. Stout. New York: Routledge, 1996)

3. *Cities for People*, (Jan Gehl, Washington: Island Press, 2010)

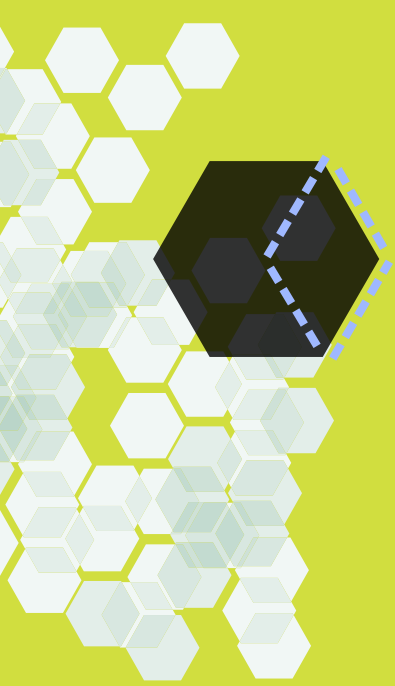
4. “A Place Called Home”, (Hazel Easthope. *Housing, Theory and Society*. Vol 21(3), 2004)





# public space

How would you  
articulate the  
concept  
of public  
space?



public space  
facet

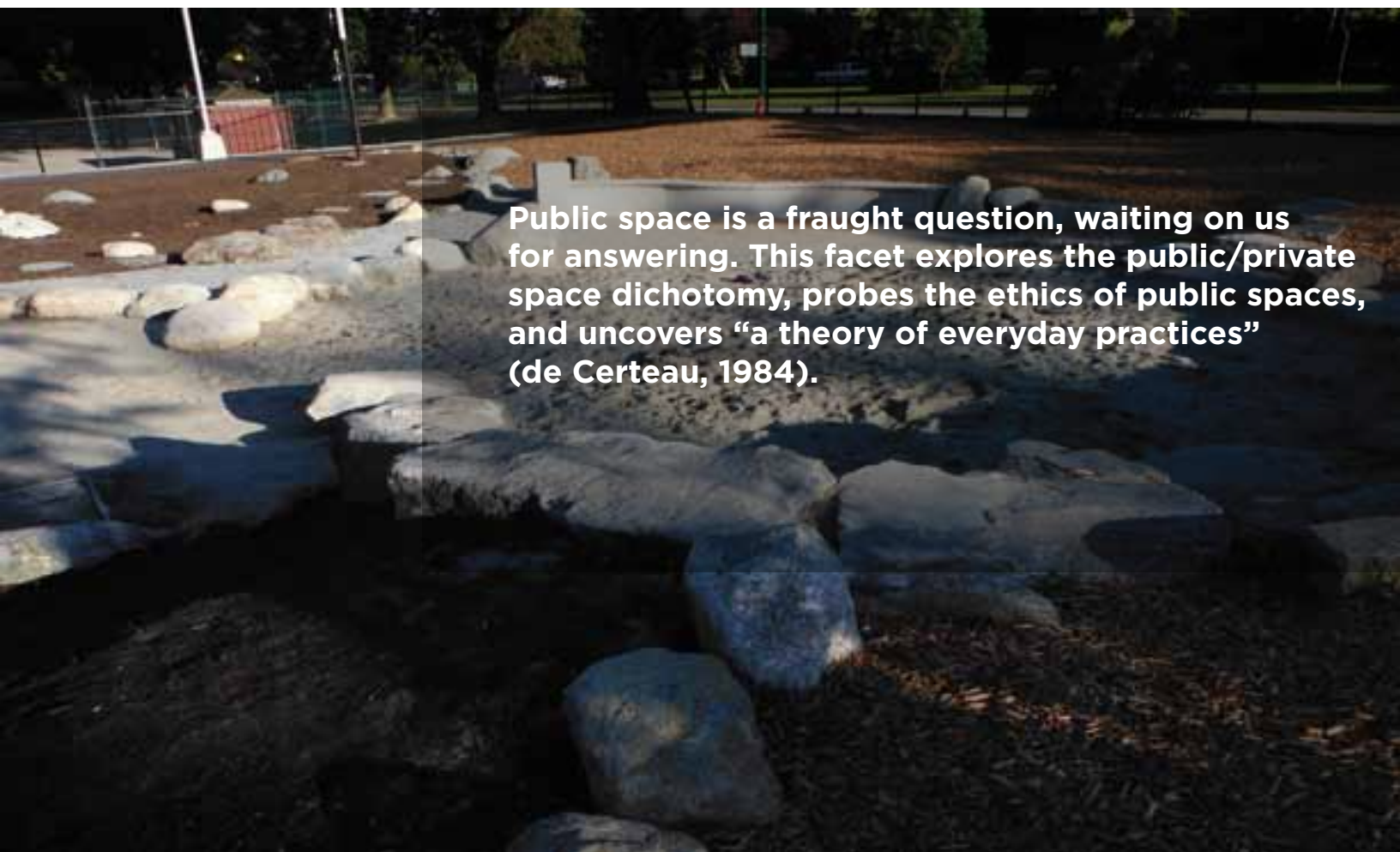
“The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or the statement uttered.”

– *Michel de Certeau,*  
*The Practice of Everyday Life*



# concept

public space



Public space is a fraught question, waiting on us for answering. This facet explores the public/private space dichotomy, probes the ethics of public spaces, and uncovers “a theory of everyday practices” (de Certeau, 1984).

# activities

public space

## **organize and design an outdoor classroom with other parents for your local school**

This outdoor classroom was designed and built over the summer of 2013 for a school in a Dunbar, Vancouver, BC neighbourhood.

Parents and local people were involved in the construction of the new outdoor classroom.





# activities

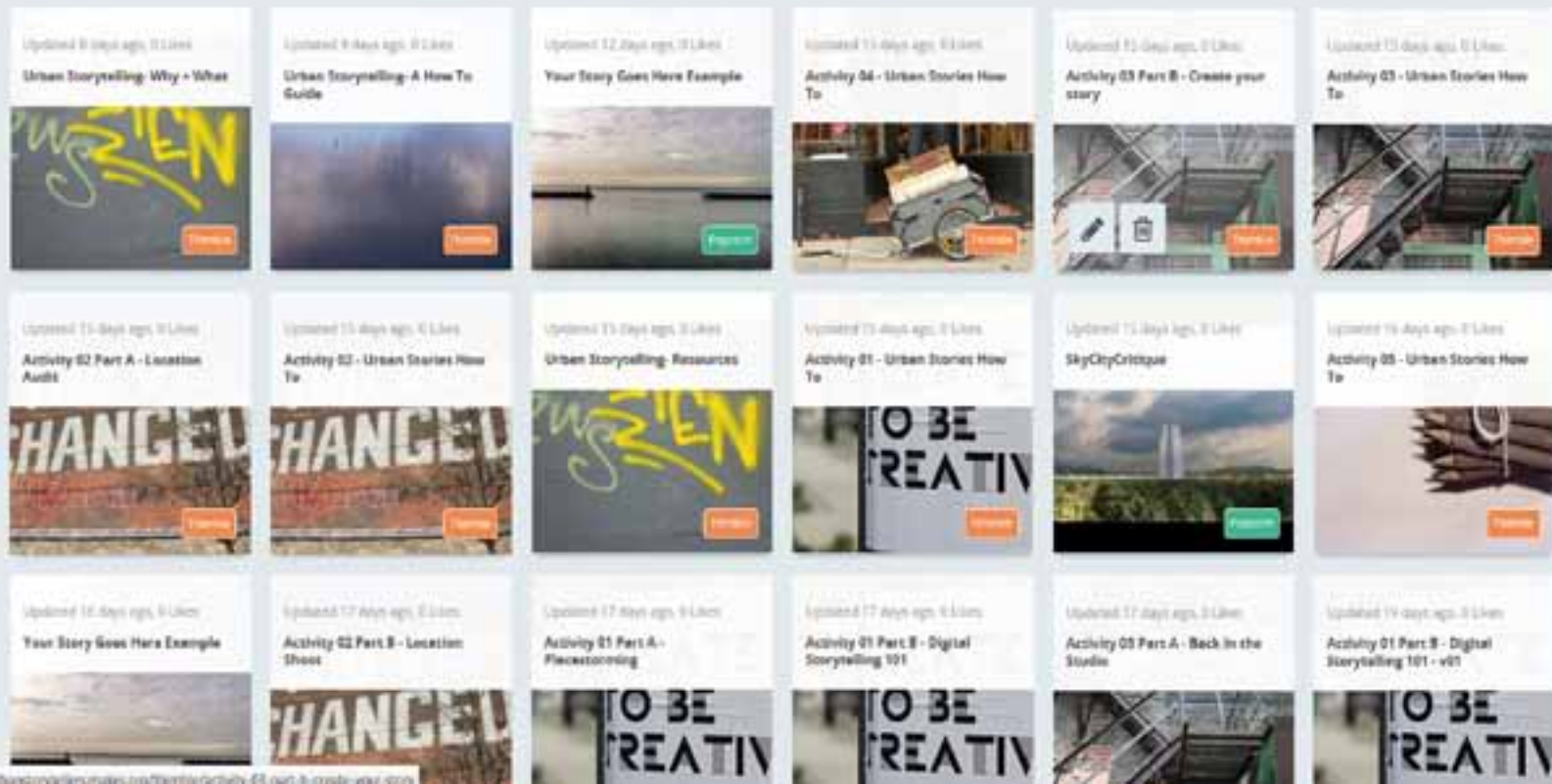
## learn the art of urban planning storytelling

*Your Story Goes Here* is a teaching kit providing prompts for exploring urban planning and developing a sense of place through digital storytelling. Creating & sharing stories about specific locations empowers citizens to participate in the ongoing urban planning dialogue by adding their insight & lived experiences to the conversation.

Designed by Andi and Michelle, *Your Story Goes Here* is a Mozilla Webmaker site and is open for anyone to use & remix.

The kit is available here: <http://bit.ly/1drsZBw>

urbanstorytellers, these are your makes:



# activities

**look for “junk space” or overlooked urban space that can be altered and reclaimed as social space.**

public space

Underpass park is a new park in Toronto that opened in 2013. It is sited under the ‘underpass’ of the Gardiner expressway on the east side of the city. The children’s playground was located in the area that receives sunlight. Skatepark and hoops are located under the ramp.





# activities

**note the spaces in your area that are publicly owned. Compare to private or publicly accessible private spaces.**

This type of fencing is usually a dystopic barrier used at construction sites or to demarcate other 'private' spaces.

Even chain link fences can become a site of surprise or delight - creating a more inviting, interesting and humane experience for people as they walk past an anonymous or derelict space.



# key informant

**James Brown,** Brown and Storey Architects (B+SA)

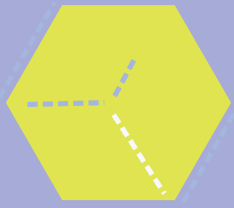
## key ideas from our interview

- designing the West Toronto Rail Path
- project scales & politics
- playing with affordances
- nodes | networks | bifurcation
- the value of redundancies in the system
- braided pathways for different speeds of life
- David Urban's paintings as pathway inspiration
- a hedge is not an unknown entity (except when it is)
- intensity, effects & constraint in the built environment

## useful reading

1. "The Spaces of Democracy" (Richard Sennett. Raoul Wallenberg Lecture, 1996).
2. "Theorizing Public Space," (John R. Parkinson in Democracy and Public Space: The Physical Sites of Democratic Performance, New York: Oxford, 2012).
3. "Walking in the City," (Michel de Certeau in The Practice of Everyday Life. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

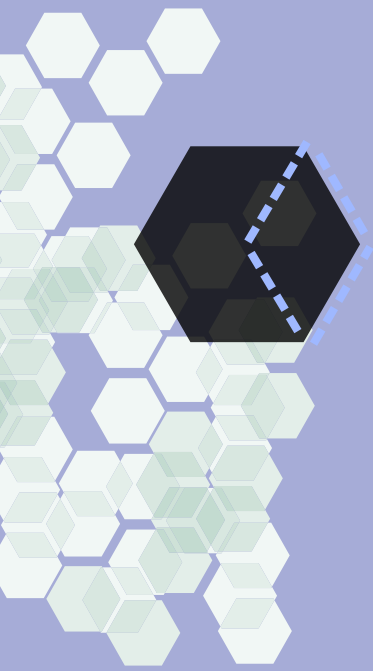




# mapping

+ digital representation  
of space

How do your  
virtual and  
physical worlds  
mesh in the  
cityscape?



## mapping + digital representation

# facet

“Interest has shifted from the map as object to mapping as practice.”

– *Jeremy W. Crampton,*  
“*Cartography: performative,*  
*participatory, political*”

“They become liberated spaces that can be occupied. A rich indetermination gives them, by means of a semantic rarefaction, the function of articulating a second, poetic geography on top of the geography of the literal, forbidden or permitted meaning. They insinuate other routes into the functionalist and historical order of movement. Walking follows them: ‘I fill this great empty space with a beautiful name.’”

– *Michel de Certeau,*  
*The Practice of Everyday Life*



# concept

mapping

Geographical Information Systems (GIS) mark our passage through the virtual world and real space. Physical “maps are performative, participatory and political” (Crampton, 2009) and above all, represent power over place. This facet explores knowledge and data sharing, GIS as way/place/finder/maker, and creating communities in the digital space.



# activities

## document your neighbourhood by adding your knowledge of locations through **OpenStreetMaps.org**

Open Street Maps is one open source mapping tool that is used by a variety of communities for interesting and socially urgent projects.

Sometimes used in emergency situations to identify areas of need - for instance mappers can quickly indicate and highlight weather damaged geo-local places where food or supplies are urgently needed.

People are also using open source maps to tell location-specific urban stories.



# activities

mapping

## **do some urban “ethnography” or urban exploration**

Bradley Garrett shares samples of his ethnographic research and his urban exploration processes in this video.

<http://vimeo.com/5366045>



# activities

mapping

**note waymaking techniques used to identify paths to and in public parks**

Why are some notations more effective than others?



# key informant

**Maurice Yeates**, FRSC, Senior Research Fellow in the Centre for the Study of Commercial Activity, Ryerson University

## key ideas from our interview

- GIS | 3D
- spatial perceptions
- interpreting social trends
- toronto's northern drift
- coming soon: fight for the Greenbelt
- most important maps? Weather maps
- mapping as political | economic | social
- development & real estate speculation
- Mark Monmonier & How to Lie with Maps
- mapping from POV of people who live in a space

## useful reading

1. "Information Places: Navigating Interfaces between Physical and digital space," (Katharine S. Willis, Jens Geelhaar in Handbook of Research on Urban Informatics, ed. Marcus Foth. Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2009).

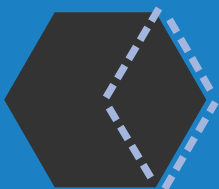
2. "A Visual Approach to Locative Urban Information," (Viktor Bedö in Handbook of Research on Urban Informatics, ed. Marcus Foth. Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2009).

3. "Virtual Cities for Simulating Smart Urban Public spaces." (Hideyuki Nakanishi et al. in Handbook of Research on Urban Informatics, ed. Marcus Foth. Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2009).



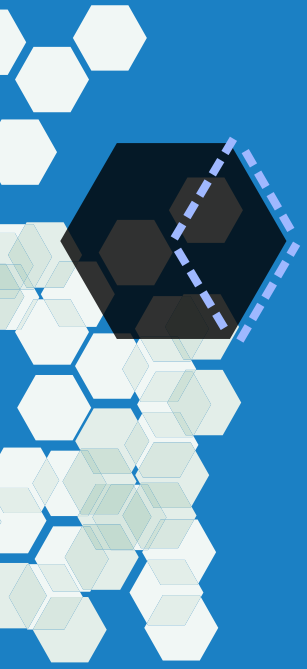


# activating space



What is your definition of an 'activated' urban space?

What are some memorable interventions?



activating space  
facet

“What attracts people most, it would appear,  
is other people.”

- William H. Whyte,  
*The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*





# concept

How to make space come alive, to solidify the invisible ties between us, to turn “strangers into neighbours” (Sandercock & Attili, 2010). This facet explores place-based, site specific, creative, social interventions. It seeks to understand how to engage people in the urban environment, how to cultivate a sense of community in the eternally evolving city.

The Activating Urban Commons Wayfinding Kit is our contribution to civic engagement. Structured around the five facets, with each section of the kit containing a conceptual explanation and an exploratory activity. Once deployed into the urban wilderness, the kit will provide a map for examining, sharing, and reclaiming public space.

activating space

# activities

activating space

**do some 'radical planning' - start a conversation about built forms, buildings, parks, bridges and paths in your neighbourhood - through non-destructive interventions**

A walk through the West Queen West neighbourhood reveals a number of interesting non-permanent interventions.



# activities

**plan an open invitation picnic with (local) urban-farmed food in your neighbourhood park. Talk to neighbours you have never met before.**

Seek out the local urban farmers in your neighbourhood to see what they are growing and when their harvests are.

activating space



# activities

**support local arts + culture initiatives  
or propose your own project to the  
public space committees for parks**

Contemporary public art initiatives differ from the more traditional concept of placing art in public spaces as a permanent object.

New forms of public art are changeable, non-permanent and temporary. Think: performances, sound works, projections or organized events. Some pieces are even take the shape of 'street' furniture, such as lamps and lighting or seating.

activating space



Anthony Gormley - *One & Another*, 2009, Trafalgar Square, UK. Photo by David Merridan

This is an example of performative changeable, interactive public art. Gormley was commissioned to create a piece for the 4th empty plinth in Trafalgar Square. He invited 2,400 people to activate the plinth in whatever way they wanted for one hour at a time over a 100 day period.

# key informant

**Shawn Micallef**, writer, editor, columnist, walker

## key ideas from our interview

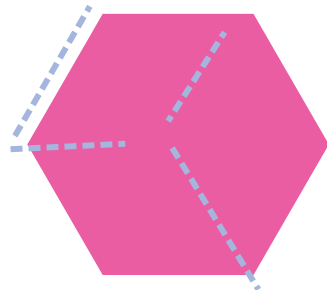
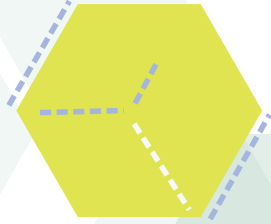
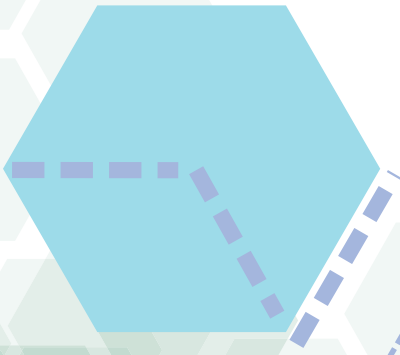
- walking as a way of seeing & talking about the city
- layering stories on top of places
- activating urban spaces makes the politicians nervous
- showing people their city
- fighting the weird Toronto impulse to not engage
- what brings everyone together?
- food & sports
- the urge to gather, the urge to watch
- Nathan Phillips Square steps
- that compulsion to write your name in the cement
- leaving a mark on the city
- ownership & authorship of urban spaces
- undervalued suburbs & authentic strip mall culture

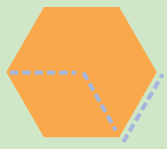
## useful reading

1. "Clusters, Networks and Creativity," (Charlie Karlsson in Handbook of Creative Cities, eds. David Emanuel Andersson, Åke E. Andersson & Charlotta Mellander, Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2011).

2. "Fun with Strangers," (Jane McGonigal in Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World. New York: The Penguin Press, 2011).

3. "The Game, the Player, the World: Looking for a Heart of Gameness," (Jesper Juul, Keynote, Level Up conference. Utrecht, 2003).

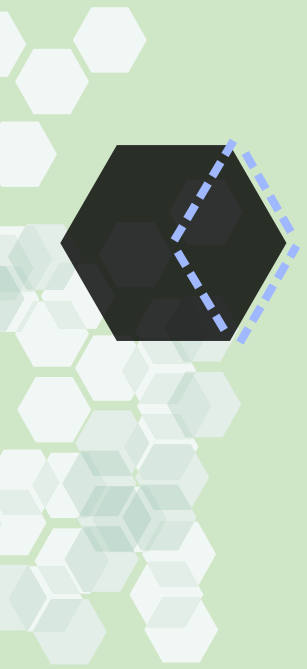




# governance

**and shared management of public space**

Where do  
you see  
participatory  
governance  
playing out?



## **governance** facet

“Thus, spaces in which one can encounter the demos in all its variety have an important democratic function – they help us see and recognize others and make us more willing to take their right to make claims on us seriously when we encounter them in political debate. It is not the claims they make that are important here; it is recognizing them as rightful claim-makers that matters...”

– *John R. Parkinson,*  
*Democracy & Public Space*



# concept

governance

Governance is the tightrope on which democracy balances. This facet examines non-expert, collaborative and participatory models of governance, and concepts related to 'new urbanism.' It seeks to understand how effective governance can accompany community engagement and civic participation.



# activities

## **organize a public debate for local politicians to speak about planning issues before the next local election**

Six months prior to a local election, begin contacting the people running for the office of councillor. Find a public space that you can hold a citizen organized 'town hall'. Inform the candidates of the debate focus and give them the same questions before hand. Find an independent moderator. Publicize the event.



# activities

**organize open free public discussions or ‘charrettes’ to get local citizens imagining what their neighbourhoods could look like in the future.**

Charrettes are great ‘visioning’ exercises for local area residents. Organize the event around specific location-based questions - this is a chance for non-expert citizens have a say on how they see their future neighbourhoods evolving.



# activities

## **Crowdsource your condo charter.**

In our case study area, there are thousands of new residents expected to join the neighbourhood in the coming years.

Condo-dwellers are a huge new demographic for neighbourhoods yet harder to make connections with - both within the condo and with existing neighbours.

Identifying fellow vertical-neighbours through condo boards and reaching out to a wider neighbourhood is a good starting place for future community based work.



# key informant

**Fiona Crean**, Ombudsman, City of Toronto

## key ideas from our interview

- democracy is pretty messy
- appreciative inquiry & positive change
- fighting bureaucracy w/ the Kafka method
- toronto the transparent (for the most part)
- city would stop functioning w/o its citizen volunteers
- the complicated business of (governing) public space
- who is not speaking? Whose voice has gone unheard?
- procedural fairness | substantive fairness | equitable fairness

## useful reading

1. "Placemaking through Participatory Planning," (Wayne Beyea et al. in Handbook of Research on Urban Informatics, ed. Marcus Foth. Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2009).
2. "Tokenism or Political Activism? Some Reflections on Participatory Planning." (Valeria Monno & Abdul Khakee. International Planning Studies, 17(1), 85. 2012).
3. "Participatory Democracy, Decentralization and Local Governance: the Montreal Participatory Budget in the light of 'Empowered Participatory Governance,'" (Caroline Patsias, Anne Latendresse, & Laurence Bherer. International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 37(6), 2214, 2013).

This is the end of the Waymaking Kit (v. 01); but it's just the beginning of something else.

We hope that these pages have helped deepen your understanding of place through the five facets: the *physical landscape* we can touch and feel; the liminal valence of *public & private space*; the *representations of real & virtual places*; the sparks & ideas that make *parks & squares, sidewalks & streets* come alive; and what *rules, or lack thereof*, make this eccentric and unreliable urban space tick and hum and run like the utterly fascinating machine that it is.

If you can think about these facets in the context of places you know and love—or hate—then you've started on the path of waymaking and taken the first steps toward **activating the urban commons.**

What happens next is up to you.

thank you

We are grateful to Professor Peter Pennefather for sharing his time, energy, and inquiring mind with us.

Without him, the way would not have been made.

# references

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Model exploring the concept of Waymaking by Peter Pennefather, used as probe to determine our facets of inquiry. July 2013.









# A **WAY** **MAK** **ING** KIT



## **ACTIVATING** **URBAN** **COMMONS**

KMD4000:  
Professor Peter Pennefather  
Andi Argast + Michelle Gay  
Fall Session 2013  
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