

UTILIZING PUBLIC ART TO ENERGIZE

UNDERUTILIZED SPACES IN DOWNTOWN SHEBOYGAN

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Approximately two years ago, the City and Sheboygan Squared embarked on an effort to map underutilized spaces in downtown Sheboygan and develop a plan to energize these spaces through place-making or creating something that stands out and people that experience it say “wow, I did not know this was here.” The plan identified six alleys and a public plaza along 8th Street to target. Phase one of these improvements was to add planters and lighting to the alley south of the Black Pig and south of the Subway. Residents have responded well to these improvements. We have seen wedding parties taking pictures in these alleys to people eating lunch on the benches and socializing.

One might ask what exactly is creative place-making. Successful communities across the United States are embracing place-making in their downtown revitalization efforts. Place-making is a multi-faceted approach to the planning, designing and management of public spaces. Place-making capitalizes on a local community’s assets, inspiration and potential, with the intention of creating public spaces that promote people’s health, happiness and well-being.

The two alleys being focused on this summer include the small alley near the Weill Center and the alley to the south of Mavericks. In partnership with the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, a grant was received from the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) to allow the Arts Center to utilize their Connecting Communities initiative to energize these other alleys. The goal of the Connecting Communities program is to empower the Sheboygan community to work together and facilitate positive change.

Artist in residency Diana Gabriel is building an immersive installation that will be a responsive public artwork that aims to enhance the community’s interaction with architecture and open space. The piece will bridge the public space with the community that inhabits it. This installation will be installed in the underutilized alley south of Mavericks Barber Shop. This in turn should mirror how the relationship between people, art and environment can empower the city as a whole. “Opening” is a public art installation that consists of multiple 6x6 wooden beams on the ground along each wall. The art installation will be lite and can be experienced year round.

A small alcove in between the Weill Center buildings will be the site of the second art installation by the Arts Center. “Natural Bridge Study” will be an immersive installation. Built like a stage set, it will consist of hand cut plywood with concrete supports and a background mural. This set will create an image of the natural land bridge in Virginia, made from a collage of theme park landscape photos. Natural Bridge Study will involve the local Spanish speaking community by inviting them to contribute their personal photos of fake landscapes.

It is anticipated that the art installation at the Weill Center will occur in the next few weeks with the art installation near Mavericks Barber Shop to begin in mid-August. Once these two installations are

complete, there is approximately two to three additional spaces that need to be energized. The goal of the underutilizing space plan was to create a long-term sustainable connection within the downtown district that welcomes and embraces the people who live here and work, as well as visitors to the Arts Center, performing arts center and other downtown area attractions. As Place Governance Group stated "Government's role: Be the host, don't try to be life of the party." The City understands this hence the reason we feel partnerships with creative place-making organizations is the key to transforming downtown Sheboygan.