



Creative Infill

Photo Credit: Great Places in Canada

Brody
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“Small scale entrepreneurs bring vitality, innovation and commitment that help reinvigorate Manitoba communities”

Small Scale Food Manitoba



Photo Credit: Fraser Valley FB Page

Figure 1: Citizens cycling from street market to local farm as part of Fraser Valley’s annual Farms Cycle Tour

Streets and vacant lots carry great potential to foster placemaking and safety in the public realm. Many studies have linked vacant property with increased fear of crime and risk of felony assaults.⁷ Similarly, two Winkler-based reports^{12,17} have identified safety as a top public priority despite having a relatively low Crime Severity Index from 2013 to 2017.¹ According to some researchers, natural surveillance, the level of pedestrian activity throughout the day, can influence perceived safety⁴ – therefore shifting public safety strategies towards enhancing natural surveillance through creative social opportunities for all ages.

Creative infill development builds upon derelict spaces or ‘gaps’ within existing neighbourhoods where cultural roots are able to flourish and accommodate social interactions. Commercial parking lots and vacant properties offer the greatest potential for inexpensive, or perhaps temporary, creative infill developments. Small-scale outdoor venues will be highlighted to illustrate feasible options for increasing the number of ‘eyes on the street’ (i.e. natural surveillance). Specific examples of such venues will be placed within four categories: Local Street Markets, Cultural Hubs, Pocket Parks, and Community Gardens.

Local Street Markets

According to Small Scale Food Manitoba, **local production and consumption of goods is an effective strategy to build positive relationships between residents and local organizations while promoting civic and environmental stewardship.**¹³

“[Small scale markets provide] a place and space where people who care about healthy food, farming and the environment might gather to support local producers and each other.”

Smithers, Lamarche, & Joseph (p. 99)¹⁴

Local street markets offer much more than a simple alternative retail outlet. *Cultivating Community at the Farmers Market* provides several examples, in a British Columbia context, of how local markets can help shape consumer education, agri-tourism, shared meals, and civic pride.⁶ In particular, Fraser Valley’s *Farms Cycle Tour* illustrates how local vendors and agriculture industries can partner to become a collective local market.



Figure 2: Annie Street Plaza - a local gathering held in an alleyway



Figure 3: Annie Street Plaza - community movie night held in an alleyway

Cultural Hubs

Unlike the consumer-based focus of local street markets, **cultural hubs promote deeper social interaction and meaningful experience through a wider range of events, festivals, and programs.** However, these hubs are not limited to luxurious plazas or entertainment venues, but rather, encompass much smaller investments such as alleyway retrofits or ‘dumpster’ paintings. In *Great Ideas for Community Vibrancy*, community uniqueness is depicted primarily through festivals and art displays, though most examples build upon and protect existing elements of local heritage.¹⁵

The *Harmony Courtyard* in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin and *Annie Street Plaza* in San Francisco, California – both originally vacant lots that were restored to honor local heritage – are among several small-scale cultural ‘hub’ examples that can be drawn upon as infill strategies to develop social cohesion. As part of a larger pavement-to-park movement, the *Annie Street Plaza* showcases adaptable mixed-use and connectivity to nearby amenities, including museums, entertainment venues, and cafes.¹⁰



Figure 4: Harmony Courtyard - a vacant lot turned into a space honoring victims of a tragedy

Pocket Parks

Pocket parks have emerged as a method of improving access to open space within dense urban areas. Although similar to cultural hubs, **pocket parks tend to accommodate more informal social interactions and are typically much smaller in size** (less than one acre).⁹ Compared to normal-to-large park sizes, pocket parks have been found to:

- Generate more daytime use²
- Promote more moderate physical activity²
- Reduce the number of burglaries and other ‘prepared’ crimes⁷

Pocket parks encompass more than simply having green open space and may include some element of local heritage, art, and culture – as illustrated by the *Market Square Art Park* in Paducah, Kentucky. What is now a vibrant space for personal reflection, conversation, and relaxation, was once a significant gap in Paducah’s downtown area.³



Figure 5: Before (top) and after (bottom) of a vacant property turned into an art park

Figure 6:
House garden
evolved into
Urban farm in
Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania



Figure 7: West
Broadway
community
garden in
Winnipeg,
Manitoba



**“The garden,
as a symbol,
strengthened
the collective
neighbourhood
identity”**

Troy Glover

Community Gardens

Perhaps the most tangible social experience that may arise through creative infill is the development of community garden space. **In addition to promoting knowledge sharing and environmental awareness, communal gardening can further mobilize support for other local initiatives and state funding.**¹⁶

In a Pennsylvania example, a single home-owner’s garden evolved into a cooperative urban farm that now receives annual funding from two horticulture agencies.¹¹ However, in a local context, there are many land use conflict of interests for individuals seeking communal gardening which may be mitigated through involvement and support from neighbourhood associations.⁸

In a classic success story of the Queen Anne Memorial Garden – a small group of residents overcame crime and urban decay within their neighbourhood not

because an aesthetically or economically viable environment came about, but rather, the community garden, a symbol of collective efficacy, repressed a dominant cultural narrative of drugs and prostitution.⁵

In this tragedy-to-triumph story, neighbourhood revitalization began with investment in human and social capital – a requisite for creative infill – ultimately reproducing civility and security among participants.

Final Thoughts

The driving force behind each infill strategy referenced in this report stems from the recognition of distinctive community characteristics.

Although the ability to replicate these examples is therefore limited,

the functionality of such venues offer incredible potential for cities characterized by surface parking and vacant properties. The term ‘creative infill’ implies a level of re-creation within existing neighbourhoods to attract, grow, and sustain social interactions. Street markets, cultural hubs, pocket parks, and community gardens provide only a glimpse at the overlapping possibilities of creative infill development. The role in which these small-scale developments have in promoting natural surveillance and pedestrian activity depends greatly on the collective ability to identify and build upon local strengths. In doing so, our preconceived idea of parking space develops into a renewed sense of place.



Figure 8: Public street closure for
recreational use

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