Summit Report

Public Spaces to Great Places
October 1 - 5, 2018
Tallahassee, Florida
Introduction

Tallahassee is a unique city with natural beauty and nearly year-round sunshine, home to a young and dynamic population. It is also one of the top 20 most educated cities in the entire country, according to a 2018 study by Wallethub. Those are assets few cities across the world possess. Tallahassee has the potential to position itself as one of the best North American cities in which to grow up and grow old. The Public Spaces to Great Places Summit was all about identifying Tallahassee’s path forward, paying special attention to the role of public spaces and their potential to improve the quality of life for all residents in Tallahassee.

The Public Spaces to Great Places Summit, hosted from October 1 – 5, 2018, was a week-long series of events, meetings, workshops and keynote speeches about building a healthier, happier and more inclusive Tallahassee. Co-hosted by 8 80 Cities and the Blueprint Intergovernmental Agency and generously funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, it brought together civic leaders, elected officials, city and county staff, community advocates and business leaders from across the city to start charting a new course for the future of public space in Tallahassee.
The Four Big Pushes

We at 8 80 Cities have worked in over 300 cities around the world. Despite the vastly different sizes and contexts of these places, they all share a few things in common. Sustainable mobility, equity, public health inequalities and economic competitiveness are challenges that all cities across the globe are struggling to tackle. The cities that reach these crossroads and turn the page on 20th century thinking are the ones making the biggest strides towards improving access to economic opportunity, increasing equity and improving public health. Public spaces—the roads, parks, plazas and civic buildings that we all share—are central to the solution. Here are the top four areas Tallahassee needs to focus on to tackle these challenges head-on:

1. Be bold

**Aim high:** According to projections from the City of Tallahassee’s Office of Economic Vitality, Tallahassee is set to grow by 20 percent by the year 2045, representing an increase of over 41,000 residents (from 192,381 to 234,000). This is an incredible opportunity. Decision makers need to start making investments now to accommodate this growth. That means ensuring that new development is pedestrian, cycling, and transit-friendly and within walking distance of vibrant parks and schools. While Tallahassee has certainly made large strides in the right direction, there is still room for decision makers to be bolder and to act with more urgency. If Tallahassee wants to be amongst the best, it needs to benchmark itself with the best when it comes to investing and managing its public assets, such as streets, parks, and public spaces. There is an impressive amount of talent in Tallahassee, between its highly educated workforce, strong government sector and large student population. There is nothing stopping Tallahassee from becoming the most livable, or the happiest, or the healthiest city in the US, if those are the goals it sets out for itself.

**Design for all ages and abilities:** From 2010 to 2017, the highest rate of population growth in Tallahassee, at 6.8 percent, occurred among those in the 65 to 79-year-old age group. However, unlike many other cities in Florida, Tallahassee has only recently started actively recruiting retirees to relocate to the city. To better support this demographic shift, it’s critical that walkability and livability are not just for the wealthy, middle-aged or able-bodied. Children, older adults and the economically disadvantaged are the most vulnerable in our society. Decision makers and civic leaders must become guardian angels of these groups and ensure their needs are reflected in all public spaces. Creating high quality parks, sidewalks, bike lanes, plazas, bus stops, bus shelters and safe and reliable public transit is not just about economic opportunity or tourism or even public health. It’s about ensuring the most vulnerable amongst us have access to the basic building blocks to enjoy healthy, happy lives.

2. Create a shared vision

**Find new ways to excite and engage the community:** A lot of community engagement goes into developing plans for public space investments across the city. However, engagement needs to be an ongoing process. We heard at several of the workshops that more residents need to be informed and engaged in public space projects instead of relying on feedback from “the usual suspects”. This requires branching out beyond community meetings and workshops. Trying out more fun, creative and casual methods of engagement has the effect of reducing barriers for many residents, especially those who would not typically attend a 7pm meeting at a community center.

**Try before you buy:** Undertaking bold ideas can be a scary task for both decision-makers and community members. Piloting these ideas on a temporary basis is a way to mitigate project risks while actively
3. Programming, programming, programming

**Tie in programming agreements with park investments:** We at 80 Cities often talk about how it’s often easier to find the millions to build a beautiful public space than to find the thousands to make it work. Successful parks and public spaces are not just about design and maintenance. A good school needs more than four walls and textbooks. It needs passionate teachers, committed administration and an engaged PTA. Parks too need fantastic management to thrive at different times of the day and different days of the week. This requires park management to take a more active role in programming its public spaces. Sometimes, the entities funding the construction of a new park are separate from the entities that will eventually manage the park. In these cases, the hand-off agreement should entail a clear commitment by park management to go beyond just providing maintenance services but to also invest in year-round park outreach and programming.

**Take it outside:** There is a rich array of community programming that is taking place indoors or behind closed doors, be it seniors dance lessons, fitness classes, chess tutorials, etc. More energy should be dedicated towards reaching out to civic organizations, schools, community groups, arts and culture programmers, and inviting them to use public spaces as a platform for programs they are already running.

**Reduce red tape:** Beyond making the invitation to community programmers, it generally needs to be easy and transparent for individuals and organizations to provide community programming in public spaces. In the case of parks, interested parties should be able to easily access information about how to host a public program in a park and then have the option of filling out a simple online application. The more centralized this resource is for all parks in Tallahassee, the more user-friendly it will be. Similarly, if there’s interest in obtaining a street occupation permit to host events like block parties, farmer’s markets, and health fairs, there should be a centralized website in which to do so as well.
4. Continue to bridge the town and gown

Make it easier to use active transportation: Any sort of transportation-related investments or decisions made by either of the two major universities in town has the potential to impact a significant portion of Tallahassee’s population. Most students at both universities drive, which affects not just traffic within the university campus but also on other Tallahassee roads. Driving however is currently the most convenient and cheapest option for many students. Parking fees are usually lumped in with general student fees, giving off the illusion that parking lots are “free” each time they are being used. Even still, the costs of parking are still heavily subsidized by these public universities. To help create a more sustainable and healthier campus, universities need to consider disincentivizing driving all the while investing in safe, connected walking and bicycling networks. Simple changes like charging for parking per-use instead of lumping the cost in with student fees will make people think twice about driving. Other schools across the country have done so with great success, but they’ve also paired it with investments in safe active transportation and other incentives. For example, the University of California, Los Angeles provides staff with cash incentives for trading in their parking passes in return for a commitment to use active transportation. Students also receive heavily discounted public transit passes. Beyond the health and environmental benefits of making these changes, universities also serve to economically benefit. Parking lots could be freed up to be used for expanding facilities or for other higher-use purposes, reducing the need to acquire additional land.

Build a minimum grid: Tallahassee has already started this work of building bicycle facilities. Some facilities are wide and protected while others are delineated with striping or sharrows. To make it truly safe and inviting for all ages and abilities to bike as a form of transportation, Tallahassee needs to lower speeds in residential areas and build an interconnected grid of fully separated bike lanes connecting popular destinations and all communities across the City. In certain places, the City has accomplished the most difficult task, securing a portion of the roadway for painted bike lanes. It’s time to take the next step and make them safe by installing bollards so that all cyclists can feel empowered moving about their city. Students make up a significant part of the population of the city. Targeting efforts to encourage students to bike instead of drive to campus would have an immediate impact on the city of Tallahassee has a whole.

Linking public institutions with public spaces: There are many initiatives that link the students at the public universities to community engagement opportunities. However, there is still room to optimize the relationship between the students and the public spaces throughout Tallahassee. There are dozens of highly active student groups and clubs at both local universities. Make it known that they are welcome to the spaces. For example, dance groups or bands should be encouraged to book time to practice in nearby public parks or facilities, if university facilities are overbooked. As mentioned in the “Try before you buy” section above, there could potentially be many more opportunities to partner with university classrooms so that they can study and use public spaces as their “laboratories”, providing mutual benefit to the city, community, and participating students.
What We Did

MONDAY OCTOBER 1
• Meetings with elected officials
• Coal Chute Pond visioning workshop with stakeholders
• Keynote as part of the Leon County Lecture Series

TUESDAY OCTOBER 2
• Keynote to Blueprint, Office of Economic Vitality Committees & Planning Commission
• Meetings with elected officials and city staff
• Creating Great Places workshop with frontline staff
• Active transportation planning session with FSU staff
• Keynote and workshop at Orange Ave. neighborhood meeting

WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 3
• Public Engagement training for City of Tallahassee staff
• Interview with American Planning Association – Florida
• Keynote at FSU

THURSDAY OCTOBER 4
• Planning workshop with Knight Creative Communities Initiative
• Panel discussion on WFSU
• Campus planning session at FAMU

FRIDAY OCTOBER 5
• Keynote for business and development community
What We Heard

Two of the workshops that 8 80 Cities co-hosted with Blueprint Intergovernmental Agency were the kick-off outreach events for two transformative public space projects that will take place at Coal Chute Pond and the Orange Avenue Public Space. Below is a summary of the major findings from these sessions.

Orange Avenue Public Space

About the Site
The Orange Avenue Public Space is in southeast Tallahassee, located at the southwest corner of Orange Avenue and S Meridian Street. The 20-acre site was developed as a stormwater management facility for the widening of Orange Avenue over 10 years ago. The land is owned by Leon County but to date there has been no formal public use of the site. The conversion of this stormwater site into a public space with park-like amenities is a Blueprint project. Blueprint plans to design the space in 2019 and begin construction in 2020. A key first step in this project is working with the local community to understand what type of amenities they would like to see developed on this site.

About the Workshop
On Wednesday October 3, Gil Penalosa delivered a keynote to a room of over 60 community members and city leaders at Bethel AME Church. The keynote included lessons and examples from great public spaces from around the world. Following the keynote, attendees discussed in small groups their ideas for the new public space at the Orange Avenue stormwater pond facility. Each group had a staff member from either Blueprint or 8 80 Cities who facilitated and recorded notes of the discussion.

Community members’ ideas centered on four major themes:

1. Basic amenities: The new public space needs to have basic infrastructure that would provide year-round comfort.
2. Infrastructure that supports physical activity and social interaction: The infrastructure needs to appeal to diverse ages and uses to reflect the needs of the families residing in the area.
3. Programming and partnerships: The public space needs to come alive with regular activations. Additional programming support from local institutions, such as FAMU, FSU, and the magnetic labs can ensure that the new park provides educational opportunities in addition to recreational ones.
4. Safe connections: There are several schools, daycares and family residences surrounding the site. The new public space needs to be safe to access, especially by walking, biking, and public transit.
## Complete list of ideas collected for Orange Avenue Public Space:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic amenities</th>
<th>Infrastructure for physical activity and social interaction</th>
<th>Programming and partnerships</th>
<th>Safe connections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Water fountains for drinking</td>
<td>1. “Smart park” with wifi, charging stations, mobile apps for parks and libraries</td>
<td>1. Free music a few times a month</td>
<td>1. Sidewalks connecting to bus stops, schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Stationary features e.g. seating</td>
<td>2. Play area for kids e.g. ball pit, bouncy areas</td>
<td>2. Movies in the park</td>
<td>2. Sidewalks (in the south side) to help expand people’s circles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Solar powered amenities e.g. bus shelters, lighting, seating</td>
<td>3. Skateboard facilities,</td>
<td>3. Have space where universities and mag lab can do outreach and educational programs</td>
<td>3. Golf carts as a way to get around</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Covered tables</td>
<td>5. Covered area for music</td>
<td>5. Involve neighborhood-run businesses. Invite people who use the vacant space to set up in the Orange Ave public space</td>
<td>5. Have an interim solution to the sidewalk construction backlog. Look into cheap, temporary ways to do pavement markings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Permanent restroom</td>
<td>7. Bike repair station and bike maintenance mentors</td>
<td>7. Food stands</td>
<td>7. Traffic calming is very important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Night sky viewing</td>
<td>10. Locate more activities on the west side and more passive uses near the drain</td>
<td>10. Play some tunes at the park</td>
<td>10. Covered bus stop (residents currently stand close to ditch)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Increase size of stormwater pipes because current pipes are too old and small</td>
<td>11. Walking loop &amp; signs indicating how far you’ve walked</td>
<td>11. Concession stands for events</td>
<td>11. Make it safer for people to cross Orange ave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Benches</td>
<td></td>
<td>15. Diversity like in Cascades Park</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Trail with exercise functions like in Meyers Park</td>
<td></td>
<td>16. Neighborhood yard sales</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Security/emergency call post</td>
<td></td>
<td>17. Focus on family gatherings</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. Security cameras</td>
<td></td>
<td>18. Engage animal shelter to program the site</td>
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<td>19. Stage for community days</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Water fountains</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Shade</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Some attendees chose to participate by placing sticky dots on oversized survey boards that were displayed around the room. Based on responses by 19 participants, the surveys revealed the following:

- Apalachee Ridge was the most well-represented neighborhood, accounting for 42 percent of survey respondents
- 77 percent of respondents are in the Orange Avenue area at least once a day
- The top two types of infrastructure respondents would like to see are: 1) sports and fitness equipment and 2) a playground and plants/greenery (both answers tied for second place)
- The top two types of preferred programming include: 1) outdoor concerts and 2) pop-up shops/market

**Coal Chute Pond**

**About the Site**
The location of Coal Chute Pond is equidistant between FSU and FAMU. It is well connected by the Capital Cascades Trail, a 2.6-mile urban trail providing multimodal accessibility and enhanced community amenities throughout downtown Tallahassee. Blueprint has funding to construct the public space amenities and the workshop will provide the opportunity for participants to think about what type of amenities/public space would attract them to the area.

**About the Workshop**
A total of 20 area residents, business owners, community leaders and university student representatives attended the half-day workshop to help identify design and accessibility elements that can elevate the Coal Chute Pond space to a welcoming social space for diverse populations to engage with their city and each other. Hosted by 8 80 Cities at Domi Station, the workshop started with a presentation on what makes a great public space, followed by a site visit to Coal Chute Pond, and concluding with an action planning workshop where participants brainstormed ideas and action plans for the site.

**Site Observations**
Participants visited Coal Chute pond to talk about the opportunities and challenges that the site presents.

**Opportunities**
- Natural features: the pond, wading birds and other local wildlife, open grassy area
- Good connectivity: FAMU Way is well-maintained, proximity to Railroad Square businesses and new residential development, location between FAMU & FSU

**Challenges**
- Natural features: natural area feels “rough” and unmaintained; area lacks natural protection from the elements; rolling topography presents limitations
- Power lines: no permanent structure is allowed to be built underneath the power-lines
- Poor access: Lack of public transportation along this route, lack of safe railroad crossing at the moment
When it came to developing ideas for the Coal Chute Pond space, community members’ ideas centered on four major themes:

1. **Basic amenities**: The new public space needs to have basic infrastructure that would make it comfortable to spend time in year-round.

2. **Digital/interactive features**: We are living in an increasingly digital world. An innovative digital park would make Coal Chute Pond a unique destination and would especially appeal to young people.

3. **Water-related features**: The stormwater pond should be a focal point in the design and programming of the space.

4. **Programming**: Partnering with businesses, universities, resident groups and community organizations to regularly activate the space is critical to keep people coming back.

### Complete list of ideas collected for Coal Chute Pond:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic amenities</th>
<th>Digital/interactive features</th>
<th>Water-related features</th>
<th>Programming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Creative seating e.g. porch swings</td>
<td>2. Designated drone flying zone</td>
<td>2. Paddle boats</td>
<td>2. Silent raves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Shade</td>
<td>7. Swings with lights and music</td>
<td></td>
<td>7. Outdoor community art gallery</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Tables with table games</td>
<td>10. Digital guided yoga lessons</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Hot yoga poses signage</td>
<td>11. 24/7 real-time video stream of the park</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Shade (x 7)</td>
<td>13. Wifi</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Walking loop</td>
<td>15. Charging poles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Dog walking stations</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Developing Action Plans

Participants were asked to work in small groups to identify their favorite ideas. Each group then developed action plans for the top ideas that emerged from their discussions. In total, participants put forward four idea action plans for Coal Chute Pond - some in more detail than others. Summaries of these four ideas are as follows:

**Project name:** Digital Park

**Project description:** The park that never sleeps!

**Measures of success:**
- Engagement 24/7; always connected
- People using park at night
- It becomes a “third place”
- Community interaction through digital technology
- Seamless integration of technology and nature
- The most “social” park ever

**Actions required:**
- Provide wifi access and docking stations
- Develop park app
- Work with partners to provide digital programming related to physical activity, history, wildlife, etc.
- Find and recruit a private sponsor for the project
- Create a digital community for the park
- Formally connect it to FSU and FAMU

**Project name:** Multi-Use Pavillion

**Project description:** A multi-use pavilion providing shade, seating, game tables, art exhibition space and movie screen.

**Measures of success:**
- Participation from adjacent neighborhoods
- Diversity in age/gender/race
- # of rentals
- # of gallery exhibitions
- % of day sued (morning, afternoon, night)
- ADA accessible

**Actions required:**
- Engage community for ideas related to programming, design and uses
- Design the pavillion
- Construct it
- Program it in partnership with Parks & Rec, local schools, churches, clubs, senior center, etc.

**Project name:** Outdoor Sculpture Park

**Project description:** Construct a space for an outdoor sculpture park.

**Measures of success:**
- Economic growth among surrounding businesses
- User satisfaction surveys
- Repeat visitors
- Number and demographics of attendees
- Name recognition
- ADA accessible

**Actions required:**
- N/A

**Project name:** Access

**Project description:** Improve pedestrian, vehicular and transit connections to Coal Chute Pond.

**Measures of success:**
- N/A

**Actions required:**
- Work with Star Metro to trolley service and additional lighting to the park
- Work with CSX to create a safe, at-grade railroad crossing for pedestrians
- Integrate a roundabout
- RRSQ fence

**What’s next?**

The two workshops to kickstart the planning process for the Orange Avenue public space and Coal Chute Pond are just the beginning! Participants at both sessions made it clear that it’s critical to find creative ways to get more residents, community leaders, local institutions, students and stakeholders involved in order to ensure the success of these projects.