



TRANSFORM

TACOMA THEATER DISTRICT

PLACEMAKING PLAN



acknowledgements

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table of contents

INTRODUCTION.

Executive Summary	1
Goals & Use of This Document	3
Outreach to the Community	4
Theater District Context	7
History	8
The Theater District Today	9
Transit	11

VISION.

Messages from the Community	13
Vision for the Theater District	14
The Theater District Could Be...	15

PUBLIC SPACE FRAMEWORK.

Strategies	18
Arts Considerations	21
Real Estate & Development Potential	24
Framework Concepts	25
Project Ideas	28
Community Feedback	41

FOCUS AREA CONCEPTS.

Introduction	43
Community Preferences for Focus Area Activities	45
Pierce Transit Facility	47
Ideas for Commerce Street Beyond the Right of Way	48
Focus Area Design Concepts Comparison	49
Concept 1	52
Concept 2	60
Community Feedback	67
Recommendations/Next Steps	68
"Five by 2025"	69

executive summary

Project Intent & Vision.

The Theater District Placemaking project presents an enormous opportunity to strengthen one of Tacoma's oldest neighborhoods. The Project Partners (Pierce Transit, the City of Tacoma, and Tacoma Arts Live, formerly known as Broadway Center for the Performing Arts) share a vision for a more robust and active downtown: a place where arts, cultural and civic events are available to residents, workers and visitors. This planning project builds on the neighborhood's existing assets and identifies potential synergies between them. The plan also identifies new opportunities to create a stronger sense of place.

Public Space Framework.

The Tacoma Theater District is approximately 16 blocks in area, bounded on the south by 11th Street and the north by 7th Street. In the east-west direction, the District rises steeply from Pacific Avenue up the hill to Market Street. It includes multiple performing arts venues, beautiful historic buildings such as Old City Hall and the Pantages Theater, Broadway and the well-attended weekly Farmer's Market, and Commerce Street, a regional transportation corridor for buses and light rail. This plan includes a public space framework that encompasses this entire area, with a wide range of ideas aimed at making the district feel more active and vibrant, improving access on nights and weekends, making it easier to get around, improving the sense of safety, providing amenities, events and programming for all ages, and supporting the people and businesses who are already here.

Focus Area.

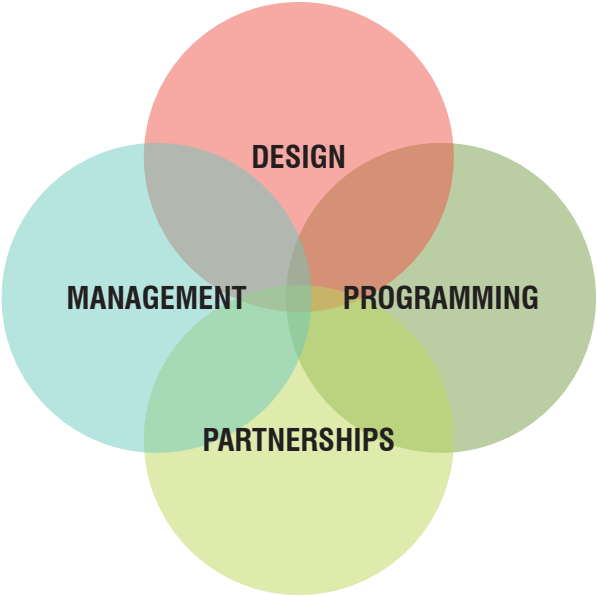
The plan also includes specific design and development recommendations for the “Focus Area”, which is the block bounded by 9th, 11th, Commerce and Broadway. This block includes the Pierce Transit layover and turnaround facility, Theater Square, the City of Tacoma parking structure, the Pantages Theater, and Broadway. The primary goal of the Focus Area projects is to create a vibrant, visually appealing destination for arts, cultural and marketplace events, supported by public transportation.

Process.

A wide array of viewpoints and expertise from City of Tacoma and Pierce Transit staff, along with members of the performing arts community, informed this plan. The design team was led by urban planners and designers and included consultants who advised on economics, transportation, architecture, and art, and was supported by Spaceworks Tacoma, an arts organization supporting artists and creative entrepreneurs, who led outreach and arts activation for project. Most importantly, the Tacoma community contributed greatly to the ideas and vision represented in this document. Over the course of two years, the community participated in arts-oriented and interactive outreach events, online surveys, and public open houses that were coordinated by Spaceworks in partnership with the design team. Great attention was devoted to encouraging participation by a racially, generationally, and socioeconomically diverse group of participants.



goals & use of this document



Achieving the Vision.

Over the last twenty years, there have been numerous plans and studies associated with portions of downtown Tacoma, as well as the City as a whole. One of the studies that bears upon the Theater District is the document entitled “Artful Tacoma.” Adopted by the City in 2016, it lays out a series of broad strategies for stimulating and supporting arts and culture in many forms throughout the city, and recognizes the economic impact that supporting the arts has had in Tacoma. While it does not address the Theater District in particular, it does recognize the importance of public places and the role of “creative placemaking.” In this way, the Theater District Placemaking Plan can help fulfill this goal.

Partnerships, Outreach and Ongoing Advocacy.

The intent of this plan is to provide a basis for ongoing partnership between Pierce Transit , the City of Tacoma, the performing arts community, and the community at large. The plan includes a spectrum of ideas at a range of budgets that can be implemented over time by various public agencies and business, development and non-profit partners. It can be shared across Regional and City agencies, and can be used to inform strategy and planning by Pierce Transit, and the City of Tacoma Office of Economic Development, Office of Arts & Cultural Vitality, Planning and Development, Public Works, and MetroParks. Because the plan represents the input of the Tacoma community, and aims to welcome all of Pierce County’s citizens to the Theater District, it is an example of lively and inclusive outreach and can be used in ongoing advocacy for neighborhood improvements. It is a flexible framework to guide the evolution of Theater District.

outreach to the community

Purpose.

The Placemaking project was conceived with an emphasis on community involvement, to inform the development of the planning concepts and also to initiate positive change in the district during this process. Reflecting the arts focus of the Theater District and the project, our team worked with the Steering Committee and Spaceworks to make engagement creative and unconventional. Outreach was based on arts and culture themed activities and events, oriented to these goals:

- Stimulate public imagination and capture feedback.
- Improve perceptions of the area and showcase its potential to be vibrant and engaging, with a focus on Theater Square and Commerce Street.
- Create visible activity in the district with visual art and performances by local artists.

Evolving Process.

The initial engagement plan had two main components. The first was an ongoing program of arts-based events, installations, and conversations organized by Spaceworks Tacoma, focused on the goals above. The second was a series of interactive workshops with a Stakeholder Group organized by the project partners to represent the interests of a range of organizations and the broader community.

During the second workshop, members of the Stakeholder Group voiced



top: Stakeholder Workshop 1
bottom: karaoke outside TRANSFORM Event 2

outreach highlights

Theater District Art Walk. September 2017
50 artists and performers in Theater District's galleries, cultural spaces, streets and public spaces. Tour by Spaceworks. Project information and feedback opportunities.

Creative Colloquy. February 2018
Literary event at Pythian Temple with readings about the Theater District by local authors, and an open-mic for commentary. Project information and feedback opportunities.

Intermissions. April 2018
Music and art in public spaces. Project information and feedback opportunities.

TRANSFORM Event 1. April 2018
Project open house in the Pantages Theater lobby. Outside street circus with aerialists, karaoke, popcorn, dancing.

TRANSFORM Event 2. September 2018
Project open house in the Theater on the Square lobby. Event included movie screening, drag performance, musicians, and circus activities at Tacoma Youth Theater.

TRANSFORM Website & Online Surveys.
September 2017 to September 2018
Four (4) online surveys to collect input on project development, hosted on the project website.

Project Representation at Events.
Booths and participation at city events including: Music and Art in Wright Park; Hilltop Street Fair (August 2017); Downtown to Defiance; Broadway Farmers Market; Park(ing) Day (September 2018); Kaleidoscope (October 2018).

Social Media.
October 2017 to September 2018
38 Facebook posts with project updates and announcements, invitations, links to surveys, and prompts for conversation.



images of outreach and temporary arts activation by Spaceworks

concerns that the Group did not reflect the Tacoma community at large, and that the project needed to do more to reach a racially diverse audience. As a result of this conversation, a decision was made to cease the Stakeholder Workshops and refocus all outreach energy on Spaceworks' efforts to reach as broad an audience as possible, bring more voices to project, and energize the district by bringing people together.

Over the course of the project, Spaceworks hosted a range of activities: a Theater District art walk, many pop-up art and performance events, a literary event, two open houses, surveys, interviews, and information booths—all aimed to promote the project and community feedback. We estimate that these activities directly engaged over 1,600 people. Through the project website and social media conversations, Spaceworks made over 28,000 touch points.



images of outreach and temporary arts activation by Spaceworks

Incorporating the Community's Voices.

Throughout the project, Spaceworks documented the input and ideas captured through their engagement activities, and shared these with the consultant team. Prior to the working on planning concepts and at three key points in the development of the Placemaking Plan, Spaceworks and the design team collaborated to get focused input on the team's work and collect questions and ideas to inform the next phase.

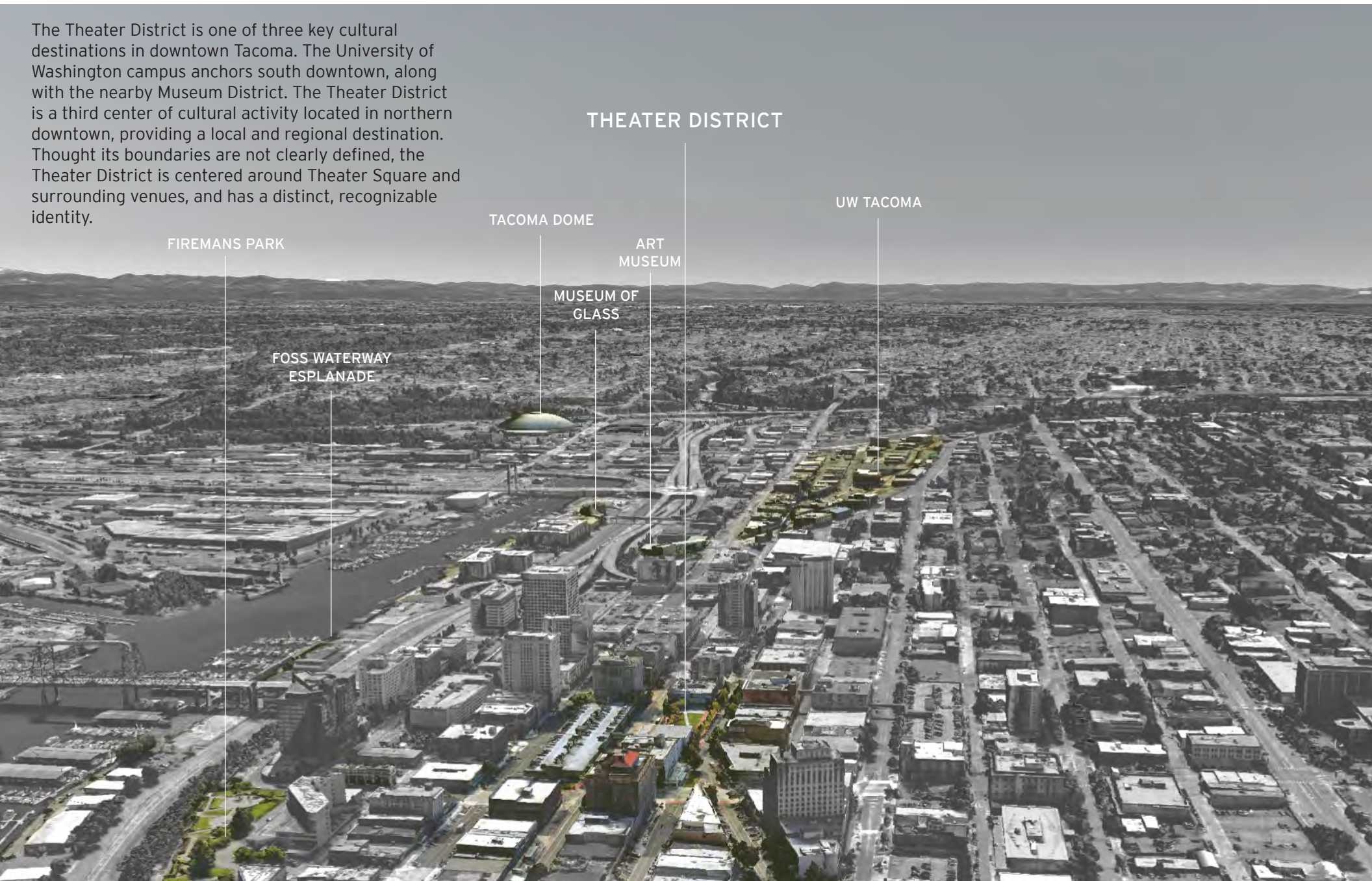
1. Initial thoughts about the Theater District and its potential
2. Vision for the District
3. Theater District Framework Plan and Project Ideas
4. Focus Area Design Concepts

Through open house activities and online surveys, the project recorded the feedback of hundreds of participants who contributed their preferences, questions, and own creative ideas. This input was discussed with the project's Steering Committee and incorporated into the development and refinement of the ideas found in this document.

The Tacoma Theater District Placemaking Plan reflects the voices of a diverse community of residents, workers, artists, and organizations committed to the future of the Theater District.

theater district context

The Theater District is one of three key cultural destinations in downtown Tacoma. The University of Washington campus anchors south downtown, along with the nearby Museum District. The Theater District is a third center of cultural activity located in northern downtown, providing a local and regional destination. Though its boundaries are not clearly defined, the Theater District is centered around Theater Square and surrounding venues, and has a distinct, recognizable identity.



history

“Tacoma was marked out as the City of Destiny, and there were men within its borders who foresaw the tens of thousands who would make their homes upon the shores of Commencement Bay. A beautiful theater, fashioned in most modern elegance, a fit place of amusement in the metropolis of the new northwest, was one of the things which it was known must be provided.”

-Report from opening night of the
Tacoma Theater

Early History of the Theater District.

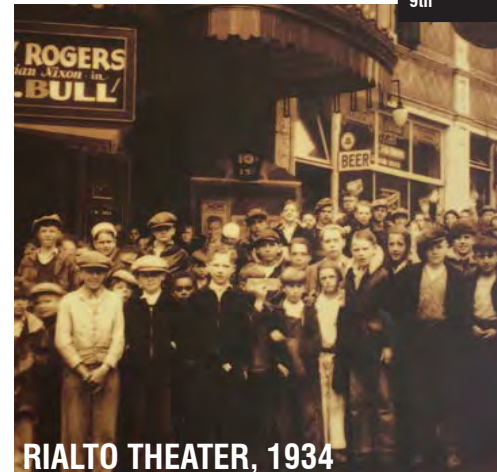
For millennia, Tacoma was home to the Puyallup Tribe. Euro-Americans began settling there in the 1850s; in 1873, development sped up when the Northern Pacific Railroad terminated its transcontinental line in Tacoma. One of the railroad’s managers envisioned a grand theater in the heart of a bustling metropolis, leading to construction of the Tacoma Theater in 1890. 28 years later, the Pantages and Rialto theaters were built; nine years afterwards came the Temple Theater.

Thriving Public Markets.

The diversity of settlers in Tacoma increased as time passed. By the 1920s, a large indoor market graced the corner of 11th and Market boasting a culturally diverse range of tenants. During World War II, the great public markets were broken by the loss of Japanese-owned businesses. Today, the thriving and diverse Broadway Farmers Market is a strong echo of the original Theater District’s diverse public markets, and the district remains a center for shopping and commerce.

Civic Heart.

With its many venues, the intersection of Broadway and 9th street has long been a center for many civic events. Parades, circuses, gatherings, marches, and celebrations-all this and more has occurred here for generations, and this intersection remains the civic heart of the Theater District.



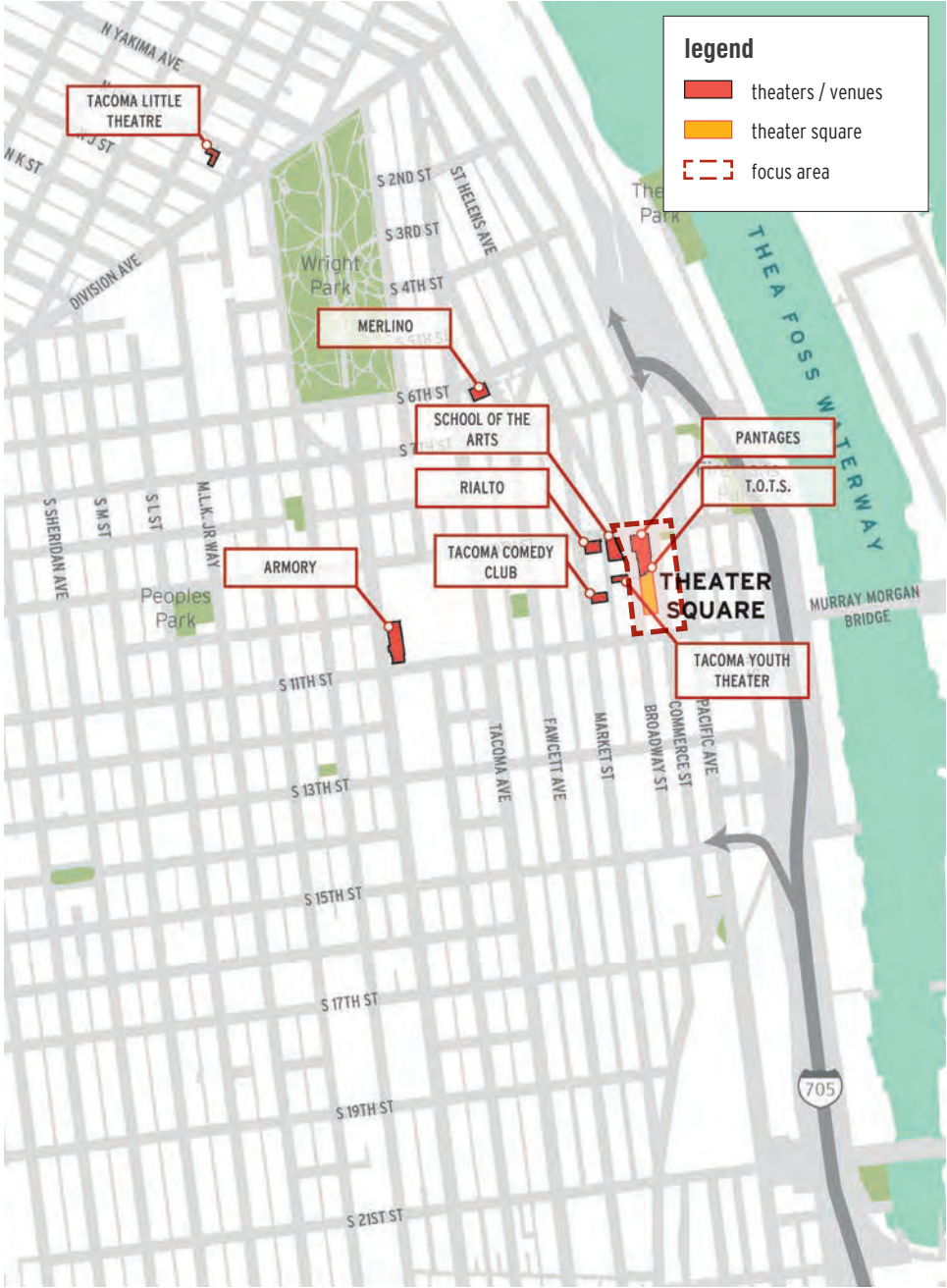
the theater district today

Key Observations.

The Theater District today is a mixed downtown district with office buildings, retail buildings, and a few multifamily housing buildings. There are few public open spaces in the area; Theater Square, owned and operated by Pierce Transit, is at the center of the district and is the primary open space, serving both as a neighborhood green space with and civic plaza for occasional events.

Notably, the district is still home to a range of theaters and performance venues, including several that date back to its golden era. It continues to be a destination for the arts.

theaters and performance venues



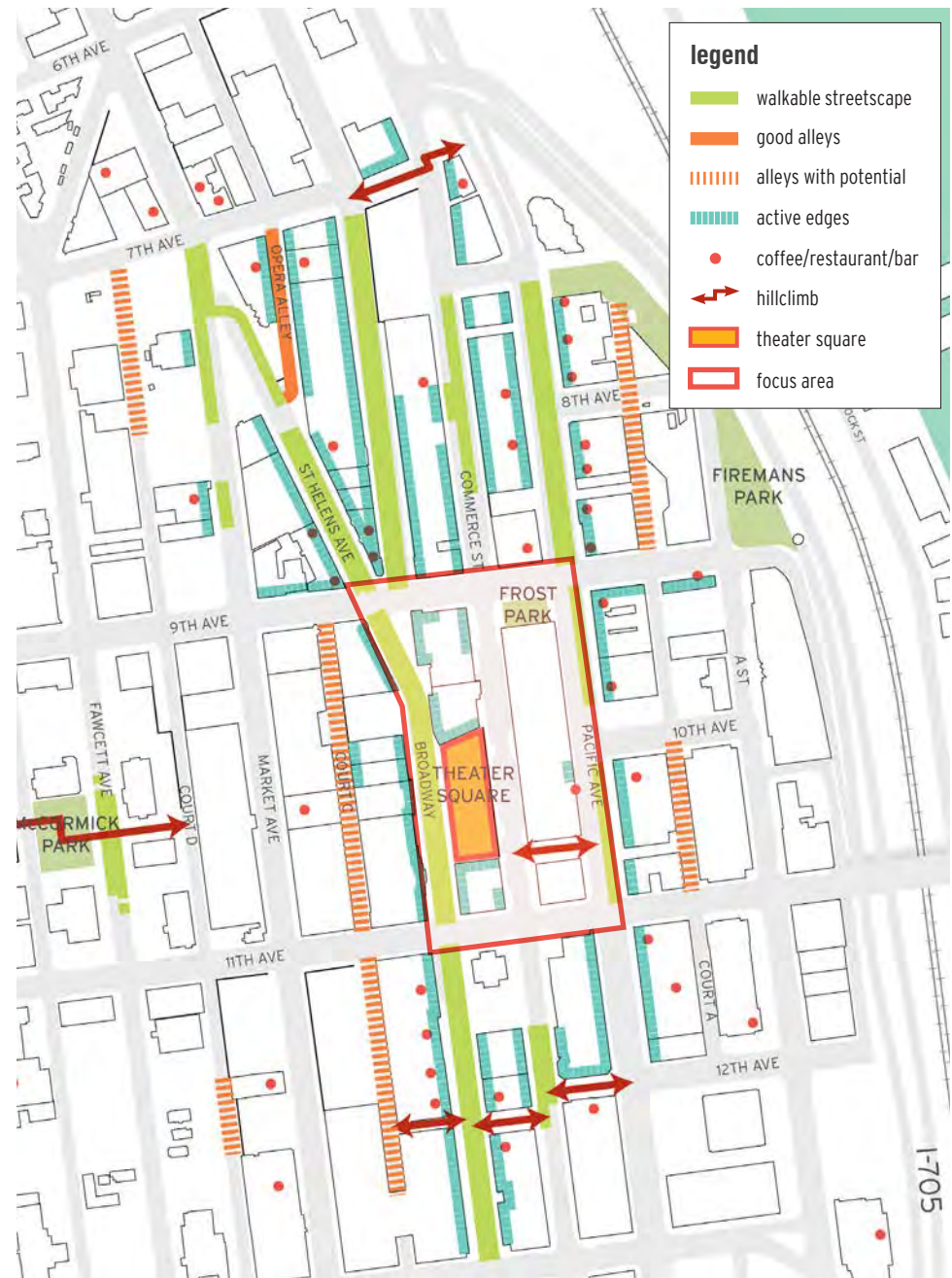
theaters and performance venues

successful pedestrian environments

Pedestrian Environment.

The urban fabric of the district is a mixed bag. On one hand, it is distinguished by handsome historic buildings, several active streets, alleys with character, a unique system of pedestrian “hill climbs”, and a number of cafes, bars, and restaurants. Together, these indicate an appealing neighborhood for spending time, and an inviting pedestrian experience that supports commerce and public life in general. On the other hand, long blocks, steep grades, the prevalence of inhospitable parking garages and surface lots, and a general inconsistency in public realm experience all pose challenges to the character and vigor of the Theater District.

Many of these challenges can be addressed with discrete physical improvements, active programming, and better use of the Theater District’s public realm.



successful pedestrian environments

transit

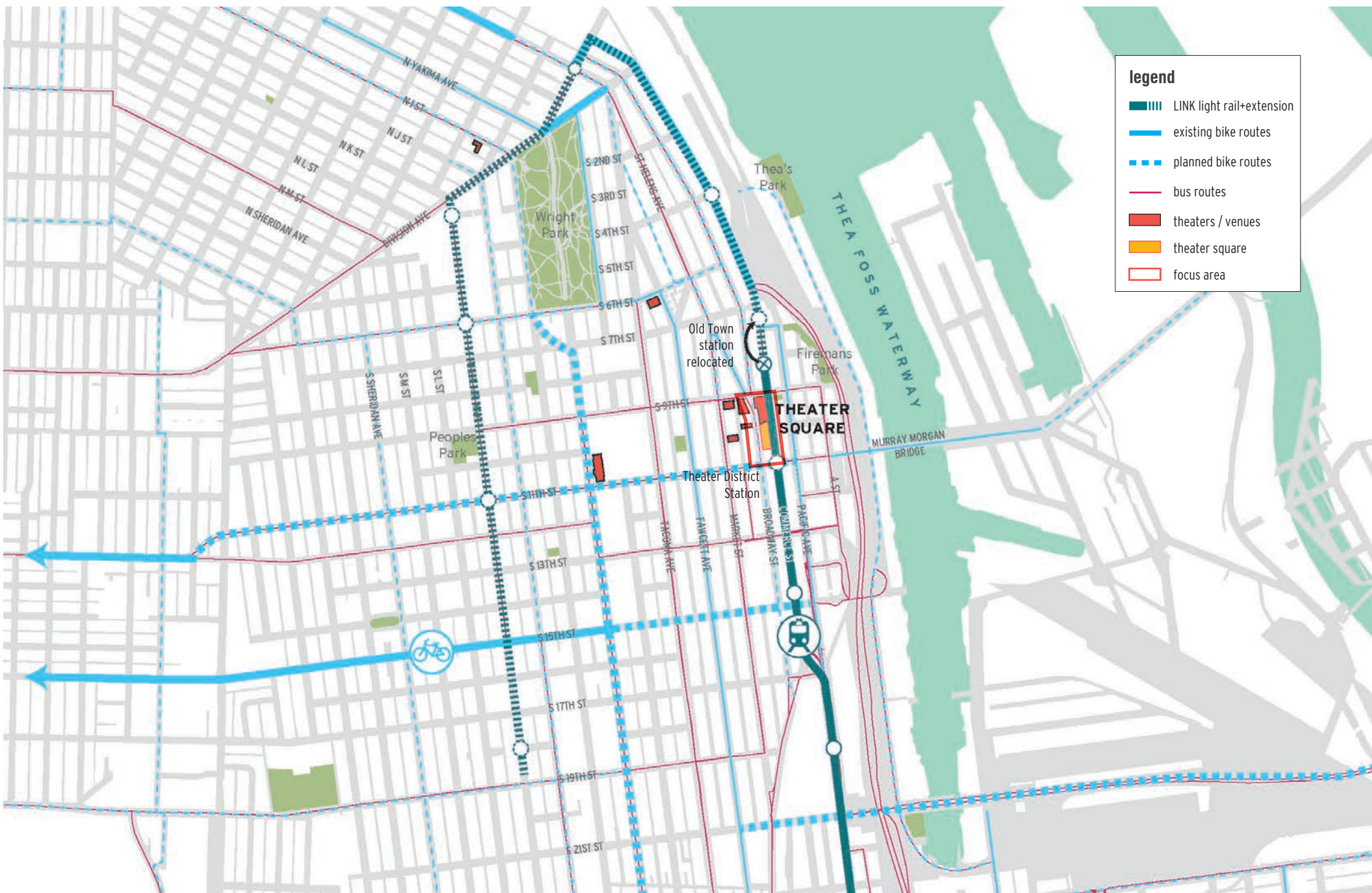
Transit Access Today.

Transit access is good, with bus lines, bike routes, and the LINK light rail providing connections to the rest of downtown, surrounding neighborhoods, and the greater region. The light rail runs down Commerce Street, along Theater Square, behind Theater on the Square, and the Pantages, as do several significant local and regional bus lines. However, access and visual connections between transit stops and these destinations are weak and need improvement. Furthermore, transit service is currently focused on work day commutes and is too infrequent on weekends and late evenings to provide a good way to get to and from the theaters and Theater Square. This was a recurring theme of public input throughout the project.

LINK Light Rail Expansion.

Sound Transit is expanding its LINK light rail system from the current terminus on Commerce between 9th and 7th west to the Hilltop neighborhood of Tacoma. The Hilltop Tacoma LINK Extension will add six new stations and more than double the length of the Tacoma LINK. Changes to the LINK will significantly impact the Theater District. Physical changes include a new stop at Old City Hall and the renaming and relocation of the station closest to Theater Square as the Theater District Station. Tracks run in existing road lanes, use platforms in the center of the roadway, and are compatible with on-street parking and existing bicycle facilities. Service will run every 10 minutes and bring people conveniently to the Theater District without the need for personal automotive transport. Construction is currently underway and the LINK extension is expected to open for use in 2021.





transit, including LINK light rail expansion, and bicycle connections

messages from the community

Early in the outreach process, we asked questions like, “What makes the Theater District special? What is precious here that we should preserve? What needs to change? What is your boldest idea for the Theater District?” The following key messages emerged became the basis of the plan’s Vision for the District.

- The Theater District is distinguished by its history, the performances and events that take place here, and its creative culture.
- The theaters, historic architecture, and the open space here are precious.
- We want the Theater District to be active and vibrant, all the time.
- Transit is important to the vitality of the district. More options for getting here, especially nights and weekends, are necessary. And we want to feel comfortable and safe on Commerce Street.
- Feeling comfortable and safe in the district requires more people out and about day and night. We also want streets and public space to more inviting and be better cared for.
- We need to support the people and businesses who are already here and who make the Theater District what it is. But, we want to see positive change here.
- We want to see more amenities, events, and programming, for all ages and a wide range of interests.
- We want to see more neighborhood-focused businesses, like grocery stores, and more restaurants and shops.
- We want to see more people living here and more housing options for the diverse community. But we are worried about gentrification, displacement, and maintaining affordability.
- Artists, musicians, and other creatives are key to strengthening the community and economic base of the District.

“the area is truly an authentic interesting place to live work and explore”

“Tacoma needs urban plaza style parks for city life to mingle and rest [...] Make a place for the community to do their own thing.”

“propose a housing master plan include option or support to make it affordable for performers to live in the Theater District”

“Community, people coming together, communication in a positive way.”

“the spaces that are open to all, the art and culture, space for a market, unique architecture”

VISION FOR THE DISTRICT

An aerial photograph of the Tacoma Theater District, showing a dense urban area with various buildings, streets, and parks. Overlaid on the image are glowing green and blue lines representing a proposed transit network, including a light rail line and bus routes. The lines run through the center of the district, connecting key areas. A prominent building with a clock tower is visible in the upper right, and a large Wells Fargo building is in the lower right.

The Tacoma Theater District will continue to be defined by the strong, diverse community of people who live and work here, who care about their neighborhood, and keep it vibrant day and night. It will be a lively, active core, welcoming to everyone—an outstanding destination for visitors from both near and far, with a dynamic network of streets, parks, and plazas that are rich with history and brimming with social activity.

People of all backgrounds and physical abilities will participate in street life, commerce, and the arts, supported by good public transportation options that are comfortable and easy to use. Whether during the morning commute or late on a Saturday night, buses and light rail will offer everyone a favorable way to travel to and from the district.

The Theater District will be where locals and visitors, artists and audiences, congregate and interact in the midst of grand historic theaters and new arts spaces. The ongoing creation, performance, and enjoyment of the arts will permeate the streets and public spaces every day.

THE THEATER DISTRICT COULD BE...

A VIBRANT NEIGHBORHOOD

The Theater District could be a lively and eclectic neighborhood where vibrant commerce, multiple performance venues, and an active arts scene bring people together—all day, all year. This local culture would foster strong social connectivity among the people who live, work, and visit here.

A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE

The Theater District could be a desirable home to a diverse and tightly knit community of residents. It could be a friendly and comfortable neighborhood, with housing opportunities for everyone and amenities that make it an easy place to live.

A CREATIVE CENTER WITH ARTS WOVEN THROUGHOUT

The Theater District could be a center for performing arts with a creative culture that is part of everyday experiences in its streets and public spaces.

A HUB OF ACTIVITY

The Theater District could be the center of a network of streets and transit that connects people to commerce, culture, and transportation options, day and night.

AN OUTSTANDING DESTINATION

The Theater District could be a powerful magnet that attracts visitors from throughout Tacoma and other regional cities, and rewards them with positive experiences, every time.

EASY TO GET AROUND

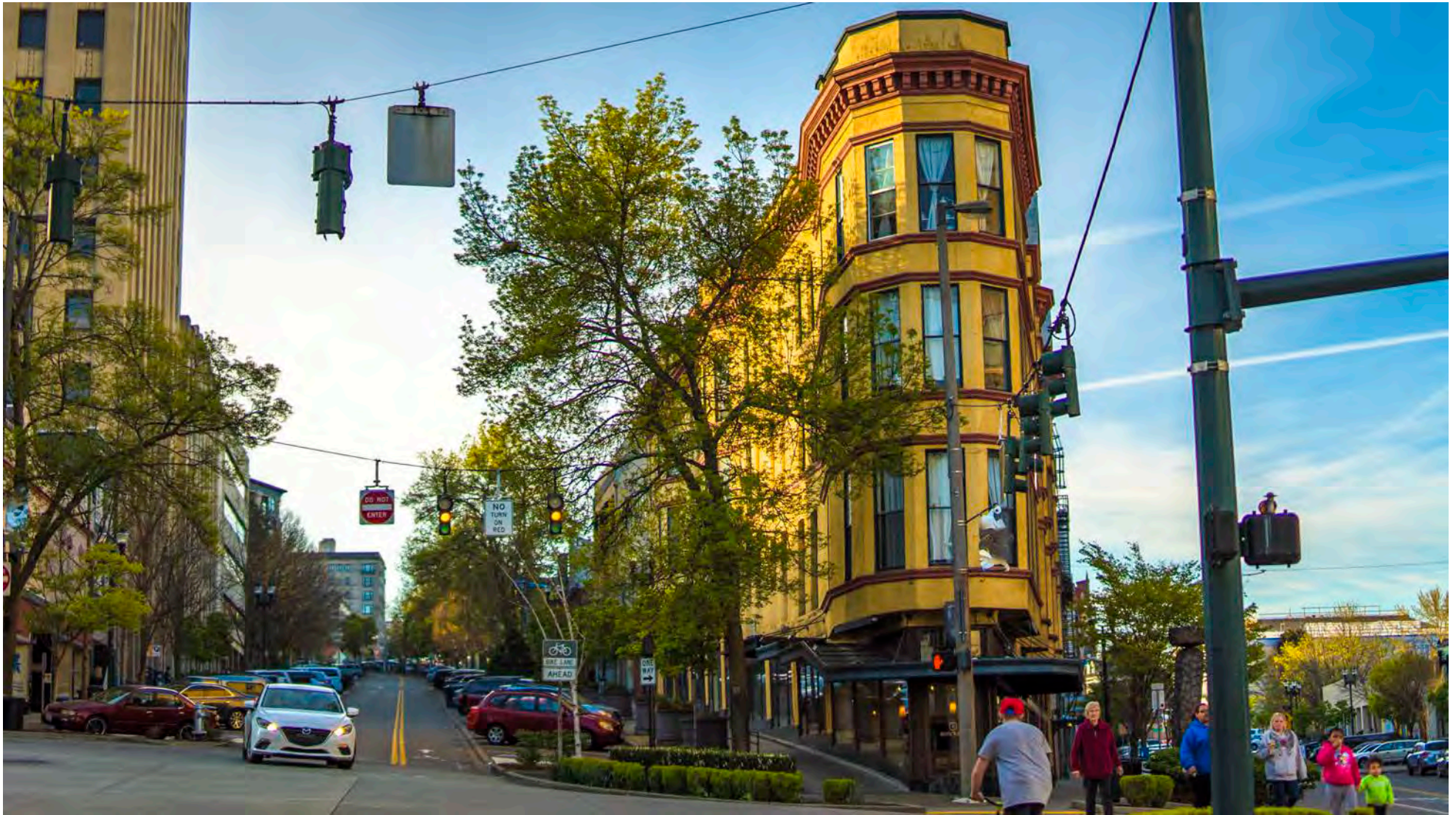
Moving within the district could be intuitive, comfortable, safe, and interesting, no matter which way one chooses to do it. Circulation could be a pleasure.

A PLACE THAT CELEBRATES DEEP ROOTS

The Theater District could be rich with places and people who have been here a long time, anchor the district, and give it soul. Buildings and environments could provide a sense of history and the enduring qualities of this place.

RECOGNIZED FOR ITS DISTINCT IDENTITY

The Theater District could have a clear physical identity, with many different elements of the urban landscape contributing to a coherent sense of place.



PUBLIC SPACE FRAMEWORK

introduction

A Framework for Progress

The district vision will be realized over time, through the accrued success of individual projects and contributions by many organizations and community members. Most likely, improvements will take place incrementally, not necessarily in planned phases or sequences, resulting from opportunities and needs that emerge and evolve.

This chapter presents a framework of long term strategies, existing elements to build upon, and specific public realm improvement ideas, to guide ongoing public and private investment and community-based efforts, so that each endeavor advances the vision and wellbeing of the whole district.

LONG TERM PUBLIC REALM STRATEGIES toward achieving the vision

CREATE A DISTINCT AND ACTIVE CENTER

Transform Theater Square into a bustling center and heart of the district: an iconic gathering place, crossroads, and stage for locals and visitors.

CULTIVATE A NETWORK OF GREAT PLACES

Over time, develop a rich and intricate network of great places throughout the district.

PROMOTE THE STREETS AND ALLEYS

Promote streets as the primary component of the public realm, by enhancing their quality and use as circulation routes and places to spend time. Build a rich and interesting network of bustling thoroughfares, commercial streets, intimate alleys, and pedestrian shortcuts.

EXPAND THE USE OF OPEN SPACES

Expand the use of parks and open spaces so that they support a large array of activities for people of all ages with a wide range of interests. Encourage active use at different times of day, throughout the week, and throughout the year.

LEVERAGE PROXIMITY OF TRANSIT

Leverage the convergence of transit options to support the performing arts and district life in general. Expand transit service and support alternatives—like transit network company (e.g. Uber and Lyft) and microtransit/shuttle—so it is easy and preferable to visit without a car, day and night, every day of the week.

ESTABLISH A STRONG VISUAL IMAGE

Over time, establish a strong visual image for the district with a variety of elements that reinforce a cohesive identity and memorable sense of arrival. Preserve and build on the district's historic buildings and environments that provide a unique sense of history.

ENGAGE DIVERSE COMMUNITIES AND ARTISTS

Engage diverse communities and artists in the planning, creation, and programming of Theater District public space as a central platform for arts experiences.

ADD NEW VENUES FOR PERFORMANCE

Enhance the live arts scene with new venues and spaces for performances and rehearsals, both organized and impromptu. Encourage an array of indoor and outdoor places—theaters, studios, bars and restaurants, streets, and open spaces—that support and celebrate creative culture throughout the district.

LONG TERM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES toward achieving the vision

ADD HOUSING

Encourage adaptive re-use of older buildings for housing. Create policies that support mixed income housing and families, and develop a strategy for housing affordability in downtown. Encourage more people to make a home here and join current residents in a robust community that is engaged in its neighborhood.

PROMOTE ACTIVE GROUND FLOOR USES

Aggressively recruit commercial tenants for vacant ground level spaces who will bring positive energy to the district's streets and open spaces—such as restaurants, cafes, galleries, and new venues. Focus recruitment efforts on the fine-grain and work with new tenants to engage the public realm with friendly facades and sidewalk amenities.

SUPPORT THE WORKING ARTS COMMUNITY

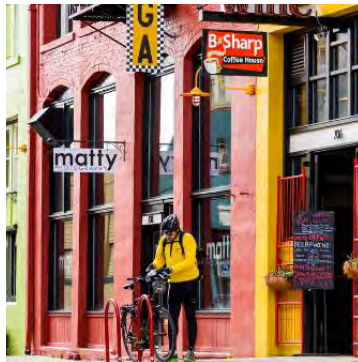
Encourage the renovation of older structures for live/work arrangements and arts spaces such as studios, rehearsal spaces, and new venues.



build on the district's assets

The Theater District already has a strong foundation of features and qualities that make it a successful and unique place. These should be preserved, nurtured, and aggrandized as the district evolves.

buildings & streets
with character



the center of a transit
network



theater & performance



Theater Square



the Broadway Farmer's
Market



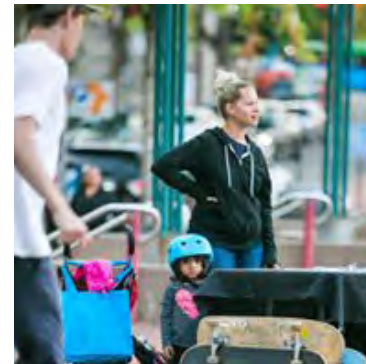
the active arts
community



local businesses



the people who live
and work here



arts considerations

Opportunities for Art in the Theater District.

Artwork should be considered an important part of the identity of the area and woven throughout, including its infrastructure. Physical improvement projects should result in a place as art rather than simply a place with art. The identity of the Theater District should be clear from one end to the other. There should be a sense that this is a special and unique place in Tacoma, one with high energy and appeal.

Art Program Goals.

1. Contribute to a strong sense of place in the Theater District.
2. Help define the identity of the Theater District as a dynamic place of creativity.
3. Celebrate the diversity of the arts, artists, and Tacoma community.
4. Provide the public an experience of continuity as well as serendipity.

The Role of Artists.

The effectiveness of the current artwork notwithstanding, there is an important role for art and artists to play in the District in the future, including incorporating an artist as a peer team member on the redesign of Theater Square, Commerce Street, and other open spaces so that the art that is developed is integral to the space. One artist or artist team should be selected to be both lead artist for the overall design and also identify specific opportunities for other artists that are an outgrowth of the plan. Art should be used as

a significant element in placemaking and identification of the Theater District. Resulting artwork could be iconic and/or functional as well incorporated in small grain details.

Three Approaches.

As a framework for considering the place making role of new artworks, opportunities can be categorized into three groups:

- Elements of Continuity: These are features that may repeat in various locations throughout the district. By making these unique to the Theater District, they will add to its identity and cohesion.
- Elements of Distinction: These are features that are unique and character defining.
- Elements of Change: These are opportunities for creating temporary interventions within the district.

Existing Works.

Consideration should be given about how to incorporate or relocate existing works such as the bronze masks and stone sculptures by Doug Granum, some of which conflict with new programming goals for Theater Square. In addition, thinking about how to relocate elements of the Theater District light rail station should be incorporated into the plans for the District.



sculptures by Doug Granum: Quetzalcoatl (left) and Collection of Rock Sculptures (right)

arts considerations (cont'd)

Weaving the District Together.

Another important role for art is weaving the various sections of the Theater District together and within the larger city fabric. The hill climbs from the distinctive Spanish Steps between Pacific, Commerce and Broadway to the more mundane steps between Pacific and Commerce are important linkages to the Theater District and are prime opportunities for creative lighting and permanent public art projects.

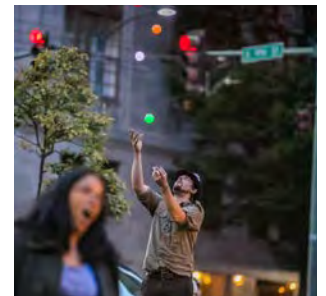
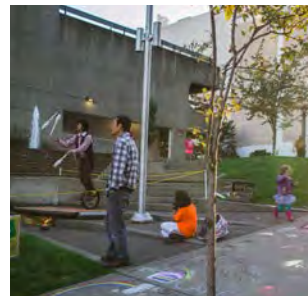
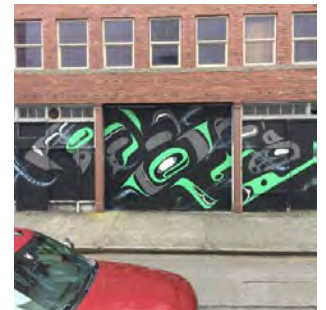
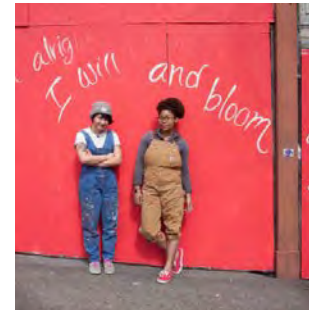
Opportunities for Temporary Art and Activation.

Even before Theater Square is reimagined, the District is resplendent with opportunities for temporary art, performance, installation and events. In fact, the best way to create a constituency for the redevelopment of the site is by producing and presenting programming and activities. Even an unimproved alley can be a great art venue with lively music and temporary catenary lighting.

Currently, the Theater District has a number of locations that are excellent places for performing arts programming and/or art installations. These include the west and north walls of Pantages closest to 9th Avenue, Frost Park, Theater Square, the hill climbs, and the ramp between Commerce and Broadway, among others. The two small, unused spaces facing Commerce Street that are part of the Pierce Transit turnaround and layover facility are potentially places that for artists-in-residence or pop-up art shops.

Spaceworks is the primary organization that programs temporary arts in downtown. In the Theater District, it currently presents temporary artworks in the Woolworth Building windows facing Broadway and Commerce Street and the Toll Booth Gallery at 11th and Broadway in the Theater District. There are also murals on the Court C alley side and the 11th Street side of 953 Market. Other immediate opportunities for temporary artworks include the display windows on 9th on the north side of Pantages.

Over the course of this project, Spaceworks programmed many temporary art installations, interventions, and events that demonstrated the positive impact of art activation in the Theater District.



top: Spaceworks Temporary Installations: Woolworth's Building
middle: Spaceworks Temporary Installations on Market and Court C
bottom: TRANSFORM temporary art activation by Spaceworks

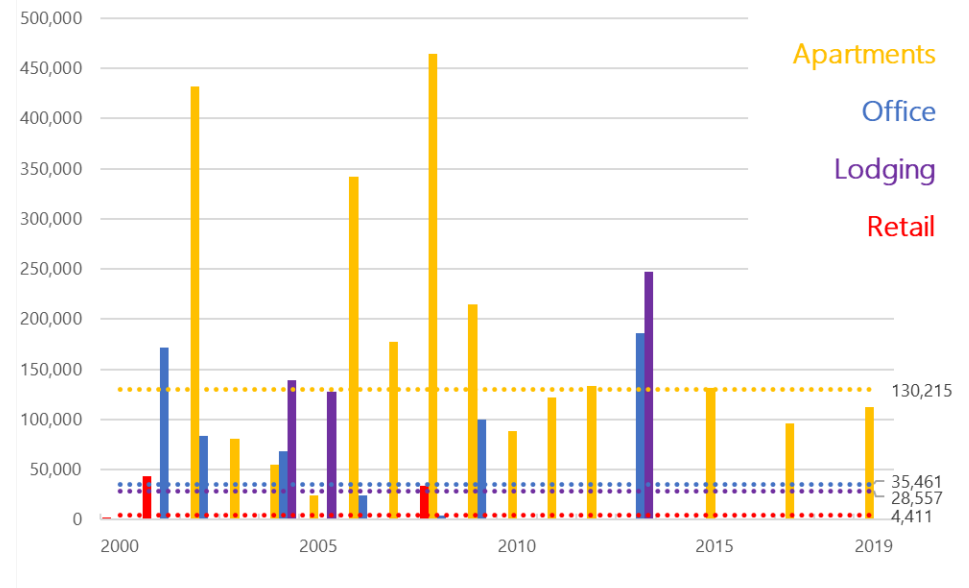
real estate and development potential

Significant momentum for development and renovation has been building in the Theater District. Recent and ongoing projects include: McMenamins (former Elks Temple), opening 2019; Convention Center Hotel, opening 2020; \$9M public-private investment in the Pantages interior; New KNKX Station (on Broadway, across from Theater Square); Old City Hall; and the Rialto Parking Structure.

Additionally, there are three key properties that are not currently contributing activity or interest to the District: the North Garage and the Woolworth and Rhodes buildings. These properties are in close proximity to light rail and Commerce Street bus lines, Theater Square, Tacoma Arts Live, Pantages, and the bars and restaurants on Pacific Avenue, and their transformation to mixed use or housing would be transformative for the District. The Rhodes Building is owned by WA State, and the North Garage is owned by the City of Tacoma. For that reason, these properties may present the best short term opportunities for redevelopment. The transformation of the North Garage into housing or mixed use is especially critical to the District. It occupies almost a full block between 9th and 11th, and sits adjacent to the Commerce St. bus stops, and adjacent to Theater Square. More people living in this area would increase activity on nights and weekends, help support a safe environment, and would also attract restaurant tenants, which would support the overall appeal of the Theater District.

The figure on this page shows the annual square footage of development by type (apartments, office, retail, etc.), that has taken place in Downtown Tacoma since 2000. There has been far more housing (apartment) development than office or lodging development (an average of 130,215 square feet per year). This is consistent with the national trend in urban housing development, even in historical commercial CBDs. The development of urban housing will continue to far outpace other types of land uses, such as office and lodging, in downtown Tacoma for the foreseeable future. Housing is also the most likely use to create demand for new, ground-up development, and adaptive reuse, in the Theater District. Given the notable lack of housing in the Theater District Focus Area, and the proven benefits of housing in urban

districts, the City should give thought to where and how housing development can best be supported. Improvements to open space amenities and streetscapes such as Theater Square and Commerce Street could also help catalyze development, and make it more attractive for people to live downtown.



annual development by type and area, downtown Tacoma (source: CoStar, Leland Consulting Group)

Broadway is one likely location where it could be possible to attract high quality retail and restaurants since many of these buildings are attractive, historic buildings. Although there are challenges in remodeling older buildings, there are also public programs that encourage reinvestment in historic buildings, such as the City of Tacoma's Historic Preservation Program. The project partners and the City could work together to identify means of supporting and incentivizing further development in the Theater District.

FRAMEWORK CONCEPTS

the district framework

District Heart, Streets, Shortcuts, Places to go, and Moments: together these core concept elements comprise a framework for public realm improvements across Tacoma's Theater District that will support the community's vision and long term strategies to pursue it. Future projects should reflect these ideas and goals so they contribute to the larger endeavor.



heart

At the center of the Theater District is its Heart. It should be the focal point of arts and culture, public life, and transit activity, where visitors arrive and know they have landed in the right place. It should be full of life all the time.

Occupying two full city blocks that encompass Theater Square, the Pantages, Theater on the Square, and the existing City of Tacoma parking structure, the Heart should be developed to convey a clear image, support numerous civic, neighborhood, and arts-oriented uses, promote transit, and stimulate street-level commerce that will bring people and energy.



streets

Commerce Street and Broadway are two complementary spines to the district. Commerce is a bustling transit thoroughfare; Broadway is pedestrian-oriented promenade. St. Helens Avenue could be a garden street lined with shops, restaurants, and outdoor gathering spaces, leading from Broadway to Opera Alley and Ben Gilbert Playground.

These should be developed as distinct parts of a cohesive network of high-quality streets that support transit, walking, and biking, and are destinations in themselves. As primary components of the district's public realm they should anchor its arts venues, stores and restaurants, and be improved to provide comfortable, dignified places to be outside.



shortcuts

Providing intermittent access between north-south streets, midblock hillclimbs at buildings and parking lots are a practical feature of the district's pedestrian network.

Though clearly belonging to an identifiable circulation system with design standards, each shortcut should be developed to be unique with site specific opportunities for design, art, and active programming.



places to go

Parks, plazas, and some streets are destinations punctuating the district's public realm. These include not only Theater Square and Ben Gilbert Playground, but also Opera Alley and Gallery Alley, and new “street rooms” along St. Helens Avenue.

These are distinct places, each with its own character and offerings to public life of the district. They should be developed to provide specific roles that serve the community, making the district a better place to live, work and visit.



moments

Streets and public spaces are accented by singular features and experiences that make being outside in the Theater District an interesting, engaging, and memorable activity in itself.

Artists, businesses, property owners, and the public should participate in making their district a richer, more delightful place to explore. Arts activation and programming, installations and temporary interventions, facade treatments and lighting, furnishings, and design features should contribute to a serendipitous and constantly evolving public realm that is truly unique.



PROJECT IDEAS

Project ideas shown on the following pages reflect the public realm strategies and framework and demonstrate a variety of approaches, scales, and levels of complexity. While not comprehensive, these projects address many of the themes that emerged during the “vision” phase of this plan’s community outreach process, and indicate potential directions for future design studies and implementation projects.



COMMERCE THOROUGHFARE

Commerce bustles with energy and welcomes visitors from all of Tacoma.

As a hard-working transit corridor at the core of the district, Commerce Street should be a wide boulevard like street, full of life, linking multiple modes of transportation, and designed to support the cultural identity of the District.

IMPACT

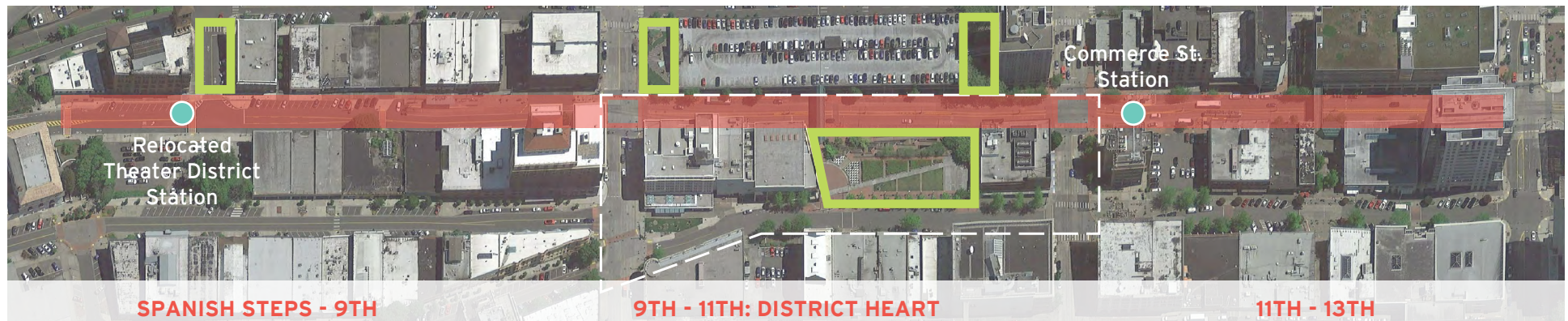
- subtle
- significant
- major

COMPLEXITY

- low
- medium
- high

GOALS

- Increase a sense of continuity across the District.
- Promote transit as integral to Theater District events and activity.
- Design Commerce as a primary arrival and departure zone for transit and car sharing services.
- Increase street life on Commerce and improve pedestrian and transit rider experience.



BROADWAY PROMENADE

Broadway is a pedestrian-oriented street, great for dining and window-shopping.

Broadway runs through the center of the original Theater District and includes impressive historic buildings, shops, and businesses. The street should be redesigned to connect theater-goers to existing businesses and to encourage new restaurants and housing to find a home here.

IMPACT

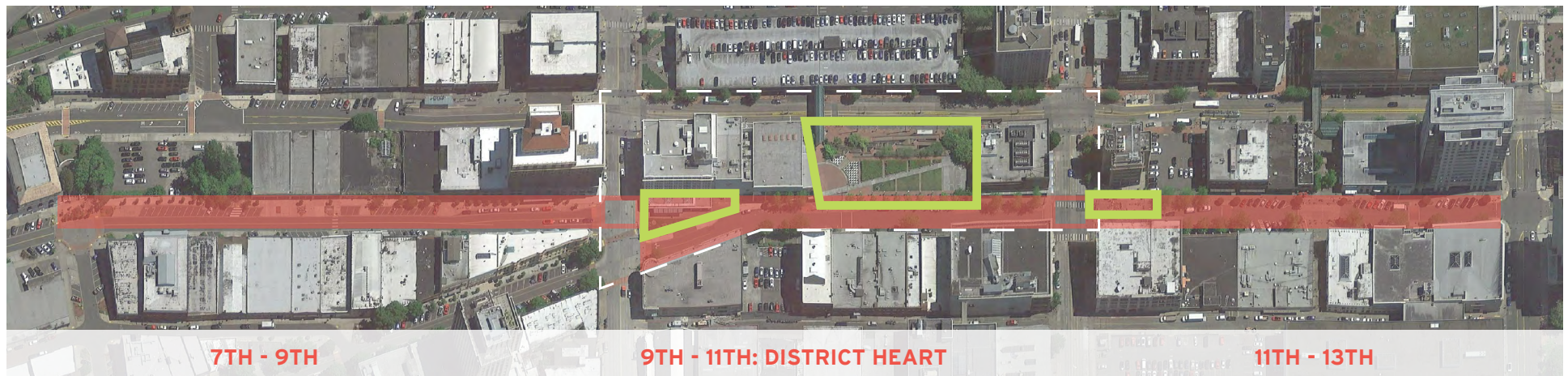
- subtle
- significant
- major

COMPLEXITY

- low
- medium
- high

GOALS

- Increase a sense of continuity across the District.
- Promote a distinct identity unique to Broadway.
- Support anchor performance venues by extending the activity along the corridor.
- Support restaurants, shops, and new housing by promoting street life associated with them.



PROMOTE THE ALLEYS

Opera Alley and “Gallery Alley” are social event streets, designed and regularly closed for programming and block parties.

Opera Alley and “Gallery Alley” (Court C between 9th and 11th) have unique appeal and potential to become vibrant public space. Physical improvements to both streets enhance their existing character and attract and accommodate more social pedestrian activity, including street closures for events.

GOALS

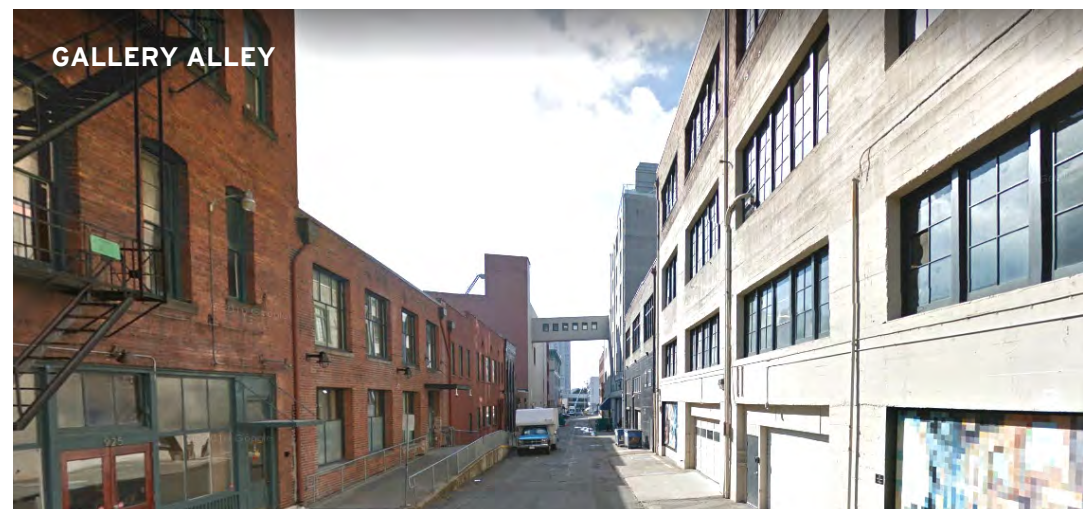
- Enhance the use and value of alleys as public open spaces for Theater District programming and events.
- Expand activity into further reaches of the district.
- Support adjacent and nearby businesses and organizations, and attract more.

IMPACT

- subtle
- significant
- major

COMPLEXITY

- low
- medium
- high



THEATER SQUARE RE-DESIGN

A New Vision

Building on community feedback, Theater Square is re-designed to be similar to a town square. It is transformed into a more flexible, multi-use space that includes active building uses at all four edges, more space for programming and events, and a stronger sense of place.

IMPACT

- subtle
- significant
- major

COMPLEXITY

- low
- medium
- high

GOALS

- Encourage day-to-day use of Theater Square.
- Create a gathering place for local communities.
- Support existing events like the Farmers Market.
- Accomodate large events and performance.
- Encourage people visiting the Theaters and using transit to linger at Theater Square.



FROST PARK

Frost Park becomes an active gateway into the Theater District.

Frost Park is re-designed to support street life in conjunction with transit and rideshare areas on Commerce St. With a larger at-grade area on Commerce, it becomes a great spot to grab breakfast or coffee from a food cart or meet a friend.

GOALS

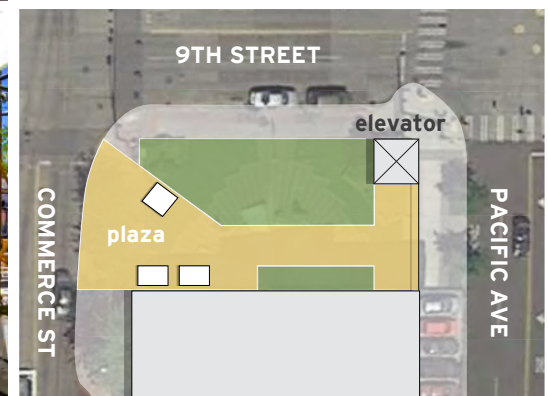
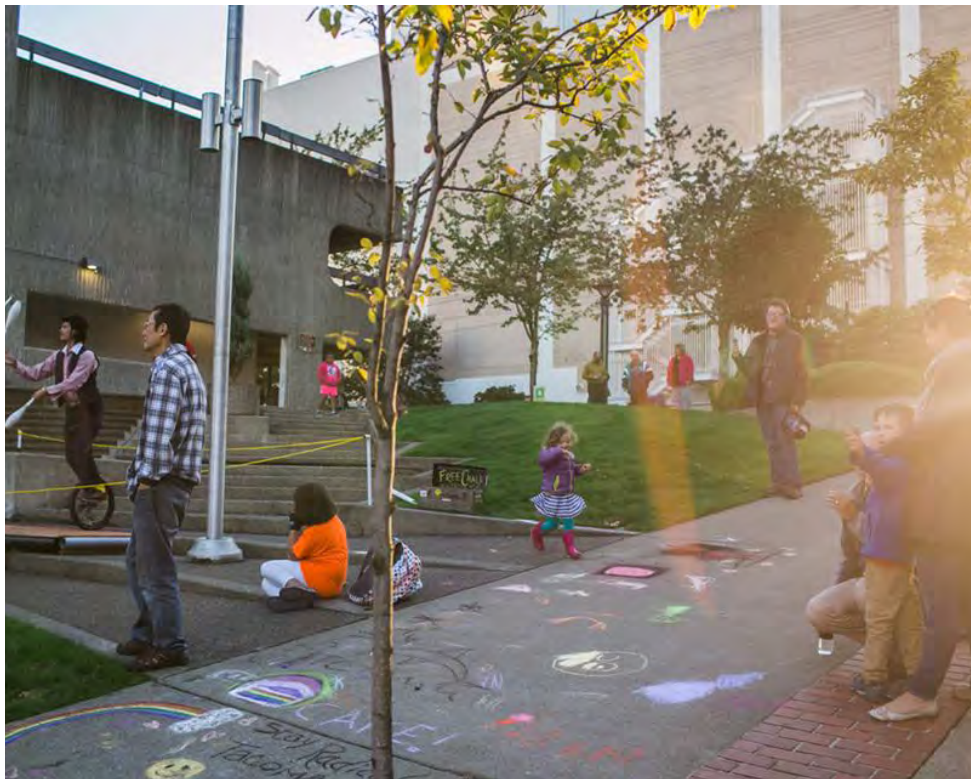
- Transform this quiet and underutilized park into a bustling neighborhood gateway.
- Support and activate Park Plaza North redevelopment.
- Maintain memorial function and features.

IMPACT

- subtle
- significant
- major

COMPLEXITY

- low
- medium
- high



BEN GILBERT PLAYGROUND

A quiet pocket park becomes a playful gathering space for children and parents.

The Theater District needs open spaces for families. Ben Gilbert Park is an ideal location for a small playground—a serene and protected setting on a quiet block near residential buildings, close to but beyond the activity of the District Heart.

IMPACT

- subtle
- significant
- major

COMPLEXITY

- low
- medium
- high

GOALS

- Provide public space oriented specifically to children and families.
- Activate the park and draw people from the District Heart.
- Promote the Theater District as a good place for families to live and visit.



HILLCLIMB IMPROVEMENTS & NEW PARKING LOT CLIMBS

A simple set of upgrades makes for better pieces of the neighborhood fabric.

Hillclimbs are a unique and practical feature of the district's pedestrian environment, providing steep short-cuts between the long north-south blocks. With visibility and character, Hillclimbs become active places and useful assets to the district's public realm.

IMPACT

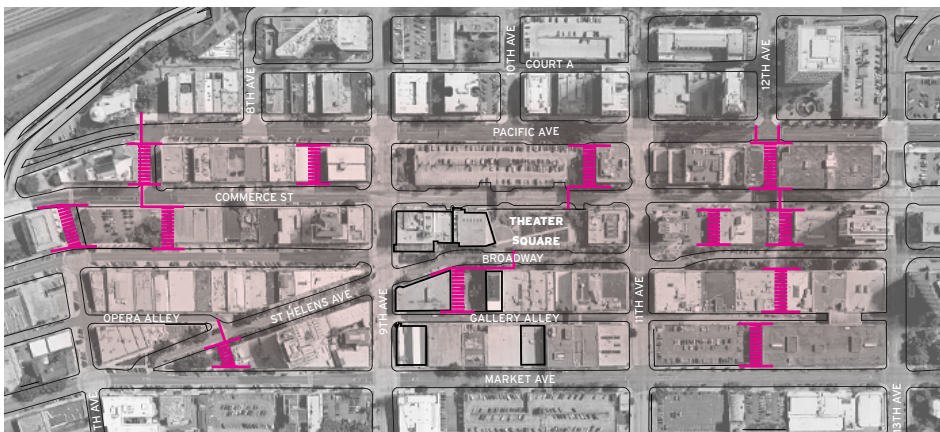
- subtle
- significant
- major

COMPLEXITY

- low
- medium
- high

GOALS

- Bring awareness and visibility to Hillclimbs so that they are better used as pedestrian routes.
- Improve pedestrian experience and sense of safety and interest.



PUBLIC STAGES

Stages throughout the district's sidewalks give everyone a place to perform.

The district is full of events and performances, almost all indoors. Public Stages provide outdoor venues for performance and rehearsal, and make an audience of passers-by. In celebration and support of the district's creative community, performance and creative activity permeate streets and public spaces.

GOALS

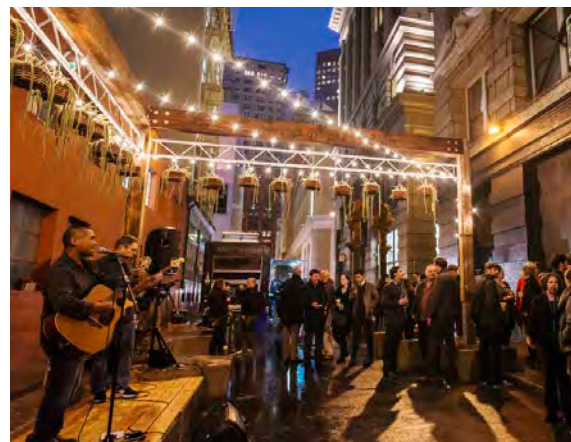
- Add venues for performance, accessible to everyone.
- Promote the district's performing arts identity in the public realm: bring performances to the street.
- Support street life by encouraging active use of sidewalks.

IMPACT

- subtle
- significant
- major

COMPLEXITY

- low
- medium
- high



ILLUMINATE THE HEART OF THE DISTRICT

Iconic lighting creates a strong identity for the heart of the Theater District.

This project strengthens the identity of the District and extends the energy of Theater Square outward to include Broadway, Commerce, and their intersections at 9th and 11th. Facades are artistically lit, creating an envelope around Theater Square.

IMPACT

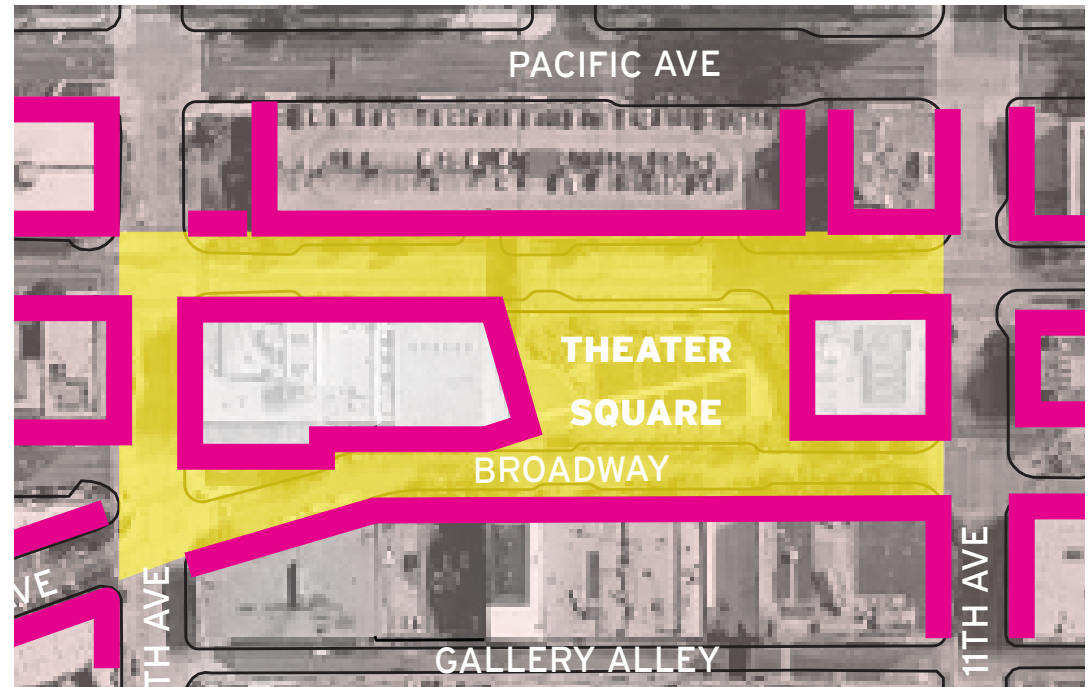
- subtle
- significant
- major

COMPLEXITY

- low
- medium
- high

GOALS

- Encourage evening activity and streetlife.
- Create a unique identity that links Commerce, Broadway, Theater Square, and architectural landmarks such as Pantages.
- Strengthen the sense of arrival; this will be supported by projects at Broadway & Commerce.



REAL-TIME EVENTS MAPS

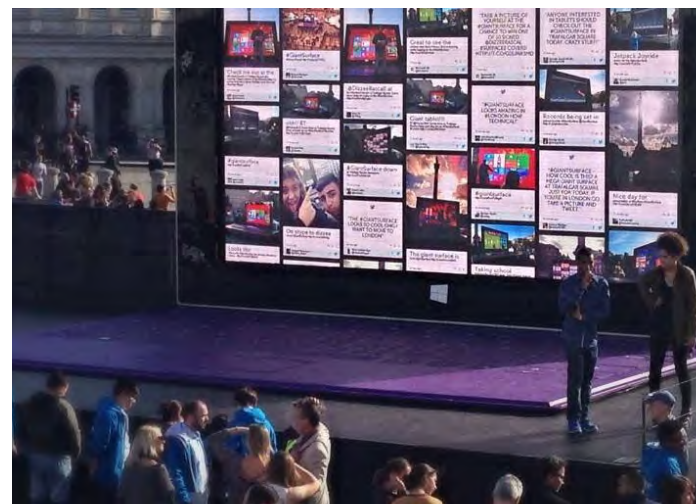
Dynamic maps show you what is happening around the Theater District.

Events Maps are digital displays throughout the district that locate events and activities happening soon or at that moment. With up-to-the-minute information mapped on a clear image of the vicinity, they orient and encourage visitors and locals to discover unfamiliar venues and experiences in the district.

GOALS

- Promote Theater District arts and entertainment venues.
- Encourage people to explore the district and discover new places.
- Engage transit riders and invite them to cultural venues in the district.

IMPACT	COMPLEXITY
○ subtle	○ low
○ significant	● medium
● major	○ high



STREET SOUND

Simple street infrastructure turns sidewalks into sound installations.

Through speakers and receivers mounted to light poles, artists and musicians reach a new audience and bring surprise and delight to the district's streets. Street Sound is a technology-enabled art program that utilizes new means of transmission to recreate time-honored pleasures like storytelling and jukebox listening.

GOALS

- Create eccentric, delightful moments to punctuate and enhance the experience of walking through the district.
- Promote the district's creative arts identity.
- Promote local artists and musicians in the public realm.

IMPACT

- subtle
- significant
- major

COMPLEXITY

- low
- medium
- high



PROGRAMMING & ACTIVATION

Regular events and activities support local culture and community

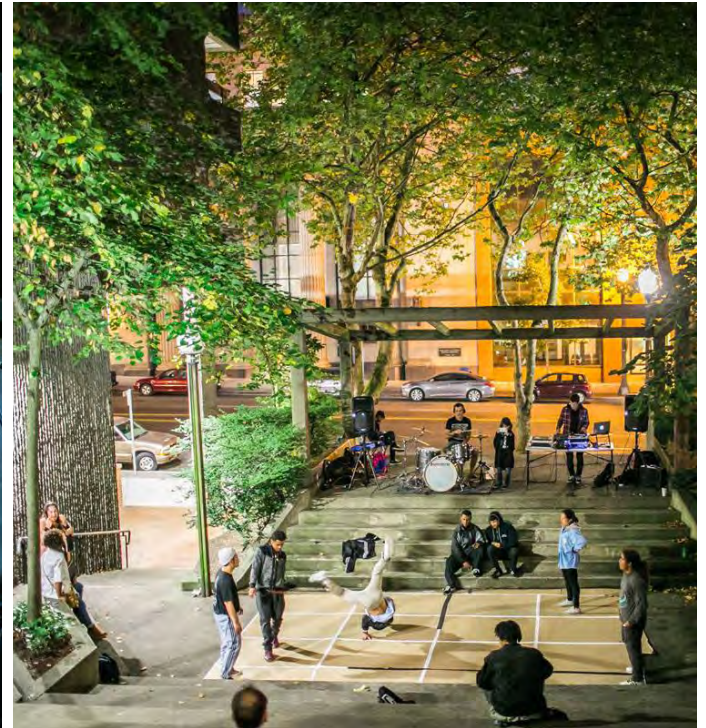
Regularly scheduled events such as the Broadway Farmers Market and Art Walk are supplemented with other events and activities throughout the District at many times of year. Local music festivals, busking, street performance, temporary art installations, and food trucks create activity and excitement.

IMPACT

- subtle
- significant
- major

EASE

- easy
- medium
- difficult



GOALS

- Engage diverse local artists, performers, vendors and visitors from all of Tacoma.
- Support local businesses and restaurants by bringing more people here.
- Promote walking and transit.
- Connect the District with festivals and events.