



**PEOPLE**

**MAKE CITIES**

**THE CHARLOTTE URBAN DESIGN CENTER**

**YEAR IN REVIEW**

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# 01 INTRODUCTION

The Charlotte Urban Design Center had an exciting year full of growth, transformation and continued elevation of our mission: advancing the quality of Charlotte's built environment and bringing public awareness to the importance of urban design. We are very excited to have welcomed three new staff members this year: Laura Bandara, a landscape architect and urban designer, and Justin Ritchey and Kate Cavazza, urban designers and planners. I invite you to learn more about their expertise and unique experience in this report. Diversifying our expertise in urban design has been a focus as we continue to transform our city.

We continue to build our three core practice areas: our urban design consultancy, our Placemaking Program and our South End Studio. We have moved forward very important projects this year, including leading planning work for the City of Charlotte's Corridors of Opportunity program, the creation of the LYNX Silver Line's Urban Design Framework and the structure for the City of Charlotte's first Equitable Transit-Oriented Development project (both to be released soon).

Our Placemaking Program launched its second annual grant cycle, awarding over \$200,000 to 21 community recipients, and opened the Creative Pool to over 40 local artists to participate in community-driven local art opportunities. The program is also responsible for one of the largest and most celebrated wall murals in Charlotte – the West End Gateway Mural by Jamil Dyair Steele at the I-77 and Trade Street overpass. Additionally, the Urban Design Center was instrumental in the planning, design and construction of Five Points Plaza, the City of Charlotte's first open space in over 25 years, which opened in March. Our team then committed to activating the plaza through community-driven programming

and public space management. Located in the Historic West End, Five Points Plaza had a large opening festival followed by the Five Points 5K, the first ever 5K race on the west side of the city in August, and the second annual Jingle Jam in December. Our work at Five Points Plaza demonstrates the Urban Design Center's commitment to the long-term sustainability of our projects and City of Charlotte investment.

We have been hard at work on building the communications and activation of our South End Studio, located in Charlotte's South End neighborhood. We hosted our second annual Urban Design Awards ("Urbies") to a full house of over 125 people where we distributed 12 awards, including the first People's Choice Award for the community's favorite urban design project. This year, we also relaunched our blog, "People Make Cities", and created our quarterly newsletter, "Connections." We invite you to subscribe and stay up to date with the Urban Design Center's work throughout the year.

I am so honored to lead this team of incredibly talented, passionate and committed urban designers. I am excited for the year ahead, full of influential work, the continued growth of our staff and the opportunity to make our city more walkable, connected, sustainable and economically resilient. Be sure to follow the journey on Instagram @clturbandesign and through the hashtag #peoplesmakecities.

Sincerely,



Erin Chantry, Manager, Urban Design Center

# 02 STAFF

## WELCOME OUR NEW TEAM!

In the spring of 2022, three new team members joined the Urban Design Center. Please welcome Laura Bandara, Justin Ritchey and Kate Cavazza. We are excited to have them on board and for you to meet them!

### LAURA BANDARA

Laura has experience in urban design and landscape architecture at the intersections of ecological and cultural systems. She has a master's in landscape architecture from the University of Virginia and a bachelor's degree in cultural studies and political science from Hampshire College. She strives to celebrate the everyday and foreground the human relationship to place in her work. Her happy place is the Piedmont forest and she loves a walk in the woods on foot, snowshoe or cross-country ski.

### JUSTIN RITCHEY

Justin has a master's in city planning from the University of Pennsylvania and a bachelor's degree in architecture from the University of Texas at San Antonio. He previously worked in transportation planning in Philadelphia and Fayetteville. He is passionate about using community design and placemaking to increase accessibility to public spaces. When not at the studio, he spends his time hiking regional trails, running half marathons and exploring the Carolinas.

### KATE CAVAZZA

Kate has worked in Charlotte for five years, gaining an understanding of the political landscape. She has a master's in political science from Lehigh University and a bachelor's degree in political science and French language studies from Susquehanna University. She is passionate about connecting community members to planning, urban design and policy resources to make positive changes in the built environment. She spends every minute not in the office on the water, rowing or training for a regatta.





**Erin Chantry**  
Charlotte Urban Design  
Center Program Manager



**Jacob Huffman**  
Associate Urban Designer and Planner



**Laura Bandara**  
Project Manager and Urban Designer



**Kate Cavazza**  
Associate Urban Designer and Planner



**William Linville**  
Senior Urban Designer and Planner



**Jessica Macks**  
Event Coordinator



**Justin Ritchey**  
Urban Designer and Planner

# 03 THE CHARLOTTE URBAN DESIGN CENTER

## PURPOSE AND HISTORY:

The Charlotte Planning, Design & Development Department formed the Charlotte Urban Design Center in 2020 to consolidate its urban design consultation, placemaking and community engagement services under one roof.

With its physical space rooted in South End, the urban design team offers community members more access to these services, builds on past successes and continues to excel in design and engagement.

## MISSION:

The Charlotte Urban Design Center's mission is to advance the quality of Charlotte's built environment and bring public awareness to the importance of urban design. The center reveals how design influences quality of life and economic resilience and advocates for great public places in a livable city.

# 04 STUDIO WORK

## URBAN DESIGN AWARDS

In the fall of 2022, the City of Charlotte Urban Design Center and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte's School of Architecture produced the second annual Urban Design Awards, or "Urbies." These awards elevate the importance of great urban design in our city and acknowledge the accomplishments of local designers and placemakers. The awards highlight projects, places, streets, student work and urban design champions throughout the city. The goal of the annual awards program is to recognize and celebrate quality urban design in Charlotte, while encouraging continued community discussion around what makes for unique and great places. The award recipients were:

- Great New Development Near Transit: Atherton
- Great Walkable Neighborhood: Wesley Heights
- Great New Life for an Old Place: The Brooklyn Collective
- Great Public Space: Romare Bearden Park
- Great Placemaking: Nebel's Alley Night Market
- Great Street: North Davidson Street
- Great Urban Architecture: Elizabeth on Seventh
- Great Suburban Design: Piedmont Town Center
- Great Student Project: Charlotte Urbanists
- Great Urban Design Champion: David Furman
- Great Neighborhood Champion: Neighboring Concepts
- People's Choice Award for Great Urban Design: Five Points Plaza



A diverse jury of 10 urban design experts chose the best of 12 projects based on nomination submissions made by architects, urban designers, planners, placemakers and the public. Winners were announced at the Urban Design Awards Ceremony held at the South End Studio.

This was the first year for the People's Choice Award for Great Urban Design, opening up nominations to the public. Five Points Plaza was the first space awarded this category.







Great New Development Near  
Transit – Atherton



Great Walkable Neighborhood –  
Wesley Heights



Great New Life for an Old Place –  
The Brooklyn Collective



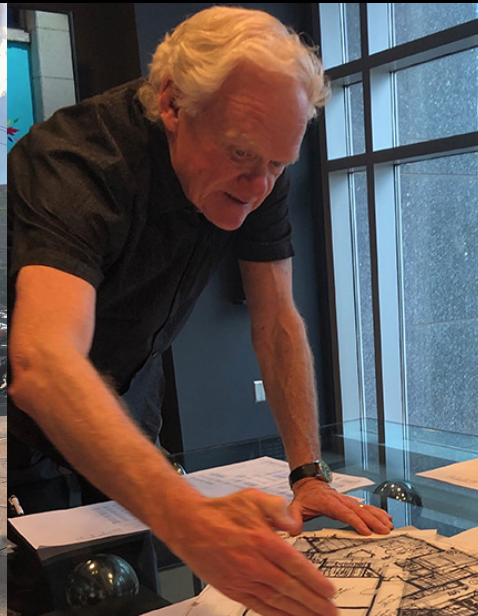
Great Public Space –  
Romare Bearden Park



Great Suburban Design –  
Piedmont Town Center



Great Student Project –  
Charlotte Urbanists



Great Urban Design Champion –  
David Furman



Great Neighborhood Champion –  
Neighboring Concepts





Great Placemaking – Nebel's Alley  
Night Market



Great Street –  
North Davidson Street



Great Urban Architecture –  
Elizabeth on Seventh



People's Choice Award for Great  
Urban Design – Five Points Plaza



Urban Design Awards Ceremony at  
the South End Studio

# 2022 AWARD RECIPIENTS

PEOPLE MAKE CITIES

## Charlotte Urban Design Center

Home



Charlotte Urban Design Center

31 Followers

Advances the quality of the built environment, creates public awareness, and communicates the importance of urban design in Charlotte, NC.

Follow



## COMMUNICATIONS RELAUNCH

The Charlotte Urban Design Center launched a new communications strategy in 2022. Drawing on the new team's multidisciplinary viewpoints, we started creating unique content for our "People Make Cities" blog, Facebook and Instagram audiences. We publish intentional content that better illustrates planning and urban design concepts to the public. In the past year, the number of people who have seen our posts has increased by 25% and the number of people who interact with our posts has increased by 10%.

To complement our social media and blog, the center also successfully launched a quarterly newsletter called "Connections". This publication highlights the center's project, studio, and placemaking work to introduce more people to the services provided by the Urban Design Center.





## CNU 31 CHARLOTTE

The Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) is an organization dedicated to championing walkable urbanism and providing resources, education and technical assistance to create people-centered places with three key goals: to diversify neighborhoods, to design for climate change and to legalize walkable places.

Every year, the CNU holds a conference, and in 2023 the annual congress will be hosted in Charlotte from May 31st through June 3rd. The Urban Design Center, along with other government and private partners, is leading the local host committee that has been working hard planning the Congress throughout 2022. The congress planning process includes marketing, programming, tours, social events, sponsorship, volunteers and legacy projects. Join us at CNU 31 in Charlotte this spring and learn more about New Urbanism and the City's commitment to walkable urbanism.

For more information access the contacts below:

Website: [www.cnu.org/cnu31](http://www.cnu.org/cnu31)

Email: [cnuclt@gmail.com](mailto:cnuclt@gmail.com)

Twitter: @CNUCLT



# 05 CONSULTANCY WORK

## CORRIDORS OF OPPORTUNITY

For over twenty years, the City of Charlotte has invested in corridors because of the critical role each corridor plays in supplying basic needs and opportunities for its residents. The Corridors of Opportunity program is a coordinated investment approach to create safe, prosperous communities in six key corridors within Charlotte. The Urban Design Center team provides its expertise in design, placemaking and community conversation for the Corridors of Opportunity program.





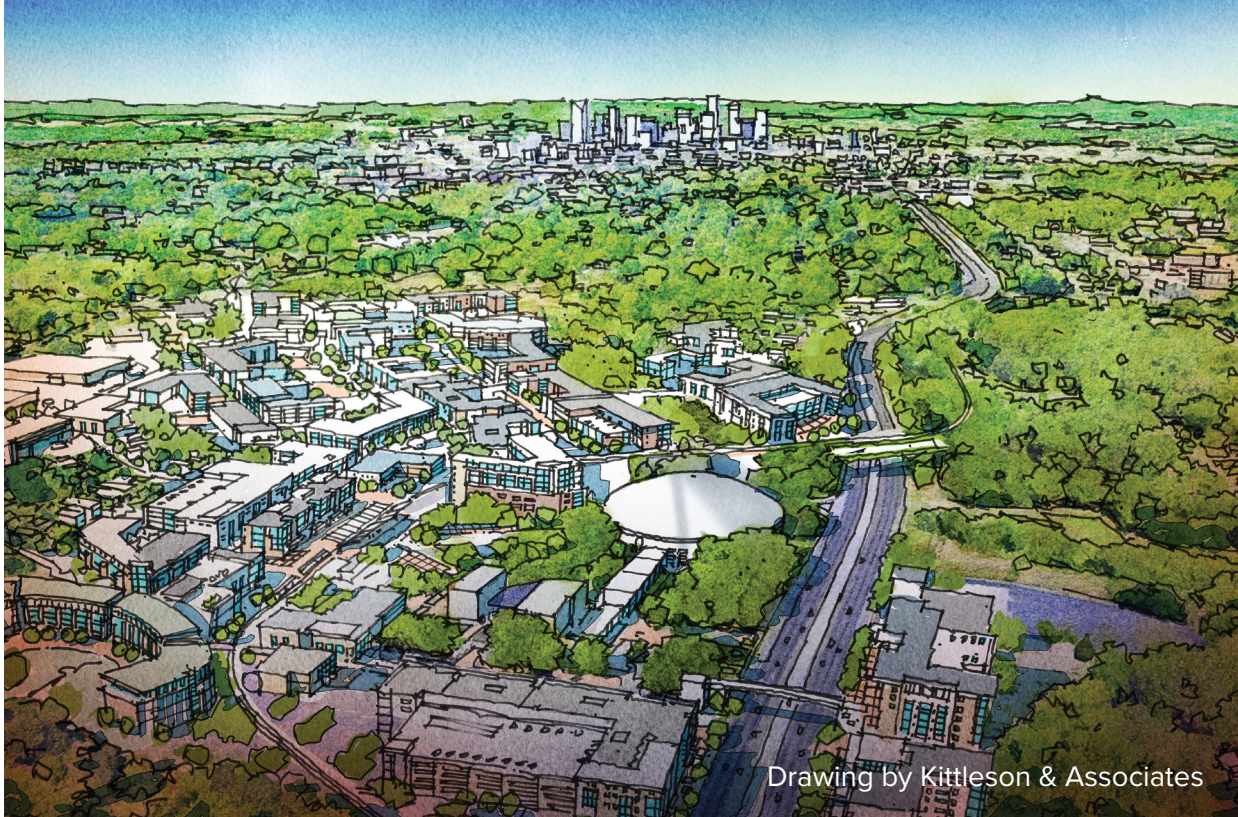
In 2022, the Urban Design Center primarily worked on three corridors: Albemarle Road, North Graham Street/North Tryon Street and Sugar Creek Road. These three corridor roadmaps will serve as the community's vision and implementation plans for the corridors over the next 3 to 15 years.

Albemarle Road is one of the six corridors in the corridors program. Working hand in hand with the community, the Urban Design Center and the corridors team developed a playbook to understand the vision and shared future of the Albemarle Road Corridor. In July 2022, the City of Charlotte held an Albemarle Road economic mobility workshop at the Urban Design Center to create a two-year roadmap for the Albemarle Road Playbook. This was an interdepartmental and cross-disciplinary effort by the City of Charlotte and other stakeholders to collaborate on next steps. This roadmap formulated a two-year implementation plan, based on projects, themes and goals set by the Albemarle Road Playbook. The roadmap is the first step in implementing the playbook and provides a framework of projects and strategies for city investment.

The North Graham Street/North Tryon Street area is also one of the six corridors and will serve as the strategic action plan for investment. To help lay a foundation for the work, the Urban Design Center and other city staff created a report of all existing city investments in the

corridor, cataloged all identified city projects, programs and partnerships from adopted plans and studies, and held a comprehensive stakeholder and community engagement process. During the engagement process, city staff, with the support of a consultant team, asked corridor residents, stakeholders, brokers and landowners to share their visions for the community and to identify projects, programs and partnerships for the corridor area. Building on the identified projects and programs and the community engagement process, a corridor playbook was developed to describe the vision and shared future of the North Graham Street/North Tryon Street corridor. Collaboration with the community and key stakeholders ensures these visions are brought to life.

Along with Albemarle Road and North Graham Street/North Tryon Street, Sugar Creek Road is also within the Corridors of Opportunity program. Building on the sprint report created in 2021, a corridor playbook was developed to understand the vision and shared future of the I-85/Sugar Creek corridor. To implement the playbook and to create a framework for strategies for city investment, a roadmap was created. The roadmap provides a three-year guide to implementing plans and projects developed in the Sugar Creek Playbook. Along the way, we are collaborating with the community and key stakeholders to bring these ideas to life.



Drawing by Kittleson & Associates



## LYNX SILVER LINE EQUITABLE TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

Urban Design Center staff has worked closely with an interdepartmental team to develop a scope of work and strategies for equitable transit-oriented development (ETOD) with communities along the proposed LYNX Silver Line route. The City of Charlotte was awarded an Federal Transit Administration grant to plan for equitable development in areas of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County where residents and small businesses are at risk of displacement because of station area development along the future LYNX Silver Line.

Equitable transit-oriented development provides all people, regardless of socioeconomic status, with the opportunity to live near transit stations and experience the benefits of development. ETOD ensures that marginalized groups have power and ownership in decision-making processes while implementing policies designed to equitably direct resources to those who need them most. ETOD values and preserves community history and culture; improves life outcomes for all by increasing spending power, wealth and access to quality jobs for the most vulnerable; and intentionally secures affordability in housing and transportation costs for the most vulnerable community members.





Urban design staff has investigated numerous strategies for implementing ETOD along planned and existing transit corridors around the country. We gathered lessons learned from agencies and nonprofits in peer cities that have ETOD planning and implementation underway. Staff developed a scope and framework for the project focused on equitable coalition building to create a community-built road map. The goal of the project is to create policy and implementation plans that are grounded in the lived experience of marginalized community members. The ETOD study will also develop pilot project criteria that reflect community history, aspirations and modes of cultural expression. This project's request for proposals was released in January 2023 with project kickoff anticipated in the spring.

## LYNX SILVER LINE URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

Urban design frameworks (UDF) are design recommendations to provide enhanced design treatment and materials on certain built environment conditions along the future Silver Line. Design frameworks can protect community character, encourage placemaking and promote equity. Design conditions can include treatment to preserve and enhance the pedestrian character of a community. The LYNX Silver Line urban design framework is placing special attention on physical elements (pedestrian crossings, cabinets, bridges, walls, etc.) to ensure design treatments are equitable in their application. This document is meant to provide design guidance for the major elements of the proposed Silver Line. However, it should be noted that equity in design is achievable only when following the design treatment recommendations at the locations identified in the map that accompanies the framework. Deviations from recommended design treatments, especially in locations where enhanced design is recommended, can lead to inequitable outcomes. The LYNX Silver Line urban design framework will be completed and made available to the public in 2023.



# 06 PLACEMAKING

## PLACEMAKING GRANTS

The Charlotte Urban Design Center awards annual placemaking grants to community organizations to support public space activation, streetscapes improvements, art and beautification, and the creation of community gathering spaces.



21 community placemaking grants were awarded in 2022 for a total of \$208,000



43 local artists were selected for the Creative Pool, providing placemaking and programming opportunities from the City of Charlotte and other arts organizations





Projects completed in 2022 featured placemaking elements such as wall and street murals, signal cabinet wraps and pop-up plazas. Some projects even required the creation of an entirely new placemaking category: sustainable place-based infrastructures. One grantee, Saturn Atelier, paved the way for this new placemaking theme. Saturn Atelier is a makerspace in the Derita community that seeks to inspire creativity through legible, beautiful and local design. Through their grant project, the creatives at Saturn Atelier designed and built a custom bench intended for installation at a bus stop in the Derita community.

Over 10,000 plastic grocery bags were collected in the community at drop-off points throughout the summer of 2022 and used in the fabrication of the bench. Beyond providing useful and aesthetically pleasing infrastructure in the public realm, this project also serves as a demonstration of sustainable urbanism in practice, and highlights the numerous benefits of upcycling and environmentally responsible resource management.

## PUBLIC SPACE PERMIT

The City of Charlotte manages three public spaces - Five Points Plaza, the Green at Prosperity Village and the Ritz at Washington Heights - all available for reservations and events. In 2022, the Charlotte Urban Design Center launched the public space permit and facilitated multiple community events throughout the year. To reserve a city public space, a public space permit and application process is required. This program gives local communities an easy way to reserve these public spaces to host community events. Our goal is to increase awareness that the spaces are available to the residents for events and to educate them on the permitting process.



Mural by Lo'Vonika Parks





## URBAN ARBORETUM TRAIL, GREENVILLE PUBLIC SPACES

Co-led by the Charlotte Urban Design Center and the Tree Canopy Preservation Program, the Urban Arboretum Trail creates community gathering places on city-owned parcels to preserve tree canopies, reconnect neighborhoods divided by 20th century urban renewal projects and catalyze environmental justice while celebrating historic Charlotte communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic transformed outdoor public space from an urban amenity to a public health necessity. The Urban Arboretum Trail started as a pilot project to repurpose underused city parcels, prevent tree canopy loss and incorporate environmental education into the urban landscape. Now, post-pandemic planning brings a new urgency to transforming smaller city properties into community outdoor hubs where people can safely gather to heal from the pandemic while preserving trees against development pressures.

The Urban Arboretum Trail now prioritizes the connections between people, places, history and the urban and natural environments. As we emerge from the pandemic, the Urban Design Center and the Tree Canopy Preservation Program are reinvesting time and resources into three sites in the Greenville neighborhood. A partnership with the private sector can accelerate the construction and implementation of desired elements within the neighborhoods.





The Urban Design Center and the Tree Canopy Preservation Program have been conducting public engagement in the Greenville neighborhood since 2019. The team has recorded stories from long-time residents, hosted pop-up informational gathering sessions, and completed one Urban Arboretum Trail installation with two more on the horizon. The city was able to start construction on a sidewalk connector, complete a community herb garden within a townhome community and secure three additional sites for activation. A majority of residents want natural, quiet spaces with plenty of seating for gathering, listening to music and watching nature. After gathering community input, city staff hosted an internal design charrette and designed three preliminary site plans in Greenville on city parcels and rights-of-way: Spring Street, Hamilton Street and Polk Street.

The three Greenville site designs are unique in activation and use but connected through cohesive branding and landscape elements. There are different furnishings and activations, depending on how it will be used by the community. The final details will be co-created with adjacent property owners, but each site will contain some of the following features: seating, landscaping, pathways, signage and public art. This includes benches and resting areas alongside all fruiting plants and trees, allowing neighbors to sit and enjoy the produce. Urban Arboretum Trail signage explaining the fruit uses, ripeness and cooking techniques will accompany all plantings. Wide sidewalk extensions and paths will connect people to trees and accessible seating areas within the sites. Street murals and sidewalk art will increase visibility and enhance usage.

Three draft site plans and design concepts with renderings have been created to visualize the three public spaces. The Urban Design Center will seek funding opportunities in early 2023 to fund and construct these public spaces in the future.







Photo by Deon Brown



## FIVE POINTS PLAZA PROGRAMMING

Five Points Plaza had its opening ceremony in March 2022. Located in the heart of the Historic West End at 1803 W. Trade St., it has a splash pad, amphitheater, swings and moveable seating, public art and enhanced landscaping. The opening day was full of activity, with events ranging from a drum circle, to yoga and fitness classes, to an art walk and a double Dutch clinic. Rounding out the day was an Old School Skate Party set to music.

The Urban Design Center has committed to providing programs that keep the plaza lively and humming and placemaking event coordinator, Jessica Macks, has spent 2022 making the community's vision for Five Points Plaza come alive. Events included fitness bootcamps, community bike rides, karaoke contests and art walks. The Charlotte Symphony presented concerts from string quartets to jazz combos. In June, there was a splash pad up and running and outdoor film screenings at night.

On August 13, 2022, Five Points Plaza had a beautiful morning for the first Five Points 5K and Fun Run, and saw great community participation with 155 participants, raising over \$5,000 for programming at the plaza. To bookend the year, there was a visit from Santa Claus himself at the Jingle Jam Christmas Tree Lighting! There was music, hot cocoa, fresh donuts, a movie and, of course, pictures with Santa. This was all while collecting toys for donation to benefit the Southview Recreation Center.





## I-77 UNDERPASS MURAL, TRADE STREET

In the spring of 2022, under the leadership and guidance of the Charlotte Urban Design Center, local artist Jamil Dyair Steele completed a mural at the I-77 and West Trade Street underpass in Charlotte's Historic West End. It is one of the longest murals in Charlotte at 180 feet and also activates a pocket plaza adjacent to the underpass. This project combines with other art work at the underpass, including four interactive sculptures and a public art installation using light to create a gateway for the Historic West End and stitch together the blossoming west side and Uptown, a historic connection severed by segregation. The mural chronicles the rich history of this predominantly African-American corridor by creating a visual timeline of all the people and moments that helped shape the area. Each side of this mural starts with the main figure of a boy and girl. Flowing from the back of these figures is a wave of color that carries the viewer's eye down the wall. A montage of significant people and places including Julius Chambers, Dorothy Counts, Johnson C. Smith University, the Good Samaritan Hospital, the Excelsior Nightclub and others appear throughout the wave. To complete the aesthetic of the mural and to connect the legacy of the corridor to the broader geography of North Carolina, dogwood flowers and cardinals are included as a design motif throughout.

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