



PEOPLE

MAKE CITIES

THE CHARLOTTE URBAN DESIGN CENTER

YEAR IN REVIEW

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01 INTRODUCTION

The Charlotte Urban Design Center thrived in 2021, and was able to accomplish the Center's mission of advancing the quality of Charlotte's built environment and bringing public awareness to the importance of urban design - even with the continued challenges of a global pandemic. One way that was accomplished was by kicking off a newly minted tradition, the Charlotte Urban Design Awards. The Charlotte Urban Design Awards ("Urbies" for short) celebrate the built environment and its champions by honoring the best urban design projects and the most dedicated community leaders. Our staff grew by two, as well, with the addition of Jessica Macks and Will Linville. Jessica Macks is an accomplished singer and event producer who joined the team to lead the programming at Five Points Plaza. Will Linville is a certified planner with over 12 years of planning and design experience working on projects throughout the state – and has been with the City since 2019.

The pandemic continued to challenge our team, shifting the way we build community and public space through virtual engagement. The continued pivot included expanding our experimenting with new engagement practices with the use of tools like virtual decision sprints – professionally led virtual meetings meant to build consensus quickly. The team even spearheaded the construction and completion of a new public space, The Ritz at Washington Heights, in less than a year.

Closing out 2021 brought on change to the Charlotte Urban Design Center's leadership as well. I'm excited to announce that Erin Chantry will be the newest leader of the Urban Design Center. Erin is a foundational member of the Charlotte Urban Design Center and will be a phenomenal leader for the team – in addition to her love of placemaking and people, she cares deeply about staff and their professional growth and development and will ensure the Center continues to build community relationships and great public spaces for all. Unfortunately, 2021 also meant saying goodbye to Grant Meacci, Rachel Stark and Lorna Allen, three immensely talented landscape architects who had been with the Center since its inception.

As Erin continues to build the center for next 5 years, I move on to be the Division Manager for Urban Design and Historic Preservation. I'm excited to see what 2022 brings for the Urban Design Center and the City of Charlotte and how we, in partnership with the community we serve, can continue to improve quality of life, economic resilience, and make great public spaces.

Be sure to follow the journey on Instagram @clturbandesign and through the hashtag #peoplemakecities.

Sincerely,

Monica Carney Holmes

02 STAFF



Rachel Mukai Stark,
Senior Urban Designer



Will Linville,
Senior Urban Designer & Planner



Monica Carney Holmes,
Charlotte Urban Design
Center Program Manager



Charlotte Lamb,
Associate Urban Designer & Planner



Erin Chantry,
Senior Urban Designer & Planner



Jacob Huffman,
Associate Urban Designer & Planner



Lorna Allen,
Senior Urban Designer



Jessica Macks,
Event Coordinator

03 INTRODUCING 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 2021, the City of Charlotte Urban Design Center and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte's School of Architecture launched the first annual Urban Design Awards, or "Urbies". These awards elevate the importance of excellent urban design in our city and are a way to share the value of our team, work and mission. The Urbies highlighted projects, individual champions, activists, and student work 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 15 inaugural award recipients were:

- Great Transit/Trail-Oriented Development – The Metropolitan
- Great 10-Minute Neighborhood – Plaza Midwood
- Great Neighborhood Center - NoDa
- Great Community Activity Center – Camden Road
- Great New Life for an Old Place – Optimist Hall
- Great Public Space – Little Sugar Creek Greenway
- Great Placemaking – Camp North End
- Great Street – Tryon Street
- Great Street Redesign – 9th Street
- Great Street Action – Black Lives Matter Mural
- Great Urban Architecture – The Railyard
- Great Urban Design Champions – Hugh McColl, Harvey Gantt
- Great Neighborhood Activism – Darryl Gaston (in memoriam)
- Great Student Project – Queens Park Proposal/NS Railyard Design
- The Crown Jewel – Historic West End Initiatives

Award recipients were chosen by a diverse, 10-member community jury. The awards ceremony recognizing the inaugural Urbies winners took place at the Charlotte Urban Design Center's outdoor plaza.

The Friday following the awards ceremony, a community conversation was held at the Dubois Center where select panelists were able to reflect on award recipients and share thoughts behind urban champions and great urban places in the City of Charlotte.





Great Transit/Trail-Oriented Development – The Metropolitan



Great 10-Minute Neighborhood – Plaza Midwood



Great Neighborhood Center - NoDa



Great Community Activity Center – Camden Road



Great New Life for an Old Place – Optimist Hall



Great Public Space – Little Sugar Creek Greenway



Great Placemaking – Camp North End



Great Street – Tryon Street



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Great Student Project – Queens Park Proposal/NS Railyard Design



The Crown Jewel – Historic West End Initiatives

INAUGURAL AWARD RECIPIENTS



SOUTHEAST URBAN DESIGN SUMMIT

In 2019, the City of Charlotte Urban Design Center hosted the first ever gathering of Southeastern municipal urban design programs. Urban designers from Atlanta City Studio, Charleston Design Division, Charlotte Urban Design Center, and Raleigh Urban Design Center convened in Charlotte. Given a shared geography within the United States, the cities within the group share similar challenges: rapid growth and development, urbanization, gentrification and displacement, affordable housing, and upward mobility. The summits serve as an opportunity for the cities to share best practices and develop a framework to collaborate and tackle urban design challenges unique to the Southeast. In the fall of 2019, the summit grew to include Chattanooga Design Center and held the second convening in Atlanta and hosted by the Atlanta City Studio.

In 2020, summits planned in Charleston and Raleigh were put on hold as the COVID-19 pandemic placed restrictions on travel and in-person gatherings. After a challenging year, the urban design programs convened again virtually on Thursday, January 28th and Friday, January 29th for the third biannual Southeast Urban Design Summit. Joined by special guest speaker, Kristen Jeffers, founder of The Black Urbanist, urban designers gathered to share, discuss, and learn how the past year has pushed urban design programs to reevaluate and allow for evolution of the public realm as our country has faced challenges related to COVID-19, civil unrest, racial injustice, climate change, and the economy. The virtual summit was planned in partnership by the Atlanta City Studio and the Charlotte Urban Design Center.



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 (COO) 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.

Albemarle Road is one of the six corridors in the COO program. Working hand in hand with the community, the Urban Design Center is developing a Corridor Playbook to understand the vision and shared future of the Albemarle Road Corridor. Throughout the Playbook Process, corridor residents and businesses have had the opportunity to share their needs, desires, and visions for their community. Through collaboration with the community and key stakeholders, these ideas will be brought to life through the completion of the Corridor Playbook.

The Sugar Creek area is also one of six corridors within the COO program. To help lay a foundation for the work, the UDC staff held a design sprint and created a report. Building off the sprint report, a corridor playbook will be developed to understand the vision and shared future of the I-85/Sugar Creek corridor. During the playbook process, city staff asked corridor residents and businesses to share their visions for the community. Collaboration with the community and key stakeholders ensures these visions are brought to life.

The Albemarle and Sugar Creek playbooks will serve as the community's vision for the corridors over the next 3-15 years and are expected to be complete in March 2022.



ALBEMARLE CREATIVE ENGAGEMENT

HOW DO YOU REACH A COMMUNITY OF OVER 60 COUNTRIES TO ENSURE THEIR IDENTITY, CULTURE, IDEAS, AND PRIORITIES ARE INCLUDED IN THE FUTURE OF THE CITY?

CREATIVE ENGAGEMENT

With over 50 languages spoken and over 60 countries represented from around the world, Albemarle Road is one of Charlotte's most diverse corridors in the city. From the onset of the project, the Corridors of Opportunity Albemarle Road project team knew that engagement with stakeholders would need an approach specifically tailored to the corridor.

The City brought on a team of Creative Engagement Specialists to help shape the engagement strategy for the corridor. Working with Charlotte Is Creative, the City crafted a strategy that was multilingual, youth and family focused, and incorporated aspects of the corridor's culture into inclusive programing through art and performance.

The engagement strategy and Playbook development was guided by a steering committee of 20+ stakeholders who represent the diverse residents, businesses, and organizations of the corridor. Over the course of 6 months, the City held nearly 50 unique opportunities for stakeholders to engage with the project as well as online through social media, the project's website, and features on news outlets. At each of the in-person and online engagements, language assistance was provided by Into Languages and all materials produced for the project were provided in English and Spanish.

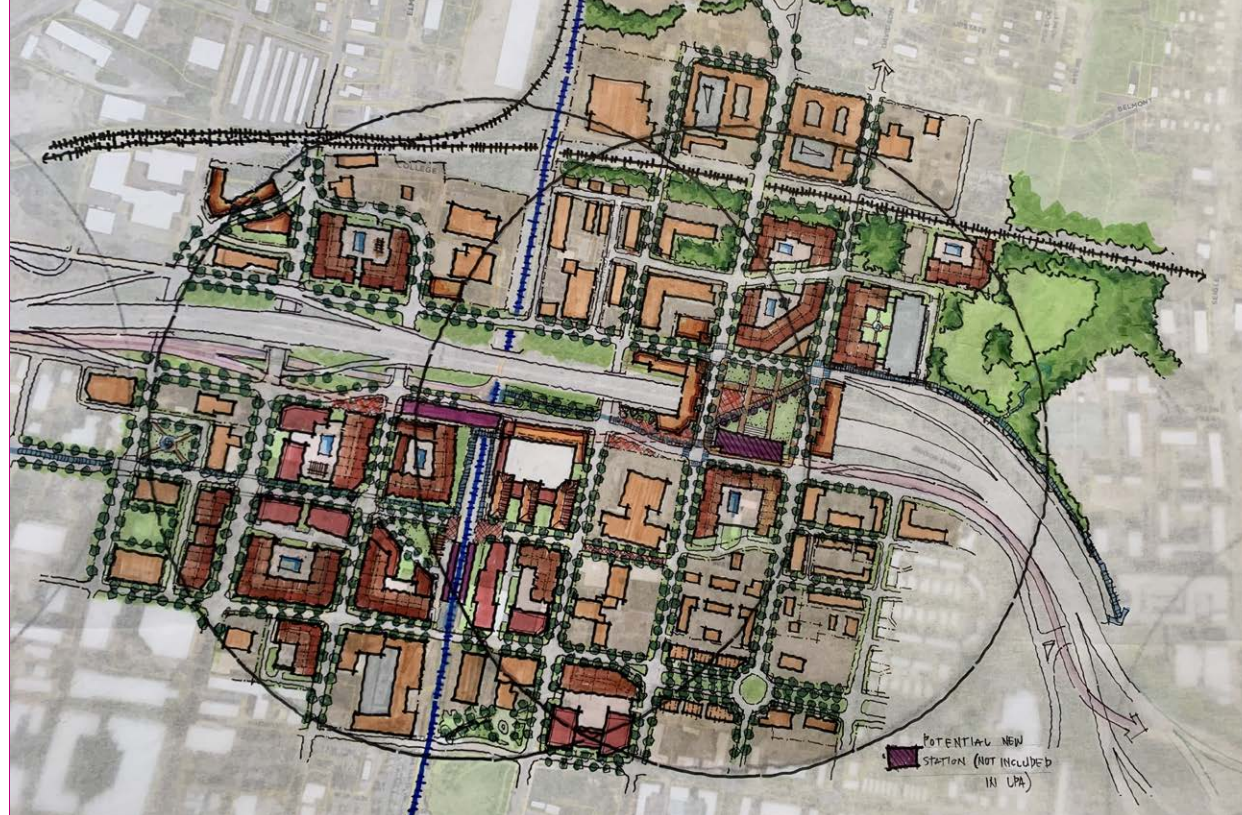
Throughout the process the over 25 local creatives contributed to the development of the Playbook through the creation of content, unique experiences, and ideas. This approach to engagement is new for the City and unique to Albemarle Road. Working closely with creatives to tailor a unique experience to engage with stakeholders helped the project team build trust, navigate cultural and language barriers, and build relationships throughout the process.

ARTIST IN RESIDENCY PROGRAM

Committed to engaging with artists and creatives throughout the Playbook process, the Albemarle Road corridor is the first Corridor of Opportunity to pilot the Corridor Artists in Residence program. The Project engaged and employed over 20 artists with expertise in multilingual engagement, youth engagement, and experience incorporating culture and art into programming. The artists who partnered on the development of the Playbook are collaborative, community minded, and understand the diversity of the Albemarle corridor and importance of inclusive engagement.

- Nico Amortegui, Artist, Community Reflection
- Myloan Dinh, Artist, Community Reflection
- Mike Daikubara, Artist, Workshop Leader
- Sharron Dowell, Artist, Community Reflection
- Irisol Gonzalez, Artist, Community Meeting Sketch Artist, Community Reflection
- Julio Gonzalez, Artist, Placemaking Installations
- Megan Gonzalez, Artist, Community Meeting Sketch Artist
- Tom Hanchett, Historian, Albemarle Road Treasures
- Hannah Hasan, Spoken Word Artist, Community Reflection
- Von Hunter, Musician, Community Meeting performer
- Ernesto Moreno, Photographer, Workshop Leader
- Jay Ward, Poet
- Rosalia Torres-Weiner, Artist, Workshop Leader
- Kriska Wood, Photographer, Workshop Leader





LYNX SILVER LINE STATION AREA PLANNING

Urban Design Staff have been working with CATS and other Planning, Design and Development colleagues on station area planning along the proposed LYNX Silver Line. This work is focusing on how adjacent areas and communities along the Silver Line, particularly those around future light rail stations, can be prepared for growth and development by focusing on a future that is multi-modal, and making land use decisions that are equitable and economically resilient.

In July of this year, the Urban Design Center hosted station area planning charettes that included illustrating concepts and perspectives of potential development around station areas. During these charettes, staff and stakeholders designed during the day before bringing their work out to a series of in-person community meetings in the evenings to gather real time feedback from community members. Designers then went back to the drawing board the next day. During the six meetings, community members learned about the station area planning process and TOD study, learned how the City is planning and preparing for the LYNX Silver Line project, and gave input around what they would like to see in their station areas. The community meetings focused on seven demonstration areas, but attendees were able to provide input on all 29 stations along the corridor. This work has assisted in the completion of station areas' recommended land uses, helped identify capital needs, and ultimately allowed users visualize the type of growth Silver Line stations may see in the future. The Draft LYNX Silver Line Transit-Oriented Development Study is currently under review and set to be finalized in early 2022.



CENTER CITY VISION PLAN

Over the past two years, staff assisted Charlotte Center City Partners with the development of the Center City Vision Plan. The plan was created to build on past momentum from previous planning efforts (the last plan document addressing the needs of Center City was adopted in 2010), current momentum related to immense growth and development in the Center City, and to diligently address the challenges of creating greater equity and a more prosperous future for everyone in Center City. Similar to the City's recently adopted 2040 Vision Plan, the Center City Vision Plan takes a big picture look at Center City while creating a framework and unifying vision for Center City's future growth and development. This vision is a direct product of community outreach - Charlotte residents working with each other - with neighbors, community groups, and civic leaders - to help shape Center City for future generations to enjoy. The Center City Vision Plan was adopted by City Council in December 2021.

UPTOWN CYCLELINK

The City of Charlotte's Transportation Department asked the Urban Design Center to propose and implement placemaking and public art along the new Uptown CycleLink Project within a set budget of \$200,000. Over the past year, staff researched and pitched various placemaking opportunities to City leadership before settling on biker bars, improved wayfinding signage, piloting vertical barriers, and commissioning artwork from five local artists. In 2022, staff will work with the City of Charlotte's Department of Transportation, the North Carolina Department of Transportation, and Norfolk Southern to enhance the 6th Street Rail overpass that the CycleLink Project passes under with a linear mural and improved lighting.

06 PLACEMAKING

CREATIVE POOL

In April, the Urban Design Center re-launched the City of Charlotte's Pre-qualified Artist Pool to include a broader range of professional creatives who are interested in working with the City. The Urban Design Center accepted qualifications from over 70 local professional creatives (visual artists, performing artists, fabricators, photographers, poets, etc.), teams of creatives, and artist management businesses/organizations for inclusion in the Prequalified Creatives Pool (Pool). Creatives in the Pool were commissioned to produce original work(s) and/or contracted to collaborate with the City to provide design or management services for art elements at several specific placemaking projects. The Pool has been used to match local creatives on a rolling basis, with opportunities throughout Charlotte. Projects range in scale and scope: this year creatives from the pool have been hired for bus stop enhancements, interpretive displays and signage, wall murals, street murals, photography, live performances, and lead creative engagement for our two playbooks!



PLACEMAKING GRANTS

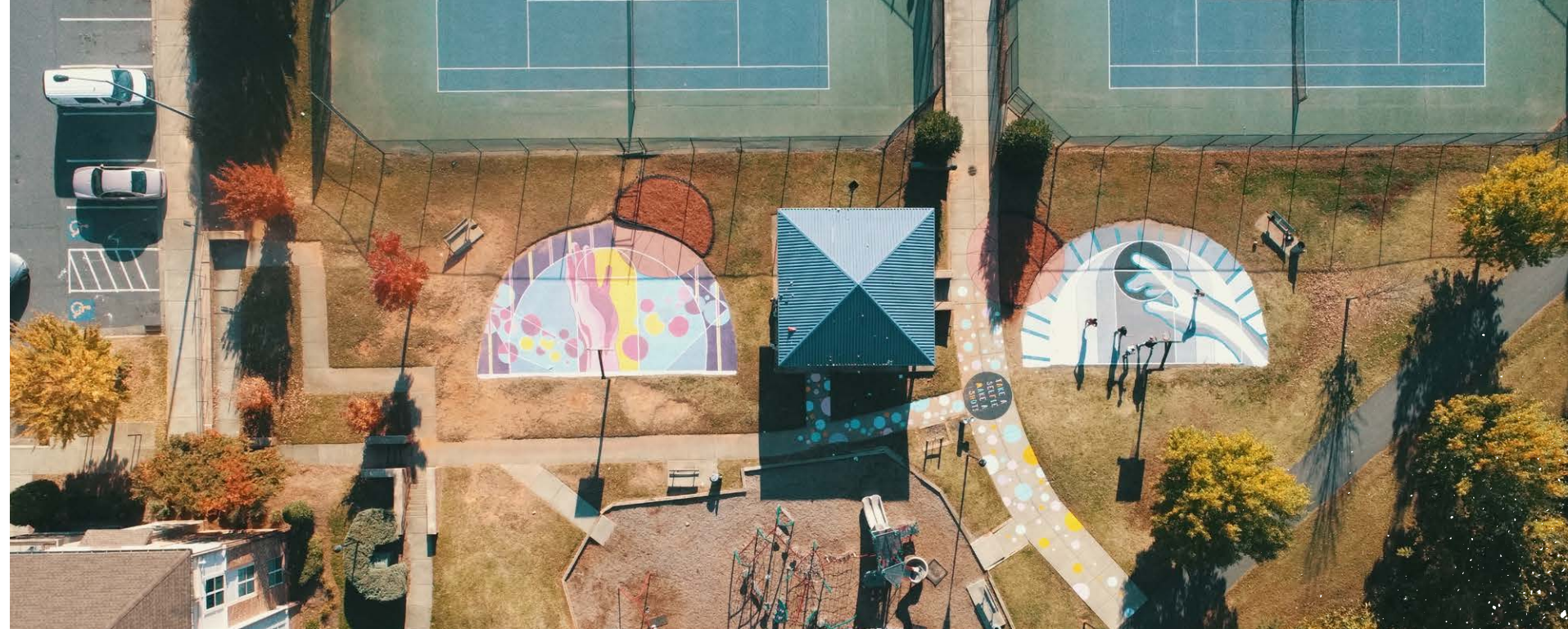
The Charlotte Urban Design Center awards annual placemaking grants to community organizations to support public space activation, streetscapes improvements, art and beautification, and the creation of community gathering spaces. Due to the general uncertainty and gathering restrictions of 2020, most of the grants awarded were not completed within the calendar year as originally intended. The Urban Design Center decided that instead of releasing another round of grants in 2021, it would be best to provide additional support to the 2020 grantees to get them over the finish line. Recently completed projects feature a range of placemaking elements such as playscapes, edible gardens, wall murals, and sculptures.

One grantee, Galilee Ministries of East Charlotte, served as a meeting place for more than 700 refugees, immigrants, and other residents of the city each week prior to the pandemic. One of the most popular events at the Center was a weekly meal where people, from many different backgrounds, could come together for a meal. The pandemic nudged the organization into using their placemaking grant to focus on creating outdoor gathering spaces for the community. The project added an urban orchard, native plant beds, a natural playscape, and seating areas for neighbors to gather. The Center celebrated the completion of the grant this summer by inviting the community into the new outdoor gathering space for a block party with food, entertainment, and children's activities.

One of the goals of the placemaking program is to turn underutilized space into places for people – the Galilee Ministries Green did just that. With the 2020 projects wrapped up, the placemaking grant program is set to return in early 2022 to activate more underutilized spaces across the city.

FIVE POINTS PLAZA

Five Points Plaza was completed this year and is the first permanent public space to be built by the City of Charlotte since 1992. Located in the heart of the Historic West End across from Johnson C. Smith University, it has a splash pad, amphitheater, swings and moveable seating, public art, enhanced landscaping, and Wi-Fi. This plaza was designed with the community and as a result the UDC won a Knight Foundation grant for approximately \$400,000 to program the plaza over four years. Additionally, part of the grant is the development of a community and grassroots driven organization responsible for guiding the plaza's management. In 2021, the UDC has made great strides in developing this organization. A group of committed members from the surrounding neighborhoods, institutions, and businesses have met monthly to build the foundation of how this group will operate and plan events at the plaza. The Five Points Plaza Management Team is organized into five committees: 1) Governance & Leadership; 2) Programming; 3) Sponsorship & Partnerships; 4) Community Outreach; and 5) Marketing. Additionally, the UDC hired an Event Coordinator who works with the above committees to ensure events and activities reflect the goals of the Historic West End community. The UDC is looking forward to the Management Team taking off with the official opening of the plaza in the new year.



ALEXANDER STREET BASKETBALL COURT

This Fall, the Urban Design Center connected with the next generation of placemakers when leading a project with UNC Charlotte's Master of Urban Design students. The students designed and painted two basketball courts, bringing a new vibrancy to Alexander Street Park. The team chose Alexander Street Park due to the age of the courts and the proximity to Seigle Point, a mixed-income neighborhood with a rich history for students to dive into. A special thank you to Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation for partnering on this project and making it possible!

Funded through the placemaking program, staff worked with the students to refine their design and manage logistics. The student's described their final design as one that reflects 'the history of basketball in Charlotte while connecting to the history of the Belmont neighborhood and the future of the area... The park's two courts represent the past (the black and white design) and the future (full color), and each contains a hand tossing a basketball, which extends beyond the court into the grass, defined by mulch and landscaping, aimed to touch on the history of basketball in Charlotte while connecting to the history of the Belmont neighborhood and the future of the area.'

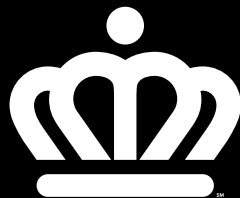
After weeks of planning, the 12 MUD students were joined by nearly 30 additional student volunteers to paint the courts in early November. There were kids from the neighborhood playing on the court before the team had even finished packing up our supplies!

THE RITZ AT WASHINGTON HEIGHTS

The Ritz at Washington Heights is the City of Charlotte's newest open space on the Beatties Ford Road corridor. At this location The Ritz, the last movie theater to be built only for black people during segregation, once stood as a hub of community life. It closed in 1971 and was demolished in the early 1990s. The city-owned lot has been sitting vacant ever since. As part of the city's Corridors of Opportunity (COO) program, The Urban Design Center (UDC) led the Beatties Ford Road community in an engagement process to identify placemaking and public space opportunities. This vacant parcel rose to the top with the vision of restoring community life on this corner of the corridor. The UDC and Historic Washington Heights received a \$200,000 Lowe's 100 Hometowns grant earlier this year in addition to \$50,000

in COO funding. There was one catch — the project had to be designed and built within three months. City staff and community leaders rolled up their sleeves, working hard to bring The Ritz vision to life. The new community space opened on Saturday, Nov. 6 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony featuring city leadership and community members. In addition, in the evening there was entertainment, food and of course — movie night! The Ritz at Washington Heights has elements that meet the desires and needs of the community in an open space. There is a performance area with a shipping container and shelter, a plaza area with moveable seating and chairs, and a small play area. There is beautiful, enhanced landscaping and four art elements completed by local artists: a wall mural by Makayla Minter, a painted plaza and inspirational quotes by Sala Faruq and the "The Ritz at Washington Heights" sign by Junior Gomez. Historic Washington Heights community will regularly host movie nights and community events.

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CHARLOTTE
URBAN DESIGN
CENTER

+

 CITY *of* CHARLOTTE