

Intervention	Time/Location	Initiator	Description
Post Furniture	2009-present; All Over	Culver City Industrial Designers (Ken Mori, Jenny Liang)	Benches and chairs that can be attached to street signage poles
Bike Lane/Signage	2008; Fletcher Dr Bridge (Atwater neighborhood)	LA Dept. of DIY (Anonymous Group)	Painted bike lane and signage
Bike Sharrows	2010; Highland Park	LA Dept. of DIY (Anonymous Group)	Painted bike signage
'Pass With Care' Bike Signage	2010; All over LA	Anonymous	Bicycle awareness signs
Bike Sidewalk Ramp	2008; LA	LA Dept. of DIY (Anonymous Group)	Painting curb red to give more access to bikes over cars
4th St Bicycle Signage	2007-present; along 4th St in Central LA	Anonymous	Signs saying 'Bike X-ing' at a few intersections
Intersection Painting and Traffic Bollards	2014; Silverlake	Anonymous	Painting cracked pavement to slow traffic and highlight unsafe roadway. Use of traffic bollards to slow traffic.
Bus Shelter	2015; Northeast LA	Owner of Tony's Barbershop	DIY awning and benches at a bus stop.
Bus Bench	2014; Echo Park	Anonymous	Bench in front of a bus stop
DIY Public Service	2002; 110 Freeway	Artist Richard Ankrom	Freeway Signage Suspending over the 110 Freeway
Socal Guerrilla Gardening	Late 1990s- Present; All over LA	Scott Bunnell (socal guerrilla gardening group)	Planting drought-tolerant plants in vacant spaces

Figure 6: Functional & Individual

LA DEPARTMENT OF DIY

The LA Department of DIY may or may not be a legitimate group of people, but the term was first used by a blogger who was describing unsanctioned bike lanes that seemed to have been painted over night on Fletcher Bridge in the Atwater neighborhood in Los Angeles in 2008.

Since then, the name has been used in multiple articles to describe many other similar anonymous interventions, most of which address bicycle infrastructure. Gordon Douglas, the author of *Do-It-Yourself Urban Design: The Social Practice of Informal "Improvement" Through Unauthorized Alteration*, identified and interviewed many people who performed these anonymous interventions, including individuals who have been attributed to the Department of DIY. Douglas states their influence and intentions in his essay: "the bike lane painters I spoke to in Los Angeles invariably say their actions are a response to the city's lack of such infrastructure, and also that they were directly inspired by Toronto's Urban Repair Squad, who began doing similar things a few years earlier." (Douglas, 2013) Also worth noting is that this largely anonymous group, or the actions that have been attributed to them, have often tried to replicate official infrastructure. Douglas, also a part of the curatorial team at the Spontaneous Interventions exhibition of the U.S. Pavilion at the 13th International Venice Architecture Biennale, wrote an article describing the specifics of the Fletcher Bridge Bike Lane painting:

"In workers' vests and hard-hats, protected by orange cones and barriers made of sawhorses, and wielding brooms, stencils, and a professional lane-stripping device, they went to work amidst the early-morning traffic over the L.A. River. In less than an hour, and for a few hundred dollars in materials, they painted a new bicycle lane." (Douglas, 2012)

Some other bike improvements include informal bike sharrows, 'Pass With Care' and 'Bike X-ing' signs. The city often takes down these anonymous, spontaneous bike interventions quickly. At the least, however, they do start dialogue about improving bicycle infrastructure in Los Angeles. It is unclear whether these interventions had any community input or whether they only reflect a few individuals' needs. These bicycle infrastructural projects do address a deficit in the built environment, but because of their anonymity and questionable community input, they have less of a chance to catalyze more lasting changes, and fall in line with the challenges regarding DIY and Tactical Urbanism: gentrification and equity.

SOCAL GUERRILLA GARDENING

Socal Guerrilla Gardening is a group of volunteers led by Scott Bunnell who plant drought-tolerant gardens in vacant lots, on medians, beside sidewalks, and any other neglected piece of city land. “Bunnell and others have met under the cover of darkness and stealthily converted almost a dozen vacant spots into beautiful gardens.” (Villano, 2012) Bunnell has been doing this since the late 1990s. He selects a site himself and then recruits volunteers through word of mouth and his website, socalguerrillagardening.org. Their intention seems to be the beautification and activation of vacant space. These actions are illegal and Bunnell has apparently “had a handful of run-ins with CalTrans, the state agency in charge of the freeway off-ramps on which gardens have been planted.” (Villano, 2012)

I previously discussed Ron Finely and LA Green Ground’s guerrilla gardening efforts. The gardening by LA Green Grounds focuses on edible plants, intended to address a lack of healthy food access, and includes a heavy amount of community involvement. Socal Guerrilla Gardening is way more spontaneous and does not establish a relationship with the community or area where the gardens are planted. I assume that they are often welcome improvements by the community, but it still could create tensions without any community input. These functional yet unauthorized urban interventions done by individuals or small groups need to be recognized by the city because they are controversial. They are communicating a need one way or another through the built environment and should be further discussed in regards to their potential benefits and drawbacks.

PLAYFUL & ASPIRATIONAL

Gordon Douglas in his essay categorizes some of the informal urban interventions as ‘aspirational urbanism,’ in which the interventionists promote or advertise a future use of land or

a building—calling attention to the space, but not actually making a functional improvement. I also include ‘playful’ interventions because, like aspirational intentions, they usually just start a discussion about a use of a space without actually providing civic-minded infrastructure. If they are changes that can be utilized by people, it is usually more ephemeral to spark people’s interest. I list and briefly describe these interventions happening in Los Angeles in **Figure 7**. Usually done by artists and designers, these types of activities play with the landscape and simply bring into question what may be possible in the future. Because they aren’t functional improvements themselves, their impact on longer-term change is much harder to discern. They still fall into the category of illegal, unauthorized urban interventions, but seemingly have less of an impact in the discussion on Tactical Urbanism. They are usually done by individuals and small groups, often anonymously, and without community input. Because of this, they fall victim to potential issues with conflicting community values and needs. The ‘Bunchy Carter Park’ sign promoted a park on a piece of land slated for development and the ‘Aqualine’ signs from the group Heavy Trash promoted a subway line. I could see how there could be some potential backlash from the community if their needs or values don’t line up with what these signs are promoting; they could, in that sense, be catalysts for unwanted development. Although these ‘Playful & Aspirational’ interventions aren’t the focus of my study, I found them useful to mention in the overall discussion of unauthorized urban interventions. Like the previous section on ‘Functional & Individual’ interventions, they also need to be discussed and acknowledged to better understand the nature of illegal, bottom-up initiatives in Los Angeles.



(Bunchy Carter Park for the People) Photo Credit:

<http://www.spontaneousinterventions.org/project/bunchy-carter-park-for-the-people>

Intervention	Time/Location	Initiator	Description
Aqualine Sign	2000; Along Ocean Ave, Wilshire Blvd, San Vicente Blvd	Heavy Trash (Art Group)	Signs promoting a subway line from DTLA to the Westside; This project is currently the Purple Line Extension
DIY Swings	2011; All Over LA	Jeff Waldman	Homemade swings temporarily built in underutilized spaces
Seedbomb Vending Machine	2010-present; All Over LA	COMMONstudio (design firm) and anyone can install one	Vending Machine encouraging the planting seeds in underutilized spaces
Billboard Art	2010; All Over LA	MAK Center for Art and Architecture	Using billboards for art instead of advertisement
Islands of Los Angeles	2007-present; All Over LA	Ari Kletzky	Signs proclaiming traffic islands as National Parks
Little Free Libraries	2010-present; All Over LA	Little Free Library (Non-profit Org) but anyone can install one	Miniature Libraries installed usually in front of people's houses or in underutilized spaces
Fort Hauser	2009; Midcity LA	Faith Purvey	activating a traffic island with temporary art installations
Bunchy Carter Park' Signage	2009; Downtown LA	LA Dept. of DIY (Anonymous Group)	Sign promoting a vacant lot as a park

Figure 7: Playful & Aspirational

UNAUTHORIZED URBAN INTERVENTIONS: TAKEAWAYS AND CONCLUSION

When taking into account the issues of equity and gentrification and analyzing the unauthorized urban interventions that I have categorized—everyday urbanism, ‘functional & communal,’ ‘functional & individual,’ and ‘playful & aspirational’—it becomes clear that the examples that included a large amount of community involvement or expressed consistent cultural values and needs show the greatest benefits to the area. Latino Urbanism and ‘Functional & Communal’ examples of small-scale, unauthorized actions best reflect and address community values and needs. While examples of Latino Urbanism reflected more ephemeral and everyday needs and values, the examples of ‘Functional & Communal’ were more pre-planned responses to a lack of adequate street infrastructure. Like most successful examples of Tactical Urbanism, these interventions are usually not intended to catalyze an officially sanctioned program or form of approval, but share the goal of improving the built environment with small-scale, low-cost actions. They prove as counterpoints to the criticisms of equity and gentrification often associated with Tactical Urbanism. Individuals or small groups mostly initiated the examples that fell into the categories of ‘Functional & Individual’ and ‘Playful & Aspirational.’ They were often anonymous and without any kind of community input except for their responses after the project was already completed. These types of unauthorized urban interventions are most often criticized for being performed by the white middle class and only representing the values of one person or very few individuals. Despite this criticism, popular examples of Tactical Urbanism have proven that these types of interventions done by individuals or small groups can have a profound impact on the community and catalyze long-term change. For this reason it is important not to discard the ‘Functional & Individual’ and ‘Playful & Aspirational’ examples purely

because they are synonymous with issues of community representation.

CITY-INITIATED TACTICAL URBANISM IN LOS ANGELES

How do formalized examples of Tactical Urbanism remain equitable and empowering in terms of location, and community input for design? Once an example of Tactical Urbanism becomes an officially recognized process or program, how much is the creativity and empowerment from the community compromised due to official concerns with safety, liability, and code? These are just a few questions to consider when examining official Tactical Urbanism programs. I group the different city-initiated examples in Los Angeles—refer to **Figure 8**—into four different categories: parklets and plazas, pop-up planning workshops, pop-up events, and ‘phase 0 implementation.’ I will be focusing and going into the most depth on the parklet and plaza program in the city of LA called the People St. program. I also analyze the newly initiated LA County pilot parklets. Pop-up planning workshops are examples of when the city or planning officials bring their official neighborhood or street-level plans to the community. Usually done in a day, officials show the community examples of various street improvements through physical manifestations using low-cost, temporary materials. The pop-up event that I will be talking about is CicLAvia, sometimes called Open Streets—an event that allows various streets around the city to be used only by cyclists and pedestrians. Lastly, ‘Phase 0 Implementation’ is when planners use temporary, low-cost materials to test and quickly implement projects from an already official, city-approved plan. Mike Lydon also uses this term in his book on Tactical Urbanism to refer to these types of projects.



Figure 8: Types Of City-Initiated Tactical Urbanism in LA

PEOPLE STREET

The People St. program, run primarily through the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT), is a program in which various community partners can apply to transform underutilized parking spaces or roadway into a parklet or plaza. The program also provides on-street bicycle parking, but I am only focusing on the parklets and plazas. A parklet is the transformation of up to two on-street parking spots into an extended sidewalk seating area. A plaza transforms a portion of a street into a large pedestrian space with chairs, tables, and/or other amenities. The parklets and plazas are built using low-cost, easily removable materials and must be renewed by the community partner on a yearly basis. This program falls under the category of Tactical Urbanism because the interest comes from the community for projects that are small-scale, temporary, and low-cost with the goal of catalyzing longer-term change.

According to the website, it “is hoped that community support will be so strong that residents

will work with the city and local elected officials to make them [the parklets and plazas] permanent or seek future capital-intensive, corridor-level urban design improvements.” It is an iterative process where the projects can easily be removed or can also lead to more permanent, expansive change. Below I have mapped out all of the People St. plaza and parklet locations, represented by green dots within the city boundaries. So far there are 12 total plaza and parklet projects that have either been approved or already built. The yellow dots represent the three parklets that just opened in unincorporated East LA, which I will discuss after People St.

Parklet (York Blvd)



Photo Credit: Charlie Simpson

Plaza (Sunset Triangle Plaza)



Photo Credit: Brian van der Brug, LA Times <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/mar/11/local/la-me-silver-lake-space-20120311>

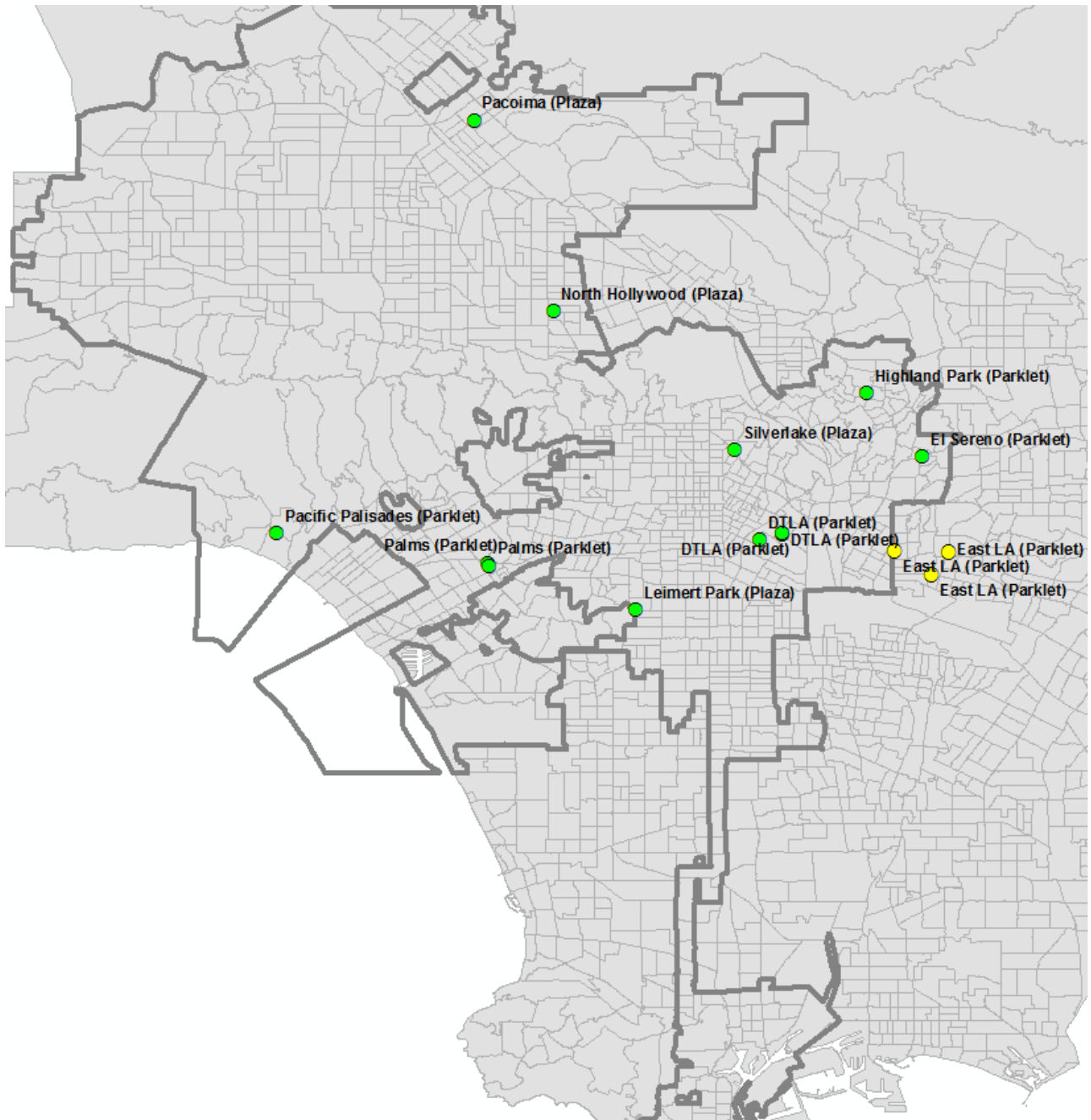


Table 9: Parklets and Plazas in LA City and County (Green Dots = People St. projects)

(Yellow Dots = LA County parklets in Unincorporated East LA)

Parklet and plaza programs around the country have of course not come without criticism. When analyzing the issues in regards to the People St. program, however, it is worth noting that the first round of parklet and plaza applications were just recently approved in late 2014 and have started to be implemented only early this year (2015). Los Angeles has had one

pilot plaza and four pilot parklets that date as far back as 2012, but People St. has only recently begun to install the first round of projects as an official application-based program. I will examine some of the initial and preliminary criticisms, but the difficulties will become more evident as the program accepts and installs more projects. The most common criticisms and challenges of the various parklet and/or plaza programs around the country, as I briefly discussed in the literature review, include funding and maintenance from the community partner, public engagement by city officials in terms of design, and the ability of the program to serve the communities most in need.

In *The Planner's Guide to Tactical Urbanism*, Laura Pfeifer explains the challenge that many parklet and plaza programs face, is to “balance the need for a robust level of citizen engagement with the desire of community stakeholders to implement projects quickly.” (Pfeifer, 8) The People St. program tries to strike this balance with the ‘Kit of Parts,’ which provides a set of pre-approved, required design options from which to choose. The People St. website states that the reasoning behind the ‘Kit of Parts’ is “to simplify the process, removing the need for Community Partners to reinvent the wheel each time a project is considered and avoid lengthy project review.” The ‘Kit of Parts’ may speed up the implementation process, but it undoubtedly jeopardizes some level of community input. The UCLA parklet study done by a team from the Luskin School of Public Affairs, states this same challenge with Vancouver’s version of a parklet program: “public engagement could be improved during the planning phase, a challenge given that parklet projects are designed to move quickly from concept to implementation.” (UCLA, 2012; pg. 58) In a recent LA Times article by architecture critic Christopher Hawthorne, he writes about the resurgence of public space being built in LA and specifically addresses the ‘Kit of Parts’ compromise. He mentions, in reference to the original plaza on Sunset Blvd, how “its

recognizable polka-dot pattern has been copied — cut and pasted, as it were, with minor modifications — to create the People St plazas.” (Hawthorne, 2015) Each plaza has a different design ‘kit’ selected from the options that reflects the context of the space, but the overall look is very similar across all of the plaza projects. In the Leimert Park plaza, the community negotiated with the city to change the colors from the ‘Kit of Parts’ and to add Adinkra symbols from West Africa in the middle of the polka-dot designs. Despite these slight design changes that attempt to reflect the strong cultural identity of the area, Hawthorne goes further to criticize the newly built Leimert Park Village plaza, which sits next to a famously built public space built by Frederick Law Olmsted:

“The polka dots overwhelm the attempts to mark the African American cultural history of the neighborhood, while the adjacent Olmsted plaza, long the active center of Leimert Park's political life, is ignored altogether. To simplify getting these plazas approved, the DOT has created a "kit of parts" that limits design choices. But there are places where a more considered approach makes sense, even if it means slowing the process and raising additional funds for a more comprehensive design. Leimert Park, where prewar City Beautiful ambition and rich postwar African American cultural history are piled together, is certainly one of them.” (Hawthorne, 2015)

Leimert Park Village Plaza



Photo Credit: <http://www.thefamilysavvy.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/leimert9.jpg>

I had a brief discussion with Valerie Watson, the assistant pedestrian coordinator for the city of LA, who has been a key contributor to the evolution of the People St. program. She addressed the design, maintenance and funding. She discussed how the partnership between the community and the city is all about empowering the community to take ownership of the space. In terms of maintenance and funding, there apparently haven't been any issues because they only try to approve community partners that demonstrate funding and maintenance capability. The People St. website explains that community partners include Business Improvement Districts (BID), Community Benefit Districts (CBC), chambers of commerce, ground-floor business owners, fronting property owner, or non-profit and community-based organizations. BIDs show the most success because they have strong organizational capacity. Non-profits and community organizations, who may not have as many resources, have been fortunate enough to receive pro-bono work from architects and landscape designers and usually turn to the online crowd-sourcing tool called Kickstarter for additional funding. Funds have also commonly come from neighborhood councils and local officials. I asked her about the 'Kit of Parts' designs and she expressed to me that if a community partner wants a design that is different from the kit of parts then it takes a ton of time. People St. is trying to speed up the project delivery process and give them the design assistance so the community doesn't have to provide funding for design and technical services. She says it will obviously evolve over time and that these projects are only the first phase in what hopefully leads to more permanent solutions in the long-term. The Leimert Park and North Hollywood plazas both were able to slightly change the color pattern that was different from the 'Kit of Parts,' which proved to be a difficult compromise with the paint supplier. Clearly more flexibility and community input needs to be considered.

Community partners have to fund, maintain, and operate the plazas and parklets, while

LADOT provides some baseline services to help speed the implementation process. This process seems to inherently limit certain organizations that may not have the organizational capacity to apply for a project, much less fund and operate them. Community partners also must have the organizational capacity to “seek professional guidance” on the implementation of the ‘Kit of Parts’ designs. Robin Abad, in his thesis on parklets and plazas, examined various case studies in California, including Los Angeles. He found that “during the pilot program stages in San Francisco, Oakland, and Los Angeles design professionals worked for free.” (Abad, 147) Pro-bono professional design assistance may have been key to the pilots’ successes, but moving forward that doesn’t seem like a consistently reliable option for all community partners, especially those with fewer resources.

Because the program relies upon private funding, a legitimate concern has been that parklets and plazas will only be located in more affluent areas. Based upon the existing and approved People St. projects, however, two plazas do exist in the lower-income neighborhoods of Pacoima and Leimert Park. These communities were able to receive the plazas because of the well established and influential community organizations that applied. They were able to demonstrate their capacity to maintain and operate the spaces. The organization that applied for the Bradley Avenue Plaza that was just recently built in early 2015 was the non-profit organization called Pacoima Beautiful. To gain further insight into the application process and the potential impact that a plaza may have on a community in need, I decided to interview Max Podemski, Pacoima Beautiful’s planning director.

Pacoima is a neighborhood in the San Fernando Valley where, according to the national real estate search engine CLR’s 2012 demographic data, more than half of the residents have not completed high school and the per capita income is only half of that of California. The area is

also around 86% Hispanic. In my interview with Podemski, he talked about how the residents rely on walking, biking, and public transit and how there is a vibrant street life. He states: “there is a disparity between the physical reality and demographic reality of the area. It was a working class minority suburban neighborhood and now it has become a dense immigrant neighborhood. Lots of people do not own cars and 20% of the population lives in converted garages and/or rented rooms. People are using the neighborhood in a different way.” This plaza on Bradley Avenue is a means to start addressing this disparity between how people are using the space and how it was built for them. The location of the plaza itself is adjacent to the San Fernando Gardens Housing Development and is hoping to act as a bridge between the housing community and the rest of the neighborhood. Podemski talked about how the San Fernando Gardens has been known for crime and gang activity and how the plaza risks being taken over by these groups. For this reason, Pacoima Beautiful plans to heavily program the plaza, hosting community activities and shows. The ability to program and activate plazas is one of the key components that People St. emphasizes. Podemski said that he will gauge the success of the plaza, however, if the community congregates around the space even when there aren’t any programmed events.

In terms of the application and funding, Podemski noted that the process moved really smoothly and advocated that it become a model for other programs in LA. Funding for the plaza included \$10,000 from local officials, \$5,000 from the neighborhood council, and \$10,000 from the online crowd-sourcing website called Kickstarter. Maintenance also was not an issue because Pacoima Beautiful identified the ‘Green Team,’ a group formed by the local Councilman to maintain the whole boulevard, to help with the plaza. They also received pro-bono help from the renowned Alta Planning firm in terms of arranging the designs that were picked from the ‘Kit of

Parts.’ When asked about the ‘Kit of Parts,’ Podemski seemed happy with the results and mentioned that the designs can evolve and become more permanent over time. Included in the plaza are two exercise bikes, removable tables/chairs/umbrellas, lounge seating, and an event space, which are all options that People St. includes. Podemski showed how Pacoima Beautiful was able to do outreach and get major support from the community. There were 7 community meetings to discuss the details of the plaza before it was installed. Identifying maintenance and funding wasn’t extremely difficult either. With strong community support and organization, this application brought much-needed public space to a lower-income neighborhood that otherwise might not have gotten this kind of attention from the city. As the program moves forward, it will be interesting to note how other lower-income communities that may not have well-established community organizations deal with the People St. application; because there is not organizational capacity in the first place, certain areas may not even think to apply.

Bradley Plaza (Pacoima)



Photo Credit: <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/684301992/help-furnish-bradley-plaza>

The People St. program proves to be a way to get things done and test out ideas; it's reflective of the spirit of Tactical Urbanism, which marks a change from the typically rigid, slow bureaucratic process. It allows communities to bring new public space to an area quickly and cheaply, and empowers them to maintain and operate the space. Because the program is in its early stages, it is difficult to confirm that People St. is dealing with similar issues that are occurring around the country in terms of serving all types of communities, regardless of their wealth. Complaints and challenges with the design options, however, has been part of the discussion. There is an obvious compromise in terms of community input that must take place in order to achieve these quick transformations. Even if the 'Kit of Parts' simplifies the process, more flexible design options need to be considered. I will touch more upon this in my 'Recommendations' section.

LA COUNTY PARKLETS

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors and the LA County Department of Public Works have been inspired by the city's People St. program to conduct their own parklet program. The areas covered are the unincorporated areas outside of the Los Angeles city boundaries. In late March of this year the county celebrated the opening of three parklets that will serve as part of the pilot program. All three parklets are located in East LA, in predominantly underserved Latino neighborhoods. The goal is to turn this pilot program into an official application-based program in partnership with the community, similar to People St. Just for the pilots, the parklets were completely funded and constructed by the county, leaving the operation and maintenance to the adjacent business owner, but in the future program, the community sponsor would provide funding.



Photo Credit: James Rojas



Photo Credit: James Rojas