



INSTANT IMPACT GUIDE

TEMPORARY, COST-EFFECTIVE IDEAS
FOR MORE VIBRANT STREETS





The Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) is the voluntary association of local governments in the 13-county Gulf Coast Planning region of Texas. H-GAC also serves as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the eight-county Houston-Galveston area.

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INTRODUCTION

Creating a pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly streetscape can make a community more vibrant, attracting new residents, businesses, and investments. This guide offers information on quick, temporary, low-cost projects that can help create active, walkable, and bikeable streets. These instant impact projects can be initiated and implemented by volunteers, community groups, and local governments.



WHY IT'S GOOD

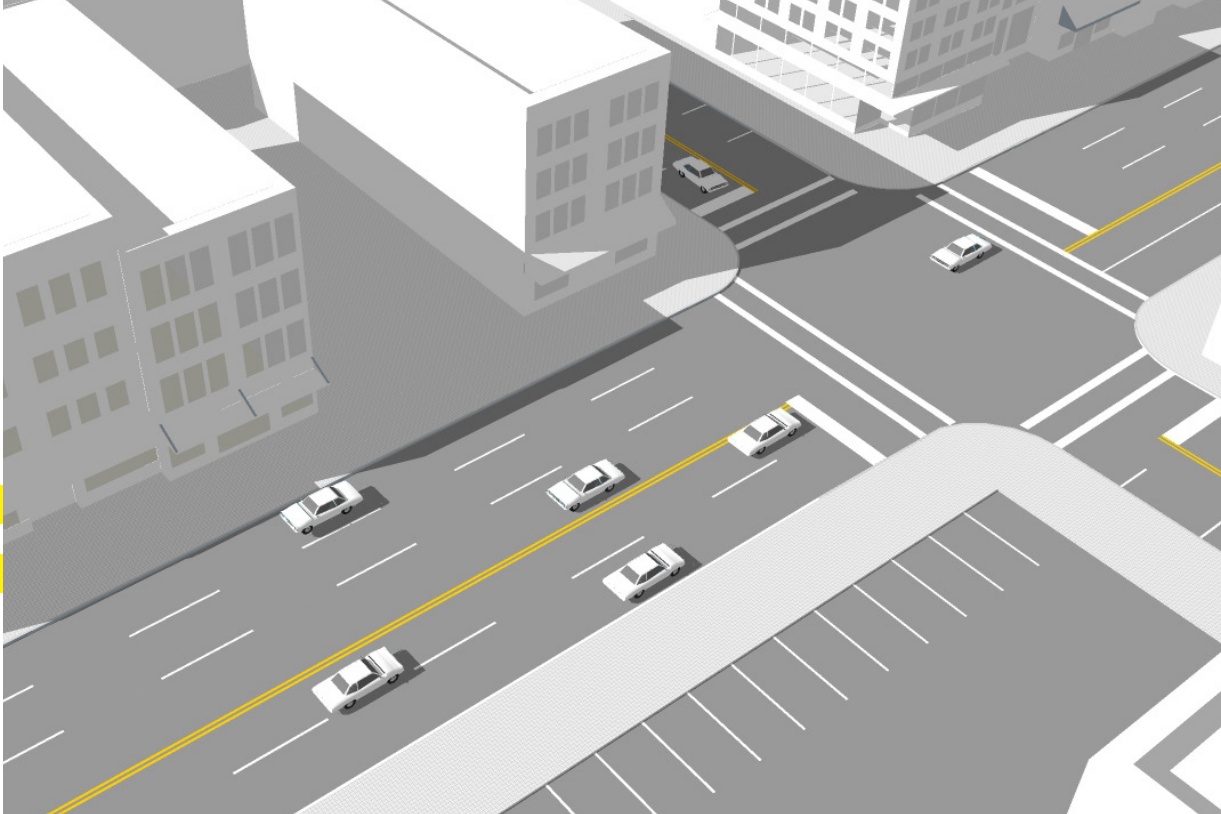
Creating a high-quality environment for pedestrians and bicyclists can take time. Resources for new infrastructure, such as sidewalks and bikeways, may not be readily available. Instant impact projects can help build momentum by increasing public awareness and support. They are also a good way to test new ideas before designs and policies are finalized.



Image: SWA



Image: SWA



▲ WHAT IS...

Streets are often designed to maximize the speed and number of cars moving through, making them uncomfortable for pedestrians and cyclists. Poorly maintained or nonexistent sidewalks, wide streets, vacant buildings, and large parking lots discourage people from walking, biking, and spending time in an area.

Instant impact projects are implemented by community volunteers and/or local governments. They use provisional, low-cost materials to temporarily transform an under-performing street into a charming place, attracting pedestrians, cyclists, and other visitors of all ages and abilities:

- Temporary bike lanes make cycling comfortable.
- Potted trees shade pedestrians and beautify the corridor.
- Farmers' markets, food truck lots, and pop-up cafes attract shoppers.
- Artificial turf medians slow vehicular traffic, increasing safety for pedestrians.
- Community gardens installed in vacant lots draw nearby residents.

▼ WHAT COULD BE...



HOW TO DO IT

Instant impact projects can be planned on a short timeline (about three months) and a low budget (less than \$1,500). This step-by-step guide offers ideas for planning an instant impact one-day event.



Image: SWA

MAKE A PLAN

1) Identify the Area

An optimal area for an instant impact project has buildings near the street, ideally with no space between the building and the sidewalk, regardless of the condition of the storefronts. An area with large parking lots or vacant lots lining the street can also work. A street with existing sidewalks is a plus. To maximize limited resources, set a clear project boundary. Also, consider places with active community organizations and property owners willing to participate.

2) Assemble the Project Team

Extend an invitation to the community—businesses, property owners, residents, local governments, and community groups—to lead and participate in the planning and implementation of an instant impact project. Target property owners and local community groups, including volunteer groups, churches, civic organizations, and Chambers of Commerce.

3) Visualize the Project

Take the project team on a tour of the area to gather ideas and identify strengths and weaknesses. Document existing conditions and visualize what the area could look like. Choose a date for the project and outline a project timeline.

4) Advertise

Advertise the project and the day of the event. Promote the event on social media and other marketing outlets. Be sure to provide updates as the project evolves.

MAKE A DESIGN

5) Create a Design Concept

Create the design plan based on ideas collected during the area tour.

Tips for creating the design:

- Keep the design simple to maintain a low budget and short timeline. See the Toolbox beginning on Page 8 for potential project elements.
- Align participants' skills and strengths with different elements of the project.
- Though not necessary, consider closing at least one lane of traffic and some parking to accommodate the instant impact project. However, be sure to not completely shut down the street. A primary reason for instant impact projects is to demonstrate that everyone—bicyclists, pedestrians, and motorists—can simultaneously share the right-of-way.
- Do not forget basic essentials and important items like port-a-lets and electrical needs.
- Obtain necessary permits and approvals from the city or county.

6) Coordinate Community Resources

Consider the project components and who can help you achieve them. Build on the community's assets and expertise—designers, electricians, artists, or carpenters may be interested in participating as advertising for their businesses or services.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

7) Install the Project

Build the project. The instant impact project team should be in charge of setup. Block off a lane of traffic for pedestrians and bicyclists. Place planters and benches along the street or sidewalk. Roll out the artificial turf median. Paint crosswalks and bike lanes. Help local vendors set up shop.

8) Measure Success

Survey event participants, record pedestrian and bicyclist counts, monitor traffic and traffic speeds, and gather information on retail sales. These metrics will provide data to support long-term improvements.

9) Wrap Up

Most of the instant impact project components could remain indefinitely, including benches, bike racks, bike lanes, and public art. Work with city or county officials to make arrangements to leave some instant impact design elements in place longer. Evaluate what was learned from the project and make plans to make successful elements permanent.

TOOLBOX

The elements in the instant impact toolbox help create a safer and more comfortable environment for pedestrians and bicyclists. Independently, each element contributes a subtle change, but a combination of the tools will create a vibrant public space.

PROGRAMMING

FARMERS' MARKET



Block off a portion of a parking lot or lane of traffic with cones or potted plants to host a farmers' market. Farmers' markets generate foot traffic and provide a pleasant outdoor environment for shoppers to buy local produce and other goods.

FOOD VENDORS



Invite local food vendors to fill pop-up shops, bring food trucks, or set up booths.

POP-UP SHOPS



Invite local restaurants and vendors to open a pop-up shop, a temporary retail business, in a vacant storefront or to set up a booth on the sidewalk. Encourage pop-up shops by making space available, working with property owners of vacant storefronts, or expediting necessary permitting processes.

COMMUNITY GARDEN



Revamp a vacant lot with a community garden. Gardens don't require large swaths of open green space if you use raised planter boxes. With community support, this tool can last beyond the instant impact event.

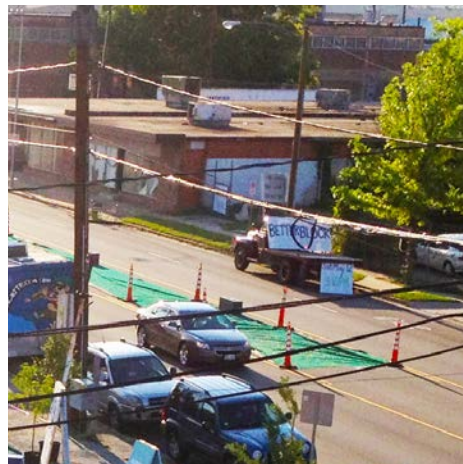
STREETS

BIKE LANE



Paint a bike lane on the street or delineate one with traffic cones. A comfortable bike lane is about 6 feet wide.

TURF MEDIAN



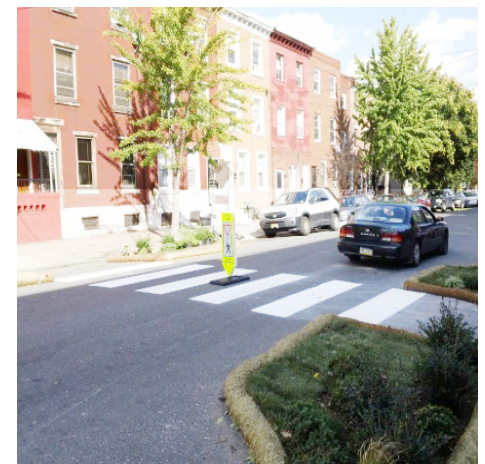
Block off a lane of traffic or turning lane to accommodate a median made of artificial turf.

CROSSWALKS



Paint crosswalks at intersections and in the middle of long streets to facilitate pedestrian crossings.

CURB EXTENSION



Add curb extensions at street corners. This extension of the sidewalk at intersections protects pedestrians by decreasing the distance to cross the street and slowing turning cars. Curb extensions can be marked with potted plants, potted trees, or traffic cones.

TOOLBOX

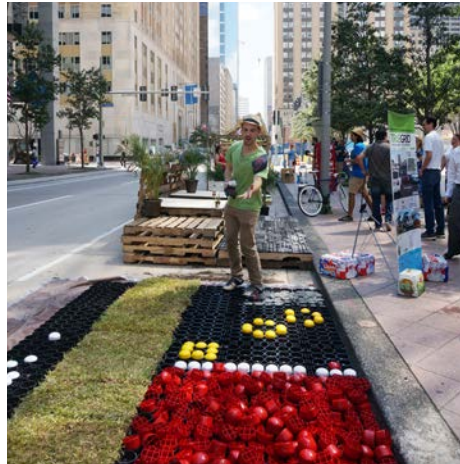
SIDEWALKS

MUSIC



Allow musicians and bands to perform on sidewalks or other public places. Music always attracts people.

PARKLET



Create a parklet, a tiny park often taking up one to two parking spaces or an empty lot. Parklets can be delineated by traffic cones or potted plants and can be designed to accommodate creative uses like a big chess game, cafe seating, or a garden.

SIDEWALKS



Widen sidewalks or walking areas by blocking off on-street parking or a lane of traffic with potted plants, potted trees, or traffic cones.

BUILDING FACADES



Work with property owners to revitalize deteriorated and/or vacant storefronts. Quick fixes like adding a new awning, painting a storefront, or staging the windows of empty buildings can reinvigorate dilapidated or vacant buildings.

PUBLIC ART



Invite a local artist to display his or her work, or, with the permission of a building owner, paint a mural.

POTTED PLANTS



Line sidewalks, parklets, and turf medians with potted trees and plants. They beautify the street and add shade.

STREET FURNITURE



Install outdoor cafe seating near restaurants and add benches along the street and in parklets.

BIKE RACKS



Site bike racks at destinations like pop-up shops, community gardens, and parklets. Make temporary bike racks out of wooden pallets or ask an organization to donate them.



Image: Asakura Robinson



Image: Asakura Robinson



Image: SWA

SPOTLIGHT ON... HOUSTON'S WASHINGTON AVENUE

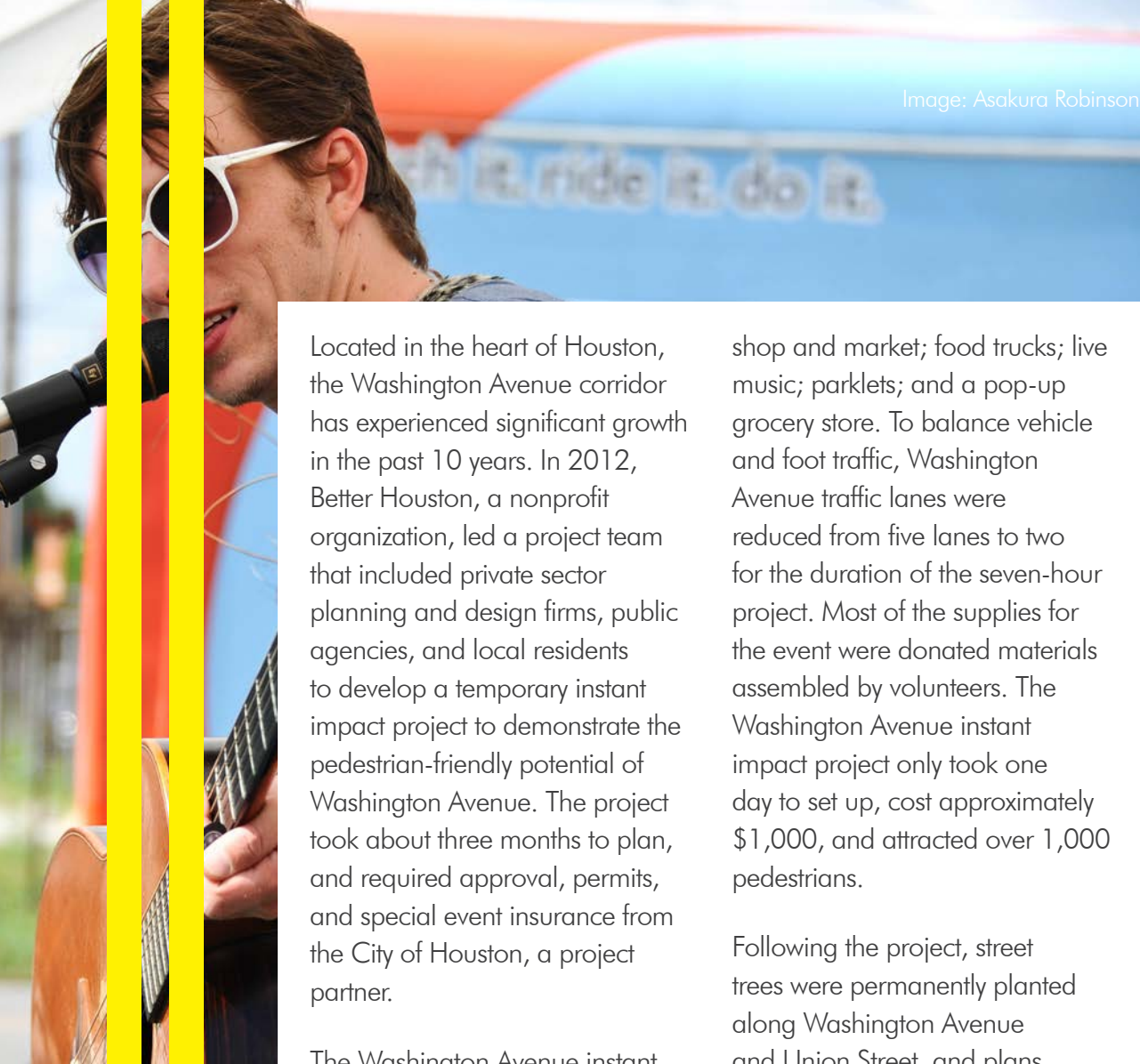


Image: Asakura Robinson

Located in the heart of Houston, the Washington Avenue corridor has experienced significant growth in the past 10 years. In 2012, Better Houston, a nonprofit organization, led a project team that included private sector planning and design firms, public agencies, and local residents to develop a temporary instant impact project to demonstrate the pedestrian-friendly potential of Washington Avenue. The project took about three months to plan, and required approval, permits, and special event insurance from the City of Houston, a project partner.

The Washington Avenue instant impact project consisted of murals; street trees; pocket parks with yard games, face painting, and children's activities; a fenced dog park on an abandoned lot; a pop-up bike repair station; a crawfish boil; a pop-up coffee

shop and market; food trucks; live music; parklets; and a pop-up grocery store. To balance vehicle and foot traffic, Washington Avenue traffic lanes were reduced from five lanes to two for the duration of the seven-hour project. Most of the supplies for the event were donated materials assembled by volunteers. The Washington Avenue instant impact project only took one day to set up, cost approximately \$1,000, and attracted over 1,000 pedestrians.

Following the project, street trees were permanently planted along Washington Avenue and Union Street, and plans are currently being made to redesign Washington Avenue into a "Complete Street." All of the storefronts that hosted pop-up shops are now occupied by locally-owned businesses, bars, restaurants, and coffee shops.



Image: Asakura Robinson

SPOTLIGHT ON...

MEMPHIS BETTER BLOCK



Image: Livable Memphis

Like many U.S. cities, Memphis, Tennessee, has suffered a decline of its urban core. Binghampton, a Memphis neighborhood characterized by high poverty rates and a declining population, was surrounded by potential assets—parks, a college, a greenway, thriving neighborhoods, and a rail line.

Livable Memphis (a program of the Community Development Council of Greater Memphis), Broad Avenue Arts District, Binghampton Development Corporation, Team Better Block, and a local business owner launched “Build a Better Block,” a two-day event to reimagine Broad Avenue.

Team Better Block, a Dallas-based consulting firm, guided the community in planning and implementing the project. For one weekend in 2010, Broad Avenue used temporary bike lanes, crosswalks, food vendors, cafe seating, enhanced

pedestrian amenities, and cultural programming to create a vibrant commercial corridor. About 13,000 people participated in the event.

The event was so successful it sparked \$2.5 million in private investment the next year and more than \$18 million in the following three years. By the fourth year, the area had 95 percent occupancy of commercial spaces, including a bike shop, bakery, micro-brewery, dance school, and other new businesses.

As new investment occurred, cycling advocates raised \$4.5 million for a 2-mile bike lane connecting Binghampton to nearby parks.

Also, the project inspired the MEMFix program, a partnership between Livable Memphis, Innovate Memphis, the City of Memphis, and other community groups that has taken an instant impact approach to seven Memphis neighborhoods over the past five years.

SPOTLIGHT ON...

HOUSTON PARK(ING) DAY

Park(ing) Day is an annual event to transform metered on-street parking spaces into temporary public places, like parklets. The objective of Park(ing) Day is to urge people to think about how urban space can be repurposed and reallocated in favor of pedestrians, instead of the car. The first Park(ing) Day started in San Francisco in 2005 with the conversion of a single parking space into a parklet. Since then, it has grown into an international movement, inspiring thousands of Park(ing) Day projects in over 100 cities worldwide.

Downtown Houston has participated in Park(ing) Day since 2012. With the installation of 14 parklets attracting about 2,000 pedestrians, the 2015 event was one of the biggest Houston Park(ing) Days to date*. The Rice Design Alliance (RDA), a Rice University educational organization dedicated to advancing architecture and urban design in the Houston region, spearheaded the event which took about three months to organize and plan.

As part of the process, RDA recruited the project teams, which consisted of 14 design and planning firms, as well as community and student organizations. The group also worked with a Travis Street building owner to use the building's plaza during set-up and take-down. To obtain approval for this event, a Special Event application, Street Function permit, and traffic control were secured from the Mayor's Office of Special Events. Event insurance was also in place.

The pop-up parks included miniature plazas, outdoor seating, plants, and temporary green features. Other public space installations included interactive amenities, such as a miniature putting green and a chalkboard visioning wall. Only an hour was needed to set up each parklet.

Park(ing) Day inspired a permanent parking space converted to a parklet in front of a shop in the Heights area of Houston.

**The 2016 event was held in mid-September. Participation totals were not available at the time this publication was printed.*

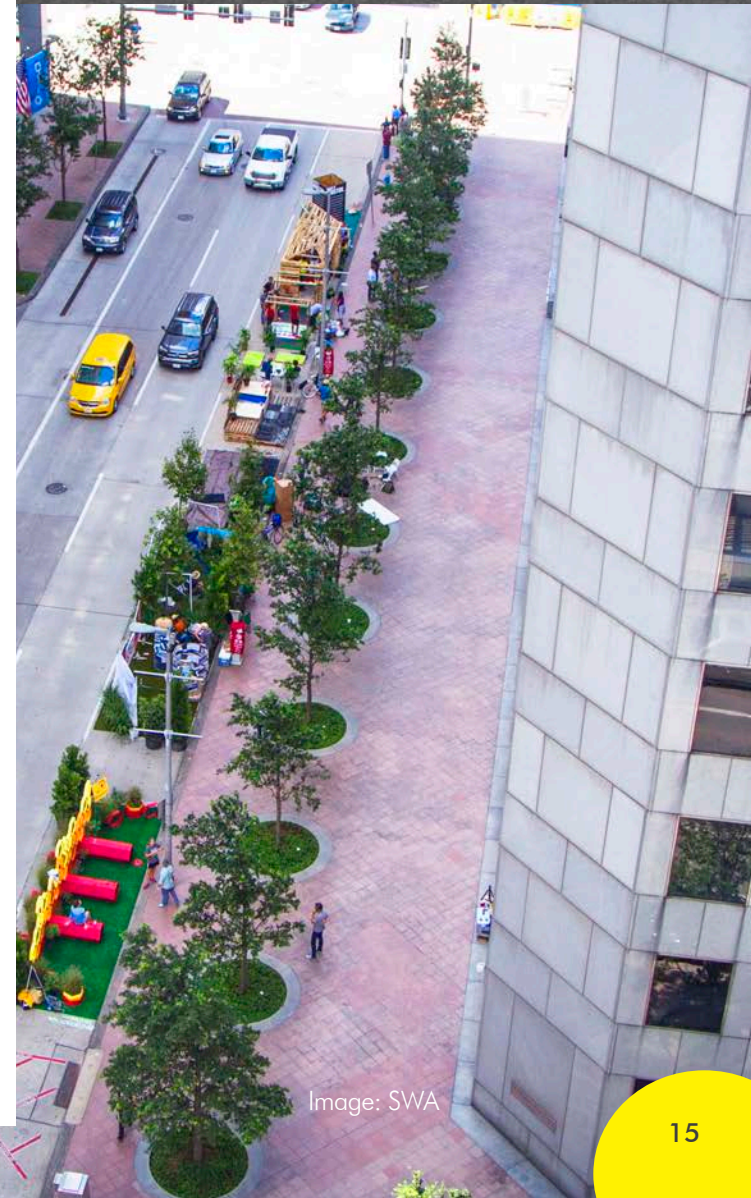


Image: SWA

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



H-GAC Community Enhancement Grants Program

www.h-gac.com/go/community-grants

H-GAC Livable Centers Program

www.h-gac.com/community/livablecenters

H-GAC Pedestrian and Bicyclist Special Districts

www.h-gac.com/go/special-districts

H-GAC Pedestrian Pathways Brochure

www.h-gac.com/community/qualityplaces/pedbike/publications/Pedestrian_Pathways.pdf

Building Better Bikeways: A Planning Guide for the Houston-Galveston Region

www.h-gac.com/community/qualityplaces/pedbike/publications/building_better_bikeways.pdf

The Better Block

www.betterblock.org

Scenic Houston's Streetscape Resource Guide

www.scenichouston.org/wp-content/uploads/2016-Streetscape-Resource_Guide-web.pdf

Tactical Urbanism: Volume 2, by Street Plans

www.issuu.com/streetplanscollaborative/docs/tactical_urbanism_vol_2_final

MEMFix

www.memfix.org

City of San Francisco: Parks to Pavement

www.sfpavementtoparks.sfplanning.org

New York City Department of Transportation

www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/sidewalks/sidewalks.shtml

UCLA's Reclaiming the Right-of-Way: A Toolkit for Creating and Implementing Parklets

www.innovation.luskin.ucla.edu/content/reclaiming-right-way-toolkit-creating-and-implementing-parklets

Urban Harvest

www.urbanharvest.org



IMAGE CREDITS



Toolbox Image Credits, pages 8-11:

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Asakura Robinson, Pop-Up Shops, page 8

SWA, Bike Lane, page 9

SWA, Turf Median, page 9

Team Better Block, Crosswalks, page 9

Team Better Block, Curb Extension, page 9

Clark Condon, Parklet, page 10

SWA, Sidewalks, page 10

Livable Memphis, Building Facades, page 10

SWA, Street Furniture, page 11

Asakura Robinson, Bike Racks, page 11





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