

July 2020

# Uncovering the Impact of the Design Excellence Program

**Gehl**

WALTON FAMILY  
FOUNDATION

Insights from  
Applying the Framework



ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

# What is the impact of design excellence?

In partnership with the Walton Family Foundation, Gehl has explored this question through applying the Design Excellence Framework to eight Foundation-funded projects in Northwest Arkansas. Between July 2019-July 2020, we tested the Framework with grantees, designers, and in the field. We used this experience to generate insights and create a set of tools to position the program —and the region — for a sustainable future of design excellence. This document outlines our findings from this process.

GEHL

**Matthew Lister**  
Managing Director

**Julia Day**  
Project Director

**Adriana Akers**  
Project Manager

**Eamon O'Connor**  
Designer

**Olivia Flynn**  
Designer

WALTON FAMILY FOUNDATION

**Jeremy Pate**  
Senior Program Officer

**Meredith Bergstrom**  
Associate Program Officer

**Laura Simmons**  
Senior Strategy, Learning & Evaluation Officer

**Gehl** · New York  
395 Hudson Street, 8th Floor  
New York, NY 10014

[www.gehlpeople.com](http://www.gehlpeople.com)  
[mail@gehlstudio.com](mailto:mail@gehlstudio.com)

Introduction 03

**Project Strengths** 09

Common successes observed across completed projects

**Project Challenges** 21

Common setbacks or shortfalls observed in completed projects

**Regional Factors** 26

Common regional issues observed in all project evaluations

Appendix 35



# *Putting theory into practice*

**In 2018, Gehl partnered with the Walton Family Foundation to create the Design Excellence Framework.** By teaming up again in July 2019, Gehl and the Foundation seized an opportunity to test the framework in the field on eight existing Design Excellence projects. This document outlines our findings from this process.

- \* **Project Strengths** • Common successes observed across completed projects
- \* **Project Challenges** • Common setbacks or shortfalls observed in completed projects
- \* **Regional Factors** • Common regional issues we discovered through site-specific evaluations

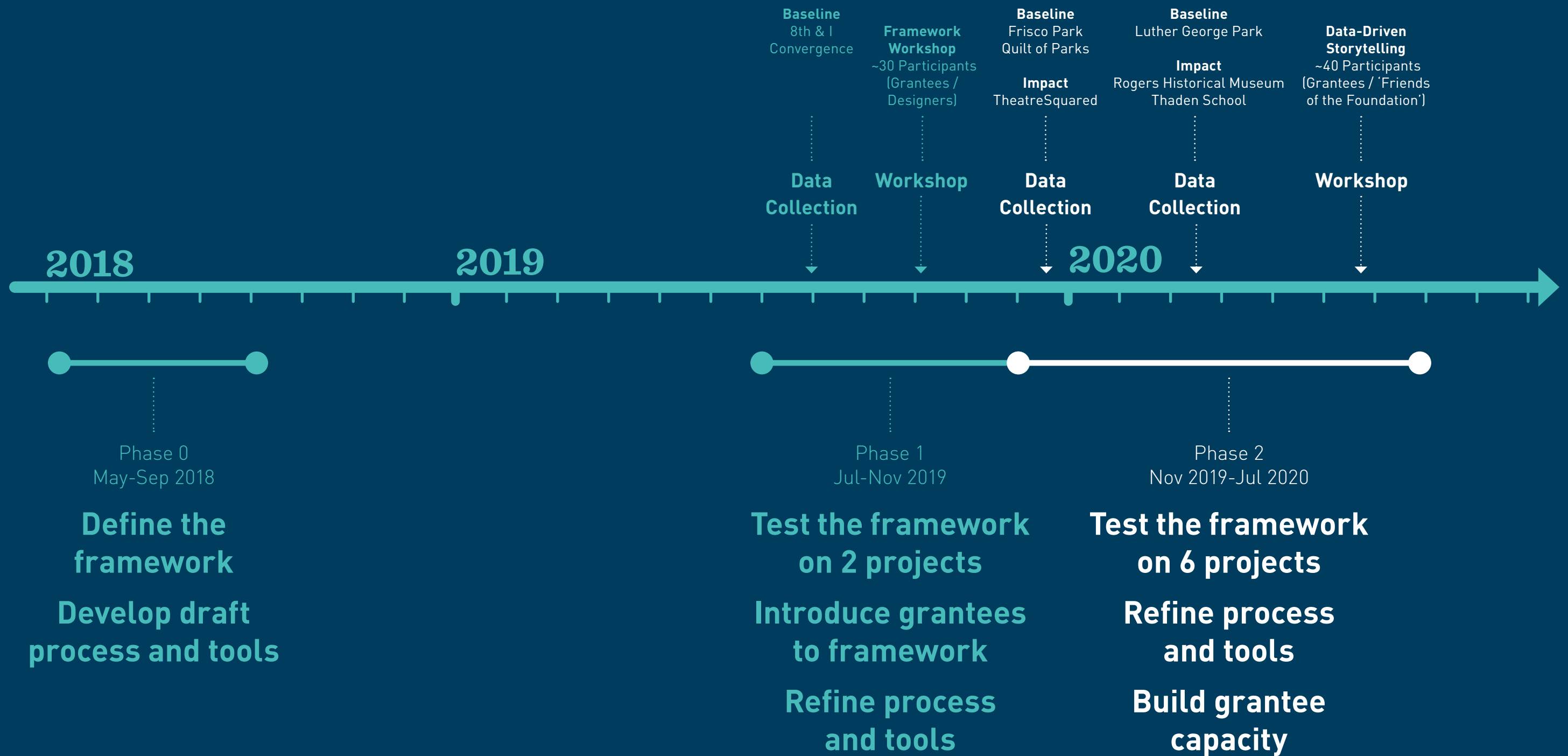
Our experience applying the framework has been a humbling reminder of the challenges and opportunities facing the program — united in purpose, yet diverse in project type and grantee capacity. **We hope these updates help position the program — and the region — for a sustainable future of design excellence.**



WHERE WE STARTED

**How can applying a common framework — a shared language of principles and goals for Design Excellence — empower grantees to elevate and evaluate the impact of their projects?**





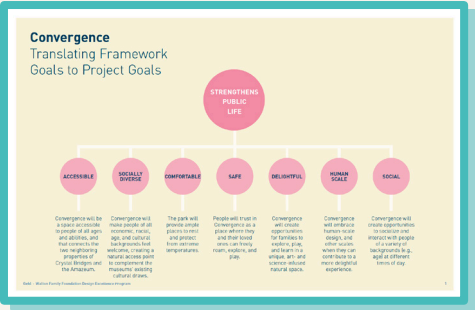


# We collaborated with grantees in four key ways.



## Align Goals

We conducted one-hour interviews to better understand how grantee project goals aligned to the Design Excellence Framework.



## Set Plan

We drafted a set of metrics for gauging progress toward these goals, and developed methods and tools to measure baseline or post-construction conditions on these sites.

Area to Focus	Baseline Metrics	Target Metrics	Measurement Methods
Accessibility	Percentage of people with disabilities who can access the site.	100% of people with disabilities can access the site.	Surveys, interviews, and direct observation.
Socially Diverse	Percentage of people from different backgrounds who visit the site.	50% of people from different backgrounds visit the site.	Surveys, interviews, and direct observation.
Comfortable	Percentage of people who feel comfortable in the park.	80% of people feel comfortable in the park.	Surveys, interviews, and direct observation.
Safe	Percentage of people who feel safe in the park.	90% of people feel safe in the park.	Surveys, interviews, and direct observation.
Delightful	Percentage of people who enjoy the park.	70% of people enjoy the park.	Surveys, interviews, and direct observation.
Human Scale	Percentage of people who connect with the community.	60% of people connect with the community.	Surveys, interviews, and direct observation.
Local	Percentage of people who connect with the environment.	50% of people connect with the environment.	Surveys, interviews, and direct observation.



## Collect Data

We visited project sites to observe and map conditions and conduct surveys or interviews.



## Surface Findings

We analyzed site data to identify challenges and opportunities (for projects not yet completed) or tell stories about impact (for completed projects).





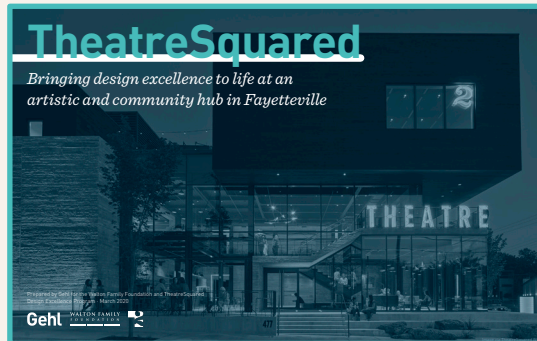
# We outlined opportunities and challenges for projects in progress, and assessed impact for completed projects.

For one-pager summaries of our findings for each project, visit the Appendix.

## IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

### TheatreSquared

*Bringing design excellence to life at an artistic and community hub in Fayetteville*



### Rogers Historical Museum

*Celebrating the past in a changing Downtown Rogers*



### Thaden School

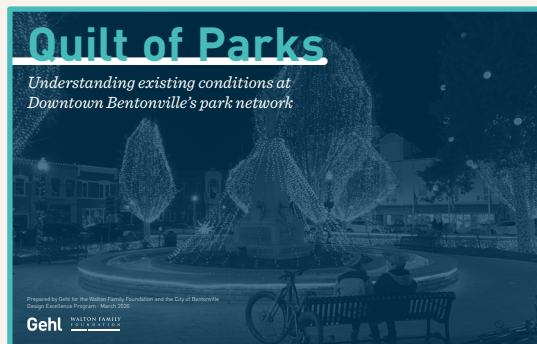
*Supporting a unique educational model in Bentonville with design excellence*



## BASELINE REPORTS

### Quilt of Parks

*Understanding existing conditions at Downtown Bentonville's park network*



### Frisco Park

*Understanding existing conditions at a park in the heart of Rogers*



### Luther George Park

*Understanding existing conditions at a Downtown Springdale open space*





# Aside from site-specific findings, we took stock of common themes that came up across projects.

DE Program Challenges, Triumphs, Regional Factors	BASELINE					IMPACT				
	Convergence	8th Street Gateway	Plaza Park	Quilt of Quilts	Luther George Park	Therapy Squared	Therapy School	400		
CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT										
Underrepresentation of minority groups / lack of invitations for underrepresented groups										
Low foot traffic on / around site										
Walkability issues (link with above)										
Inactive edges / variable facade quality around site										
Parking as barrier to access										
Core user engagement / needs assessment (baselines not eligible)										
Awareness-building beyond project site										
Reducing reliance on programming / encouraging drop-ins and unstructured activity (baseline)										
Making sure great design doesn't come at the price of approachability										
Success of projects limited by regional infrastructure / pending progress on revitalization										
Kid and family friendly, but not seen as a place for adults										
DE PROGRAM SUCCESSES (NB: Baseline projects selected either (a) aspire to achieve										
Balancing NWA authenticity with world-class design										
Contributing to broader revitalization of the downtown / urban fabric										
Expanding access to and audience for arts / culture										
Engaging / empowering youth										
Attracting / retaining people to the area										
Preserving memory of place										
Positive sentiment toward the place										
People feel welcome / included										
People feel ownership										
Connections to local small businesses										
Integration with / leveraging / clustering with nearby infrastructure projects (current or future)										
Elevating regional profile										
Increased visitation										
Community use for events etc.										
REGIONAL FACTORS										
Poor pedestrian infrastructure										
Bike-friendliness (everyday not fitness)										
Lack of everyday public space usage / culture — people don't feel like public space is an ev										

1

**Strengths** across completed projects that highlight program successes

2

**Challenges** across all projects that highlight program opportunities

3

**Regional Factors** to consider addressing for bigger impact



# Project Strengths

Common successes observed  
across completed projects





# Completed projects have achieved the vision of Design Excellence in many ways.





## STRENGTHENS PUBLIC LIFE

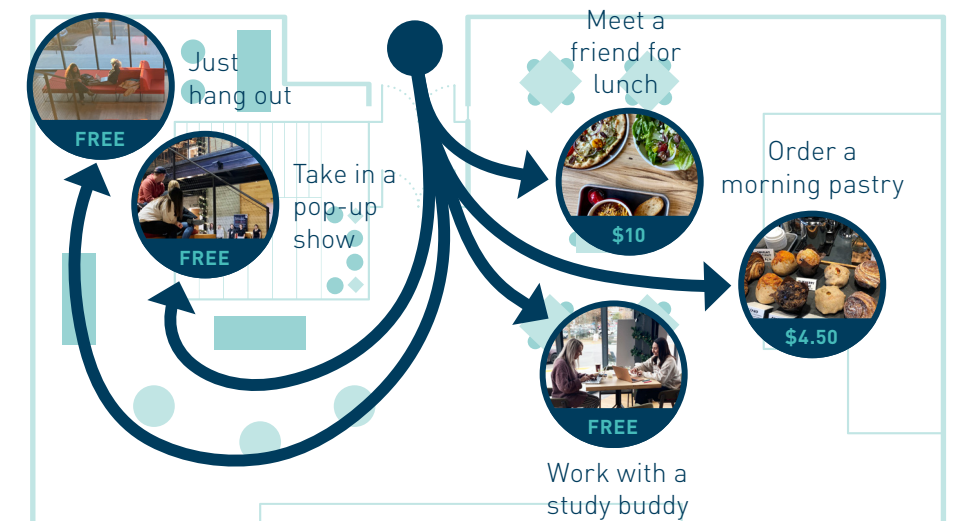
# Expanding access to and audiences for arts & culture

Design Excellence projects are using their new spaces and platforms to invite in more diverse audiences, and to elevate more diverse voices and perspectives.

**TheatreSquared** hopes to move toward a more diverse audience by creating more invitations to stay at different price points. During its daytime hours, visitors were more on par with Fayetteville's racial diversity and median income, and much younger in age. Said Martin Miller, Executive Director, "In our space, you can just walk in ... It's a much lower barrier to entry than a ticket to a show."

### DAYTIME OPTIONS

*Choose your own adventure, or two — on your time*



Images for 'lunch' and 'pastry' via TheatreSquared Website



An Arkansas Arts Academy class visits the 1619 Project exhibit at Rogers Historical Museum.

**Rogers Historical Museum** worked with Kinya Christian of the Rogers Experimental House to launch an exhibit in its Dick & Nancy Trammel Gallery. The 1619 Project exhibit — inspired by the *New York Times* project — explored the legacy and persistence of racism through archival and new works by local artists.



STRENGTHENS PUBLIC LIFE

# Creating places for community connection

Expanded public-facing spaces at completed projects have translated to a rise in community-centric programming.

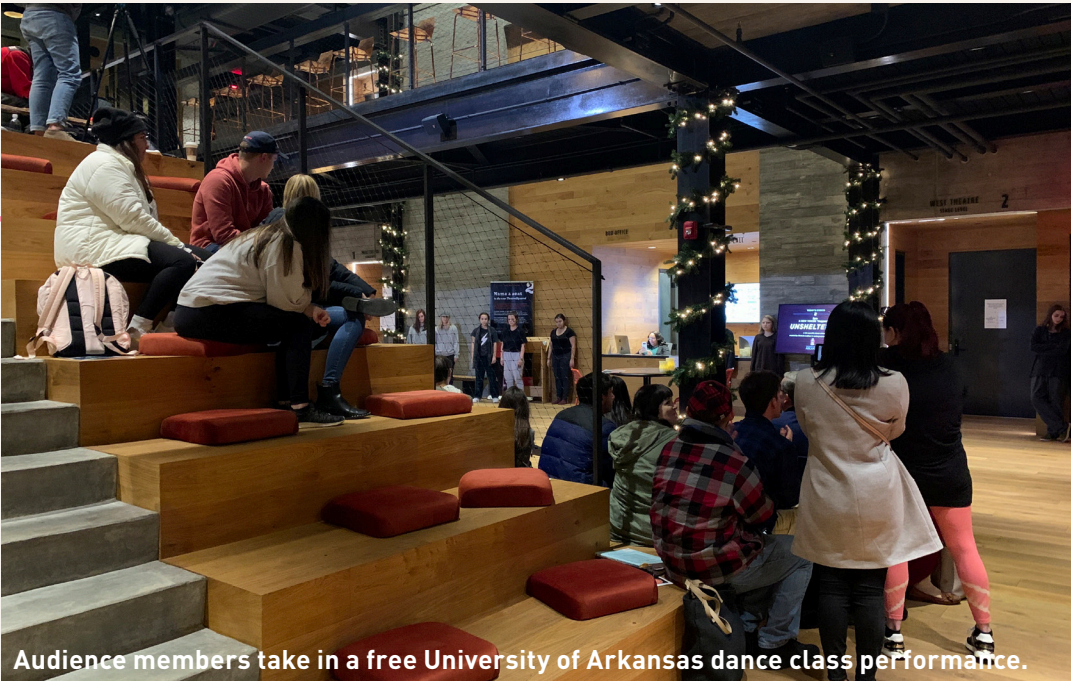


Kids get crafty at Third Saturdays.

**TheatreSquared** has opened up its Commons area to community-based performance art, such as through this dance performance, right, on the experience of homelessness in Northwest Arkansas. 3,500 people have attended events outside of theatrical programming since opening, and 65 percent of survey respondents felt like TheatreSquared was ‘their place.’



Cyclists use the pump track.



Audience members take in a free University of Arkansas dance class performance.

**Rogers Historical Museum** has used its increased programmable space to host family-friendly events like monthly Third Saturdays craft days, pictured at left.

**Thaden School** has opened its facilities for community use, such as when 110 people gathered at the school’s pump track and cafeteria for a National Interscholastic Cycling Association event on Saturday, March 7.



## STRENGTHENS PUBLIC LIFE

# Setting the stage for more walkable and bikeable communities

Though the three completed projects evaluated in this phase are private institutions, their site peripheries make headway on improving the public's walking and biking experience.



The future bike hub will open on to S Main Street.



The corner site will connect to the Cultural Arts Corridor.

**Thaden School's** new bike facility will double as an interactive classroom for students, and a community-centric, street-facing 'garage' for bike repairs and bike education. Thaden has also invested in streetscape improvements along SE C and S Main Streets.



The Museum sits at the end of the downtown Rogers alley network.

**Rogers Historical Museum** has developed a pedestrian connection to the alleyway at the rear of its property — one piece of a larger network slated for redevelopment by the City of Rogers.

**TheatreSquared** and other sites were thoughtful with how their facades met the street — in this case, opting for transparent windows, with plantings embedded into raised steps.



ELEVATES STANDARDS OF  
SUSTAINABILITY & RESILIENCE

# Exhibiting the highest standards of sustainable design

Through material use, local sourcing, and energy efficiencies, completed projects set a high bar by weaving sustainability into the fabric of their design and operations.



Thaden's hallways are filled with natural light.

**Thaden School's** sustainable design features include ample natural light — allowing sunlight to passively heat buildings. Students also learn about sustainable features on campus, like its 15 miles of underground geothermal piping.



Students get a tour of Thaden's geothermal network.

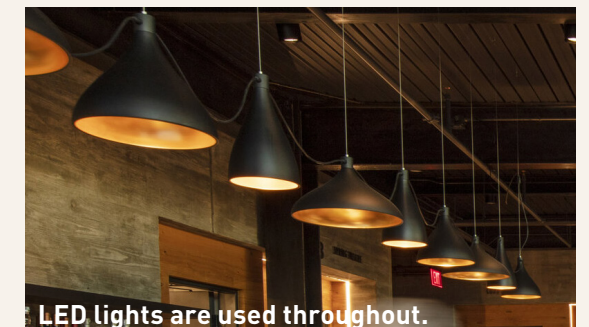
**TheatreSquared** also adopted best-in-class sustainable design features — from use of locally sourced materials (e.g., concrete, wood, steel) as finish, to furniture milled from trees on site, to energy-efficient LED lighting.



Using structure as finish avoids excess material use.



Select furniture was milled from trees impacted by construction.



LED lights are used throughout.



ELEVATES STANDARDS OF  
SUSTAINABILITY & RESILIENCE

# Shifting local youth toward sustainable lifestyles

At Thaden School, sustainability doesn't stop at building operations. The campus and curriculum work together to shift a new generation of Arkansans toward a deeper appreciation — and everyday practice — of sustainability.

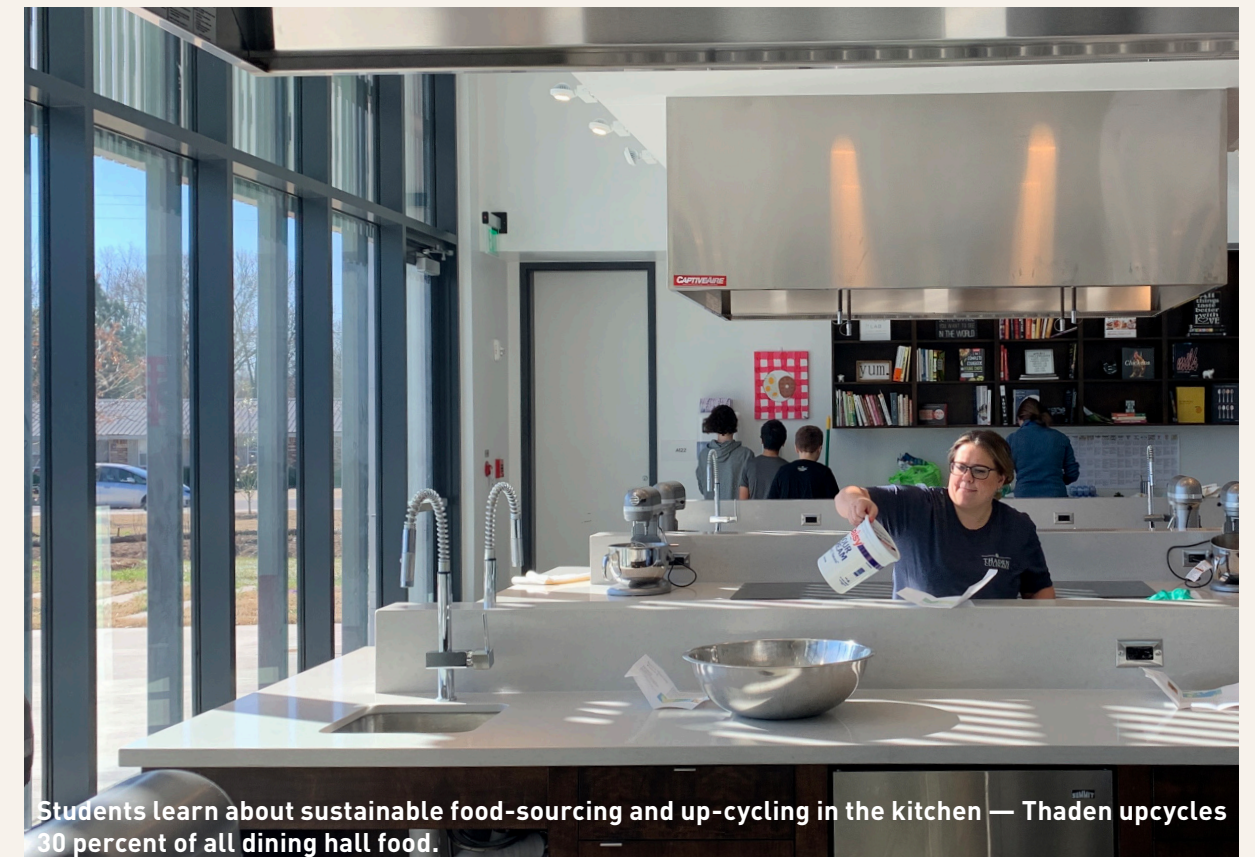


Students at work in the 'wheels' curriculum.

Thaden School's campus brings its hands-on curriculum to life — shifting students toward sustainable behaviors through practice: such as by repairing bikes, collecting soil samples, and working in the kitchen. And many of these practices seem to stick at home. Said one Thaden parent in a focus group: "It comes up almost every day in my house. My 14-year-old will not let me throw away anything or use any plastic bags. I've also noticed she's more likely to figure out how to make things by herself or source things locally."



Science classrooms face outside to allow for hands-on learning (e.g., collecting soil samples).



Students learn about sustainable food-sourcing and up-cycling in the kitchen — Thaden upcycles 30 percent of all dining hall food.



CELEBRATES LOCAL  
CULTURES & PLACE

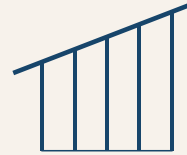
# Balancing authenticity with world- class design

Subtle cues toward Arkansan identity take shape in recycled materials, restored facades, or re-imaginings of local architectural styles.

## Arkansas Vernacular

### Chicken coop

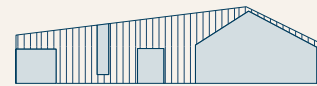
- Pitched roof
- Wood material
- Natural light



## Thaden Interpretation

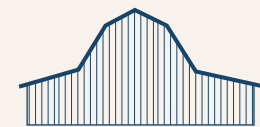
### 'Funked up' chicken coop

- Creative pitched roof
- Large windows
- Windows and sunroofs for natural light
- Natural color palette



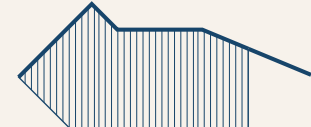
### Barn

- Gabled roof
- Wood materials
- Red color



### 'Funked up' barn

- Creative cantilever and roof
- Wood material
- Windows and sunroofs
- Painted red



**Thaden School's** architects integrated elements of everyday, rural Arkansan design — giving a nod to local heritage with a modern twist.

**TheatreSquared's** way of integrating Arkansas culture, design, and materials is more subtle — it sourced materials locally and hired craftsmen to mill trees from the original site into furniture like the table at right.



Use of local wood in the materials grounds and softens a contemporary aesthetic.



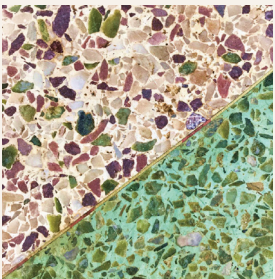
CELEBRATES LOCAL  
CULTURES & PLACE

# Preserving and building on **historical** places

Nods to local heritage came in material use, full building restoration, and use of historical features as inspiration for contemporary designs.



**Rogers Historical Museum's** thoughtful Hailey Building restoration stretched from the facade to the interiors. The architects drew inspiration from original elements, including the terrazzo floors, which inspired a subtle wayfinding color palette in the new administrative wing.



**Thaden School's** namesake, Louise Thaden, was a local aviation pioneer. Her legacy lives on not only in the school's name and trailblazing philosophy, but in her restored and relocated Bentonville home, which now sits on campus and houses the Admissions Department.

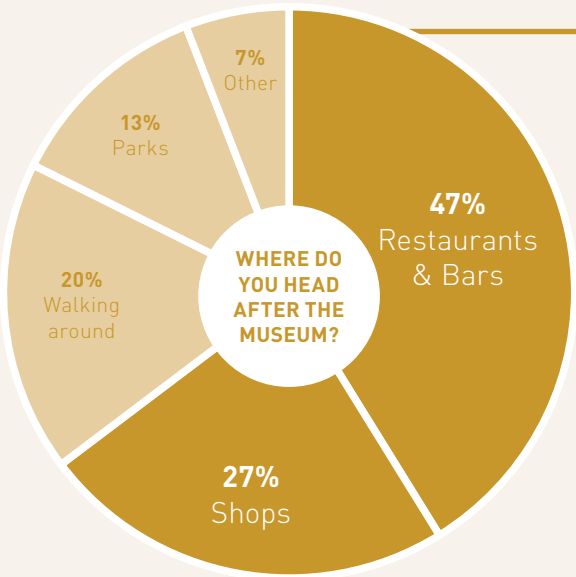




BUILDS REGIONAL CAPACITY

Contributing to the revitalization of local economies

Completed projects are part of broader downtown transformations — creating synergies with local businesses, or serving as emerging ‘third spaces’ in their own right.



**Rogers Historical Museum** visitors often integrate visits to local businesses as part of their time in downtown. When asked to name their destinations, nearly 75 percent cited some sort of small business (restaurants, bars, or shops).

**TheatreSquared** has created more than a performing arts venue with its new building. The Commons space functions as an everyday, pre-, and post-show hangout — 1 in 3 respondents report visiting for more than a show.



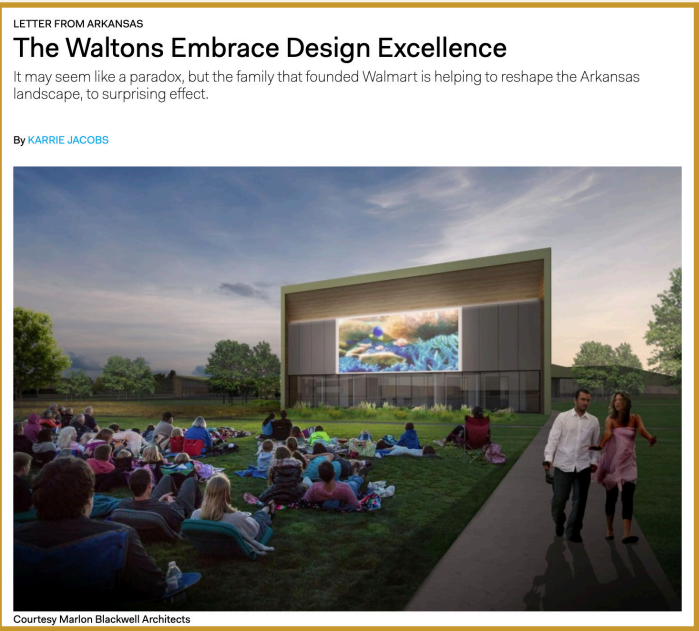
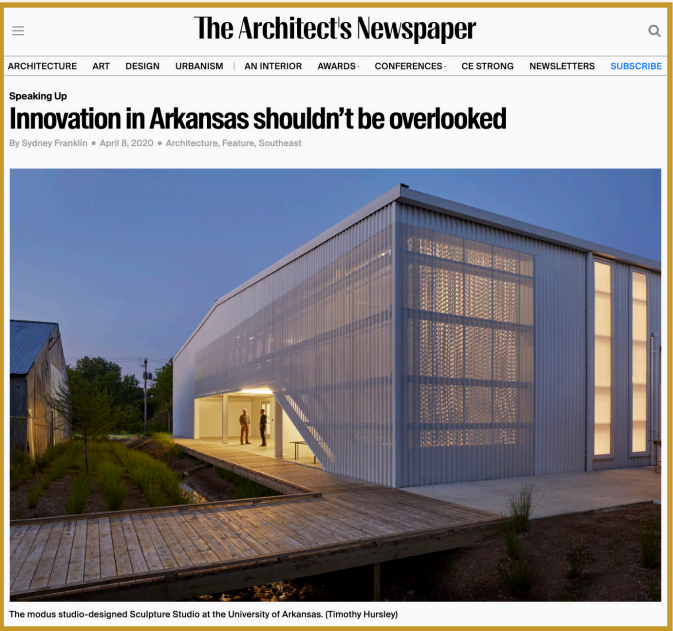
Image via TheatreSquared



BUILDS REGIONAL CAPACITY

# Elevating the profile of the region

The Design Excellence Program is starting to gain press and accolades beyond the region, raising the bar for Northwest Arkansas design. What’s more, there are signs that projects are both attracting people to — and keeping people in — the region.



**Design Excellence** has gained press mentions in architecture circles as part of a broader movement toward world-class design in the region.

THE COUPLE WHO STAYED

*“Someone I spoke with had just bought some place outside of the region and decided not to move because of TheatreSquared — it was the sense of belonging. We gave them another reason to love this region.”*

— MARTIN MILLER

**TheatreSquared** has

seen subscriptions and ticket sales climb since opening its new space, but this example of one couple reversing their decision to move from the region conveys the human impact.

ATTRACTING FAMILIES

*“Thaden is the only local independent school that I would consider on par with other schools across the country.”*

— THADEN PARENT

*“The school made us pick Bentonville over Fayetteville.”*

— THADEN PARENT

**Thaden School** has become an asset in attracting families to the region.



BUILDS REGIONAL CAPACITY

Leveraging  
and building on  
nearby efforts  
to improve  
quality of life

No project exists in a vacuum, and the three completed projects embedded this reality into their design — advocating for changes around their site and making sure the design was well-positioned to integrate with future development and investment.



TheatreSquared visitors will be looking down on a vibrant Cultural Arts Corridor, rather than a parking lot, once the project is complete.

**TheatreSquared's** landmark new building will be an anchor space at the edge of the future Cultural Arts Corridor in Downtown Fayetteville.



**Thaden School** has invested in streetscape improvements and street-facing amenities like its future bike garage. It is also advocating for pedestrian improvements to the 8th Street corridor.

**Rogers Historical Museum** sits at the end of the Downtown Rogers alley network, primed for redevelopment in the coming years.





# Project Challenges

Common setbacks or shortfalls  
observed in completed projects





# While examining the limitations of three completed DE projects, we identified three themes.

For more detail on specific project challenges, see Appendix.



## NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A **mismatch** between user needs and decisions for design and programming



## DEMOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY

A lack of **representation** of non-White, lower-income, and less educated users



## SITE CONTEXT

A set of **connectivity challenges** facing site-scale projects



## NEEDS ASSESSMENT

# A mismatch between user needs and decisions for design and programming

Final project designs revealed some gaps for everyday users — signaling a need to more comprehensively listen to user needs, integrate them into the design, and monitor potential changes over time. This may also signal a need for grantees to better communicate with designers (and vice versa) on value engineering decisions.



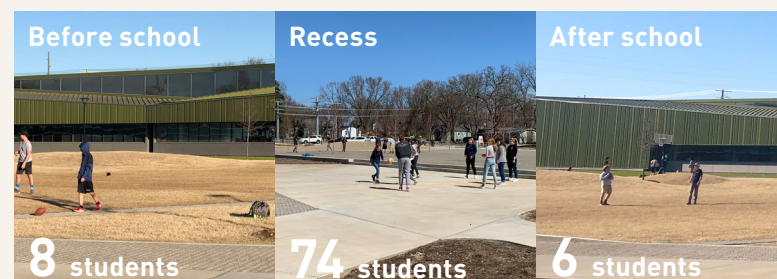
A metal roof in the office area makes it hard to hear phone calls when it's raining.



A kitchen co-located with the loading dock attracts dust and requires daily cleaning.

At **Rogers Historical Museum**, form came at the price of function in some cases, detracting from the usability of staff working spaces.

At **Thaden School**, the Quad fills up with group sports at recess, but is otherwise unused. High school students told us they wanted intimate, relaxed places to hang out, but few outdoor spaces provide this.





DEMOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY

A lack of representation of non-White, lower-income, and less formally educated users

Where usership was not representative of local demographics, there is an opportunity to more intentionally engage marginalized groups, and to improve invitations to stay.



DO YOU FEEL T2 IS 'YOUR PLACE'?

Bachelor's or More



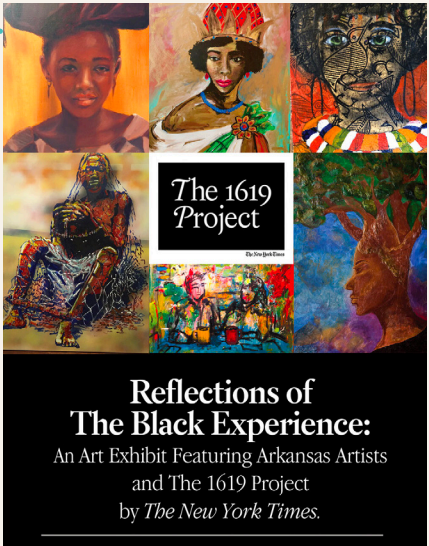
Some College or Less



With low- and no-cost ways to visit, **TheatreSquared** successfully invites a range of users to experience the building. But they are still not achieving diverse representation, particularly at showtime — when visitors are more White, higher-income, and more formally educated than Fayetteville demographics. In particular, people with less education are not coming in force by day and at showtime — and those with less formal education who do visit are less likely to feel ownership of TheatreSquared as ‘their place.’

Note: Researchers visited TheatreSquared during the annual holiday programming. The organization offers unique productions throughout the year.

Demographic data on **Rogers Historical Museum** usership was more limited by a small sample, as surveying was cut short by the COVID-19 pandemic. That said, many respondents surveyed off-site in Downtown Rogers indicated interest in more programming and exhibit content that represented marginalized groups in the area — as The 1619 Project exhibit did before the museum closed for quarantine.



TELLING A FULLER STORY

*“I’d definitely go if there was more on the Native American community in the area.”*

— OFF-SITE SURVEY RESPONDENT



SITE CONTEXT

A set of connectivity challenges facing site-scale projects

Inadequate infrastructure in site surroundings made for connectivity issues to and from nearby downtown hubs — signaling a need for more comprehensive planning in step with site-scale development.



At **Thaden School**, we observed some students arriving at school on foot — including along 8th Street, which lacks sidewalks. Inadequate walking and biking infrastructure around the site made getting to school through more active modes either unpleasant or prohibitive.

MOBILITY BARRIERS

*“I don’t feel safe sending my child to school on a bike. There’s no safe route for her to take.”*

— THADEN PARENT

**Rogers Historical Museum** is located at the edge of a revitalizing downtown, but the walking experience from the heart of the action diminishes in quality on the way to the museum. This may deter downtown visitors from heading to the museum, and museum visitors from venturing into the rest of Downtown Rogers.





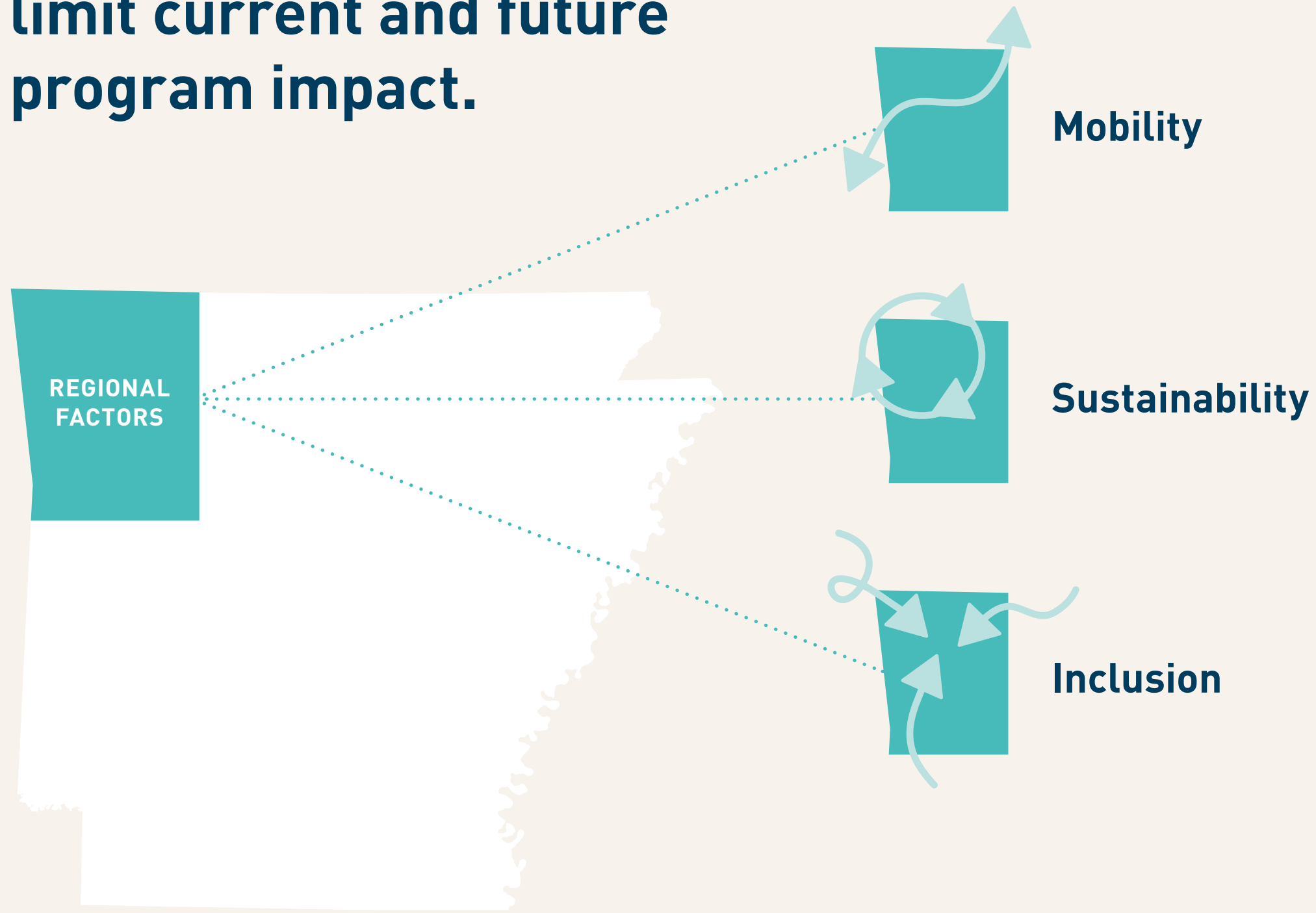
# Regional Factors

Common regional issues observed  
in all project evaluations





**We identified three regional factors that can limit current and future program impact.**





# Mobility

Inadequate walking, biking, and transit infrastructure limited many projects' potential for success. This showed up in various ways. Site-specific improvements couldn't compensate for lacking pedestrian connections to a nearby downtown. Thorny sidewalks or bike lanes made for an unpleasant walking and biking experience. The prioritization of parking and other car-centric infrastructure meant less room for people. What's more, these challenges cropped up in a fast-growing region without a robust public transit network to move people around outside of their cars.

8th Street  
Gateway

Convergence

Frisco Park

Luther George  
Park

Quilt of Parks

Rogers  
Historical  
Museum

Thaden School

Theatre  
Squared

At **Frisco Park**, most people surveyed got to downtown by car. Some lamented the lack of transit, and others were hopeful given recent improvements.

87%  
drive

*"Arkansas  
has no good  
transit!"*

13%  
walk

*"Trending  
in the right  
direction —  
progress in  
walkability."*



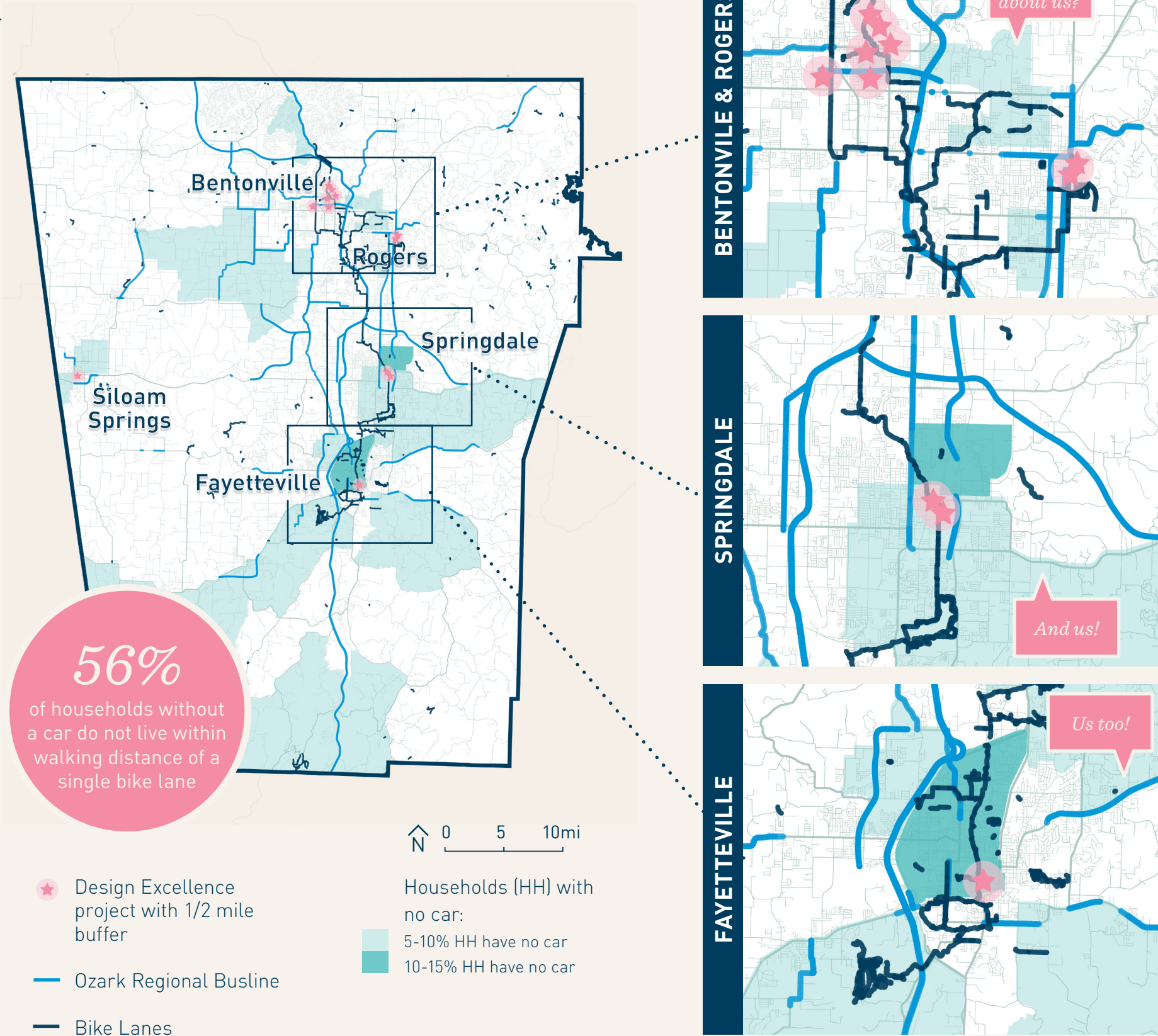
In a car-centric region, poor alternative mobility options deter active and sustainable transportation and constrain households without cars.

**BIKING**  
A robust recreational network, but few mobility lanes for everyday travel.

The region may be known for its robust recreational cycling trail network, but urban biking infrastructure falls short. Cities in NWA lack consistent, comfortable, and complete bike lane networks, which likely intimidate the 96% of car-owning households from biking as an everyday mode. What's more, existing bike networks don't cater to those who stand to benefit most from them. For example, 56% of the region's 7,616 car-less households do not live within walking distance of a single bike lane.

**TRANSIT**  
Limited service shapes low demand.

The Ozark Regional Transit (ORT) provides bus routes throughout the region, but coverage is limited. ORT's critics point to the system's shortcomings: a decentralized service area that fails to consider walkability and residential density, low-frequency service, and an inefficient, unreliable schedule.



Maps created 7/30/20 with data from Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission (2020), US Bureau of Transportation Statistics (2018) & US Census Bureau (2017).





# Sustainability

Recent development in Northwest Arkansas has seized many opportunities to celebrate the region's natural beauty and move the needle toward more sustainable places and lifestyles. At many projects, however, real progress toward sustainability is limited by factors outside of the site boundary. Shifting the region — not just individual projects — toward sustainability will require a broader strategy, not a piecemeal approach.

8th Street  
Gateway

Convergence

Frisco Park

Luther George  
Park

Quilt of Parks

Rogers  
Historical  
Museum

Thaden School

Theatre  
Squared

At **Thaden School**, students appreciated an eco-friendly curriculum and campus, but felt that they weren't able to realize fully sustainable lifestyles.

## From a Parent

*"It comes up almost every day in my house. My 14-year-old will not let me throw away anything or use any plastic bags. I've also noticed she's more likely to figure out how to make things by herself or source things locally."*



*"You can be sustainable in your own self but, after a while, if the system is not set up for you to be sustainable it doesn't work."*

## From a Student



Sprawling development exacerbates health and climate risks by increasing emissions and encroaching into high-risk flood zones.

CO2 EMISSIONS

Unmanaged growth leads to high emissions.

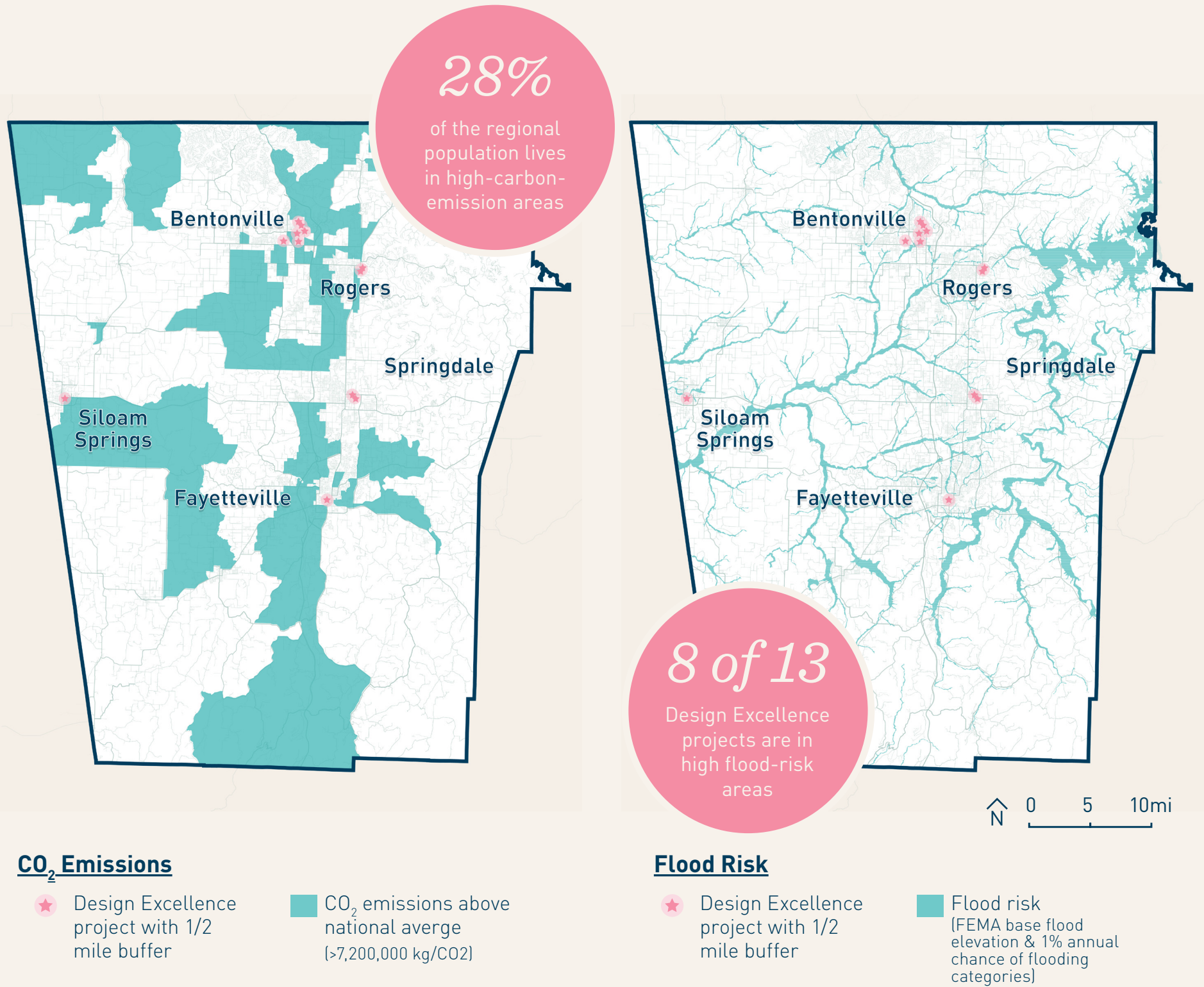
With industrial centers, urban sprawl, large-scale agricultural facilities, and car reliance, much of urbanized Northwest Arkansas emits CO2 emissions at a rate that outpaces the national average. Up to 133,000 people (28% of the regional population) live in the high-carbon emission areas, which is harmful for not only the environment but also air quality and public health.

FLOOD RISK

Some residents, many D.E. projects are at risk.

35,000 Northwest Arkansas residents - 7% of the regional population - live in the 100-year flood zone, and 8 out of 13 current DE projects are located in high flood risk areas. Although flood risk is not an issue that came up in our conversations with grantees and designers regarding their sustainability and resilience goals, it is a regional issue that may have dramatic site-scale consequences if left unconsidered.

Sources: Executive Office of President Obama (2013)



Maps created 7/30/20 with data from US Federal Emergency Management Agency (2020), National Aeronautics and Space Administration (2017) & US Census Bureau (2017).



# Inclusion

Nearly all sites faced challenges in attracting a diverse clientele — particularly in terms of race, education, and income levels. We observed seeds of possibility through efforts like Rogers Historical Museum’s 1619 Project exhibit, and in the racially diverse usership of Luther George Park. Even still, analysis across sites signaled room for greater diversity on par with local demographics, more intentional engagement of marginalized and underrepresented groups, and a rethink of existing features, design and programming.

8th Street Gateway	Convergence	Frisco Park	Luther George Park
Quilt of Parks	Rogers Historical Museum	Thaden School	Theatre Squared

At **Quilt of Parks**, the Confederate statue in the Town Square was the second-most common topic people brought up — many cited it as a barrier to a more diverse, inclusive Bentonville.



Note: The Confederate statue was removed from the Bentonville Town Square in September of 2020.



Growing regional diversity is not translating to equitable outcomes in poverty levels or representation at DE sites.

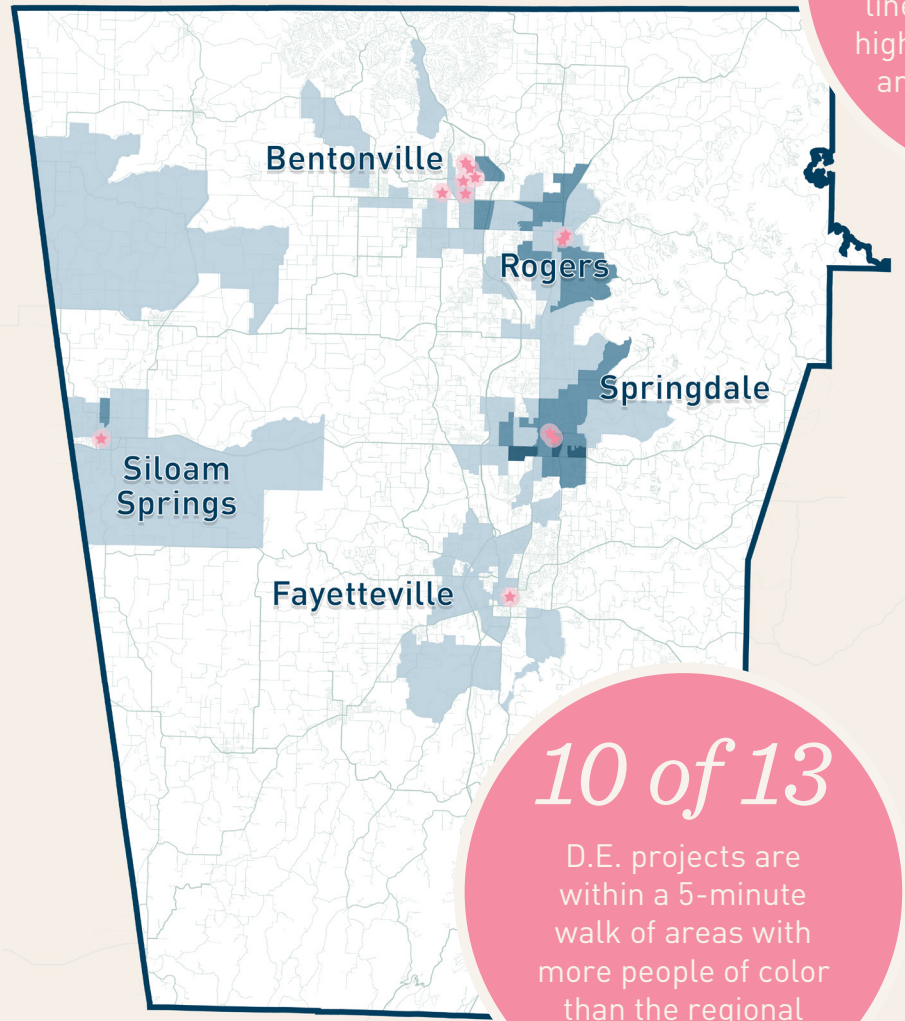
Nearby diversity isn't showing up at D.E. projects.

27% of Northwest Arkansans are people of color — a figure that is steadily increasing as the region grows. Many of these historically marginalized groups live in areas served by Design Excellence projects, particularly in Rogers and Springdale. Ten out of 13 current D.E. projects are located within a 5-minute walk of areas where more than 27% of the population is non-White, and 3 projects are located within a 5-minute walk of areas where over half the population is non-White. The Design Excellence Program strives to promote inclusion in its projects, yet our project impact assessments found that people of color were often underrepresented — in some cases, significantly so. To understand why this is occurring will require further study, and in particular, engagement with underrepresented groups.

People of color are in poverty at higher rates

While 14% of all Northwest Arkansas residents are below the national poverty line, people of color are overrepresented in this population. Only 11% of White NWA residents live in poverty, while 13% of Latinx and 29% of Black residents are below the poverty line.

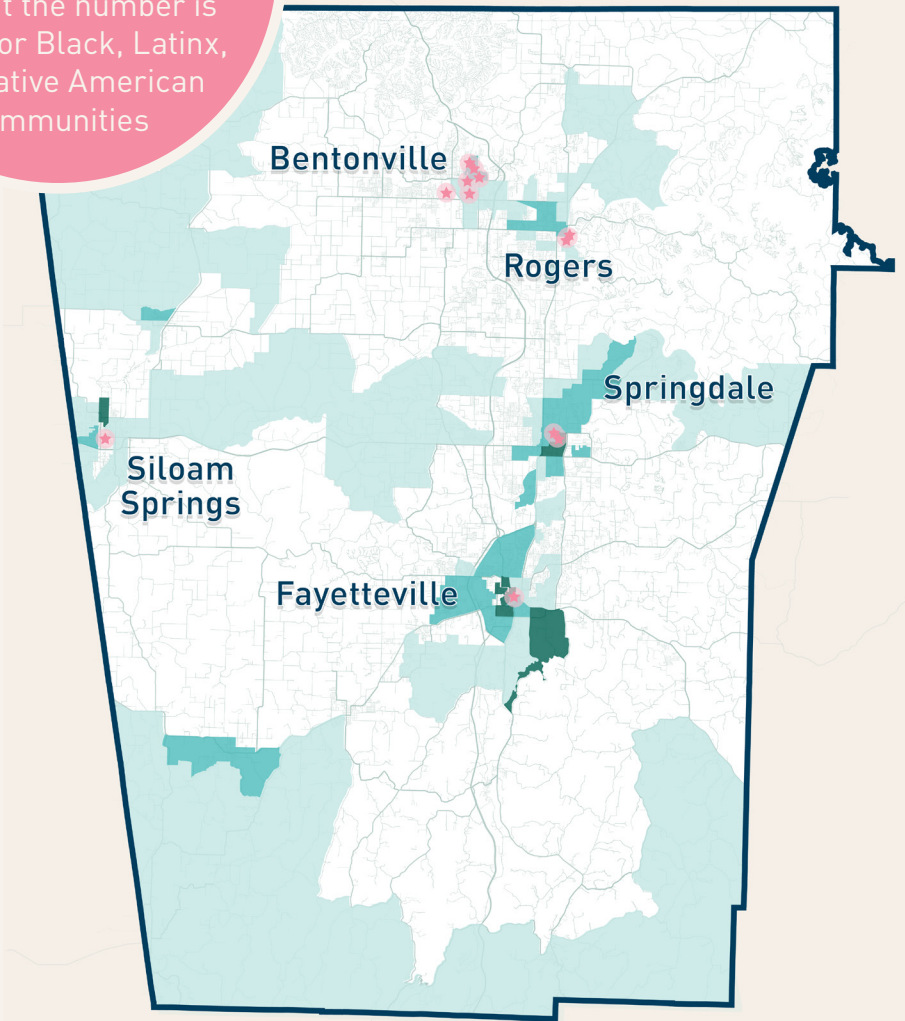
Sources: US Census Bureau (2018)



% Non-White Population

- 27\* - 50%
- 50 - 75 %
- 75- 100%

\*27% of NWA's population is nonwhite. This map displays census block groups with above average rates of nonwhite residents.



% Below-Poverty Population

- 14\* - 25%
- 25 - 50%
- 50- 100%

\*14% of NWA's population is below poverty. This map displays census block groups with above average rates of poverty.

Maps created 7/30/20 with data from US Census Bureau (2018).



**To address these factors,  
the Foundation may  
consider supporting  
region-scale efforts that  
re-envision systems  
and networks, not just  
individual places.**





# Appendix

The background of the slide is a photograph of a person riding a bicycle on a paved path. The path is on the right side of the frame, and the rider is moving towards the right. To the left of the path is a dense line of green trees and foliage. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent teal color.

---

## 1. Top Insights by Project



# 1. Top Insights by Project



# Frisco Park - Baseline Assessment

## VISION

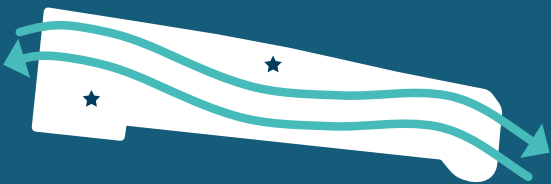
“We’re looking at the park as a catalyst for future development. Frisco Park will be a beautiful anchor that **boosts economic and commercial development** while **maintaining a sense of place and authenticity** for Downtown Rogers.”

## KEY METRICS

- Pedestrian/cyclist count
- People staying count
- Age, gender, demographics of people in park
- Arrival mode
- Perceived safety
- Frequency of visits
- Reason for visit
- % using local businesses before or after park
- Nighttime visibility



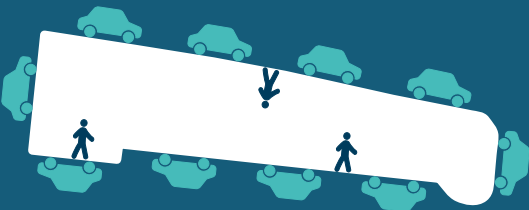
## TOP INSIGHTS



*An underused asset with few invitations to stay*



*An increasingly vibrant downtown hub nearby*



*A place for cars, making some room for people*

- \* Few people use the site, and those who do engage in a small set of activities.
- \* Limited lighting and infrequent nighttime activity lead to a perception of insecurity.
- \* A more diverse group of users may not be visiting because of limitations in space and programming.
- \* While people embraced the park as kid- and family-friendly, some adults felt they didn’t have a reason to go.
- \* Revitalization is bringing people downtown, energizing locals, and attracting newcomers.
- \* Frisco Park isn’t benefiting from Downtown’s energy because parking blocks people from accessing it.
- \* Most people get to the area by car, but many are excited by increasing opportunities to walk.
- \* Parking is top of mind for many residents — whether they want to see it supplemented, kept, hidden, or cut.



# Quilt of Parks - Baseline Assessment

## VISION

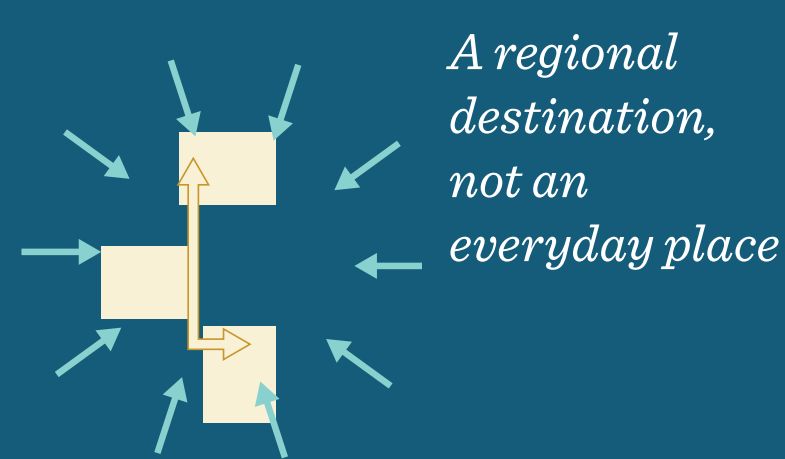
“Quilt of Parks will be of the highest design quality, creating unique spaces of various sizes intimate enough for individual users to be comfortable, and simultaneously offer spaces for informal social gatherings, larger events, and park amenities attractive to the young, professional demographic of Bentonville.”

## KEY METRICS

- Pedestrian/cyclist count
- People staying count and posture
- Perceived inclusion
- Perceived delight
- % who have socialized
- or plan to
- Demographic diversity of visitors
- Visit frequency
- Length of time spent at site
- Facade/edge quality



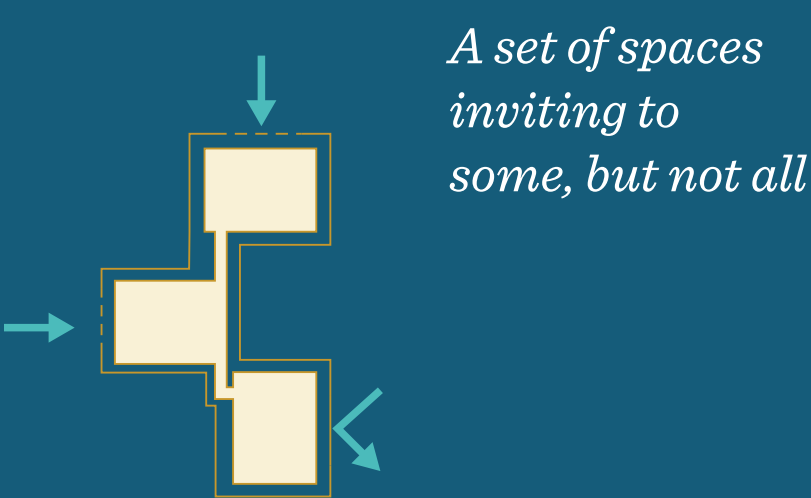
## TOP INSIGHTS



- \* The area is a special attraction for people from Northwest Arkansas, but it's not a place for regulars.



- \* Some areas of downtown have high foot traffic. The Quilt of Parks site doesn't. Hint: It has to do with active edges.
- \* Seasonal programming draws in visitors but everyday invitations could invite for more regular use and activity.



- \* Minorities and people with less formal education are slightly under-represented in those spending time on site.
- \* The Confederate statue is the talk of the town; it was the second-most common topic people brought up when asked how they felt about the space.



# Luther George Park - Baseline Assessment

## VISION

“Redeveloping Luther George Park will act as a catalyst for community engagement in the downtown by providing thoughtfully planned gathering spaces with facilities that support the surrounding businesses and neighborhoods.”

## KEY METRICS

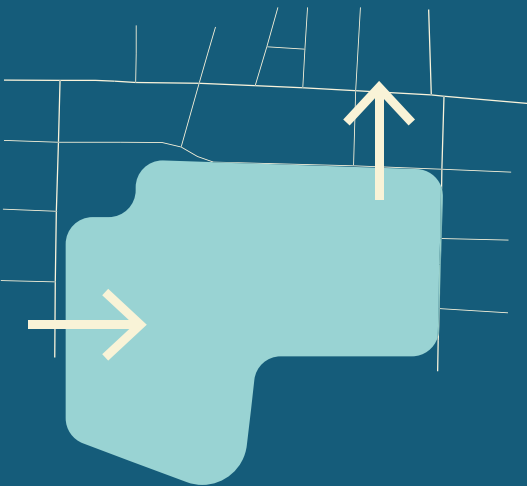
- Ped / cyclist count
- Activity count
- Arrival mode
- Perceived inclusion
- Perceived delight
- % who have socialized
- Frequency of visits
- User demographics
- % using local businesses before/after park visit
- % downtown users who visit/know of park
- Edge quality



## TOP INSIGHTS



*Luther George Park is inviting a diverse crowd to stay, play, and socialize*



*Luther George Park is disconnected from Downtown Springdale*

- \* Luther George Park is attracting more people than other downtown public spaces.
- \* People staying at Luther George Park represent a diverse demographic group who feel welcome.
- \* Most visitors are focused on play and recreation—including parents watching children play.
- \* Luther George Park’s strong invitations for play are encouraging social interactions among community members—even those who don’t know each other.
- \* A harsh microclimate and low quality seating could be deterring people from leisure activities.
- \* Luther George is next to downtown but not part of the downtown fabric. Physical barriers and poor quality walking conditions make Luther George easy to miss!
- \* Today, Luther George is not on most people’s mental map of downtown Springdale.
- \* Most people don’t visit Luther George because they don’t know about the park.
- \* Others don’t visit because they see Luther George as a place for kids with limited invitations for adults.
- \* Those that do make it to Luther George value what it has to offer.



# 8th and I - Baseline Assessment

## VISION

“The mission is to **preserve green space** and to **enhance quality of life** for the people that live in our community — and to do so through great park space and recreation.”

## KEY METRICS

- Pedestrian/cyclist count
- Car count
- Total feet of continuous shade
- Existing pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure and comfort



## TOP INSIGHTS

### *A place for cars, not people*

No people observed walking and only a few observed biking, with many cars passing at high speeds.



### *A heat trap, despite street trees*

An extremely hot stretch for people on foot and bikes - with some sidewalk landscaping and trees, though they are too small to provide shade or comfort.



### *A waiting game to cross 8th Street*

Signal timing makes crossing 8th Street difficult on foot.





# Convergence - Baseline Assessment

## VISION

“A community family playspace, inspired by arts, science, nature and technology that will connect the two neighboring properties of Crystal Bridges and the Amazeum into one cohesive environment of learning and play in an outdoor setting.”

## KEY METRICS

- Pedestrian/cyclist count
- People staying count
- Arrival mode
- Perceived inclusion
- Perceived comfort
- Perceived safety
- Perceived delight
- People alone / in group
- % who have socialized or plan to
- Demographic diversity



## TOP INSIGHTS

*Walking access to the site is limited*

*Nearby open spaces seem more open*

*Ticketed events deter and confuse*

*Surveyed visitors are homogeneous*

*Locals use the space as a solo retreat*

*Sunrise and sundown feel off-limits*

*Museum patronage doesn't overlap*

## DESIGN IMPLICATIONS

- \* Explore how to create improved wayfinding, and more walking connections to the site, from within and beyond the museums' footprints.
- \* Ensure wayfinding and visibility are welcoming from the street — so the long drive into Convergence seems less like a deterrent, and more like a welcome mat.
- \* Ensure the space doesn't rely too heavily on ticketed events, so it can achieve its ambitions as a public space that connects two museums to the community.
- \* Consider building on the momentum of the Family Programs at Crystal Bridges — or other cultural programming — to draw in more socially diverse visitors.
- \* Maintain the sanctity of the trails as a space for solo time, even if one of the goals of the site is to build connections across people of diverse backgrounds.
- \* Establish programming to boost foot traffic at dawn and dusk, when some visitors feel less safe on site; at minimum, consider more lighting installations.
- \* Explore how to funnel visitors to Crystal Bridges and the Amazeum in equal measure — so the trail represents a true convergence of the two museums.



# Rogers Historical Museum - Impact Assessment

## VISION

“The Hailey Building is an adaptive-reuse expansion ... Reinforcing the Museum’s mission to ‘enrich lives through education, experience and exploration’ of the City’s unique heritage, the project celebrates the idea of the ‘city as exhibit’ by capitalizing on relationships between the stylistically diverse collection of downtown buildings, outdoor public spaces and connective pedestrian pathways that engage the community.”

## KEY METRICS

- Pedestrian/cyclist count
- Activity counts
- Perceived delight
- Visitor demographics
- % visiting local businesses before/after
- % downtown users aware of museum
- Reason for visit
- Length of time on site
- Edge quality around site
- Seating options



Image: Leon & Primmer Architecture Workshop

## TOP INSIGHTS



### Heritage

*A space that honors local history in form and function*

- \* Unearthed historic facade and floor, and used them to inspire the new design
- \* New space allows for temporary exhibitions, the most common reason why people said they would visit



### Awareness

*A hidden gem waiting to be discovered*

- \* Awareness among downtown regulars is low - 2/3 of people surveyed downtown hadn't visited, and 70% of those hadn't heard of RHM
- \* The building is much more inviting since the restoration, but could do more to draw in passersby



### Operations

*A boost to museum staff, footprint, and capacity*

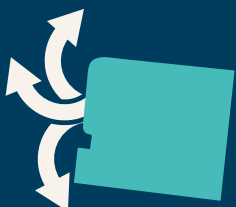
- \* 243% increase in usable campus square footage as a result of the Hailey Building expansion
- \* Form came at the price of function in some cases, detracting from the usability of staff working spaces



### Experience

*A destination with room for more drop-in invitations*

- \* Kids love to visit RHM for educational and interactive playspaces
- \* Hours and seating options don't align with visitor needs
- \* The lobby is underutilized and could be used for in a way that draws new visitors



### Connectivity

*An institution poised to be a downtown anchor*

- \* Museum visitors generate business for local bars, restaurants, and shops - 73% of visitors said they would also head to a downtown business as part of their time in Downtown Rogers
- \* The loading dock area is not operating as a public space yet, but could be a natural platform for the museum to link up to the broader alley system
- \* Poor connections to downtown make it less likely that people will walk to the museum
- \* 93% of museum visitors visit rarely (once, once a year or less, or a few times a year)



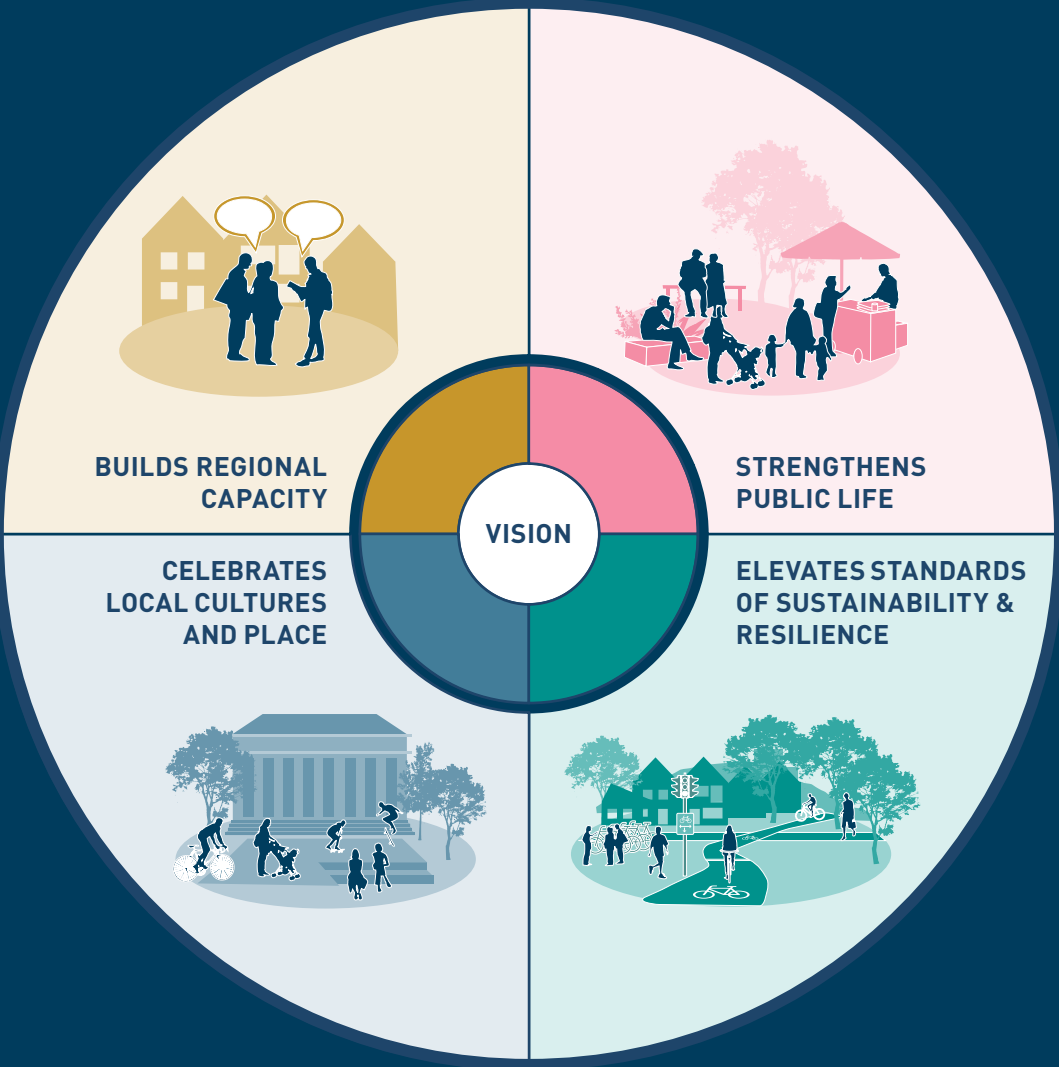
# Rogers Historical Museum - Impact Assessment

## Elevating local design standards and seeding new collaborations

The design raises the bar for Rogers' downtown architecture and local museums. Through thoughtful adaptive reuse, it elevates the importance of civic memory, inspires local pride, and enables new partnerships beyond museum walls (e.g., 1619 Project).

## Celebrating hometown heritage in form and function

The design itself — not just the exhibits within — celebrates local cultures and place. In a rapidly evolving downtown, attention to history is especially important. The museum and design team's attention to adaptive reuse helps preserve such character.



## Setting the stage for a more walkable, vibrant downtown

The restoration transformed a dull facade on S 2nd Street and opened up the original showroom — improving the sidewalk experience and expanding space for public programming. The south side doubles as a public space link to the city's future alley network.

## Achieving environmental and financial efficiency through reuse

Adaptive reuse in its own right is a more sustainable and environmentally friendly construction option. The project also achieved financial efficiencies with a modest budget — seeking ways for design to do “double duty,” such as by using paint as wayfinding.



# TheatreSquared - Impact Assessment

## VISION

“We see TheatreSquared as its own center, a destination and a place of origin. The work created here will draw audiences from near and far, and be our region’s export to the world’s theatre centers. We see a gathering place — a theatre commons — that is welcoming and fascinating, alive with activity. A building that draws the eye and evokes curiosity. A place that invites, hints at the unusual, suggests, something significant will happen here.”

## KEY METRICS

- Pedestrian/cyclist count
- Activity count
- Perceived delight
- Visitor demographics (public space vs. show)
- % who have socialized
- Visit frequency
- Sense of ownership
- Annual energy usage
- Budget performance



Image: Leon & Primmer Architecture Workshop

## TOP INSIGHTS



### Atmosphere

*Southern hospitality softens a cutting-edge design*

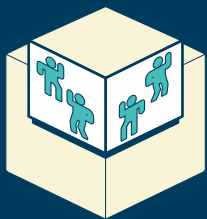
- \* The building’s design gives off a ‘wow factor,’ but the people make the place inviting
- \* People feel comfortable throughout each level of the Commons — and stay for a while during their visit



### Community

*A new hub for Fayetteville is already drawing in regulars*

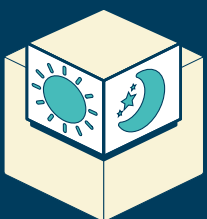
- \* Even though it’s only six months old, people already feel ownership of the space, visiting frequently and reporting that the space feels like it’s “their place”
- \* Locals use the Commons for their own events



### Audience

*A mix of invitations attracts diverse groups of people*

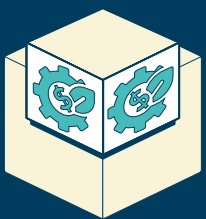
- \* People feel comfortable throughout each level of the Commons — and stay for a while during their visit
- \* By opening the space up to the public by day and providing offerings at different price points, TheatreSquared creates an inclusive environment



### Usage

*A multipurpose space stays active well beyond showtime*

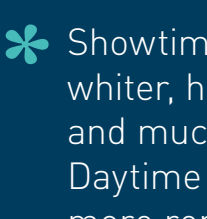
- \* TheatreSquared provides visitors with a range of options, resulting in a building that functions as more than just a theatre



### Usage

*T2 minimized carbon footprint and maximized financial efficiency*

- \* Exceeds many LEED requirements and reduced electricity use per square foot
- \* Project was completed ahead of schedule, under budget, and cafe created a new revenue stream



- \* Showtime visitors are whiter, higher income, and much more educated. Daytime visitors are more representative of Fayetteville’s population
- \* Compared to national theater trends, TheatreSquared’s audience is more diverse in age and income level, but less diverse in race/ethnicity and education level



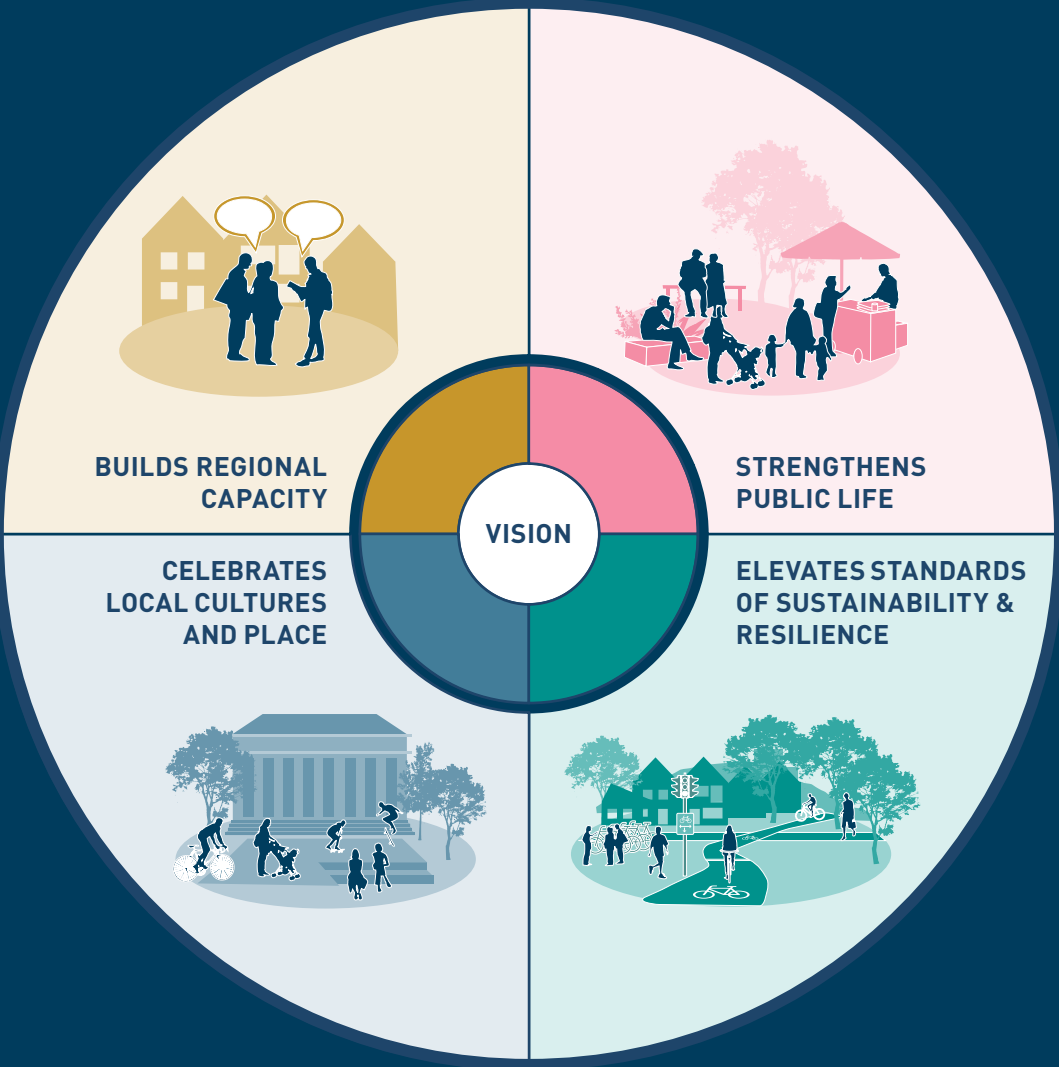
# TheatreSquared - Impact Assessment

## Raising the bar for inspiring design and top-notch cultural space

Respondents were overwhelmingly positive about the space — responding well to the contemporary design, ample light, and thoughtful touches throughout. Future projects shouldn't shy away from bold design — locals are more than ready to embrace the 'wow factor.'

## Shaping a world-class place that reflects and serves the NWA spirit

While its design is breathtaking and unique in the region, TheatreSquared doesn't feel alien to the area. People repeatedly cited the warm, friendly people, and they were proud to call it their own. All projects should strive to match high design with hometown character.



## Modeling how a quasi-public space can welcome all people, anytime

The Commons shows potential to become a vital third space that invites a mix of activities — and in the process, a mix of people, spurring public life at all times of day. Crucially, the Commons invites demographics that are usually not present in most theater spaces.

## Building a sustainable community space, environmentally and financially

TheatreSquared made a minimal carbon footprint integral to design, construction, and operations, all while staying on track financially.



# Thaden School - Impact Assessment

## VISION

“An enduring and innovative campus that will spark curiosity, inspire creativity, and invite reflection...As students proceed through the course of the school day, they move through a variety of architectural and landscape features that create an enduring and enriching sense of place.”

## KEY METRICS

- Pedestrian/cyclist count
- Activity counts
- Mode of arrival
- Perceived delight
- Facade/edge quality around site
- Presence of sustainable behaviors
- Perception of downtown neighbors
- Level of community use of site



## TOP INSIGHTS



*Thaden’s design enables an innovative curriculum*



*Thaden honors where Bentonville came from and where it is going*



*Sustainability at Thaden is punching above its weight*

- \* The campus design not only facilitates distinctive curriculum needs but elevates them.
- \* The Quad provides space for organized group activities, and cozy spots on campus create more intimate, small group or individual gathering spots.
- \* Beyond recess play, few students use the Quad
- \* Thaden’s architecture reflects and elevates local vernacular
- \* Downtown interviewees viewed the school’s iconic design as a part of a positive downtown development that attracts people to the region.
- \* Those who know about Thaden think it’s an asset for the city. But many people don’t know about it yet!
- \* Community use of Thaden campus is limited to events or using the pump track
- \* While physical barriers to campus are low, perceptual barriers are high
- \* Thaden’s curriculum and design work together to embed sustainability into students’ days
- \* According to parents, Thaden’s sustainability education shows up in the home
- \* Students see a limit to their potential to live in a sustainable way due to larger regional limitations
- \* Very few students walk or bike to school, in part because the walking and biking infrastructure needs improvements



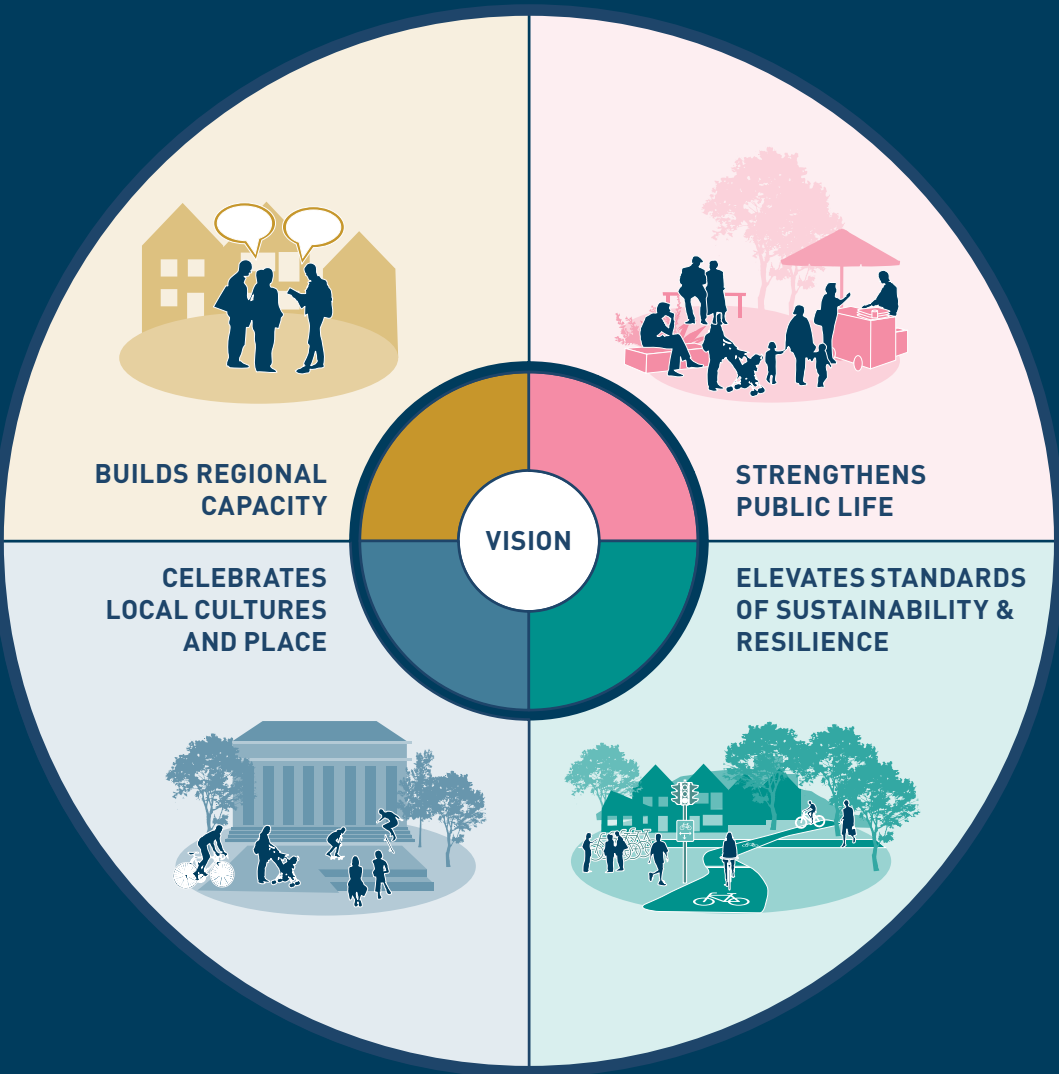
# Thaden School - Impact Assessment

## Raising the bar on design and sustainability for the future generations of Bentonville

Thaden's campus elevates standards of design excellence for educational architecture in the region while teaching a future generation to have higher expectations of what it means to live sustainably.

## Drawing inspiration from local form to create a global precedent

While its design is striking and distinct in Bentonville, Thaden's form is drawn from local vernacular and is inspired by local culture and history. Thaden elevates local character to inform a global best practice of school design.



## Thaden's design enables an innovative curriculum

Public life among the Thaden School community is thriving. The school accommodates and encourages the type of learning experience that Thaden sets out to achieve. For the broader community, Thaden already has a positive perception among locals and is laying the foundation to be a key resource and asset in Bentonville.

## Sowing sustainable behaviors and raising regional expectations

Thaden's campus and program work together to raise the bar of sustainability standards in the region. Students and families have seen a shift in their personal habits while identifying a need for larger regional infrastructure to support more sustainable ways of living.