INTRODUCTION: REVITALIZING LITTLE ITALY

PROJECT SCOPE

Little Italy is one of Toronto's most unique and vibrant Business Improvement Areas (BIAs), embodying a rich historical and cultural legacy at the heart of downtown. This plan seeks to honour these qualities, enhancing Little Italy's appeal as a dynamic retail, business, recreational, and cultural destination. By building upon the area's historic foundations, we aim to transform it into a simple, vibrant, beautiful, and contemporary linear hub, ensuring its status as a vital part of Toronto's urban fabric while also preparing it for the future.

STREETSCAPE COMPOSITION

Three distinct zones have been identified based on their streetscape, form, dimensions and character:

Zone 1. Shaw St to Grace St;

Zone 2. Grace St to Manning Ave; and,

Zone 3. Manning Ave to Bathurst St.

While all are part of the greater overall character of the Little Italy BIA, each zone presents its own strengths and opportunities, as well as challenges.

BRIEF HISTORY

College Street—Little Italy is a hub of rich cultural and historical influence. College Street has become Little Italy despite having a strong Portuguese presence. In the 1950s and 60s, Little Italy was a quiet suburb within the core of downtown Toronto, featuring village-like attributes, including mom-and-pop grocery stores, local butchers, and cafes.

Early plan for College Street called for it to be a wide boulevard for the city's elite. The street ultimately became a cultural hub starting with those of Jewish descent, where many Jewish citizens resided in 'the Ward' (St. John's Ward) after World War 2. Italian populations on College Street soared in by the early 1970's, reaching 750,000 from 3,000 in the early 1890s. Toronto's Italian orgin population has become one of the largest and most significant outside of Italy, and the role of Toronto's College Street—Little Italy, proved crucial in that development. Portuguese and Italian immigrants of post-war Toronto settled in adjacent, and sometimes overlapping, residential areas. Both ethnic groups shared similar value systems and faced similar issues as new immigrants in Canada.

College Street has a rich history of art dating back to the early 20th century. The street has been a hub for artists, galleriexs, and cultural institutions, making it a vibrant and dynamic avenue for artistic expression. Some of the earliest manifestations of artistic culture on College Street would have been street entertainment. In more recent years, the street has become known for its vibrant art scene.

PRELIMINARY STAKEHOLDER INSIGHTS

Vision and Unique Qualities

- A neighbourhood that balances progressive development with its historical character.
- Highlight Garrison Creek's history as a natural heritage system integral to the neighborhood.
- The area's unique blend of imagination and creativity, along with a demographic inclusive of diverse needs, emphasizes the importance of harmonizing commercial and residential growth.

Desired Changes and Activities

- Need for pedestrian-focused enhancements and supportive infrastructure for local businesses, such as cafes and restaurants.
- Desire for parkettes and well-maintained amenities like seating and lighting.
- Aligning the neighbourhood's retail experience with its changing demographic to ensure a lively and welcoming atmosphere.
- Accommodating the aging population and leveraging side streets for community engagement.

Current State and Usage

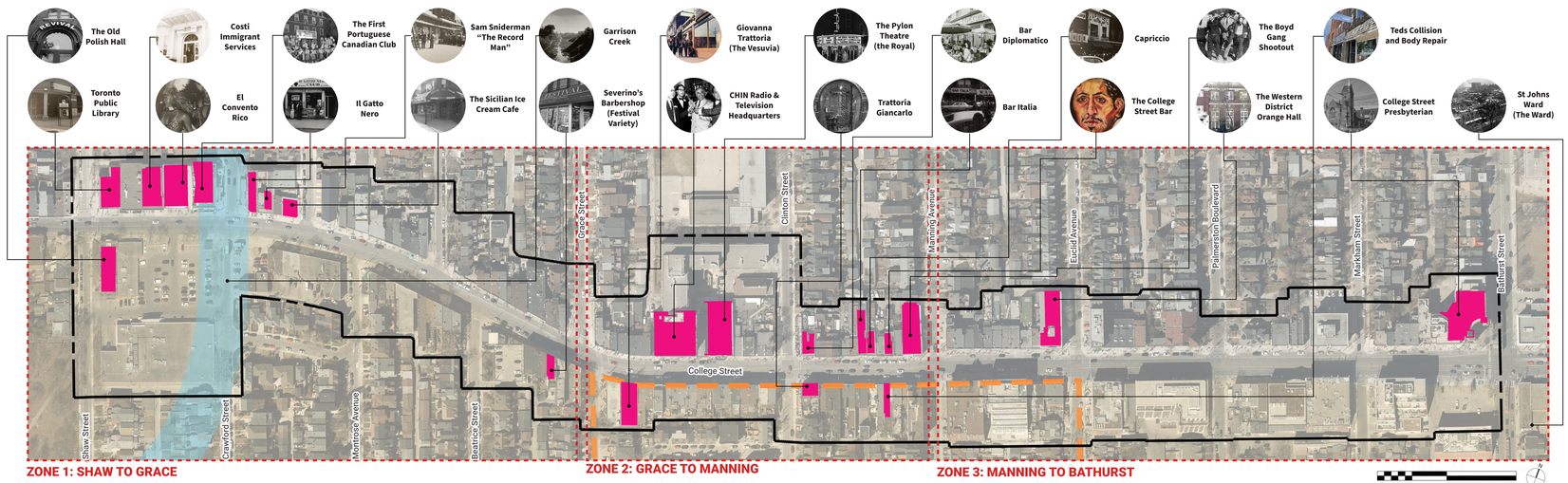
- Diversity in business, the absence of big-box stores, and the prevalence of independent retailers stand as key assets.
- The streetcar and flexible usage hours were highlighted as strengths.
- Call for improved liveliness through regular events and better integration of non-food attractions.

Outdoor Amenities and Accessibility

- Need for more outdoor amenities was a common concern among stakeholders
- Logical layout of street furniture and consistent tree care, accommodating daily use and signature events like The Taste of Little Italy.
- Ensuring coordinated sidewalks, clear signage, seasonal adaptability, and overall accessibility is crucial.
- Discussions also broached the possibility of a car-free zone and improvements to the cycling network.

Signage and Maintenance

- Cluttered signage and hydro lines overcrowd the streetscape, suggesting a decluttering pilot project for a more streamlined appearance.



EXISTING CONDITIONS

Bicycle Parking
178 Toronto municipal standard bicycle rings, 2 Toronto municipal bike stands (Euclid St and Manning Ave).

Public Art Murals
6 art murals throughout the streetscape. Displays promote the rich historic Italian culture of the area.

Seating
5 municipal benches along the length of the streetscape. Additional seating provided by surrounding businesses.

BIA and Private Marketting
Private marketing in parking lots and on bus shelters. BIA marketing takes form in light posts featuring BIA banners.

Public Waste Disposal
1 trash receptacle per block.

Publication Boxes
No longer in use.

Clearway Widths
Business patios create pinch points.

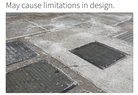
Cycling Lanes
Raised dedicated bike lanes from Bathurst St to Manning St.

Bike Shares
1 at Crawford St and 1 at Markham St.

Above Grade Utilities
Raised dedicated bike lanes from Bathurst St to Manning St.

Tree Pit Utilities
No longer in use.

Underground Utilities
May cause limitations in design.



Tactile Warning Strips
Featured at the corner of most crosswalks and bus stops.

Streetscape Parking
Green P parking throughout occupys a street lane or lay-by parking model.

Parking Lots
Located at Bathurst St, Beatrice St and between Shaw and Crawford St.

Side Street Parking
Side street off College St utilize municipally-owned dead space as private parking. Some spots pose concerns for pedestrian safety.

Commercial Waste Disposal
Pickup occurs Thursday evenings with most waste placed at roadside curb, with some placed within the pedestrian clearway, tree pits and cycling lanes.

Streetscape Paving Types
Consists of concrete paving in good to moderate condition, unit paving in Piazza Johnny Lombard, a unit paving band between Montrose Ave and Euclid St, and unique paving treatments at some businesses.

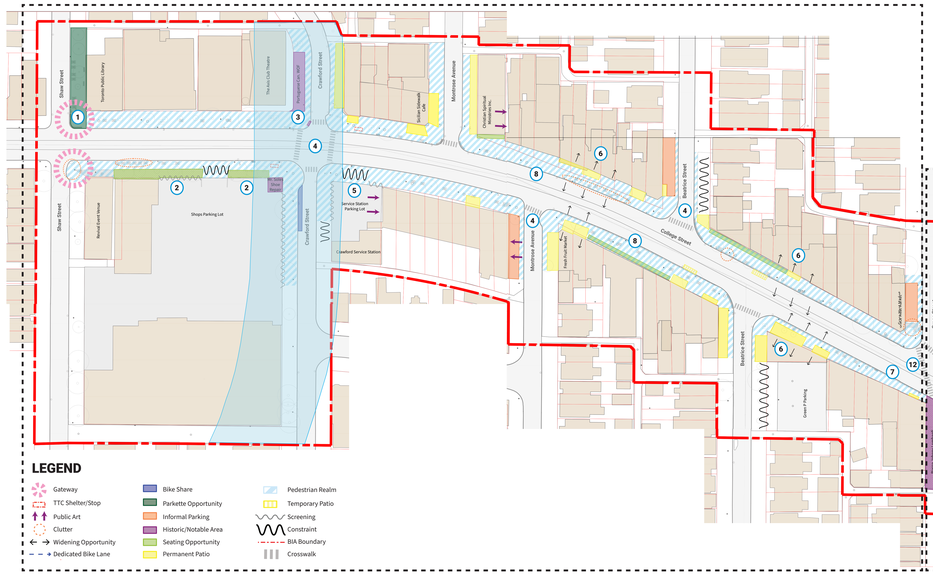
Historic and Notable Monuments
Piazza Johnny Lombardi, Portuguese Pioneers Parkette (privately implemented), signage outside the historic Café Diplomatico patio, The Project Bookmark Canada parkette, the landmark 'Walk of Fame'.

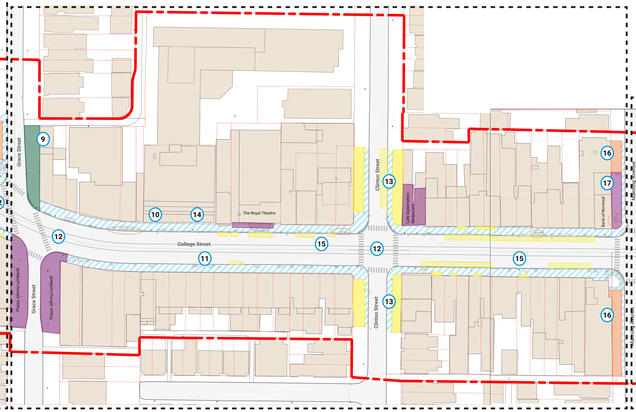
Transit Stops
Two at every three blocks, each featuring a bus shelter, except for the west travelling TTC stop at Grace St, which is identified by a single pole.

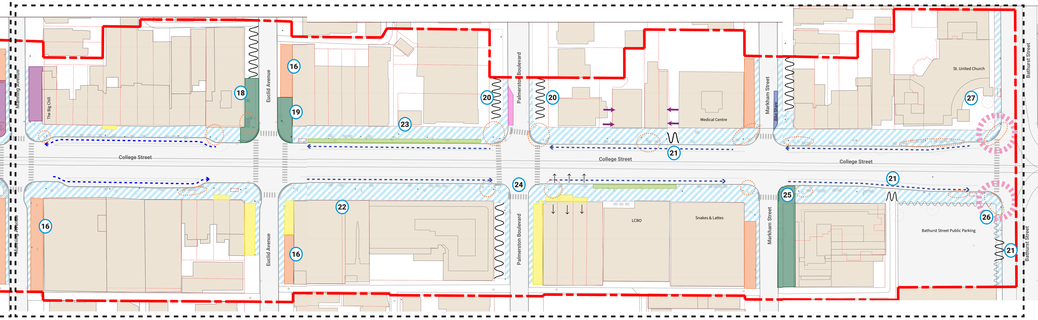
Planting
Primarily street trees, with some planters outside storefronts, and basket rings on the Little Italy BIA light posts. Most common trees include Honey Locust, Elm, Maple, and Ash trees, most in good/fair conditions, with 10 showing signs of poor health and 2 determined as dead. Inconsistencies in tree planting condition.

SITE ANALYSIS: OPPORTUNITIES & CONSTRAINTS

LITTLE ITALY COLLEGE ST







THE GOAL

"Good design isn't about how much you add to a space; it's about what you choose to leave out."

This Master Plan proposes strategic frameworks for the BIA and the community, and will suggest projects for the short, medium, and long term. Our approach highlights Little Italy's cultural and historical significance while prioritizing the needs of its people and the commercial viability of the area. By simplifying and enhancing the streetscape, we will create more opportunities for community engagement and economic growth.

A key component of this plan is the commitment to a sustainable and welcoming environment. We aim to blend historical preservation with modern urban design, creating a greener, more accessible streetscape that reflects Little Italy's unique character. Through the thoughtful integration of new elements and the enhancement of green spaces, we will foster a vibrant public realm that supports both community interaction and environmental stewardship.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Cleansing the Palette
- Create Dynamic Community Spaces
- Be Bold
- Preserve the Heritage
- Embrace Green Initiatives
- Capitalize on Assets
- Create a Unified Look
- Boost Commercial Vitality

ZONE 1: LA CURVA (THE BEND)

SHAW TO GRACE

1 Gateway
- Opportunity to install gateway feature at North East corner of Shaw Street and College Street
- Coordination with adjacent land owner (City of Toronto Public Library) may be required

2 Seating Opportunity
- Make use of the widened path here and add in seating
- Add a fence on top of off the existing curb to provide additional safety screening from the adjacent parking lot
- Opportunity to turn fence into a decorative element, maybe highlighting the history of the area

3 Garrison Creek
- Opportunity to highlight the old Garrison Creek in a bigger way than the current in-pavement signage

4 Intersection Accessibility
- Opportunity to increase accessibility by adding tactile warning surfaces to edges of sidewalks at crosswalks

5 Entrance to Service Station Constraint
- Existing service station requires access from both Crawford Street and College Street, measures to beautify the corner and spaces around the entrances could be taken

6 Sidewalk ROW Widening Opportunity
- Opportunity create greater pedestrian accessibility by removing site furnishings from the narrow sidewalks
- Need to work with property owners about patio sizes
- Reducing on-street parking and extending temporary curb patios in these areas will allow for greater pedestrian movement

7 Paving
- Unit paving, concrete, asphalt patching, some unit paver band at curb (closer to Grace St)
- Opportunity to improve the paving conditions in the ROW (unified, safe, interesting)

8 Tree Planting
- In unit paver tree pits (from Shaw St to Grace St)
- Opportunity for tree planter details to be unified and updated

ZONE 2: LA PASSEGGIATA (THE PROMENADE)

GRACE TO MANNING

9 Public Art Opportunity
- Opportunity to create a mural on the side of the building
- Build upon the plaza being constructed to include planting
- Need to work with property owners (IC Savings)

10 BIA Branding Opportunity
- Potential for a BIA branded banner or art piece outside of Naloi Media Group Office (already discussed with property owners)

11 Tree Planting Constraint
- This south section along College doesn't have trees, but due to the width of the sidewalk and building shading, proposed planting is limited here

12 Intersection Accessibility
- Opportunity to increase accessibility by adding tactile warning surfaces to edges of sidewalks at crosswalks

13 Patio Constraints
- Permanent patios, including historic restaurants, are located at all the streetscape corners, limiting any sidewalk widening potential
- Cafe TO temporary patios along this section of streetscape limit the potential for streetscape furniture and could be a hindrance to pedestrian traffic

14 Tree Planting
- Trees planted within small square open tree pits and unit paver tree pits
- Opportunity for tree planter details to be unified and updated

15 Paving
- Concrete, most blocks have unit paver band at curb, and unit paving with occasional asphalt patching
- Opportunity to improve the paving condition in the ROW (unified, safe, interesting)

ZONE 3: IL VIALE (THE BOULEVARD)

MANNING TO BATHURST

16 Existing Parking Constraints
- Existing parking permit limit using these spaces for seating or planting
- Some existing parking spots require the cars to drive through the pedestrian intersection
- Need to work with permit holders

17 Existing Parkette
- Opportunity to work with property owner (BMO) to better highlight the history of the Project Bookmark Canada parkette

18 Parkette Opportunity
- Opportunity to create a parkette at the North West corner of Euclid Street and College Street
- Site is currently unoccupied aside from some site furnishings and an electrical box
- Coordination with adjacent land owner is required

19 Parkette Opportunity
- Opportunity to create a parkette at the North East corner of Euclid Street and College Street
- Site is currently unoccupied since the adjacent property closed
- Coordination with adjacent land owner is required

20 Private Residence Constraint
- Private residences adjacent to the streetscape limit streetscape improvements (ie. need to limit loitering, noise, etc.)

21 Parking Lot Constraint
- Existing parking lot requires access from College Street, limiting streetscape elements and pedestrian activity

22 Tree Planting
- Within unit paver tree pits, large rectangular open tree pits, and raised open planter beds
- Two trees planted within tall, wooden planter boxes (Euclid Ave)
- Opportunity for tree planter details to be unified and updated

23 Paving
- New concrete paving (from Manning Ave to Bathurst St)

24 Intersection Accessibility
- Opportunity to increase accessibility by adding tactile warning surfaces to edges of sidewalks at crosswalks

25 Parkette Opportunity
- Opportunity to revitalize the existing parkette at the South East corner of Markham Street and College Street
- Coordination with adjacent land owner (Shoppers Drug Mart) is required

26 Gateway Opportunity
- Opportunity to design space with identifiable BIA marker / gateway feature
- Add screen between the sidewalk and the parking lot to provide additional safety screening and reduce eyesore
- Opportunity to turn fence into a decorative element,
- Opportunities for seating and landscaping

27 Gateway Constraint
- Private property goes right to the sidewalk, not leaving any opportunity to create a feature here
- Existing plaza does include planting and seating that is welcoming
- Opportunity to work with land owner to enhance/ beautify this corner

CONCEPT PLAN

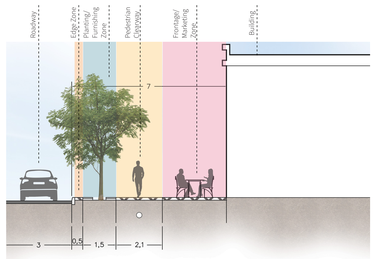
The overall streetscape vision ensures a 2.1-metre clearway promoting accessibility across the BIA, prioritizing the public realm. This is achieved through relocating street trees and furniture to the curb's edge or central locations based on underground utility locations. Additionally, frontage and marketing zones utilize the remaining space outside the clearway, allowing for surrounding vendors to promote their business without impacting the pedestrian experience.

Other improvements include six vibrant parkettes, two of which will serve as landmark gateways at Shaw and Bathurst Street, enhanced seating, unified site furniture, cohesive surface treatments, a mural opportunity at Grace Street, green parking with integrated tree planting, unified tree grates, dynamic lighting, and a 'shared-space' concept for pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles in Zone 2 characterized by BIA branded umbrellas, parklette patios and expansion of surface treatments into the roadway.

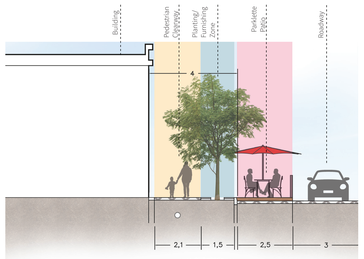
THE BIG MOVES

1. Organize and Unify the Pedestrian Realm Structure From Curb to Building Face
2. Placemaking Through the Replacement of Concrete Sidewalk With Bold, Distinctive Paving Pattern
3. Consolidate and Unify Little Italy Furniture Palette
4. Capitalize on Underused Space: New Parkettes, Gateways
5. De-clutter Where Possible: Utilities, Furniture, Lighting

PROPOSED TYPICAL STREETSCAPE SECTIONS

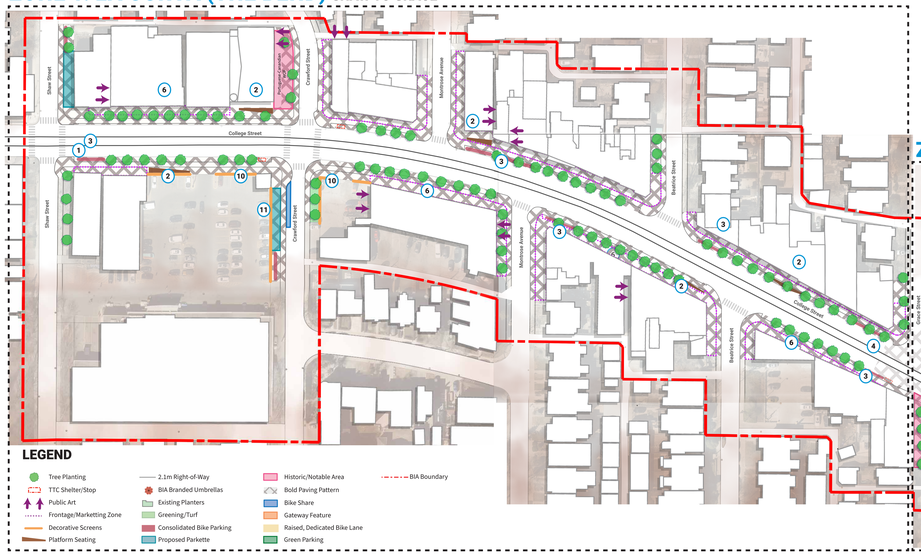


Typical Section for Zone 1 and Zone 3

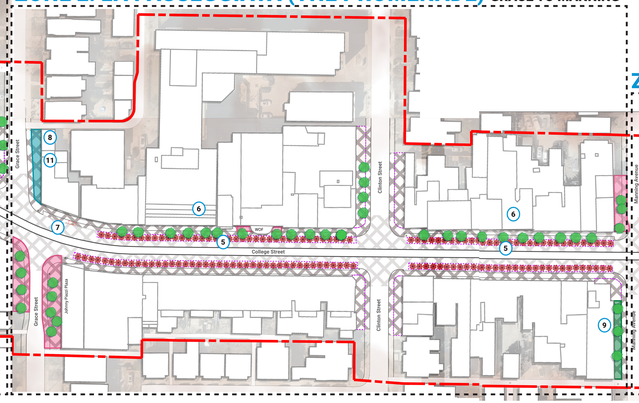


Typical Section for Zone 2

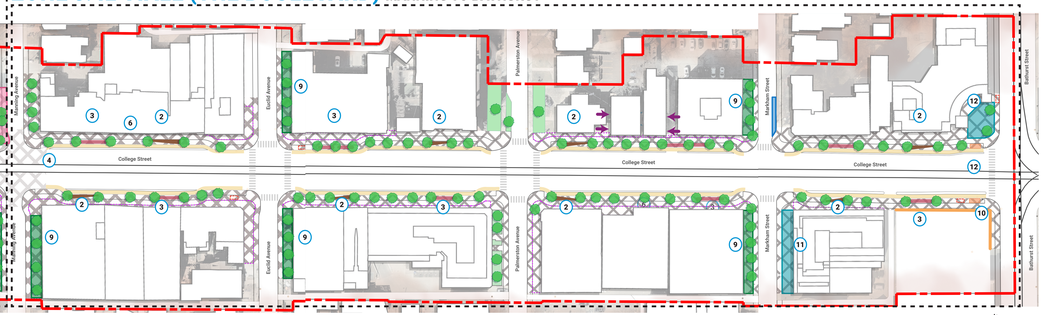
ZONE 1: LA CURVA (THE BEND) SHAW TO GRACE



ZONE 2: LA PASSEGGIATA (THE PROMENADE) GRACE TO MANNING



ZONE 3: IL VIALE (THE BOULEVARD) MANNING TO BATHURST



1 SHAW GATEWAY

Before After

2 OVERSIZED LINEAR & PLATFORM SEATING

Before After

3 CONSOLIDATED SITE ELEMENTS

Before After

4 SURFACE TREATMENTS

Before After

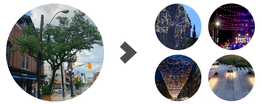
5 BIA UMBRELLAS & PARKLETTE PATIOS

Before After

6 UNIFIED TREE GRATES

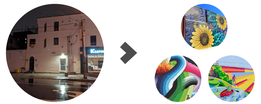
Before After

7 DYNAMIC & INTEGRATED LIGHTING



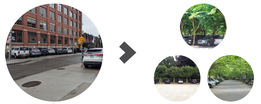
Before After

8 NEW MURALS



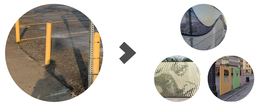
Before After

9 GREEN PARKING



Before After

10 GRAPHIC SCREENS

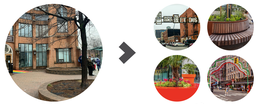


Before After

11 PARKETTES

Before After

12 BATHURST GATEWAY



Before After