In 2012, the City of Boulder began a visioning process for a major redevelopment of Boulder’s Civic Area. This area just south of the city's downtown includes the main public library, municipal buildings, Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, a seasonal farmer’s market, and a central park and greenway that extend along Boulder Creek. The goals of the redevelopment included developing an urban design vision for public and private spaces, guiding decisions for buildings in the high hazard flood zone of the creek, and exploring potential uses for recreation and culture. In 2014, the city moved into a site planning phase, engaging the community and a design firm in public meetings and a design workshop. Citizens of Boulder passed a tax initiative that will provide $27 million to enhance community spaces and support cultural projects, including spaces within the Civic Area. During the fall of 2014, Growing Up Boulder (GUB) worked with children and youth to gather ideas for the Civic Area re-design. The work included these groups:

- 60 3rd graders at Whittier International Elementary School
- 18 10th graders in a Boulder High School Advancement via Individual Determinism (AVID) Class
- 21 Casey Middle School students in an applied science elective
- GUB staff, interns, graduate students, and visiting graduate students

Below is a summary of their combined recommendations.

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Youth involvement in the Civic Area Redesign was supported by GUB coordinators Tori Derr and Mara Mintzer; CU PhD student Alessandro Rigolon; visiting doctoral student Simge Yilmaz; GUB interns and volunteers Emily Tarantini, Jacob Accola, Travis Cobb, and Jaron Drucker; Whittier International Elementary School teachers Cathy Hill, Lisa O’Brien and Tamar van Vliet; Casey Middle School teacher Jackie Esler; BHS AVID teacher Jennifer Douglas-Larsson; and the City of Boulder’s staff from Parks and Recreation and Community Planning and Sustainability. This project was supported by a University of Colorado Outreach and Engagement Award.
Summary of the results

Elementary school students expressed their desire to interact with nature through treehouses, zip lines, boat building stations, underground creek viewing tunnels and climbable animal structures. One 8 year old particularly highlighted the importance of nature in the Civic Area. Her nicho box was populated with wild animals and a simple mirror. When we asked what the mirror represented, she said, “me and nature.”

Middle school students began with a focus on ecological learning and exploration; however, their ideas and recommendations expanded to include spaces for active play, water interaction, and a sanitation station for the homeless. The homeless sanitation station was a reaction to the large transient population within the area and a recognition that the area lacked basic services for this population. Other recommendations expanded to include spaces for active play and water interaction. Active play areas included slack-lines and small skate parks, while water interaction was represented with sandy beach-like areas near the creek, water fountains, slides for tubing and bridges with monkey bars below them.

High school students discussed affordable food options because there are currently limited affordable food options within walking distance of their school. Access to food and hangout spaces were integrated, with recommendations for food trucks, food stands, picnic tables and covered seating. The flexible green space would provide opportunities for activities such as soccer or summer movie nights. Secondary students also made clear that they wanted play areas for all ages, including themselves. In their final reflections at the end of the semester, they wanted to make sure that we remember that “treehouses are for teens too!”

Most students’ ideas were practical and feasible. All ages of children and youth thought about other age groups, both younger and older, creating designs that reflect inclusive thinking.
Nature Play

Suggestions by age

Elementary School Students
- Zip line
- Rubber duck race
- Bird feeders
- Boat building station
- Underground creek viewing tunnel
- Treehouses
- Climbable structures

Middle School Students
- Creek adventure area
- Treehouses
- Flower gardens
- Fruit trees
- Boat pulled by rope across creek
- Tall grass to play hide and seek
- Hippo statue that spits out water
- Slide for tubing
- Swimming area with sandy beach

High School Students
- Koi pond
- Crossing the creek using rock stepping stones
- Sandy beach-like area
- Ponds with colored lights
- Green space open for different purposes
- Water play opportunities for children
- Treehouses

“More places to go down closer to the creek. We liked a place with lots of rocks where someone could go almost in the middle of the creek. We’d like the idea of being able to cross it more informally.”
- High School Student

Active Play

Suggestions by age

Elementary School Students
- Skateboard park
- Play structure with a large slide
- Jungle gym
- Climbing wall

Middle School Students
- Parkour course
- Small skate park
- Obstacle course
- Biking areas
- Paint ball
- Ping pong
- Monkey bars under bridges
- A stand to rent helmets and kayaks
- Variety of ways to cross and access the creek

High School Students
- Soccer
- Beach volleyball
- Basketball
- Football
- Ping pong
- Sports games in water

“A green open space that can be used for different purposes, including sports and movie projections. Soccer, volleyball, and basketball could be played here.”
- High School Student

“More places to go down closer to the creek. We liked a place with lots of rocks where someone could go almost in the middle of the creek. We’d like the idea of being able to cross it more informally.”
- High School Student

“I drew a climbing wall that is 100 feet tall with colors. I think it can be a slide too.”
- 3rd Grade Student

“Kids want to interact with nature and there’s not a good way to do it. I think there should be bird feeders hung in the trees.” - 3rd Grade Student

“More places to go down closer to the creek. We liked a place with lots of rocks where someone could go almost in the middle of the creek. We’d like the idea of being able to cross it more informally.”
- High School Student

“I drew a climbing wall that is 100 feet tall with colors. I think it can be a slide too.”
- 3rd Grade Student
Arts and Cultural Expressions

Suggestions by age

Elementary School Students
- Benches painted like national flags
- Steps that shoot paint onto a wall
- Painting and drawing station
- Animal sculptures
- Craft station
- Benches with international quotes

Middle School Students
- Graffiti wall to express yourself
- A clock tower
- Animal sculptures that produce energy

High School Students
- Performance stage
- Sculpture garden
- World flags
- Quotes of poems in different languages
- Inspirational chalk board wall
- Bridge with colored lights
- Murals

“Steps that shoot out paint - 3rd Grade

“I propose we put steps that shoot out paint onto a giant piece of paper.”
- 3rd Grade Student

Envisioning sculptures in the Civic Area - High School

Outdoor Libraries & Learning Spaces

Suggestions by age

Elementary School Students
- Treehouse with bean bags and books
- Bookshelves in trees
- Glass tunnels under the creek to learn about the fish
- Dinosaur statues with books and bean bags in it
- Outdoor lending library
- Greenhouse with books in it

Middle School Students
- Sculptures that produce energy, like run a fountain
- Homeless sanitation station

High School Students
- Tables with shade and shelter for the rain
- Outdoor classrooms
- Flexible green spaces for different uses

“The homeless sanitation station could have clean towels and clothes, and offer jobs.”
- Middle School Student

“Maybe we could have a greenhouse library where the books could be about plants.”
- 3rd Grade Student

Treehouse - 3rd Grade

Lending library - 3rd Grade
Affordable Foods
Suggestions made by Boulder High School students

- Food truck parties
- Food stand areas
- Picnic tables with shade
- Places to eat and hangout
- Vending machines

“We are tired of hearing about healthy food. We cannot afford it. We want something cheaper like Starbucks, Panda Express, Subway, frozen yogurt, or a hot dog stand.”
- High School Student

Food truck parties and covered picnic tables
- High School

Design scenario critiques
General feedback

“This image makes me feel…”

Happy
Inspired
Welcomed
Confused
Overwhelmed

“Everyone seems happy”
“I am happy to play here”
“I don’t think this would attract a young/teen audience”
“There is nowhere to go when it rains”

Happy
Peaceful
Bored
Underwhelmed

“I would definitely enjoy hanging out in this area”
“No kids around”
“It’s a nice place to eat, lie down and hang out”

Unwelcome
Confused
Unhappy

“I don’t feel invited”
“The table needs to be further from the creek”
“I feel like this will be too crowded”
“This is a horrible idea because it destroys nature and bad for our country”

Happy
Excited
Thankful
Inspired

“Kids are bonding”
“There should be seats”
“I love this, it seems like a very great place that kids would love to play in”
Our Approach

Methods

Growing Up Boulder used many methods including presentations about inspiring public spaces, field trips to the Civic Area, the Personal Experience and Perception (PEP) technique from Co-Design, City as Play, photogrid, imagining public art pieces with a visiting artist, drawing, visual preference surveys, design scenario critiques and model-making.

Nicho Boxes

Primary students also made nicho boxes – multimedia art boxes, inspired from Latin American folk art – through which students expressed what was important to them.

Nicho Box - 3rd Grade

Middle school students used the “picto-play” method from Belgium to learn to design play spaces within a set budget. Each icon had dots that represented relative expenses.

“Picto-Play” - Middle School

Photogrids

Elementary and Middle school students critique the Civic Area and suggested what they felt should be kept, changed or added.

- Keep the path separation
- There is a good diversity of seating
- Keep the big cottonwood trees
- No smoking allowed
- We need shelter from the rain
- We need to add some hills
- Add a play structure
- Add a treehouse shelter for kids
- Add statues in the water
- We need brick bridges
- We need lights at night
We designed a water slide that goes into the river. It's free for kids to go on it. It goes over the creek to make it easier to get across the creek. But the important thing about the zip line is that it is fun. Kids can play in the air. But the important thing about the zip line is that it is fun.

The important thing about the dog statue is that it is blue. It is small and it can be climbed on by kids. It is in the grass and it is made of cement. It would be fun to have because if a kid came out of the library and checked out books, he or she could come outside by the creek and play in the nature area.

The panda statue is cool because it is blue. It is small and it can be climbed on by kids, it is in the grass and it is made of cement. You can get some nice views of the creek from underneath it. It is true that it is a sofa and that the dog statue is in the field too.

The underground creek viewing tunnel is interesting because art is cool and when you jump from one step to another, it would be fun to see the paint splash against the wall. This is a fountain that you can play in. We made water hoops that can jump through. We made marbles that you can rub your feet on. There is rubber on the bottom of the fountain. This is a fountain that you can play in. We made water hoops that can jump through. We made marbles that you can rub your feet on. There is rubber on the bottom of the fountain. This is a fountain that you can play in. We made water hoops that can jump through. We made marbles that you can rub your feet on. There is rubber on the bottom of the fountain. This is a fountain that you can play in. We made water hoops that can jump through. We made marbles that you can rub your feet on. There is rubber on the bottom of the fountain. This is a fountain that you can play in. We made water hoops that can jump through. We made marbles that you can rub your feet on. There is rubber on the bottom of the fountain.

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**Final Models**

**Models with label descriptions**

### Elementary School Students

**Whittier Elementary School Civic Area Model - Cathy’s Class**

- **Glass Dome**
  - We designed a glass dome where kids can see in the water on hot summer days. We also planted a lot of plants along with the climbing statues so that kids are in nature as they play. This is a really great thing for kids because they love to climb and it’s great exercise!

- **Climbable Statues: Zoo Animal Annex (Bear cave)**
  - The zoo is connected to a bear cave by a pond. Kids can jump in the water on hot summer days. We also planted a lot of plants along with the climbing statues so that kids are in nature as they play. This is a really good thing for kids because they love to climb and it’s great exercise!

- **Treehouse**
  - We designed the treehouse because we want kids to interact with nature and art. We want them to see the world in a different view and angle. To get to the treehouse, you climb up a moss-covered ladder into a house that is made of a tree. Flowers are everywhere because it’s beautiful and they camouflage them. The treehouse is important because kids from Boulder appreciate nature and love to play. Not everyone has a treehouse in their own backyard!

- **Climbable Statues: An Animal Zoo**
  - We designed an animal zoo for kids. We have two dogs, a bear, a fish, two goats, two gazelles, a dragonfly, and two lizards. The zoo is connected to a bear cave by a pond. Kids can jump in the water on hot summer days. We also planted a lot of plants along with the climbing statues so that kids are in nature as they play. This is a really good thing for kids because they love to climb and it’s great exercise!

### Middle School Students

**Skate Park with Graffiti Wall**

- Play area
- North side of creek
- Padding on ground
- Climb on trees
- Treehouse
- Access to water

**Creek Adventure Play**

- Places to sit while watching the kids play in the water
- Located where the shuffle board is
- Water fountain
- Rubber surface leading to the creek
- Monkey bars on the bottom of the bridge
- Boardwalk
Final Models

Models with label descriptions

Middle School Students

Sanitation Station for the Homeless
• Shipping containers for the buildings
• Offers clean towels and clothes
• Offers jobs
• Benches
• Bridge to cross over
• Water fountains
• Fruit trees

Play Structures
• By the Boulder canyon theater in the large grassy area
• Obstacle course
• Nature play treehouse
• Boat pulled by rope across creek
• Hippo that spits out water

High School Students

Boulder High School Civic Area Model

- Food trucks
- Covered seating area by Library
- Lights on the bridge
- Flags representing different countries
- Inspiring quotes along the path
- Chalkboard wall
- Soccer field
- Movie screening area