

# CIVIC AREA PARTICIPATORY PLANNING



## Young people's ideas and views of the Civic Area in Boulder

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.

### Nature Play

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- Interaction with the creek
- Climbing trees
- Treehouses

### Active Play

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- Small skateboard park
- Space for pick-up games
- Parkour course
- Slacklines
- Climbable animal structures

### Arts and Cultural Expressions

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- Interactive art displays
- Sculptures
- World flags
- Quotes and poems on path in different languages
- Inspirational chalkboard wall

### Affordable & Diverse Food Options

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- Food trucks
- Picnic tables
- Coffee shops
- Food stands
- Shaded seating areas

### Outdoor Libraries & Learning Spaces

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- Outdoor lending library
- Treehouse with book nook and bean bags
- Sheltered spaces for protection from sun and rain
- Hangout spaces
- Greenhouse with books about nature

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."



"Me and Nature" - 3rd Grade

*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.



Homeless Sanitation Station- Middle School

*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!"



Civic Area Model - High School



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

*"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*

## Suggestions by age

### Elementary School Students

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



City as Play - Middle School

### 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

*"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

### 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



Treehouse with a statue of a duck - 3rd Grade

# Active Play

*"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

## Suggestions by age

### Elementary School Students

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



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

### 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

*"We need children sized B-cycles."*  
- Middle School Student

### High School Students

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



Soccer field - High School

# Arts and Cultural Expressions

"A Chalkboard with a question like, 'What do you love about Boulder?' or 'What are your goals?'"

-High School Student

## 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



Steps that shoot out paint- 3rd Grade

### Middle School Students

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

"I propose we put steps that shoot out paint onto a giant piece of paper."

-3rd Grade Student

### High School Students

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



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

"Maybe we could have a greenhouse library where the books could be about plants."

-3rd Grade Student

### Middle School Students

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

"The homeless sanitation station could have clean towels and clothes, and offer jobs."

-Middle School Student



Treehouse - 3rd Grade

### High School Students

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



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 trucks and covered picnic tables  
- High School

# Design scenario critiques

General feedback



"This image makes me feel..."

- Happy
- Inspired
- Welcomed
- Confused
- Overwhelmed

Additional thoughts

- "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

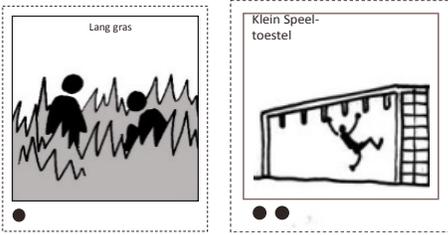
Growing Up Boulder used many methods including presentations about inspiring public spaces, field trips to the Civic Area, the Personal Experience and Perception (PEP) technique from Co-Design, City as Play, photogrid, imagining public art pieces with a visiting artist, drawing, visual preference surveys,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



Nicho Box - 3rd Grade

### 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.



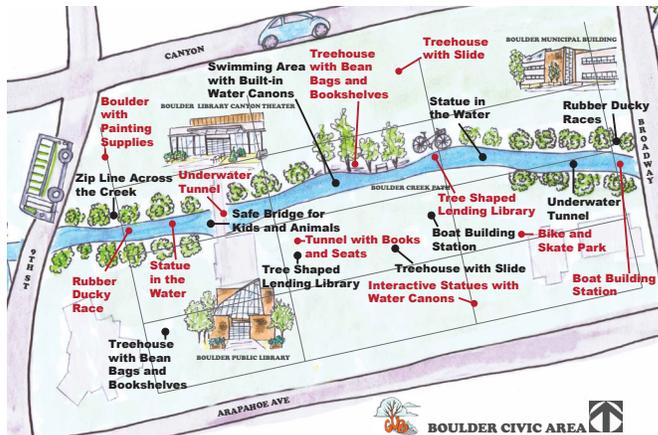
### Picto-Play

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.



Lisa's 3rd Grade  
Odd Group # Even Group #

Whittier Elementary

Photogrid - 3rd Grade

- 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

# Final Models

## Models with label descriptions

### Elementary School Students

#### Whittier Elementary School Civic Area Model- Lisa's Class

**Dog Statue**  
"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. But the important thing about the dog statue is that it is blue"

**Zip Line**  
"The important thing about the zip line is that it is fun. Kids can play on it, it goes over the creek, it connects to trees, it is safe and you are in the air. But the important thing about the zip line is that it is fun"

**Rubber Duck Race**  
"The important thing about the rubber duck race is that it is fun. It is true that it is a race and that the ducks float. But the important thing about the rubber duck race is that it is fun"

**Swimming Area**  
"The important thing about the swimming area is that it is fun for the public. It has a water fountain in the middle and a cement boundary above it where you can see Boulder Creek. It has a pool where you can swim, it is surrounded by grass. But the important thing about the swimming area is that it is fun for the public"

**Treehouse**  
"The important thing about the treehouse is people can get close to nature. Kids can climb stairs or ramp, you can read books inside, it is cozy, it will take up some of the parking lot, and you can see the creek and other parts of Boulder. But the important thing about the treehouse is people can get close to nature"

**Panda Statue**  
"The important thing about the Panda statue is that it is outdoors. You can learn about endangered animals and you can take books or receive books. You can sit on its legs while you read. But the important thing about the Panda statue is that it is outdoors"

**Underground Creek Viewing Tunnel**  
"The important thing about the underground creek viewing tunnel is that you can see the fishes in the creek. It is true that you can check out books, and learn more about fishes and other things. You can get from one side of the creek to the other. But the important thing about the underground creek viewing tunnel is that you can see the fishes in the creek"

**Boat Building Station**  
"The important thing about the boat building station is that it would be inviting. It connects to nature, and you can build toy boats out of natural materials. It is a good place for people to get together and share ideas. But the important thing about a boat building station is that it would be inviting"

**Laser Tag Maze**  
"The important thing about the laser tag maze is that it is fun. It takes up part of the parking lot, and it attracts people to the Civic Area, you chase people and you try to shoot your friends with lasers. But the important thing about the laser tag maze is that it is fun"

#### Whittier Elementary School Civic Area Model- Tamar's Class

**Water Slide**  
"We made a water slide that goes into the river. It's free for kids to go in and out. In the bottom, we made a 'dry station' so when kids are wet they can go in there and dry off. It has a shower and towels so people can clean themselves after being in the river. Kids could play in the water and have a fun time instead of just playing in the river. There would also be books so that kids can read"

**Paint Steps**  
"We designed pressure plates that when stepped on, activated paint cans that spray onto a paper-covered wall. This is interesting because art is cool and when you jump from one step to another, it would be fun seeing the paint splash against the wall"

**Treehouse**  
"We designed the treehouse. One side is a nature play area, and the other is a reading area. People could read outside by the creek and play in the nature area"

**Stepping Stones**  
"We designed stepping stones because it might make it easier to get across the creek that way. It would be easier for people to get around in the park"

**Tunnel Under the Creek**  
"We designed a tunnel to go under the creek. We have a dog, an elk a fish, and a frog around the tunnel. It would be cool to view the creek from underneath"

**Maze**  
"We designed a maze so kids can have more fun. There could be a door to the library at the end of the maze. Kids can play different games, like hide and seek, in the maze"

**Fox Statue Playground**  
"We designed the fox statue playground. There is an orange slide that is the fox's tongue, and some monkey bars on the tail. There is a ladder up to the top of the fox's head and the body. There would be swings under the body. It would be fun to have because if a kid came out of the library and checked out books he or she could come and have some fun on the fox playground. If kids are bored in the library, they can play on the fox statue outside"

**Dinosaur Playground**  
"We designed a playground with a dinosaur statue. We made an entrance that is a bridge. We put animals by the entrance that kids could climb on. We have bean bags to sit on. There is a ladder to the dinosaur, and a slide to get back out. We made a garden around it. Kids can play inside and have fun"

**Fountain**  
"This is a fountain that you can play in. We made water hoops that can jump through. They squirt water when you jump through. We made marbles that you can rub your feet on. There is rubber on the bottom of the fountain. This is more fun than a fountain that just shoots water"

**Train Station**  
"We designed a broken down train because kids could play on it. It should be big so that they can climb around on it. There should be secret passages that take them to different areas, like a maze. There should be books too so that people can read in it. It would be fun for everyone"

# 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 go inside and read and relax on cushions while their parents are getting books inside the library. The dome is next to the library and near the creek so kids can look out and see nature. This is important build because kids need something to do while their parents are checking out books! Kids in Boulder love to learn and they value a good education, and the dome will help them be good readers and thinkers. Resting is good for your body!"

**Fall Colored Trampoline**  
"We designed the trampoline to have a fall theme because it's so nice and colorful in Boulder in the fall. It blends in really well with the environment of the Civic Area. It would be fun to have a trampoline in their own backyard. We think it would be great to play on the trampoline after visiting the library or the creek"

**Bird Feeding Area (in a tree)**  
"We designed a place where kids and their families could feed birds and interact with nature! The way you do it is you climb up a ladder which is inside the tree's trunk. Once you are up in there, there's an opening where the birds fly in. There's bear and squirrel-proof food containers on the top, so that visitors can feed the birds and not worry about any interferences with bears"

**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. This treehouse is important because kids from boulder appreciate nature and love to play. Not everyone has a treehouse in their own backyard"

**Bench with International Quotes**  
"The idea behind this is that families can sit down and relax and watch nature. There are a lot of different cultures in our town, but there aren't objects that show all the different cultures. We think this is important so that people can feel and learn about different cultures. People will be more knowledgeable about the world when they visit our bench"

**Glass Tunnel Under a Duck Pond**  
"We designed a glass tunnel under a duck pond so families can go in the glass tunnel and interact with the creek and the fish. It will be connected to the library and go underground and into the creek. Having an underwater tunnel is important because you can interact with nature and families love to play in the water and there's no real place to do that now. It will be so fun to go under there and see all the fish! There will be bookshelves and some spaces, so you can read in a bean bag and look at fish at the same time! This will be a place that people will want to come to all the time"

**Turtle Shell Bench with a Safety Robot**  
"We designed a turtle shell bench and placed it by the creek so that people have a place to rest by the creek. We laid out a pathway of stones so that families have a nice way to get to the bench. We thought that it would be kind of fun to have a turtle because turtles do live in water! The safety robot can help families enjoy the Civic Area with no worries in any medical or physical way. If someone has an accident, like someone fall into the creek, then the robot would alert the police and try to help them out safely."

**Climbable Statues: An Animal Zoo**  
"We designed an animal zoo for climbing. We have two dogs, a bear, a fish, two goats, two gazelle, a dragonfly, and two lizards. The zoo is connected to a bear and 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*

