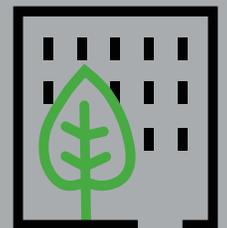




# PLAZAS FOR PEOPLE



Assessment of Privately Owned  
Public Spaces in Greater Downtown

NOVEMBER 2018

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## BACKGROUND

The Seattle Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) helps create great places for all Seattleites to enjoy. As our city continues to rapidly grow and develop, public spaces are becoming increasingly valuable places to pause, converse, rest and refresh.

Between June and August 2018, we surveyed and analyzed 46 public spaces in the Greater Downtown area (FIG 2). Thirty-six are **privately owned public spaces** (POPS), required of private developers as part of alley vacations or zoning bonuses. For comparison, we also assessed ten projects that voluntarily provided public spaces (called voluntary spaces in this report); four of these projects are publicly owned properties.

## RESULTS

The spaces were evaluated using tools from the Gehl Institute, the Project for Public Spaces and the Advocates for Privately Owned Public Spaces. In total, 43% of the assessed POPS received a score of 'average', which communicates that most of our public spaces are, at minimum, usable but do not leave a lasting impression on users. The most common type of POPS are plazas – open spaces typically at sidewalk grade and open to the sky – which tend to score higher in the rankings. Conversely, setbacks are the worst performing type of POPS, clustering at the lower end of the rankings. The other types – courts, hillclimbs and atriums – are too rare to form conclusions on them.

Voluntary spaces perform similarly to projects that are legally required; the tabulated scores of voluntary spaces (referenced A-K, TABLE 1) are spread throughout the rankings (page 9).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Half of the sites ranked in the top ten are recent developments, built in the last two decades. Four of these five sites are in South Lake Union, where the neighborhood has an open space requirement for office buildings, stipulated through the Seattle Land Use Code. The code standards combine with the SDCI Design Review process to fine-tune the design and positive results of these private plazas.

Based on the relatively high performance of these code or vacation required spaces, it is recommended to consider a similar code requirement for public space development throughout Greater Downtown, and/or citywide in relevant zones.

Only 15% of the surveyed POPS are 'good'. Many plazas could improve their performance and public space value with one or more of the following easy/medium improvements:

- Legible, large and well-distributed signage indicating Public Use
- More seating, either movable chairs and tables, benches, and/or seating walls
- Engaging play structures, water features and/or public art
- Portable kiosks or permeable storefronts with activating uses such as food, vendors, etc
- Canopies and other forms of shade or weather protection
- Adding potted or permanent vegetation, and planting variety
- Lighting and other enhancements for nighttime safety and use



**PLAZAS**  
ARE THE BEST PERFORMING  
TYPE OF POPS

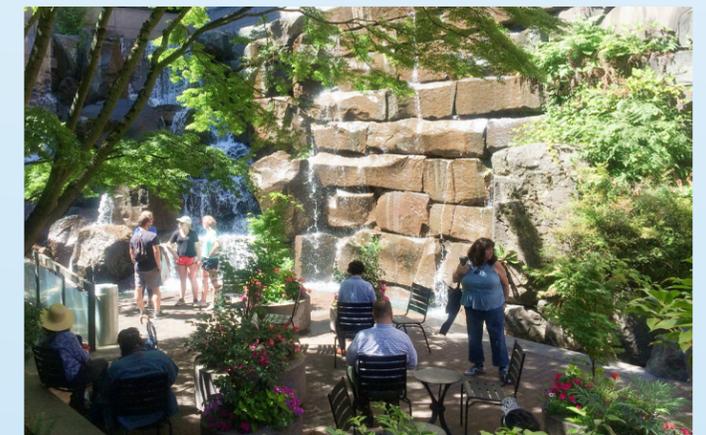
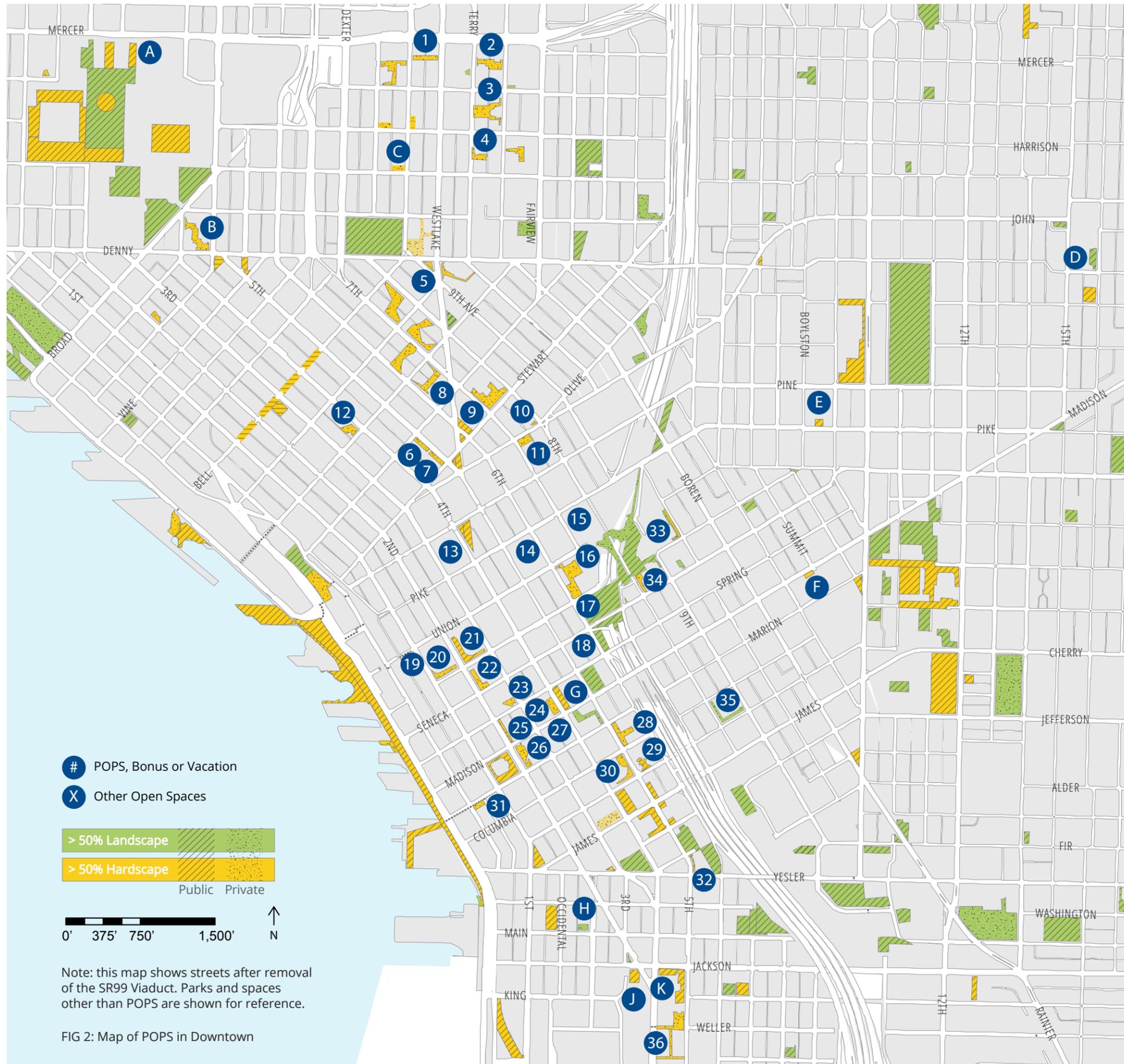


FIG 1: People enjoying the UPS Waterfall Garden



	Common Name	Plaza S.F. (approx.)	Type
1	Nessie office bldg.	11,200	plaza
2	Rufus office bldg.	18,000	plaza
3	Van Vorst office bldg.	30,300	plaza
4	Ruby office bldg.	9,700	plaza
5	Enso Condo	3,600	setbacks
6	6th & Lenora bldg.	3,400	setbacks
7	Westin bldg	2,000	setbacks
8	Doppler office bldg.	18,200	plaza
9	Plaza 600	10,200	setbacks
10	8th and Olive bldg.	1,200	setbacks
11	1600 7th Ave	9,900	plaza
12	4th & Blanchard bldg.	10,400	plaza
13	Century Square	0	atrium
14	US Bank Centre	0	atrium
15	WA Convention Center	7,000	plaza (atrium)
16	1&2 Union Square	40,600	plaza
17	Park Place office bldg.	7,500	plaza
18	Crown Plaza Hotel	6,300	court
19	Four Seasons Hotel	700	hillclimb
20	Seattle Art Museum	9,600	setbacks
21	Benaroya Hall (along 2nd)	19,300	plaza (setbacks)
22	Old WAMU Block	14,400	plaza (atrium)
23	1111 3rd Plaza	6,100	plaza
24	Safeco Plaza	12,100	plaza (arcade)
25	1000 2nd Ave	5,700	court
26	Wells Fargo Center	15,500	plaza (hillclimb)
27	4th/Madison bldg.	16,400	hillclimb (atrium)
28	800 5th Ave office bldg.	18,400	plaza (arcade)
29	Seattle Municipal Tower	7,600	plaza
30	Columbia Center	15,500	plaza
31	The Post Apts.	5,300	setbacks
32	Passport Agency	2800	setbacks
33	Horizon House	6,400	setbacks
34	Cielo Apts.	7,000	court
35	Skyline at First Hill	12,600	setbacks
36	Union Station South/ OPUS	12,800	plaza
A	Kreilshimer Promenade	17,000	court
B	Fisher Plaza (KOMO)	24,400	plaza
C	Apollo office bldg.	7,000	plaza
D	Kaiser Capitol Hill Campus	12,200	plaza/ park
E	Motorworks Forecourt	5,500	court
F	Swedish Entry at Summit	3,700	court
G	Central Library plaza	15,100	plaza
H	UPS Waterfall Garden	6,200	court
J	King St Station plaza	11,700	plaza
K	C/ID Station plaza	32,600	plaza

TABLE 1  
POPS  
Reference chart

# CONTEXT

To better understand the usability and design of our public spaces, OPCD systematically evaluated the quality of 46 public spaces in the Greater Downtown. The assessment method built on tools and information provided by the Gehl Institute, Fred Kent and the Project for Public Spaces, and Jerold Kayden and the Advocates for Privately Owned Public Spaces. With this assessment, we hope to inform current and future planning and design efforts regarding the public realm.

This assessment focuses on Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS), which are public amenities provided by private developers as part of alley vacation processes, or in exchange for stipulated zoning code bonuses, often additional floor area. The Seattle Land Use Code informs the development of these spaces;

POPS appear in many different forms such as plazas, arcades, atriums, hillclimbs, and green streets. POPS are legally required to be open to the public, however, these spaces are managed by private property owners who control hours of access and allowed activities.

There are over 40 POPS in Seattle; most of these spaces are in the 10 neighborhoods that comprise the Greater Downtown area. The 36 official POPS located in that area were selected for review. For comparison, we also assessed ten projects that voluntarily provided public spaces (called voluntary spaces in this report); four of these projects are publicly owned properties. This assessment does not include sites managed by Seattle Parks and Recreation.



FIG 3: Van Vorst plaza - Amazon, 410 Terry Avenue North; Ref. #3

# METHODOLOGY

## RESEARCH AND PREPARATION

The assessment adapts the Place Inventory framework developed by the Gehl Institute. The framework is a part of a larger collection of Public Life Tools, which was officially released in 2017 with the goal of creating a standardized toolkit for studying public life and public space. The Gehl Place Inventory tool is relatively new and remains in the Beta testing phase. The Place Inventory tool collects information on the physical features of a space through two components: mapping and survey questions. The mapping process highlights the different amenities available in the space and the survey questions assess the experience of the space as it relates to the given amenities. The two combined allow for thoughtful analysis of the space's design.

In preparation for the fieldwork, the structure and content of the Place Inventory tool was tested and modified to best suit the objectives of this project. The original tool consists of 14 questions with four potential answers. Our modified tool consists of 21 total questions – 13 questions explored the amenities, physical design, and the experiential attributes of each site and the remaining seven questions collected contextual information (See Appendix for complete list of **Survey Questions Details**).

Additionally, during this preliminary phase, a scoring system was developed to aid the analysis process. Most of the questions are scored on a scale of zero to three, with zero being awarded to conditions that do not exist and three being awarded to conditions that go above and beyond; scores of one and two capture conditions that are either subpar, average, and above-average.

After the testing process, one question was given special consideration in the scoring process. Seattle has numerous spaces which are visually remote from the sidewalks, leading to the creation of Question 16. The question attempts to measure visibility of the site by pedestrians from the adjacent sidewalk and street. A highly visible site has higher potential of use compared to a nonvisible or partly visible site. A highly visible site invites users into the space, which is the desired outcome for open spaces. Due to these elements Question 16 receives an extra weight during the scoring process.

The following formula is for question 16:  
**raw score x 1.5 = score**



FIG 4: Entrance plaza at Columbia Center, 701 5th Avenue; Ref. #30

## LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations and clarifications regarding this project:

- This study is strictly a public space survey and not a public life survey. Therefore, data was not collected on behaviors or activities, although such a study (see Gehl Institute Stationary Activity Mapping tool) would provide a more detailed understanding of how spaces are used over longer time periods and seasons. A public life survey is a recommended next step.
- The information on POPS was not cross-checked with legal requirements or permitting information; therefore, comments offered through this study may be limited by other agreements. The suggestions made in this report will depend upon the private property owner to decide how to manage the site. The information offered in this report should not be implied as any form of enforcement.
- This assessment took place during July and August and survey responses reflect the weather conditions during these months. Since public spaces during the summer time are usually livelier than in winter, it will be important to assess these spaces during the cooler months to confirm the year-round usability and design of each POPS.

## FIELDWORK

Data collection took place during the summer months of 2018, in the 10 neighborhoods across the Greater Downtown area (FIG 2). A total of 46 sites were surveyed, with most of the POPS concentrated in the Commercial Core. To capture the everyday use of these spaces, data was collected during the daytime and primarily during the working week. Each site received three to four visits, including evening observations.

## ANALYSIS

With each site assessment complete, survey responses were translated to numerical values; these values created a raw score. To fully view the scoring process and how each survey question was evaluated, refer to pages 28-29 in the Appendix.

Admittedly, our sample size for this study is small. Despite the small sample size, the 46 surveyed sites were completed over the past 30 years (see chart on pages 24 - 27 in the Appendix); therefore, these sites provide ample information and lessons for studying design and usability of space.

In addition to the scoring process, the information collected through this assessment was also considered along with:

- Type
- Geography
- Time period



FIG 5: Coffee cart activation at Occidental Square

These categories revealed that most of our POPS were plazas, predominately concentrated in the Commercial Core, and built during the 1980's and 1990's. Since many of the POPS are plazas, the most relevant trends observed in this report pertain to this type of open space. Moreover, this report does not further analyze the data by geography or time.

### OUR FOCUS ACCESSIBILITY

explores whether there are physical or visibility challenges to accessing a space.

### FEATURES AND AMENITIES

identifies the types of elements offered in a space.

### ACTIVATION AND USES

investigates the types of activities supported in the space or the adjacent built form.

### CONDITIONS AND IMPACTS

examines all topics together to understand how these elements impact the human experience of the space.

Ref. #	Common Name	Plaza S.F. (approx.)	Type	Address	Score
D	Kaiser Capitol Hill Campus	12,200	plaza/park	201 16th Ave E	30.5
3	Van Vorst office bldg.	30,300	plaza	410 Terry Ave N	29
2	Rufus office bldg.	18,000	plaza	510 Terry Ave N	28
C	Apollo office bldg.	7,000	plaza	325 9th Ave N	27
1	Nessie office bldg.	11,200	plaza	500 9th Ave N	27
34	Cielo Apts.	7,000	court	802 Seneca St	27
8	Doppler office bldg.	18,200	plaza	2021 7th Ave	27
10	8th and Olive bldg.	1,200	setbacks	720 Olive	26.5
33	Horizon House	6,400	setbacks	900 University St	26.5
21	Benaroya Hall (along 2nd)	19,300	plaza (setbacks)	200 University St	26.5
4	Ruby office bldg.	9,700	plaza	350 Terry Ave N	26
B	Fisher Plaza (KOMO)	24,400	plaza	140 4th Ave N	26
29	Seattle Municipal Tower	7,600	plaza	700 5th Ave	26
15	WA Convention Center	7,000	atrium	701 Pike St	25.5
23	1111 3rd Plaza	6,100	plaza	1111 3rd Ave	25.5
36	Union Station South/OPUS	12,800	plaza	625 5th Ave S	25
22	Old WAMU Block	14,400	plaza (atrium)	1201 3rd Ave	24.5
5	Enso Condo	3,600	setbacks	2201 9th Ave	24.5
26	Wells Fargo Center	15,500	plaza (hillclimb)	999 3rd Ave	24.5
H	UPS Waterfall Garden	6,200	court	219 2nd Ave S	24
16	1&2 Union Square	40,600	plaza	600 University St/ 21 Union St	23.5
27	4th/Madison bldg.	16,400	hillclimb (atrium)	925 4th Ave	23.5
A	Kreilshheimer Promenade	17,000	court	321 Mercer St.	23
14	US Bank Centre	0	atrium	1420 5th Ave	22
32	Passport Agency	2800	setbacks	300 5th Ave	22
31	The Post Apts.	5,300	setbacks	888 Western Ave	21
G	Central Library plaza	15,100	plaza	10000 4th Ave	21
30	Columbia Center	15,500	plaza	701 5th Ave	20.5
K	C/ID Station plaza	32,600	plaza	Jackson/5th	20.5
13	Century Square	0	atrium	1501 4th Ave	20
28	800 5th Ave office bldg.	18,400	plaza (arcade)	800 5th Ave	20
17	Park Place office bldg.	7,500	plaza	1200 6th Ave	20
F	Swedish Entry at Summit	3,700	court	1221 Madison St	19
J	King St Station plaza	11,700	plaza	Jackson/2nd Ave ext	19
20	Seattle Art Museum (along University)	9,600	setbacks	1301 1st Ave	19
25	1000 2nd Ave	5,700	court	1000 2nd Ave	18
24	Safeco Plaza	12,100	plaza (arcade)	1001 4th Ave	18
E	Motorworks Forecourt	5,500	court	715 E Pine St	17.5
6	6th Lenora	3,400	setbacks	2033 6th Ave	17.5
7	Westin Bldg	2,000	setbacks	2001 6th Ave	17.5
12	4th Blanchard	10,400	plaza	2101 4th Ave	17
9	Plaza 600	10,200	setbacks	600 Stewart	16.5
35	Skyline at First Hill	12,600	setbacks	715 9th Ave	16.5
11	1600 7th Ave	9,900	plaza	1600 7th	15
18	Crown Plaza Hotel	6,300	court	1113 6th Ave	15
19	Four Seasons Hotel	700	hillclimb	99 Union St	7.5

## RESULTS

+  
GOOD

Ø  
AVERAGE

—  
POOR

TABLE 2  
Complete rankings

Indicates samples  
on pages 14-21

## RANKING CATEGORIES:

The 46 sites fall into three categories:

- **Good:** Sites that fall within this category are providing multiple amenities of high quality (in terms of material type, durability, and quantity).
- **Average:** Sites in this category provide basic amenities such as seating, shelter, and lighting. In these spaces, it is common for a site to have both a great element and a subpar feature. The overall number of amenities provided is sufficient.
- **Poor:** Sites in this category include basic amenities and make few attempts to invite users into the space. Overall these spaces are insufficient.

Note: The Four Seasons Hotel and its lowest score is treated as an outlier. The remaining score range from 15 to 33, which is the maximum possible score, was divided into thirds to generate three groups.

Seven sites are found in the 'good' category, while 20 are considered 'average' and 18 are 'poor' public spaces (TABLE 2). Therefore, most of the surveyed sites are 'average' to 'poor' spaces. The following chart illustrates the varying amenities found in the assessed POPS.

TABLE 3 Summary of amenities

	MOST SITES	SOME SITES	FEW SITES
 PUBLIC ART		◆	
 SIGNAGE		◆	
 SHADE/SHELTER WEATHER PROTECTION	◆		
 SEATING	◆		
 LANDSCAPING	◆		
 PHYSICAL ACCESS	◆		
 VISIBILITY		◆	
 INTERACTION		◆	
 BUILT EDGE ACTIVATION		◆	
 ACTIVITY			◆
 LIGHTING		◆	

For a more detailed breakdown for each site, refer to Pages 24-27 in Appendix.

While there are no elements that create a substantial challenge to the overall usability of these spaces, it is important to recognize the value of public space and the desire to continually enhance the experience of the public realm. This assessment indicates that most of our public spaces are moderately amenable but do not leave a lasting impression on users.

Interestingly, most of the sites that ranked in the top ten are recent developments, built in the last two decades. These sites are in South Lake Union, where the neighborhood has a ground level open space requirement, visible from adjacent streets and sidewalks, as stipulated through the Seattle Land Use Code.

## SPECIAL OBSERVATIONS

### INDOOR SPACES

There are seven sites with an indoor component, either an arcade or an atrium (see TABLE 2). The US Bank Centre (FIG 6; Ref.# 14); Century Square (Ref.# 13); and 4th and Madison Building (Ref.# 27) are fully indoor spaces. Surprisingly, the seven sites are spread out in the rankings; a few are exemplary cases and others are average spaces. Expectedly, the visibility of these sites can be poor, and it can be unclear whether the space is public. This ultimately speaks to the biggest challenge for indoor public spaces: privatization.

### SURVEILLANCE

Twelve sites had some form of personnel security (i.e. someone monitoring the space); all indoor spaces had security. Formalized security brings up issues of safety, welcomeness, and discrimination. For some, the presence of a formal security guard provides a sense of safety that encourages them to use a space; for others, the presence of security communicates that a space is not welcoming, and/or the space is not created to serve them. As we work towards creating a more equitable city with more public spaces for all Seattleites to enjoy, security presence is a main issue to reconsider.

### OUTLIER

The Four Seasons Hotel hosts the worst scoring POPS site. The hillclimb (FIG 7) fulfills its singular function of facilitating able-bodied pedestrian movement up a large elevation change. The landings along that long stair do not afford usable public space and the mini street end plaza at the top of the stair provides minimal amenities. The site contributes little public amenity beyond the 103 step stair function.

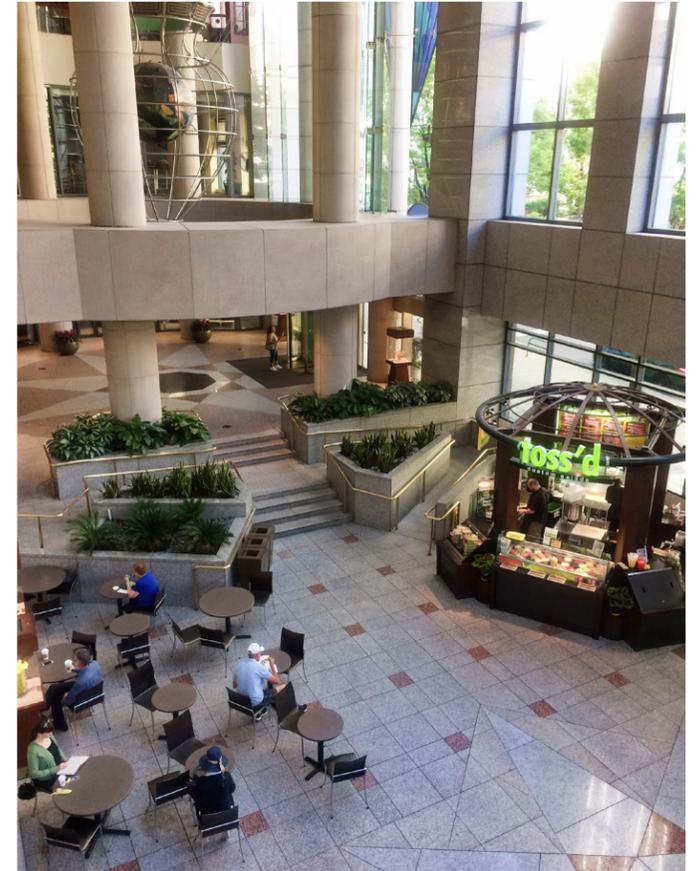


FIG 6: Indoor atrium of US Bank Centre, 1420 5th Avenue; Ref. #14

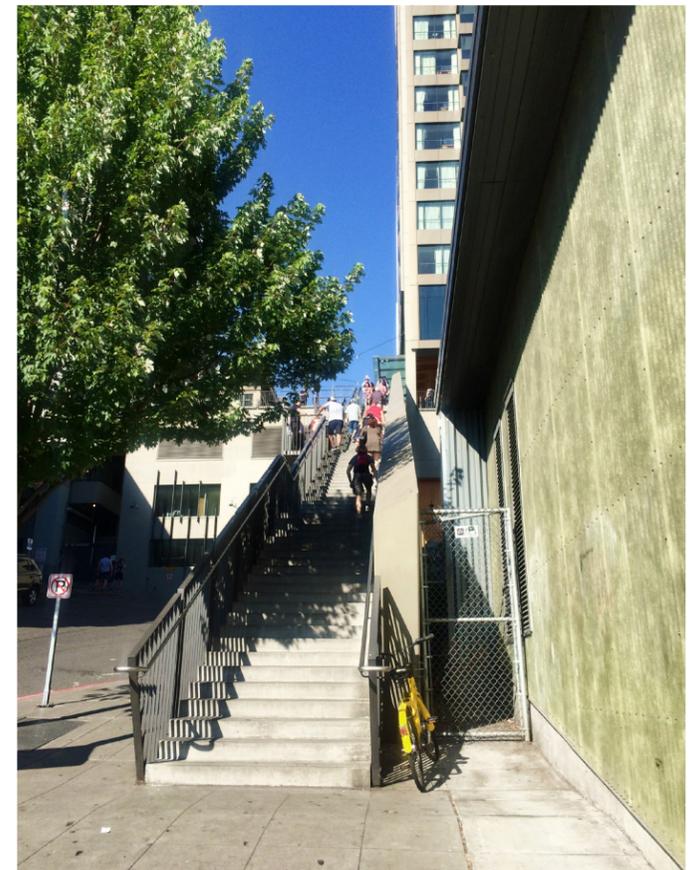


FIG 7: Hillclimb at Four Season Hotel, 99 Union Street; Ref. #19

# ASSORTED SURVEYED PLAZAS



FIG 8: Apollo Plaza, 325th Thomas Avenue; Ref. #C



FIG 9: Benaroya Hall, 1301 3rd Avenue; Ref. #21



FIG 10: Wells Fargo Center, 999 3rd Avenue; Ref. #26



FIG 11: Fisher Plaza, 140 4th Avenue North; Ref. #B



FIG 12: Passport Agency, 300 5th Avenue; Ref. #32



FIG 13: Kaiser Capitol Hill Campus, 201 16th Avenue East; Ref. #D

# OTHER PLAZAS

While the private plazas shown below were not a part of this assessment, they are examples of many privately owned public spaces in Seattle that could be improved through the recommendations found in this report.



FIG 14: South facing plaza at Westlake Center Retail Mall



FIG 15: Sizable, non-amenable setback at 920 4th Avenue



FIG 15: Large plaza at 5th Avenue and University Street

# SAMPLES

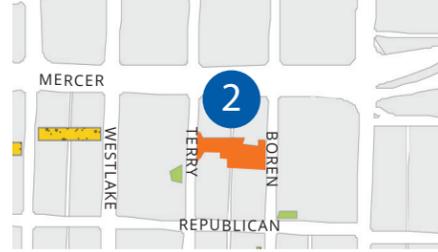
The following pages offer an in-depth assessment of four sites. Each was selected to represent scoring in the middle of the **GOOD**, **AVERAGE**, and **POOR** categories (see orange highlights on pg 9). A fourth - 800 5th Avenue - was also included to illustrate the deficiencies that are keeping a typical **UPPER-POOR** site from being average.

The selected sample sites focus on outdoor spaces. Indoor features such as shopping arcades, hillclimb assists, and atriums were not assessed in this section since they are relatively rare.

It is important to restate that the information provided in the following pages should not be interpreted as any form of enforcement.

# RUFUS - AMAZON

## 510 TERRY AVENUE NORTH



### SITE SUMMARY

**LOCATION:**  
South Lake Union;  
midblock connecting Boren to Terry  
Avenue North, between Republican  
and Mercer Streets.

**DESCRIPTION:**  
A level connection with paving and  
plantings, framed by office buildings.

**PLAZA SIZE:**  
Approximately 18,000 S.F.



FIG 17: Plaza from Boren Avenue

ASSESSMENT  
**CATEGORY: GOOD**

**28.0**  
SCORE

### STRENGTHS



The site is highly visible and accessible. There are no physical barriers impeding access to the site. On both Terry Avenue North and Boren Avenue, the sidewalk is flush with plaza (FIG 17, 18).

The plaza is easily seen from adjacent sidewalks and streets and visibility through the plaza is clear. In the space, navigation is easy. Users can walk from end to end to see the site amenities (FIG 20). During the summer, the tree canopy offers shade and shelter from the weather; the tree canopy also enhances the landscape to create a pleasant atmosphere. Fixed seating is found throughout the space (FIG 19).



FIG 18: Terry Ave. Sidewalk connection to plaza space



FIG 19: Seating and tree canopy

### WEAKNESSES



The site relies primarily on the tree canopy to provide weather protection (FIG 21). During the summertime, this works in the sites favor; however, protection during the wintertime is less because most of the trees will be leafless.

The center of the site is a self-designated smoking area. Many employees dominate this area during break times, which impacts the experience for users walking through.

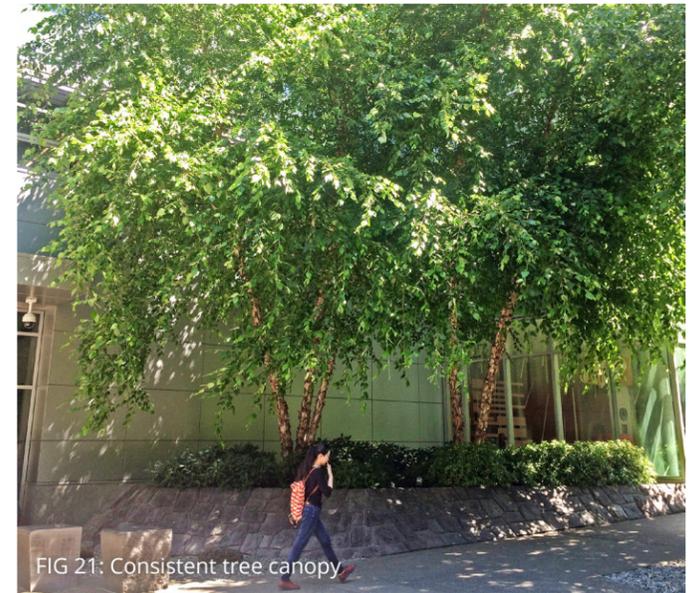


FIG 21: Consistent tree canopy

### POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS

Even though Rufus is a relatively high performing site, there are ways to improve the overall experience of the space.

- Diversify landscaping
- Formalize smoking area
- Add movable seating



FIG 20: Clear view through the space; users are able to see the amenities offered in the space

#### Additional Observations

Many POPS, including this site, have signage, but do not use the official POPS sign. The signs clearly indicate that the plaza is for public use and it also lists the allowed activities. These signs are usually found at the entrances to the plaza space. Clearly stating that the plaza is for the public helps remove ambiguity.

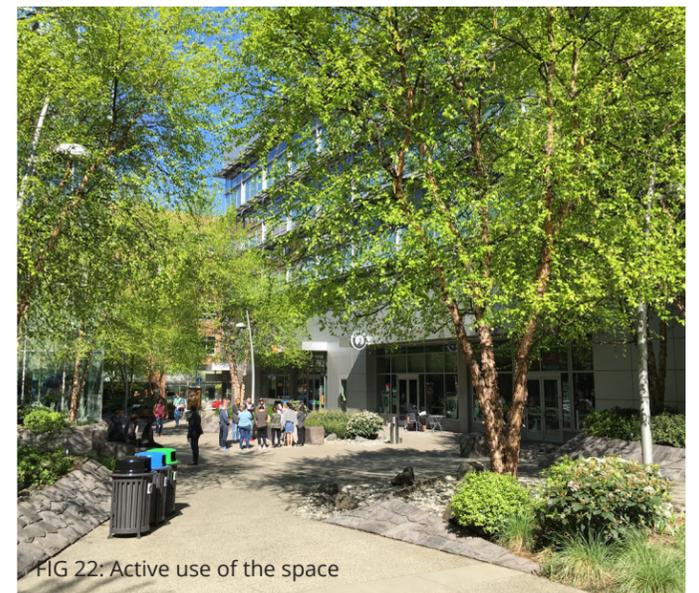


FIG 22: Active use of the space

# OLD WASHINGTON MUTUAL TOWER (WAMU)

1201 3RD AVENUE



## SITE SUMMARY

**LOCATION:**  
Commercial Core; full block development between 2nd and 3rd Avenues, and University and Seneca Streets.

**DESCRIPTION:**  
The plaza is located on 2nd Avenue and provides access to the hillclimb assist and to the rooftop garden along Seneca St.

**PLAZA SIZE:**  
Approximately 14,400 S.F.

**MISC:**  
Additional bonus received for internal atrium and transit access (at 3rd Ave).



FIG 23: Plaza from 2nd Avenue

## WEAKNESSES



The site uses the official POPS sign issued through the City as well as signage specific to the building (FIG 26). However, there is no signage identifying the location of the rooftop garden, which cannot be seen from the plaza, despite the stair access in the space. Moreover, wheelchair users or parents using strollers cannot access the rooftop garden from the plaza space; instead they must travel to Seneca Street and locate the unmarked entry point at mid block.

While there are only one to three risers, the single steps along 2nd Avenue prevent physical access for wheelchairs, strollers, etc. The ADA access location is not easy to find or well signed.

The areas under the arcade are well lit at night; however, during the day, the lights are not as bright, making portions of the space darker than expected (FIG 27, FIG 28).



FIG 26: Signage for the hillclimb and ADA access to plaza

## ASSESSMENT

CATEGORY: AVERAGE

24.5  
SCORE

*Note: The rooftop garden was under construction during site visit; the assessment is based on features that previously existed.*

## STRENGTHS



The plaza and rooftop garden provide ample outdoor seating. Large public art sculptures also add character to the space (FIG 25).

The plaza and rooftop garden include a variety of vegetation; however, only the tree canopy in the plaza provides shade. The public art and vegetation work together to create a pleasant environment for people to sit and interact. All materials are durable and high quality and the spaces are well maintained.



FIG 24: Moveable and fixed seating in the plaza



FIG 27: Weak lighting under arcade

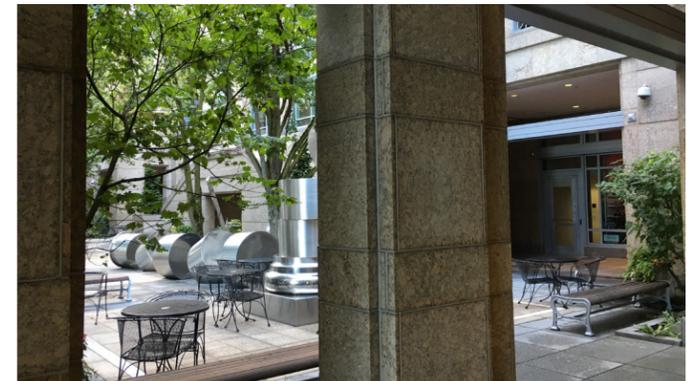


FIG 28: Relationship of the dark arcade and the open plaza



FIG 25: Tree canopy and arcade on site; stair access to rooftop garden

## POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS

- Increase signage informing public of the rooftop garden
- Enlarge legibility of signage for hillclimb assist escalator (FIG 26)
- Add ADA access signage at the steps along 2nd Avenue
- Retrofit the steps along 2nd Avenue into ramps, if possible

### Additional Observations

The plaza space has small physical barriers (stairs and walls) that demarcate the space. However, the site finds a balance in the design of these barriers to offset any perceived privatization. The entry point to the site is wide and the steps are low to allow for clear visibility into the site. The heavy walls are four to five feet tall, which also hinders visibility of the plaza.

# 800 5TH AVENUE



## SITE SUMMARY

**LOCATION:**  
Commercial Core;  
full block development between 5th and 6th Avenues, and Columbia and Marion Streets.

**DESCRIPTION:**  
From the sidewalk on 5th Avenue there is a covered entry plaza to the building's main lobby. Adjacent to the entryway is an elevated and setback courtyard (FIG 30).

**PLAZA SIZE:**  
Approximately 18,400 S.F.

**MISC:**  
Additional bonus received for internal shopping arcade.



FIG 29: Lobby entry from 5th Avenue

ASSESSMENT  
**CATEGORY: POOR**

**20.0**  
SCORE

## STRENGTHS



The elevated courtyard has covered portions along its perimeter and plenty of seating options, both fixed and movable. There are opportunities to sit under shade and shelter as well as in the open where there is no weather protection. Additionally, the courtyard incorporates vegetation with a mini garden at the center (FIG 31). The courtyard is set back and elevated from the streets, which reduces traffic noise and other disturbances.

Both the elevated courtyard and the plaza on 5th Avenue provide generous weather protection, which is valuable during the rainy seasons.



FIG 30: Seating in the elevated courtyard



FIG 31: Mini garden at center of elevated courtyard

## WEAKNESSES



The entry plaza space on 5th Avenue lacks amenities; there is only one seating opportunity and there is no vegetation or art. There are no attempts to activate the space (FIG 33). Since there are few amenities, the vastness of the building entry creates a sterile and unwelcoming atmosphere. Additionally, this section of the site is not well lit at night and depends on the building's lobby to provide lighting.

While the elevated courtyard has better amenities, the space is not clearly visible to pedestrians and physical access is not intuitive (FIG 34), the site does not feel completely open to the public. Overall, the space feels privatized.

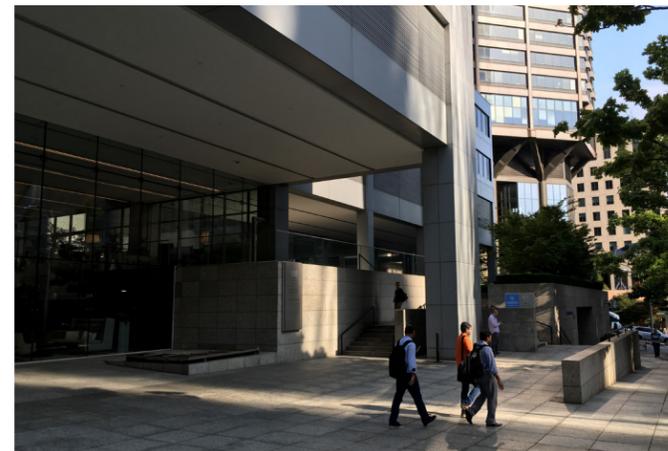


FIG 33: Partial view of 5th Avenue building entry and stairs leading to elevated courtyard



FIG 32: Empty space at southeast corner of elevated courtyard; non-activated storefronts



FIG 34: Barriers to access along 5th Avenue

## POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS

The southern and eastern sections of the courtyard have no activity and lack physical amenities. During a site visit, observations recorded temporary games introduced to the space; these games could be expanded to other areas in the courtyard and made available beyond the lunch hour.

### Courtyard:

- Increase signage along the sidewalk to inform the public of the elevated courtyard
- Increase activation of storefronts and uses (possibly through food vendors)

The entrance plaza on 5th Avenue has great potential to be a good public space. 5th Avenue experiences high pedestrian traffic. The plaza is flush with the sidewalk offering seamless access and clear visibility.

### Plaza on 5th Avenue:

- Provide more seating opportunities
- Increase storefront activation
- Introduce kiosks or other temporary pop-ups
- Provide vegetation and/or public art

### Additional Observations

800 5th Avenue is an interesting case study due to the lack of continuity between the plaza on 5th Avenue and the elevated courtyard, and their dramatically different amenities. Due to the differences in amenities, the two areas have very different activities. For example, observations noted more people in the courtyard engaging in leisurely activities than in the plaza space. It is important to note that the entire site is empty in the evening, as current tenants are not open beyond traditional working hours.

# SAFECO PLAZA

1001 4TH AVENUE



FIG 35: View from 4th Avenue

## SITE SUMMARY

**LOCATION:**  
Commercial Core;  
full block development between 3rd and 4th Avenues, and Spring and Madison Streets.

**DESCRIPTION:**  
From the sidewalk, on 4th Ave, a large plaza leads to the building's main entrance. The plaza's two short edges host active commercial storefronts, currently a bank branch and a cafe.

**PLAZA SIZE:**  
Approximately 12,100 S.F.

**MISC:**  
Additional bonus received for internal arcade.

## WEAKNESSES



The plaza space offers few amenities. While people sit around the large planter and public art base, the walls are not designed for comfortable seating (FIG 39). There are no benches or moveable chairs in this space. There is little protective cover; the building offers canopies only at the short edges of the space (FIG 39).

Activation is concentrated at the short edges of the space and not at the center of the site. Additionally, during a site visit, casual observations noted security asserting control of the space when a group of young people entered the plaza.

With little activation in the center of the site, this plaza is essentially a giant forecourt to the building's lobby (FIG 40). Users are not invited to occupy the space; it is a space to quickly move through.



FIG 39: Incidental seating opportunities

ASSESSMENT  
**CATEGORY: POOR**

**18.0**  
SCORE

## STRENGTHS



The plaza is clearly visible from the sidewalk and the adjacent street. The plaza is mostly flush with the sidewalk, making access to the space easy; moreover, the site has smooth paving, which makes navigation easy (FIG 38).



FIG 37: Activation at the short edge by bank

## POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS

The plaza has the conditions to be a good public space. There is significant foot traffic on 4th Avenue. The plaza is visible to users and has limited barriers to the site. While the size of the plaza poses a challenge (FIG 40), it also provides an opportunity for multiple improvements:

- Provide movable seating opportunities
- Increase activation beyond the edges; carts, kiosks, etc.
- Diversify landscaping; consider a tree canopy
- Increase the shade and shelter coverage to include the center
- Improve lighting



FIG 39: Activation by cafe set back towards building



FIG 38: Sidewalk and plaza connection



FIG 40: Full extent of the plaza, framed by short edges to left and right

# SUGGESTED PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS

The data reveals that most of the POPS within the Greater Downtown area have an average performance and only 15% are 'good', indicating there is much room for improvement. This section describes different actions that could help improve the different sites.

Improvements are divided into three categories, to represent the relative effort and expense in making changes to these POPS.

## TIER 1:

These actions represent low-cost and simpler adjustments that could improve a space instantly:

- Increasing vegetation or landscape variety
- Providing more seating opportunities to enhance the attractiveness of a space
- Adding signage (FIG 41, FIG 42, FIG 43).

## TIER 2:

These actions are more difficult to implement than 'easy' actions and may require more investment and more time to implement. Medium improvements would deal with electric and/or structures:

- Installing lighting fixtures or installing structures that provide weather protection (FIG 3)
- Temporary events or activities such as pop-up cafes and food kiosks
- Game or play structures (FIG 5)

## TIER 3:

These actions are the most challenging to implement, requiring the most investment and commitment. Improvements in this category would involve thoughtfully redesigning and reimagining spaces for public use.

- Permanent kiosks or edge treatments with activating uses
- Adding public art and/or water features
- Redesign to eliminate physical barriers



FIG 41: Clear signage identifying the public amenity and the hours of operations



FIG 42: Various landscaping approaches

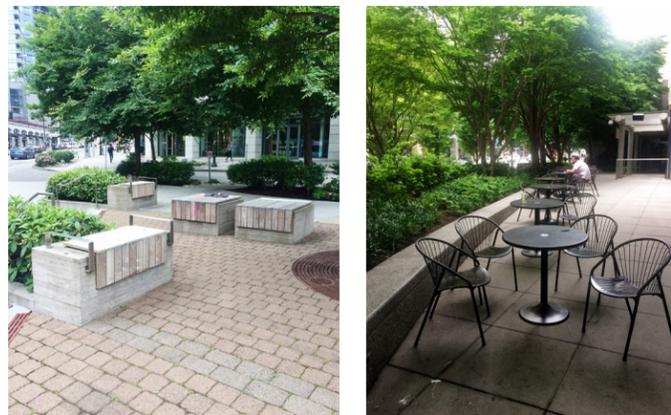


FIG 43: Fixed and movable seating

It is important to reiterate that this discussion does not indicate any form of enforcement. Any changes to these spaces would necessarily involve the cooperation of the property owner.

# OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

As identified in the Limitations, this assessment only addressed the physical characteristics of public spaces and did not collect information on public life within these spaces. A public life assessment will be crucial to further understand the usability of these POPS; this information will also be an important component when encouraging property owners to provide better amenities in their spaces.

With a public space and public life assessment, the two surveys will provide information that could contribute to changes to the Seattle Land Use Code, the Downtown Amenity Standards, the Incentive Zoning policy, and/or the Seattle Citywide Design Guidelines. Both surveys could lead to better public spaces for all Seattleites to enjoy.

Changes related to policy and code will be the most impactful. This study revealed that half of the top ten sites are located in South Lake Union, which has a code requirement and Design Review process regarding private open spaces. With future development it will be crucial for the City to communicate and uphold the importance of public space and the public realm. To guarantee compliance of property owners and to cement the City's commitment to great public spaces, code requirements and the continued involvement of Design Review will be essential tools moving forward.

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# APPENDIX (OVER)

**DOWNTOWN POPS ASSESSMENT CHART**  
**SEPTEMBER 2018**

Common Name	Type	1. ADDRESS: Enter site address or cross street of site	Public Feature Built Year	7. VISUAL: Is there public art? 0 = N 1=Y	8. SIGNAGE: Does the space identify that it can be used by the public? 0 = N 1=Y	9. MAINTENANCE: Does the space appear to be well-maintained? 0 = N 1=Some 2=Y	11. SHADE/SHELTER: Does the space have areas that provide shade/shelter- to stay in the sun during cool weather and shade in the summer? 0 = N 1=Mostly N 2= Mostly Y 3=Abs	12. SEATING: Does the space have seating and areas to spend time/sit and rest? 0 = N 1=Mostly N 2= Mostly Y 3=Abs		13. PLANTINGS: How strong is the presence of vegetation? 0 = N 1=Some 2= Sufficient 3=High amt	14. ACTIVATION: Are the built edges active? 0 = N 1=Mostly N 2= Mostly Y 3=Abs	15. ACCESS (universal): Are there physical barriers to the sidewalk or streets? Is it ADA accessible? 0 = Y 1=Most 2= Some 3=N	16. ACCESS (perception): Is the space clearly visible and welcoming from the adjacent sidewalk or street? 0 = N 1=Most 2= Some 3=Y [weight formula: raw score +(raw score*0.5)]	17. ACTIVITIES: Does the space have areas or facilities for activities or play? 0 = N 1=Mostly N 2= Mostly Y 3=Abs	18. INTERACTION: Can you comfortably have a conversation with another person in the space? 0 = N 1=Mostly N 2= Mostly Y 3=Abs	19. NIGHTTIME: Does the space appear to be well-lit and safe at night? 0 = N 1=Some 2=Y	20. SAFETY: Do you feel safe and comfortable in the space, overall? 0 = N 1=Mostly N 2= Mostly Y 3=Abs	Total
D: Kaiser	mini park	201 16th Ave E	-	0	0	2	3	2		3	2	3	4.5	3	3	2	3	30.5
Van Vorst	plaza	410 Terry Ave N	2005	1	1	2	3	3		2	2	3	3	2	3	2	2	29
Rufus	plaza	510 Terry Ave N	2008	1	1	2	2	3		2	1	3	3	2	3	2	3	28
C: Apollo	plaza	325 9th Ave N	2016	1	1	2	1	3		2	2	2	3	3	3	2	2	27
Nessie	plaza	500 9th Ave N	2012	0	1	2	2	3		2	2	3	3	1	3	2	3	27
Cielo Apt	court	802 Seneca St	2012	1	1	2	1	3		2	2	3	3	2	3	2	2	27
Doppler	plaza	2021 7th Ave	2012	1	1	2	3	3		2	2	2	3	0	3	2	3	27
8th and Olive	setbacks	720 Olive	1981	0	1	2	2	2		2	2	3	4.5	0	3	2	3	26.5
Horizon House	setbacks	900 University St	-	0	1	2	1	3		3	1	3	4.5	0	3	2	3	26.5
Benaroya (along 2nd)	plaza (setbacks)	200 University St	1998	0	1	2	3	3		3	1	2	4.5	1	3	0	3	26.5
Ruby	plaza	350 Terry Ave N	2012	1	1	2	2	3		2	2	2	3	1	3	2	2	26
B: Fisher Plaza	plaza	140 4th Ave N	2003	0	0	2	2	3		2	2	3	3	2	3	1	3	26
SMT	plaza	700 5th Ave	1990	1	1	2	3	3		2	2	2	3	1	3	1	2	26
WA Convention Center	atrium	701 Pike St	2001	1	1	2	3	3		2	1	2	1.5	1	3	2	3	25.5
1111 3rd Plaza	plaza	1111 3rd Ave	1977	0	1	2	1	3		1	2	3	4.5	1	2	2	3	25.5
Union Station South (OPUS)	plaza	625 5th Ave S	2000	1	0	2	3	3		2	2	2	3	1	3	1	2	25
Old WAMU	plaza (atrium)	1201 3rd Ave	1988	1	1	2	3	3		1	2	2	1.5	1	3	2	2	24.5
Enso Condo	setbacks	2201 9th Ave	2007	1	1	2	2	1		2	2	3	4.5	1	2	1	2	24.5
Wells Fargo	plaza (hillclimb)	999 3rd Ave	1983	1	0	2	2	3		2	2	2	4.5	1	3	0	2	24.5
H: UPS Waterfall Garden	court	219 2nd Ave S	1978	0	1	2	3	3		3	2	2	3	0	2	0	3	24
1&2 Union Square	plaza	600 University St/ 621 Union St	1981 1989	0	0	2	3	3		2	2	2	1.5	2	3	1	2	23.5

**DOWNTOWN POPS ASSESSMENT CHART (CONT.)**  
**SEPTEMBER 2018**

<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>1. ADDRESS:</b> Enter site address or cross street of site	<b>Public Feature Built Year</b>	<b>7. VISUAL:</b> Is there public art?	<b>8. SIGNAGE:</b> Does the space identify that it can be used by the public?	<b>9. MAINTENANCE:</b> Does the space appear to be well-maintained?	<b>11. SHADE/SHELTER:</b> Does the space have areas that provide shade/shelter- to stay in the sun during cool weather and shade in the summer?	<b>12. SEATING:</b> Does the space have seating and areas to spend time/sit and rest?	<b>13. PLANTINGS:</b> How strong is the presence of vegetation?	<b>14. ACTIVATION:</b> Are the built edges active?	<b>15. ACCESS (universal):</b> Are there physical barriers to the sidewalk or streets? Is it ADA accessible?	<b>16. ACCESS (perception):</b> Is the space clearly visible and welcoming from the adjacent sidewalk or street?	<b>17. ACTIVITIES:</b> Does the space have areas or facilities for activities or play?	<b>18. INTERACTION:</b> Can you comfortably have a conversation with another person in the space?	<b>19. NIGHTTIME:</b> Does the space appear to be well-lit and safe at night?	<b>20. SAFETY:</b> Do you feel safe and comfortable in the space, overall?	<b>Total</b>
4th/Madison	hillclimb (atrium)	925 4th Ave	2002	0	1	2	3	2	1	2	3	1.5	1	2	2	3	23.5
A: Kreilsheimer	court	321 Mercer St.	2003	0	0	2	1	3	1	1	3	3	2	3	1	3	23
US Bank Centre	atrium	1420 5th Ave	1986	1	1	2	3	3	1	1	2	0	0	3	2	3	22
Passport Agency	setbacks	300 5th Ave	2003	1	0	2	2	2	2	1	3	2	1	3	1	2	22
The Post	setbacks	888 Western Ave	2011	0	0	2	2	3	2	1	3	2	1	2	1	2	21
G: Central Library plaza	plaza	10000 4th Ave	2004	0	0	2	2	2	2	1	3	3	1	2	1	2	21
Columbia Center	plaza	701 5th Ave	1985	0	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	1.5	1	3	0	3	20.5
K:C/ID Station plaza	plaza	Jackson/5th	1990	0	0	2	1	2	1	0	3	4.5	1	2	2	2	20.5
Century Square	atrium	1501 4th Ave	1983	0	0	2	3	3	0	2	2	0	0	3	2	3	20
800 5th Ave	plaza (arcade)	800 5th Ave	1981	0	1	2	2	2	2	1	1	0	2	3	2	2	20
Park Place	plaza	1200 6th Ave	1971	0	0	2	2	1	2	1	3	3	2	2	0	2	20
F: Swedish	court	1221 Madison St	-	0	0	2	1	1	1	1	3	3	1	2	1	3	19
J: King St Station plaza	plaza	Jackson/2nd Ave ext	2014	0	0	2	1	3	1	0	3	3	1	2	1	2	19
SAM (along University)	setbacks	1301 1st Ave	1991	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	3	1	2	1	2	19
1000 2nd Ave	court	1000 2nd Ave	1987	0	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	3	0	2	1	2	18
Safeco Plaza	plaza (arcade)	1001 4th Ave	1969	1	0	2	1	2	1	1	2	3	1	2	0	2	18
E: Motorworks	court	715 E Pine St	2017	1	0	2	2	3	0	2	1	1.5	0	2	1	2	17.5
6th Lenora	setbacks	2033 6th Ave	1963	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	2	1.5	0	2	0	2	17.5
Westin Bldg	setbacks	2001 6th Ave	1982	0	0	2	3	0	1	2	2	1.5	0	2	2	2	17.5
4th Blanchard	plaza	2101 4th Ave	1977	1	0	2	1	2	2	1	1	0	1	3	1	2	17
Plaza 600	setbacks	600 Stewart	1969	0	0	2	2	1	2	1	1	1.5	0	2	2	2	16.5
Skyline	setbacks	715 9th Ave	2006	0	1	2	0	1	3	0	1	1.5	0	2	2	3	16.5
1600 7th Ave	plaza	1600 7th	1973	0	0	2	2	0	3	2	2	0	0	2	0	2	15
Crown Plaza	court	1113 6th Ave	1973	0	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	0	1	2	1	2	15
4 Seasons	hillclimb	99 Union St	2005	1	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	1.5	0	0	0	2	7.5

## DOWNTOWN SEATTLE POPS ASSESSMENT SURVEY QUESTIONS

The survey consists of 21 total questions; however, only 13 questions were awarded points. The following table provides information on the 13 questions including how the questions were interpreted and evaluated, and how the scores were generated.

Questions	Interpretation	Score Assignment
<p>Question 11.</p> <p>SHADE/SHELTER: Does the space have areas that provide shade/shelter- to stay in the sun during cool weather and shade in the summer?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does the site have a physical structure (separate from the building itself) that provides shade and shelter?</li> <li>Does the building incorporate something that creates the shade or shelter?</li> <li>Is there a tree canopy on site that provides the shade and to some degree the shelter? (Tree canopies on the street do not count)</li> </ul>	<p>0 = None</p> <p>1 = Something exists, but it is not enough</p> <p>2 = Sufficient weather protection is provided</p> <p>3 = More than enough weather protection is provided</p>
<p>Question 12.</p> <p>SEATING: Does the space have seating and areas to spend time/sit and rest?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What type of seating is available: formal (chairs and benches); informal (ledges/walls) – also need to consider whether seating was design intentionally with a dual purpose in mind; nontraditional (i.e. granite blobs in Apollo)</li> <li>How much seating is there compared to the size of the space?</li> <li>Is there seating but it is private? How does the private seating compare to the public seating?</li> </ul>	<p>0 = None</p> <p>1 = Something exists, but it is not enough</p> <p>2 = Sufficient seating is provided</p> <p>3 = More than enough seating is provided</p>
<p>Question 13.</p> <p>PLANTINGS: How strong is the presence of vegetation?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How much space does the vegetation occupy compared to the size of the space?</li> </ul>	<p>0 = None</p> <p>1 = Something exists, but it is not enough</p> <p>2 = Sufficient vegetation is provided</p> <p>3 = More than enough vegetation is provided</p>
<p>Question 14.</p> <p>ACTIVATION: Are the built edges active?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where are the blank walls, windows, doors/building entrances? (Note if some windows are covered)</li> <li>If edges are nonactive is there potential for activation?</li> <li>What is the degree of activation/ engagement: actively (restaurant/ cafes); passively (lobby entrances, office windows)</li> </ul>	<p>0 = None</p> <p>1 = Some activation exists, but either passive or windows are covered</p> <p>2 = Most built edges are active</p> <p>3 = All built edges are active</p>
<p>Question 15.</p> <p>ACCESS (universal): Are there physical barriers to the sidewalk or streets? Is it accessible to a wheelchair, strollers, and others?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the access points for an able-bodied person compared to the access points for people using</li> <li>Wheelchairs or strollers and other</li> <li>Mobility assisted devices?</li> <li>Are the physical barriers substantially blocking access to the space?</li> </ul>	<p>0 = Physical barriers exist (major barriers)</p> <p>1 = There are physical barriers, but it does not create a challenge</p> <p>2 = Few to little physical barriers and does not create a challenge</p> <p>3 = No physical barrier exists</p>

Questions	Interpretation	Score Assignment
<p>Question 16.</p> <p>ACCESS (perception): Is the space clearly visible and welcoming from the adjacent sidewalk or street?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can you easily see into the space without any obstructions?</li> <li>Are there amenities that make the space inviting and draws people in from the street?</li> </ul>	<p>This can correlate with Question 15</p> <p>0 = Obstruction of view exists.</p> <p>1 = Some obstruction exists</p> <p>2 = Few to little obstruction exists</p> <p>3 = No obstruction exists</p> <p><b>Weighted formula: raw score x 1.5 = score</b></p>
<p>Question 17.</p> <p>ACTIVITIES: Does the space have areas or facilities for activities or play?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What elements exist formally and informally to allow for active uses to occur?</li> <li>If no facilities or areas, does the space offer the potential for activities to arise?</li> </ul>	<p>0 = No areas or facilities exist (both formal and informal)</p> <p>1 = There is a potential for activities to take place</p> <p>2 = Informal activities exist</p> <p>3 = Formal area provided for activities</p>
<p>Question 18.</p> <p>INTERACTION: Can you comfortably have a conversation with another person in the space?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What elements exist to allow for conversation? (Look at seating, shade/shelter)</li> <li>Does noise impede conversation?</li> <li>Is the space policed? Does this limit the ability to stay in the space?</li> </ul>	<p>0 = No areas or facilities exist (both formal and informal)</p> <p>1 = There is a potential for activities to take place</p> <p>2 = Informal activities exist</p> <p>3 = Formal area provided for activities</p>
<p>Question 19.</p> <p>NIGHTTIME: Does the space appear to be well-lit and safe at night?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where are the lighting fixtures located?</li> <li>Are the middle sections of the space well lit?</li> </ul>	<p>0 = Not lit</p> <p>1 = Some lighting exists, space is lit at night, but it is dim lighting</p> <p>2 = Lighting fixtures exist, and space is well lit at night</p>
<p>Question 20.</p> <p>SAFETY: Do you feel safe and comfortable in the space, overall?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are sightlines clear? (can see entry/exit points)</li> <li>Are there places where people could hide?</li> <li>What is the nighttime lighting like?</li> <li>Is there a lot of vehicular traffic surrounding the site?</li> </ul>	<p>0 = Do not feel safe at all</p> <p>1 = Somewhat safe, a few aspects that impact safety in space</p> <p>2 = Mostly safe and comfortable in space, minor aspects could impact experience but not majorly</p> <p>3 = Feel completely safe</p>

