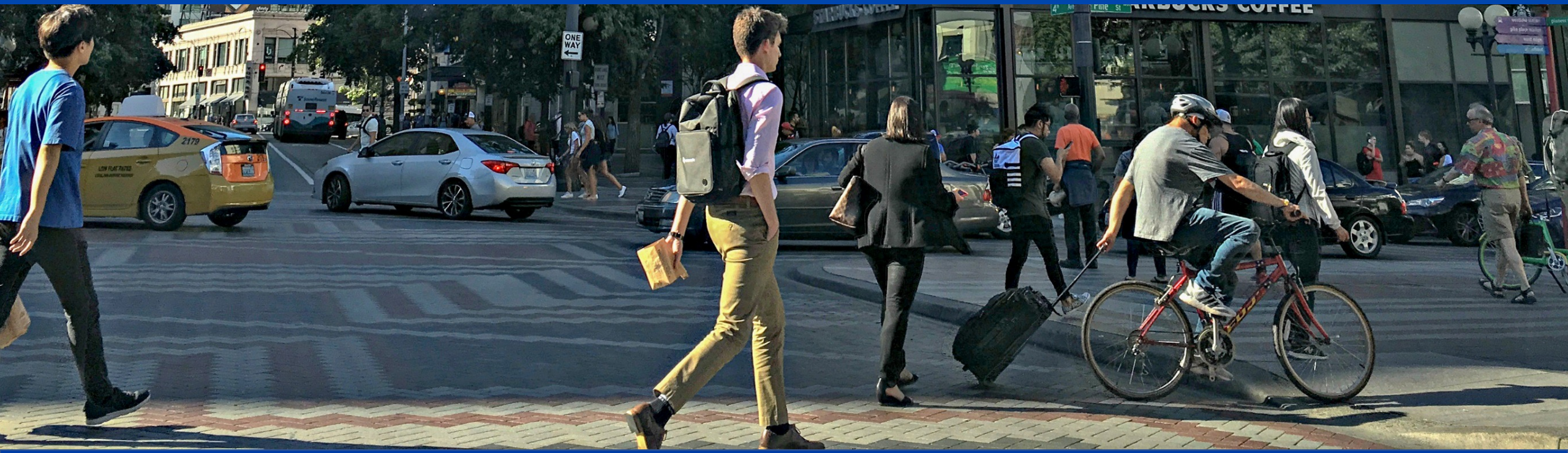
SDOT Public Life Program



Aditi Kambuj, Ellie Smith, Alex Hagenah, Joshua Gawne
Seattle Department of Transportation

City of Seattle

Agenda

- Introductions
- Background on SDOT Public Life Program
- Public life tools and applications
- Q&A
- Discussion

Hello from the SDOT public life team!

Aditi Kambuj – Urban Design Manager	Policy & Planning
Ellie Smith – Senior Transportation Planner	Policy & Planning
Alex Hagenah – Data Librarian	Asset Management
Joshua Gawne – Urban Designer	Policy & Planning

Our vision, mission, and core values

Vision: Seattle is a thriving equitable community powered by dependable transportation

Mission: to deliver a transportation system that provides safe and affordable access to places and opportunities

Committed to **6 core values**:

- **Equity**
- Safety
- Mobility
- Sustainability
- **Livability**
- Excellence

LIVABILITY

manage our streets and public spaces to enrich public life and improve community health

EQUITY

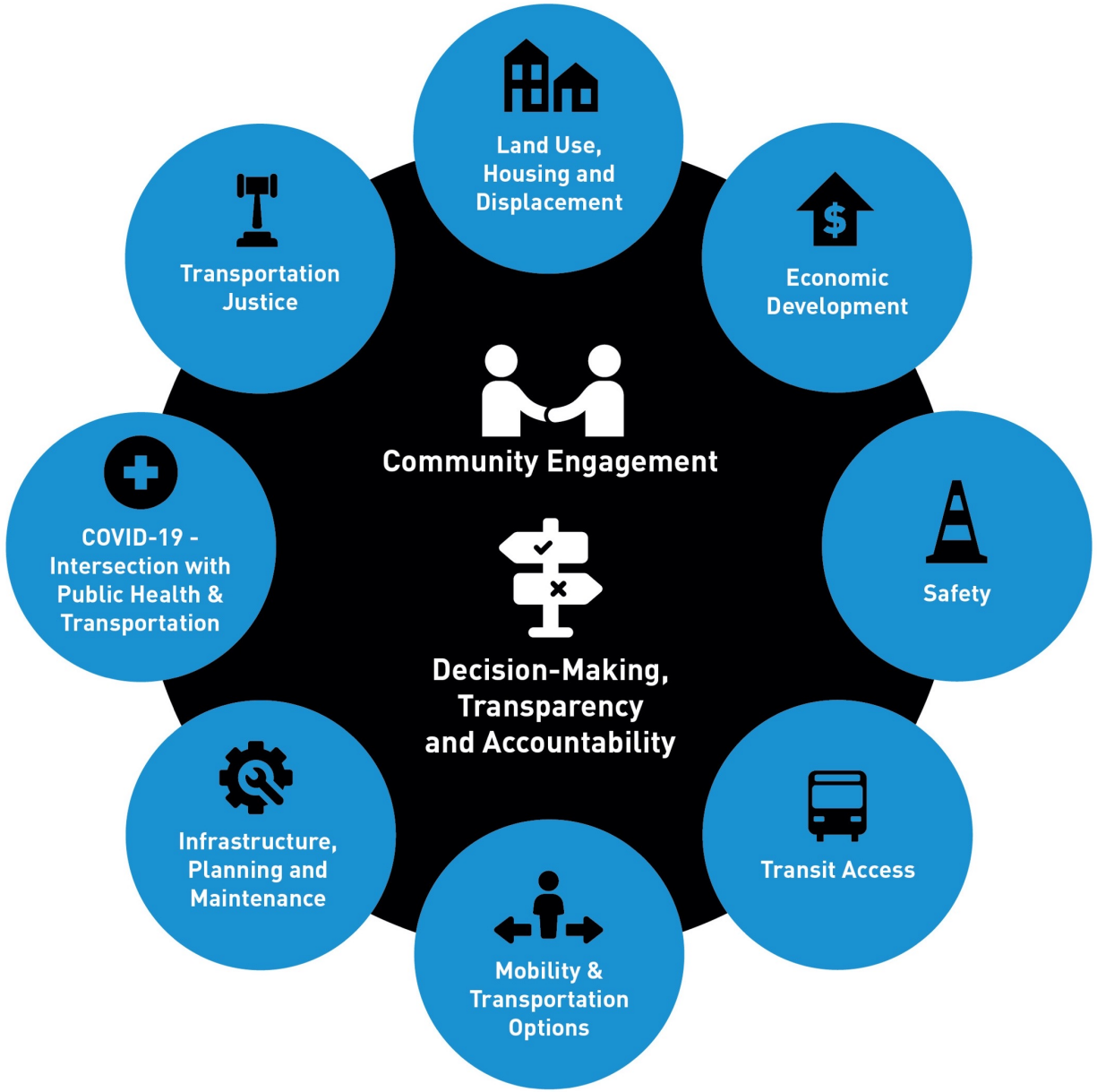
partner with communities to a build a racially equitable and socially just transportation system

In Seattle's future, a robust transportation system should develop a more vibrant city by creating streets and sidewalks that generate **economic and social activity**, adding to the city's overall **health, prosperity, and happiness**

-Seattle Comprehensive Plan

Transportation Equity Framework

Tactic: Create and launch a public space initiative that is community-driven to foster connection and build public spaces (e.g., places to socialize and host cultural events)



What is public life?

The activity that unfolds in our shared public spaces, which can be:

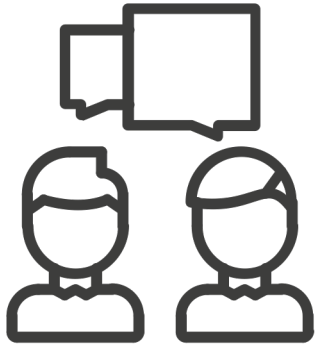
As simple as everyday routines.

As complex as fostering spaces for interaction and community development.

As fundamental as exercising free speech.

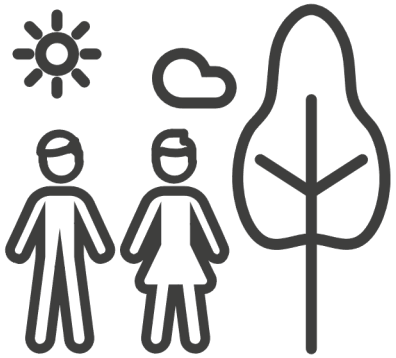
What is a public life study?

observing and measuring people moving and staying



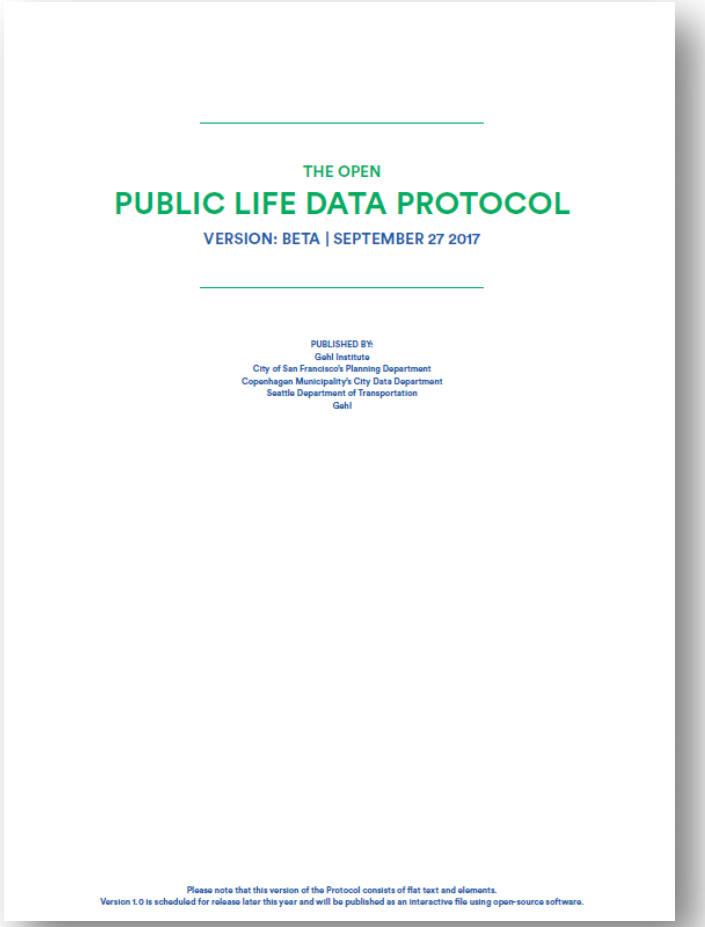
engaging users of the space in dialogue about what works

assessing urban design characteristics



working with users to identify opportunities to enhance experience

Public Life Data Protocol



THE OPEN

PUBLIC LIFE DATA PROTOCOL

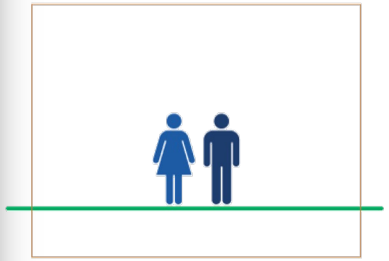
VERSION: BETA | SEPTEMBER 27 2017

PUBLISHED BY:
Gehl Institute
City of San Francisco's Planning Department
Copenhagen Municipality's City Data Department
Seattle Department of Transportation
Gehl

Please note that this version of the Protocol consists of flat text and elements.
Version 1.0 is scheduled for release later this year and will be published as an interactive file using open-source software.

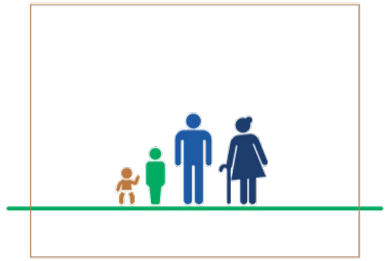
GENDER

Applies to people staying and moving



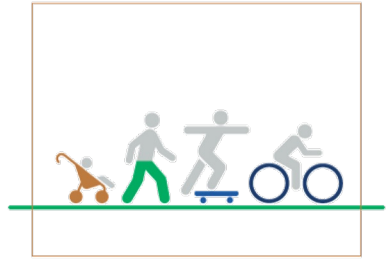
AGE

Applies to people staying and moving



MODE

Applies to people moving

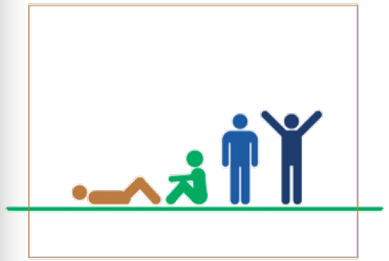


GROUPS

Applies to people staying and moving

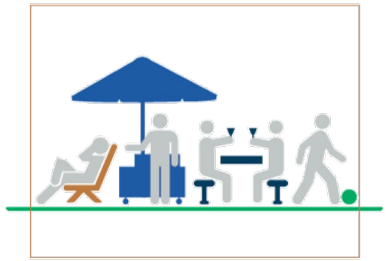
POSTURE

Applies to people staying



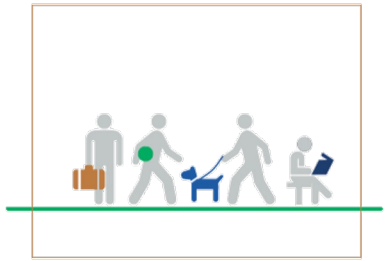
ACTIVITIES

Applies to people staying and moving



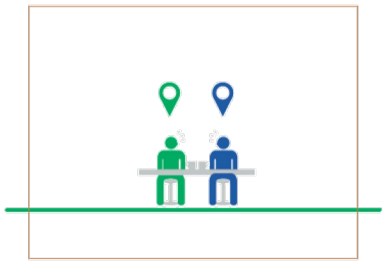
OBJECTS

Applies to people staying and moving



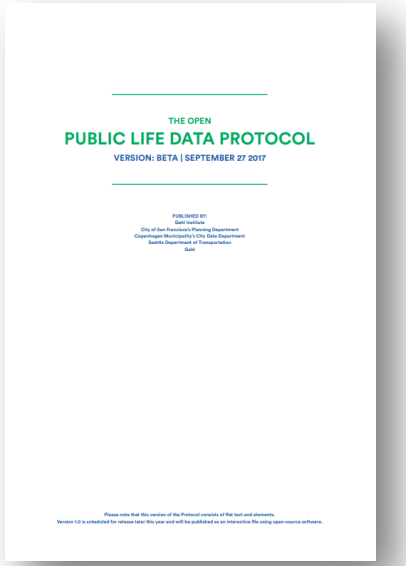
GEOTAG

Applies to people staying

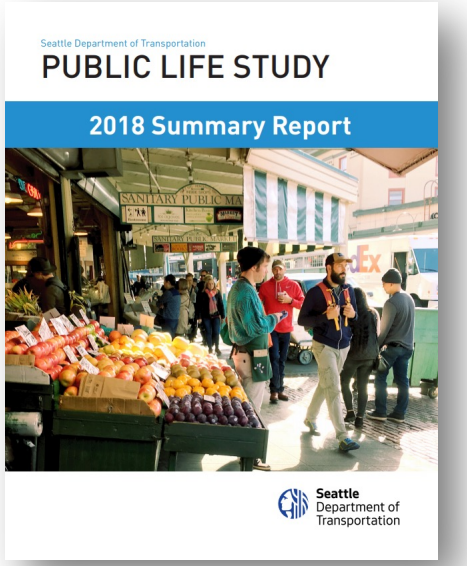


SDOT Public Life Program

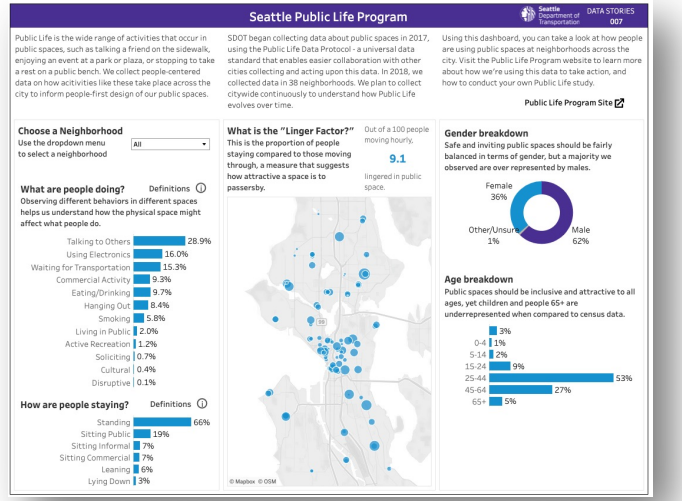
2017
Developed the Public Life Data Protocol with international partners



2018
Conducted initial citywide study



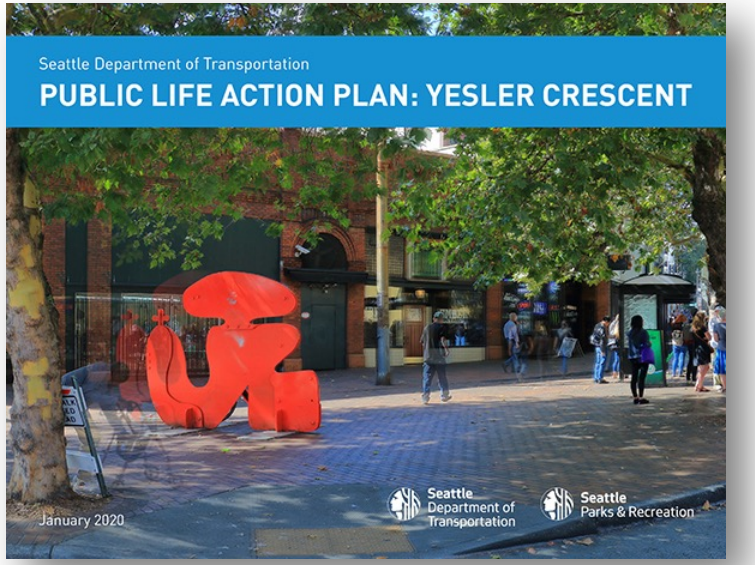
2019
Established key *livability* metrics to be included in Seattle's Moving the Needle performance report



SDOT Public Life Program

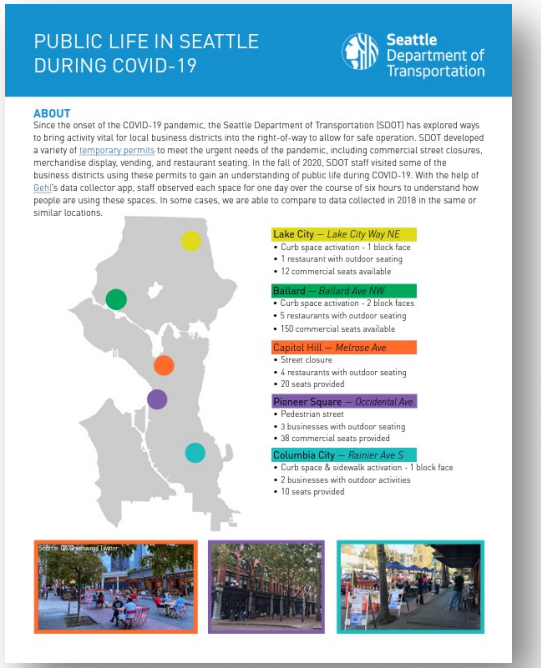
2019

Developed framework for and completed first Public Life Action Plan



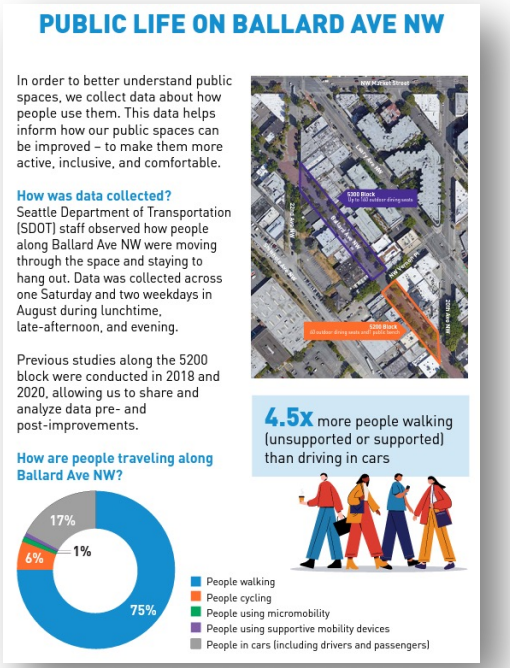
2020

Conducted study at sites with pandemic street activations



2022

Conducted studies at McGraw Square and Ballard Ave NW



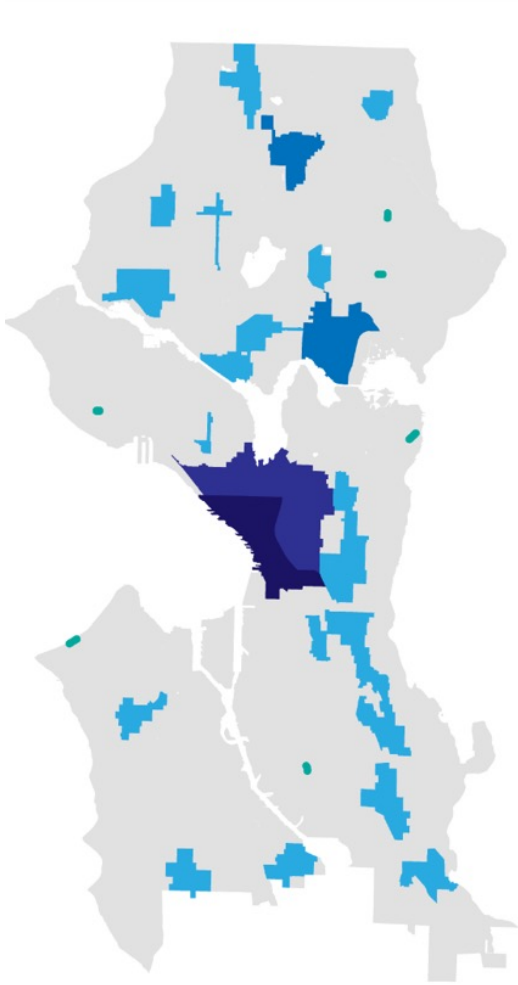
Application: citywide study (2018)

Purpose

- Measure SDOT's core value of livability
- Provide initial benchmark to track the performance of sidewalks as public spaces, and allow for comparisons over time
- Equip SDOT with data to inform public realm investments

Methodology

- Public life observations



	hourly average: people moving	hourly average: people staying
Downtown Urban Center Belltown, Chinatown/ International District, Commercial Core, Denny Triangle, Pioneer Square *20 sites total*	451	35
Center City Urban Center Capitol Hill, First Hill/12th Ave, Pike/Pine, South Lake Union, Uptown *20 sites total*	229	20
Urban Center Northgate, Ravenna, University District *10 sites total*	157	4
Urban Village 23rd Union/Jackson, Ballard, Beacon Hill, Bitter Lake Village, Columbia City, Crown Hill, Fremont, etc.* *46 sites total*	103	11
Outside Neighborhood Alki, Bryant, Georgetown, Madison Park, Magnolia, Wedgwood *12 sites total*	108	14

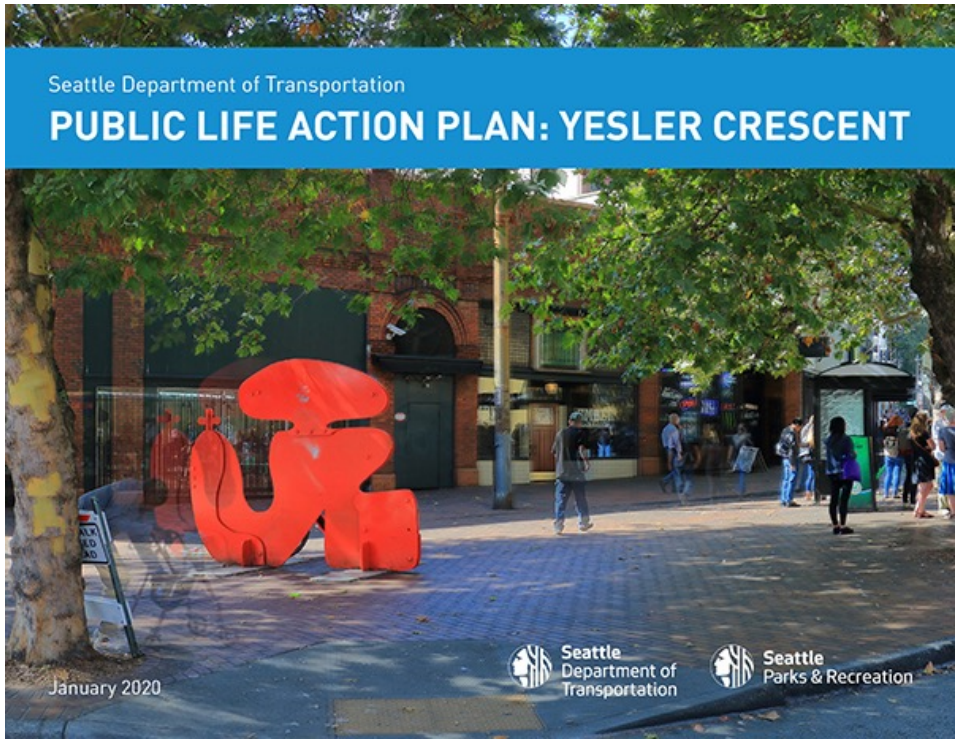
Application: public life action plan (2019)

Purpose

- Document how collection of public spaces are used and perceived
- Identify ways to maximize use and meet needs of current users
- Develop a plan of action to fund and implement design recommendations

Methodology

- Public life observations
- Intercept surveys and focus groups
- Urban design assessment



Application: site-based design intervention (2022)

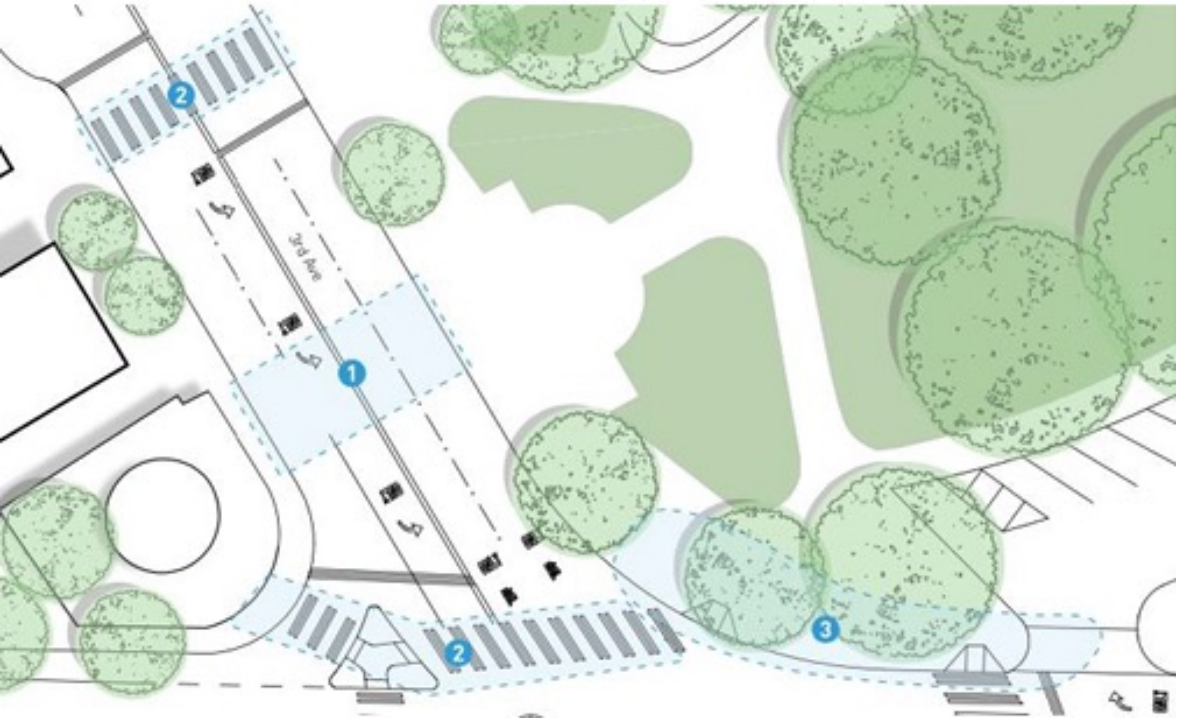
Purpose

- Use public life data to inform re-design of McGraw Square
- Encourage City team and design team to observe and experience the space; partnership between public and private groups to shape project's public benefit

Methodology

- Public life observations
- Observer de-brief and application of findings

Public life data informs design decisions



Circulation observations and recommendations informed 3rd + Yesler safety improvements

Postures indicate people aren't encouraged to linger for long periods

79% standing
10% sitting formal
7% sitting informal
3% lying down

Compared to 2020:
52% standing
37% sitting formal
<1% sitting informal
<1% lying down

Staying patterns indicate opportunities for improving lingering at McGraw Square

Key takeaways

Produce knowledge. Street-level research and engagement is critical for understanding the social and physical environment.

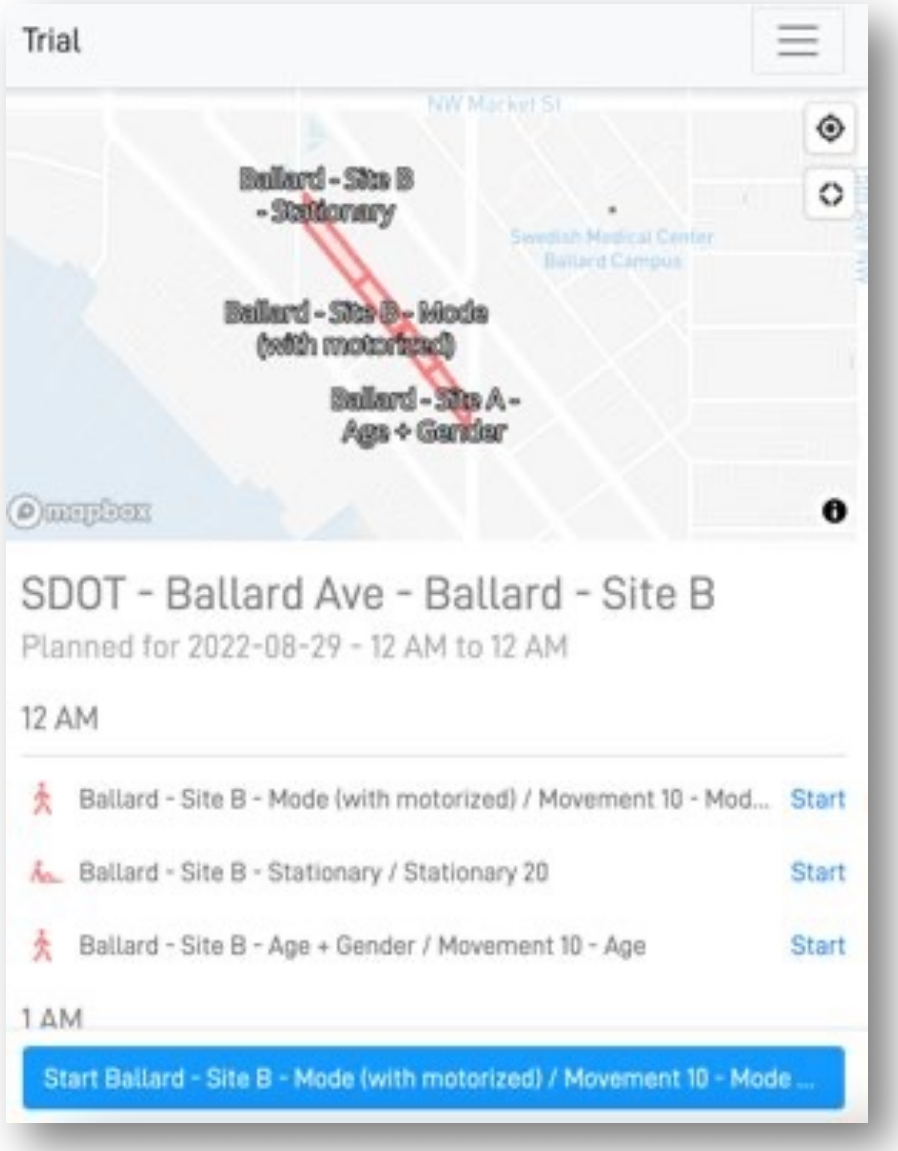
Get scrappy. Public life tools are scalable and can be created and executed in-house.

Build partnerships. Data collection itself is a form of engagement and a great way to establish a shared vocabulary about a local area and buy-in for solutions.

Center user experience. People-data as the basis of the planning process gets us closer to equitable outcomes.

What's next?

- Build out data collection infrastructure and internal capacity to support
- Continue growing awareness of tools and opportunities for partnership
  - Develop partnerships to study station areas
  - Identify opportunities through the Seattle Transportation Plan (specifically the People Streets and Public Spaces element) to use public life tools for equitable public space development



Gehl public life data collection app

Questions?

Stay in touch

https://www.seattle.gov/transportation/projects-and-programs/programs/urban-design-program/public-life-program

SDOTpubliclife@seattle.gov