

# The social impact of public space downtown

Leslie Bethel | June 20, 2018

What is your favorite public space in downtown Glenwood Springs? Why do you go there? What attracts you to pause and experience an urban setting? These are the questions we consider when approaching a new placemaking project. The DDA knows that social activity is important to making a space



memorable. But how we approach this in the design is reflected in material choices, spacing, opportunity for public art, seating and entry.

So what design inclusions create social interactions in public space? In public space design and planning there is a need to consider opportunities for social interaction and further examine how humans interact with a space — particularly if you are also designing for economic development. The landscape design plan under the bridge does just that. The under-bridge area will create a new social space in the heart of downtown, finished using materials that are historically significant, sustainable and regionally sourced.

The structural bridge design under Seventh Street formed with concrete canopies designed intentionally to provide more overhead space under the bridge, also creating more light. The alignment of the new bridge abutment allows for a smoother flow by connecting in alignment with the alleys. The continuity of materials between the wing streets and under the bridge creates a sense of place. The area is now more open and provides a public use space that is a desirable location for special events, dining, and leisure space.

There is a strategic practice around this: the sociology of space examines the social and material constitution of spaces. It is concerned with understanding the social practices, institutional forces, and material complexity of how humans and spaces interact.

Here is what I mean: Next time you are jotting down your list of errands – pick up mail, drop off library book, pay the utility bill, buy a birthday present — plan your route and make your way downtown. As you check the items off your list, you strike up a conversation about the headline in the newspaper. Just a bit later, you run into an old friend and grab a quick bite to eat. These moments in our public spaces help make our downtown special and strengthen our community ties. And having the space to create this bond is important to our city. Strengthening downtown as the retail and government hub of the city is a central goal of the Downtown Development Authority.

In another example, by finding a suitable site for a new Garfield County Library downtown, the DDA and its partners ensured that the library would not move to an outlying area. In pursuing library sites, Colorado Mountain College joined the partnership in an opportunity to share space and ultimately secure a new and more efficient administration building. The library is just one of the many threads that come together to form the fabric of our downtown.

In the coming months 7th Street will continue the beautification project in the area. The granite pavers under the bridge will continue being installed and landscaping in the wing street planters will be completed. This summer, an invitation to bid will be released for the four project areas of the plan: sanitary sewer improvements, phase 2 hardscape, phase 3 hardscape and landscaping/furniture. A temporary condition with asphalt in the street will be in place from late June or early July until after Labor Day, allowing the downtown businesses to partially recover from the bridge project with the busy summer tourist season.

The vision of Seventh Street and other DDA projects is to enhance and broaden the downtown experience for residents and guests. Design through infrastructure and beautification helps move that vision forward, creating spaces that are functional, beautiful and inviting.

*Leslie Bethel is executive director of the Downtown Development Authority. You can follow the DDA on Instagram @downtownglenwoodsprings and Facebook. Early design conceptual sketches are periodically posted on Facebook and Instagram.*

<https://www.postindependent.com/opinion/columns/bethel-column-ddas-alley-revitalization-strategy-moves-forward/>