PACK SQUARE PLAZA VISIONING



Asheville City Council
September 12, 2023

THE CITY OF ASHEVILLE

BUNCOMBE COUNTY NORTH CAROLINA

McADAMS

Key Takeaways

- The City and County investment in this planning process resulted in a Vision Plan that can successfully be used for all the purposes originally intended
- The community's input has been refined into ten themes or values that can guide future decision making in this area
- There are ten community-supported design ideas or projects that can be used to further the community's short and long term vision for the area
- The momentum behind the vision will be continued via a City/County partnership funded by the Mellon Foundation



Purpose of the plan

1. Issues/ideas associated with repurposing of the former Vance monument area.

2. How equity and inclusion can be advanced at Pack Square Plaza, now and in the future.

3. Guidance on a future design/design process for capital improvements to Pack Square, including budgetary considerations.

4. Recommendations on a public private partnership to support future improvements to the area (including operations and management).

5. Ideas to better connect both physically and mentally packed square to The Block



ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

PACK SQUARE PLAZA VISIONING

WHAT WE HEARD...

Engagement was robust and powerful. This summary is a representation of the themes that emerged from all engagement sessions.







EQUITABLE + WELCOMING PLACES/SPACES

There is a strong desire to see Pack Square Plaza transformed into a place where all people feel welcome. Participants felt Pack Square is an underutilized space that has great potential to be an inclusive gathering place for residents and visitors.

PEOPLE-CENTERED

Participants are craving a people-centered place that is well-designed for comfort, activities, programming and events - large and small. Pack Square should be the City's central square that welcomes a diverse group of visitors and residents through programming, events, food options and amenities.

RE-ENVISIONING THE VANCE MONUMENT

Most participants understood the removal of the Vance Monument is still awaiting a decision by the NC Supreme Court. Residents are open to ideas about a new design for the plaza. There was consensus that another monument did not have to replace the former Vance Monument, and future elements within The Plaza should not be divisive.

HEALING + ADDRESSING PAST HARM

Shared history is extremely important. Many participants expressed the need to tell the true history of Asheville. Participants felt that the park is not the place to tell the true comprehensive history. However, past harm and the feeling of not being welcomed must be addressed. Pack Square Plaza should be a place for healing, inclusiveness and togetherness.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Many participants perceived Pack Square Plaza as unsafe. Concerns varied from presence of the unhoused population, a heavy tree canopy that obscures sight lines and the lack of lighting and active uses, particularly in the evening.

AUTHENTIC + ELEVATES LOCAL PRIDE

Pack Square is viewed as the center of the region with many memorable events such as Bele Chere Street Festival and the large fountain. On-going parades and festivals are also well regarded. There is a lot of local pride about how Asheville is a different and an authentic place. Indigenous material and fauna should be used in material selection of The Plaza. While Asheville is a tourist destination and tourism represents a substantial part of the region's economy, residents felt spaces and places should not be designed solely for tourists. If designed properly for Ashevillians, the tourists will enjoy as well.

ELEVATED, SUPPORTED, + CONNECTED

There was general agreement that "The Block" and YMI Cultural Center are important historical assets to the city. A physical connection, especially along S. Market Street is vital to linking Pack Square to The Block. There were numerous ideas and recommendations on how the connections to The Block can be improved such as redesigning S. Market Street, using art and pop-up activities, activating open spaces and increasing the lighting. Extend the current limits of The Block north to physically connect it to Pack Square. Additionally, redesign and program S. Market Street to activate the Municipal Building with people centered uses.

Changing uses of the Municipal Building will require relocation of the police and fire departments.

TELLING THE STORIES

While there is an intention to tell the true history, there is also a sentiment that the Plaza and Downtown area currently occupy numerous signs and markers. The conversations regarding relocation or removal of public art, markers, and signs need to be treated with sensitivity. A storytelling audit may help address public concerns. Suggestions for types and ways to tell stories include stories that connect to land and narratives of Asheville's diverse population using audiovisual technology.

PEDESTRIAN FRIENDLY

There was consensus that Pack Square Plaza is not pedestrian friendly. Concerns ranged from the amount of vehicular traffic around the plaza, fire and police vehicular traffic routes around Pack Square and the narrow sidewalks flanking the plaza. Making pedestrians a priority is important. Suggestions included reducing vehicles from the plaza, traffic calming and making the plaza more accessible.

MAINTENANCE + OPERATIONS

The participants recognized that the City does not have the resources to manage, maintain and operate Pack Square and at a satisfactory level of service and understand a different approach is warranted. The participants were open to a public-private partnership so long as Pack Square is not privatized. Day-to-day activation was deemed important to the success of Pack Square Plaza. Marketing and communications need to be be considered as part of a public-private partnership model to ensure that all demographic groups' needs are met through programming, including teens.

Ten Design Ideas



1

Improve or create new spaces in the plaza for civic engagement and expression, storytelling, oral history, public art and a central gathering space.











2

Move the crosswalk near Patton Avenue and Broadway Street to improve pedestrian access to Pack Square Plaza.





3 Remove the base of the Vance Monument, subject to a ruling by the North Carolina Supreme Court.







4

Redesign and activate the ground floor of the Biltmore Building which serves as the northern edge of the Plaza.







5 Reposition the elevated lawn on the eastern edge of the Plaza to create a meditation grove.



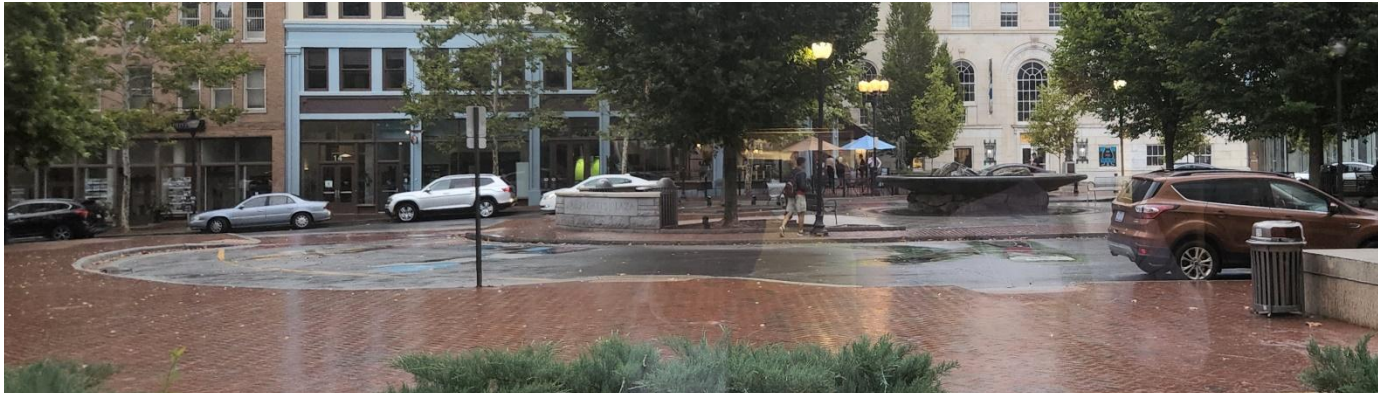






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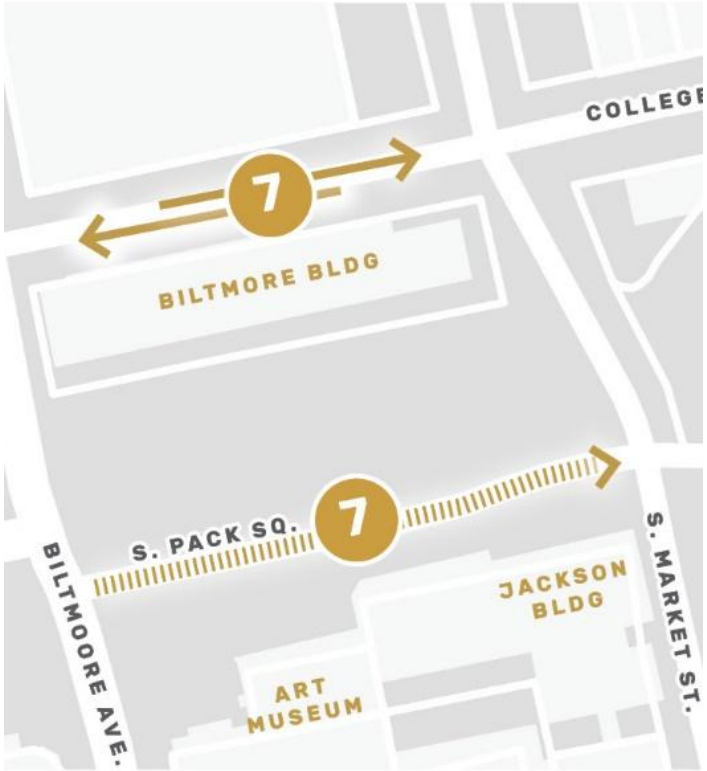
Close North Pack Square to vehicular traffic to increase the accessible space of the plaza for pedestrians.







7 Convert College Street from one-way to two-way traffic.



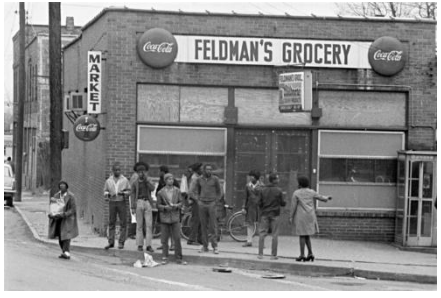




8 Redesign S. Market Street as an active cultural corridor to improve connections to The Block.

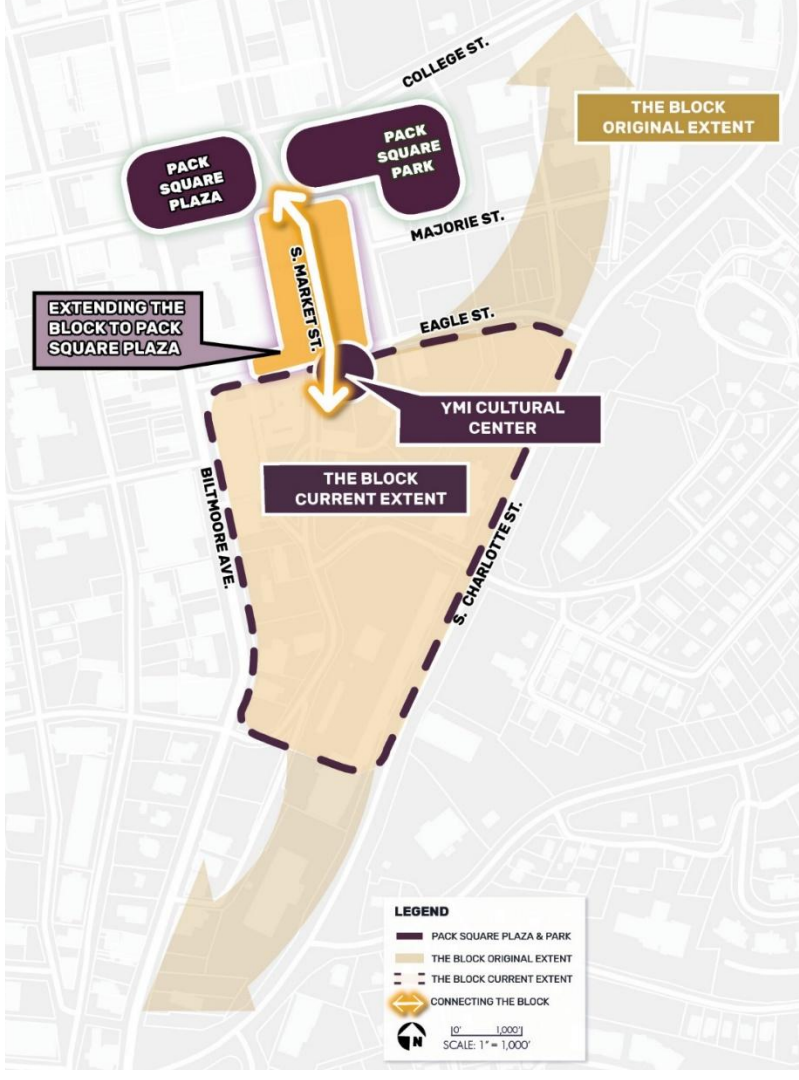






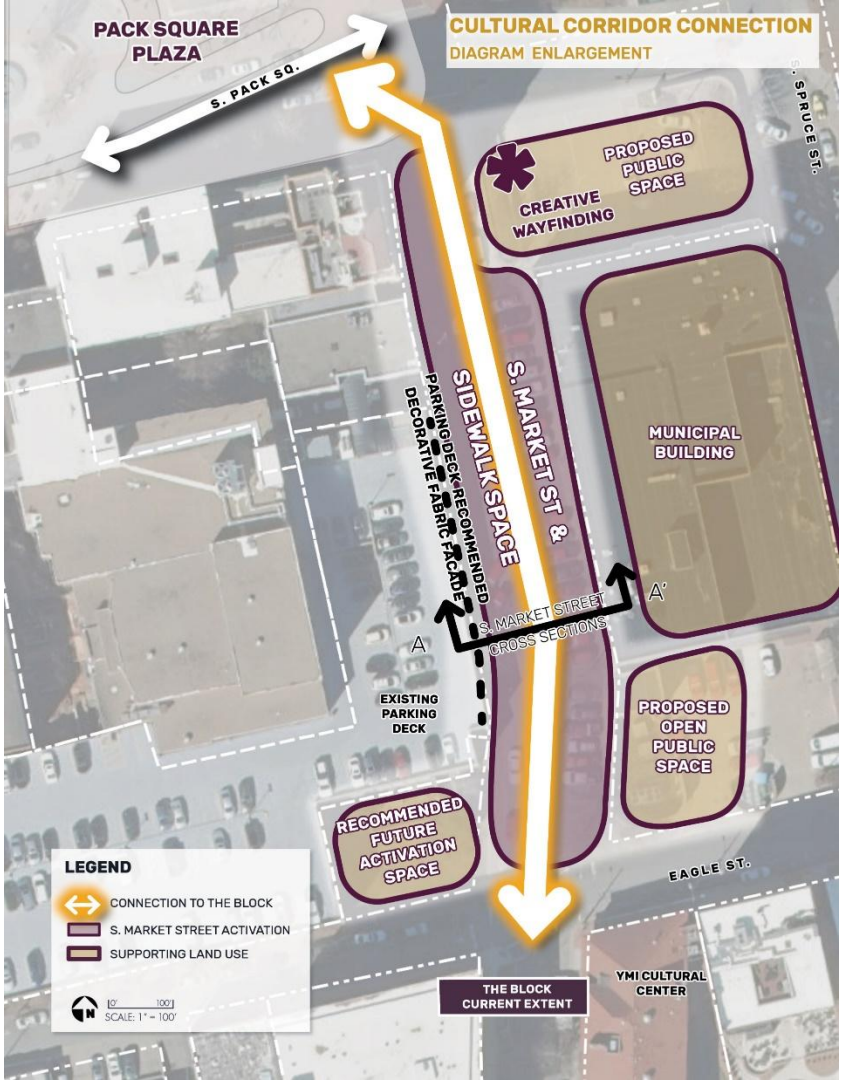






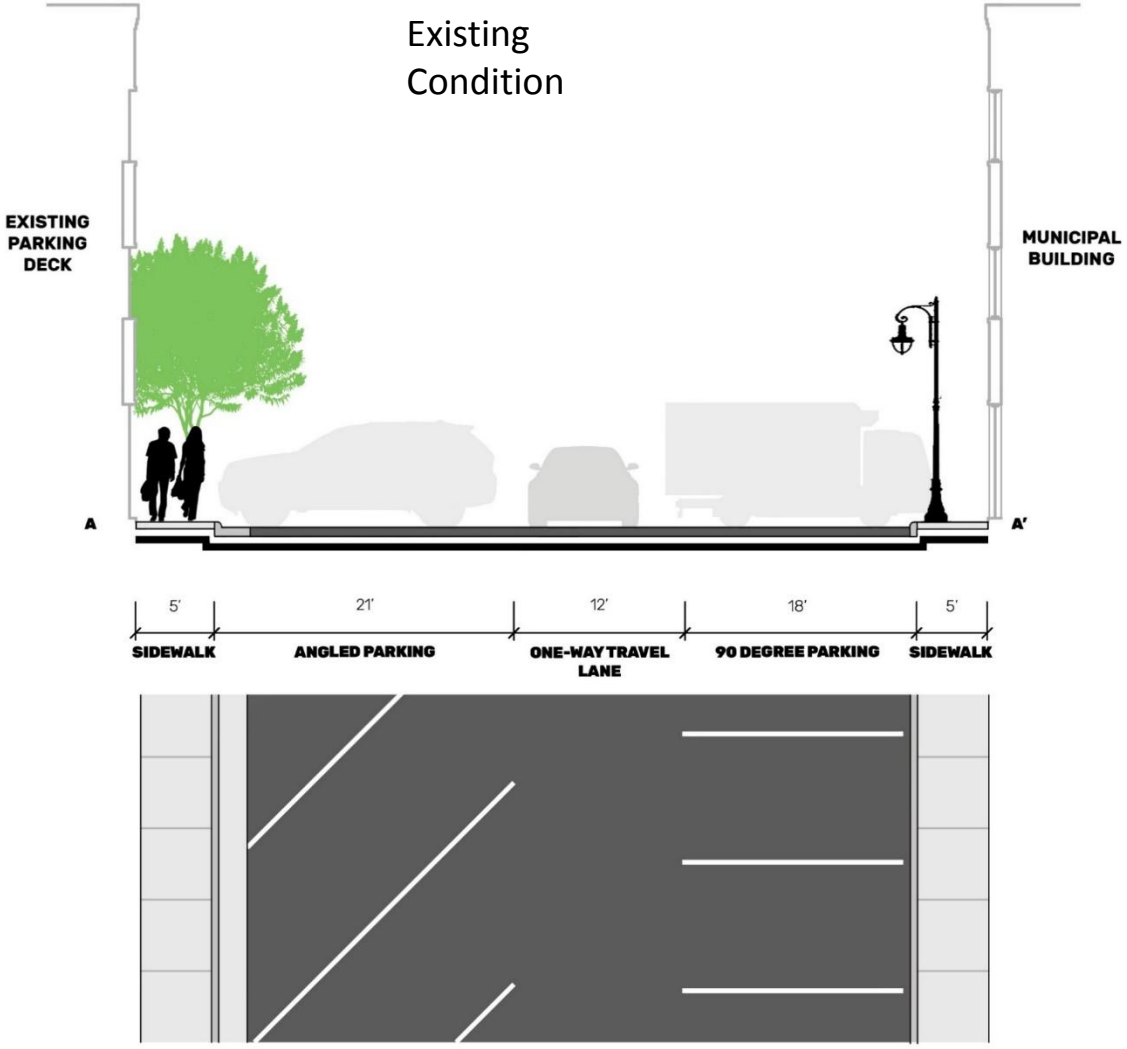
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Cultural Corridor with proposed amenities



8

Existing Condition

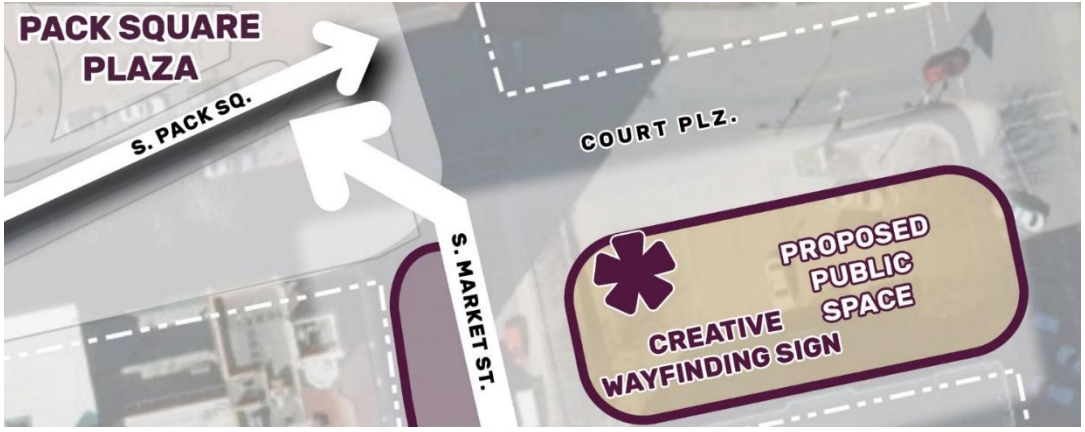








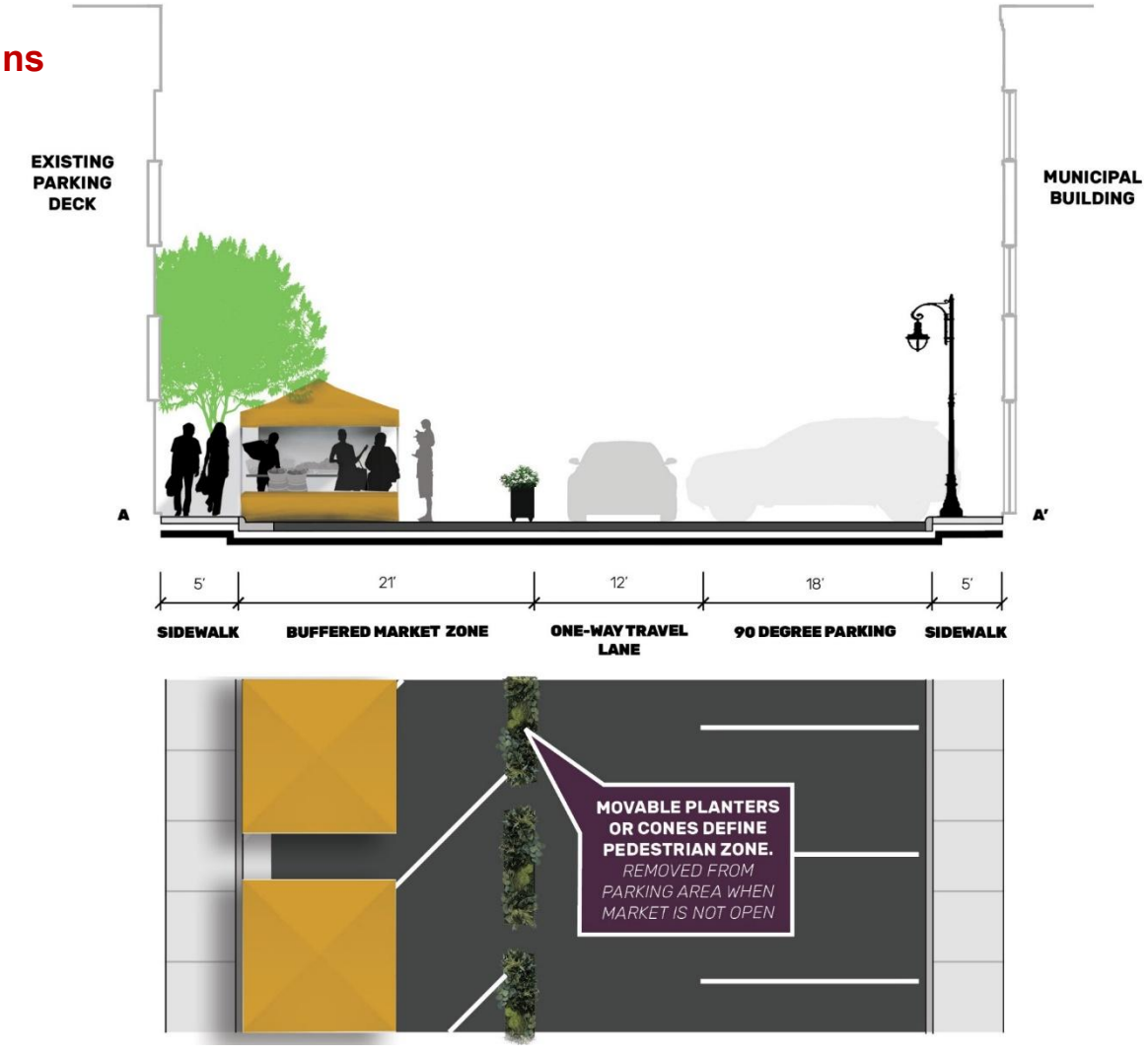
8 Creative Wayfinding for a gateway to The Block







8 Quick Wins


EXISTING PARKING DECK
MUNICIPAL BUILDING
A
A'
5'
21'
12'
18'
5'
SIDEWALK
BUFFERED MARKET ZONE
ONE-WAY TRAVEL LANE
90 DEGREE PARKING
SIDEWALK
MOVABLE PLANTERS OR CONES DEFINE PEDESTRIAN ZONE.
REMOVED FROM PARKING AREA WHEN MARKET IS NOT OPEN

8 Long-Term recommendations

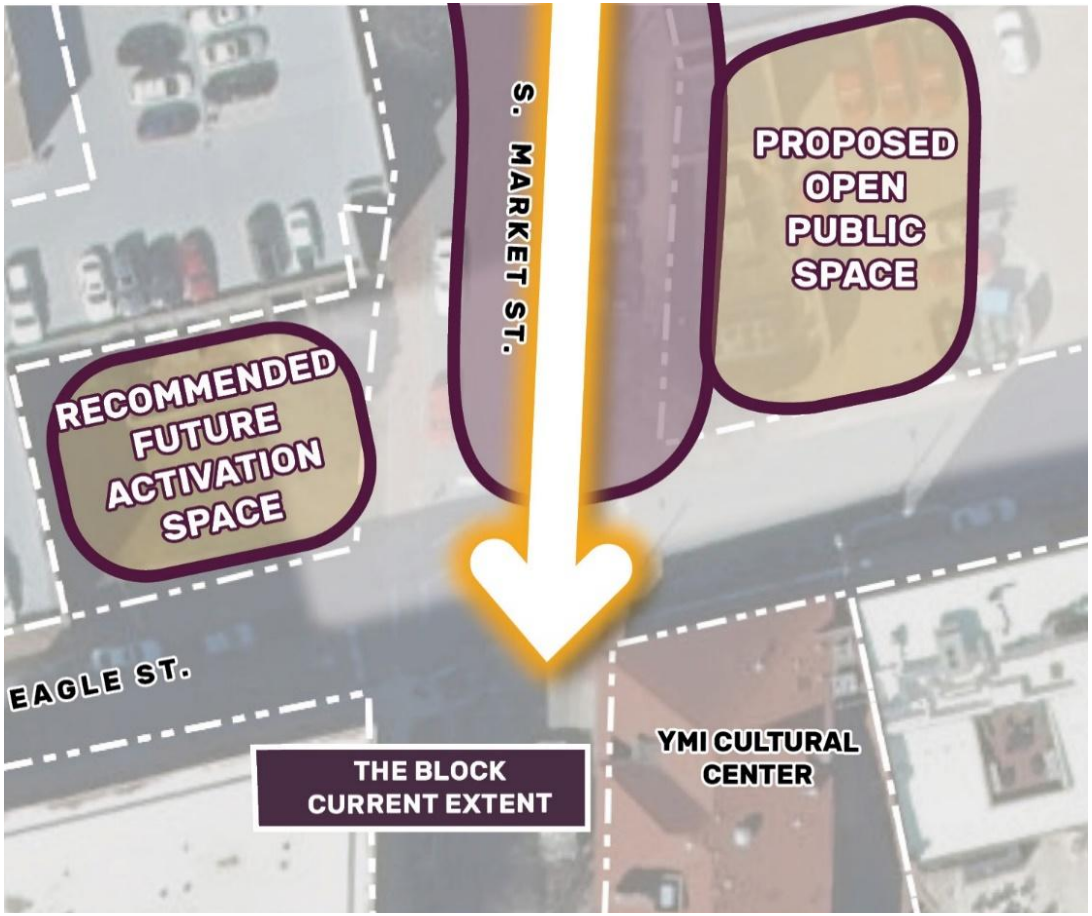


EXISTING PARKING DECK





8 Utilizing Existing Open Space



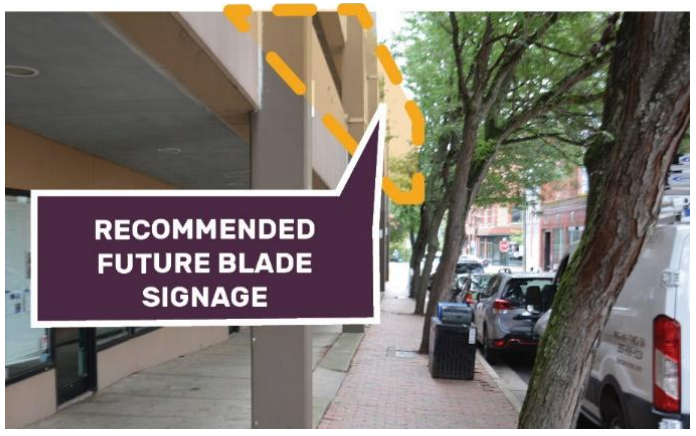




9 Improve wayfinding to The Block from Biltmore Avenue.









10 Reimagine the long-term use of the Municipal Building.





Other Considerations

- Assess elements in the Plaza to be relocated
- Perform inventory or audit of memorials, markers and storytelling
- Participate in the process to create a Municipal Service District
- Promote inclusive and equitable programming





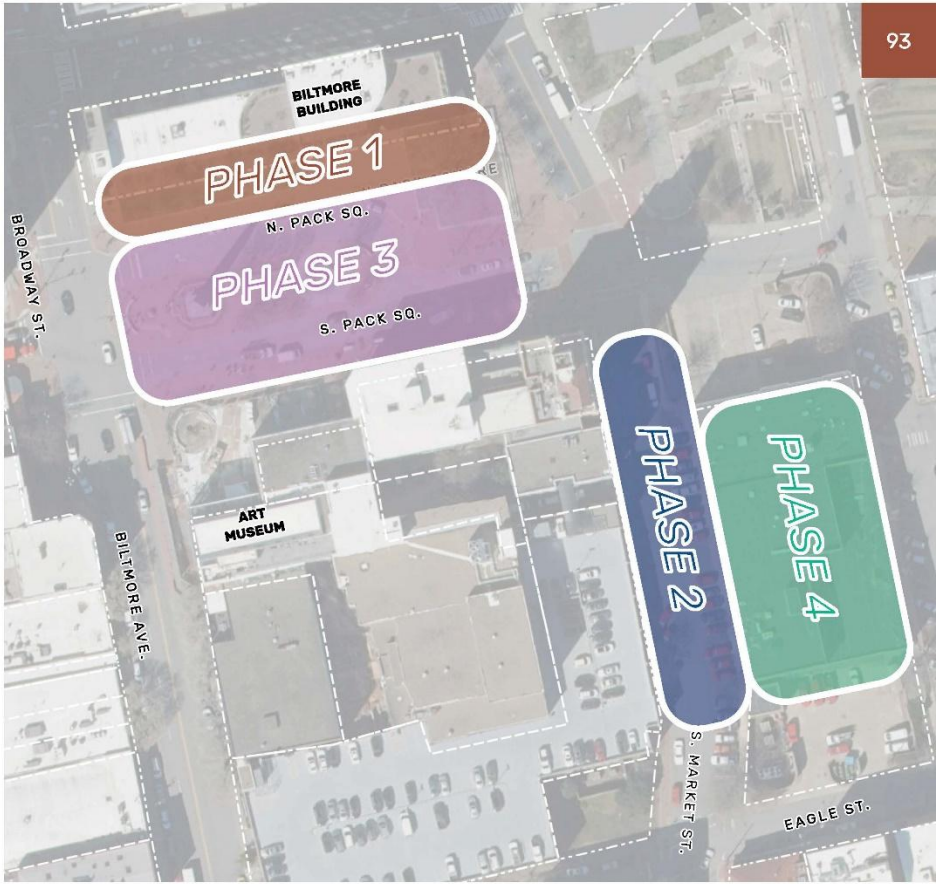
Suggested Phasing Plan for Cost Estimating Purposes for Pack Square Plaza Improvements

PHASE 01
Re-design Pack Square per vision and begin executing quick wins.

PHASE 02
Establish cultural corridor

PHASE 03
Construction of Pack Square.

PHASE 04
Re-working the municipal building



10/01/2023 Mellon Foundation Grant Official Start Date

- Priority 1: City MOU with the Block Collaborative
- Priority 2: City RFQ Pack Square Plaza and The Block
- Priority 3: Sharing our Stories Program Development
- Priority 4: Long Term Funding Partnership Development

Questions



Photo Credit: Travel Lens