Insights from Perth South West US Delegation

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Introduction

In September 2024, the Perth South West Metropolitan Alliance Board embarked on a delegation to the United States, primarily focusing on understanding the implications of the AUKUS partnership and exploring issues surrounding social licence. These critical topics are thoroughly addressed in a separate report produced by the Alliance. However, the purpose of this report is to present additional findings from the delegation, highlighting observations and insights gained from visiting diverse urban areas across the United States, many of which face development challenges akin to those in the Perth South West region.

The delegation's itinerary included Los Angeles, San Diego, Newport News, and New York—destinations selected to provide insight into challenges and solutions directly relevant to the Alliance's united regional vision. These cities offered opportunities to examine a wide array of topics, including urban redevelopment, public transport systems, the development of parklands and natural areas, economic development with an emphasis on the blue economy, and addressing emerging social issues such as homelessness. These areas of focus align closely with the Alliance's strategic priorities and provided invaluable case studies for applying international best practices in a local context.

While the delegation's primary focus centred on AUKUS-related issues, particularly in San Diego and the Hampton Roads region of Virginia, where the US Navy has a significant presence, the itinerary also took advantage of necessary transit stops in Los Angeles and New York. This provided the Alliance with opportunities to engage with broader urban development and infrastructure challenges. These engagements offered insights into innovative approaches to city planning, transportation systems, and economic growth, many of which are of potential relevance to Western Australia.

This report not only details the targeted areas of focus but also captures broader observations from urban design initiatives witnessed during the delegation. These insights, while not the primary focus, provide valuable examples of creative approaches to city building that may inspire alternative methods for addressing challenges in the Perth South West region. By incorporating these broader findings, the report seeks to emphasise the importance of learning from international practices and considering alternative perspectives to localised issues.

The findings documented in this report aim to inform strategic discussions with developers, government agencies, and internal stakeholders within member local authorities. Rather than providing prescriptive solutions, the intent is to stimulate new ways of thinking and inspire innovative approaches to urban challenges. Western Australia's geographic remoteness often results in a focus on locally developed solutions, but this delegation underscores the value of adopting international perspectives to enrich and diversify problem-solving frameworks. By learning from global examples, the Perth South West Metropolitan Alliance can enhance its ability to tackle local challenges with fresh, informed approaches.

Housing and Homelessness

On her first day in office, Mayor Karen Bass declared a state of emergency, signalling her immediate focus on addressing the homelessness crisis in Los Angeles. With 46,000 people experiencing homelessness in LA, 70% of whom are unsheltered, the challenge is immense. The crisis extends beyond the city, as the county's homelessness rate stands at 75,000 people across a population of 9.7 million. In the City of LA, homelessness accounts for 1.2% of the population, compared to 0.77% across LA County (by way of comparison the current rate for Perth is approximately 0.05% in Perth). The disparity between the City and County stems largely from the varying approaches of local governments, with LA City having more robust programs that attract unhoused individuals, even as nearby areas enforce policies that displace them.

One of the key strategies in LA's fight against homelessness is the delivery of more affordable and social housing. This is being achieved primarily through development outcomes, where affordable housing is secured with covenants lasting 50 to 99 years, ensuring that homes are leased to people within income limits. This focus on long-term affordability is critical to ensuring that housing remains available for those in need, not just for a short period but for decades.

To incentivise developers to build more social housing, the City of LA has introduced several measures to speed up the process. For example, approvals for developments that include social housing can now be fast-tracked, reducing waiting times from up to a year to just 60 days or less. These streamlined processes have been a significant factor in accelerating the development of much-needed housing. Additionally, developers are offered the ability to add three extra floors to buildings that include social housing, a strong incentive in a city where height restrictions and density are often closely regulated.

However, this approach, while effective in LA, may not work as well in cities like Perth, where planning systems are already relatively efficient. In Perth, approvals for developments typically occur within 60 to 90 days, making the fast-tracking incentive less impactful. Similarly, in Perth, the use of additional height and plot ratio as incentives has not been particularly successful in securing social housing. This is partly due to recent planning practices where the state government treats height and density flexibly, allowing developers to negotiate these elements without necessarily providing social benefits in return. Unfortunately, this has resulted in lost opportunity to leverage development for societal gain, and it would be difficult to reverse these practices without causing tension with the development industry.

One area where Perth could learn from LA is the fast-tracking of utilities. In LA, the City has an advantage as the owner of the utilities, which allows for quick connections to water, power, and other essential services. This has been instrumental in ensuring that housing projects move forward without delays. In Perth, however, access to timely utility upgrades remains a major impediment to the delivery of subdivisions and multi-dwelling developments. The State Government could look to incentivise the inclusion of affordable housing by offering more timely access to utility services, a critical factor in ensuring projects proceed smoothly.

Beyond housing, LA's interim housing solutions play a crucial role in addressing homelessness. For many individuals, moving directly from long-term homelessness into permanent solo accommodation is a significant challenge. People often need time to acclimatise back to living in conventional housing, and interim solutions provide this bridge. In LA, interim housing typically involves a nine to twelve-month stay, during which individuals receive support from social workers and other service providers to help them transition to long-term housing. These facilities are staffed at a ratio of one support worker per 20 clients, ensuring that individuals receive a personalised approach to their needs and support in finding employment.

The importance of interim housing cannot be overstated. Some people need ongoing support and may never live entirely independently. The need for permanent interim housing facilities is essential, and while many are focussed on permanent solution only in the Western Australian context, there is a need for facilities for those who are simply "down on their luck" and need temporary shelter in a crisis. In all cases, the need for a tailored approach is paramount, as the circumstances of each person vary greatly. Their age, mental health status, and other factors dictate the best path forward, and a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to succeed.

Mayor Bass has taken the lead in securing sites for both interim and long-term housing, despite this traditionally being a County responsibility. This action is driven by her policy platform, which prioritises homelessness solutions, and is supported financially by the City Council. The rationale behind this approach is simple: the public does not care which level of government is responsible for addressing homelessness; they just want to see results. This sentiment has helped galvanise political support for aggressive action on housing.

A key learning from LA's experience is the importance of rehousing entire homeless camps, not just portions of them. If a camp is only partially rehoused, the remaining encampment may grow back to the original size over time, perpetuating the problem. By focusing on rehousing everyone within a camp and then cleaning up and beautifying the site, the City is able to create long-term improvements in public spaces. The examples shown included elements of "hostile architecture," such as landscaping or design features that discourage rough sleeping. While controversial, these measures, combined with housing efforts, have been found to build social licence, as the public is more supportive of housing solutions when the alternative is homeless encampments in public spaces.

A few other key factors in providing housing have emerged from LA's efforts. For instance, many homeless individuals are reluctant to leave their current arrangements unless they are guaranteed their own bathroom. Additionally, many have pets and will not abandon them. Recognising this, housing providers have implemented blanket policies allowing pets at all sites. Although these demands increase costs, they are seen as necessary to ensure people are willing to move into housing.

There is also a need to reframe the conversation around the cost of homelessness. When viewed through the lens of emergency healthcare costs, providing housing is far cheaper in the long term. With issues such as mental health support, diabetes management, substance abuse and wound care can be handled proactively within a housing environment, this reduces the need for costly ambulance services and hospitalisations. However, because these costs are often spread across different levels of government and departments, it can be difficult to quantify the full savings. Nevertheless, the public needs to understand that investing in housing is not just a moral imperative but also a financially sound decision.

One of the key messages from LA's approach is the importance of involving people on the ground in developing solutions. Well-meaning policies devised in boardrooms often fail because they do not take into account the real drivers of homelessness or the lived experiences of those affected. A multitude of approaches is needed, as different people have different needs, and no single solution will work for everyone. It is essential to ensure that the voices of those with direct experience are heard in the policymaking process.

In terms of ongoing support, LA has made strides in creating employment pathways for people transitioning out of homelessness. The City has reserved entry-level positions with public transport providers and other partner organisations, offering a tangible way for people to rebuild their lives. This has been a vital component of LA's broader strategy, which emphasises the importance of collaboration with organisations that support veterans, healthcare providers, and mental health services. By working together, these groups can provide comprehensive support to help people find stability.

Funding for these initiatives comes from a variety of sources, including the City's own budget and Federal support. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provides around one billion dollars annually through the Homeless Housing Assistance and Prevention Program. This funding is critical in maintaining the City's efforts to address homelessness. Additionally, the cost of emergency medical care, which often falls on the City's budget, reinforces the value of investing in early intervention and housing solutions.

A significant portion of LA's interim and permanent housing has been delivered through the adaptation of unused motel and hotel sites. Under the Homekey program, the County has acquired 32 such sites, converting them into over 2,100 units. This repurposing of run-down or poorly maintained motels has generally been welcomed by communities, as it improves the local area while providing much-needed housing. Perth, facing its own housing shortage, particularly in short-stay accommodation, lacks the same opportunities. Additionally, both LA and Perth share the challenge of retrofitting underutilised office space for housing, as issues related to ventilation, natural light, and services make these conversions difficult.

One of the ongoing challenges in LA is identifying unhoused individuals who may not have sought help or registered with outreach groups. These individuals are often found in public spaces like libraries, public transport hubs, or locations offering free Wi-Fi, where they seek shelter from the elements. These sites are ideal locations to provide information about available support services, as they are more likely to be frequented by those in need.

Tiny Homes Approach

Tiny homes are being utilised in Los Angeles as part of the city's efforts to combat homelessness. These small, temporary housing units, typically around 64 square feet (six square metres) in size, provide an immediate and secure shelter for those without stable accommodation. Tiny house villages are often located on underutilised land, such as parking lots and vacant lots, in various parts of the city, including North Hollywood, Reseda, and Westlake. Each home is equipped with essential amenities like electricity, climate control, and a door lock for privacy and safety.

Beyond providing shelter, these tiny home communities offer a range of support services aimed at helping residents transition into permanent housing. On-site services typically include access to food, showers, bathrooms, laundry facilities, mental health services, and job placement assistance. Social workers and case managers are also available to provide personalised support. These villages, developed by organisations like Hope of the Valley, serve as temporary but crucial stepping stones for individuals trying to escape the cycle of homelessness. While not a permanent solution, the tiny home model has been praised for providing immediate relief and offering a stable environment for individuals working towards long-term housing solutions.

The City would be involved with the provision of utilities to these sites, as well as the installation of CCTV. While we expected to hear stories of communities against such developments, they noted that most residents were supportive, where it meant that homeless camps would be removed, preferring this outcome of supported living to visible homelessness in their neighbourhoods.

The Weingart Center

The Weingart Center is a comprehensive non-profit organisation based in Los Angeles that has been providing services to the homeless since 1983. Located in the heart of Skid Row, the centre is dedicated to helping vulnerable individuals transition from homelessness to self-sufficiency. The organisation offers a variety of programs aimed at addressing the root causes of homelessness, including mental health support, addiction recovery, job training, and access to permanent housing.

Weingart Center serves a wide demographic, including individuals facing chronic homelessness, veterans, and those struggling with mental health and substance use disorders. Their programs are designed to provide both short-term emergency relief and long-term solutions, offering services like case management, life skills workshops, and employment services to help residents rebuild their lives.

In addition to temporary housing, the Weingart Center is expanding its efforts to include permanent supportive housing developments, which combine housing with wraparound services to help individuals maintain stable lives. One such development is a project to construct over 700 units of affordable housing.

What is different about the Weingart Center to Australian examples is the scale. They have a 19 storey permanent accommodation centre under construction. The entire property is dedicated to affordable housing. Additionally they have large scale interim facilities of over 300 beds. In Australia we have more integrated models, with affordable housing and crisis housing only a small percentage of any development. The response from the Center is that they are dealing with a crisis and can more efficiently manage service provision and support services through large scale developments. They note that their built form is typically architecturally more pleasing than other sites in the neighbourhood, and you would not know what services were provided there. They further note that they have a large scale building in Los Angeles located adjacent to a Porsche dealership and whilst located amongst upscale retailing, do not detract from the amenity of the neighbourhood due to their design focus and social support of clients.

The centre is funded through a combination of public and private sources, including government grants, donations, and partnerships with other non-profits and community organisations. The Weingart Center is widely recognised for its holistic approach to addressing homelessness, providing not just shelter, but also the critical tools and resources necessary for people to regain their independence and improve their quality of life.

Public Transport

Public transport systems were prioritised during the trip to observe and experience different cities' approaches to transit. While Perth has made significant advancements over the past decade, particularly with major expansions and changes to fare structures, there remains room for further planning and development.

Los Angeles

The public transport system in Los Angeles utilises a travel card (both physical and virtual) that grants access to buses, trains, and bike share services. The fare structure is straightforward, with a base fare of $1.75 for all trips, regardless of distance. A daily fare cap of $5 and a weekly cap of $18 provide cost-effective options for frequent travellers.

The bus network in Los Angeles is extensive and operates efficiently despite limited reliance on dedicated bus lanes for priority. Much of the fleet observed was powered by natural gas, with some electric buses operating on select routes. Boarding was quick, thanks to a streamlined tap-on system, and a coin-only vending machine was available at the front of the bus for those without tickets. The flat fare system which did not require tap off eliminated delays when passengers alighted, allowing for faster drop-off stops.

The Los Angeles Metro Rail includes both the rapid transit and light rail systems. The rapid transit system was partially under maintenance on the day that it was used, with limited wayfinding available to locate stations and exits. City centre stations were underground, well-lit, and staffed to assist passengers with ticketing.

The light rail system also utilised underground stations in the city centre before transitioning to open-air stations along the route. The *high-floor* tram design required station platforms for boarding and alighting, in contrast to the *ultra-low-floor* trams found in Melbourne. This design, influenced by the Americans with Disabilities Act, requires level boarding but necessitates larger station spaces, limiting the potential for constructing additional stops without significant redevelopment of station precinct.

The rail network travelled along dedicated lanes, moving swiftly and free from the traffic congestion common in Los Angeles. Some shared rail spaces were observed in other parts of the network, though the majority of travel occurred in segregated corridors. Smaller stations lacked fare gates or a "tap-off" system, though major terminals, such as the one in Santa Monica, required passes to exit. The trains were well-lit with hard surfaces throughout, though there was evidence of rough sleeping, likely due to the climate control.

Lastly, the Angels Flight funicular in downtown Los Angeles serves more as a historical attraction than an everyday transport service. Covering a 29-metre vertical rise over a 91-metre distance, it helps passengers avoid a steep slope by travelling in cable cars equipped with internal steps. Originally closed in the 1960s and reopened in 1996, the line has undergone several closures due to accidents, most recently reopening in 2017. Tickets for the service cost $1, or 50 cents with a travel card. Although primarily a novelty, the system functions as an alternative to outdoor elevators, such as Brisbane's Howard Smith Wharves elevator. However, due to high maintenance costs and staffing requirements, its viability outside of a historical or tourist context is limited.

San Diego

In San Diego, the light rail (trolley) system serves as a key mode of public transport. The system operates under a simple fare structure with a daily maximum fare of $6 and a monthly fare cap of $72, as opposed to a weekly limit. The railcars are designed with low floors, allowing level boarding for passengers, though some sections inside the carriage feature raised flooring to accommodate mechanical components underneath.

Unlike Los Angeles, much of San Diego's light rail system runs at street level in the city centre, where trolleys share space with pedestrians and vehicles. There are minimal barriers or gates along these shared spaces, allowing for greater accessibility but requiring the trains to travel at lower speeds. Once outside the city centre, the light rail operates at higher speeds (up to 88 km/h) on dedicated rail lanes, connecting to suburban areas such as the University of California San Diego.

A notable feature of San Diego's light rail is its shared use of tracks with freight rail services, particularly in the evenings when light rail frequency decreases. Freight trains travel through the city on the same tracks, although at much lower speeds. The light rail operates using overhead power lines, similar to Perth's system. This shared infrastructure contrasts with Perth's model, where commuter and freight trains do not coexist on the same lines, with the exception of regional rail.

Although buses were not used during the trip, it was observed that they were powered by natural gas.

New York

New York's subway system is globally renowned for its high ridership and extensive coverage. The stations within the city centre are predominantly underground, transitioning to elevated rail lines in the outer boroughs. Services operate with high frequency, and within Manhattan, multiple routes are available to key destinations. The system uses a fare card known as OMNY, which also accepts credit card tap-ons. The fare structure includes a single fare of $2.90 and a weekly fare cap of $34.

New York's bus infrastructure was also examined, with several features informing the Department of Transport's recommendations for the mid-tier transport review in Perth. Efficiency improvements in the New York system stem from a few key factors: the creation of dedicated bus stops located further apart, dedicated bus lanes, and priority at intersections. A significant improvement was off-board payment in some locations, which allows for all-door boarding, eliminating the need for passengers to tap on or off upon entering the vehicle. Although this method offers substantial time savings, it was not considered for Perth due to concerns about fare evasion, which could be viewed as a shortsighted decision.

Particularly notable were the inner-city bus stops, which are integrated with the LinkNYC system. LinkNYC is a public kiosk network that provides free Wi-Fi, phone calls, device charging, and access to information services, launched in 2016 as part of the city's efforts to modernise public infrastructure and expand digital connectivity.

The key features of LinkNYC include:

· Free Wi-Fi: Available at each kiosk, with a network designed to handle high usage across thousands of locations.
· Free Phone Calls: Users can make free calls to any US number, including emergency services.
· Device Charging: USB ports are available for charging phones and other devices.
· Digital Displays: Large screens provide local information, public service announcements, and advertisements.
· Browser Access: Built-in tablets allow users to browse the web and access city services.

LinkNYC is funded by advertisements displayed on the kiosks' digital screens, making it a self-sustaining initiative.

One challenge faced by travellers is navigating the fare system when crossing into New Jersey. While only a short journey from New York, travelling interstate requires a different fare card and incurs varying rates. This can be confusing for new users, though staff at the Port Authority Bus Station where many of these cross state journeys commence, are available to assist.
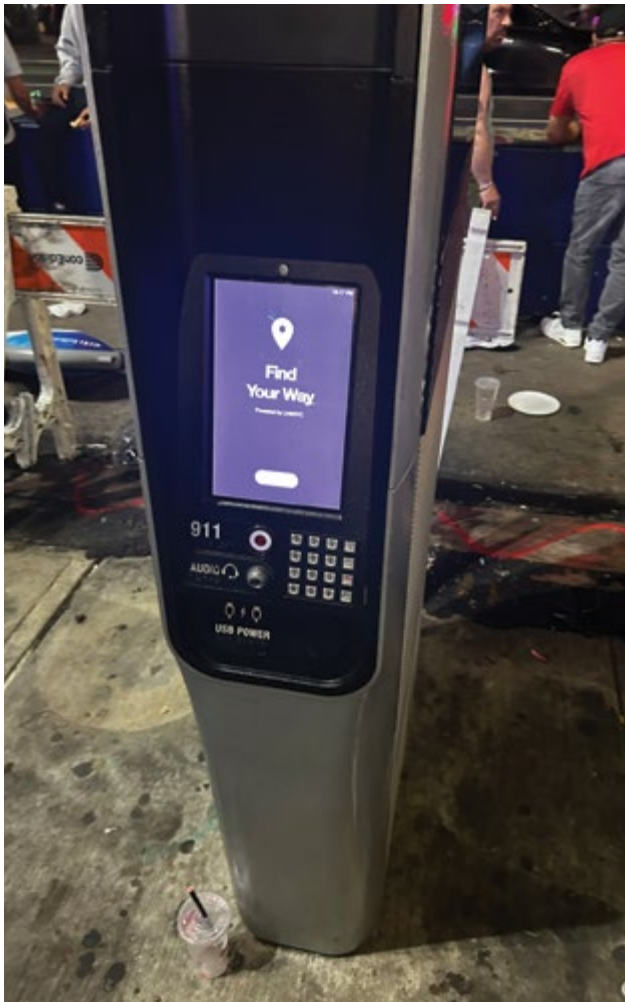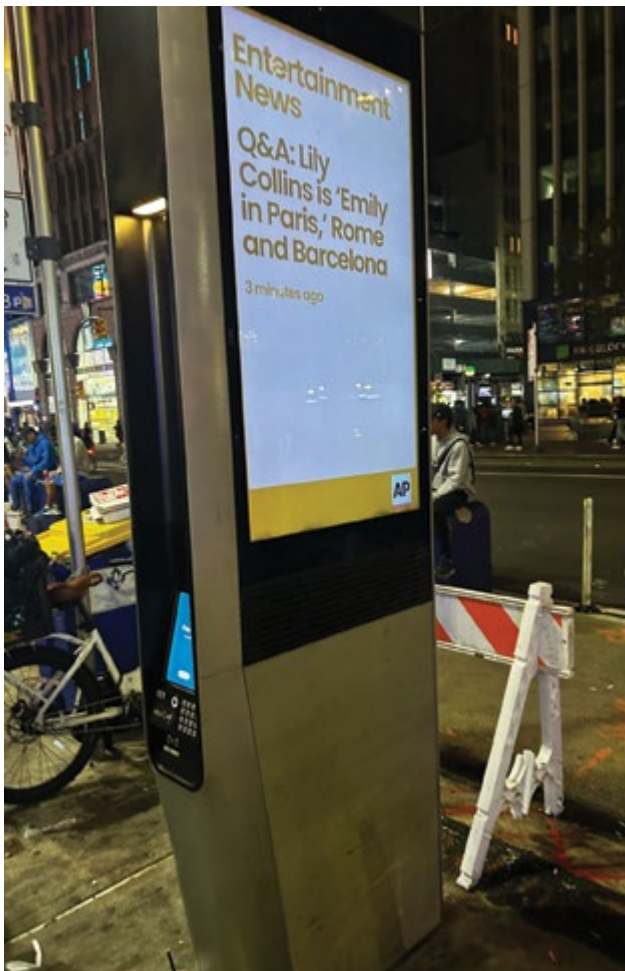
Implications for Perth

Several key takeaways from these public transport systems could offer valuable lessons for Perth. Although Perth recently implemented a two-zone fare system, there are notable advantages to adopting a single-fare system. First, a single-fare model promotes equity by ensuring that residents in more affordable outer suburbs are not disadvantaged by paying higher public transport costs compared to those living in inner-city areas. Second, this system can enhance operational efficiency. While there may be some revenue loss from a uniform fare structure, the potential service improvements—especially in speeding up boarding and alighting, as seen with off-board tap-on systems—are significant and a small price to pay for the efficiency gains, especially when compared to the cost of intersection upgrades.

Perth's current bus fleet, a combination of gas-powered and electric vehicles, already benefits from advanced acceleration and braking capabilities. Additionally, the city is expanding its network of bus lanes and implementing intersection priority measures, leaving limited room for incremental efficiency improvements. However, the upcoming tap card system, which will also accommodate credit card payments, promises faster processing times. Nonetheless, the most substantial efficiency gains could come from allowing all-door boarding and eliminating the need to tap off, as this would greatly reduce dwell times at stops.

Fare capping also presents a valuable opportunity for Perth. By introducing a maximum weekly fare cap, the system can incentivise users to utilise public transport on weekends and during off-peak times, as there would be no additional cost to them. Since the costs associated with running vehicles (whether buses or trains) are already covered during peak periods, additional off-peak patronage would come at minimal extra cost to the service provider. This would not only encourage consistent public transport use but also financially reward passengers for opting to leave their private vehicles at home.

Overall, Perth has developed a quality public transport service for a city of its size, and recent investments are set to enhance functionality. However, it would be unwise to halt progress simply because recent fare system changes have been made. Further improvements, particularly around fare structures and boarding efficiency, should be explored to ensure continued growth and service optimisation.

AltaSea

AltaSea, located at the Port of Los Angeles, is a transformative initiative aimed at unlocking the potential of the ocean through innovation, sustainability, and economic development. Now in its 10th year, AltaSea operates on a sprawling 35-acre site and has quickly become a cornerstone of the blue economy.

Founded in 2014, AltaSea's first years were marked by jurisdictional complexities. The campus is situated on state land, operated by the City of Los Angeles, but located in federal waters, adding layers of governance and legal hurdles to the early phases of development.

AltaSea is structured around a 66-year lease, the maximum available for an entity of its kind. Rather than paying a traditional lease, AltaSea offsets payments by using credits from upgrades to its existing historic buildings, which were originally constructed in 1910. Each section of the campus is redeveloped and opened incrementally, with 60,000 square feet (approximately 5,500 square metres) being refurbished at a time.

The campus itself sits on an existing wharf with a 60-foot (18.3-metre) deep berth, making it ideal for marine research and ocean-related industry activities. AltaSea's long-term lease and strategic location are key to its mission of turning Los Angeles into a global hub for marine innovation.

AltaSea is primarily focused on three sectors of the blue economy: regenerative aquaculture, renewable energy, and blue technology, including underwater robotics. Each of these focus areas addresses critical global challenges such as food security, sustainable energy, and the preservation of marine ecosystems. By fostering innovation in these sectors, AltaSea contributes not only to economic growth but also to environmental sustainability.

One of AltaSea's flagship initiatives is "Project Ocean," which it envisions as a vital solution to combat climate change. This ambitious project seeks to leverage the ocean's vast potential for renewable energy, marine conservation, and carbon sequestration, positioning the organisation as a leader in the global climate action movement. Additionally, hydrogen energy is viewed as the next big step for AltaSea and its partners, with the organisation exploring hydrogen's role in the future of the blue economy.

AltaSea operates a unique partnership model, distinguishing between **onsite partners** and **coalition partners**, rather than traditional tenants. Onsite partners are organisations with a physical presence at the campus. These partners either pay rent or a heavily subsidised amount—up to 80% of their rent can be offset by performing community outreach or hosting internships. This approach aligns with AltaSea's commitment to fulfilling specific community outcome requirements, part of its agreement with the Port of Los Angeles.

AltaSea's first onsite partner was a business support group, which assists startups by providing mentorship, resources, and facilities. These groups also serve as a "landing ground" for international businesses, offering foreign companies a foothold in the U.S. market while they establish operations and scale their ventures. By fostering these partnerships, AltaSea creates a fertile environment for innovation and business growth in marine-related industries.

Coalition partners, on the other hand, consist of like-minded organisations that collaborate with AltaSea on advocacy, policy, and legislative matters. For example, AltaSea played a key role in building a coalition to support bills related to wave and tidal energy, and later helped in the implementation phase. These partnerships extend AltaSea's influence beyond the campus, allowing it to shape policy and drive change at state and federal levels.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are central to AltaSea's mission. The organisation takes pride in its efforts to ensure gender and ethnic diversity across its workforce and governance. Its board of directors and executive team are deliberately diverse, reflecting the organisation's commitment to inclusion and setting a standard for other companies and institutions involved in the blue economy.

A defining feature of AltaSea's trajectory is its "Deep Blue Decade" initiative, a ten-year plan launched in 2021 to drive ocean sustainability and foster the blue economy. The initiative focuses on innovation, education, and public engagement to address ocean-related environmental challenges. Aligned with global efforts like the United Nations' Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030), the Deep Blue Decade seeks to leverage ocean-based solutions to mitigate climate change and promote sustainable economic growth.

AltaSea's efforts in regenerative aquaculture, renewable energy, and blue technology are the cornerstones of this initiative, with the campus serving as a living laboratory for marine innovation. The ultimate goal is to create scalable solutions that not only benefit the local economy but also have far-reaching impacts on global ocean health and climate resilience.

As AltaSea continues to grow, it is poised to explore new opportunities in hydrogen energy, positioning itself at the forefront of this emerging sector within the blue economy. Hydrogen is seen as a clean and renewable energy source with vast potential for reducing carbon emissions and supporting sustainable ocean operations. AltaSea's leadership in this area could play a pivotal role in the transition to a more sustainable global energy system.

AltaSea stands as an example of how public-private partnerships, innovation, and sustainability can come together to solve some of the world's most pressing challenges. From its complex beginnings, navigating multiple jurisdictions, to its development of cutting-edge marine technologies, AltaSea has firmly established itself as a leader in the blue economy. Through its Deep Blue Decade initiative, AltaSea is not only contributing to local economic development but is also positioning itself as a global hub for marine innovation and sustainability.

Cultural Centres and Precinct Development

During the delegation, we visited renowned cultural sites in Los Angeles, such as The Getty Center, The Broad, and the Walt Disney Concert Hall. These institutions are part of intentionally developed cultural precincts aimed at enhancing tourism, civic pride, and the arts in Los Angeles. Rather than evolving as traditional cultural hubs, these precincts have been meticulously planned to focus attention on art and culture, elevating the city's profile through landmark architecture, high-quality collections, and accessible infrastructure.

The Getty Center

The Getty Center, designed by architect Richard Meier, is an iconic cultural destination situated on a scenic hilltop in the Santa Monica Mountains. Completed in 1997, the centre hosts a range of art collections, spanning European paintings, decorative arts, and photography, supported by the financial legacy of oil magnate J. Paul Getty.

One of The Getty's distinctive qualities is its location outside of Los Angeles' central business district, which challenges traditional ideas about museum placement. Its carefully integrated transport system, which includes a monorail from a designated parking area to the museum itself, ensures accessibility while preserving the site's immersive quality. The monorail isolates visitors from urban distractions, allowing them to fully engage with both the art collections and the breathtaking views of Los Angeles. The Getty exemplifies how cultural sites need not be centrally located as long as they are accessible and designed with a holistic visitor experience in mind.

The Getty demonstrates that decentralised cultural facilities, when adequately planned and designed, can successfully attract visitors, creating an experience that is not just about the collection but about the broader interaction between architecture, environment, and culture.

Downtown LA Cultural Precinct

The downtown Los Angeles cultural precinct, which includes The Broad and the Walt Disney Concert Hall, demonstrates the value of co-locating cultural facilities. Initially, downtown LA was not perceived as the city's cultural heart; however, the placement of key facilities, such as The Broad art museum and the Walt Disney Concert Hall, reshaped this perception and turned the area into a cultural hub.

The Walt Disney Concert Hall, designed by architect Frank Gehry, stands out with its stainless-steel exterior and advanced acoustics, symbolising modern architectural innovation. The Broad, designed by Diller Scofidio + Renfro, has a unique "veil-and-vault" structure, with a honeycomb exterior that limits windows to draw focus on internal exhibits. These venues are now part of a precinct that attracts high-end dining and accommodation, generating a self-sustaining cultural ecosystem that appeals to locals and tourists alike.

The downtown precinct underscores the importance of strategically clustering cultural venues to create a destination, which can reinvigorate previously overlooked urban spaces. The co-location of diverse cultural attractions fosters a synergistic effect, where restaurants, hotels, and residential developments support and are supported by these institutions, creating an appealing urban centre of culture and commerce.
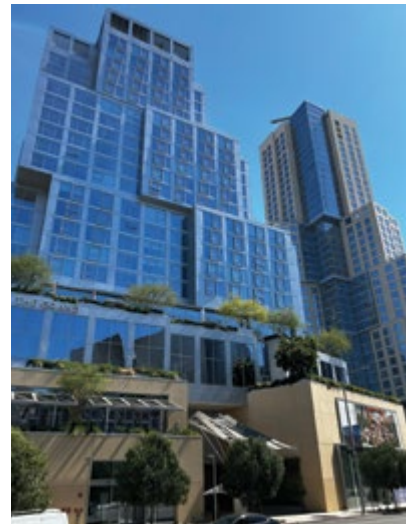
New York's Cultural Institutions

Outside of the delegation's visits, several New York cultural institutions highlight the interplay between architecture and cultural experience. The Guggenheim Museum, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright is distinguished not just by its collections but by the architectural forms. Wright's Guggenheim, with its unique spiral form, is an attraction in itself, often overshadowing the exhibits it contains. The Oculus at the World Trade Center, whilst not a cultural hub, but part of a wider landmark commemorating September 11, shows the importance of architectural design in creating a precinct. Designed by Santiago Calatrava Calatrava's Oculus, with its white ribbed design, serves as both a transit hub and a cultural landmark, enhancing New York's urban aesthetic.

New York demonstrates that while collections and cultural offerings draw audiences, architecture can equally drive visitor engagement. Iconic designs become part of a city's cultural fabric, making the building itself a memorable experience. Such architectural ambition should be a consideration for Perth South West, where distinct architectural identities could help position the region as a forward-looking cultural destination.

Implications for Perth

The cultural precincts in Los Angeles provide valuable lessons for the Perth South West region. Traditionally, Perth has centralised its cultural institutions, which has successfully attracted tourism and economic activity into the CBD. However, Los Angeles' approach shows that decentralisation can be equally effective, especially when cultural facilities are paired with strong design and accessibility. As demonstrated by the Getty and the downtown LA precinct, placing cultural assets in outer metropolitan areas can successfully attract tourism and local engagement, particularly if transport infrastructure is thoughtfully incorporated.

By considering decentralised cultural precincts, Perth South West can diversify its appeal, drawing visitors beyond the CBD and into outer areas. This approach not only spreads economic benefits but could also enhance local identity by creating distinctive cultural experiences that resonate with specific communities.

Destination Marketing

During the delegation's visit, destination marketing emerged as a critical focus. The Perth South West Metropolitan Region offers a wealth of exceptional natural assets, which, while not as globally recognised as destinations like Rottnest Island or Cottesloe Beach, are equally captivating. Recognising this potential, the delegation discussed strategies to elevate the region's profile through targeted campaigns aimed at drawing both domestic and international visitors.

The anticipated AUKUS agreement presents a unique opportunity, as it is expected to bring an influx of US and UK military personnel and their families, who may wish to explore the region as tourists. Developing an appealing, comprehensive tourism experience is essential to capture this audience. In Los Angeles, we examined how cities market their coastal attractions, focusing on notable sites such as Venice Beach and Santa Monica Pier.

Venice Beach has gained a global following, often showcased on social media and in films, as an eclectic, vibrant destination. However, we observed that, despite its popularity, the area is primarily filled with tourist-focused retail and lacks a deep connection to the local culture. The facilities and upkeep of the beach did not match the quality typically expected in Western Australia, underscoring how the "brand" of Venice Beach often surpasses the actual visitor experience.

Santa Monica Pier is similarly focused on tourism, with the Santa Monica Pier Corporation overseeing its operations. This community-focused organisation manages the pier as a shared asset, working to maintain its quality and vibrancy as a visitor attraction. Initially in decline, the pier underwent revitalisation in the 1990s and has since embraced its association with Route 66, incorporating themed attractions to create a cohesive and appealing narrative. Street performers, regulated through a licensing system, bring added energy to the pier, enhancing the visitor experience beyond direct revenue.

One insight from our meetings with the Beverly Hills Chamber of Commerce was their strategic targeting of affluent international markets, including regions like the Middle East. Their campaigns are carefully curated to present Beverly Hills as a luxury destination, emphasising high-end shopping and exclusive experiences that align with their visitors' expectations of the "Beverly Hills" lifestyle.

For Perth, the key takeaway is the need to confidently promote our assets as being on par with, if not better than, well-known international locations. Collaborating across jurisdictions to market the Perth South West Region as a cohesive destination could enhance its appeal, spotlighting landmarks such as Fremantle, Rockingham Beach, and the Omeo Wreck. Discussions with Los Angeles' local government and chamber representatives highlighted the importance of a unified branding approach to attract international visitors, who are generally less aware of specific local boundaries.

For regional and intrastate markets, a more individualised approach can be effective, with destinations marketing themselves for short, focused visits. This strategy recognises that domestic visitors typically have a brief itinerary and seek experiences within a day or two.

Finally, our exploration of Santa Monica underscored the role of urban design in enhancing tourism. Despite the slight distance between public transport links and the pier, the journey is made pleasant through wide footpaths, strategic lighting, and landscaping, effectively guiding pedestrians to the main destination. For Perth, integrating similar design elements to create intuitive, enjoyable pathways to key attractions could significantly enhance the visitor experience. This blend of cohesive marketing and thoughtful urban design positions the Perth South West Region as a compelling destination for local and international visitors alike.

Domino Sugar Refinery Redevelopment

The redevelopment of the Domino Sugar Refinery on Brooklyn's waterfront presents a successful model for transforming industrial heritage sites like the South Fremantle Power Station into vibrant, mixed-use spaces. This project, led by Two Trees Management and designed by architect Vishaan Chakrabarti and his firm PAU (Practice for Architecture and Urbanism), is part of a larger $3 billion development encompassing five buildings. The overall project includes office, residential, and retail spaces, all with visually striking designs that revitalise the area and offer diverse amenities.

The Domino Sugar Refinery, similar to the South Fremantle Power Station, posed unique challenges due to its original industrial design. The refinery's layout featured inconsistent floor levels and a mix of expansive and narrow spaces, which did not naturally lend themselves to a straightforward conversion into modern office or residential spaces. These challenges echo those faced by the South Fremantle Power Station site, where non-standard floors and deteriorated interiors have complicated redevelopment efforts in the past.

To address these constraints, the Domino project preserved the historic refinery's outer shell while constructing a modern structure within. A 9-foot void between the original and new buildings allowed space for greenery, including trees, vines, and some synthetic plants, ensuring year-round vibrancy while softening the industrial architecture. This approach maintains the refinery's historic facade while creating a unique architectural identity that connects old and new elements. For South Fremantle Power Station, this model suggests that retaining the exterior shell while constructing a modern internal structure could offer a similar solution, preserving heritage aesthetics without compromising usability.

The refurbished refinery, now featuring expansive views across Manhattan, has seen high demand for commercial space, particularly on its upper floors, which host open-plan layouts ideal for events, functions, and photoshoots. Each floor is designed with flexibility, allowing various tenant-specific fit-outs and uses, while floor-to-ceiling windows maximise natural light, compensating for the limitations imposed by the historic shell.

This redevelopment is part of a larger precinct strategy, incorporating architecturally innovative residential and commercial spaces connected by a central park, promoting a community-centric environment. The area is well-served by public transport, with ferry terminals just a 10-minute walk to the north and south and subway access about 15 minutes away—enhancing accessibility and appeal for residents, visitors, and workers alike.

The Domino Sugar Refinery project illustrates a viable approach for the South Fremantle Power Station, where a more pragmatic heritage redevelopment method may be needed. Traditional preservation standards in Western Australia often complicate adaptive reuse for industrial sites, but Domino demonstrates how retaining the outer shell while creating modern interiors can breathe new life into historic buildings. For South Fremantle Power Station, adopting a similar model could overcome challenges with non-standard floor levels and internal deterioration, creating high-quality, adaptable spaces that honour the site's industrial heritage. This approach balances heritage preservation with innovation, offering a pathway to reintegrate such iconic structures into modern urban landscapes.

Industry City

Industry City, located in the Sunset Park neighbourhood of Brooklyn, is a major redevelopment project by Industry City, LLC, a partnership between Belvedere Capital, Jamestown (also responsible for redeveloping Chelsea Market), and Angelo, Gordon & Co. This partnership has transformed the site from an industrial warehouse complex into a vibrant, mixed-use hub that retains its historical character while embracing a modern, innovation-focused identity.

Situated along Brooklyn's waterfront in Sunset Park, Industry City spans approximately 560,000 square metres across 16 buildings on a 14 hectare site. Industry City is comprised of a mixture of industrial, commercial, and creative office spaces. In addition to traditional office and industrial spaces, the site offers retail shops, event venues, public art installations, and outdoor courtyards and green spaces, mainly developed from former rail corridors between buildings.

Originally built in the 1890s as part of Bush Terminal, Industry City was once a major hub for shipping, manufacturing, and warehousing. As deindustrialisation affected New York City from the 1960s onward, Bush Terminal saw a decline. In the 2010s, Industry City LLC initiated the current redevelopment, which preserves

much of the original industrial architecture while transforming the site to support modern commercial and creative industries. This mix of preservation and modernisation connects Brooklyn's industrial legacy with contemporary urban life.

Industry City hosts a diverse mix of tenants across technology, media, design, manufacturing, and retail sectors, creating a dynamic environment of specialised spaces.
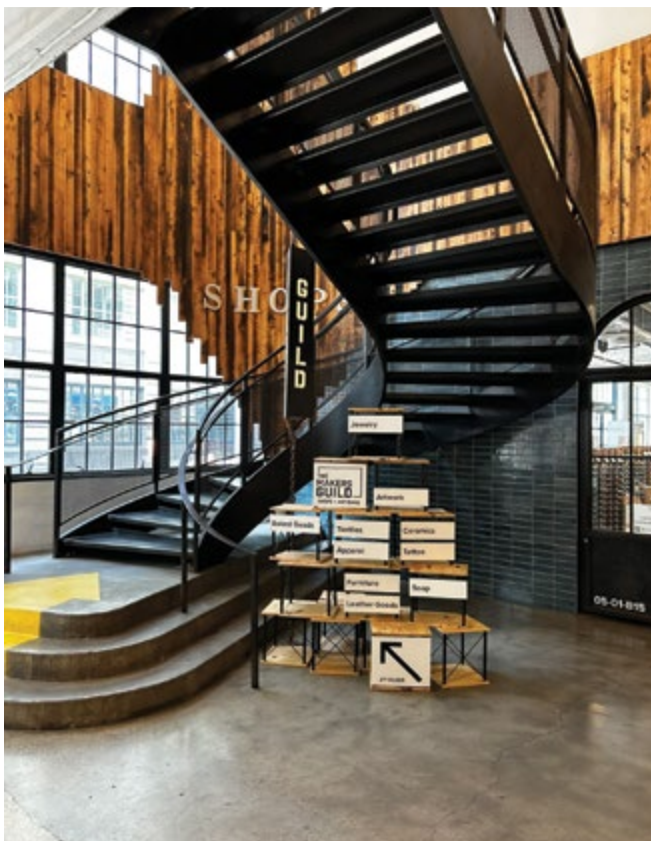
Key tenants include:

· The Brooklyn Nets
· A range of Car Dealerships
· Camp David - A coworking space for creative professionals and entrepreneurs.
· A range of eclectic shops such as the Morbid Anatomy Library & Shop.
· And a range of food vendors

In addition, Industry City includes the Brooklyn Film School and Makers Guild, both catering to creative and tech industries, and offers ready-to-lease office spaces, attracting prospective tenants looking for vibrant, turnkey workspaces. Though the developers initially sought to include residential units, zoning restrictions prevented this, keeping the complex entirely dedicated to commercial and community use. With plans to further develop remaining underused areas, Industry City is still growing, evolving as a commercial and cultural destination that brings together locals, workers, and tourists in one innovative waterfront complex.

The development's tenants presently employ over 6,000 people.

Implications for Perth

Industry City's success as a redevelopment model offers valuable insights for Perth, particularly for the Future of Fremantle project. The large-scale transformation demonstrates how repurposing industrial spaces can drive economic growth and revitalise urban environments, with particular attention to community engagement and public visibility. Offering incentives for businesses with a public-facing element—such as the glass-fronted workshops and stores seen here—creates a vibrant environment and attracts diverse clientele. Moreover, the combination of specialised spaces, high-profile tenants, and continued investment contributes positively to the broader area, showing that innovation-driven, phased redevelopment can activate underutilised urban spaces and attract both businesses and visitors.

For Perth, replicating aspects of Industry City's adaptive reuse model—particularly in underused waterfront or industrial areas—could support emerging industries, enhance urban density, and foster new economic opportunities while respecting local heritage and community needs. The key to the success has been a developer with the means to drive the vision and fund the necessary upgrades, attracting high profile tenants and engaging positively with the community.

NYPD Community Engagement

To better understand how large organisations manage community engagement, we met with the New York Police Department (NYPD) to explore their methods. The NYPD's approach integrates technology and community outreach in innovative ways, utilising "smart" devices and advanced data-driven systems to enhance both public safety and community interaction. This engagement-driven model highlights practices that, while unique to New York's context, offer insights into how advanced technology can support community-focused policing efforts.

Smart Devices in Policing

The NYPD employs a range of smart devices as part of a broader "smart city" strategy. One notable example is the "ShotSpotter" programme, which uses an array of microphones installed on CCTV cameras throughout the city to detect and triangulate gunshots. The system can pinpoint the location of gunfire within a few metres, even when gunshots go unreported to the police—estimated to be as high as 70-80% of incidents. While this technology effectively enhances NYPD response capabilities, it also reflects the underlying issue of gun accessibility in the country, a reality that would not likely necessitate such technology in Western Australia.

The NYPD also integrates small radiation sensors into certain officers' equipment. These sensors automatically alert authorities to any abnormal radiation levels, allowing officers to move dynamically through areas while continuously collecting data. The system operates in the background, transmitting data to a central monitoring hub without requiring officer intervention, effectively turning individuals into mobile observation units.

Community Engagement through Technology

The NYPD has also adapted technology to support community engagement, particularly with younger demographics. For example, the department uses the "robot dog" produced by Boston Dynamics, a piece of technology that, while intimidating at first glance, has become a focal point of interest for youth and the community. The robot can be set to a lower and less intimidating mode, especially useful when interacting with children. This type of engagement sparks curiosity and fosters a more positive interaction with law enforcement, reducing perceived barriers.

Drones also play a significant role in the NYPD's operations, offering extensive surveillance capabilities and enabling real-time situational awareness. The NYPD emphasised the use of drones to support their community presence, allowing officers to respond swiftly and gather situational data in real time.

City-Wide CCTV Network

New York's vast CCTV network is integral to the NYPD's oversight of public spaces. This system is a collaboration among various agencies and private partners, all contributing to a centralised data network. These high vantage-point cameras have exceptional magnification capabilities, offering the NYPD a comprehensive view of urban areas. Unlike domestic cameras typically seen on private properties, these city cameras are strategically placed for optimal coverage and are shared among multiple security-focused agencies.

Implications for Perth

For local governments, the NYPD's use of technology, particularly in community engagement and enforcement duties, offers valuable insights. While smaller jurisdictions like Perth's local councils may not require the same level of surveillance, the NYPD's approach to technology use—especially in youth engagement—could be adapted to local needs. Programs focusing on youth, such as anti-graffiti initiatives, might benefit from incorporating technology in a way that engages and educates.

Ultimately, the NYPD's commitment to community engagement reflects a broader effort to improve public trust and strengthen its reputation within the community. This focus on relationship-building, coupled with strategic technological investment, supports NYPD efforts in a way that goes beyond enforcement, highlighting the potential of technology to bridge gaps between law enforcement and the communities they serve.
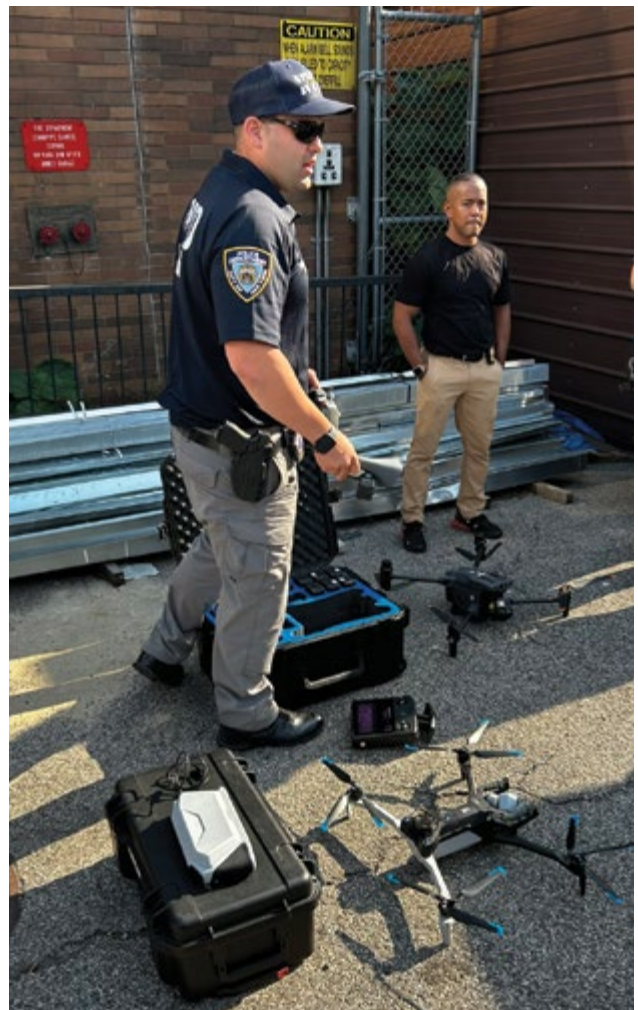
New York Parks

In examining New York's parks, Central Park stands out as an iconic example of landscaping intervention, designed to create landscapes not naturally found in the area. This carefully crafted space offers various settings, including vast active spaces, all set against a backdrop of an artificial, yet meticulously designed, natural environment.

In contrast to Central Park's scale, New York City's dense urban environment necessitates the development of small but impactful open spaces. These compact parks make the most of limited real estate, providing accessible green areas amid high-density surroundings.

Perth, on the other hand, has historically developed at lower densities, with planning mandates, since the Stephenson-Hepburn plan, requiring that 10% of new developments be set aside as open space. As Perth moves towards more infill development and higher-density precincts, some of New York's innovative approaches to small urban parks offer valuable lessons. While Perth may not experience the same economic pressures as New York, these examples demonstrate the potential of creative design in delivering quality public spaces amidst urban growth.

Little Island

Little Island is a public park located at Pier 55 in New York City and is just under 1ha in area. The project was primarily funded through philanthropic donations from the Diller-von Furstenberg Family Foundation. They were inspired to support the creation of the park out of their love for the Chelsea neighbourhood. In this case, the purpose for the Designed by Heatherwick Studio and engineered by Arup, the park features a distinctive structure composed of interlocking concrete "tulips." This design creates varying elevations and undulating landscapes, introducing dynamic spaces into the typically flat urban environment.

The park offers a variety of interactive elements, including musical tiles and two amphitheatres: The Amph, a 687-seat venue for larger performances, and The Glade, an intimate space accommodating approximately 200 guests, suitable for events such as weddings. Additionally, The Play Ground serves as a communal area hosting food stalls and providing open space for visitors.

The landscape incorporates a diverse mix of trees, shrubs, and native grasses, enhancing biodiversity and offering a changing environment throughout the seasons.

While the park includes various stairs to access different areas, it also features ramps to ensure universal accessibility. However, the design may limit multiple access points to certain spaces.

The High Line

Adjacent to Little Island lies the High Line, a former elevated railway repurposed into a public park. In 1999, Joshua David and Robert Hammond founded Friends of the High Line, a non-profit conservancy, to advocate for its preservation and reuse as a public space. The High Line is approximately 1.45 miles (2.3 km) long, stretching from Gansevoort Street to 34th Street in Manhattan.

The park features a variety of plantings, including perennials, grasses, shrubs, and trees, selected for their ability to thrive in the shallow, specially formulated lightweight soil that ensures the structure can support the vegetation without compromising the integrity of the infrastructure.

Maintenance of the High Line is managed by a team of horticulturists, supported by a large group of volunteers who assist with upkeep and provide tours. The park operates primarily through donations and philanthropic support, as city funding is limited to liability coverage.

Public art is a significant feature of the High Line, with installations typically displayed for 12 months to offer visitors a continually evolving experience. The diverse plantings also ensure that the park's appearance changes with the seasons.

The High Line includes various communal spaces, some designed to highlight the landscape, others to connect with surrounding areas of interest, and some to provide framed views or ample seating.

The transformation of the High Line from a disused railway to a vibrant public space underscores the potential of repurposing infrastructure through community activism and innovative design. In Fremantle, discussions have emerged about converting redundant bridge crossings into similar public amenities. This reflects a broader conversation in Perth's southwest region about rehabilitating unused infrastructure, such as the rail corridor currently under consideration for redevelopment. These initiatives highlight the value of reimagining existing structures to enhance urban environments and provide new public spaces.

Brooklyn Bridge Park

Brooklyn Bridge Park, spanning 34.5 hectares along Brooklyn's East River waterfront, is a prime example of urban redevelopment transforming former industrial areas into vibrant public spaces. Historically, the site comprised deteriorating piers and warehouses, remnants of Brooklyn's maritime industry.

The vision for the park emerged in the 1980s when community activists advocated for public access to the waterfront, opposing commercial development plans. Their efforts led to the establishment of the Brooklyn Bridge Park Development Corporation, which, in collaboration with local and state authorities, spearheaded the park's creation.

Construction began in 2008, with the park opening in phases over the following years. The project was completed in 2021, with an estimated total cost of $400 million.

The park features a mix of active and passive recreational areas. Active spaces include playing fields, basketball courts, and tennis courts, which are open to the public and can be reserved for organised activities. The rise of sports like pickleball has led to the adaptation of some courts to accommodate new recreational trends.

Passive areas offer tranquil environments with rolling hills, lawns, and gardens. Notably, some hills are constructed using lightweight materials, such as foam, covered with soil to support vegetation. These hills, along with strategically placed berms, serve as sound barriers against the adjacent Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, creating peaceful retreats within the urban landscape.

The park's design also incorporates salvaged materials, including granite from other city projects, promoting sustainability and historical continuity.

Brooklyn Bridge Park's transformation from industrial decay to a dynamic public space offers valuable insights for urban redevelopment projects. For areas like Fremantle or other infill sites, facing shortages of active playing fields and increasing urban density, this model demonstrates how underutilised waterfronts can be repurposed to provide diverse recreational opportunities, not just commercial developments. By integrating active and passive spaces, employing innovative landscaping to mitigate urban noise, and ensuring accessibility, such developments can create unique destinations that serve both local communities and visitors.

Paley Park

Paley Park, located in Midtown Manhattan, is a prime example of how small urban spaces can provide high-quality amenities and environments amidst high density cityscapes. Occupying just 390m^2, this "pocket park" was established in 1967 by the William S. Paley Foundation.

Designed by Zion & Breen Associates, the park features a six metre high waterfall that spans its rear wall, that masks city noise. The space is shaded by honey locust trees and bordered by ivy-covered walls, enhancing its atmosphere. Movable chairs and tables allow visitors to customise their seating arrangements, fostering a sense of personal space and comfort.

Paley Park demonstrates that even modestly sized areas can serve as valuable urban retreats, offering residents and visitors a peaceful respite from the surrounding city's activity.
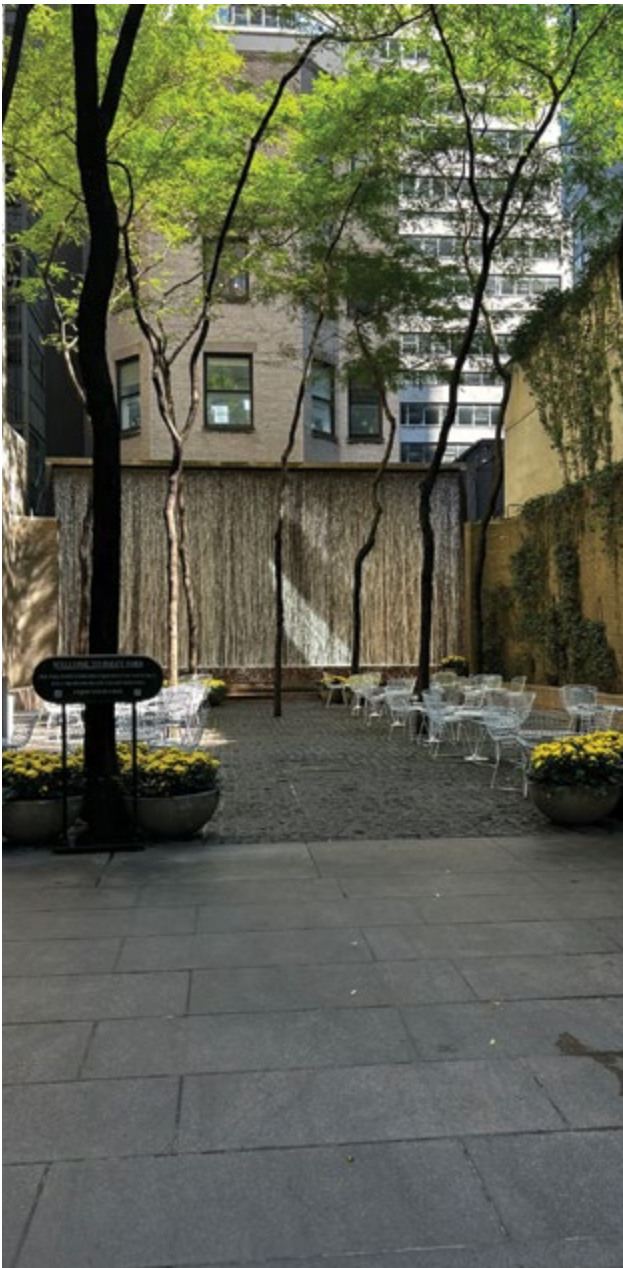
Sherman Creek Park

Sherman Creek Park, located in the Inwood neighbourhood of Manhattan, exemplifies the transformative power of community-driven urban renewal. Once a neglected industrial area plagued by pollution and illegal dumping, the park's revitalisation was spearheaded by the New York Restoration Project (NYRP), a non-profit organization dedicated to reclaiming and restoring underutilized green spaces in New York City.

The restoration efforts focused on stabilising the riverbanks and replanting native vegetation, resulting in significant canopy cover and diverse landscapes. The creation of pathways leading to the Harlem River enhanced public access to the waterfront. Wetland rehabilitation included planting new reed systems to improve water quality, attracting increased birdlife and contributing to clearer waters. Innovative projects, such as installing oyster reefs, were implemented to further filter and clean the water.

The park also features community gardens where local groups experiment with growing various vegetables and herbs. These initiatives engage residents in urban agriculture, fostering a sense of ownership and connection to the space. Educational signage throughout the park provides information on local flora and fauna, including guidance on managing pests and plant diseases, thereby enhancing community knowledge and stewardship.

The success of Sherman Creek Park underscores the critical role of community leadership and volunteerism in urban redevelopment, particularly in less affluent neighbourhoods.

Implications for Perth

The experience of public park development in New York reveals several important implications for Perth. In New York, local government plays a limited role in funding and maintaining public parks, with many spaces relying heavily on private donations or in less affluent areas, volunteer-led initiatives. While this approach has yielded vibrant public spaces in high-income neighbourhoods, it places significant risk on community-driven funding and the ongoing financial stability of these areas. Parks are often created through activism, rather than routine public planning—a stark contrast to the Perth model, where local government investment ensures public open space is widely available and consistently maintained.

However, the New York model demonstrates the potential of private philanthropy and volunteer efforts to enhance urban spaces, as well as the benefit of attracting private investment into the creation of public amenities. This is particularly valuable in cases where philanthropic contributions align closely with community needs and interests, bringing unique opportunities to neighbourhoods that might otherwise lack these resources. Collaborative efforts between volunteers, community leaders, and private donors can elevate urban green spaces, highlighting the importance of ongoing community engagement in public park success.

An additional lesson from New York's waterfront parks is the strategic use of valuable real estate—such as riverfront areas with views of Manhattan—for community open space. Expanding into waterfront areas with carefully designed, minimally invasive interventions has created much-needed public spaces while preserving scenic and natural qualities. For Perth, this suggests the potential for waterfront and infill developments that maximise public access while accommodating higher density.

The success of New York's pocket parks and use of durable hard surfaces also provides insight for Perth. These elements create robust, high-use spaces capable of supporting high-density populations, an essential consideration as urban areas in Perth continue to grow.
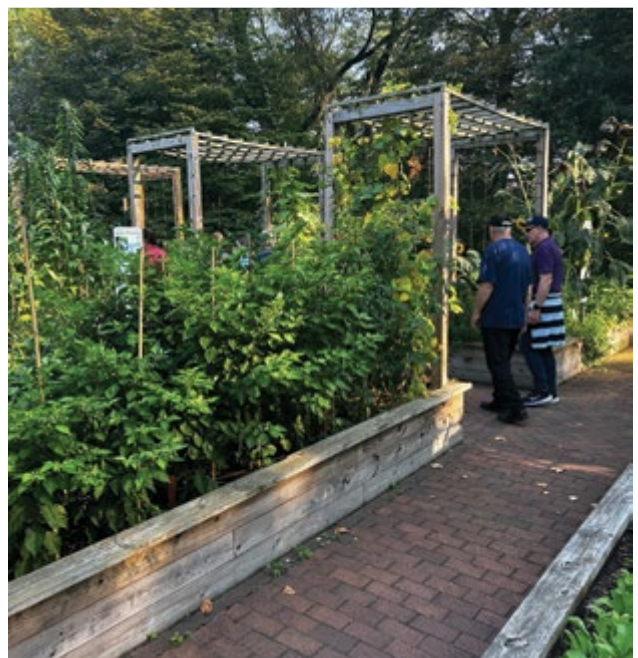
Miscellaneous Developments

In addition to the in-depth analyses of key engagements and destinations, some observations merit a more concise overview. These entries highlight a range of urban design and city-building initiatives—some innovative, others perhaps less applicable, yet all worth noting for the value they bring to broader discussions. While some of these ideas could inform future projects, others may serve as cautionary examples, adding depth to our understanding of diverse approaches in urban development.

This approach to signage extends beyond branding—it becomes a lasting emblem of the area, contributing to its cultural narrative and tourist appeal. The U.S. strategy involves maintaining these iconic signs for decades, allowing them to evolve into recognisable symbols of place identity. Such enduring icons provide continuity and build long-term brand value, a concept worth considering for tourism destination branding initiatives.

The lesson for our region is that while we often work to refresh brands, at iconic destinations, there is some merit into holding a single branding vision and allow it to develop its own unique character, rather than be updated regularly.

Iconic Signage in U.S. Tourism Destinations

The United States is renowned for iconic signage that has become inseparable from the identity of specific destinations. Signs like those at the Santa Monica Pier, Beverly Hills and Route 66 sign are more than mere markers; they are symbolic representations that shape how both visitors and locals perceive these locations.

Landscape Approaches in U.S. Urban Environments

In U.S. cities, landscape design choices often balance aesthetics with practicality, particularly in response to local climates and urban challenges. In regions like San Diego and Los Angeles, drought-resistant plants such as cacti and succulents are widely used to establish resilient, low-maintenance green spaces. This approach not only conserves water but also integrates seamlessly with the local environment, enhancing the natural look and feel of urban spaces.

In contrast, cities like Brooklyn, New York, adapt creative urban landscaping to tackle specific challenges. For example, large planters (originally repurposed skip bins) have been placed strategically to curb illegal parking. These planters, now home to shade trees, enhance pedestrian comfort by cooling sidewalks, while also supporting local wildlife.

Meanwhile, in cultural districts, grass mound space bollards serve as functional dividers between pedestrian areas and roadways. These green bollards create a visually appealing buffer that reinforces safety while blending with the area's cultural landscape.

Innovative Use of Sidewalks for Access in Urban Environments

An urban feature observed in Los Angeles is the use of sidewalks to incorporate basement access points for buildings. This design enables loading and access to services within the public realm, keeping service areas separate from bustling pedestrian zones. In busy urban environments, where space is limited, this approach optimises both functionality and accessibility.

Sidewalk access points are not only used for commercial loading but also serve as emergency exits from underground transit systems in some instances. By integrating these access areas directly into sidewalks, cities can accommodate commercial vehicles and service needs without encroaching on pedestrian space. This design concept is especially valuable in high-density areas, offering a practical solution for businesses and urban infrastructure alike.

Cost-Effective Placemaking Near Food Markets in Los Angeles

Adjacent to food markets in Los Angeles, low-cost placemaking strategies have been creatively employed to enhance the pedestrian experience. Planter boxes, positioned to delineate pedestrian zones, offer both a visual boundary and an element of safety. This straightforward setup is further complemented by affordable, movable furniture, which vendors set up and store away daily to create temporary alfresco dining areas.

Additionally, quirky art installations add vibrancy to these spaces, transforming otherwise utilitarian surroundings into lively, engaging areas for visitors. These interventions highlight how simple, budget-friendly elements can make public spaces more welcoming and dynamic, drawing in foot traffic and creating memorable experiences in urban environments.
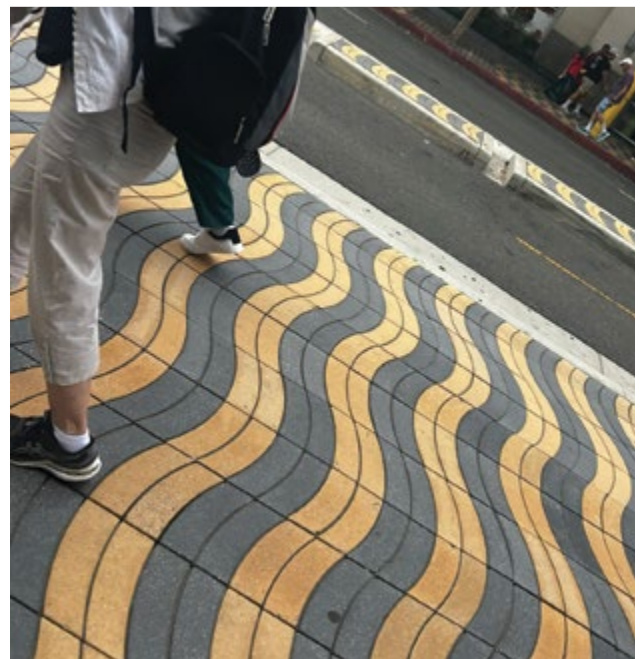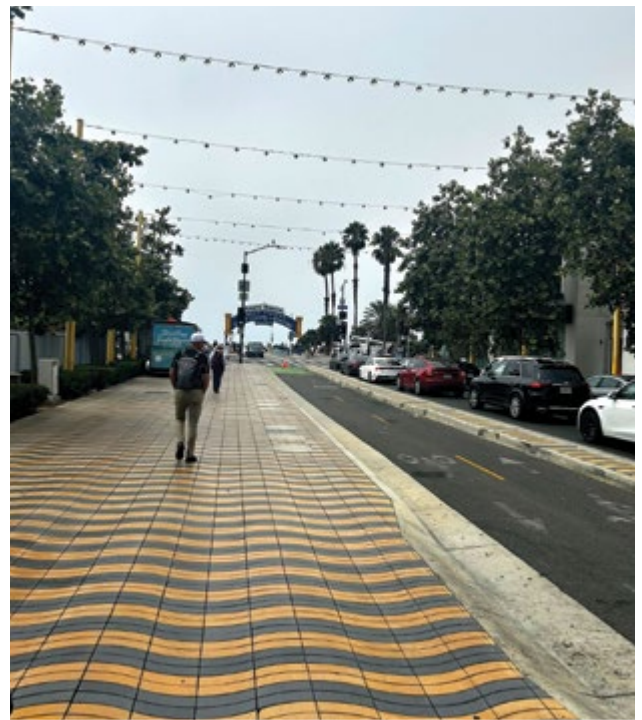
Creative Pavement Designs to Enhance Urban Spaces

In some urban areas, distinctive paving patterns on sidewalks are used to create optical illusions that subtly encourage pedestrians to slow down. These visual effects transform a functional walkway into an engaging, interactive space. By breaking the monotony of standard pavements, these patterns turn busy areas into more contemplative spaces, forcing people to slow down and explore their surroundings. This simple design choice not only enhances pedestrian experience but also contributes to a unique sense of place in the urban landscape.

Neon and LED Lighting in Nighttime Destinations

In major nighttime destinations like Los Angeles and New York, the extensive use of neon and LED lighting (often designed to mimic neon) has proven highly effective in transforming urban spaces into vibrant, inviting destinations. These lighting designs create a lively atmosphere that encourages people to linger, contributing significantly to the appeal and economic vitality of areas with a strong night-time economy.

In cities aiming to build or enhance their own night-time destinations, incorporating unique lighting schemes through Percent for Art programs, incentives or mandating interesting lighting designs as part of the Development Approval process could support the implementation. These lighting outcomes support engaging, well-lit spaces that enhance both aesthetic appeal and safety, while building a memorable experience.

Retired Naval Vessels as Public Engagement and Tourist Attractions

Repurposing retired naval vessels as public attractions has proven highly effective for cities like San Diego and New York. The USS *Midway* in San Diego and the *Intrepid* in New York are prime examples of this approach, serving as both major tourist attractions and educational outreach tools. These ships have become integral to the identities of their respective cities, reflecting and reinforcing San Diego's longstanding association with the Navy and New York's historical ties to military service.

Beyond their draw as attractions, these vessels engage the public in understanding naval history, defence, and maritime technology, providing unique interactive experiences. The presence of such iconic ships deepens the connection between the community and the military, while also offering an enduring, respectful tribute to those who served. This model of repurposing retired vessels provides a compelling blueprint for cities seeking to celebrate their maritime heritage and bolster tourism. While it is noted that Fremantle Maritime Museum hosts the HMAS Ovens, there may be more opportunities to look at naval tourism attractions given the region's ongoing ties to the Navy.

Stramp Design: Integrating Universal Access in Urban Architecture

An innovative feature known as the "Stramp"—a blend of stairs and ramp—was originally conceptualised by Canadian architect Cornelia Oberlander. This design integrates ramps directly within staircases, allowing for seamless universal access in a single, cohesive structure. Examples of Stramp designs can be found on New York's High Line, where the walkway interweaves gracefully between seating areas, and at AltaSea where a ramp flows alongside the stairs to create an accessible and interesting space.

A similar design exists outside Perth's Central Park building, demonstrating the growing popularity of Stramps as a practical, inclusive solution in urban architecture. By combining accessibility with aesthetics, Stramps offer an engaging and functional approach to public space design, making areas more welcoming for all users.

Historical Footpath Signage in San Diego

In San Diego, simple metal plaques embedded in footpaths serve as a unique and accessible way to share the city's history, particularly around the cruise terminal. These plaques introduce incoming tourists to significant historical milestones, such as the construction of the Coronado Bridge, the Point Loma Lighthouse, and the transformative relocation of rivers that shaped the harbour's development. Key moments, like the arrival and establishment of the U.S. Navy in the area, are also highlighted.

This approach provides an engaging, self-guided historical experience for visitors, linking them to San Diego's story as they explore. By offering historical insights directly within pedestrian pathways, the city has created an inviting, educational experience that enhances the tourism appeal and encourages visitors to connect with the area's heritage in a memorable and impactful way.
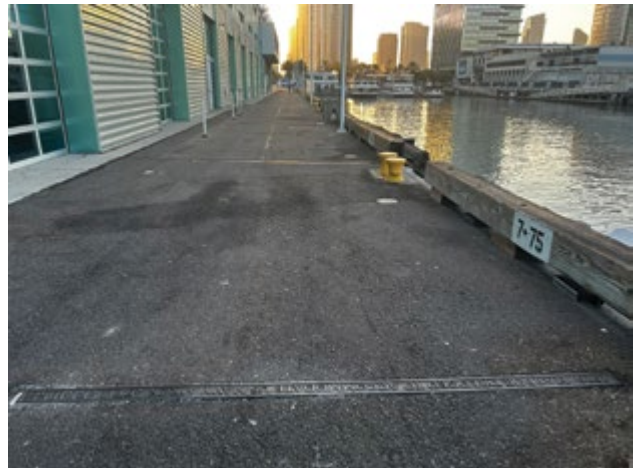
Public Safety and Personal Responsibility in U.S. Urban Design

In U.S. cities like San Diego, there appears to be a notable emphasis on personal responsibility in public safety measures, particularly in mixed-use spaces where trains vehicles and pedestrians share proximity without extensive physical barriers. At pedestrian crossings, for instance, there is often a reliance on individuals to remain alert and cautious, rather than on heavily constructed barriers. This approach promotes shared responsibility, fostering an environment where individuals play an active role in their own safety.

Similarly, in Virginia, areas with potential hazards, such as spaces around generators with multiple exposed cables, were marked simply with "witches hats", rather than with robust barricades. This minimalistic approach to hazard marking is surprising in the context of the U.S., where liability concerns and the potential for litigation are portrayed as high. Rather than "designing out" every possible risk, there seems to be a balance struck between necessary signage and an expectation that individuals will engage responsibly with their surroundings. This approach offers an alternative perspective on urban safety, allowing flexibility in design while encouraging public attentiveness.

Use of Landscaping to Manage Public Space Use in San Diego

In parts of San Diego, the landscape design leans heavily toward hardscaping, potentially to discourage the establishment of unhoused camps in certain areas. Sidewalks are often narrow and winding, interspersed with limited grass patches and densely planted trees. While this layout could stem from environmental considerations, such as reducing water usage and promoting tree cover, it also appears to influence the use of public spaces.

The dense planting and hardscape elements make these areas less conducive to prolonged stays or setting up temporary shelters, subtly guiding the intended use of the space. This design approach reflects a balance between environmental goals and urban management, shaping public areas to control their accessibility and function.
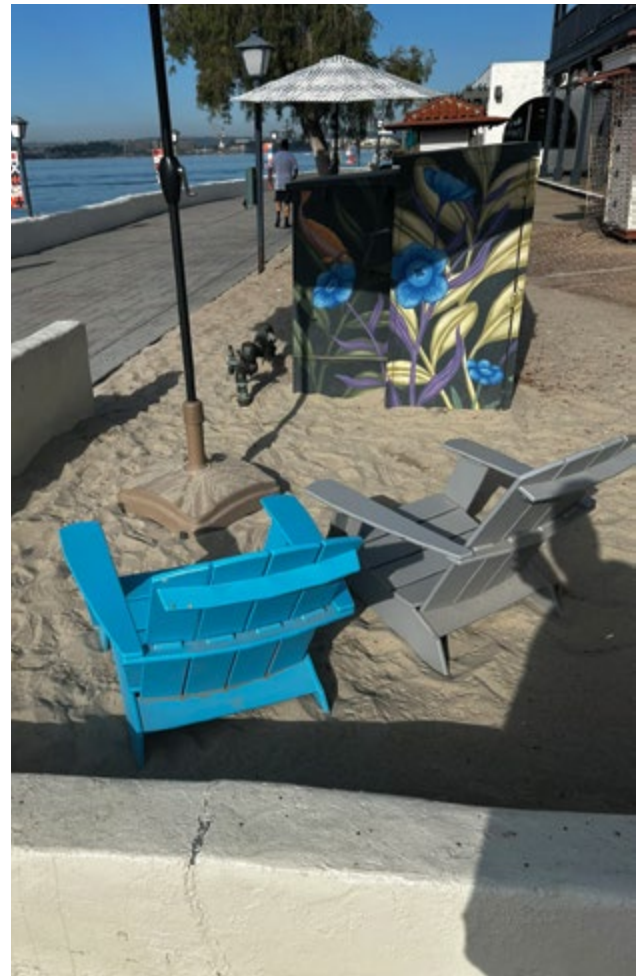
Use of Adirondack Chairs as Movable Urban Furniture

Across several U.S. cities, including Los Angeles, San Diego, and Virginia, freely movable Adirondack chairs have become a prominent feature in public spaces, particularly near coastal areas. These lightweight, colourful chairs invite visitors to sit, relax, and enjoy the view, enhancing the accessibility and comfort of public spaces.

Interestingly, these chairs are not bolted down or chained, nor is there a fee to use them; they are simply left in place as part of the public furniture. This approach fosters a sense of openness and trust, allowing individuals to rearrange the seating to suit their needs. The chairs' vibrant colours and flexible placement add an engaging visual element and encourage visitors to interact freely with the space, making it feel welcoming and dynamic around the clock.

Public Art Celebrating Local Identity

In cities like San Diego and Norfolk, street art prominently celebrates local identity, with murals and installations featuring imagery that captures each city's unique character. These artworks do more than add colour; they serve as recognisable landmarks designed to foster a sense of place and encourage social media sharing among visitors.

Conversely, cities such as Los Angeles and New York often host temporary installations by renowned artists like Richard Orlinski in Beverly Hills and Gillie and Marc in New York. These rotating installations bring a fresh, evolving quality to public spaces, inviting frequent engagement and public interaction. By balancing permanent, identity-focused art with temporary works by notable artists, these cities successfully enhance their urban landscape, catering to both community roots and the appeal of dynamic, ever-changing art for residents and tourists alike.

Street Vendors as Vital Contributors to Urban Economy and Vibrancy

Street vendors and food trucks were a prominent feature in all the cities visited, coexisting effectively alongside established food businesses. Each city appeared to have unique regulations governing street vending, balancing the benefits of these vendors with the needs of local businesses and public spaces.

In San Diego's Gaslamp Quarter, for instance, designated "no vending" zones were noted, likely aimed at safeguarding established businesses and supporting traffic flow. Despite these restrictions, street vendors remain a key part of the local economy, adding creativity and vibrancy to urban spaces. Their presence enriches the street-level experience, creating a lively atmosphere that attracts both residents and visitors, enhancing the appeal and accessibility of city life.

Parking Management for Street Maintenance

An interesting approach to parking management was observed in areas with a high demand for street maintenance access. To allow for efficient street sweeping, councils post "no parking" times with very brief, defined windows. This setup ensures that the streets can be cleared and maintained regularly without disrupting access for the rest of the day.

Iconic Landscape and Architecture at UC San Diego

The landscaping around UC San Diego's Geisel Library is a celebrated example of landscape architecture, featuring a design that resembles a giant snake winding its way up towards the library, effectively linking it to the main campus. Before the addition of this pathway, movement between the library and the rest of the campus was limited; the "snake" now provides both a functional route and a playful aesthetic, enhancing connectivity while sparking curiosity.

The Geisel Library itself, with its striking, futuristic architecture, serves as a major campus landmark. Surrounding it are other whimsical design elements that add to the campus's unique character, such as large-scale books outside the library and the engineering department's display of a small house precariously perched on the side of a building—an inventive showcase of engineering prowess. These features collectively create a vibrant, engaging environment, reinforcing the university's identity and making campus life visually stimulating and memorable.

Outdoor Shopping Centres

The open-air design of Westfield UTC (University Town Cetre) provides an innovative response to the demands of warm climates, similar to that of Perth. With a lettable area of 99,000 m^2 (compared to Rockingham's 66,000 m^2), this approach significantly reduces the operational and environmental costs typically associated with air-conditioned centres. High-quality landscaping, shaded structures, and narrow pathways create a natural ventilation effect, encouraging airflow through the space. This setup borrows from Middle Eastern design principles, where narrow corridors and buildings with thermal mass use prevailing winds to moderate temperature.

Though the layout encourages swift movement between stores due to the less inviting heat in outdoor areas, it places greater emphasis on individual retailers to attract customers with engaging storefronts and window displays. This high-end, aesthetically appealing environment—despite its open exposure—demonstrates that outdoor malls can successfully support a premium retail mix while promoting sustainability in hot climates. For Australia, it offers a compelling alternative to traditional enclosed malls, proving that well-designed outdoor retail spaces can thrive even under challenging weather conditions.


Peninsula Town Center in Hampton, Virginia, is another example of a modern outdoor shopping centre designed on Main Street principles. Redeveloped from the original Coliseum Mall in 2010 by developers and designers, Steiner + Associates, the centre has been transformed into a vibrant, mixed-use precinct intended to function as the region's central shopping and lifestyle hub. The architectural style combines contemporary design with classic elements, creating an inviting space that resembles a traditional town centre.

A key feature of Peninsula Town Center's layout is a central city square, fostering a sense of community and offering an open space for gatherings and events. The shopping center's design integrates street-level shopfronts with retail or residential spaces above, ensuring an accessible and engaging environment. The buildings, which generally range from four to five storeys, reflect a cohesive development vision, allowing for a visually harmonious and functional space.

Notably, the development includes Juliet balconies rather than full balconies—a feature uncommon in Western Australia, where the Residential Design Codes (R-Codes) often require more substantial balcony spaces. Although Juliet balconies don't provide usable outdoor space, they allow for ample ventilation and a visual connection to the public realm without the need for potentially obtrusive balcony structures.

The town centre also incorporates thoughtful landscaping elements to encourage public interaction, although the streets were quiet during the visit. To maintain a clean and uncluttered aesthetic, large wooden doors are used to conceal essential service infrastructure, such as firefighting valves and telecommunications access points, seamlessly blending functionality with visual appeal.

Overall, Peninsula Town Center's Main Street-inspired design marks a departure from the enclosed mall models prevalent in past decades. It demonstrates how outdoor shopping centres can revitalise urban areas by creating pedestrian-friendly environments that are both visually engaging and highly functional, setting a precedent for future retail developments in warm climates and urban settings.
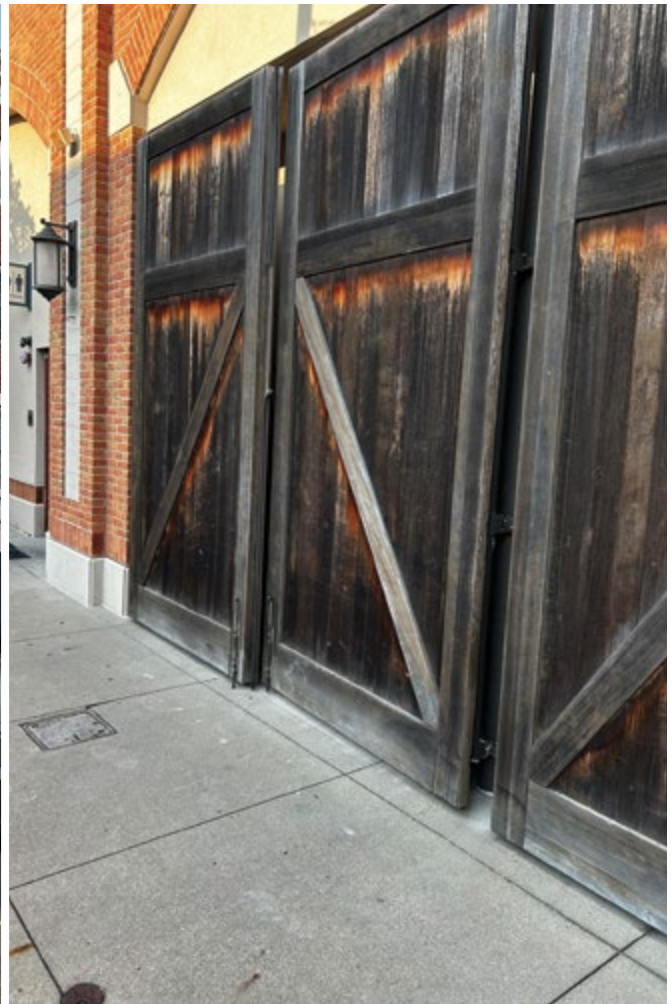
Apartment Letterboxes with Parcel Lockers

The letterboxes in front of apartment buildings showcased a practical and visually appealing design, featuring integrated parcel lockers at the base. This setup allows couriers to drop off larger parcels securely by placing the locker key into the recipient's letterbox, enabling easy access for residents. This simple yet effective intervention highlights how urban furniture can evolve to meet modern delivery needs, streamlining parcel management in multi-unit dwellings.

In terms of landscaping, sand and gravel were used around these letterboxes instead of traditional mulch. This choice complements the coastal urban environment, offering a low-maintenance, visually cohesive solution that aligns well with the local climate and aesthetic. Together, these design elements demonstrate thoughtful, user-focused approaches to both functionality and environmental suitability in urban spaces.

Waterfront Activation at Norfolk

Norfolk's waterfront features a lively entertainment area adjacent to its food markets, serving as a dynamic activation project that enhances the area's appeal. A key component of this space is a permanent sound stage designed for live music, creating a vibrant atmosphere that encourages community engagement and draws in both locals and visitors. This setup is comparable to the Fremantle waterfront, where similar activation strategies transform the space into a social hub.

Electric Bikes

Electric and standard bike rental programmes were widely used in cities like New York, Los Angeles, and Norfolk, providing an efficient and convenient way to navigate urban areas. In contrast to electric scooters, which can create conflicts with pedestrians in shared spaces, bikes are generally integrated into the road system, where extensive cycle lanes allow cyclists to travel at greater speeds.

New York, in particular, offers an extensive network of cycle lanes integrated into the road infrastructure, as well as Central Park's dedicated counterclockwise one-way loop, designed to facilitate safe and continuous cycling. Given the traffic conditions, electric bikes often outpace vehicles, making them an efficient and eco-friendly alternative for short to medium journeys within the city. This approach not only reduces congestion but also encourages active travel, enhancing the functionality and appeal of urban transport networks.

The bikes offered a way to commute significantly longer distances, providing storage space and no shortage of bike stations. This may be worth considering at a regional level for Perth South West, given comparatively the substantial distances between the centres, but significant infrastructure investment in bike paths.

Engaging Street Frontages with Floral Displays

A notable trend in U.S. retail streetscapes is the use of vibrant floral displays to create eye-catching shopfronts. Many businesses have adopted extensive floral installations, with some utilising artificial flowers, to make their facades stand out and draw attention from passersby. These displays add character and charm to the public realm, differentiating each shop from its neighbours and enhancing the visual appeal of the street.

Integrated Parking and Charging Infrastructure

An interesting trend in U.S. urban areas is the integration of parking with electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure. This setup allows drivers to park for a limited time, charge their vehicles, and simultaneously engage in activities such as shopping or dining. By combining these two services, cities and commercial centres make efficient use of parking areas, adding value for EV users while supporting local businesses.

This model could be especially effective in environments where paid parking is common.

Public Engagement Through Interactive Displays on the High Line

The High Line in New York had a unique approach to public engagement by inviting visitors to contribute their thoughts on post-it notes, which are later scanned and displayed on boards to share the area's history and evolution. This display creates a living record of public input, connecting community voices to the storytelling of the space.

This method was a meaningful approach to community engagement, with potential applications in strategic planning and placemaking. By documenting and showcasing public contributions alongside the interventions, cities can foster a sense of collective ownership and transparency, helping residents see how their input has shaped or influenced a development.

Architectural Sensitivity to Sunlight on the High Line

Throughout New York, there are standout examples of architecture designed with an emphasis on preserving sunlight for public spaces. Along the High Line, some architects have thoughtfully redesigned their buildings to allow sunlight to penetrate down to the park, ensuring that this popular green space remains vibrant and inviting. These adjustments often involve creative building layouts and setbacks that mitigate shading impacts, balancing urban density with public space preservation.
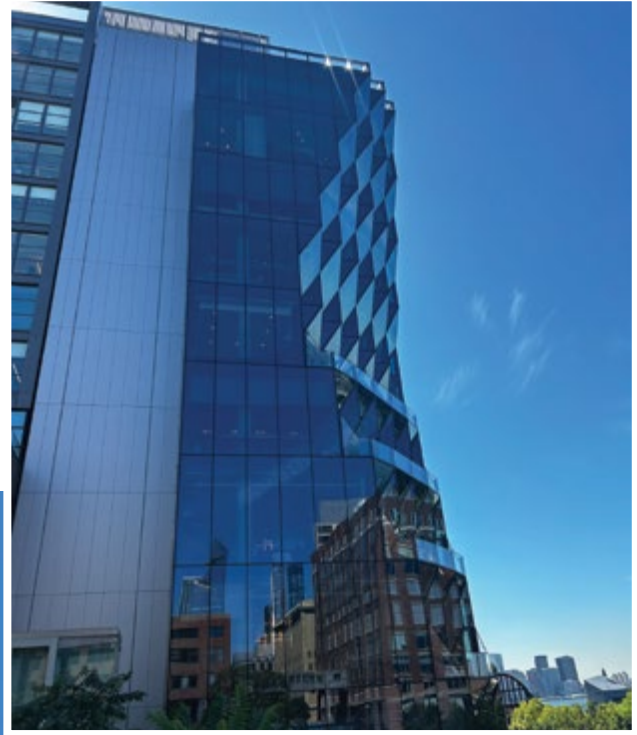
Enclosed Outdoor Dining Spaces in New York's Road Reserves

In New York, enclosed outdoor dining structures have been creatively set up in road reserves, offering additional dining spaces that are sheltered from the elements. Unlike traditional open-air parklets, these spaces are fully or partially enclosed, providing warmth during colder months and protection from wind and rain. This setup allows for comfortable, intimate dining experiences throughout the year, even in challenging weather conditions.



Integrated Seating and Fencing

An innovative approach to landscape design involves integrating fencing as part of the seating structure. By using the fence itself as the seat back, designers create multi-functional features that blend seamlessly into the landscape. This approach was enhanced by incorporating recycled wood, adding a sustainable and visually appealing element to the space.

Purposefully Underdeveloped Spaces

At Industry City in Brooklyn, large, open warehouse spaces have been preserved and adapted for versatile event use, showcasing an innovative approach to industrial redevelopment. Rather than subdividing these expansive concrete areas, they've been maintained as open spaces, enabling a wide range of activities, from watch parties and long-table lunches to pop-up events.

Temporary facilities, such as restrooms and commercial fixtures, can be easily brought in to support large gatherings, offering a practical solution that suits a variety of event types. This model demonstrates the value of keeping large spaces intact in industrial redevelopments, which can inspire creative uses, turning former warehouses into dynamic event venues, rather than plan for retrofit as is often the default position in renewals.
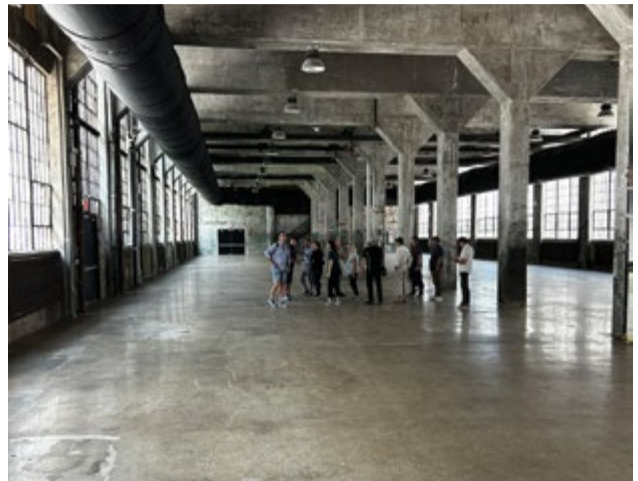
Fog Machine Public Art

Adjacent to the Brooklyn waterfront, an impressive fog machine installation periodically releases mist into the atmosphere, evoking the historic fog from the nearby Sugar Refinery's tanks. This feature serves both a nostalgic and practical purpose, cooling the surrounding area and creating a unique spectacle that draws people in. At night, the mist is illuminated by coloured lights, adding visual drama and transforming the space into an engaging, almost theatrical setting.

This installation has become a popular spot, with visitors gathering to experience the cooling effect and enjoy the atmospheric display. It's a creative approach to placemaking, turning an otherwise ordinary area into a memorable destination that encourages people to linger.
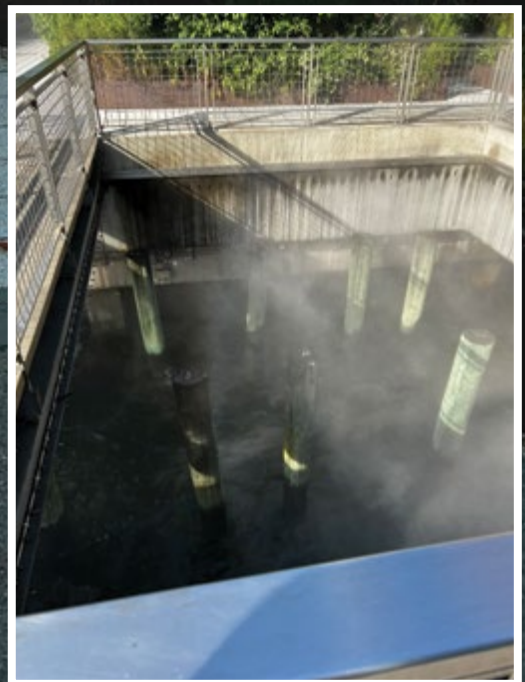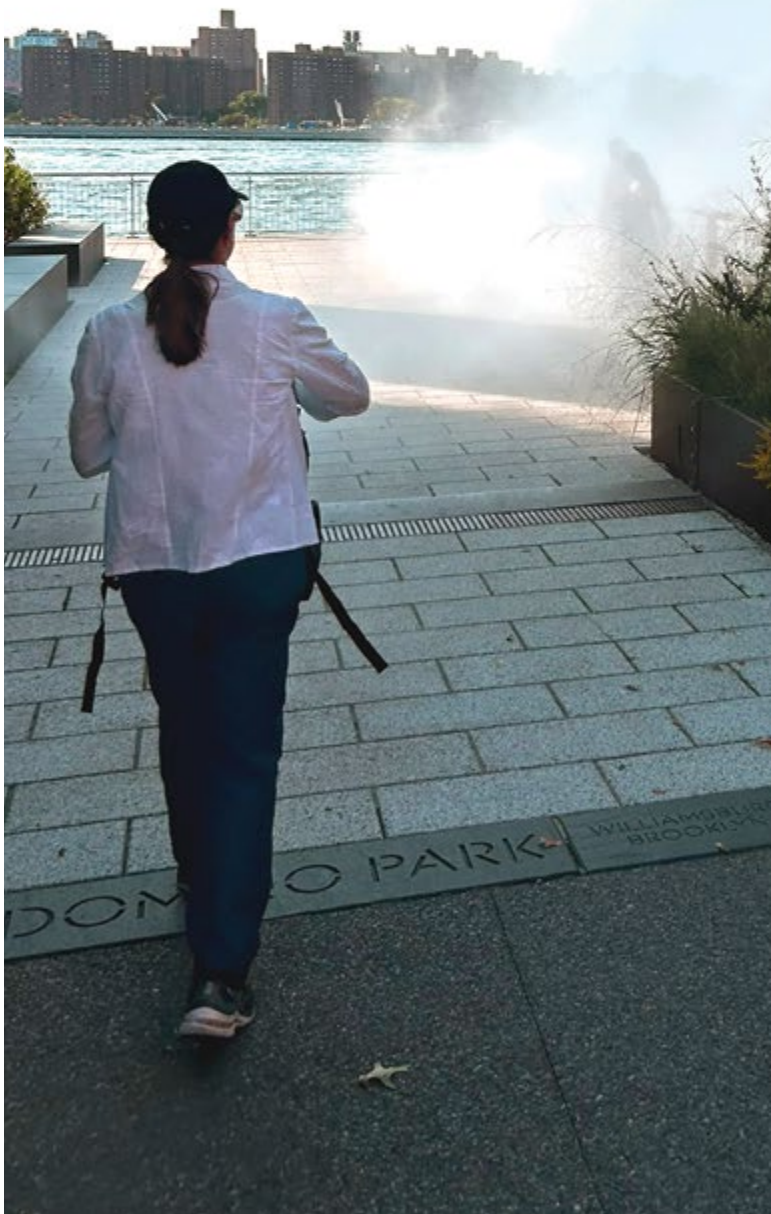
Use of Underbridge Spaces for Recreation

In densely populated urban areas with limited park spaces, the areas beneath bridges are being effectively repurposed for recreational activities. These underbridge spaces, often left unused, are ideal for amenities like basketball courts, which benefit from the hard surfaces and don't require direct sunlight, unlike gardens or green spaces.

This approach maximises available land by turning shaded, weather-protected areas into active community zones. By accommodating sports and other activities, these spaces offer residents additional recreational opportunities, alleviating the demand on traditional parks. It's a practical solution that adds value to urban infrastructure, fostering community engagement and enhancing quality of life in high-density neighbourhoods.

Chess in the Park

In various public spaces across the United States, chess is a prominent feature, with installations and events dedicated to the game. For example, San Diego's parks offer multiple chess sets accompanied by signage displaying the rules, encouraging public participation. In New York, Central Park was hosting the annual youth competition, Chess in the Park Rapid Open, a tournament open to the first 850 participants.

This tradition is notably absent in Perth, where potentially climate conditions and lower populations may see a lack of demand. However, the popularity of chess in American parks highlights how a simple, accessible game can enrich public spaces and contribute to community engagement.

List of Engagements

Los Angeles

Lauren Salisbury	Vice President Communications, Santa Monica Travel and Tourism Association
Jim Harris	Director, Santa Monica Pier
Ms. Tanya Bennett	US Consul General LA
Jenny Krusoe	Executive VP / CEO, Alta Sea
Loudres Castro Ramirez	Chief of Housing and Homelessness, City of LA
Kevin Keller	Deputy Mayor of Housing, City of LA
Senator Kevin Murray (ret.)	President and CEO, Weingart Centre Los Angeles

San Diego

San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG)

Mario Orso	Chief Executive Officer, SANDAG
Antoinette Meier	Regional Plan and Major Projects, SANDAG
Jennifer Williamson	Deputy Director of Mobility Planning, SANDAG
Danielle Kochman	Manager of Strategic Partnerships, SANDAG
Hector Vanegas	Boarder Program Manager, SANDAG

County of San Diego

Nick Zubel	Senior Emergency Services Coordinator, Office of Emergency Management

City of San Diego

Mayor Todd Gloria	Mayor City of San Diego

San Diego Military Advisory Committee (SDMAC)

MILITARY PANEL

RDML Rosen	Regional Commander, Navy Region SouthWest
CAPT Yakeren	Commanding Officer, Submarines Base Pt Loma
CAPT Heely	Commanding Officer, Naval Base San Diego
Commodore Wiley	Commander, Submarine Squadron 11

INDUSTRY PANEL

NASCCO - General Dynamics, John Robertson	General Manager of Repair, San Diego
BAE - Eric Icke	Vice President BAE Systems San Diego Ship Repair
Lindsey Silvia	Senior Economic Development Manager EDC

SDMAC PANEL

David Boone	President and CEO SDMAC
George Scheel	Vice Chairman of the Board SDMAC
Rob Pennoyer	Legislative Committee Chairman, SDMAC

Virginia

HII - Huntington Ingalls Industries

Matt Needy	Social License and Corporate Responsibility, HII
Dr. Latitia McCane	Director of Education, HII
Jimmy Jessup	Community Engagement on Risk Management, HII
Douglas (Mark) Tomlin	Interface B/T Operational and Local Community (Land Use Perspective
Ashley Schneider	Director of Australia and United Kingdom emerging markets
Tom Cosgrove	
Jon Calma	
Robb Schrock	
Melinda Alimonos	

Naval Station Norfolk

RDML Carl Lahti	Commander Navy Region Mid-Atlantic
CAPT Matt Schlarmann	Naval Station Norfolk Commanding Officer
Maggie Sticklen	CNRMA Housing
Beth Baker	Norfolk Naval Shipyard
Alexis Miller	Norfolk Naval Shipyard

Hampton Roads Military and Federal Facilities Alliance

Rick Dwyer	Executive Director
Todd Nichols	Deputy Executive Director

City of Newport News

Mayor Phillip Jones	Mayor Newport News
Alan Archer	City Manager, Newport News
Ralph L (Bo) Clayton III	Assistant City Manager City of Newport News

New York

David Farnsworth	Principal America's Property Market Leaders, Arup - Little Island Project
Preeti Sodhi	Senior Director Community and Government Relations, The High Line
Various	NYPD
Jarrod Grim	Vice President Real Estate and Economic Development, Downtown Brooklyn
Belinda Cape	Senior Vice President Communication and Public Affairs Downtown Brooklyn
Kevin Hussey	Senior Property Manager, Industry City
Sarah Krauss	Chief of Staff & VP Public Affairs, Brooklyn Bridge Park Corporation
Eric Landau	President, Brooklyn Bridge Park Corporation
Brett Shannon	Senior Vice President CBRE, Domino Sugar Refinery
Caio Muranda Carneiro	Engagement Coordinator New York Restoration Project - Sherman Creek Park
Jason Smith	Director of Northern Manhattan Parks, New York Restoration Project - Sherman Creek Park

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PERTH SOUTH WEST
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