

# Addressing Inequities through Public Realm Design

This year I've been asked by Building Dialogue's publisher to provide a column each quarter on design trends we are following and incorporating at Design Workshop. In recent years, public realm design has increasingly focused on addressing inequities by creating spaces that foster inclusion, remove barriers and encourage meaningful community connections. Inclusive public design is a powerful tool for building equitable communities, enabling diverse populations to engage with their environment and each other. Here are six examples of how communities here in Colorado and across the U.S. are working to address inequities through public realm design:



**Becky Zimmermann**  
CEO,  
Design Workshop

the project addresses urban heat islands, stormwater management and air quality concerns.

■ **City of Frisco, Texas.** Frisco's Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan offers a blueprint for creating equitable public spaces by prioritizing accessibility and ecological stewardship. Utilizing a vulnerability index map of the city to identify parkland deficient areas, park capital improvement projects and parkland acquisitions were reprioritized to these areas. Frisco's approach emphasizes connecting neighborhoods with parks, trails and green spaces to ensure all residents have equal access

■ **Fruita: Population 13,500.**

The North Mulberry improvement project highlights how revitalizing streetscapes can enhance connectivity and inclusion. North Mulberry was temporarily closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Post-pandemic, using a very small budget, the street closure was made permanent, transforming an underutilized area into a vibrant public space to gather and support local small businesses. Importantly, the project incorporated community input to ensure that the design addressed the distinct needs of Fruita's diverse population.

■ **The Greening of Five Points in Denver.** This is an initiative aimed at enhancing urban sustainability and improving public spaces in one of the city's historically Black neighborhoods. By incorporating tree planting, improved streetscapes and green infrastructure,



*The newly designed accessible play environment at Hart Patterson Park in Waco, Texas, exemplifies how inclusive design can remove physical and social barriers.*



to recreational opportunities. Frisco's commitment to equity extends to designing multiuse spaces that accommodate various cultural, social and recreational needs, fostering a sense of belonging for all residents.

■ **Glendale Park, Salt Lake City.** Youth engagement has proven to be a critical aspect of designing inclusive spaces, as demonstrated by the redevelopment of Glendale Park in Salt Lake City, Utah. Recognizing that young people often face barriers to accessing and using public spaces, park planners involved local youths in the design process. This approach not only empowered young residents but also resulted in a park that reflects their interests and needs. Features such as skate parks, interactive play areas, and spaces for art and music were incorporated, creating a vibrant environment that encourages intergenerational connections. By involving youths in decision-making, Glendale Park illustrates the importance of amplifying voices that are often underrepresented in planning processes.

■ **Hart Patterson Park, Waco, Texas.** The newly designed accessible play environment at Hart Patterson Park in Waco, Texas, exemplifies how inclusive design can remove physical and social barriers. The park features play equipment that accommodates children of all abilities, backgrounds and experiences, ensuring that

no one is excluded from enjoying recreational activities. The design is inspired by and with the local Hispanic community.

■ **Raleigh, North Carolina.** The Bailey Drive Gateway project is a community-led initiative aimed at enhancing access to the Walnut Creek Wetland Park. Spearheaded by The Conservation Fund's Parks with Purpose program, in partnership with the city of Raleigh and local organizations, the project focuses on integrating cultural and historical elements into the park's design to reflect the community's heritage. In 2021, artist Tiffany Baker unveiled "The Reflective History," a temporary art installation featuring glass portraits of local residents, celebrating the neighborhoods' rich histories and fostering community engagement.

Collectively, these examples demonstrate that addressing inequities through public realm design requires a commitment to inclusive principles, community engagement, and continuous evaluation. By removing barriers – whether physical, social, or economic – and fostering connections, cities can create spaces where everyone feels valued and empowered. Thoughtful public realm design not only enriches individual lives but also strengthens the social fabric, contributing to more equitable and resilient communities.\

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