

Calgary



# Activate + Experiment

on Stephen Avenue  
**Summary of results**

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# Land Acknowledgment

In the Blackfoot language, Calgary is Mh'kin'stis; in Îyâxe Nakoda, Wiçispa Oyade; in Tsuut'ina, Gu'tsi'tsi and in Métis, it is Otokwunee. For each of these Indigenous languages, the words translate to 'Elbow,' representing the confluence of the Bow and Elbow Rivers. The confluence has been a trading hub for Indigenous peoples for millennia and the site where they celebrated natural abundance, ceremony, culture and partnerships. This is where the story of Calgary begins.

# Table of Contents

Activate + Experiment.....	6
Project Selection.....	7
Strategic Moves.....	8
Activate + Experiment Projects.....	9
1 Street S.W. Corner Pollinator Bed + Seating.....	10
Centre Street Corner Seating.....	11
YYC/LRT: Community Based Art and Community Engagement.....	14
Winter City Design Competition.....	16
Transformative Racial and Spatial Justice Workshop.....	18
Urban Furniture.....	20
Creative Wayfinding.....	22
Strata: A Cycling Infrastructure Node.....	24



# Activate + Experiment

The Activate + Experiment program prototyped creative public realm ideas along the Avenue that were in line with the City's Future of Stephen Avenue Public Realm Study (visit [calgary.ca/stephenavenue](http://calgary.ca/stephenavenue) to learn more). Changes to the public realm were made and impacts were measured. The findings from this work will help to inform the permanent redesign of Stephen Avenue and 8 Avenue as well as placemaking and vibrancy projects in the Downtown.

## Partnerships were integral to the program's success

The City of Calgary worked with many partners throughout the program to prototype and test ideas. Two significant partners throughout the program were the University of Calgary and the Calgary Downtown Association. Many others were involved with individual projects and are listed on each project page.



### The University of Calgary

The University was our primary partner for Activate + Experiment. Interdisciplinary research teams proposed and implemented projects aligned with both their own research and The Future of Stephen Avenue Public Realm Plan and reported back on their findings. This partnership was critical to the success of the program.



### Calgary Downtown Association

Calgary Downtown Association (CDA) was an important partner for Activate + Experiment. The CDA maintained and monitored many of the projects, provided connections to businesses and resources, helped with data collection.



# Project Selection

Projects that were selected and funded under Activate + Experiment were chosen based on the following criteria to ensure they met the objectives of The Future of Stephen Avenue.

Criteria	Type
<b>Mandatory</b>	
Findings will feed into the Future of Stephen Avenue - economics/design/governance	<p>Measurable outcome</p> <p>Aligns with the strategic moves from the Public Realm Study</p> <p>Will help to refine future project actions</p>
Diversity of projects selected	<p>Reaches a diverse audience. Includes considerations for equity, diversity, inclusion and access.</p> <p>Project locations are spread out throughout the Future of Stephen Avenue project area (The Commons/The Core/Downtown West)</p> <p>Triple bottom line considerations - project meets at least one (social/environmental/economic) and there is a diversity of project types among chosen projects.</p>
<b>Optional</b>	
Findings will feed into the Future of Stephen Avenue - economics/design/governance	<p>Align with short term priorities in the Public Realm Study</p> <p>Gets us to YES! Will create a useful precedent along the Avenue</p> <p>There is opportunity for iteration and the project idea is intended to be refined and reimplemented</p>
Partnership Opportunities	There are partners to execute or collaborate with, who are providing funding, personnel or resources.
Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Access	Further equity, diversity, inclusion or access of active partners, stakeholders or project executors along the Avenue.

**Innovation** = The translation of ideas into new or improved services, products, processes, or social interaction, that create value for the community.

**Mandatory** = Must address all criteria

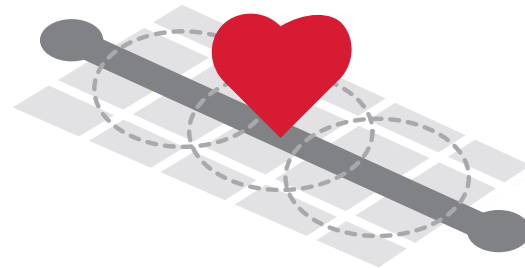
**Optional** = Will strengthen likelihood of approval



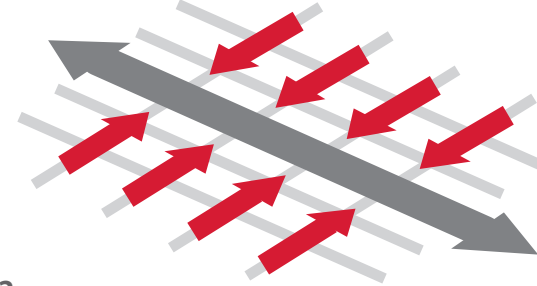
# Strategic Moves

Six strategic moves were identified as the key drivers for the Future of Stephen Avenue. All projects tested at least one of these overarching concepts.

For more detail on the six strategic moves, visit [calgary.ca/stephenavenue](http://calgary.ca/stephenavenue) and download the Public Realm Study.



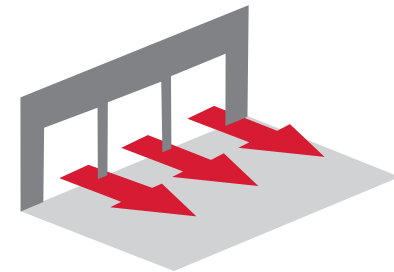
1  
Branding the Avenue



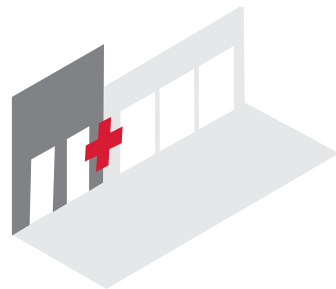
2  
Connecting the Avenue



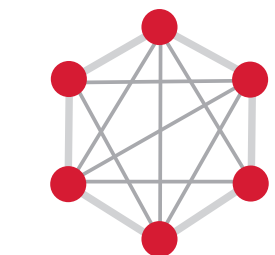
3  
Activating the Avenue



4  
Opening up and onto the Avenue



5  
Repositioning the Avenue



6  
Governing the Avenue

# Activate + Experiment Projects

The following pages highlight each project that was undertaken as part of Activate + Experiment. A total of eight projects were completed, with four led by the University of Calgary and four led by the City of Calgary.

## City of Calgary led projects:

- 1 Street S.W. Corner Pollinator Bed + Seating
- Centre Street Corner Seating
- Winter City Design Competition
- Creative Wayfinding

## University of Calgary led projects:

- YYC/LRT: Community Based Art and Community Engagement
- Transformative Racial and Spatial Justice Workshop
- Urban Furniture
- Cycling Infrastructure





# 1 Street S.W. Corner Pollinator Bed + Seating

Stephen Ave and Centre Street

## Project Description

We envision a greener future for Stephen Avenue. This location offered an opportunity to test in-ground, pollinator focused planting, paired with alternative seating options. Incorporating nature into the urban realm has a proven positive impact on citizen well-being, biodiversity, storm water retention and air quality.

## Project Considerations

- Add colour and playful designs to the Avenue
- Add in pollinator plants to the area
- Remove hardscape and embed plantings to create more permeable surface

Installed September 2021

Project lead: City of Calgary

Project partners: Calgary Downtown Association

## Public Realm Study Alignment:



Branding the Avenue



Activating the Avenue



## Location:



1 Street S.W. Corner Pollinator Bed + Seating

# Findings

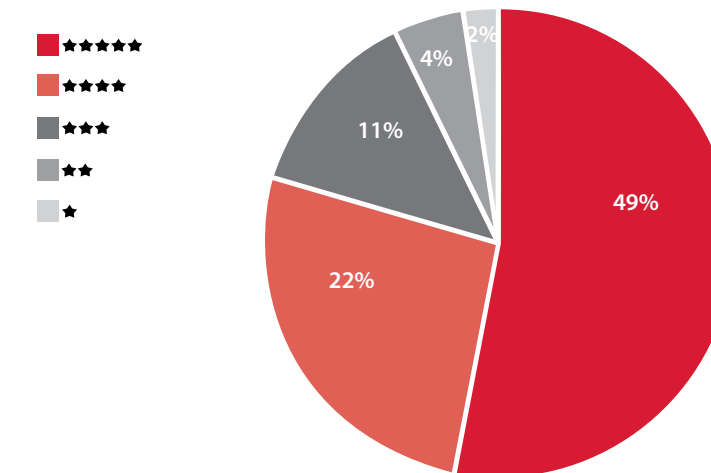
Data was collected for this project through an online survey (QR code posted onsite) and observational surveys.

## Observational Data Highlights

- For the age group 15-24 the benches were over 200% more popular compared to all the patios combined on this block. Could indicate that public seating provides affordable, youth friendly seating options.
- The number of youth (15-24 years) was more than double on this block compared to the adjacent block (200 block) with its standard benches. Could indicate a preference among youth for less traditional seating options.
- This seating area with the pollinator garden was almost twice as popular than the Centre Street Corner seating location. This could indicate a preference for greenery and/or a more protected seating area without pedestrian walk through traffic compared to the other seating location.

## Public Feedback Highlights

What did you think of this spot?  
(5 being great place and 1 being poor place to hang out).



## Other suggestions from the public:

- More spaces like these along Stephen Avenue and downtown
- Raise the bed
- Use native and winter friendly plantings
- Orient benches towards planting

## Project Learnings

- Planting and greenery along the Avenue is highly desired and appreciated by citizens.
- Cedar was found to be low maintenance and weathered well. Painted plywood while less expensive requires regular cleaning and painting to maintain (provided by Calgary Downtown Association).
- Many bees were observed in the pollinator garden. Pollinator plants can serve an important function, even in highly urban areas.
- Coordination with other City projects (in this case, pavement updates) can reduce costs.
- Seating locations are best placed outside non-restaurant commercial spaces, to reduce any impediments on patios.

When asked if they'd like to see more plantings like this integrated into the Avenue,

**86% of respondents chose "yes please, love all the greenery!"**



# Centre Street Corner Seating

Stephen Avenue and Centre Street

## Project Description

Colourful seating was added to this corner, configured to encourage social interaction and provide a space where citizens and tourists can take a moment of respite from their busy day, while being nestled amongst the vibrant street life of Stephen Avenue.

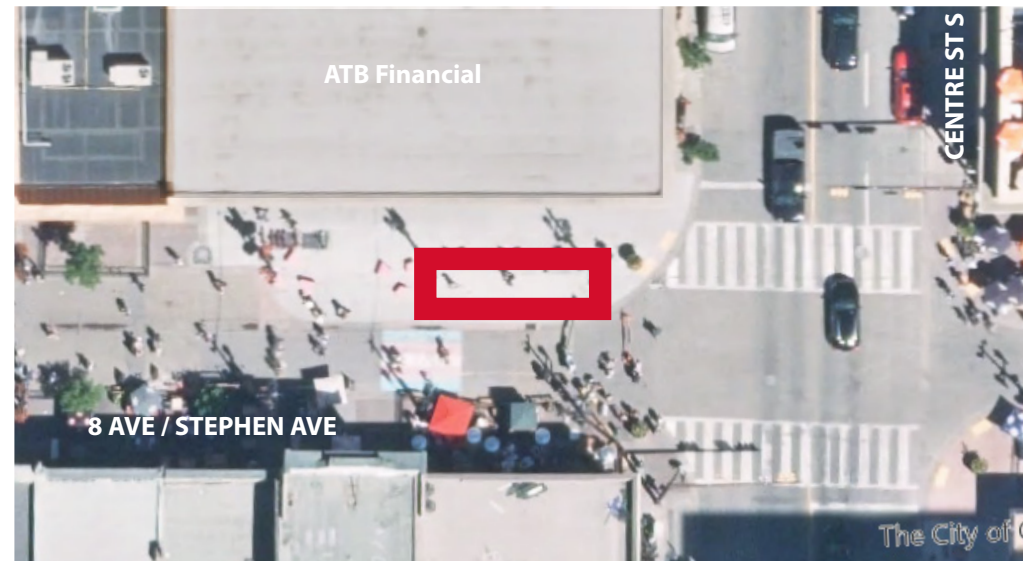
## Projection Intention

- Add modular and reconfigurable street furniture to the Avenue
- Brighten up the street

Installed September 2021

Project lead: City of Calgary

Project partners: Calgary Downtown Association



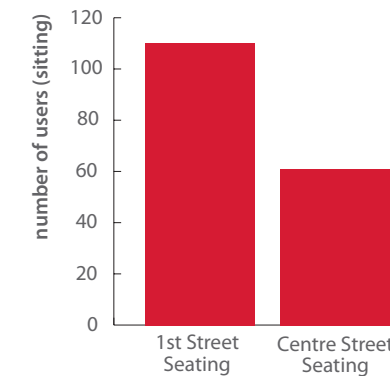
Centre Street Corner Seating

# Findings

Data was collected for this project through an online survey (QR code posted onsite) and observational surveys.

## Observational Data Highlights

- For the age group 15-24, the Activate + Experiment benches along this block were over two hundred percent more popular compared to all the patios combined on this block. This could indicate that public seating provides affordable, youth friendly seating options.
- Both seating spaces (including 1st Street S.W. Corner Seating) along this block had a higher use rate among youth (15-24) compared to the adjacent (200) block. However the public seating saw less senior users compared to adjacent block. Could indicate preference among seniors for traditional public seating and/or more accessible seating design.
- This seating area was not as popular as the 1st Street S.W. seating location, however it was still well used despite the public feedback on design. This could indicate preferences for greenery and more enclosed spaces. This space was more permeable to the pedestrian flow of traffic on Stephen Avenue.
- More conversations were observed at this location. 10% more people were captured "in conversation" compared to the 1st Street Seating location. This could indicate the clustering of seating towards each other attracted more social uses and groups.



## Public Feedback Highlights

What did you think of this spot? (5 being great place and 1 being poor place to hang out).

## Other suggestions from the public:

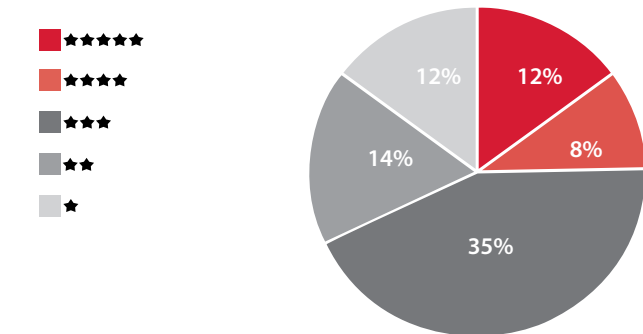
- Create something more inviting and comfortable
- More greenery combined with seating
- Needs more maintenance

## Project Learnings

- Materials used require consistent maintenance and upkeep to look fresh. The Calgary Downtown Association now cleans and paints benches regularly.

When respondents were asked if they'd like to see more seating like this integrated into the Avenue,

**66% chose "yes please, love the additional seating options!"**



## Public Realm Study Alignment:



Branding the Avenue



Activating the Avenue



# YYC/LRT: Community Based Art and Community Engagement

8 Avenue and 10 Street S.W.

## Project Description

YYC/LRT was a research project between University of Calgary researchers and Contemporary Calgary, exploring how bringing contemporary art into the streets can build community. YYC/LRT offered artmaking workshops and events in Downtown West to build relationships and learn about what matters to residents and Calgarians. YYC/LRT is a community studio and art sculpture created by a local artist, Bryan Faubert. It is constructed out of an old light rail transit car.

Throughout its lifetime in Downtown West, YYC/LRT collaborated with creative partners and held workshops covering topics such as zines, self-portrait, book making and drop-in art classes for seniors and kids.

## Project intent

- Activate the street with the creative community
- Create a gateway feature that pulls people into Downtown West
- Test out placing a "building" onto the street
- Create a community connection experience through art making

**Installed Fall 2021.** Programming ran Spring 2022 to August 2023.

**Project lead:** Faculty of Arts - University of Calgary, Bryan Faubert

**Project partners:** School of Landscape, Planning & Architecture – University of Calgary, Contemporary Calgary, Unison at Kerby, Loophole Coffee Bar

## Public Realm Study Alignment:



Branding the Avenue



Opening up and onto the Avenue



## Location:



YYC/LRT: Community Based Art and Community Engagement

# Findings

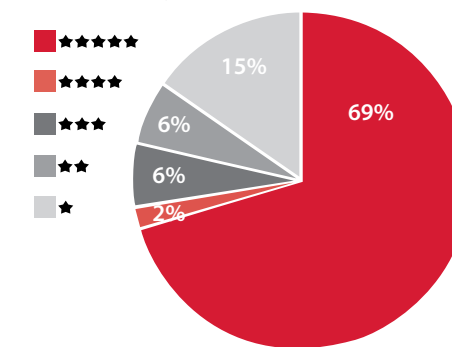
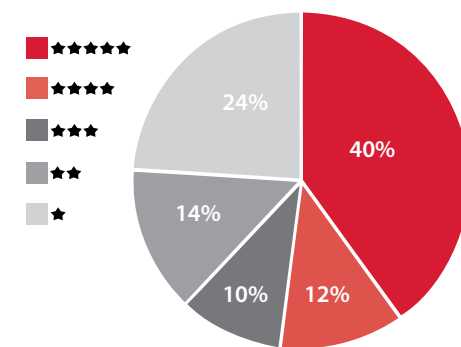
Data was collected for this project through an online survey (QR code posted onsite), observational surveys, participant interviews and surveys, and a participatory wrap-up event and discussion.

## Participant interviews and survey results

- The highest project costs were parking and hoarding fees (over 30% of project costs), which can make these types of projects unfeasible for many groups.
- The LRT provided an on-street location for arts-based workshops. Workshops attracted artists, residents and others into the neighbourhood. The majority of attendees were first timers to the neighbourhood.
- 30% of participants who were first timers to the neighbourhood reported returning after to explore what the neighbourhood had to offer. Others reported a change in perception of the neighbourhood from unsafe to comfortable.

## Public Feedback Highlights

- What did you think of this spot? (5 being great place and 1 being poor place to hang out)
- Would you like to see more art and seating integrated into the avenue? (5 stars being strongly supportive, and 1 star being strongly against)



## Project Learnings

- The highest project costs were parking and hoarding fees (over 30% of project costs), which can make these types of projects unfeasible for many groups.
- Power availability is critical for these types of right-of-way projects, however, is not easy to obtain. Retrofitting streetlights to allow for power draws is expensive. In this instance, power was able to be drawn from a generous adjacent building owner. Future power considerations during street design and infrastructure upgrades could accommodate further activations of this nature.
- Projects like these can build strong partnerships amongst aligned groups and are an opportunity for organizations to gain a street-side presence. University of Calgary partnered with a number of organizations for programming such as Contemporary Calgary, the Kerby Centre, Western Canada High School and Antyx. Private business partnerships included Sigla Books and White Rabbit Atelier. Joint programming was successful in creating partnerships within the community amongst service and arts organizations.
- The studio (with a capacity of 12 attendees) was a small but mighty force. These types of projects can have great depth of impact in the community. The number of residents engaged was small but the lasting relationships amongst residents and neighbourhood organizations was strong, with many groups and projects continuing past this initiative. Participants expressed a real sense of impact on their lives, their community networks and their identity as an artist, in the final wrap-up event.

**73% of respondents indicated they would like to see more art and seating integrated into the Avenue.**



# Winter City Design Competition

100 and 200 block Stephen Avenue

## Project Description:

The Winter City Design Competition invites artists and designers to dream up inviting, playful, cozy outdoor winter spaces in our public realm, and share these dreams with the public. It is during the cold winter months that we move less, socialize less, and yearn for those moments of sun soaking into our skin. Sometimes these conditions can wear on our mental health. What can we dream up that will create more resiliency, better social connections, and increase overall wellness?

This event kicked off with a call for designs in 2021. A total of three winter-friendly designs were installed along the avenue over two winters, chosen through jury from over 30 submissions.

## Project Intent:

- Test out winter designs and their impact on the use of the street
- Invite designers and artists to playfully reimagine the outdoor public realm
- Encourage citizens to spend more time outside
- Add interactivity and play to the street

Installed February/March 2022 and 2023.

Project lead: City of Calgary

Project partners: University of Calgary

## Public Realm Study Alignment:



Activating the Avenue



Infinito, 2022



Illumine, 2023

## Location:



## Winter City Design Competition

# Findings

Data was collected for this project through an online survey (QR code posted onsite) and observational surveys.

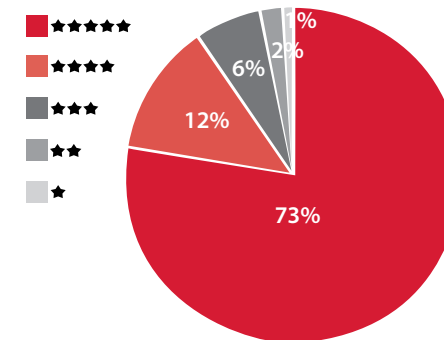
## Observational Data Highlights

- Stationary activity on the block increased by 26% during the 2023 installation. Before the installation 0 individuals were found "in play" on the block, however during the installation 9 people were recorded "in play".
- Increase in stationary activity of women at the installation (56%) compared to the rest of the street (26%).

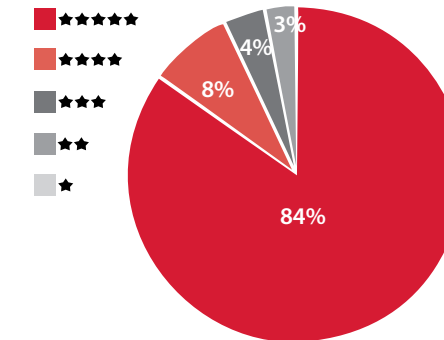
In 2022, the Illumine installation (photo on page 15) comprised of rotating wood blocks, took an unexpected but delightful turn. Citizens began to write messages on each block. More than 1,000 messages were left in the span of four days.

## Public Feedback Highlights

What did you think of this space? (5 stars being a great space and 1 star being a poor space)



Do these types of spaces make winter feel more playful, cozy, bright or fun to you? (5 stars being strongly agree, 1 star being strongly disagree).



Other suggestions from the public on how to make winter friendly streets and parks?

- Hot chocolate shacks
- More lighting
- Strategically dumped snow to build forts and snow castles
- More warming areas to gather

## Project Learnings

- Public competitions open to individuals (and not only design firms) empower creative Calgarians to co-create the public realm and builds up our cities public realm innovation acumen. The competition is popular among individuals such as artists and university students as well as urban design and architecture firms.
- Open calls and competitions are a great way to invite others to playfully re-imagine the street. 16 submissions were received each year.

**100%** of respondents indicated that winter friendly spaces like these encourage them to walk outside in public spaces.



# Transformative Racial and Spatial Justice Workshop

151 8 Avenue S.W. (vacant space on the pedestrian mall)

## Project Description:

The Transformative Racial and Spatial Justice: Celebrating Black people's Knowledges and Contributions Summer Youth Leadership program is a collaboration between the Faculty of Social Work Anti-Black Racism Task Force and the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape at the University of Calgary in response and solidarity to ongoing calls for racial equity and racial justice. The youth program provided Black youth with a greater understanding of Black history, knowledges and cultures while building their leadership skills.

## Project Intent:

- Engage Black youth to better understand their experience and sense of belonging on Stephen Avenue. Engage Black youth in discussions on public space design.
- Support Black individuals by creating more inclusive spaces that foster their physical, mental, and social well-being.
- Establish and nurture positive relationships with Black youth and other communities on Stephen Avenue.

## Took place over 8 sessions during Summer 2022

**Project lead:** Faculty of Social Work - University of Calgary

**Project partner:** School of Architecture, Planning & Landscape - University of Calgary

**Partner:** Barkman Concrete

## Public Realm Study Alignment:



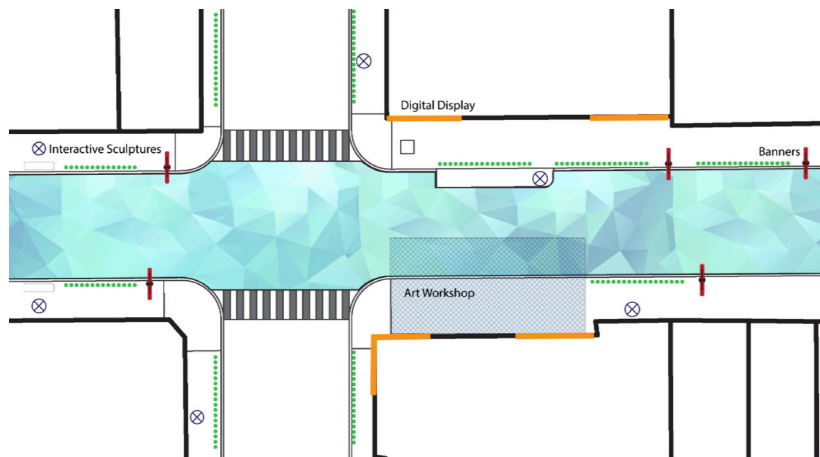
Activating the Avenue



Repositioning the Avenue



Student work, idea generation and conceptual plan



Student work, Visual Arts Group Design Proposal

## Location:



Transformative Racial and Spatial Justice Workshop

# Findings

Findings from this project were collected and reported on by the Faculty of Social Work.

## Workshop findings

Some elements that were noted among workshop participants for Stephen Avenue:

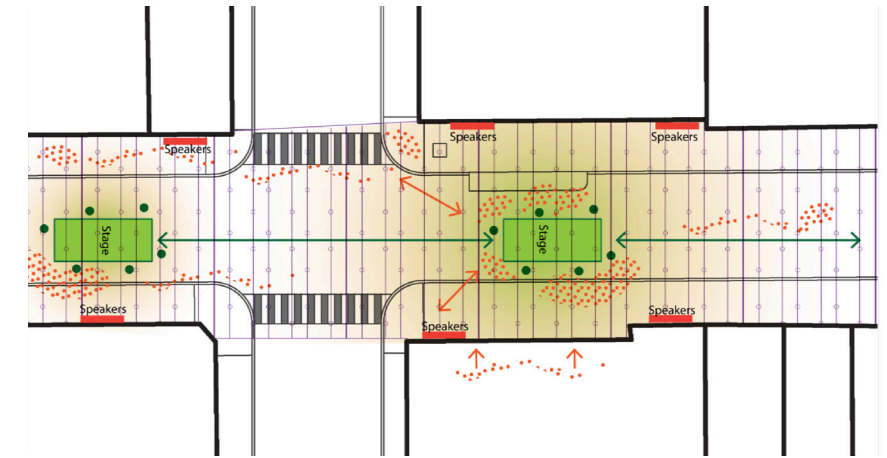
- Lack of representation and inclusivity on the street, which reflected the lack of representation in society. Moreover, they noticed no Black owned business, or activities geared to Black communities.
- Lack of leadership positions around the area.

As the workshops were centered downtown and around Stephen Avenue, participants were able to get their peers excited about design and the design of the city. Participants shared the following about the workshops:

- "Gave us a voice to express our culture and individuality"
- "Design is a platform for sharing ideas with peers and the public"
- "Opportunity to learn from others"

Regarding desired changes to be made to increase the inclusivity of Stephen Avenue, some suggestions included:

- Public artwork from Black artists representing their culture
- Open spaces for art workshops that invite Black individuals
- Cultural specific interactive sculptures
- Black storytelling which could include a poetry wall, graffiti poems, spoken word workshops



Student work, Dance Group Design Proposal



# Urban Furniture

600 block Stephen/8 Avenue S.W.  
(Outside the Globe Theatre)

An interdisciplinary team from the University of Calgary's School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape (SAPL) partnered with a local concrete manufacturer to design and prototype a kit of parts for a modular seating system with three unique furniture components (stool, leaner, table) that can be used together or on their own.

## Project Intent:

- Explore hybrid digital design and robotic fabrication methods that result in more efficient and sustainable processes while adding character and visual identity to Stephen Ave.
- Test out modular furniture that provides ways to accommodate different group sizes along the avenue and support surrounding programming (like the Globe theatre!).

**Installed September 2022**

**Project lead:** School of Architecture, Planning & Landscape - University of Calgary

**Partner:** Barkman Concrete

## Public Realm Study Alignment:



Activating  
the Avenue



## Location:



Urban  
Furniture

# Findings

Data for this project was collected through pedestrian counts. An online survey with QR code was available on site, however no responses were received.

## Observational data highlights:

- Observation data indicates zero use of the seating for sitting, however standing around the objects was captured, and was an intended use of the design. Lack of sitting at this location could indicate disfavour amongst users towards concrete benches. It could also be due to observational time frame (September to June).

## Findings from the project team:

- The digital design fabrication methods opened up the ability to create these benches with unique geometries through a local manufacturer. Generally custom, complex forms are not achievable through standard manufacturers. Therefore, this shows that custom concrete furniture is achievable for streetscapes as it can integrate with industrial mass-production processes.



# Creative Wayfinding

Location: Municipal Building, 800 MacLeod Trail SE

## Project Description:

Great destinations lie on either side of the Municipal Building, however the building blocks Stephen Avenue from continuing into the East Village. The Creative Wayfinding mural playfully invites pedestrians to take a short cut through the building and highlights walk times to favourite destinations on either side.

## Project intent:

- Figuratively extend Stephen Avenue into the East Village, inviting citizens and visitors to take a short-cut through the Municipal Building to destinations on either side.
- Test out playful and innovative wayfinding methods

Installed May 2023

Project lead: City of Calgary

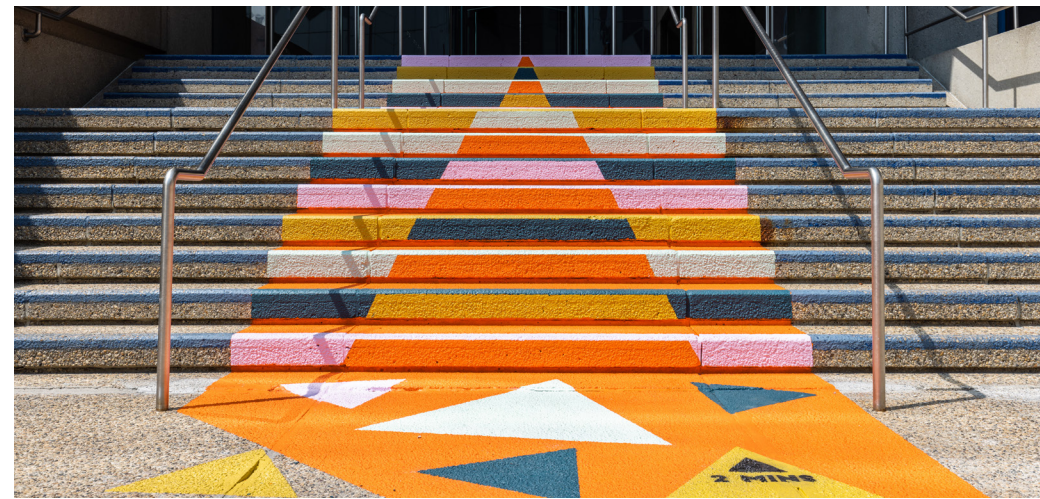
## Public Realm Study Alignment:



Branding the Avenue



Activating the Avenue



Creative Wayfinding

# Findings

Data for this project was collected through pedestrian counts and an online survey.

## Public Feedback Highlights

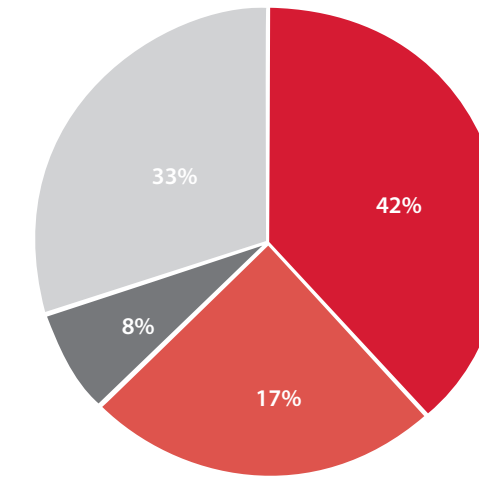
- Out of the respondents that did not already know their way, **80%** found the mural helped them "find their way, invited them through the building and/or alerted them to destinations on the other side."
- 73% of respondents indicated they would like to see more wayfinding like this on Stephen Avenue or downtown.
- What did you think of this spot? (5 being great place and 1 being poor place to hang out)

## Observational data highlights

Pedestrian traffic through the building increased by over 200% after the Creative Wayfinding mural was installed.

## Project Learnings

- Ground murals require the use of the right non-slip paint.
- Paint fades faster than with traditional murals, due to the walking, wheeling and snow clearing that occurs. Re-application is important to consider for project timeline and budget.
- Best to install ground murals in the spring in Calgary, as winter and snow-clearing will take its toll.





# Strata: Cycling Infrastructure Node

200 Block S.W., Stephen Avenue

## Project description:

The Center for Civilization (CFC) at the University of Calgary School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape (SAPL) teamed up with The City of Calgary and the Calgary Downtown Association (CDA) to create and deploy a unique set of cycling-centered infrastructures to enable active transportation on Stephen Avenue. The installation brings together the functionality of a bench and a bike rack while also enabling a variety of uses such as seating, leaning and resting. Strata was designed and manufactured at SAPL.

## Project intent:

- Test out multi-functional street furniture design
- Create cycling nodes that enable and facilitate active transportation

## Installed July 2023

**Project lead:** Center for Civilization – University of Calgary

**Partners:** Calgary Downtown Association

## Public Realm Study Alignment:



Activating the Avenue



Connecting the Avenue



## Location:



Strata: Cycling Infrastructure Node

# Findings

Data from this project was collected by the University project team across five weeks. Data was recorded in two-hour slots three times a day (8:00-10:00, 12:00-14:00, and 17:00-19:00) on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

## Observational data highlights:

- Children were some of the most enthusiastic users of the installation and found multiple ways to treat it as a miniature playground. This could indicate a latent need for playful installations along the Avenue.
- Observed types of pedestrian activity/engagement with the installation included: sitting/resting, looking, taking pictures, smoking, talking on the phone, chatting with other pedestrians, playing, bike parking, resting objects, drinking (e.g., coffee), and eating.
- The most popular activity/engagement with installation was sitting (71% of instances), followed by looking (35% of instances) and smoking (29% instances).
- The least popular activity/engagement was eating food (8% of instances), followed by parking a bike (10%) and resting objects (13%).
- Certain patterns of behavior across time suggest a community-based awareness/knowledge of the installation such as increased instances of the installation as a site for drinking coffee/eating as time went on, and decreased instances of looking/taking pictures of the installation as time went on.
- Pedestrian awareness/understanding of the installation as a bike-parking site was not immediately apparent, indicated by its low usage for this activity.

## Project Learnings

- Bicycle parking component was not well used. Needs signage, or may indicate a preference among cyclists for front wheel entry and lock up.
- The spacing on the seat slats was not hugely comfortable to smaller-framed users. Future iterations need a slightly decreased spacing rhythm.
- When creating new functional and unconventional designs for street infrastructure, it is highly advantageous to build and test one prototype before creating further installments. At first the intent was to create multiple to start, however many design changes are being made for the next iteration.