Contextual Street Revitalization in a Changing Environment

Learning from: Myrtle Ave Reconstruction Plan

54th IMCL Conference on Public Places
Oct. 3rd 2017
Lian Farhi
“STREETS ARE MUTABLE AS LIFE ITSELF AND ARE SUBJECT TO CONSTANT ALTERATIONS THROUGH DESIGN OR USE”

Çelik, Zeynep

Incorporating contextual design practice while addressing local needs in a planning process is an enormously challenging responsibility for planners.

Current street revitalization projects demonstrate the ongoing shift to prioritizing communities’ complex needs and suggest a different hierarchy for elements in the public realm.
Goal & Methodology

→ Goal
To analyze a street revitalization project and to provide recommendations for stakeholders who are involved in current and future street revitalization projects

→ Mixed-methods Approach
Including: interviews, data analysis and design evaluation. Also, formal documents study: presentations and reports about the Myrtle Avenue Reconstruction Plan to complete a comprehensive view on the planning process.
The larger context includes the north parts of Fort Greene-Clinton Hill neighborhoods.

The main case study for the thesis is the revitalization plan for Myrtle Ave between Hall St and Emerson Pl in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn.
Historic Background

1. Historic Background
2. Demographic changes
3. Development of the built environment

- Early 19th century - The development of the Brooklyn Navy Yard
- 1839 - The city of Brooklyn mapped the neighborhood into a grid pattern
- Myrtle Avenue was home to an elevated railroad line - Myrtle Avenue El, which ran from 1888 to 1969.
- The development of the area north of Myrtle Ave is different from the area to the south.

Myrtle Avenue Elevated Train, 1970
## Demographic changes 1990-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Black/African American nonhispanic</th>
<th>White nonhispanic</th>
<th>Hispanic origin</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td></td>
<td>62%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 48.5% Black/African American nonhispanic
+ 27% In White nonhispanic

### Sources:
US Census Bureau, 2000 and 2010 Censuses, SF1 and Pratt studio research from 1999

### HISTORY AND CHARACTERISTICS

1. Historic Background
2. Demographic changes
3. Development of the built environment

### Selected Tract(s):
- Brooklyn 193, 191, 187, 185, 183, 31, 195, 29
Contextual Street Revitalization in a Changing Environment

Development of the Built environment

MYRTLE AVE AND GRAND AVE LOOKING NORTH-EAST

Source: MARP

1999

2016
Contextual Street Revitalization in a Changing Environment

MYRTLE AVE AND HALL ST. LOOKING SOUTH-EAST

Development of the Built environment

Source: MARP

1999

2016
Contextual Street Revitalization in a Changing Environment

Development of the Build environment

MYRTLE AVE AND HALL ST. LOOKING NORTH-EAST

Source: MARP

1999

2016
MYRTLE AVENUE RECONSTRUCTION PLAN

1. Stakeholders Overview
2. Timeline of the Reconstruction Plan
3. Critical moments in the Decision-Making Process
## Contextual Street Revitalization in a Changing Environment

### Time Line & Critical Decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Late 90s</td>
<td>Taskforce for Myrtle Avenue Reconstruction Plan was formed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>MARP was incorporated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-2005</td>
<td>The Myrtle Avenue Brooklyn BID was formed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>The Partnership (MARP+BID) started community engagement process –with Pratt Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>The Partnership collaborated with PPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>The Partnership collaborated with Street Design Incubator at Pratt to develop sitting area</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Time Line & Critical Decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>Funding resources were secured:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$1.5M - Local Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$2M - Federal Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$2.5M - NYC DOT Plaza Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>The design consultant - AECOM was appointed by DDC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>The construction firm - CAC was appointed by DDC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-2017</td>
<td>Construction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DECISION NOT TO IMPLEMENT AN INTERIM STAGE PLAZA**

**APPOINTING AECOM**
1. **Critique of the design proposal**

   The proposed design missed opportunities to strengthen the relationship between Pratt and Myrtle Avenue corridor.

---

**Final Plan** Source: DDC presentation - 2011
DESIGN CRITIQUE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Critique of the design proposal
2. Lessons learned
3. Recommendations

Lessons learned

Implementing an Interim Stage

• Influences and informs the capital design and reconstruction

• Gives users an opportunity to experience the space

• Develops a sense of place among users and could lead to a positive attitude toward the construction of the capital project
Lessons learned

Choosing Suitable Design Team for the Scale of the Project

- An international engineering company is not the best fit for a local project.
- Possibly a local team that has a connection to the site would challenge conventional design and simple solutions.

Creating Incentives to Meet the Project Schedule

- The city should expedite the review process, offer the consultants a bonus for completing tasks before the deadline and prioritize public space projects over private development.
- It is crucial to mitigate delays because they undermine public support for transformative projects and initiatives.
**Recommendations**

1. Appoint Design Firm as head of the consulting team
2. Test the suggested plan before reconstruction
3. Balance between Temporary and Permanent Art Installation
4. Involve local partner
5. Ensure Ongoing participatory efforts
6. Promote innovation and groundbreaking design
Recommendations

**IV Involve local partner**

- A community based organization is an essential stakeholder for street redesign projects
- The local partner can take a holistic approach and be involved in all the stages from initiation, to design, construction and operation
- A local partner with strong political backing would have capacity to overcome bureaucratic challenges that are inherent in public projects
Ensure Ongoing participatory efforts

- Capital reconstruction projects tend to be lengthy, yet this time could be used to create a sense of place.

- There is a potential for the ongoing dialog to build connections between new and incumbent residents, and maybe even mitigate some of the social tensions of gentrification.

- A group of “Friends of the Plaza” could come together even before the plaza opens to educate community members about the story of the place, the history of the area, and plan for future events.
Recommendations

Promote innovation and groundbreaking design

- Contemporary urban design projects based on participatory processes face a challenge of trying to satisfy many stakeholders at the expense of innovation and ambitious design.

- Innovative design and community needs are not necessarily mutually exclusive and can be created simultaneously with a strong vision and ambitious leaders.
Street redesign projects reflect changes in values in the field of planning and demonstrate the demand of communities for successful and vibrant public space.

Community engagement is crucial to the success of street revitalization progress, and should be ongoing throughout the process.

Placemaking practice needs to address the clashes of values that are often surfaced in street redesign projects.

There is a potential for the ongoing dialog to mitigate some of the social tensions of gentrification.
Thank you!