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Re: Deliverable 1A-5: Policy and Process Framework for Equitable Placemaking

I. Introduction

This report serves as FTA TOD Planning Grant deliverable 1A-3, a Policy and Process Framework for Equitable Placemaking. It introduces key ways arts-and-culture interventions can help achieve TOD planning goals under this grant, which align with the Purple Line Corridor Coalition's (PLCC's) defined fourth priority outlined in the 2017 Community Development Agreement: "Vibrant and sustainable communities enhance health, culture, and a sense of place." The report outlines how PLCC, leveraging its partnerships with communities, public agencies, and faculty and student design capacity within the University of Maryland, can support future creative placemaking work along the Purple Line corridor in ways that reflect and fortify the strong identities of the neighborhoods along the line.

II. PLCC and the Purple Line Community Development Agreement

The Purple Line transit corridor is home to more than 180,000 people, two-thirds of whom are people of color. For at least the last two decades, the corridor has offered affordable market rate housing and commercial space in the region, with dense residential neighborhoods and bustling commercial districts offering a sense of community and neighborhood identity. However, in the high-cost DC area market, new transit presents both opportunity for new investment – and displacement risk.

In 2017, PLCC published a Community Development Agreement (CDA) that provides a collective vision for equitable development in communities along the Purple Line. PLCC released a plan alongside the CDA that identified four key goal areas.

Goal 1: Diverse, locally established businesses prosper both during and after the construction period.

Goal 2: Workers in the corridor grow in number, are well trained and are well matched with employers in skills and location.

Goal 3: Housing opportunities are available for people of all income levels in communities throughout the corridor, especially current low-, middle-income, and transit-dependent residents.

Goal 4: "Vibrant and sustainable communities enhance health, culture, and a sense of place."

Creative placemaking can be an important tool to achieve Goal 4. Such an approach celebrates the rich identities of neighborhoods along the corridor, while facilitating inclusion as communities undergo change. Creative placemaking complements and supports equitable TOD by ensuring that transit-oriented neighborhoods are more than just transportation nodes; they are beautiful, culturally vibrant, and inclusive places where people want to live, work, and play.

III. What is creative placemaking?

Placemaking, creative placemaking, and placekeeping differ because they each prioritize and employ different strategies in the equitable development process. This report encourages the use of creative



placemaking and placekeeping to ensure artists are part of the process, and imaginative visions for the future are balanced with the preservation of existing community assets.

[Project for Public Spaces, a national placemaking leader, defines placemaking](#) as “Both an overarching idea and a hands-on approach for improving a neighborhood, city, or region, placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community.... With community-based participation at its center, an effective placemaking process capitalizes on a local community's assets, inspiration, and potential, and it results in the creation of quality public spaces that contribute to people's health, happiness, and well being.”

Placekeeping is distinct from placemaking or creative placemaking by emphasizing the need for the preservation of cultural heritage, practices, spaces, and assets as defined by an identified community at risk of losing those things. Placekeeping arose in opposition to placemaking, which - when done irresponsibly - can lead to physical and cultural gentrification. In 2016, the U.S. Department of Arts and Culture hosted an event to explore the concept of placekeeping and [provided the following context](#):

“While there are ample examples of Placemaking activities resulting in positive change, some Placemaking activities can also support gentrification, racism, real estate speculation, all in the name of “neighborhood revitalization.” Across the country, “Creative Placekeeping” has come into usage as a counter to Placemaking. Placekeeping is the active care and maintenance of a place and its social fabric by the people who live and work there. It is not just preserving buildings but keeping the cultural memories associated with a locale alive, while supporting the ability of local people to maintain their way of life as they choose.”

Creative placemaking emphasizes the roles of arts and culture. The [National Endowment for the Arts defines creative placemaking](#) as:

“The integration of arts, culture, and design activities into efforts that strengthen communities. Creative placemaking requires partnership across sectors, deeply engages the community, involves artists, designers and culture bearers, and helps to advance local economic, physical, and/or social change, ultimately laying the groundwork for systems change. This definition is intentionally open and broad because creative placemaking draws on all artistic disciplines, and can be deployed as a strategy to address a wide range of community issues or challenges from public health to safety, economic development to housing.”

4. Creative Placemaking Supported by UMD

PLCC, community partners, and UMD-led arts and design initiatives have worked together to implement creative placemaking initiatives in Purple Line neighborhoods for several years. This report offers recommendations to strategically drive additional university resources to contribute to long-term placemaking success. Following is a description of key UMD initiatives that can be leveraged for this purpose.

The Maryland Creative Placemaking Collaborative

Established in 2018, UMD's [Maryland Creative Placemaking Collaborative](#) (MCPC) seeks to employ art, design, and culture, to empower equitable and resilient communities through comprehensive community revitalization and system-based change. MCPC weaves the independent activities of stakeholders and practitioners with the institutional power and expertise of the University of Maryland



to effect change. UMD programs and students in the arts, architecture, urban planning, preservation, transportation, public policy and more are leveraged to confront entrenched issues including loss of cultural heritage, climate change, gentrification, unequal economic development and lack of public safety. MCPC's efforts draw on a long history of collaborative projects involving UMD coursework and communities throughout the mid-Atlantic region.

Since 2018, the MCPC has led the creative placemaking components of PLCC's Vibrant Communities goal, supporting efforts to preserve neighborhood culture and character both during and after this transformational change. MCPC, PLCC staff, and PLCC partners work collaboratively to identify communities, partners, focus areas, and projects to advance this mission.

Partners have included government and non-profit neighborhood organizations such as the Central Kenilworth Avenue Revitalization CDC; CASA, The Neighborhood Design Center; Montgomery Housing Partnership; and the YMCA of Metropolitan Washington. Arts partners include Dance Exchange and Arts on the Block. UMD partners include colleagues in Studio Art; Theatre Dance and Performance Studies; and the iSchool.

Creative Placemaking Minor

In 2021, following the initial vision of the MCPC, UMD's Maryland School for Architecture, Planning, and Preservation (MAPP) and the School for the Arts and Humanities (ARHU) co-established a [Creative Placemaking Minor](#) (CRPM) Program, which allows for the creation of new creative placemaking research electives and creative placemaking studio courses with multiple disciplines. Currently the minor program works with architecture and studio art classes, but could grow to include writing, theater, dance, graphic design, and landscape architecture. CRPM courses can play an important role in advancing community-driven creative placemaking projects along the Purple Line.

Partnership for Action Learning and Sustainability

UMD's [Partnership for Action Learning and Sustainability](#) (PALS) program offers an avenue for matching community placemaking needs with coursework. PALS is a campus-wide program that "leverages the expertise and ingenuity of University of Maryland students and faculty to tackle specific, sustainability-related issues facing Maryland's diverse communities." PALS has a strong track record of co-crafting strategic solutions, while establishing clear deliverables and expectations that make University-community partnerships most productive.

The current FTA TOD planning grant has offered opportunity to use the PALS infrastructure to support TOD planning goals through placemaking – first through an urban design course focused on strip malls in Long Branch in spring of 2024, and second through a creative placemaking course underway now that focuses on major strip malls in the Takoma Langley station area. In both cases, PALS has helped articulate course goals and provided oversight to ensure the course project is meeting community goals as well as TOD planning goals.

Experience in Long Branch

Creative placemaking that has taken root in the Long Branch neighborhood of Silver Spring demonstrates the value of long-term university-community partnerships. Long Branch, a gateway community for a diverse immigrant population, will soon have two Purple Line stations. Revitalization efforts in the neighborhood have historically been slow. As a result, in 2012, Montgomery County contracted with a local nonprofit called Montgomery Housing Partnership (MHP) to revive the area's business league and support a struggling main street. However, the MHP staff member assigned to Long



Branch found it difficult to build trust with legacy businesses. MHP reached out to UMD architecture faculty member, Ronit Eisenbach, to help generate creative ideas to inspire the small businesses and engage local residents.

A team of university partners, MHP staff, architecture students, and a few small businesses initiated visible, quick, public art projects and neighborhood festivals. These relatively low-cost but people-powered and artist-centered tactics generated quick wins that proved to hesitant businesses that tangible improvements were possible. This led to a festival series and community-led public art that changed the perception of the commercial district, widened the circle of belonging, and expanded neighborhood pride. As placemaking in Long Branch has become more sophisticated over time, UMD has continued to be a resource. Most recently, a spring 2024 urban design graduate course provided MHP and a local property owner with concepts for re-envisioning a strip mall across from the Arliss Street Purple Line station. The Long Branch experience demonstrates that creative placemaking partnerships with UMD can have a lasting impact in communities, beyond the time constraint of a semester.



Ten Installations and Super Block Party, 2013-2014. Work by Professor Eisenbach and Professor John Ruppert and Architecture and Studio Art Students. In partnership with the Long Branch Business League and Montgomery Housing Partnership, these projects helped lay the foundation for a long-term university-community partnership and established creative placemaking as a tool for inclusive investment.

Process for Developing Framework for Creative Placemaking

Edgar Alvarado, a Long Branch-born UMD graduate, architectural designer, and experienced creative placemaker conducted research to guide the recommendations in this report. He documented past placemaking projects that should serve as a foundation for future visioning – including numerous UMD art and design courses that had worked in key neighborhoods near campus.

He also interviewed regional creative placemaking stakeholders to identify opportunities for creative placemaking and placekeeping. Through interviews, site visits, and community events, he connected with a total of 28 individuals from over 16 organizations – including nonprofits, local governments, and university affiliates.

A key finding was that three neighborhoods are most primed for creative placemaking partnerships with UMD, including Long Branch, Takoma-Langley Crossroads, and Riverdale. These neighborhoods are close



to the Purple Line, demonstrate unique cultural identities, have local organizations with strong community networks, and are poised to anchor creative placemaking efforts with some locally-driven capacity.

Finally, he identified a process framework that can support sustained creative placemaking progress in these three neighborhoods.

V. Framework for Creative Placemaking

This section offers a framework for creative placemaking and placekeeping that can help PLCC achieve Goal 4 of the CDA. Under Goal 4 is a set of four key strategies the PLCC identified in the “Pathways to Opportunity” 2017 document. These strategies directly connect to creative placemaking tactics, listed in the chart below.

Goal 4: Vibrant and sustainable communities enhance health, culture, and a sense of place.

Strategy A: Build and preserve sustainable neighborhoods through improved access and safety for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users, and increase green infrastructure from Purple Line transit stops to surrounding neighborhoods.

Strategy B: Preserve the culture and character of neighborhoods surrounding Purple Line stations through investments such as public art, public spaces, parks, cultural programming, and corridor branding.

Strategy C: Support access to businesses, commercial corridors and public gathering spaces that promote small businesses during and after Purple Line construction.

Strategy D: Strengthen and deepen overall community input and engagement in projects during and after the completion of the Purple Line



Creative Placemaking Tactics Along the Purple Line:

Strategy A: WALKABILITY and SUSTAINABILITY	Strategy B: NEIGHBORHOOD CULTURE	Strategy C: COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR SUPPORT	Strategy D: CREATIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
EXAMPLES:	EXAMPLES:	EXAMPLES:	EXAMPLES:
Creative crosswalks with painted walking and bike paths, painted street barriers, decorative planters with native plants, artful stormwater management gardens, that increase safety and include culturally relevant plants, colors, patterns, & messaging Precedent: Art in the Right of Way Toolkit	Murals, mosaics, street banners, and other forms of urban design with specific cultural and regional references, ie: pedestrian-level signage with local history or leaders, iconic sculptures as wayfinding signs, open-air libraries, public stages for free programming, culturally relevant play equipment, decorative shade structures, artfully designed public seating Precedent: Designing a public square in Mexico City	Create regular arts and culture programming with small businesses to attract old and new customers, enhance wayfinding signage to advertise existing legacy and new businesses, create safe but artistic boundaries and pathways for temporary pop-up events, ensure small businesses are partners in various initiatives (including housing, design, transit projects) Precedent: Irrigate project with the Green Line in St. Paul, MN	Creative engagement tactics can involve artist-led visioning sessions, multi-generational activities, and input sessions utilizing poetry, music, and dance. Other methods include recording testimonies, oral histories, creating short social media videos, hosting interactive tours, and collaborative map-making to document cultural assets. Precedent: Cultural planning for Chinatown by Asian Arts Initiative

Community Engagement to Achieve Creative Placemaking Success

Including communities in creative placemaking processes ensures that neighborhood improvements are aligned with the aspirations of the people who live and run businesses there. It involves ongoing collaboration with community members to address their needs and concerns, especially those from marginalized groups.

Because coursework is by its nature limited to a semester, coursework is not an effective avenue for community engagement. Rather, coursework should involve collaboration with community-based organizations and community leaders who maintain direct and ongoing ties with the community. University stakeholders support placemaking primarily from outside the community, leveraging the talents of students who are still learning their craft. This learning curve brings risk as faculty students engage in community projects. Coursework should dedicate time for reflection on the responsibility that comes with community partnership. Faculty and students may ask questions like:



- How does the UMD team's community engagement strategy support and bolster local leadership?
- How is the UMD team representing its affiliation and partnerships? For example, are they naming partners in their outreach? What are the implications?
- How might the UMD team's community engagement strategy cause harm to the community? What can be done to mitigate that harm?
- Which segments of the community is the community partner most connected with? What gaps does this leave?
- What is the capacity of this organization to follow through on implementation? How can the project build on their strengths?
- Who else should we consult with as we engage each community?
- How can we disseminate final deliverables to all who engaged with the project?

Furthermore, community engagement with course projects should involve early conversations to establish mutual expectations and ensure two-way benefits from the course.

Framework Overview

A structured Purple Line creative placemaking framework helps focus the goals of future creative placemaking projects, support collaboration, and infuse broader TOD strategies with arts and culture activities. The framework proposes four core components to a creative placemaking cycle.

The cycle begins with an intensive period of **Research**, to identify placemaking aspirations and cultural preservation needs for a particular community. In this phase, collaborators will conduct research to lay the groundwork for future projects. Research may include:

- **Archival Research:** Documenting the history of a community and its assets.
- **Oral Histories:** Collecting and disseminating oral histories to enrich knowledge on a topic, provide a profile of an area, or highlight community leaders.
- **Engagement Plan:** identify core questions and gaps in knowledge that community members and other stakeholders can help
- **Integrating Artists/Designers/Culture Workers:** Creative community engagement methods to collect data that later informs design, including listening sessions, community mapping, and walking tours. This might involve hiring local artists to lead mini-workshops, hiring artists to play live music or host a dance during an engagement session, or hosting a celebratory meal that honors local culture.
- **Practical Research for Implementation:** Review of existing plans, permitting needs, organizational capacity, barriers to site control, potential funding needs, and policy changes needed for placemaking success (for example, signage and permitting)

The second step is **Design**. This may involve creating conceptual designs, prototypes, and hosting public events/forums to gather feedback.

- **Vision Sessions:** Precedent research for similar projects, visioning sessions with community members, and testing various versions of an idea in a public setting to gather input on how it can be improved.
- **Conceptual Design:** Site visits and developing conceptual designs that respond to a creative problem statement.



- **Events:** An activation or event to bring a larger community together to prepare for the next “build” phase, when funding, local expertise, and volunteer support is critical to the project’s success.

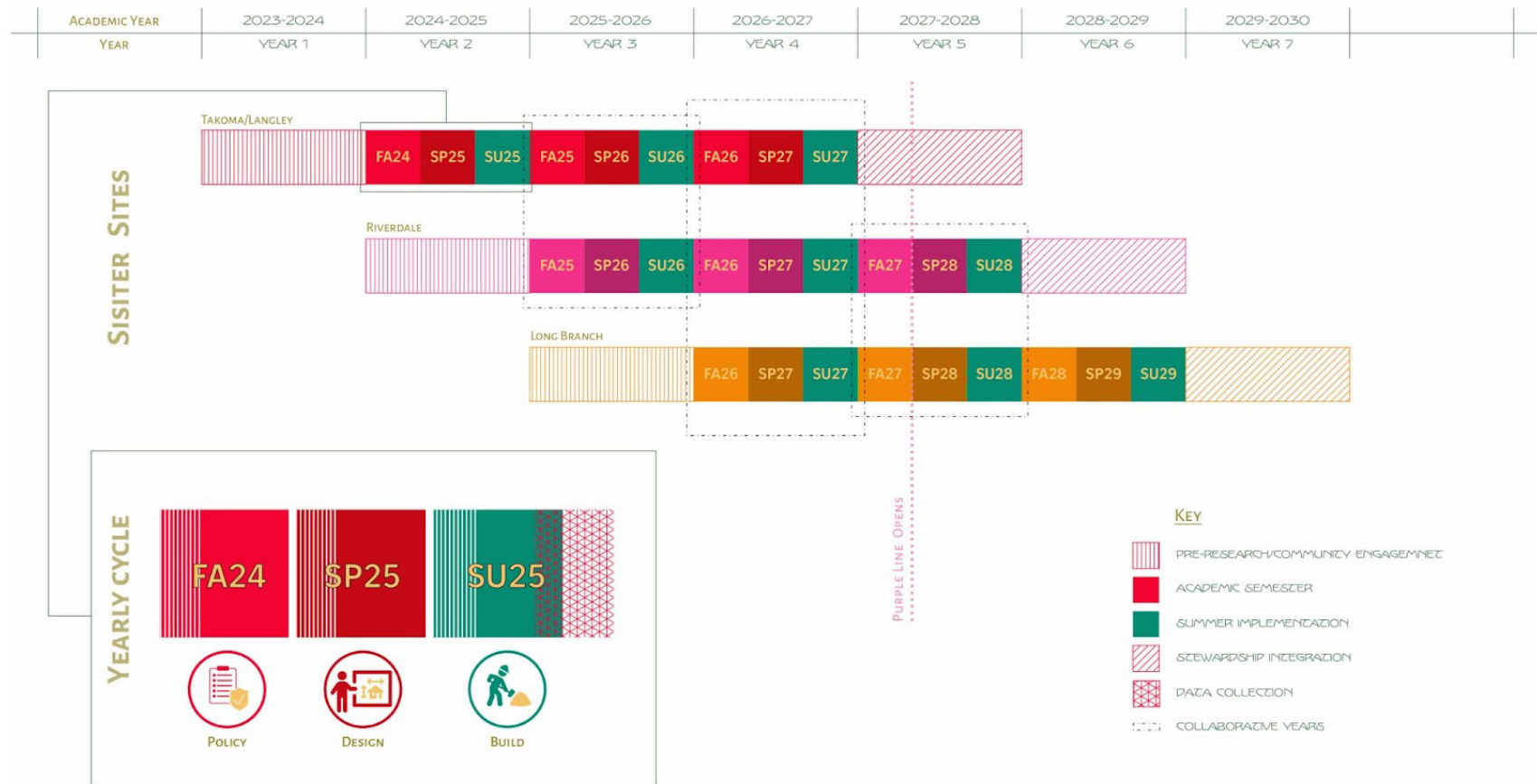
The third step is **Build**. At this stage, collaborators will implement or expand the project after going through the design phase. Resources and clear expectations are important at this stage.

The final stage is **Evaluate**. At this stage, collaborators should evaluate the success of the effort. For example, did the community have positive interactions with the project? Are installations being used and maintained? Was the collaboration effective? Evaluation will also help guide future projects in an area.

CRPM and other UMD coursework can support this cycle at each stage. With intentional planning, courses can be stacked over multiple semesters for continuity within each targeted neighborhood. Below is an example of how courses could be staggered over time to support the creative placemaking cycle – potentially culminating in an event that cuts across Purple Line communities just before the line’s official opening.



FRAMEWORK



VI. Next Steps

With this framework in mind, creative placemaking along the Purple Line can begin immediately. PLCC and its partners both internal and external to the University can initiate projects as early as this spring, with additional work possible through successful fundraising.

Immediate actions

1. To streamline capacity, target course-related creative placemaking in three communities rather than all six equity areas. Long Branch, Riverdale, and Takoma Langley are areas that offer community-based partnership infrastructure for effective course collaboration over the next three years before the Purple Line is operational.

Who: MCPC and creative placemaking minor

2. Mine for faculty willing to dedicate course capacity to research that supports the Purple Line creative placemaking framework.

Who: PLCC, PALS, and NCSG

3. With existing FTA TOD Planning Grant funds, pilot use of the creative placemaking framework through a spring 2025 design studio course focused on the Takoma Langley area.

Who: Creative placemaking minor

4. Build relationships with arts organizations that can contribute to creative placemaking and be partners in fundraising

Who: MCPC and PLCC

Fundraising would bolster the success of creative placemaking along the Purple Line corridor. Additional funds would strengthen capacity for the research phase, support community participation, ensure effective community-course collaborations, and provide greater capacity for UMD-led community outreach.

Actions that require fundraising

1. Raise funds for a cultural preservation assessment. This would coordinate multiple research activities and lay the groundwork for community-driven strategies that support creative placemaking, digital humanities, and urban design.

Who? NCSG



2. Identify resource needs for capacity-strapped community partners to pursue creative placemaking goals. Support course partnerships to identify fundable projects and fundraising targets. Pursue funding with collaborators.

Who? PLCC

3. Raise funds for PALS creative placemaking courses. PALS offers a tested structure for matching community goals with faculty capacity, at a cost of \$10,000 per course.

Who? PLCC and NCSG

4. Raise funds to hire a MCPC community coordinator. This person would serve as an ongoing bridge between communities and UMD-led placemaking work.

Who? MCPC

In sum, there are numerous opportunities for immediate creative placemaking projects, as well as concrete ideas for funding proposal development. PLCC, NCSG, and MCPC can jointly work with community partners to support immediate progress and pursue funding for long-term success.

7. Conclusion

Creative placemaking is already taking root in communities like Long Branch, but there is significant opportunity to amplify and strengthen these efforts - especially as the Purple Line's opening date draws near. Models like the [11th Street Bridge Project](#) in Washington, D.C., and the [Irrigate project](#) in Minneapolis/St. Paul provide inspiration. Each of these models demonstrates that creative placemaking is a powerful tool for equitable development in the context of large infrastructure investments, especially when local groups are strategic in attracting and deploying capacity.

The PLCC network, MCPC, and other UMD stakeholders can play an important role in the success of creative placemaking along the Purple Line. This is especially true if partners along the Purple Line work together to build strategic relationships, streamline existing capacity by targeting efforts to select communities, stack coursework to support the long-term creative placemaking cycle, and collaborate on fundraising to achieve long-term placemaking success.