

Spring 2025

Takoma Langley Crossroads

Keeping and Making Place in a Purple Line Community

COURSE

ARCH408: Making Place: Takoma Langley Corridor Green Isles

PALS

An initiative of the National Center for Smart Growth

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CREATIVE PLACEMAKING MINOR & COLLABORATIVE

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Partnership for
Action Learning
in Sustainability



PURPLE LINE
CORRIDOR
COALITION





source: Cathy Madsen

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Students in the Spring 2025 UMD Creative Placemaking Architecture (ARCH408) and Art (ARTT427) Studios worked in partnership with TLCDA to engage with participating businesses to hear their stories and share their understanding of the present and hopes for the future of Takoma Langley Crossroads.

Table of Contents

Introduction	6
The Community—Past and Future	9
The Team	9
The Project	11
Research for Understanding	12
Site Analysis	12
Community Analysis	13
Demographics & Planning History	13
Business Analysis & Owner Interviews	14
Case Studies: Transforming Place	16
Irrigate	
LentSpace	
L'Avenue Mont-Royal	
Copenhagen Islands	
The Fleeting Forest	
Shifting Urban Diets Foodscape Pilot	
Designs for a Now and Future Crossroads	20
Envisioning the Future—Dreamscapes and Green Isles	21
Dreamscapes	21
Green Isles Design and Prototype	23
Event: Blooms & Beats Block Party	27
Planning and Community Engagement	
The Alley	
Planning for the Long Term: Creative Placemaking and Placekeeping	36
Pedagogy and Reflections	37
Appendices	41
Appendix 1: Purple Line Policy Goals	
Policy and Process Framework for Equitable Placemaking	
Appendix 2: Research	
Site Analysis	
Business Engagement	
Case Studies	

Appendix 3: Design Process

- Dreamscapes

- Green Isle Designs

- Prototypes

Appendix 4: Blooms & Beats Block Party

- Final Presentation Boards

- Blooms & Beats Block Party Video (Adam Krell, Videographer)

- Blooms & Beats 2025 | Flickr (Catherine Madsen, PALS photographer)

- ARTT427: Advanced Painting: Paint on Site, Assistant Professor Brandon Donahue-Shipp

Appendix 5: ARCH408 PAL Showcase '25

- Takoma Langley Crossroads Green Isles Poster

Appendix 6: Artist Observations

- Cassie Meador, Partnership Report on Creative Placemaking in Takoma Park

- Heather McMordie, Blooms & Beats Block Party: Reflections of Pressure Printing

Introduction

“The PLCC network, Maryland Creative Placemaking Collaborative & Minor, 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.”

—Policy & Process Framework for Equitable Placemaking (See Appendix 1.)

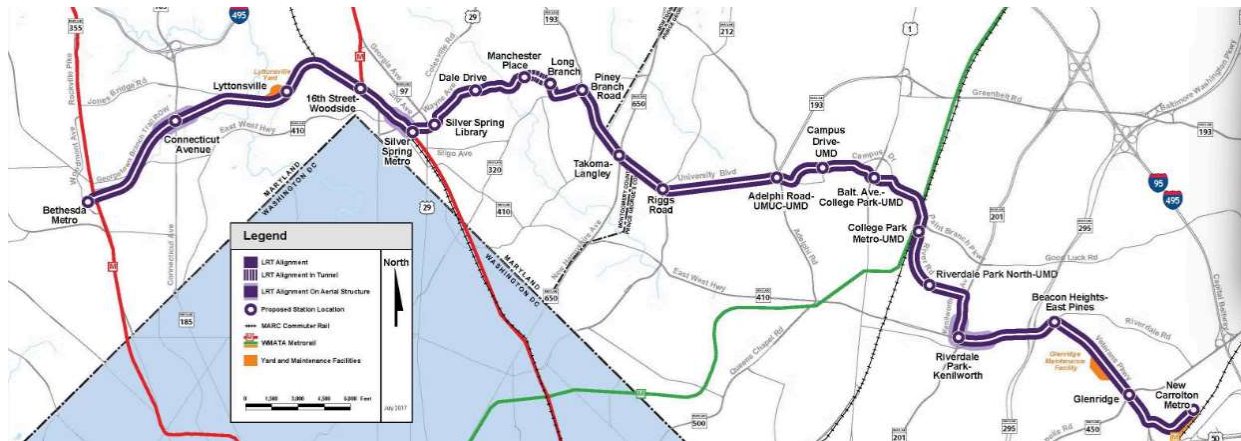
Creative Placemaking (CRPM) architecture students partnered with CRPM studio arts students and worked under the supervision of faculty and planning students to imagine a future for the Takoma Langley Crossroads, part of the ongoing work to expand the benefits of public investment in the Purple Line. With the goal of supporting the area’s small businesses, the project was designed to help stakeholders envision a future where people walk and bike to the businesses from the Purple Line and surrounding neighborhoods, enjoying a shared community space with a series of oases, places for people to stop and play, relax, or dine. The studio developed designs and activities to spark public conversation to imagine what this might look like.

The Takoma Langley Crossroads commercial district at the intersection of New Hampshire Avenue and University Boulevard is home and haven for many first- and second-generation Americans. The businesses in this first ring suburb of Washington, D.C. serve the needs of immigrant groups who have settled in the area. They sell clothing, share cuisine, and provide the services that different groups look for in their community. It is a diverse ethnic enclave and the “hub of immigrant entrepreneurship here in Takoma Park and in Maryland,” says Javier Rivas, Executive Director of The Takoma Langley Crossroads Development Authority.

In the Spring of 2025, a Metro system extension, the Purple Line light rail line, is currently under construction and disrupting commerce, adversely affecting many small businesses and contributing to a sense of uncertainty and vulnerability. While the hope is that the new light rail and subsequent development will eventually contribute to the “creation of vibrant and sustainable communities that enhance health, culture, and a sense of place,” (PLCC) it is difficult to envision this future right now.

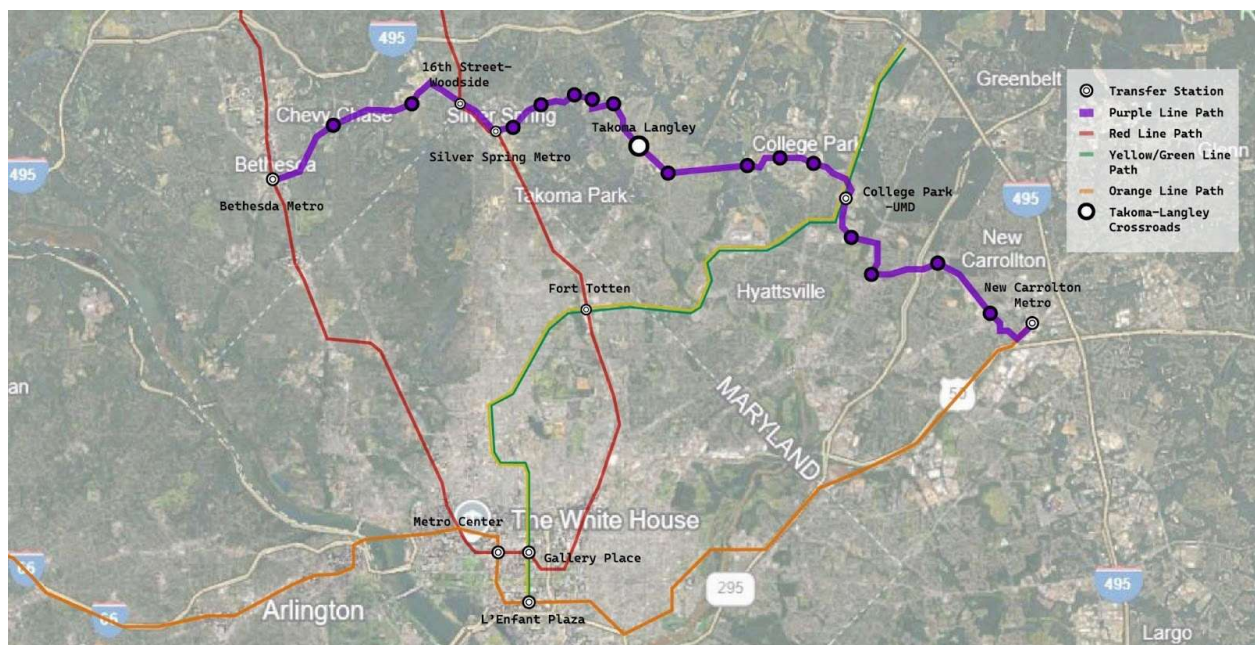
The area is built at a car scale and lacks public amenities, but this international area currently has a rich culture and sense of place, to which the local small businesses contribute. The current challenge is to alleviate the stress on businesses and help them attract customers to ensure their survival. The opportunity here is the chance for people to imagine the positive impact of the completed Purple Line, including new customers and a more pedestrian-oriented public realm.

Figure 1. Purple Line route through Montgomery and Prince George's Counties



source: <https://admin.umd.edu/initiatives-and-projects/purple-line>

Figure 2. Takoma Langley Crossroads in relation to the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area



source: Christine Tan

In the practice of Creative Placemaking, artists, designers and culture bearers affirm and develop public space with local citizen experts. It can play a vital role in helping communities navigate equitable change to shape and imagine their future. In communities affected by the Purple Line, this practice can help spark conversation, create shared experiences, and celebrate the rich identities of corridor neighborhoods as they grapple with change. Here, in Takoma Langley Crossroads, the goal is to support small business and transform the area from car-focused to pedestrian-friendly, making best use of public investment in the Purple Line. Creative placemaking seeks to support this transformation while sustaining and building on existing assets. The Takoma Langley Crossroads and all Purple Line

communities should be beautiful, culturally vibrant, and inclusive places where people want to live, work, and play.

Placemaking: “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.”

—Project for Public Spaces

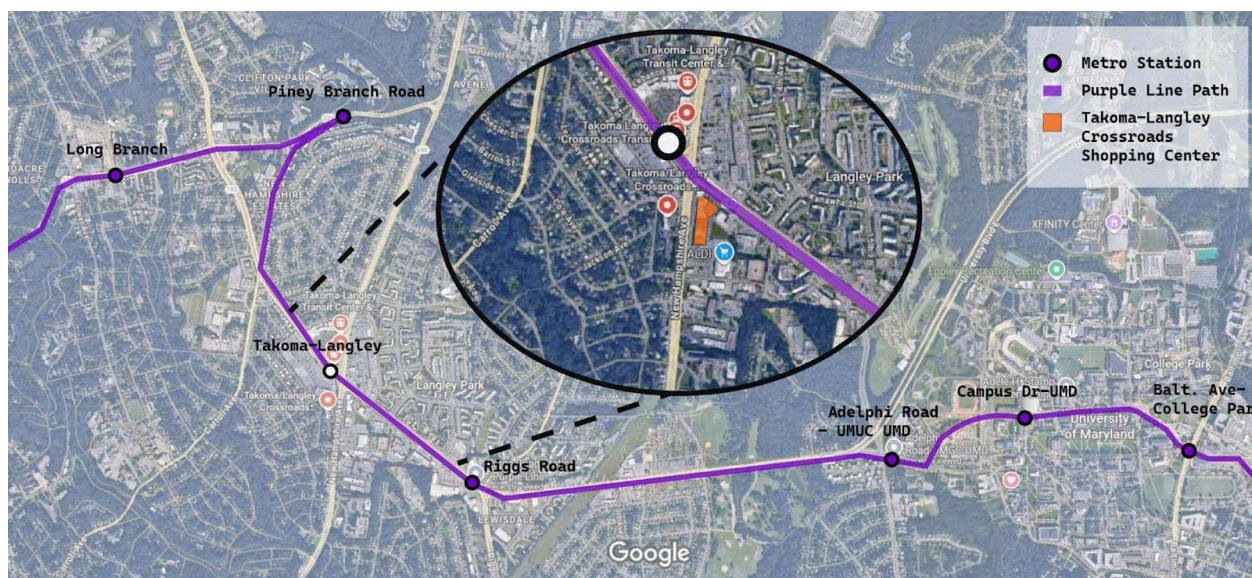
This project begins with a *Placekeeping* approach, emphasizing the need to preserve cultural heritage, practices, spaces, and assets as defined by an identified community at risk of losing those things. The goal is to avoid cultural gentrification, improving the community for its current residents.

“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.”

—U.S. Department of Arts and Culture

Since its founding in 2013, The Purple Line Corridor Coalition (PLCC) and Maryland Creative Placemaking Collaborative (MCPC) and Minor (CRPM) have worked to ensure vibrant communities through Creative Placemaking studios all along the Purple Line. This year's effort focused on Takoma Langley Crossroads. University staff, faculty and students; the Purple Line Corridor Coalition; the Creative Placemaking (CPRM) studios; and PALS worked with the Takoma Langley Crossroads Development Authority (TLCDA) to create designs and an event that would animate a strip mall and create a path for change.

Figure 3. Purple Line Transit Center in relation to the Takoma Langley Crossroads Shopping Center



source: Christine Tan

The Community—Past and Future

The Takoma Langley Crossroads area was developed after World War 2 as a suburban car-oriented community with many residents commuting to jobs via bus or car in Washington, D.C. on its two arterial roads, New Hampshire Avenue and University Boulevard. This first ring suburb straddles Montgomery and Prince George's Counties. The focus of this project, the Takoma Langley Crossroad Shopping Center, is in Montgomery County.

Each quadrant of the crossroads intersection is developed with mixed commercial uses, with large parking lots in front of stores, surrounded by varied housing. The Bedford and Victoria Station Apartments were built alongside a single-family residential neighborhood to the west of the intersection. Two strip malls, Hampshire Langley and Langley Park Plaza, were built in the mid-1950s.

The Takoma Langley Crossroads Shopping Center followed in 1960. From University Boulevard, it stretches south along New Hampshire Avenue with stores arrayed along a parking lot. At its center, the strip mall is split by an alley connecting to University Boulevard. Murals were painted in 2016, and the facades were refurbished in 2021. Most of the retail businesses are food or beauty related, and most serve a local community and are family owned. The shopping center's northern end is across the intersection from the Purple Line Transit Center, which will also serve as a Purple Line light rail station.

Even during Purple Line construction, which began in 2017, the shopping center businesses have continued to serve their customers while dealing with safety issues and traffic congestion. The center is a hub of immigrant owned commerce, but it lacks a central public space and needs improvement of the public realm for it to be appealing and accessible to a wide customer base. The Purple Line has the potential to be an asset to the businesses—connecting them to a regional market and it could be the starting point for re-orienting the community from car oriented to one that is safe, convenient, greener, and pleasant to walk.

The Team

When the Purple Line Corridor Coalition was founded in 2013, it established four goals: Creating Housing Choices, Supporting Workforce Development, Supporting Small Businesses, and Sustaining Thriving Communities. Placemaking was understood as integral to advancing thriving communities, and since 2020, Director Sheila Somashekhar has been working with Creative Placemaking Minor & Collaborative Director Professor Ronit Eisenbach and PALS Director Kim Fisher to advance this goal through UMD courses with Takoma Langley Crossroads Development Authority and in other Purple Line communities.

The first UMD classes focused on placemaking in this area occurred in Spring 2022 when two classes: the Creative Placemaking Architecture Studio (ARCH408) led by Professor Ronit Eisenbach and the Landscape Architecture Graphic Communication and Design Studio (LARC240) taught by Professors Naomi Sachs and Dennis Nola worked with TKLDCA. The studios envisioned a series of interconnected pedestrian friendly spaces and public amenities that knit together the residential, commercial, and transportation uses into a pedestrian friendly environment. These spaces included reimagining vacant land behind the commercial uses as a public green space, developing a walking path on the west side of New Hampshire Avenue to ease access to the Purple Line, pop-up businesses, and envisioning an incubator market at the corner of Holden Lane and New Hampshire Avenue. In the Fall 2024, Professor

Clara Irazabal Zurita's studio (URSP708) examined [“Equitable Development for Langley Park, Maryland,”](#) in which students worked with community groups to develop tools that all stakeholders could use to protect, nurture, and celebrate Langley Park's existing cultural identity and assets while planning together for its future. Assistant Professor Brandon Donahue-Shipp's Spring 2025 CRPM Studio, [Advanced Painting: Painting on Site \(ARTT426\)](#) focused on branding for the business. Students conducted research with business owners in the Takoma Langley Crossroads community with the goal of creating large banners that would be printed, and hung to promote the growth, expansion, and beautification for the upcoming Purple Line corridor.

In the Spring 2025 semester, two Creative Placemaking studios joined this effort, Advanced Painting: Painting on Site (ARTT427) led by Assistant Professor Brandon Donahue-Shipp, and, Making Place (ARCH408), led by Architect Rayya Newman and Professor Ronit Eisenbach. The two studios worked in partnership with TLCDA to learn from local businesses and hear their owners' stories, aiming to activate the area, create proof of concept designs, and spark a conversation about a future that celebrates the local culture and businesses, and is welcoming to pedestrians and supports vehicular traffic.

The Takoma Langley Crossroads Development Authority (TLCDA) is a key partner in this project. The group was created in 1987 as a 501(c)(6) to represent the interests of business and property owners in the Crossroads. It includes the commercial properties along University Boulevard from Merrimac Drive to the eastern boundary of the City of Takoma Park and those along New Hampshire Avenue from University Boulevard to Holton Lane.

The TLCDA's mission is to support and enhance the vitality of the Takoma Langley Crossroads commercial district through strategic marketing, safety initiatives and collaborative efforts to create a welcoming and prosperous business community. The TLCDA had received grant funds from the City of Takoma Park to increase landscaping, lighting, and safety. The PLCC-supported UMD Creative Placemaking effort demonstrated how design and art could expand ways of thinking about how active public places could provide security and safety, with the aim of developing a plan to implement these ideas.

This TLCDA project gave the Creative Placemaking Minor and PALS students the opportunity to engage with and work alongside business owners to develop events and solutions for community concerns while working toward PLCC's goal of a vibrant and sustainable community. Business owners and customers, the affected communities, were involved in developing solutions. Their input helped define the problem and how to best approach designing a solution. Using their thoughts and concerns and developing the event around them helps achieve the goals they have for their community and anticipate their next steps.

This team of TLCDA; local businesses; students, staff, and faculty from UMD CRPM disciplines; PLCC and PALS also partnered with Cassie Meador, Executive Artistic Director of Dance Exchange, a Takoma Park arts organization with an international reputation. Dance Exchange collaborates across generations, disciplines, and communities to channel the power of dancemaking as a means for dialogue, a source of critical reflection, and a creative engine for thought and action. It is a key local organization that has engaged the community in more than 250 performances.

Together, these layered efforts point toward a model of creative placemaking that is dynamic, inclusive, and responsive to change—one that can support equitable development while also honoring the cultural and human infrastructure that makes places thrive.

—Cassie Meador, Executive Artistic Director, Dance Exchange

The Project

The University of Maryland Architecture Faculty proposed the design of “green isles” that would answer calls for green space and public gathering to spark a conversation about the long term while bringing the community together.

The studio premise began with the goal of supporting the businesses of Takoma Langley Crossroads now and helping stakeholders envision a future where people walk and bike to the businesses from the Purple Line and surrounding neighborhoods enjoying a shared community space with a series of oases, places for people to stop and play, relax, or dine.

After field work, research, and design development, the student teams worked with academic and community leadership to create the Blooms & Beats Block Party, a prototyping event that involved both CRPM studios and local artists and delivered design prototypes and plans for short- and long-term change. While students from both classes participated in organizing the event’s activities and particulars, this report focuses on the work of ARCH408, the Creative Placemaking Architecture studio.

This report includes student research, and the designs and description of the public event they helped create. Research included site analysis and documentation, case studies, a movement workshop, and a business engagement plan to document site visits. This research informed the art students’ mosaic covered planters and the architecture students’ visions for the whole site—a prototype “green isle seating structure—as well as the spatial, strategy, and activity planning for the block party that transformed the strip mall for an afternoon and encouraged people to learn about the businesses and share their ideas for the area’s future.

This project employed temporary Creative Placemaking to advance the long-term goals of improving walkability, sustainability, celebrating local culture, strengthening community engagement, and supporting local businesses along New Hampshire Avenue. Developing the areas along the Purple Line light rail line—the strip mall and the larger Takoma Langley Crossroads area—into a more pedestrian friendly civic realm that encourages cultural activities and offers places for gathering, could help regain foot traffic and offset business decline during the construction.

With guidance from TLCDA, students met with business owners to gauge their concerns and priorities. Despite the diverse and supportive community, storeowner accounts suggest that the lack of landscaping, shade, and parking spaces; issues with loitering and theft management; and Purple Line construction compound to create an environment with potential, but that needs to be reoriented to create a more hospitable place for commerce and community.

After completing their research, students began the design phase by creating “dreamscapes,” quick images to spark imagination of what could be. These visions included new planters and furniture to support gathering and activate the sidewalks, alley, and areas currently reserved for cars. After sharing these ideas with TLCDA and receiving feedback, students took inspiration from these dreamscapes, condensing their core ideas into a “green isle,” a mini oasis that offered a shaded place for people to gather, play, dine, or rest at the shopping center.

Students were advised to develop designs that were accessible for people of all ages and mobility levels. Their green isle designs could be placed on the sidewalk or in the parking lot. Materials were initially

limited to those that would be easy to find and purchase for manufacturing a prototype that would be built for the block party. Studio members and faculty met regularly to develop each isle design. At the midterm review, the students, faculty and partners voted on which projects to advance. Two students' ideas were selected as the basis of full-scale prototype.

This prototype was developed and built by a team of students during the second half of the semester and displayed in the Blooms & Beats Block Party. The block party engaged the community and transformed the experience of the strip mall space with music, art activities, food from local restaurants, mosaic planters, and the green isle prototype. This was a proof-of-concept event—would art and cultural activities encourage visitors to stay longer, how would they notice and use the planters and seating, would the prototype seating and planters and the event change the experience of the place? From observations and interactions, students also gathered information—who came to the center, what were their ideas for their community, could these installations expand to other strip malls at the Crossroads? Blooms & Beats was intended to bring attention to the local businesses now and as a contribution to the public conversation about reimagining the area as a pedestrian-friendly environment that supports local businesses and culture and builds on the Purple Line investment.

Research for Understanding

The studio's site research covered the physical environment—how users would reach the site and what they would see and hear when they arrived, as well as the social environment—demographics, planning history, and current businesses. This research was used to understand the strip mall's context and existing conditions that would inform the event and prototype designs.

(See complete analyses in Appendix 2.)

Site Analysis

The small businesses in the Takoma Langley Crossroads Shopping Center rely on community connections and word of mouth to expand their customer base, and loyalty comes from a connection to customers and the quality of the products offered. The strip mall is a commercial operation, but also a place where people connect culturally, perhaps through clothing, hairstyles, or food. It is an ethnic enclave that allows the Takoma Langley community to be unreserved in sharing and communicating through food and conversation.

Many residents and customers walk and use the buses, and there are also those who move through the area via car, but the area doesn't support people who walk. With the completion of the Purple Line, new infrastructure—trees, sidewalks, benches, and public plazas—should be designed to knit the area together and support pedestrians in a safe and pleasant environment.

Currently, the area privileges cars and quick stops over pedestrians. It isn't a pedestrian friendly, welcoming, community-oriented space that encourages people to gather and stay. A product of the car-culture era, the strip mall isn't designed as a community space, yet it has the potential to be a place of cultural diversity and activity. While people come often for basic needs and shopping, they don't stay long. This is exacerbated by Purple Line construction, which has increased vehicular traffic and made it harder for people to access Takoma Langley's small businesses.

The area is walkable from surrounding residential communities of varying densities, as well as transit access—bus, Metro, and bike. However, the mall itself is not accessible, with few entry ramps and long sidewalks that make it difficult to reach across busy roads on foot, by wheelchair, stroller or bicycle. There is constant noise due to construction and vehicle traffic.

The strip mall stores face the double-loaded parking lot, a narrow sidewalk, and New Hampshire Avenue, which in this section is six lanes divided by a narrow median with a fence. There are four entry/exit curb cuts, which introduce potentially conflicting movements between vehicles and pedestrians. The roughly 300-space parking lot has ten handicapped parking spots, less than the standard one per 25 spaces. The spaces are concentrated near sidewalk ramps and shop entrances but don't meet size and accessibility standards. Wheelchair users can't navigate directly to the sidewalk in front of the shops and along the street. Instead, they must circle around into the street to the ramp entrance of the sidewalks, increasing the risk of disabled people, young children, and caretakers being hit by cars coming through.

The intersection of University Boulevard and New Hampshire Avenue is the meeting of two six-lane roads, with strip malls in each quadrant. It is one of the most dangerous intersections in Takoma Park, with sidewalks and crosswalks that haven't been upgraded for pedestrian safety. The shopping center parking area doesn't offer clear pedestrian paths or respite, and the limited parking encourages aggressive driving.

The site's western exposure has neither trees nor landscaping to shade and soften it. The site is primarily covered by an asphalt parking lot and building structures, with bits of landscaping—bushes and grass—at the ends of sidewalks and at the parking lot entrance. These areas aren't usable, have limited visual impact, and don't perform an environmental function. The largest area of green is the grassy hillside in the back of the site. Overall, the site has very little tree cover and no shade.

Murals were part of the strip mall's [2016 refurbishment](#) and in [other communities](#), they've been shown to increase brand recognition and encourage repeat business. In fact, in one community there was a measurable decrease—[up to 95%](#)—in vandalism. There are no vacant storefronts and some owners commented they could use more space to run their businesses.

Community Analysis

Demographics

The surrounding community has a large Hispanic population (83%), distributed almost evenly among age groups. In 2020, the age distribution was 28% 5 to 19 years old, 20% 20 to 39 years old, 30% 40 to 59 years old, and 22% were people over age 65. It is an area that should be family friendly and appropriate for all ages. [A 2019 study](#) shows that the median household income for Takoma Langley was \$56,600, compared to the County's median household income of \$82,000.

Planning History

Planning for the area is overseen by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, which completed the [Takoma/Langley Crossroads Sector Plan](#) in 2012 with the support of the City of Takoma Park.

The plan notes that the area’s “diversity is reflected in local retail and neighborhood services with business catering to “the highly diverse racial and ethnic populations that make up the local multicultural neighborhoods.” It recognizes that the business and the market base are “a unique economic engine for the future.”

That plan also recognized that the Purple Line “poses a great opportunity to encourage development that emphasizes walking, bicycling and public transit use.” The design guidelines that accompany the plan describe a reshaped community: “Redevelopment in the area will be focused on a transit center in the Crossroads District, the community’s core. This core should be the center of community activity and have the tallest buildings with the most density amid public use spaces and a connected network of sidewalks and green streets. The surrounding residential neighborhoods should be connected to the core but buffered from its density.”

This diversity and business activity should be supported by the Purple Line and by an improved public environment. But, as the Purple Line spawns investment and prices increase, what is the commitment and ability of the Planning Department and the County to preserve these small businesses and diverse residents? How and who will create public spaces and assets that include the community in design and decision making? How can activities such as this placemaking effort be part of a process that shows people the strength of their community and allow them to articulate what they want and how to engage to get it? What actions are being taken what voices do community have in these actions? The work of this studio demonstrates the type of community-based work that the M-NCPPC should consider and fund.

Business Analysis

The studio developed a Business Engagement Plan and visited six businesses, selected by the TLCDA, to interview business owners; the team also “walked in the shoes of a customer” to create a customer experience map (see Appendix 2).

Figure 4. Takoma Langley Crossroads Shopping Center: Interviewed Businesses



source: Christine Tan

Storeowners note their customers are both regulars and passers-by drawn by popular stores like Red Apple and WingStop. The shop owners spoke of the supportive community, open to cultural diversity

and sharing traditional cultures. However, a lack of landscaping makes the area less visually appealing and without shade, uncomfortable.

Owners also mentioned a lack of space for products and parking, issues with loitering and managing theft, along with Purple Line construction deterring potential customers. But there are initiatives that could change these conditions. Recent redevelopments such as facade murals have decreased vandalism, with owners saying that they get more repeat customers and feel a positive impact on their businesses. Several advocated for outdoor seating and increased lighting at night to improve safety.

Findings from Business Owners Interviews

Baleadas Express

This restaurant has been open for six months and is one of few in the region that serves authentic Honduran food. They have a strong social media presence and serve a regional customer base. They find construction and traffic are a challenge, as is nighttime safety.

The owner would like to see green space and space for seating, nighttime lighting for safety and to advertise the store, and a place for Christian music.

San Alejo Restaurant and Pupuseria

This is a relatively new restaurant in Takoma Langley; it already has a location in Hyattsville. It has a good reputation, and their goal is to be “open to everybody.” The staff speaks English and Spanish, and the food is made to order. Along with serving food, the owners strive to emphasize the culture of El Salvador.

The business is challenged by the current traffic and construction but anticipates both will improve when the Purple Line opens. Of course, other restaurants also offer competition, and in the strip mall, there is also competition for parking spaces. In the future, they’d like to see more outdoor green space, with benches and tables for eating, and a place to bring pets and relax.

McDoris Fabrics

This family-owned business has been selling African and Muslim fashion, fabrics, and accessories for nearly 10 years. Their customers are local and from outside the area.

Construction and traffic make it hard for employees to arrive on time and often generate trash and dust. They are also experiencing delivery delays due to customs issues. They have many of the usual retail problems—shoplifting and an occasional disruptive customer. Their business doesn’t really need outdoor space, but the owner notes a place to sit and relax would be nice.

TJ Beer, Wine & Liquor

This family-owned business enjoys a repeat clientele throughout the year and especially at holidays. While some customers walk to the store, most drive. There are occasional security issues and construction has created a sometimes-chaotic environment in the parking lot.

The owners are both optimistic and skeptical about changes that the Purple Line may bring. While it would be nice to have seating, they doubt murals will generate more customers.

Red Apple Farmers Market

For more than 30 years, this grocery has carried a range of African and Caribbean products not commonly found in chain groceries. It has developed a good reputation, and its staff can offer knowledge and advice to customers. This history and expertise make it a standout in the local market. Customers regularly note how clean and orderly the store is, and the owners expect the Purple Line to be an asset.

AD Blades and Braids

This husband and wife operated business offers expert braiding and precision barbering to its primarily African and African American customers. They also sell some hair styling and convenience products. Like all the businesses in the strip mall, they have felt the impacts of construction and parking can be challenging for customers. The lack of green space limits visual appeal. In the future, they'd like to see more green space to add curb appeal with seating and nighttime lighting.

Case Studies: Transforming Place

The studio examined precedents from public interest designers and creative placemakers to learn how others transformed spaces to address a community's spatial, social, cultural, economic, and environmental needs. Their inventiveness led to multilayered, measurable impacts.

These case studies were chosen to show how different creative placemaking applications can encourage vibrant communities, bring landscape and nature into an urban context, or increase seating in high energy areas to create gathering places. Each case study focuses on one of these issues but in a different way depending on site context and community needs.

One of the Purple Line Corridor Coalition's goals is to create vibrant and sustainable communities. Currently, this area of Takoma Langley is under Purple Line construction, but this same project is an opportunity to create a new environment. These case studies offer examples for the Takoma Langley Crossroads area, ways to transform the physical and spatial realms, using landscape and art to invite users to experience their communities.

Irrigate

St. Paul, Minnesota, 2010-2014

This artist-led placemaking project was developed by Springboard for the Arts in response to the disruptive construction of a light rail line through the urban core. A collaborative effort, the project sought to reconceive undervalued spaces to change people's perception of those places, to build social capital, and to increase small business visibility and prosperity.

Like Takoma Langley Crossroads, the three-year Irrigate initiative was intended to invigorate the community during the construction of a new light rail throughout the city. Its physical projects are precedents for functional art pieces that mix mediums such as steel, ceramics, recycled materials, and electronics, applied to awaken curiosity, contemplation, and playfulness in everyday life. Springboard for the Arts also created multiple applications and examples of "creating place" such as community events, renovations, or exhibits that add whimsy to the mundane, an approach applicable to Takoma Langley. As with this project, many of their prototypes and installations weren't fully functional or permanent. Their many projects show how to use temporary and permanent installations depending on the medium and site restrictions.

Figure 5. Irrigate: Avalon's Sculptural Mobile Units



source: Springboard for the Arts (YouTube)

LentSpace

Manhattan, New York City, 2009

Installed on land slated for eventual development, LentSpace was a temporary landscape designed to promote art. Interboro Partners used inexpensive materials to define and secure the space giving it flexible options for uses that included art shows, food trucks, and filming a television show.

LentSpace is a good example of how simple planters can frame a space, create accessible paths to important site locations, and be used for seating in the urban landscape. LentSpace temporarily reclaimed an urban space with a community project, increasing landscaping, defining space, and creating a platform for art shows and events.

Figure 6. LentSpace installation



source: The New York Times

L'Avenue Mont-Royal

Montreal, Canada, 2021

The urban and landscape design cooperative, Castor & Pollux, were commissioned by the Mont Royal Avenue Merchants Association to create a year-round pedestrian plan for 2.5 kilometers of the street.

Prompted by the need for safe public space during the pandemic, the cooperative developed a comprehensive plan that considered the communities involved and used the idea of "The Current" as a guiding principle, the image of a stream meandering along the Avenue. "The pathway highlights key moments, provides breathing space, promotes physical distancing and social connection, and creates a coherent experience from east to west. Space was marked by a series of murals, street paintings, and marking signs.

This project's multipurpose installations--planters, seating, and catalysts for play--are part of a design that reallocates space from cars to pedestrians. With similar site conditions and street context, Mont-Royal's seasonal protocol for managing this project is relevant in Takoma Langley. L'Avenue Mont-Royal is a clear precedent for outdoor furnishings that take back the streetscape for pedestrians and create a safe and vibrant place that people can enjoy.

Figure 7. Mont-Royal Avenue transformed



source: INT Design

Copenhagen Islands

Copenhagen, Denmark, 2022 and ongoing

The architecture firm MAST designed this free public park in Copenhagen Harbor as a series of floating islands accessible by swimmers and boaters. "The islands reintroduce wilderness and whimsy to the rapidly gentrifying harbour with endemic plants, trees and grasses above and anchor points below providing a habitat for birds and insects, seaweeds, fish and mollusks. The islands bring a constantly changing, green space into the centre of the city. The project also hints at a new type of climate resilient urbanism, inherently flexible in its use and only using sustainably sourced and recycled materials."

This project inspires observers to consider ideas that seem at first to be fantastical, certainly beyond the usual. The project's richness comes from its design process and execution. The creation of the first Copenhagen Island helped create a proof of concept for a larger application of this idea, and inspired creators to experiment with materials and techniques to balance function and aesthetics. It shows that when carefully designed and built, boundary-pushing ideas can improve and change our environments to suit the community's needs. In Takoma Langley, shifting the pattern of car development to one for transit and pedestrians could significantly reshape the community.

Figure 8. Copenhagen Islands



source: <https://www.copenhagenislands.com/>

The Fleeting Forest

London, UK, 2023-2024

In recent years, Granary Square at King's Cross has hosted seasonal art installations designed to enhance public space. In 2023, Fleeting Forest was commissioned by Argent, a real estate development firm, and designed by a collaborative team of architects, artists, students, and landscape designers, and engineers. Fleeting Forest is a temporary copse of trees set in a structure of hay bales and lit to highlight their form against the surrounding buildings. The mostly nursery-grown passed through the square on a winter stop-over, on their way to permanent homes in public parks, community gardens and schools elsewhere in London. The project brought an authentic natural world into an urban environment, creating a tranquil rest area where seasonality and lighting combine to model a greener urban environment.

This project inspired thoughts about how Takoma Langley could present itself at night. Now, the area is poorly lit, making it less comfortable for nightlife and fun. The Fleeting Forest illuminated Granary Square, with a warm light among the trees. Because it was temporary, the installation could be moved into different configurations or to different locations, making it an example of a planter that isn't permanent yet still meaningful due to its functionality.

Figure 9. Nighttime in the Fleeting Forest



source: Lewis Jones, Rebecca Heald

Shifting Urban Diets Foodscape Pilot

Copenhagen, Denmark, 2020

This project explored how urban food systems align with the planet's health, particularly shifting the diets of young people. Using wood and plastic planters and seating to create different seating configurations based on the users, the project was designed to be flexible, but vandal-proof. Weighting the furniture with sand or water kept it from being easily moved or stolen.

The Foodscape Pilot, like the proposed Green Isles, is a seating installation that seeks to advance a larger goal—in its case, shifting the urban diet. That core goal influences choices of vegetation, location, and furniture. In the case of Takoma Langley, the larger goal is to conceive a public space connected to transit.

Figure 10. Food and gathering in Copenhagen



source: Gehl Architects

Designs for a Now and Future Crossroads

Consistent with the planning and public investment in the Purple Line, this project is an examination of actions and activities that could start to shift the community and this site from a car-oriented environment—road and strip mall—to a place that builds on the culture and resources of the people for people and community.

Just as the area's physical, cultural, and social characteristics are interconnected, the goal is to advance an interconnectedness of effort: counties and city working cooperatively on planning, the investment of state and federal funding for the Purple Line, TLCDA advocating for the businesses and the existing community, and, with this project, faculty and students in art and architecture bringing their skills and perspectives to extend and enhance the public investment and benefits of the Purple Line. This work was guided by the values of advocacy for and co-creation of a thriving community, one that both keeps and makes place.

The studio work is part of this ongoing effort. The larger project began before the semester and unfolded over the semester, but its impacts and findings should continue over time, as the Purple Line opens, and the affected communities work to take advantage of new opportunities and at the same time address the challenges this investment may bring. The reality is that, as Cassie Meador has expressed, places are works-in-progress, they are not static but everchanging, and multiple people and factors shape it over

time, and development takes time—offering an opportunity to consider, test, learn, discuss and develop ideas for the future.

The studio worked in this space of “place as a work-in-progress” contributing to the conversation about what could be. By prototyping street furniture that invited people to linger and creating a pop-up event *in situ* that altered both the space and offered a shared experience, the studio engaged in the process of examination, design development, and fabrication informed the community’s people and their goals. By showcasing local businesses and prototyping short-term solutions—both physical and ephemeral—the studios engaged the community and gathered information to continue the conversation and shape long term solutions.

(For additional design process work see Appendix 3.)

Envisioning the Future — Dreamscapes and Green Isles

Dreamscapes

The studio’s design process began with the dreamscape assignment, which invited students to consider the studio’s premise: “supporting the existing local businesses and rich culture in a future where people can easily and safely walk and bike to the businesses from the Purple Line station and surrounding neighborhoods.”

Given the context and problem, the Dreamscapes were informed by what student observed and heard from the businesses. They imagined a unique pedestrian friendly area that included landscaping, seating, public space, delight and innovative programming. The method was simple—take a photo of the site as it is now, and using digital collage, show what could be—thinking both big and small, long term and short term. Consider how things might change with a quick intervention, and how that might lead to more permanent change: one day, one month, 10 years, 50 years, 100 years.

The Dreamscape designs addressed the whole site and included “green isles”—places for people to stop and play, relax, or dine, in different seasons, night and day. They examined larger site concerns—traffic and re-orienting car space to accommodate people—customers, families, and kids and the vision of the local business owners. Students took what they learned from their research into the local conditions, case studies, and field visits and used it to develop quick visualizations to spark conversation about what the future could be.

Figure 11. Six Dreamscape visions



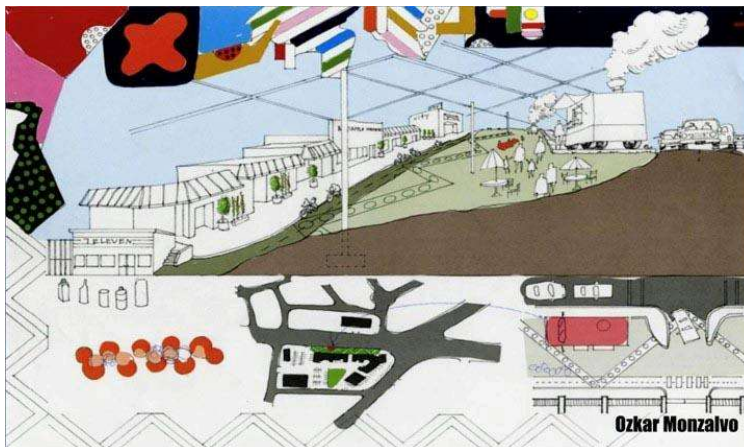
source: Abigail Smith



source: Christine Tan



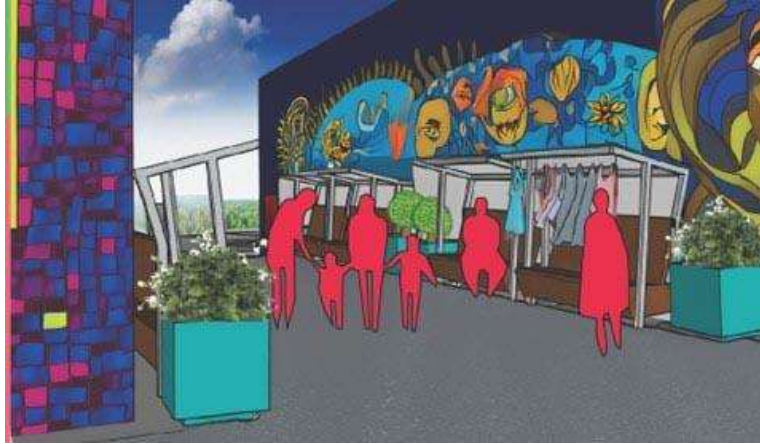
source: Jaden Adjai



source: Ozkar Monzalvo



source: Matthew Cienfuegos



source: Conell Brandner

Green Isle Designs and Prototype

After creating the Dreamscapes, the studio shifted scale, and each student developed a green isle that could happen soon and inspired by their first ideas explored in the dreamscapes. Rather than tackling the whole site, the focus was on developing a smaller area (a place for two, four or eight people) that included seating, defined a place for gathering, shade, landscaping, and perhaps signage. Since they were meant to happen quickly and without a lot of investment, proposals were designed to be temporary, had to address site conditions, and be easy to build, like the COVID pop-up restaurant spaces. Two designs were selected to develop further by the team that built a prototype for the Blooms & Beats event.

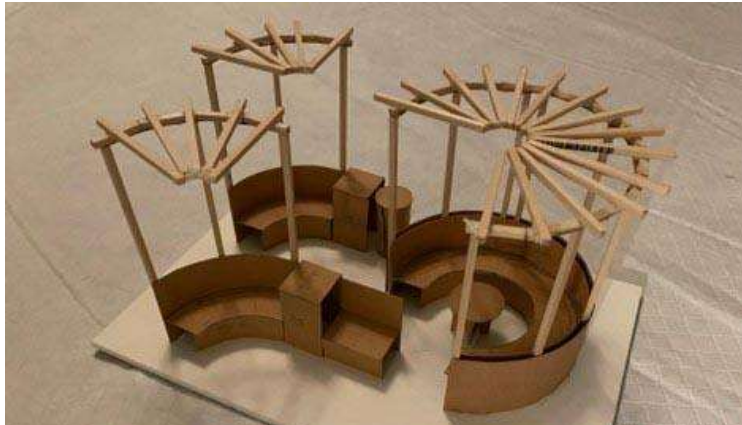
The final green isle prototype was dubbed the Color Wheel and shared and tested at the Blooms & Beats Block Party. The Color Wheel sparked conversation: it suggested ways to incorporate seating and plants as a first step in developing long term methods to create a more welcoming commercial area, one that celebrates local culture, and attracts customers of all ages to local businesses.

Under Professor Newman's guidance the students worked with a fabricator to estimate the price of replicating the seating units: \$3,785. Another team explored how multiple units could be arranged and placed for different types of events on the site. Several activities and stations designed for the block party centered around the design of the prototype and how it could be improved and manufactured.

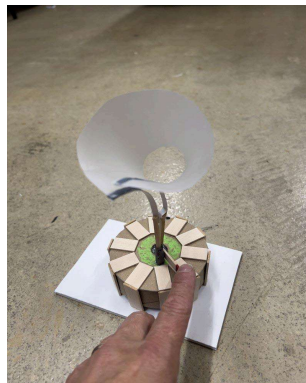
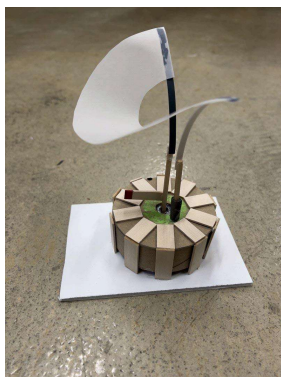
Figure 12. Three Green Isle designs



source: Seta Whitney



source: Daniel Cosby



source: Matthew Kilby

Figure 13. Two designs were chosen by the faculty and students to be combined into a finished prototype for the Blooms & Beats Block Party prototype. The final design was named the Color Wheel



source: Michelle De Jacolyn Seneviratne (left), Abigail Smith (Right)

Figure 14. Students building the Color Wheel prototype at full scale



source: Ronit Eisenbach

Figure 15. The Community Engagement Team involved community members in hands-on activities. Working with artist Heather McMordie, they built two printing presses for a printing station and created a scavenger hunt card to encourage folks to explore the local shops.



Figure 16. The Master Plan team built a site model that included mini murals, green areas, and miniature color wheels for people to place and explore how they might transform the parking lot into a public space. They developed a series of layouts for how the Color Wheel might be



source: Ronit Eisenbach

The Event: Blooms & Beats Block Party

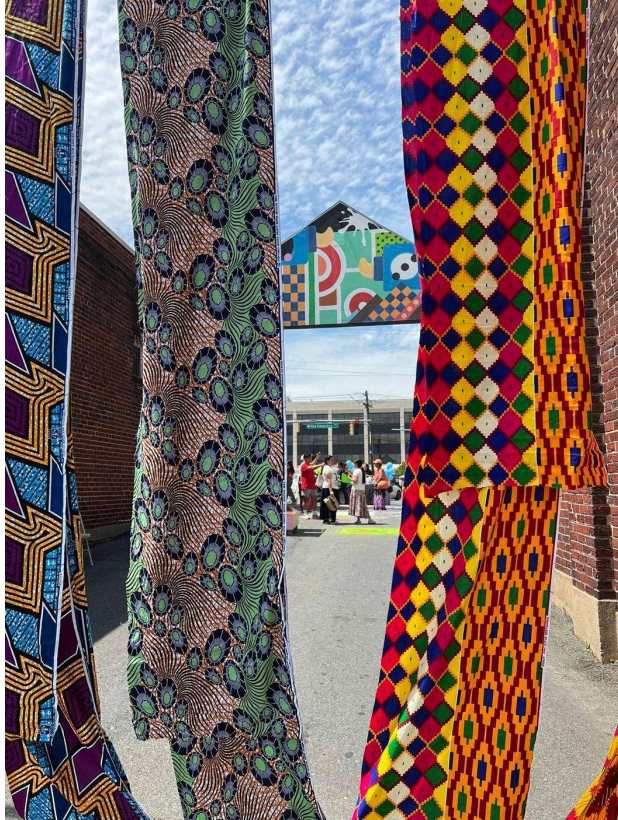
The May 3, 2025, block party was the culminating event. Created in partnership with TLCDA, the Takoma Langley Park Crossroads Shopping Center businesses, CRPM faculty, PALS, and PLCC leaders, the event resulted from a year of collaboration. The block party brought people together in a fun and productive way, creating a shared experience and transforming the place. In addition, it created an opportunity to share the physical prototype seating and unveil the mosaic planters. The event gathered community input and encouraged conversations about what people would like to see in the space. Through music, art, color and food, for a few hours the Blooms & Beats Block Party transformed the experience of the commercial strip, planting a seed for the future.

(For additional Blooms & Beats images, video, and final student boards see Appendix 4.)

Figure 17. Blooms and Beats Block Party: mosaic covered planters, art activities, TLCDA welcome station, and the alley activation created an environment of joy, connection and potential.







source: Cathy Madsen

The block party was designed as an opportunity to engage community members in imagining a future that could transform the car-oriented strip mall into a multimodal public gathering space; it was a proof of concept to show what kind of place that the Crossroads could become but it was also a proof of concept about the value of having events or festivals in the commercial areas. Music, art, and activities can invite people to stay longer, and they may shop more too. It was a vehicle to build community and to test ideas for a more permanent redesign. Thus, like the dreamscapes, it too was part of the effort to advance and co-create a new vision for the area's future.

On the day of the event, the site was transformed with activity tents set up in parking spaces adjacent to the walkway next to the businesses. Balloons and live music let people know something special was happening and they were welcome. The alley under the archway was transformed into a place for people rather than cars. Beautifully patterned African fabrics purchased from McDoris Fabrics closed off the alley's end to cars and drew attention to its potential. The Color Wheel was placed here, providing a place for people to sit and relax. The walls were covered with opportunities to engage the designers and share ideas for the area's future. Adults and children were invited to color on slips of paper where they could also share what they use and value at the shopping center. The papers were attached to the color wheel seating to display the community's opinions.

Figure 18. The Color Wheel “oasis” adorned with McDoris’ fabric with community response tags



source: Cathy Madsen

Over the course of the afternoon, UMD CRPM/Studio Art alums, Maddie Olek, Jak Lansford, and Masha Soboleva of MJM Murals created a chalk mural on the ground, and musicians stationed at the entrance inspired spontaneous dancing.

Along the walkway, local businesses shared their wares and food. Tents set up in parking spaces housed different student-led activity stations. These included an interactive site model, community poll charts, and a hand printing station with artist Heather McMordie. A business scavenger hunt was run by the architecture students, and pot painting, face painting, and bracelet making were run by the art students. The Color Wheel team set up a color/comment board and restaurant station activities.

These multiple strategies engaged people, gathered their ideas and feedback, and increased exposure for the businesses.

Figure 19. Participants respond to questions displayed on the Color Wheel



source: Cathy Madsen

In the alley, participants were prompted with questions in English and Spanish.

1. I am curious about...
Me curiosidad de...
2. This Place matters to me because...
Este Lugar me importa porque...
3. What brings me joy here is...
Lo que me dá alegría aqui es...
4. What is most important to me here is...
Lo que es más significativa para mí de esta lugar es....

Figure 20. The community engagement team developed a monoprint station. Printing was a magical way to engage people's curiosity, and drew people in



source: Cathy Madsen

Figure 21. Business scavenger hunt cards, in English and Spanish, were designed by the community engagement team and business owners' offerings enticed visitors to enter businesses they might not have visited before.



source: Community engagement team (card), Cathy Madsen (photos)

Figure 22. The masterplan team's site model invited stakeholders to play with possible futures. The asset and activity boards invited people to share ideas about the area—what they loved about it and what they would love to add





source: Cathy Madsen

Planning and Community Engagement

The community engagement team led the block party efforts, creating graphics and materials for the event, designing the engagement activities, and helping design the event layout and schedule.

At the block party, students facilitated art and activity stations encouraging customers of all ages to participate. These activities were coordinated by students and a print artist and allowed the art studio activities to blend into the festival smoothly.

- **Printing press:** Participants chose different paint colors and template shapes to create a customized printed keepsake leaving the ghost print for the community book. The prints were hung to dry on clotheslines, creating a lovely display that brought other people to the booth. After printing, participants were encouraged to do the business scavenger hunt.
- **Color and feedback:** Participants could color on a wall display inspired by Takoma Langley's murals and share feedback on what they valued and hoped for their community in the future.
- **Scale model and dot charts:** On a student-built scale model of the strip mall, students and customers used 3-D printed models of people, objects, and design prototypes to communicate the proposed plan for planters and seating. Participants could also indicate how they used the shopping center, and how the area might be improved.

These activities encouraged play and were also a way to co-create, to learn from community members what they envision.

The Alley

The Alley offers an opportunity to prototype a public space. It is a low-hanging fruit, an area that, without giving up much, could be used to address some of the business owners' concerns and could continue to host pop-up events. The studio design teams pursued the idea of closing the alley and repurposing it as a pedestrian space to eliminate a traffic conflict point while also creating a seating area that doesn't disrupt the flow of pedestrian or vehicle circulation.

During the block party, the alley also was, as a prototype, a quick vision for this space in the future.

At the strip mall and in the larger crossroads area there aren't many public spaces to stop, rest, or gather, one of the issues this project addresses. Although the green isles could be strung along the sidewalk, clustering them creates an opportunity for people to connect, communicate, and enjoy the place.

The shopping center alley could be a place to create a cluster of Color Wheels. Set in the center of the mall, and framed by the "Takoma Langley Crossroads" arch, the space is a highlighted break in the storefronts. It currently operates as a cut through on mall property, from New Hampshire Avenue to University Boulevard intersecting with other service roads within the shopping center. These service roads and intersections create traffic, with pedestrians crossing in front of vehicles using the alleyway.

Planning for the Long Term: Creative Placekeeping & Placemaking

Ephemeral works can have outsized impact in shaping the future by creating shared experiences and quickly transforming a place, but only if their benefit is shared and understood and the insights are used to advance the conversation about values, vision and investment, and response to change. To understand the impact of this project and to ensure follow-through and long-term benefit, we took several steps to commit to continued work with our partners and encourage expansion to other sites.

- Public figures were invited. These individuals can help move this project forward and continue to engage the university in the work: Talisha Searcy, Mayor of Takoma Park; David Moon, Maryland State Delegate; and Tania D. Mitchell, UMD's Associate Provost for Community Engagement.
- The event was documented so others could experience it and understand its value. Adam Krell created a video, Cathy Matson photographed the final event, and Heather McMordie, created a booklet from the community's ghost prints.
- Rayya Newman worked with the prototype team to price their design and find a company to build the structure. After the semester ended Rayya met with TLCDA and fabricating firms Div 32 and Green Theory to discuss moving forward with another iteration.
- The studio's assets: research, logo design, and event planning documents were shared with TLCDA, to make repeating the event easier. Final boards proposals, a site model, public engagement boards and the Color Wheel prototype can help continue the conversation with stakeholders.
- Inspired by the Irrigate case study, local professional artists were commissioned to participate in the studios and the event—Cassie Meador, Stephen Clapp, Heather McMordie, MJM Murals, and two bands—Son Cosita Seria and Ni Dembaya. A print artist, McMordie, taught students about printmaking and helped run the printing press at the event. She reflected on the experience and created a tangible object—a booklet made from the prints produced by the community. Cassie Meador's impact report reflects on the partnerships, work with students, and her observations of the event to examine its impact and potential. These are just a few ways that professional artists can be involved in this work and engage with the community, something that we hope to expand in the future.

- Professional project documentation (video by Adam Krell and photographs by Catherine Madsen) is available to future grant and partnership work and to publicize the effort and its results in the University and the wider community, including expanding the proof-of-concept designs to other Crossroads sites.

We hope that future PALS/PLCC/CRPM studios and other classes can build on this work in the Crossroads and in communities along the Purple Line, exploring placemaking and placekeeping, as well as other issues. The partnerships developed in this project are not about a single event, but rather a resource for the future. Perhaps to plan future events and installations for the Purple Line opening day.

“At its core, this collaboration was not about a single event—though the Blooms & Beats Block Party was a powerful demonstration of what’s possible—but about building sustained, place-based strategies that support equitable development and cultural vitality along the Purple Line corridor.”

—Cassie Meador, Executive Artistic Director, Dance Exchange

As well as documenting and expanding the project’s proof of concept, there are specific next steps to anchor the impacts of the work at the Takoma Langley Shopping Center. In the near term, the partnerships among the University, City of Takoma Park, the Neighborhood Design Center, TLCDA, NDA, and PLCC should continue and work to secure grant funding for lighting and landscaping, scheduling more short-term pop-ups to activate the space, turning the prototype seating into a permanent feature, and coordinating with the Design and Democracy Project. Other tasks would include working on a long-term plan for improvements, closing and reconfiguring the alley permanently.

The event helped achieve the goal to “plant seeds” in the hearts and minds of citizens that will grow this community, through the partnerships developed and the record of student research and prototypes.

Pedagogy and Reflections

PLCC and its community partners have worked together to create placemaking and placekeeping projects designed to meet the goal of creating thriving communities along the Purple Line.

In this project, students learned skills—observing, listening, question posing, collaborating, developing design ideas to share publicly, taking an idea from concept to actualization, manufacturing, and working with a community team. They also learned that their work could have impact, that they have responsibility and agency. This was an opportunity for future designers and artists to engage in a meaningful project, think about their own futures and the kind of work they want to do. They now know how to instigate a conversation and how to move from conversation to action.

Based on feedback gathered at the festival and final review, the students felt that their plans for the Color Wheel prototype were achievable and could inspire change that would affect the Crossroads in a way that business owners and community members had been hoping for.

“Seeing this project through, from the design process to displaying a prototype has been an amazing experience. I feel in this age, we constantly hear about global issues that we struggle to solve, but there are issues that go unnoticed in our own backyards. What we do and how we

change our environment is constantly affecting people who should have a say in the change. My hope is that with this project and future projects, it solves local issues and becomes a catalyst to support immigrant areas and help communities thrive.”

—Christine Tan, ARCH408

“.. overall, I think the event was successful in giving the people a new sense of what Takoma Langley can be in the future. I hope this can be a stepping off point to having better engagement with its residents to be safer, stronger, and more community oriented.”

—Matthew Cienfuegos

“Additionally, the event gave me a chance to experience and appreciate different cultures in a way I hadn’t before. As someone from a South Asian background, I found it exciting to see Hispanic food, African music, and other cultural expressions celebrated. These moments broadened my perspective and deepened my appreciation for how cultural identity can be expressed through the built environment. It was a powerful reminder that design can and should be a tool for inclusion, storytelling, and community pride.”

—Michelle De Jacolyn Seneviratne

(See final student boards in Appendix 5.)

Community members who participated in the Blooms & Beats Block Party mentioned to staff and students how much they appreciated the lively activities and the change in atmosphere that comes with organizing events and making space for the people to enjoy. Javier Rivas, Executive Director of the Takoma Langley Crossroads Development Authority, UMD faculty and students mentioned that there are hopes that the block party can become an annual event. Initiatives like this project can inspire more permanent improvements at the strip mall and the wider Takoma Langley Crossroads area.

Students also made observations about the class, the design process, and working in the community.

“This process reminded me that our work as designers is ultimately in service of real communities—with real needs, aspirations, and challenges. That awareness made the feedback we received even more meaningful, as it pushed us to consider the long-term impact of our design decisions beyond surface-level aesthetics.”

—Michelle De Jacolyn Seneviratne

“This class involved working with real clients, which brought a new level of responsibility and purpose to the design process. It challenged me to listen more carefully, respond to real needs, and adapt my ideas based on community feedback.”

—Matthew John Kilby

“People were willing to take a few seconds out of their day to share their input, thanks to the minimal time it took for people to put their stickers on the board, move a piece on the model, or make a comment. I will carry this with me into the future: the importance of simplicity, clarity, and focusing on who the space is actually for.”

—Seta Whitney

The artists also reflected on their participation. In her report, *The Partnership Report on Creative Placemaking in Takoma Langley Crossroads 2025*, Cassie Meador of the Dance Exchange wrote:

“The key to the success of this effort were the values and methodologies each partner brought to the table. Dance Exchange served as a creative anchor and facilitator, grounding the collaboration in embodiment, storytelling, and iterative practice. Liz Lerman’s Critical Response Process offered a framework for navigating change—treating place not as a static backdrop, but as something always in process, much like our relationships to it. UMD students and faculty activated the project through design thinking, real-time engagement, and experimental installations that tested how public space might respond to shifting needs and narratives. And community members, business owners, and local leaders contributed the insight and energy that ensured the work remained rooted in local priorities.

Together, these layered efforts point toward a model of creative placemaking that is dynamic, inclusive, and responsive to change—one that can support equitable development while also honoring the cultural and human infrastructure that makes places thrive.”

(See complete report in Appendix 6.)

Print Artist Heather McMordie also reflected on the event’s impact, including thoughts on public engagement.

“Overall, people seemed proud of the work they created and excited to share their prints with others. There were at least two people that made prints specifically for someone else in their life. On the other hand, about a third of the people who made prints never came back to collect their prints. While they didn’t take their prints with them, the prints will be a valuable part of the record of the event.”

(See complete report in Appendix 6.)



“...these layered efforts point toward a model of creative placemaking that is dynamic, inclusive and responsive to change—one that can support equitable development while also honoring the cultural and human infrastructure that makes places thrive.”

—Cassie Meador, Artistic Director, Dance Exchange

Appendix

Appendix 1: Purple Line Policy Goals

Policy and Process Framework for Equitable Placemaking ([Drive](#)/[DRUM Link](#))

Appendix 2: Research

Site Analysis, Business Engagement, Case Studies ([Drive](#)/[DRUM Link](#))

Appendix 3: Design Process

Dreamscapes, Green Isles, Prototypes ([Drive](#)/[DRUM Link](#))

Appendix 4: Blooms & Beats Block Party

Final Presentation Boards ([Drive](#)/[DRUM Link](#))

[Blooms & Beats Block Party Video](#) (Adam Krell, Videographer)

[Blooms & Beats 2025 | Flickr](#) (Catherine Madsen, PALS photographer)

ARTT427: Paint in Place, Asst. Professor Brandon Donahue ([DRUM Link](#))

Appendix 5: ARCH408 Showcase '25

Takoma Langley Crossroads Green Isles Poster ([Drive](#)/[DRUM Link](#))

Appendix 6: Artist Observations

Cassie Meador, Partnership Report on Creative Placemaking in Takoma Park ([Drive](#)/[DRUM Link](#))

Heather McMordie, Blooms & Beats Block Party: Reflections of Pressure Printing ([Drive](#)/[DRUM](#))