



**KNIGHT
FOUNDATION**



Public Spaces to Great Places

October 1 - 5, 2018

Summit Report

Tallahassee, Florida



Introduction

Tallahassee is a unique city with natural beauty and nearly year-round sunshine, home to a young and dynamic population. It is also one of the top 20 most educated cities in the entire country, according to a 2018 study by Wallethub. Those are assets few cities across the world possess. Tallahassee has the potential to position itself as one of the best North American cities in which to grow up and grow old. The Public Spaces to Great Places Summit was all about identifying Tallahassee's path forward, paying special attention to the role of public spaces and their potential to improve the quality of life for all residents in Tallahassee.

The Public Spaces to Great Places Summit, hosted from October 1 – 5, 2018, was a week-long series of events, meetings, workshops and keynote speeches about building a healthier, happier and more inclusive Tallahassee. Co-hosted by 880 Cities and the Blueprint Intergovernmental Agency and generously funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, it brought together civic leaders, elected officials, city and county staff, community advocates and business leaders from across the city to start charting a new course for the future of public space in Tallahassee.



The Four Big Pushes

We at 8 80 Cities have worked in over 300 cities around the world. Despite the vastly different sizes and contexts of these places, they all share a few things in common. Sustainable mobility, equity, public health inequalities and economic competitiveness are challenges that all cities across the globe are struggling to tackle. The cities that reach these crossroads and turn the page on 20th century thinking are the ones making the biggest strides towards improving access to economic opportunity, increasing equity and improving public health. Public spaces—the roads, parks, plazas and civic buildings that we all share—are central to the solution. Here are the top four areas Tallahassee needs to focus on to tackle these challenges head-on:

1. Be bold

Aim high: According to projections from the City of Tallahassee’s Office of Economic Vitality, Tallahassee is set to grow by 20 percent by the year 2045, representing an increase of over 41,000 residents (from 192,381 to 234,000). This is an incredible opportunity. Decision makers need to start making investments now to accommodate this growth. That means ensuring that new development is pedestrian, cycling, and transit-friendly and within walking distance of vibrant parks and schools. While Tallahassee has certainly made large strides in the right direction, there is still room for decision makers to be bolder and to act with more urgency. If Tallahassee wants to be amongst the best, it needs to benchmark itself with the best when it comes to investing and managing its public assets, such as streets, parks, and public spaces. There is an impressive amount of talent in Tallahassee, between its highly educated workforce, strong government sector and large student population. There is nothing stopping Tallahassee from becoming the most livable, or the happiest, or the healthiest city in the US, if those are the goals it sets out for itself.

Design for all ages and abilities: From 2010 to 2017, the highest rate of population growth in Tallahassee, at 6.8 percent, occurred among those in the 65 to 79-year-old age group. However, unlike many other cities in Florida, Tallahassee has only recently started actively recruiting retirees to relocate to the city. To better support this demographic shift, it’s critical that walkability and livability are not just for the wealthy, middle-aged or able-bodied. Children, older adults and the economically disadvantaged are the most vulnerable in our society. Decision makers and civic leaders must become guardian angels of these groups and ensure their needs are reflected in all public spaces. Creating high quality parks, sidewalks, bike lanes, plazas, bus stops, bus shelters and safe and reliable public transit is not just about economic opportunity or tourism or even public health. It’s about ensuring the most vulnerable amongst us have access to the basic building blocks to enjoy healthy, happy lives.

2. Create a shared vision

Find new ways to excite and engage the community: A lot of community engagement goes into developing plans for public space investments across the city. However, engagement needs to be an ongoing process. We heard at several of the workshops that more residents need to be informed and engaged in public space projects instead of relying on feedback from “the usual suspects”. This requires branching out beyond community meetings and workshops. Trying out more fun, creative and casual methods of engagement has the effect of reducing barriers for many residents, especially those who would not typically attend a 7pm meeting at a community center.

Try before you buy: Undertaking bold ideas can be a scary task for both decision-makers and community members. Piloting these ideas on a temporary basis is a way to mitigate project risks while actively

involving the community in an iterative design process. Transformative projects such as the Orange Avenue and Coal Chute Pond public space could certainly benefit from a piloting phase, especially when it comes to the more unique or innovative ideas that might be incorporated into the design. The presence of two major universities in Tallahassee, both with architecture/planning programs, presents a huge opportunity for students to work in partnership with city/county staff to test out ideas in real time. This has been proven to be a tremendously successful model in cities like Vancouver, where the Vancouver “City Studio” pairs university classrooms with city staff to deploy, measure and evaluate dozens of small-scale pilot projects every year. This program embraces experimentation and failure as a learning opportunity, but in doing so, this partnership has also led to new insights and permanent projects that wouldn’t have otherwise taken place.

Continual measurement and evaluation: Having clear measurement and evaluation processes in place before, during, and after the completion of a public space project ensures greater accountability around the project. Measurement and evaluation do not need to be time consuming or expensive to be valuable. A short annual or semi-annual survey of 100 random residents living near a public space can track how attitudes about a space change over time, and to what degree the space reflects the community’s changing needs and desires. These results can be benchmarked with annual targets such as “In the year 2020, 75% of surveyed residents rate their experience in the Orange Avenue public space as 7 out of 10 or higher”. Should that goal be achieved, aim for an even higher approval rating in subsequent years. It’s also important to share back this information with the community, so that they too are aware of the progress taking place.

3. Programming, programming, programming

Tie in programming agreements with park investments: We at 80 Cities often talk about how it’s often easier to find the millions to build a beautiful public space than to find the thousands to make it work. Successful parks and public spaces are not just about design and maintenance. A good school needs more than four walls and textbooks. It needs passionate teachers, committed administration and an engaged PTA. Parks too need fantastic management to thrive at different times of the day and different days of the week. This requires park management to take a more active role in programming its public spaces. Sometimes, the entities funding the construction of a new park are separate from the entities that will eventually manage the park. In these cases, the hand-off agreement should entail a clear commitment by park management to go beyond just providing maintenance services but to also invest in year-round park outreach and programming.

Take it outside: There is a rich array of community programming that is taking place indoors or behind closed doors, be it seniors dance lessons, fitness classes, chess tutorials, etc. More energy should be dedicated towards reaching out to civic organizations, schools, community groups, arts and culture programmers, and inviting them to use public spaces as a platform for programs they are already running.

Reduce red tape: Beyond making the invitation to community programmers, it generally needs to be easy and transparent for individuals and organizations to provide community programming in public spaces. In the case of parks, interested parties should be able to easily access information about how to host a public program in a park and then have the option of filling out a simple online application. The more centralized this resource is for all parks in Tallahassee, the more user-friendly it will be. Similarly, if there’s interest in obtaining a street occupation permit to host events like block parties, farmer’s markets, and health fairs, there should be a centralized website in which to do so as well.

4. Continue to bridge the town and gown

Make it easier to use active transportation: Any sort of transportation-related investments or decisions made by either of the two major universities in town has the potential to impact a significant portion of Tallahassee’s population. Most students at both universities drive, which affects not just traffic within the university campus but also on other Tallahassee roads. Driving however is currently the most convenient and cheapest option for many students. Parking fees are usually lumped in with general student fees, giving off the illusion that parking lots are “free” each time they are being used. Even still, the costs of parking are still heavily subsidized by these public universities. To help create a more sustainable and healthier campus, universities need to consider disincentivizing driving all the while investing in safe, connected walking and bicycling networks. Simple changes like charging for parking per-use instead of lumping the cost in with student fees will make people think twice about driving. Other schools across the country have done so with great success, but they’ve also paired it with investments in safe active transportation and other incentives. For example, the University of California, Los Angeles provides staff with cash incentives for trading in their parking passes in return for a commitment to use active transportation. Students also receive heavily discounted public transit passes. Beyond the health and environmental benefits of making these changes, universities also serve to economically benefit. Parking lots could be freed up to be used for expanding facilities or for other higher-use purposes, reducing the need to acquire additional land.

Build a minimum grid: Tallahassee has already started this work of building bicycle facilities. Some facilities are wide and protected while others are delineated with striping or sharrows. To make it truly safe and inviting for all ages and abilities to bike as a form of transportation, Tallahassee needs to lower speeds in residential areas and build an interconnected grid of fully separated bike lanes connecting popular destinations and all communities across the City. In certain places, the

City has accomplished the most difficult task, securing a portion of the roadway for painted bike lanes. It’s time to take the next step and make them safe by installing bollards so that all cyclists can feel empowered moving about their city. Students make up a significant part of the population of the city. Targeting efforts to encourage students to bike instead of drive to campus would have an immediate impact on the city of Tallahassee as a whole.

Linking public institutions with public spaces: There are many initiatives that link the students at the public universities to community engagement opportunities. However, there is still room to optimize the relationship between the students and the public spaces throughout Tallahassee. There are dozens of highly active student groups and clubs at both local universities. Make it known that they are welcome to the spaces. For example, dance groups or bands should be encouraged to book time to practice in nearby public parks or facilities, if university facilities are overbooked. As mentioned in the “Try before you buy” section above, there could potentially be many more opportunities to partner with university classrooms so that they can study and use public spaces as their “laboratories”, providing mutual benefit to the city, community, and participating students.

What We Did

MONDAY OCTOBER 1

- Meetings with elected officials
- Coal Chute Pond visioning workshop with stakeholders
- Keynote as part of the Leon County Lecture Series

TUESDAY OCTOBER 2

- Keynote to Blueprint, Office of Economic Vitality Committees & Planning Commission
- Meetings with elected officials and city staff
- Creating Great Places workshop with frontline staff
- Active transportation planning session with FSU staff
- Keynote and workshop at Orange Ave. neighborhood meeting

WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 3

- Public Engagement training for City of Tallahassee staff
- Interview with American Planning Association – Florida
- Keynote at FSU

THURSDAY OCTOBER 4

- Planning workshop with Knight Creative Communities Initiative
- Panel discussion on WFSU
- Campus planning session at FAMU

FRIDAY OCTOBER 5

- Keynote for business and development community



What We Heard

Two of the workshops that 8 80 Cities co-hosted with Blueprint Intergovernmental Agency were the kick-off outreach events for two transformative public space projects that will take place at Coal Chute Pond and the Orange Avenue Public Space. Below is a summary of the major findings from these sessions.

Orange Avenue Public Space

About the Site

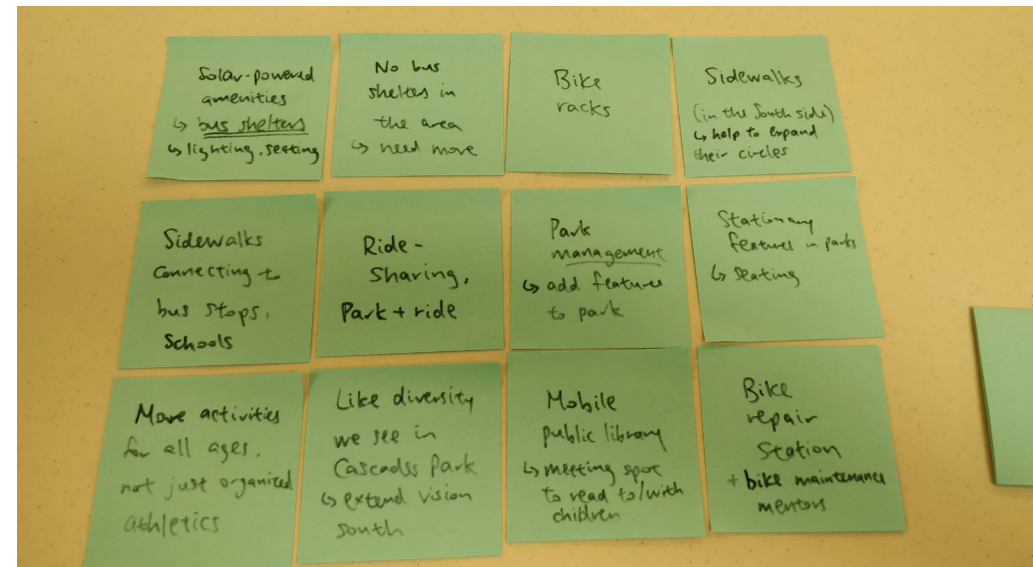
The Orange Avenue Public Space is in southeast Tallahassee, located at the southwest corner of Orange Avenue and S Meridian Street. The 20-acre site was developed as a stormwater management facility for the widening of Orange Avenue over 10 years ago. The land is owned by Leon County but to date there has been no formal public use of the site. The conversion of this stormwater site into a public space with park-like amenities is a Blueprint project. Blueprint plans to design the space in 2019 and begin construction in 2020. A key first step in this project is working with the local community to understand what type of amenities they would like to see developed on this site.

About the Workshop

On Wednesday October 3, Gil Penalosa delivered a keynote to a room of over 60 community members and city leaders at Bethel AME Church. The keynote included lessons and examples from great public spaces from around the world. Following the keynote, attendees discussed in small groups their ideas for the new public space at the Orange Avenue stormwater pond facility. Each group had a staff member from either Blueprint or 8 80 Cities who facilitated and recorded notes of the discussion.

Community members' ideas centered on four major themes:

- 1. Basic amenities:** The new public space needs to have basic infrastructure that would provide year-round comfort.
- 2. Infrastructure that supports physical activity and social interaction:** The infrastructure needs to appeal to diverse ages and uses to reflect the needs of the families residing in the area.
- 3. Programming and partnerships:** The public space needs to come alive with regular activations. Additional programming support from local institutions, such as FAMU, FSU, and the magnetic labs can ensure that the new park provides educational opportunities in addition to recreational ones.
- 4. Safe connections:** There are several schools, daycares and family residences surrounding the site. The new public space needs to be safe to access, especially by walking, biking, and public transit.



Complete list of ideas collected for Orange Avenue Public Space:

Basic amenities	Infrastructure for physical activity and social interaction	Programming and partnerships	Safe connections
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Water fountains for drinking 2. Stationary features e.g. seating 3. Solar powered amenities e.g. bus shelters, lighting, seating 4. Restrooms 5. Covered tables 6. Greenery 7. Permanent restroom 8. Nature 9. Look at water quality 10. Night sky viewing 11. Increase size of stormwater pipes because current pipes are too old and small 12. Need to update storm water management system 13. Walking path 14. Walking trail 15. Benches 16. Trail with exercise functions like in Meyers Park 17. Security/emergency call post 18. Security cameras 19. Stage for community days 20. Water fountains 21. Shade 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “Smart park” with wifi, charging stations, mobile apps for parks and libraries 2. Play area for kids e.g. ball pit, bouncy areas 3. Skateboard facilities, 4. Sports area 5. Covered area for music 6. Provide meeting space outdoors 7. Bike repair station and bike maintenance mentors 8. Mobile public library and meeting space to reach children 9. Sidewalk trail around the pond 10. Locate more activities on the west side and more passive uses near the drain 11. Walking loop & signs indicating how far you’ve walked 12. Dog park 13. Outdoor fitness equipment 14. Little Free Library or vendor machine with paper books 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Free music a few times a month 2. Movies in the park 3. Have space where universities and mag lab can do outreach and educational programs 4. Programming by FAMU & FSU 5. Involve neighborhood-run businesses. Invite people who use the vacant space to set up in the Orange Ave public space 6. Park management is important 7. Food stands 8. Fruit market 9. More supervised activities for children. Open another teen center here. 10. Play some tunes at the park 11. Concession stands for events 12. Pop up tent/stands 13. Something to promote literacy 14. More activities for all ages, not just organized athletics 15. Diversity like in Cascades Park 16. Neighborhood yard sales 17. Focus on family gatherings 18. Engage animal shelter to program the site 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sidewalks connecting to bus stops, schools 2. Sidewalks (in the south side) to help expand people’s circles 3. Golf carts as a way to get around 4. Connect existing bike trails to the site 5. Have an interim solution to the sidewalk construction backlog. Look into cheap, temporary ways to do pavement markings. 6. Build sidewalks everywhere! 7. Traffic calming is very important 8. Need a bike network in the south side 9. Traffic calming on Meridian 10. Covered bus stop (residents currently stand close to ditch) 11. Make it safer for people to cross Orange ave. 12. No bus shelters in the area -need more 13. Ride-sharing, park & ride 14. Bike racks

Some attendees chose to participate by placing sticky dots on oversized survey boards that were displayed around the room. Based on responses by 19 participants, the surveys revealed the following:

- Apalachee Ridge was the most well-represented neighborhood, accounting for 42 percent of survey respondents
- 77 percent of respondents are in the Orange Avenue area at least once a day
- The top two types of infrastructure respondents would like to see are: 1) sports and fitness equipment and 2) a playground and plants/greenery (both answers tied for second place)
- The top two types of preferred programming include: 1) outdoor concerts and 2) pop-up shops/market

Coal Chute Pond

About the Site

The location of Coal Chute Pond is equidistant between FSU and FAMU. It is well connected by the Capital Cascades Trail, a 2.6-mile urban trail providing multimodal accessibility and enhanced community amenities throughout downtown Tallahassee. Blueprint has funding to construct the public space amenities and the workshop will provide the opportunity for participants to think about what type of amenities/public space would attract them to the area.

About the Workshop

A total of 20 area residents, business owners, community leaders and university student representatives attended the half-day workshop to help identify design and accessibility elements that can elevate the Coal Chute Pond space to a welcoming social space for diverse populations to engage with their city and each other. Hosted by 880 Cities at Domi Station, the workshop started with a presentation on what makes a great public space, followed by a site visit to Coal Chute Pond, and concluding with an action planning workshop where participants brainstormed ideas and action plans for the site.

Site Observations

Participants visited Coal Chute pond to talk about the opportunities and challenges that the site presents.

Opportunities

- Natural features: the pond, wading birds and other local wildlife, open grassy area
- Good connectivity: FAMU Way is well-maintained, proximity to Railroad Square businesses and new residential development, location between FAMU & FSU

Challenges

- Natural features: natural area feels “rough” and unmaintained; area lacks natural protection from the elements; rolling topography presents limitations
- Power lines: no permanent structure is allowed to be built underneath the power-lines
- Poor access: Lack of public transportation along this route, lack of safe railroad crossing at the moment



When it came to developing ideas for the Coal Chute Pond space, community members' ideas centered on four major themes:

1. **Basic amenities:** The new public space needs to have basic infrastructure that would make it comfortable to spend time in year-round.
2. **Digital/interactive features:** We are living in an increasingly digital world. An innovative digital park would make Coal Chute Pond a unique destination and would especially appeal to young people.
3. **Water-related features:** The stormwater pond should be a focal point in the design and programming of the space.
4. **Programming:** Partnering with businesses, universities, resident groups and community organizations to regularly activate the space is critical to keep people coming back.

Complete list of ideas collected for Coal Chute Pond:

Basic amenities	Digital/interactive features	Water-related features	Programming
1. Hammocks	1. Digital park with interactive art, free wi-fi, etc.	1. Wading pool	1. Music-oriented programming
2. Creative seating e.g. porch swings	2. Designated drone flying zone	2. Paddle boats	2. Silent raves
3. Playground that is elder-friendly	3. Solar-powered elements	3. Water feature show with art and lights	3. Social services fairs
4. Basketball nets	4. Design competition for public sculptures	4. Boardwalk or platform over the water	4. Market place for local events
5. Mini dog park	5. Outdoor science museum	5. Posts in pond for birding rookeries	5. Cultural events
6. Community garden	6. Organized games and chess tables	6. Interactive fountain light show	6. Community potlucks
7. Shade	7. Swings with lights and music		7. Outdoor community art gallery
8. Market breezeway	8. Digital wildlife guide		8. Exhibition space
9. Workout equipment	9. Wildlife tracker		9. Communal tailgate for FAMU and FSU
10. Tables with table games	10. Digital guided yoga lessons		
11. Hot yoga poses signage	11. 24/7 real-time video stream of the park		
12. Multi-use pavillion	12. Nightlife-oriented LED park		
13. Shade (x 7)	13. Wifi		
14. Misters	14. Signage for digital interaction (running app)		
15. Walking loop	15. Charging poles		
16. Dog walking stations			
17. Observation tower			

Developing Action Plans

Participants were asked to work in small groups to identify their favorite ideas. Each group then developed action plans for the top ideas that emerged from their discussions. In total, participants put forward four idea action plans for Coal Chute Pond -some in more detail than others. Summaries of these four ideas are as follows:

Project name:

Digital Park

Project description:

The park that never sleeps!

Measures of success:

- Engagement 24/7; always connected
- People using park at night
- It becomes a “third place”
- Community interaction through digital technology
- Seamless integration of technology and nature
- The most “social” park ever

Actions required:

- Provide wifi access and docking stations
- Develop park app
- Work with partners to provide digital programming related to physical activity, history, wildlife, etc.
- Find and recruit a private sponsor for the project
- Create a digital community for the park
- Formally connect it to FSU and FAMU

Project name:

Multi-Use Pavillion

Project description:

A multi-use pavillion providing shade, seating, game tables, art exhibition space and movie screen.

Measures of success:

- Participation from adjacent neighborhoods
- Diversity in age/gender/race
- # of rentals
- # of gallery exhibitions
- % of day used (morning, afternoon, night)
- ADA accessible

Actions required:

- Engage community for ideas related to programming, design and uses
- Design the pavillion
- Construct it
- Program it in partnership with Parks & Rec, local schools, churches, clubs, senior center, etc.

Project name:

Outdoor Sculpture Park

Project description:

Construct a space for an outdoor sculpture park.

Measures of success:

- Economic growth among surrounding businesses
- User satisfaction surveys
- Repeat visitors
- Number and demographics of attendees
- Name recognition
- ADA accessible

Actions required:

- N/A

Project name:

Access

Project description:

Improve pedestrian, vehicular and transit connections to Coal Chute Pond.

Measures of success:

- N/A

Actions required:

- Work with Star Metro to trolley service and additional lighting to the park
- Work with CSX to create a safe, at-grade railroad crossing for pedestrians
- Integrate a roundabout
- RRSQ fence

What's next?

The two workshops to kickstart the planning process for the Orange Avenue public space and Coal Chute Pond are just the beginning! Participants at both sessions made it clear that it's critical to find creative ways to get more residents, community leaders, local institutions, students and stakeholders involved in order to ensure the success of these projects.