

Public Art Framework for Tacoma's Prairie Line Trail

Final Draft for Review

City of Tacoma Arts Commission

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Introduction

The Prairie Line Trail

Tacoma’s Prairie Line Trail is a bike and pedestrian trail that will provide an important link in the City and regional trail networks. It connects South Tacoma’s Water Ditch Trail to downtown by way of Tacoma’s Brewery District the Thea Foss Waterway.

Nearly a mile long, the trail will traverse a vibrant area of downtown – through the University of Washington-Tacoma (UWT) campus, past the Tacoma Art Museum and Tollefson Plaza, and within sight of the Museum of Glass, the Washington State History Museum, the Greater Tacoma Convention and Trade Center, and the Children’s Museum of Tacoma. The trail will become a linear park and important urban space in its own right; an integral component of the vision for an attractive, livable, revitalized downtown.

The trail will be built in three segments:

1. The segment through the UWT campus, from 17th to 21st Streets – called the “Prairie Line Trail at UWT Station.
2. The segment north of the university from 17th Street to the waterfront.
3. The segment south of the university from 21st Street to 25th Street

The first segment will be designed and built by the University of Washington-Tacoma who have selected Atelier Dreiseitl as their designer.

The other two segments will be designed and built by the City of Tacoma. The City’s team will pay particular attention to the crossing at 21st Street, examining at-grade, above-grade and below-grade options. This is likely to be the most challenging infrastructure component of the project.

As of this writing, grant funding has been received for preliminary engineering, but a design team not been selected, and the alignment has not been finalized.

The trail will also be impacted by several adjacent design and construction initiatives, which are improving the public infrastructure and strengthening the cultural hub in the area.

- The redesign of Pacific Avenue between 9th and 17^h Streets, which the City is undertaking, will establish a new template for this important connector to downtown.
- The redesign of the Tacoma Art Museum’s plaza, funded in part by a National Endowment for the Arts Our Town grant, promises to strengthen this cultural asset and positively impact the design and programming of Tollefson Plaza.
- The recently relocation of the Tacoma Children’s Museum to Pacific Avenue and 15th Street.

The Public Art Master Plan

This Public Art Master Plan for the Prairie Line Trail explores art and design themes that can unify the experience of all three segments of the trail as well as opportunities for a range of site-specific art projects along the trail. The goal of the plan is to identify the best ways to use the creativity of artists, and public art funding, to create an exemplary public realm and set a standard for the design of future trails in Tacoma.

The analysis and recommendations in this plan follow the philosophy that public art projects in the trail corridor should be grounded in the urban conditions that shape this area of Tacoma. The plan takes a holistic look at the entire trail corridor and its relationship to adjacent City districts. The recommendations specifically explore the role that Tacoma Arts Commission should play in

commissioning art along the City-managed aspects of the trail; they also consider the relationship between public art and design and the role that different institutions along the corridor can play in commissioning public art. It outlines how an art program can evolve in an incremental fashion, as trail design, construction and use evolve over time.

The plan begins by discussing important contexts for the trail corridor: its role in the history of the City, the role it will play in stormwater management, and the general impact a trail can have on people's perceptions of connections. These contexts will provide an essential foundation for the work of urban artists and designers working on the trail.

Strategies and Opportunities

The plan outlines four overlapping strategies for how public art can interface with the design of the trail corridor:

1. Immediate, short-term installations should stake out the path of the corridor, before the trail is built. This will provoke public awareness of the trail, and encourage artistic exploration of the trail's meaning and character in a way that might inform longer-term design strategies. A demonstration project, "Temporal Terminus," was implemented as part of this plan to illustrate this concept in November, 2011.
2. Artwork should be incorporated into the infrastructure of the newly constructed trail or the immediate cityscape, with a focus on new spaces designed for stormwater management. There is an immediate opportunity to work with the Pacific Avenue Streetscape project, which terminates at the point where the trail crosses Pacific Avenue.
3. Artwork should be developed for specific, unique locations along the trail – locations that exist now or that will come into being when the corridor is rebuilt. These locations might be planned and designed by the City or the University or their design consultants, or perhaps even by the museum or private developers depending on the ownership.
4. Unique and special projects should be considered during the trail's design phase, and design plans adjusted accordingly, even if the artworks are implemented later. These should be organized directly by the City's or the University's public art programs, in consultation with the design teams.

Priorities and Collaboration

While the plan recommends and outlines these four strategies, it does not set priorities for the Tacoma Arts Commission. At the moment all four strategies should be pursued – short-term installations, art in infrastructure, artist-designed special places and special commissions – to cultivate specific opportunities through the design process. By considering this entire range of strategies, the Tacoma Arts Commission will be able to respond opportunities as they arise, and to proceed in an incremental fashion, with each project absorbing the lessons of what came before it.

Less a blueprint than a living document, this plan provides a means to convene ongoing conversations and guide future collaborations among the many entities that will have a hand in making the trail and its public art a success. The key managers of the trail, (UWT and the City), have independent policies, procedures and funding mechanisms for public art. Nevertheless, the City, the University, the Tacoma Art Museum – and the trail users – would benefit from a collaborative approach to planning installations and commissioning artwork along the trail. Collaboration between the two design teams will be especially key in developing trail infrastructure projects and the special projects described in this plan.

Influences and Themes

The Unique Nature of Public Urban Trails

Urban trails are catalytic insertions into cities. They have the power not only to create new connections, but also to establish new everyday geographies, new ways of thinking about how the City is organized and how to get around. Like the transcontinental railroad did 150 years ago, the Prairie Line Trail will rewrite people's maps of Tacoma.

The nature of urban trails, and of the Prairie Line Trail in particular, suggests a body of art and design concepts that can be discussed using several metrics:

- *Corridor / Incident*. Does the art strategy ask the artist to create multiple interventions that operate at the scale of the corridor? Or does the strategy ask the artist to create one intervention for one location?
- *Purposefulness / Serendipity*: Will the artworks be asked to do a job – e.g., act as wayfinding, seating, or lighting? Or will they be experienced as surprises and discoveries that play off their surroundings?
- *Now / Later*: Can the art be commissioned now, even before the trail is built, or does it have to wait until later, when the trail construction is underway, or should it wait even longer, until the use and character of the built trail are known?

A Sequential Landscape

Urban trails can gently re-orient cities to human scale and public life. Though the Prairie Line Trail will be a mile long, it will be experienced as a series of discrete urban rooms, each with its own character – the Brewery District, the UWT campus, the museum district, a corridor dominated by railroad and highway infrastructure, and the landing at the waterfront, where traditional maritime uses and modern redevelopment are juxtaposed.

Block by block, people using the trail will be exposed to new perspectives on the architecture and landscape that surrounds them, not in small part because the trail will transform what had been an inaccessible back-door space into a public amenity. Over time, the trail will be experienced as a civic space, where a diverse array of people will encounter each other, and where a variety of activities will exist side by side.

This implies that a successful art and design program will consider the trail at two basic scales – the scale of the *corridor*, or a new geographic connection that is mapped onto the city, and at the scale of the *incident*, or a specific place that is experienced more immediately and intimately.

Purpose and Serendipity

Urban trails combine a sense of purpose with serendipity, both of which have implications for approaches to design and public art, particularly along the Prairie Line Trail.

Some aspects of the Prairie Line Trail should be designed to reflect the *purposefulness* of the trail – these should be city-scale elements, with a legibility that helps people recognize the trail as a continual space as it passes through different areas. These aspects could include an approach to managing fast traffic (bicyclists) and slow traffic (pedestrians); strategies for marking and mapping elements (wayfinding) that make the path legible in the City; and a palette of materials (hardscape, landscape, colors, lighting, typography, dimensions) that define the trail.

This is not to say that the entire length of the trail should be designed to a level of standard consistency. Rather, there should be a recognized vocabulary that can be applied as appropriate to

the different segments of the trail. For example, a palette of landscape and water design might produce a landscape that evolves along the trail, as the elevation of the trail and relationship to underlying water flow changes. The historic rails might remain throughout the corridor, but be treated in different ways in different places.

Other aspects of the trail would respond more to the sense of *serendipity* – especially to the unique uses, users, and architectural / urban design / environmental context of each particular area of the trail. The adjacency and programming of UWT and the Tacoma Art Museum need to be acknowledged. The passage under I-705 is an important event, as might be the crossings of 17th Street/Pacific Avenue and 21st Street. In future years, adjacencies may evolve with new land uses in the Brewery District, but for now the art and design interventions might respond to the transitional nature of this area. Contours, views, eddies in the paths of movement, underlying environmental systems, incidents, remnants and juxtapositions might inspire these moments.

The key will be to articulate systems of spaces or events that occur along the trail and merit the attention of artists and designers, while allowing those spaces or events to be interpreted in unique ways, appropriate to the setting, now or some time in the future as the use of the trail, and development along it, evolves. For example, there may be any number of spaces designed as adjuncts to the trail – viewing points, pausing places, gathering places, or event spaces – that can be more or less formal, more or less programmed. There may be a set of historical references consciously embedded in the art or design along the trail. There may be a certain mood or sense that is conveyed in particular areas of the trail – articulated by landscape, lighting, materials, infrastructure and art.

An example of how *purposefulness* and *serendipity* influence the design of a linear corridor and contribute to creating a remarkable place can be found in New York City’s High Line. Strong, consistent design ideas along the length of the promenade make the High Line a coherent place. Yet design and artistic incidents respond to the specific character of places along the way – the underlying infrastructure, ghost rail spurs, the architecture, the views, the patterns of streets beneath, the prevailing sunlight – giving every block or two a very different feel. Interestingly, the High Line is just less than a mile long, about the length of the Prairie Line Trail.

The Presence of Time

The physical environment and activity along trail corridors, like other aspects of city infrastructure and the public realm, are not static, they evolve. Over time, people in the city will discover the new trail and learn how to use it to chart new journeys for themselves.

The public art initiative for the trail should have the ability to reflect this incremental absorption of the new trail corridor into city life. The commissioning of projects should not occur all at once, but over time, reflecting at each point the knowledge about the corridor and the aspirations for it at the moment the work is created.

The Arc and its Legacy

One of the most visible contexts for the Prairie Line Trail is the historic fabric through which it passes – and the historic moment that it represents.

The Prairie Line Trail will make a new connection by helping Tacomans rediscover an old connection.

The trail follows the route the transcontinental railroad inscribed across Tacoma’s cityscape – a path determined profoundly by both destiny and the particularities of the landscape. As the history goes, the Burlington Northern was racing to complete its route from Chicago to the salt water of the Pacific in order to secure a federal land grant. The last leg was the route through

Tacoma. In a feat of engineering, the builders of the rail line inscribed an arc along the hillside that described the steepest slope that train engines of that day could manage, and thus the shortest feasible path to the Puget Sound, via Commencement Bay.

As the city developed, that arc became the spine of a cultural landscape that included all of the facilities and activities necessary for a railroad terminal. A cultural landscape involves more than the traditional cannon of historic architecture. Here it might include the grand passenger station and hotels, warehouses and flophouses, infrastructure systems to keep the train running, and the merchants that sprang up along the line. Slowly, as the active rail line fades into memory, this cultural landscape is being subsumed into the contemporary city.

Nevertheless, the grand arc of the original rail line remains inscribed on the plan of the City, as railroad rights-of-way are powerful urban traces that rarely disappear entirely. The rails that carried trains until 2003 remain as well. For trail users, the gently curving, gently sloping grades will be a visceral connection to this chapter in Tacoma's history, and the rails and wooden ties will be a tangible reminder of it as well. The original course of the rail line, and the pair of rails that were left behind after the trains ceased operations, are indelible artifacts and should be immutable aspects of the future experience of the trail.

All of this historical texture provides an essential context for the trail and evidence of material culture that can inspire creative responses from artists.

The Language of Landscape

The Prairie Line Trail lies at the intersection of two Washington State ecosystems. The Puget Sound Nearshore wraps around the 1,200 mile shoreline of the Sound and its tributaries (including Commencement Bay and the Thea Foss Waterway), extending from deep offshore areas to the top of the bluffs that surround the water; this is the sloped terrain through which the Prairie Line Trail corridor passes. The Garry Oak Ecosystem extends south and west from Tacoma; it includes the prairie lands through which the historic railroad line passed on its route south and east, and which have become the namesake of the rail line and the trail.

Both of these ecosystems have been deeply disturbed by urbanization, and while the areas of the Nearshore (including the Thea Foss Waterway) are showing signs of recovering, the Gary Oak prairielands south of Tacoma continue to disappear rapidly. In Tacoma, the key issues related to this are the management of the volume and quality of stormwater that drain into the Thea Foss Waterway, and expansion of the overall urban tree canopy, and the restoration of plant and wildlife habitat.

The city has seen some victories in this regard. In 1983, the Thea Foss and Wheeler-Osgood waterways were designated as Superfund cleanup sites, and in 2006, waterway cleanup and construction were finished, though the monitoring of stormwater runoff and water quality is ongoing. In the early 1990s, "Simpson Landing," a fallow sawmill site in the Port of Tacoma was restored with naturalistic stormwater detention ponds, native indigenous plantings, and recycling of industrial materials. The goal was to support water quality initiatives and to enhance the location as a stopover on the Pacific Flyway.

Artists have been at the forefront of initiatives like this – in the region, the nation and beyond – for several decades. The visible and invisible natural processes at work in the ecosystems that intersect here can inspire a range of artistic responses, from temporal installations to site-specific commissions to collaborations with design teams. Artists could approach this openly in terms of the topics they chose to highlight; however, the city's policies currently prioritize stormwater management, particularly water quality, and the expansion of Tacoma's tree canopy, which would be obvious candidates for artist attention.

Principles and Metrics

A Vision for the Prairie Line Trail

The Prairie Line Trail will be a vibrant new public space for the City of Tacoma. It will stimulate recreational activity, creative energy and economic investment by linking downtown, the waterfront, the University, historic and cultural resources, and the Brewery District.

A Vision for Art Along the Trail

Public art along the Prairie Line Trail will support the creation of a vibrant public place in Tacoma, drawing on the energy of Tacoma’s art community to bring the corridor’s unique character to life.

Goals for Art along the Trail

Create art and design features that:

- Respond to and enhance people’s experience of the key contexts for the trail – history, environment and connection.
- Respond uniquely to the specific nature (uses, visual context) of specific sites along the trail.
- Exist in a range of timeframes, for short-term incidents to long-term, durable, iconic projects.
- Give the trail a continual, cohesive identity as it threads through various districts of the City.
- Draw on the unique creative talents of artists who are based in Tacoma and the Puget Sound region.

Guiding Principles for the Public Art Plan

The following principles provide a foundation for this master plan. They can be used to guide an overall curatorial strategy, and to evaluate the impact of the public art initiative in the future. These build on, and extend, the ideas discussed in “Influences and Themes,” above.

Context: The overall Prairie Line Trail public art initiative will reflect the overall urban context, particularly the contexts of history, environmental management (stormwater, tree canopy, native habitat) and urban connections.

Integrity: Artists and designers working on one segment of the trail will work with ideas that have enough integrity and resilience to inform art and design along the rest of the trail.

Collaboration: Artists and designers along all segments of the trail will collaborate to develop design “strands” or “palettes” (materials, colors, forms) that can bring an overall unity to the trail while allowing artistic and design responses that address the unique character, uses, budgets, management and maintenance requirements of each segment of the trail.

Time: The art initiatives in particular will have the flexibility to evolve over time, as the trail is designed and as it comes into use, so the art can reflect the evolution of how the trail is used and how it relates to the adjacent cityscape.

Guiding Principles for the Public Art Commissions along the Corridor

The following principles can provide guidance for assessing public art opportunities and public art concepts / proposals.

Uniqueness: Art projects will be site-specific, site-related original creations for locations along the Prairie Line Trail.

Meaning: Art projects will connect trail users with a deeper understanding of the corridor and the areas through which it passes. This understanding could be related to culture, to spatial or visual experience, or to the rituals of use of public space. They should take into consideration the context of the site – its use, its history, its ecology.

Strategies and Tactics

Layer One: Activating the Trail Corridor

Public art installations should be organized even before the trail is built, with inexpensive temporary projects that can help bring the trail corridor to life.

Short-term projects can accomplish several things:

- They can make people aware of the Prairie Line Trail corridor and encourage them to explore it, activating the corridor and generating interest in the neighborhoods it passes through long before the trail is put into place.
- They can explore the corridor's visual character, in parallel with the design process, and can foster a dialogue between artists and designers about the meanings embedded in the corridor.
- They allow artists to test the practicalities of various sites, media and approaches to developing work in the corridor, in preparation for more ambitious commissions later.
- They provide great opportunities for younger artists to experiment at a low budget level.
- They can set the expectation that the Prairie Line Trail will be a place to see interesting art and design, once it is complete.

Over time, these projects would result in an evolving set of experiences and a dynamic body of artistic work, like an outdoor gallery. They could be sponsored by any arts organization, and could be created by artists who work in a variety of media, and at all levels of experience.

Trail activation projects should fall into two categories – *urban incidents* and *urban theatre*.

Urban Incidents

“Urban Incidents” are playful, site-specific artist interventions that enhance the sense of discovery for people walking or biking along the trail. These could include patches of wall where graffiti art is staged, installations of light or sound that interplay with architecture or infrastructure; installations modeled on wayfinding, historical markers, prayer flags, or other types of urban coding systems; videos installed inside buildings along the trail; kinetic sculptures, etc.

Urban Incidents should be commissioned in a range of budgets, created by a range of artists (student, emerging, established), and be put up for a range of time frames (some could be ephemeral, some could be up as long as a season or a year). The primary approach should be a curatorial process in which artists are invited to respond to the site in a particular medium. The process could range from open calls to invitational, and should be managed collaboratively by the arts institutions along the corridor. However, there should also be a process for accommodating artist-initiated proposals and the initiatives of private property owners.

Urban Theatre

“Urban Theatre” projects are event-style projects, such as performances, projections, dances, interactive art, or very short-term installations. In the near term, they can be staged either in special places, such as informal locations that artists identify themselves. In the long run, they can also be staged in spaces that are designed as part of the trail (such as a gathering space, plinth or amphitheatre).

Urban Incidents can be staged at any time that access to the trail corridor is permitted – from formal events at Tollefson Plaza to pop-up events in the blocks south of the UW campus – and continue on through the opening and use of the trail.

Moving Forward

What?

Urban incidents and *urban theatre* projects should be commissioned from artists at various times and for various sites along the trail. They will contribute a sense of change and dynamism, and the expectation that every day the trail might offer a new experience. These artworks should come in many media, though they generally will be of a smaller scale, and will be up for a short time duration.

Who?

Urban incidents and *urban theatre* projects could be initiated by almost anyone. The Tacoma Arts Commission should consider the trail as one of the most important stages for public art in the City and organize art programming there as artistic and trail development / activation goals converge. Other organizations, such as TAM or UWT, should consider using spaces along the trail for programming that supports their own art, culture and public space missions. Even business owners could commission art projects on their properties along the trail. Artist-initiated proposals should also be entertained.

The Arts Commission can both commission *urban incidents* and *urban theatre* projects, and provide technical assistance to other arts organizations that wish to stage projects like these. Funding for these projects would come from any available discretionary arts funding, grants, sponsorships, other contributions and private commissions. Because these projects would be small, social networking funding sources (such as Kickstarter) could be considered.

The City of Tacoma and the University of Washington–Tacoma, each of which will manage separate segments of the trail, will be responsible for approvals in their respective trail sections. However, they should develop a single information package that makes information about their policies and procedures for exhibiting artworks easily accessible to artists.

Where?

The location of most *urban incidents* and *urban theatre* projects should be determined by artists, through their investigation of the urban landscape and activity along the trail, as well as the directions they are pursuing in their own artistic practice.

In addition there could also be a few key locations where platforms for rotating artworks are established. These could be literal platforms, such as bases for sculpture or locations for repeated commissions of temporary artworks / installation (for example, Tollefson Plaza or the Tacoma Art Museum plaza). These could also include metaphorical platforms, such as a graffiti wall, a scaffold for changing signage, a video board, or poles for banners. These locations would be determined during the design process for each trail segment.

When?

Urban incidents and *urban theatre* projects can be commissioned and exhibited at any time. Demonstration projects were successfully installed in conjunction with the development of this plan, in November, 2011 and illustrated institutional collaboration, brought new attention to the trail, and attracted pedestrian activity. Additional temporary artworks can continue to be exhibited before trail construction and after.

Layer Two: Designing and Building the Trail

The Prairie Line Trail should be understood in the minds of users and the public at large as a continuous piece of infrastructure, an important connection and seamless experience for people who follow it from end to end. Art projects, created as part of the trail infrastructure, can contribute to that sense of identity and continuity, by expressing a visual language of elements that repeat themselves or by marking distance and scale.

These art projects should be durable and long-term. They will convey a sense of familiarity, constancy, stability and reassurance; they will contribute to the sense that the trail is a trusted friend. By transcending the specific character of any one segment of the trail, they will convey a sense of civic purpose, that the trail is shared by all.

These art projects will also require coordination between the City, UWT and their design teams, throughout the process of designing, building and maintaining the trail.

Trail Infrastructure

Trails usually have a basic infrastructural kit of parts – from wayfinding to trailhead markers to gateways, from lighting to signage, from trailscape materials to planting materials, from concrete form liners to bridge structures. All of these infrastructural elements could be developed through artist commissions, or through collaborative artist–design team approaches.

Both of the trail’s design teams should be asked to inventory elements that could be considered trail-wide infrastructure (e.g, shared design elements that would be found in all trail segments) and which would best be designed on a segment-by-segment basis. Of those trailwide elements, the design teams should propose which might be designed through artist collaboration.

Ecological Network

The corridor’s ecological framework, even more than its historic and cultural framework, is a hidden factor that will exert powerful impact on how the trail is designed, how it is experienced and how it will function. Primarily, the concern is about managing stormwater flows into the Thea Foss Waterway, which drains into Commencement Bay and, ultimately, Puget Sound. Tacoma’s stormwater system dumps directly into the water without treatment, so water quality is a specific issue to be addressed. A related concern is the palette of vegetation that will allow for the proliferation of native species, and help with stormwater and microclimate management.

Stormwater, habitat and microclimate issues will be studied by the trail design teams, who are likely to create a new vocabulary of urban ecological infrastructure to address these issues. Environmental artists have a strong record on creating designs for ecological infrastructure, and in creating sculpture and installations that interact with or respond to these natural forces. Artists should be involved with this design thinking.

21st Street Crossing

One of the most problematic street crossings for the trail occurs at 21st Street. Because of the traffic patterns there and the underlying topography, vehicles have short sightlines and travel at fast speeds. Different alternatives for managing this crossing – including an underpass and an overpass – will be studied. Depending on the design that is chosen, there will be different opportunities for involving artists in the design of the infrastructure, or in creating works that are integrated into the infrastructure.

Moving Forward

What?

Artist-designed infrastructure elements should be integrated into the design of the trail corridor. These elements can be related to any aspect of the functioning of the corridor, such as wayfinding, lighting, landscaping, ecological infrastructure or special infrastructure built to facilitate the trail crossing at 21st Street.

Why?

Artist-designed infrastructure elements can make the trail distinctive, compared to the other elements of the surrounding cityscape, and can reinforce a sense of visual continuity in a dynamic environment. This, in turn, will help make the trail a more legible feature on the cityscape, and make it easier for people to see how to use it. Artist-designed infrastructure elements can also leverage funding that would have been used for “off the shelf” products to create something unique and site-specific.

Who?

Decisions about involving artists in trail infrastructure design should be made by each design team and client, in consultation with arts professionals (in the City’s case, the Tacoma Arts Administrator and the Tacoma Arts Commission; UWT can access the Washington State Arts Commission program manager for support and consultation). We encourage early discussion and collaboration between the City’s and the University’s teams, so that the overarching design strategy, and the strategy for involving artists, has integrity for the length of the trail.

Funding for integrated design elements, and artist design fees, should be incorporated into the overall project design and construction budget, just as environmental, engineering and other sub consultants and design recommendations would be treated.

Where?

The location of and extent of artist-designed infrastructure elements should be determined during the trail’s design phase. Infrastructure artworks could suffuse the design of the trail, appearing wherever a particular type of infrastructure would normally appear.

When?

Planning for these elements should occur early in the design process. In addition to design issues, questions of budget allocations and artist selection process would need to be determined early enough so that the integration of artwork does not delay the design or construction process.

Layer Three: Special Places along the Trail Corridor

The trail corridor will include a variety of places that serve as counterpoints to the flow of pedestrian and bicyclists. These could range from quiet seating areas, gardens and viewing spots to active spaces for gathering, play, performance and dining.

Some of these places already exist, and some have been proposed in various plans – Tollefson Plaza, the Tacoma Art Museum Plaza, the proposed Japanese Language School memorial space on the UWT campus, a gateway features at the north end of the UWT segment of the trail corridor. The mapping and programming of these spaces will be developed through the planning process and through the independent plans of property owners along the trail.

These places, as they emerge as design projects, could be powerful focal points for artist involvement. Thoughtful planning could allow for artists to be involved with the design of these places, allow for artist commissions in these places, or reserve the places for site-specific artworks that could be commissioned and installed over time. The artworks could come in a variety of forms, from artist–designer collaborations on a garden, to traditional sculptural work in seating space, to site-specific light, sound, text or color projects that relate to the surrounding architecture or infrastructure.

Moving Forward

What?

Special places along the trail that support the functionality of the trail, the activities of the stakeholder organizations along the trail, or civic gathering in general.

Why?

These spaces will add to the functionality and interest of the trail, and thereby attract more users. The incorporation of art will make these places more visible and add to their meaning; the artwork itself could attract additional users.

Where?

Some potential spaces can be identified now. These include Tollefson Plaza, the Tacoma Art Museum plaza, the plaza spaces at the point where the trail intersects with the Thea Foss Waterway, the small green at the foot of the 15th Street bridge. Others will be identified in the planning and design processes for the various trail segments.

When?

The design teams working on each trail segment should be asked to prepare a public realm framework that indicates the public spaces that would be developed with the trail, and others that could be developed later. Concurrent with the completion of the designs, the Arts Commission and University could spearhead a more concrete strategy for commissioning or presenting art in these spaces.

Who?

The location of special places would be determined by design teams, and the strategy for incorporating artworks in those spaces would be developed by the Arts Commission and the University, in consultation with the design teams.

Funding would come from the trail design and construction budget, City or University percent for art funds, or future fundraising.

Layer Four: Potential Art Projects to be Commissioned for the Trail Corridor

The trail corridor should also be the location of one or more major, long-term commissions that directly respond to the corridor's underlying character. These special commissions would be organized proactively by the Art Commission or the University's public art program. They could turn out to be signature artworks or legacy artworks that become intertwined with the trail's image for years to come.

Trailwide Text Project

Text art is important to Tacoma (letterpress) as well as to the historical narrative of the trail corridor ("ghost" signs, painted on walls that remain in a state of arrested decay). An artist/graphic design team should be commissioned to create a contemporary graphic language (text and iconography) for the trail corridor. The dimensions of the project should be determined by the artist team, in conversation with the design team and stakeholders. Several of the key considerations are:

- What is the purpose of the language: Is it functional? Narrative? Thematic messaging? Something else?
- Where should the language appear: Trail surfaces? Adjacent structures? Special signs?
- What should the timing be? Should the project be static? Should it roll out incrementally? Should it allow for the changing or incremental addition of messages?

Stepping Up

The trail corridor's most unique characteristic is its arc and its relentless climb up the escarpment that encloses the Harbor. The arcing route up the escarpment is an important trace of the cultural landscape of the original Prairie Line. An artist should be commissioned to develop a project that explores the spatial and visual sensations of the arc and grade change one experiences along the length of the trail. The artist should consider how to translate increments of rise, and increments of turning, into a set of installations that heighten the visual experience of moving along the trail corridor.

Meta-Mapping of Historical Narrative

The trail passes through a unique historic cultural landscape that includes not only the infrastructure of the transcontinental railroad, but also the railroad city that emerged along it – from warehouses to flophouses, from offices to hotels. An artist should be commissioned to work with a historian and a designer to create an interpretive narrative for the trail, and then to develop a small number of discrete artistic and design elements that interpret that narrative in site-specific locations. Potential sites for projects include the first location at which the water is visible to people coming down the corridor, ghost sidings, and the old cold storage warehouses of the Brewery District.

Moving Forward

What?

The trail corridor should also be the location of one or more major, long-term commissions that directly respond to the corridor's underlying character. These special commissions could turn out to be the signature artworks, or legacy artworks, that become intertwined with the trail's image for years to come.

Why?

Special commission projects will enable artists to investigate the fundamental character of the trail corridor, create signature projects for the corridor, and advance the overall diversity and quality of the City's public art collection.

Who?

All of these projects will require creative collaborations, with artists involved or in the lead. A project exploring the trail's historical narrative will require the involvement of cultural historians; a project exploring text will require the involvement of graphic designers. All of the projects will require collaboration with the trail's two design teams.

The Tacoma Arts Commission / Arts Administrator should take the lead in this project, finalizing the concept, managing the call to artists, and arranging for coordination with the various trail managers and design teams, including UWT. If a design competition process is chosen, the Arts Commission should work in collaboration with local chapters of professional organizations, such as the AIA, ASLA and SEGD.

How?

Special commission projects should be explored through a standard public art process, with a call for artist-led teams that include professionals from other relevant disciplines.

In an artist-led process, the Art Commission's public art staff would develop a call for qualifications for teams that would like to work on the project, and establish a committee that would select an artist-led team most qualified to undertake the project. That team would then develop concepts in collaboration with stakeholders along the trail. This process would follow the Commission's existing policies and procedures.

As an alternative, the Art Commission could consider a design-competition process, which is not common for a public art process. In this case, the public art staff would organize a call for design proposals from interdisciplinary teams, responding to a specific brief. From the entries, an interdisciplinary jury would select a project that could move into development. The advantage of a design competition is that it generates broad civic activity around an important or interesting civic opportunity. Teams are inspired to enter so they can show off their work, and the exhibition of the work draws attention to design thinking and design potential. While this approach is generally accepted in the architectural and related professions, it is frowned upon in the public art field. However, this is a special circumstance where such an approach would be appropriate.

Conventionally, a budget would be established at the time the call for qualifications is circulated, or the design competition is launched. Nevertheless, this is the type of project where fundraising might need to follow the design concept, to support the concept to the level necessary.

Where?

The specific locations for these projects should be determined by the artists, influenced by the overall project goals, the artist concept, and the ability to obtain site permissions.

When?

Preliminary planning for special commission projects should be undertaken in collaboration with the design teams and project sponsors for all segments of the trail. Tacoma public art staff should work with these stakeholders to determine what direction the projects will follow, as well as their scope, timing and integration with trail design. From that point, art program staff can establish a budget and an artist selection method.

Art and Design

The Prairie Line Trail is unique to the history of Tacoma, but in many ways emblematic of how American cities build their public realm.

There are great hopes for how the trail will knit together diverse spaces in the City, provide a new connection for bicyclists and walkers, create a great new public space for everyone, and stimulate new interest in the Brewery District.

But, as it is with so many places in the urban public realm, decision-making for the Prairie Line Trail corridor is fragmented among numerous property owners, public agencies and review bodies.

Successful public spaces depend on collaborations of all sorts. The trail corridor would benefit from a basic level of coordination in regard to the conceptualization, design and management of the space – while recognizing that different entities have their own decision-making processes, funding sources and timing requirements.

At a minimum, the City and the University, who will be responsible for designing, building and managing the various segments of the trail, should establish a dialogue on the important conditions of urbanism that shape the corridor: functionality, history, environment, and art. Depending on the topic, that dialogue might involve other stakeholders, as well.

At the very least, such a dialogue could result in common principles that inform the decisions each organization makes. Hopefully, it could result in much more – a cohesive set of design ideas and languages that is applied along the length of the trail, according to the unique circumstances of each block. It could also result in an understanding of how the trail corridor is managed over time – viewed not as design that will be built and completed, but as an evolving place where design adjustments, new developments, and cycles of art commissions will take place over time.

The trail's art program would also benefit from a collaborative approach that involves various stakeholders – the City, the University and the Tacoma Art Museum, for starters. While each organization brings its own resources and institutional goals, as a group they can inform each other's curatorial strategies, and deploy their resources so that their projects complement each other, in terms of location and timing.

Acknowledgements

This plan is an initiative of the City of Tacoma Arts Commission, in collaboration with other City staff (Mobility, Historic Preservation, Long-Range Planning) , the University of Tacoma–Washington and Tacoma Art Museum. Thanks for input from ... tbd

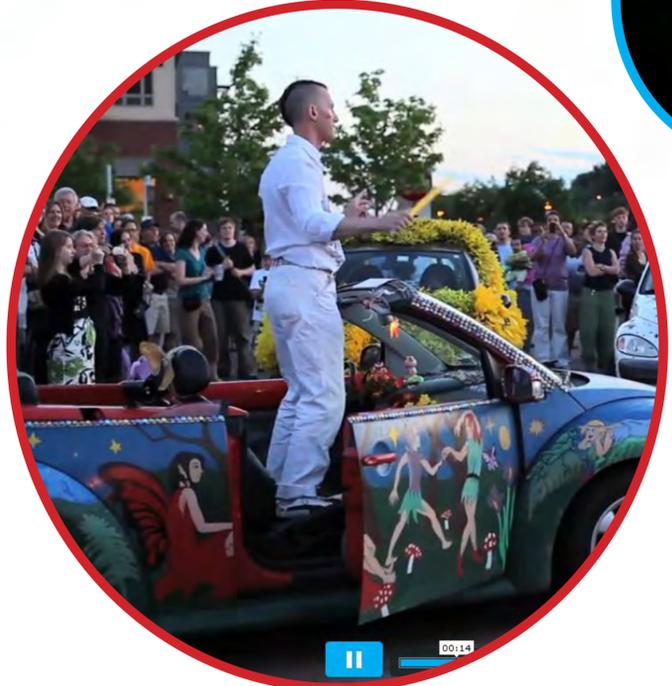
It is funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

URBAN INCIDENTS / URBAN THEATRE

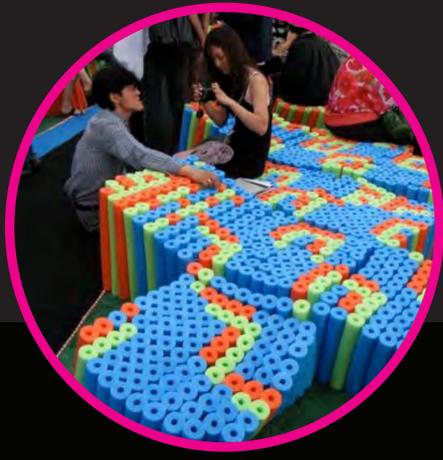


“Urban Incidents” are playful, site-specific artist interventions that enhance the sense of discovery for people walking or biking along the trail. “Urban Theatre” projects are event-style projects, such as performances, projections, dances, interactive art, or very short-term installations. They could be located almost anywhere along the trail corridor.

Urban incidents and urban theatre projects could be initiated by almost anyone. They will contribute a sense of change and dynamism, and the expectation that every day the trail might offer a new experience. These artworks should come in many media, though they generally will be of a smaller scale, and will be up for a short time duration.

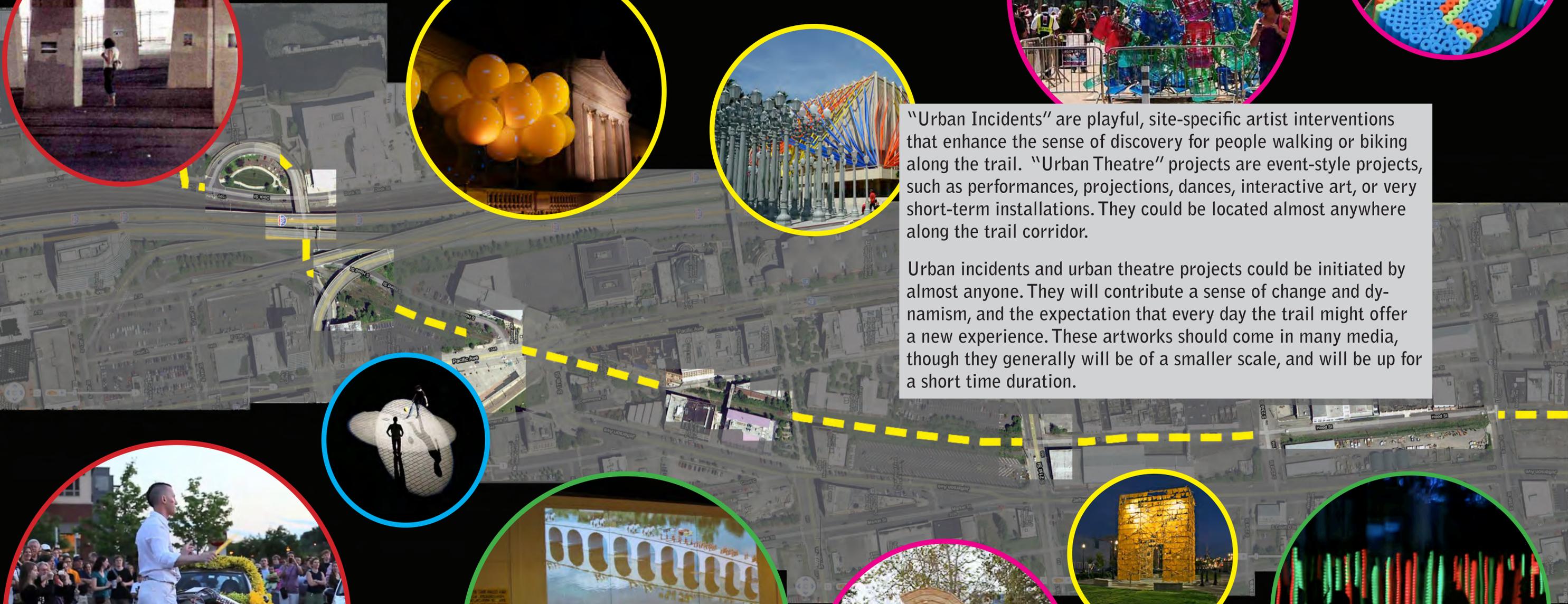


URBAN INCIDENTS / URBAN THEATRE

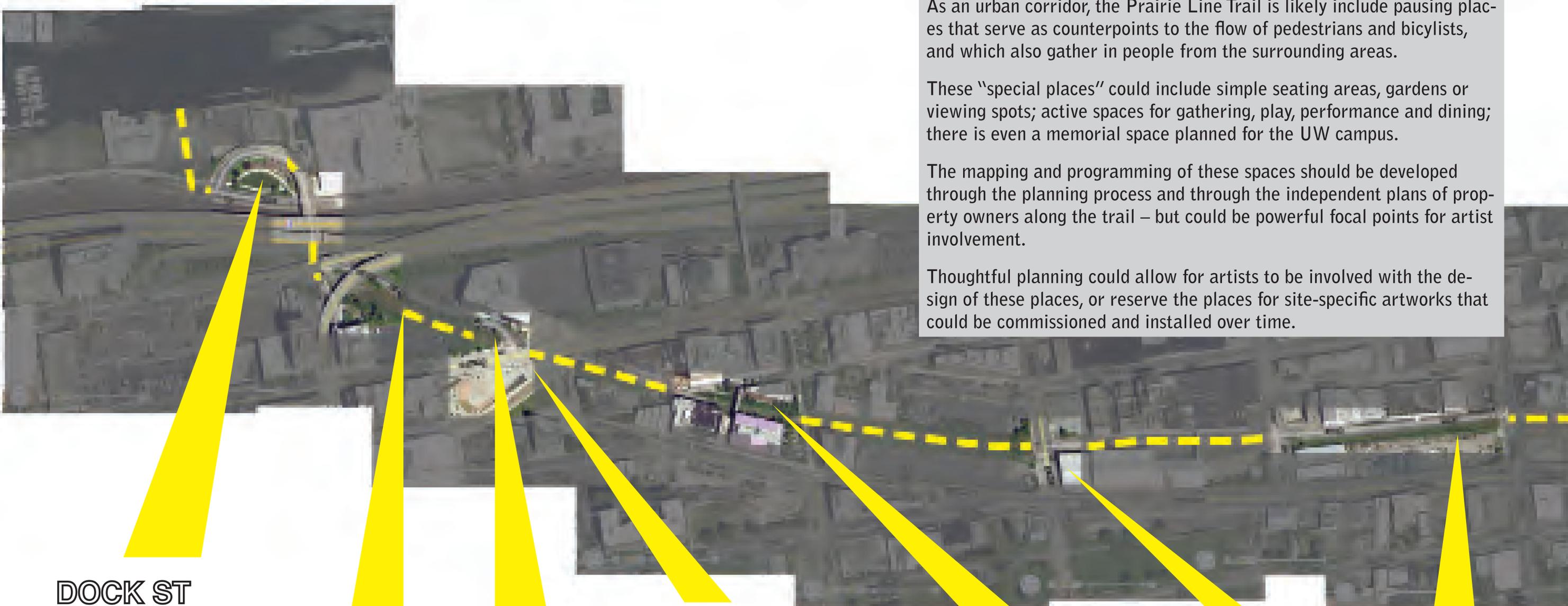


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SPECIAL PLACES / POTENTIAL LOCATIONS



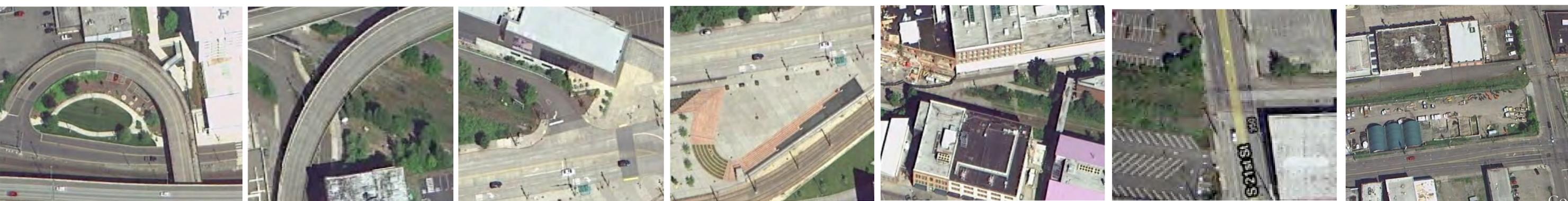
As an urban corridor, the Prairie Line Trail is likely include pausing places that serve as counterpoints to the flow of pedestrians and bicylists, and which also gather in people from the surrounding areas.

These "special places" could include simple seating areas, gardens or viewing spots; active spaces for gathering, play, performance and dining; there is even a memorial space planned for the UW campus.

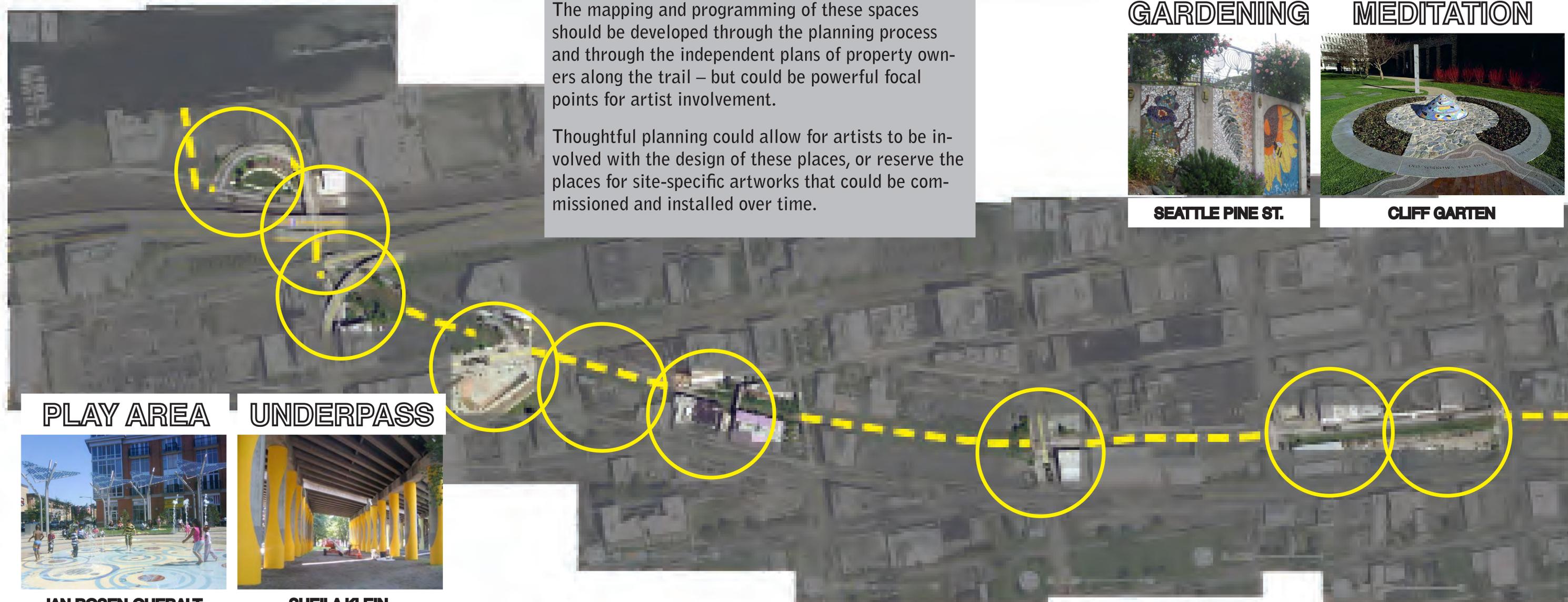
The mapping and programming of these spaces should be developed through the planning process and through the independent plans of property owners along the trail – but could be powerful focal points for artist involvement.

Thoughtful planning could allow for artists to be involved with the design of these places, or reserve the places for site-specific artworks that could be commissioned and installed over time.

DOCK ST
 15 ST BRIDGE BNSF / 15 ST BNSF / 15 ST TOLLEFSON UWT 21ST ST BREWERY



SPECIAL PLACES / CONCEPTS



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GARDENING



SEATTLE PINE ST.

MEDITATION



CLIFF GARTEN

PLAY AREA



JAN ROSEN-QUERALT

UNDERPASS



SHEILA KLEIN

MEMORIAL



SAN JOSE

BIKE OASIS



BUTCH ANTHONY

MEET



INGES IDEE

SHELTER



AA / LONDON

TEACHING



HARRIES / HEDJER

SEATING

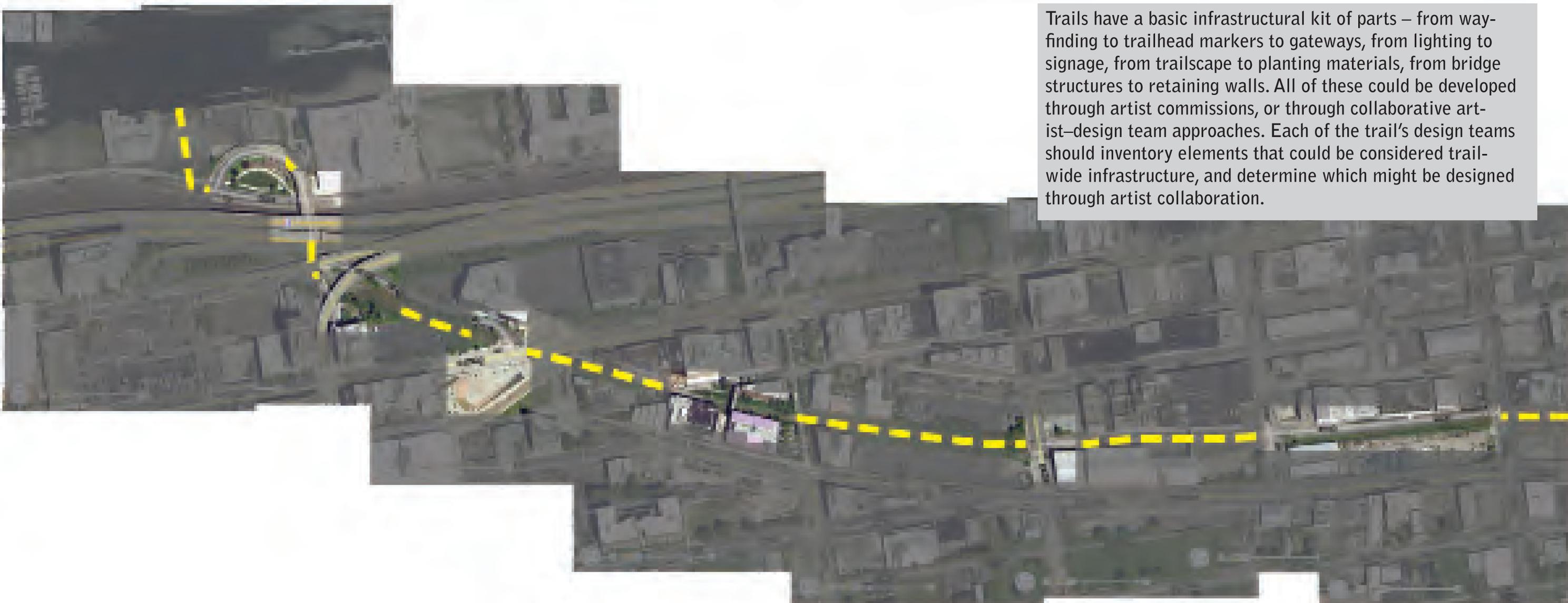


STAGE



JAMES SINDING

INFRASTRUCTURE / CONCEPTS



Trails have a basic infrastructural kit of parts – from way-finding to trailhead markers to gateways, from lighting to signage, from trailscape to planting materials, from bridge structures to retaining walls. All of these could be developed through artist commissions, or through collaborative artist–design team approaches. Each of the trail’s design teams should inventory elements that could be considered trail-wide infrastructure, and determine which might be designed through artist collaboration.



SHEILA KLEIN



THOUGHTBARN



BIKEWAY BELEM

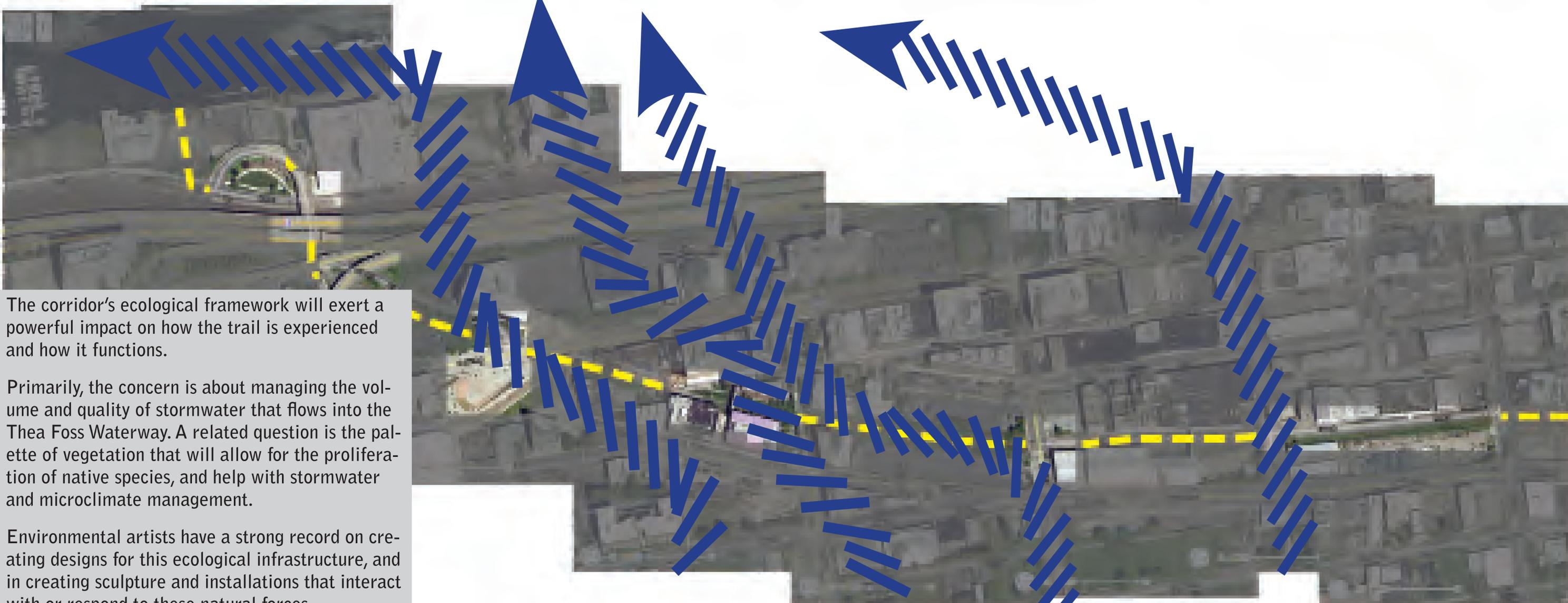


HARRIS HEDER COLLABORATIVE



ROSS LOVEGROVE

WATER AND LANDSCAPE / CONCEPTS



The corridor's ecological framework will exert a powerful impact on how the trail is experienced and how it functions.

Primarily, the concern is about managing the volume and quality of stormwater that flows into the Thea Foss Waterway. A related question is the palette of vegetation that will allow for the proliferation of native species, and help with stormwater and microclimate management.

Environmental artists have a strong record on creating designs for this ecological infrastructure, and in creating sculpture and installations that interact with or respond to these natural forces.

STORMWATER ART PROJECTS



ATELIER DREISEITL



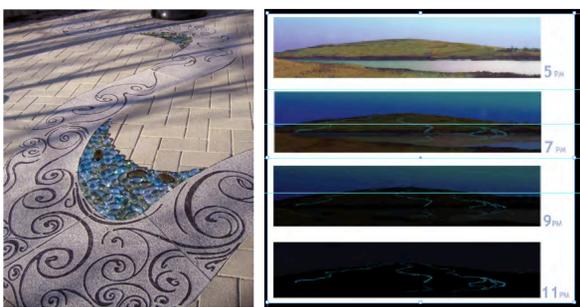
RICHARD TURNER



BETSY DAMON / MARGIE RUDDICK



STACY LEVY



**City of Tacoma
Art Commission**

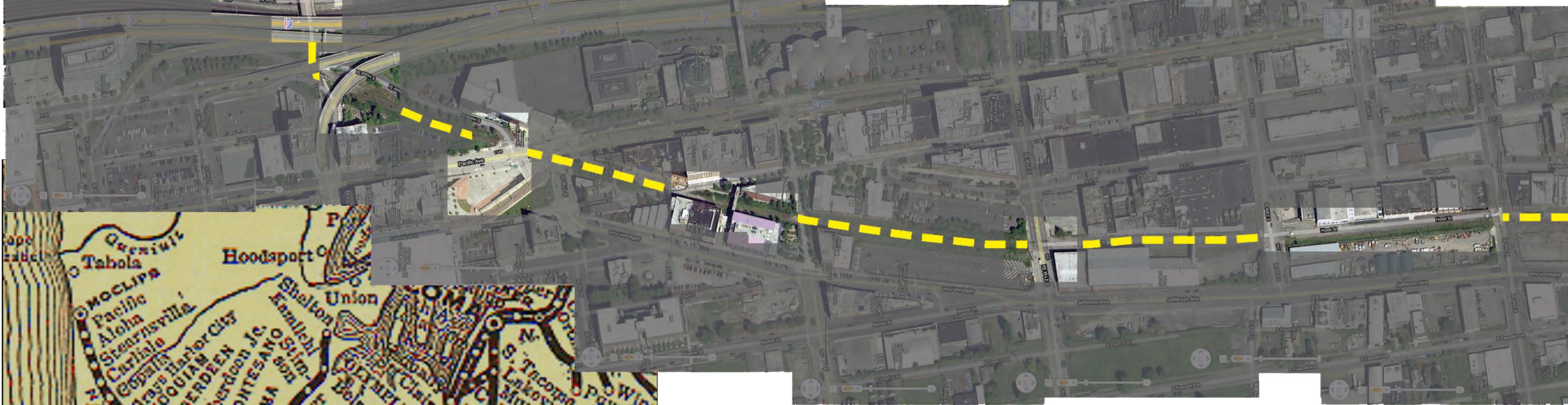
PRAIRIE LINE TRAIL PUBLIC ART PLAN

TODD W. BRESSI / THOUGHTBARN

HISTORY: THE ARC AND THE CITY



THE HISTORY OF THE BREWERY DISTRICT IS INSCRIBED BY THE ARC OF THE PRAIRIE LINE



RICHARD TURNER



REPO HISTORY



GREG LEFEVRE



STEPHEN FARLEY



JAMES WOODFILL



City of Tacoma
Art Commission

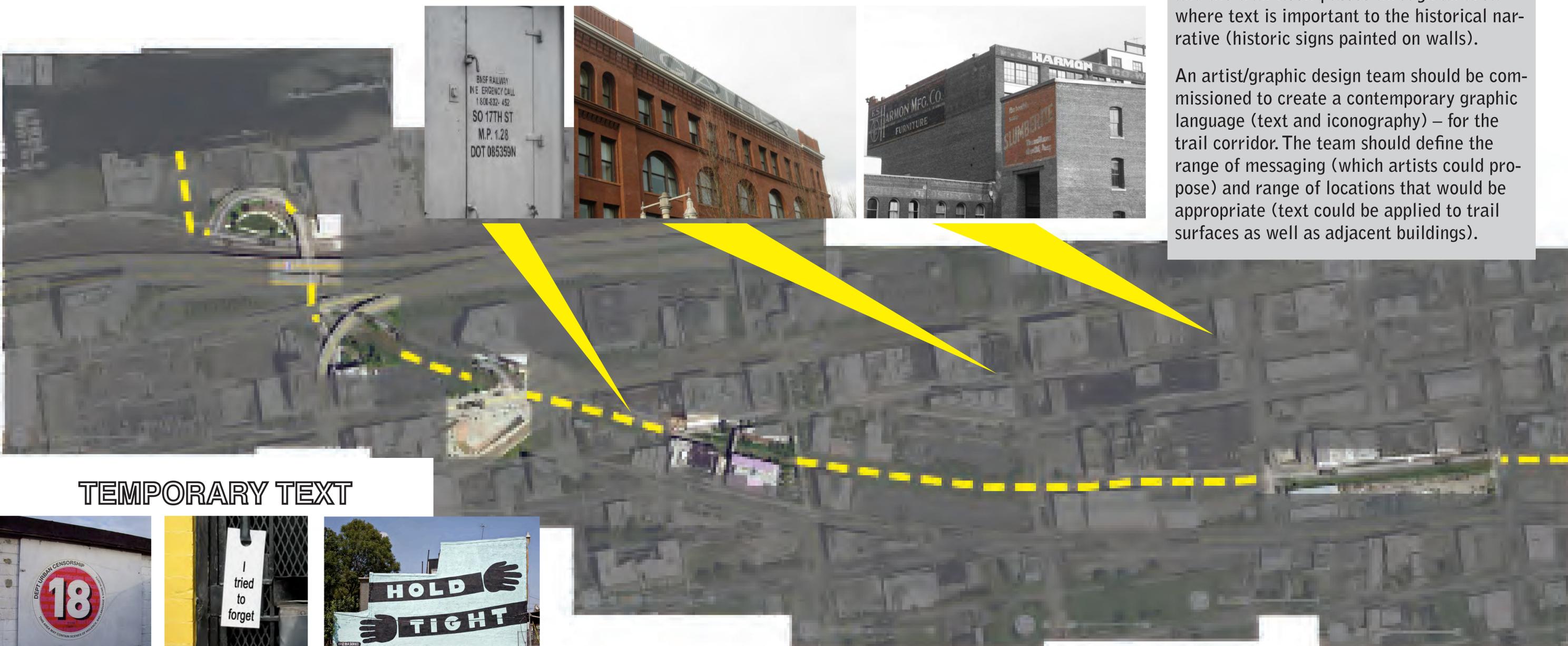
PRAIRIE LINE TRAIL PUBLIC ART PLAN

TODD W. BRESSI / THOUGHTBARN

TEXT / CONCEPTS

Text art is important to Tacoma (letterpress) and the trail itself passes through an area where text is important to the historical narrative (historic signs painted on walls).

An artist/graphic design team should be commissioned to create a contemporary graphic language (text and iconography) – for the trail corridor. The team should define the range of messaging (which artists could propose) and range of locations that would be appropriate (text could be applied to trail surfaces as well as adjacent buildings).



TEMPORARY TEXT



LINDA HESH

STEVE POWERS



JAMES SINDING

NATHAN COLEY

BIKEWAY BELEM GRAPHIC SYSTEM



P-06 ATELIER AND GLOBAL LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Artist Credit Given When Source of Image is Known