

Hiawatha Avenue + Lake Street: Priorities for Under- Bridge Redesign

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SDK Communications + Consulting
Stephanie Devitt, M.P.P.
Owner + Principal Consultant

81 South 9th Street, Suite 310
Minneapolis, MN 55402

stephanie@sdkcommunications.com
ph: 612 437 0899
sdkcommunications.com

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Project Team

SDK Project Team

Stephanie Devitt, Project Director

Matthew Rezac, Design

Andy Berndt, Photography

Andy Meyer, Outreach

Jim Schueneman, Outreach

MTZ, 3D Modeling

Agency Staff

Jason Staebell, Hennepin County, Agency Project Lead

Colin Cox, Hennepin County, Communications Lead

Aaron Tag, Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT)

Lisa Austin, MnDOT

Kelsey Fogt, City of Minneapolis

Luke Sandstrom, Metro Transit (B Line)

Cody Olson, Metro Transit

Christina Morrison, Metro Transit (Blue Line Station)

Project Advisory Committee

Dave Bergstrom, Wellington Property Management

Rachel Boeke, Longfellow Neighborhood Association

Charise Canales, Lake Street Council

Matt Kazinka, Lake Street Council

Kevin Kirsch, Humanize Hi-Lake

Lois Long, Little Earth

Sam Olbekson, Lake Street Alignment Initiative (McKnight Foundation)

Sarah Santiago, East Phillips Neighborhood Association

Michael Schroeder, Minneapolis Park Board

Jamie Schwesnedl, Longfellow Rising

Alicia Smith, Corcoran Neighborhood Association

Introduction

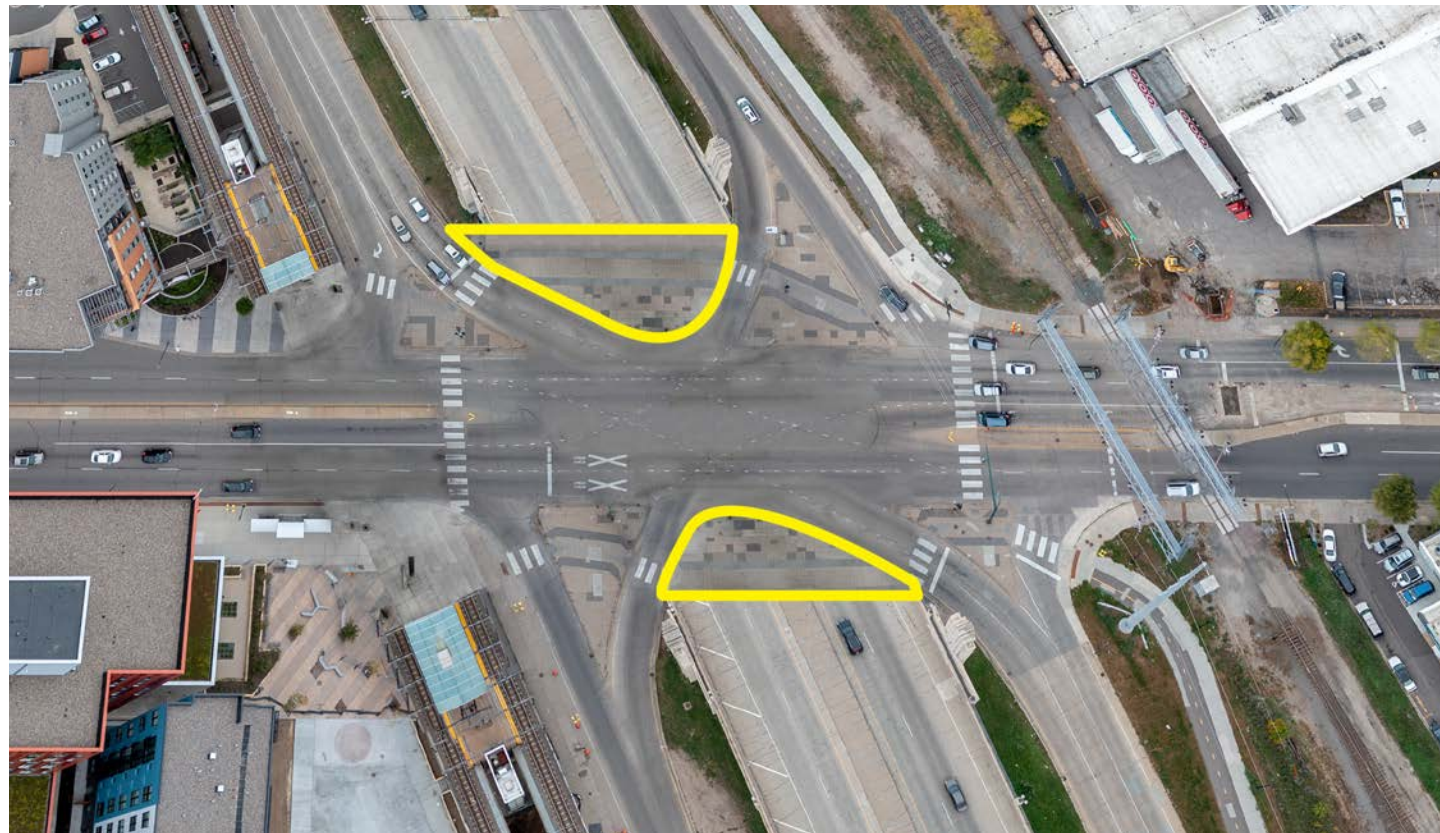
The Hiawatha Avenue and Lake Street intersection (Hi-Lake) is being reconstructed in 2024 to create a safer area where people can move easily—and more often—by walking, biking, rolling and using public transit.

Planned Hi-Lake intersection changes to a “tight diamond” layout will add substantial public space under and around the Hiawatha Avenue bridge – almost 1,800 sq. ft. in total. This added space creates a unique opportunity for the community surrounding the Hi-Lake intersection to help inform and influence the final use of the public space. The planned changes are designed to improve pedestrian experience and include reducing the number of crosswalks, squaring turns onto Lake Street and increasing sidewalks, among others.

Planned roadway improvement efforts reflect the results of earlier planning and engagement efforts, including short-term improvements (2016) and public engagement that informed the long-term intersection redesign (conducted 2017–2019).

The neighborhood surrounding Hi-Lake has seen significant changes since interactive redesign public engagement concluded. In May and June 2020, the Lake Street corridor surrounding Hi-Lake was at the heart of civil unrest after the police killing of George Floyd, with more than \$500 million

Below: The current intersection design with public space outlined in yellow.



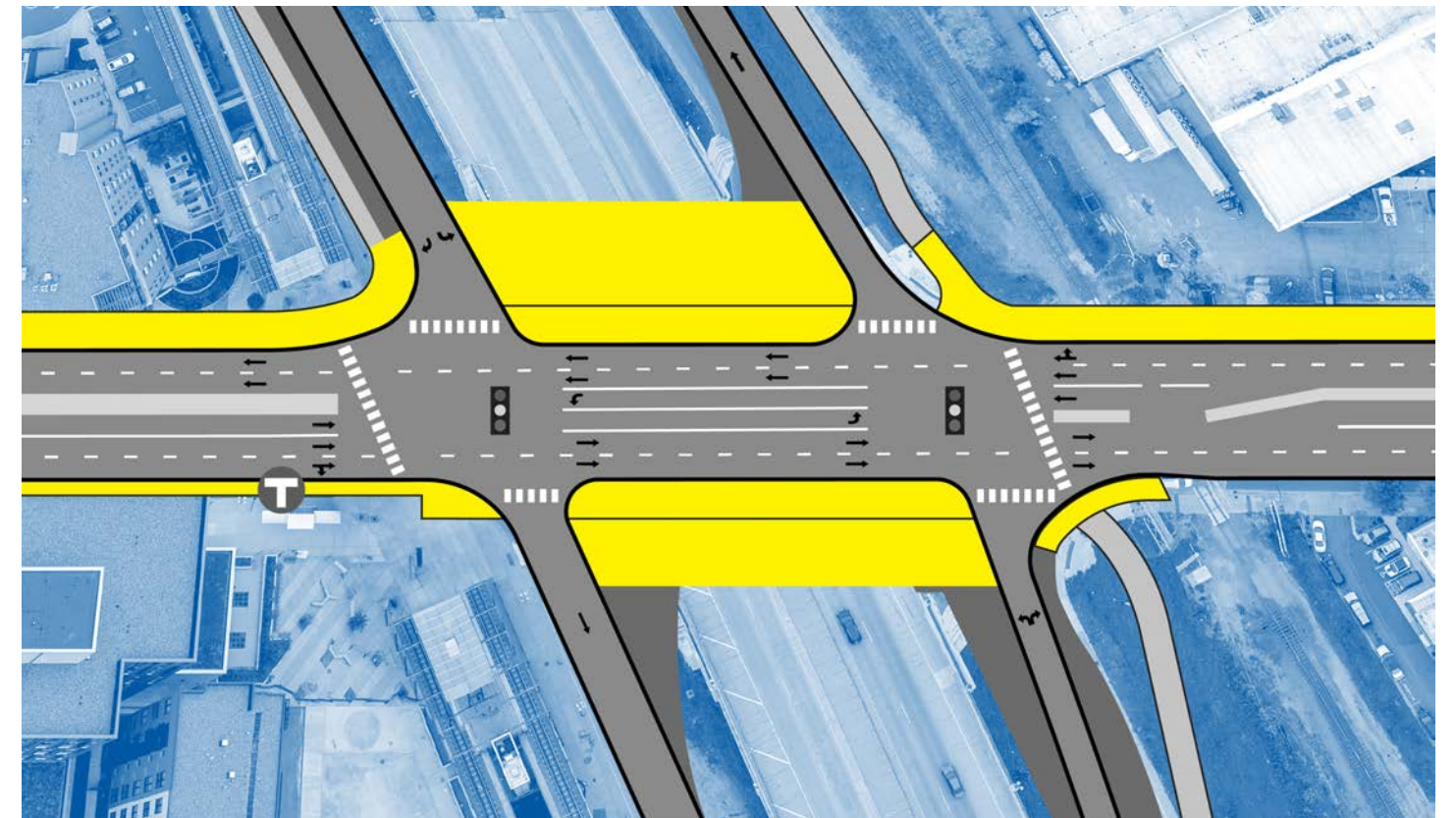
in property damage and 1,500 area businesses damaged or destroyed in the process.

Since the unrest, the Lake Street Council, neighborhood organizations, area funders, local government leaders and others have come together to help people, businesses and neighborhoods throughout the Lake Street corridor heal from these losses.

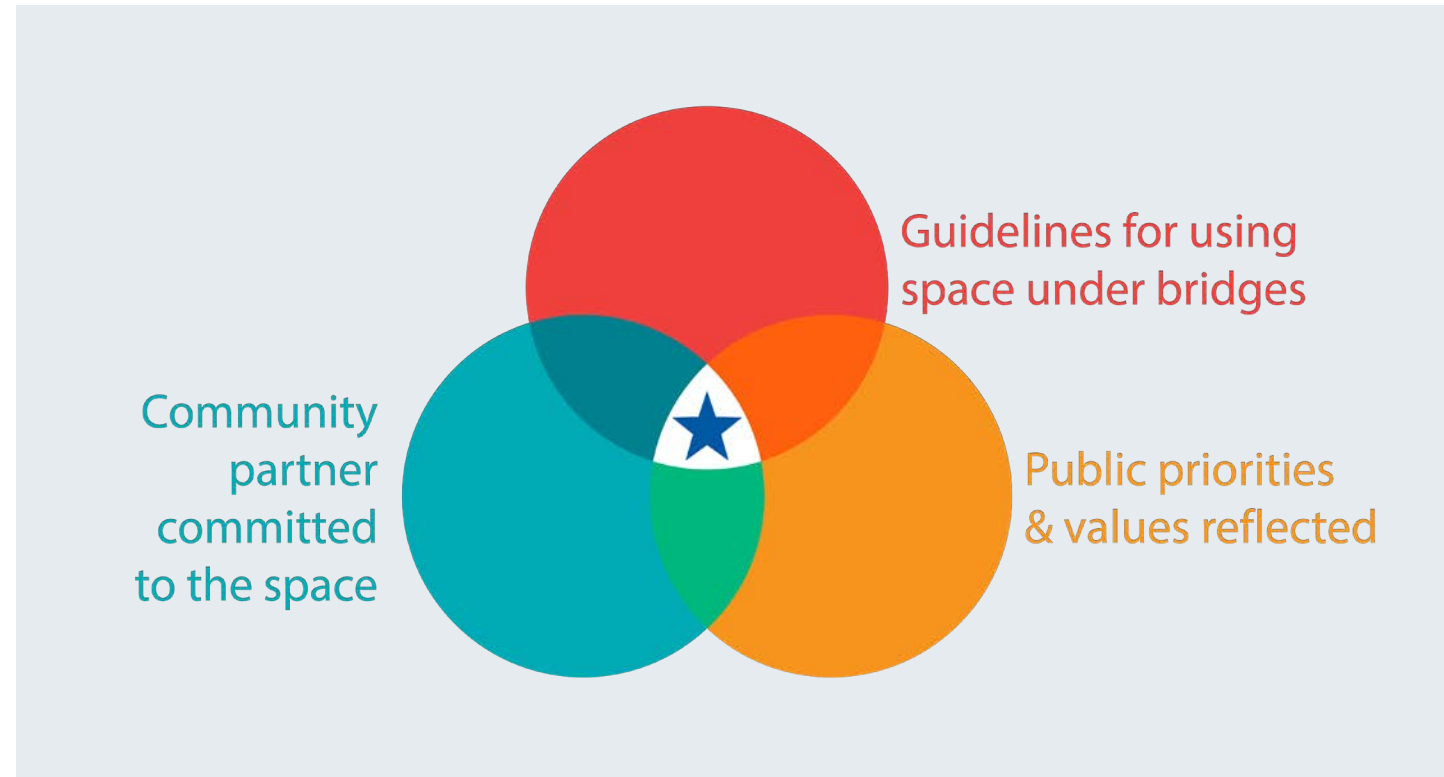
SDK Communications + Consulting has supported Hennepin County and project partners – City of Minneapolis, Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), Metro Transit – by providing facilitated coordination, communication and public engagement. SDK’s work is meant to inform final designs for the added open space that will be created after the intersection is reconstructed in 2024. Community input collected during engagement is detailed in the report that follows.

The intersection redesign process is a collaboration of Hennepin County (responsible for Lake Street), MnDOT (responsible for Hiawatha and the overpass), and the city of Minneapolis, where the intersection is located. Metro Transit is also a key partner to the work because the intersection is one of the Metro Area’s busiest transit hubs and will become even more important to the Metro’s transit system as the B Line Bus Rapid Transit system is built in 2024.

Below: The planned changes, with added public space highlighted in yellow.



Final Use of Space Will Be Determined by Three Factors



Scope

SDK led two rounds of public engagement. In the first round, engagement focused on inviting public input on their overall goals and priorities. This information was used to spark three concept ideas. Next, SDK led a second round of engagement aimed at confirming the priorities and inviting feedback on draft designs that put the priorities into practice.

Engagement Methods

Hennepin County contracted with SDK to provide public outreach, communications and interagency coordination on these items for the project. SDK's work had three objectives:

1. Build connections with and provide project information to the people, businesses and initiatives in the neighborhoods surrounding Hiawatha and Lake Street so that area residents and customers are aware of and prepared for future changes.
2. Invite public input on how to maximize the space under the intersection to create an inviting, pedestrian-friendly space that reflects the communities' priorities and values while falling within the regulatory and funding parameters of project partners.
3. Explore potential partnerships for non-transportation uses of the space under the Hi-Lake bridge.

Methods

The following methods were deployed for the project:

- **Open Houses.** Three public open houses and two targeted listening sessions were conducted across phases of engagement. Two online open houses were hosted during the Invite Feedback phase in Feb. and Mar. 2022. These were held over Zoom, with the first offering live Spanish interpretation, and the second offering live Somali interpretation. A third open house was hosted in-person in Sept. 2022, as well as two targeted listening sessions. One targeted listening session was hosted in person preceding Mercado Central's monthly leadership meeting, and was conducted in Spanish. Another was hosted online over Zoom, and offered Somali interpretation.
- **Paper Surveys and Intercept Distribution.** Paper surveys and intercept interviews were administered to target groups that may not otherwise have been able to interact with the project and engagement materials, including those spending time underneath the bridge. Spanish-language interviews were also conducted with Latino business owners on Lake Street.
- **Comment Line.** A comment line phone number was advertised on promotional materials such as flyers and the project website to collect additional feedback.



- **Tabling/“Pop-Up” Events.** In-person tabling and pop-up events were conducted only in the Demonstrate Responsiveness phase due to a rise in Covid-19 cases in early 2022.
- **Online Survey.** An online survey was shared for both phases of outreach.

Both phases of engagement together heard from a combined 1,000 people living or working in the community.

Phase 1: Understanding Community (Jan. – Mar.)

During the Invite Input stage, nearly 500 community members were engaged, including 299 survey respondents. Of the 236 respondents who disclosed their race, age and gender:

- 53% were women
- 16% were people of color
- 61% were less than 44 years old

These numbers include paper surveys, which were completed by 25 people, primarily men of color under the age of 34. Open houses were attended by 75 community members across two sessions conducted virtually over Zoom. An additional 70 comments were received through a comment box on the projects ArcGIS Story Map site.

Phase 2: Demonstrate Responsiveness (Aug. – Oct.)

More than 500 people provided input during this stage. Of the 332 individuals who disclosed their race and ethnicity, 78 were people of color. Tabling events captured 164 comment cards and 102 other comments from community members across events. Thirty-six attendees left feedback across open house opportunities. The online survey received 236 total responses.

Project Governance

The project was guided by a Project Advisory Committee (PAC) composed of 10 individuals representing diverse perspectives of the neighborhoods surrounding the Hi-Lake intersection. The PAC provided input on planned engagement methods, analysis of community feedback received, and design approaches. Members were representatives of the following organizations:

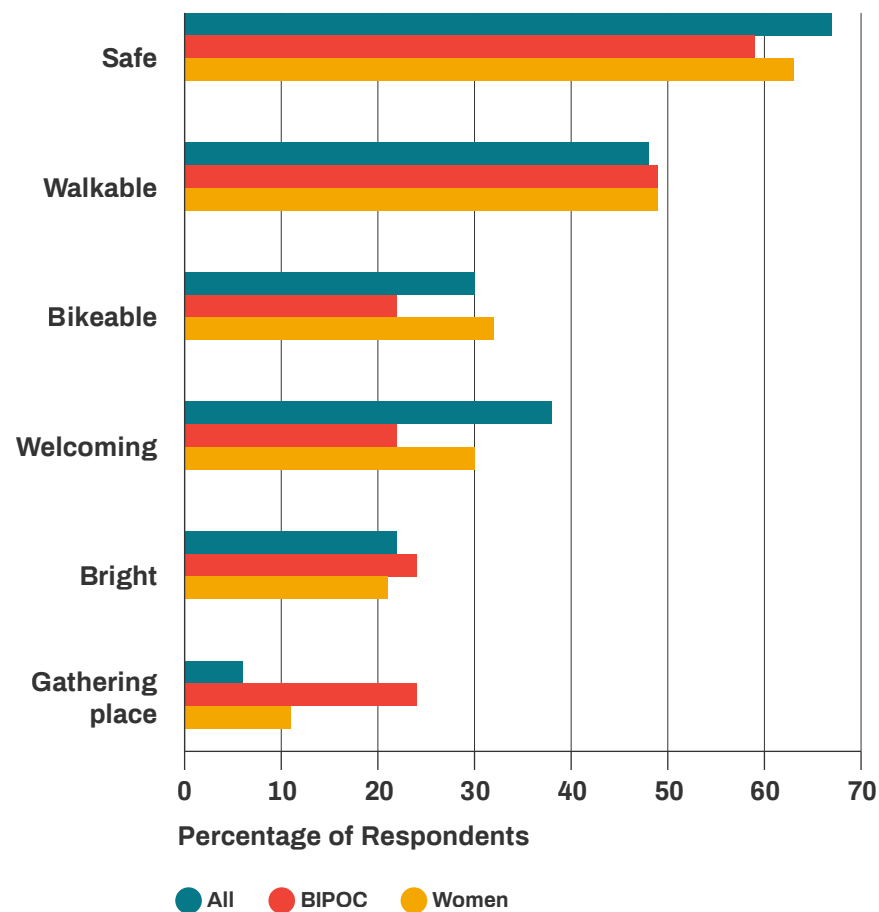
- Corcoran Neighborhood Organization
- East Phillips Improvement Coalition
- Humanize Hi-Lake
- Lake Street Council
- Little Earth
- Longfellow Community Council
- Longfellow Rising!
- Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board
- Target
- Wellington Management

Phase 1: Understanding Community Priorities

The first phase of community engagement invited the public to share priorities for the added open space under the Hiawatha Bridge. Nearly 500 people offered their opinions and ideas, reflected below.

Safe, Walkable, Bikeable, and Welcoming are priorities. When asked to describe how they would hope the added space under the Hi-Lake bridge would be used, most respondents chose “safe”, followed by “walkable,” “bikeable,” and “welcoming”. Across all respondents, over 60 percent chose “safe.” Women respondents prioritized “welcoming” more than respondents overall, and BIPOC respondents were more likely to choose “gathering place.”

Survey: What three adjectives best describe how you hope the add space under the Hi-Lake bridge will be used?



“For me, safety under the bridge is a big concern...”

“If something is child-friendly, it’s inherently safe...”

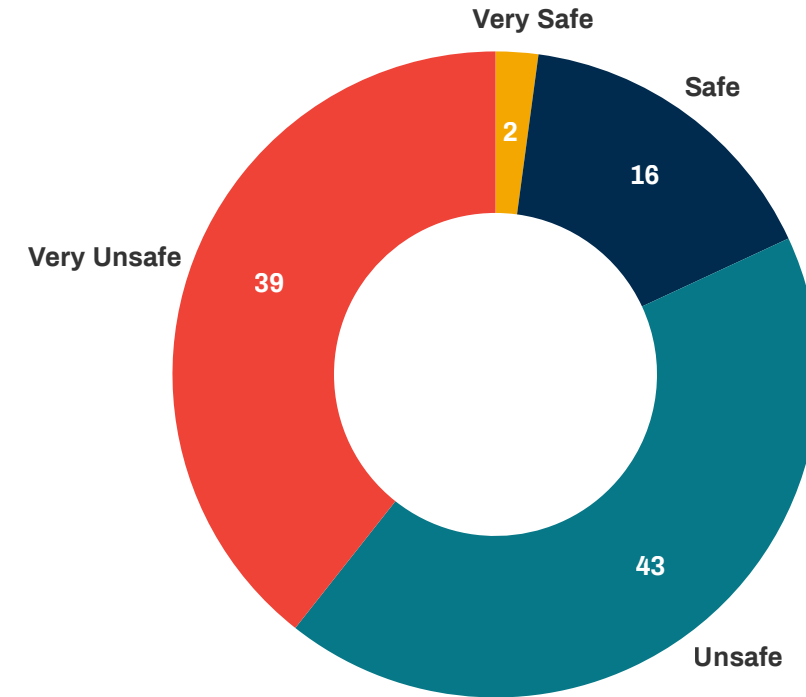
“Syringe litter is concerning. Things feel off [there now].”

“It’s not a consistently safe space. Peaceful and bright are a high priority.”

“What I would really love is a space where children and grandmothers feel safe... to not worry that we will be hit by a car, harassed or scared.”

Safety is a top concern. When asked about perceived safety crossing through the Hi-Lake intersection, 82 percent of survey respondents shared they feel “Unsafe” or “Very Unsafe”. Safety was among the most frequently volunteered priorities across all engagement venues — survey, open houses, presentations and more. Comments received specified concerns both in transportation safety and personal safety.

Survey: How safe do you feel crossing through the Hi-Lake intersection?



“I feel safe driving. Somewhat safe walking.”

“I feel unsafe because of traffic but I am not afraid of my neighbors.”

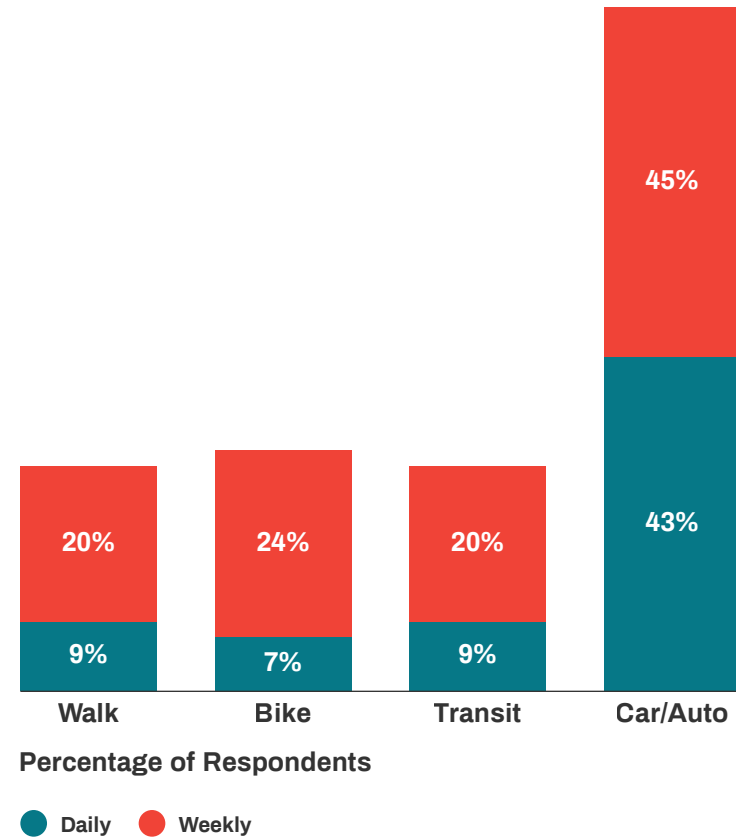
“Unsafe mainly due to the folks camping under the bridge...”

“I always avoid this area because it is a threat to my safety. I used to walk to take the train to work, until I was mugged on the platform.”

“I don’t always feel safe navigating the area by foot — there are often police vehicles nearby and the space gives me some unease.”

Fewer than one in three survey respondents walk or bike Hi-Lake. Most people who travel through the Hi-Lake intersection do so in a car or automobile. Less than a quarter travel through on a bike weekly, and fewer walk or ride transit through the intersection.

Survey: Modes of transportation through the Hi-Lake intersection



“It’s a long space to walk after a public transit ride, especially alone at night...”

“The area under the bridge currently looks terrible and there’s no way most people want to walk or bike there.”

“The intersection itself is extremely unsafe for anyone — people walking, biking, driving, and taking transit. [Hi-Lake is] honestly terrifying and I avoid it no matter what mode of transportation I’m using.”

“I’d like something that makes you feel safe [from the cars flying by] while walking and biking.”

Concern for the area’s unhoused population is a consistent priority. The displacement of unhoused community members was a frequent concern among those engaged. Community members are also concerned with types of interventions to be made available and how future infrastructure will affect the unhoused. However, ideas for how to address safety and the unhoused community vary.



“I would like to know how the homeless that are frequently seen taking shelter in the space will be helped and not just kicked out.”

“It is currently not safe or welcoming due to the homeless people forced to take shelter there. They need to be given a better place.”

“I worry, though, about the number of apparently unsheltered people who shelter there. Could there be outreach for addiction services? Homelessness services?”

“It is currently not safe or welcoming due to the homeless people forced to take shelter there. [Unhoused] need to be given a better place.”

“The overpass is also a natural spot for shelter. I believe that this should be amplified and explored as a positive rather than a motivation for designing a bunch of stuff to keep people from lingering.”

“I’d avoid benches because those could be used as beds.”

“Why not have a staffed safe injection site? Why not have a staffed social services kiosk.”

Priority: Respects unhoused neighbors

The future design and use of the space must respect the unhoused community

“I would like to know how the homeless that are frequently seen taking shelter in the space will be helped and **not just kicked out.**”

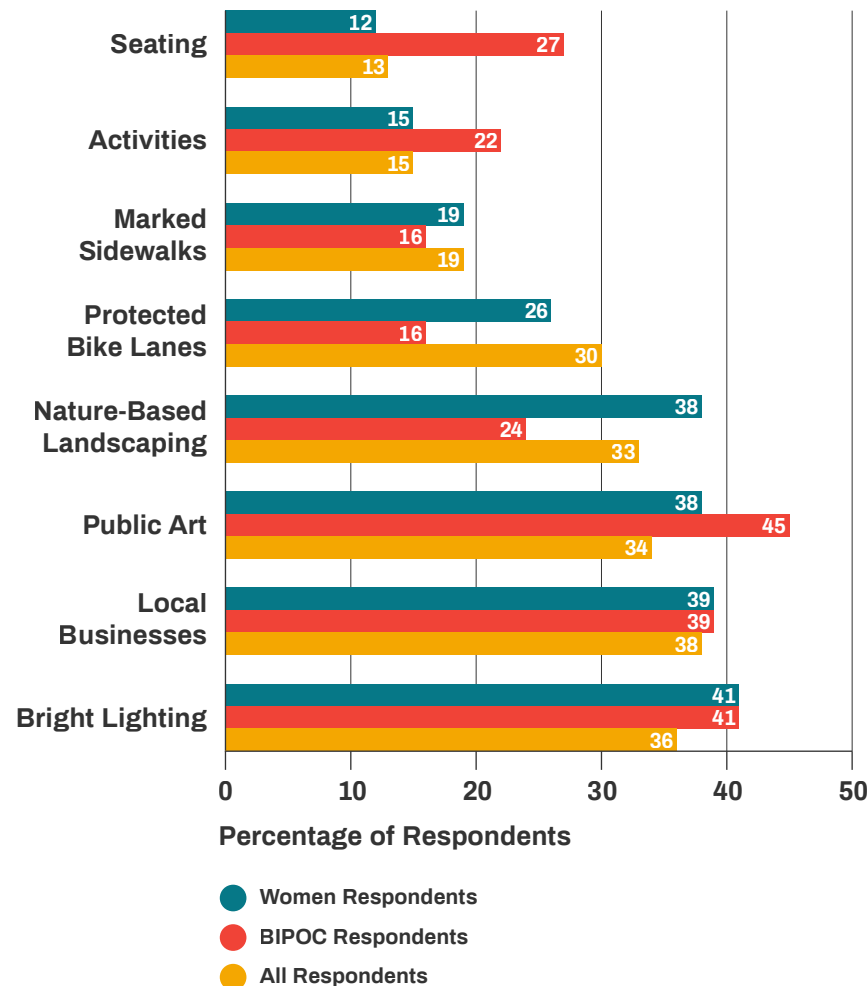
Social media graphics summarizing findings.

Findings: Desired Features

Survey respondents were also asked to comment on and rank their most desired design features to incorporate in the intersection redesign. Sample features were offered to give concrete examples for potential future additions.

Most in the community hope for bright lighting, local businesses, and public art. The design features most prioritized by survey respondents were bright lighting, local businesses, and public art. Features like nature-based landscaping were more preferred by women, and features including seating and activities were more favored by respondents of diverse racial and ethnic communities.

Survey: What features do you most hope to see?



Lighting was the most requested feature overall. Across individual comments, lighting was the feature most volunteered between the survey and Website comment boxes. Features like bathrooms and service kiosks were also suggested as ways to improve conditions underneath the bridge.

Priority: Clean and welcoming

Welcoming means clean and well-lit with softer sound

“It’s not a consistently safe space. **Peaceful and bright** are a high priority.”

Social media graphics summarizing findings.



“At night the space should be brightly lit and feature a lighting display that features the northern lights.”

“[I want to see] public art with some more creative lighting installation. I really think you should hire a lighting designer to come up with some ideas.”

“[We need] lighting and clarity, not overstimulating.”

“Put in a public bathroom, staffed 24/7 and cleaned... similar to the Bryant Park public bathroom in Manhattan on 42nd Street.”

“Services kiosk. Place for storing tables that could be used by people offering services to those in the area.”

Local business was the most popular idea for usage underneath the bridge.

Many community members offered local business opportunities as a good use for the area underneath the bridge. From pop-up stores to food trucks to kiosks, many believe this idea would encourage use of the space while supporting local businesses.

A yellow social media graphic with a purple header box containing the text "Priority: Activated destination". Below the header, there are three text boxes: a white one with "Local businesses, events, and a mobility hub may encourage more activity", a blue one with a quote "[Local business] can transition the Hi-Lake intersection from a place you travel through into a place to travel to.", and an orange one with a bicycle icon. At the bottom left, there is an orange icon of a food truck.

Social media graphics summarizing findings.



“Local business/community pop-ups is a great way to invest and lift up the local community. It can transition the Hi-Lake intersection from a place you travel through into a place to travel to.”

“It would be cool to have small kiosks that people can rent for their businesses under the bridge, like New York has. This will promote small businesses and unique products that may not be possible in larger spaces.”

“I like the idea of having community stalls for small businesses in the summer, but this can leave some people out.”

Public art, green space and more were also popular among respondents.

Community members frequently shared that public art installations would improve the intersection. This suggestion was often shared in tandem with other uses and ideas because of its versatility. Other features include greenspace, and mobility enhancements like protected bike lanes.

A yellow social media graphic with a purple header box containing the text "Priority: Art and nature-based landscaping". Below the header, there are three text boxes: a white one with "Public art and nature-based landscaping can offer ways to build identity and aesthetics", a blue one with a quote "I would love to see public art and a welcoming space for people passing through and even stopping to rest.", and an orange one with a flower icon. At the bottom right, there is an orange icon of a plant stem with leaves.

Social media graphics summarizing findings.



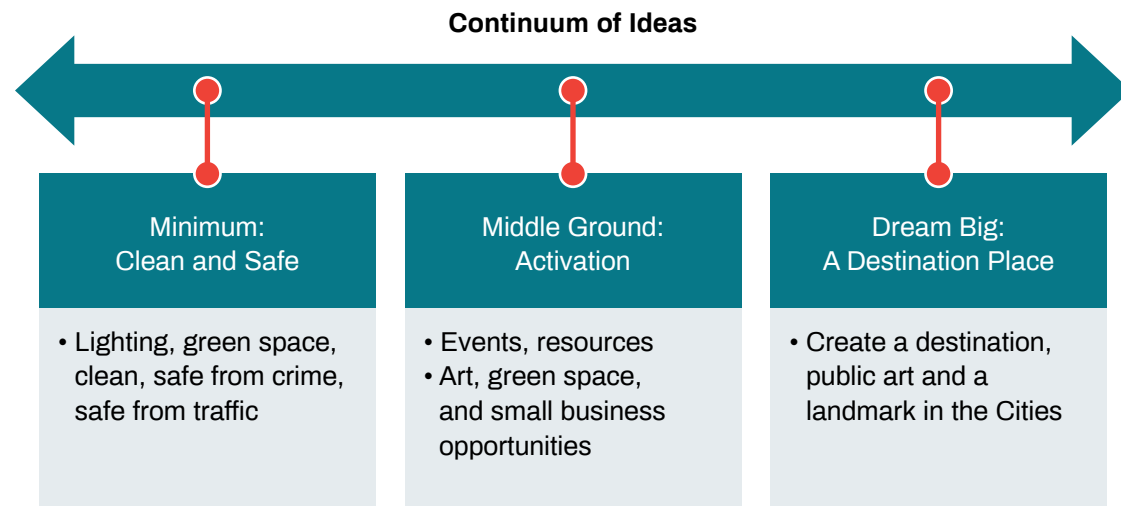
“I would love to see public art and a welcoming space for people passing through and even stopping to rest.”

“Public art and little park spaces have a higher likelihood of just continuing to go unused. It would be better to see amenities that actually draw people to the space from the surrounding neighborhoods.”

“I want to see vibrant, beautiful art by local artists.”

Analysis: Community Priorities

The ideas received throughout the first round of engagement for this project can be organized into a continuum of three options for use:



- **At minimum, the community wants the Hi-Lake intersection to be clean and safe.** Safety was a top priority for respondents. This means being and feeling safe from both traffic and crime. Suggested features like lighting, trashcans and bathrooms also contribute to the basic need for the space to feel clean and safe.
- **As a middle ground, the space could add features for activation.** Events and resources for community members would make the intersection feel more activated. A combination of public art, green space, and local business opportunities could put more attention on the intersection and help improve it overall.
- **Hi-Lake could be a destination place for the Twin Cities.** The most ambitious believe the Hi-Lake intersection could be made into a destination to create a landmark for the area. Features that invite use could encourage more people to the intersection, creating a further sense of safety and identity for the community.

No matter the level of amenities, community comments pointed to two distinct uses for the area under the Hi-Lake bridge:

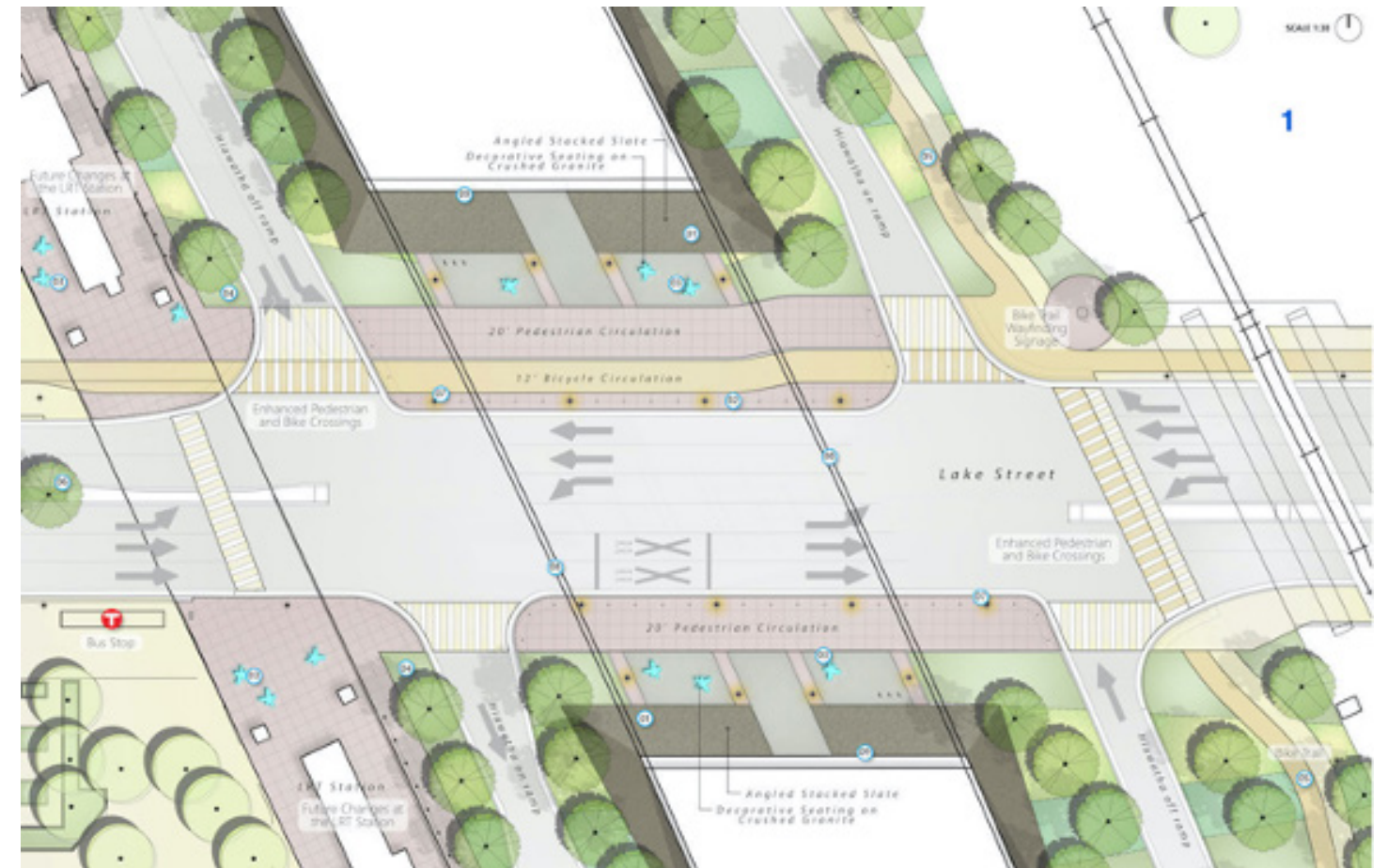
- **Space to Gather.** Features for a space to gather include benches, seating, and activities in the area. This perspective was more represented by local walkers, BIPOC, and unhoused communities.

- **Space to Pass Through.** Those who view the intersection as a space to move through prioritized transportation hubs, protected bike lanes, partitions, and marked sidewalks. This group was generally less local and featured more bikers and transit riders.

SDK presented this analysis to the Project Advisory Committee and agencies. The analysis and an agency design session facilitated by Damon Farber provided the basis for three design options on the following pages.

Option 1: A Space to Pass Through

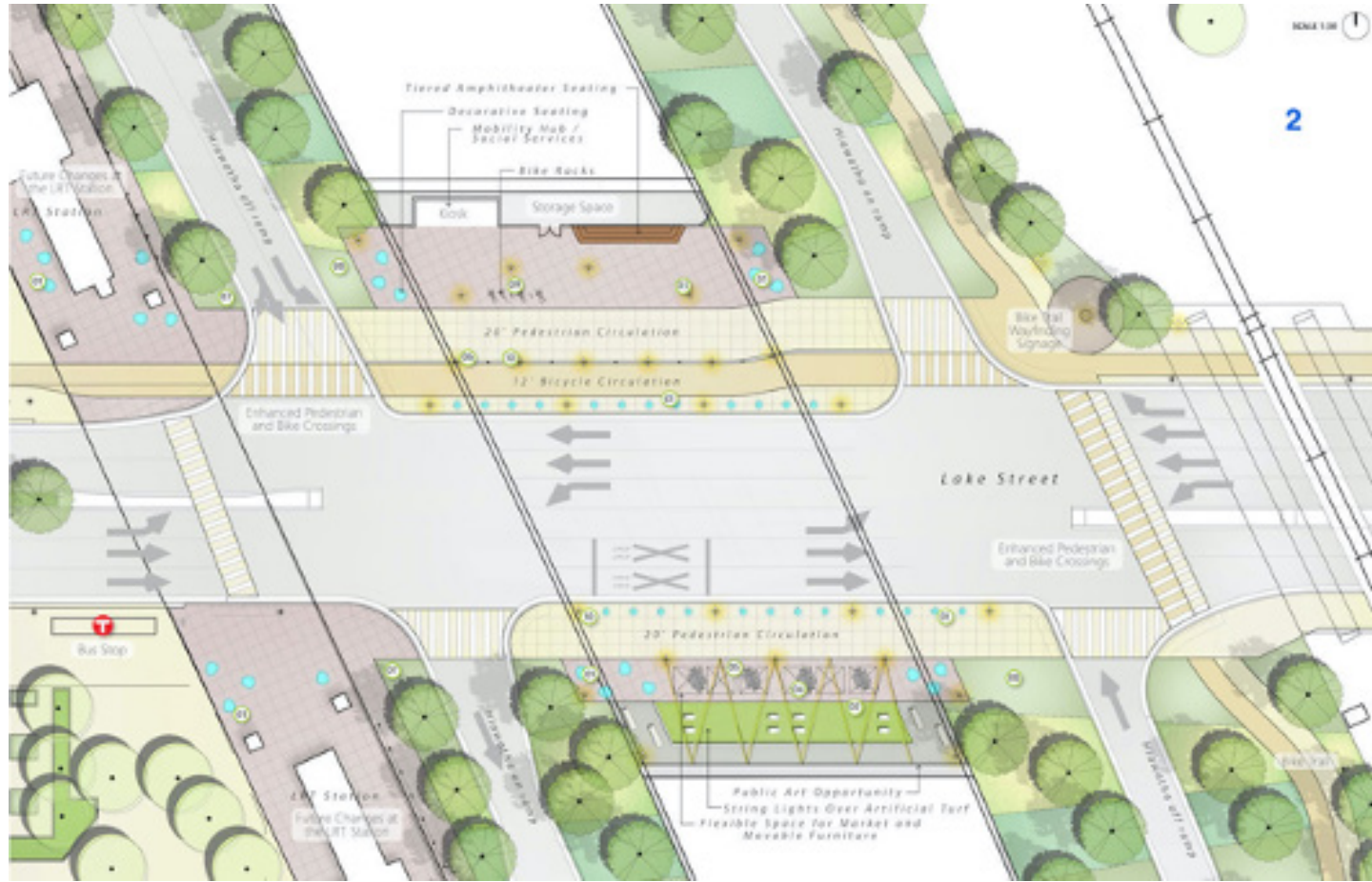
Design option 1 updates include lighting, marked sidewalks, protected bike lanes, public art, seating, and noise control.



DF/ DAMON FARBER

Option 2: Flexible Space

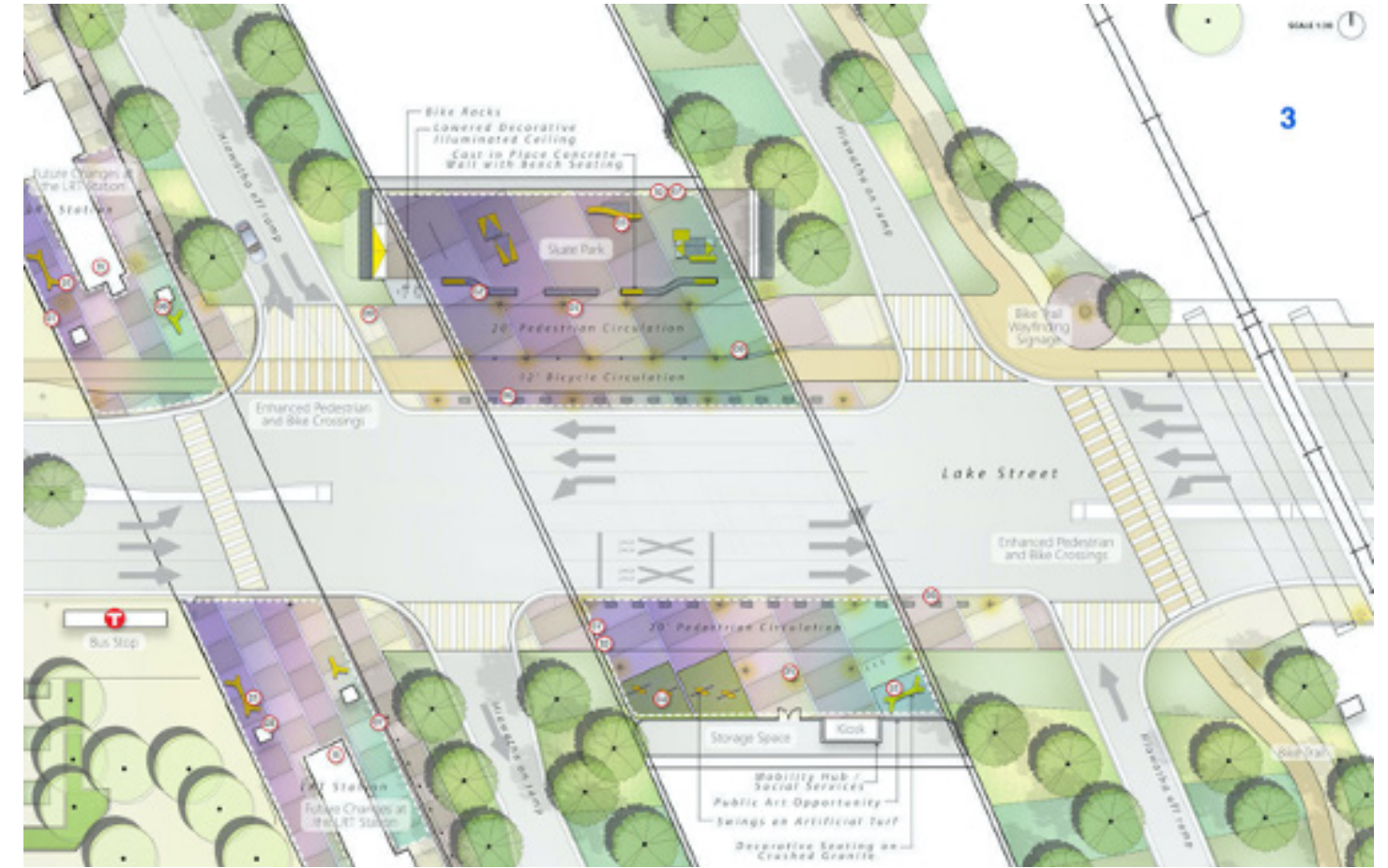
Design option 2 updates include features from option 1 as well as tiered seating, a kiosk, a mobility hub, and a flexible community space.



DF/ DAMON FARBER

Option 3: Destination Space (Including a Skate Park)

Design option 3 updates include features from option 1 as well as a neighborhood-scale skate park, decorative ceiling, a mobility hub, kiosk, and extra seating.



DF/ DAMON FARBER

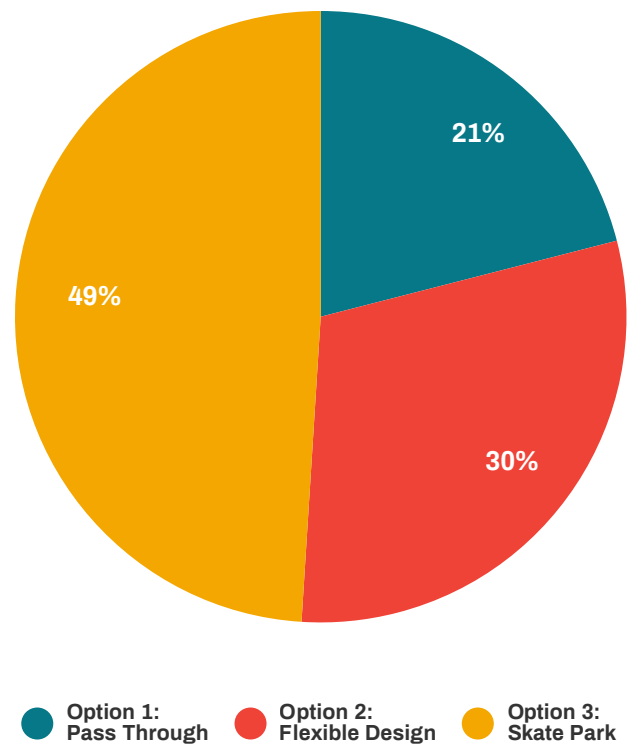
Phase 2: Demonstrate Responsiveness

Feedback from approximately 500 individuals across open houses, tabling events, surveys and interviews affirmed the priorities collected during spring engagement. The community was also invited to comment on three design options for how previously heard priorities may look in the space.

Around half of respondents favored the third design: a destination space with a skate park.

Across survey and paper comment card responses, nearly half of all respondents preferred the design option for a destination space that would include a skate park and area for gathering. Thirty percent preferred an option for a flexible space, and 21 percent preferred a space that is designed to pass through rather than stop and gather.

Survey: Which concept do you prefer?



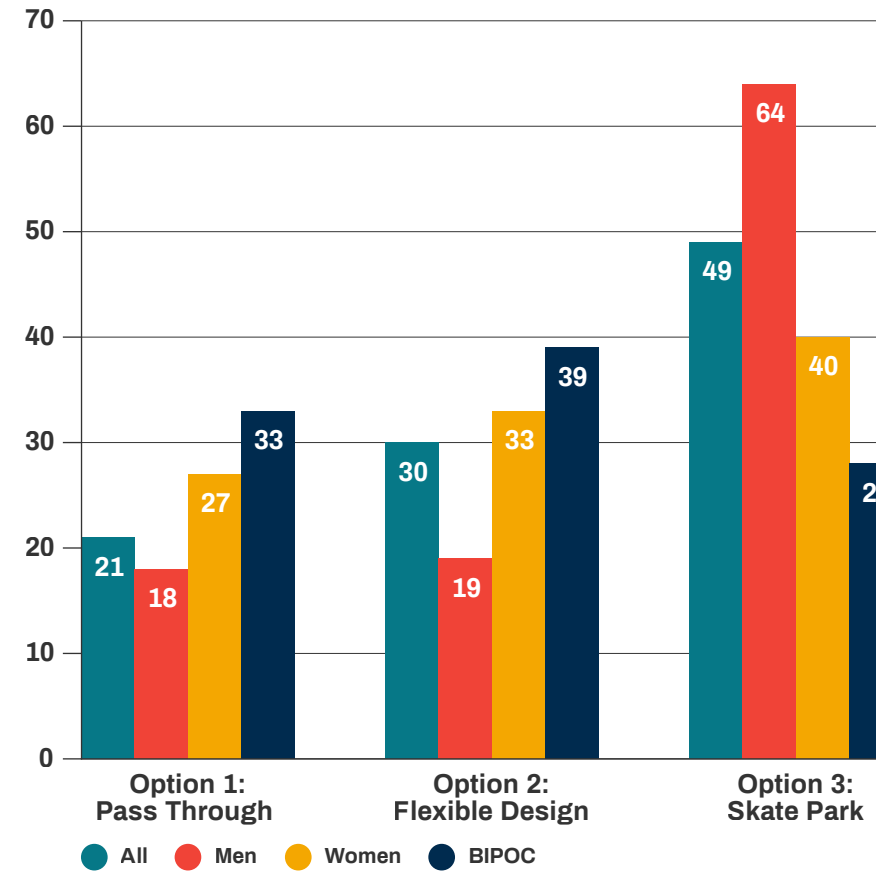
“I love the focus on community spaces in Option 3. Either way I’m delighted to see a focus on more accessible transport beyond cars!”

“It seems like the #3 design is the most likely to bring in the most people on a regular basis, making it safer and more pleasant.”

“We don’t have enough spaces like this in the city for youth to gather, especially skate parks. Having a large dedicated space for this will be an asset to the community.”

However, preferred designs varied by race and gender. The skate park was the most preferred design option, overall. However, preference varied by race and gender. While men preferred a skate park more than the other two options, women and BIPOC community members preferred options 1 and 2, as the graph below shows.

Survey: Preferred design option



“I think that in order to be a successful place for people to linger, the space would need to be closer to other positive activity like the farmers market, and two days a week isn’t enough to populate the area with a healthy mix of people doing productive things.”

“It’s exciting to see a design that encourages and improves activities and usage already happening (farmers market, transit) without total change.”

“I also like the ability to have a flexible space for events. I’d be fine with concept 3 too, but it’s a bit hard for me to see an underpass as being a destination where people would come hang out on swings.”

Core design elements like lighting and green space were the focus of most comments.

Comments collected most frequently mentioned including elements for flexible use, followed by lighting, green space, public art and a service kiosk. These features were consistently popular and positive, and will be part of the base design at Hi-Lake.

- Lighting
- Green space
- Walking and bike lanes
- Public art

The community wants a bright, green and walkable Hi-Lake.

People like flexible designs, lighting, green space, art, kiosks, and walkability.

“It’s exciting to see a design that encourages and improves activities and usage already happening (farmers market, transit) without total change.”

Social media graphics summarizing findings.



“[Option 2] seems most flexible with opportunities to close off or open up areas if it gets abused due to people hanging out and being nefarious.”

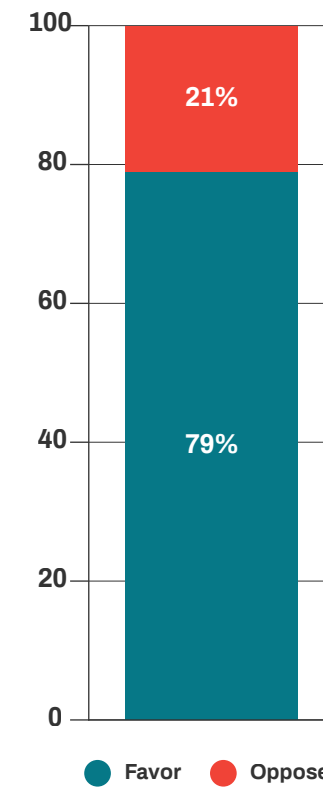
“I think overhead lighting, designed by a lighting designer, will do a lot to make the space feel safer.”

“I like the [concept of] public art and space for events, plus the nice lighting. I also like lots of green space.”

“Space for market or other local business activity that will draw people to the location more than some seating and art installations will.”

“Skate Park” was the feature that received the most comments. The idea is largely supported with some concerns. Of the 115 comments mentioning the skate park, approximately four out of five were favorable. Some in favor felt that a skate park would add built-in activity that wouldn’t requiring programming. Of the comments opposed to a skate park, many cited concerns with safety from traffic and air quality.

Survey: Support for a Skate Park



“Concepts 1 and 2 are going to be dead space unless continually programmed. No one is going to want to just sit on amphitheater seating under a highway overpass, public art is going to get tagged and broken. Skaters will use the space without needing programming, there are still very few spaces available for skaters to use, and highway noise won’t be a problem.”

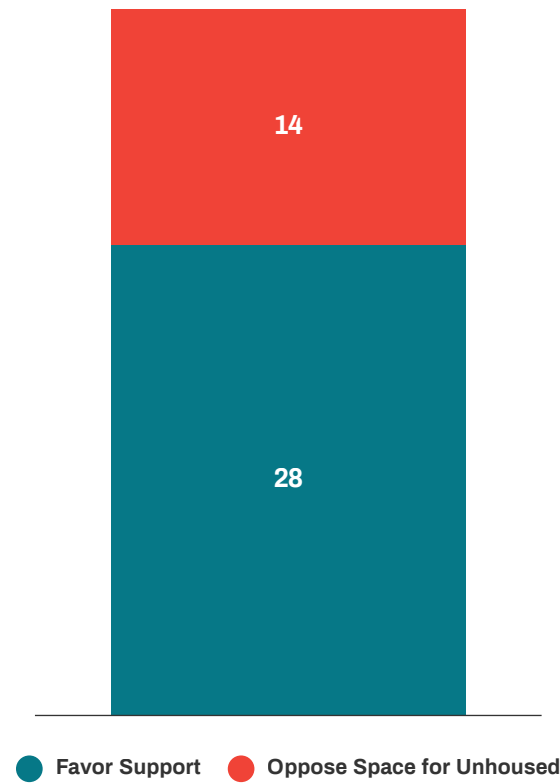
“I don’t believe it’s the right intersection for a skate park, too busy. But yes to the lights, green space and art.”

“Game spaces and skating places will help make the “re-design” feel like an investment in the community... and it couldn’t come a day too soon.”

“[I] don’t think having children (or anyone really) hanging out where there are so many exhaust fumes is safe, especially under a bridge where the fumes have nowhere to go so just sit/circulate in the playground & skate park.”

Respondents had mixed opinions on designing space for unhoused community uses. The community had differing views on whether the Hi-Lake redesign should prioritize use of the space by the unhoused community. In total, 42 comments were received regarding creating a welcoming space for unhoused neighbors underneath the bridge. Two-thirds of comments favored support for the unhoused community, with the remaining opposed.

Survey: Support for Design for Unhoused Community Use



“I liked bits of all of [the designs]; I don’t feel like there’s a clear winner. My biggest priorities are keeping the space useful to the people who spend time there now.”

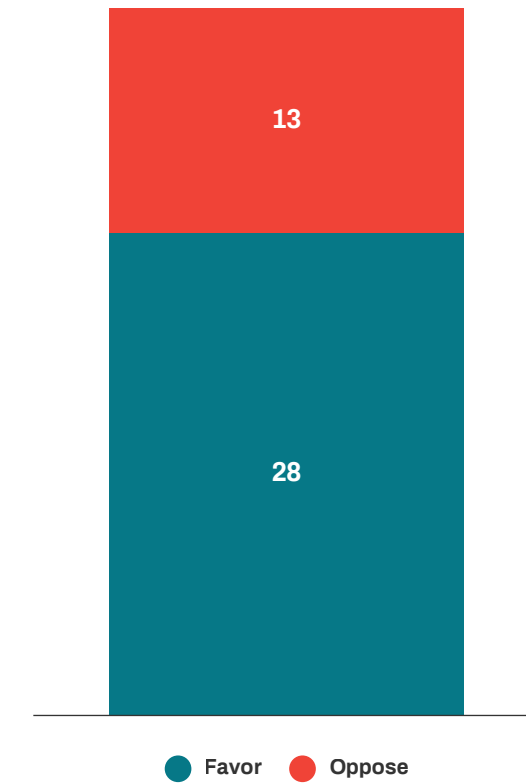
“[Option 1] does the job - all the extra stuff is unnecessary! I appreciate that you are prioritizing respectful ways of design that are not hostile to unhoused neighbors.”

“None of these are a good idea. Fence the area off and get rid of the homeless junkies. It is a horribly unsafe area. It is a complete waste of money to try and make it nice before the crime and homeless issue is fixed.”

“Park space! Gathering places! What is the plan for working with homeless folks that live/hang out in this area? Just kick them out? Provide services? Allow tents?”

While some in the community oppose creating a gathering space underneath the bridge, the majority are in favor. A similar divide to the one above exists regarding providing resting and gathering places in general. Of 41 comments received that mentioned creating gathering spaces underneath the bridge, two-thirds were in favor, feeling that a redesign could create an inviting space at Hi-Lake. The remaining one-third opposed creating a space to gather underneath the bridge.

Survey: Support for a Gathering Space



“Can’t see people playing games with six lanes of traffic next to them. Seating probably ends up being an encampment area that riles people up for some reason.”

“I liked the tier seating, and [inviting] people into the space.”

“Among other things, [Option 3] is the best way to assure safety. Also, the south side provides a space for people to sit comfortably rather than simply sprawl on the concrete.”

“I don’t believe that under an underpass makes for a good gathering space”

“[Option 2] provides gathering space that I think people will actually use.”

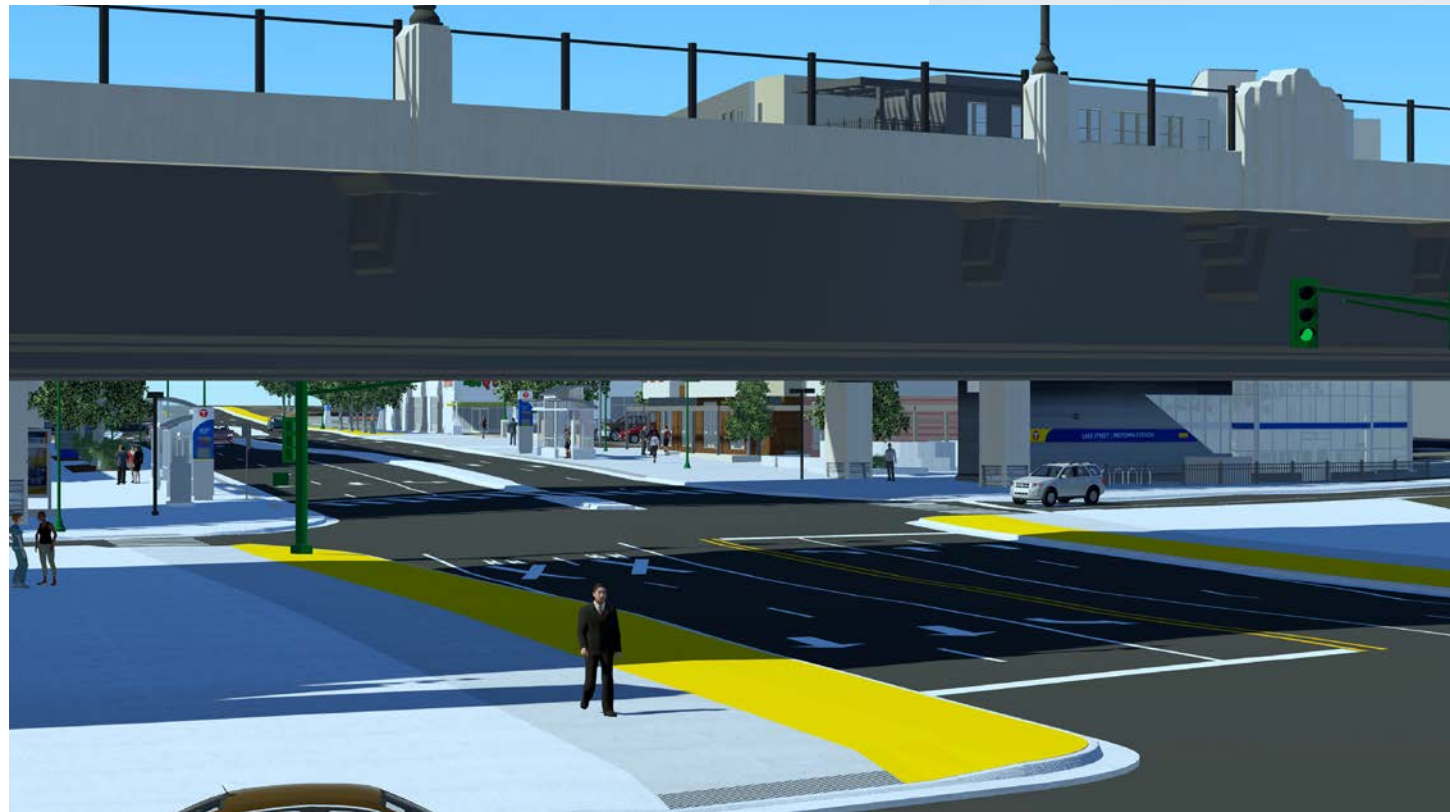
Still, some respondents favored a base design, with few feature additions. In total, 35 comments received believed that the space should be left with little to no additional design features beyond the intersection changes. Some of these comments felt that a base design would be the easiest to keep well-maintained. Others felt that spending resources building and sustaining more complex designs wouldn't be cost-effective.



“Park Board resources need to be directed to parks. Site needs to be maintained. Site should be comfortable as people wait for bus/train.”

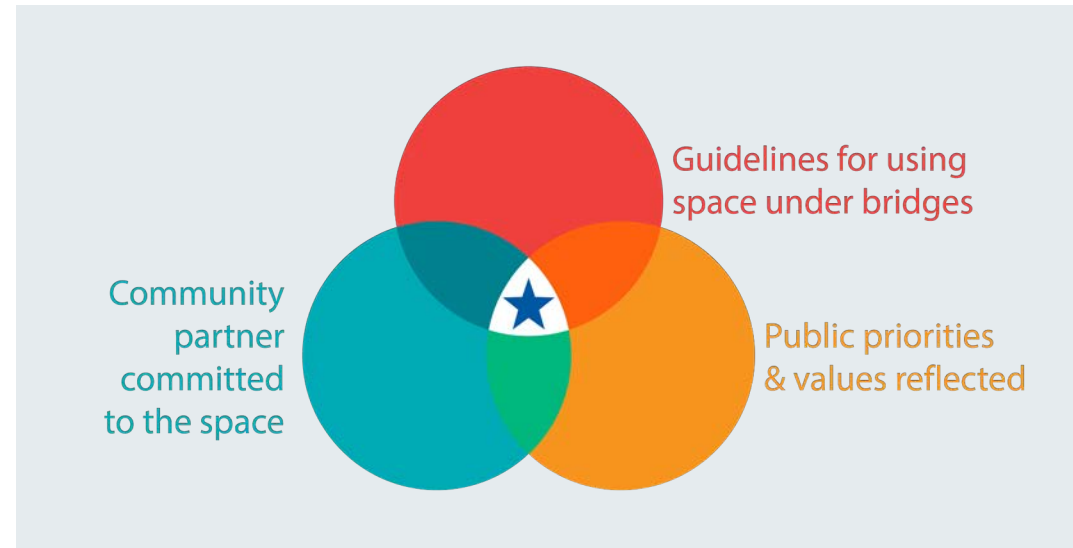
“[Option one is] the most cost-effective, easiest in terms of maintenance. The more difficult a project is to maintain, the less likely it is to sustain.”

“Keep it simple. There's a lot of traffic in that location and so I don't want too much going on there.”



Establishing Activation Partnerships

Translating the public's priorities into a final space design will ultimately require design selections that reflect the public's priorities, fit within the boundaries of allowable uses for transportation right-of-way, and align with the goals of a partner with capacity to maintain a contract with MnDOT and manage the space for non-transportation uses.



Throughout the project, SDK helped to identify potential partners with capacity to succeed at Hi-Lake. SDK also facilitated multiple conversations across agencies to identify potential non-transportation resources that would support an activated design under the Hi-Lake bridge.

The process unearthed several important findings:

1. **Hi-lake is not an automatic fit for special service districts.** Within the City of Minneapolis, “Special Service Districts” are designated commercial zones where property owners agree to pay a slightly higher tax / fee in return for numerous special city services that add to the attractiveness of the space. These services include streetscape designs, lighting, planting, and a higher level of trash pickup services. Each Special Services District is governed by a board of member-property owners, and this board selects the features for the District. The tax or fee charged to members of the district is the cost required to pay for the selected features. The Downtown Improvement District in downtown Minneapolis is a well-known Special Services District, but there are examples throughout the city.

City staff consulted felt that Hi-Lake had some challenges related to being a Special Service District. Specifically, the relatively small number of commercial properties and the high number of nonprofits and government agencies, including Hennepin County, the city of Minneapolis, Metro Transit, the Minnesota Department of Transportation and the MNNR railroad all of whom are not normally taxed in a Special Service District. The city, Hennepin County, Metro Transit and the Minnesota Department of Transportation own a substantial portion of property from the Target on Lake Street (where the East Lake Street Special Services District ends) to 22nd Avenue. Public sector property owners are exempt from Special Services Districts unless agencies seek an exemption, creating a funding challenge for this method in this place.

2. **Minneapolis park board sees Hi-Lake as potentially alleviating a park desert.** The Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board (MPRB) has expressed preliminary interest in assuming a lease for the added open space underneath the Hi-Lake bridge. Specifically, the area has been identified in the Park Board’s Master Plan as a “park desert” that could benefit from added facilities. The Park Board is also interested in innovative spaces that could house a skate park or other park features that can be harder to place in traditional parks. Currently, the MPRB owns Market Square – the open space between the Hennepin County Service Center and the southwest corner of the Hi-Lake intersection – and hosts the Midtown Farmer’s Market, added play structures, and other features. MPRB acquired the space from the Hennepin County Housing and Redevelopment Authority, which oversaw its redevelopment. This confluence could make the Park Board a natural partner for the added space under the bridge. During this phase of work, SDK has worked with Park Board to understand overall interest and next steps. While they have expressed interest in being the primary lease holder, they have also indicated they would need help from other partners to fill in some gaps of funding and other resources to properly care for and maintain the space. They would be looking to have partnership agreements with other public agencies and private sector partners.
3. **Lake street is a vibrant, rebuilding community, and Hi-Lake could make an important contribution to its future.** The McKnight Foundation convened a community-led planning process parallel to the Hennepin County engagement inviting input to the future of Hi-Lake. The expansive process reimaged the future of Lake Street from the Longfellow neighborhood to Bde Maka Ska after the uprising that followed the murder of George Floyd. In the months since that process

concluded, McKnight Foundation has worked with a variety of partners to bring different types of capital to small business owners, nonprofits, and others along Lake Street. The collaborative effort is most focused on supporting the community-based organizations and small businesses along Lake Street, but the Hi-Lake project stands to make a substantial contribution to the future of the area because of its important role as a transit hub and connecting-point for several neighborhoods.

4. **Activation, increased safety are important additional elements to any use of space under the bridge.**

Recreation amenities underneath the Hi-Lake bridge are seen as an important first step in creating a welcoming, safe destination space. However, the Project Advisory Committee and area leaders consulted do not believe that recreation features alone would be sufficient to create an active and welcoming area in the added space. Instead, many believe that a layering of activities would be needed. This could include regular activation programs like pop-up shops or community events, added safety through violence interrupters, and more frequent cleaning and trash services to keep the space clean and welcoming. Others also suggested incorporating culturally responsive services for the unhoused community of the area, as well.

5. **Existing project-level funding for amenities does not neatly fit with activation or non-transportation uses.**

As part of the partnership process, SDK met with each agency's assigned staff to understand the current system of maintaining the Hi-Lake intersection and available resources for amenities underneath the bridge. This process established a shared understanding across agencies of the base amenities possible under the current system and provided the basis for scoping the added partnerships needed to achieve an activated and amenities-rich space.

Support for these added amenities was almost universal across the Project Advisory Committee and community engagement findings. However, community members and leaders also ask that any amenities be developed for long-term successful activation and maintenance. Ultimately, community members and leaders hope that the final use of space under the Hi-Lake bridge can be clean, safe and welcoming, at minimum—and ultimately hope to see a community destination.

Conclusions

Almost 1,000 people gave input to the future of space under the Hi-Lake bridge that will be added in 2024 as a result of planned road changes. Their work, combined with ongoing collaboration from agencies and the Project Advisory Committee, among others, has informed the following conclusions:

1. **There is enthusiasm for key improvements to the area: added art, nature-based landscaping, lighting, and an easier pedestrian experience.**

Ultimately, the redesigned Hi-Lake intersection will include a menu of basic features that are universally supported by community members. These include planned art, added greenery and landscaping, brighter lighting underneath the bridge, and clear, wide bike and pedestrian lanes that allow for ample safe, multi-modal traffic. The intersection change itself, with narrower crosswalks and clearer corners and site-lines for vehicles and pedestrians, is a positive design-change that is the result of extensive public engagement. Each of these features are positive, supported elements of the intersection redesign planned for 2024.

2. **An activated destination space is universally preferred, provided it's maintained.**

In addition to these base features, stakeholders engaged prefer an activated destination space with the added space that will be created under the Hi-Lake bridge. Community members want to see a bright, vibrant place that is an easy and safe gathering place, with the addition of shops, pop-up services, or park-like activities. However, community and Project Advisory Committee members were also clear that added amenities only add value if the project can also secure the resources needed to maintain them. For most, maintenance is all-encompassing: clean and well-maintained features; adequate staff for regular programming or activities that attract regular foot-traffic; and a safe place that respects all community members who gather there.

3. **Partnerships necessary for an activated space are promising but take time.**

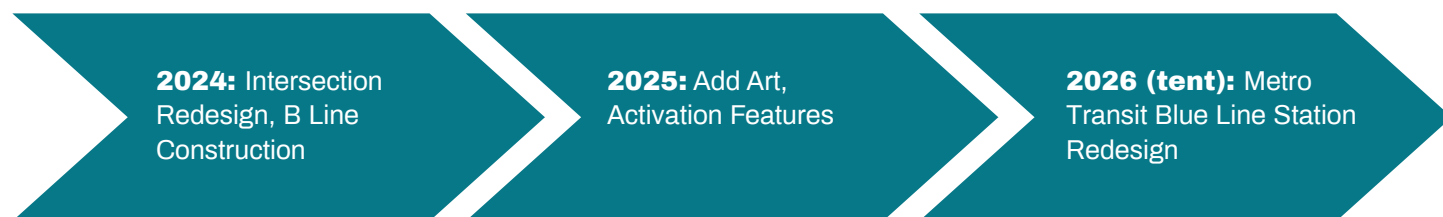
Ultimately, achieving the funding and management structures necessary to fully activate the space underneath the Hi-Lake bridge will require unique, cross-sector partnerships. Key capacities that will be necessary include:

- Lease: A partner positioned to manage an ongoing lease with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT).
- Amenities Construction: Most added amenities cannot be paid for from traditional transportation funding sources. Funding efforts will include the cost of added amenities not eligible for transportation funding.

- Property Management: Dedicated staff time to provide ongoing cleaning, safety, and physical space maintenance.
- Activation: Staff time dedicated to programming, activities, publicity, and other actions aimed at creating a welcoming and active space that maximizes the design features added and fosters a safe, fun culture.
- Funding / Governance: A clearly defined mechanism for ongoing funding to support maintenance of the area, and a legal structure (joint powers agreement, charter, nonprofit or other) to bring partner-agencies and other stakeholder-organizations together for coordinated management of the space.

4. **Substantial public-sector land ownership creates a need for new approaches.** The multi-jurisdictional, public sector land ownership surrounding the Hi-Lake intersection creates added complexities that make partnerships necessary for an activated space. Specifically, the entire Hi-Lake intersection and important stretches of the space immediately east and west of it are owned by different agencies: the city of Minneapolis (east), Metro Transit (some parts of the northwest corner), and southwest (Hennepin County / Park Board / MNNR railroad). Self-assessing maintenance fees are a common strategy to fund added maintenance costs among private property owners, such as Special Service Districts, but are more complicated to implement when the property is owned by multiple units of government.

5. **A phased approach to implementation will accommodate relationship + construction realities.** Construction for the new intersection layout and B Line features will move forward in 2024, with many construction specifications due in 2023. At the same time, many of the partnership details noted above will take more time to finalize. For this reason, a phased approach to implementing activation designs, as detailed in the graph below, may be necessary. This approach also allows agencies to work through the ongoing funding and governance mechanisms that will be necessary to successfully sustain an activated space without slowing the physical construction schedule.



Recommendations For Under the Hi-Lake Bridge

Based on SDK’s work to understand community priorities and explore potential partnerships for upcoming, added space under the Hi-Lake bridge, we would offer Hennepin County and partner-agencies the following recommendations for moving forward:

1. **Pursue an activated design, with attention to resetting the area dynamic.** Hennepin County and its agency-partners are well-positioned to build the partnerships needed to fully activate the new, added space under the Hi-Lake bridge. The Minneapolis Park Board’s interest in the space as a potential skate park and venue for pop-up shops is an especially promising opportunity. The Park Board already manages of the open plaza space next to the Hennepin County Service Center, including maintaining a strong relationship with the Corcoran Neighborhood Association and its farmers market. Extending the Park Board’s area presence to the space under the bridge could be a natural complement to these area relationships and amenities.

2. **Identify sustainable funding and governance for maintenance and activation.** Ultimately, an activated design will require a sustainable funding source to support ongoing maintenance and activation. Specifically, areas of partnership necessary include lease, funding for activation amenities, property management, ongoing activation, and a funding and governance system to support these activities on an ongoing basis.

There are not exact systems in place to neatly assemble all components listed above in a packaged approach. However, there are several examples of alternate funding and governance structures that have been applied to other Minnesota projects and could translate to the Hi-Lake project needs. Example models include:

- **Joint powers board and base-budget funding.** This approach is a common tool for public sector agencies to collaborate across jurisdictions for a project and could be an appropriate fit for Hi-Lake. Joint Powers would work best if the partnerships required to activate the space are strictly public sector agencies; adding nonprofits, philanthropy and neighborhoods to the collaboration could be a challenge in this model. Likewise, creating a project contribution amount through

agencies' base budgets could be a simple, sustainable funding approach similar to the Special Service District's annual fee but for public agencies.

- **Public-private investments in an activation endowment.** Under this example, a nonprofit or foundation holds a charitable fund that is set aside to cover ongoing activation and maintenance costs. Long term costs are budgeted and funds raised before construction, and money is placed into a charitable fund for ongoing management (e.g. donor advised fund or specified fund at a community foundation, like the Park Board Foundation). The governing rules of a fund would stipulate how money can be deducted from the fund and for what costs. Under this approach, the fund's governing rules can also specify governance and decision making for future allocations, such as requiring an appointed board to approve annual allocations.

In the Hi-Lake example, this structure could be used with the Park Board Foundation, if they are interested. The model could provide a simple route for bringing together both public and private dollars and project oversight without creating excessive new structures. The fund could include governance requirements that empower representatives of agencies, private owners, neighborhoods, and/or other voices to be represented in any governance group. An example of this structure in action is the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund's NOAH Impact Fund. This Impact fund received dollars from Hennepin County, private foundations, Minnesota Housing and others to invest in refurbishments to naturally occurring affordable housing units. The fund pooled both public and private resources to address a specific funding need and invited cross-sector leadership without creating excessive new structures.

- **Cross-sector nonprofit with membership fees.** Finally, this example would assume creating a nonprofit organization to foster coordination and community involvement in the Hi-Lake area. A nearby example is the Midtown Greenway Coalition. One strategy could be to have the Midtown Greenway Coalition extend their reach to include Hi-Lake, rather than creating a similar, parallel nonprofit organization. Under this model, a nonprofit organization serves as the financial vessel for collaboration and area organizations are asked or invited to donate annually. The strength of this model would be the ongoing community leadership it can help cultivate, and it could provide an important venue for hiring staff that can provide ongoing activation at Hi-Lake. However, this model would not be well

positioned to collect and hold money for added amenities, pay for security, or added cleaning. Under this model, agencies may choose a hybrid approach with care for the physical space addressed through a Joint Powers agreement, and community activation funded and managed through a cross-sector nonprofit.

3. **Cultivate and care for community relationships.** The process to date has benefited from careful attention to transparent communication across agencies and with key community partners. The community was instrumental in calling for the redesign of the Hi-Lake intersection, and ongoing attention to those relationships will remain important as the intersection redesign moves into its final phases. Equally important, the partnership work ahead will require engaging additional internal stakeholders from each agency. The added stakeholder complexity will both make the community-based relationships even more important to maintain and could make maintaining the complex set of relationships harder (or at least more time consuming). The project would be well-served by creating a clear, transparent community and stakeholder engagement plan and dedicating sufficient resources to facilitate relationships to reach decisions on the areas of partnership identified.

