

## Memorandum

June 6, 2012

To: Pasadena Complete Streets Team

From: Philip Erickson, Tim Sullivan, Jonah Chiarenza; CD+A

Total of 11 pages

Re: Pasadena Complete Streets (CD+A No. 1206): Parklets Research Findings

### Introduction

In anticipation of the City of Pasadena's consideration of *parklets* on Colorado Boulevard, this memorandum summarizes research conducted by CD+A regarding this new and exciting streetscape element. In its simplest form, a parklet is a sidewalk extension into the roadway. The installations are typically very inventive and create additional pedestrian-oriented public space by transforming space allocated to vehicle parking into an expanded sidewalk area with seating, landscaping and other amenities that are open to the public.



Herald Square in New York City  
Source: Brigid Keating



PARKing Day installation, San Francisco  
Source: Rebar

Parklets first appeared in San Francisco as part of the City's Pavement to Parks program, which was inspired by similar projects in New York City where informal plazas and seating areas were created on available portions of roadways. Another precursor to San Francisco's parklets is PARK(ing) Day, an annual event started by Rebar, a San Francisco art and design studio. The premise of PARK(ing) Day is to transform metered parking spots into temporary public parks. Participants set up lawn chairs, card tables and other amenities, feed the parking meter, and draw attention to the allocation of public space to vehicles and travel compared with pedestrians and open space.

Parklets perform a similar function, but as semi-permanent streetscape infrastructure. Most examples are the width of one parallel parking space (approximately six feet) and span between one and three parallel parking spaces in length (between 20 and 66 feet). At present, there are over 20 semi-permanent parklets in San Francisco, with two mobile parklets and a multi-part *Promenade* of parklets in the heart of the City's Union Square shopping district. About 40 additional parklets are being reviewed by the City at this point.

CD+A visited a collection of these San Francisco parklets representing a broad variety of designs, construction techniques, materials and contexts; a complete set of photographs from these visits is available in an appendix. CD+A also interviewed a contractor who worked with the aforementioned Rebar studio that designed, built and installed a number of the City's parklets.

Parklets are intended to minimize permanent physical impacts to installation sites. As standalone infrastructural elements, they are commonly designed to be relatively easily installed and removed if necessary. A typical parklet incorporates a modular design that allows a team of workers to assemble or disassemble it piece by piece within a day or two, depending on design. This is facilitated through the use of a metal frame module, lightweight cladding material, and separately installed seating, tables, and landscaping components.

To ensure parklets are installed in appropriate locations, meet ADA requirements and local design criteria, have community support and a maintenance plan, and are properly insured, they are required to possess a permit and a local steward, usually an adjacent business. Typically, the applicants are the stewards of each parklet, and are responsible for following the established maintenance plan, which includes keeping the parklet free of debris and maintaining associated landscaping and furniture.

Permitting for parklets in San Francisco is coordinated through the Department of Public Works. Eligible applicants include Community Benefits Districts, ground floor business owners, non-profit and community organizations, fronting property owners, and other applicants who may be considered on a case-by-case basis. The permit application requires an initial \$215 fee, and an approved plan carries a permit fee of approximately \$400, followed by an annual renewal fee of \$215.



San Francisco's many parklets take a variety of shapes. Clockwise from left, Mojo Bicycle Café on Divisadero Street and Revolution Café on 22nd Street feature parklets with movable tables and chairs, but diverse material palettes; Freewheel Bike Shop features a unique bench with sod, and landscaping along the street edge, as well as adjacent bicycle parking, and local resident Amandeep Jawa hosts a lushly vegetated parklet in front of his house, both on Valencia Street.

## Creating Successful Parklets

Parklets have been an enormous success in San Francisco. They are well-used, attractive, diverse and inspiring additions to the City's public realm. CD+A observed a number of characteristics that contribute to this success; while the topics that follow are not exhaustive, they frame the discussion going forward. Included in this discussion are certain lessons learned about potential challenges and solutions.

### *Land Use Context*

One of the primary reason San Francisco's parklets thrive is because they are located and designed with adjacent land uses in mind. While parklets are public spaces where anyone is permitted, they benefit from being adjacent to retail-commercial establishments that already have a sidewalk presence and/or attract foot traffic. The presence of people dwelling in the expanded pedestrian realm provided by the parklet has a snowball effect, attracting more people and generating more activity and creating more interesting street life. In this way, parklets also allow business owners to attract more people who might become patrons, while providing the other great benefits of parklets, such as buffering pedestrians from the roadway and contributing additional landscaping, activity, and visual interest to the streetscape, as well as more "eyes on the street." Converting two or three parking spaces—which can only attract a few people at a time—into a parklet allows the same amount of space to attract and accommodate a potentially much greater number of people.



Fabric8 Gallery Parklet is comprised of an annually rotating artist's installation; 22nd Street, San Francisco

Successful parklets can also be located adjacent to non-retail establishments that generate and benefit from foot traffic. For example, a gallery in San Francisco's Mission District has installed a parklet that will feature a series of installations that change annually. Galleries such as this, as well as museums, religious institutions, schools and other community facilities all have users who would benefit from opportunities to congregate, interact, and contribute to a more active street life.

In addition to benefiting the users, these types of open spaces also provide an opportunity for establishments to express an aspect of their organization through the personalized design and programming of their parklet space. The resulting variety of parklet designs in San Francisco is due in part to the variety of sponsors, and is a great aspect of their delight.

## Urban Context

While land use context describes the business or organization adjacent to a parklet, urban context describes the *physical features* of the location around the installation. The most engaging parklets in San Francisco play off their location by considering how a potential user might wish to interact with the environment around them based on the character of the street. If there is an obvious view that people will want to enjoy such as a mural or interesting building façade, allowing users to face and interact with that site feature gives the parklet a special connection to its location. Built-in seating, tables, and ledges allow the designer to choreograph users' activity and may be appropriate in some contexts to facilitate this kind of programming. However, flexible seating allows users and stewards to move and reconfigure chairs and tables to suit a wider variety of needs. In many cases, parklets successfully incorporate a combination of these elements.

The choice of a parklet's materials can also take into consideration the urban context of a given site. Along broader streets that feature denser development, more urban materials like metal and masonry may provide a fitting palette, while on side streets, softer materials like wood and fabric can complement the surrounding urban character.



Four Barrel Coffee Café Parklet, Valencia Street (left) and Café Abir Parklet, Fulton Street (right), San Francisco; These parklets demonstrate a combination of seating configurations including fixed inward-facing benches and flexible chairs and tables, and inward/outward facing stools with wrap-around bar height tables. They also demonstrate diverse material palettes that take inspiration from the respective character of their urban contexts.

In addition to major site features, parklets benefit from taking into account adjacent streetscape furnishings such as benches, bicycle racks, lighting standards, planters, landscaping and trees. These elements may pose impediments to certain parklet designs, but may also provide opportunities to knit the existing context into the new amenity provided by the parklet. For example, a parklet on 24th Street in San Francisco is situated next to sidewalk that features many lushly vegetated tree wells spaced closely together. By providing a relatively high and solid edge topped with flowering plants along the streetside of the parklet, the designers were able to play off the existing vegetation and create a sense of enclosure that resembles a garden on a private patio. In this particular example, the parklet steward, Fun Scribbledoodles party store, has incorporated a painting station at children's height, adding a unique feature that plays off the retail establishment's business.



Existing street trees and landscaping frame the curbside edge of the Fun Scribbledoodles Parklet on 24th Street, San Francisco, while vegetation on the streetside of the parklet creates a sense of enclosure. A painting station references the stores' business and creates a unique feature within the public realm.

Where parklets are situated along bicycle routes it is especially common for them to provide bicycle parking, either within a portion of the parklet, or in an adjacent parking space. Valencia Street in San Francisco features Class-II bike facilities on both sides of the street, and several of the seven nearby parklets feature bicycle parking.



Bicycle parking can be accommodated within the parklet design, as featured at the Mojo Bicycle Cafe Parklet (left) and Four Barrel Coffee Parklet (center). Bicycle parking can also be accommodated in adjacent vehicle parking spaces as featured at the Freewheel Bike Shop (right) on Valencia Street, San Francisco.

Turning the challenge of limited space into an opportunity, some very creative results are possible. Four Barrel Coffee's parklet on Valencia Street accommodates over a dozen bicycles in less space than one vehicle and expands the armature devised for vertical bicycle storage into a complete canopy design. Whether on major bicycle routes or not, parklets can efficiently increase the number of potential patrons at local businesses and encourage more people to travel by bicycle citywide, by providing plentiful,

secure, and interesting bicycle parking. Local transportation infrastructure is an important physical element to consider in studying the urban context of a potential parklet site. In addition to accommodating bicycles, one can envision parklets near transit stops providing realtime arrival information and ticket vending machines, or parklets near common jogging routes featuring exercise and stretching features, composed in a playful, creative format.

### *Alternative Configurations*

The creativity and variety found among San Francisco parklets is perhaps the program's greatest successes. Powell Street Promenade, while itself unique in the field of the City's parklets, actually features a series of eight very similar parklets located along two blocks of the City's Union Square shopping district. This series of parklets provides a needed addition of sidewalk space for the throngs of pedestrians that frequent this district. As signature pieces designed by notable landscape architect Walter Hood and funded by Audi, the Promenade features custom aluminum "ribbons" that weave into benches, rails and tables, and form planter boxes along the edges of the parklets.



Powell Street Promenade in San Francisco's Union Square features eight thematically related parklets along two blocks

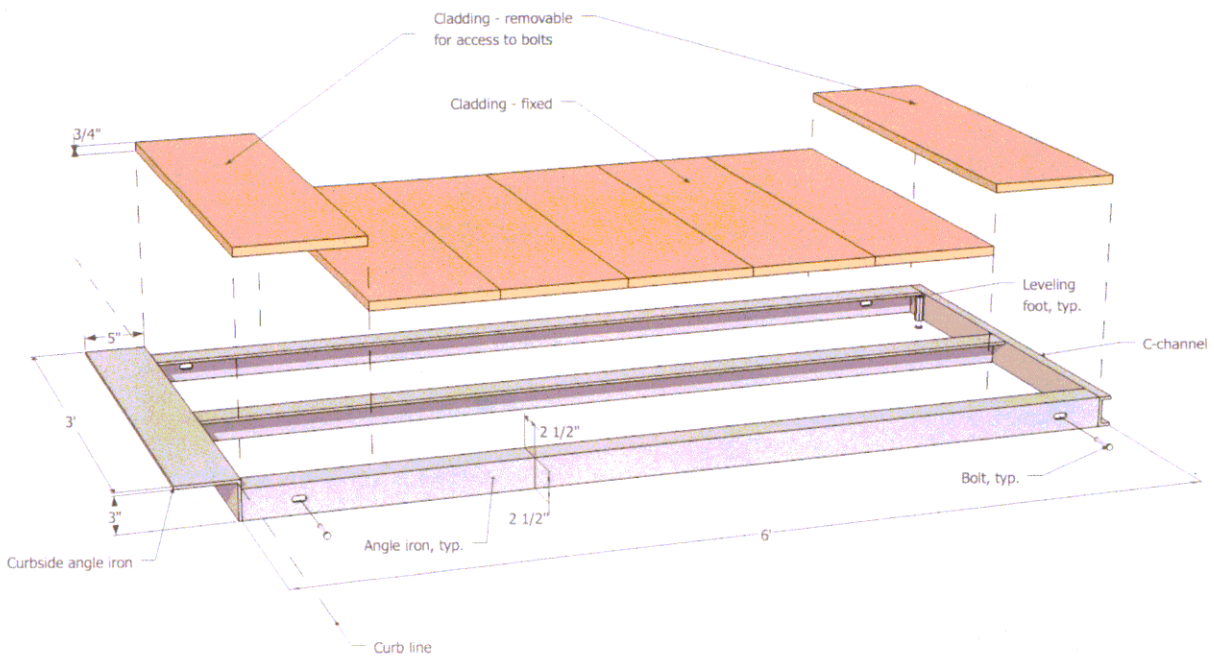
As mentioned in the introduction, New York City has experimented with the dedication of unused portions of roadways to pedestrian uses, similar to parklets, but without extending sidewalk-height platforms into the roadway. San Francisco's Pavement to Parks developed a similar installation, using permanent planters, but also alternative pavement treatments and movable furniture and planters to create Castro Commons along busy Market Street. Installing the permanent planters in the untraveled portions of the intersection between pedestrian, vehicle and transit paths the edges of the space are defined and users are shielded from traffic.



Castro Commons features permanent planters that anchor the corners of the space, along with movable planters and seating, at the intersection of Castro, Market and 17th Street, San Francisco

## Construction, Installation & Maintenance

Parklets are designed to minimally impact the installation site. The San Francisco parklets for which construction appeared most straightforward were built on modular metal frames that support the cladding and furnishing amenities. To connect to the adjacent sidewalk, parklets built with metal frames feature an elongated angle iron, which overlaps the existing curb. Additional angle irons extend into the parking lane, connecting with a c-channel along the far edge of the module. Lightweight wooden or synthetic decking is permanently attached to the frame as cladding. At key locations, the cladding is removable to provide access to the frame so adjacent frames can be secured to one another. The cladding in these locations is installed last, along with such components as planters, benches, walls, and fencing, among other elements.



While CD+A explored the above design in greater detail, several other designs exist. Using the same metal frame modules described above, some parklets feature longer segments of cladding, staggered and customized at the fascia location along the street edge. Others use a different structural system and feature masonry pavers, bricks or even landscaped area for cladding, while others feature more polished, customized industrial construction. See the appendix for additional photos of various cladding and designs.



A variety of materials are used to clad San Francisco's parklets

A common feature among parklets is a stormwater drainage channel along the curb and gutter. This allows the uninterrupted flow of stormwater under the parklet and into storm sewer inlets. The drainage channel can become clogged with refuse, however, and may require cleaning to function properly. Near these drainage inlets and outlets, wheels stops are required to prevent vehicles in adjacent parking spaces from colliding with the parklet. These may also pose an impact to drainage if not properly spaced from the parklet and curb.



Drainage channel outlets may pose maintenance issues if not designed and maintained properly

Other maintenance issues include maintaining the health of planted matter and maintaining the integrity of cladding, walls, rails, seating, movable furniture and other components.



## **Next Steps**

### *Applying Lessons Learned to Colorado Boulevard Parklets*

The ideas and applications discussed above provide a framework for developing concepts for pilot parklets on Colorado Boulevard between South Oakland and South Madison Avenues in the City of Pasadena.

#### **Design Character or Themes for Parklets**

The *land use context* and *urban context* of the block should provide a departure point for discussing potential themes and strategies for making these parklets special, place-based amenities that expand and improve the quality of the public realm in a way that is specifically tailored to the location.

#### **Technical Design for Annual Removal of Parklets**

The technical design of the parklets will also require careful consideration to accommodate the City of Pasadena's unique needs on Colorado Boulevard, with respect to the street's annual Tournament of Roses Parade. Lessons learned from the study of San Francisco's parklets will help guide a discussion about the logistics of construction, as well as inform potential operational strategies related to assembly and annual disassembly, storage, and reassembly (see logistics discussion below).

#### **Design in Relation to Roadway Configurations**

The City has asked that design concepts be developed for two configurations for parking and travel lanes on Colorado. One as it is today with four travel lanes and parallel parking on each side, and another with two travel lanes and back-in diagonal on each side. While the diagonal parking will allow for wider parklets there is the issue of roadway crown over this length and its potential to result in a parklet surface that is too sloped to facilitate its use.

#### **Accommodation of Bus Stops**

An additional consideration of roadway configuration is presented by the bus stops that are on both sides of the street and how these are accommodated in both street configurations.

#### **Potential Removable Corner Bulb-outs**

Also, the concept designs could consider the feasibility of parklet-like structures that could serve as removable corner bulb-outs. Alternatively, a design with removable bollards may be appropriate, particularly in the option with diagonal parking.

#### **Land Use and Urban Context**

The land use context of this block includes the Le Cordon Bleu Culinary Institute's Technique restaurant, and Pasadena Presbyterian Church on the north side of Colorado, while Sofa U Love furniture store, County children's services building, the Culinary Institute administration and classrooms, and a surface parking lot are located on the south side of the boulevard. Both sides of the street feature 14-foot wide sidewalks, street trees, and on street parking with some red zones and fire hydrants. There is an eastbound bus stop on the southeast corner of Colorado and Oakland, and a westbound bus stop on the northwest corner of Colorado and Madison.

The land use and urban context along this block of Colorado Boulevard creates some great opportunities for parklets. Particularly on the north side of the block where there will be more consistent sunlight, spaces that accommodate churchgoers, culinary school students, and patrons of the school's restaurant would likely provide a popular amenity. On the south side of the block, a parklet that accommodates people visiting, working in, or waiting outside of the County children's services building could provide a welcome landmark and amenity; and the design could integrate more whimsical elements and features for children to interact with.

If angled parking and/or an installation at an intersection were desired—such as the northeast corner of Colorado and Oakland outside the Technique restaurant—additional design parameters would need to be investigated, including allowable curb radii, curb ramps at street crossing, pedestrian and possibly street lighting, and potential modifications to the existing sidewalk, such as larger planters and landscaping. Converting a larger area in the roadway may also provide an opportunity to consider a design approach similar to that used for San Francisco's Castro Commons, as discussed under Alternative Configurations, above; with the constraint that all elements are removable.

### **Logistics**

Methods of construction, assembly and disassembly are of particular importance on Colorado Boulevard, because of the facility's annual use for the Tournament of Roses Parade. While a given parklet is custom designed to suit the adjacent land use and urban context, its modular construction and semi-temporary form of installation provide a streamlined way for a crew of workers to assemble it on-site that could be replicated for multiple parklets. This approach to construction and assembly presents one possible option for disassembly: a similar crew of workers disassembles the parklet modules piece-by-piece, removing the component modules to a temporary storage location for the duration of the Parade, from set up to clean up. A crew would then reassemble the modules following the Parade.

There may be opportunities to contract with the crews that provide other physical preparations for the Rose Parade for installation and disassembly of parklets on Colorado Boulevard. Similarly, the teams that build and operate the floats in the Parade may be of service in constructing the parklets. In both cases, benefits may emerge in working with vendors that have working knowledge of the operations and infrastructural requirements of the Parade on the public right-of-way.

While modular construction is a common technique for building parklets, another option for construction, assembly and disassembly might include creating a design with more structural rigidity that allows a forklift operator to remove fewer, heavier pieces with components such as seating and landscaping left intact. Such a design has not been observed, but is worth further investigation considering the specific needs of the City in accommodating the Parade.

The availability of temporary storage locations in the immediate vicinity of the installation may impact the feasibility of designing parklets in smaller modular units, or larger intact units and should also be considered.

## **Conclusion**

This memorandum, and a set of street configuration diagrams, establishes an initial constellation of issues for a continuing discussion and iterative concept development with the City, starting with a meeting to

discuss potential parklet locations, configurations and programming, to be followed by the design of conceptual plan(s).

Below is a partial bibliography of web-based sources for additional information.

### ***SF Parklets Map***

<<https://maps.google.com/maps/ms?msa=0&msid=212798053680911513793.0004955d73950fdbb6356&ie=UTF8&z=13>>

### ***Articles about Parklets***

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2011/07/01/MNH01K2AG1.DTL>

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2011/12/29/MNNS1MDAHQ.DTL>

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/qws/as/qr?scope=term&source=&dmode=preset&period=1y&minm=01&mind=01&miny=2012&maxm=12&maxd=31&maxy=2012&term=parklet&smode=and&Submit=S>

<http://www.treehugger.com/urban-design/nyc-invites-businesses-replace-parking-outdoor-seating.html>

<http://missionlocal.org/2012/02/too-many-parklets-in-the-mission/>

<http://createquity.com/2012/03/parklets-coming-soon-to-a-city-near-you.html>

<http://luskin.ucla.edu/news/school-public-affairs/gilbert-foundation-awards-grant-ucla-parklets-los-angeles-project>

[http://la.curbed.com/archives/2012/01/3\\_new\\_pedestal\\_parklets\\_coming\\_to\\_long\\_beach\\_businesses.php](http://la.curbed.com/archives/2012/01/3_new_pedestal_parklets_coming_to_long_beach_businesses.php)

[http://la.curbed.com/archives/2011/09/parking\\_space\\_parklets\\_could\\_last\\_past\\_parking\\_day\\_in\\_down\\_town.php](http://la.curbed.com/archives/2011/09/parking_space_parklets_could_last_past_parking_day_in_down_town.php)

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parklet>