

THE ROAD TO LIVABLE STREETS: PEDESTRIANIZING A SUNBELT DOWNTOWN

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Downtown Phoenix Streetscape Improvements

Despite decades of major investments in large offices buildings and civic facilities, Downtown Phoenix in the early 1990's still had little pedestrian street life. Its look-alike one-way streets and superblock high rise developments interspersed with surface lots had created an overscaled, poorly enclosed, and auto-dominated ambience typical of many sunbelt downtowns. Phoenix visitors found that while conventions, sports events and concerts were held downtown, streetlife and nightlife were to be found in neighboring smaller cities like Scottsdale. Images of deserted downtown streets fed perceptions of poor personal security, further draining downtown's vitality. A "Visioning Process" was held by the City in 1993 where community participants identified increasing the "pedestrian-friendliness" of downtown as a top priority. FTB made recommendations during the process to focus improvements on key streets to increase the project's impact. Following the Visioning Process, FTB was asked by the Downtown Phoenix Partnership, a public-private consortium, to redesign three major streets within Downtown Phoenix' core. The project set out to:

- Dramatically enhance the image and character of downtown

- Increase pedestrian comfort by changing perceived scale and width of pedestrian spaces

- Support ground-floor businesses by changing traffic patterns on selected streets

- Provide better pedestrian linkages between major downtown workplaces, hotels, and cultural facilities

- Stimulate new commercial investment with highly visible public capital improvements

- Accomplish these goals at a reasonable cost and without impeding vehicular movement.

The three project streets (Second, Monroe, and Adams Streets) were transformed with custom 30' tall light columns, purple-hued streetlamps and furnishings, uplit date palm and deciduous desert tree plantings centered in parking lanes, high-intensity (5 footcandle minimum) warm white (3200K) metal halide area lighting, and construction of sidewalk corner "bow-outs" to shorten street crossing distances. The overall strategy was to spend money primarily on vertical elements rather than large paving areas for the "best bang for the buck." Use of "overlap zones" allowed activities and elements (parking, street trees) to occupy the same space within the constrained street section, and psychologically enlarge pedestrian turf within street corridors without moving curbs or constraining traffic flow. North-south Second Street became a formal ceremonial way, lined by monumental street lighting columns and terminating in the America West Arena, home of the Phoenix Suns basketball team. East-west Adams and Monroe Streets (west of 2nd Street) were converted from one-way back to two-way traffic, with former lane width re-used to add angled

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parking on one side. Monroe Street east of Third Street was lined with tall date palms, in response to the street's low and irregular building enclosure. A "distillation" of Downtown's varied environmental character - its "Pueblo Deco" skyscrapers and civic buildings, remnant Victorians, modern steel and glass highrises, and the desert landscape of the surrounding Salt River Valley - inspired custom furnishing designs and selection of catalog components, plant materials, and colors.

The project covered 18 blocks (6,840 linear feet). It was completed in 1995 at a cost of approximately 6.8 million dollars. The project team had 17 months from the beginning of schematic design to the completion of construction in order to be ready for the 1995 NBA All-Stars Game, and was successfully completed on-time and on-budget.

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