

INTERNATIONAL AWARD FOR PUBLIC ART

Artist : Jim Gallucci and Scott Richardson
Location : North Carolina, USA
Year : 2012
Researcher : Jessica Fiala

In the early 2000s downtown Greensboro faced a challenge that confronted many communities across the country. Lacking a downtown residential base, when large department stores and businesses relocated to suburban communities, the city center's activity and vibrancy waned. Additionally, although vehicle traffic wove together disparate parts of the city, pedestrian connections were inadequate, creating a physical disjunction that served to fortify racial and social divides between downtown Greensboro and historically African American communities to the south.¹

In response to this challenge, eight local foundations formed Action Greensboro, a nonprofit dedicated to urban renewal that developed a series of strategies to revitalize the downtown, including a plan for a four-mile greenway that would encircle the city. This greenway would connect the urban core to surrounding communities as well as to the extensive park and trail systems beyond. Planning began in earnest in 2009 and in 2012, the first significant portion of the project was completed.

This first quarter mile segment, Morehead Park, features numerous public art projects and public art is part of the much larger greenway plan. The central focus for this case study is a railway underpass containing the artwork *Over.Under.Pass*. Impassible since the 1970s, the greenway renovation opened up the underpass as a pedestrian traffic route connecting southern communities to the downtown. *Over.Under.Pass* was completed in conjunction with area cleanup, the creation of a paved path, and the much larger Morehead Park renovation. Running through the underpass, the installation is anchored by historic archways covered by iron gates designed by artist Jim Gallucci modeled after nearby art deco architectural accents dating back to 1928, the year the underpass was originally built. These gates cover arching windows filled by LED lights run by a motion-sensor program designed by Scott Richardson that responds to the movements and interaction of passersby. In addition to creating a passageway connecting formerly divided portions of the city, the work serves to enhance safety through lighting, provide a welcoming interactive component for visitors, and serve as a pedestrian gateway to downtown.

The physical installation is one piece of a much larger undertaking. Early in planning phases, it became apparent that opening a path through the underpass would bisect a large homeless camp that had been established in the area for many years. The camp was significant not only for its size but also for the internal rules and self-policing that

¹ "How can public art be used to give new life to aging infrastructure and build connections between urban neighborhoods?" National Endowment for the Arts – Exploring Our Town. Accessed January 29, 2016. <https://www.arts.gov/exploring-our-town/overunderpass>

made it more maintained and safer than other local camps. Partnerships and federal funding enabled Action Greensboro to offer permanent housing, which was accepted by about half of camp residents. A number of other residents moved, and collaboration with an adjacent private property owner enabled two individuals to continue living encamped near the original site. As the larger project to connect communities moves forward, this aspect of the work sheds light on the many stakeholders involved in place (re)making and brings to the fore the imperfect complexities of balancing and serving the distinct needs and perspectives that meet in shared public space.

As a downtown revitalization effort and larger economic development project, the greenway's impact will not be fully known until 2018, when the full loop will be mostly completed. In the meantime, beginning with Morehead Park was a strategic effort, in part an acknowledgement of the need to build partnerships and trust in Warnersville, a long-standing African American community that has struggled to rebound from failed external efforts at urban renewal that resulted in the loss of local businesses and activity. While the investment that has sprung up in other neighborhoods in anticipation of the greenway has not yet manifested in this section, it was important to Action Greensboro to begin their work here. As Dabney Sanders, Project Manager for the Downtown Greenway, emphasized, "We wanted to send a message that the Greenway is equal opportunity to everyone."²

Over.Under.Pass is in this regard indicative of an undercurrent that runs throughout the project: a desire to create connections between communities coupled with commitment to an ongoing and long-term process.

² Researcher conversation with Dabney Sanders, Project Manager, Downtown Greenway, January 14, 2016.