

# THE PORCH AT 30TH STREET STATION

## BETA TESTING PHILADELPHIA'S NEXT GREAT PUBLIC SPACE

University City District is pleased to celebrate the opening of **The Porch at 30th Street Station**, a transformative urban open space for Philadelphia. With magnificent views of the Schuylkill River, bridges, and the Center City skyline, and bounded by two monumental historic buildings, The Porch is a place of activity, respite, and social interaction at a location where there has long been a dire need for pedestrian amenities. In addition, it is a vibrant and welcoming gateway for travelers emerging from 30th Street Station, whether visiting Philadelphia for the first time or commuting daily.

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Adjacent to the nation's second busiest train station, the site is at the heart of the University City's eastern end, an area only growing in vitality with the addition of more than 4,000 federal employees across the street, the prospect of future Cira buildings, the creation of Penn Park, and Drexel University's growth-oriented master plan. Within a ¼ mile radius of The Porch, there are approximately 9 acres of surface parking, much of which is controlled by institutions with specific plans for development. These parcels present a rare opportunity to create a vibrant and walkable new district linking Center City, 30th Street Station, and University City.



Credit: Lager Raabe Skatke Landscape Architects

AERIAL RENDERING

### WHAT'S IN A NAME?

“The Porch” is the result of a juried naming contest, which garnered nearly 500 entries. The jury chose the name because they found it welcoming, low-key, and unpretentious, with a freshness and simplicity reflective of UCD’s placemaking methodology.



To create The Porch, University City District was able to piggyback on a larger PennDOT project to rehabilitate six bridges adjacent to 30th Street Station. A true public/private partnership between area stakeholders – including Councilwoman Jannie L. Blackwell, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission, the Streets Department, Amtrak, Brandywine Realty Trust, and many others – engineered the creation of a 50' wide sidewalk where there was once an outer parking lane. PennDOT plans were designed to “lay the foundation” for the future, and UCD seized the opportunity to layer upon them.

### LIGHTER, QUICKER, CHEAPER

UCD's vision for the site is the creation of an inviting, animated public place, with amenities such as abundant and comfortable seating, sun and shade, trees and plantings; ultimately, The Porch at 30th Street Station will become a vibrant magnet and a source of civic pride. However, in the interest of quickly and economically building upon the work of the PennDOT project, UCD looked to examples of new public spaces in other cities that have been developed by taking small, iterative, and experimental steps – Lighter Quicker Cheaper (LQC), as coined by the Project for Public Spaces – in order to determine what works best, rather than starting with large capital expenses.

*New urban open spaces can be developed by taking small, iterative, and experimental steps in order to determine what works best, rather than starting with large capital expenses.*

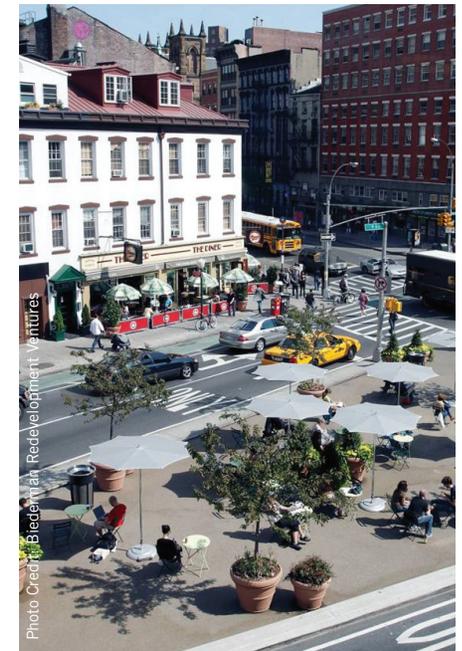


Photo Credit: Biederman Redevelopment Ventures

GANSEVOORT PLAZA IS AN EXAMPLE OF A LIGHTER, QUICKER, CHEAPER PUBLIC SPACE IN MANHATTAN'S MEATPACKING DISTRICT

This summer, UCD unveiled Philadelphia's first parklets. UCD's Parklets are an example of LQC, but the most notable example is the pedestrian improvements orchestrated by New York City's Department of Transportation for Times Square, where sections of Broadway were incrementally converted from places to drive to places for pedestrians to sit, eat, read, stroll, or socialize by simply adding simple furnishings.

UCD's interpretation of LQC is that one leads with people, rather than with large capital investments. This approach resonates with UCD – not just because of its speed and efficacy – but because it plays to UCD's organization strengths: cleaning and stewarding the public realm, and activating public spaces with destination events such as the Night Market and the Baltimore Avenue Stroll.

This approach is effectively beta testing for public spaces, allowing the flexibility to experiment with a variety of configurations and programming to determine what could bring people to the space – farmers markets, concerts, yoga, ballroom dancing, author events, and a variety of performances – before making permanent capital changes – while seeking the assistance of partners, so that the site reflects the best of Philadelphia's arts and culture.

With these ideas in mind – and funding, in part, from the William Penn Foundation – UCD hired Lager Raabe Skafte Landscape Architects (LRSLA) to transform a 50' by 565' stretch of sidewalk into an inviting, vibrant space, while keeping to a very modest construction budget. In order to bring a sense of human scale to the space, LRSLA divided the space into a series of outdoor rooms, punctuated by trees and umbrellas. UCD and LRSLA agreed that movable tables and chairs would allow users maximum flexibility in choosing where to sit in relation to the space, other people, and the sun. LRSLA worked with the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society to fill the site with high quality seasonal plantings. Because large planters were cost prohibitive, LRSLA repurposed agricultural feeding troughs with green roof technology to create large, economical planters with trees that filter traffic noise levels from six lanes of Market Street and foster a hospitable pedestrian environment. All elements are fully removable.



Photo Credit: Conrad Erb

UCD WILL LEAD WITH PEOPLE, ACTIVATING THE PORCH WITH ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS, RATHER THAN WITH A CAPITAL-INTENSIVE DESIGN



Photo Credit: Ryan Collier

MOVABLE TABLES AND CHAIRS ALLOW USERS MAXIMUM FLEXIBILITY IN CHOOSING WHERE TO SIT IN RELATION TO THE SPACE, OTHER PEOPLE, AND THE SUN.



Photo Credit: 34th Street Partnership

UCD IS INSPIRED BY GREELEY SQUARE PARK, A VERDANT, INVITING SPACE WITH A FOOD KIOSK, LARGE TREES AND HIGH-QUALITY SEASONAL PLANTINGS, MOVABLE TABLES AND CHAIRS, AND A BUFFER FROM THE TRAFFIC.

## TOWARDS A CAPITAL INTENSIVE FUTURE

UCD envisions a capital-intensive investment in the space in the near future. As precedent projects, UCD is drawn to examples such as Herald and Greeley Square Parks in Midtown Manhattan, each a verdant, inviting space with a food kiosk, large trees and high-quality seasonal plantings, movable tables and chairs, and enclosed by a low wrought-iron fence and buffered from the traffic by rows of hedges. The Porch's future designs will be informed by a rigorous study of site usage patterns, using a methodology inspired by urban sociologist William "Holly" Whyte. A research assistant will map behavior on the site. Are users sitting or standing? Are they alone or in groups? Are they reading or talking or eating? Where are they in relation to shade, pedestrian traffic, and other elements? The answers to these questions will drive the future development of The Porch.

## MARKET TESTING THE PORCH

In order to test the appropriateness of investing in The Porch, UCD conducted a simple market study. First, UCD determined that the site's seated capacity is approximately 250 people, though a sense of vibrancy will be created by as few as 100 users. 16,000 people work within a very conservative 5 minute walk to the site; this section of the City largely lacks street trees, let alone benches and pleasant places to enjoy the urban outdoors. The Porch is adjacent to 30th Street Station. Roughly 34,000 people board and alight from trains at 30th Street Station; this is the equivalent of nine more Cira Centers of people.

For additional information, please contact Prema Katari Gupta, University City District's Director of Planning and Economic Development at 215-243-0555 or visit [www.universitycity.org](http://www.universitycity.org).