

East Howe Steps Plaza: A New Community Gateway and Gathering Space

The East Howe Steps Plaza project is a community-driven intervention to transform SDOT right-of-way previously used for parking into a new gathering space at the base of the East Howe Steps hill climb in the Eastlake neighborhood of Seattle. HBB worked with the local community group to facilitate a strong engagement program and develop a master plan for the space. The community group received initial funding for the master plan process through a Department of Neighborhood's Small and Simple grant program. Through the master planning process, a partnership was formed with the adjacent property owner, which allowed the community group to match subsequent city grants for final design and permitting with the adjacent property owner's commitment for construction and long-term maintenance. The final design was refined to allow partial term-permit parking by the adjacent property owner while creating dedicated public parking spaces, ADA access, and a plaza design that transforms a narrow stairway into a new gateway and gathering space for the community. HBB facilitated multiple workshops between the community steering committee, the city, and the adjacent property owner, as well as three open houses and other outreach events with the general public. Throughout the process, design alternatives were tailored to balance community interests with requirements for safety/security (CPTED), accessibility, and utility infrastructure within this small, highly constrained space. Design features include a small seating area, flexible plaza space, sensory planting and expanded tree canopy coverage, ADA accessible path, viewing overlook, and opportunities for future public art. This project showcases the success of a dedicated group of neighbors coming together to create a small intervention that has a significant positive impact on their community.