Acknowledgments

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The City of Tallahassee Community Redevelopment Agency
The Tallahassee-Leon County Office of Economic Vitality
Florida State University Master Craftsmen Studio

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Maishia Mitchell - Tallahassee Food Network
Darryl Scott - Frenchtown Resident
Jim Bellamy - Frenchtown Neighborhood Association
Sundiata Ameh El - iGrow "Whatever You Like"
The Frenchtown Heritage Market

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Executive Summary
Tallahassee is a diverse city with a strong historical background and native population who is proud of where they are from. An embodiment of the Tallahassee ideal is the community of Frenchtown, a historically Black neighborhood with its own unique past and culture.

This report covers the efforts of second-year students at Florida State University’s Department of Urban and Regional Planning (Studio and Urban Design courses), in conjunction with the Better Block Foundation, community leaders and City of Tallahassee, to establish a Better Block event for the Frenchtown neighborhood. The purpose of the Better Block event is to help Frenchtown residents display their community’s rich history and pride through the temporary establishment of a “Better Block” – an urban block that takes the ideas of what would make Frenchtown better and implements them for a weekend. Better Block uses informal placemaking practices, which includes the creation of informal open spaces, unofficial performance spaces, informal sidewalks and bike lanes, and even informal marketplaces. This is a community-oriented process, and so there are many goals: better walking infrastructure, increased local business exposure, more open space. This weekend event is ultimately meant to serve as a “live charrette” with the purpose of providing planners with a blueprint of how to plan in the neighborhood for development.

This document covers the planning and implementation process of the Better Block project in the short-term, and also offers long-term urban design concepts for the Frenchtown neighborhood. Overall, students concocted short term and long-term plans for the neighborhood that ranged from creating an intercultural district along Macomb Street; residential urban infill in the D-Street district; and developing a district that will serve as a transition between FSU and the Frenchtown neighborhood. This visioning process took on several iterations before one comprehensive long-term urban design concept was chosen. The class then drilled down to establish a set of short-term design possibilities that tied in with their long-term vision for the area. These short-term plans included pop-up businesses, passive and active open spaces, and pedestrian friendly streetscaping.

This document will first delve into the history of Frenchtown in order to establish some familiarity with the area, following that up with a thorough context analysis of the Frenchtown neighborhood. Direct community engagement will be discussed at length as well in order to establish what the Frenchtown residents envisioned for their neighborhood, as well as what methods worked and what methods proved challenging. Next, a precedent analysis will be presented to provide the rationale behind subsequent design interventions based on cases across the U.S. After providing the context, the next sections will present the short and long-term concepts. And lastly, the implementation and recording of the actual Better Block event will be discussed in order to facilitate future discussion on the successes and challenges of the Better Block process and project.

Overall, this report will offer a baseline for future tactical urbanist interventions in the Frenchtown neighborhood.
1 | Introduction
Florida’s Capital City is a city of the South with geographic features as diverse at its residents. Tallahassee is hub for more than just the State government: it is home to two nationally acclaimed universities, several notable geographic features, and many unique neighborhoods that reflect its storied past.

One such neighborhood is that of Frenchtown, a place with deep ties within the local Black community. It is a place whose jazz roots and vibrant culture lie just beneath the surface, a surface marred by the neighborhood’s decline and fearful local stereotypes. It is a place where civic pride is intrinsically intertwined with cultural identity, and a neighborhood of people who know how great it is to live in Frenchtown.

Frenchtown in the context of Tallahassee
Introduction

Better Block site selection

Frenchtown neighborhood boundaries

Better Block site selection
The Frenchtown neighborhood is recognized as the oldest historically black community in the state of Florida. Its history begins in 1825 when Gilbert du Motier, the Marquis de Lafayette, received a township from the Lafayette Land Grant. The land he received was located in what was then the Northwest quadrant of Tallahassee. Motier brought hundreds of French laborers to this land because he intended to establish a large farming plantation. When his goals were never realized, most of the French laborers either returned to France or moved to New Orleans. Those that remained settled the area, which has now become known as Frenchtown.

After the Civil War and the abolition of slavery in 1865, many emancipated African Americans relocated to Frenchtown. Throughout the 19th century, Frenchtown served as a place of refuge for the African American community. Restricted by segregation laws and redlining practices, the Frenchtown neighborhood contained its own residences, businesses, churches, parks, a bus system, a cemetery, a hotel, and a movie theater. Many of the houses constructed in Frenchtown mimicked traditional New Orleans style shotgun homes.

In 1869, Leon County’s only all-black school, Lincoln Academy, opened in Frenchtown. This school offered elementary, middle, and high school education, as well as vocational and trade skills development for adults.

As the African American population continued to grow, the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) was founded on the Southside of Tallahassee in 1877. FAMU has since become a premiere school among historically black colleges and universities.
"Lincoln Academy had a tremendous impact on this community"

-Jim Bellamy, Frenchtown Resident
A Vibrant Community

During the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, Frenchtown became the central hub of African American culture, community, and commerce in Tallahassee. Local black-owned businesses flourished along Macomb Street and notorious jazz musicians performed at the Red Bird Café, including Ray Charles and the Adderley Brothers.

Annie Harris, a current Frenchtown resident and business owner, remembers the bustling nightlife and activity that took place every weekend in Frenchtown. She commonly referred to it as the local hot spot for live entertainment and dancing.

Saxophonist in the Daddy Twofoot Band, 1971

B-Sharp’s Jazz Cafe, 2016

The Tookes Hotel at 412 W. Virginia St., 1955

Mike Norman’s Service Station, 1959
Civil Rights Era

Frenchtown’s economy continued to thrive until the 1960s when the nation entered into a period of social unrest. The national Civil Rights Movement sparked a series of protests in Tallahassee, including the Tallahassee bus boycott led by C.K. Steele in 1956 and the lunch counter sit-in demonstrations from 1960-1963.

Despite the achievements of the Civil Rights Movement and existing desegregation laws, Tallahassee remained a very segregated city. Leon County did not begin to integrate its school system until after the Civil Rights Act of 1964. As a result of integration actions, Lincoln Academy closed in 1967 and its students were relocated throughout Tallahassee. This event initiated a period of decline for Frenchtown, as Lincoln Academy was a great source of pride for Frenchtown residents and largely supported the neighborhood’s community and culture.
Neighborhood Decline

As a large majority of the white population in Tallahassee migrated to the suburbs, Frenchtown began to feel the devastating effects of economic disinvestment. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, crime rates increased, homes declined, and local businesses closed. A once thriving neighborhood became known for its rates of unemployment, drugs, and prostitution.

Lifelong Frenchtown residents and community organizers Miaisha Mitchell and Darryl Scott attribute the widening of Macomb Street to the rapid deterioration of Frenchtown’s business district.

"It really took the heart out of Frenchtown."

- Darryl Scott, Frenchtown Resident

"When White Flight happened they took their money with them. It caused Lincoln Academy to close, which was a big blow to the community."

- Miaisha Mitchell, Frenchtown Resident
21st Century Renaissance

In 1994, Frenchtown was designated as a historic district and a movement began to revitalize the community. The Frenchtown/Southside Redevelopment area was established in 2000, which began a funding source for improvements to the neighborhood’s amenities. New community development investments have begun to shape Frenchtown’s future. In 2012, the iGrow community garden and the Frenchtown Heritage Hub were formed. These groups are dedicated to eliminating health and economic disparities in Frenchtown and they offer valuable leadership and entrepreneurial training opportunities for community members. In this exciting period of revitalization, Frenchtown is quickly becoming an urban agriculture incubator in Tallahassee. The Frenchtown community now celebrates its rich and vibrant history at weekly farmers’ market events and during the annual

"We are beginning a new chapter in Frenchtown’s history."

- Sundiata Ameh El, iGrow "Whatever You Like"

Volunteers at the iGrow Urban Garden in Frenchtown, 2015
Historic events have defined the evolution of Frenchtown and shaped its built environment.

1825 French settlers receive the Tallahassee township as a gift from the Lafayette Land Grant

1849 Harriet Tubman escapes slavery and guides the Underground Railroad

1851 West Florida Seminary (FSU) is founded

1863 President Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation

1865 13th Amendment abolishes slavery

1867 Emancipated African Americans settle in Frenchtown

1869 Lincoln High School opens

1877 Florida A&M University is founded

1876 Jim Crow Laws begin

1896 Plessy v. Ferguson maintains segregation

1909 NAACP is founded

1920 - 1935 Harlem Renaissance

1929 - 1939 Great Depression

1914 - 1918 World War I

1939 - 1945 World War II

Vibrant Community
Frenchtown becomes the African American hub of Tallahassee and a booming area of commerce, community, and culture.
Frenchtown has entered a period of revitalization as investments in community development begin to shape its future.
3 | Context Analysis
The goal of the Better Block event is to spur permanent change that is supportive of the local community; the event and any future action plans must be based upon a real understanding of the needs of the community. In order to build a vision for your community, it is important to understand the natural and built environment of your community, as well as the people who live in it. Such an understanding will allow you to make strategic decisions and efforts that use available resources in the most efficient way possible. Moreover, a solid analysis and understanding of your community will allow you to build a solid base to support any desired short-term and long-term interventions. In other words, it is important to know where

### Community Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Frenchtown</th>
<th>Tallahassee</th>
<th>Leon County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>3,999</td>
<td>185,395</td>
<td>280,882</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2,082</td>
<td>88,412</td>
<td>131,134</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1,917</td>
<td>96,938</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
<td>57.2%</td>
<td>63%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>62.4%</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
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<th>Housing</th>
<th>Frenchtown</th>
<th>Tallahassee</th>
<th>Leon County</th>
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<tr>
<td>Monthly Housing Cost ($)</td>
<td>$790</td>
<td>$974</td>
<td>$1,011</td>
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<tr>
<td>Renter Occupied</td>
<td>82.4%</td>
<td>59.4%</td>
<td>46.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Owner Occupied</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
<td>53.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vacant Housing Units</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
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<th>Community Mobility</th>
<th>Frenchtown</th>
<th>Tallahassee</th>
<th>Leon County</th>
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<tr>
<td>Public Transportation</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Walking</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
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<th>Frenchtown</th>
<th>Tallahassee</th>
<th>Leon County</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Rate</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Population Below Poverty Line</td>
<td>63.9%</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Median Income ($)</td>
<td>12,180</td>
<td>39,407</td>
<td>46,620</td>
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<tr>
<td>Household Mean Income ($)</td>
<td>23,146</td>
<td>57,994</td>
<td>65,643</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Frenchtown</th>
<th>Tallahassee</th>
<th>Leon County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Population 25+ years old with High School Diploma or Higher Education</td>
<td>78.0%</td>
<td>92.7%</td>
<td>92.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Population 25+ years old with Bachelor’s Degree or Higher Education</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
you are before you can accurately decide where you want to go and how you are going to get there. Such a method is important in all community building efforts; small, large, short-term, and long-term. This section describes the demographics of the neighborhood as well as the existing physical conditions.

Frenchtown is home to an estimated 3,999 residents, with a median age of 29.6 (ACS 2015). The community is 62.4% black and 34.7% white, with male residents (2,082) slightly outnumbering female residents (1,917). These figures are the inverse of trends seen throughout Tallahassee and Leon County, where there are a greater number of whites than blacks, and more women than men. The racial makeup of the community can be attributed to the area’s history as a black neighborhood. Still, the percentage of African Americans in Frenchtown in 2015 is over 10% higher than it was in 2010 (ACS).

Based on ACS 2014 data, 88.3% of residents moved to the neighborhood after 1999 and 44.6% after 2009, signifying that a majority of Frenchtown’s current residents are relatively new to the community.

The age and sex composition of Frenchtown is unique compared to Tallahassee as a whole. Frenchtown’s population is dominated by two populations: young adults and middle-aged males. There are several underlying reasons for this composition. Florida State University’s main campus is directly adjacent to the Frenchtown neighborhood. As this location is optimal for students (being so close to campus), several student-oriented multifamily residential complexes including University Lofts, Jake’s Place Apartments and Casa Caldarone Apartments provide housing for young adult cohort ages 18 through 29 in the neighborhood. Additionally, Frenchtown was the former home of Tallahassee’s The Shelter, now known as the Kearney Center, which provided services for the homeless. Much of the Kearney Center’s service population remained in the neighborhood when the shelter moved over three miles away to its new location. Throughout Florida, the homeless population is dominated by males age 25 to 60 years old and much of the Tallahassee homeless population has been characterized as less transient (Council on Homelessness, 2014; Big Bend Homeless Coalition, 2009). Though difficult to quantify, both observation and data depict the robust homeless population located in Frenchtown.

In 2015, Frenchtown possessed a much higher rate of people living below the poverty line (63.9%) and unemployment (35.7%) than Leon County (23.7% and 11.2% respectively). Frenchtown’s poverty rate is similar to that of the nearby area surrounding the universities, but it is significantly higher than other areas, particularly in northeast Leon County. Additionally, the Frenchtown unemployment rate has increased by 21.1% since 2009 to 35.7% in 2015 (ACS2015). A contributing factor to the high unemployment rate could be the high disability rate (24.8%) in Frenchtown compared to the average for Leon County (9.6%). Likewise, Frenchtown households experience median ($12,180) and mean ($23,146) annual incomes that are notably less than Leon County ($46,620 and $65,643 respectively) as a whole, which is likely related to the 30.9% of Frenchtown households that receive food stamps.
Existing Land Use

Frenchtown consists mostly of residential (55%) and vacant (16%) land uses, with commercial (8%), open space (8%), and religious/non-profit (7%) being the three next most common land uses. Single family detached dwellings account for the majority of the residential land uses in Frenchtown and are located throughout the neighborhood, although, the highest concentration of these dwellings occurs in the northwestern section of the neighborhood referred to as the D-Streets. On the other hand, multi-family housing is generally located south of Brevard Street, but is located throughout Frenchtown. Additionally, a range of commercial businesses exist in the neighborhood, including various dining options from seafood to fast-food, multiple convenience stores, auto repair shops, barber shops, a supermarket, financial institutions, law offices and more. Much of this commercial activity is located along Tennessee and Macomb Streets.
Future Land Use

Tallahassee’s future land use designations for the Frenchtown Neighborhood include multiple categories from Central Core to Recreation/Open Space. The southeastern corner of Frenchtown around the Tennessee Street and Macomb Street intersection and north along Macomb Street to Carolina Street is designated as Central Core. This area currently serves as the southern gateway into Frenchtown and contains the most intense development in the neighborhood. The Central Core designation is intended to support a vibrant urban activity center by promoting a mix of uses, higher densities and intensities, and multiple modes of transportation. While commercial and office development currently exist in this area, there are multiple vacant lots and buildings that present opportunities for future development.

Excluding Carter-Howell Strong Park and Dade Street Community Center which are designated as Recreation/Open Space, the remaining areas of Frenchtown are generally divided into Central Urban and Residential Preservation. Generally, everything south of Brevard Street west of Old Bainbridge Road and south of 4th Avenue between Old Bainbridge Road and Macomb Street is designated as Central Urban. The intent of land designated as Central Urban is to encourage infill and redevelopment in areas that are characterized by older development and located near the urban core and major universities. The remaining area to the north is designated as Residential Preservation. The intent of this future land use designation is to protect existing stable residential areas from incompatible uses.
Frenchtown Future Land Use
Zoning

Frenchtown consists of several different zoning districts, each allowing a range of land uses and density/intensity. The northwestern part of the neighborhood, referred to as the D-Streets, is zoned Residential Preservation (RP-2) which permits residential development up to six dwelling units per acre. This classification’s intent is to protect existing stable residential areas from the intrusion of incompatible land uses and, thus, prohibits commercial and industrial development. Based on this zoning as well as this area’s Residential Preservation future land use designation, it can be assumed that the D-Streets area of Frenchtown will remain a residential district.

The remaining portion of the neighborhood contains various zoning classifications. Most of the remaining land is zoned as Central Urban 18, 26, and 45 (CU-18,26,45). These Central Urban classifications permit a range of uses, densities, and intensities that each increase as the classification increases in number (i.e. CU-45 permits a wider range of uses, higher densities, and higher intensities than CU-26 permits). Continuing, the blocks surrounding the intersection of Tennessee and Macomb Streets, which serves as the southern gateway into Frenchtown, are zoned Central Core (CC), Tallahassee’s most intense zoning classification which permits a mix of uses along with high density and intensity rates. Focusing north of Tennessee Street, other zoning classifications in Frenchtown include a Planned Unit Development (PUD) at the City’s Renaissance Center and Open Space (OS) at Carter-Howell Strong Park.
Most of the houses in Frenchtown have a similar feel – small, with porches in the front, no garage, and small yards. Tallahassee GIS maps that compare areas of the city from 1954 to 2016, show that most of the houses were built in the early 50s or before. Our windshield survey was used to produce the map above, and shows that most of the streets in Frenchtown have a mix of houses in various conditions. There are a few sections of streets, Dover and Dent in particular, that have parcel after parcel of houses that are in poor condition. Other areas, like along most of Georgia St., many houses look newer and very well-kept. There are parcels of vacant land dispersed all throughout Frenchtown.
Housing Condition and Vacant Land

- Poor Housing
- Good Housing
- Fair Housing
- Vacant Land
Another windshield survey was used to produce the Business Condition map below. Most of Frenchtown’s business are located along one of three main arterials in the neighborhood. The conditions of the businesses range widely from new to very poor.
The Frenchtown neighborhood is laid out on a grid network. Brevard St., a major collector, bisects the neighborhood running east to west and Old Bainbridge Rd.\Macomb St., a minor arterial, bisects it north to south Tennessee street, one of the city’s busiest arterials, bounds the area to the south. These three thoroughfares are used by local residents and commuters driving through and around the area. Sidewalks, of varying widths and conditions, exist on a majority of the streets within Frenchtown, except for the interior streets of the D-Streets area which comprises Preston St. south to Dunn and Old Bainbridge west to Dade and along the east side of Old Bainbridge Rd. The lack of sidewalks could have an effect on safety due to the high percentage of households that do not have a vehicle (25.2%) and thus may use walking as their primary mode of transportation and for those commuters who rely on walking (13%) and bicycling (0.8%) to work. Dedicated bicycle infrastructure is nonexistent. Road conditions vary from poor to fair. Issues include: lack of curbs (which exacerbate existing drainage issues), pot holes and a mismatch of widths and intersections. The area immediately surrounding the Carter-Howell-Strong stormwater facility park is identified in FEMA 100 and 500-year event mapping.

Multi-modal transit is limited by the lack of dedicated bicycle infrastructure and an incomplete sidewalk network. One Star Metro bus route runs through the community along Old Bainbridge/Macomb and 4th Street every 30 minutes Monday through Friday with a reduced schedule on evenings and weekends.
Street Activity

Based on our windshield survey, street activity was most widespread during midday, but most concentrated in certain areas around rush hour. The following maps display where most activity was seen at different times throughout the day.
Activity: 12PM

Street Activity: 5PM
4  | Community Engagement
Despite its once thriving past, the Frenchtown neighborhood has faced significant public and private disinvestment. In response, a strong community has formed to advocate for revitalization and city investment in the area. Although having a significant presence at CRA and city commissioner meetings, the community remains frustrated with the City’s response to citizen concerns. Tactical urbanism is a strategy that bypasses slow-moving bureaucracy by making low cost, temporary changes to a city’s streetscape to prompt the City’s government to action. Tactical urbanism has been used around the world to address community concerns in an informal and timely manner.

In order to better understand the desires of the community, the team developed a Community Engagement Action Plan. This plan consisted of a schedule of engagement events, and initiatives to assist in better understanding of the community, gathering community input, and advertising the Better Block event.

Central to the Community Engagement Action Plan was maintaining, creating, and strengthening relationships between community members and plan makers. In order to do so, team members attended CRA meetings, one on one meeting with Frenchtown property owners, and met with several community members to speak about the planning process. Connections with several community organizations, iGrow, the Lincoln Community Center, the Urban League, local business owners, and the Southside Teen Center, the Team identified community champions to help direct community engagement events and processes. The sharing of knowledge also allowed for the meeting with other property owners who were able to provide insight to their own personal history of Frenchtown, what they hoped for in the neighborhood, and helped visualize goals for the Better Block area. In order to leverage existing local and community knowledge the team utilized several formal and informal outreach strategies.

Informal Outreach Strategies

The Community Engagement Action Plan provided a list of ongoing and upcoming community events that the Team has utilized for advertising Better Block and related events. As told by community members, the most effective way to gather community feedback and desires is to use a more personalized approach; phone calls instead of emails, in person meeting instead of conference calls. Accordingly, every Saturday, the Team took to the pavement and walked the community speaking with community members. The areas of Frenchtown that were covered were Old Bainbridge, Georgia Street, Carolina Street, and Brevard Street. As the Frenchtown Heritage Market is a community staple, the Team worked to establish a weekly presence at the Frenchtown Heritage Market. Setting up a table at the market, the team employed several strategies to gain feedback from local residents. These strategies are outlined under “Outreach Tools.”
Outreach Tools

Several tools were utilized to engage the community and direct conversation in addressing potential site interventions for Frenchtown. The first tool developed was a dream board, two pieces of plywood harnessed together and then painted with chalkboard paint. These boards were intended to capture the spirit of tactical urbanism by being low-cost, easy to make and engaging. As a way to capture community members’ hopes, dreams, and desires for their block, the tag line: “My Better Block has...” was painted on the top of the board. Here, members wrote in several ideas, including “laundry mat,” “crosswalks” “theater” and “café.”

A large aerial map was developed and displayed at the farmers market for residents to affix post-it notes identifying locations on the block where they would like to see specific interventions. This tool was used to visually display resident ideas, as well as better understand the desired placement of the interventions.
Semi-Formal Outreach Events

#1. The Community Kick-Off Event

The City of Tallahassee along with the Better Block Foundation hosted an event on Tuesday night, August 30th at the Frenchtown Heritage Market. This semi-formal event was attended by a mix of Frenchtown residents, elected officials, members of FSU and city staff. Unfortunately, since the event had primarily been advertised via social media, non-residents far outnumbered residents of the neighborhood. The kick-off event consisted of brief presentations by City staff and the Better Block Foundation outlining the purpose of the project, describing what Better Block has done in other communities, and informing the community how the project could benefit them. Long-time neighborhood resident Jim Bellamy gave a summary of the Frenchtown’s history describing neighborhood’s vibrant past and expressing his hope that it would return to its former vitality. These presentations were followed by a time when the community could ask questions, express their concerns, or complete a survey that Better Block made available.

Feedback from the residents about the short term Better Block Process included neighborhood concerns that the project was simply a thin disguise for gentrification and further displacement of the neighborhood, that the project was a misuse of resources because it focused on a weekend event instead of addressing the real issues faced by the community. At the core of the responses, the Team found that the attendees were mistrustful of the aid that Better Block and the City was trying to provide.
#2. Jazz in the Back

Championed by longtime community member, Annie Harris, an event was planned and executed to gather input and start conversation around the short term changes that would be implemented by the Better Block initiative. This event, named “Jazz in the Back,” was held in the evening on Friday, September 30th. Residents were invited to enjoy barbecue from a local vendor, listen to jazz music and engage in informal conversation regarding the Frenchtown neighborhood and improvements that could be made to the project area. The dream boards, post-it map and informational flyers were placed on all the tables and in gathering places. With over 30 community members in attendance, community members provided feedback about the project through informal conversations and on the dream boards.
#3. Better Block Better Talk

Much like the Jazz in the Back event, Mrs. Harris opened her home again to provide a platform for community members and planners to engage and interact. Residents were invited to enjoy barbecue from a local vendor, listen to jazz music and understand if planners properly planned for the community in which they were working. The purpose of this event was for planners to present envisioned interventions to community members and receive feedback. During this time, community members gave constructive feedback as to the appropriateness of the intervention itself, as well as the location site.

Overall community members liked the short-term envisioned changes to the neighborhood. However, most residents were fearful of placing parklets and kids' activities along Macomb St and Old Bainbridge, as traffic in this area is a serious threat. Long-term interventions will need to be revisited.
Community Feedback

The Better Block kickoff event surveys, regular attendance at the Frenchtown Heritage market, and the Jazz in the Back community event have provided considerable feedback in the form of informal conversations, formal survey responses, dream board input, and the post-it map intervention locations and ideas. These suggestions were compiled and organized by their frequency. Some of the most notable desires expressed by these results included: new local businesses, improved sidewalks and sidewalk connectivity, bicycle lanes, restaurants with outdoor seating, and a playground with activities. This feedback is what will drive the choice of interventions used at the Better Block event and the site design plans. As there were 93 total responses, the table below shows the number of community members who expressed support for the top 20 suggestions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideas</th>
<th>Number of Supporters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small business incubation/more retail</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playground</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More sidewalks</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant with outdoor seating</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grocery with fresh food</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gathering space with stage, shaded seating</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movie/drama/dance/music theater</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports facilities/gym/fitness center/fitness classes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cafe/bookstore with outdoor seating</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nice street lighting</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garden</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market area (small vendor opportunities)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbecue</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art gallery/studios</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speed bumps</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laundromat</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music venue</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural center for events</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Community Awareness of Existing Business and Amenities

When analyzing the survey data, it was noted that some requests already exist within Frenchtown. The best example is a desire for a barbecue restaurant, which was identified by several people. However, Curbside BBQ and Seafood is an African-American owned local restaurant located at 316 North Copeland Street, a block west of Macomb just off of Virginia St., within the Frenchtown area. This may indicate a need to promote and advertise Frenchtown based business within the community and greater Tallahassee area.

Further, many people have stated a desire for a playground, sports facilities, and outdoor gathering spaces. Carter-Howell-Strong Park is located in the heart of Frenchtown. It could be inferred that the existing amenity (Carter-Howell-Strong Park) is not meeting the needs of the community. The park is little used except for by the homeless and there is a significant litter problem. The only activity available is to use is a paved trail for walking or running around the perimeter of the lake. Improvements and added amenities in the park could potentially turn it into a vibrant gathering place. Likewise, the idea of a garden was mentioned more than once, but currently a urban farming organization, iGrow, exists in the community and thus the garden option was dropped from the survey because the iGrow community garden is already filling this need and a goal of the Better Block event is to promote existing institutions so that they can expand and become well known in the neighborhood.

The following strategies are being considered to address these information gaps:

1. Creating a wayfinding map with locations and descriptions of local businesses, services, community centers, parks, organizations, etc. to be displayed at the event and in a permanent installation.

2. Compiling a Frenchtown Directory of all such establishments as well as a calendar of local events.

3. Inviting these establishments to participate in the Better Block event to grow their presence in the community.

4. Develop a strategy for future neighborhood marketing.
(Better) Block Fun!

Live Music!

Food

Party 5:30

Friday (9/30) 8:00
5 | Precedent Analysis
Understanding the Frenchtown context alongside the key tenets of community engagement are two very large pieces of the puzzle that is tactical urbanism. Another important part of tactical urbanism is research; without precedent, it can be difficult to fully ascertain what’s feasible and what is more difficult to implement. To that end, the team of Urban Design students reviewed case studies in order to better understand the elements of tactical urbanism in an effort to design feasible, realistic plans for the Frenchtown neighborhood.

This section is to provide contextual background into solutions for the Frenchtown interventions. To do this, past better block cases were studied, and the proposed interventions have been used below to show how they can be applied to the Frenchtown interventions.

**Morgan Hill, CA**

Monterey Road in Morgan Hill is a four-lane avenue that cuts through the central business district. Fast through-traffic made the area undesirable for pedestrian activity. This resulted in a lack of customers for businesses along the road. In order to boost pedestrian activity, the city initiated a project to reduce Monterey Road to two lanes, slowing down through-traffic. The extra pavement was used for parking spaces and bike lanes. The complete streets demonstration in Morgan Hill, CA is similar to the proposed interventions for Macomb Street. Like Macomb, Monterey Road is a four-lane road that was converted to two lanes during the demonstration. The outside lanes were used for bike lanes and parking, providing a barrier between traffic and pedestrians. Although the streets differ in many ways, the effects on street alignment, intersections, and traffic flow are similar. The Morgan Hill demonstration is a good example of how to improve the pedestrian environment on Macomb Street.
In Burlington, there was a high demand for pedestrian and bicycle travel. However, the city lacked adequate infrastructure to meet the demand. Street Plans teamed up with the Local Motion and the Department of Public Works to initiate demonstrations and infrastructure upgrades. To improve walkability, crosswalks were painted in an area with high pedestrian traffic. Parklets were set up to complement the crosswalks. To demonstrate good bicycle infrastructure, bike lanes were set up around a city block. Several different strategies were used for safety, including painted lanes, parking-protected lanes, and barriers. The demonstrations were a success and public involvement was high.

Two of the key proposals for Macomb Street, bike lanes with barriers and parklets, were successfully implemented in Burlington, VT. The first proposal was to paint bike lanes and protect them with obstacles such as hay bales and potted plants. The second proposal was to set up four parklets at various locations along Macomb Street to complement improved pedestrian infrastructure. The Burlington projects demonstrated good methods for creating bike lanes, pedestrian crosswalks, and parklets.
Walk Your City - Raleigh, NC

The North Hills area in Raleigh is a mixed-use district with offices, shops, restaurants, and residential buildings. All of these amenities are in close proximity to each other and have the pedestrian infrastructure to support it. However, people were not taking advantage of this opportunity. To get more people to walk and visit the area, a local realty group used Walk Your City by placing wayfinding signs with QR codes throughout the area to provide directions and walking times to notable destinations. This increased pedestrian’s awareness of how close they were to different amenities and increased the amount of pedestrian traffic.

The use of wayfinding signs was a key component of the proposed bike station and information kiosk intervention. Due to the large amount of activities planned, it was determined that using guerrilla wayfinding would help participants find areas that they would otherwise not know existed. Interventions located on the outskirts of the better block area, such as the active sports field and iGrow, would benefit greatly from wayfinding signs. The proposed sidewalk markings, maps, and signs reflected the culture of the neighborhood, specifically iGrow. This idea was a direct result of the North Hills case study.
North Hill, Akron, OH

The North Hill neighborhood in Akron, OH has several similarities to Frenchtown. First, the main road through both areas facilitates through-traffic between the central business district and residential areas. This causes a poor pedestrian climate and negatively affects local businesses. In addition, both areas have several neglected/abandoned historic buildings, a waste of potentially valuable space. In an attempt to revitalize North Hill, Better Block collaborated with local organizations to create a multi-modal district with an open-air market area. Interventions included buffered bike lanes, pedestrian plazas/parklets, an activity field, pop-up shops, and the open-air market. Traffic speeds were cut in half, creating a more desirable pedestrian atmosphere. The plaza, parklets, and sports field attracted a number of people to the area, resulting in record sales for businesses.

Several of the interventions in North Hill were replicated in the plan for Frenchtown. The most notable intervention, building pop-up shops, were proposed to boost activity in the area while providing businesses an opportunity to expand, a win-win scenario. Due to the similarities between Frenchtown and North Hill, the same success was expected for the pop-up shops. When determining how to use a large field adjacent to the better block area, an active sports park was proposed to attract even more participants to the event. The selected site was large enough to support multiple activities/games at one time and the distance between the field and the center of the event was expected to boost pedestrian traffic along Macomb. Finally, bike lanes were painted to create a multi-modal district similar to North Hill. Overall, North Hill was a good example of how to use vacant space in order to attract people and businesses to the area.
Placemaking is crucial to bringing vibrancy and a positive environment to a community. Integrating the cultural identity of a neighborhood through community driven art offer a unique method to bring an area to life. In Jefferson park, Better Block and volunteers painted a huge piece of art at the street intersection. By having this it stamped this spot as a place in people’s minds, and really brought an identifiable mark giving it a sense of place. Additionally, the Wilmington, DE case had wall art, a blank wall where painting was permitted. The efforts in Jefferson Park were useful in the context of Frenchtown, where two areas of the Block used art to create a sense of place and identity. The first proposal was an art wall along Brevard that was intended as an opportunity for residents to use the wall as a way to start dialogue about what might go there in the future. In addition to the art wall, volunteers painted colorful crosswalks to add to the limited streetscaping and made Brevard more pedestrian friendly.
Denton, TX

Just as community art brings vibrancy, music also offers a way to facilitate placemaking and activate spaces. The Denton Better Block used an empty parking lot in front of an abandoned store to build a stage for performances. Volunteers used pallets and wood to piece together a small stage and then connected a tarp above it. Likewise, as an alternative in Frenchtown, there is a proposal for a concert venue to capture and recreate the Frenchtown of old, as a cultural and entertainment destination. Frenchtown was a hub for musical entertainers such as Ray Charles, and recognizing how vibrant the neighborhood was during this period, a musical intervention was needed to reintroduce Frenchtown as an entertainment destination. In this case, a stage will provide a venue for musicians to perform and offer a wonderful gathering space in the community.
Creative Play

Integrating spaces that cater to a wide demographic is important, particularly providing options for children within a Better Block is essential. Dalton, Texas Better Block found innovative ways to create interesting play and interactive areas for children. Better Block set up a children’s pool in the parking lot for kids to play, as well as a life-size game of chess. In Frenchtown, there are a number of vacant parcels that can serve as great locations to accommodate children’s play areas. Several options were proposed to utilize vacant green spaces as children’s parks with games, hay bale maze, and educational workshops in conjunction with iGrow.
6 | Long-Term Interventions
The Urban Design team of students conceptualized several different urban design interventions in order to visualize what Frenchtown could look like in the next ten years. Their first task was to identify districts within Frenchtown that were well suited based on the context analysis and resident feedback for specific urban design interventions. Interventions were then suggested and visualized for three districts, with additional emphasis on the Macomb Street District due to its status as a gateway into Frenchtown. The D-Street area was also under consideration because of its historic exclusion from Frenchtown’s planning process and the fact that many of the D-streets are single-family residential homes in disrepair. The Community Hub District was also identified as an area with several urban design interventions to facilitate more cohesion between the Frenchtown neighborhood and FSU campus.

This section provides an overview of the three districts in Frenchtown and then delves deeper into suggested interventions for the neighborhood.
Macomb Street District

The Macomb Street district consists of the stretch of street between Tennessee Street and the split into Old Bainbridge. This area was selected because of its central location and acts as the cultural core of the area. Interventions along Macomb center on creating a central destination, almost acting as a Main Street for Frenchtown. The many empty buildings and lots already located along the street are ideal for local businesses, services and active areas for the people of Frenchtown, as well as start attracting people who don’t reside there to visit. The local interventions include a grocery store, bookstore, theater, football field, playground, seafood restaurant, retail, and dance studio among others. There is a clear diversity here that will add some much-needed food options, and activity centers into a part of town that is lacking in many areas.

The overall vision is to create a community that is independent, to eliminate the Frenchtown food desert by encouraging local businesses to open up and provide community appropriate services. The Macomb Street District aims to create a pedestrian friendly retail corridor with active sidewalks, mixed-use retail, outdoor cafes and parks. The goal of this district is to build on the cultural identity of Frenchtown by focusing on local businesses and services important to the people of Frenchtown.

This café captures multiple aspects of our vision for Frenchtown. It brings people out onto street providing safer streets. It acts as a community gathering place and adds to the Main Street idea. Additional ideas include a local grocery store stocked with fresh produce from iGrow and other local suppliers, a laundromat and other services needed in the community, and a variety of local businesses.
D-Street District

The D-Street District is the conglomeration of D-named streets on the west side of Frenchtown. The initiatives in this area primarily aim to incorporate recreational activity and social space into a residential neighborhood. This area of Frenchtown has a large quantity of dilapidated buildings and vacant parcels which offer opportunities to both build infill housing and use vacant spaces to create community pocket parks. This area is predominantly residential so the focus is on recreation and gathering spaces rather than commercial or retail. The concept for the D-Street District includes a variety of parks, a playground, a basketball court, and a small café. These spaces aim to provide public spaces to foster social interactions that facilitate and help to build a sense of community. Also, blocks were shortened to foster more walkability throughout the D-Streets.
Community Hub District

The Community Hub District is focused around Carter-Howell-Strong Park and aims to provide a transition from the higher density and higher intensity college zone to the single-family neighborhood. This district aims to build a blended community between Frenchtown and the adjacent Florida State University campus without students infringing on the culture and community of Frenchtown and creating a more vibrant atmosphere that is representative of the diversity of the neighborhood. One concept is to change the benches around the lake to larger, standard size benches, as well as adding in an ice cream shop to make it a little more of a destination for the community. The park is a great resource in this area and has the potential for being a great place for the people of Frenchtown to get outside and enjoy nature in the middle of Tallahassee. Additionally, this area is very close to FSU and faces constant encroachment from student housing. To form a bridge between these two communities, we envision several locally based businesses, such as cafés, bookstores, and retail stores owned and operated by the residents of Frenchtown, but also serve the FSU community.
5. Children's Park

4. Community Theater

3. Concert Stage & Outdoor Seating

2. iGrow Connection & Greenhouse

1. Macomb Street
6. Active Park

7. Bike Station & Information Kiosk

8. Community-Driven Art Displays

9. Decorative Park & Pop-Up Shops

10. Interior Pop-Up Shops
1. Macomb Street

Several interventions on Macomb St. include bike lanes, reducing street widths, creating parklets and making the street safer for pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles. Bike lanes will extend for most of the stretch of Macomb involved in the Better Block event. Four parklets will be created along the street section. These parklets will include seating and tables for people to hang out and enjoy the various vendors. For vehicle protection buffers from trees and other similar materials will be implemented. Lastly, a median will be construction along Old Bainbridge to further slow traffic and make the even area safer. These medians also act as pedestrian zones while crossing the street. The Star Metro bus route will continue to run during the event.
2. iGrow Connection & Greenhouse

iGrow has become a feature of Frenchtown which the community rallies behind. In an effort to expand the iGrow mission, a greenhouse will be constructed by Better Block for the event and then will be gifted to iGrow for permanent use. This will allow for more fruits and vegetables to be grown at all times of the year. In addition, a connection between the current iGrow space and the Better Block will be utilized through a proposed pop up park to the south. This further cements the influence iGrow has and will have in the future in the community of Frenchtown.
Music has a deep, rich history in Frenchtown. Many greats including Ray Charles have lived in Frenchtown and each has brought a unique piece of this diverse musical world. Because music is so important in this community, a concert stage with outdoor seating is proposed for the event. The stage will be central to the event and will host a number of musical groups and act as a place for people to socialize and interact. Additionally, outdoor seating should be provided for the comfort of concert viewers but also for places to sit and hang out outside of Ferrell’s for pop up restaurant use.
4. Community Theater

The theater is among the original ideas when designing the Better Block event. The community has voiced a strong desire for a theater which will have live music and performances. Inside the theater, the lower level will be used as stage space for music and theater performances while the upper level will be the seating area. Outside of the theater during the Better Block event, a blow up screen will air the FSU and FAMU football games. Seating will be provided in the form of pallet benches, hay bales, or milk crates. The desire is for the community theater to become a permanent fixture in the neighborhood.
5. Children's Park

A children’s park containing a playground and other activities geared toward children will be located next to the theater. This will be a safe place for children to play while their parents are watching the football game nearby. This will be close enough in which parents will feel safe letting their children play and enjoy themselves and the park is back enough from the road where there is a traffic buffer.
6. Active Park

This park will be geared towards older children and teenagers. The purpose is to provide a safe place for them to play without endangered smaller children at the playground. This park will be designed to be convertible between a soccer field and a football field. Field markers should be painted in the grass and PVC pipe goals will available for easy moving. This park is across the street from the theater and children’s park which allows for parents to keep an eye on their children while still enjoying some of the adult oriented activities. Crosswalks and other pedestrian safety measures will be implemented to ensure safe roadway crossing.
Short-Term Interventions
This intervention will be a hub of the Better Block event because the information kiosks will include wayfinding information as well as information about the vendors participating in the event. This will be the starting point for all other wayfinding methods such as “follow the tomatoes” or other signs which may be posted. In a further attempt to encourage event goers to utilize the bike lanes and other multi-modal efforts implemented during the event, a local bike shop will set up a bike station in which people have access to the basic tools and guidance necessary to repair or fine tune a bicycle. This will also act as a secure place for those to lock up their bikes as they enjoy the event.
8. Community-Driven Art Displays

Community Driven Art has proven to be a great way to facilitate placemaking and promote neighborhood pride. During the event, two methods of community driven art will be implemented. An art wall along Brevard St. will be used for community members to leave their mark on Frenchtown. It is a place for residents to share their skills and create a beautiful mural for Frenchtown to be proud of. In addition to the art wall, fencescaping is proposed to bring beauty to the fences around buildings throughout Frenchtown. This will add more color and beauty into Frenchtown, which will be created by those of Frenchtown rather than outside artists with no connection to the neighborhood.
Short-Term Interventions
9. Pop-Up Shops & Decorative Park

The parking lot in front of the white building/church will be used for pop up shops for local patrons to showcase their talents and skills and provide new goods and services to Frenchtown. Ideally, these shops will find a permanent home in the community. Some proposed pop up shops include Marie Jellies, Knots & Mane, Debbie’s Granola, Marie Bryant’s Barbecue and others. This space will be filled with kiosks for vendors to sell their goods and tables and chairs for the residents to enjoy.

This space is also designed to be a quaint hangout spot with hammocks and chairs or benches. The park will also include small scale games such as ping pong or badminton. The park will contain string lights or other methods for ambiance. A variety of seating methods include hammocks, chairs, benches, and tables. Plants and other aesthetic elements will be used as well.
10. Interior Pop-Up Shops

Several unoccupied buildings have been included in the event area. To bring life to these buildings, several proposed pop up shops are to be located inside the buildings. Ideas include a dance studio, art gallery, B Sharps Jazz/Restaurant, coffee shop, and a seafood restaurant. These interior pop up shops will allow residents and vendors to get a feel for a space and host potential for permanent settlement of businesses to enhance Frenchtown and economic gains. These shops, along with the exterior pop up shops will be central to the Better Block mission as everyone has different talents and many right here in the community are able to provide new and different goods and services to the people of Frenchtown.
The Better Block event took place over the course of Friday, November 18th, and Saturday, November 19th. Many of the features brought to the area by the Better Block event were created in response to talking with local residents. Community members provided ideas and expressed their vision for their neighborhood. These suggestions were gathered from several community events, including the weekly Frenchtown Heritage Market, the Jazz in the Back event held on September 30th, and the Better Talk, Better Block event held on October 21st. Using the information gathered, FSU, FAMU, The City of Tallahassee, Frenchtown community members, and the Better Block Foundation worked to create an event that highlights the ability for temporary changes to transform streetscapes. As a result, existing community based businesses were placed in vacant storefronts, constructed temporary safe places for children to play, and incorporated pedestrian friendly street designs into Frenchtown’s street fabric.

Many of these features were intended to drive future development (theater/event space on Brevard Street), while others were intended to form a sense participation and neighborhood identity (community mural on the North Macomb Street retaining wall). Each of these features have been examined
in terms of community members’ response. Moving forward the Frenchtown community may be able to organize around the most desired projects-- those that have the greatest benefit, or have the highest opportunity to be successfully implemented. This section will give an overview of the implementation as well as recommendations for future projects of this nature.

The event kicked off on Friday at 6pm and while it was advertised to go to 10pm, it started slowing down a little after 8pm. On Friday the event was unintentionally split into two areas: the pop-up shop area, and the stage area. The two were more separated than was planned because the stage area was not visible from the intersection, and the building between the two areas created a sound barrier that blocked the music from carrying over and drawing people to the stage.

The event on Saturday went from 11am to 7pm. A major draw of the Saturday crowd was the FAMU Classic football game that was being played inside the main building. People came to enjoy the game with their community. Because of the sound barrier, performers were moved out of the stage area and set up in front of the pop-up shops. This allowed the event to be focused all in one area.
Throughout the weekend observations were made in order to determine what elements made Better Block a successful and engaged space. There were a number of interventions that were successful, which included street infrastructure improvements, community driven art, and locally owned businesses in stand-alone buildings and exterior pop up shops.

One of the most positive aspects of this effort was crosswalks and bump outs that improved public safety in a neighborhood that relies so heavily on walking as a mode of transportation. In addition the street art added between the crosswalks created a sense of expression and is being considered for permanent display. The art walls gave the community an opportunity to reflect on the event and list a few things about what their neighborhood means to them. This type of engagement is vital to a successful tactical urbanism event and further inclusion with the public would only improve future events. Also, The Bike House created a hub at the corner of the event along Brevard and drew people into the space. The ability to attract passersby through this created activity was very important and should be built upon by the community as a means to improve commercial activity. Lastly, the Pop-up area and concert venue served as a central location for the event and gave everyone involved a place to gather. The shops gave local businesses an opportunity to show the community their merchandise in a small localized forum. The concert venue as well as the hay bales placed in the center of the space increased the engagement of those at the event by giving them a place to sit as well as something to discuss.

The implementation of these interventions created a positive atmosphere and should be built upon going forward as a way to improve the community on a more permanent basis.
Interventions: Conceptual vs. Implemented

Many of the planned interventions never came to fruition, and most of the ones that did had to be drastically changed due to a neighboring construction site.

Kid's Park & Outdoor Theater

A kid’s park adjacent to an outdoor theater was planned to be a space where people could watch the football game while their children played within eye’s view. Unfortunately, the construction project next door decided to start construction less than two weeks before the event. Not only was the area blocked off, but also the construction had already broken ground and the space was unsafe to even walk through. This made the use of this area as a site for people to sit and watch or play totally unfeasible. Instead, the space directly to the side of the theater was where the greenhouse was located. There were no designated spaces for children to play, but that did not stop them from running around in the main area. There were also small activities on the stand-up chalkboards where children could be seen drawing and writing.

Greenhouse

The neighboring of the construction site also impacted the placement of the greenhouse intervention. The temporary greenhouse structure was incorporated next to Macomb Street adjacent to the painted crosswalks. The iGrow Community Garden used the greenhouse to host educational gardening workshops throughout the event.
Bike Lanes & Parklets

Bike lanes and small parklets were planned to be on both sides of Macomb Street. No parklets were created because of distance to focal point of the event. A bike lane was only implemented on the east side of Macomb, and only for two blocks. This was due to a lack of paint, and lack of time prior to the event. Painting bike lanes requires a redirection of traffic and lots of manpower. Both sides of Macomb street from Brevard to Virginia were planned with a series of bike lanes, on street parking, and parklets to create a pedestrian friendly and walkable environment.
Pop-Up Shops

Pop-Up shops were planned to be outside and inside, all along the Macomb Street corridor. Once again, the location proved to not be feasible, and everything was condensed into one intersection. The only unused building that could have housed some pop-up shops was the theater building, and it did not have electricity. The pop-up shops ended up being outside only, but there was enough space to make them all flow together nicely. The pop-up shops along Brevard Street served as the center of activity for the Better Block event.
Crosswalks & Traffic Calming

The crosswalks really tied the space together, allowing pedestrians to safely cross the street to get to and from the event. They were placed right in the focal point of the block activity, and added a splash of color to the block. The median helped people in cars see the crosswalks, and the plants on top created an aesthetic appeal that also provided an increased sense of safety. The addition of the crosswalks and traffic calming measures effectively slowed traffic during the event and created a safer pedestrian experience for event attendees.
Frenchtown Better Block: What Didn’t Work & Recommendations

While many of the elements worked well to create a successful Better Block, certain aspects could be improved through varying planning strategies and design. One of the most apparent improvements that needed to be made was the interaction between the outdoor venue and the indoor theatre. Due to the nature of the building where the theater was housed it was difficult to create movement between it and the outdoor venue. There was a boundary between the two venues, which decreased activity and made the event seem more divided. The ability to integrate both activities would have improved the event as a whole, through either signage, lighting, or just more people that would make both areas seem more crowded. Also, internal parking between structures could be better implemented to ensure those trying to reach the event had clear concise directions. There could have been a possibility for improved wayfinding through better signage as well as vendors being placed along this routes to draw people towards the center of the event.

An emphasis was also placed on creating a multi-modal event, made clear through the creation of bike lanes. The only issue is that the bike lanes were not heavily utilized. This might have more to do with habit but could also be a result of design. While there were constraints that were mentioned above, more could have been done to increase connectivity by adding bike lanes for more than two blocks. It is very difficult to engage new behavior with such a small addition to the street. Not only is hard to enforce new behavior, but bike lanes on only one side encourage people to bike the wrong way on it. Outside of the central location it was found that activity decreased significantly. It was found that more needed to be done in surrounding areas to draw people out and experience more of the event. An increase in foot traffic may occur when more is being done to peak people’s interests through other types of activities and more to see. Overall, the event was success and brought the community together, these suggestions should be used to improve upon what was seen in the Frenchtown Better Block event and continue the revitalization process.
Frenchtown Better Block: What Didn’t Work & Recommendations
Post Evaluation & Analysis

The urban design firm of Gehl Studios, with the help of volunteers, conducted a post evaluation and analysis of the Frenchtown Better Block Event. The purpose of the evaluation was to understand how people utilized the event area before, during, and after the event in order to raise awareness and improve this public space for the community. During the event, volunteers measured, counted, and surveyed attendees’ interaction with and use of the area and the interventions implemented during the event. One evaluation method involved volunteers recording the number and gender of pedestrians and cyclists utilizing the event space from three separate locations. Also, the location and type of activities (standing, playing, performing) of the attendees were observed and mapped by several volunteers. Additionally, volunteers surveyed attendees throughout the event to gain an understanding of their backgrounds, what brought them to the event, and more in order to measure the use of this public space and the success of the interventions. Survey questions included:

• Why did you come here today?
• How did you get here today?
• Did you interact with someone here today, who you did not come with?
• Do you identify as a local to this neighborhood?
• How do you feel about this place? Negative, Neutral, or Positive?
• Do you see yourself becoming actively involved in supporting/maintaining this place in the future?
• What neighborhood do you live in?

Gehl Studios will be analyzing the survey and public realm data to provide both insight and recommendations for future Better Block events in Frenchtown.
Beyond the Better Block

In order to build on the success and support that Frenchtown Better Block experienced, a similar event in Frenchtown can be used to keep the momentum behind the community moving in a positive direction. For example, the event brought a high level of attention to the community from around the city that needs to be taken advantage of. Also, a community needs to be organized in order to fight against unwanted change and gain the necessary support to push for improvements. Unwanted developments and policies often take the path of least resistance and end up being located in unorganized communities. Another community driven event in Frenchtown can lead to further organization within the community and support from local officials that can be turned into permanent improvements. An important next step is to consider other locations in Frenchtown that may benefit from a similar event. Possible examples of where to have a similar event include:

#1. D-Street District

Based on community engagement feedback gathered before the Frenchtown Better Block Event, it can be inferred that a community event in the D-Streets might better capture the support, needs, and desires of the whole Frenchtown community. Feedback suggested that D-Streets residents felt as if they were being ignored by recent neighborhood development initiatives by the city; such as Goodbread Hills, Carolina Oaks, and the Renaissance Center.

Additionally, recent measurements and observations have shown a high level of dilapidated housing and street activity, along with a large disconnect in pedestrian infrastructure, within the D-Streets. A community event located in this area can be used to highlight any needs and desires of residents that are possibly being overlooked and need improvement.
#2. Carter Howell Strong Park

This area of Frenchtown serves as a transition zone between student and single-family residential housing. Often, tension exists in these areas as multi-family student housing developments encroach into areas of single family houses. An event here can allow residents, or students, to voice their concerns and to demonstrate to local officials how they want the character of this area to be now and into the future. Moreover, it can bring residents together in order to fight for the neighborhood they want.

#3. 4th Avenue & Central

This location could be a beneficial spot for another event because of its open space and pedestrian activity. Additionally, its proximity to Old Bainbridge Rd. also increases the visibility of the event and can encourage higher participation. A tactical urbanism event can highlight the lack of sidewalks in the area and the potential for activating vacant lots with new businesses. The event could also help to create community partnerships by connecting the Goodbread Hills Community and the community center.
Frenchtown is a vibrant and storied neighborhood that has been often overlooked in planning decisions of recent years. Residents have found themselves voiceless up against larger interests and more institutionalized interests than their own, which has made it particularly difficult to effect any meaningful and long-lasting change in the neighborhood. By bringing Better Block to Frenchtown, several parties hoped to introduce the idea of tactical urbanism – and on a higher level, increase civic participation – to this neighborhood in order to restore some of its pride and sense of place.

This document covered the efforts of FSU students involved in making the Better Block project a possibility. Students took an analytical approach to the project, by first studying other cases of tactical urbanism and then assessing the unique Frenchtown context. By establishing precedent, students were able to develop meaningful and thoughtful design solutions for Frenchtown for both the short term and the long term and work alongside the community to implement the Better Block event. By laying the groundwork for assessable, legible urban design and data collection, the Better Block project aimed to empower communities like Frenchtown to determine what their built environment looks and feels like.