

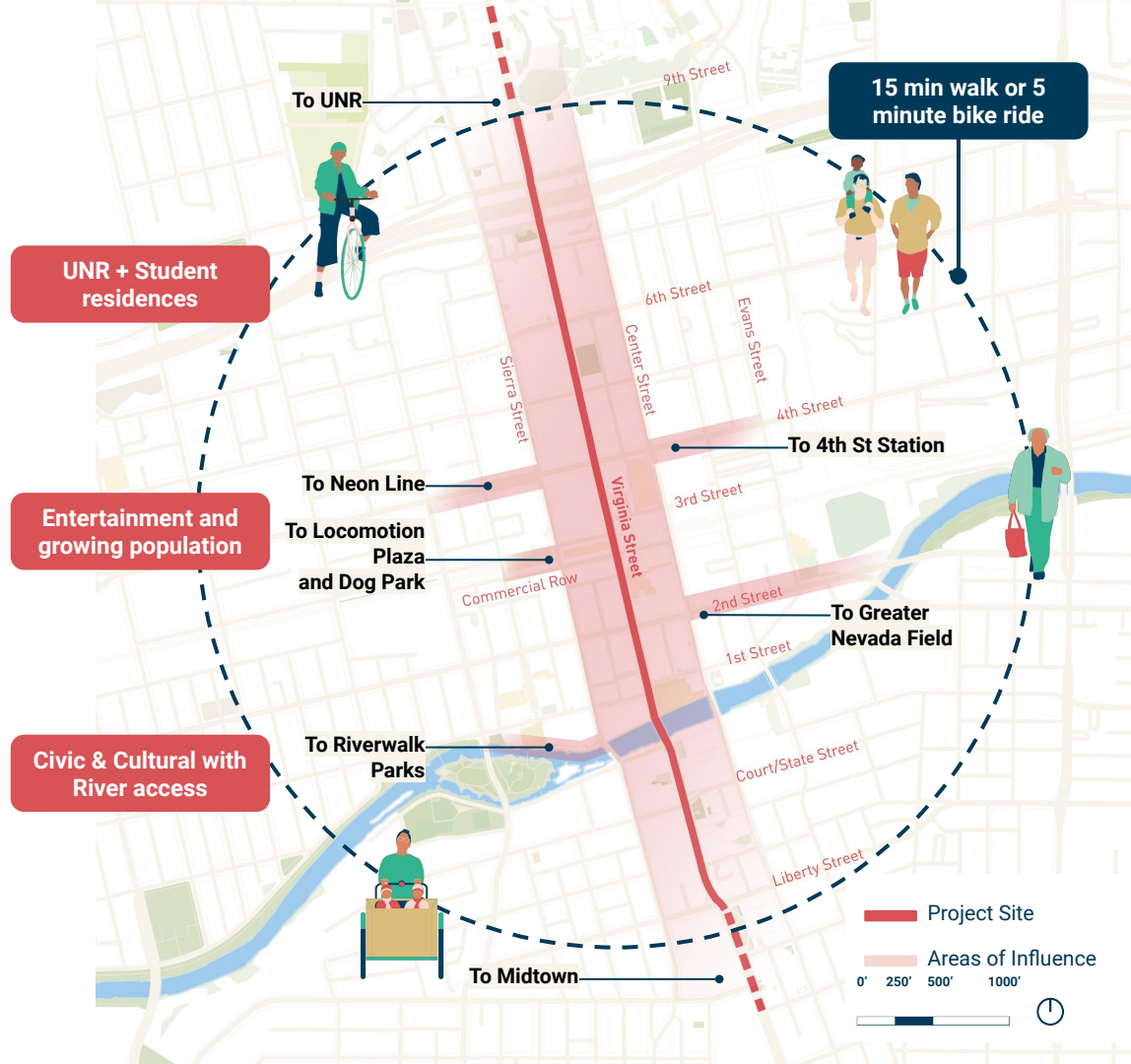
The Future of Virginia Street Placemaking Study

Gehl



We are looking at Virginia Street from Liberty to UNR

1 street Various contexts



What is Placemaking?

Placemaking is a people-centered approach to the planning, design and management of public spaces, that involves looking at, listening to, and asking questions of the people who live, work and play in a particular space, to discover needs and aspirations. This information is then used to create a common vision.

Why this Placemaking Study and why now?

**The pandemic has impacted how
we live, work and play**

**Streets are a valuable public
asset**

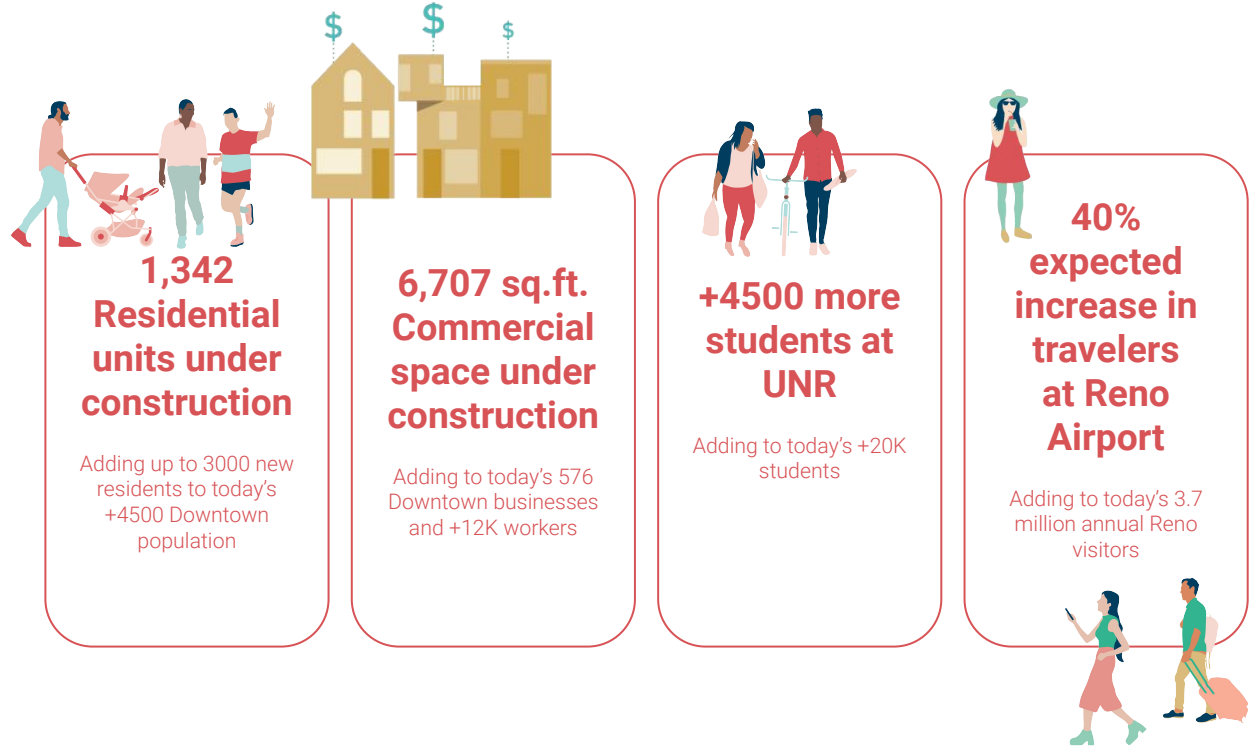
**Downtown main street are leading
change**

Online shopping has increased

Living local

Diversity = Resiliency

Downtown Reno is changing from an event-based destination to an everyday neighborhood



Sources: Reno-Sparks Convention & Visitors Authority Visitor Profile Survey, University of Nevada Reno 2024 Campus Master Plan, and Downtown Reno Partnership Downtown Reno Development Map, Airport Technology, and census.gov

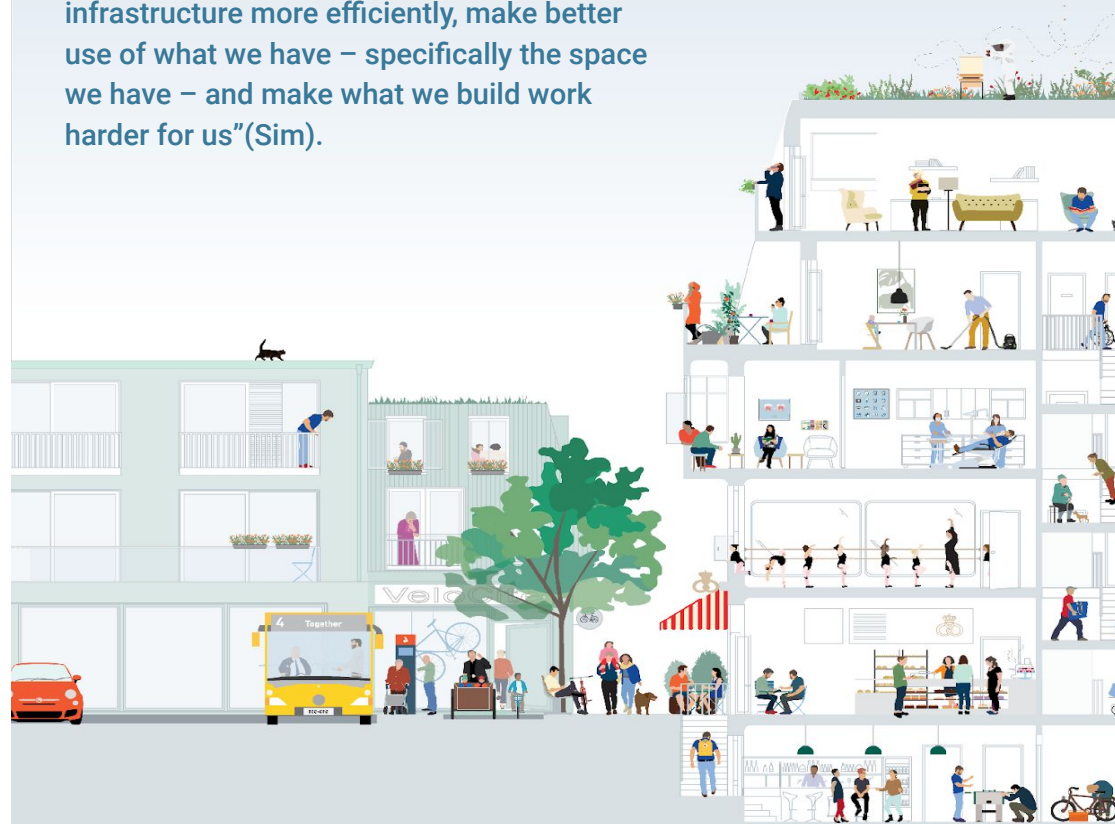
More residents Downtown means that the public realm will need to work harder to support everyday life and economic development



Placemaking on Virginia Street and nearby can guide this change

Live
Work
Play

“With rapid urbanization and dwindling resources, we have to use existing infrastructure more efficiently, make better use of what we have – specifically the space we have – and make what we build work harder for us”(Sim).



The time is now

**Lean into the
change and
strengthen
what makes
Reno unique**



The time is now
**To unite all
Renoites
around a
shared vision
for the Future
of Virginia
Street**



With the Virginia Street Placemaking Project, Reno joins cities around North America and abroad in creating a people first approach to a thriving Downtown.

Balancing transportation and place

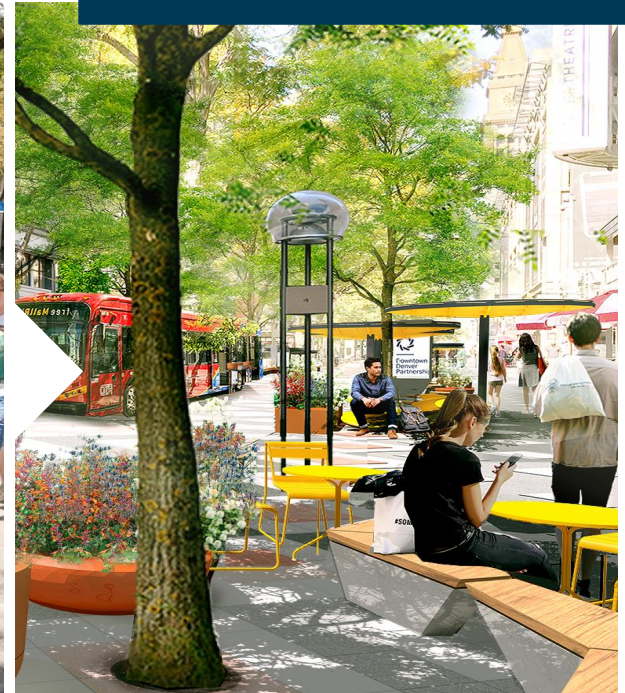
Consensus for capital improvement for a Future 16th Street in Denver CO that better balances transit and public life



157%
Increase in commercial activities



30%
Increase in people spending time on the street

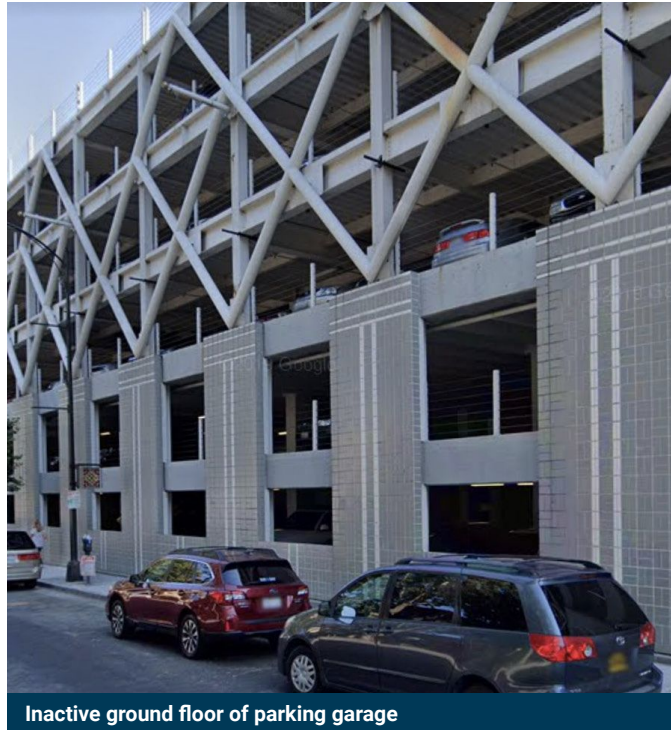
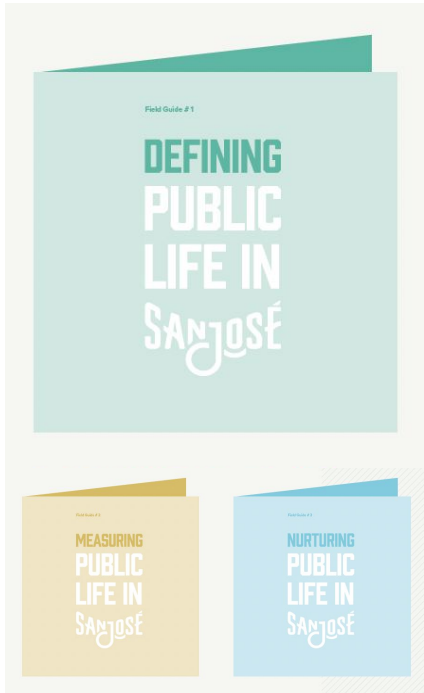


Vision for capital improvements

Baseline 'all about moving people through'

Placemaking pilot 'increasing stickiness'

Ground floor activation



Leaning into the local spirit of ingenuity has led to many placemaking initiatives in San José. MOMENT is a sustaining successful product of that



Incremental change & resilience



35%
Of businesses reported
increase in sales
between 2019 and 2021

Only 12 vacancies
out of 110 ground
floor units

Baseline = local F&B's with limited outdoor serving



98%
Of survey respondents
and business owners
approve

Pilot = outdoor serving and public seating attracting locals

Economic recovery response in
Downtown Mountain View led to an
active street during lockdown and to
support for permanent closure

Castro Street Functional Plan and Interim Design Guidelines

Mountain View | CA



Incremental change before permanent redesign

Holistic urban development

In West Palm Beach a developer led redesign of a public street and a privately owned public space, through CityPlace Community Development District, a special taxing district created to fund public infrastructure



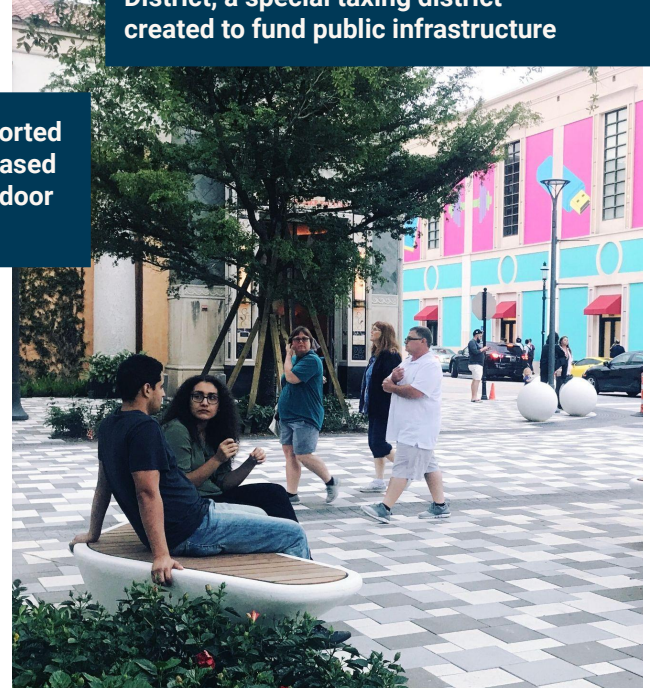
Baseline = just like any other street in the city



X3
People walking and spending times

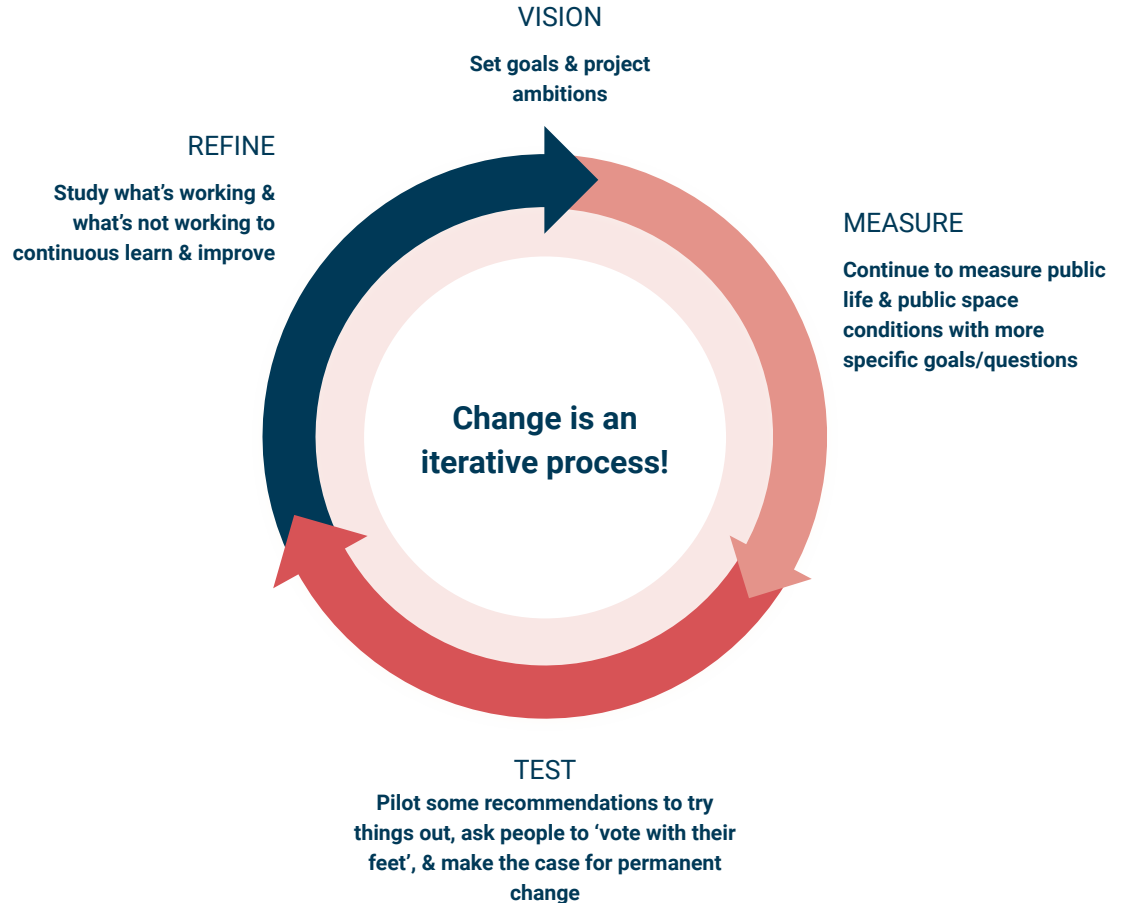
Businesses reported increased demand for outdoor seating

Investment in flush pavers, a lush tree canopy and quality seating = supporting the existing use while increasing public life



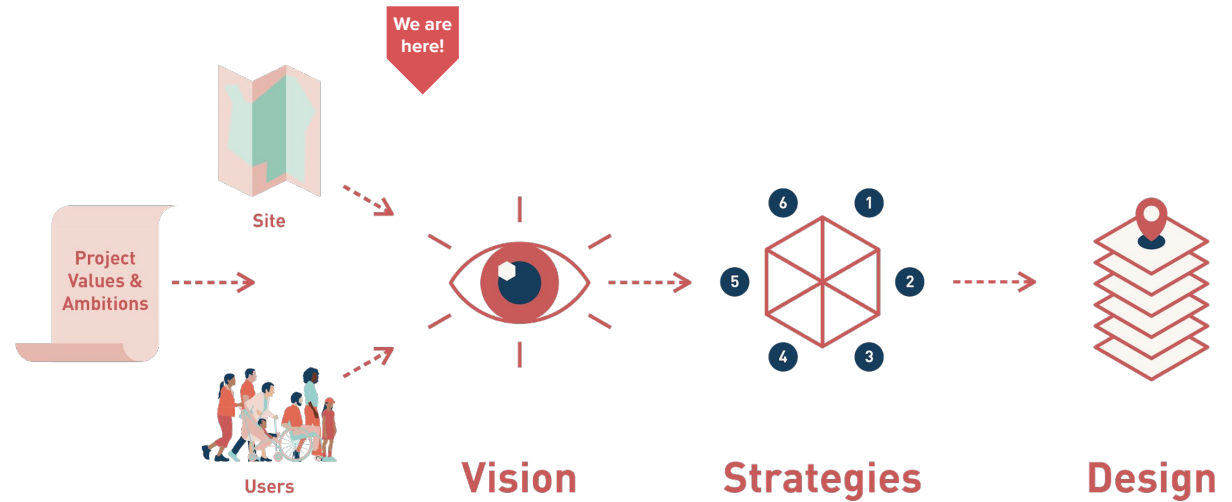
Investment in flush pavers, a lush tree canopy and quality seating = supporting the existing use while increasing public life

Virginia Street will not change overnight
Change is an iterative process and to succeed it is important to align around a shared and co-created vision

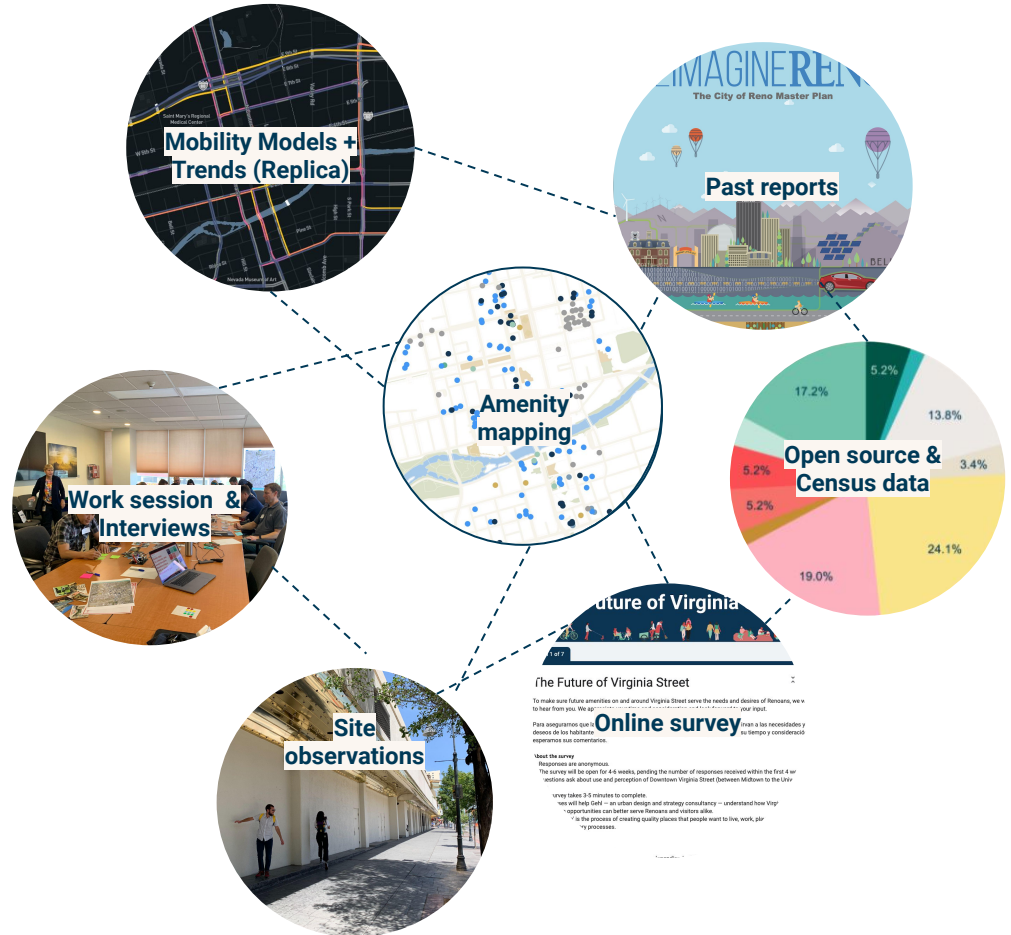


Change will not happen in isolation

A successful process requires shared ownership based on a shared understanding of challenges and opportunities



To understand the Placemaking opportunities on Virginia Street we applied a multi-method research approach



"It has all of the quintessential nostalgic elements of Reno's history. I see potential there for it to be fully revived."

"Virginia street is a lot of fun during events, like Blues Brews BBQ etc. It's great when people are out and about."

"There is not enough activity for people to feel safe, because it feels desolate."

"More places designed to sit and stay awhile; let my teens socialize here on their own"

I love/like...
"Cruising under the Reno arch."

We heard from +2700 Renoites!!!

" It would be good to have cafes and restaurants where you can sit outside. It would feel more crowded and safe."

"I wish downtown had trees, places to sit outside, an occasional food truck..."

"Ride a bicycle safely. Needs more protected bicycle infrastructure."

"Walk without worrying about traffic or sweating to death in the concrete jungle"

"Be able to drive down the street both ways without all the obstructions."

What We Heard & What We Saw

Defining Success Criteria for Virginia Street by aligning around challenges and opportunities

Good news!

**There is consensus that
Virginia Street is a central
part of Downtown Reno...**

90% of online survey respondents agree that Virginia Street is important

Cross departmental city staff and leadership agree

**There is also consensus
that Virginia Street lacks
invitations for locals...**

**75% of online survey respondents finds
that Virginia Street lacks reasons for
them to visit**

**Cross departmental city staff and
leadership agree**

Today, Virginia Street...

01

draws locals and visitors alike for events, but is not a place that Renoites gravitate towards everyday

02

has a rich history, but does not reflect the culture of creativity cherished by Renoites and visitors alike

03

physically connects well-visited downtown destinations, but few Renoites choose to walk between them

04

is home to businesses that are an important part of the Downtown DNA, but lack amenities and businesses with a local draw

**01 Virginia Street draw locals
and visitors alike for events,
but is not a place that
Renoites gravitate towards
everyday**

Renoites come to Virginia Street for events...

...but express a need for programming, more public life and “eyes on the street” for them to visit on an everyday basis

→ Source: The Future of Virginia Street online survey.

“I liked the benches that used to be along the road so that you could sit and watch the cars go by and the events etc. Now there isn't anywhere to stop and take a break to watch anything unless you want to stand up all the time....”

“As an older person, it would be nice to have benches or shady places to sit and rest.”

“Virginia street is a lot of fun during events, like Blues Brews BBQ etc. It's great when people are out and about.”

“More places designed to sit and stay awhile; let my teens socialize here on their own”

“There is not enough activity for people to feel safe, because it feels desolate.”

...Because of the casinos, there can be entire blocks where the whole building is just a fake wall, it makes it feel eerie and scary at night.

The collage features several illustrations: a group of four people sitting on a bench, two people playing trumpets, an elderly person with a cane, and two people on roller skis.

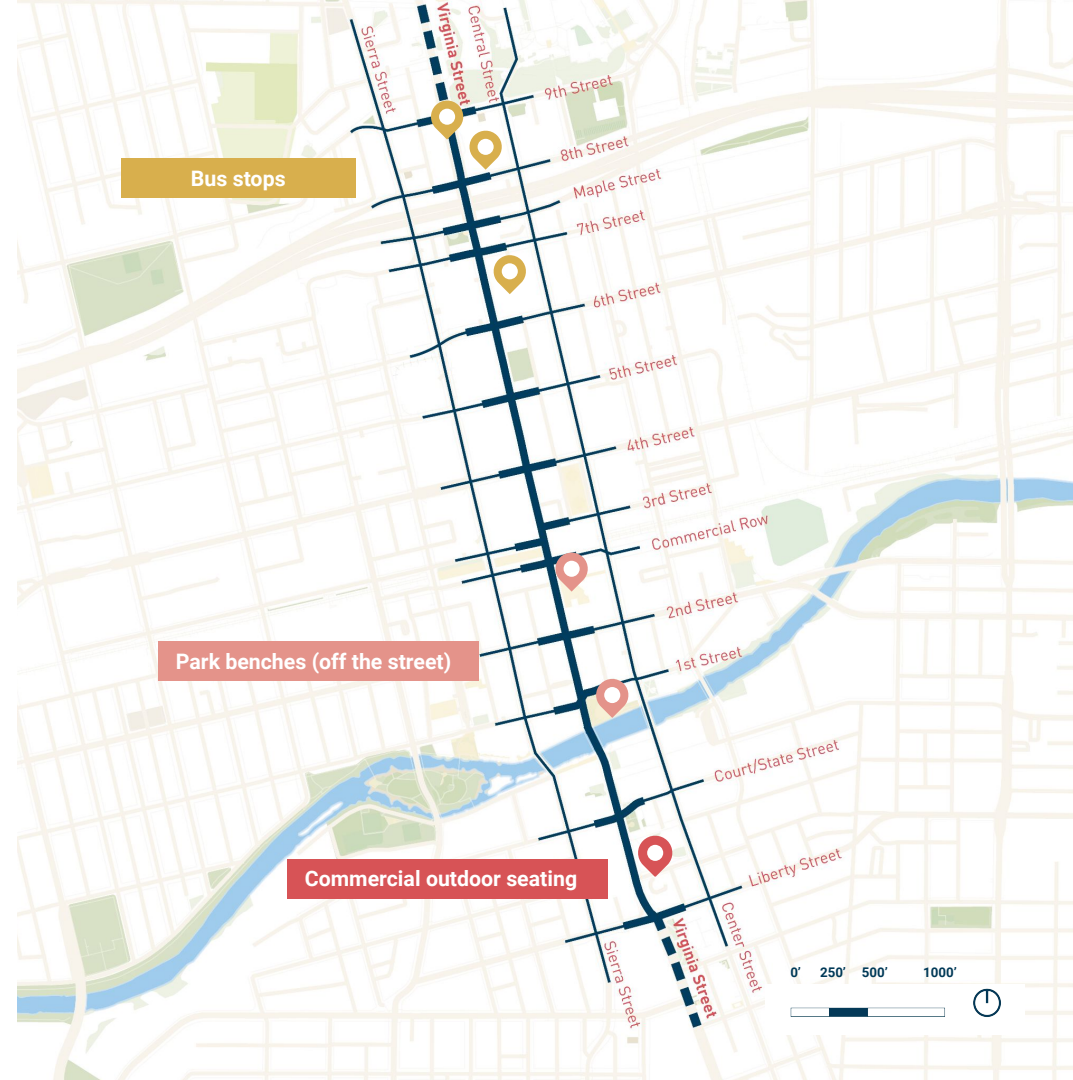
Virginia Street is famous for events that bring 4-5X the number of visitors to Virginia Street than on non-event days...



→ Sources: The Future of Virginia Street online survey. Sources: Reno-Sparks Convention & Visitors Authority *Visitor Profile Survey*,

**When no events,
there are few
invitations to linger
on Virginia Street**

**The bus stops offer
the only public
benches on the
street**



Yet, there are loads of sq.ft. that could be further activated and programmed and invite Renoites to spend time...



Sidewalks and street plazas



For example: There is +16K sq. ft. of open space in front of the Pioneer Center

Areas in front of cultural destinations



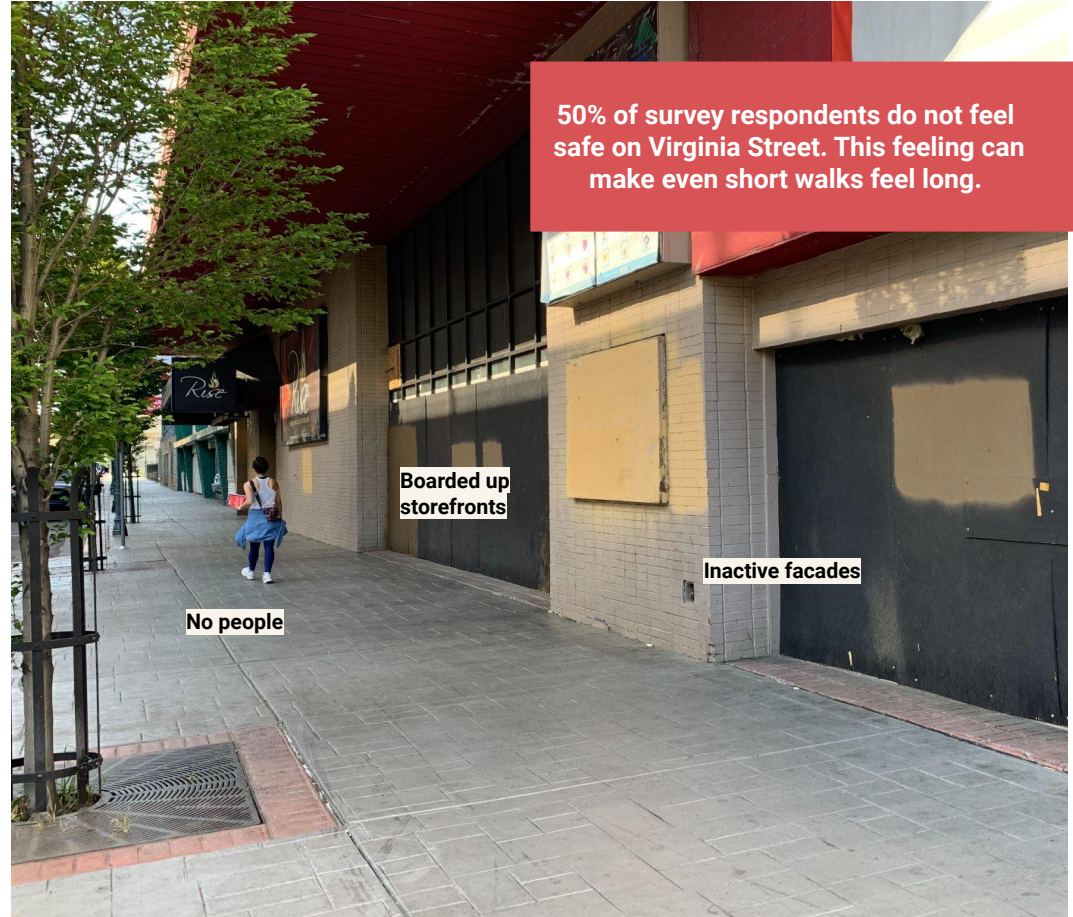
Adjacent public plazas



Parking lots

Due to lack of public life “eyes on the street”, Virginia Street has a safety perception challenge

→ Source: The Future of Virginia Street online survey.



50% of survey respondents do not feel safe on Virginia Street. This feeling can make even short walks feel long.

Boarded up storefronts

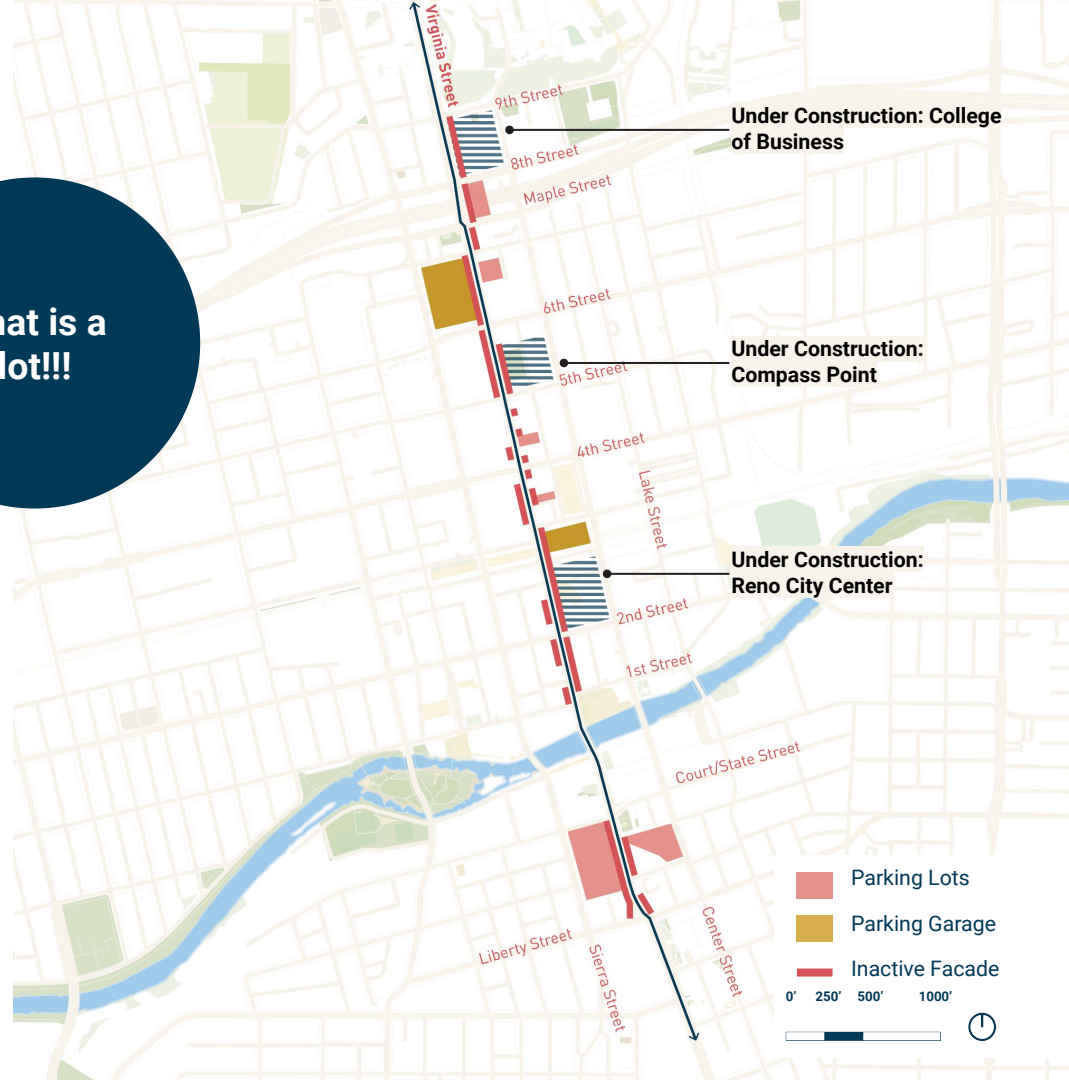
Inactive facades

No people

In fact, 70% of Virginia Street is fronted by inactive facades, parking garages and empty lots...

All of which can make even the shortest walk feel uncomfortable

That is a lot!!!



Placemaking opportunities

**Convert underused sidewalk
and plaza space into inviting
places for people, with
seating, small scale repeat
programming, and building
edge activation**

Tree canopy

Shade

Vehicle access

Bike Access

Event space

Seating

Greening

Active Edges

Human Scale

Local Businesses

Ample room for walking





Greening

Loading zones

Active Edges

Vehicle access

Ample room for walking

Distinct character

Sun / Shade

Bike Access

Public seating

Outdoor serving

Lighting

02 Virginia Street has a rich history, but does not reflect the culture of creativity cherished by Renoites and visitors alike

Renoites love the history of Virginia Street, the Arch and the art...

but also state that there is a disconnect between the street today, and its' glory days

→ Source: The Future of Virginia Street online survey.

"It is Reno's history on display. I would love to see it upgraded to its former glory."

"It has all of the quintessential nostalgic elements of Reno's history. I see potential there for it to be fully revived."



"Love the history and the beautiful historic buildings... the Downtown Post Office, Piazza Building (St. Francis Hotel), Reno National Bank and Washoe Savings Bank, and the Reno Arch"

I love/like...
"Cruising under the Reno arch."



"The Reno Arch sign and art additions are nice."



The iconic Arch is appreciated by locals and visitors, and it is a perfect Instagram moment...

...but needs a platform for appreciation for non-drivers too

Source: Reno-Sparks Convention & Visitors Authority Visitor Profile Survey,



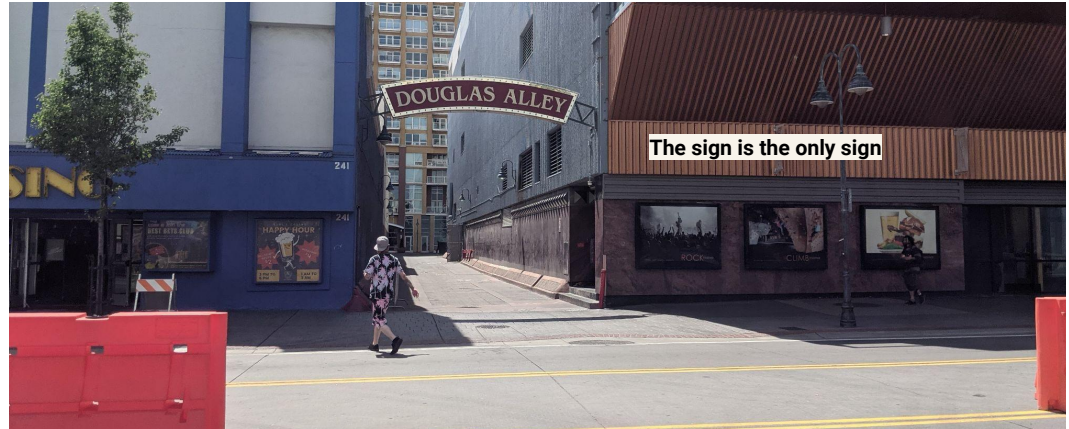
**Like the Arch,
beloved historic
buildings are fronted
by unceremonious
public space...**

**... and while parking
is important, a better
balance can be
struck**



**Historic alleys are
back of house with
important service
functions...**

**...but could serve as
shortcuts for people
walking, and as
programmable,
human scale space**



Murals soften surfaces, and bring delight...

... but given the culture of creativity in Reno, arts programming could do more to activate Downtown...

→ Source: Reno-Sparks Convention & Visitors Authority Visitor Profile Survey



Placemaking opportunities

Provide quality public space for appreciation of iconic signage and historical buildings, and include the alleyways in the Downtown public space network with art & programming



Edge activation

Historical signage (art)

Wayfinding

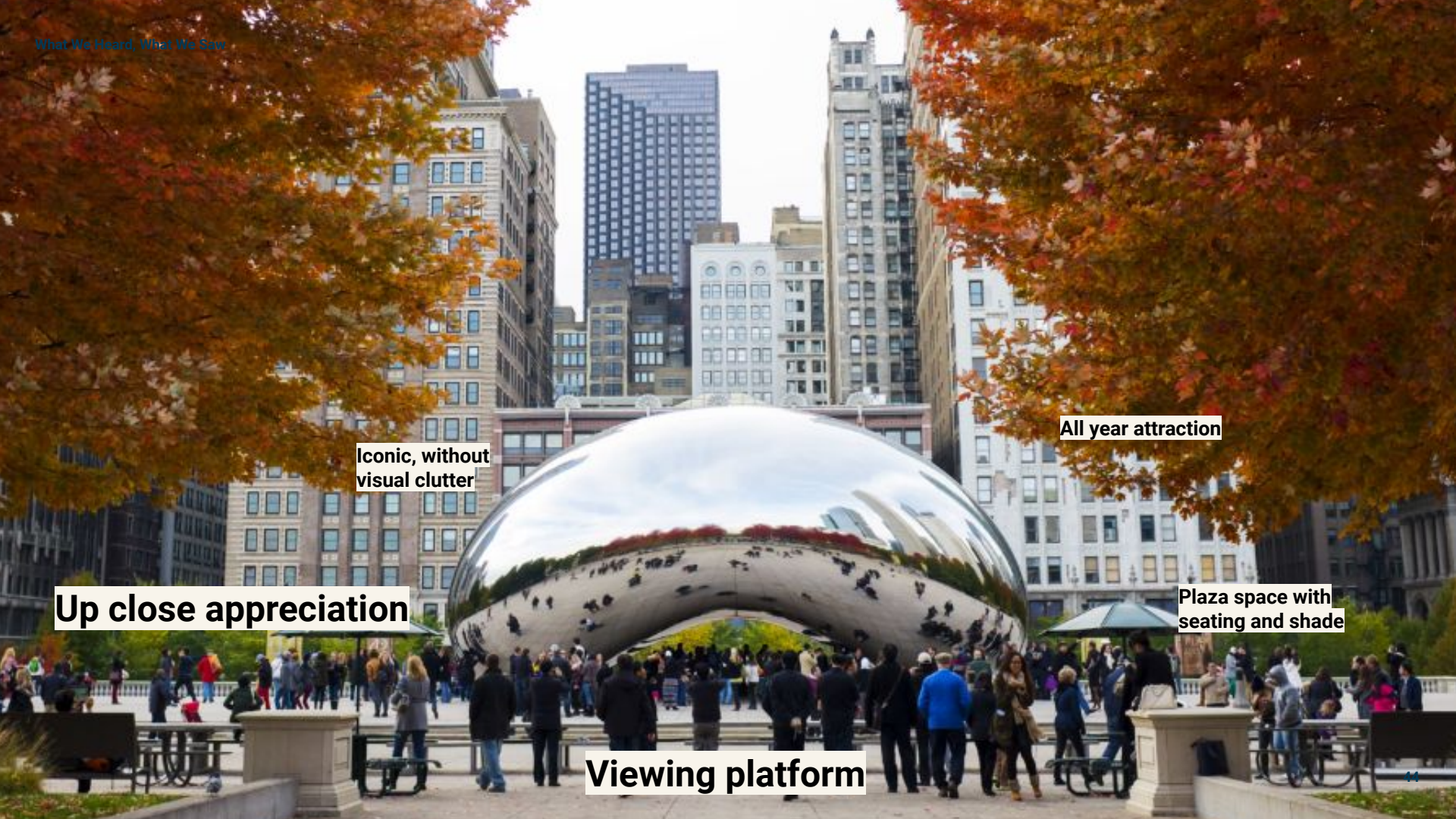
Historical details

Lighting

Eyes on the street

Edge activation

Ample room for walking



**Iconic, without
visual clutter**

All year attraction

Up close appreciation

**Plaza space with
seating and shade**

Viewing platform

03 Virginia Street physically connects well-visited downtown destinations, but few Renoites choose active mobility to get around

Renoites want Virginia Street to be safe and comfortable for people walking and wheeling...

...but appreciate being able to drive two-way

→ Source: The Future of Virginia Street online survey.



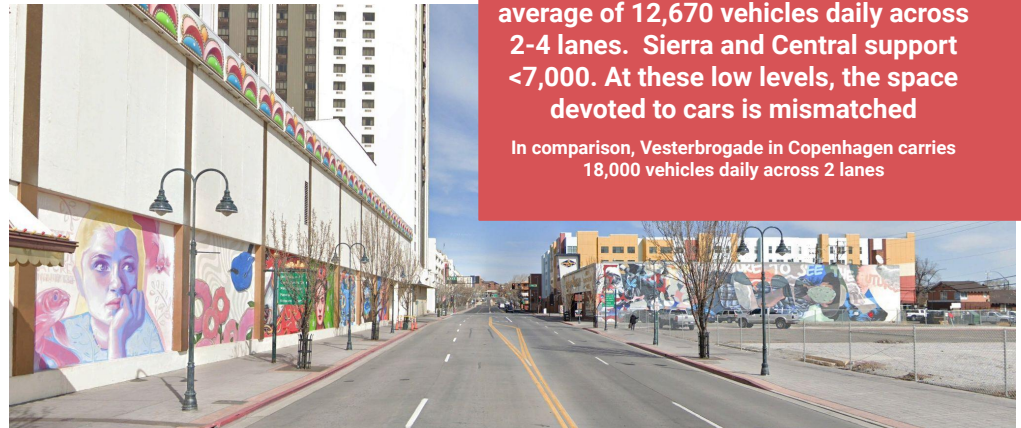
Today, most Renoites drive to Virginia Street. But! After parking, drivers becomes pedestrians too!

Yet, streets with ample space for cars pose challenges to all other users.

→ Source: The Future of Virginia Street online survey.



80% drive to visit Virginia Street, only 12% walk and even fewer wheel



Virginia Street carries an annual average of 12,670 vehicles daily across 2-4 lanes. Sierra and Central support <7,000. At these low levels, the space devoted to cars is mismatched

In comparison, Vesterbrogade in Copenhagen carries 18,000 vehicles daily across 2 lanes

Missing links between destinations for people walking and wheeling, make traveling without a car less desirable

Project Area

Existing Strong Connection

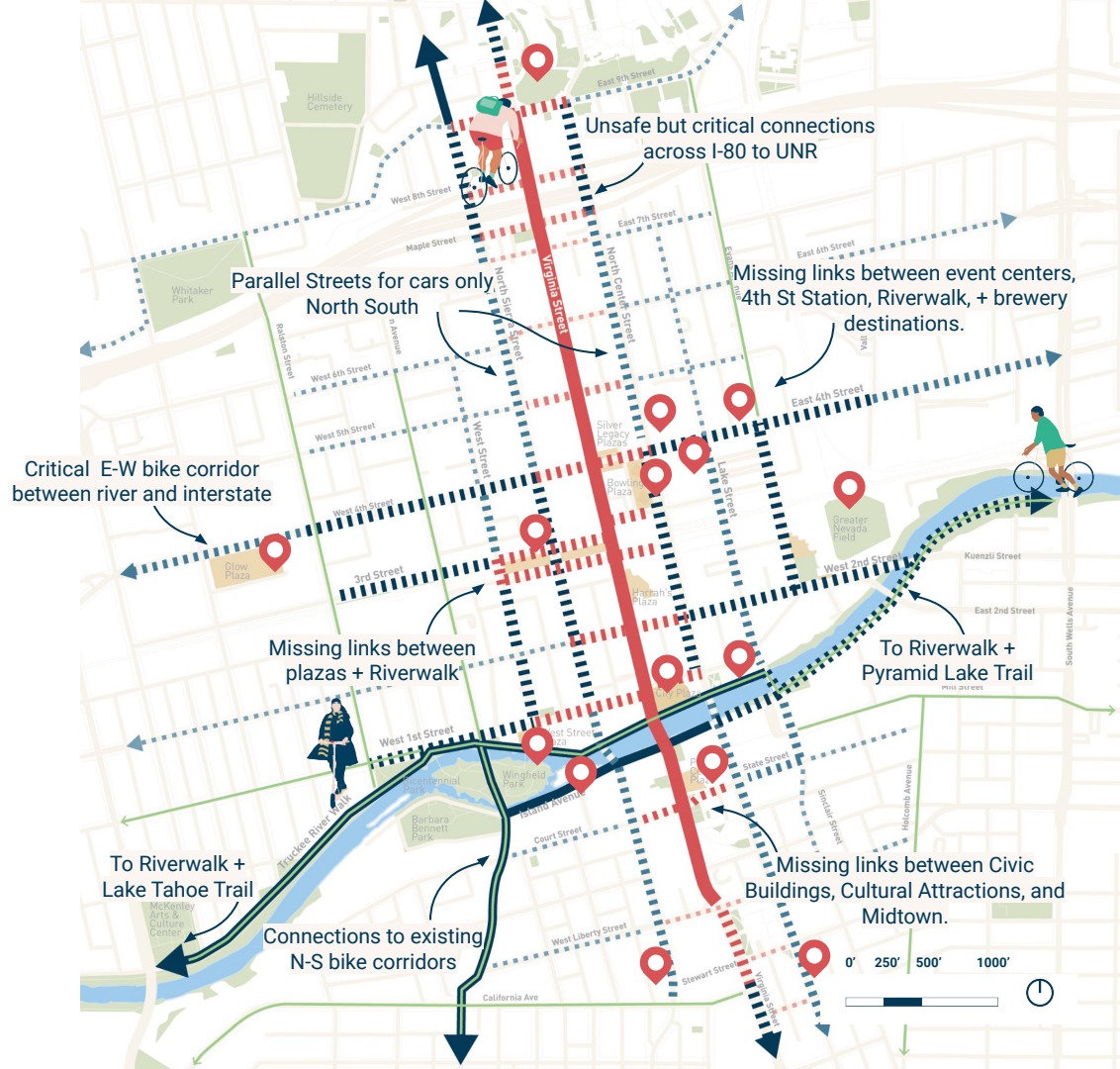
Missing Links:
immediate context
highest-lowest priority



Missing Links:
downtown connectivity
highest-lowest priority



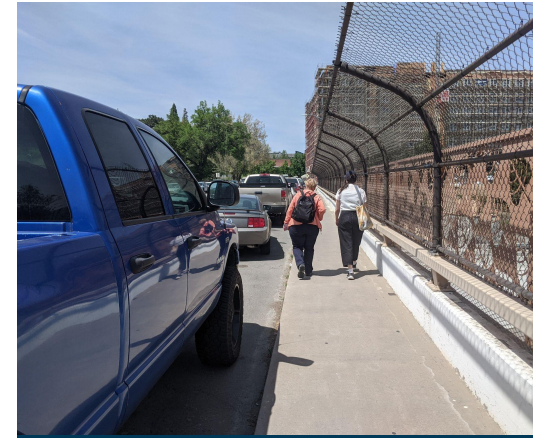
Existing Bike Link



When Renoites DO walk and wheel, they brave low quality sidewalk conditions and limited bike infrastructure, and are exposed to traffic and the elements...



Wide streets and exposure to traffic



Narrow, exposed sidewalks



Bike lane protected parking



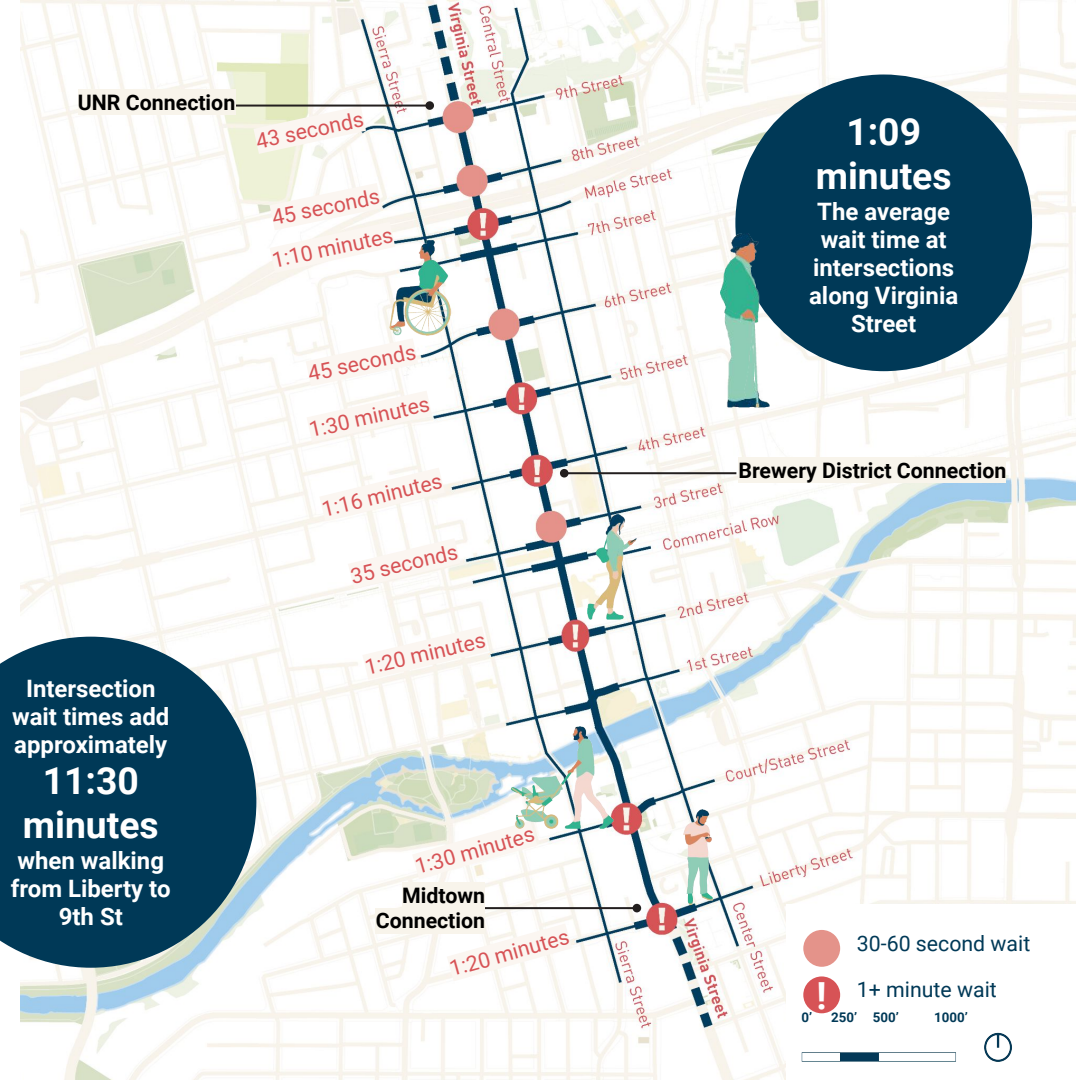
Summer or Winter, exposure is a challenge

Large intersections with limited time to cross, wide turning radii, and fast and heavy traffic, further discourage people from walking and wheeling, and increase the risk of crashes

→ Source: NDOT crash data 2015-17



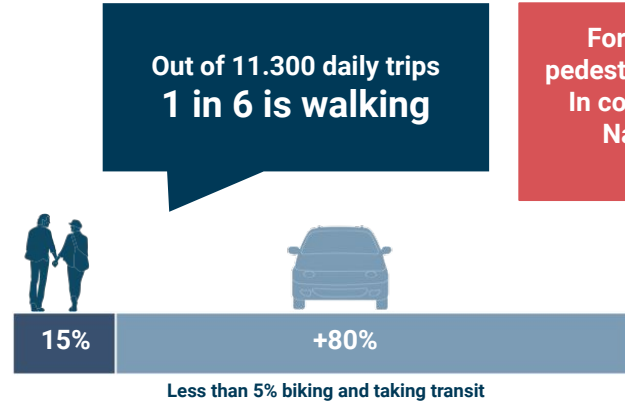
Intersection signaling is rarely in favor of non-drivers, increasing the risk of people crossing outside of designated crossing time



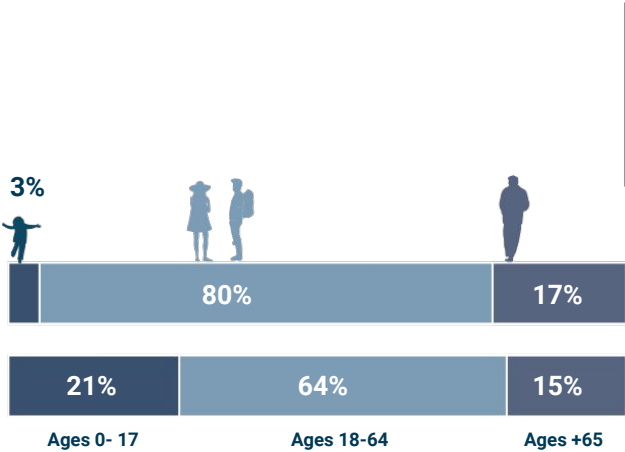
The numbers reflect few people walking and biking on Virginia Street...

...and a demographic split that is not representative of the Reno population

→ Source: Replica trip data by mode and by age groups



For an entertainment street the pedestrian numbers are strikingly low. In comparison, Lower Broadway in Nashville sees an average of 4,482/hour!



Kids and teens are not represented on Virginia Street with less than 3% of trip takers under the age of 17

Trip taker age split on Virginia Street

Trip taker age split across Reno

Placemaking opportunities

**Elevate the baseline for
active mobility users of all
ages and abilities, with
comfortable [and shaded]
sidewalks, quality bike lanes,
and safe crossings**

Shade for people walking and rolling

Lighting

Ample room for walking

Parking protected cycle tracks

Travel lanes

Pedestrian refuge islands

Elevated crosswalks





4th Ave



EXCEPT BICYCLES

Shade

Lighting

Even more shade!

Ample room for walking

Dedicated loading zones

ONE WAY

Parking

Travel lanes

Buffered bike lanes

Short crossing distances

ADA ramps

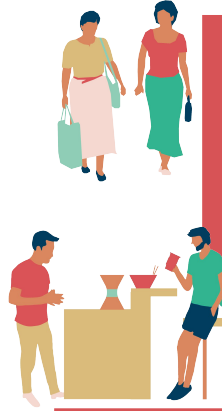
Corner bulb outs

Bike marking

04 Virginia Street is home to businesses that are an important part of the Downtown DNA, but lack amenities and a local draw

Renoites see the casinos as an important part of Reno's DNA...

...but want to see more local shops and eateries mixed in



"Have more shopping and recreation. Outdoor Dining. A safe, clean, healthy and vibrant Virginia Street that wasn't just catered to the casinos, but felt even family friendly with shade and places to walk."

"I don't normally visit the casinos but I feel like they're a key part of Reno."



"I think more shops, entertainment, and restaurants (fun stuff) on Virginia street would be awesome. There are many closed places and boarded old casinos, and I'd love to see those closed places become something..."

"I would love to see more restaurants, gift shops, clothing stores, and businesses that bring in the right crowd. Less convenience stores, pawn shops, and things of that nature."



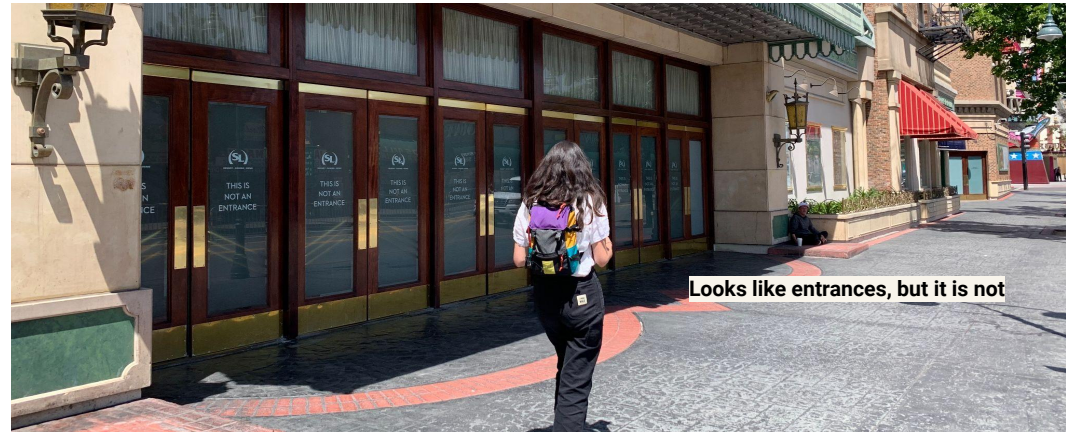
"I wish downtown had trees, places to sit outside, an occasional food truck..."

"It would be good to have cafes and restaurants where you can sit outside. It would feel more crowded and safe."

→ Source: The Future of Virginia Street online survey.

Large singular businesses turn their backs to the street with no or few entrances...

... limiting access to existing businesses



Existing food and beverage places are off the street, and few have direct access from Virginia Street...

... this adds to an empty street



Local attracts!

Renoites love Midtown, with walkability, quiriness, and its local businesses.

More of THIS!



And THIS!!!



Placemaking opportunities

**Bring Reno entrepreneurs
and Virginia Street property
owners together to convert
inactive ground floors to
thriving businesses and
amenities with local and
visitor draw**

Ground floor activation

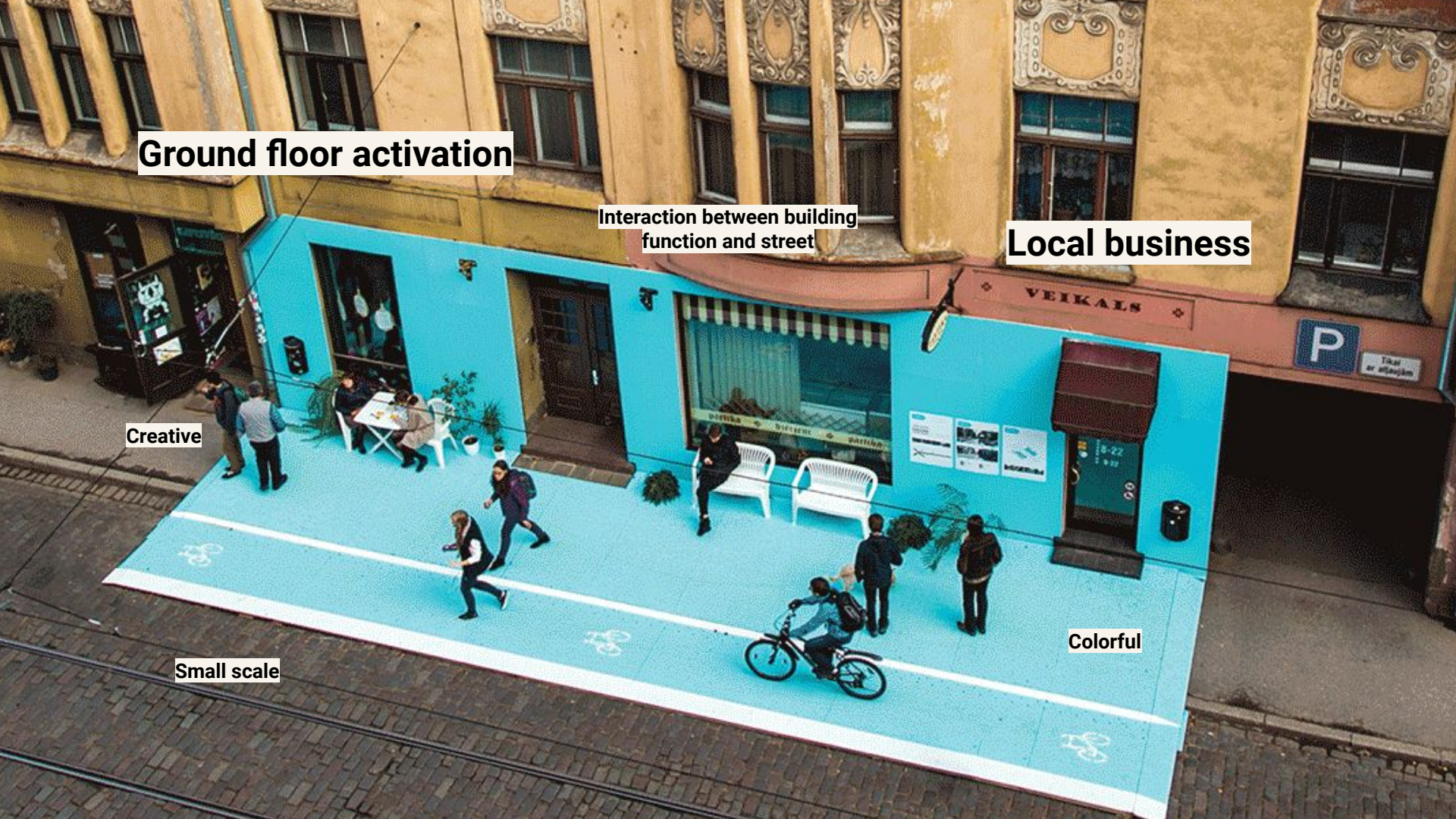
**Interaction between building
function and street**

Local business

Creative

Small scale

Colorful



Interaction between building function and street

Ground floor activation

Local business

Seating

Signage

Ample space for walking

Shade



Aspirations for a Future Virginia Street

Insights are informed by:

- Workshops with City staff
- Conversations with Council members
- Responses to an online survey open to all Renoites through an online survey
- Site surveys
- Observational studies

These guide the project vision and goals on the following, that will set the stage for concept design recommendations



**Change to become
more like we are**



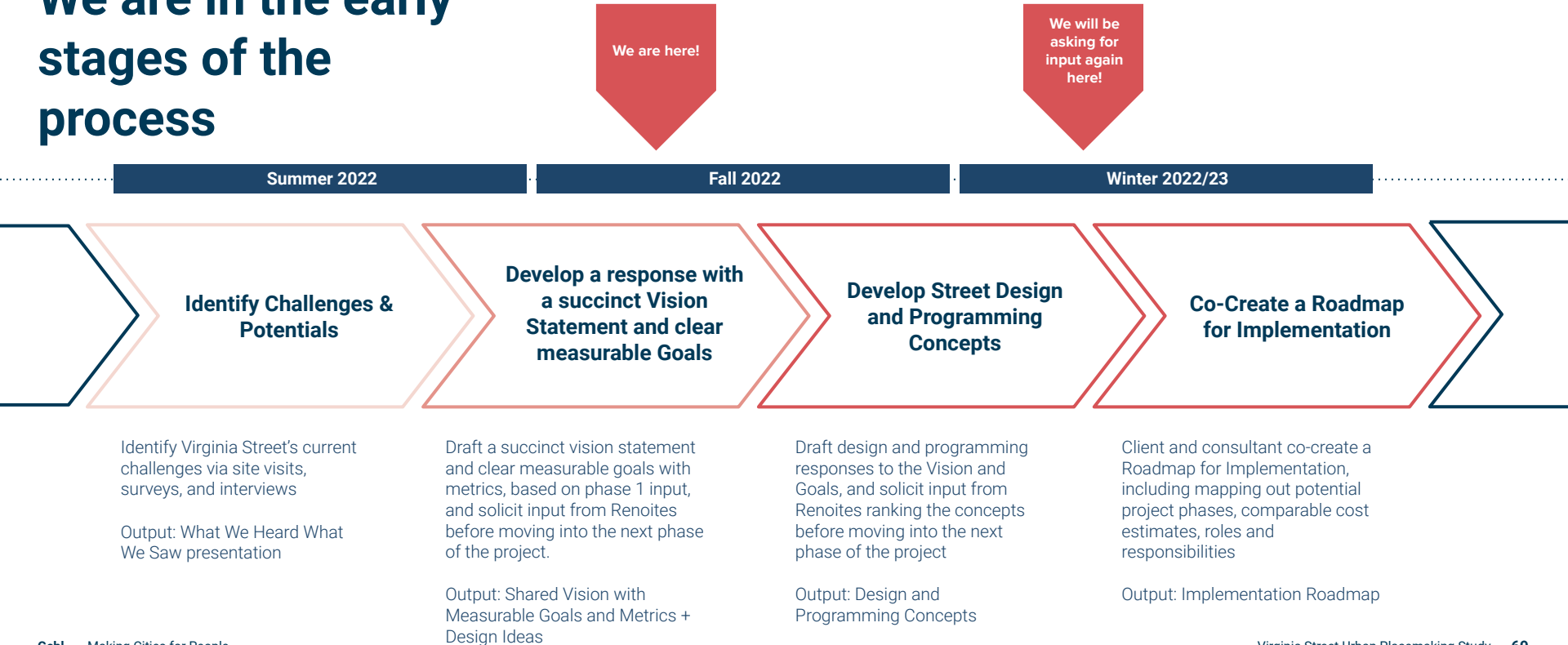



**Change to
become different**

Next Steps



We are in the early stages of the process





**Does the presented resonate
with you and your experience
of Virginia Street?**





What role do you see
yourself playing?

**Time to fill out the
survey and mingle!
We look forward to
hearing from you!**



**Web users,
access the
survey
here!**

Or at <https://www.reno.gov/community/placemaking-study>