PROJECT OVERVIEW

Client
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Racine, Wisconsin is centrally located between Milwaukee and Chicago along the shores of Lake Michigan and at the mouth of the Root River. With a population of nearly 79,000, it is the 5th largest city in the state and has long been a factory town housing notable companies such as J.I. Case, S.C. Johnson & Son, and the Dremel Corporation. Racine attracts visitors from all over to their pristine waterfront, the nature trails along the Root River, cultural museums and galleries, and architectural gems designed by famed architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Norman Foster. The downtown is pedestrian and bike friendly, bustling with restaurants, pubs, galleries, and lakefront trails, all looking out over the beautiful Lake Michigan.

DOUGLAS AVENUE I background

With a desire to extend destination activities and street scape beautification beyond the centrally located downtown, Racine created the Douglas Avenue Business Improvement District (BID) in 2008. The district boundaries include 3 Mile Road to the North, State Street to the South, the railroad tracks on the West and one block East of Douglas Avenue. As a major corridor into downtown, the district is focused on restoring the avenue as a destination and celebrating its past. By proposing green space, street side landscaping, wayfinding and art signage, lighting, and traffic calming strategies, the BID hopes to encourage business and residential development along the corridor.

Douglas Avenue boasts a rich history of theaters, diners, and shopping that provided a charm Racine hopes to restore along the major corridor. Beginning in 1883, Douglas Avenue became route for the Belle City Electric Railway - a local streetcar servicing both Racine and Kenosha. The streetcar operated between the two cities for nearly 65 years before that segment was shut down in 1947. Today, the cable car rails still remain under the asphalt south of High Street. The black poles that once held the cables for the cars still remain along the avenue. Coupled with the existing telephone and electric poles, the street scape has become visually cluttered. With narrow sidewalks and medians and several vacant or rundown buildings, Douglas Avenue has lost its pedestrian appeal.
DOUGLAS AVENUE  |  current efforts

Adopt a Pot Program

In an effort to soften and beautify the Douglas Avenue corridor, the BID sponsors a program that encourages business owners to adopt a large, 30” planter that they will maintain and proudly display in front of their businesses throughout the year.

Douglas Avenue Design Services Grant

This grant was created to assist property owners with design service needs in preparation of a façade improvement. A total of $3,000 per building is available through this grant to assist with architectural or designer fees associated with a façade/building improvement.

Douglas Avenue Landscaping Grant

This grant was created to help business owners enhance the appearance of their property through improved or additional landscaping. The Douglas Avenue BID Board will provide a total of $250.00 per address towards the purchase of permanent flowers and plantings along the front or side facades.

Douglas Avenue Lighting Grant

This grant was created to help property owners improve the safety and security of the area through the installation of additional exterior lighting. A total of $1,000 per building is available towards the purchase and installation of new exterior lighting.
DOUGLAS AVENUE | project scope

The project focuses on Douglas Avenue from 3 Mile Road down to State Street. The 3 mile stretch is home to an array of dining, restaurants, services, and residential lots. Because of the diverse nature of the site, the needs and opportunities vary along the corridor; therefore, it is broken down into 6 major sites that have the potential to be nodes of activity. These nodes will serve as catalytic projects to promote economic development on surrounding sites. The areas of focus will bring together permanent and temporary landscaping, signage, lighting, and art to help create an identity for Douglas Avenue, provide safer pedestrian access, create nodes of public green space, and beautify the overall streetscape.
DOUGLAS AVENUE  I  major intersections and nodes

potential sites
Douglas Avenue Park
Create a functional park that connects with the community and creates an interactive public destination that provides an oasis from the busy street.

High Street_MLK Drive
Utilize the small, prominent parcel for gateway signage and lighting. Highlight pedestrian crossing to slow traffic and add permanent plantings.

South Street
Connect with bike path and create pedestrian and bike hub pocket park. Opportunity for future retail/restaurant development and expansion.

St. Patrick Street
Vacant parcel an opportunity for public green space and pocket park, focusing on pedestrian access, signage, and traffic calming.

Hamilton Street
Using the vacant parcel, create an opportunity for a pocket park or public green space. Focus on landscape and pedestrian access.

3 Mile Road
Main entry and exit gateway for Douglas Avenue. Opportunity to use signage to create an identity for the corridor, incorporating lighting and landscaping.
sidewalk landscaping and street trees

Sidewalk landscaping should use deep-rooted native or drought-tolerant species. Both have many benefits including tolerance to flooding and drought, low or no irrigation needed once matured, improving water quality by filtering pollutants, and aerating and increasing the permeability of soils. Native plantings provide wildlife habitat and generally contribute to the health of the soil.

Because there are areas where the edge between the sidewalk and street are too narrow for street trees, using native grasses and small shrubs periodically in conjunction with a variety of alternating hardscape materials can provide an aesthetically pleasing buffer area that can be implemented within a narrow zone.
Traffic calming is a high priority in order to encourage more pedestrian activity. The narrow sidewalks and edges create a challenging and unsafe zone for pedestrians and cyclists traveling along the high speed, high traffic areas. Incorporating material changes and signage draws the attention from both driver and pedestrian, bringing awareness to major intersections and crosswalks while also offering opportunities for way-finding. A change in material or pattern is also an aesthetically pleasing solution to soften the streetscape. Lower cost solutions include paint, stamped concrete, or street tape while more expensive options include brick pavers, cobblestone, or other natural stone.
Adding artwork and signage can update facades, soften the streetscape, and create an identity for the neighborhood. Because of the diverse nature of the Douglas Avenue corridor, creating an identity is a high priority. Artwork and way-finding signage will help create a coherent and consistent vehicular and pedestrian experience along the avenue. Including a well lit, permanent gateway sign shows that Douglas Avenue is a destination. Signage at the pedestrian, cyclist, and vehicular level will draw attention to the nodes of activity and guide travelers and residents along the street. Bus stops can also be an opportunity to add an artistic element that represents the neighborhood while also providing a functional service for pedestrians and public transit users.
SITE ONE  I  Douglas Avenue_Three Mile Drive_preliminary proposals

This intersection acts as the gateway entry and exit to the Douglas Avenue Corridor. With very little development due to restrictions from the airport, the site design focuses on signage, lighting, and landscaping to help create an identity that can serve as a template for the entire route. The current welcome sign lacks a sense of permanence and can only be seen during the day. There is a strong corner with ample space to incorporate a more substantial sign with permanent structure and landscaping that uses solar lighting for higher visibility at night. Signage options include a contemporary design that would re-brand Douglas Avenue while the more traditional options offers a heavier stone structure with a gateway to the city of Racine.
Option A is a more traditional option that uses the solid, stone gateway signage surrounded by landscaping that is easily maintained and pleasing all year round. The sign can be up-lit at night using solar lights that are powered during the day. The crosswalk is highlighted using a stamped, painted concrete or brick pavers.

Option B is a modern option. The signs are a sleek design made of painted steel. Each of the signs may vary in height and width depending on if they are targeted toward vehicular, cyclist, or pedestrian traffic. Because of the simplicity, more of the signs could be placed at corners and medians as well as a banner option attached to telephone poles. The crosswalk includes a painted graphic calling attention to the entrance onto the Douglas Avenue Corridor.
The final proposal combines elements of both the traditional and modern signage. The design maintains a simple form using a stone base, concrete, and corten steel. Variations in size and shape allow for modifications geared toward cyclists and pedestrians. These smaller signs can be placed in the pocket parks, along sidewalks, and at intersections or any locations where way-finding would be useful. Uplighting is added to the gateway sign for clear visibility in the evening.
SITE TWO  | Douglas Avenue_South Street_preliminary proposal

This intersection has a unique set of issues surrounding both cyclist and vehicular traffic. Just a short distance from the bike path, the site offers an opportunity to connect cyclists to the Douglas Avenue Corridor. The south side of the site is currently vacant and a bar occupies the north side of the site. There is a fast food restaurant across the street to the south and a few residences across the street to the east. The city has already implemented improvements to the crosswalks, highlighting them with a change in materials. Both designs for this site focused on creating a public green space that would attract pedestrians as well as cyclists from the bike path. This site could serve as a catalyst for further development or expansion of the existing bar to become more of a destination targeted toward pedestrian and cycling traffic.
Option A creates a grassy area that could function as a pocket park on the vacant portion of the site. The street edge is contained using landscaped berms with trees that would provide a structured boundary for the park - buffering it from the dense traffic. Just south of the existing building, another landscaped berm helps build up the northern boundary of the pocket park. This creates an intimate, protected oasis in an otherwise dense and open vehicular environment. An outdoor seating area flanked by street trees on the northern portion of the site offers a potential extension of the existing pub.

Option B is focused on creating an aesthetically pleasing street edge along the south side of the site. Also incorporating a grassy area, this zone is flanked by a continuous row of street trees and planters to create a buffer between the traffic and pedestrian activity on the site. Permeable pavers are placed on the driveway portion of the site adjacent to the existing building. This option is more about greening and softening the landscape without completely altering its current function.
The final proposal for this site focuses on the connection between the bike path to the west and Douglas Avenue. In order to encourage more cycling traffic, the proposal creates a public green space tailored towards cyclists. The vacant parcel of land offers a sculptural bike rack, bike repair station, walking path, and seating options. There is a mix of hardscape, landscape, and permeable pavers to soften the site and provide a variety of green options for water catchment and rain water filtration. Street trees are planted on the exterior boundary to create a softer barrier between the park and the busy street traffic. The focus on pedestrian and bike traffic can be a catalyst for development of the bar/restaurant to the north as a bike friendly establishment. Future proposals can include an outdoor dining/beer garden area directly north, making this site a destination for pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicular traffic.
SITE THREE | Douglas Avenue Park_preliminary proposal

The Douglas Avenue Park was an effort by the City of Racine to provide a public park along Douglas Avenue. The park is adjacent to a community center to the north, a residential neighborhood to the east, and a big box commercial district to the west. The residents of the city are unhappy with the landscape design and the lack of connection between the park and surrounding residential neighborhood and community center. Both design options focus on creating a more solid boundary between the dense traffic, providing a more intimate experience for pedestrians and cyclists using the park.
Option A added more trees to the existing park layout. The benches and paths remained the same but the addition of trees creates pockets of more intimate zones within the park, providing more shaded areas for comfortable seating along the road. The park could become more of an orchard, using fruit trees as a way to promote healthy eating and living. A paver or flag stone walkway provided a direct connect from the neighborhood to the park.

Option B reorganized the park so that seating and activity takes place in the areas away from the street. The benches were grouped together and placed further inside the park to block users from the heavy traffic on Douglas Avenue. The functions of the park were expanded toward the community center, incorporating picnic tables and additional seating on the north end of the park as well as an extended pedestrian path leading to the neighborhood to the east. More trees were planted to add a soft, yet denser boundary on the western side of the park. Community and interactive art walls were placed at the outer boundary of the softball field in order to engage the community as well as protect the park from incoming softballs and baseballs.
The final proposal for the Douglas Avenue Park focuses on connecting the park with the neighborhood and community center. Landscaping is moved to the exterior boundary, creating a buffer zone between street traffic and pedestrian traffic within the park. The interior is a paved hardscape with a variety of seating options and outdoor activities. The area is surrounded by a continuous line of trees and shrubs, creating an intimate and defined park. The walking path extends from the community center, through the park, and across to the neighborhoods on the east side. The path is set back furthest to the south so it will not disrupt weekly softball games. Outdoor chess tables and picnic tables add function and seating options for users of all ages.
The triangular site is the smallest of the six but one of the most important. It is located at the conjunction of three major streets and close to downtown. It has the potential to serve as the southern gateway between Douglas Avenue and Downtown Racine. There is currently a statue of Korel Jonas, a Czech journalist, linguist and political activist, who became a Wisconsin journalist and politician. The site is an island with clear visibility on all sides making it one of the most prominent sites. The design options focused on landscaping and signage that would complement the statue and make the site a focal point as part of the Douglas Avenue Corridor.
Option A used a combination of low shrubs and grasses coupled with a paved or stone hardscape to differentiate the island from the surrounding street. The lower lying plants were a stark contrast to the height of the statue. The crosswalk was highlighted using a painted stamped concrete or paved brick walkway, slowing traffic and bringing attention to pedestrian activity surrounding the island.

Option B transformed the island into a functional seating area or miniature park. The majority of the surface at the center was a paved or stone hardscape with a low railing to provide a protective and aesthetic boundary from the adjacent streets. A few tables were placed within the boundary for optional seating. Planter beds and shrubs occupied the north corner and surrounding the statue, creating a softer and greener view for passersby.
SITE FOUR I Douglas Avenue_High Street_MLK Drive_final proposal
The goal for this final proposal is to create a focal point for the Douglas Avenue Corridor. Because the site is located where three streets intersect, traffic is heavy and the site is small so pedestrian activity is low other than passersby. With this in mind, the design focuses on traffic calming, highlighting the crosswalks with a stamped concrete or paved brick walkway. The center of the island is paved using red bricks to soften the look of the surrounding concrete. The planters are replaced with more permanent, concrete planters that step up towards the existing statue. The planters and paved surface help create a more defined edge to the island, making it a prominent focal point at the intersection.
SITE FIVE  
Douglas Avenue_ St Patrick Street

This intersection is flanked by a gas station, a small fast food restaurant, residential housing, and retail. The site is a vacant corner lot located on the northeast side of the intersection. Because the site boasts high pedestrian and vehicular traffic, the design options focused on beautifying the street edge of this intersection to make it an aesthetically prominent zone for both pedestrians and vehicles. The designs use landscaping, traffic calming strategies, and signage to soften the street edge and provide a public green space for the intersection.
Option A occupied the entire vacant lot creating a community interactive garden and park. The outer edge was flanked by a variety of trees that provide a permeable barrier between the gardens and traffic. The crosswalks were highlighted using a painted, stamped concrete or paved bricks to calm traffic and encourage pedestrians to safely cross between the intersection.

Option B focused the attention at the street edge. Mulch beds and larger trees were planted at the outer boundaries with a small paved zone occupying the corner of the site. A community art board, little free library, and small seating area encouraged neighbors and visitors to interact with and use the small, intimate pocket park.
The final proposal for this site focuses on creating an interactive, public green space, incorporating community art, seating, and gardens. Because the future of this site is unknown, the proposal includes temporary designs that can be easily moved if there are plans for development in the future. Landscaping is added using raised beds that double as bench seating. There are three community garden beds and three little free libraries with each being maintained by the neighboring church and elementary school. The close proximity to the fire hydrant allows for easy and convenient access to water for the gardens and landscaping.
SITE SIX  | Douglas Avenue_Hamilton Street_preliminary proposals

This intersection lacks development but offers a great opportunity to incorporate another gateway park or public green space. The intersection is flanked by a large parking lot, a vacant lot, and a few small pubs with nearby residences less than a block away. The designs focused on creating a park on the vacant lot and beautifying the edge of the parking lot to take the attention off the large vacant parking lot. Because the site is located closest to the downtown area and the furthest south on Douglas Avenue, the intersection can serve as the southern gateway to the corridor.
Option A focused on flanking the intersection with public green space. The vacant lot to the north became a type of plaza, incorporating gateway signage and artwork, a paved gathering and seating area, and surrounding street trees providing a buffer from the traffic. The parking lot to the south was planted and fenced off with trees and a large planter bed at the corner toward the street. The crosswalks were highlighted with the material change to slow traffic.

Option B focused on creating a gateway onto the Douglas Avenue Corridor from downtown Racine. The vacant lot was peppered with small areas of pavers, breaking up the surface and providing zones of signage and small activities. The surface signage was used in the crosswalks, drawing attention to the entrance onto Douglas Avenue while also providing a highlighted crosswalk for pedestrians.
The final proposal is a small pocket park that provides an entrance gateway to Douglas Avenue from downtown Racine. The intersection is near the southern end of Douglas Avenue, allowing another opportunity for gateway and way-finding signage to complement the signs at 3 Mile drive to the North. The site is surrounded by trees at the street edge adjacent to the sidewalk providing a defined boundary for the park. As an added focal point, a sculptural element is located near the center of the paved hardscape. This sculpture can be a permanent addition or an opportunity for local artists to display their work as a rotating show throughout the year.