FIVE POINTS BETTER BLOCK
AFTER-ACTION REPORT
Five Points Intersection in Historic West End

West End in Charlotte is home to many of the City’s oldest African-American neighborhoods including the last middle-income ones. It is also home to Johnson C. Smith University, a historically black college dating back to 1867. The community has a long and proud history as a center for African-American culture, community, and activism, from the post Civil War era through the Civil Rights era and up to day.

Despite the strong sense of community, the area has historically suffered from a lack of investment in public infrastructure and public spaces. The Five Points Intersection at the corner of West Trade Street, West 5th Street, Beatties Ford Road, and Rozzelle's Ferry Road in particular has become a no-man’s land. It is an area with streets and roads devoid of pedestrian life where cars routinely speed through. The public pocket parks and plazas in Five Points remain underutilized with a perception of being unsafe.

New Investment Coming to Five Points

But with the new streetcar line coming to Five Points, the City will be making investments in the infrastructure and public spaces. Three years ago, the City (along with partners Charlotte City Center and the Historic West End Initiative) began a community engagement process to identify the community’s priorities for
investments in infrastructure and community amenities.

The three-year process included numerous community meetings, planning charrettes, surveys, and more.

It culminated in a document created by planning and design firms, Neighboring Concepts and AECOM, called the *Community Investment Plan for the Five Points Intersection and West Trade/I-77 Underpass Gateway*. The plan called for investments in the roadway infrastructure to create a multi-modal street with space for the new streetcar, cars, bikes, and pedestrians. It also called for investments in the public realm and amenities at the West Points intersection. Concept plans were created and renderings drawn up to show what could happen in the community.

But after three years of planning and meetings and talking about what community members wanted, it was time for some action.

The Better Block Foundation, in partnership with the Historic West End Initiative and Neighboring Concepts, was awarded a grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation to conduct a Better Block project and bring the community’s ideas to life.
Five Points Morris Column
The Better Block started with a kick-off event at the Five Points intersection in September of 2017. Members from Better Block talked with neighbors about their community, what they enjoyed about it, and what they felt was needed. Many of those conversations confirmed what we found in the Community Investment Plan (CIP). Neighbors wanted a place that was not only safe, but also an inviting area where they could gather.

The kick-off culminated with a community build of a Morris Column to act as a community message board. The topper design was done by local artist T’Afo Feimster. With more than 35 years of experience as a visual artist, cultural educator, and playwright/actor, T’Afo has been a leader of the artists community in the neighborhood for decades. He is also the co-owner of The ArtHouse Studios and co-founder and executive director of ADEPT Artists Inc., a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization whose mission is to assist in the development of emerging artists.

T’Afo submitted a design for the topper of the Morris Column based on a painting he had previously done. Using T’Afo’s design, Better Block’s design staff traced the outline of the painting and cut the design out with a CNC router.
T'Afo's Design
From the various surveys, the CIP report, and input from the community, we determined which interventions and which ideas to test out based on the following questions:

Which ideas came up again and again?
What was feasible, given the timeframe, budget, and resources?
What reaches the broadest range of community members?
FIVE POINTS CONCEPT PLAN

Road Diet and Bike Lanes

With the upcoming streetcar line headed through Five Points, the design of the intersection will soon be changing. The design created in the CIP by community members and consultants was intended to do several things. First: it would create a multi-modal street. Second: it would improve the connectivity of the community. Third: it would increase safety at the intersection.

The design included travel lanes, bike lanes, improved crosswalks, wide sidewalks, and room for the new streetcar. During the Better Block, we tested it out. To create the buffered bike lanes, we brought in 600 bales of hay and more than 100 shrubs and trees. We used them to create Dutch-style bike islands and bike boxes. Community members then painted more than 1,000 feet of bike lanes down West Trade, West 5th, Beatties Ford, and Rozzelles Ferry Road.
Bike Lane Painting
The No. 1 amenity that the neighbors wanted was a Community Amphitheater. They wanted somewhere to gather, and where local and regional live music acts could perform. As some community members put it, much of the public space in Five Points felt off limits or unsafe to them. The dead-end of State Street between the Church’s Chicken and the Medical Building was an underutilized public space. With its natural incline headed toward the intersection, it was a great fit for an amphitheater.

Better Block worked with community members to design and fabricate a stage and bandshell, which was painted with the school’s colors. We then deployed seating elements in the park leading up to the intersection.

We partnered with Hip-Hop University, a local nonprofit that seeks to uplift communities through the arts, to program the stage with live music, DJs, and spoken-word performers who took to the stage both Friday night and Saturday during the day. Friday night also had a dance party complete with the Wobble. Community members who didn’t often sit next to each other danced next to each other. Saturday, the line-up was so packed that an after-party was planned.
A Show at the Community Amphitheater
Beautifying and Activating the Vacant Street

The dead-end street of West Trade with the small pocket park was also seen as an underutilized area, unsafe, and off-limits to many.

Community members had also indicated that they wanted more art in the area. We worked with a local artist on a design for a street mural to interject community art onto the street and create a safer environment. Then, on Thursday, we worked with community members to paint the 2,000-square-foot mural along West Trade Street.
Community members had indicated that they also wanted a public market. We worked with the community to identify a dozen local entrepreneurs who wanted to set-up pop-up shops throughout the newly transformed West Trade Street.

Vendors included local apparel shops, jewelry makers, and artists. Charlotte’s Black Film Festival popped up a studio to record neighbors’ stories, and students from JCSU’s Growing Healthy Communities Program brought vegetables and fruit from their community garden to sell. We also worked with the Black Business Owners of Charlotte to get food trucks there both Friday night and Saturday.
Outdoor Seating and Cafe Seating

One thing the intersection lacked was seating, especially after food trucks, vendors, and live music were brought to the community. A number of different seating elements from the Better Block Wikiblock library were assembled and painted by the members of the community.
COMMUNITY FEEDBACK
COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Neighboring Concepts created a survey of people attending the Better Block on Saturday for their feedback on the different interventions. The most popular interventions were the Festival Plaza, the various artists, and the outdoor seating.

WHAT DID YOU ENJOY ABOUT THE BETTER BLOCK DESIGN?*

- Community Board: 15
- Separated Bike Lanes: 15
- Outdoor Reading Room: 15
- Festival Plaza: 28
- Art: 27
- Amphitheater: 18
- Games: 16
- Outdoor Dining: 24
- Bike Racks: 15

*Respondents also wrote in: “Preserve & Add More Trees” & “Trash/Recycle Receptacles”
12 Quality Criteria

Gehl Institute’s 12-quality criteria metrics were gathered by student volunteers from JCSU’s Master’s of Social Work.

Better Block
12 Quality Criteria

Date:
Time:
Weather:
Notes:

Observe the space around you, and rate it on each of the categories below. Fill in the circle completely if the space meets the criteria, half way if it partially meets, and leave it blank if it doesn’t.

- **feeling safe** – protection for pedestrians against cars
- **feeling secure** – protection against crime and violence
- **micro climate** – protection against the elements (rain, cold, etc.)
- **connected** – space is connected to surroundings and resources
- **walkable** – room for walking, interesting facades, accessible for everyone
- **sit & stay** – opportunities to sit in the space and reasons to stay
- **seeing** – good sight lines, pleasant views, and reasonable viewing distances
- **talk & listen** – space is conducive to talking and listening
- **activity & function** – varied range of activities and functions
- **human scale** – things are at eye-level, you can recognize faces across the space, you don’t feel small in the space
- **identity** – space has a strong visual identity
- **senses** – good design, rich sensory experience
The data show people felt the area was more walkable, safer, connected, and had a better sense of identity. In particular, people reported that the area was far better to sit and stay, that it was active, and that it was functioning better than before the Better Block.
The road diet and redesigned intersection worked. Despite fears of accidents, injuries, and pedestrian safety, motorists handled the changes easily. And, more importantly, with the crossing distance shortened, pedestrians were able to cross the street with ease.
Programming Is as Important as Physical Changes

When the amphitheater was created, it looked great, but community members, even those who helped build it, stood by not really engaging the space. But as soon as the music came on, they immediately filled the space.

Moving forward, after the hardscape improvements are completed, soft costs for programming should be considered.

West Trade can work as a pedestrian plaza. When the dead-end part of West Trade street was beautified and activated with vendors, people used it. It worked as a pedestrian area that fostered a sense of community. Developing that street and the corner as one space geared for the community can work well.

The Five Points Better Block brought the community together and showcased what could happen with the intersection and the area around it. But more work is needed. The community needs to continue to press for the improvements and the investment in the neighborhood. The Better Block helped to showcase that these improvements can work and are liked by the community. That evidence can be used by the community to continue to advocate for those improvements and investments.

These investments can not solve all the issues in the neighborhood. Investments in infrastructure and the public realm can greatly improve the quality-of-life in the neighborhood, but those investments also need to be tied to investments in social services, community-asset building, local business development, and more. Five Points is an incredible community with great potential.