

December 10, 2021



ELLA LIBRARY EAST LAKE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT 2

PUBLIC ART CHATTANOOGA
FALL 2021



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT 2

The Community Engagement Report 2 describes the continued creative engagement efforts made in the East Lake neighborhood on behalf of Public Art Chattanooga to inform a unique public art project in East Lake. The community input directs how public art in East Lake can beautify and enliven East Lake Park through interactive artistic seating and East Lake Rec Center with the installation of a custom artistic basketball court as derived from the first round of engagement.

VISION STATEMENT

East Lake is a beautiful and historic community, once a thriving manufacturing hub connected to downtown Chattanooga and North Georgia through trolley and rail connections. Established in 1887 East Lake is now a place of new beginnings. Community members have identified colorful, practical and interactive as the three main themes that reflect the people and the culture of the East Lake Neighborhood.

East Lake is home to a diverse people and seated in a cultural corridor that still connects the state of Tennessee to the state of Georgia. Through multiple decades of economic shifts, the manufacturing companies who helped shape the original fabric of the community left, taking with them certain options of economic mobility and community connectivity.

Through community feedback East Lake Park has been identified as the heart and the community hub of East Lake, where residents exercise, play, relax, and interact with family, friends, and neighbors. The residents have communicated the desire for intentionality and public art that has been created specifically with the people of East Lake in mind. Residents would like public art that is mindful of the people and history of the community that would make an inactive space within East Lake Park inviting without distracting from the natural elements and flow of the park. Community members have identified permanent public art as having the power to connect the diverse people of the neighborhood together in a shared space and recognize the history of the place and the role that East Lake has had in shaping the city of Chattanooga over the course of more than 130 years.



APPROACH

The purpose of the engagements was to bring the community together to celebrate our cultural assets, highlight the unique character of our neighborhood and honor its history, so that future public art and development projects are authentic and support place keeping in East Lake. This was done by intentionally soliciting input from a broad range of East Lake neighborhood residents, in particular the population of residents who are less likely to come to a meeting or event, therefore traditionally under or unrepresented in the planning and engagement process. To accomplish the goal of equitable engagement ELLA Library used easily accessible and interactive materials.

INCLUSIVITY: TAKING IT TO THE STREETS

One of the keys for building public engagement is to make it easier and more convenient for people to participate. ELLA Library took engagement to places where people were already congregating, at community events and high foot traffic locations. This made it easier for community members to provide insight on their thoughts on public art and the role it plays in the East Lake neighborhood without them having to attend a separate meeting.

Meaningful engagement requires consistent, visible, and approachable community connections. Engagement efforts were conducted with a focus on equity to connect with a broader cross-section of the neighborhood's population, including the elderly and the latinx population. Efforts included collaborating with organizations and other partners working within the East Lake community.

USER FRIENDLY MATERIALS

To effectively and consistently communicate with members of the community we developed inviting, user-friendly, jargon-free project materials. These materials are visually-attractive and easy to understand. The materials were oriented to people who might not be familiar with different types of Public Art. Candy, candy and pool noodles were provided for people to participate in providing feedback and comments.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS

Creative Engagement Activities

MUSIC NIGHT IN THE PARK

October 4, 2021

East Lake Park

In conjunction with the East Lake Neighborhood Association, to replace National Night Out in October and to kick off ELLA Library's second round of community engagement Music Night in the Park was an artistic way to connect with community members. East Lake Park was alive with music played by East Lake residents. ELLA Library invited residents to bring their instruments and set up in their favorite place in the park and make music. East Lake Park was filled with much until well after dark as people continued to come together through the common language of music.

On Music Night, we had a beautifully culturally diverse group of neighbors in attendance. As people were encouraged to spread out and use the space, it was observed that people clustered together in the few seating options throughout the park. Specifically, people gathered in Pavilion 2, the cement cutouts around the east side of the park near Pavilion 1 where the spring water enters the pond, and the new benches built into the boardwalk. The natural energy and movement of people did not have people gathering to play music or sing on the cement cutouts along with the wall or near Pavilion 3 on the southside of the park. ELLA Library identifies an additional opportunity for community-led seating upgrades to the cut-out seating along the retaining wall.

What we heard:

East Lake needs more opportunities for art.

East Lake needs more ways for different people to connect and come together.

Seating that feels less isolating and inviting would be good

The only communal seating at the park are the picnic tables, there were not many other ways to sit together and do something.

Participants: 100



WISHTREE

October 4 - 23, 2021

East Lake Park

Wishtree was a visual way to discuss aspirations creatively. With the Wishtree, people wrote down their wishes/dreams for East Lake Park and then hung them in a tree at East Lake Park for everyone to see and read. Unity in dreams to build community voice and for people to feel connected.

What we heard:

The need for more security

Public art that doesn't cause blind spots in the park for safety and visibility

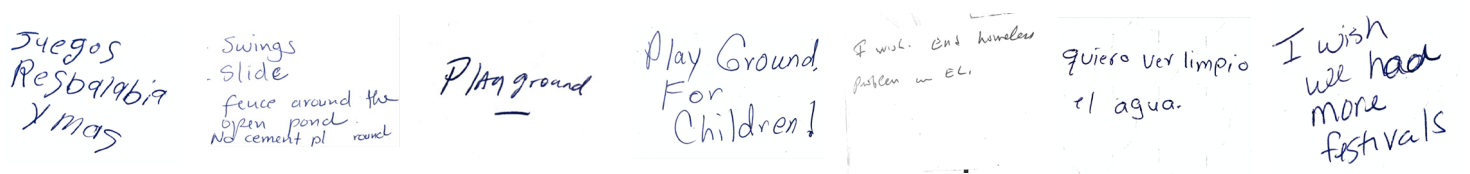
Something that is comfortable but not too comfortable that homeless people would monopolize

A space that people can use together

An installation that is colorful and inviting

Seating that is more comfortable

Participants: 62



PAINT THE COURT

October 14, 26, 27, 28, 2021
East Lake Rec Center
East Lake Salvation Army

A combination of two activities, one in which community members filled in a paper court, and another in which we physically illustrated a physical court. Due to weather, the physical court painting was adapted to an inside activity. The use of inviting and visible materials led to conversations about seating and energy for the basketball court.

What we heard:

Excited for the court

Happy that the community is going to have something unique

It's about time

Better communication on open times and use options

More programming and options for kids to participate

Participants: 114



GINGERBREAD PARK DESIGN

December 8 & 9, 2021
East Lake Park

To wrap up the series of engagements and to celebrate the holiday season. We used the gingerbread medium and candy to activity Pavilion 3 at East Lake Park to discuss interactive and creative seating using candy, lots and lots of candy. Imaginations came to life as community members young and old explored their creativity to design seating for East Lake Park.

What we heard:

Interest in circular or horseshoe shaped seating so that something could be going on in the center, for example watching children play, but that you could still be close enough to have a conversation with people on another seat.

A statue that also served as a seat, so that it was both beautiful and functional

Something playful

Seating that is functional yet aesthetically pleasing

Participants: 33



OPPORTUNITY ANALYSIS AND FRAMEWORK

The Opportunity Analysis provides a detailed overview of the community's vision for public art in East Lake. The analysis includes how best to integrate engagement efforts and public art projects planned for the East Lake neighborhood.

The Opportunity Framework Plan serves as a guiding document for Public Art Chattanooga, City of Chattanooga, partner agencies, and future development in East Lake and encourages multi-disciplinary collaboration in the public and private sector to create vibrant public spaces that serve and reflect the community based off the themes heard in the 2019 report. For East Lake Park building off the Public Art Priority Project identified of playful and interactive seating in the lawn at site A, near the North East entrance pavilion and stage or site B, near the South West entrance lawn. And for the East Lake Recreation Center custom basketball court flooring using the old East Lake colors of purple and white.

The 2021 revived analysis further updates and informs public art for East Lake Park and East Lake Rec Center as identified in the 2019 report. ELLA Library through conversations and engagements with residents and community members continues to recommend playful and interactive seating in East Lake Park. Seating that encourages interaction among people and creates a sense of community. Building off the Public Art Priority Project identified of Playful and interactive seating in the lawn at site A, near the North East entrance pavilion and stage or site B, near the South West entrance lawn.



A



B

BACKGROUND

Founded in 1887, East Lake has a long history as a neighborhood. East Lake Park was donated to the city in 1896 and is Chattanooga's first park. The duck pond was originally stocked with goldfish sold to help pay for the park's maintenance. Today, East Lake Academy two blocks away has a similar fundraiser and sells tilapia from their aquaponics as a way to pay for that program. East Lake Park was also the home to Oxley Zoo, which closed in 1911, but community members claim that some animals stuck around the park until much later, including multiple community members who remember monkeys at the park. In addition, many people recount being able to pedal a boat across the pond. The park is also said to have housed Chattanooga's first arboretum/ greenhouse while the animals were in the park. Gardening clubs stayed part of the community culture in East Lake until the 1990s. East Lake Academy has also made efforts to introduce students to horticulture as community beautification.

Currently, the seating options at East Lake Park are powder-coated perforated picnic tables with benched and one perforated bench, all of the powdered-coated perforated seating is bowed from age and vandalism. Pavilion 2 houses aluminum picnic tables. Along the retaining wall that faces the pond, there are five cut-out concrete “benches” in addition to two cut-out semi-circle seats that are also concrete along the eastern side of the pond. The park renovation added wooden backless bench seats in the boardwalk and one slatted steel bench along the new walking path.

As reported in ELLA Library’s first Engagement Report East Lake is a culturally diverse community. One thing about the importance of parks that not previously mentioned is the role that central parks and plazas play in communities in Latin America. They are a meeting place for information, commerce, art, and culture featuring public art, fountains, and spaces that are alive with the energy of people. This is an element that was realized during ELLA Library-led community engagement at East Lake Park for The Trust for Public Land for the recommended opportunity from ELLA’s previous report for the 36th Street Connector project of asphalt art.

During that engagement, ELLA Library utilized a paleta cart (popsicle cart) similar to the ones found in Latin America activating East Lake Park, by adding a simple cultural element made community members so excited and filled people with memories, both our immigrant community and people who have lived in East Lake their whole lives and remembered how much different the park use to be when it was activated in the past and was part of the cultural fabric of Chattanooga.



C



D

CURRENT PARK SEATING A-H



E



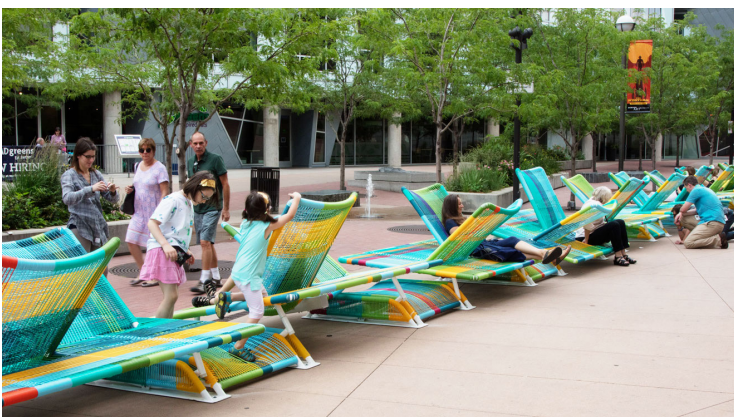
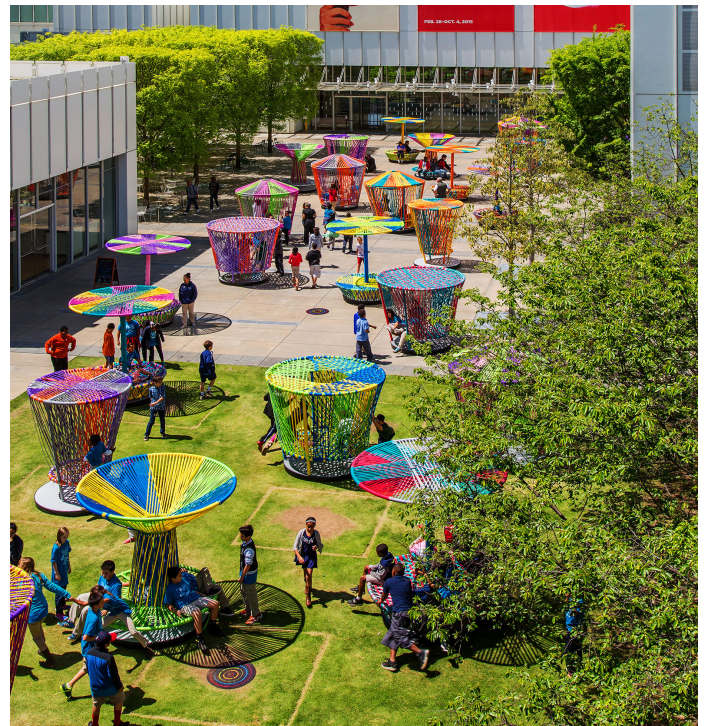
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EXAMPLES OF PUBLIC ART INSTALLATIONS THAT APPEAL TO THE INTEREST OF THE PEOPLE OF EAST LAKE:

Los Trompos is the original idea taken from the East Lake community members in 2019 as what public art should look like in East Lake. People were captivated with the combination of fun and function and saw such an installation as something that would enhance our community and fit well.

La Musidora, Outside the Lines, Soft Civic, and The Meeting Bowl are other examples taken from what community members have said. Seating that multiple people can use at once and interact with each other, unlike a bench where you never have to make eye contact with the other person who is sitting besides you on a bench. These are examples of playful, fun, ways for people to engage in a park through seating.

Hèctor Esrawe and Ignacio Cadena
Los Trompos

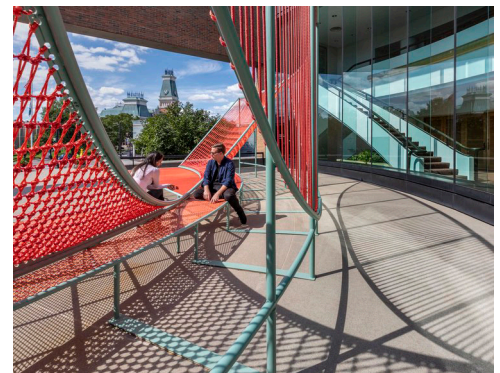


Hèctor Esrawe and Ignacio Cadena
La Musidora

Bryony Roberts Studio
Outside the Lines



Bryony Roberts Studio
Soft Civic



Madrid based mmmm...
Alberto Alarcón, Emilio Alarcón, Ciro Márquez, and Eva Salmeron
The Meeting Bowl



CONCLUSION

The second round of creative engagement in East Lake Park for the addition of public art was more challenging because of the added layer of mistrust that the community residents have after the renovation of East Lake Park and the nature playscape that is in lieu of a traditional play structure instead of in addition to a traditional playground structure, so ELLA Library had to listen through the unified community passion filled with disappointment and tinged with mistrust as public art through the lens of community members is not a current priority for the community energy. Adults of all ages and children alike expressed that the park could use art or seating, their desire was for a playground that features swings and slides.

Acknowledging the community's voice and concern for that issue we creatively moved through the subject to the matter of art and creative seating. Often using the position of if a family could play on a playground what additional artistic seating space would enliven their imaginations and bring joy? Another way ELLA Library framed the conversation was how can art be useful as a means of seating? If you were to take a break from a walk, or while watching children play, or meeting for a book club where and how would you want to sit?

East Lake Park is a large space, however, there are two primary areas in which people congregate, and locations near those nodes of the park were identified as sites during ELLA Library's initial engagement. Within those two sites, because of their high visibility and accessibility, they remain viable locations for public art in the renovated East Lake Park.

On Music Night, we had a beautifully culturally diverse group of neighbors in attendance. As people were encouraged to spread out and use the space, it was observed that people clustered together in the few seating options throughout the park. Specifically, people gathered in Pavilion 2, the cement cutouts around the east side of the park near Pavilion 1 where the spring water enters the pond, and the new benches built into the boardwalk. The natural energy and movement of people did not have people gathering to play music or sing on the cement cutouts along with the wall or near Pavilion 3 on the southside of the park. ELLA Library identifies an additional opportunity for community-led seating upgrades to the cut-out seating along the retaining wall.

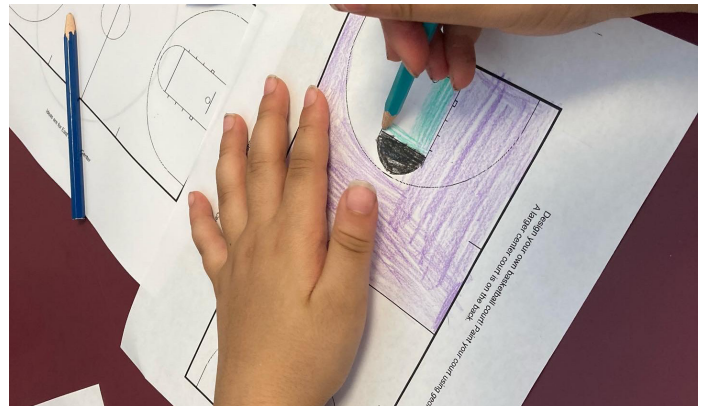
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What we heard throughout this second round of engagement that wasn't related to the desire for a playground:

Community members still feel that safety and cleanliness are two issues that are a work in progress in the East Lake community and at East Lake Park, where there is a shortage of trash receptacles in areas that people create waste. The unhoused people who use East Lake Park as their safe place create an added layer to the comfort level some people have impacting when and how they use the park. This is important to keep in mind related to additional seating. None of the current seating options offer long-term comfort, unhoused people are often in areas of shelter that offer a covering from the elements, including the natural playscape that has tunnels, and areas that offer privacy and covering.

A community is ever-evolving and ever-changing. It is important to honor the past, present, and future of the people that make up the community. East Lake Park is unique in its size and age as a park. The diversity of the people that use the park is often based on the people who live and work in the area. The park sits on a residential road in the neighborhood East Lake Park is something of a hidden gem that you only find when you are looking for it. The park maintains its community feeling even with the publicity received after the renovations that introduced many people to the East Lake community and East Lake Park. The East Lake neighborhood has had negative connotations for many people outside of the community for more than 30 years. The neighborhood has experienced intimidation from the Ku Klux Klan in the 1970s and 1980s. And more recently is shedding the stigma of gun violence and drug use. The negative reputation of the community assisted with the hidden gem nature of East Lake Park.



G



H

During the last decade, there has been a large influx of residents from Latin America in East Lake, the largest group of new residents are from Guatemala. The community elementary schools are now more than 80% Latino in the student population. This shift has caused much tension as previously, the same schools had a large African American population. Before the mid-1980s the community was largely a Caucasian population.

The cultural transition has not been smooth at any of these transitions in the East Lake community economics was usually an unspoken cause, but a community is the sum of all the people. Public art in East Lake Park needs to be mindful of this as public art is inclusive and welcoming. A public art installation that is overtly more culturally representative of one people group would be poorly received by people who identify culturally in another way who currently feel culturally undervalued.

Language and economic differences are current barriers in the East Lake community. Public art has the potential to be a starting point for conversation and communication. Seating creates a physical space to be shared with strangers. Playful/whimsical artistic seating can hold that shared space, giving people a reason to interact to be the starting point of connection. Art that uses sound, light, or movement transcends language.

Seating that is vibrant and colorful that holds both form and function will have a way to blend the hopes and dreams of people from the East Lake community. People expressed a desire for permanence in public art. A permanent art installation would be a visual representation of the value that the city holds for the people of the East Lake community. A community that has often felt neglected and displaced from the greater city. It has been expressed that the people of East Lake “need beautiful things.” Beauty is important to creativity and the mental health of people. So beauty in public spaces both natural and man-made is essential at East Lake Park.

THINGS THAT WILL HELP KEEPING EAST LAKE RESIDENTS ENGAGED AND CONNECTED GOING FORWARD.

Signage with updates

- This let's residents know that you are thinking about them and trying to communicate with them even if people don't actively read the signs, when mentioned later they acknowledge that they did see the sign.

Communication in the paper or the news

- Many of the older East Lake residents read the newspaper and watch television and do receive information in this way
- If there is a call to action such as a website, email address, or phone number to follow, that gives an outlet for residents to feel acknowledged.

Showing up at community events and actively engaging with people.

- Hands on and interactive art specific activities or demonstrations