THE ROAD AHEAD

I-75 CAP

Arts and Culture Report

I-75 Cap Feasibility Study

Downtown Detroit Partnership

October 2026

DOWNTOWN DETROIT PARTNERSHIP
EST. 1922

MDOT
Michigan Department of Transportation

CITY OF DETROIT

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2022 Detroit Month of Design

Image Source: Design Core Detroit

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Mesh Hub, 2017 Detroit Month of Design Urban Furniture Competition Winner

Image Source: Design Core Detroit

2 Summary

The goal of this report is to inform the I-75 Cap concept designs by identifying how arts, culture, and inclusive design can help create public spaces that feel rooted in Detroit. Drawing on community input, local knowledge, and relevant design precedents, the report considers how the proposed caps can acknowledge the histories and cultures of surrounding neighborhoods; reflect the concerns and lived experiences of residents; create opportunities for Detroit artists, designers, makers, and businesses; and welcome locals and visitors alike. These recommendations are intended to build upon the design and character of the spaces envisioned in the **Public Space Program Plan**.

Community feedback gathered through public meetings, digital surveys, personal interviews, Ride + Reflect walking and biking tours, and case studies was organized into four broad areas: ***Art Installations, Cultural Moments, Health and Wellness, and Live Performances***. Together, these areas consider not only what people might see in the public spaces, but how arts and culture inform the ways people gather, move, play, rest, participate, and experience the spaces. Participants were not asked to prioritize one category over another, and suggestions were distributed roughly equally among the four.

Across the four areas, several priorities emerged repeatedly. Participants wanted the caps to feel distinctly Detroit; reflect local histories and contemporary culture; create meaningful opportunities for Detroit talent and participation; support both everyday use and programmed activity; and welcome people across ages, abilities, backgrounds, and neighborhoods. Feedback also favored flexible, multi-use design, with art, greenery, gardens, and opportunities for relaxation receiving just as much if not more emphasis than cultural activity and programming. These findings point toward an approach in which arts and culture are integrated throughout the caps—into landscape, pathways, furniture, signage, storytelling, exhibitions, performance infrastructure, play, and recreation—rather than treated primarily as programming or artwork after the spaces are designed.

Light Up Livernois

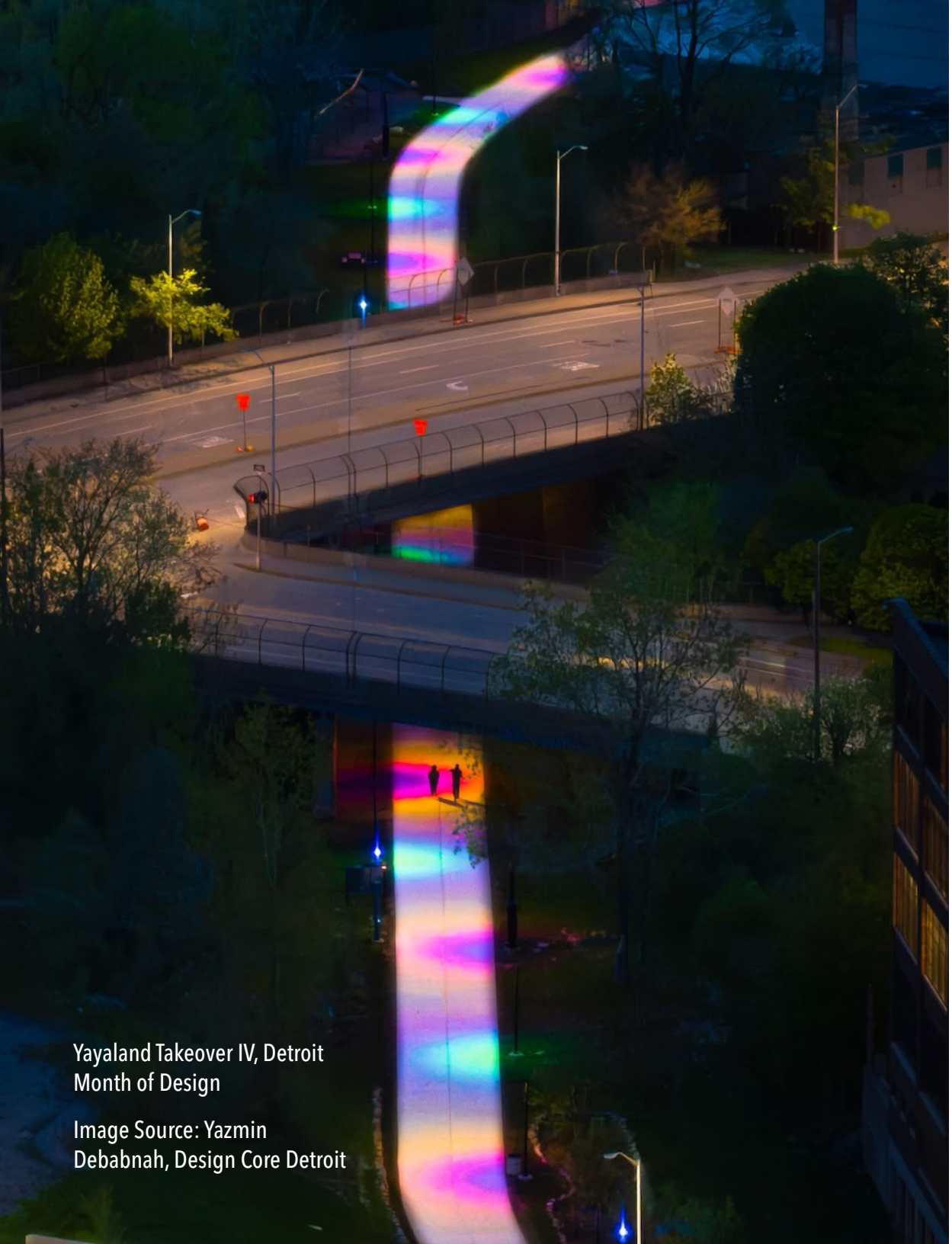


Image Source: Design Core Detroit

Eastern Market After Dark



Image source: Steve Koss, Detroit Month of Design



Yayaland Takeover IV, Detroit Month of Design

Image Source: Yazmin Debabnah, Design Core Detroit

Community input also underscored the importance of grounding each cap in the particular place it occupies. Each proposed cap occupies a different historical, cultural, and contemporary context, creating an opportunity for the three spaces to develop distinct identities while remaining part of one connected system. The histories of Paradise Valley, Black Bottom, Chinatown, and Cass Corridor, together with the perspectives of current residents, stakeholders, attractions, and institutions in adjacent neighborhoods, should inform the identity and character of the proposed spaces. Art, installations, activities, wayfinding, furniture, landscape, and other amenities offer opportunities to make these connections visible while supporting contemporary Detroit artists, designers, makers, and businesses—particularly those with ties to impacted communities.

Supporting research from other UNESCO Cities of Design demonstrates how many of these priorities have been translated into public space elsewhere.

As the project moves from the Feasibility Study into design and implementation, the community priorities identified throughout this process should continue to shape both what is created and who has the opportunities to create it. Participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of local artists, designers, performers, makers, businesses, students, and community organizations. Rather than identifying a fixed roster of practitioners at this stage, this report recommends accessible and inclusive open-call, Request for Proposals (RFP), and Request for Qualifications (RFQ) processes, supported by targeted outreach through trusted Detroit creative, cultural, and community networks.

3 Why Arts and Culture

The community engagement and supporting research presented in this report point to a clear conclusion: arts and culture can and should play an essential role in shaping our public spaces. When the histories, traditions, creative expression, and everyday life of a community are integrated into a public space, they can transform how that space is experienced, and the role it plays in the life of a city. As the Detroit and international examples highlighted throughout this report demonstrate, arts and culture can help give public spaces a distinct sense of place, create opportunities for local artists, makers, performers, and businesses, and connect residents and visitors with the stories that make a city unique. Without this cultural dimension, even a well-designed public space can miss the opportunity to become something more than an amenity: a place rooted in and expressive of the community it serves.

Creating that sense of place requires a broad understanding of what's meant by arts and culture. For the purposes of this report, that includes public art, music, performance, festivals, and cultural programming, as well as local histories and traditions: the knowledge and creative work of residents, artists, designers, makers, businesses, and community organizations. It also means considering how arts and culture intersect with other aspects of everyday public life, including health and wellness. Community input connected movement, recreation, rest, nature, and social well-being to how people want to experience the caps and how their landscapes and amenities are designed. The precedents presented in the Supporting Research section show how these influences can extend beyond art installations and programming to inform landscape, materials, furniture, signage, wayfinding, gathering spaces, and other elements of the built environment.



BlackOutWalls, 2024 Detroit Month of Design,

Image source: Lizz Cardwell, Design Core Detroit

Detroit Month of Design

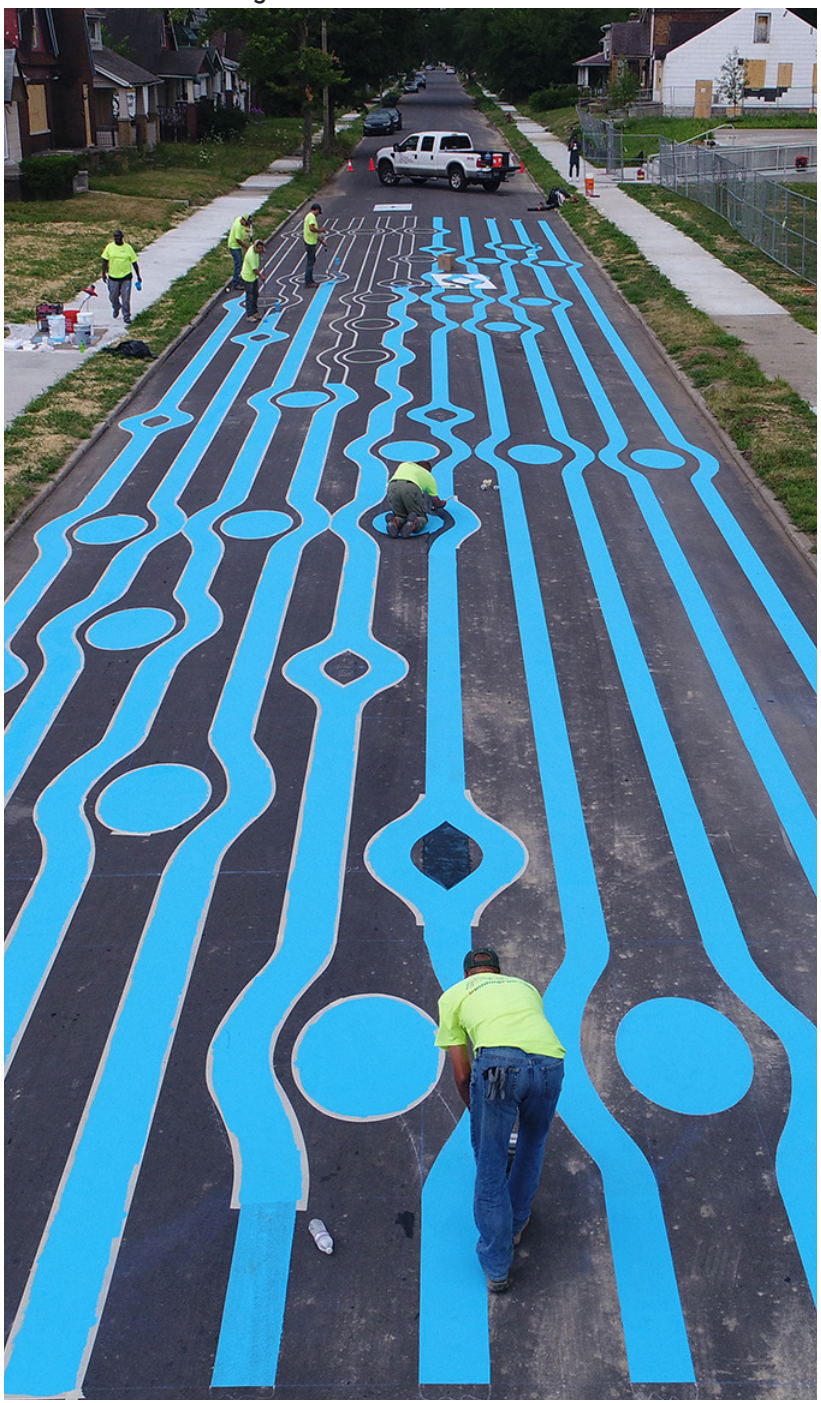


Image Source: Design Core Detroit

This is a particularly resonant opportunity in Detroit. The proposed I-75 Caps would create new public spaces above infrastructure that damaged and divided neighborhoods. The histories of Paradise Valley, Black Bottom, Chinatown, and Cass Corridor, as well as the experiences and priorities of communities surrounding the interstate today, give the caps a cultural context that should inform what is built there. New public spaces cannot undo the losses caused by past infrastructure decisions, but they can acknowledge those histories, restore connections, and create new places for culture, commerce, gathering, and creative expression.

This arts and culture strategy supports the broader goals of the I-75 Cap project: reconnecting neighborhoods divided by I-75, improving walkability and access, advancing transportation equity, and creating new public spaces shaped by the history, experiences, and priorities of surrounding neighborhoods. Arts, culture, and inclusive design offer tools for advancing that vision, not only by helping reconnect places physically, but by honoring Detroit's history and creating new opportunities for recreation, culture, economic activity, and community life.

To bring this cultural lens to the I-75 Cap planning process, the project team gathered perspectives from residents, artists, designers, culture-bearers, businesses, and other stakeholders and paired that input with research into relevant Detroit and international precedents. The findings identify opportunities to reflect Detroit's history and contemporary culture throughout the proposed spaces, and provide a framework to carry those priorities forward as the caps move from concept to design and implementation.

Community engagement and local creative participation should not end with this report. As the project advances, the findings here are intended to serve as a reference for the teams and partners responsible for design, programming, artist selection, and implementation. It is recommended to engage trusted, locally rooted organizations in future open-call, Request for Proposals (RFP), and Request for Qualifications (RFQ) processes to help ensure that opportunities are accessible and culturally informed—and that artists, designers, makers, and businesses with close ties to these local communities have meaningful opportunities to shape the completed spaces.

4 What We Did

The project team designed community engagement to understand how Detroiters wanted to experience the proposed I-75 Cap spaces and how arts and culture could inform the design process. Through interactive surveys, site-based Ride and Reflect conversations, and existing public programming, participants were asked what kinds of art, cultural experiences, activities, and amenities they wanted to encounter; how spaces could reflect local histories and neighborhood identities; and what would make them feel welcoming, useful, and distinctly Detroit. The project team drew on its networks and communications platforms to complement the broader Feasibility Study with targeted outreach to Detroit's creative community. This input was supplemented by research into relevant Detroit and international precedents.

Public Meetings

May Public Meeting



During the Feasibility Study, the project team facilitated engagement activities during the May 2026 and July 2026 public meetings, designed to gather input on the role arts, culture, and design could play in the proposed cap spaces. Intentional outreach to Detroit's creative community was conducted to ensure artists' and designers' voices were heard alongside those of residents and other stakeholders. Participants took part in interactive activities focused on four areas: Art Installations, Cultural Moments, Health and Wellness, and Live Performance.

Ride and Reflect

The project team hosted five Ride and Reflect sessions, inviting artists, cultural practitioners, designers, and community stakeholders to experience the proposed cap locations firsthand. Participants walked or rode through the area while discussing place, identity, connectivity, and future possibilities. Experiencing the sites firsthand generated place-specific observations about neighborhood character, cultural history, public space design, connectivity, and opportunities for storytelling. These conversations helped inform the distinct identities and recommendations developed for each cap later in this report.

UNESCO Case Study Review

The project team also gathered examples of arts and culture interventions from other cities, including examples observed in other UNESCO Creative Cities. The review examined how cities have successfully integrated arts, culture, storytelling, activation, economic opportunity, and community identity into major infrastructure investments. It provided helpful context on cultural preservation, artist integration, programming strategies, and the creation of vibrant, community-centered public spaces.

Drinks by Design

DrinksxDesign



Image Source: Elonte Davis, Design Core Detroit

The existing Drinks X Design platform was leveraged to gather additional input from Detroit's creative community. After a brief introduction to the I-75 Cap project, attendees were asked to cast their votes on the arts and cultural experiences and wellness activities they would most want to engage with on the caps. More than 500 responses were collected from artists, designers, architects, cultural organizers, creative entrepreneurs, and other attendees.

Cass Tech Student Design Charrette

The project team held an engagement session with two classes of Cass Technical High School (Cass Tech) students, adding youth perspectives to the broader engagement process. Students considered how the caps could serve young people, families, and the broader community, adding to the findings and recommendations presented in this report.

Legacy Interviews

The project team conducted ten interviews of legacy residents and Cass Tech alumni during the Feasibility Study. The interviews garnered the lived experiences, memories, and perspectives of former residents, community leaders, business owners, and stakeholders connected to Paradise Valley, Brush Park, Woodward East, Cass Tech, and the surrounding neighborhoods. Themes from these interviews were identified with recommendations for representation through various potential design elements and arts and culture activities on each of the caps.

Together, these engagement efforts provided multiple entry points for people to contribute to the cap planning process, combining broad public input with more specialized perspectives from Detroit's arts and culture ecosystem. Collectively, the findings help to shape a vision for the I-75 Caps that is authentically Detroit, community-centered, and activated year-round.

5 What We Heard

Community input was gathered and organized across four broad areas: ***Art Installations, Cultural Moments, Health and Wellness, and Live Performance***. While each generated distinct ideas and considerations, the four areas frequently overlap. Many of the ideas raised served more than one purpose: art can support play and learning, performance spaces can accommodate everyday gathering, and landscape can contribute to wellness and climate resilience. Several themes appeared across the four areas and throughout the engagement, taking different forms within each.

Themes Across the Four Areas

Make it distinctly Detroit. Reflect local histories, neighborhood identities, cultural traditions, and Detroit's contemporary creative community.

Prioritize local talent and participation. Create meaningful ways for Detroit artists, performers, makers, businesses, students, and community organizations to shape and benefit from the spaces.

Create spaces that adapt to everyday needs and evolve over time. Balance programmed cultural activity with flexible spaces for gathering, recreation, and everyday use, while allowing exhibitions, performances, and activations to change as community needs evolve.

Design for well-being, access, and inclusion. Create welcoming, resilient spaces that support physical and mental well-being and respond to different ages, abilities, sensory needs, and ways of using public space.

Be thoughtful about infrastructure. Successful cultural activity depends on the physical conditions that support it, such as power, seating, shade, water, lighting, restrooms, and weather protection.

Make the space feel lived-in rather than event-dependent. Activity doesn't necessarily mean programming; Detroiters want the caps to be active and regularly used rather than constant events.

Themes from the Legacy Interviews

Ten interviews of legacy residents and Cass Technical High School alumni were collected during the Feasibility Study. Below is a synopsis of the common themes from the interviews conducted.


Neighborhood as a Self-Contained, Dense Ecosystem


Churches and Faith as Spatial Anchors


Mobility Before the Freeway


Recognition, Achievement, and Builders After the Freeway


Food Culture as Identity and Memory Anchor


Youth Life - Play, Recreation, Fashion, and Activism


Disruption - Erasure and Broken Promises


Education as Community Infrastructure


Soundscape, Music, and Nightlife


Family Networks and Multi-Generational Living


Paradise Valley as Cultural Imagination


Multi-Ethnic Detroit

Art Installations

What people encounter physically and visually. Think permanent and rotating artworks, interactive/tactile art, landmark works, art integrated into furniture/play/landscape, and exhibition infrastructure.

Key Priorities

Balance permanent landmarks with changing art. Participants expressed interest in both permanent, recognizable works that could become Detroit landmarks, like the Joe Louis Fist, and rotating installations that create opportunities for local artists, new ideas, and community contributions over time.

Make art interactive and integrated into the space. Feedback favored tactile, musical, climbable, and multi-dimensional work over art intended only for viewing. Participants also envisioned art incorporated into seating, play, landscape, pathways, and other functional elements of the caps.

Reflect Detroit's history and contemporary creative culture. Input emphasized work rooted in Detroit, including opportunities to pay homage to neighborhoods like Paradise Valley, Black Bottom, Chinatown, and Cass Corridor; cultural movements like Motown; and influential artists and makers, while prioritizing contemporary Detroit artists and designers.

Make art engaging and relevant to a wide range of Detroiters. Participants wanted art that speaks to and invites participation across generations, backgrounds, and abilities, with particular opportunities for youth and students to see themselves and their work represented in the spaces.

Integrate art and nature. Participants expressed interest in art that works with landscape and natural systems, from gardens to installations that provide habitat, shade, environmental benefits, or invitations to experience nature in new ways.

Wasserman Projects Art Gallery in Eastern Market



Image Source: Wasserman Projects

Design Recommendations

1. Integrate art from the outset. Treat art as part of the design process and physical experience of the caps rather than decoration added after the spaces are designed.
2. Plan for permanent, landmark works alongside flexible exhibition infrastructure that can accommodate rotating and temporary installations.
3. Make art interactive and multifunctional. Look for opportunities to integrate art into seating, play, landscape, shade, wayfinding, wellness, and other elements, including work that invites interaction through touch, sound, movement, and participation.
4. Create ongoing opportunities for Detroit artists and communities. Prioritize local artists and designers while building adaptable exhibition spaces that allow students, schools, community groups, and emerging practitioners to contribute work over time.
5. Consider artists and creative practitioners as collaborators in landscape and environmental design, including sculptural landscapes, habitats, gardens, and work that responds to or communicates environmental conditions.

Wasserman Project, 2021 Detroit Month of Design



Image Source: Design Core Detroit

Ideas from Public Engagement

- Student showcases from Cass Tech, College for Creative Studies, Wayne State University, and University of Michigan Center for Innovation
- Community music walls made with metal, wood, or recycled industrial materials inspired by Detroit music and industrial histories
- Shipping container space for art installations managed by students, perhaps through a work-study program
- Built-in exhibition spaces, like walls, pathways, frames, kiosks, pole flags
- Interactive Motown, Jazz, or Movement murals with QR codes
- Climbable, tactile, and/or community-created installations
- Eco-art and sculptural landscapes
- Artist-designed seating
- Landmark sculptures
- Large scale signage

Inspiration

- Monument to Joe Louis (The Fist)
- Sit on It Detroit benches
- Charles McGee Legacy Park at The Shepherd
- New Forest, Ancient Thrones, a sculptural installation created by artist Jordan Weber in East Canfield Art Park, which uses solar energy and a colored LED lighting system to monitor air quality in the neighborhood

Cultural Moments

How Detroit's histories, traditions, communities, and civic life become visible, from festivals, holidays, and celebrations, to markets, storytelling, cultural education, and community gatherings.

Key Priorities

Tell Detroit's stories. Feedback emphasized opportunities to share the histories of the places surrounding the caps, particularly Paradise Valley, Black Bottom, Chinatown, and Cass Corridor, and to recognize the people, traditions, and cultural movements that shape Detroit.

Create space for celebration and tradition. Participants envisioned the caps as places for annual and seasonal celebrations, festivals, holidays, and other traditions that bring Detroiters together and create reasons to return year after year.

Support community-led cultural activity. Input underlined the need for spaces where local organizations, businesses, artists, educators, and residents could stage markets, workshops, classes, talks, activities, and other neighborhood-scale gatherings.

Create opportunities for intergenerational learning and exchange. Participants repeatedly mentioned activities for children and youth, connections with nearby educational institutions, and opportunities for people of different generations to learn, create, and participate together.

Make room for civic life. Stakeholders and residents see the caps as places for community discussion and public expression including rallies and protests.

Mack Alive Community Center Gazebo, 2017 Detroit Month of Design



Image Source: Design Core Detroit

Design Recommendations

1. Design flexible spaces for cultural and civic gathering. Provide a range of adaptable spaces that can accommodate everything from neighborhood-scale gatherings and markets to festivals, celebrations, discussions, rallies, and other larger events without compromising everyday use.
2. Build in practical support for recurring cultural activity. Consider seating, power, lighting, weather protection, lawns and gathering areas, and other infrastructure that makes it easier for communities and cultural partners to host activities without extensive temporary setup.
3. Support community-led and intergenerational programming. Create opportunities for neighborhood organizations, schools, cultural groups, and residents to lead workshops, classes, youth programs, cultural education, and other activities that encourage participation and exchange.

4. Make space for local creative commerce. Incorporate flexible spaces and infrastructure for markets, pop-ups, fairs, and other opportunities for Detroit artists, makers, food and beverage entrepreneurs, and small businesses to sell their products and participate in cultural events, with an emphasis on vendors connected to surrounding communities.
5. Build storytelling and cultural heritage into the physical environment. Create opportunities for history and community memory to be encountered throughout the caps through interpretive art, memory walls, story stations, cultural wayfinding, historic markers, interactive or digital elements, and other approaches developed with creatives from surrounding communities.

Belle Isle Commons Community Event, 2025 Detroit Month of Design



Image Source: Xavier Cuevas, Design Core Detroit

Ideas from Public Engagement

- Storytelling station that allows guests to share their experience and what they love about Detroit: past, present and hopes for the future
- Annual and seasonal anchors, from winter holiday artist markets to Juneteenth celebrations
- Visual memory wall of faces of influential Detroiter artists and culture bearers, past and present
- Community tagging, mural, or graffiti-art events centered on positive, Detroit-focused themes
- Weekly neighborhood-based programming organized by community organizations and groups
- Events of all sizes, from large scale to intimate
- Cultural education programming about Paradise Valley, Black Bottom, Chinatown, Cass Corridor, and other local histories
- Small Business Saturdays and markets featuring Black-owned businesses
- Children's festivals, camps, and weekend/out-of-school programming
- Community discussions, protests, and rallies
- Space for picnics and cookouts
- Lunch and Listen series

Inspiration

- Speakers playing place-specific or -influenced music, as seen in cities with strong musical legacies like Tongyeong, South Korea (classical) and Nashville, Tennessee (country)
- La Marche du Nain Rouge, annual community parade in Cass Corridor and Midtown
- Dally in the Alley, Detroit's largest, volunteer-run street fair, operating since 1978
- Dequindre Cut Greenway graffiti murals

Health and Wellness

How the space supports physical, social, sensory, and environmental well-being. This encompasses exercise, recreation, accessibility, inclusivity, and sustainability.

Key Priorities

Support active recreation and everyday movement. Participants wanted infrastructure and spaces for walking, biking, roller skating, volleyball, yoga, Pilates, play, and other forms of physical activity, with options for different ages, abilities, levels of participation, and sensory needs.

Create places for rest, restoration, and connection with nature. Feedback expanded the idea of wellness beyond exercise to include relaxation, gardening, greenery, gathering, opportunities for prayer and meditation, and finding respite from the urban environment.

Reduce barriers to access and participation. Participants pointed to the importance of accessibility and welcome for a broad range of Detroiters, not only nearby residents or out-of-town visitors. They emphasized connections by foot, bicycle, and public transit, along with practical amenities such as childcare and workspaces that could make the spaces useful and accessible to people with different schedules, responsibilities, and reasons for visiting.

Prioritize comfort and climate resilience. Shade, seating, cooling, water access, lighting, sanitation, maintenance, and weather protection emerged as important conditions for making the spaces comfortable, usable, and sustainable throughout the day and across the seasons.

Pair safety with inclusion and care. Feedback called for addressing real and perceived safety concerns without excluding vulnerable users, including unhoused people. Participants suggested partnerships with outreach and social service organizations alongside ongoing maintenance and stewardship.

Cyclerate, 2019 Detroit City of Design Competition, installation by SmithGroup



Image Source: Design Core Detroit

Design Recommendations

1. Create multiple ways to move, play, and be active. Integrate pedestrian and bicycle routes, recreation and play areas, and flexible spaces for organized or informal wellness activities, with connections to public transit and options for different ages, abilities, and sensory needs. Consider practical amenities such as childcare, workspaces, and other features that reduce barriers to visiting and participating.
2. Design for restoration, comfort, and climate resilience. Use trees, greenery, gardens, water, shade, seating, quieter areas, heating and cooling features, and weather protection to create spaces that support rest, sensory relief, and social connection while remaining comfortable and usable throughout the day and across seasons.
3. Develop an inclusive stewardship strategy alongside the physical design. Plan for lighting, sanitation, maintenance, and ongoing stewardship from the outset, and engage local outreach and social-service organizations in developing approaches to safety and care that maintain welcoming public spaces without unnecessarily excluding or displacing vulnerable users, including unhoused people.

Ideas from Public Engagement

- Motown-inspired playground, sound garden, or nature space with wildflowers and music
- Quiet, sensory-friendly areas buffered by trees, water, and other natural soundscapes
- Lightweight shade canopies with timed mist and/or sculptural misting poles
- Climate-mitigating features including living walls and creative shade
- Partnerships with outreach and social services organizations
- Multigenerational playgrounds and play environments
- Courts and fields representing Detroit sports teams
- Morning-to-evening wellness-based programming
- Gardening and food-based wellness activities
- Roller-skating areas and volleyball courts
- Walking trails and biking infrastructure
- Youth- and teen-focused recreation
- Mini urban forests
- Yoga and Pilates
- EMS presence
- Water stations

Inspiration

- Dance fitness on the Joe Louis Greenway
- The Fit Park on Dequindre Cut
- Free yoga options including Detroit Parks Coalition “Yoga in the Parks,” Detroit Riverfront Conservancy classes, and outdoor yoga studio pop-ups
- Programming with Bask



3Rooms, 2019 Detroit City of Design Competition, designed by Collectif Escargo from Montreal, image source: Design Core Detroit

Live Performances

How the space supports Detroit's living performance culture, from larger to more intimate productions: music, dance, theater, and more.

Key Priorities

Participants favored a mix of intimate and mid-size experiences rather than designing primarily for large festivals and concerts, which are already accommodated at venues such as Hart Plaza.

Put Detroit performers and musical traditions at the center. Feedback emphasized local talent and a wide range of genres rooted in Detroit's identity as a music capital, including gospel, hip-hop, jazz, DJs, and more.

Make room for both planned and spontaneous performance. Participants envisioned scheduled concerts and events alongside smaller-scale performances that visitors might encounter while eating lunch, gathering with friends, or simply passing through.

Create opportunities for performance throughout the day and week. Feedback mentioned lunchtime programming, evening and weekend events, and later-night activities such as jazz and hustle nights.

Design Recommendations

1. Distribute performance opportunities throughout the caps, making it part of the everyday experience. Rather than relying on a single large stage, incorporate performance areas at different scales, including spaces for intimate and informal performances as well as mid-size events.

Light Up Livernois, Detroit Month of Design



Image Source: Design Core Detroit

2. Build in plug-and-play performance infrastructure. Provide power, lighting, sound capabilities, and other basic infrastructure that allows local performers and community groups to activate spaces without extensive setup. Consider flexible or shared equipment and infrastructure that can support different genres and types of performance.
3. Create an accessible system for reserving and using performance spaces. Develop a straightforward process for artists, performers, and community groups to reserve shared infrastructure, such as mobile-friendly sign-ups or QR code access points. Ensure the process does not rely exclusively on digital literacy and includes support for users who may need assistance.

Ideas from Public Engagement

- Interactive DJ/performance plug-in Stations (permanent infrastructure allowing community DJs and performers to activate the space easily)
- Informal performances visitors encounter while using the caps
- Intimate acoustic or small-group performances
- Evening and weekend performances
- Hip-hop performances
- Gospel performances
- Hustle/dance nights
- Silent disco events
- Poetry nights
- Jazz nights
- Open mics
- DJ sets
- Theater
- Dance

Inspiration

- Concert of Colors, Detroit's free, family-friendly music festival
- David Campbell Terrace on the Dequindre Cut, an outdoor community stage for both programmed and spontaneous performances
- House Thursdays at The Congregation
- Summer House Sundays on the Dequindre Cut

Eastern Market After Dark, 2025 Detroit Month of Design



Image Source: Steve Koss, Design Core Detroit

6 Giving Each Cap a Distinct Identity

The three proposed caps are part of one connected project, but each sits within a distinct geographical, historical, and cultural context. Applying the same arts and culture interventions uniformly across all three would miss an opportunity to create public spaces that feel genuinely rooted in place.

The findings in What We Heard provide a shared foundation for all three caps. This section considers how those priorities can take different forms in response to the history, culture, institutions, destinations, and communities surrounding each site. The resulting recommendations are intended to help guide design and programming decisions while ensuring the West, Central, and East Caps remain part of one connected system.

The recommendations below include both physical design opportunities and examples of activities the spaces could support. Examples of art and cultural interventions are intended as possibilities rather than predetermined creative solutions.

West Cap

Active Commons

In the midst of major educational institutions including Cass Tech and the University of Michigan Center for Innovation, the West Cap sits within a landscape shaped by learning, ambition, and investment in Detroit's future. It gives students, residents, institutions, and visitors space to participate in public life, innovate, connect, and learn.

Central Cap

Civic Pride and Celebration

Located at the intersection of Downtown, Midtown, and some of Detroit's busiest sports, entertainment, and cultural destinations—including Little Caesars Arena, Comerica Park, Ford Field, and the Fox Theater—the Central Cap is an opportunity to build on connections between places that already draw people from across the city and region. It expands the activity of the surrounding district into a dynamic public space for celebration, movement, and expressing Detroit pride, transforming the journey between destinations into an experience of its own.

East Cap

Neighborhood Gathering Space

Located within the historic Black Bottom and Paradise Valley area, the East Cap occupies a place profoundly shaped by both Black cultural life and the displacement caused by urban renewal and highway construction. It creates opportunities to remember and return to the people, places, and traditions connected to this history while supporting restoration and gathering.

West Cap

Active Commons

Participate

Make civic life and investment in Detroit's future feel open and shared. Create opportunities for Detroiters—especially young people—to participate in public life through civic dialogue, organizing, youth programming, and community decision-making, while ensuring the cap is accessible and welcoming to all.

- Public forums, debates, and civic conversations
- Space for rallies, demonstrations, and peaceful protest
- Voter registration and civic-information events
- Youth councils, service opportunities, and student-led civic programs
- After school and weekend programming
- Summer camps and youth enrichment
- Public meetings and community decision-making

Innovate

Make Detroit's next generation of ideas and creative work visible. Give students, emerging artists, designers, entrepreneurs, and other Detroit creatives opportunities to test ideas, create, perform, and exhibit work in public.

- Student-designed furniture, murals, and installations that imagine Detroit's future
- Prototype and product demonstrations
- Design exhibitions and public critiques
- Student entrepreneurship fairs and pitch events
- Student-run cafes, markets, and pop-ups
- Maker fairs and hands-on demonstrations
- Temporary installations be emerging Detroit artists and designers
- Writable or interactive surfaces

Multi-Hoop Basketball Nets in Toronto, Canada



Image source: Design Core Detroit

Connect

Create common space for institutions, neighborhoods, and communities. Design the West Cap as a shared civic territory where students, residents, workers, institutions, and visitors can encounter one another, exchange ideas, and work together.

- Intergenerational mentorship and networking
- Volunteer and community service opportunities
- Lounges and conversation areas for public forums and community conversations
- Community events, orienting institutions to the shared space
- Moveable/reconfigurable furniture
- Multigenerational health and wellness amenities that are playful, including climbable sculptures, pickup sports, and skate surfaces

Learn

Extend learning beyond the walls of nearby institutions. Use the cap as a shared educational landscape where students and community members can study, experiment, teach, and encounter new ideas.

- Outdoor classrooms and learning spaces
- UMCI public lectures, demonstrations, and speaker series
- Cass Tech classes and student-led learning activities

Northwest Goldberg Cares Park Bench by Detroit Design Studio Donut Shop



Image source: Northwest Goldberg Cares

- STEM, design, history and civic education
- Interactive science, technology, and design installations
- Outdoor study areas with Wi-Fi and charging
- Educational programming connecting Cass Tech and UMCI
- Digital art and installations exploring Detroit's future

Hammock Village in Petoskey, Michigan



Image source: Design Core Detroit

Central Cap

Civic Pride and Celebration

Celebrate

Create a place for celebration. Extend the excitement of sporting events, concerts, and nightlife while creating room for new festivals, cultural events, recreation, and traditions.

- Flexible event lawn and performance space with festival, screen, and live broadcast infrastructure for watch parties, music, food, performance, and cultural celebrations
- A signature annual Central Cap festival or celebration
- Game-day activations celebrating the Lions, Pistons, Red Wings, Tigers, DCFC, and Detroit's growing women's pro sports presence

Move

Make movement part of the experience. Use circulation, wayfinding, art, landscape, and cultural encounters to define the Central Cap as not just a place to pass through, but a place to stay, play, dance, perform, and participate.

- Wide, event-ready pedestrian promenades
- Interactive paving and light installations activated by footsteps, dance, or movement
- Plug-and-play DJ stations and open dance floors
- Climbable and playable sculpture
- Detroit sports team-inspired play and fitness elements
- Motown-inspired musical playground or sound garden
- Interactive, artist-designed routes and markers connecting and interpreting venues, embedded history, and landmarks Little Caesar's Arena, Comerica Park, Ford Field, the Fox Theatre, Midtown, and Downtown

Garden Novella, 2019 Detroit City of Design Competition



Image Source: Design Core Detroit

Drinks X Design 2026



Image Source: S. Jarrus, courtesy of Design Core Detroit

Represent

Express the area's layered cultural identity. Connect the artistic and countercultural history of Motown, Cass Corridor, Chinatown, and contemporary Midtown and Downtown through art, storytelling, programming, and work by Detroit creatives.

- Installations honoring Cass Corridor artists, galleries, music venues, and counterculture
- Storytelling about Chinatown businesses, residents, and cultural landmarks
- Motown, techno, and Detroit DJ culture interpreted through sound and interactive art
- Large-scale commissions by contemporary Detroit artists
- Murals, installations, and cultural markets connecting past and present

Support

Turn Detroit pride into Detroit opportunity. Create space where local teams, artists, vendors, entrepreneurs, and food and drink can benefit from the people drawn to the area for sports, entertainment, and cultural activity.

- Flexible infrastructure (power, hookups, tables or kiosks, and adaptable selling space) for Detroit vendor markets
- Food-truck and pop-up zones prioritizing local businesses and entrepreneurs
- Detroit-made sports, music, art, and cultural merchandise
- Pre- and post-event activations that give visitors a reason to arrive early or stay later
- Partnerships with nearby venues and nightlife tied to games, concerts, and festivals

Eastern Market After Dark, Detroit Month of Design 2025



Image Source: Design Core Detroit

East Cap

Neighborhood Gathering Space

Remember

Make the histories and cultural legacy of Black Bottom and Paradise Valley visible in the landscape. Use art, storytelling, and interpretation to honor the people, places, businesses, institutions, and traditions connected to the area while acknowledging the displacement caused by urban renewal and highway construction.

- Monuments, memorials, sculpture, public art, and installations focused on Black Bottom and Paradise Valley history
- Memory walls featuring residents and culture bearers
- Historic maps, photographs, and neighborhood markers
- Former street grids and footprints of businesses, homes, and institutions traced in paving or otherwise interpreted in the landscape
- Digital and interactive oral histories and listening stations
- Murals and commissions by Black Detroit artists

Restore

Create space for reflection, healing, spirituality, and connection with nature and native species. Use landscape and sensory design to provide respite from the urban environment while supporting individual and collective practices of restoration, quiet play, and learning for all ages.

- Reflection and healing gardens
- Community gardens and urban growing spaces with opportunities for learning and play
- Quiet walking paths for people and pets
- Secluded or semi-enclosed spaces for prayer and meditation
- Soft soundscapes masking highway noise
- Trees, native planting, and restorative landscapes
- Water and sensory elements, including places for play
- Flexible lawn/deck areas for yoga, meditation, and wellness spaces appropriate for all ages

Local Color, 2020 Detroit Month of Design installation by textile artist Kayla Powers of Salt Textile Studios



Image Source: Noah Elliott Morrison, Design Core Detroit

Fiber Art at Oakland Avenue Farm



Image Source: Design Core Detroit

Gather

Support the traditions and relationships through which community life thrives. Create flexible spaces for fellowship, family, food, live music, social dance, block parties, celebrations, and other experiences that strengthen and build relationships. Make spaces welcoming for all members of the family, including elders, children, and dogs.

- Generous picnic and cookout areas with tables, grills, and nearby utilities
- Flexible lawns/plazas sized for block parties and neighborhood celebrations
- Walking and play spaces for dogs
- Small-scale performance space for gospel, jazz, and blues
- Dance floor or hardscape for hustle nights and social dancing
- Sheltered gathering areas for church, family, and intergenerational groups
- Community tables and seating for conversation and meals
- Community garden and gathering space for harvest events

Return

Carry the legacy of Black Bottom and Paradise Valley forward. The cap cannot replace the neighborhoods and institutions lost to urban renewal, but it can create new space for cultural traditions, community relationships, and Black creativity and enterprise.

- Built-in market and vending infrastructure for Black-owned businesses
- Flexible kiosks and pop-up spaces for artists, makers, and cultural entrepreneurs
- Recurring markets and community commerce
- Permanent infrastructure for rotating community art and storytelling
- Community-led cultural programming
- New traditions rooted in neighborhood history
- Opportunities for long-term community stewardship and care embedded in the landscape
- Spaces designed to evolve with future generations

Detroit Month of Design 2026



Image Source: Design Core Detroit

7 Supporting Research

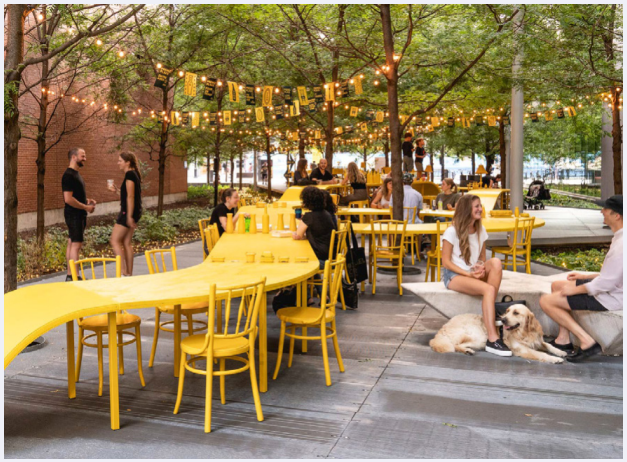
Montreal, Canada

Placemaking Handbook

Over the past decade, Montreal has used temporary and seasonal public space projects to test new approaches to placemaking and activation. "Despite their temporary nature, these actions taken in the public domain not only help enrich neighbourhood life, but they can also be major drivers of positive social, economic and cultural impacts," the Bureau of Design writes in its Temporary Street Design Projects in Montréal: Handbook of Best Practices for Design Quality.[1]

The handbook includes examples that align with priorities identified through Detroit community engagement, alongside practical guidance for implementing and evaluating similar projects. Its case studies address the following topics: Resilience to Crisis and Changes; Environmental Responsibility; Economic Performance; Culture and Identity as Values; Equity, Diversity and Inclusion; and Health and Wellness.

The handbook also demonstrates how temporary placemaking investments can be reused and adapted over time. The Prenez Place project, for example, used approximately 100 upcycled furniture and decorative pieces to enliven a public space; afterward, the items became part of the city's inventory for future private and community events.



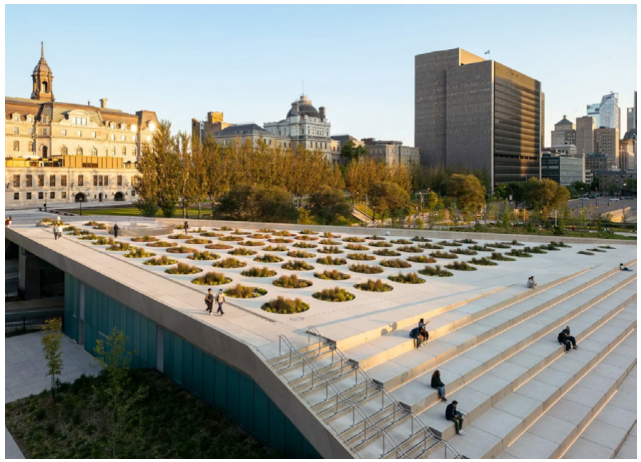
Parc Hydro-Quebec, Quartier des Spectacles, borough of Ville-Marie, design by ADHOC Architectes in collaboration with Maude Lescarbeau and Camille Blais

Image Source: Raphael Thibodeau

Design to Honor History and Culture

Montreal's Place des Montréalaises offers an especially relevant precedent for the I-75 Cap project: a permanent public space built over sunken highway infrastructure that reconnects parts of the city while using landscape, art, and design to make cultural memory visible. The final design for Place des Montréalaises, which was selected via an international competition, pays tribute to the 14 victims of the 1989 École Polytechnique femicide and honors seven female pioneers from Montréal.[2]

"Place des Montréalaises is reshaping Montreal's civic and tourist heart by covering a sunken expressway with a vibrant esplanade," the winning design firm, Lemay, explains in a press release. "Designed by Lemay in collaboration with artist Angela Silver and the engineering team at AtkinsRéalis, this major intervention connects Old Montreal to downtown and, above all, inscribes the memory of exceptional women in the urban landscape."[3]



Place des Montrealaises, designed by Lemay in collaboration with Angela Silver and AtkinsRealis

Image Source: Vincent Brillant

Dundee, Scotland

Children's Games

Designer Rhianne Connelly created interactive graphics in a neighborhood public space, Hilltown Park, based on resident input and local stories, including the area's history of strawberry picking and the forms of local landmarks. The low-cost intervention (€3000) demonstrates how community history can inform everyday play: a strawberry trail encourages children to explore the park, alongside hopscotch, a maze, and interpretation panels sharing local stories and information about the park's biodiversity.



Image source: UNESCO City of Design Dundee

Berlin, Germany

Commercial and Performance Spaces

A multipurpose kiosk in Berlin demonstrates how a compact structure can combine everyday commerce with cultural activity, with a food or beverage cafe at ground level and a DJ or performance stage above. The example suggests how permanent infrastructure can support multiple uses at different times of day while creating opportunities for both local business and creatives.



Image source: Design Core Detroit

Kortrijk, Belgium

Rotating Art and Design Exhibitions

The KIOSK on Graanmarkt, managed by Designregio Kortrijk, demonstrates how permanent public-space infrastructure can support continually changing creative content. The glass pavilion functions as an experimental public platform for showcasing regional innovation and creative design. Each month, Designregio Kortrijk matches a regional company with a designer to create a site-specific installation presenting the company's products or services in an innovative way. These installations promote sustainable, interactive, and circular design while giving regional businesses a prominent platform in central Kortrijk.[4]



Image source: Design Regio Kortrijk

Interactive Music Installations

An outdoor public DJ booth, located next to TRACK Music Center and the Conservatory at Conservatoriumplein in Kortrijk, demonstrates how interactive music infrastructure can bring creative participation directly into public space. Users place a smartphone on a sensor pad and manipulate two steel scratch wheels to mix, scratch, apply effects, and control the pitch of their own music. Solar-powered and designed for outdoor public use, the installation is constructed from weather- and vandal-resistant concrete and steel.







Image Sources: Design Core Detroit, MRC Recreation

[1] Ville de Montréal, Bureau du design, Service du développement économique. Temporary Street Design Projects in Montréal: Handbook of Best Practices for Design Quality. 2024. https://designmontreal.com/en/handbook-of-best-practices-for-quality-of-temporary-street-design-projects-in-montreal

[2] Ville de Montréal, Bureau du design. "Place des Montréalaises International Multidisciplinary Landscape Architecture Competition." Design Montréal, September 6, 2018. https://designmontreal.com/en/calls/place-des-montrealaises?section=2931

[3] Lemay. "Place des Montréalaises: A Monumental Gesture Inscribing Women's Memory at the Heart of a City." March 4, 2026. https://www.v2com-newswire.com/en/newsroom/categories/landscape-architecture/press-kits/865-67/place-des-montrealaises-a-monumental-gesture-inscribing-women-s-memory-at-the-heart-of-a-city

4 Designregio Kortrijk. "KIOSK." Designregio Kortrijk, n.d. https://designregio-kortrijk.be/en/drk-for-you/kiosk

8 Engaging Detroit Creatives in the Next Phase

Prioritizing Detroit artists, designers, makers, performers, businesses, students, community organizations, and other local creatives emerged as a consistent goal throughout the engagement process. Meaningful local creative participation will therefore be essential to translating the priorities identified in this report into spaces that feel rooted in Detroit's histories, cultures, and contemporary life.

Rather than identifying a fixed list of practitioners at this stage, this report recommends an open and inclusive process for identifying creative partners as specific opportunities, scopes, budgets, and timelines are defined.

Artist and designer selection should prioritize accessible, equitable open-call, RFP, and RFQ processes, supported by outreach to practitioners who may not participate in conventional public art or design procurement. Wherever possible, creatives should be engaged early enough to help determine the form an arts and culture intervention takes, not simply asked to execute an artwork or design element that has already been fully defined. The examples in this report are intended to illustrate possibilities rather than prescribe specific creative solutions; selected artists and designers should have meaningful latitude to respond to the site and project goals.

Trusted community, cultural, and creative organizations can help broaden future outreach, particularly organizations with relationships to the communities surrounding the caps. These partners can help reach relevant practitioners, provide community and cultural context, and make future opportunities more accessible.

Cultural interpretation should also be supported by additional historical research. Identifying artists, musicians, writers, business owners, community leaders, and other cultural figures associated with the communities and neighborhoods in close proximity to the caps would help ensure that future public art, interpretation, wayfinding, and programming tell specific, well-researched stories rather than relying on broad references to neighborhood identity.

Neighborhoods and Cultural Organizations for Future Outreach

- Black Bottom Archives
- Buffalo Prescott
- the Carr Center
- Cass Tech Alumni Association
- Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History
- City of Detroit ACE
- College for Creative Studies Community Arts Partnerships
- College for Creative Studies Alumni Community
- CultureSource
- Detroit Cultural Center Association
- Design Core Detroit
- Detroit Chinatown Vision Committee
- Detroit Historical Society
- Kresge Arts in Detroit
- MACC Development
- Midtown Detroit, Inc.
- Metropolitan Museum of Design Detroit
- Progressive Arts Studio
- Talking Dolls
- Wayne State Alumni

9 Final Recommendations

Taken together, the findings of this report recommend an approach to the I-75 Caps that is distinctly Detroit, prioritizes local creative participation, supports everyday use as well as cultural programming, and integrates arts, culture, wellness, and performance into the physical design of the spaces from the outset. Across all four areas explored through community engagement—***Art Installations, Cultural Moments, Health and Wellness, and Live Performance***—the caps should be flexible enough to evolve over time, inclusive and welcoming to a broad range of Detroiters, and supported by the practical infrastructure necessary for cultural and community life to thrive.

Art Installations

Integrate art throughout the physical design of the caps, balancing permanent landmark works with changing, interactive, and community-responsive installations. Art should reflect Detroit's histories and contemporary creative culture while extending beyond designated artworks into landscape, play, furniture, lighting, paving, signage, wayfinding, and other elements. Artists and designers should be engaged early enough to help shape these opportunities, with future commissions prioritizing Detroit talent through accessible and inclusive selection processes.

Cultural Moments

Create spaces where Detroit's histories, traditions, celebrations, commerce, and everyday community can evolve and thrive. Build storytelling into the physical environment through art, interpretation, memory installations, and other approaches developed with relevant communities and culture-bearers, while providing flexible spaces for markets, learning, and gathering. The caps should support both established traditions and new ones, creating opportunities for Detroit businesses, makers, organizations, and residents to participate in and benefit from.

Local Color, 2020 Detroit Month of Design installation by textile artist Kayla Powers of Salt Textile Studios



Image source: Noah Elliott Morrison, Design Core Detroit

Murals in the Market, 2024 Detroit Month of Design



Image Source: Lizz Cardwell, Design Core Detroit

Health and Wellness

Design health and wellness into the everyday experience of the caps through opportunities for movement, recreation, rest, nature, social connection, and sensory relief. Walking and biking routes, play and recreation, greenery, gardens, restorative landscapes, shade, seating, cooling, water access, and weather protection should support different ages, abilities, and ways of using the spaces throughout the day and across seasons. Accessibility should extend beyond the sites themselves to consider transit, and ensure safety and maintenance without unnecessarily excluding vulnerable users.

Live Performance

Support performance at multiple scales and make it part of the everyday life of the caps. Distributed performance areas should accommodate intimate and mid-sized performances, informal and spontaneous activity, and larger cultural events, with infrastructure such as power, lighting, sound access, flexible seating, and weather protection built in from the outset. Programming should prioritize Detroit performers and encompass the breadth of the city's performance culture, with easily accessible reservation systems.

Three Caps, One Connected System

Apply these shared recommendations in ways that respond to the distinct context of the West Cap (Active Commons), Central Cap (Civic Pride and Celebration), and East Cap (Neighborhood Gathering Space). Landscape, art, infrastructure, programming, and other design decisions should respond to the histories, institutions, communities, and contemporary life surrounding each site, giving each cap a recognizable character and role within the larger project.

Ultimately, the success of the I-75 Caps will depend not only on what is built, but on whether Detroiters recognize themselves in the spaces and continue to use, shape, and benefit from them over time.

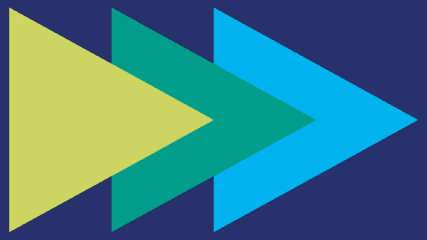
The recommendations in this report provide a foundation for carrying community priorities into the next phases of design and implementation, but that process should remain collaborative and iterative. Continued engagement with residents, artists, designers, culture-bearers, businesses, institutions, and community organizations will be essential as concepts become designs, creative partners are selected, and plans for programming and stewardship take shape.

By rooting each cap in place, investing in Detroit talent, and designing for both everyday life and extraordinary moments, the I-75 Caps will not only reconnect neighborhoods; they will create new places of belonging.

Murals in the Market, 2024 Detroit Month of Design



Image Source: Lizz Cardwell, Courtesy of Design Core Detroit



THE ROAD AHEAD
I-75 CAP