



Public Works Department

MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 21, 2022

TO: Mayor and City Council

THROUGH: Doug Thornley, City Manager Approved Electronically

FROM: Kerrie Koski, Director of Public Works/City Engineer
Amy Pennington, Special Projects and Outreach Coordinator for Public Works
Bryan McArdle, Revitalization Manager

SUBJECT: Virginia Street Placemaking Study

- **Placemaking Study Process**
- **Findings from Community Engagement and Stakeholder Meetings**

The Virginia Street Placemaking Study, conducted by Gehl Urban Design Firm, is currently underway. In September 2021, the Reno City Council approved an inter-local agreement with RTC to conduct a placemaking study to provide a cohesive and regional vision for the future of Virginia Street throughout downtown Reno. After a comprehensive search process, including a formal Request for Qualifications (RFQ) process, Gehl was selected to facilitate the Placemaking Study based on their approach to human-centered research and digital data to document the experience of place.

The goal of the Placemaking Study is to create a shared community vision and roadmap for a downtown Virginia Street where locals and visitors want to spend their time. The project spans the Virginia Street Corridor from Sierra Street to the west, Lake Street to the East, 9th Street (University Gateway) to the north, and Liberty Street to the south. The placemaking study's success relies on community and stakeholder input and feedback conducted at different points throughout the process. Residents can find more information about how to engage in the Placemaking Study process through the [Placemaking Page](#) at [Reno.gov/engage](https://reno.gov/engage).

During the first phase of the study, Gehl collected area research, previous studies, and conducted public engagement through a survey that asked residents and visitors about their experience and desires regarding Virginia Street. The survey was distributed to the public through newsletters, TV, radio and print media, social media, paid ads on social media, Spanish outreach, and distributed through stakeholder groups (RTC, TMBA, RAAC, NABs, City Staff, the DRP and downtown businesses, UNR, Downtown residents). The survey received over 2,700 responses over six weeks.

During the second phase, Gehl compiled the data and survey results. In November, Gehl returned to Reno to present their findings to the public and hold stakeholder sessions to gather more

feedback and ideas. The public meeting had over 100 participants and was followed by a feedback survey that asked if the finding resonated with the public. A [recording of the full presentation](#) and a [summary video](#) on English and Spanish were made available on the City of Reno website.

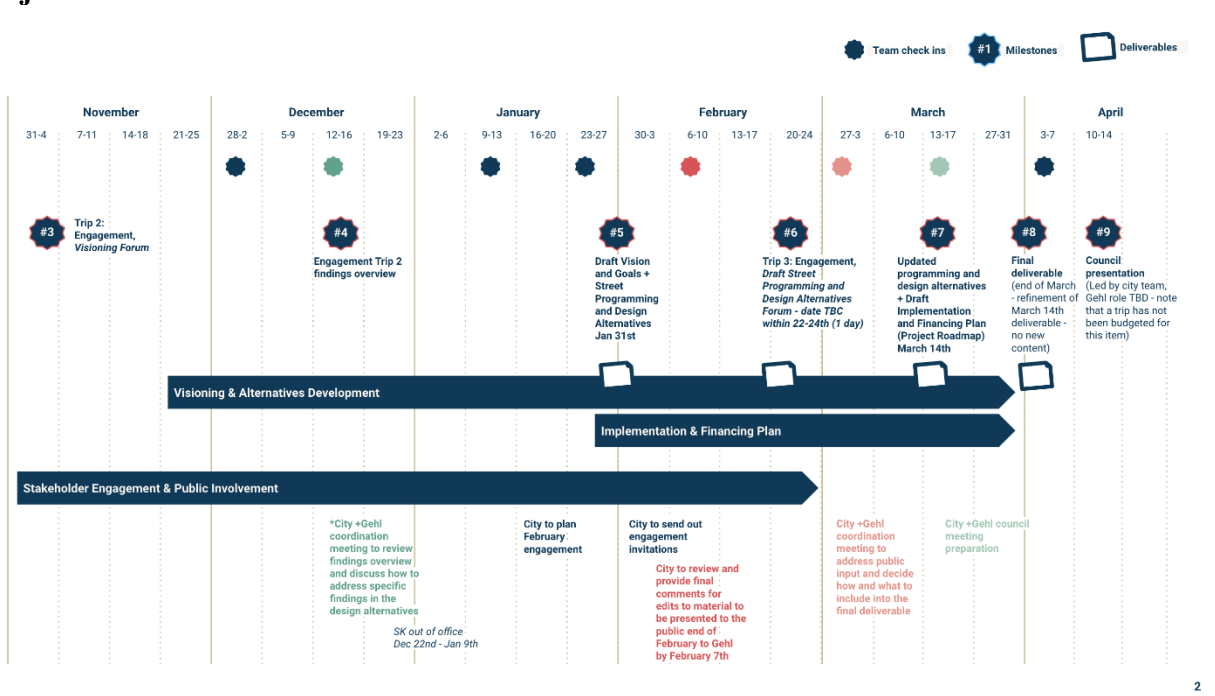
During the November trip and in the following weeks, Gehl also held several stakeholder meetings. These stakeholders include:

- Downtown Reno Partnership Board (Represents downtown businesses, casinos, residents, UNR)
- Designers of Virginia Street (RTC, TMBA, RAAC, Arts and Culture)
- Activators for Virginia Street (Downtown business and property owners)
- Users of Virginia Street (UNR Students, Downtown residents, Historic Resources)

We are currently in the third phase of the study. Gehl is using their findings from phase one, along with feedback from stakeholder groups and the public, to start developing programming recommendations and design concepts for Virginia Street. There will be one more round of public outreach in late February to gather feedback on different concept design options.

In April, Gehl and the City team will present the shared community vision and roadmap for Downtown Virginia Street. This will include concept design narrative and implementation, phasing, and financing plan for the preferred conceptual street design and programming options. The recommendations will not be limited to The City’s jurisdiction but include recommendations for all stakeholders to be involved in future improvements. Reno City Council will have the opportunity to review and approve the proposal.

Project Timeline



Findings from Phase One Research and Survey

1. Virginia Street draw locals and visitors alike for events, but is not a place that Renoites gravitate towards everyday.
 - They come to Virginia Street for events but express a need for programming, more public life and “eyes on the street” for them to visit on an everyday basis.
 - 70% of Virginia Street is fronted by inactive facades, parking garages and empty lots... All of which can make even the shortest walk feel uncomfortable
 - Opportunity- Convert underused sidewalk and plaza space into inviting places for people, with seating, small scale repeat programming, and building edge activation.

Ground floor activation



2. Virginia Street has a rich history, but does not reflect the culture of creativity cherished by Renoites and visitors alike.
 - Renoites love the history of Virginia Street, the Arch and the art...but also state that there is a disconnect between the street today, and its’ glory days.
 - Opportunity - Provide quality public space for appreciation of iconic signage and historical buildings, and include the alleyways in the Downtown public space network with art & programming.
3. Virginia Street physically connects well-visited downtown destinations, but few Renoites choose active mobility to get around.
 - Today, most Renoites drive to Virginia Street. But! After parking, drivers becomes pedestrians too! Yet, streets with ample space for cars pose challenges to all other users.
 - Missing links between destinations for people walking and wheeling, make traveling without a car less desirable.
 - Opportunity- Elevate the baseline for active mobility users of all ages and abilities, with comfortable [and shaded] sidewalks, quality bike lanes, and safe crossings.
4. Virginia Street is home to businesses that are an important part of the Downtown DNA, but lack amenities and a local draw.
 - Renoites see the casinos as an important part of Reno’s DNA...but want to see more local shops and eateries mixed in.
 - Existing food and beverage places are off the street, and few have direct access from Virginia Street... this adds to an empty street.

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