

COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY + COLLEGE 12-HOUR WORKSHOP

# activate vacant space



2013

compilation of community workshop content by Sarah Wolbert for the Minneapolis College of Art and Design

# 2013

# GMAI

**The Greater Minnesota Arts Initiative [GMAI]** is a project of MCADWorks, an experiential educational initiative of the Minneapolis College of Art and Design [MCAD]. The following ideas are the product of a 12-hour weekend workshop where 10 MCAD representatives worked with 20 community members to brainstorm and graphically envision how art and design can activate vacant space in their community.

After a presentation and voting process, one project was funded and implemented in the three weeks following the workshop. MCAD handled most of the logistics and fabricated interactive signage as well as prototyping a platform by which local artists can lead free workshops thru a skillshare open hours format.

Our community partner, Clean Up the River Environment, assisted with networking, hosting the event, and identifying vacant spaces in the Upper Minnesota River Valley in Southwestern Minnesota.

This was made possible with major support from the Bush Foundation and additional support from the Smaby Family Foundation.

See [www.mcad.edu/works](http://www.mcad.edu/works) for more information.

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# workshop format



The 12-hour blitz-style workshop used a collaborative design process in development by Sarah Wolbert. It hinges on strong facilitators, that move along small teams of people with clearly defined objectives, as well as support staff that will complete the project with respect to the priorities decided by participants. It engages community members and outside expertise to marry the knowledge of residents with specific skillsets. A restrictive timeframe ensures that the majority of the design happens during the workshop. It allows for ambiguities in project details, to allow the participants to collectively create a project that showcases their decisions. Workshop objectives were two-fold ~ to collaboratively design and implement one project, and to articulate and catalog a range of options for a variety of sites. Participatory decision-making allows for everyone to have a voice in critical decisions.

For the purposes of this project, the Upper Minnesota River Valley includes 10 towns across 5 counties. MCAD representatives were joined by residents from a variety of towns. Some are local artists, others are farmers, teachers, planners, or business owners that have an interest in experimental projects. Only two other participants had done a similar process before, and were recruited as team leaders. A brief orientation was given to the team leaders prior to the workshop.

MCAD representatives arrived on Friday afternoon, and were given walking tours of Granite Falls and Montevideo downtown areas, and the Prairie Smoke School Nature



Area [PSSNA]. They also visited a local farm and experienced pressing apples for cider. This served to introduce the students to rural Minnesota places as well as people: several of the area residents that would be participating in the weekend workshop were at the apple pressing. The local organization that was MCAD's community partner, Clean Up the River Environment, then hosted dinner at their downtown Montevideo office. Everyone exchanged stories about their backgrounds: where they were from and why they were participating.



Saturday morning began with a short introduction to the topics and projects for both community and college participants. We then moved immediately into collaborative brainstorming, where everyone's ideas are voiced and built upon using a common improvisation technique where statements are followed by, "yes, and..." The ideas are catalogued throughout the workshop in a visual resource that has original ideas as well as case studies, reference projects, and new combinations created by participants.



This workshop was the first in a series where an actual project is designed and detailed for implementation. This hinges on creating shared understanding that there are no "bad" decisions, but the group does need to reach agreement on what their values and priorities are within the parameters of the project possibilities, and iteratively develop and revisit this throughout the process. This can make for some challenging conversations at times, but the students and children were often the ones able to break the tension and refocus on shared objectives.

Now that there are more people experienced with the workshop format, the potential to build on these ideas and collaboratively develop and implement more projects is exponentially increased. The background research identifying possible project sites,

and workshop summaries of community needs and opportunities is being utilized by the community partner Clean Up the River Environment for additional projects by their organization.

The template below allows for ideas to be quickly illustrated, either with images that are created while brainstorming or downloaded images that link to reference projects. The ideas can be posted or taped up and regrouped as discussion encourages new combinations and iterations. This results in multiple ideas that can be assessed for viability based on articulated priorities and ranked values. The following page shows some ideas posted up for discussion.

**MCAD WORKS**

**montevideo view**

Screen skyline and images of Montevideo, Uruguay onto window coverings for existing Chippewa Bank Building. Could be screened onto fabric to allow for exterior installation, or printed on billboard material and applied to new plywood or other filler for window openings. Fabric could also allow for some light to filter thru to the interior.

image by [claire staudmanis](#)





Prior to the workshop, MCAD participants identified their goals with respect to the workshop, and some students requested time alone to develop one idea in detail to have more of a portfolio product. This allowed for more polished development of logo options and fundraising ideas [see pages XXXXXX].



The process balances big picture brainstorming and decision-making frameworks to assist participants in responding to various opportunities and constraints of the workshop topics. It encourages less-feasible tangents to identify innovative mutually-beneficial opportunities between the workshop participants and general public. Visual, verbal, and video documentation are emphasized to allow products to be as authentic as possible with respect to workshop content. The funded project had several constraints: timeframe, winter weather, municipal + landowner approval processes, fabrication timeframe, skills necessary to implement. There were only three weeks to finish design, fabricate, install and document. Prior to project voting, these aspects were discussed to ensure that only feasible options were up for consideration.



The following is a compilation of over 100 ideas and references that can serve as a visual resource moving forward with projects in this region, or on these topic categories. Use this as an idea pack: print them all, shuffle and group based on discussion points, consider the opportunities in the more ridiculous concepts. It can be useful to pin them all up on a large wall, and have duplicates available to allow groupings to remain intact as new groups are proposed. Alternatively, photographs can be used to quickly document the development of ideas. The left side can be used for writing additional comments.

This document can be shared with others; all ideas are covered by the Creative Commons non-commercial attribution and share alike license.

# building ideas

typical BLDG



Fairly standard storefront with big windows + simple construction. Interior space is one big room, with restrooms + other service areas across the back. This is the RC Peterson building in downtown Granite Falls.

landmark BLDG



Large vacant landmark building, for instance the historic bank building shown here in downtown Montevideo. Like a theater's false proscenium for framing various installations... of shadow puppetry? custom window panel messages or images? an indoor/indoor thru-wall chicken coop?

transition BLDG



This space is changing ownership + transitioning from a spa to a cooperative brewery. Construction is expected to take 1-2 years, so a longer-term art installation could be done in the bay storefront in downtown Granite Falls.

project BLDG



The Great Plains Natural Gas Building is available courtesy of Mike Berry. It has a covered entry, 1648 square feet on the main level, 1848 sq ft on the lower level, including a heated garage/work space.

The workshop addressed vacant buildings from four categories, created with the intention of positioning these ideas for wider distribution and applications.

- TYPICAL - standard storefront configuration: large windows, plain facade
- LANDMARK - notable building, especially if regionally or historically symbolic
- TRANSITION - storefront with a future use, but underutilized until that time
- PROJECT - arranged with building owner for an open-ended project

A prototype is an intentional preliminary model, the process by which a more comprehensive understanding of a project can be understood. By completing this first project, aspects of agreements, compensation, operation, outreach, and necessary skills are more defined. The selected project integrated several specifics of the available building including the sheltered entryway, large window openings, and lower-level heated workshop space.

# staples scratch-n-dent



Community benefit in reduced price grocery located in Staples, MN. Owners used to run the store out of their garage, and are only providing interim rent for the building owner. Their lease doesn't allow them to disclose the amount, since it's so reduced...

Consider how art could provide inviting signage or other amenities.

# open work studio



Allow for workspaces for community members to create + craft together, sharing skills/tools/resources as they see fit to encourage more local creation and sharing of best practices and collective problemsolving.

# illustrate + decorate



Illustrate vacant storefronts ~ with decorative information or just plain decoration. Painting above by Julie Nagel.

# reminisce + respect



Display large format historical images of region + residents with conversational triggers or narrative statements.

Resources: Fagen for printing, historical society

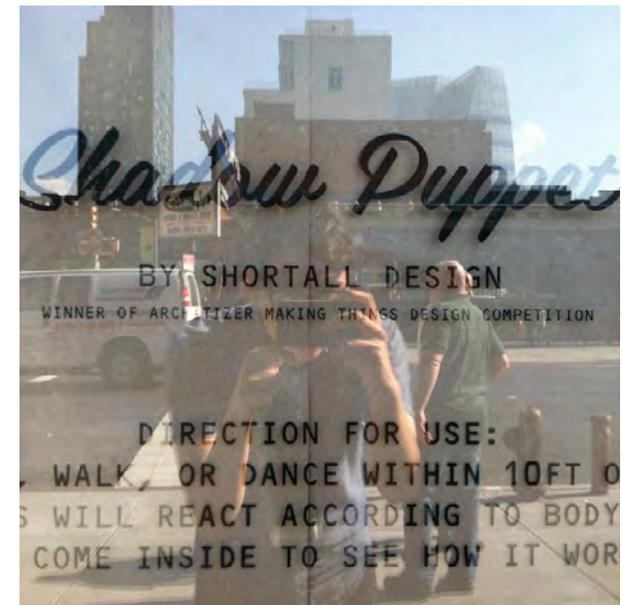
background from Google Street View, overlay images by CL Christianson Studio

# treatment lights



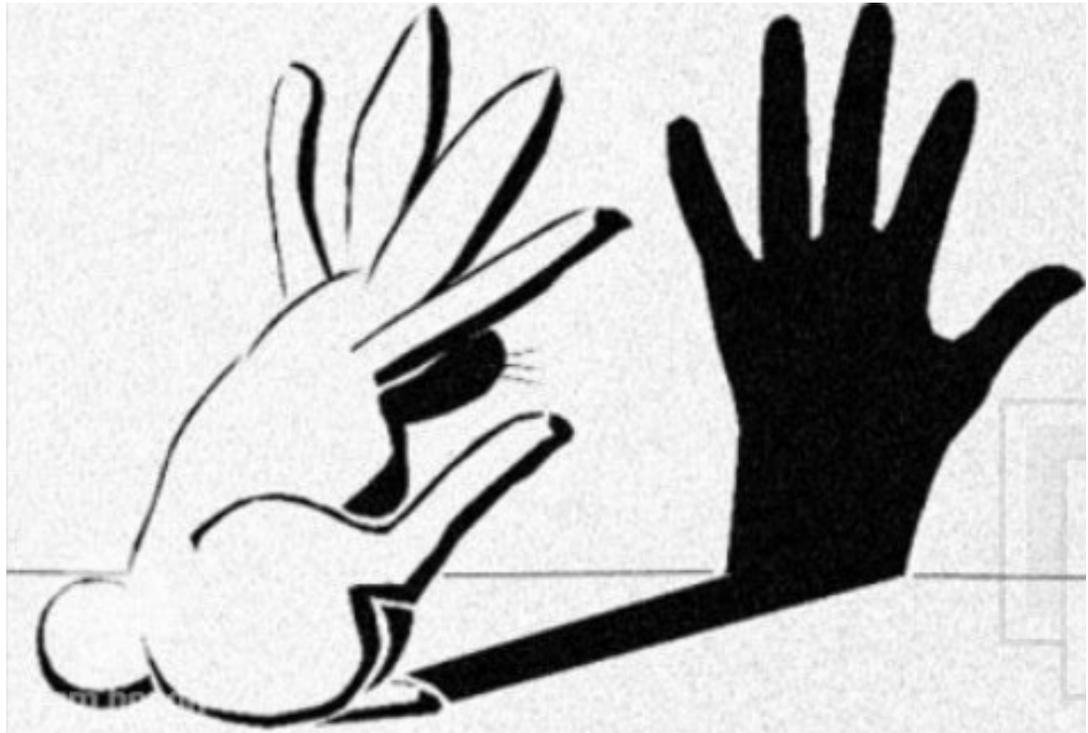
Fill a storefront with Seasonal Affective Disorder treatment lights. Offer indoor + outdoor accessibility for those dark winter months!

# pedestrian puppets



Interactive shadow puppet installations ~ recording actions from the sidewalk to be integrated + transformed into a shadow puppet show.

See more details at [www.clayshortall.com](http://www.clayshortall.com) ~ but remember, a lot can happen with a lamp, sheet, shadow puppets, + a couple creative folks!



Inside/ outside plays ~ do you want to see what happens behind the curtain, or what the projection is to the street? Opportunity to understand what happens behind the scene in shadow puppetry, and develop new techniques by sharing best practices.



Use banner prints to create visuals that acknowledge the river in lieu of leaving vacant store fronts empty. Could also display infographics that chart water quality to raise public awareness about water issues. Or issues with vacant spaces!

# sustainable showcase



Use storefronts as showrooms for alternative energy: pedal power, solar chargers for personal handheld devices, dance floors that convert the bounce into energy. They're making ice cream in the photo above!

# yarn bombin'



Yarn bomb trees along the river bank in the dark winter months. Use a vacant building to store materials + host an installation event!

# dress it up!



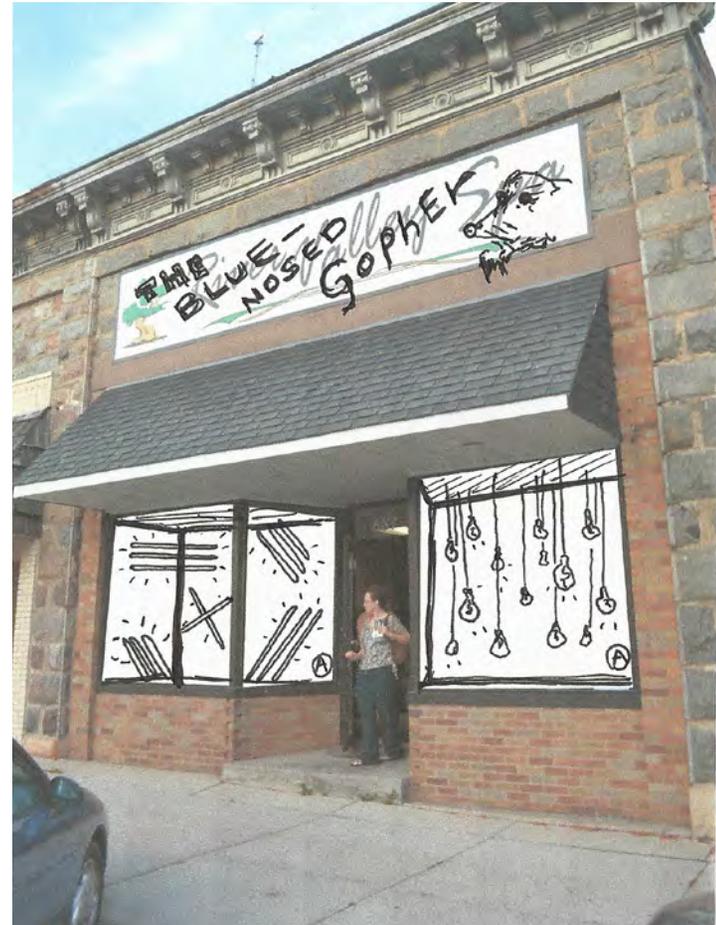
Popularize crafty collaborations. Shown here: Magda Sayeg, founder of Knitta Please, who does a range of textile installations.

# montevideo view



Screen skyline and images of Montevideo, Uruguay onto window coverings for existing Chippewa Bank Building. Could be screened onto fabric to allow for exterior installation, or printed on billboard material and applied to new plywood or other filler for window openings. Fabric could also allow for some light to filter thru to the interior.

# reflections + illumination



Light installations or mirrored elements to add dynamic depth to storefront.

# social storefront



Special themed displays on a rotating basis ~ possible links to social clubs or other types of gathering spots. Potential for cross-marketing or showcasing goods from other local businesses.

There's more to drinking than just drinking!

# small signage systems



Flexible modes of identifying a linked initiative: systems such as chalk art, temporary stencils, vinyl applications, or..?

# electronic storefronts

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Collect old electronics ~ depending on their appearance + function, they can be used to illuminate the storefront, or as pedestals, or vintage objects of wonder.



Use centrally located vacant storefronts as collection spaces for atypical disposal trends: drives for broken electronics or cds/dvds that can be diverted from standard waste disposal to cd + electronic recyclers.

# material transformation



Collect cds, then use them to make lamps, chairs, installation art, mobiles, guitar picks, light reflectors, etc. The cases can be remade into wall art, trivets, and many other things.

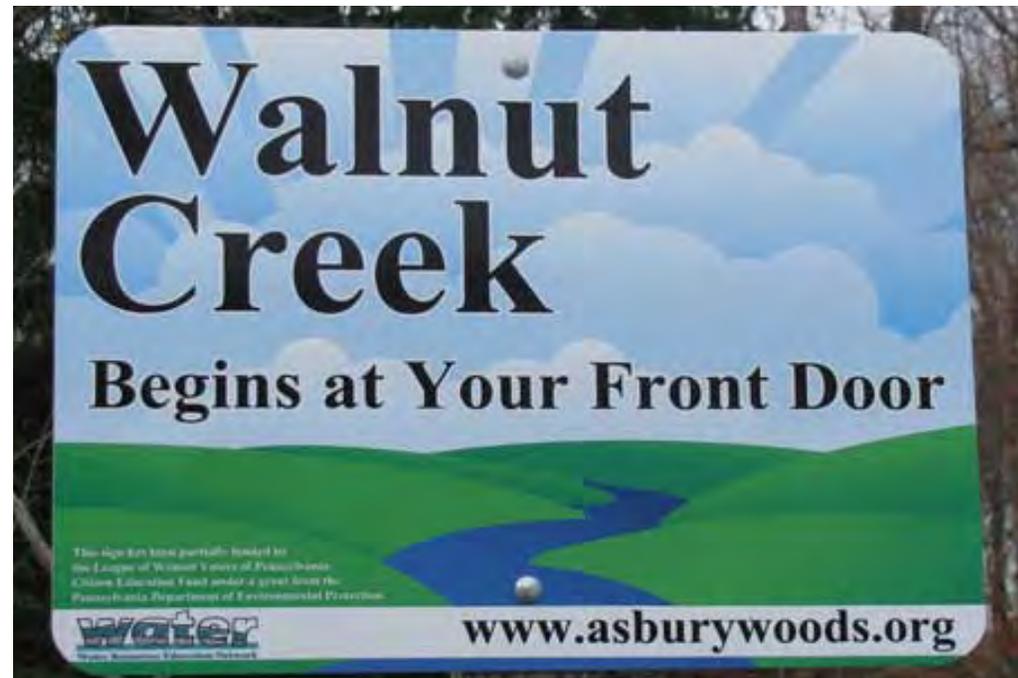


Convert underutilized spaces into a place for teens to gather - include WiFi, food, couches, gaming services, art and design resources, music studio. Make it inviting and functional.

Enlist teens to help decorate / clean / upgrade the space!

# watershed welcome mat

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Use signage in downtown regions to instill a sense of connection between communities on the river and within a common watershed.

# outdoor projections

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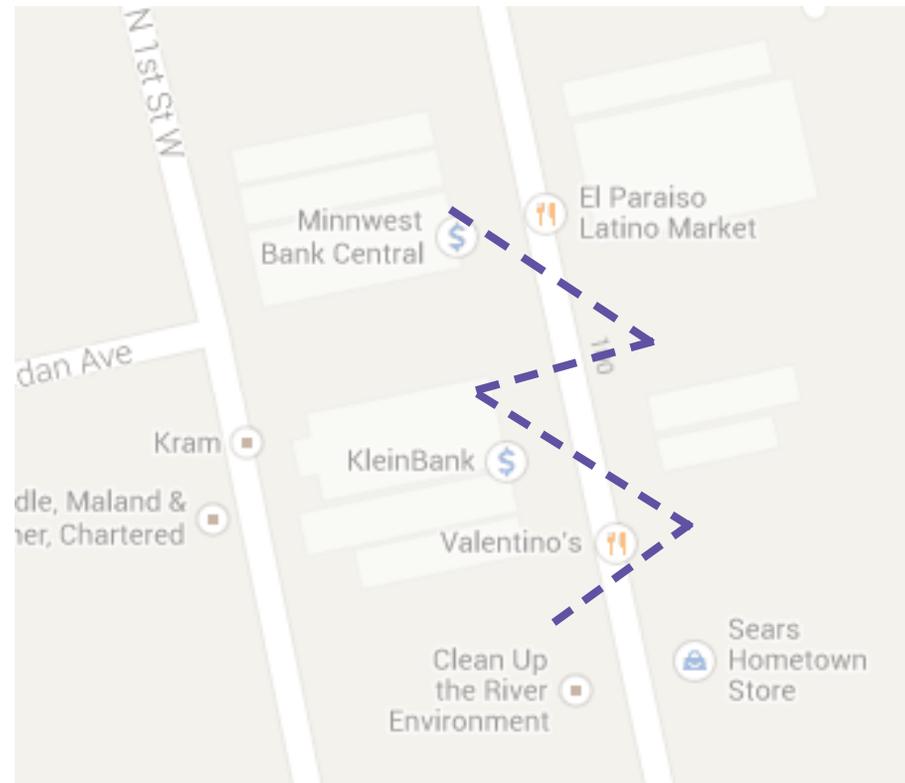
Encourage people to create Vines [videos of 6 seconds or less] and submit for projection on vacant buildings. Offer a reward program for participants [raffle or prizes]. Video compilation could be curated for community-bridging context of understanding or shared resources. Viewing nights could be themed [environment! recipes! tips for how to build a new friendship in rural MN!].

# sparking space



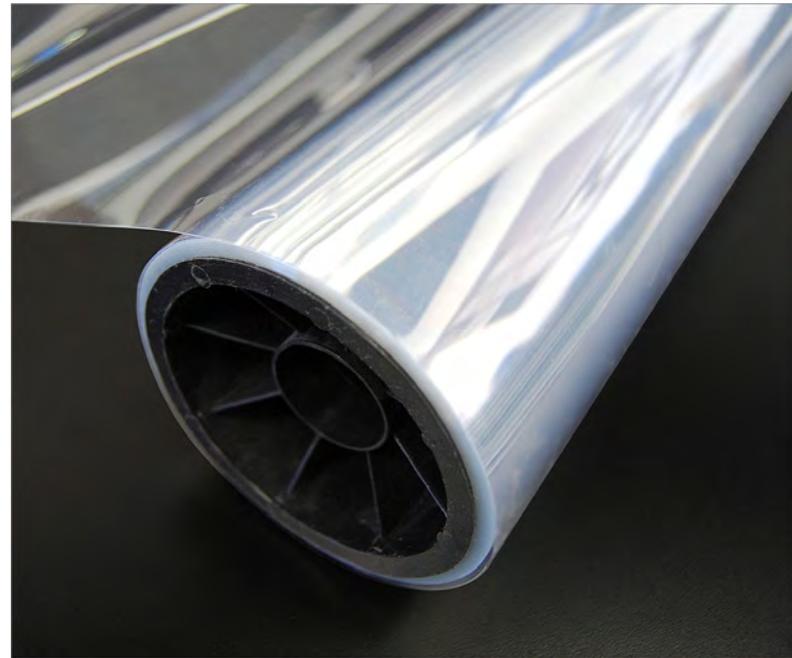
Bring the storefront outside! Demonstrate + display possible ideas for occupancy in the parking spaces out front. Instead of parking, SPARKING space.

# vacant group projections



Project from one vacant building front to another, using video to link vacancies. What makes community? What could fill these vacancies? It could highlight vacant spaces as a group, tell a cumulative story, or showcase other information.

# mylar window mirrors



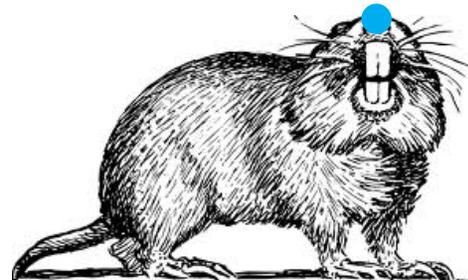
Line vacant windows with mylar to create reflections of the street and its occupants rather than being dark spaces. \*\*EDITOR'S NOTE: mylar is sensitive to heat and can expand/contract or wrinkle quite a bit. Other reflective surfaces [compact discs, mirrors, etc could provide a more stable reflective effect, albeit more like a pixelated image]. Search for information on "Mark's House" in downtown Flint for more info.

# jack-o-gallery



Pop-up seasonal gallery to showcase Jack-O-Lanterns by local artists in vacant storefront locations. Helps the space not feel so dark and uninviting at night AND protect those gorgeous pumpkin faces from squirrels + other outdoor influences detrimental to their health. Could also invite people to vote on their favorite and generate acclaim for local craftsmanship.

# regional mascots



Regional Mascots that enliven the facades of river towns. Options:

- Blue-nosed Gophers of Granite Falls
- The Jose Artigas of Montevideo
- Trolls of Milan

Could hold town design sessions to identify representative mascots or imagery for each location. May benefit tourism, call attention to arts scene, link to scenic byway, etc. Images or sculptures in storefronts, engaging with specifics of street scene or store. Treasure hunt or passport system to direct people to historic sites or educational entertainment opportunities.

Resources: Milan Village Art School, Granite Area Arts Council, Chambers of Commerce, Granite Falls Historical Society



Insert large-format renderings for possible uses of storefront ~ indoor adventure playland perhaps? or technical assistance provider?

images: [www.hightechsigns.com](http://www.hightechsigns.com) [above], [connectingpoint.wordpress.com](http://connectingpoint.wordpress.com) [below]



Have progressive storytelling installations in storefronts.

Could link several vacant storefronts in a downtown and encourage walking, etc. Use papercutting, found objects, and/or window paint!

Opportunities to connect projects with local youths and other groups that want to be involved in collaborative public art activities.

# legit graffiti



Designate a storefront as the legitimate home of graffiti. Fund an artist-on-call to allow new artists to get safety and technique tips.

Consider providing materials that won't harm the building facade, as well as ventilation masks and a place for artists to clean up.

image by Feenixx

# express yourself



Install prompts + engage the public to respond with honest feedback and feelings on various topics.

- what are you looking forward to?
- tell me a good joke!
- share a source of inspiration...

image from [thegratitudegraffiti.com](http://thegratitudegraffiti.com)

# wheatpaste layer art



Invite layered exterior installations by introducing the community to wheatpaste poster applications. Could be linked to advertising for local events, art projects for schools, retirement homes, or other community groups. Plywood facades could be friction-fit to storefront windows to allow for a surface that would not be permanently affected.

# prohibition mission

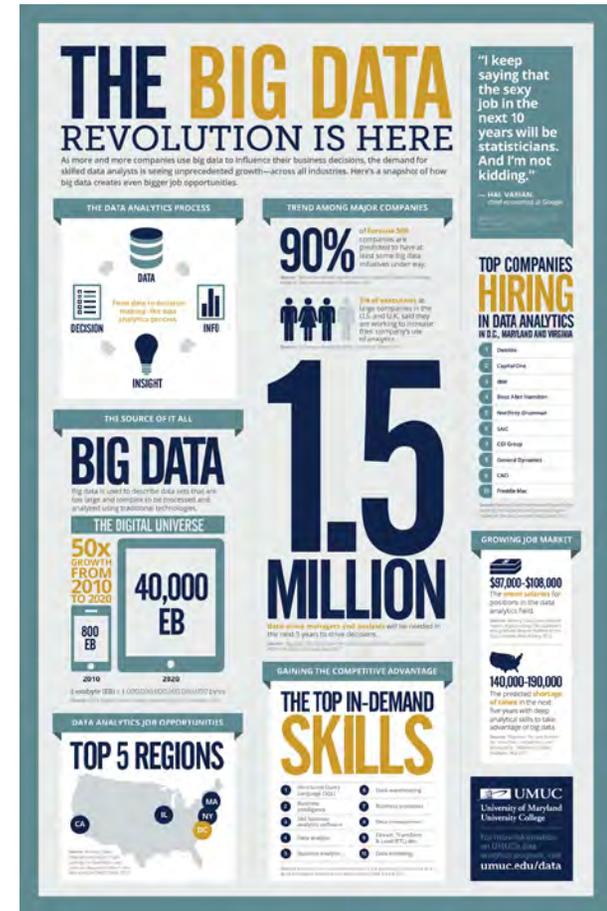


Prohibition had many effects on downtown lifestyle, legal and illegal commerce. Volstead, who championed the Prohibition Act, served as mayor of Granite Falls from 1900-1902. What unintended effects have obvious and hidden aspects in today's society? How can we learn from what came before to respond to present day situations?

# lesser-known legends



Volstead, mayor of Granite Falls from 1900-1902, is most known for his work on prohibition. But the Capper-Volstead Act, which keeps farm co-operatives safe from Sherman Anti-Trust Law, has more of a lasting impact in today's town. Include a timeline of his adventures to inspire more people to aspire to impactful roles ~ albeit with patience.



Display information to spark less familiar paths of study for locals. With the growth of online education, training for careers in new fields could begin immediately. Choose your own adventure!

image from [blog.sqlauthority.com](http://blog.sqlauthority.com), image by UMUC



# many mini-murals



Create format for accepting and formatting concepts, quotes, sayings, and typography from the public, in public. MCAD alum Erik Brandt curates “Ficciones Typografika” which can host three 24”x36” posters at the same time [more examples at <http://geotypografika.tumblr.com>]. Could source + display across several of the towns in the same region!

# microfund microdecorate



Connect with assisted living centers, community centers, and other groups that would host tile making sessions. Buy a tile for \$10, and decorate for installation at the new buildings at the nature area. Material funding and community activity coordination.

# vinyl stickers

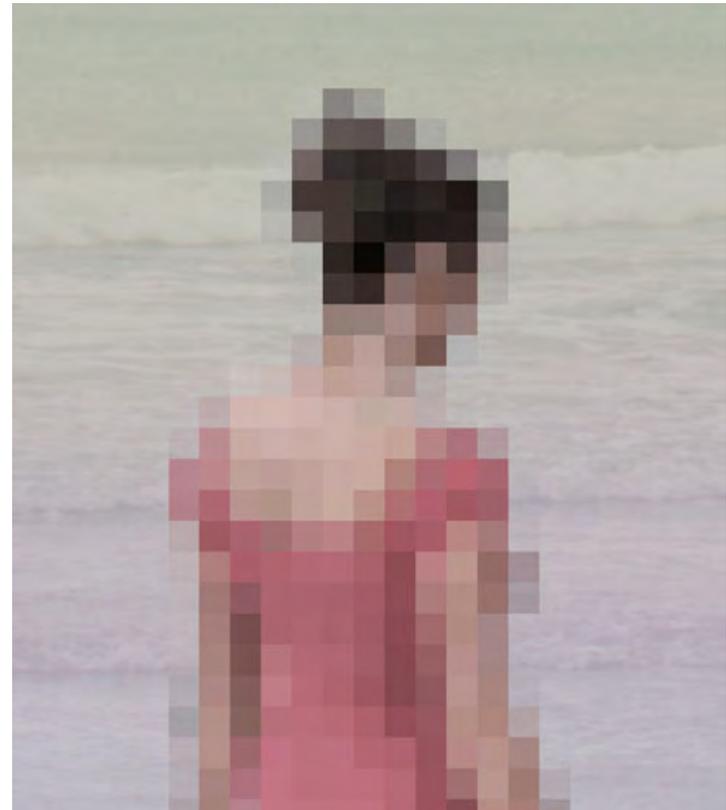


Design a replicable format that could be installed in multiple vacant storefronts or underutilized surfaces and objects. Could present a set of phrases, or pose a statement for public input.

Candy Chang's project: "I WISH THIS WAS..." is shown above.

# environmental confessional

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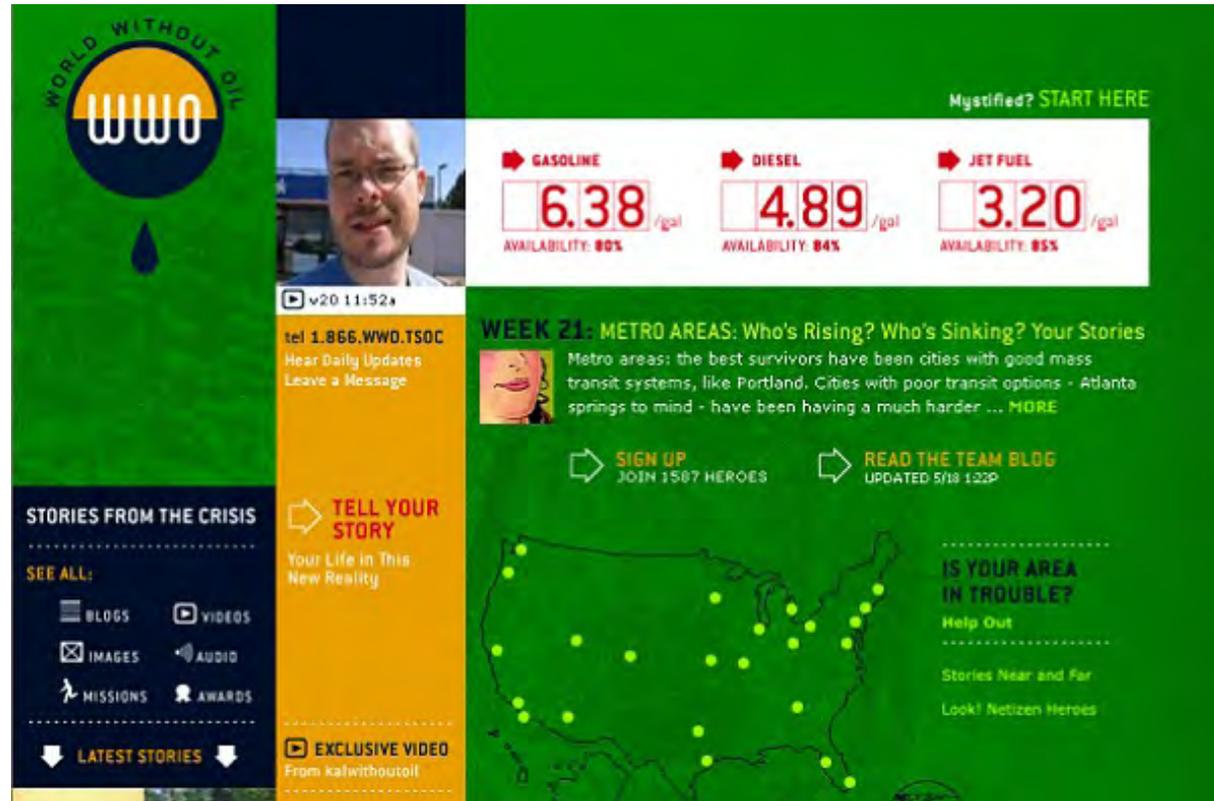
Record + broadcast anonymized confessionals: whether about community issues, environmentally disrespectful habits, or guilty pleasures, they could provide a bridge to community support to change for the better. Could allow for a deposit box for crowdsourced solutions!

# showcase the great!



Every place has amazing stories, but are often lacking the technology and operational skills to document those happenings. With minimal funds, equipment could be gathered [or donated] and area residents trained in videography and editing. Alternatively, connections with film students could be built for experiential education.

Shown above is an image from “The Kings of Flint,” a documentary about urban farming + community support in Flint, MI. It showcases a few raps about cabbage and lessons learned by youths who are learning indelible skills from Jacky and Dora King on their urban farm close to the karate dojo they also run.



Provide a curated gaming center where the free-access games also serve a social purpose. Shown above is Jane McGonigal’s “World Without Oil,” which uses crowdsourcing to generate new responses to upcoming issues with our environment. McGonigal cites multiple benefits to designing alternative realities as well as sourcing the gamers for exploring additional solutions to traditional thinktanks.

# community crossroads



Provide a place where folks can bring their own lunch, beverages, or activities and create new relationships across gender + generational boundaries. Somewhat like a library, but for community interactions ~ not for material resources! Could have specific hours for specific demographic groups [see TeenSpace idea sheet].

# milk paint mecca



Milkpaint is making a comeback due to its historic reputation and lack of volatile organic compounds [VOCs] which are now recognized as having adverse health effects. Made from common materials one can procure at the grocery store, it is also quick, easy, and forgiving as a finish. Create a station for sharing recipes for alternative materials to those that have high [negative] environmental impact.

image from [milkpaint.com](http://milkpaint.com)

# vertical garden systems

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Connect with the free succulent trimmings from conservatories in Minneapolis [e.g. the Cowles Conservatory] and create vertical growing systems as a fundraiser for... various great things in your community.

# beautify infrastructure

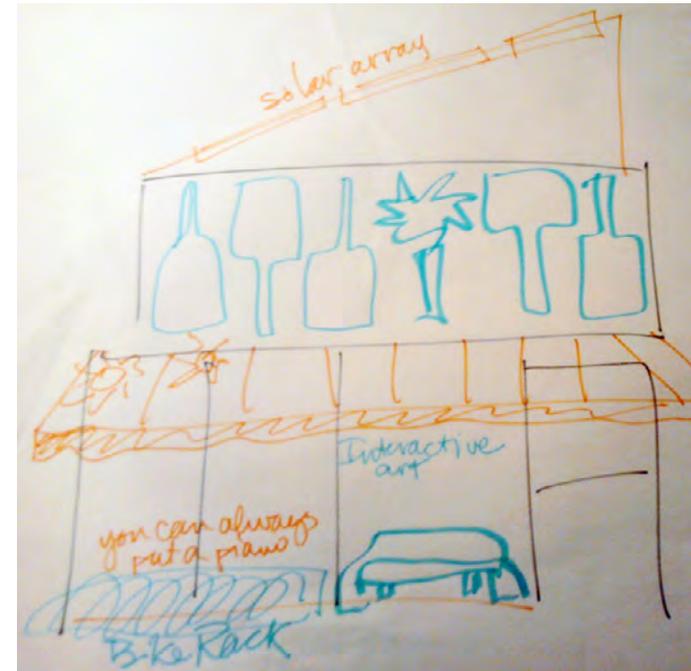


Consider if it is the design, implementation, craftsmanship, or reimagination of a staid system that makes you sit up and take notice.

What shakes your world up?

What would you like to see your community reinvent?

# combination application



Assemble several ideas to showcase possibilities and identify more permanent installation locations:

- renewable energy installations [e.g. solar array]
- big + beautiful storefront large art [call attention!]
- free things [you can always put a piano...]
- bike racks
- interactive art

And to what extent are these objects of interest vs. objects of use?

# thankful give boards



Simple boards that engage the community with free art space + responses to “I am thankful” [for my family... for probiotics] and “I can give” [great hugs... welding lessons]. Made with white-chalk paint and vinyl stickers on plywood + installed with a friction-fit system, this installation provides a community engagement space at the front of the Great Plains Gas Company building. In the spirit of sharing what we know, a community-organized skillshare took place in the lower level of the space on Saturday, November 16th.

# landscape ideas



background PSSNA



OBSERVED SPECIES such as prairie cinquefoil, spiderwort, vervain, wild onion, anemone, wild bergamot, silvery scurf-pea, leadplant, meadowweet, prairie dogbane, white sage, yarrow, coneflowers, prairie clovers, multiple varieties of milkweeds, goldenrods, sedges and grasses, etc. Many varieties of dragonflies and damselflies, including: Widow Skimmer; 12-spotted Skimmer, Doo-tailed Whiteface, many meadow-hawks, darters, forktails and bluets.

INVASIVES such as common buckthorn, honeysuckles, spotted knapweed (eastern red cedars should also be cut; eventually a controlled burn). The trail is being maintained, some herbicide along the edges (but still some dense areas of poison ivy). Also an ATV trail going through from the dike road.

signage systems PSSNA



TYPES of SIGNAGE - can relate to

- wayfinding
- eco-art opportunities
- species identification
- general maintenance [pick up yr trash!]
- public health fit-trails
- zoning e.g. free play space - exquisite corpse or picnic areas

site services PSSNA



One of the most critical needs for making the Prairie Smoke School Nature Area accessible to the public is site services such as restrooms. There are no built restrooms onsite, although portable toilets could be delivered for events. Could provide or prototype some alternatives to chemical management: such as smell mitigation with tree bark.

image from mississippifolkloresociety.truman.edu

Several community members recommended underutilized outdoor areas in the region. The Prairie Smoke School Nature Area is owned by the Yellow Medicine East School District, but has not been utilized or maintained for years. There were several opportunities to address in the workshop:

- it is not a nature preserve
- invasive species, overgrown areas, + trail maintenance will require funding
- located close to downtown Granite Falls; primary access is from a residential area
- ideas can include integration with class curricula
- signage is weathered + needs comprehensive replacement
- on-site restrooms + supportive services necessary for increased use

The school district is pursuing grants for projects and, although this site was not chosen to receive funds to implement any of the following ideas, the logo options are completed and able to be immediately utilized if the graphic choices made in the workshop are deemed acceptable.

# background PSSNA



**OBSERVED SPECIES** such as prairie cinquefoil, spiderwort, vervain, wild onion, anemone, wild bergamot, silvery scurf-pea, leadplant, meadowsweet, prairie dogbane, white sage, yarrow, coneflowers, prairie clovers, multiple varieties of milkweeds, goldenrods, sedges and grasses, etc. Many varieties of dragonflies and damselflies, including; Widow Skimmer, 12-spotted Skimmers, Dot-tailed Whiteface, many meadow-hawks, darners, forktails and bluets.

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TYPES of SIGNAGE ~ can relate to

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# site specific signage



Note materials and interpretive iconography for signage at the Biokovo Nature Park in Croatia.



Salvage building materials as opportunities for low-impact artistic public outhouse constructions. The one above was designed by Hundertwasser, + is a public toilet that's also an international work of art and tourist attraction. Wikipedia notes that it is the most photographed toilet in all of New Zealand.

# swanky systems



There's a wide variety of human-waste disposal mechanisms ~ what is the right level of swank for the Prairie Smoke School Nature Area? Could the public education location serve to prototype + test new types of environmentally responsible public loos?

# modern outhouse



**Forms of collection and direction of greywater versus blackwater treatment. Could the Prairie Smoke School Nature Area serve as a demonstration site for various toilets that manufacturers want to market to rural residents + landowners?**

# critter cam ap



Smartphone Application could be developed by high school students or other local tech developers to share PSSNA information species, songs, events, bloom times, migration data...

# insect hotel



Gathered objects provide habitat for beneficial insects ~ and maybe some residents that aren't so beneficial... a haunted hotel + restorative ecosystem project combined!

# mitigate invasives



Conservationists at the workshop were concerned with the degree to which plant species categorized as invasive have taken hold in the park [buckthorn, Siberian elm, red cedar and others]. Eradication/control could be taken on via conventional means [i.e. cutting and herbicides], via controlled burns, and/or by various creative solutions. Examples of the latter might include:

- Grinding wood for use in an on-site moldering toilet system
- Utilizing woody cuttings to demonstrate and use rocket stoves for warmth and cooking
- Coppicing buckthorn and elm for basket or furniture making enterprises
- Utilizing buckthorn for amateur or artisan carving

Map above is approximation of open areas [prairie = orange] and wooded areas [with invasives = yellow].

# eco-art toolbox



## **Turf:** ecological activism and art

### WHO IS THE AUDIENCE?

various education for various ages + types of experience:

- what topics could be explored?
- how is art integrated?
- signage? installations? performance?

<http://forecastpublicart.org/toolkit/>



Provide coloring book or other interactive elements that both deliver information on observed species and invasives. Could be used for a fundraiser or simply an educational project. Students could write descriptions of species to increase collaboration. Pages could be crafted to allow for block-printing or screen-printing to empower local on-demand production.



Option for integrating observed species into the logo for the area.

# logo option



Option for logo.

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image by Erin Wagner

# logo option

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Logo option based on observed species on Prairie Smoke School Nature Area.

# logo option

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Logo option based on observed species on Prairie Smoke School Nature Area.

# seasonal art event



Gather inspiration from artists such as Sylvain Meyer, and allow for locally-led installations of natural elements. Could be combined with nature walks, general maintenance, and public gatherings.

image from <http://assets.inhabitat.com/>



# bird watching space



**Construct platforms and other spaces for connecting with nature ~ bird watching platforms, structures or mirrors/lights that offer access to other views + residents.**

# signage sets



Consider various types of signage: display cases, interactive moments, informational, and directional elements.

# food foraging



Foraging for food (as well as medicines and materials for building or crafts) provides interesting educational opportunities that engage traditional knowledge, scientific thinking, and skills for self-sufficiency. Community dinners featuring foraged foods bring a convivial element to learning about the values of the prairie.

# dakota cultural exchange

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**Connect with cultural groups and invite ceremonies that introduce the general public to relationships with nature that are based on symbiotic relationships, in lieu of capitalistic enterprises.**

# perform controlled burn

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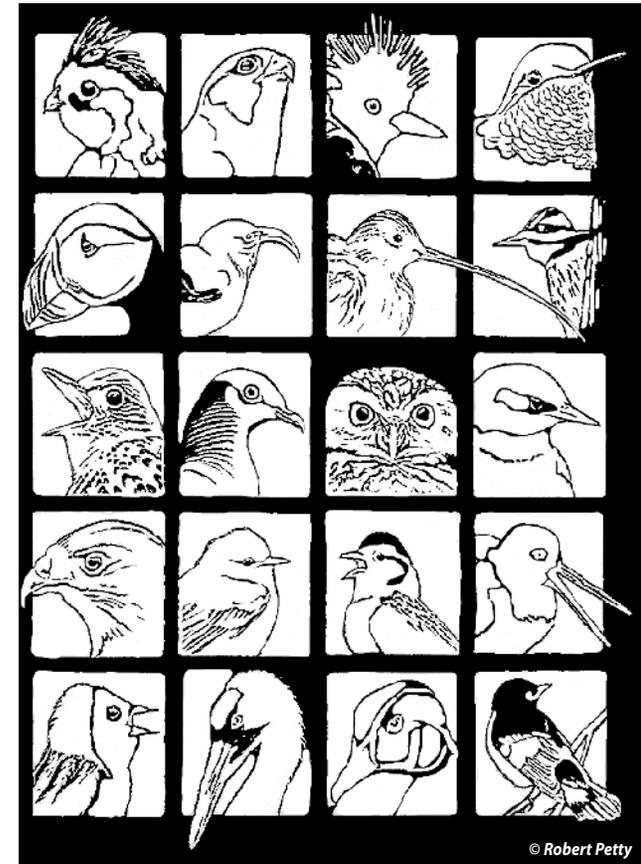


When scheduling maintenance for the prairie, such as controlled burns, think of how performances can educate, entertain, and enhance the situation. and distributing foil wrapped packets of food, so after the burn, the cleanup crew has a treasure hunt for packets of toasted treats!



Education events to introduce youths [and others] to pollinator habitat + steps we can all take to support bees as part of our ecosystems. Search [www.xerces.org](http://www.xerces.org) for packets of information as well as assemblies for bee support systems! Get bizzzy!

# migration station



International Migratory Bird Day is the second Saturday in May! See [www.birdday.org](http://www.birdday.org) for promotional and educational materials. Consider connecting with other organizations that could lead field days or diversify the participants that may attend the event!

# birdhouse install



**Make + locate birdhouses at the Prairie Smoke School Nature Area. Install event could be linked to a cleanup + infrastructure in various areas, similar to planned unit developments. Maintenance by the building team perhaps? Could the nature area actually allow the birdhouse developers to “own” one square foot of land that their structure is erected on? Could this micro-ownership transition to a sustainable mode of maintenance?**



What infrastructure should be considered to allow for programming around food prep and foraging education? Onsite commercial kitchen could also link to future income from event rentals.

# pollinator sanctuary



Prairie Smoke School Nature Area can help by planting, labeling, and educating about native plants for pollinator habitat and nourishment. Could connect with extension education, or other programs that could use the PSSNA as a test site and learning community for initiatives that can measure and positively impact pollinator health + habitat.

# sizable sculptures



Engage local and greater Minnesota artists to create sculpture throughout the park or in a specified area. Could work with found materials onsite or from intown, and start to organize event programming around art installations similar to Franconia Sculpture Park's iron pour or BareBones Productions Halloween puppet shows. Sculptures could provide landmarks to navigate by, as well as an identification system for various zones.

# invasive art carnival



Explore various landscapes for marketing and showcasing art. Charge fee for entry or access to various “exhibits” and enliven the idea of display by having a treasure hunt for donated items. Prioritize zones at the PSSNA that need removal of invasives and double site prep with maintenance. A prize for whomever removes the most buckthorn..?

# seats + musical beats



Infrastructure with multiple uses. Test the effect music can have on nature areas... more people? more species? Compose an interactive sound piece that coordinates with the rumble of the neighboring quarry and the beeps of their backing-up fleet of transport vehicles.



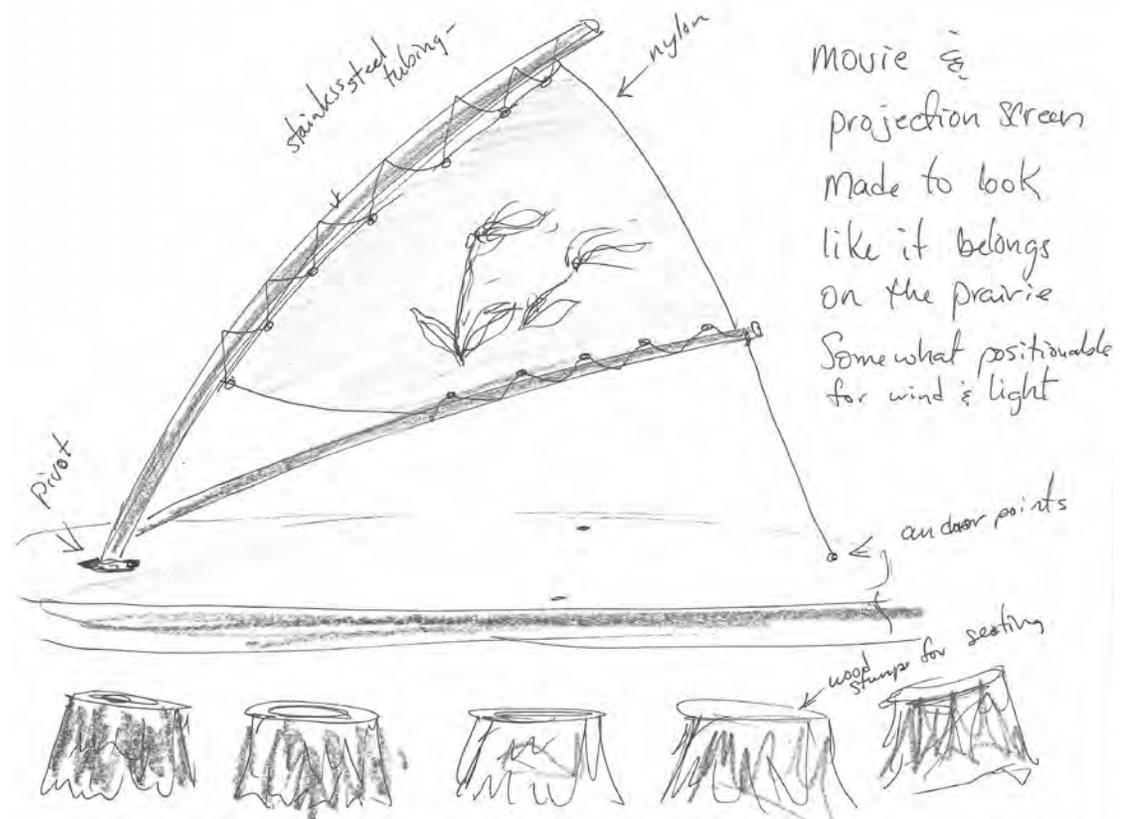
Assemble underutilized materials to provide seats and test for durability in exterior installations. And/or connect with Graypants Inc. to offer location as test site for their design shown above.

# movie on the prairie



Erect screen for drive-in or camp-chair movie viewing. Screen could be integrated with a pavilion that remains onsite, or be a temporary installation that travels elsewhere when the event is finished.

# site specific screen



**Design and fabricate a screen that responds to the specifics of the environment. Consider permanent versus seasonal installations, and how materials and structural elements will weather.**

# five senses objects



**Encourage visitors to explore specific elements to engage all five senses: sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell. What installations [signage, objects, etc] could help direct visitors to explore these senses?**

# seasonal fit trail



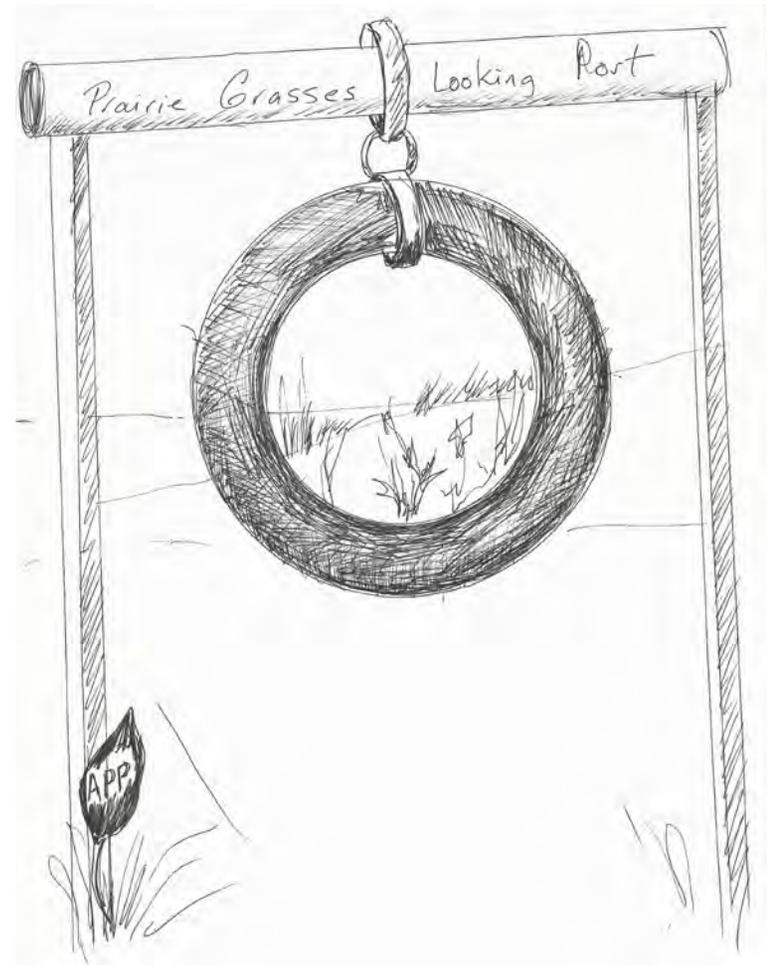
What if those staid signs of pushups + situps were adapted to engage with seasonal maintenance or other site-specific opportunities?

# accessible trails



**Consider widening existing trails to allow for increased accessibility. Cost of installation and maintenance could be offset by naming rights or other dedication and micro-funding strategies.**

# prairie portal



**Create combinatory signage + learning situations by providing viewports and other framed experiences.**

image by Tamara Isfeld

# vacant storefront signage



Use nearby local spaces to provide large temporary directional signage for nearby attractions that are underutilized.



Anna Garforth does installations of organic materials in urban settings. Consider how similar assemblies could provide event signage or other nature-based installations in this rural setting.



Consider year-round programming:

500 paper milk cartons used to build this rainbow igloo.

- fill with water + coloring [gelatin mix or food coloring]
- light with pedal-power or LEDs
- enjoy while cold
- play in rainbow puddles while it melts

Connections to neighboring residents [collect cartons!] and opportunities for intergenerational assembly.

# event shopping



**Organize a flea market fundraiser during other local events, such as WesternFest. Collaborate with other organizations to coordinate and diversify participants.**

image from <http://n0madism.files.wordpress.com/>

# feeding with friends



Collaborate with local groups to host fundraisers that benefit both organizations and initiatives.

# dance fundraiser



**Organize a pop-up fundraiser, utilizing the parking lot and other areas as dance floors. How would a disco-ball affect the prairie?**

# outdoor treasure chest



Nature-based installations can provide dioramas ~ frozen moments assembling objects of wonder, or even harvested assemblies for future fundraising events.

# viewing platforms



**Consider elements that can provide multiple uses. Provide accessories and information for various activities!**



Prototype new forms and materials for birdhouses and other structures.  
What do the birds like best?  
What else might settle in the nest?  
Catalog reuse above by Tozuo Azumi.

# neighBIRDhood



**Cluster development for habitats. How do ecosystems regulate density?  
Concept, design, and image by Andreu Carulla.**



Source fallen trees and other local underutilized materials to provide seats, or closed and lockable on-site storage.

# microfund microdecorate



Connect with assisted living centers, community centers, and other groups that would host tile making sessions. Buy a tile for \$10, and decorate for installation at the new buildings at the nature area. Material funding and community activity coordination.

# learning adventure



How can a nature area augment the learning process? Whether it is with interactive games like exquisite corpse [[exquisitecorpse.com](http://exquisitecorpse.com)], scavenger hunts, geocaching, or with built frameworks like adventure playgrounds, obstacle courses, and printmaking kits, there are many opportunities for interactive and collaborative programs at the Prairie Smoke School Nature Area. Consider how developing the game with a set of students could build relevance and regular participants!

# phenology ~ hide + seek



Periodic plant + animal cycles could be monitored by groups ~general community organizations [elder-care etc] or ones with an educational focus. Could also experiment with objects like insect hotels that may impact beneficial organisms in the ecosystem.

# signage installation



skillshare street view



interactive chalkboards on Main Street, Montevideo



pedal-powered generator

There were several ideas up for consideration, but and these were voted to be funded and implemented. The signage and skillshare have multiple community benefits and active and static art-based components. They are also replicable.

Signs were installed on the front of a vacant building on Main Street in downtown Montevideo, and the interactive phrases linked to a community-led skillshare event that happened in the lower level workshop of the same space. Constrained by the short timeframe, remote location, and prior academic commitments, students were not able to assist with the completion and installation of the signage, but project support staff from MCAD led both efforts, with assistance from Richard Handeen, Malena Handeen, Lise Olsen, James Olsen, and Audrey Arner. The signage was a friction-fit system that required no anchors or adhesive to the existing storefront.

See the “Skillshare Summary” section for more details on the event.



MY Family!

GLASS RECYCLERS

My Parents

# I am SO THANKFUL FOR FRIENDS

Sex My weiner dog lefse  
Meg  
dave  
Monte  
Main  
ST.  
LIFE

FOR ONLY FOR Burritos  
Fuel assistance  
Food Stamps

MY KIDS  
My wife!  
COMMUNITY ART Projects

MY GRANDKIDS

yummy food  
video games  
food STEVE

every breath  
Family  
LOOK, DUCKS!

family  
the roof over my head

Steve and  
MOM

my family



my running partner

GLASS CUTTING WORKSHOP ~~NEXT~~ SAT! 11/16  
THIS

# I can GIVE

Love!  
Family & friends  
Hugs, Love, DIVERSITY  
worship, SIMPLY  
CONNECTION  
FAMILIA  
HUGS!  
OR TEACH OR MAKE...  
time FRIENDSHIP  
Accordion lessons  
Sew Playing LESSONS @ 3pm  
peanut butter cottage cheese sandwiches  
curly hair  
Addresses to earn a living



ME



# skillshare summary

**MAKERSPACE.COM**  
**SKILLSHARE.COM**  
**EXCOTC.COM**  
**OURGOODS.ORG**  
**HOURWORLD.ORG**  
**CODERDOJO.COM**

A skillshare is a event where people come together to share skills, often outside of formal learning institutions. Some are linked to TimeBanking or other valuation and barter systems. Hennepin County has been hosting a similar concept: monthly Fix-it or Mend-It Clinics to empower people to fix what they have instead of buying new products. Other formats include online fee-for-service or access to learning via membership dues. Affiliation with larger networks has accelerated the use of online mechanisms that allow for diversified methods of exchange [one-on-one] and better record keeping such as hOurworld.org. Some are created for specific skills, such as coderdojo.com that offers experiential education for younger people in computer programming. New York based ourgoods.org allows exchange of various assets across three categories: spaces we have, skills we have, objects we have.



The skillshare in Montevideo emphasized hands-on learning for all ages. Community residents Richard Handeen and Lise + James Olsen attended the design workshop to see if any vacant spaces fit with their ideas and resources. Through the workshop, participants linked the language of the signs on Main Street to the one-day skillshare in the lower level of the vacant building.

The city did not require any special permitting for this event, but future events ~ particularly if food or other goods are sold ~ should be approved by the city. Signage

## PERMITS AND ACCESSIBILITY

was also a point of discussion with city officials: if there is sponsorship, the approval process may be more indepth. Available restroom facilities should also be assessed for accessibility. First-aid kits and a utility sink were on site.

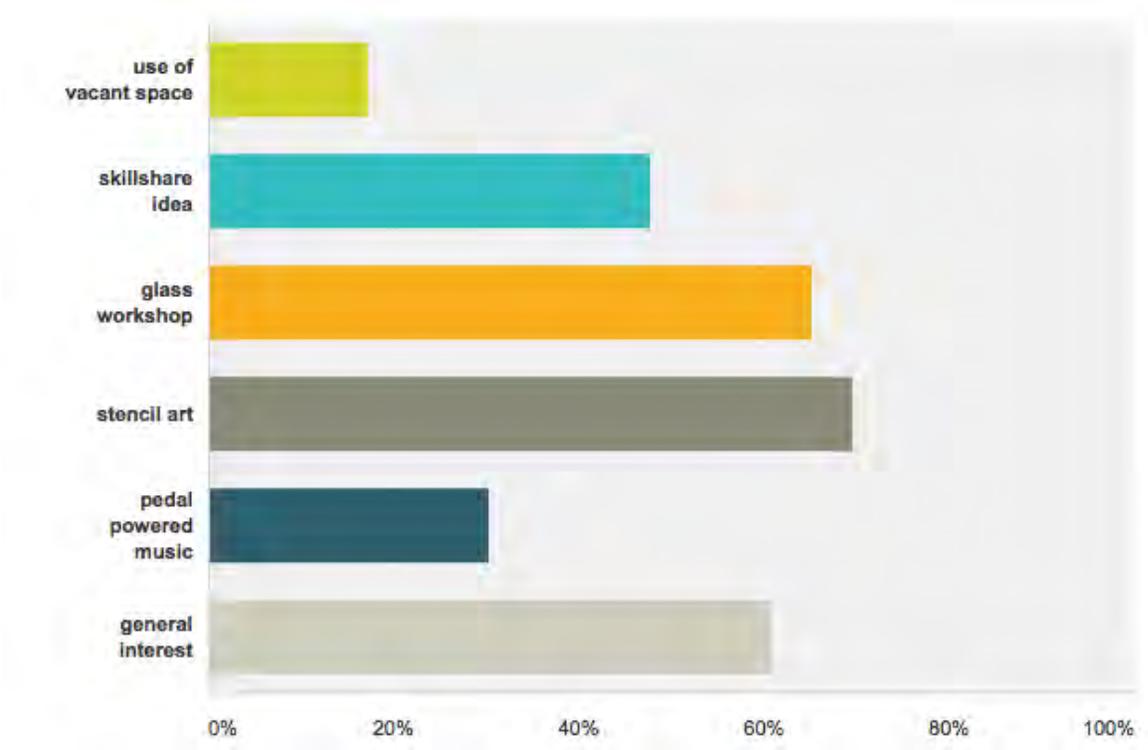
MCAD's role for the skillshare was limited to logistics, event setup, and coordinating the pedal-powered music rig from Minneapolis. Event preparations included the layout of additional ways to upcycle glass bottles [included on pages XXXXX]. Future opportunities for MCAD contributions include the creation of better press releases, posters, and other publicity for the event. Partnerships with local community organizers could provide mutually beneficial learning experiences of how to design outreach and organize innovatively by combining grassroots techniques with more tech-based urban ideas.

There were almost 50 attendees, half of whom were the youth target age group identified in the weekend design workshop. Attendees filled out a survey to determine what forms of outreach were effective, what future topics might be of interest, and most importantly, identify more people that are interested in participating or planning future skillshares.

Social media and personal connections appear to be the most successful mode of outreach for the skillshare. Attendees included families, craftspeople, professional designers, and folks that had heard about it during dinner at nearby restaurants. One attendee in the target youth demographic noted, "I would come back + bring a whole bunch of friends!" The event was designed to have activities for most ages, with an informal drop-in timeframe. This led to a casual atmosphere that allowed people to stop in briefly to see what all was going on, or to come with a group and stay for hours.



WHY DID YOU COME? check all that apply:



When asked what their favorite part was, survey respondents said:  
making a stencil design w/ a young (10 yo) attendee  
always fun to learn a new artistic skill to apply in your own creative way!  
atmosphere!  
the bikes + paint  
intergenerational community fellowship  
IT WAS ALL GOOD!

The 6-hour length of the skillshare also provided an arena for sharing plans and concepts for future skillshares, such as brainstorming how utility costs could be offset, or sharing more urban-rural resource exchanges, such as the pedal-powered generator. There is hope that these activities can grow into economic generators for residents. Upcycled bottles are being sold online and in stores as glassware for \$6-\$20 a piece. Some designs require additional materials, but result in windchimes, bird feeders, lights, or soap dispensers, priced at \$15 - \$55 per item.

A quickly conceived project can be done well when several people collaborate. It is not always about the amount of time or resources used, but how they can be used well. This provides a good baseline for evaluating the use of human resources, funding, physical assets, and impact of future projects. Clarity in relationships, particularly with safety, liability, and utilities are all important to ensuring events continue to be easy and enjoyable.



# BYOB upcycling



Simple process to upcycle wine bottles into glasses.

Necessary steps include:

- washing the bottle
- scoring + breaking
- grinding til smooth.

Other steps include, but are not limited to: etching, drinking, sharing.

# upcycling bottles



Use the bottoms for coasters or glassware, and find a use for the tops!

image from [diynetwork.com](http://diynetwork.com)

# bird feeder



Sauce bottle, base for seed display, wire, and wood mounting bracket.

# tower of tops



Stack bottle tops around a central stake to use as landscape decoration.  
Connect to water source for mini-waterfall bubbler birdbath!

image from pinterest.com

# easy squeeze



Reuse a plastic push-press from another dispenser to make an easy soap [or other liquid] dispenser.

image from pinterest.com

# pendant lighting



Use glass bottle tops as pendants.  
Various instructions + assemblies available online!

image from kelleylmoore.net

# vessels + vases



Shave off the tops and make some decanters or vases! Use denture-cleaner or a wire-brush to clean vases with small openings at the top.

# chime loops



Cut small loops for an interesting windchime or bug + bird flight obstacle course.

image from [pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com)

# landscape edging



Use glass bottles to provide edging in landscaping. Colorful + cleanable!

image from [pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com)



What do you want to make? How will you score + break it?

# self-watering planter



Flip the top inside the bottom and use a cotton wick to draw water up.

image from pinterest.com

# credits

## **COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS**

Audrey Arner  
Mike Berry  
Tom Cherveney  
Kristi Link Fernholz  
Peg Furshong  
Mary Gillespie  
Dan Handeen  
Malena Handeen  
Richard Handeen  
Ariel Herrod  
Andrew Hodny  
Arlo Handeen Jacobs

Hazel Handeen Jacobs  
Tamara Isfeld  
Ryan Meehan  
Diana Moe  
Duane Ninneman  
James + Lise Norman  
Sarina Otaibi  
Rachel Sicheneder  
Angela Steinbach  
Dixie Tilden  
Renaë Tostenson  
Nicole Zempel

## **COLLEGE PARTICIPANTS**

DeWayne Esson  
Yinfin Huang  
Kiki Kita  
Krista Leraas

Ellen McDonough  
Jennifer Sheely  
Claire Strautmanis  
Erin Wagner

## **SUPPORT STAFF**

Jay Coogan  
Kristofor Gieske  
Lindsay Larsen

Kate Mohn  
Sarah Wolbert  
Kristine Wyant

---

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