Roundabouts are a form of intersection control known primarily for their safety and capacity benefits. One sometimes overused advantage of roundabouts, however, is the placemaking opportunities they present. Through thoughtful and collaborative design, the space not dedicated to vehicle movement can be leveraged to reinforce and enhance the character of the community, to create a sense of place.

What are placeness, sense of place, and placemaking? And why are these concepts important? Placeless landscapes have no apparent connection to their surrounding communities; they could be anywhere. The opposite of placelessness is a sense of place, or a landscape that conveys a strong identity that can be perceived by residents and visitors. And placemaking is a planning and design process informed by the physical, cultural, and social identities of a place to create a landscape that conveys these concepts. Are these concepts important because they affect the relationship between people and places, encouraging community involvement, building civic pride, and supporting tourism.

How does a community decide to embrace the opportunities presented by a roundabout’s geometry to develop a sense of place? What are the factors that must be weighed and balanced? To better understand the many, and varied, reasons for placemaking a sense of place at roundabouts, interviews were conducted with owners (municipal agencies), arts councils, civil engineers, and landscape architects. The results of those interviews are summarized below.

**PROJECT**

**PURPOSE**

The first step in researching sense of place and the factors contributing to placemaking was to define these two concepts. First, sense of place is a frequently used, interdisciplinary term with a range of definitions. For the purposes of this discussion, landscapes with a sense of place are those that convey a strong identity that can be perceived by residents and visitors. Closely related to sense of place is the concept of placemaking, a planning and design process informed by the physical, cultural, and social identities of a place. Sense of place is an attribute of the landscape; placemaking is the purposeful design of a landscape with a sense of place.

We next considered the “who, what, when, where, why, and how” of placemaking. Who was involved in placemaking decisions? What elements were considered? Where were sites located? Why did owners elect to pursue placemaking? How were placemaking improvements financed?

In considering the above questions, several others naturally followed.

What proportion of roundabouts in your community have been developed to place greater value on sense of place and employed placemaking techniques frequently?

What lessons were learned from the placemaking process?

What advantages do placemaking elements bring to a roundabout? How are they conceived and implemented?

What are the biggest challenges encountered when considering and implementing placemaking activities?

Was the community happy with the placemaking efforts?

What are the reasons for the success or failure of a placemaking project, and why?

**FINDINGS**

Who was involved in placemaking decisions?

- Owner – Project Manager typically had significant input. Other Owner representatives (Public Works Director, Mayor, City Council, etc.) typically wanted to be kept informed but their approval was not required.
- Arts Councils – When involved, their participation came after the roundabout was constructed. They had agreements with Owners that gave them authority to make decisions about art.
- Public – The public was often informed of the project and placemaking efforts, but was not actively involved in decision making.

What elements were considered?

- Enhanced landscaping was the most common element selected by communities to enhance the landscape beyond the minimal treatments of rounded earth, seeding, and gravel.
- Owners were typically presented with two to three landscape alternatives. Alternatives included a wide variety of elements such as native and ornamental plantings, non-vegetated landscape treatments (wood, rock, decorative hardscaping, stel furnishings, decorative glass, and pedestrian scale illumination, signage, and suggestions for public art. When public art was desired, a call for artists was issued by and coordinated through the local arts council.

When was placemaking considered for inclusion into the project?

- Pre-Design - Gateways were typically identified as locations where a sense of place was desired prior to roundabout design.
- During Design - Sometimes placemaking elements were introduced to the roundabout was being designed.
- After Construction – Previously constructed roundabouts typically possessed some form of placemaking, often landscaping, and were then retrofitted with public art installations.

Where were gateways included?

- Gateway locations were the most popular locations.
- The City of Bend in conjunction with Art in Public Places, however, installs art in roundabouts all over the city and makes an effort to distribute art throughout the community.

Why did the owner elect to pursue placemaking elements?

- Owners wanted to create a welcoming landscape for the community and their visitors.
- Several owners used the opportunity to create a sense of place as part of the “sales pitch” when proposing the idea of the roundabout.

How were placemaking improvements financed?

- Most placemaking elements were paid for by local funds or grants. Two notable exceptions were:
  - The City of Skagit County used water quality treatment funds to pay for plantings in bioswale cells.
  - Art in Public Places, a non-profit organization, locally, then gifts public art to the City of Bend.

What proportion of roundabouts in your community have been developed to place greater value on sense of place and employed placemaking techniques frequently?

- Most interviewees have multiple roundabouts in their communities and at least one with placemaking elements.

- Communities with more roundabouts tended to place greater value on sense of place and employed placemaking techniques frequently.

What elements of a community’s character were considered when developing a sense of place?

- The most common connections were to community culture, history, and natural environment.

What were safety concerns surrounding placemaking elements expressed? How were they addressed?

- Vandalism is often a concern but has not been a significant problem.
- Maintenance crews sometimes lack the time and resources to care for elaborate landscaping, creating a partnership with a nearby school, nursery, garden club, or other civic group can be a good way to reduce owner costs and build community pride.
- Engaging in public outreach is a powerful tool in gaining community buy-in, but do as early as possible.

What lessons were learned from the placemaking process?

- Security funding.
- Creating a realistic maintenance plan and budget.

Was the community happy with the placemaking efforts?

- Placemaking efforts were generally well received by the community after installation.

What are the reasons for the success or failure of a placemaking project, and why?

- An Opportunity to Create a Sense of Place