

September 21, 2021

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Collaboration Key to Reimagined Public Space

The Civic Center Plaza's stunning makeover required extensive collaboration across the organization and community. That cross-pollination was rather unique for a capital improvement project, but it proved necessary to the success in reimagining this public space.

Constructed in the 1960s, the plaza consisted mostly of a concrete slab, and it had fallen into disrepair. A simple remove and replace option was possible, but rather, staff presented city council with several options to improve this high profile area.

It all started with gathering stakeholder input to re-envision what the space could be. Given his experience in helping bring two beautifully designed, award-winning golf courses to Elgin, Golf Operations Director Mike Lehman was tapped to help get the project rolling. He managed the conceptual design phase of the project with architects from Dewberry Engineers, Inc. and Hitchcock Design Group.

"A charrette was conducted with City staff and project stakeholders who represented the Appellate Court, downtown, cultural arts, historic preservation, tourism, transportation and mobility, parks and recreation and sustainability," said Lehman. "Everyone was asked what programming elements were important to them and how the design could tie other parts of the community together."

The result? Three design concepts were developed for city council to consider. The most basic option to remove and replace the concrete came at a cost of nearly \$1 million. Other concepts included more green space and programming elements, with higher price tags coming with the more amenities and features included. Ultimately, city council chose a fiscally conscious option that would both transform the

layout and allow for expanded uses of the plaza.

Following his appointment to public works director, Mike Pubentz took over lead on the project. Mike brought to the project his exceptional capabilities in planning and directing the City's capital programs. He welcomed the opportunity to manage this project that would deviate from the road rehabilitation and resurfacing work that he regularly oversees.



MIKE PUBENTZ
PUBLIC WORKS
DIRECTOR

"From a construction standpoint, the project was not too challenging, but what I found most interesting was the design," said Pubentz. "It allows you to view the plaza as an entire space, but also, its features successfully break it down into several, more intimate spaces."

Staff from several other departments were also called upon to collaborate and bring the project to life.

Before the reconstruction began, Water Director Eric Weiss and his team seized the opportunity to replace and relocate the dated water main that lived below the concrete pad. The water department team ensured this work was completed in time for reconstruction contract work to begin.

Historic Preservation Planner Christen Sundquist assisted in the planning to preserve certain elements and ensure the finished product complimented the mid-century design of the adjacent buildings in the complex. Christen also provided a brief biography of former City Manager Robert Brunton a.k.a. "Bob the Builder," which can be found on the new monument at the southeast entrance to the plaza.



Butch Wilhemi, cultural center director, was called on to provide perspective on needs for the events at and access to the Hemmens. This was especially valuable during the construction phase, to minimize the impact to patrons.

Parks and Recreation Director Maria Cumpata and Superintendent of Parks and Facilities Greg Hulke offered their expertise in land use, landscaping components like plants and irrigation, as well as uses of the space that could be tied to nearby recreation at the Centre, on the Fox River and the bike path.

Engineer Amanda Olsen assisted Pubentz in managing the project, coordinating logistics with various departments, contractors and subcontractors to keep everything moving.



AMANDA OLSEN
ENGINEER
PUBLIC WORKS

"I especially enjoyed working with the community development department to make sure all permits were issued and inspections completed," said Olsen. "There were a lot of moving pieces on this project, and I was responsible for making sure everything was in working and acceptable condition at the end of the day."

Assistant to the City Manager Amanda Harris also stepped in to help manage the project, representing the City Manager's Office as well as interests of the arts and special events. In this role, she learned a lot and

got to work with departments she doesn't regularly interact with. She saw a unique energy brought by the project to those involved.

"This was an opportunity to work on a project different than day to day duties, and everyone understood that it will have a lasting impact for the community. Those involved advocated for what would best suit the Elgin community," she said. "This project established new working relationships that open up for future collaborations. It feels like my team is even bigger and more resourceful than before."



AMANDA HARRIS
ASSISTANT TO THE
CITY MANAGER

The plaza officially opened to the public on August 22 with the Welcome back, Elgin! event where the public enjoyed arts and activities in the newly renovated space. The opening has brought a lot of excitement to those involved in the reconstruction, too.

"It's rewarding to see the completed project" said Olsen, who especially enjoys the view of the space from the riverwalk. "We've achieved our goal in tying together the municipal complex with the river, bike path and central business district."

"The flexibility of the space allows for a multitude of uses," said Harris. "In less than a month of its opening, we have already hosted several events, including Welcome back, Elgin, Elgin Fringe Festival, Family Fringe and the September 11 Remembrance Ceremony."

Harris notes that she's particularly excited about the future of the space, too. "A new mural will be installed in the coming weeks near the lower level of the Hemmens, and there's already talk of when and how we can provide music in the space more regularly, such as the live stream on speakers that took place during Welcome back, Elgin. The possibilities are endless."

The icing on the cake? Following the plaza's reopening, the City was officially notified that it was set to receive a \$2 million grant from the State of Illinois for costs associated with the plaza's reconstruction.

"This project incorporated a lot of thoughtful design, collaboration and fiscal responsibility—truly a tremendous improvement that's created a positive and welcoming public space that the community can be proud of," said Pubentz.





STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES & PRIORITIES

CORE VALUES

COLLABORATION



DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION



INNOVATION



STEWARDSHIP



DEFINED GOALS

CITY OF CHOICE



HIGH PERFORMING,
FINANCIALLY STABLE
GOVERNMENT



SAFE AND HEALTHY
COMMUNITY



PROMOTIONS - CONGRATULATIONS!

Adam Schuessler – Deputy Chief – Police

Jim Lullo – Police Commander – Police

Dave Lesko – Police Commander – Police

Kevin Senne – Police Commander – Police

Todd Pavoris – Police Lieutenant – Police

Travis Hooker – Police Lieutenant – Police

Jim Raap – Police Sergeant – Police

Randy Fries – Police Sergeant – Police

Daniel McNanna – Police Sergeant – Police

Darin Hood – Police Sergeant – Police

Miriam Duffy – Police Sergeant - Police

Heidi Holthusen – Public Safety Communications Supervisor – Police

Miriam Jimenez – Police Officer - Police

Yoana Davalos – Community Service Officer – Police

Karina Nava – Assistant City Manager – CMO

Amanda Harris – Assistant to the City Manager – CMO

Robert Anderson – Utility Worker – Water
Sam Abruscato – Utility Maintenance Mechanic - Water
James Gabioud – Instrumentation Service Worker – Water
Michael Martino – Police Sergeant – Police
David Olkowski – Fire Lieutenant/Paramedic – Fire
Dennis McKee – Sports Complex Athletic Supervisor – Parks and Recreation
Priscila Medrano – Administrative Assistant II – Parks and Recreation
Victor Saldana – Bilingual Clerk Typist – Parks and Recreation
Diana Asod – Land Management Administrative Aide – Land Management
Dan Lipscomb – Equipment Operator – Land Management
Claudia Rempala – Administrative Assistant II – Public Services
John "Smooch" Medina – Technical Supervisor - Hemmens Cultural Center
Oscar Hernandez – Part Time Maintenance Worker – Building Maintenance
Enrique Rodriguez – Building Maintenance Worker – Building Maintenance
Jenny Lara – Citizen Advocate I – from Parks and Recreation to Finance

NEW EMPLOYEES - WELCOME!

Mikala Larson – Sustainability Analyst – City Manager's Office
Juan Magana – Sanitarian – Neighborhood Services Code Compliance
Alma Johnson – 311 Citizen Advocate I – Neighborhood Services 311
Laura Vargas – Citizen Advocate – Neighborhood Services 311
Andriana Hernandez – Citizen Advocate – Finance
Jeremy Sauer – Building Inspector – Community Development
Fabiola Fernandez – ITS Information Technology Specialist – ITS
Bria O'Neill – Licensed Environmental Health Practitioner – Neighborhood Services
Ryan Drake – Crime Analyst – Police
Nataly Correa – Bilingual Victim Services Interventionist – Police
Michael Amelio – Police Officer – Police
Jeremy Flentge – Police Officer – Police
Courtney Fowler – Police Officer – Police
Kayla Heal – Police Officer – Police
Christian Heuchert – Police Officer – Police
Blake Huffmon – Police Officer – Police
Tyler Jacobs – Police Officer – Police
Stephanie Morales – Police Officer – Police
Jasmine Munoz – Police Officer – Police
Josue Quintana – Police Officer – Police
Arely Ramos – Police Officer – Police
Clarissa Ramos – Police Officer – Police
Allison Reynolds – Police Officer – Police
Hannah Rodriguez – Police Officer – Police
Robert Tumminaro – Police Officer – Police
Brianna Williams – Police Officer – Police
Hollis Healy – Part Time Records Clerk – Police
Sarah Lahl – Police Records Clerk – Police
Brynn Sainato – Police Records Clerk – Police
Veronica Suarez – Public Safety Telecommunicator – Police
Bernice Tinajero – Public Safety Telecommunicator – Police
Giancarlo Drenzo – Firefighter – Fire
Kathryn Foster – Firefighter – Fire
William Kennedy – Firefighter – Fire

Ryan Latvaitis – Firefighter – Fire
Jose Lopez-Pacheco – Firefighter – Fire
Shannon Murphy – Firefighter – Fire
Dusty Psaila – Firefighter – Fire
Sergio Rodriguez – Firefighter – Fire
Mark Schultz – Firefighter – Fire
Dakota Stevens – Firefighter – Fire

Adam Hodge – Land Management Grounds Worker – Parks and Recreation

Jonnathan Ryan – Utility Maintenance Technician – Water

Corbin Kozai – Water Treatment Operator I – Water

Eric Lindgren – Greens Worker – Golf

**This issue includes promotions and new employees since February 12, 2021.*

RECOGNITIONS

[Click here to view an extensive list of employee recognitions from mid-February through mid-September.](#)

SHARE YOUR STORY

Who doesn't love baby animals? And who especially doesn't love hearing about them being rescued and reunited with their mama? Early in July, a call came into 911 which was then transferred to 311 about a distressed duck in a business park's parking lot. Her ducklings had fallen into the sewer. Neighborhood Services Manager - 311 Jennie Phillips and Citizen Advocate Grisel Sandoval quickly contacted sewer on call. Matt Waterman, Equipment Operator and Kevin Smart, Utility Worker arrived on-scene quickly. After a few minutes and some careful net work, the ducklings were out of the sewer and happily back with their mother. All appeared uninjured and went for a swim with their mom within a few minutes.



This successful rescue happened thanks to the quick thinking and teamwork of multiple City departments and caring community members. The heartwarming story was pitched to the Daily Herald, which in turn wrote a [pretty cute story](#), and several other news agencies picked it up as well. Photos were also shared on the City's Facebook and Instagram accounts, and the response was overwhelming. In fact, it may be the most engaging post in recent history with 975 comments, reactions and shares on Facebook and over 400 engagements on Instagram.

This past week, a 5 year old named Iker got an inside look at the Lord Street combined sewer separation project. While at a



the Lord Street combined sewer separation project. While at a storm drain art location, Iker's grandmother approached Assistant to the City Manager Amanda Harris and described his fascination with water infrastructure and construction. Amanda set them up with Water Director Eric Weiss who then planned for Iker to come out to the construction site, see the equipment and learn about the storm sewers. Eric and Iker are pictured near a storm drain pipe, along with Water Distribution Inspector Doug Bergdahl and Jerry Aguilar from Burns & McDonnell. The photo with a summary of Iker's experience was shared on the City's Facebook and Instagram pages, and it received a lot of love.



We want to see and share your pictures and videos. They may be used on the City's social media channels, website and in other hiring and promotional materials. [Send us photos from your workday and we can help share your story.](#)

COMMUNITY PARTNERS



[The Downtown Elgin Weekly Spotlight Top Ten \(9/16/21\)](#)



[Community News](#)



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[Adventure in the Fox River Valley](#)

[Quarterly Report](#)



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ELGIN, Illinois

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