This paper reviews the best practices for the design, maintenance, and programming of civic assets—a grouping of topics that recognizes the full life cycle of the reinvestment process from vision to activation. The research and interviews focused on the trends and best practices of design inclusion and excellence, as well as the maintenance regimens and programs that sustain the investment over the long-term. For programming, the research and interviews examined the ways in which parks, recreation centers, and libraries can be used in a way that benefits their local communities.

The largest and most prevalent issue that rises to the surface when considering **design** is the question of design equity: who is the design for, and more importantly, where does the momentum for the project originate? These questions should be asked at the beginning of any design process for a civic asset, and revisited throughout the process to ensure that the design authentically responds to the concerns of the local community. Most complaints from community members arise when members feel that they are being told what is good for them, rather than asked and heeded. In other words, the design for a civic asset should not be imposed on a neighborhood, but should instead begin with a genuine engagement with the neighbors' input and interests. Without that foundation, community members may be forced to channel their objections to the overall process into criticisms of the design itself. Thus, the design of the civic asset and the equity of the reinvestment are inextricably linked, and their success is interdependent.

From the initial question of design equity, there are several avenues to explore when considering the latest in design trends and excellence. (In addition to considerations of architectural quality, several other programs exist to evaluate excellence in improved user health, increased green infrastructure, increased social cohesion, and diversity of use.) The focus of this research emphasized larger programs of rehabilitation (rather than case studies of smaller-scale, individual building or site reinvestments). For interventions at that scale, there are a number of national and place-specific standards and guidelines for design excellence, although some of the national programs have been called into question based on their certification process. Nevertheless, the General Services Administration (GSA) standard of excellence for federal government-led projects offers a clear model for many smaller, city-level excellence programs.

This concept of design excellence is also present in the conversation about design competitions, which remain a popular option for many public projects. People inside the design field and in the public sector often view these competitions as an opportunity to encourage more creative problem-solving with fewer constraints. These competitions also offer the advantage of publicity for both the project and the design team finalists.

However, design competitions also demand significant investments of time from all of the competing teams, without any guarantee of a reward or commission—an imbalance that has elicited much criticism. In a survey conducted by the Architectural Record and the Van Alen Institute in 2015, respondents reported dissatisfaction with the compensation, transparency, and diversity of design competitions: they want to be paid for more of their time, to have better access to the actual client, and to work with teams that are more diverse. Transforming the design of competitions will not happen overnight, and it will take careful planning, but a more effective and worthwhile competition process would be valuable for the creative reinvestment in a city's civic assets.

For those projects without the resources to merit an entire design competition, some cities are increasingly looking to create a "kit of parts" to better facilitate input from community members for the design process. Applied to the public right-of-way, libraries, or parks, these tools can help to demonstrate the design vision for a place before moving forward with implementation. These "kits of parts" or "tool sets" do not rely on elaborate renderings; rather, their graphics are simple and can help to communicate clear differences between various design iterations. This approach is not unlike the approach of the creative placemaking movement. That said, it is unclear to what extent these kits of parts have been actually used by cities for reinvestment projects, or how their results compare to other, more in-depth community engagement design conversations.

For all infrastructure, but libraries in particular, the expectation today is that a single building will not serve a single purpose. Instead, these assets are often outfitted with space for books, community meetings, access to technology, cafes, co-working spaces, offices for community service organizations—or all of the above. These changes in design reflect organizational shifts in the way that libraries, recreation centers, and parks are resourced and viewed today, establishing a landing point for longstanding and new community members to have numerous needs met in a single place. This is a trend across many civic assets, although parks are the least likely to be included in this "co-location" conversation.

Libraries, meanwhile, have proven to be a desirable amenity and anchor institution for many developers creating mixed-use projects. They can draw both residents and commercial tenants, and the development often benefit from the co-located services that libraries can offer, including job training, food assistance, or other programs. In this model of civic asset co-location, the library serves as an increasingly necessary community gathering space that can serve the local neighborhood in more ways than one. Ironically, in some ways, this co-location with community space is actually a return to the design features of the early-20th century Carnegie libraries, which mandated the inclusion of community space for any Carnegie-funded building. Thus, the latest design trends of our current "third period of libraries" are in many ways a reversion to the design trends of a century ago.

This co-location within libraries also recognizes the other trend that shapes the design of civic assets, as technology shifts library collections online. The switch to digital materials and collections changes the physical demands of these civic assets, freeing up some space that was once devoted to bookshelves but also necessitating additional space for digital resources and technical support staff.

As a civic asset is designed or redesigned, its ongoing **maintenance** should be an integral part of the planning process. Perceptions of maintenance can have a serious impact on public trust and can quickly disintegrate a citizen's engagement with municipal government. For this reason, the design process should take into account what the city can afford to build *and* what it can afford to maintain.

In 2017, the Center for Active Design released its Assembly Civic Engagement Survey with funding from the Knight Foundation. This survey queried respondents about park maintenance, shedding light on various levels of investment and the corresponding maintenance necessary to retain civic trust. The survey found that some amenities such as dog parks, community gardens, and informational signs improve civic trust, no matter their condition. Other features such as fountains, public art, and seating or tables can increase trust if they are maintained, but do not decrease that trust if they fall into poor condition. Those amenities that demand the largest civic investment,

including bathrooms, playgrounds, recreation centers, and sports fields, result in negative civic trust if they are not maintained. Too often, ongoing maintenance costs are the first budget items to be eliminated in budget shortfalls; when programming costs are cut, too, then these civic assets suffer the double loss of ongoing upkeep and use. This contributes to the further degradation of the civic asset, and the costs of reinvestment may quickly seem like a waste.

Many parks, libraries, and recreations centers are maintained in part or in full by local Friends groups. (See the Governance and Partnerships topic for more on the structure of these groups.) These partners may organize regular workdays and run other programming to train community members and take responsibility for the care of the parks. For those groups that are formal 501(c)(3) organizations, they can collect money to fund maintenance and programming, and they may even take responsibility for capital building campaigns that cannot be funded by the City budget. This maintenance model can engage local community members in the care of their own civic asset, and can alleviate pressure on the city's bottom line.

However, this model also sets up a structural inequity for the maintenance of a city's civic assets, as those parks, libraries, and recreation centers located in more affluent communities will ultimately receive more funding from their wealthy neighbors. Meanwhile, the civic assets in lower-income neighborhoods will receive less support from both public and private sources, as their community members cannot afford the same level of local fundraising.

As another trend in the management of public resources and civic assets, some cities have privatized the maintenance of their parks, libraries, or recreation centers. This privatization is not an inherently bad option, but in too many cases, public agencies agree to aggressive terms by private entities in order to ensure the necessary infusion of cash. This includes selling ownership in the civic asset, or agreeing to inequitable management practices in order to offset costs. The immediate need to plug holes in the city budget often puts the municipal government in a difficult position, resulting in terms that are too favorable for the private partner and may jeopardize the future earning potential or civic ownership of these public assets. Short-term fiscal demands should not compromise the long-term survival of a city's civic assets.

Planning for the design and maintenance of civic assets are vital parts of the reinvestment process, complemented by the crucial inclusion of **programming**. Active use of these public spaces ensures that undesired behaviors are deterred, and that local communities benefit from these investments. Programming requires equally thoughtful planning, however, as permitted uses and permitting processes can create or reinforce barriers of inequity. Researchers have begun to explore the ways in which sanctioned uses can be a barrier to entry for communities of color, in the same way that privatized use of public space can create cost barriers for the use of a community's own civic assets. For these reasons, programming a civic asset is not a neutral exercise; it carries significant responsibility to the local community to ensure that a public resource is "for them."

The design, maintenance, and programming of a civic asset are interconnected planning challenges to ensure the vitality of the reinvestment process. They cannot be un-linked, and they pose necessary questions at each stage of the reinvestment process. Taken together, these three areas of inquiry can respond to community needs in a way that builds civic infrastructure for the long term.