

# URBAN DESIGN STRATEGIES



HUMANITIES PLAZA

## 6.5.1 A GROWING CONSTITUENCY FOR DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT

The fractures to the district surrounding the Basilica that were imposed during the federal highway expansion era are clear and present, visible right from the Basilica's front step. The imposing infrastructure of the I-94 viaduct directly abuts the west side of the campus, and the raised deck shades the surface parking lot underneath, where cars are parked between structural columns, and the more remote corners are utilized as occasional homeless encampments.

The neighborhood and institutions surrounding the viaduct have long sought improvements to the underpass, starting more than a decade ago with the combined grassroots efforts of Citizens for a Loring Park Community (CLPC), the neighborhood association. Their goals for improvement were memorialized in the neighborhood's Small Area Plan, and were then adopted by the City in its thematic Downtown Public Realm Framework Plan. More recently, stakeholders including CLPC, the Lowry Hill Neighborhood Association, and district stakeholders including cultural and religious institutions, schools, and



WAVE PATH

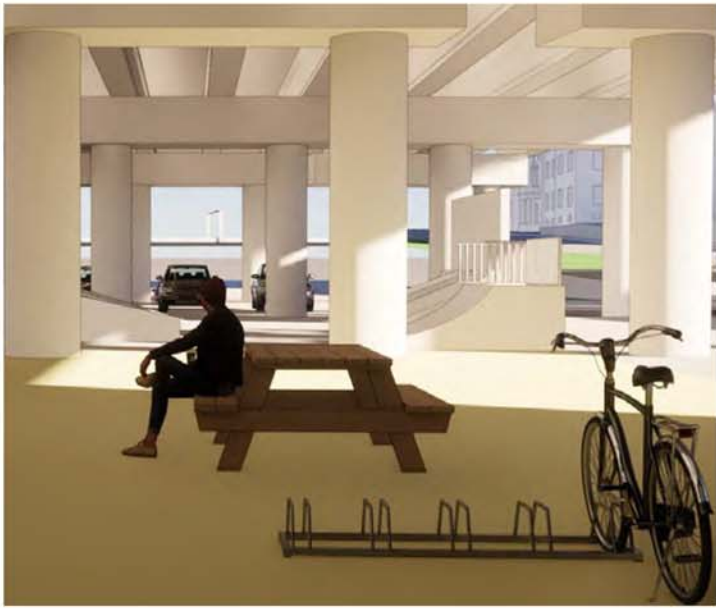
businesses have formed the Henn-Lyn Crossing coalition led by Green Minneapolis, to advocate for greening at the underpass. That coalition is pursuing resources for a yet-to-be determined near term improvement such as column wraps.

## 6.5.2 LEGIBILITY AT THE DISTRICT SCALE

At the district and site scale, legibility can be gained by tying in to the regional toolkit by asking: How do regional concepts of Path, Place, and Storytelling become present at the district and site scale? In addition, more granular and specific urban design improvements are necessary in order to achieve specific goals.

### A Difficult Urban Context

The immediate urban context of the Basilica is very challenging from the perspective of creating people-friendly paths and places. The I-94 viaduct and underpass abut the west side of the campus. On the north side is the 94/394 interchange. To the east, the back side of the Minneapolis College Parking Ramp.



INTERIM PLAZA

### New Connections: The Opportunity for Urban Design

The south side of the campus has the potential to become more humane, with more granular as occupiable programmed space, and more iconic, as the place where the monumental facade of the Basilica presides. This side of campus is also in closest proximity to civic gathering spaces such as Loring Park and the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden. Loring Corners holds the other corner, with its historic facade and creative tech tenants and visitors. Despite the very large and wide intersection, which most urbanists would consider inhospitable to pedestrians due to the slip-lane condition and wide crossings, this moment has the best "bones" to build on from an urban design standpoint, and offers the most viable strategy for achieving legible community connection and activation.

### Near and Mid Term Strategy

The urban design moves that are proposed here and described in the pages that follow are near to mid term strategies, with real potential for implementation in the 5-10 year horizon with dedicated planning and advocacy. However, there is potential to do even more to heal the district.



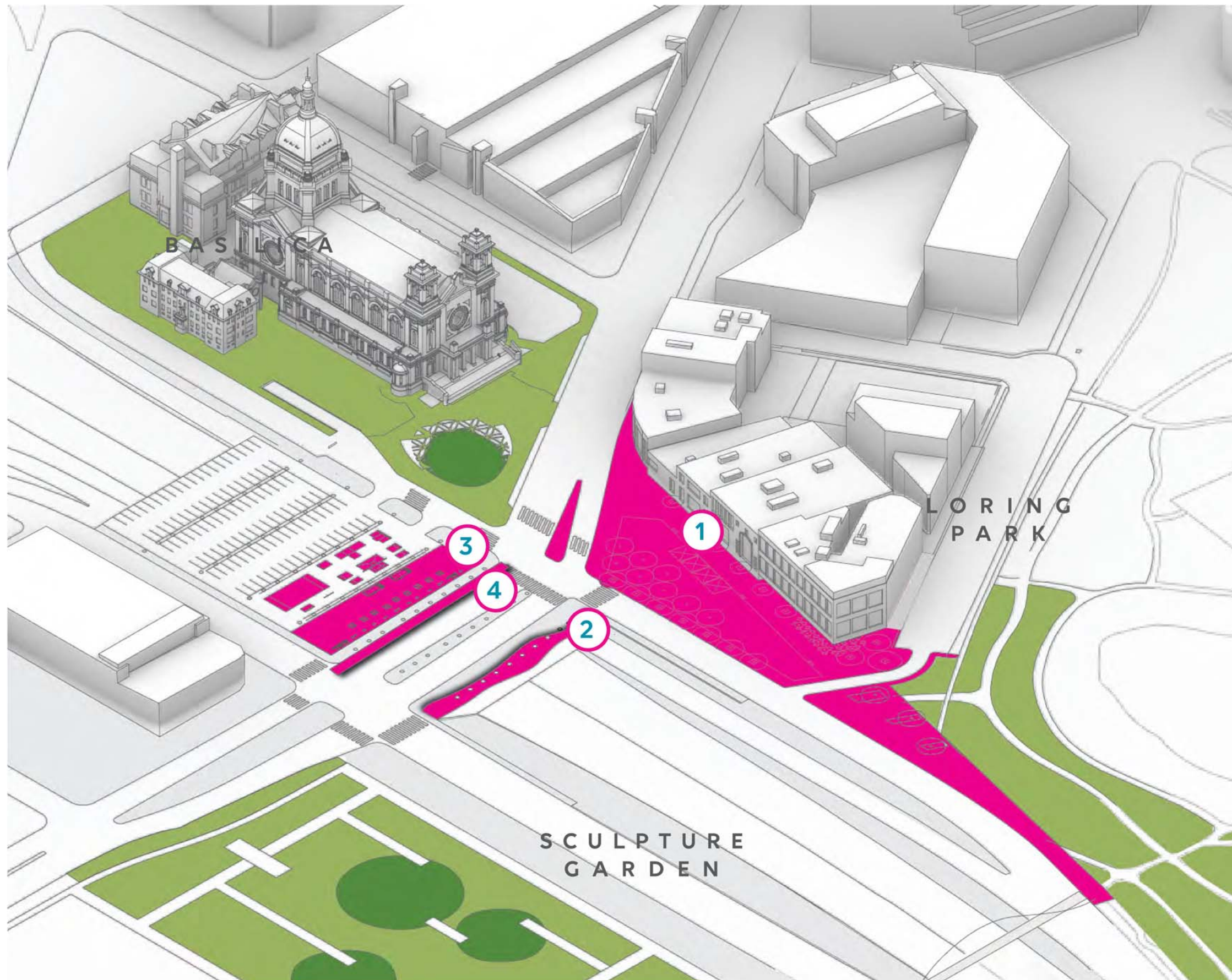
MIRROR STRIP

### Long Term Strategy

When the freeway segment abutting the Basilica ages out, it should be removed. More specifically, the elevated deck should be removed, and the I-94 tunnel should be extended, enabling the freeway to move through the district beneath the ground. Achieving that goal will require constituency, and an adopted plan recommending the viaduct's removal and providing justification. That adopted plan must then be championed by the City of Minneapolis.

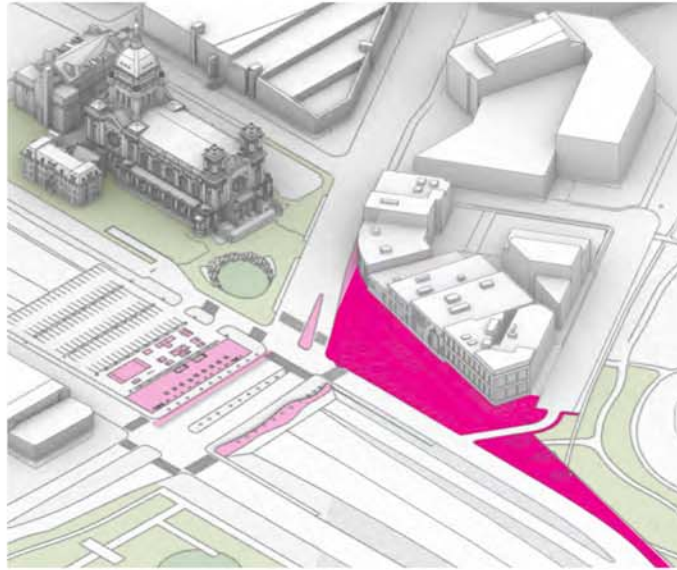
This is no small lift, but is certainly possible. The Basilica could join with district stakeholders and neighborhood associations to create a district plan, which is beyond the scope of the current campus master planning effort. The infrastructure is more than 50 years old, and with MNDOT already in the midst of its "Rethinking 94" study, now is the time for thinking big. For that reason, creation of a plan that could be adopted as City policy should be strongly considered.





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- 2 WAVE PATH
- 3 UNDERPASS ACTIVATION
- 4 GATEWAY ART INSTALLATION





6.5.3

## HUMANITIES PLAZA

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

The intersection on Hennepin Avenue in front of the Basilica is complex and large. The wide and arcing right turn lane configuration is known as a "slip lane," and it allows cars to move faster through their turn. Turning configurations like this within an urban area presents challenges for pedestrian safety, and is out of vogue for good reason in cities now striving to create livable and complete streets. In addition to the slip lane, the intersection is very wide, which creates a unique set of challenges for elderly or less able pedestrians.

The City of Minneapolis has adopted a complete streets policy prioritizing pedestrians and those with accessibility concerns as the most important mode in the right of way. This policy encourages street design that makes the public right of way a place for people, not simple an engineering solution for vehicular movements. Intersections featuring right turn slip lanes like this have recently been reconstructed by the City of Minneapolis for precisely this reason. When this intersection meets the City's conditions for reconstruction and resurfacing, it would be natural to expect that they would seriously consider transforming it into a T-intersection with enhanced pedestrian facilities.

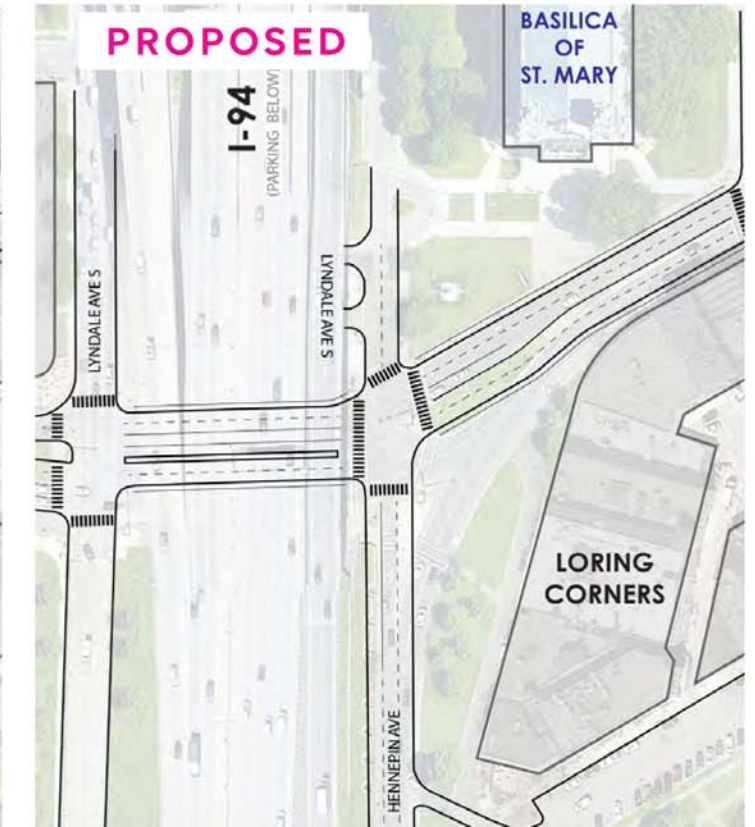
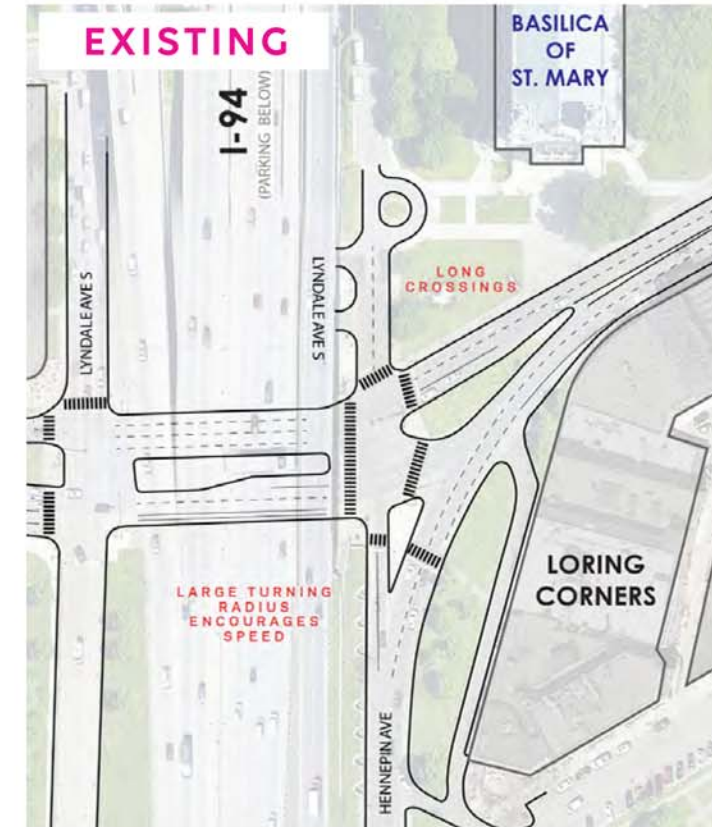
### URBAN DESIGN STRATEGY

The proposed urban design strategy is to replace the slip lane configuration with a T-intersection, creating a much safer crossing condition for pedestrians and bikes.

The new configuration also reclaims and consolidates approximately 1 acre of land from the patchwork of existing lanes and medians, creating a new programmable public space dubbed "Humanities Plaza."

The plaza benefits from the iconic facade of the Basilica on it's north side, the historic and activating storefrontage of Loring Corners holding it's east side, and a strong pedestrian connection to Loring Park on its south side.

The creation of a significant public gathering space at the foot of the Basilica will create enormous potential for district and institutional identity, activation, and placemaking.











6.5.4

## WAVE PATH

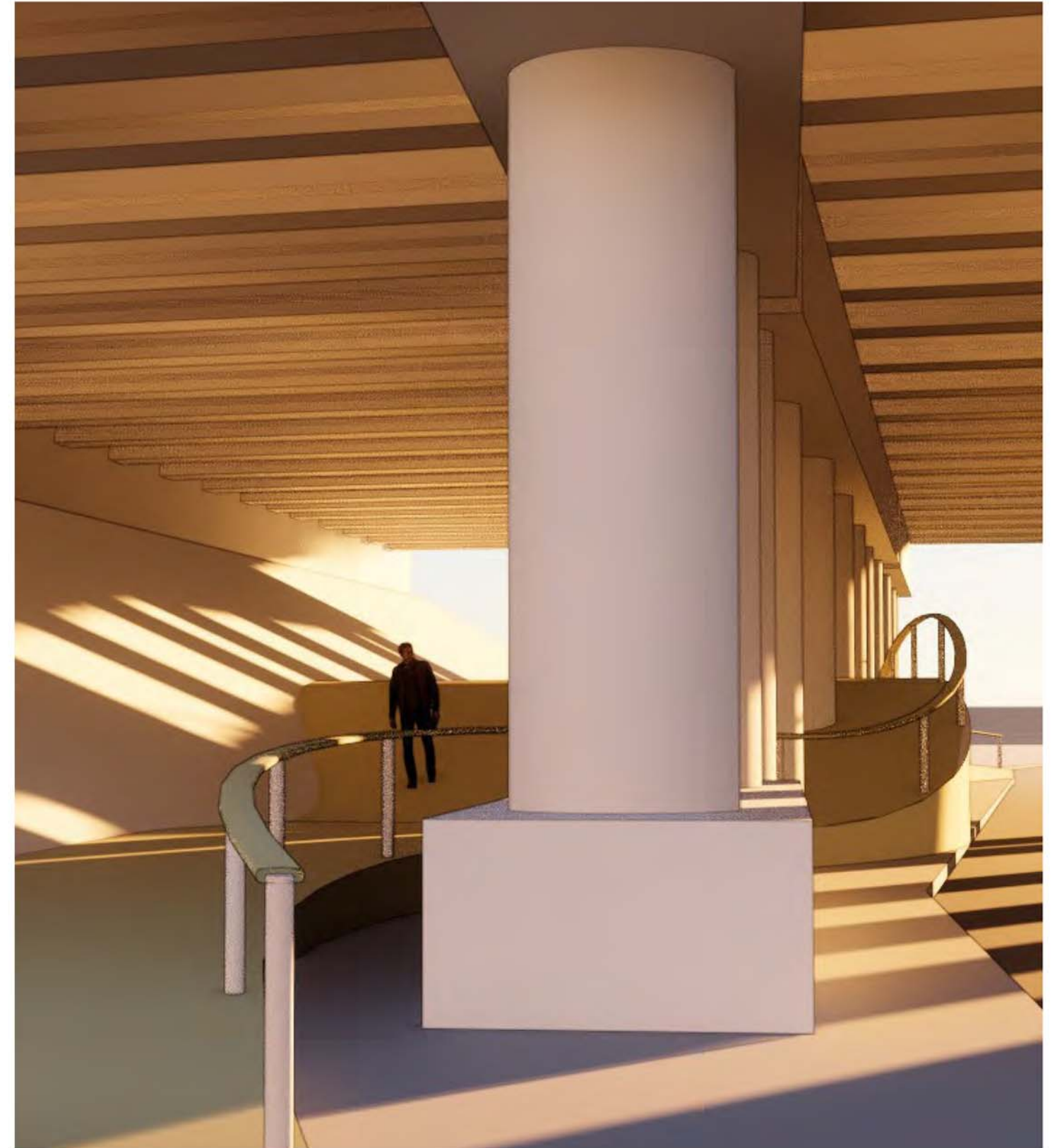
### PROBLEM STATEMENT

Overcoming the psychological and physical barrier of the I-94 underpass has been a concern of both Loring Park and Lowry neighborhood associations for a decade, and is a common priority for other district stakeholders. Recommendations to improve the underpass appear in multiple adopted plans, including the Loring Park Neighborhood Master Plan (2013), the Downtown Public Realm Framework Plan (2016). A coalition has been working with Green Minneapolis on a greening initiative called Hennepin Lyndale Crossroads, but to date there is no specific plan for improvements to the underpass.

### URBAN DESIGN STRATEGY

The underpass is an important gateway to downtown, and connects the theater district and the Basilica with the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden and Dunwoody. Importantly, in 2023 it will also be a primary corridor for transit riders moving to and from the Basset Creek Valley LRT Station. As such, it will rise as a priority among the bike and pedestrian communities.

The proposed installation of a "wave path" will create a sculptural link between future Humanities Plaza and the Sculpture Garden. The undulating form will be a sensory experience that will bring people into their bodies, and the material quality will be audibly and experientially different from the concrete sidewalk, creating a sense of place and bodily awareness. The crossing should be safe and well lit.



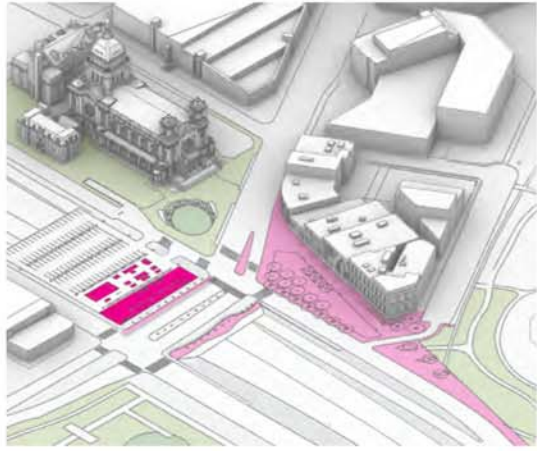
WAVE PATH | VIEW FROM HUMANITIES PLAZA TOWARD THE SCULPTURE GARDEN





WAVE PATH | VIEW FROM THE PARKING AREA UNDER I-94 (LOOKNG ACROSS THE VEHICULAR LANES)





6.5.5

## INTERIM PLAZA

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

The large asphalt area under the freeway deck, north of the roadway, is occupied by municipal surface parking. The parking spaces are utilized by Loring Corners employees, as well as by people coming to the Basilica for mass on Sundays. However, there are many more spaces than parkers, and there is a 1,200 space parking ramp on the Basilica's east side that is also available. Some proportion of the parking area could be repurposed with little impact. The coalition of organizations and stakeholders seeking improvements under the freeway have expressed concerns about perceived safety for visitors parking in the underpass, as the less visible areas under the deck have attracted homeless encampments.

### URBAN DESIGN STRATEGY

An Interim Plaza is proposed as an activating strategy for the two parking bays closest to Hennepin Avenue. In the Urban Street Design Guide, NACTO defines the Interim Public Plaza as a temporary condition that allows public and private partners to evaluate and build support for future capital improvements. "Using low-cost materials, such as epoxied gravel, movable planters, and flexible seating, interim public plazas reconfigure and revitalize intersections that might otherwise be unsafe or underutilized." This interim plaza would serve two colleges, the Basilica, the Walker, Loring Corners, and the Park Board as it's closest neighbors, and will seed ideas for improved bike and pedestrian connections to the future Basset Creek Valley Station.

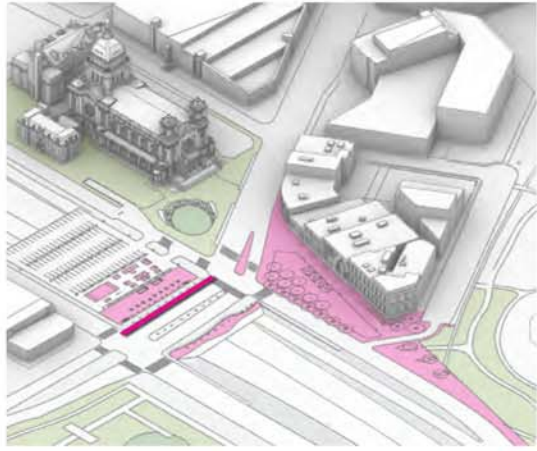


### INTERIM PLAZA | INEXPENSIVE PLAZA & SEATING MATERIALS, LIGHTING, & ACTIVATION (VENDORS, ART, PERFORMANCE, SKATEPARK)

Interim plazas have become great models of public private partnership in recent years. Typically, private partners take responsibility for programming, management, and maintenance, while the City participates in implementation. The model is more than just trendy "pop-up urbanism," as it carries with it the benefit of building partnerships, constituency, and political will that can lead to public investment in more permanent improvements later.







6.5.6

## MIRROR STRIP

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

As the point of convergence for Hennepin, Dunwoody, and Lyndale, and as the future connector to the Basset Creek Valley Station, this threshold should serve as a gateway to downtown Minneapolis, Loring Park, and the theater district, but instead it is perceived as a barrier.

### URBAN DESIGN STRATEGY

An iconic work of art worthy of "gateway" status, the "Mirror Strip" would reflect the sidewalk and columns below it as it passed beneath the freeway, creating the perception of vaulted space while bouncing light into the underpass. At its ends, vertical mirrored surfaces would fold up the sides of the deck to announce the gateway as a legible element of the district. The mood of the reflections would be dynamic, matching the time of day and the weather.



### MIRROR STRIP | ICONIC GATEWAY ART INSTALLATION

An iconic artwork should mark this gateway link between the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden on the west side of the freeway, and destination features lining Hennepin Avenue east of the freeway overpass, including the Basilica, the Theater District, and the North Loop neighborhood. Iconic features are landmarks that contribute to placemaking and district identity, and in this case could be a natural draw for the more than 800,000 annual visitors already coming to the area to visit the Walker Art Center and Minneapolis Sculpture Garden.

