

69th Street Plaza

STUDIO 431

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WAUWATOSA, WI

Landscape Forms Elements:

Custom Shade Structure, Custom Signage, Custom Benches, Custom Lounge Seating, Custom Picnic Tables, Custom Bike Rack, Custom Lighting Elements

Design Partner:

SmithGroup

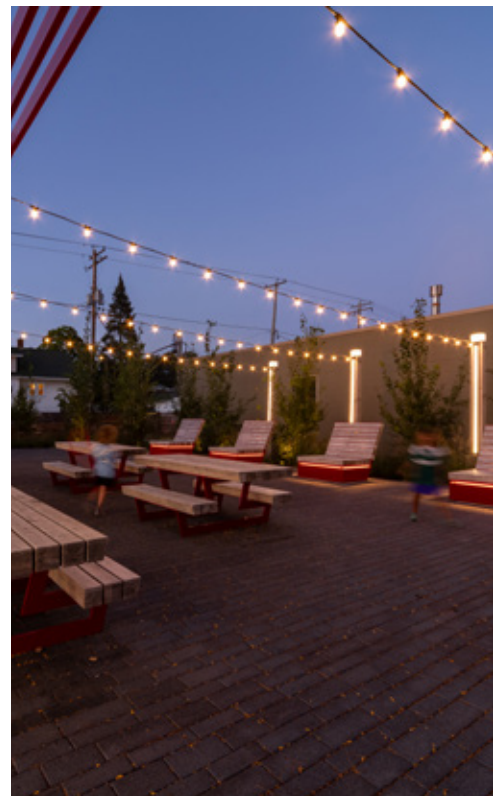
The 69th Street Plaza in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, a former parking lot, is now “the neighborhood’s front porch.” The public park is located in the East Tosa neighborhood along the North Avenue corridor, a growing retail and entertainment area. City planners wanted people to have more opportunities to enjoy the lively vibe along the corridor; the half-acre park is the first expression of repurposing a site for pedestrian-focused use. As future streetscape projects are undertaken in the East Tosa neighborhood, the 69th Street Plaza will provide design guidance related to materials, colors, lighting, furniture, and signage.

For Landscape Forms’ Studio 431, the project offered an opportunity to showcase the studio’s range of talents and expertise. The project included a shade structure, signage, benches, lounge seating, picnic tables, bike rack, and lighting elements. “The plaza incorporates a variety of products and materials,” says Studio 431 Chad Kendall, lead engineer on the project, “from wood, aluminum, and steel to precast concrete and LED lighting.”

Studio 431 partnered with SmithGroup’s Madison, Wisconsin, office to engineer and manufacture the plaza lighting and furnishings. Nate Novak and Tom Rogers, landscape architects with SmithGroup, credit city planners with an inclusive development process that included a committee composed of parks and planning personnel, government officials, business owners, and private citizens. At a steering committee charrette, Novak and Rogers listened to the members’ visions and aspirations for the plaza.

“They wanted something representative of Wauwatosa,” said Rogers. “They wanted something that stood out, was distinctly different, and that would identify the location—a combination of branding through signage, shelter, and furnishings. They wanted something that felt familiar, not too traditional and not too modern. They wanted a comfortable gathering place for two or 200 with an element of playfulness. They wanted it to feel like the neighborhood’s front porch.”

The red canopy and metal bases on the lounge seating, benches, and tables reflect the distinctive red in Wauwatosa’s logo. Furniture can be moved to open the plaza for large events, and oversized lounge seating turns the plaza into a playground for children. Natural materials, including Alaskan



yellow cedar laminated wood, add a warm and comfortable feel to the space.

“We designed usable site elements to serve as branding tools,” says Rogers. The front of the bike rack positioned at the plaza’s entrance spells TOSA. Precast concrete pedestals on the columns and light poles note the 69th and 72nd Street locations, along with East Tosa & Parking custom signage. The string lights that crisscross the plaza also add warmth. “The committee wanted the plaza to be inviting, not lit up like a parking lot,” says Novak. Recessed, reflective lighting in the lounge seating and benches welcome evening visitors and light the ground around the furniture.

“Site lighting played a role in the branding of the neighborhood,” says Rogers. “The corridor includes restaurants, bars, and a movie theatre, and this space bolsters the neighborhood’s night life; the plaza is a place to meet and gather before or after dinner, a movie, and in winter and summer.” The plaza also accommodates a small stage for performances.

Kendall worked through several engineering challenges in constructing the site elements. The columns for both the canopy structure and light poles required several iterations to land on the perfect solution. “We ultimately chose rectangular tubing as the core structural element, encased with sheet metal to achieve a clean fit and finish and improve durability and long-term corrosion resistance,” explains Kendall. “With this construction method, we could achieve the angled design element of the wood clad columns and beams and create low-profile access doors to service lighting components.” The Studio 431 team also engineered attachment points and electrical access for the string lights. “We made it plug-and-play for maintenance crews.” The canopy’s shade is made of aluminum tubing with a red powdercoat finish.

Light poles apply the same construction as the canopy structure. Their full-length solid light strips covered with acrylic diffusers make an impression in the evening hours. The plaza opened in the summer of 2018. It’s become a destination for residents and visitors and already slated to host two large community events, including the Tosa Grand Prix bike race. Even the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel took notice of the plaza. A July 11, 2018 article on new dining patios around Milwaukee added the 69th Street Plaza to its list, writing, “Granted, it’s not a restaurant patio, but this new parklet by the City of Wauwatosa is just too cool to not mention....It has oversize chairs to climb onto....Trees and a roofed pergola provide shade; at night, the string lights come on. And the parklet has some great accessories, trimmed out in red.” Both Studio 431 and SmithGroup enjoyed the process of making the plaza come to life.

“It was a fairly interactive process with Studio 431,” says Novak. “They shared information on fabrication, suggested a few minor changes in constructability, and provided input on



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wood. We were surprised by how well they kept true to our design. They did an excellent job refining details to improve construction and durability while maintaining the design.” Kendall agrees. “SmithGroup was great to work with. They were open to our ideas and suggestions. We were always on the same page,” he says.

