

**Innovation Incubator 2019/2020**

# **Inside Out: Defining the Future WorkSITE**

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Today, work is an activity, not merely a place. Let’s broaden our view of where work might happen.

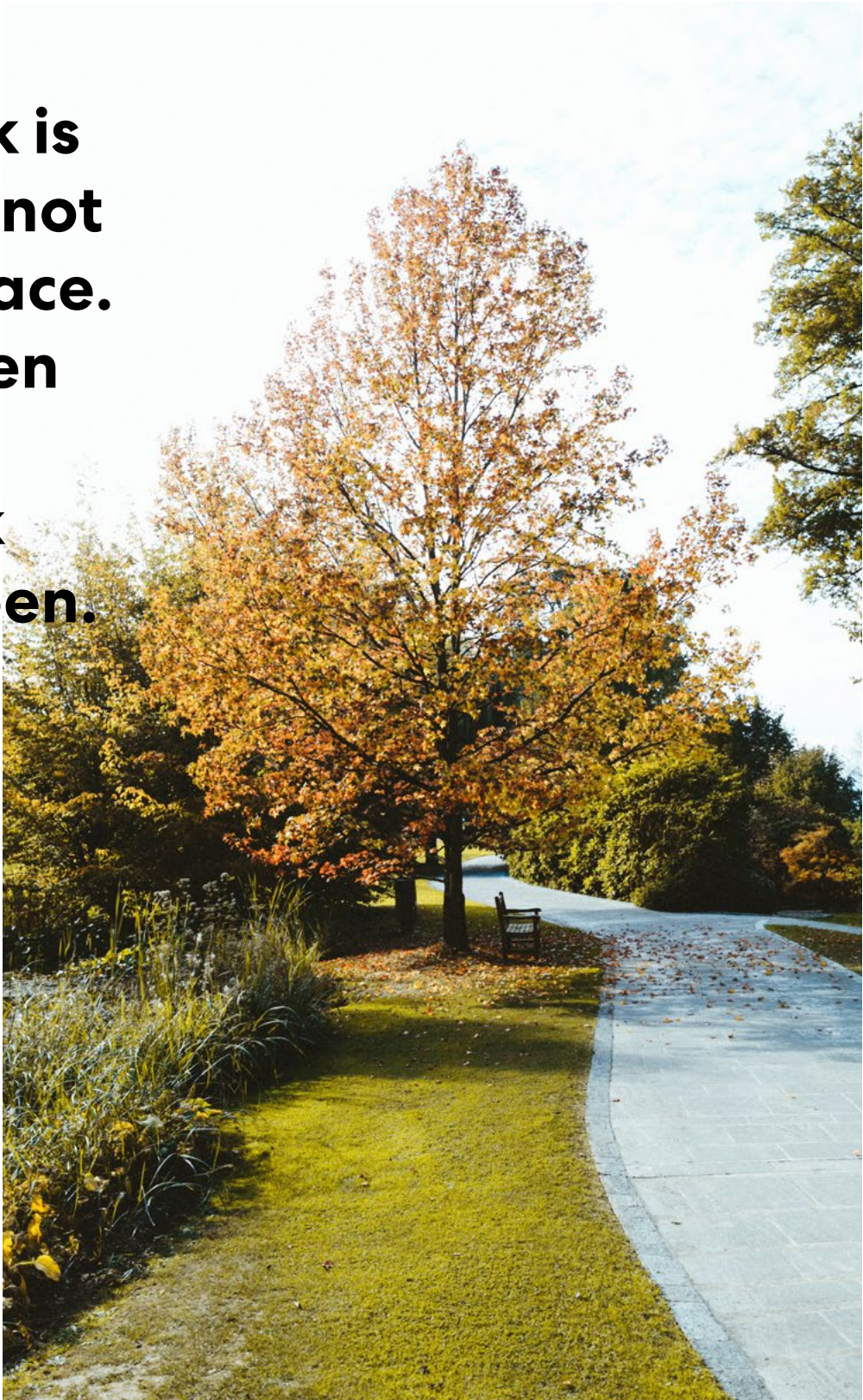


Image courtesy of Unsplash.com.

# Introduction

Perhaps the most prevalent workplace theme today is employee health and well-being, addressed by such design considerations as clean air, access to light and views, amenities, social spaces, and choice. Perkins and Will’s Well-being Works survey revealed that choice—the ability to control where, when, and how one works—was the #1 most important element of well-being across the board.

Gartner finds that employees who are satisfied with their work environments are 16% more productive, 18% more likely to stay at their companies, and 30% more attracted to their company over competitors.

Intersecting this trend is the continual rise of a dispersed, mobile workforce. When our primary tools for work are a laptop (or phone), people can—and do—work wherever and whenever, often neither in traditional workplaces nor during typical “9 to 5” hours. According to Census Bureau data reported in the *Wall Street Journal*, approximately 5.3% of adults in metro areas between 500,000 and 3 million people worked from home in 2017, an increase of 3.7% from 2007.

**We propose a new workplace model:** The city, our client, becomes a provider of holistically designed outdoor work settings that engage today’s mobile workforce, improves users’ health and well-being, and enlivens public spaces and communities.

The concept of the outdoor office may not be new, but what we have seen thus far are furniture solutions (i.e. a bench with Wifi) dropped into outdoor environments.

Our vision is more holistic and integrated—the design of a new space at the intersection of both interiors and landscape architecture disciplines.

A kit-of-parts approach would identify best practices in current workplace design, including the range of spaces needed, recommended space allocations, and considerations for acoustics, collaboration space, visual privacy, furniture, signage, usage protocols—and beyond. These would be merged with landscape architecture practices to create outdoor spaces that are holistically designed. Think planting patterns that create enclaves for small group meetings, or ergonomic furniture that integrates with the landscape.

## A note on COVID-19

Our research and concept was well underway before the COVID-19 global crisis began. In a matter of weeks, the world changed—and those changes both altered our process and influenced our view of the concept. We had planned to organize a group charrette to test and refine the prototypes with leaders from Perkins and Will’s Landscape Architecture and Corporate Interiors practices, but restrictions on travel and gathering prohibited that. More importantly, we recognize that our socially distanced—and forever changed—world has colored our lens on the idea of an outdoor workplace. We elaborate on the viability of this concept in a pandemic on page 9.

*In light of the global pandemic, we had to recalibrate our approach and also view our concept through a new lens, one that both supports and challenges its viability in a post-COVID world.*

# Part 1

Building the Case  
Supporting Research



# Building the Case

## Well-being

The demands placed on workplace are higher than ever, and employers vying for the best talent are rising to the challenge. Ensuring well-being is one such recruitment strategy.

The public’s appetite for healthy buildings (as seen in the rise of LEED-certified spaces) has evolved into a growing interest in occupant well-being. LEED has given rise to the WELL Building standard and Fitwel, as a healthy workplace has morphed from differentiator to a baseline expectation. Today’s workforce seeks spaces that accommodate physical and mental well-being, and access to nature plays a vital role in that.

Perkins and Will’s Well-being Works study revealed both the importance of choice in where to work as a key well-being metric; approximately 21% of respondents said it was most important, making it more popular the following elements combined.

In the US, we spend more than 90% of our lives inside

buildings. Biophilic design addresses how design can bring the outdoors in, bringing the benefits of plants, daylight and natural materials into our workplace environments—but as proposed by this project, it may also be possible to bring the indoors out.

## Mobile Workforce

Today’s mobile workforce arose from a confluence of several forces: dispersed—often global—teams working in different time zones; the fast-paced (and often un-relenting) pace of business which means we need to be available 24/7; the rise of the gig economy; and the ability to work wherever and whenever with just a laptop or smart phone. When coworking first emerged as a trend, it was the domain of start-ups. Now, Fortune 500 companies take entire floors at WeWork. Today, business can be conducted on-the-go anywhere—from a hotel lobby to a store to the outdoors. If companies weren’t already on board, they quickly realized not just the viability of mobile work, but also the necessity of it, given the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, which forced many organizations to implement work-from-home policies.

## Other Drivers

- Dissatisfaction with common workplace woes—noisy offices, bad lighting, etc.—fuels a desire for spaces that boost productivity and satisfaction, as well as spaces that regenerate vs. drain.
- Preventative health strategies frequently cite nature and outdoor activity as contributors to well-being.
- The “War for Talent,” which drives employers to offer more enticing workplaces and greater flexibility.
- Greater acceptance and socialization of remote work by today’s leading companies.
- The fast rise of coworking.
- Growing awareness of mental health and the environment’s role in supporting it.
- Advances in technology allow for more seamless remote work.
- Impact investment on equitable public space and well-being initiatives to maximize positive outcomes—i.e. way to get workers outdoors and combat the amount of time spent on the computer indoors.
- A desire to live where one works to either aid work-life balance (limit commute time) and/or open up job opportunities (with the ability to work remotely for a position in another city or state).

- Millennials’ and Gen Z’s pull toward experiences over materialistic goods and inclusivity over exclusivity.
- Branding of outdoor environments and the prevalence of placemaking
- Increased appetite for principles of biophilia in indoor work environments.

- Shifting perception of the outdoors that goes beyond the traditional “nature”; expanded types of uses for parks such as studying for students, on-the-go communications, and other business that can be done on laptops and phones.

Where these trends converge is an exciting opportunity for the city (solely or in partnership with private companies) to provide outdoor work settings that accommodate today’s mobile workforce while improving well-being.

We envision multiple benefits:

## For the employee:

- An additional work setting option for on-the-go or dedicated work
- The ability to work where one lives vs. where a company resides.
- Improved health and well-being as a result of active design and exposure to fresh air, light, etc.

## For the employer:

- Recruitment and retention tool.
- Ability to broaden talent pool beyond company’s location.
- Improved bottom line as a result of greater employee productivity and satisfaction.

## For the city:

- Attract new residents advertising new infrastructure/ investment in workforce.
- Repurpose and improve otherwise vacant or underutilized public space.
- Engagement in the city benefits other city entities—civic, cultural, retail, etc., which in turn could steer more private capital toward social assets.

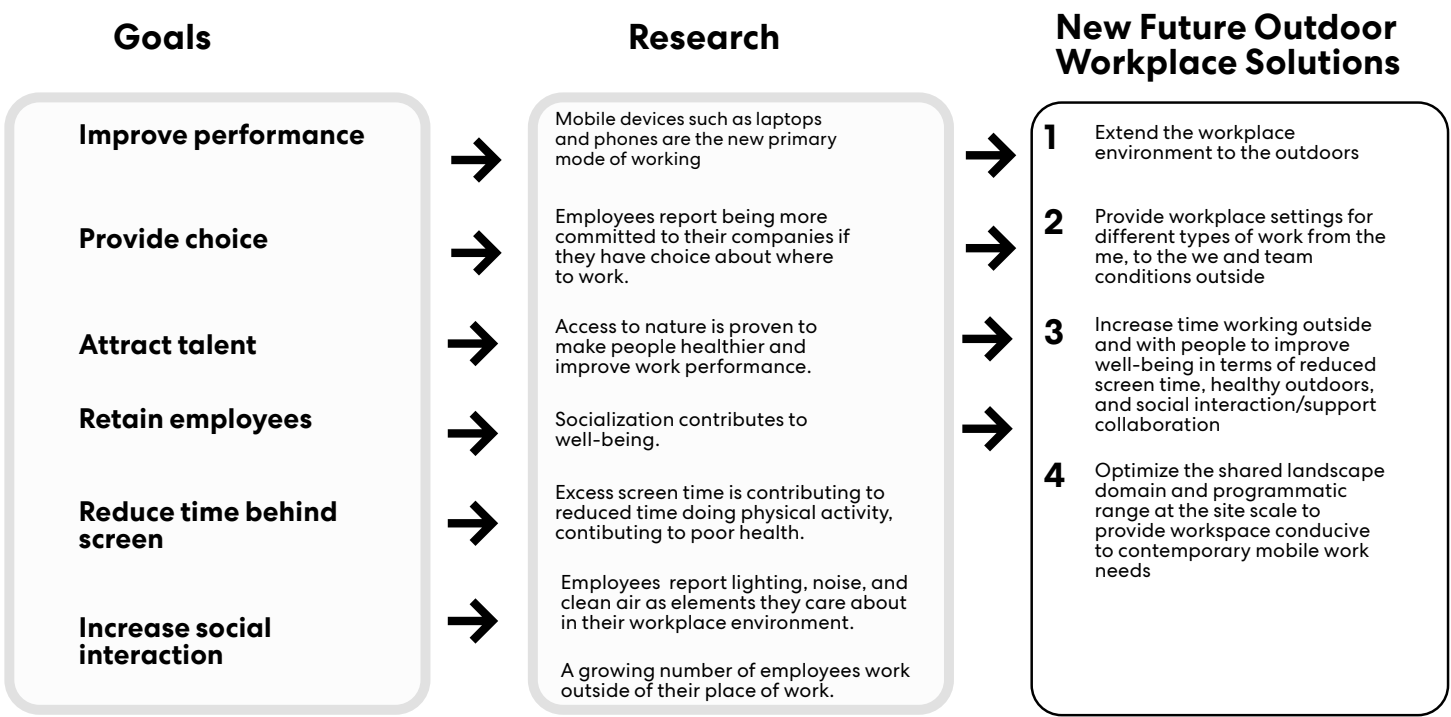


Image courtesy of Unsplash.com.



# Challenges & Opportunities

When we talk about the value of choice of work setting, we are typically referring to all the available choices both within a workplace (i.e. a quiet room vs. a collaboration area vs. a workstation), as well as the balance of choice beyond a company’s walls as an organization allows.

But are all choices created equal? As employees are increasingly afforded more options as part of a recruitment strategy and to aid work-life balance, it’s useful to evaluate these options’ strengths and limitations. How does the outdoor workplace compare?



### The “Bad” Office

Many organizations understand that transparency, light and views are good for employee well-being, but not all workplaces reflect the growing awareness of these principles. While more closed-off spaces can be good for temporary focus, overall well-being may suffer in these spaces. The outdoor office, while imperfect, offers a healthier choice.



### The Crowded Cafe

Because usage is often free (minus the cost of a coffee and scone), these spaces suffer from people “camping out” for WiFi for hours on end. Finding a seat and proper worksurface, not to mention access to that coveted outlet, can be a challenge. These challenges may occur in the outdoor workspace, as well, however we envision that the “elements” will limit the “campers.”



### Coworking Membership

This can be an excellent choice for both large companies (who might even take out a full floor in a coworking space to offer employees more options) as well as independent contractors or entrepreneurs who don’t want to invest in the overhead expense of a workplace. Further, it affords access to community. But all this comes at a cost, whereas the outdoor office is free and accessible to all.



### Work From Home

For health and safety purposes, this was the sole option during the pandemic. And for many it’s an adequate or even good choice—particularly for heads-down work. But what about teaming? Advances in virtual collaboration have addressed this, but we still see a need for face-to-face. The outdoor workplace can provide an ad-hoc meeting space option for the typical work-from-home employee.



### On-the-Go Work

For most knowledge workers, work is no longer relegated to the office or to the 9-to-5. We work on the train, we scan email in bed, and—to the determinant of all—we often look at our phones as we walk city streets. The outdoor workplace addresses this as an easy place to quickly pause to check email (and maybe charge that phone) while between the office and a client’s office, or out for a walk, without settling into a work setting.



### Working Outside

Outdoor work generally happens in two space types: workplace amenities such as a roof terrace; and outdoors, from a city park bench to a remote hiking trail. The former is relegated to those who work onsite at a workplace, limiting WFH employees or independent contractors. The latter, while publicly accessible, limits work effectiveness. The outdoor office, in contrast, equips outdoor spaces with ergonomic furniture, WiFi access, power, shading, privacy (from plantings), etc.



### The “New Normal”

Given the COVID-19 pandemic, we appreciate that use of shared workspace of any kind would warrant a great deal of caution. At the same time, we expect that the increased ventilation this work setting offers may make it more appealing than a traditional interior workplace. Further, we see the need for more work options in these times—whether for current WFH employees or university students not returning to campus this fall who need options for safely gathering with classmates.

# Part 2

Workplace and Landscape Architecture  
Best Practice Analysis & Application



# Workplace as a New Park Typology

Though a park’s scope and scale will vary based on its location, in general, park typologies range from urban parklets to large nature preserves. Many workplace settings offer green spaces or outdoor amenities, but the publicly accessible outdoor workplace as an urban park typology has yet to be formally established in any significant way. The current type of park that our concept might evolve from is what is known as a “special use park.”

Our workplace–geared special use park would exist as a highly programmed area of a larger park system—designed to meet the needs of the 21st century worker seeking a “third place,” an interstitial, on-the-go place to conduct business outside the office, home, or crowded coffee shop and ultimately, a healthier choice. While the larger park would include typical park programming, for purposes of this study we’re focusing on the workplace component as a “room” of the larger park site.

### Proposed Size & Scale

In the U.S., the median park size is 13.1 acres per 1,000 people. **City parks average 3.8 acres—large enough to include a variety of programmatic elements, including workplace.** Therefore, as our concept is best suited for a city, we’re using 4 acres as a general scale for this study.

In addition, because this follows the scale for a typical Neighborhood park (which falls between 3 and 10 acres), we envision a service area of ½ mile-to-1-mile radius. To truly understand the demographics of the site users, this study suggests further investigation into neighborhood make-up—nearby corporate offices, residential buildings, stores and services, as well as distribution of employees versus residents versus visitors—to tailor the park design and scale of each typology.

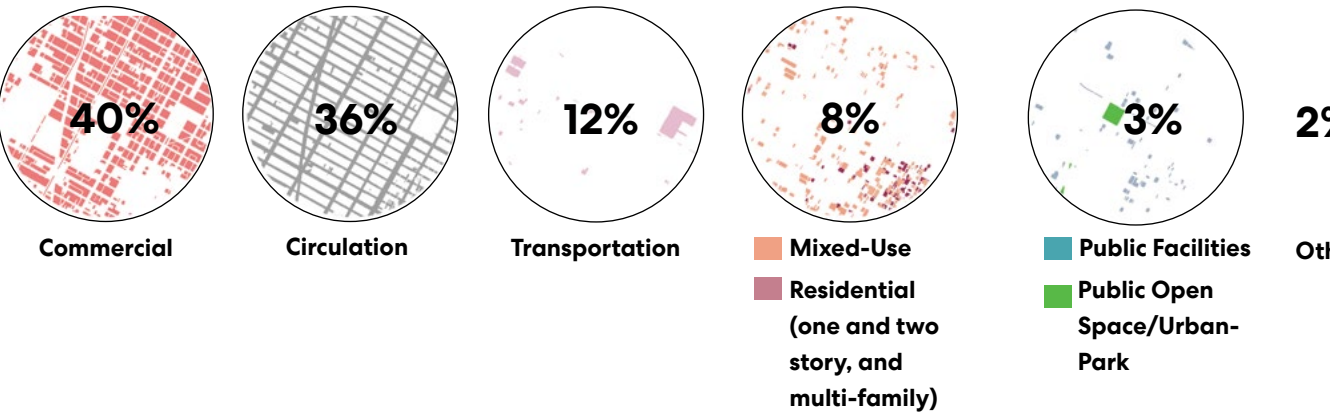
PARK CLASSIFICATION	SIZE	ACRES/POPULATION	SERVICE AREA
Mini-Park	1.5 acres or less	0.25 to 0.5 acres/1,000 people	1/8 to 1/4 mile radius
Neighborhood Playground	1-3 acres	0.5 to 1.5 acres/1,000 people	1/4 to 1/2 mile radius
Neighborhood Parks	3-10 acres	1.0 to 2.0 acres/1,000 people	1/2 to 1 mile radius
Special Use Parks	Varies	varies /1,000 people	varies

Source: <http://www.waunakee.com/DocumentCenter/View/3815/11-Appendix-B-Classifications-and-Facility-Guidelines.pdf>

*“A special use park is often designed as a revenue-generating enterprise created to satisfy demand for a particular sport, recreational activity, or special event...Certain recreational facilities such as disc golf courses, golf courses, race tracks, municipal pools and waterparks, fishing areas and marinas might be considered special purpose parks. Less active uses may include community gardens or veteran memorials.” - The Village of Waunakee*



Source: <https://zola.planning.nyc.gov/#15.07/40.75295/-73.98418>



### Putting the 1-Mile Radius in Context

This zoning map of Midtown Manhattan shows a 1-mile radius around Bryant Park for context. Understanding whom this park serves creates a model for how to design a park program through analysis of a zoning area.

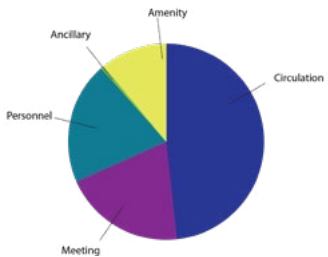
The area make-up—including the proportion of commercial and residential spaces within the radius—can suggest how much of the park should be allocated to workplace versus other programmatic elements. Further, it can help refine the workplace typologies offered. If this park is presumed to be 4 acres, then it should serve 4,000 people.

However, in the context of Manhattan, the population in this 1-mile radius exceeds 4,000 people—not even including visitors who arrive to the site through transportation.

Unlike the office setting, city parks are generally public spaces, and as such, include a much wider variety of user types. 2018 American’s Engagement with Parks Report finds that three out of four Americans say that they are within walking distance to a park and visit their local park more than twice a month.



# Park Programming: Bryant Park Case Study



USER	CONTEXT-BASED NEED	ANTICIPATED USERS	LANDSCAPE CODING
Employee	 40% Commercial	40% working at nearby offices who could benefit from an extension of the workplace (i.e. another choice) = 1,600	<b>PERSONNEL SPACE</b> Workstations and “offices,” park-style <b>MEETING SPACE</b> Outdoor collaboration space
Residents	 8% Mixed-Use Residential (one and two story, and multi-family) 3% Public Facilities Public Open Space/Urban-Park	11% there to use the park as a public resource / for recreation (note: this same resident population may include remote workers or independent contractors who, like the employee population drawing from nearby corporations, may also utilize the workplace areas) = 440	<b>AMENITY SPACE</b> Typical recreation spaces such as playground, dog run, etc.
Passersby	 12% Transportation 3% Public Facilities Public Open Space/Urban-Park	48% moving through the park = 1,920	<b>CIRCULATION</b> Paved surfaces in and around the park
Other	1%		<b>ANCILLARY</b>

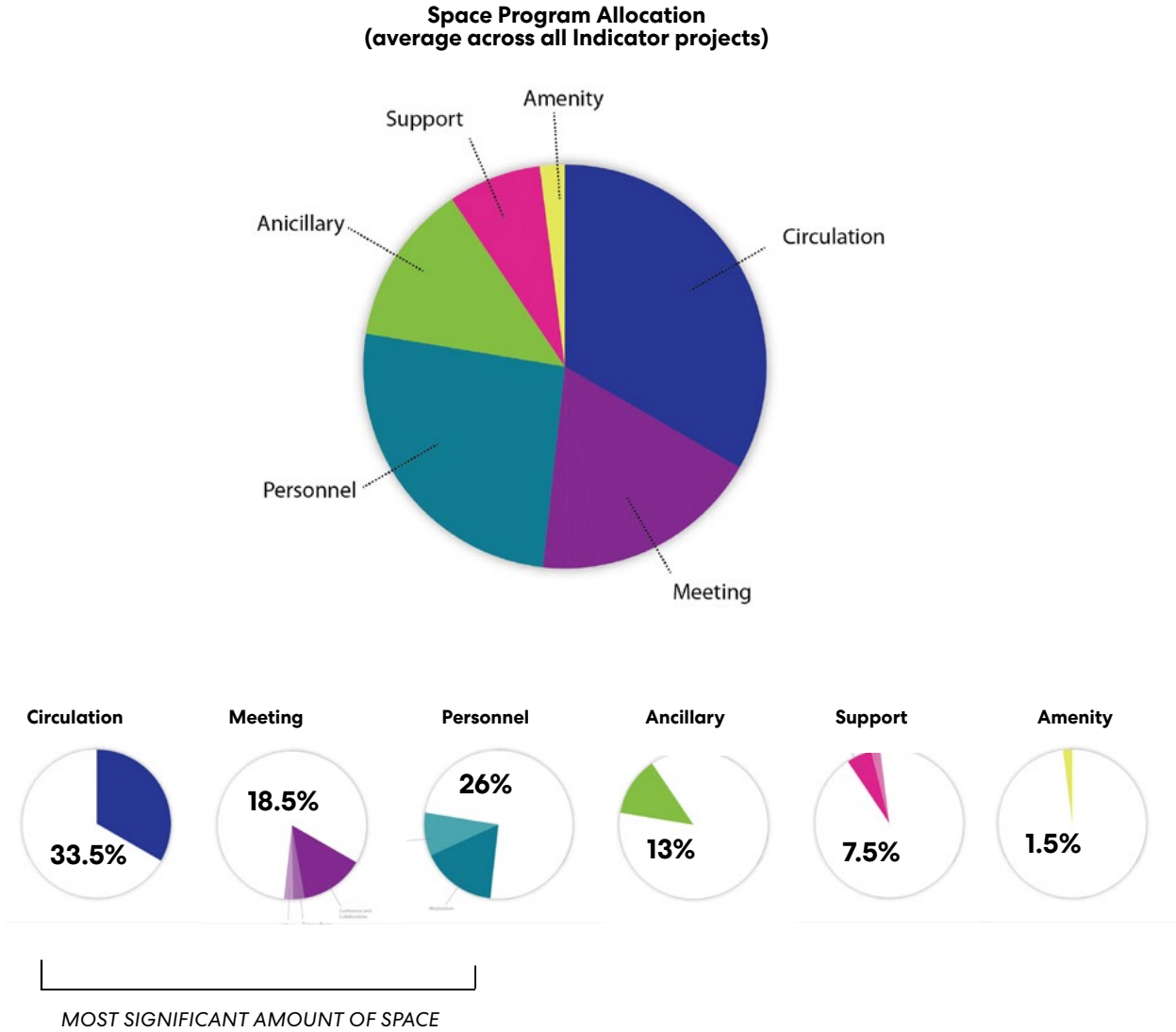
# Park Programming: Applying Workplace Benchmarks

Our kit-of-parts approach is centered on merging best practices from workplace design and landscape architecture. Beginning with workplace, we are deriving these best practices from our own portfolio of high-performance workplaces. To that end, we’re using Indicator, a benchmarking tool developed by our Corporate Interiors practice that catalogs our portfolio of workplace projects, allowing us to compare metrics across industries and space types.

Data is routinely collected, cleaned, and reported out to our Core Analytics Dashboard. The visualized data offers us—and by extension, our clients—salient metrics from hundreds of

projects, including average density, ratio of private office seats to workstation seats, collaboration room sizes and beyond—by industry and project size. This data helps kick-start the conversation about how people are working today, offering a helpful guide or merely a proof of concept for clients seeking a snapshot of the modern workplace.

For purposes of this study, we can extrapolate this data and apply it to an outdoor setting that is supported by the appropriate landscape elements. From a sample of 175 Perkins and Will workplace projects cataloged in Indicator, we looked at the allocation of different space types.

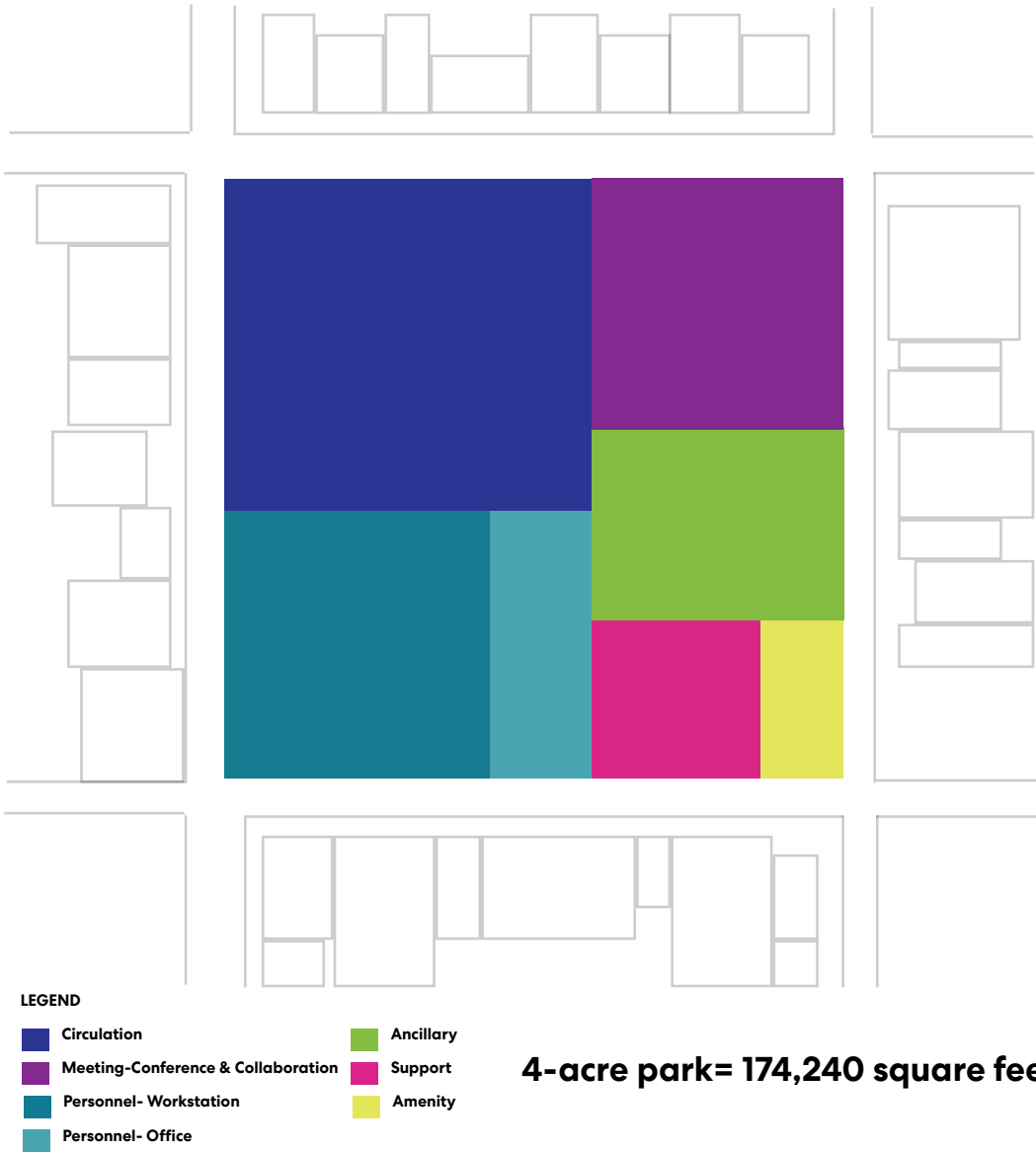


# Park Programming: Applying Workplace Benchmarks

Indicator categorizes all benchmarked workplace spaces into six major buckets, each containing a variety of space types. Below we show what each group contains and how the allocation differs slightly depending on the workplace size. On the following pages, we apply the average workplace metrics (globally and across all industries) to our case study 4-acre park.

**Projects Sampled**  
Under 100 employees = 55 projects  
Over 100 employees = 119 projects

Swatch	Program Classficiation	Space Type	Percentage of Space (0-99 employees)	Percentage of Space (100-5,000 employees)
	Circulation	N/A	32%	35%
	Meeting	conference rooms, open collaboration spaces, training rooms, project rooms, phone rooms, teleconference rooms	17%	16%
	Personnel	workstation, office	27% (Workstation 15%, Office 11%)	27% (Workstation 20%, Office 7%)
	Ancillary	reception, bathrooms, storage, server rooms, etc.	14%	12%
	Support	cafe, pantry, product development space, library/ resource center, lab	8%	6%
	Amenity	game room, outdoor space, staffed foodservice, wellness- mothers room, gallery space (art, community display, history, etc), auditorium, locker room, fitness room, gymnasium, prayer room, meditation room, bike storage, exercise studio, massage room, stores and services, doctors office/nurses office, daycare/childcare)	2%	3.5%



**4-acre park= 174,240 square feet**

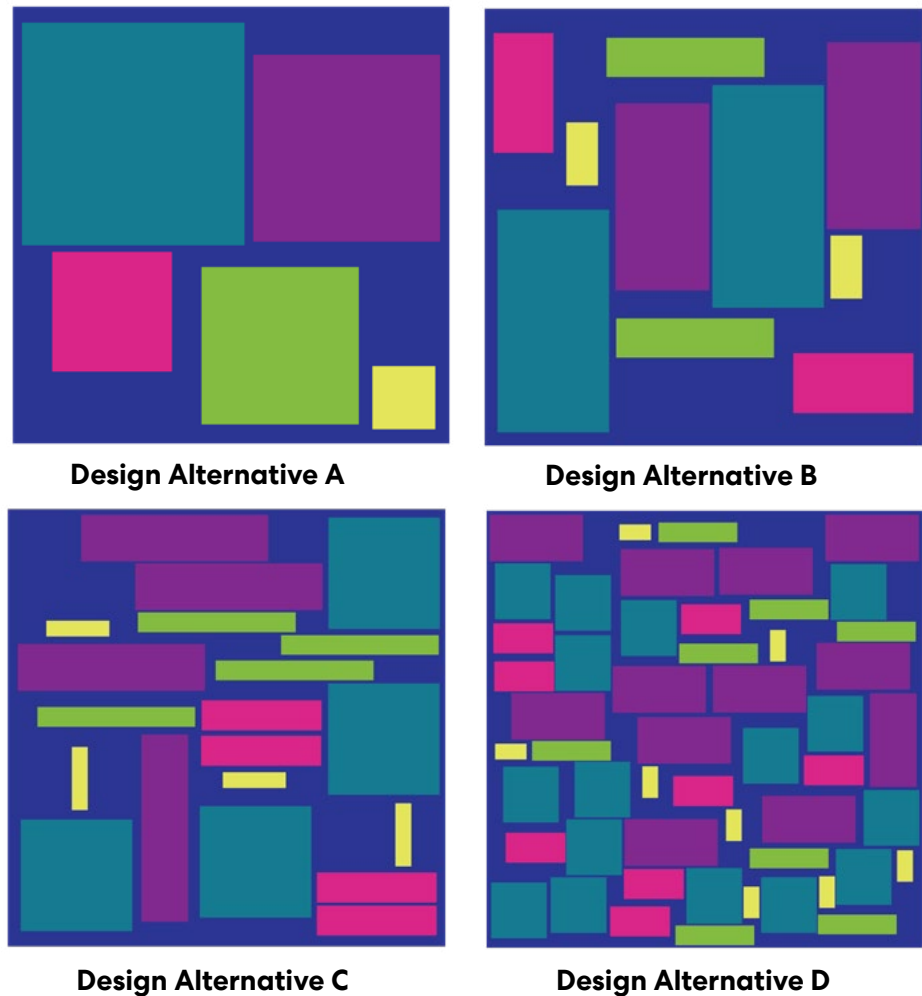
## WORKPLACE-TO-PARK SPACE PROGRAMMING

The diagram above shows the workplace allocations applied to the 4-acre park. On the following pages, we demonstrate four prospective layouts, the purpose being to show that even while the allocation of space type remains the same, the composition of programmatic elements is flexible. This highlights the importance of circulation and posits the question of to what extent should programs be consolidated versus distributed throughout the park.

In conducting this exercise, we wondered about how the relative openness of the outdoor park (relative to the workplace) would influence our workplace typologies. For example, would a new workplace typology be one where the spaces are actually more individual and private? Privacy in this case wouldn't be shaped by partitions or walls (as with cubicles or private offices), but through the juxtaposition of spaces. There's a question of scale and massing of each program in plan, but also of arrangement and proximity.



# Design Options and Considerations



## CONSIDERATIONS

Because landscape architecture program typically embeds circulation in the programmatic area, but interiors does not, these diagrams should read as programmatic rooms. As such, more circulation would be embedded within the room. Each color represents the total area of the program and its overall composition. The area illustrated above as circulation should be considered accessible open and public primary circulation, whereas the embedded circulation considered secondary or tertiary and as a part of each of the rooms. Meeting seats in these schemes those seats not allocated to personnel (workstation or office) seats. In the landscape, benches, moveable seating, and seating outside of the

dedicated workplace areas could easily translate, in both formal and informal ways. For example, permanent benches could be choreographed to provide meeting opportunities and shift from a stereotypical alignment with paths to a more meeting-centric orientation that face each other and focus less on views, and more on encouraging collaboration. Moveable seating, on the other hand, can enable flexible meetings and gatherings. The landscape might evolve to have more innovative storage types that make access to such seating more visible and available to visitors. Currently, in most parks, moveable seating is primarily stored (and locked) on-site in a way that is only accessible by park employees.

# Kit of Parts for Landscape

	PROGRAM	INTERIOR	ELEMENTS	PROPOSED EXTERIOR	PROPOSED ELEMENTS
	Support	cafe, pantry, library/ resource center, lab	basic kitchen appliances, shelving, visible storage	cafe, storage, utilities	cafe pavilion, information signage
	Ancillary	reception, bathrooms, storage, server rooms, etc.	walls, partitions	walls, partition (natural or artificial)	planted form (formal tree plantings, shrubs), architectural walls
	Meeting	conference rooms, open collaboration spaces, training rooms, project rooms, phone rooms, teleconference rooms	large tables, seating around tables, lobby seating (loung), projection space, private acoustically separate call space	collaboration area, fitness zone, private phone booths, private areas for meetings and focus	permanent large tables with moveable seating for meetings, lounge or comfortable furniture
	Personnel	workstation, office	individual desk and seating space, individual private office space with desks and chairs, personal storage	individual workspace for conducting work outdoors (laptops etc)	semi-permanent or permanent indivudal workstations for solo work
	Amenity	game room, outdoor space, staffed foodservice, wellness-mothers room, gallery space (art, community display, history, etc), auditorium, locker room, fitness room, gymnasium, prayer room, meditation room, bike storage, exercise studio, massage room, stores and services, doctors office/nurses office, daycare/ childcare)	game furniture such as ping pong tables, food areas, quiet rooms for mothers, alocatted gallery wall space for hanging art, separate auditorium, gym, and other rooms, storage room for bikes and other	outdoor game area, staffed food pavilion and services, wellness private mothers room, outdoor art space, amphitheatre, outdoor locker storage, fitness zones, meditative/ prayer zones, bike storage, child play area	space for bocce, ping pong, and other smaller outdoor game spaces, private space for mothers, outdoor stair amphitheatre seating, individual outdoor storage furnitutre, quiet flat meditative landings, bike racks, playgrounds
	Circulation	general office circulation of halls, around desks, etc.	floor/ accessible indoor floor finishing	general circulation around park setting including getting to and from individual rooms.	In the landscape, the circulation can also double as flexible plaza seating space for gatherings etc.

*\*Common workplace spaces are ADA compliant. Overall workspace in park would include WiFi access, drinking fountains, restrooms (as part of the park at large), proper receptacles.*

# Part 3

Typology Visualization



# Typology 1: The Landing Pad



ELEMENT



BioRetention Areas  
Aligning with Street



Personal Sized  
Benches with  
Power



Designed  
Pavement



Low to High  
Planted Form



High Tops



WiFi Stick



Speciality Lamps



Canopy Trees

BENEFITS

- Permeable
- Captures Water
- Captures Access Sidewalk Runoff
- Provides Screening from Noisy and Busy Street

- Garden-Embedded
- Smaller Sizes (ie larger than typical 6' park bench) for more intimate work spots
- Permanent
- Inward(Park)-Facing
- Sturdy and Durable

- Custom Design (ie not repetitive pattern) Encourages People to Pay more attention
- Urban shoe-friendly
- ADA accessible
- Widened to Accommodate Fluid Movement

- Natural air filtration of urban pollutants
- Hides embedded noise-canceling deflectors
- Natural air cooling
- Increases property values

- Variety of Height-Synced for Standing for Different People's Natural Levels and Quick Landing
- Located off the Main Sidewalk for Easy Access
- Easy to Clean Surface

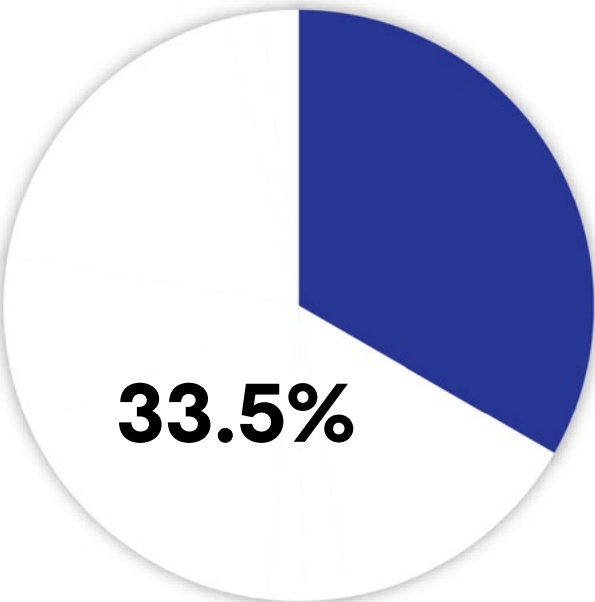
- City amenity for business on the go
- Makes online access available to all within range

- Pedestrian Height for Lighting to High Top Tables and Benches
- Emphasizes Human Experience over the Auto
- Concentrated Light-Closer to the Source

- Provide Shade
- Cool Temperatures
- Reduced Screen Glare
- Captures Water Runoff
- Protects Biodiversity
- Bird and pollinator habitat



# The Landing Pad

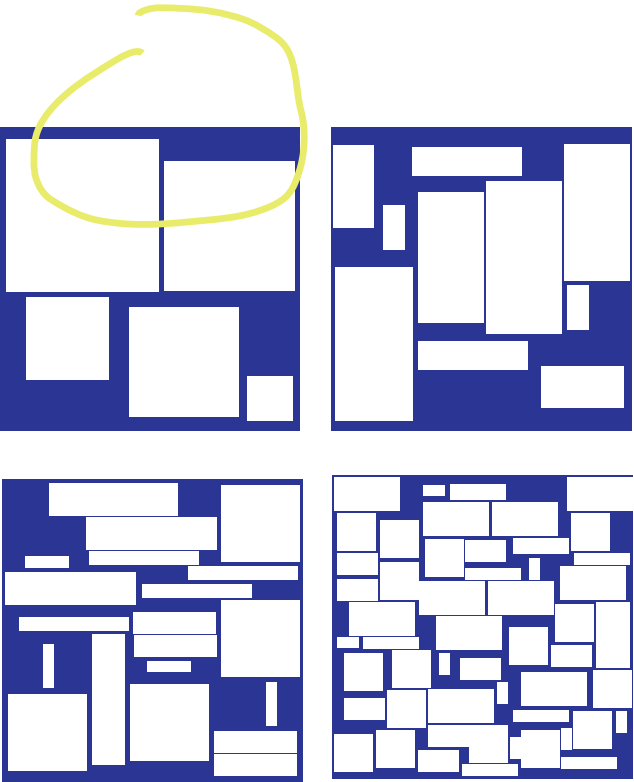


33.5% of the typical workplace is allocated to circulation.

## ABOUT

As Indicator shows us, circulation has the largest slice of the workplace allocation pie. We’ve represented its prominence by including a scheme devoted solely to movement through the park—but with accommodations that allow for on-the-go work.

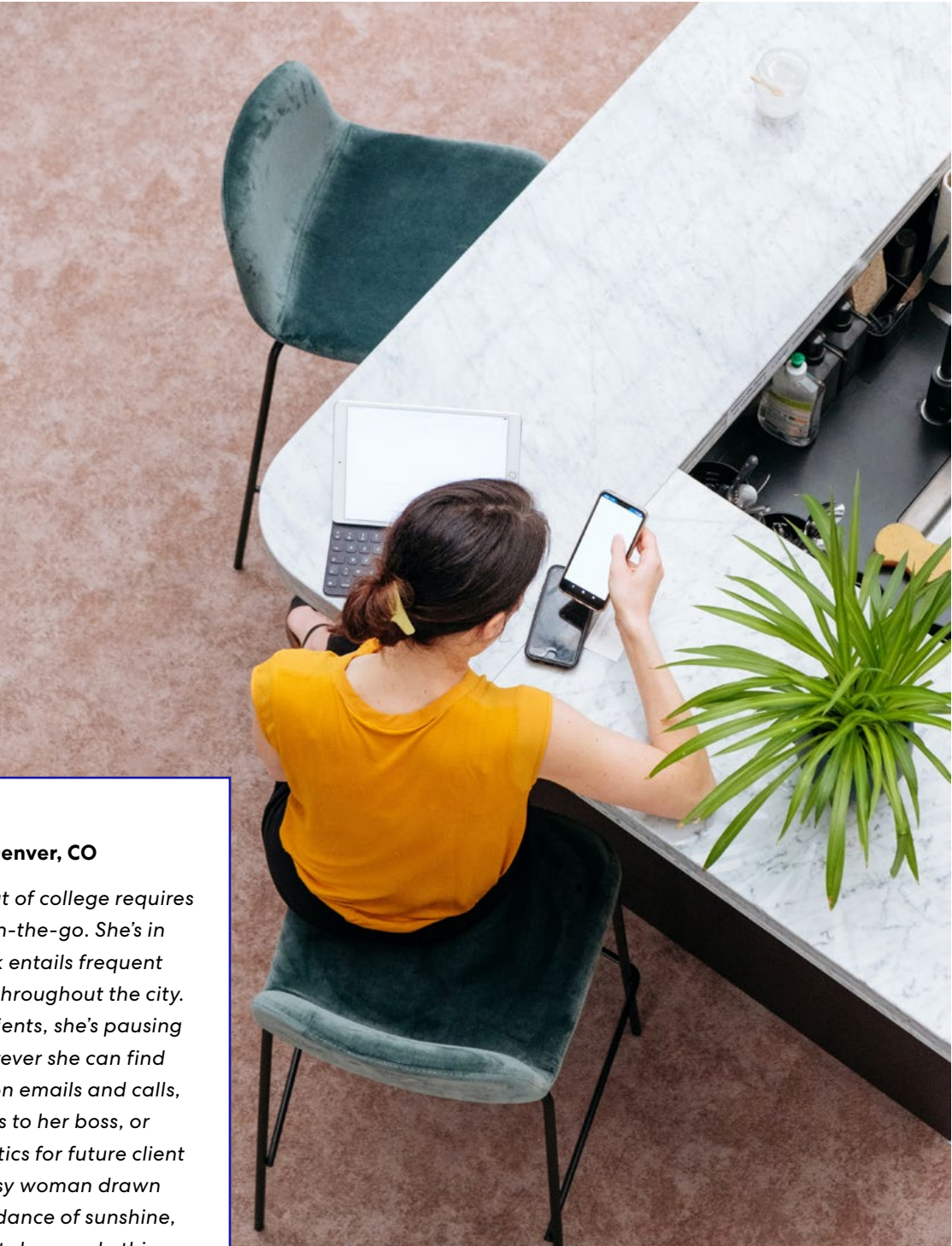
This interstitial space between the street and the inner park is both the welcoming “hallway” for the outdoor office—with people passing through—and perch that’s ideal for quick stops to return calls or emails before heading elsewhere. It offers a buffer from the street noise without having to go far into the park. Plants provide light screening between the street noise and activity, and high-boy-style tables (some with affixed tall stools) allow for quick standing work on laptops or tablets.



## FEATURES

- Proximity to park entrance and transit
- Ideal for quick stops—to quickly (and safely) check email, take a phone call, put stuff down, or meet up with people without blocking circulation
- High-top tables with WiFi/power and bag hooks
- Formal plantings support semi-privacy and wayfinding
- Proximity to outdoor food options (food bike, outdoor vending)

# User Persona



**Who: Molly, 24**  
**Advertising Sales in Denver, CO**

*Molly’s first real job out of college requires her to be constantly on-the-go. She’s in ad sales, and her work entails frequent meetings with clients throughout the city. When she’s not with clients, she’s pausing (only briefly, and wherever she can find a perch!) to catch up on emails and calls, provide status updates to her boss, or coordinating the logistics for future client meetings. An outdoorsy woman drawn to Denver for its abundance of sunshine, Molly appreciates that she can do this type of work outside.*



# Typology 2:The Solo Space



ELEMENT



Canopy Trees



Supportive Seating



Decomposed Granite



Low to High Planted Form



Electrical Outlet



Hardscape



Outdoor Desks



Noise-Canceling Bluetooth Headphones



WiFi Stick

BENEFITS

- Provide Shade
- Cool Temperatures
- Reduced Screen Glare
- Captures Water Runoff
- Protects Biodiversity
- Bird and pollinator habitat

- Posture Benefits
- Extended Sitting
- Permanent
- Swivel-Capable
- Sturdy and Durable

- Permeable
- Captures Water
- Health Benefits for Trees and Soils
- Compacted for Accessibility

- Natural air filtration of urban pollutants
- Hides embedded noise-canceling deflectors
- Natural air cooling
- Increases property values

- Provides electricity
- Extends workstation time
- International traveler capability
- Charging station for additional electronics

- Urban shoe-friendly
- ADA accessible
- Coordinated with water drainage for storm events
- Visually stimulating design

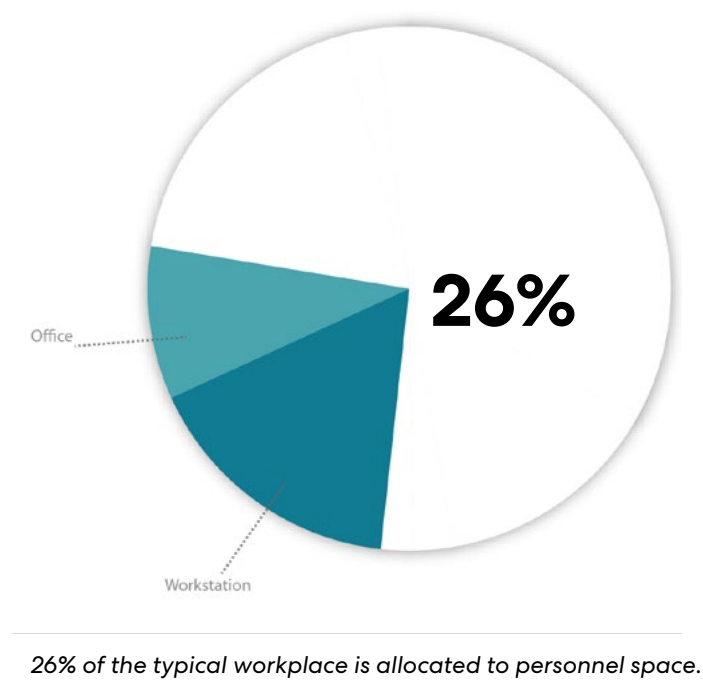
- Space for working on devices & easy to find for delivery
- Room for 1-2
- Table-top charge
- Located in Private/ Semi-Private Areas
- Height-Synced

- Reduce noise from street
- Wireless for on-the-go ease
- 3d binaural sound playback for advanced listening experience
- Audio tour of park site available for tuning into

- City amenity for business on the go
- Makes online access available to all within range



# The Solo Space



## ABOUT

After circulation, the second biggest share of the workplace is personnel space, or workstations and private offices. Clusters of solo spaces are housed in a sunken plaza with granite landing pads that suggest a workstation area. The gentle planted beds provide acoustical separation from the busy street and larger park above. Each individual space is semi-private, with plants around serving as “walls” that offer a range of visual privacy.

This zone features a hard floor to accommodate moveable seating/tables, seat backs (to enable longer stretches of working), omnidirectional wifi antenna; and power access via embedded outdoor electrical floor boxes within each “outdoor workspace.” Decomposed granite in the surrounding area denotes public space (and is good for the trees). A nearby café delivers fresh coffee or tea from Uber Eats on the phone. And canopy trees create an outdoor “ceiling” and provide shade in the summer.

## FEATURES

- Located within walking distance to concentrated areas of office buildings
- Semi-private space
- Acoustically separated from street noise
- WiFi and power access
- Space for laptop
- Seating comfort designed for up to three hours of work
- Access to restrooms, mobile food options

# User Persona

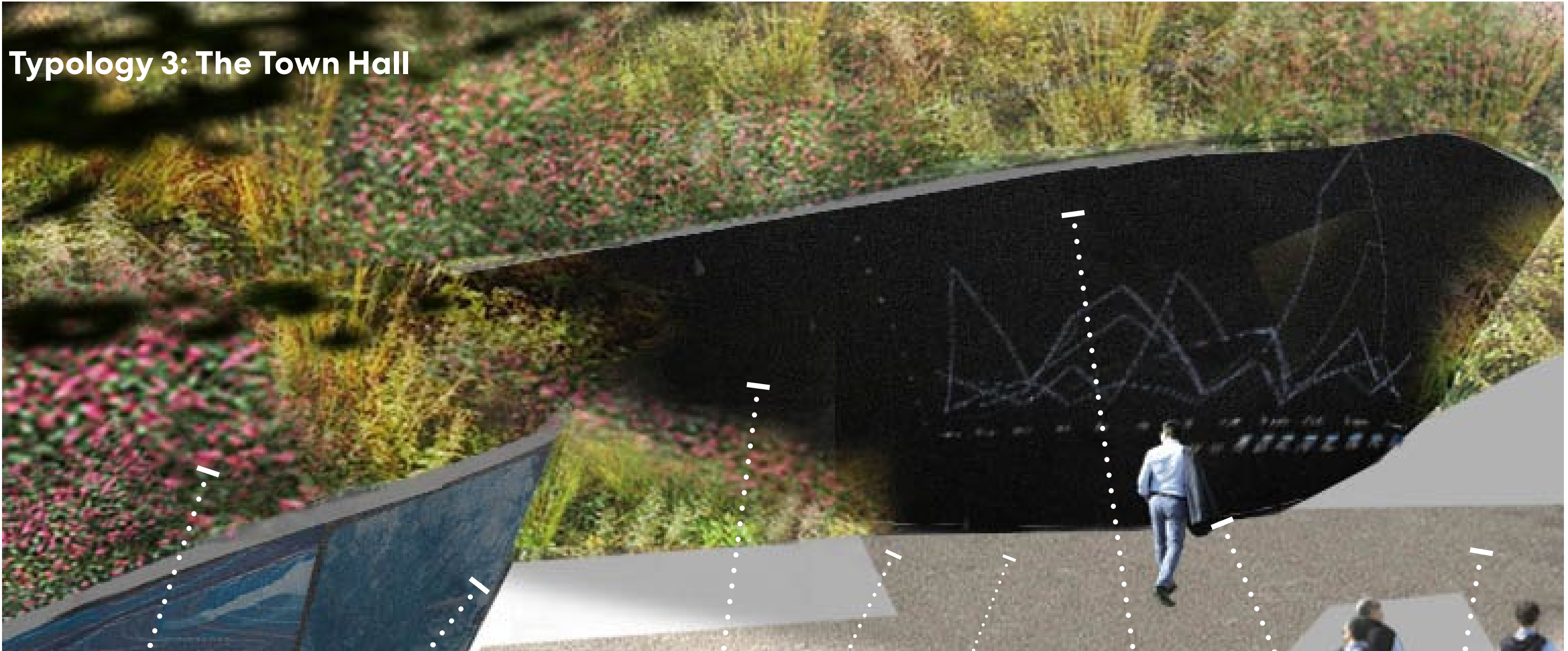


**Who: Matt, 36**  
**UX Designer in Allentown, PA**

*Matt accepted a dream job at a hip start-up in New York City—the epicenter for his field—but he didn’t want to uproot his family. At the same time, Allentown was undergoing a revitalization, aiming to keep its residents there and draw in new ones. (The outdoor office was one such investment.)*

*He primarily works independently in focus mode, needing only a laptop to get the job done. He varies his workplace options, from home or cafe (when the weather is bad) to the outdoor office. It’s centrally located between his children’s school and home and offers him the fresh air and sunshine that he’s found boosts his sertain levels. And, as a bonus, there’s city-run yoga in the same park every Wednesday, so he can pop over easily during his work-day break.*

# Typology 3: The Town Hall



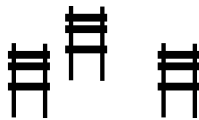
ELEMENT



Low to High  
Planted Form



WiFi Stick



Moveable  
Seating



Electrical Outlets In  
Pavement



Designed  
Pavement



Large-Scale  
Presentation Walls



Canopy Trees



Decomposed  
Granite

BENEFITS

- Natural air filtration of urban pollutants
- Hides embedded noise-canceling deflectors
- Natural air cooling
- Increases property values

- City amenity for business on the go
- Makes online access available to all within range

- Flexible
- Non-Permanent
- Different Options for Arrangement to View Walls or Personal Spaces
- Great for Events
- Stored on Site

- Provides electricity
- Extends workstation time
- International traveler capability
- Charging station for additional electronics
- Seating can be Arranged Around it

- Urban shoe-friendly
- ADA accessible
- Coordinated with water drainage for storm events
- Visually stimulating design
- Open and Flexible

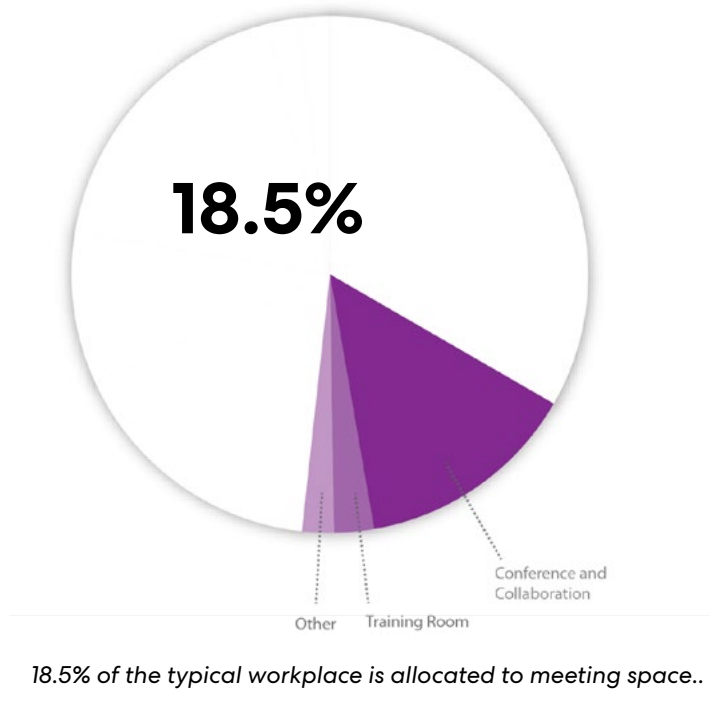
- Provide Digital Screening Space for Public Information, Presentations and More
- Embedded Utilities in Walls/Earthworks
- Accousitc Separation from Street

- Provide Shade
- Cool Temperatures
- Reduced Screen Glare
- Captures Water Runoff
- Protects Biodiversity
- Bird and pollinator habitat

- Permeable
- Captures Water
- Health Benefits for Trees and Soils
- Compacted for Accessibility



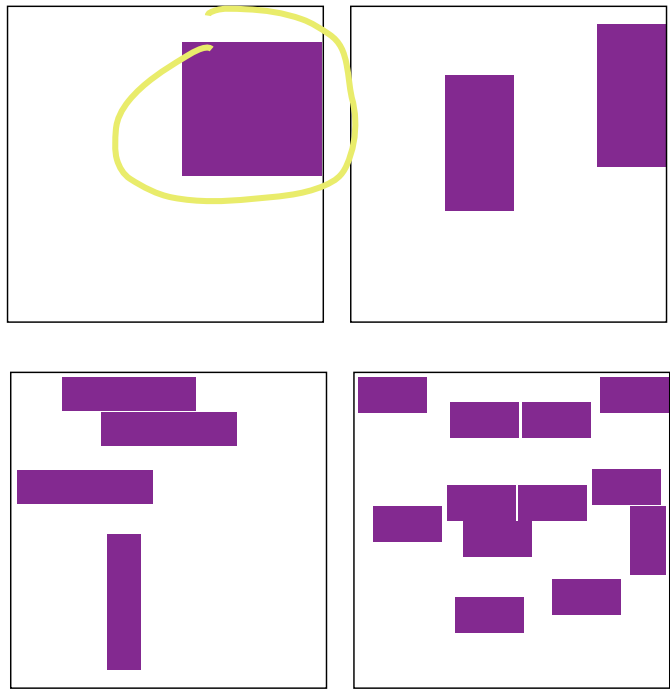
# The Town Hall



## ABOUT

Meeting space is the third largest percentage of the workplace, encompassing everything from two-person huddle spaces to large conference rooms. While most landscape designs do have informal gathering spaces, what does not exist are spaces for larger groups equipped with collaboration tools.

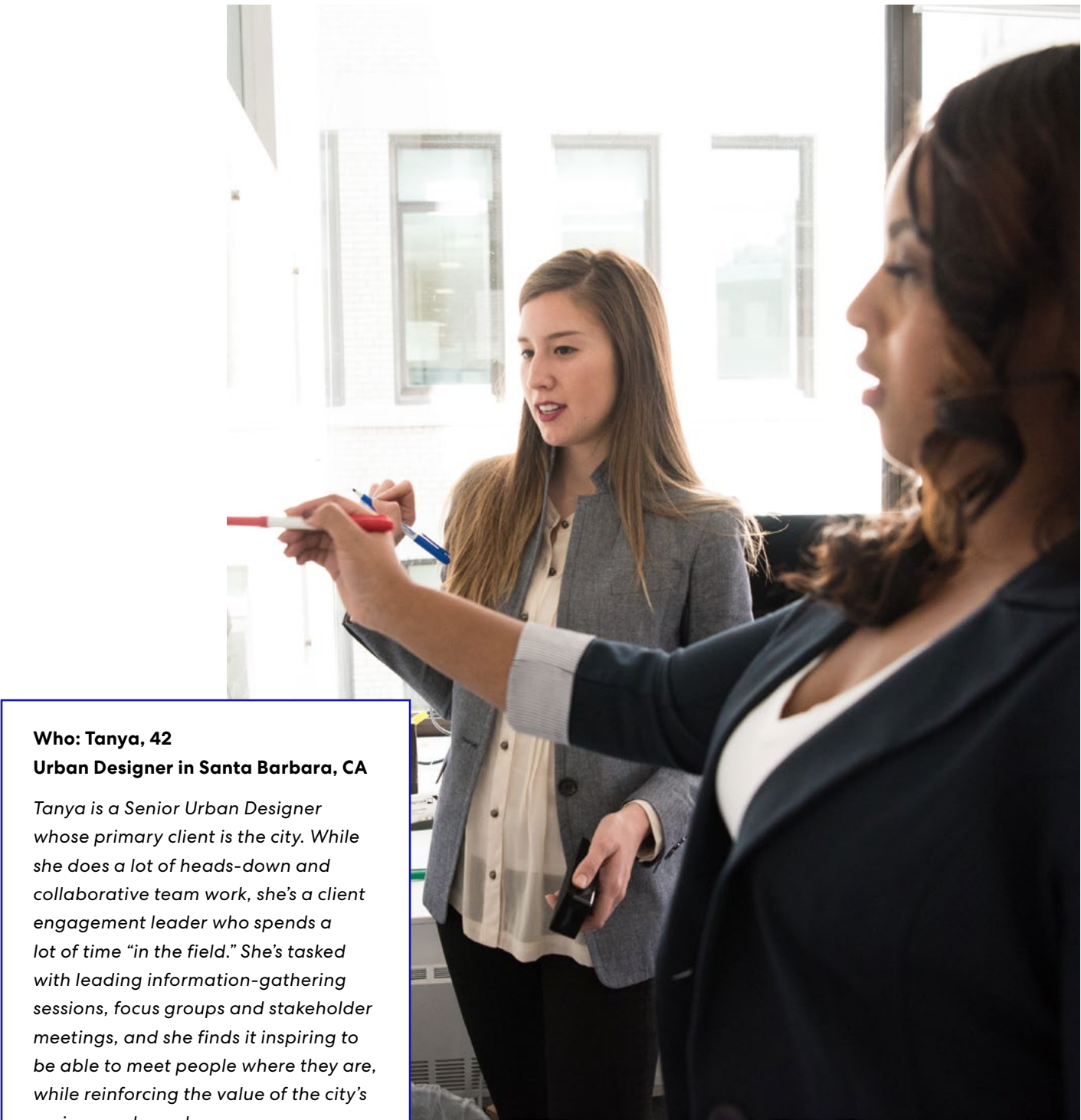
This semi-private zone is designed for group presentations and meetings. Embedded walls within the surrounding earthwork provide a surface for screening presentations while containing all AV functions and creating natural acoustic separation. Because it's open to the public, it invites community engagement; passersby are able to listen to the presentation or even participate in an ad-hoc way.



## FEATURES

- Outdoor space for presentations and community engagement, enabling open access (planned attendees as well as ad-hoc participation)
- Allows both analog and digital display / presentations
- Ideal for public input (chalkboard or other material for leaving feedback/ comments)
- Features moveable seating and storage for flexible furniture

# User Persona



**Who: Tanya, 42**  
**Urban Designer in Santa Barbara, CA**

*Tanya is a Senior Urban Designer whose primary client is the city. While she does a lot of heads-down and collaborative team work, she's a client engagement leader who spends a lot of time "in the field." She's tasked with leading information-gathering sessions, focus groups and stakeholder meetings, and she finds it inspiring to be able to meet people where they are, while reinforcing the value of the city's various parks and resources.*

# Part 4

Survey Findings & Conclusions

# Survey Findings

## Summary

In April 2020, we surveyed knowledge workers across industries, locations, and ages to understand where they work (including policies on remote work, as well as where they actually spend their work hours); what they value in a work setting; and how much influence the design of a workplace environment and the opportunity to work remotely has on their decision to accept and stay at a job. In light of the timing—at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S.—we caveated many questions with instructions about answering from their pre-COVID perspective, understanding that virtually all people were working remotely at the time the survey was issued.

One aim of the survey was to capture the potential audience of the outdoor workplace—where were people spending their work hours currently? How many had explicit permission to work where they chose? And what attributes did they most value in those choices?

In part two, we showed all respondents Typology 2 (Solo Space) and asked for their general feedback, wondering what was appealing or not appealing, what their biggest concerns with it were (i.e. the limitations), and generally how likely were they to use such a space. While the concept was developed prior to the pandemic, the survey was issued after. As such, we added a question about how respondents viewed the scheme in light of current concerns around the spread of germs.

We asked a version of all the same questions above to higher education students, the reasoning being that, as distance learning increases, these would be prospective outdoor workplace users. However, the response rate was relatively low as to not be statistically significant. Further study might involve canvassing more students, particularly in light of many not returning to campus this fall.

## Respondents

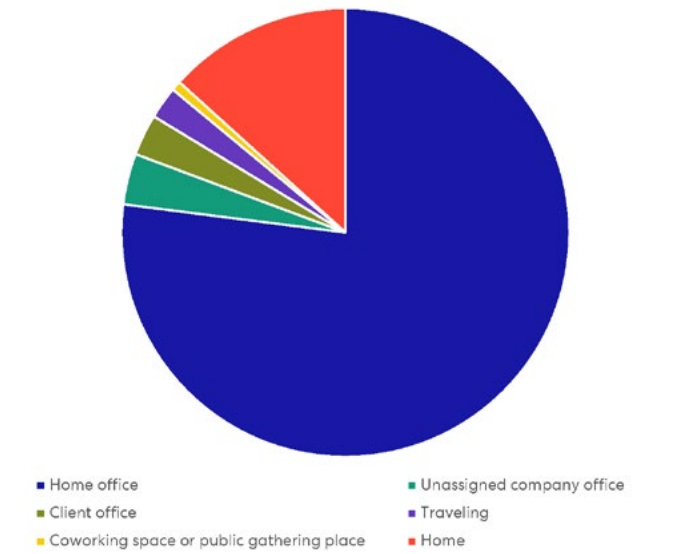
We heard from 145 respondents across multiple industries, with most (72%) working in professional services and employed by a company (91%) versus self-employed or in school. The vast majority of participants were from cities (89%) in the U.S. (94%).

To categorize the age of our respondents, we use Pew Research’s definitions of generations. Our largest cohort were Millennials (born 1981-1996), at 51%, which was expected given this is currently far and away the largest generation in the workplace. Generation X (1965-1980) followed at 33%. Gen Z (1997-2012) and Baby Boomers (1946-1964) made up the rest and 7% and 6%, respectively.

## Where are people currently working?

Remote work was prevalent, even before COVID hit and made it mandatory for many: 60% are allowed but not encouraged to work remotely (reflecting pre-COVID policy); 22% are allowed and even encouraged to work remotely; and for another 2%, remote work is required/expected. This means that 84% could work remotely, in some capacity, prior to COVID. This suggest a large group of potential users of this new workplace choice.

Despite permission to work remotely, we do see that people are spending most of their time at their company office. Collectively, the group spent 77% of their work hours at the office, followed by 13% at home (pre-COVID). The balance of hours were spent, on average, at their unassigned company office (close to 4%), a client office (close to 3%), traveling (about 2%), or in coworking spaces or other public gathering places (1%). **We saw a correlation between age and time at the office; the older the respondent, the more likely to work at the office versus at home.** Millennials spent 17% of their work time at home, versus 13% (all groups averaged).



## How important is workplace environment?

Echoing findings from past research (2017 Well-being Works study), we found that the workplace environment plays a significant role in respondents’ employment decisions. 63% “strongly agree” that the quality of company’s workplace environment would impact their decision to accept a job, or stay at a job (56%). And 50% strongly agree that they would be more likely to accept a job with a company that allowed remote work.

Across all the groups, the impact on accepting a job based on workplace environment averaged 3.6 out of 4, confirming just how important the work setting is to the recruitment process. But, interestingly, as much as we value the workplace that the company provides, at least half of us strongly values the ability to leave it—or work remotely. This speaks to the importance we place on not just the quality of the environment in which we work, but the autonomy to choose that environment. The generations answered fairly similarly in this question group with one notable difference: **Gen Z (those employees born 1997 or later) were much more inclined to accept a job that offered remote work, with all respondents from this cohort saying that was “very important.”** This suggests that the incoming generation of employees will both more readily accept, and perhaps even demand, more choices of where to work.



## What’s most important in workplace environment?

Well-being, as fostered by access to light and views, was a core driver behind this concept. The research, as well as our past industry experience, has revealed this is both integral to work effectiveness but also valued as reported by employees themselves.

Our survey confirmed these past findings, as **75% of respondents across all groups said access to natural light and views is very important. It received a 3.7 average score, making it the highest rated aspect of the workplace in terms of importance.**

So while we understand that the outdoor office will have limitations, we believe that this proven desire for light and views would make it worthwhile option in the menu of workplace choices—whether for an outdoor meeting once a month, or 10 minutes a day to check email.

Where did the other attributes fall on the spectrum? **The second most important aspect is reliable individual technology.** 72% strongly agree that it’s very important (3.6 average). The priority respondents place on the ease of using technology would be a core issue to solve with our typologies. Access to power and WiFi would be paramount and within the scope of our control.

**Location falls in third place, with 63% strongly agreeing that it’s very important (3.5 average).** Note that among those who work less than 50% of their work hours at a traditional office (we’ll refer to these as “nomads”), the importance on location goes up, to 3.8 on average. The relatively high importance of location, particularly among those who would be the core potential users of the outdoor workplace, suggests that convenience plays a role. We are tired of long commutes and want to work in places that contribute to—or at least don’t detract from—work-life balance. Half of respondents strongly agree that the “freedom and flexibility to work where, how and when you want” is very important (3.3 average). Among the nomads, this was even more important (3.6 average). )

Falling lower on the list of important workplace attributes were different spaces for different tasks (3.1), reliable shared AV (3.1), acoustical separation (3.1), spaces for socialization (2.7), a range of furniture / seating choices (2.7). We were most surprised that acoustical separation was not more important to this group, given the prevalence of the discussion of noise and distraction in the workplace. This suggests openness to a new shared workplace model that would be relatively open with limited acoustical control.



# Survey Findings

## How appealing is the setting?

When asked how appealing Typology 2 was, respondents gave it a 3.2 out of 4 (with 4 being very appealing). The largest group (42%) rated it a 3. However, despite this relatively high “appeal” score, the likelihood of respondents using it was lower, at an average of 2.8 out of 4 (with 4 being very likely to use the space). This suggests that while working outside is appealing, there may be limitations or practicality concerns. Top concerns were ease of using technology (84%) and comfort of furniture (80%), with other aspects (acoustical control; ability to meet with colleagues; and privacy) ranking relatively low on the list of concerns. When we asked specifically about COVID-related concerns, we learned that respondents would be most worried about proximity to strangers—more so than using frequently touched surfaces and the lack of true space regulation.

Anecdotally, we heard from many users that the pros of the outdoor environment (fresh air, light, views) might be offset by the cons (wind, heat, rain). As far as comfort goes, it will be tough to strike a balance, and this suggests that perhaps this setting should only be intended for limited use. It would behoove us in further study to create specific guidelines around use and include ideal time segments for each setting, with respect to climate, season, and task.

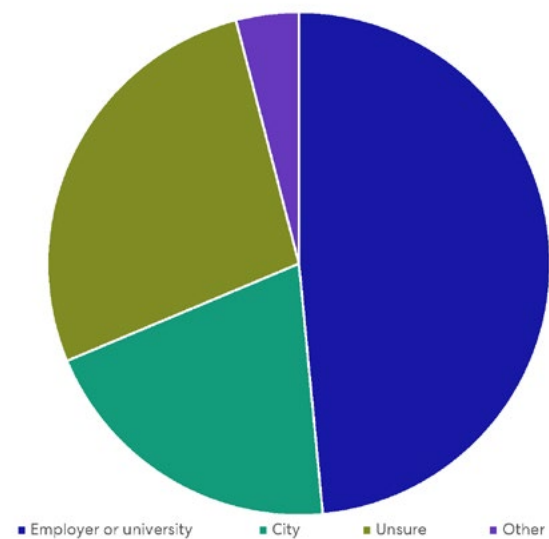
While many people appreciate the canopy of trees and its ability to control light, glare was still the most cited concern. Along with that, many raised concerns about not having enough surface area for items and computer, furniture comfort, and proximity to the indoors (bathrooms, shelter from the elements). Further, there were questions raised about security, safety, and maintenance. These would need to be paramount to address in the design guidelines and protocols. On the whole, respondents embraced the idea but saw limitations to the components.

## Who is responsible for providing these spaces?

Our model proposes city ownership—that is, that the outdoor workplace is provided by the city in the same way the city provides playgrounds, dog runs, and other public amenity spaces. These work settings are investments in the inhabitants of the city and could be viewed as incentives for people to stay within the city when they can work remotely for

companies across the country. We have heard of both cities (and entire states, like Vermont) creating incentive programs to keep people living (and paying taxes) there. Through this lens, and given the rise of remote work as an option, we could see a hypothetical user living in Detroit while working for a Bay Area tech firm, utilizing a variety of work settings to meet all needs—home, coffee shop, outdoor workplace in the warmer months, etc.

We didn’t reveal our thinking in the survey, and respondents were split on who should provide these spaces, with most believing it was the responsibility of private organizations.



## Conclusions

Simply put, the survey reveals that there would likely be demand for an outdoor workplace—given the desire for choice and natural light paired with the available existing permission to work outside the workplace. There’s natural hesitation around the concept, owing mostly to weather, climate, and the unpredictability of completely public spaces. This makes sense, and we recognize that some of these aspects can be controlled while others most certainly cannot. What would be needed is more stakeholder engagement to understand what we can control, as well as careful attention to guidelines to ensure proper use of the spaces.

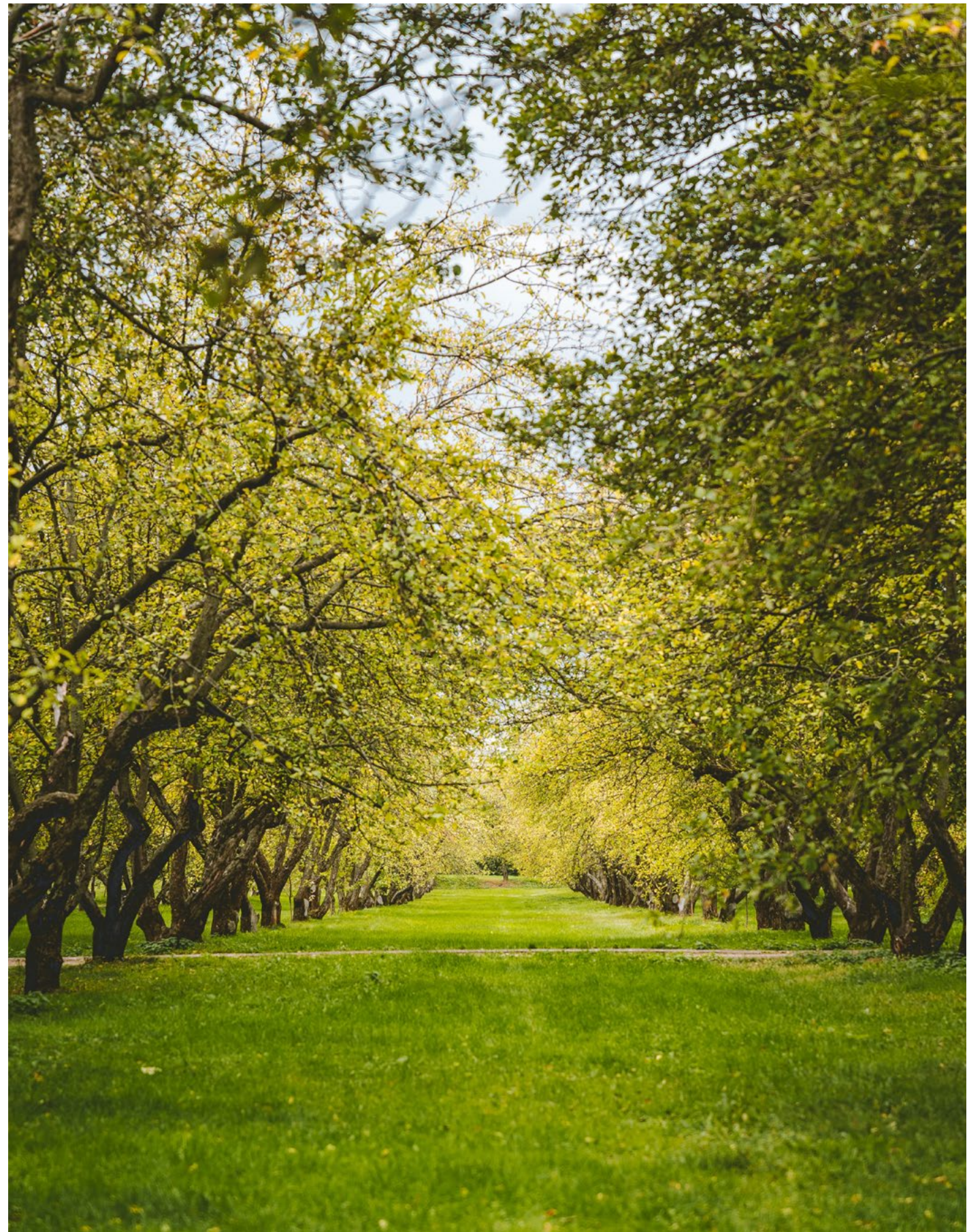


Image courtesy of Unsplash.com.



# Additional Considerations

With the time parameters of the Innovation Incubator grant, this report is just a start. What we learned from both our own research and the survey feedback is that in order to bring this concept to fruition, there would be many complexities to address—and solutions would require further study and consultation with experts in both workplace design and landscape architecture. The following represent a few of the challenges and future considerations to make this concept more viable:

### Location / Context

- Review of prospective cities based on existing park infrastructure and climate.
- Target cities with three-season use.
- Analyze park context—nearby companies and industries, how many employees within 1-mile radius, community retail and services



### Climate & Weather

- Consider seasonal adaptability (moveable furniture that can be stored during the winter in harsher climates).
- Consider a fourth four-season, all-climate typology (see image on opposite page).
- Find landscape or built environment solution for glare, among the top concerns of survey respondents.
- Find ways to mitigate other aspects of nature, i.e. falling leaves, wind; availability of nearby shelter should weather conditions change suddenly.
- Provide ample shade to protect from heat (taking into account urban air temperatures continually rising due to climate change) and wind.
- Consider shade from nearby tall buildings (to mitigate shadows and wind tunnels).
- Consider stormwater capture for increased flood control.

### Components

- Carefully select furniture, finishings, and other materials for durability.
- Select plants and landscaping that are easy to maintain.
- Consider inclusion of temporary storage (for user's personal items).
- Ensure baseline interior workplace standards, i.e. ADA accessibility, proper receptacles, accessible restrooms, water fountains, etc.

### Operations

- Consider maintenance (cleaning), security (i.e. preventing theft of moveable furniture).
- Determine usage protocols—first come, first serve or via a reservation system (perhaps similar to a bike-share like Divvy).

Jane's Carousel in Brooklyn Bridge Park is housed in a glass pavilion, creating an indoor-outdoor experience. This may serve as a potential model for creating spaces that can adapt with the seasons. Photo courtesy of Unsplash.com

# Conclusions

In this document, we've built the case for the outdoor workplace by drawing from industry knowledge, research, benchmarks, best practices, and survey results. We've also leveraged what we know intuitively—that employees want healthier choices in where and how to work, and that COVID-19 has only amplified this desire for choice. The outcome was recommended allocations for a typical 4-acre city park, along with three outdoor workplace schemes with detailed components, considerations, and possible uses, through the lens of three employee personas.

Will this outdoor workplace be right for every user and every situation? Of course not. Weather is an undeniable factor, as

is workstyle, task, and industry. If an employee needs complete privacy and confidentiality, the outdoor office is not the right venue. Nor is this right choice for the middle of winter in Chicago.

That said, we envision a time in the near future when cities will see the ROI for offering workplace to its residents and visitors. Guided by expertise in today's workplace design, landscape architecture and attention to how people experience, the city can apply a kit-of-parts approach to creating this new workplace typology—one that meets the workforce's demand for flexibility, choice, and spaces that actually improve health.



Photo by Christine Dansereau

