North-facing view of easternmost end of Riverwalk Expansion

Bradenton Riverwalk East Expansion: Final Report

Final Report – March 2018
Prepared by the Center for Active Design (CfAD)

In partnership with:
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The Bradenton Riverwalk East Expansion Research Initiative

Realize Bradenton, along with their partners, the City of Bradenton and Kimley-Horn, with grant support from the Knight Donor Advised Fund of Manatee Community Foundation, have embarked on Creating Together Bradenton, an ambitious effort to engage the community to develop ideas regarding physical design, public art, and programmatic opportunities for the planned Bradenton Riverwalk East Expansion.

Realize Bradenton and Kimley-Horn collaborated with the Center for Active Design (CfAD) in order to research community attitudes towards the Riverwalk East Expansion. CfAD is a non-profit organization using design to foster healthy and engaged communities. The organization is leading Assembly, a pioneering initiative funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation to understand how the design and maintenance of public spaces can bolster civic life, drawing upon empirical evidence and original research efforts. The results from Bradenton’s survey will inform the broader Assembly initiative, serving as a model for how citizen-driven, evidence-based design of public spaces can support overall community wellbeing.

The Survey

Realize Bradenton, Kimley-Horn, and the Center for Active Design designed and fielded surveys of residents, business owners, visitors, and other key stakeholders throughout the Bradenton area. The final results provide practical recommendations for park design, programming, and stewardship of the new Riverwalk East Expansion.

The final results from the survey provide important insights to inform the creation of the Master Plan for the expansion, ensuring the project builds on the success of the existing Riverwalk while capturing residents’ and visitors’ vision for what Riverwalk East can become.

Along with their partners, Realize Bradenton launched the online survey in early January. A total of 884 people completed the survey – an impressive response rate for a community of Bradenton’s size, creating a rich foundation of data for analysis.
Executive Summary and Recommendations

This executive summary synthesizes key findings emerging from the Bradenton Riverwalk East Expansion Survey, and offers recommendations for applying these findings. Findings are organized across five major themes: 1) Enjoyment, Pride, and Community Identity; 2) Diversity and Social Interaction; 3) Access to Nature; 4) Maintenance and Volunteerism; and 5) Navigation.

1) Enjoyment, Pride, and Community Identity

- People enjoy the existing Riverwalk immensely, visit frequently, and are very likely to recommend it to others. Seventy-nine percent of respondents say the existing Riverwalk is “Very” or “Extremely Welcoming;” 91% have visited at least once in the last year, and fully 88% are “Very” or “Extremely Likely” to recommend it to others.

- The Riverwalk is a popular destination in the context of a beloved city. Ninety-four percent recommend Bradenton as a place to visit; 89% recommend it as a place to live; and 79% recommend it as a place to work.

- There is a high level of awareness of and interest in the Riverwalk East Expansion. Sixty-eight percent of respondents were aware of the plans for Riverwalk East Expansion and 50% noted that they wanted to stay apprised of new developments and receive invitations to planning meetings and other conversations.

- The Riverwalk East Expansion provides an opportunity to showcase Bradenton’s culture, history and local identity through public art. Sixty percent of respondents said they wanted more public art on the expansion and 30% wanted this art to highlight the history of the area. Assembly’s research indicates that public art can enhance civic trust by instilling pride and contributing to local character. People who report greater access to arts and culture in their community also demonstrate higher levels of civic trust, participation, and stewardship. They are significantly more likely to rate local leaders as effective, to attend local events, and to donate money to local organizations.1

Recommendation: Apply placemaking2 strategies that emphasize local identity and draw explicit connections between the Riverwalk East Expansion and Bradenton’s unique history. People clearly have a strong attachment to and love for the City of Bradenton. This community pride can be

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1 Ibid.
2 With community-based participation at its center, an effective Placemaking process capitalizes on a local community’s assets, inspiration, and potential, and it results in the creation of quality public spaces that contribute to people’s health, happiness, and well-being (Project for Public Spaces).
reflected through programming, wellness activities, public art, signage, and other design elements.

2) Diversity and Social Interaction

- **The Riverwalk is rich with diversity.** One respondent said they loved “the accessible open space to share with citizens of all ages” while others mentioned they value how the Riverwalk makes “all feel welcome” and had an “atmosphere rich with diversity,” attracting a wide range of people “sharing the park together.” These responses are particularly compelling in an era where American neighborhoods are more politically, ethnically, and economically segregated than ever before. Urban parks like Bradenton Riverwalk provide crucial opportunities for intercultural and intergenerational interaction, and have been shown to support civic trust and participation in public life.

- **The Riverwalk serves as an important place for social interaction.** Seventy-nine percent of respondents have had at least one chance encounter with someone they knew on the Riverwalk in the last year, and 52% of respondents have met new people on the existing Riverwalk. Assembly research finds that these unexpected meetings in public spaces can help reinforce civic trust.

- **The Riverwalk East Expansion provides an opportunity to further increase social interaction.** Forty-four percent of respondents wish there were more places to eat on the current Riverwalk, and 56% would like to see new social gathering spaces on the expansion eastward. Assembly finds that formal and informal gathering spaces where all feel welcome can support civic trust and participation in public life.

**Recommendation:** Consider design options for the Riverwalk East Expansion that encourage diverse communities to gather and socialize with one another. For example, provide space for food vendors, picnics, and small-scale events.

3) Access to Nature

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4 When areas have high civic trust, residents feel they are part of a collective civic identity. They exhibit pride in their community and trust their neighbors—and their local government—to do what’s right. Retrieved from [https://centerforactivedesign.org/assembly](https://centerforactivedesign.org/assembly)


8 Center for Active Design. (2017). *The Assembly Civic Engagement Survey: Key findings and design implications.* Retrieved from [https://centerforactivedesign.org/assembly](https://centerforactivedesign.org/assembly)
• **The Riverwalk is valued as an important place to walk, relax, and connect with nature.** The most popular reasons people visit the existing Riverwalk is to walk (75%) and enjoy the view (63%). This enjoyment of natural space yields important community benefits, since research shows that people who live in neighborhoods with access to nature and green space are more likely to report that they trust their neighbors and believe community members are willing to help each other.  

• **People want to build on the success of the existing Riverwalk.** Sixty percent of survey respondents said the top priority for the Riverwalk East Expansion is to provide more space to walk and relax near the river. Top preferences for new Riverwalk amenities reflect an appreciation for natural assets: 82% want a scenic overlook and 78% requested shaded areas for sitting and enjoying the view.

Recommendation: Prioritize access to nature and views in the Riverwalk’s expansion eastward. Celebrate the Riverwalk as an important place to connect with nature. Continue to provide places for walking, biking, or relaxing in the shade and enjoying the view.

4) **Maintenance and Volunteerism**

• **Respondents think the existing Riverwalk is well-maintained.** Only 8% reported that poor maintenance was their least favorite thing about the Riverwalk. This high level of satisfaction with upkeep is critical, as Assembly research indicates that the maintenance of public spaces is directly related to community pride, trust in local government, and trust in one another. Studies indicate that maintenance of playgrounds and other amenities for children is particularly important, since these amenities are associated with negative impacts on civic pride and trust when in disrepair.

• **Respondents envision new amenities to support ongoing maintenance at the Riverwalk.** They suggested providing additional trash cans (38% of respondents), and positive signage encouraging people to clean up after themselves (22%). For Riverwalk East, they also envisioned trash cans as functional public art to encourage additional litter-cleanup (29% of respondents.)

• **People are interested in volunteering at the Riverwalk.** Forty-two percent of survey respondents are at least "somewhat interested" in volunteering — much higher than the national average. That proportion jumps to an impressive 64% for respondents that live in the Riverwalk East neighborhood. Moreover, residents suggested a variety

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10 Center for Active Design. (2017). *The Assembly Civic Engagement Survey: Key findings and design implications.* Retrieved from [https://centerforactivedesign.org/assembly](https://centerforactivedesign.org/assembly)
of ways they'd like to volunteer, including gardening (18%), and litter pick-up (13%). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 25% of Americans volunteer their time with organizations (the lowest rate in decades) and the bulk of those volunteers do so with religious organizations (33%) or educational/youth service organizations (25%) as opposed to public parks.11

Recommendations:
Sustain excellent maintenance and operations conditions for the Riverwalk East Expansion. Provide amenities, such as enhanced trash cans, to involve visitors and residents in maintenance efforts and foster norms around stewardship.

Consider formalizing a Riverwalk Volunteer Program to capitalize on the high level of interest in volunteerism relative to the Riverwalk. Based on the successful community outreach of the Creating Together Bradenton initiative, develop on-going ways to keep residents informed of the progress of the Riverwalk East Expansion and on-going engagement to develop public art and programming.

5) Navigation

- Respondents suggested a number of ways to make the Riverwalk East Expansion easy to navigate. With the extension of the Riverwalk, visitors will be able to walk or bike the entirety of the 2.2 miles along the river in the future. This is clearly an appealing notion – 89% of respondents say they are likely to bike or walk the entire distance. Respondents also advocate for distance markers (49%), increased lighting (42%), and rest areas (39%) to make traveling the entirety of the Riverwalk feel more enticing and safe. Assembly finds that walkable areas within cities have been linked to higher social capital and community cohesion,12 neighborliness and positive relationships with neighbors,13 and sense of community.14

Recommendation:
Use design to facilitate walking or biking along the Riverwalk. Consider design-based encouragements like distance markers, enhanced lighting, or rest areas.

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In-Depth Analysis

The Sample

- The survey had ample variation on demographics (see Sample Characteristics below). The survey respondents are majority female (65%), yet this breakdown is quite common for online surveys, and has been corrected by weighting results for gender in the analysis.

Eighty-five percent of survey respondents identified as white, 10% identified as Hispanic and 6% as African American. While both African American and Hispanic respondents are slightly under-represented relative to their proportion in the city of Bradenton and – less so – Manatee County, the samples of both groups are large enough to analyze independently. As such, where appropriate, CfAD has highlighted the rare instances where perspectives of these respondents diverge meaningfully from the total sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>African Americans</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manatee County</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Bradenton</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The survey captured the preferences of both Bradenton residents as well as residents of Manatee County. While 61% of survey respondents live in zip codes within the city, 39% of respondents fall outside of city limits (though still reside in Manatee County).\textsuperscript{15}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses by Zip Code</th>
<th>City of Bradenton</th>
<th>Broader Manatee County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34205</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34208</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>34202</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The bulk of the survey consists of people who have lived in the Bradenton area for a considerable time – 72% of survey respondents have lived in their home for more than 3 years, and 42% have lived there for more than 8 years. The majority of respondents do not have children under 18 in the home - 27% say they have a child in their home, while 73% report that they do not.

\textsuperscript{15} Surveys were closely reviewed to ensure they captured the perspectives of those who live or work in Bradenton at least part-time throughout the year. The survey achieved great success reaching respondents with a real connection to Bradenton: Only 7 respondents were dropped from the analysis due to lack of familiarity with Bradenton (e.g. they lived far outside of the community, and did not report living or working within 15 miles of the Riverwalk).
Enjoyment, Pride, and Use

- **Survey respondents visit the existing Riverwalk frequently.**
  A remarkable 91% of respondents report that they visit the existing Riverwalk at least once per month, suggesting a particularly active and publicly engaged survey sample. More than half of respondents (59%) visit the existing Riverwalk between 1-5 times per month; 12% visit between 6-10 times per month; 19% visit more than 10 times per month.

  ![Frequency of Visiting the Riverwalk](image)

- **Reasons for visiting the Riverwalk are highly varied.**
  The most popular reason to visit the existing Riverwalk is to walk (77%), followed by coming to enjoy the view (62%), and to enjoy nature (42%). Survey respondents’ enjoyment of the natural and scenic elements of the Riverwalk yields downstream benefits according to research from Assembly, as access to nature is inherently beneficial to civic life. People who live in neighborhoods with access to parks and green space are more likely to report that they trust their neighbors and believe community members are willing to help each other.16

  ![Reasons for Visiting Riverwalk](image)

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• People enjoy the existing Riverwalk immensely and are likely to recommend it to others. Seventy-nine percent of respondents say the existing Riverwalk is at least “extremely” or “very” welcoming, while fully 88% are likely to recommend it to others. This latter measure has been adapted from the Net Promoter Score, a validated metric introduced by Harvard Business School, which is used by more than 2/3 of Fortune 500 companies, public sector entities, and international organizations in order to gauge loyalty. The fact that a majority of respondents fall in the top “Promoter” category indicates that a majority of the Riverwalk’s visitors exhibit “value-creating behaviors,” such as visiting more frequently and making more positive referrals to other potential visitors.17

![FEELING WELCOME ON THE RIVERWALK AND RECOMMENDING IT](chart)

• The Riverwalk is a popular destination in an already-beloved city.
Eighty-nine percent of respondents say they would recommend Bradenton as a place to live; 94% recommend it as a place to visit; and 79% recommend it as a place to work.

![WOULD YOU RECOMMEND BRADENTON AS A PLACE TO...](chart)

Social Interaction and Diversity

Many respondents value the existing Riverwalk as a place of diversity and social interaction.

When asked to share what they loved about the Riverwalk, people had much to say about the fact that they saw it as a place to be connected to their diverse community. One person said: “Seeing everyone!” Another reiterated that they loved “the accessible open space to share with citizens of all ages.” Still others mentioned they value how the Riverwalk makes “all feel welcome.” Many mentioned that “the atmosphere is rich with diversity” and that it attracted such a wide range of people “sharing the park together.” These responses are compelling in an era where American neighborhoods are more politically, ethnically, and economically segregated than ever before.\(^{18}\) Urban parks have been shown to support civic trust and participation in public life by providing opportunities for intercultural and intergenerational interaction.\(^ {19,20}\) Research from CfAD’s Assembly initiative highlights the benefits of sharing public spaces with diverse groups - diversity in public spaces “is important not only as a marker of democratic openness but also as force for a more vital and inclusive democratic politics.”\(^ {21}\)

The Riverwalk is an important place for social interaction.

Fifty-two percent of respondents have met new people on the existing Riverwalk, which suggests that it is a place for making new connections and building a sense of community. People reported being most likely to meet new people at the children’s play area. Others commented they met new people while sitting or walking, or at organized events on the Riverwalk.

The Riverwalk is a place to solidify existing connections.

The survey revealed that 79% of respondents have had at least one chance encounter with someone they knew on the Riverwalk in the last year, and 12% of people have had more than 10 chance encounters! These findings indicate that the Riverwalk is providing a critical social function by providing a space to engage with neighbors spontaneously. Moreover, more than 40% of people say it’s important for them to socialize with others on the Riverwalk, indicating that they value the Riverwalk in both facilitating and serving as a backdrop to their connections with others.

Assembly research cannot overstate the importance of creating space for chance encounters. These unexpected meetings in public spaces have been shown to reinforce civic trust for those


that have them.\textsuperscript{22} Research suggests these chance encounters are critical – especially in a city with suburban enclaves:

Spontaneous ‘bumping into’ neighbors, brief (seemingly trivial) conversations, or just waving hello can help to encourage a sense of trust and a sense of connection between people and the places they live...When summed over time, these individual occurrences have been theorized to be of great importance for fostering “a web of public respect and trust, and a resource in time of personal or neighborhood need.” (Leyden, Kevin. 2003. “Social Capital and the Built Environment: The Importance of Walkable Neighborhoods” in The American Journal of Public Health)

Opportunities for Growth

- **Respondents would like to see more food options on the Riverwalk.** When it comes to respondents’ least favorite aspects of the current Riverwalk, a common response was lack of places to eat (44% of respondents), and lack of food (26%). In the open-ended responses, people were most likely to mention that they wanted food to be a part of their Riverwalk experience. Some wanted places to sit and eat outside, others wanted easily-accessible food trucks or carts or ice cream, while others simply wanted additional picnic tables where they could gather and bring their own food: “I would put in more picnic tables and shade for people to enjoy a nice lunch or dinner...” Others felt like food vendors were an omission from the Riverwalk. “FOOD!...This is the secret sauce. Put food and drink vendors on the Riverwalk!”

Respondents’ preference for food and drink echoes research from Assembly. As William Whyte said: “If you want to seed a place with activity, put out food. Food attracts people who attract more people.” Food can attract more people to a public space, supporting participation in public life and enhancing civic trust. A 2017 Assembly field experiment at a government plaza in

Charlotte, NC, found that when the space was activated with food trucks and programming, respondents were 23% more likely to report that “the local government understands my concerns.”

- **Respondents cited bathrooms as an opportunity for improvement.** Twenty-eight percent of respondents advocated for more bathrooms on the Riverwalk. According to Assembly, access to public bathrooms can boost civic trust. ACES respondents who reported access to bathrooms in their local park scored higher on measures of civic trust. Specifically, they were 7% more likely to express community pride and 6% more likely to express satisfaction with their mayor, compared to respondents who did not have bathroom access in their local park.

- **A quarter of people (24%) identified a lack of parking as a concern.** Some elaborated in the comments, saying that they want the city to “bring back the street parking,” which was unavailable due to renovations of the South Florida Museum. Other respondents said that some parking near the Riverwalk requires a “significant walk” and they requested “easier parking at beginning points of the walkway,” while others wanted more parking on the east side of the Riverwalk. While these concerns should be heard, Assembly research suggests that design of public spaces that encourages walking as opposed to remaining in one’s car is more beneficial to civic life.

![Least Favorite Parts of the Riverwalk](chart.png)

25 Ibid.
Access and Mobility

- Perceptions of mobility are essential to ensuring that as many people as possible can enjoy the Riverwalk.
  The majority of respondents get to the Riverwalk by driving (67%) and 26% walk.

![Getting to the Riverwalk](chart)

- Many perceive the Riverwalk to be easily navigable by foot.
  Regardless of the method of transport to the area, people without bicycles enter the area on foot. It is good news that 85% of respondents say the Riverwalk is easy to navigate on foot. Walkable areas within cities have been linked to higher social capital and community cohesion,\(^{26}\)neighborliness and positive relationships with neighbors,\(^{27}\) and sense of community.\(^{28}\)

Respondents suggested a number of ways to make the Riverwalk East Expansion easy to navigate.

With the extension of the Riverwalk, visitors will be able to walk or bike the entirety of the 2.2 miles along the river in the future. This is clearly an appealing notion – 89% of respondents say they are likely to bike or walk the entire distance. Respondents also advocate for distance markers (49%), increased lighting (42%), and rest areas (39%) to make traveling the entirety of the Riverwalk feel more enticing and safe. Extensive research indicates that efforts to encourage walking or biking have myriad effects – not only on public health and physical wellbeing, but on social health and civic life.

![Chart showing what would make respondents more likely to bike or walk the entire 2.2 miles](chart.png)

**Maintenance**

Respondents are impressed with the overall maintenance and upkeep of the existing Riverwalk.

A vast majority rated all elements and amenities to be in very good condition. In fact, when asked what people’s least favorite part of the existing Riverwalk was, only 8% reported that it was poor maintenance, and only 10% reported concerns about litter. This finding is especially notable given how common concerns about litter are in the U.S. In a survey of 26 cities, Assembly finds that 21% reported that litter was very common in their neighborhood, and 58% said litter was at least somewhat common. Moreover, high levels of litter are associated with depleted civic trust: people who say litter is “very common” in their neighborhood exhibit lower levels of civic trust across a range of measures, with diminished community pride (-10%), less trust in local government to maintain public spaces (-10%) and less trust in police to do what’s right (-5%).

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30 Ibid.
When it came to questioning what, specifically, was in disrepair, the bathrooms were the most common complaint for everyone – however, only 12% of respondents reporting they were not in very good or in poor condition, suggesting that this is by no means a majority concern.

Moreover, only 7% of respondents rate the maintenance of the splashpad as lacking and only 3% say the same about the playground. The high satisfaction with the maintenance of these amenities is critical given that Assembly research finds that the condition of amenities for children can be particularly important for sustaining civic trust. Civic trust is lower when playgrounds, sports fields, bathrooms and other amenities catering to children are in poor condition compared to other amenities.31

- People envision opportunities to boost community stewardship efforts and support Riverwalk upkeep.

As the Riverwalk grows and thrives, stewardship by the community will become even more important than it is today. Thirty-eight percent of respondents suggested placing more garbage cans on the Riverwalk to decrease litter, while 22% suggested signage encouraging people to pick up after themselves. In the open-ended answers, some advocated against signs that were negative in tone (like “Do not litter”). One study of environmental stewardship found that people were less likely to litter if they were exposed to positive messages indicating that cleanliness was the norm in the community.32 Assembly research validates this concept and finds that people exhibit more community pride and are more likely to think the city cares about them when they

are presented with park signs that encourage positive behavior as opposed to rules-based signs that discourage negative behavior.33

Safety and Security

- People think of the Riverwalk as a safe place to be—although people feel slightly less safe at night.

Safety and security is another critical component for enjoying life on the Riverwalk. In order for visitors to fully enjoy the space, they must feel safe in doing so. And many do – 88% of respondents feel extremely or very safe on the Riverwalk during the day. However, this number declines in the evenings – with only 40% saying they feel safe and close to 20% reporting they do not feel very safe or safe at all.

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• Respondents expressed a desire for security enhancements on the Riverwalk – especially at night.

The survey included a question asking respondents to rank potential security enhancements for the Riverwalk according to which would make them feel safest. Among people’s top two choices were an increased police presence (73%) and enhanced lighting (69%). Less popular solutions included security cameras (38%) and security call boxes (26%). While increased police presence can have mixed effects when it comes to civic life (while some people report they feel safer, others report the opposite, citing profiling and surveillance concerns), enhanced lighting unequivocally benefits perceptions of safety.34

![Perceptions of potential security enhancements](image)

• Homeless people have a visible presence on the Riverwalk.

While a majority of respondents feel safe on the Riverwalk regardless of the hour, some wrote comments about the homeless population as being their least favorite aspects of the Riverwalk. People advocated for an increased police presence in those areas during the evening hours.

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Awareness, Interest, and Volunteerism

- **There is high awareness of the Riverwalk East Expansion.**
  Sixty-eight percent of respondents say they are aware of the plans for Riverwalk East, suggesting that Realize Bradenton and the city have done a good job of informing the public. Notably, this percentage drops for African American and Latino respondents — only 38% of these respondents were aware of the plans for the extension. Such findings stress the importance of awareness campaigns that are multi-lingual, multi-cultural, and target diverse ethnic groups within the city.

![Awareness of the Riverwalk East Expansion](image)

- **There is considerable community interest in Riverwalk East Expansion.**
  Close to half of respondents (48%) said they are extremely interested in the Riverwalk East Expansion and 27% say they are very interested. This enthusiasm bodes well for the expansion as it suggests enthusiasm and engagement in the project. It also suggests that plans have caught the public’s attention and will be highly visible as implementation efforts move forward.

![How Interested are you in the Riverwalk East Expansion?](image)
• Community members have a desire to be informed about the Riverwalk East Expansion. Fifty-percent of respondents noted that they wanted to stay apprised of new developments and receive invitations to planning meetings and other conversations. Assembly research suggests key opportunities to convey community information. For example, national survey findings show that information boards in local parks are associated with elevated civic trust (+7%) and help inform people about community plans. Moreover, the location and visibility of community events can influence participation. Assembly research finds that respondents who were shown a flyer advertising an outdoor community board meeting were 21% more likely to report that they would be “very interested” in attending, compared to those who viewed an identical flyer inviting them to an indoor meeting.35

• Survey respondents want to get involved with the Riverwalk East Expansion. Twenty-two percent of respondents are interested in volunteering on the existing Riverwalk or its expansion eastward and 31% are somewhat interested. While this proportion may not seem very high when taken out of context, it is quite sizable when compared to other levels of volunteerism nationwide. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 25% of Americans volunteer their time with organizations (the lowest rate in decades) and the bulk of those volunteers do so with religious organizations (33%) or educational/youth service organizations (25%) as opposed to public parks.

Moreover, this number increases for African American and Latino respondents — 38% and 34%, respectively, are fully interested or extremely interested in volunteering (versus 22% among the general sample). Moreover, 64% of those that live in the Riverwalk East neighborhood say they are at least somewhat interested in volunteering (compared to 42% who live outside that zip code) indicating that the site of the extension may offer fruitful ground for volunteering.

• Respondents suggested a variety of ways they would like to volunteer. While 33% of those interested in volunteering said they wanted to volunteer for Riverwalk events, 21% reported they would like to participate in community art projects, and 18% said they would like to help maintain the landscape by assisting with gardening. In addition, 13% reported they would be interested in participating with litter pickup, suggesting that the Riverwalk may help Bradenton cultivate stewardship and volunteerism as core community values.

![WHAT TYPE OF VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES INTEREST YOU?](image)

Future Goals and Amenities

• People particularly look forward to walking and relaxing at Riverwalk. Most respondents believe that the most important goal of Riverwalk East should be to provide more space to walk and relax near the river (60%). Respondents clearly enjoy the existing Riverwalk and want more of it – they are excited for it to be extended “so there is more of it to enjoy!” People also want to highlight the area’s history (39%), and to provide a space designed for interaction with friends, family, and neighbors (35%).

![PRIORITY GOALS FOR RIVERWALK EAST EXPANSION](image)
• **Respondents want to see a diverse range of amenities on the Riverwalk East Expansion.**

When asked about the amenities people would like to see on the expansion, respondents demonstrated an appreciation for the Riverwalk’s natural resources: 82% wanted a scenic overlook and 78% requested shaded areas for sitting. Other popular responses include shaded areas for walking (70%), bike paths (64%), historic information (62%), and public art (60%).

![Preferred Amenities for the Riverwalk East Expansion]

• **Respondents expressed variable preferences around creating new social gathering spaces.**

For example, African American and Latino respondents indicated more positive reactions to amenities that facilitate social interaction (such as picnic areas or other gathering places) compared to non-African American and non-Latino respondents. In fact, 44% of African American respondents and 55% of Latino respondents report that it is important for them to socialize on the Riverwalk, compared to 36% of non-African American / non-Latino respondents. Respondents residing in East Bradenton are also 7 percentage points more likely than respondents in other zip codes (44% vs. 37%) to say that socializing on the Riverwalk is important to them.

Assembly finds that informal gathering spaces can support civic trust and participation in public life. The concept of “third places” emerged in the 1990s, arguing for the essential value of spaces outside the home or workplace that promote social interaction and idea exchange.³⁶

• **When it comes to children’s amenities, more than half of respondents said they preferred play areas on the Riverwalk East Expansion.**

Roughly forty percent requested designated family areas and also interactive public art for children. Preferences over the value of children’s amenities differ across geographic areas. While 32% of residents that live in East Bradenton are drawn to visit the existing Riverwalk for children’s amenities, only 19% of respondents in other neighborhoods say the same. As such, continuing to maintain and elevate the children’s amenities on the existing Riverwalk as well as adding potential children’s amenities in the Riverwalk East Expansion may further attract this community and promote interaction across East and West Bradenton neighborhoods.

### Programming and Public Art

- **Nature viewing was the most popular wellness activity.**

  Less popular was yoga (29%), group fitness classes (27%), and various runs/races (27%). While 25% of respondents aged 55 and above chose yoga as a desired activity, 39% of those under 55 said that they’d like to see yoga offered. Yoga programming could be a consideration for drawing a slightly younger crowd to the Riverwalk East Expansion.
• Many respondents have a keen interest in incorporating Bradenton’s history into Riverwalk East.

Thirty percent of the sample said they would like panels installed showing Bradenton’s history on Riverwalk East. Assembly research finds that historic assets can often serve as a foundation for cultivating community pride and supporting civic trust.

Assembly also finds that locally-produced public art is particularly valued. One experiment showed all respondents the same image of art on a bench, and randomly assigned a prompt identifying the artist. Those who believed the art was created by a local student (as opposed to a famous artist) were significantly more likely to believe that the city cared about people who live there and provided opportunities for residents to participate in their community.\textsuperscript{37}

Assembly’s research indicates that public art can enhance civic trust by instilling pride and contributing to local character. People who report greater access to arts and culture in their community also demonstrate higher levels of civic trust, participation, and stewardship. They are significantly more likely to rate local leaders as effective, to attend local events, and to donate money to local organizations.\textsuperscript{38}

• Many respondents advocated using public art to provide decorative flair to everyday objects.

Twenty-nine percent of respondents preferred that public art on the Riverwalk East Expansion be incorporated into usable objects like benches, lighting, and garbage cans. The accessibility of art is not to be overlooked: Assembly research found that a sign encouraging interaction with an art installation resulted in a 7% increase in the perception that the art “will encourage people to interact with those who are different from them.”\textsuperscript{39}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{preferred_public_art}
\caption{Preferred Public Art for the Riverwalk East Expansion}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{37} Center for Active Design. (2017). The Assembly Civic Engagement Survey: Key findings and design implications. Retrieved from \url{https://centerforactivedesign.org/assembly}
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
Areas for Future Research

The findings uncovered insights about specific community preferences worthy of further study—including interest in food on the Riverwalk, as well as areas to gather and connect with friends and neighbors. On-site, participatory design activities with East Bradenton residents, or tactical interventions with temporary markets and food vendors, can generate further information about how Riverwalk East can be tailored to the needs and interests of the local neighborhood. (See prototyping experiment below.)

The following may prove fruitful avenues for research as the Riverwalk grows and thrives:

- **Annual or biennial survey of community attitudes, preferences, and concerns enable stakeholders to track public opinion and civic life metrics over time.** In doing so, they will be able to anticipate change and respond to challenges with a foundation of evidence.
  - Have various indicators (community pride, frequency of visits, etc.) improved with the Riverwalk East Expansion? Which ones, and for whom?
  - Do visitors and residents have similar or differing perceptions of and desires for the Riverwalk? How might those be negotiated over time?

- **As design plans evolve, two methodologies can be used to test proposed improvements and possibilities.**
  - **Photo experiment:** If stakeholders are debating between a number of different designs for the Riverwalk East Expansion, photo experiments can help evidence-based decision-making. Survey respondents are randomly assigned one of the possible sets of designs, and all respondents were asked the same questions about their preferences and anticipated behavior. Because the photo treatments are randomly assigned, any difference in the civic engagement measures can be directly attributed to the differences in design.
  - **Prototyping experiment:** Prototyping experiments use temporary installations to study specific real-world place-based design interventions and provide a unique opportunity to understand the causal link between design and civic life. This can be a cost-effective way to understand the anticipated impact of a specific design intervention before it is implemented permanently. Researchers can conduct a "baseline" or "pre-installation" survey with visitors in the area and then conduct a "post-installation" survey once the pop-up has been installed. Moreover, planners can even choose to rotate various popup designs and survey during each rotation in order to compare designs. Even though a design may not be permanent, this methodology allows planners to validate and compare competing designs before investing considerable capital funds.
Conclusion

This survey highlights and quantifies the enthusiasm for the existing Riverwalk along with its proposed expansion. It’s clear that the Riverwalk East Expansion has a great potential to meet the needs of diverse community members and serve as destination for those in Manatee County and beyond. The results also clearly reveal Riverwalk East’s potential to provide a sense of welcome for all community members—especially East Bradenton residents, who express particularly high interest in volunteerism and stewardship on this project.

Thanks to the tireless efforts of Realize Bradenton, Kimley-Horn, and their community partners, the Riverwalk Expansion East Survey provides an evidence-based benchmark for attitudes and preferences around this important community asset and serves as a basis for making data-driven design choices as the Riverwalk expands eastward.