

Background:

One of Juárez's core resilience goals is to foster a sense of place while enhancing and expanding the capacity of community members to participate in the development of their city. The City dedicated significant resources to the redevelopment of the downtown district of the city center, transforming a multiple-block radius with high crime and vacant buildings into a plaza that was meant to add public recreation space. This public space, Plaza de Juan Gabriel, is adjacent to the bustling downtown; a commercial corridor linked by pedestrian walkways, that bring families from all over Juárez to the city's center. However, the public plaza remains underutilized, often vacant in the middle of the day.

In order to enhance the space with resilience principles at the forefront, Rebuild by Design teamed up with the City of Juárez, The Gehl Institute, and 100 Resilient Cities to develop a unique design competition to solicit ideas for site-specific improvements to Juan Gabriel Plaza. The competition called for design proposals that would address environmental challenges including heat mitigation, stormwater mitigation, and urban greening in the space, while empowering local voices in the planning process.



ABOVE: Professor and students from the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez doing field research at Juan Gabriel Plaza.

Research:

Utilizing the Rebuild process of collaborative research and iterative design, the first phase was to understand the challenges and opportunities of the plaza from the perspective of residents and local businesses. To do this, over 40 students from the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez were trained to use the Gehl Institute methodology for public life observation and community surveys that would inform what the competition should call for. After over 150 surveys of local businesses and users of the space, as well as 100+ hours of public observation, students created a research document that articulated what people liked about the space and the challenges that prevent them from utilizing it for its full potential.

Design:

The call for proposals for the competition coupled the research conducted by the university and the goals articulated in the City's resilience assessment to address heat and stormwater mitigation, public safety, and increased connectivity to nearby streets and businesses. In order to ensure the design submissions were aligned with community aspirations, a Jury comprised of representatives from the municipal government, local academia, Rebuild, and The Gehl Institute, chose the top three submissions to be finalists in the competition.



ABOVE: Panel of partners at the public workshop for the finalist design proposals.

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The finalist design teams were required to present their initial ideas in a public workshop at the Museo de la Revolución en la Frontera to receive feedback from community members and city officials on how their proposal could be further enhanced. The finalist designs were then given three weeks to re-calibrate their proposal according to public input and re-submit their final design to the Jury. In January 2018, the City of Juárez announced the winner of the Juan Gabriel Plaza Design Competition. The winning design was submitted by HADVD Arquitectos, an architecture firm based in Juárez and El Paso, and featured a range of greening elements including local flora, grass berms, and an events venue to encourage greater public use and culture.

Impact:

The City is now working with the design team and relevant municipal agencies to create a phased implementation plan based on the winning design which will enhance this important public space in the center of the downtown revitalization. The design will bring residents together, lower heat intensity, and help mitigate stormwater flooding. The City of Juárez's Resilience team also gained experience in implementing a collaborative process and has indicated that they will use this process as an annual competition directed at other public spaces.



ABOVE: Winning design rendering of Juan Gabriel Plaza during the daytime and evening.

About Rebuild by Design:

Rebuild by Design convenes a mix of sectors - including government, business, nonprofit, and community organizations - to gain a better understanding of how overlapping environmental and human-made vulnerabilities leave cities and regions at risk. Our process entails true public private partnerships where entities or institutions are needed to establish a meaningful resilience coalition to understand the specific needs in a city, and design evidence-based solutions for the community you are working with. This collaboration remains at the heart of an iterative creative process to address the intersection of physical social, and ecological resilience to drive lasting change.

If you would like more information about Rebuild by Design email info@rebuildbydesign.org.