

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SHOWCASE

Design Studies BA/ Taco Plaza & Brighton Station Mural Projects

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Sacramento Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Gardenland Northgate Neighborhood Association
PG&E, Folsom Boulevard Coalition, Power Inn Alliance

DESIGN STUDIES, BA
Department of Design



Taco Plaza Protocols

PARTNERS

- Sacramento Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- Gardenland Northgate Neighborhood Association (GNNA)

PROJECT GOAL

Conduct community-engaged research on usage protocols for a public space called *Taco Plaza*

ACTIVITIES

- Ethnographic research
- Stakeholder interviews and focus groups
- Case study analysis of similar public spaces
- GIS mapping and site analysis
- Collaborative visioning and feedback collection
- Worked closely with local leaders to ensure the project aligned with community goals and cultural values.

OBJECTIVES

Understand the needs, desires, and concerns of the Northgate neighborhood residents.

Support economic development through the design of a space that could host food trucks and small businesses.

Create a safe, inclusive, and vibrant community gathering place.

Develop a strategic design brief with research-based recommendations (not design solutions).

Provide Sacramento State students with **real-world experience** in human-centered, community-based design research.

Promote civic engagement and amplify community voices in shaping local public space.

PARTICIPANTS

Students: 16 undergraduate students – 4 leads, 12 supporting

Faculty member: Dr. PJ Carlino, project lead and instructor).

Community collaborators:
Juan Novelo, Vice President Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

Informal participation from local residents, small business owners, and representatives from the Gardenland Northgate Neighborhood Association.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

Elevated local voices by creating structured opportunities for community members to share ideas and concerns about the use of a key public space in the Northgate neighborhood.

Supported civic collaboration by fostering communication between residents, local leaders, and Sacramento State students.

Laid the groundwork for a shared vision of Taco Plaza as a vibrant, inclusive space that could support local businesses, cultural events, and community gathering.

Generated documentation and insights (design brief, stakeholder maps, ethnographic observations) that can inform next steps for planning and investment in the space.

STUDENT & FACULTY IMPACT

Students gained hands-on experience in design research by applying methods from the classroom to a real-world challenge with visible community relevance.

The **project deepened student understanding of public interest design**, exposing them to social, cultural, and economic dimensions of urban development not typically addressed in traditional design studio work.

Faculty strengthened community partnerships and embedded civic engagement into course learning outcomes, aligning with Sac State's mission as an Anchor University.

The project **expanded the university's role as a community collaborator**, reinforcing the value of public scholarship and experiential learning among faculty and staff.

COLLABORATION

Students worked in design research teams to conduct interviews, analyze data, and co-develop recommendations

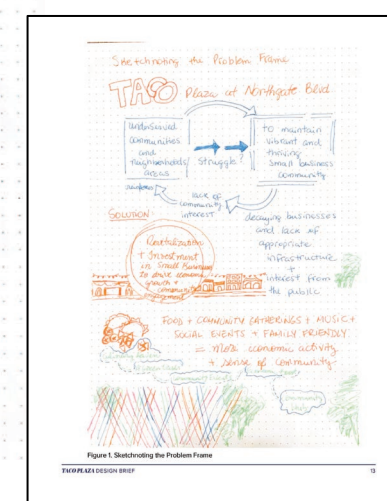
Community members contributed local expertise, historical context, and vision—ensuring the project was grounded in authentic community needs.

Collaboration was supported through **shared digital platforms site visits, and public presentations**, which encouraged transparent and reciprocal exchange among all stakeholders.



Planning Taco Plaza: A hub for Flavor, Community, and Growth

Laura Soares Oliveira
CISU Sacramento Fall 2024
DESIGN 166 – Professor Carlino



“WOW! This is extremely comprehensive! Please send my kudos and many thanks to your students. The analysis and samples will definitely help us through this process.”

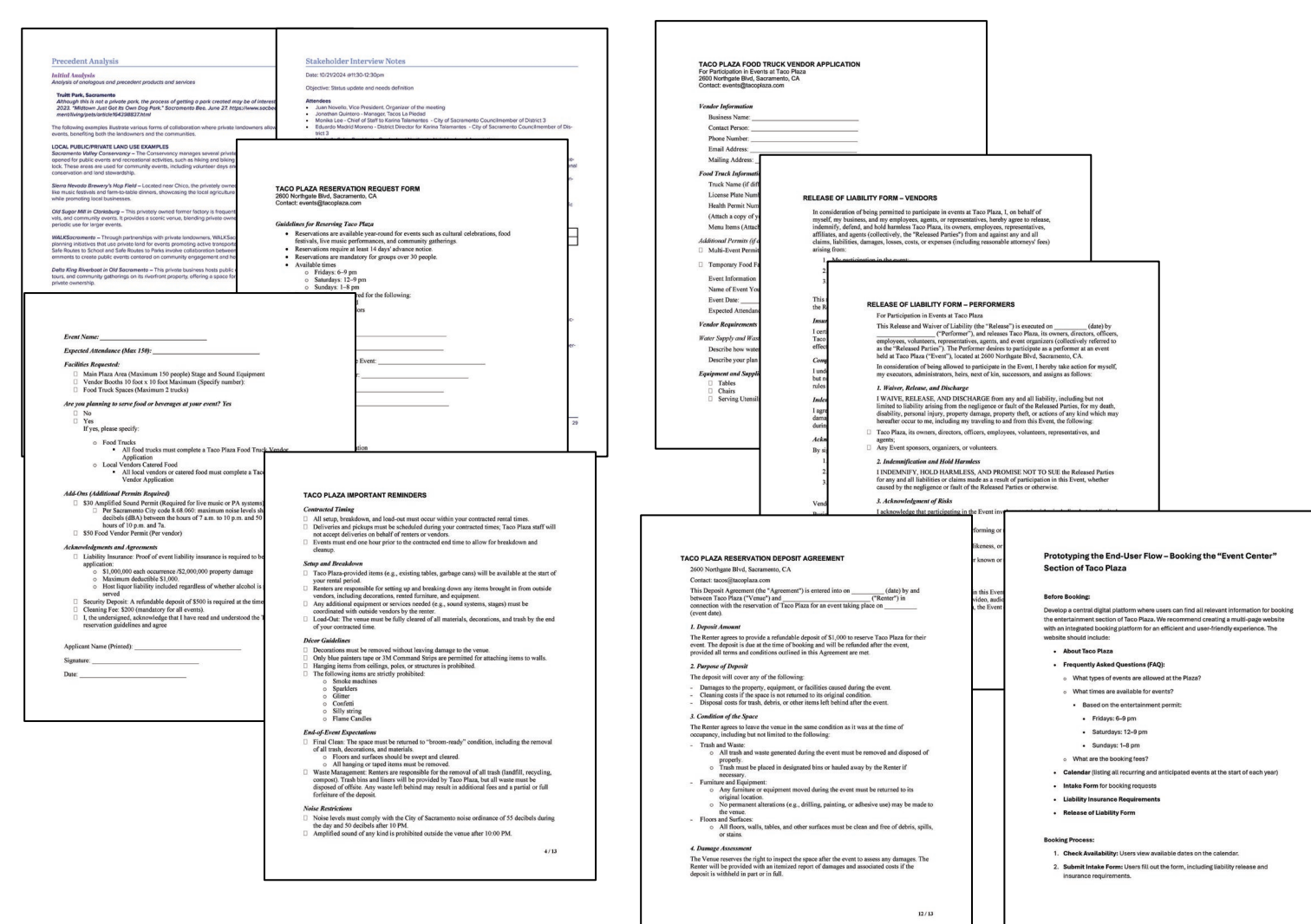
— Juan P. Novello, Vice President, Sacramento Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

“It’s really exciting to see the students taking an interest in our neighborhood. We want this space to reflect who we are—and now we have a way to show that.”

— Community member, Northgate neighborhood

“We’ve needed a place like this for a long time. Somewhere that brings people together, celebrates our culture, and gives young people something to be proud of.”

— GNNA representative



Promoting Student Success in College and Career through Design Research

Supporting Student Academic Success

Application of Course Concepts:

- Students applied design research methods, including interviews, surveys, community feedback sessions, and site analysis.
- Integrated qualitative and quantitative research to develop prototypes and strategic recommendations.
- Addressed social and organizational issues identified by community partners, including economic revitalization, public safety, cultural representation, and placemaking.

Supporting Student Career Transition

Real-World Experience:

- Students collaborated with stakeholders such as the Folsom Boulevard Coalition, Sacramento city planners, local businesses, and neighborhood residents.
- Developed skills in project management, stakeholder analysis, design prototyping, and strategic planning.
- Presented findings and recommendations to community partners, enhancing communication and professional presentation skills.

Operating from an Asset-Based Framework

Leveraging Community Strengths:

- Celebrated local history, cultural diversity, and community pride through design concepts.
- Developed prototypes that reflect and amplify community values, rather than focusing solely on deficiencies.
- Positioned community assets, such as culinary traditions and cultural events, as central elements of the projects.

Developing Career-Ready Skills and Aptitudes

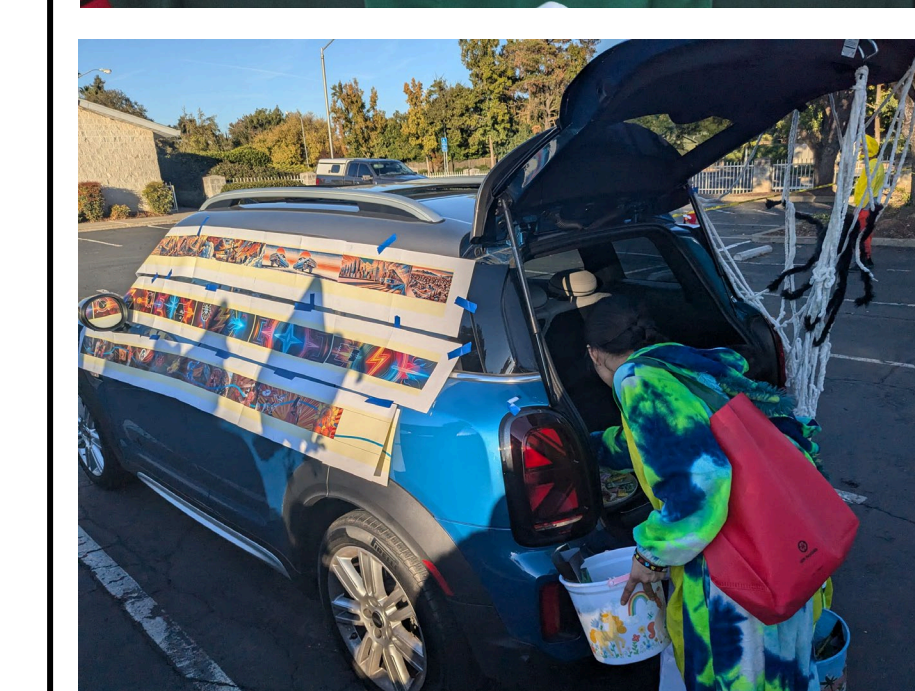
Professional Competencies:

- Critical thinking, creative ideation, iterative prototyping, and collaborative problem-solving.
- Enhanced communication skills through presentations to stakeholders and community members.
- Gained experience working on complex, interdisciplinary projects with real-world implications.

Addressing Equity in Experiential Learning

Inclusive Opportunities:

- Ensured diverse voices were heard through participatory research and community feedback sessions.
- Embedded projects within coursework to ensure equitable access for all students, regardless of financial or social resources.
- Designed community engagement activities that are welcoming and accessible to a broad range of stakeholders.



Students Canvassing for feedback at local events



Students on a site tour

“Sacramento’s vibrant murals and art scene are what make our city unique. It’s crucial that we create spaces for public art and ensure our local artists lead the way in showcasing their talents for all of Sacramento to see.”

- Kevin McCarty (Assemblyman, now Mayor, of Sacramento)



Co-design with community members



Mural 1

Folsom Boulevard Mural

PARTNERS

Folsom Boulevard Coalition, Power Inn Alliance, PG&E

PROJECT GOAL

Collaborated with the Folsom Boulevard Coalition (FBC), a local neighborhood development organization to research and develop concepts for a community mural to be installed on a new solid vinyl fence around a PG&E substation on Folsom Boulevard.

ACTIVITIES

- Stakeholder Mapping
- Territory Analysis
- Psychogeographic Tours
- Precedent Studies
- Interviews and Focus Groups
- Prototyping and Co-Design Activities
- Creating Design Proposals

OBJECTIVES

Engage students in community-based design research methods.

Support neighborhood identity and **revitalization** efforts along Folsom Boulevard.

Foster collaboration between Sacramento State students and local stakeholders.

Contribute research and design proposals that reflect the history, culture, and aspirations of the community.

Provide students with hands-on experience in public art planning, human-centered design, and ethical engagement with community partners.

PARTICIPANTS

Students: 16 UG Design Studies students— 4 leads, 12 supporting
35 UG Graphic Design Students

Faculty members: Dr. PJ Carlino, project lead and instructor
John Forrest, instructor.

Community collaborators:
Sue Brown, President, Folsom Boulevard Coalition
Brandon Black, Government Affairs, PG&E
Joy Moss, Events & Membership Engagement, Power Inn Alliance

COMMUNITY IMPACT

Beautification and Increased Community Pride: The project will enhance the aesthetic appeal of a highly trafficked intersection, creating a more inviting environment and fostering a sense of pride among community members .

Economic Growth and Business Visibility: Local businesses anticipate increased sales and positive brand association with community engagement.

Social Cohesion and Cultural Representation: Community engagement events, including focus groups, surveys, and collaborative workshops, have ensured that the mural reflects the values, history, and aspirations of the local population

STUDENT & FACULTY IMPACT

Students:

Gained hands-on experience in design research, stakeholder analysis, and prototyping.

Applied classroom concepts to a real-world community project, enhancing communication, teamwork, and client relations.

Built confidence in public art initiatives, strengthened portfolios, and deepened civic engagement.

Faculty:

Implemented community-engaged teaching, aligning with Sacramento State's mission to serve the community.

COLLABORATION

Students worked in design research teams to conduct interviews, analyze data, and co-develop recommendations

Community members contributed local expertise, historical context, and vision—ensuring the project was grounded in authentic community needs.

Collaboration was supported through **shared digital platforms site visits, and public presentations**, which encouraged transparent and reciprocal exchange among all stakeholders.