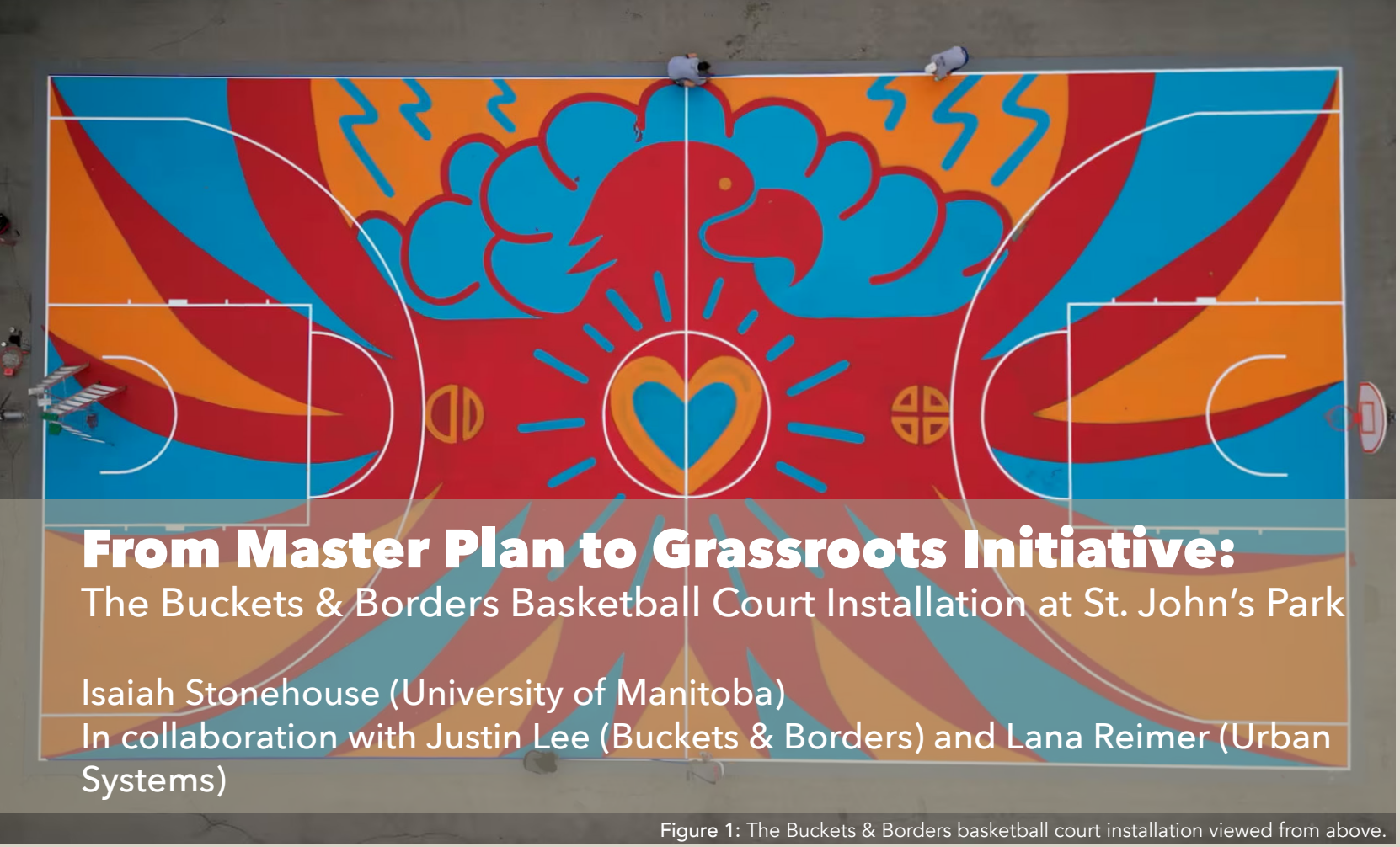

From Master Plan to Grassroots Initiative:
The Buckets & Borders Basketball Court Installation at St. John's Park

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In collaboration with Justin Lee (Buckets & Borders) and Lana Reimer (Urban Systems)

Figure 1: The Buckets & Borders basketball court installation viewed from above.

Case-in-Point 2024

1.0 Introduction

In September of 2023, the non-profit organization Buckets & Borders completed a facelift of the basketball court at St. John's Park in Winnipeg, MB. But before this court revitalization took place, the St. John's Park Master Plan completed in 2017 paved the way for increased community investment. This case study will explore both the details behind this tactical urbanist-inspired basketball court redevelopment, and how steps taken during the creation of the Master Plan allowed for this initiative to take place. This report is structured into six sections to guide the reader through the projects. The introduction will provide an initial guide. "Background" will provide a broader context to both projects within the planning field. "Facts of the Case" provides a specific breakdown of the basketball court installation and what the project aimed to achieve. "Outcomes" will address achievements from both the master plan and Buckets & Borders installation and what has changed since their completions. "Lessons Learned" will connect back to the broader planning context and explore what planners can learn from the projects. In "Final Thoughts," I recap the projects and leave the reader with a quote to ponder. So, without further ado, let's go!

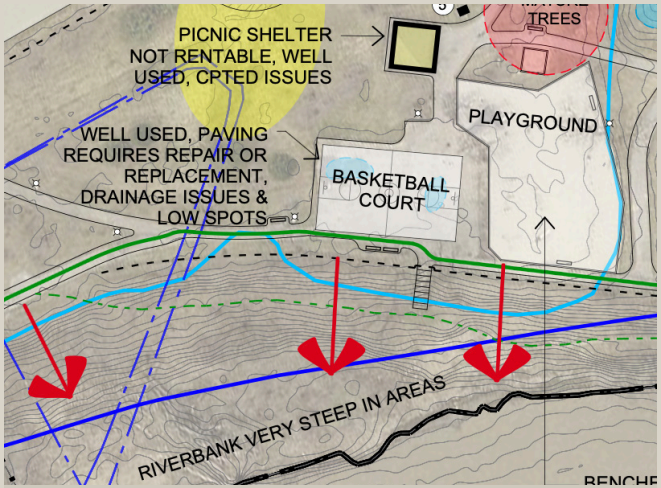

Figure 2: The original location of the basketball court, with noted drainage issues and low spots.

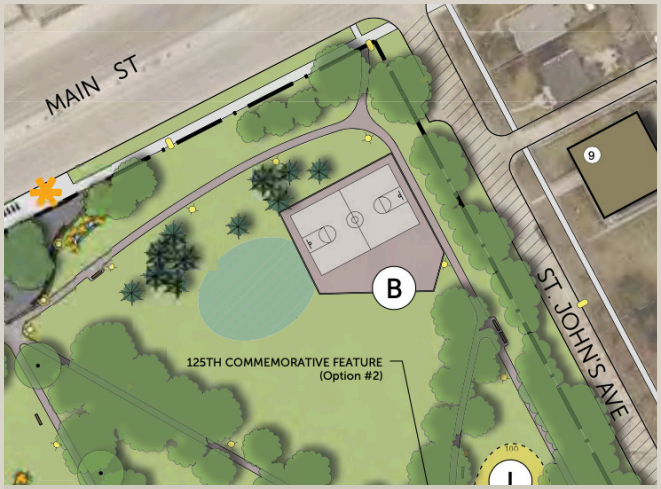

Figure 3: The new location of the basketball court at the north corner of the park.

2.0 Background

2.1 St. John's Park Master Plan

To celebrate the 125th anniversary of St. John's Park in 2017, the City of Winnipeg and HTFC Planning & Design undertook a redevelopment master plan for the park. Approximately $340,000 was invested in the plan and subsequent park redevelopment (City of Winnipeg, 2018). Among the proposed changes included lighting upgrades, a new picnic shelter, a temporary stage, a nature playground, a healing forest, and an interpretive entrance sign. A public online survey and open house were held to receive feedback on the plan. Perhaps the most forward-thinking idea, though, was the proposal to relocate the basketball court to front Main Street and St. John's Avenue. Lana Reimer, who worked for HTFC at the time, provided some context as to why this change was suggested. In the original location of the court on the southeast end of the park near the Red River (Figure 2), drainage issues and low spots plagued the site. These problems were a result of the court's location in a flood-prone area, as well as issues with its original installation. The newly proposed location of the basketball court (Figure 3) eliminated these concerns and had some additional benefits. Its location close to the busy Main Street encouraged greater activity and usage, and helped to meet CPTED principles such as natural surveillance. CPTED (pronounced sep-ted), the acronym for Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, is a set of principles based on the theory that good design can lead to reductions in fear and crime and improve the quality of life for users (CPTED Canada, n.d.). In 2018, the court was moved to the new location, and the stage was set for the Buckets and Borders installation half a decade later.

2.2 Buckets & Borders

Based out of Regina, SK, Buckets & Borders is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving communities and bringing people together through basketball. As part of a new partnership with Canada Basketball to renovate five courts across the country, a requirement was to have at least one of the courts located in an Indigenous community. Located in Winnipeg's North End with a high Indigenous population, St. John's Park was the natural first place to begin. Justin Lee, co-founder and CEO of Buckets & Borders, noted that the recent relocation and good condition of the court did play a factor in its selection. Beyond replacing the rims and backboards, the pavement only required minor crack repairs. The court was already a central hub for Indigenous hoopers in the city, and its location in Winnipeg's inner-city North End provided the organization with an opportunity to fulfill its mandate to focus on

underserved communities. Above all, Justin cites the ability of basketball to bring people together as a primary driver and hopes to help build community pride with these installations.

3.0 Facts of the Case

Having previously refurbished four courts in Regina and one in Toronto, the St. John's Park project was the organization's sixth Canadian court to be refurbished and its first in Winnipeg (Waldman, 2023). In preparation for the expansion, Buckets & Borders went to Winnipeg the year prior and reviewed over a dozen potential courts. Justin Lee notes the contributions of Terrence Ross and Lenard Munkman as integral to the project. Raised in Winnipeg, Terrence crossed paths with Justin in Regina and currently serves as recreation coordinator for Long Plain First Nation and a team member of Warriorz Basketball, an all-Indigenous basketball team representing Manitoba in tournaments across Turtle Island. Together with Lenard Munkman, a community activist and journalist for CBC, the two used their connections to engage the local Indigenous basketball community during the project's development (Waldman, 2023). Having grown up in the area, Lenard initially suggested the St. John's Park court as a potential facelift candidate. Once the court was decided on, the next step was to receive approval from the City of Winnipeg.

The approval from the City took about a year, which came in the form of a donation agreement. The agreement laid out the long-term maintenance responsibilities of the court, with the City agreeing to maintain the court asphalt while Buckets & Borders agreed to remove any graffiti that appeared on the court. So far, this has not been an issue. When the project was approved in Summer 2023, the team had a short window to get the facelift underway before the weather got cold. Therefore, the timeline was expedited with the call for artists, artist selection, asphalt upgrades, and court painting happening in a period of just over a month. The artwork selected was from Anishinaabe artist Jordan Stranger from Peguis First Nation, whose mural centred around an eagle perfectly represented the project's spirit (Figure 4). The design is also meant to honour the four directions and features a medicine wheel and a sun at the top of the three-point arcs, thunderbolts shooting from the sidelines, and a blue heart at its centre. As Jordan Stranger described, "It was important to try and include elements that relate to Earth and keep us grounded, but also inspire people to dunk and fly" (Waldman, 2023, para. 18). Reflecting on the goals of the court upgrade, Terence Ross remarked: "I just wanted to bring [this project] to a place where I know all the Indigenous players go. I'm hoping this will provide for them a place to gather and create their own community, kind of like we did growing up" (Waldman, 2023, para. 11). September 16th marked the grand opening

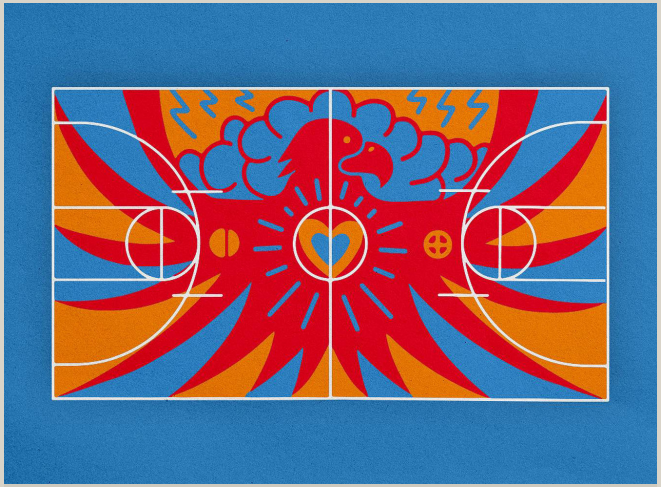

Figure 4: A rendering of the "Fly Like an Eagle" on-court mural by Jordan Stranger.

> ***"I just wanted to bring [this project] to a place where I know all the Indigenous players go. I'm hoping this will provide for them a place to gather and create their own community, kind of like we did growing up"***
> ***- Terrence Ross***

Figure 5: The Kapabamayak Achaak Healing Forest (designed by ft3 Architecture Landscape Interior Design) during a site visit in February 2024.

Figure 6: Local leaders who made the St. John's basketball court installation possible.

of the court and included an Elder's prayer, drum circle, music, youth programming, and a local all-star game (Winnipeg Sea Bears, 2023). At least 750 people turned up for the opening event despite information only being released a week in advance.

4.0 Outcomes

4.1 St. John's Park Master Plan

Circling back to the St. John's Park Master Plan, it is evident that this plan and the relocation of the basketball court led to the Buckets & Borders project in 2023. By focusing on social infrastructure, including not only the basketball court but also installations such as the Kapabamayak Achaak Healing Forest (as pictured in Figure 5), the plan created an environment for increased community investment. Experience planning, as some call it. In a balanced analysis of the history of master plans titled The Trouble with Master Plans, Myrick (2022, para. 19) put it this way: "A creative, thoughtful approach to experience planning will help make sure [developments] become vibrant, well-used, inclusive spaces, so that a healthy community actually buds and grows." By involving local residents from the forefront, HTFC and the City of Winnipeg encouraged the community to get behind the plan. Moving forward, St. John's Park will continue to be an important gathering place for North End residents, and the master plan helped maintain this foundation.

4.2 Buckets & Borders

For Buckets & Borders, the outcomes of this project are still ongoing. Above all, the court upgrade created a good foundation for the organization to do more projects in Winnipeg. A second court to be completed this summer in Winnipeg will be announced in April. The court's new location and reactivation will play a major role in encouraging more people to use the space, and it has the potential to become a hub for local Indigenous basketball players. Finally, revitalizing the St. John's Park basketball court opened up new doors for Buckets & Borders, with new partnerships made across the city. Figure 6 shows a few local leaders who were integral to the project, including Lenard Monkman (centre in the black t-shirt) and Terence Ross (far left). Beyond their partnership with Canada Basketball to install five courts across the country, Buckets & Borders also built a connection with the city's new CEBL basketball team, the Winnipeg Sea Bears. As part of an agreement signed between the two parties, the Sea Bears agreed to clean the court once per year, replace hoop meshes as needed, and run annual kids' basketball camps at the court.

5.0 Lessons Learned

5.1 Preparation Time

In reflecting on lessons learned for the project, Justin reiterated that there wasn't a lot he would change. For future projects, a key component to ensuring success will be giving the team more preperation time. Given the year long approval process with the City of Winnipeg, it was halfway through the summer before Buckets & Borders had all the green lights to move forward with the court renovation. This resulted in a few last minute moments, such as final paint touches to the court happening the day before the grand opening until 2 am (some unexpected weather events also caused this)! Figure 7 gives a visual of what this process looked like. Justin also mentioned that last summer was a busy time for the company, and so this had an effect on the installation feeling rushed. Despite the tight timeline, it is evident that the right people were in place to ensure the project was successful.

Figure 7: Jordan Stranger (left) and Justin Lee (right) painting the basketball court mural.

5.2 Tactical Urbanism & Creating Activity Hubs

From the very start, part of the allure of choosing this project from a planning student perspective was its ties to tactical urbanism. Tactical urbanism can be defined as bottom-up, low-cost, organic approaches to city-building. Despite its short-term outcomes, a pivotal piece to tactical urbanism is initiating long-term change, which is why collaboration with stakeholders and partners is critical (Lydon & Garcia, 2015). Justin is aware of tactical urbanist principles and hopes to incorporate more urban features into future work. Additions could be as simple as artwork outside of a basketball court or additional community amenities. A key piece to tactical urbanism that is present in this project is its relatively low cost, completed at a budget of approximately $50,000. A

Figure 8: "Project Pick & Roll" in North Central Regina highlights the importance of activity hubs.

critical factor in the court selection was that only minor asphalt upgrades needed to be done. Justin noted that major asphalt upgrades can increase project costs by as much as $100,000. The idea of building onto existing community infrastructure and bringing resources together to create community hubs is something that Justin Lee finds extremely valuable. Another Buckets & Borders basketball court completed in North Central Regina titled "Project Pick & Roll" was built after the City had invested in a new soccer field, an Indigenous art piece in the park, and a waterpark. The basketball court then served to complement investments already made, adding to the activity hub. This project is shown in Figure 8. Another example from Mexico was brought up, where the Buckets & Borders court was located right next to a community plaza where a market was held twice a week. Awareness of what goes on in a community and where the central spaces for activity are located is a critical lesson for planners to take home. Tactical urbanist initiatives can only be successful if the community actually uses them.

5.3 Community Leaders & Partnerships

A final lesson learned was the power of having a few community leaders who represented the project. For this installation, those people were Lenord and Terence. To understand how those connections had an impact, Justin shared a story. One night, while Justin and Lenord were painting the court, they heard a drum circle practicing nearby in the park. Curious, they took a break and walked over to listen. Lenord knew several people in the drum circle and quickly sparked conversation. They then asked the group if they would like to perform at the court's opening event, to which they said yes. Organic connections like these were only possible because of the community leaders on board with the project. The community leaders were also responsible for bringing together a group of volunteers to help paint the court, facilitate the opening event, and help garner community feedback. I hope to be a part of this myself this year with Winnipeg's second Buckets & Borders court installation! Winnipeg was also unique because of the number of partnerships the organization had already built in the city. Justin noted additional contributions from the Synonym Art Consultation, the Wall-to-Wall Mural & Culture Festival, the Winnipeg Sea Bears, Basketball Manitoba, Canada Basketball, and a local t-shirt provider. A critical piece to working in new markets is getting people in the community to rally behind it, and that is precisely what Buckets & Borders did with their basketball court installation in St. John's Park. I look forward to following this organization's next steps.

6.0 Final Thoughts

From a planning perspective, this project is exciting on a number of fronts. In a very tangible way, the St. John's Park master plan and subsequent Buckets & Borders basketball court installation show that, as the title of this report suggests, great plans lead to great initiatives. In a journal article titled "Does planning need the plan?" Michael Neuman (1998, p. 215) had this to say: "Does planning need the plan? Or can planning go plan-less, naked and exposed? If the latter, why not call our profession "ning" and leave out the "plan" entirely? As it is, planning is blessed with an active verb for its name, a characteristic it shares with other professions that nurture and bring things into being: nursing, engineering, design. City planners bring cities to life and life to cities, and have done so for centuries using plans." Through its mindful approach to experience planning, as well as gaining community investment, the St. John's Park master plan set up an environment of success for the park, allowing future innovative organizations like Buckets & Borders to come in and reactivate a space (Figure 9). This is how a master plan led to a grassroots initiative.

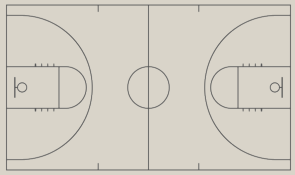

Figure 9: The Buckets & Borders basketball court installation at St. John's Park during a site visit in February 2024.

> ***"Does planning need the plan? Or can planning go plan-less, naked and exposed? If the latter, why not call our profession "ning" and leave out the "plan" entirely? As it is, planning is blessed with an active verb for its name, a characteristic it shares with other professions that nurture and brings things into being: nursing, engineering, design. City planners bring cities to life and life to cities, and have done so for centuries using plans." (Neuman, 1998, p. 215)***

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List of Figures

Figure 1: The Buckets & Borders basketball court installation viewed from above. From "Oji-Cree artist paints new life into Winnipeg basketball court," by CBC News, 2023 (https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1.6968932)

Figure 2: The original location of the basketball court, with noted drainage issues and low spots. From "Opportunities & Constraints, St. John's Park," by HTFC Planning & Design and City of Winnipeg, 2018 (https://legacy.winnipeg.ca/publicworks/parksOpenSpace/ParkAreas/NewProjects/PDF/stjohnspark/map.pdf)

Figure 3: The new location of the basketball court at the north corner of the park. From "St. John's Park Master Plan Concept," by HTFC Planning & Design and City of Winnipeg, 2018 (https://legacy.winnipeg.ca/publicworks/parksOpenSpace/ParkAreas/NewProjects/PDF/stjohnspark/OpenHouseBoards.pdf)

Figure 4: A rendering of the "Fly Like an Eagle" on-court mural by Jordan Stranger. From "Revamped basketball court brings new life to the North End," by C. Houde (CHVN 95.1 FM), 2023 (https://chvnradio.com/articles/revamped-basketball-court-brings-new-life-to-the-north-end--)

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