



**STOREFRONT  
MASTERY**

**DISTRICT ACCELERATOR REPORT**

**New Jersey Neighborhood Preservation Program,  
Seton Village, South Orange NJ  
April 2022**



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Report prepared by Jaime J. Izurieta of Storefront Mastery for the Seton Village Neighborhood Preservation Program (NPP). The graphics presented in this report purport a conceptual level project only. The conceptual graphics and textual information contained herein do not constitute a finished architectural or design project. No product details or specifications or pricing are included, and any depictions of objects, furniture and other objects are for informational purposes only and do not constitute an endorsement of a specific brand or product.

April 2022

Inquiries and follow up: [hello@storefrontmastery.com](mailto:hello@storefrontmastery.com)

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**CONTEXT**



**URBAN CONTEXT:**

Seton Village is spread along a stretch of Irvington Avenue going from Riggs Avenue to College Pl., a ten minute walk from South Orange station and downtown South Orange, and six minutes from the Seton Hall University campus.

The streetscape has been upgraded in recent months, with no distinctive intervention on the creation of gateways that may define the area of Seton Village. Although it is currently a discernible neighborhood center, there is opportunity for further developing a visual language that can provide cohesiveness to the urban experience and facilitate a narrative that knits the contribution of each individual local business, especially in the wake of new development adding to the sidewalk experience in coming months and years.



**IMMEDIATE CONTEXT:**

The area scores high on walk appeal, since the scale of the building frontages is small and the enclosure creates a comfortable atmosphere that motivates walking.

The sidewalks offer little opportunity to accommodate outdoor dining, but are comfortable enough to set up frontage displays that have more interactivity than closed off display windows.

There is a distinct diverse flavor to the area, with both service and food businesses offering unique goods and services that may define the area and guide its brand.

There is some tree coverage. The buildings' subtle color palette serves as a backdrop for installing and activating small public spaces that may amplify the efforts of small business in the area.





**DISTRICT CONDITIONS ASSESSMENT**



**BEAUTY INDEX**

Seton Village relies on the good design of its clusters of storefronts to bring up opportunities for public space activation and to provide foot traffic that may interact with frontages.

The scale, proportion, rhythm and width of the existing storefronts, as well as the proposed in the new developments, are conducive to walkability.

**QUIRK INDEX**

The Quirk Index measures the quality of a place by the density of nooks, alleys or wall art that a walker can discover. Framed views that highlight urban elements are a bonus. These spaces provide opportunities to install benches, small frontage gardens or wayfinding elements that support the narrative. Seton Village doesn't rank high in the quirk index but there is opportunity to build it up.

**CONNECTIONS**

The sidewalks are continuous and wide enough to accommodate walking plus some use of private front-ages. Intersections can be improved with sidewalk extensions to provide clear paths for vehicles and shorter crossing distances, while improving travel through the district and help to identify key spots and businesses.



**WALK APPEAL**

Walk Appeal refers to the quality of the walk and whether urban conditions motivate walking. Beautiful buildings set in comfortable sidewalks with well designed, transparent storefronts catch attention every few seconds. The tree canopy is sparse but the width of streets and sidewalks offers opportunity to fix that. The scale is conducive to walking.

**QUALITY OF ENCLOSURE**

This refers to whether the perceived limits of the place give it a sense of comfort, protection and vitality. Several elements especially the typical South Orange gas lamps improve the quality.

**WAYFINDING**

Every district needs a story that is easy to read as people travel through. Landmarks need signage and a system of wayfinding signs complements it by signaling the path between them.





## DISTRICT ACCELERATOR STRATEGY

Seton Village benefits from being a hinge between two hubs of high foot traffic: the Seton Hall University campus and downtown South Orange, which are ten and seven minutes away by walking.

There is a distinct diverse feel in the various businesses along Irvington Avenue. Two clusters are easily identified: an ethnic food cluster, with Salvadoran, Chinese, Nicaraguan and African cuisine, among others; and a beauty cluster, with nail, hair and fashion shops as well as beauty salons.

Turning the inside of these shops out to activate the stretch of Irvington Ave and amplify their efforts can capture some of the foot traffic and interest.

The District Accelerator strategy is related to branding, where Seton Village could benefit from creating a brand that revolves around its more impactful industries and highlights the reasons why those clusters have formed and thrive there.

Below are a few ideas that can develop into targeted interventions that amplify the impact of each business' efforts to engage with their community and customers.

**IDEA #1.** Create an activity hub in the garden on West Fairview Ave. During the warmer months, it can be occupied periodically by one of the businesses in the district, where they can stage showrooms or tastings.

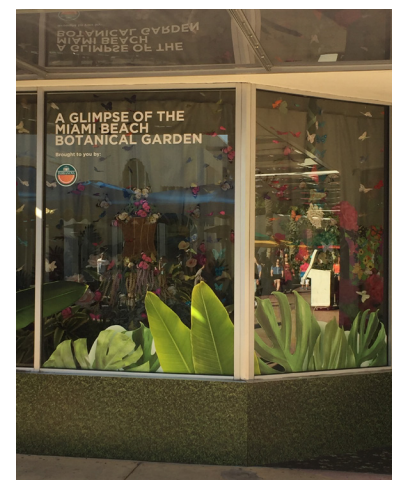
During the colder months it can become a flower kiosk or a coffee shop, a themed micro shop selling branded scarves, blankets and gloves, or the site for community dinners.

**IDEA #2.** Create a series of themed spaces, centered around the green on West Fairview Ave. and the periodic activations staged there. These would highlight the culture of the business outside of which they sit, by using two tools:

- Benches, a bistro table and chairs or a version of Adirondack chairs, painted in the distinct colors of the business which frontage they decorate
- A display with an introduction to the culture and a QR code that can lead to the district's landing page

The activity in these micro public spaces, and the collection of scans of the QR codes can unlock benefits and promotions.

Additionally, a third **IDEA #3** can be implemented to create "meanwhile storefronts" that send a message of expectation for things to come. This idea consists in covering some storefronts that may need it with branded vinyl with the "coming soon" message, staging temporary exhibitions for local cultural or entertainment organizations, or organizing temporary rentals to install art shows, themed dinners or theater plays.





**PLACEMAKING AND TACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS**



Legendary Medellin Mayor Sergio Fajardo introduced the concept of Educational Urbanism. In a nutshell, every intervention and project that is undertaken in a city should serve to educate locals and visitors on the nature of good urban practices, form habits of resilience, conservation, respect for history, build identity and pride, and raise awareness of both larger issues of city building and the specific issues of the place.

In the following pages are strategic recommendations to tie the efforts of individual small business owners and commercial storefront owners, and improve the engagement, reach, legibility and beauty of Seton Village.

In the image above is a bird's eye view of the proposed locations of themed spaces and urban elements.

**PHYSICAL INTERVENTIONS**

- ① Well placed branding station that sets the tone for the wayfinding system and shows the brand character
- ② Design wayfinding elements to place at both district gateways, with a strong educational component
- ③ Introduce educational components to the design of the playground, to support the branding and wayfinding
- ④ Possible location of micro public space with repeating elements that celebrates the district's diversity
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- ⑥ Possible location of micro public space with repeating elements that celebrates the district's diversity
- ⑦ Possible location of micro public space with repeating elements that celebrates the district's diversity
- ⑧ Possible location of larger public space at the community center, with the same repeating branded elements

**ACTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT**

- Monthly micro festivals; direct access to educational components, mailing list and district landing page
- Branding support
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- Micro public space with a limited replication of the main branding space - Temp art show, play or one-time restaurant
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- Larger themed festivals, direct access to educational components, mailing list and district landing page





## SITE-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS



- ① Flower kiosk to double as “monthly special”
- ② Educational element
- ③ Planters in district branding color
- ④ Banners with monthly special
- ⑤ Chairs that repeat in front of individual businesses

The most legible space in the district is the green at West Fairview. It consists on a multi-purpose kiosk that hosts one district business each month to showcase their food and culture. A long-term ethnic food festival.

The educational element has information about the food and the country that is highlighted, plus QR codes that take the user to a landing page where they can learn more about the festival, about Seton Village and also subscribe to the mailing list. It may include a directory of district businesses.

A place within the green can have exchangeable outdoor furniture that echoes each “monthly special” color.

The design of the green should be replicated in micro public spaces in front of individual businesses that participate, as well as in the front lawn of the community center.

Activations beyond the business takeovers can include winter festivals, themed community dinners, public art shows and performances

*\* Before designing and producing the definitive elements, review the local regulations regarding the size and lighting of the sign, and the decals on the display windows*

*\*\* Actual colors TBD*



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## SITE-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The creation of micro public spaces is based on a Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper approach with very few elements that amplify the diverse offer of the district. Each participating business can create one or several can group to create one per cluster of businesses.

They should be themed and offer an educational component to highlight the contribution of the business or group of businesses to the diversity of the local community.

The colors can vary but the elements should repeat through the district.

- ① Themed furniture with the same design as the main space
- ② Use windows for decals, walls for plates or self standing objects that can offer the educational component
- ③ The use of color to frame the places can go from a few stickers placed on the floor to more visible graphics



Using walls on spaces between buildings as support for elements that highlight the educational component can be beneficial to take advantage of less used places in the district, and to add to the overall interest and in the storytelling.

The creation of these spaces should also improve the Quirk Index by creating surprising and fun to discover places that offer more to the walk along Irvington Ave.

- ① Place a visible, well lit written story about a local resident of note, similar to “Humans of New York”
- ② Paint walls and pavement around the support element for the story to create a “branding station”







**PRECEDENTS AND IMPLEMENTATION EXAMPLES**

**MEANWHILE DECALS**

A cohesive tactic to build up expectation and awareness about new businesses and activities is to have a consistent message on vacant storefronts. These messages can complement the branding and serve as identifiers and also as a way of signalling that something new is coming.

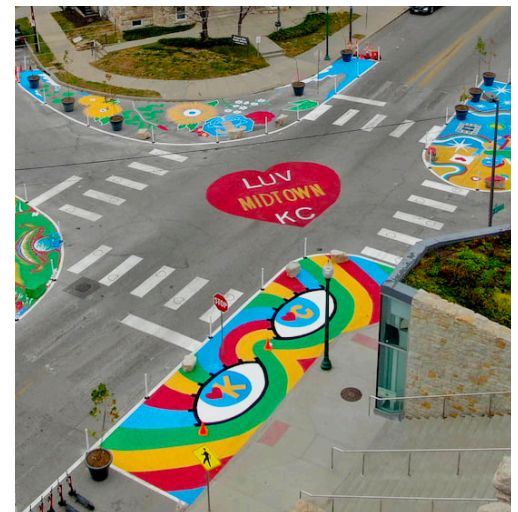
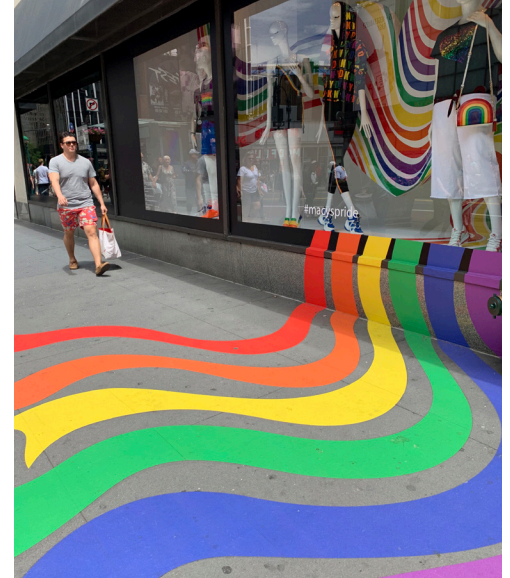


**YARN BOMBING**

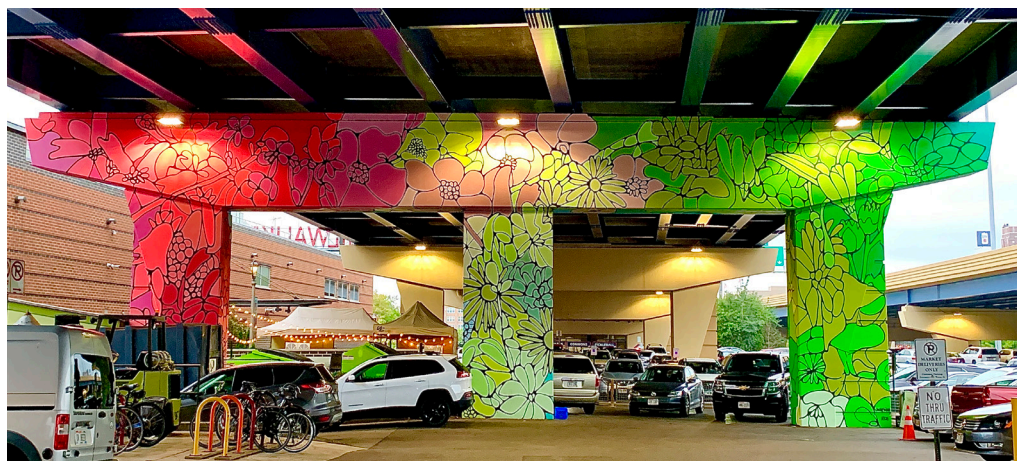
Yarn bombing is the practice of covering objects with knitted patterns. Typically done over tree trunks, it can be applied to walls or fences and other elements that offer structural support and provide opportunities for impact.



**COLOR TREATMENT**



Color has been used in cities for centuries to highlight identity and to add vitality. Bursts of color can boost the mood and enhance the experience. Whether it's asphalt art of underpass murals, or storefronts spilling over to the sidewalk, color helps to send a message.



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**PRECEDENTS AND IMPLEMENTATION EXAMPLES**

**BRANDED SEATING**



Placing benches around the district perimeter may serve a dual purpose: providing seating opportunities and a chance to educate the public, and supporting the branding of the district by using recurring elements and colors. Good seating opportunities can come in the form of benches and bistro chairs, but also of properly sized garden walls.



**RECURRING CHARACTERS**



Recurring characters can be used as repeating objects scattered around the district to signal landmarks and frame views. The can be seen as branding elements in Taiwan (Top), Rotterdam (above) and for individual storefronts (below)



**WAYFINDING**



Branded maps for wayfinding support the storytelling. Using plain text and color to deliberately tell a written story can help, seen above as supporting the Eataly brand.

This branded element below from Taipei has a very useful map with walking distances.



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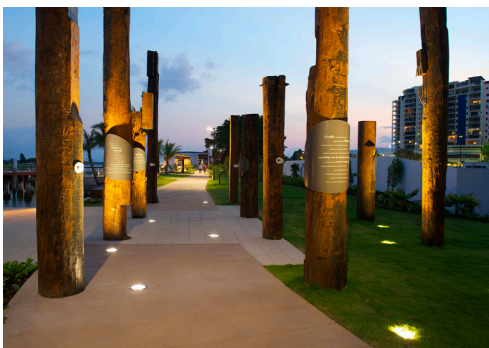


**PRECEDENTS AND IMPLEMENTATION EXAMPLES**

**STORYTELLING**



The entire district can serve as an open book where the place's story is told. Either using decals on windows or visible elements that may replicate in other parts of the district, the coherence and visibility of the visual system are critical aspects of telling a compelling story that engages the public. Larger spaces like the green on West Fairview or the playground on College Pl. can have larger versions of modular elements that repeat in smaller size or lesser number in other parts of the district.



**FLOWER ARRANGEMENTS**

A kiosk that may be flexible enough to accommodate many different uses and also has one principal use can determine the character of the district.

In the case of a flower kiosk, similar displays can be repeated along Irvington Ave. to support the district brand and create a recognizable enclosure.



Alternatives to flower kiosks can be small coffee shops, lemonade stands, souvenir shops, newsstands or even a college store.



Flower displays can look great whether they are installed in front of storefronts, on the sidewalk or as free standing elements in selected spots.

