

Business & Nonprofit Collaboration Creates New Pocket Park in Barre

Historic downtowns often have densely situated older buildings lining their Main Streets that leave little space for members of the community to gather, rest and enjoy nature. That is why the installation of a 68-foot granite zipper sculpture in downtown Barre – aptly named “Unzipping the Earth” – and the creation of a new pocket park around the zipper have captured the imaginations of many in our area.

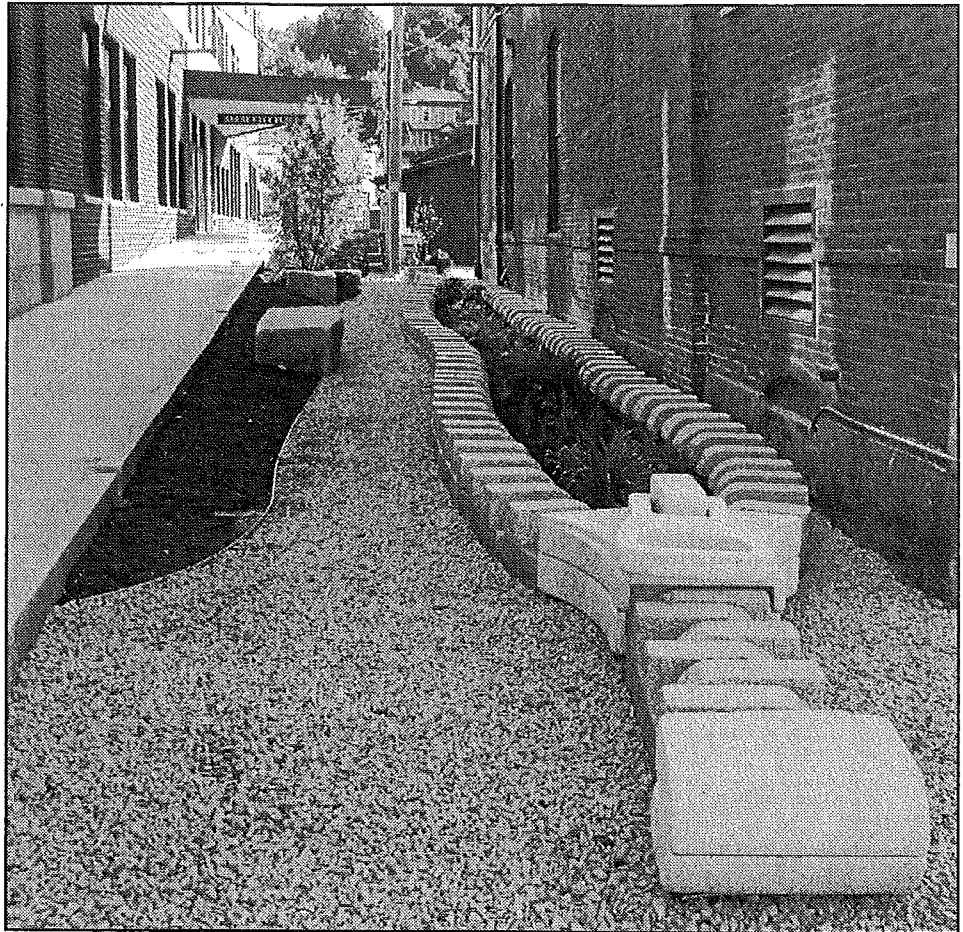
Over the last several weeks, the space between the new Barre City Place development by DEW Construction Corp. and nonprofit art center Studio Place Arts (SPA) has had a constant hum of gardening activities. A new Granite Zipper Pocket Park has been created between the two buildings and a major public sculpture, Unzipping the Earth, is the artistic focal point for the space. People who walk by the two buildings are immediately intrigued to find out why there is an oversized, 4-foot long, granite zipper pull peaking out in front of the SPA building.

Long and narrow, the Granite Zipper Pocket Park measures approximately 75-feet in length and 12-feet in width and is bordered on one side by a wide, raised walkway to the entrance to the City Place building. The 68-foot long zipper, made by Calais artist Chris Miller of carved and stacked granite, snakes along the deep side of the historic SPA building and is “unzipped” to expose a lush perennial garden inside.

The pocket park was conceived to improve land use between the two buildings and to replace a well-loved, but temporary public sculpture garden created by SPA that occupied the previously vacant lot, where Barre City Place now stands.

“We proposed the pocket park as a solution to using a small plot of land that, otherwise, was scheduled to be a public throughway, said Sue Higby, Executive Director of SPA. Instead of staging people to walk through the area, the pocket park encourages people to linger in our historic downtown and enjoy art in an unusually beautiful setting.”

SPA and DEW Corp. worked closely for two years to devise and install a shared landscape plan for the space between their respective properties. While the pocket park is located off of busy Main Street, it is a surprisingly secluded, quiet zone that offers informal seating on granite blocks and is shaded by the two tall buildings nearby. The area is planted with small understory trees and naturalized ferns, which mimics the aesthetic sensibility of an older forest. But the artistic sculptural zipper planted with flowers and Hostas with an adjacent stone pathway and ornamental grasses



suggest a space where people are welcome to congregate with a cup of coffee.

According to Donald Wells, DEW President, “The Granite Zipper concept was inserted into a challenging space. The design team, SPA and DEW Properties’ vision for this narrow interstitial space turned what could have been a boring, utilitarian path into an engaging walk. Combining the granite detailing and brick facade on Barre City Place with the granite zipper, gardens, and brick backdrop results in a very comforting and pleasing cityscape.”

The Granite Zipper Pocket Park occupies land owned by SPA and DEW Corporation. It is an example of a business and nonprofit collaboration that, while created solely with private funding, is positioned in the public sphere for many years of enjoyment by community members and visitors.

The project represents the first time that DEW Properties has placed large scale artwork at one of its building projects, with what Wells described as “a great end result... DEW Properties and SPA worked together to make sure this large project in downtown Barre worked for both parties, and that we created a space for the public’s enjoyment. I encourage others in Barre that have a similar space or interest to talk to Sue, you won’t be disappointed.”