

## A NEW FRAME FOR COMMEMORATION: REINVENTING DEALEY PLAZA

Gracious Acknowledgement of Important Moments in Dallas History Within the Experience of the Urban Fabric



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BOSTON, MA, 10.20.2022 — Prompted by a need to mend a badly neglected urban node at the intersection of Dealey Plaza and the Triple Underpass, and restore a sense of reverence for the tragic and multifaceted layers of Dallas and American history at the site of the JFK Assassination, the Dealey Plaza Reinvention was set in motion.

Project catalyst, Mark Lamster of the *Dallas Morning News*, states, “These defining spaces are essential both to the life of the city and to the nation at large, but in their current state are a civic embarrassment. At the time of their introduction, in 1936, they formed a celebratory and gracious gateway into a city on the rise. Today, however, they are something quite different: perilous to navigate, marked by tawdry vandalism, and utterly inadequate to both their historical gravity and to the functional demands of the city. It is a deplorable state of affairs, but also a great opportunity; a chance to transform this site into a space of civic memory and understanding that embraces the past and points to the future.”

In response, the project was positioned as a forward thinking examination of history’s gravity through a critique of monuments and remembrance, urban design, and access for all. A design team was formed to create a new plan for the site including Chris Reed of Stoss Landscape Urbanism, Boston; Monica Ponce de Leon of MPdL Studio, Princeton; and Lauren Cantrell of Delineator, Dallas.

“The resulting district study incorporates beautiful site choreography to craft an experience that is honorific, connecting some of the most significant moments in American History in a way that brings about reflection,”

underscores Reed. Thoughtful interlacing of places for observance included the JFK assassination site (presently marked by white chalk x marks on the pavement), a place where three slaves were lynched at Martyr's Park, a historic jail (readapted as a visitor center), and Trinity River and Park, vital landscapes and waterways in the context of urban life.

Central to the design process was both the notion of connectivity as well as the overarching goal of modeling what is meant by commemoration in gestural and physical form. "The term 'living history' was very important to us - commemoration in America, not monumentality, not grandeur. We wanted to create a district that is didactic but also open-ended for interpretation and use. The public is invited to engage with history that looks towards the future, which can be positive and not negative," says Ponce de Leon. "Dallas is situated so artfully between the past and the future."

The Reinvention of Dealey Plaza was also conceptualized with the human experience motivating each design move. Urban design scale takes into consideration better pedestrian facilities, tree lined boulevards, linear forests around a highway interchange, set in a softer greener lush context, to create a much more civil experience for people. Examples of these objectives are present through the careful visioning of the site:

Threading of a multi-use trail on the southside of Commerce Street that extends from the park into downtown to create a much more humane and civil experience.

Transformation of Houston Street into a flexible community space to be occasionally shut down for festivals and celebrations that honor the present, living history of Dallas.

Illumination the Triple Overpass underside with soft white and blue lights with a bit of movement, creating safe passage and alluding to the presence of the Trinity River, which had a significant role in the founding of the city right at this location.

Street closure to auto traffic at the site of the JFK Assassination to recognize the sacred importance of what happened there, and the creation of two water markers raising gently at points of bullet impact, with water subtly flowing over into the ground. "The idea is to represent this moment in a way that offers hope as much as remembrance," says Reed. "You can think about the water here as the shedding of tears, but there is hope in terms of something springing forth."

Conception of a memorial overlook and plaza amphitheater to create a proper space for gathering, reflection, education, and interaction. The overlook would rise up over the railroad tracks and offer an opportunity for people to look back on Dealey Plaza, to see the bullet markers, and the Sixth Floor Museum and Book Depository, within a contemporary context of Downtown Dallas.

Trees planted at angles atop the overlook structure to acknowledge the aberrance of activities in this place, but also to function as an example of our ability to adapt and thrive in the current environment, as they self correct and grow upwards towards the light. Species of trees selected represent both JFK's hometown in Massachusetts (River Birch) as well as the current place in Texas (Cedar Elm).

More information on the project can be found on the *Dallas Morning News* website: <https://interactives.dallasnews.com/2022/designers-reimagine-site-of-jfk-assassination-triple-underpass-in-downtown-dallas/>

## PROJECT COLLABORATORS:

Stoss Landscape Urbanism // Chris Reed, Mateo Yang

MPdL Studio // Monica Ponce de Leon

Delineator // Lauren Cantrell

Project Commissioned by Mark Lamster, *Dallas Morning News*

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## ABOUT STOSS

Stoss is a pioneering design firm focused on creating resilient social spaces that foster vitality, equality and community within the public realm. Founded in Boston in 2001, Stoss is a Cooper-Hewitt National Design Award winner for urban planning and landscape projects that integrate urbanism, landscape, infrastructure, and sustainability. Collaborating with cities, public agencies, institutions, and private interests on multi-faceted and varied projects, the Stoss team is involved in conceiving, designing and managing construction for; parks and open spaces; urban and campus design; ecological and resiliency planning; municipal and regional strategies; multi-scale landscape infrastructures; development and remediation projects; furnishings and exhibitions.

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