



CULTIVATING CONTINUITY:
A MODEL FOR SHARED
OWNERSHIP & CO-CREATION AT
YZD'S HANGAR DISTRICT

MIDWAY PROGRESS REPORT

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Problem Definition

i. The Specific Problem

Without a built-in continuity mechanism, phased developments like YZD risk experiencing predictable engagement decline and planning decisions based on assumptions rather than community input, undermining long-term shared ownership and co-creation of public spaces.

ii. Sources Consulted

To understand this problem, we consulted two primary categories of sources. First, we engaged directly with primary sources from our partners at Northcrest. A site visit and presentations from Mitchell Marcus and other Northcrest representatives provided essential insight into the developer's operational realities, the existing "Meanwhile Use" activations, and the strategic goals embedded in the Responsible Development Framework (RDF). These primary sources were key for understanding the developer's specific goals and existing "Meanwhile Use" activations and grounding our understanding in specifically the YZD context. Second, we heavily consulted academic sources to understand the economic and institutional frameworks related to cooperative governance, public goods and long-term community persistence (e.g., Manley et al., 2023; Guiso & Zingales, 2023). They helped to get to the root causes of engagement failure, such as incentive misalignment, the absence of durable rules, and the risk of perfunctory consultation. This directly contributed to our solutions.

iii. The Impacted Parties

- **Future residents** of YZD and surrounding neighborhoods, who depend on these spaces for daily well-being, social connection and quality of life.
- **Workers, students and visitors** whose continued engagement relies on spaces that feel welcoming and responsive over time.
- **Indigenous partners** seeking meaningful inclusion in placemaking, as episodic engagement risks performative consultation rather than the deep, on-going co-creation essential for cultural recognition - a principle highlighted in Northcrest's own public space principles.
- **Local businesses** within and adjacent to YZD whose economic viability depends on sustained foot traffic, local patronage and the overall appeal of the district as a destination.
- **Municipal authorities** would bear the long-term burden of underused or mismanaged assets if engagement fails to foster genuine community stewardship.
- **Northcrest Developments**, who shape the decisions on development and hold the responsibility for the long-term governance, implementation and legacy of the district.

iv. Root of the Problem

The problem is rooted in the absence of durable governance and feedback system that lasts the full span of a phased development. While activities and programming occur in early stages ("Meanwhile Use"), there is no defined mechanism that ensures community guidance are *carried forward, updated, and acted on* as conditions change. Research shows when participation is more episodic than continuous, decision-making standards set assumptions about the future users rather

than basing it on evidence from lived experience, reflecting what is described as *tokenistic* participation and is identified as a failure of commons governance without clear and durable rules (Arnstein, 1969; Ostrom, 1990). In the context of YZD, this represents a critical gap between the aspirational “Quality of Place” and “Inclusive Prosperity” pillars of the RDF.

v. **Limits of Scope**

The scope of this problem is limited to the participatory processes that enable shared ownership and co-creation in YZD’s public and shared spaces, specifically during the planning, programming and stewardship phases. It focuses on systems for engagement and process continuity, connecting input to action, while excluding physical design, private development, transportation infrastructure, environmental outcomes and the evaluation of engagement tools.

vi. **Importance of Addressing the Problem**

If shared ownership and co-creation are not built into how decisions are made over time, participation tends to be short term and symbolic. Public spaces may feel active at first, but can lose relevance as the community changes over time and new users move in. At the scale of YZD, this can result in spaces feeling forced rather than shaped with the people who use them. This affects trust and stewardship in the long term and can become an operational and financial risk. Under-loved public spaces require more municipal maintenance, fail to attract and retain residents and businesses, and ultimately undermine the value of the entire district. As Innes and Booher (2004) argue, participation must be continuous to remain meaningful. Addressing this issue is crucial to ensuring that community participation continues over time and remains meaningful as the district evolves.

vii. **Reflection on Process**

We defined the problem by realizing that participation is often treated as a one-off activity, systems rely on episodic consultation and voluntary motivation instead of repetition, are spatially detached from daily life, and provide little feedback for ongoing involvement. Engagement competes with everyday routines, ignoring that humans act through habits shaped by repetition and context (Simon, 1957; Wood & Neal, 2007). As a result, participation is sporadic, symbolic, and short-lived. This made it clearer that shared ownership and co-creation need to be supported in the long term, and not just in the early stages.

Potential Solutions

i. **The Intended Solutions**

Solution 1: The YZD Community Conservancy Trust

An entity with the aim of the residents holding genuine decision-making power while respecting Northcrest’s need for strategic oversight and risk management. Inspired by models like Melbourne’s Green Our City Fund, the trust blends scalability with authenticity. Unlike a purely advisory body, this would ensure that cultural and social priorities are set by the community. As the district evolves over time, this model will adapt with it, building real social capital and long-term stewardship ethic.

Tier	Role	Composition	Powers
Tier 1: Board	Strategic oversight	Northcrest, City	Long-Term Planning
Tier 2: Community Assembly	Design, Programming, Feedback, Priorities	Open to all residents, workers, local businesses	Propose projects, allocate community funds
Tier 3: Staff & Volunteers	Day-to-day management, maintenance, activation	Paid staff + volunteer working groups (gardening, events, youth, art)	Implement programs, manage space, report to Assembly & Board

The key to success will be a staged incentive program designed to build participation from the ground up as the district evolves:

1. **Pre-Occupancy Phase**: To attract early adopters and test systems, offer “Founding Member” benefits such as legacy recognition and weighted input on inaugural projects. Use the existing “Meanwhile Use” as a testing ground for incentive and feedback systems. (For example, a “Founding Participant” program will invite early volunteers to co-design event elements, providing real-world data on engagement drivers and operation needs before residency begins.)
2. **Early Occupancy** (Years 1-3): To build Tier 2, implement a “Create for Rewards” system, where starting an organization or community project (e.g. Reading Club, Gardening Club) via the digital platform or community assemblies earns credit redeemable at local businesses or for park amenities.
3. **Mature Community** (Years 5+): To ensure sustained stewardship beyond initial volunteer momentum, the governance model would need to be supported by a long-term funding strategy developed in partnership with Northcrest, the city and community stakeholders. This transition from volunteer-led to professionally supported operations is essential to prevent burnout and maintain continuity.

Solution 2: The Co-Creation Feedback Loop – A Digital-Physical Platform

This solution addresses the problem by making participation habitual rather than episodic by embedding engagement opportunities into daily routines. Rather than creating a new governance structure, this solution focuses on the infrastructure of engagement - the tools, feedback mechanisms, and visible impact markers that transform episodic input into an ongoing dialogue across the lifecycle of the district.

The platform comprises four interconnected elements:

1. Digital Platform - App/ Web portal enabling residents, workers and visitors to:
 - Submit ideas for programming or space activation at any time.
 - Vote on proposed projects and priorities.

- Track the status of past suggestions through a public “idea journey” feature.
 - Receive notifications when input leads to action.
 - Report maintenance or safety issues with photo geotagging.
2. Physical Touchpoints - Strategically located interactive installations throughout the district, including:
 - QR-code linked kiosks in high-traffic areas like the Plaza.
 - “Feedback Benches” with embedded voting buttons (e.g. “Press green if you’d like more seating here”).
 - Interactive displays at key events (Play on the Runway, Hangar Skate) showing live poll results.
 - Pop-up engagement stations during Meanwhile Use activations with staff who can answer “What happened to my idea?”
 3. Feedback Protocol - A transparent process governing how input is carried forward, including:
 - Clear Timelines: all submissions receive an acknowledgement within a set time.
 - Designated responsibility: paid staff (within a future YZD programming office or Northcrest’s community team) synthesize input monthly.
 - Decision traceability: every proposal put to a vote includes a “How we got here” summary showing which past input shaped it.
 - Annual “State of the District” feedback report distributed to all residents.
 4. Feedback-to-Action Engine - To ensure participants see and feel that their input matters:
 - “You Said It, We Did It” Campaign to directly connect input to visible outcomes.
 - Idea Journey Tracking for transparency, also accounting for why some ideas are not feasible with a clear explanation. This gives closure and builds trust.
 - Point-based Incentive system to provide low-stakes rewards that acknowledge contribution without being coercive.

Note: While the Feedback Loop can function independently, it would also serve as a powerful operational tool if YZD adopts a formal governance structure, like the Community Conservancy Trust described in Solution 1, providing the continuous input stream that makes Tier 2 and Tier 3 truly effective.

ii. Evaluation Criteria & Constraints

- **Feasibility:** Legal, financial, and operational viability within a large-scale development.
- **Inclusivity:** Accessibility across ages, abilities, digital literacy, and language.
- **Sustainability:** Long-term funding models and stewardship capacity beyond initial volunteerism.
- **Alignment:** Direct support for the RDF pillars, especially "Quality of Place" and "Inclusive Prosperity."
- **Measurability:** The ability to track participation rates, impact on decisions, and user satisfaction.

iii. Solutions Ruled Out

As a team, we explored several directions before landing on the approach we are proposing now. A pure conservancy style model seemed strong in terms of structure and stability, but we felt it placed too much control at the top and did not leave enough room for real community ownership.

On the other hand, a fully grassroots model did not feel realistic either, since it can be difficult to maintain over the long term without steady funding and coordination. We also discussed one-time co-design processes, such as early workshops or consultations, but these did not solve the main issue we identified, which is continuity across a multi-decade build-out. And in considering options for the platform, we focused on not creating very narrow or highly technical ideas because the resident population is still forming, and it did not make sense to design something too specific before the community fully exists.

iv. **Potential Positive Impacts**

- **Increased long-term stewardship:** Residents with decision-making power are more likely to care for shared spaces (Ostrom, 1990).
- **Higher sense of belonging:** Co-creation builds social capital and community cohesion.
- **Resilient public spaces:** A community that feels ownership can adapt spaces to changing needs more effectively than a distant authority.
- **Reduced public burden:** Active stewardship can supplement municipal maintenance.

v. **Potential Negative Impacts & Mitigation**

- **Governance Complexity:** A multi-tiered structure could become bureaucratic.
 - **Mitigation:** The Participation Continuity Charter will clearly define roles and pathways, and implementation will be phased to allow the system to scale organically. There can be annual review implemented to ensure efficiency.
- **Digital Divide:** Relying on an app could exclude some residents.
 - **Mitigation:** The hybrid digital-physical design ensures multiple feedback channels.
- **Volunteer Burnout:** Relying on goodwill is unsustainable.
 - **Mitigation:** The phased incentive strategy and eventual transition to a funded endowment model (including potential micro-levies) will professionalize key roles and reduce reliance on pure volunteerism.

vi. **Leveraging Team Expertise**

Our team's multidisciplinary composition has been essential to developing solutions that are both theoretically grounded and practically viable. The diversity in our backgrounds enabled us to approach the problem from multiple angles - economic incentives, environmental stewardship, psychological motivation, physical infrastructure and digital tools - resulting in integrated solutions that no single discipline could have produced alone.

vii. **Reflection on Process**

Our process was iterative and grounded in research. We started by researching global case studies of public space governance. The hybrid Community Conservancy Trust emerged as a synthesis solution, balancing Northcrest's need for strategic oversight with the community's need for authentic power. The Co-Creation Feedback Loop was developed as an essential tool to make community co-creation a tangible reality. These solutions align with YZD's existing commitments to create context-specific solutions.

Collaboration

Our team assigned roles based on disciplinary backgrounds to maximize both efficiency and ownership of the work. We held weekly check-ins to ensure alignment, progress, and accountability. Moving forward, we will maintain this structure while deepening our research on implementation pathways and preparing for the final presentation.

Team Member	Primary Roles	Key Contributions to This Report
Ben Petlach	Editor, Presentation Lead	Assisted in defining the problem and led the project kick-off presentation.
Alessandro Policicchio	Visual Designer, Coordinator	Managed project timelines; created visual diagrams and charts for the Trust structure and Feedback Loop.
Harsha Bonthagorla	Lead Researcher, Lead Editor	Developed the Community Conservancy Trust structure (Solution 1) and contributed to Solution 2. Edited final report.
Nicolas Vargas	Lead Researcher, Lead Editor	Conducted research on long-term participation and contributed to shaping solution directions. Edited final report.
Deepanjali Syal	Lead Analyst - Psychology	Integrated behavioral insights to design systems aligning with existing routines and defining problem.
Nathan Pillanger	Researcher - Digital Solutions	Contributed to the development of Solution 2 (Co-Creation Feedback Loop).
Camilo Vargas	Editor, Presentation Lead	Led the project kick-off presentation development and provided editing support.
Sina H.	Editor, Presentation Support	Contributed to developing the slides and refining the problem section.

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