



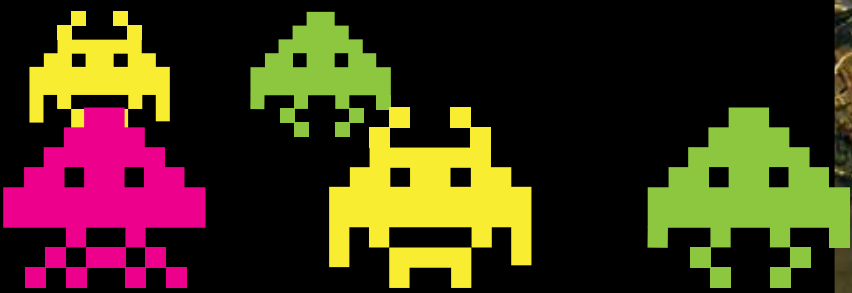
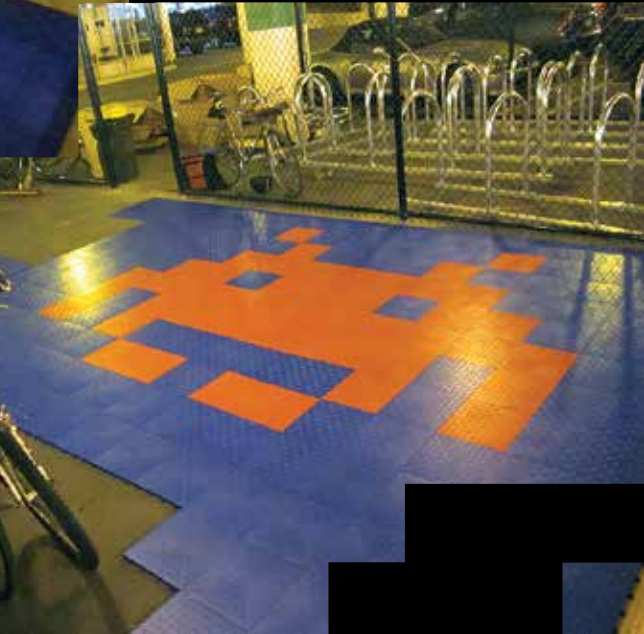
Bicycle parking in garages built for cars knocks it out of the park in Pittsburgh.

# PARKING SPACE INVADERS



By Christopher Speers, CAPP

I have to admit right from the start that I did a double take when I received my first call in 2012 from the Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership (PDP). They were inquiring about the Pittsburgh Parking Authority’s interest in collaborating with BikePgh—the city’s main bicycle advocacy group—to build a bicycle station.



The pitch the PDP made surrounded what was known as Project Pop-Up: Downtown. Mayor Luke Ravenstahl launched the program in conjunction with the Urban Redevelopment Authority, Department of City Planning, and the Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership, with a goal to activate and reinvigorate downtown Pittsburgh storefronts. “We’ve made it a priority to bring downtown back to life,” said the mayor. “New office tenants, residential properties, and the renovated Market Square are part

of that vision. For retail, Project Pop Up Pittsburgh: Downtown is a great tool to inject life and energy into the downtown business district.”

Here’s how the program works: Local artists, entrepreneurs, nonprofits, and other interested parties submit proposals to temporarily activate empty downtown Pittsburgh storefronts. Finalists are then invited to “pop” into downtown for limited engagements using grants of up to \$10,000. Some notable projects include:



- Dream Cream Ice Cream. More than just a great place for a scoop. A portion of designated flavor sales will be contributed to causes in exchange for community service by the recipients.
- Boutique 208. A retail boutique featuring high-quality, handmade wares from local artisans. Also includes community workshops.
- Robot Repairs. Is your robot experiencing technical difficulties? Consider visiting this place for a fix.
- Symbiotic Collusion. A modern music initiative presenting visual and musical art concepts through installation, education, and performance. Performances include string quartets, bands, orchestras, and demonstrations.

### Popping Up Parking

What exactly, you might ask, does all of this have to do with parking? To answer that, we'll start with a little background on the PDP. The PDP's mission includes, among other things, developing and advancing initiatives that foster economic vitality and improve downtown life. The PDP's vision for the downtown Pittsburgh area is not solely focused on downtown, however. The group promotes the downtown area as essential not only to Pittsburghers, but to the entire region. Included in that vision is an understanding that, "Pittsburgh is essential to an efficient, equitable, and environmentally-friendly transportation system."

Can you see where this is going? They not only wanted us to help build a bike station, but they wanted to build the bike station inside one of our downtown garages as

a permanent Project Pop-Up.

My mind wandered. Bikes, cars, bikes, cars. The Ghost of Parking Past pinched me hard and said, "You park cars, not bikes. Don't do it! You can't go green—you're a parking garage, for heaven's sake." I pondered the idea, spoke with my executive director, Dave Onorato, CAPP, came to terms with my conscience, and then told the PDP I had the perfect location: the Third Avenue Garage.

In the heart of the downtown area and adjacent to the popular Market Square, this garage was among the only ones in town with non-revenue-generating space that sat right between the entrance and exit area. The area contained a small number of bike racks that accommodated 12 bikes. Upon visiting the location, the group decided it was perfect because of its central, prime location and immediate need for additional bicycle parking. It was time to figure out what to build.

### Build It; Will They Come?

In an initial meeting, Scott Bricker and Eric Boerer of BikePgh intimated that they wanted to do something fun, provided, of course, that the Pittsburgh Parking Authority was willing to go along. Considering the age, look, and feel of some of the parking garages we operate, why not inject some fun? We were on board. They then proposed the theme of Space Invaders! We envisioned green two-wheeled pedal pushers invading space normally used by gas-chugging, carbon dioxide-emitting monsters. Perfect.

BikePgh suggested both a public section and a private, secured section. The free-use public component would





include room for approximately 30 bicycles, a bike fix-it station, and colorful, durable plastic flooring that incorporated the Space Invaders theme. The preferred fenced-in section would include spaces to be sold to the public on a first-come, first-served basis at a rate of \$100 per annual season.

Wait a second. We were going to charge money for the bicycle parking too? We'll come back to that in a minute. The area would contain room for approximately 24 bicycles, lockers for storing gear, and a bench for cyclists to use for changing. Access to the secured area would be via a magnetically locked door opened through the use of a proximity badge.

Funding the bike station was a challenge from the start. As noted earlier, the initial grant available from the PDP through Project Pop-Up to BikePgh was only \$10,000. Unfortunately, the project cost estimate was around \$20,000. More partners and creativity were clearly necessary. These critical partners ending up contributing both funds and services to bring the project to fruition. A local architect donated her design services and also assisted employees of BikePGH and the Pittsburgh Parking Authority with the flooring installation. The bike racks, lockers, and bike fix-it station were also built and installed by the partners. PPA agreed to fund both the fencing and signage for the project (approximately \$7,500). PSX Group, the authority's parking revenue control equipment vendor, graciously agreed to provide the access system for the private area and subsequent tie-in to the Third Avenue garage revenue control system for tracking purposes (approximately \$4,200).

### Popped Up

In June 2013, Mayor Ravenstahl issued his press release on our project. "Providing cyclists with safe, secure parking for their bikes is another step forward in making Pittsburgh a world-class, bike-friendly city," Ravenstahl said. "Project Pop Up: Downtown has made great strides

in increasing downtown's vibrancy and bringing more people into the heart of our city. This collaborative project will make shopping, dining, and entertainment amenities more accessible to cyclists as we continue to make Pittsburgh an even more livable city for everyone."

In the release, Scott Bricker, BikePgh executive director, stated, "We've loved working on this project. Not only does it stay true to the spirit of the Mayor's Project Pop Up program by taking an underutilized space and making it vibrant and interesting, it addresses a true need in the heart of downtown. The Third Avenue Bike Station shows off the city's dedication to bike transportation and sustainability, while helping Pittsburghers save a few bucks and stay healthy."

In July 2013, the Third Avenue BikePARK was launched to the public. The project increased the bicycle parking capacity at the location more than four-fold, from 12 to 54 spaces. The new public area space fills to capacity daily. Word of the new BikePark and the fix-it station amenity is also spreading through the cycling community. Reviews have all been positive. Subscriptions are beginning to come in for the preferred section as well.

What was once a non-revenue generating space is now capable of generating \$2,400 annually. As a result of the success of the Third Avenue Bike Station, the Pittsburgh Parking Authority has already decided to earmark these revenues for the future expansion of its bicycle program to further its commitment to the Pittsburgh bicycle community.

The mission of the Pittsburgh Parking Authority has always included a dimension beyond the basic responsibility to provide and maintain spaces for vehicle parking throughout the city of Pittsburgh. It also includes supporting the efforts of city departments and groups such as the Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership and BikePgh to ensure not only the economic progress of our region, but also mindfulness that parking doesn't have to be just for cars.



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