It is the people that make the place
Public facilities and public spaces (i.e. “civic buildings, civic amenities”) are:

- Public assets to build community
- Places where people connect

Spaces where people from all walks of life can bump into each other and spark community in unexpected, vibrant, and thriving ways...ways in which we as “professionals” can’t imagine, plan for, design, or program.
Points of this presentation

Introduction

[a] Begin with a critique of the current state of affairs

[b] Offer an example of what is possible (Veterans Plaza)

[c] Suggest a parading shift

Concluding thoughts
[a] CRITIQUE OF THE CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS
Sometimes planning and design:

[1] Confines more than creates

[2] Inhibits more than innovates

[3] Prescribes more than placemakes
Programming top down can:

[1] Exclude more than include

[2] Segregate more than integrate

[3] Succeed formally while failing informally
Planning alone a place does not make

Design alone a place does not make

Programming alone a place does not make

It is the people that make the place
+ Planning
+ Design
+ Programming

= Placemaking
Expected and unexpected users and users

The usual suspects and the unusual participants

Those there by choice and those there by chance

Regulars, Occasionals, and Passer-bys
[b] AN EXAMPLE OF WHAT IS POSSIBLE:

VETERANS PLAZA
Silver Spring Civic Building
“No, we did not sit down and strategically chart this out. It was not a linear process. It was not so much planning and engineering as placemaking and engaging... Lots of it was necessitated by a changing public fiscal environment. We were dealing with a space conceptualized, designed and built in a time of prosperity; and now we had to manage it in a time of austerity. ... In retrospect, we were led by certain values that got traction and seemed to be accepted and adapted by consensus, if not in the protocol of codes, certainly in the ambiguous and hard to pin down ‘cultural norm’.”
Emerging ‘cultural norms’ for Veterans Plaza’s “success”:

1. Listen and respond to civic entrepreneurship
2. Engage, include, and welcome the broad spectrum of community members
3. Affirm diversity of uses and users
4. Don’t be afraid to experiment, pilot, innovate
5. Celebrate children and family
6. Ensure safety and security
7. Communicate “Do’s”, not just “Don’ts”
8. Be fiscally responsible
9. Pay attention to ‘little things that matter a lot’
10. Still evolving...!?!!?
A critical side - but integral - note:

The role of participatory performing art is key to successful civic buildings and public amenities.

From face-painting to flash-mobs to playback theater:

Participatory performing art is key in the conceptualization, design, implementation, programming, and evaluation of civic buildings and public amenities.

(Art is life. Life is art.)
[c] A PARADING SHIFT
Civic buildings and public amenities are necessarily looked at through the prism of:

- GIS maps
- Planning models
- Architectural renderings
Equally as important is to look at civic buildings and public amenities as a:

populist play with audience participation where:

the public space is the stage

... and, the community’s soul, salsa and spirit(s) offers the conversation, dialogue, music and dance
CONCLUSION
We can help set the table, suggest ingredients for the meal, even bring samples of what tastes great... But ultimately:

It is the people that make the place.
Our County Executive Ike Leggett often says that our community is not a melting pot. ... Rather, we are ‘gumbo’:

Where everyone comes together yet keeps their own flavor, joined by the roux, that special ingredient that binds us to a common cause, to a common purpose.
So, as we dialogue about civic buildings and civic amenities, I invite us to embrace

indigenous, organic - dare we say -
c.h.a.o.t.i.c. placemaking

Original at
http://intrepid-llc.com/
“Let it happen. Let it breathe. Let it come alive. Don’t over plan, design or program. Trust the users and uses. Unleash creativity and innovation. Amend, bend, and revise as necessary. Be humble. Ask. Engage. Embrace…”
It is the people that make the place