Tina Leone:
Cheers, everyone, and welcome to Ballston Connect. We're here to connect you to all things about Ballston. I'm your host, Tina Leone, the CEO of the Ballston Business Improvement District. Well, we are all continuing our lives under COVID conditions, and we hope all of you and your families remain safe and healthy. For us, we are continuing to record our interviews remotely, so please forgive what might be a bit lower sound quality and the background noises, although hopefully today you won't hear the kids or the dogs.

We look forward to returning to our recording space at Industrious in Ballston Exchange just as soon as we can. And speaking of our lives under COVID, I hope you've been spending more time outside lately, taking a break from your work to walk and stretch your legs, and maybe hanging out in open air plazas or parks, something for a change of scenery. You may have noticed that your neighborhood has a pretty particular feeling or character to it, and maybe you know exactly when you cross from one neighborhood into another like we do here in the Ballston-Rosslyn Corridor. Maybe you see banners on the light poles, or certain colors are used in certain neighborhoods, and signage and furniture, street furniture.

Well, that's no accident. The sense of place is created through a process aptly named placemaking, and that is something that we do here as a Business Improvement District. But what is placemaking, and is there a special psychology to designing spaces, and now outdoor spaces? And how has this idea shaped patterns of behavior in the public realm? We will discuss these questions and more as we chat with Stephanie Pankiewicz, partner and landscape architect with LandDesign, and one of my favorite people. Stephanie, cheers, and welcome. Thank you so much for joining us today.

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
I'm so happy to be here, Tina. I love all things Ballston as well, and particularly working with you and your team and staff. So thank you so much for having me on your podcast today.

Tina Leone:
I'm so happy you're here. Probably long overdue, to say the least. I mean, you've worked with us almost since the very beginning of the BID, of this Business Improvement District.

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
I can tell from our project numbers, and the original one was a 2012 project number. So we have loved the many years of seeing it transform, and all the work you all and many other BID members have been doing to make Ballston just a really incredible place for shopping and dining.

Tina Leone:
The vibrancy of Ballston today has really evolved, especially over the last eight years that we've been here. We've seen such dramatic development. But a big part of what makes Ballston special is the public realm itself. And so I've said this, it's a really cool topic, and it's something that most people might not even be aware of it because they just maybe take it for granted that these are great places. But before we get into the big picture stuff, Stephanie, let's talk about you. Tell us about what you do. Tell us what's your work like, what you work on.

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
No, I'd be happy to. And I had a bit of prep for this in that yesterday, I actually did a virtual mentorship with the University of Georgia landscape architecture program, which is where I actually went to school. And so I actually graduated in 2000, so 20 years ago I graduated from the University of Georgia with a degree in landscape architecture. And then I've had the pleasure of working across the country, from California to North Carolina, and now here in the DC region. Loved art and architecture and environment and science, and landscape architecture, which is about the design, as you noted, of outdoor spaces and parks and public places, and really, the spaces between the buildings. That really is the career path I chose, and I've been doing it now 20 years, and just have loved every minute of it.

Tina Leone:
I have to do this because I've heard this story before, but you have always known that you wanted to be a landscape architect. You just knew. But you had shared a story with me that you might have been a model. Who knows?

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
That's true. I was stopped on the streets of New York once by a modeling recruiter who said that I had great cheekbones, and my response to that was, "No, I want to be a landscape architect," because I was at Georgia at the time, and I am pretty confident I made the right choice. And really, landscape architecture is about creating great places for people to live and shop and dine and work, and also includes the habitat and environment. I definitely made the right choice in that regard.

Tina Leone:
And you still have great cheekbones, so you didn't lose that.

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
Oh, thank you.

Tina Leone:
So tell us about what brought you into Northern Virginia, because you were working at the office in North Carolina, and so what brought you up here to the DC area?

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
That's correct. Well, it was a pretty exciting time in 2010 when the local metro system was extending [inaudible 00:05:12] out to Fairfax County, and so Tysons, Reston, Herndon, and then now ultimately to Dulles. And at the time, I was located in our Asheville, North Carolina office with LandDesign. We're a multidisciplinary design firm, and we have offices in different location. And one of the founding partners of the firm, who was here in DC, said, "There's going to be a huge transformation of the urban realm in Northern Virginia, and we would love to have you come up here and work with us."

So that was sort of the impetus, but really, although initially I was working primarily in Tysons on several projects there, really began to see the richness of the entire Northern Virginia region. And then it was shortly thereafter in 2012 that the Ballston BID was formed, and you all began thinking about placemaking in Ballston and how to distinguish yourself between other parts of Arlington and other parts of Northern Virginia. And so it's been really exciting to be part of this transformation for almost a decade now here in Northern Virginia.
Tina Leone:
Yeah. I mean, well, you're a partner in crime over there. I've called it, because it has been an incredible, not just for Ballston and Arlington, but he right. The entire Northern Virginia has just really exploded.

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
And it's just a really wonderful area to live. I know before I moved here, probably a lot of people across the country, you just think of the DC area and Northern Virginia maybe through a few labels of either politics, or you might know The Pentagon is located here. And then once I got to this region, I really saw that there's local breweries, there's local restaurants, there's bike lanes, there's great park spaces, there's wonderful neighborhoods. And there's a real richness to this region that is beyond maybe a label that might be applied in national news.

Tina Leone:
Yeah, I know we're very lucky. Every time I go away and return, I always say, "Wow, we're so lucky to live where we live. It has such great infrastructure and bones to have these great parks and everything." So obviously, I'm pretty excited about this topic because this is what we do, and we work with you on that, and placemaking is a big part of what we do. But a lot of people may not realize, again, like I said, it's not that it's all around them. So let's talk about what is placemaking. What is the definition of it? What is it about?

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
Great. It's a really important question, because it is tied to the desire for people to live, shop, and work in a particular neighborhood or district or area. And that really greatly contributes to the economic engine and value those places create. So I think for many of us, when you think of great cities, whether it's Paris or New York, and you think of wonderful streetscape environments, you may not realize that, whether it's signage, site furnishing such as benches, trash cans, or the pavers that are used in a sidewalk. Maybe it's a brick paver, maybe it's a concrete sidewalk, it could also be just the width of the sidewalk that allows for things like outdoor dining.

Often, those are very intentional decisions, and the ones that are really carefully calibrated to be authentic and to represent almost a particular brand of a neighborhood or district, people are going to desire to go there because they want to be associated with that environment. So I think that's really what we've been trying to work with the Ballston BID on. Even knowing when you entire into a neighborhood, how is it different from Clarendon or Virginia Square or Rosslyn? And so certainly things like gateway signage and banners contribute to that, but also just the rich environment so that people want to dine outside and have a drink with friends. And so the quality of the environment really matters to placemaking as well.

Tina Leone:
Absolutely. We should talk about, since a lot of it is intentionally planned, which it doesn't come off that way. It doesn't feel like it's fabricated, which is totally what you want, right? You want things to be authentic. Whatever you're planning needs to be authentic to the place, and I think we've worked to do that here. What other elements would you say have to be part of a really truly effective placemaking plan?

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
I think along with the quality of the materials and detail, it's the flexibility of the spaces. I know we're seeing now, particularly due to COVID era and the pandemic restrictions, that if a restaurant or a retail shop or other business, including offices, if they have a great space that's outside that's directly adjacent to them, where they can set up pop-up type environments that will allow for interim interventions, maybe an outdoor movie night happening in an adjacent parking lot or a street, or a fitness class from a local fitness vendor, whether that's [solidcore] or F45 or another vendor happening in a public space, the flexibility is really key along with the quality of public space, and making sure that people can safely ...

There's a safety aspect, too, that we've always been focused on through lighting and making sure that there's good visibility in public spaces. And now we're thinking about how you can space out in public space. But I think to your point, many people might experience a park or a streetscape and not realize that there is a design process, and often there is a developer or a planning agency from the local county, along with designers like landscape architects and urban designers and architects, who are all working together to actually come up with the dimensions and the material and the design of that space.

Tina Leone:
Yeah, and what the purpose is. Maybe we should even just back up a little bit and talk about what is a placemaking plan, because people might not ... What are the elements of that? What goes into it? I mean, what are we looking at when we're looking at placemaking?

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
No, and I think back to 2012 when we started on the original plan for the Ballston BID. I mean, there were some great buildings in the BID, and there were great sidewalks and plazas, but even identifying them through signage so that people know this actually is a public space, and identifying it, and being warm and welcoming. So when you look at the components in the original placemaking plan, we looked at places to include art of all kinds. So not just sculpture or static pieces, but performance art, murals, interchanging art piece, temporary art pieces. So art is a key component of a great place.

Then also, the green spaces, and making sure that they're linked, because if you can't walk from space to space or bike from space to space, you might not get as much vibrancy or activity. And then definitely, the streetscape furnishing, so as I mentioned, trashes and bench, cans, and lights, and signage, really making sure that they're a distinct family will contribute to a unique district and place as well. And I think it does take many partners to make this successful.

So that's, I think, another key of a great placemaking plan, is you have to have all the partners, whether it's property owners, property managers, developers, county staff, and then of course the business improvement staff who are also, I know for you all, you're planning events and activities and connecting people through your residential club, the Ballston Connect. And it really does. It's like a tapestry. It takes all these great layers to make a place that feels distinct, that people want to be in. Like you might when you imagine a city like New York or Paris, we want Ballston to be that kind of neighborhood where people are like, "I've got to go to Ballston because it's such a unique place."

Tina Leone:
That's how we feel about that too. And for us, the place, especially as a new BID, when we did our first placemaking plan, it really was eye opening just looking at the member buildings that are here, but we have to look at the neighborhood as a whole, and identify those areas of ... Some areas need
improvement. Some areas can benefit, like you said, from art. There were areas, maybe some plazas or certain streets that we discovered, that we hadn't really thought about, well, maybe we should do something.

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
In 2012 when we walked together with LandDesign and the BID, we walked every street in Ballston. And I think one of my team members at that time, iPhone apps and the distance trackers on your phone, she put her phone on for one of these particular walks, where I think it was on where we were documenting where all the parking garage entrances were, because to arrive to a great place, you need to know where to park or go. And she clocked six miles on her app just walking up and down Ballston streets, documenting the parking garage entrances.

Tina Leone:
And that was a great thing to do. And then we actually went back over time to keep updating that with the times that they were open and how much they charge, et cetera, because that actually led to the county putting in the parking signs. So it makes a big difference, but again ... And the county of course had to do their own study, but at least we had the documentation that said, "Here it is. Yeah, here. Go ahead and verify."

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
And I think that's really important that you're trying ... When we talk about placemaking, it's really about the people. You want people to feel attracted like a magnet to come and work and live, and they want places that are quality and have amenities like parks and restaurants and retail. And often, we talk about, too, is a particular neighborhood or district or city, is it an 18-hour day, is it a 20-hour day? Very few places are 24-hour days. That's like Las Vegas.

Tina Leone:
Yeah.

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
But if you think about a mall that might be closing at 10 o'clock in an evening, but maybe they have a movie theater, and that theater's going to stay open for later movies, it's very common in this area and vibrant districts that you actually do have an 18-to-20-hour day. And thinking about that experience from early morning, arriving to office, or maybe you're getting up and walking your dog. And I should mention, that's an important part particularly in these vibrant neighborhoods, to be dog friendly, and Ballston is very dog friendly as well.

Tina Leone:
Well, we want to be more friendly soon, we hope.

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
You want to be more friendly, but I do see people out walking around with dogs, and so having residences and other buildings that are dog friendly is really important, too. But thinking about the transition from morning to lunch time to evening to later evening, what is that experience? And that also makes a great place. And then the fact that it can be really pleasant and enjoyable on an everyday
event, and it can also be awesome when there's a larger event, like maybe a food festival or art fair. And that's what I think is an important part. Ballston has several streets that if you close off that street, you can have a great concert.

Tina Leone:
We know that with our quarter fest food festival, that now we're pivoting, like many other organizations for this year, and we can get to that on the COVID impact on the public realm. So I think maybe we did touch on this enough as far as what are good examples of placemaking. I think we probably covered a lot of that. People probably think parks and stuff, but ... So yeah, talk to us a little bit more.

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
I think, too, it's allowing for the evolution of place over time. And that's really ensuring that, as new businesses or new demands happen, there could be a need for new services. One of the things we worked on with you all was to put WiFi in every park space, because that was another quality that people were seeking, was to have an environment if they were out on their phone or tablet. We're also looking at QRC codes that connect to wayfinding. So I think an important part of a rich environment is that evolution and infusion of technology and information, and really uncovering the hidden gems that might be in a particular place. We've talked about recently, there's a lot of great public art already in Ballston, but do people know the name of the sculpture, maybe the history of it? And so there's these other layers of history and art that could go into the environment as well.

Tina Leone:
Definitely. Definitely. Well, and you touched on this a little bit about the evolution, and the building, and well, flexibility is really important. But we have a great example of evolution here in Ballston, and it started out in the 1950s as Parkington, which was revolutionary for that time. You actually drove to the shopping center and parked your car. That's a space that developed into Ballston Common Mall, which was the traditional and closed malls of the 80s. And then just recently another evolution, I call it, it's the third generation here, is Ballston Quarter, which now has opened back up to the public. And good timing, by the way.

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
That is a perfect example, because as culture and society and trends have changed, people, they no longer want to be enclosed in the middle of the mall. Malls are becoming more outwardly facing, and they want to have the connection with the streetscape and the public realm. So that evolution of Ballston Quarter and that story from being car focused to now people focused is really incredible. And it does highlight, part of that is really tied to the placemaking, which is the signage, the lighting, the outdoor dining on the restaurants along Wilson Avenue. I know we've sat out at a couple there.

And now you have the ability to people watch, engage with a beautiful day, have your lunch outside. And there's also public spaces there, and I think that's key, too, that not every public space in Ballston is associated with a restaurant. You could just bring a book or bring your dog, or be waiting on a friend, and still be in this really great environment. And so Ballston Quarter has created that, too, with the amphitheater outdoor area, along with the outdoor dining. But a lot of that, it's very much tied to that realm of what's happening between the building face on one side of the street to the building face on the other.
And there’s a dimensionality there, where we look at, in new developments, we study developments that have been existing, and is that dimension 60 feet, or 45 feet, or 80 feet? And what width does the sidewalk need to be? And that gets back to that very intentional design piece. And that was something we looked at really early on in the Ballston 2012 placemaking plan, is what should Wilson Street feel like, and how to make it more attractive to people being there. And so the idea at that time was actually, maybe the streets need to be narrower and the sidewalks need to be wider. And so-

Tina Leone:
And here we are.

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
... some of that’s been happening in Ballston. But the evolution piece of it transforming over time, and again, that takes many partners to achieve that, and it can take many years as well. These are very expensive projects when you redevelop something like that. But what I love about placemaking, too, is you could have an area where you’re doing an interim pop-up event, and maybe you’re doing sidewalk art or chalk art, and having an artist do something that’s only going to last one day. And it can be more affordable and manageable, and that can have just as great of an impact as a multimillion dollar redevelopment of a major mall.

Tina Leone:
Exactly. Exactly. That’s a lot of what we try to do, too. With a small budget, you have to make things stretch. Yeah, we really look at, how can you have impact? What’s going to be the most impactful for each dollar that we spend? And we keep referring to the placemaking plan we did in 2012. Well, we’re actually updating that now, but that tells you how long it takes to implement some of these ideas that you have. I mean, just under what we have control over, and then what developers do and what the county does is a whole nother ... Like you said, it’s layered. It’s all layered, so we all kind of have to work together.

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
One of the best days happened last year. I was meeting at an architecture firm that overlooked North Fairfax Drive, where we had worked with you all, and we redid the five medians, that they had trees and some landscaping previously, but we redid them with a signature tree. And that’s part of placemaking and branding. So these beautiful bald cypress that actually now, it’s October, they’re turning this beautiful golden orange color. They’re a very distinct shape, this triangle shape, very tall.

And the architects overlooked those medians, and they told me just how much they loved seeing that redone. And so that’s really incredible. I drove through there recently, and it just makes you feel really great when you’re on North Fairfax, and you’re crossing into Randolph and Quincy, those intersections, and you see those beautiful bald cypress, and you know you’re in Ballston then, along with the signage, and there’s the fence in the middle, too. And that’s really, I think it does take a long time. There were permits we had to get from the county, from Arlington County. There were permits we had to get from the Virginia Department of Transportation.

There was a contractor who had to be hired to implement the design. And then the BID is also maintaining that, so there's watering of the plants, and trimming and pruning, and making sure trash is picked up in the median. So those are all activities that kind of happen behind the scene, but your BID members, they get the benefit. And they see the benefit, too.
Tina Leone:
They don't always know who does it, but now you do. If you're listening, you know who does it.

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
Even more BID signs to give acknowledgment. And I think that is a piece about placemaking. If you go to great cities and parks, there is a Business Improvement District that is working. So whether it's in DC, there's several BIDs. If you go to New York, you go to Bryant Park, there's going to be a BID. You go to Tysons, they have the Tyson partnership. The Ballston Business Improvement District and you and your staff, you are performing a great role, and that is really managing to maintain a level of quality and service in these public spaces in the district, along with the other partners, like property managers and the county.

Tina Leone:
Exactly, yeah. It is really important to have that partnership. We all work together on what we need to work on. That's what makes it a great place. We all have to work together and do what we do best. There's stuff that the county does best, there's stuff that the property manager does best, there's stuff that we do best. So yeah, absolutely. When you design public spaces, I mean, talk about the psychology of it. Obviously, doing something that's very well designed is going to impact our behavior, so you must be thinking about that. What do you want people to do? What are you trying to get them to do, or influence their habits?

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
No, that's really true. As landscape architects, we are very focused on the health and safety and wellness, along with how something looks. So the aesthetics of it can absolutely contribute to all of that. But if we're designing a great place where people want to be outside, it's going to contribute to fitness. If we are working on a plaza or space that's going to be a 20-hour space and we need to think of that nighttime safety, we're going to be working with a lighting designer to make sure that people of all generations and genders, and young people, older people, people with kids, feel safe in that space.

There is a psychology that often, people want to be around other people, so having the magnets of art and other activities such as entertainment, they bring groups of people together, and that actually can make people feel safer. So when we're designing a plaza or park or space, we're thinking about what is it like on an everyday occurrence versus a special event, and how it's going to feel safe and welcoming. And we often tell the story of the person who's going to be there, so if we know there's a group of restaurants, we want to think about, well, what's it like for the family who's waiting on their reservation?

Is there an art piece that it's okay for their kid to be climbing on and running off some energy while they're waiting on that reservation? So it really is about the story of the place and making sure it's welcoming to everyone. And I think that's really key now, that we want to make sure that multiple people feel welcome in a space, that it's not just for one group or another.

Tina Leone:
So, Stephanie, obviously, as a Business Improvement District, we want to make sure our businesses are successful, so talk to us about how placemaking can help support businesses and their success.

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
Absolutely. I mean, I think at the heart of it, every great city or place that we want to visit, retail and restaurants and shopping and dining, and other kinds of entertainment that is part of commerce and business and people who work and live there, that is what makes a great place. So the business part of it is really key. And we've seen that impact even with COVID restrictions. With restaurants and retail not being open, places don't feel as vibrant. And so that's a really important link to the success of those landlords, tenants, business owners.

And I think what the BID does, one, is you're a great PR agent in many regards for your BID members. You're helping bring awareness to Ballston. But then, once people come to Ballston, you all are supporting those efforts through the more physical elements of wayfinding, which is signage, whether that's kiosk signage, or directional signage, or entry, gateway signage like the four gateway signs that we worked together on to put into Ballston. And then additionally, just making sure you all are an advocate at the other local organizations, like the Chamber of Commerce, with county staff, that you're helping bring awareness of things these retailers and restaurants might need in regards to, maybe they need more sidewalk space for outdoor dining.

Maybe serving alcohol and beer and wine is an important part of a rich environment, so do they have the proper spaces [inaudible 00:31:28]? Can you do it for an event as part of revenue, as part of experience? So I think the BID's role in the business part of it, and tying that to a great authentic place that people want to come to, that's really where it syncs up with the business part of it, the PR part of it, and the design part of it, because that's all part of the tapestry of a great district.

Tina Leone:
That helps all of us be successful for sure. And we'll talk about the current environment with COVID that's had a huge impact on our current situation and the work we've done with the county and with the business owners and the owners of the properties. That's changed the way we eat. I mean, first, it was exclusively takeout, which, again, and to the Commonwealth of Virginia's credit, allowing alcohol sales to be done, ABC saying, "Go ahead," and then the county blessing that, too, saying, "Okay, go ahead and do your takeout alcohol sales."

It's a huge impact for the restaurants [inaudible 00:32:38] the temporary outdoor seating areas that we collaborated with the county on, all the BIDs did, and the Chamber of Commerce, all together coming, had the importance of it, number one. The importance of it making it easy, please, fast approvals, all that. And now with winter coming, the whole winterization of these outdoor areas. So this has changed. How is this changing now that this has happened, and it could happen again? How is this changing how you're going to design these public spaces?

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
That's a great question. And one, we're looking at how we need more of the spaces for people on foot or sitting or walking or biking, as opposed to cars. Cars are very, very important, but it has been amazing to see that the on street parking space that we've worked with you all for a number of years during parking day, where communities and organizations all over the country take over a single parking spot on street for a single day in September, and there's a little pop-up park. And suddenly now, whether it's in Ballston or Alexandria or DC and all these neighborhoods, that parking space is now the outdoor dining area room, even retail happening.

And I do agree with you, it's a real credit to the state and to the counties and the different agencies to embrace that and to move quickly, because it really is sometimes the difference between a business surviving or not. I think the big discussion is going to be winter, because we've been very
fortunate through summer and fall, and the question will be, what will that experience be like in February?

And I think rightly so, many cities and districts and BIDs and other organizations are involving the fire marshal and other safety experts in that question, because a solution that, when you're cold, you turn on a heater, what kinds of heaters would be best used or served in these outdoor spaces? What if there is an overall shade or tent covering? And I really do think it's beneficial that the BIDs and small business organizations and municipalities and design groups are talking about that now while the weather is nice.

Tina Leone:
Five months ago was the start of the conversation. The county released just a few weeks ago, their guidelines on the heaters. There are certain heaters that you just cannot put underneath a tent, and yes, the health and safety is the most important thing, of course. I mean, it's being a little chilly versus being on fire.

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
Safety is paramount, particularly when you have groups of people. And I think too, there could be really thinking about even more ways to encourage pickup or curbside or takeout. The restaurants that I think have thrived in spite of all the pandemic challenges are the ones who were quickly able to pivot. And I know they're now probably feeling like they've already pivoted two or three or four times, and now they have to think about winter. But there is a great deal of ingenuity, and I think again, that does get back to the physical space of design. And whether that's how the sidewalk accommodates curbside pickup, or maybe a street actually allowing for some area of drive through or the retail establishment having a walkup window. Which, as a dog parent, I have wished that every coffee shop anyway had walkup windows, and now many of them do.

Tina Leone:
Yeah, or have doggy parking. They got to have places to park the dog.

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
And as much as the pandemic has been this just terrible impact to life and business and the county, there are some things that will evolve from it that I think will be part of contributing to the environment moving forward. And I think walkup windows at coffee shops, that's a great example. That's probably here to stay. And there could be more emphasis on having a curbside area, so thinking about that when we're doing site design, and where that interaction may happen. Obviously, the delivery component of groceries, and there's probably a whole nother podcast you could do about drone delivery or the robot delivery.

Tina Leone:
It's coming. It's coming.

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
But I don't think any of this will ever replace that people like to be together. We like to socialize. We like to see each other in person. We like to speak together, we like to have a meal. So I think we are going to have to think about how to not only make interior ... And I know architects and consultants who work on
the HVAC air conditioning and heating units, they're very focused on how to make interior spaces very safe. But the exterior space, I mean, that's going to be key. And it really does. You talked about, at the beginning, me being a landscape architect.

The person who founded landscape architecture as a profession in the US was Frederick Law Olmsted, and that’s why he helped design Central Park, because people in cities need places for fresh air and exercise and getting outside. So I think all those threads will continue with us even as we, fingers crossed, get a vaccine for COVID, and learn how to really make our interior spaces safe. This desire to be outside for all those great activities, and outside in those great activities in an urban area like Ballston will continue to be key.

Tina Leone:
Well, and I think especially for the near to midterm, outdoors is where our life is. So we've just completed a survey of over 860 respondents that live or work here in Ballston, and 60% are saying they want outdoor activities. They will attend outdoor activities. Indoor activities, not so much. I mean, they don't want to go inside to eat at a restaurant, and they definitely don’t want to go inside of a gym. So we're really working on solving that issue in particular with the gyms. And what we're looking for now is, where can we create an outdoor fitness center here in Ballston?

And I think I've mentioned this to you, but it's become where we want our gyms to survive. What can we help provide for them so they could continue to do their classes, and people can still pay their memberships and get an in person workout safely and spaced out? So I mean, we’re working on this question right now. But to the point about urban planning for the future, I mean, these are things that we're hoping that will be considered. You're talking about the new sector plan for whichever neighborhood, pick one. Hopefully Ballston will probably be up soon for that. I mean, the thought is, we've got to really focus on these outdoor areas and how they’re going to be used, and maybe flexibility, right?

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
Yes, that is the key. And we're seeing that in parks now where we have a very flat lawn. In order to provide that yearlong flexibility, we’re no longer using natural turf. And some people might have a reaction to that, thinking that natural turf is better, but it actually takes a lot of chemicals and maintenance and mowing and resources to keep it, and in this environment, it's very difficult to keep it looking good all year round. And so we've actually gone to artificial, which allows for fitness classes or other activities all year round.

It performs a great benefit because it's permeable for stormwater management, so it's still environmentally friendly. They've changed the products. Some of them even have crushed coconut as a base instead of petroleum. Rubber products have gotten more environmentally friendly. And it allows for the wear and tear of a bootcamp out on it as well as just normal park activity.

Tina Leone:
And that's what will be needed. I mean, to have a space like that right now would have enabled our businesses, in particular our gyms, or even our restaurants to have outdoor area immediately accessible.

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
Maintenance of spaces is incredibly important and expensive. So if the design team who's working on this is thinking about not just how great it looks or what size it needs to be, but the maintenance aspect,
that's really a great benefit to the BIDs and other partners who are going to be managing these spaces long term as well.

Tina Leone:
Absolutely. Absolutely. Well, Stephanie, thank you so much. I always learn something too when I talk to you, but hopefully our audience has learned more about placemaking.

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
Thank you for having me, and just look forward to seeing all the great things that Ballston will continue to do.

Tina Leone:
Thank you. And Stephanie, tell us how we can learn more about LandDesign and how we can get in touch with you.

Stephanie Pankiewicz:
Oh, sure. LandDesign is www.LandDesign, and it's two D's, so L-A-N-D-D-E-S-I-G-N, dot com. And so you can connect on the social platforms, LinkedIn and Twitter, at LandDesign. And definitely, you can find me there on many of those platforms as well.

Tina Leone:
All right. Thank you so much, Stephanie. All righty then, it's last call for this show. Remember to stay in touch with us. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and sign up for our enews at BallstonVA.org. I'm your host, Tina Leone, and we hope you'll join us next time to learn more about Ballston and connect with more of the amazing people here in our community. In the meantime, please stay safe and healthy. And remember, life is still full in Ballston.