



PLACEMAKING *YOUR* MAIN STREET

Connecting Community & Commerce

TOOLKIT

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To those that care about and care for main street communities across the country. You are doing incredibly important work supporting the commercial and social hearts of our country. Your work has never been more needed and important. This toolkit is dedicated to you.

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7th Place Farmers Market in St. Paul, MN, during the Wander Wabasha event produced by The Musicant Group

Welcome to the Placemaking Your Main Street Toolkit!

We hope this will be a valuable resource for placemaking your main street community into a lively place for locals and visitors. The principles, processes, and practices that lie herein are the same ones we use and have refined over five years and 50+ projects of all sizes within our work as The Musicant Group.

The toolkit rests on the premise of six guiding principles that we firmly believe are true of every main street, every community, and every person.

Guiding Principles

1. Place matters. Who we are as individuals and as community members is deeply affected by the places we inhabit. Places have the power to foster or inhibit human flourishing. It is important, natural, and essential that we all create places that make people feel alive.

2. Everyone has the power. Everyone has a right to the city (or village!), meaning the power and ability to shape spaces and places in their community to best meet their needs and desires. By working together, we can create places that value the local context and community.

3. Feelings and questions serve as our guide. As human beings we inherently know what makes spaces and places feel good and beneficial to us (or those that do not). By asking the right questions and trusting our feelings, we can assess opportunities for placemaking in our communities.

4. People think and act holistically. Human beings are multi-faceted creatures. We are physical beings with intellectual, emotional, relational, and spiritual aspects. Places too, are

whole things, not collections of isolated pieces or siloes. When creating great places, it is important to consider all of these elements and how they relate to each other.

5. Process is more important than product. Each community is unique. The process of placemaking is key to finding the right action for each community and situation. There is not a one-size-fits-all solution, so we must wisely use the process to tailor actions we take to best serve the local context.

6. Great places benefit both community and commerce actors. The positive effects of placemaking extend beyond the people that inhabit these places. When and where there are people, commerce thrives as well. Creating commercial and community value should never be mutually exclusive.

How to Use the Toolkit

This toolkit is meant to provide you with a basic placemaking framework and process for creating value in your community. Each of you will have a different goal for referencing this toolkit, so the uses and outcomes will look different for each person. We suggest using this toolkit as:

- A way to run an experiment that serves as a precedent for getting something big done;
- A tool to mobilize stakeholders and resources;
- A way to bring more community and commercial vitality to your district;
- A framework to develop programs and initiatives.


And don't forget to have fun! If you—and everyone else—don't enjoy the process of creating places, your places probably won't feel very good either. So enjoy yourself!



Introduction to Placemaking



What is Place?

Before we can *make* a place, we have to have a shared sense of what a place *is*. For the purposes of this toolkit, we will draw a distinction between a space and a place, with each physical environment lying somewhere along the continuum between the two. While these words are often used interchangeably, their meanings have significant differences. To explore these differences, jot down (alone or with others) what words, images, and feelings define the concepts of “space” and “place.” 

This is how we defined the two concepts. How does it compare to what you came up with?

Space

- Large, possibly global
- Few or no limits or boundaries
- May not be directly perceived
- Has latent but unrealized potential
- A commodity, is undifferentiated



Place

- Small, local—but can be part of something that extends out broadly
- Defined limits, but connected to its surroundings
- Shared meaning, collective memories
- Specific storied context—where something significant has happened or is happening
- Unique, different, cannot be easily replicated or replaced



As you can see there is a spectrum as spaces transition into places. It is important to note that a *place* holds associations of **locality, meaning, and value**. In short, a space becomes a place as users attach experiences, routines, and shared meanings to it. For example, a baseball field, when it is not in use, represents more of a space. We can choose to use the field in whatever manner we want, and the lines are fairly meaningless. However, when a game is being played and avid fans are there to watch, it becomes more of a place because there is shared meaning about the rules of the game, the goals of the game, and the loyalty of fans to particular teams. Over time, these shared understandings, attachments, and routines permeate the space and can lead to the creation places. We develop stories, memories,

and habits around these places. That is why places such as Wrigley Field and Fenway Park are both iconic and more valuable for the community and commercial actors than newer, but still “nice” stadiums.

The Value of and Strategy of Place

Understanding how meaning is generated by a place is a key component of placemaking. The crux of a successful place is that it is **valuable** to its users. This value can take many different forms, beyond just the traditional understanding of economic benefits.

Usefulness

Since placemaking is a holistic approach to meeting people’s needs and desires, the value of place is evident through its usefulness in **fulfilling human needs**, which can be broadly defined as:

- Providing goods and services
- Food
- Shelter
- Connections to family and relationships
- Social and spiritual well-being
- Learning opportunities

Habits and Routines

Likewise, the more a place contributes to a particular **habit of use**, the more value we attach to it. A coffee shop that one frequents every morning becomes a valuable part of the daily routine. That routine supports the:

- Enterprise of the coffee shop,
- Formation relationships between people, and
- Formation of meaning and attachment to the physical environment

Feeling Good

Additionally, we value places that **make us feel good**. These good feelings are directly tied to the physicality, social environment, emotional ties, utility, etc. of a place. Likewise, it is important to remember that places that are easy and pleasant to get to tend to make us feel good; more so than



A good test of where a given location falls on the space/place spectrum and how good it feels is to ask yourself how long you would want to spend there alone (with no cell phone!). Better yet, go to the location itself and see how long you want to stay. Under 5 minutes it's probably more of a space, over 20 minutes and it's likely more of a "place."

places that are difficult and out of the way. Even when a town's best-maintained park is beautiful, if it is unpleasant to access due to poor pedestrian paths and roads, residents will tend to value and use it less because the journey there does not feel good. 💡

Positive Spillovers

Finally, the value of a place increases when there are **positive spillovers**. In other words, it enhances the value of its neighbors; the place is "generous." This can take a variety of forms, such as:

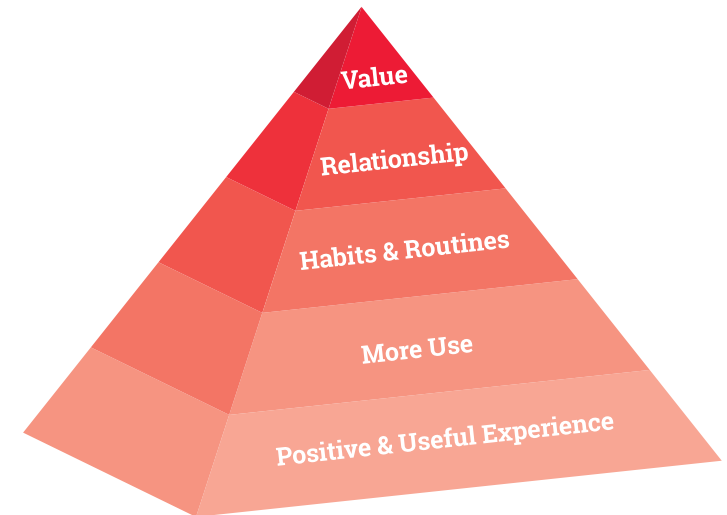
- Increased customer visits
- Complimentary goods and services offered
- Benefits of beauty
- Sharing resources or spreading out of costs

A thriving business on main street will be a natural attractor for new businesses that can rely on spillover customers from the existing successful businesses.

From these ideas, we form a **strategy of place** or pathway to understanding the value of a place. The pyramid diagram illustrates how places become more valuable through particular and repeated experiences and associations by the user.

1. If people have **positive and useful experiences** in a place, then they will...
2. **Use it more frequently**. By frequently using the space they establish...
3. **Habits and routines**. These habits are the foundation that supports enterprise and...
4. **Relationships**, between people and the place itself. These relationships are non-portable and create locational...
5. **Value**. A place where people want to be is the essence of real estate's "location, location, location" value proposition.

Thus, when a user (or an entire community!) has positive and useful experiences in a place, use it frequently, form productive habits, and build relationships in a place, economic and social **value** is created. This is the underlying strategy of a placemaking approach to the development of local economies and community.



The Process of Placemaking

Placemaking at its core is a holistic, iterative process. It acknowledges place as an interconnected ecosystem. It utilizes experimentation to continually improve the place. And it is a process, more than a product—meaning it doesn't just copy the end-result of what worked somewhere else.

Too often projects—of all kinds—are formulated at desks and not in the dirt. In other words, plans are written and drawn on paper, removed from their physical locations with very little knowledge of how the places actually feel, are being used, or hope to be used by the local community and stakeholders. The placemaking approach comes at it from the other side; plans are dynamic and are only finalized after “in the field” experiments, pilots, and conversations are had. Adaptations are expected and valued as users influence the way a project takes shape. Initially, this approach might create a level of uncertainty (which can be discomfoting!), but ultimately it provides flexibility for designing a project that responds well to, and is, therefore, valued by users and stakeholders.

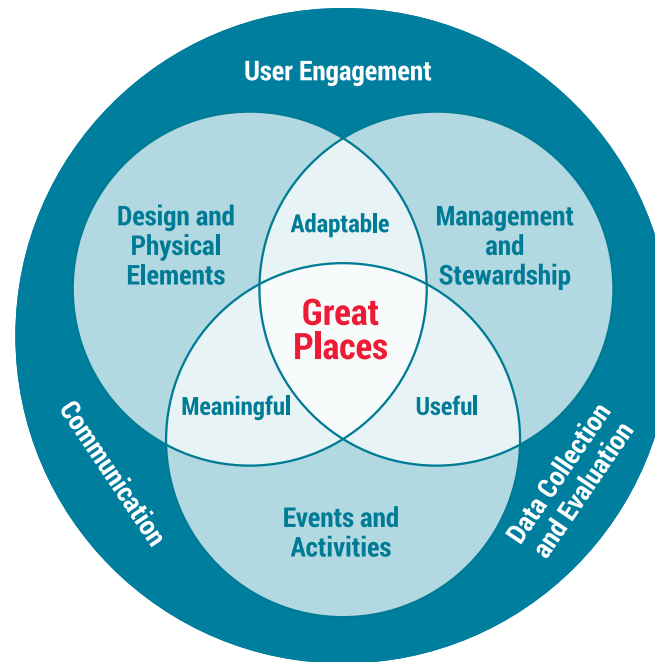
The following section outlines such a framework and process to help you engage in thoughtful and strategic placemaking in your community. This process can be used at any scale for any type of place. The process will allow you to achieve maximum impact from a small-scale, place-based experiment all the way to shaping the design, funding, and utilization of a large capital project.

Before we dive in though, we want to emphasize that this is meant to be a nimble process, rather than a rigid formula. The process itself accommodates an infinite variety of circumstances, yet we still encourage you to continually adapt it to meet the particular needs and

desires of the specific users, stakeholders, and places in your community.

What goes into making a great place?

A great place is by definition highly contextual to its location, users, and community influences. But that said, there are key elements that consistently contribute to making a great place. The diagram illustrates the holistic, iterative process that is needed to create and steward a great place.



The 3 Key Elements: Design, Stewardship, and Activities/Uses/Events

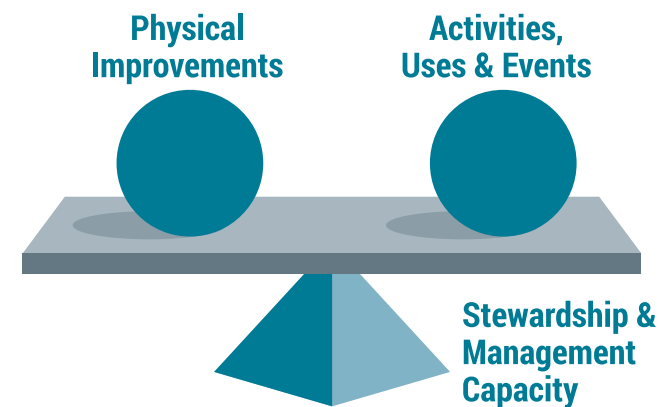
A great place is not a collection of pieces, it is an interconnected whole. It requires the collaboration of three key elements:

- A beautiful and functional physical environment;
- The proper management and stewardship of that physical environment;
- And events, activities, and uses that people need and enjoy.

When these elements are all working together, you get a great place that is useful, meaningful, and able to adapt over time.

All of these elements need to be in place and at the appropriate levels. We can all think of spaces that have an imbalance. Missing one leg of the “three legged stool” causes a potential place to topple over. A few examples include:

- **Design + Management (but no uses):** a park or plaza, with well cut grass, big trees, but nothing to do; no food, no place to play, no restrooms, no regularly occurring events. It is a decorative element, not a place used, enjoyed, and valued by people.
- **Uses/Activities + Design (but no management):** Bourbon Street in New Orleans or a rowdy bar street in a college town. The streetscape is attractive, filled with historic buildings. There is much excitement, so many things to do and people to see. But the environment is in disorder; trash everywhere, street furnishings often falling apart. It can feel unsafe. It is a space in which only a certain segment of the community feels comfortable.
- **Management + Uses/Activities (but no design):** A large special event in a parking lot. The day of the event is wonderful: there is food, music, games, and excitement. Everyone from the community is there. It is the sort of experience you wish you had all the time. But the event ends. The next day, like Cinderella, the venue turns back into a parking lot about which no one cares or visits.



But how does one determine the right combination of these three elements? To answer this question we explore the outer ring of the diagram, which outlines the *iterative process* that is required.

The Support System of Place: Communication, Data Collection & Evaluation, and User Engagement

We believe that at its foundation a place becomes great when it is able to meet the desires and needs of its users. For example, a beautiful park with nowhere to sit does little to invite visitors to linger and/or return; it must be designed to provide places of rest and relaxation if this is the desired use. Thus, in our approach, developing a great place begins with extensive user engagement to find exactly just what people would like to do in a place! This involves collecting relevant data, having conversations with users and stakeholders, and evaluating current and desired uses. Subsequently, the feedback we gather helps us determine what experiences users are looking for in a particular place and what programs can be developed (and redeveloped) to achieve these desired uses.

So if these are the support systems of creating and sustaining a great place, how does one put these elements into practice? To say nothing of generating additional resources if existing capacities do not already exist? To answer these questions,

we now move into the application of the placemaking process itself:

The Process of Placemaking

As people who care about the places within the community in which we live, we know that making positive change is about more than just having good ideas. It matters a lot how those ideas are generated, advocated for, used, and valued by the multitude of actors in our communities. The process that follows is one that we have used and tested on placemaking projects large and small. Before we dive in, a few notes:

- **It is linear(ish):** In general, the process flows step by step. But there are many times where steps are happening at the same time, loop back, or happen out of order (particularly around engagement and communication). First and foremost, use the process as it seems most appropriate to your circumstances.
- **It is experimental:** This process mirrors very closely the path followed by scientists and “innovators” (we are all innovators, though) in executing experiments. Great places are constantly trying new things, improving and growing over time, which is why we draw on successful processes used by other disciplines.

1. Establish Shared Goals

The first step in developing a successful project involves establishing shared goals among stakeholders. It is tempting to immediately name goals that focus on addressing particular problems, however, framing projects in terms of **opportunities rather than deficits** is usually a much more effective approach for gaining buy-in (and resources!) from stakeholders. Oftentimes, stakeholders have shared desires for outcomes, but may disagree about what comprises the problems and what to do about them. Rather than spending energy finger-pointing the negative aspects of your community and who is at fault, focus your energy on determining the good things you would like to see happen and the goodness that is already there, if latent. Studies have repeatedly shown that positive activity naturally drives out bad activity. Hence, creating good things and great places is often the most effective way to solve “problems.”



KEY IDEA: Framing of Opportunities > Deficits

Some important questions to ask in this process include:

- What do you want to do, experience, feel in this place?
- What projects/activities can be implemented to encourage these experiences and feelings?
- How can these future changes benefit all stakeholders?

Be sure to utilize Step 3: Engage, Collect, Communicate in establishing these goals



Example: Central Station, St. Paul, MN

A redevelopment next to a busy transit stop in Downtown St. Paul was taking longer than expected and a vacant lot was left in its stead. The area began to feel unsafe. Downtown leaders asked The Musicant Group to “fix the youth problem.” We took the germ of what that issue was and created a more inclusive, expansive and aspiration goal that united everyone involved (youth included!): “creating a place that everyone wants to be, enjoys, and in which they feel safe.”

2. Find Resources

Once you have established your shared goals, it is much easier to gather the resources needed to successfully implement the project. And “resources” does not just mean money. While money is a critical factor to keep in mind, we encourage you to adopt a placemaking approach that **exchanges money for flexibility**. Large grants or funds usually have long timelines, slim odds, numerous strings attached, such as lists of funding criteria, reporting, and low tolerance for truly new activities or processes that work (like this one), but have emergent paths to success.

Our nimble approach of placemaking simply does not fit well within this rubric! We collectively need the flexibility to experiment and adapt before making large-scale investments. Only through a series of experiments can you learn what works and does not work for your community. As we’ve now said several times, the freedom to adapt your projects is incredibly important to successful placemaking. So, while securing some money for your project may be necessary, we encourage you to start with a small amount that will allow you to implement something immediately. People are more comfortable taking risks when there is less money at stake. You will be more free to try projects that may seem “edgy” to those uncomfortable with disrupting the status quo. Start small, generate a real-world success, and then all of a sudden your placemaking idea isn’t so crazy to larger entities and funders after all!

It is also critical to continuously **harness the latent energy and resources** found within your own community. These resources can take many forms and each piece plays an important part in building the whole place. The relationships formed with users and stakeholders are central to spurring project excitement, support, and success. Whenever possible, organize community members to actively participate in the creation of the place. The process of co-creation will cause:

- Broader **excitement** and **awareness** about the project
- The formation of **ownership** of the place,
- The creation of a broader **coalition** that cares about the place,
- New and stronger **relationships** between collaborators, and

- The unlocking of **“free”** resources.

The types of contributions and resources

Individuals and organizations can contribute to a placemaking project in a variety of ways:

- Financially: money is always nice, but never the be-all, end-all
- Promotion: getting the word out
- Material or In-kind donations: supplies, food, facilities, etc.
- Taking action: showing up, volunteering, visiting a place, changing a behavior, leading an initiative, providing entertainment
- Relationships: the most important and the element that unlocks each type of contribution



Finally, when **seeking out these resources, highlight the opportunities for mutual gain and benefit to contributors**. Similar to the approach for establishing shared goals, it is much easier to garner resources for doing work that creates benefits rather than just addresses problems. People care more about the benefits of the work than the description of what the work entails (at least at first). This is a subtle, but very important distinction.

**KEY IDEA:****Less \$ + Flexibility > More \$ and Rigidity**

Some important questions to ask in this process include:

- What are the benefits for the community you are seeking to achieve through your project?
- How can you explain/promote these benefits to different users/stakeholders in a way that resonates with them?
- What are latent resources in your community and how can you tap into them?
- If you think your project requires some money, what is the amount makes contributors feel the most comfortable?



Example: Park the Street 2 Demonstration Event
St. Louis Park, MN

The City of St. Louis Park wanted to highlight the connection between a regional bike trail and a struggling shopping center. A two-block festival was proposed along the streets between the two places—but there was no money to pay for entertainment, activities, food, or much else. By organizing community groups, small businesses, and residents around how they would all benefit from being part of the event, over 50 types of vendors, performances, and activities took place, drawing over 2,000 people.

3. Engage, Collect, and Communicate

We've talked a lot about how important user engagement and collaboration is to the placemaking process. At all steps, we need to have real empathy and compassion for all users and stakeholders. If our goal is to create a place that is welcoming, vibrant, and thriving for the community and commerce (and it is!), then we must truly care about the needs, desires, and wonderful peculiarities of these people. But what are the best ways to do this?

The first step is to **analyze and feel-out the place yourself!** Your thoughts and feelings matter. Spend some time there - on multiple days, at different hours, during different weather conditions. All of these factors play a significant role in how/when/if a place is used. When you are there, pay attention to how the place makes you feel. Think about how it encourages or discourages you to interact with others. Note the elements you like and/or dislike and why. Think about what uses and activities you are able to do and what you would like to do, but cannot. Write down how you see people using and responding to the space and to others when they are in that space.

Second, **engage extensively with all types of users, stakeholders, and partners!** If you want to know what people want—ask them. But it's important to structure the asking to be the most meaningful. Strategies include:

- Meet people where they are. Don't rely on calling a meeting and expecting people to show up. Go to where people are already gathering. Go to the place itself. Utilize social media and online channels.
- Make it fun! Placemaking should be fun and meaningful. Hold or be part of events. Give away (healthy) food. Utilize games. Have it be creative, like building something
- Ask about current and desired experiences, feelings, uses, and activities. Keep the focus on the experience, not physical objects, specific events, or other types of elements. These questions focus on what people really care about—their experience—and give you much more flexibility on how to deliver upon these desires via the three components of place outlined earlier.

- Collect both qualitative and quantitative data. Both types of information are important and tell you different things. From multiple choice questions and usage patterns to comments and drawings—it's all to the good.

Compiling this data will be incredibly valuable for communicating back to partners and stakeholders the value, broad support, and direction for your placemaking project. While the feedback you receive may simply confirm what you have already known, corroborating your ideas with what others are expressing brings stakeholders and partners on board much more easily. Additionally, it is wise to always be communicating your findings back to the users themselves. By sharing with them what you have heard from them and how you are seeking to address their needs and desires, you will gain their trust and build enthusiasm.

Lastly, craft your placemaking project based on your findings! Use what you learn about desired experiences, uses, and activities as the framework for developing your placemaking solutions. As these solutions are implemented, continue to collect feedback and modify the project based on what you are hearing in response. Your nimbleness to adapt a project to meet users' needs and desires lets people know that their voices are truly being heard. In turn, this will bring more support and buy-in for future projects.



KEY IDEA:
Engaging Users to Generate: Direction, Enthusiasm, and Political Capital

Some important considerations in this process include:

- Focus questions around what uses, activities, and experiences people would like to have in a place over questions that focus on specific physical elements, events, or features
- What users, stakeholders, and partners are associated with this place?
- What are they communicating about their needs and desires for the place?
- Have you talked to the user groups that your stakeholders and funders most care about?
- Have you clearly communicated the feedback to users, stakeholders, and partners?

- How do your findings corroborate your placemaking project idea(s)?



Example: 333 South 7th Street Office Building Minneapolis, MN

An office building wanted to turn their outdoor lawn into a place that was used and enjoyed by their tenants. We recommended the addition of tables, chairs, and games. They were only interested in the chairs and games, skeptical of the tables. After a successful first year, we surveyed tenants to see what THEY wanted, and lo and behold, they said loud and clear that they wanted tables to eat lunch and have meetings. Tables were added the next year. The word-cloud below was used to take user desires and translate them in to real change.



4. Tell the Story

We often organize our thoughts and beliefs through stories. If we are doing a placemaking project in a given space, it's probably because (among other things) the story around it is not very good, or could be enhanced. Creating a new narrative in conjunction is part and parcel of the process of placemaking.

New good things will be happening as part of your project and these good things need to be incorporated into the story that users and stakeholders hold about the place. Changing the story of a place will:

- Build enthusiasm for the project,
- Give people confidence to show up and enjoy the improvements, and
- Provide you with momentum for future placemaking projects.

Clearly communicating the vision and the process should be done at all stages of the placemaking project. Just like Step 3, use communication channels that meet people where they are: online, newspaper, signs, fliers, word of mouth, whatever is relevant.

There is a need for story telling and communication tailored to each phase. For larger projects, there often is no before, during and after—in that case, treat these timelines as phases of improvement most relevant to the place.

Story telling at each phase of a project:

Before the project is implemented

- Platform for sharing what will be happening
- Asking people what should happen
- Tool for organizing and mobilizing action and resources
- Provides a sense of confidence to those doing something for the first time
- Builds momentum
- Name the place/project—without a name, people can't talk about or remember it easily

During implementation and operation

- Platform for sharing what is happening
- Creates the conversations that foster new positive habits and norms

After

- Platform for sharing what has happened
- Celebrating and memorializing success
- Narrate the new story of a place
- Creates ideas and impetus for future projects



KEY IDEA: The Story Holds It All Together

Some important questions to ask in this process include:

- What communication platforms are best utilized for sharing the story with the most users/stakeholders?
- Is there a consistent theme and/or narrative to describe the project? (create a hashtag!)
- What is the story of the place currently?
 - How is it being used?
 - What is being expressed about desired uses?
- What new patterns/ideas emerged during the project?
 - What were the reactions/interactions of those who engaged in the process?
 - How did the users/stakeholders receive the project?
- What adaptations can be made for future projects?
- Are the right audiences hearing about this new narrative?



Example: Piazza on the Mall, Minneapolis, MN

The Musicant Group was brought on to rehabilitate a plaza that never had been used by the public and was in disrepair. We made physical improvements and added events, but we had to communicate to the public that this space was a place now worth visiting (and that it was, in fact, open to the public). We created a new name for it (Piazza on the Mall), launched a Facebook page and email newsletter to promote and record happenings, distributed posters, and even put lawn signs in the space itself (seen above) communicating the invitation. All these things contributed to the space becoming the most active public space in the Downtown within a year.

5. Evaluate

Using metrics and data is important to guide a project early on and to evaluate and substantiate the results of your project after the fact. Even though placemaking is often an intuitive process and deeply based on people's feelings about a place, finding ways to quantify these responses is valuable for communicating the significance of the project to current and future partners, funders, and supporters. **Showing tangible numbers and results will authenticate what feels good.** Think of data as another form of "meeting people where they are," some folks care and need to be communicated to with numbers—the data, in-part, is for them.

In turn, demonstrating positive results will bolster the appetite for implementing additional projects and better enable you to overcome obstacles and naysayers in the community. Moreover, collecting and evaluating data will also help you discover where there are opportunities for improvement, which will strengthen the next iteration of your placemaking project.

In order to evaluate and demonstrate the success of your project, it is important to collect data. **Think about what questions and data are important to you and what other data is important to current and future stakeholders.** Data cannot only help you on your current project, but can set the stage for initiatives in the future.

Methodologies to collect data and develop metrics include:

- Onsite observation before, during, and after the project, looking at: how and how often the space is being used. Be sure to capture different times of the day/week/season if that is important. This can be bolstered by using a stop motion camera, hunting camera, or even just a smart phone to capture activity when a human is not present
- Onsite, in-person and/or electronic surveys, potentially before, during, and/or after the project. Ask users and stakeholders what they desire to see/feel in a space and how the installation is or is not meeting these desires and needs
- Using data from other organizations. If accessible, these can be the most powerful signals of the effects of our placemaking project. This could include data around traffic, safety, health outcomes and behaviors, retail sales, rental rates, etc.

Remember at all times to frame your questions in a way that provides results that are meaningful to stakeholders and funders. For example, usage and pedestrian counts are valuable to retailers. For ideas on types of questions to ask and data to collect, below are examples of things we have measured from our placemaking projects:

- % increases in daily usage of a space
- Increasing satisfaction for % of users
- Increasing sense of community of % of users

- % of users feeling more productive, connected, etc. after events and programs
- % of users feeling safer in a given place
- % more users engaged for (community, neighborhood, park, infrastructure, etc.) project
- Neighborhood (bike, park, garden, etc.) plan passed following demonstration event
- # of neighbors met due to the project
- Traffic speeds reduced by # miles per hour
- % of attendees of an event made more aware of a given place, business, or amenity
- Media impressions from social media, TV, newspaper, radio, etc.
- # attendees to an event, event series, or place
- \$ sales for vendors and businesses associated with an event or placemaking project
- Demographic information as relevant: age, culture, place of residence, how people arrived, etc.



KEY IDEA:

Data as a lever to make change

Some important questions to ask in this process include:

- What results would be most valuable to demonstrate for increasing stakeholder support of the placemaking project(s)?
- How do you frame questions to demonstrate these results?
- What data is most important to build support for future projects and implementing long-term changes?
- What are the most effective ways to collect responses from users and stakeholders that provides the necessary data for project evaluation?
- Are the audiences that stakeholders care most about represented in your data collection efforts?



Example: Traffic Calming in Rice Lake, WI

Rice Lake has a very wide main street, with vehicles moving fast, with few stop lights, no stop signs, and irregular respect for crosswalks by drivers. Getting the road to be changed will take a long time, so what can be done? During a placemaking workshop 20 participants built two parklets on either side of the busy street. They looked great (and were fun to build!), but what were effects? The police department was asked to measure the average speed of drivers before and after the parklets went in. Speeds were reduced by 16% during the creation of the parklets, and by 10% in the days that followed. This data has now opened up a new conversation in Rice Lake about traffic calming and the long term addition of parklets.

6. Repeat!

The beauty of the placemaking process is its adaptability to meet real time, real life desires of the local community. Each iteration can be tweaked and enhanced to fine tune what works best for meeting the needs and desires of users and stakeholders.

Just like we as humans (and nature) are never done growing and improving, this also means your project(s) are never really done. We are continually seeking to improve and enhance the places in our community. The next phase may

involve making larger investments within your current project. Or it could just involve tweaking something that worked pretty well. Or learning from something that didn't work at all (it's called "learning"). Additionally, the success of your first project will enable you leverage support for future projects, so do not lose momentum by waiting a long time before moving to the next phase or taking your next step.

If the first project gave you an inch, now take a mile with your next project! With a demonstrated project under your belt, you will have significantly changed the conversation by rooting the discussion in reality. Even if it is a small project, being able to speak about something that has really happened is far more productive than a dialogue based on hypotheticals. Hypotheticals leave room for continued fear and uncertainty, which are drivers for maintaining status quo. Placemaking is about doing on-the-ground projects of all sizes that open the doors to new and better places in which we all want to be.



KEY IDEA:
You're never done!

Some important questions to ask in this process include:

- How can this project be tweaked to achieve greater results in the next phase/project?
- How can this project be structured to support future projects?
- What hypothetical fears/barriers did this project overcome?
- How can the dialogue for the next phase or project highlight what is the reality?
- What would the next phase involve to work towards a longer-term implementation?

Retail, Real Estate, & the Importance of Place

At the end of the day, why does a sense of place matter for businesses and commercial districts? Is “place” really essential, or just a nice to have?

As we’ll see, the user experience—derived from a sense of place—is the number one competitive advantage of main streets as they go head to head with big box and online venues.

Macro Trends Changing Customer Habits

There are a number of macro trends that are changing the way people spend their time and money.

Trend 1: The rise of mobile technology

Effect: We can now do almost anything from almost anywhere.

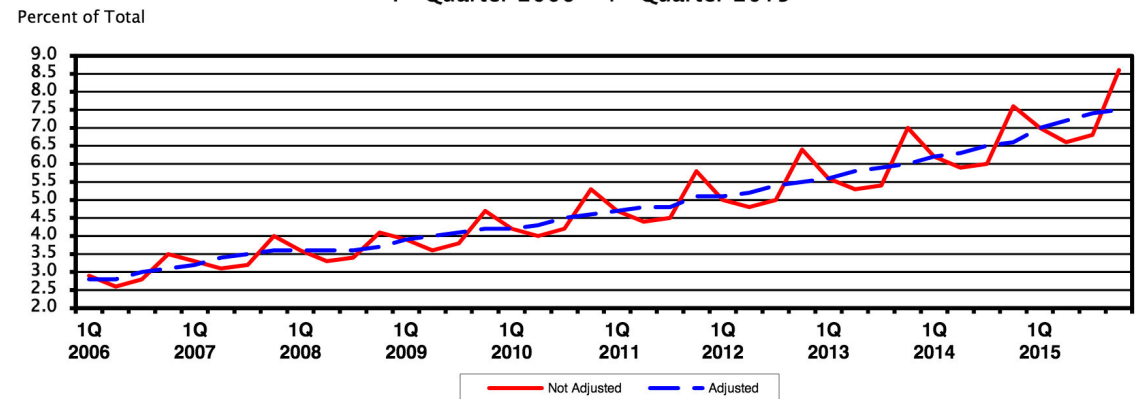
In the past, we had to go to the office/shop to work; to the store to shop; to church or a bar to socialize; to the theater to be entertained. No longer. Mobile technology allows people to do what they want, when they want, where they want—all from the convenience of their phone or computer. This is having a particularly large effect on retail, with more and more purchases happening online.

Trend 2: The meaning of access is changing

Effect: Proximity is increasingly being defined as access via foot, bike, and mobile technology.

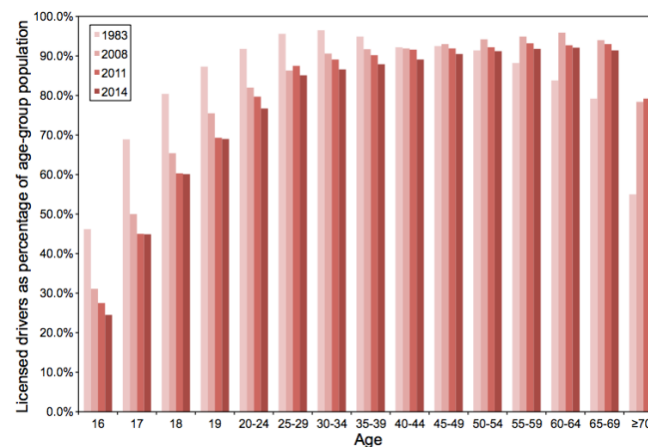
People will still drive in the future, but it is increasingly being seen as a necessary activity, rather than a desirable way to get around. More and more, people want a “one drive life,” where they go somewhere, park once and can enjoyably access their desired places on foot or bike.

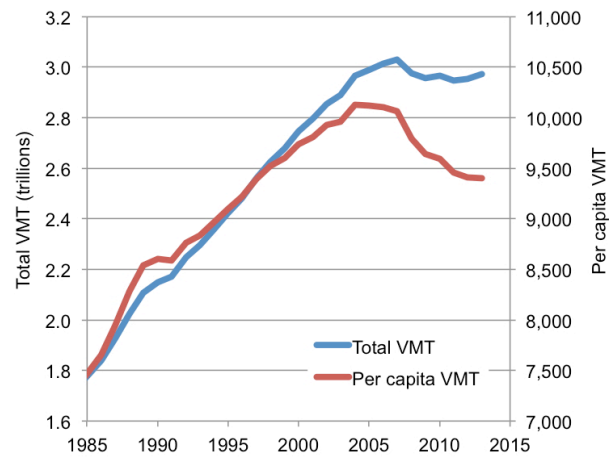
Estimated Quarterly U.S. Retail E-commerce Sales as a Percent of Total Quarterly Retail Sales:
1st Quarter 2006 – 4th Quarter 2015



Quarterly U.S. e-commerce sales as a percent of total quarterly retail sales - U.S. Census Bureau

Licensed Drivers as % of their Age Group Population



US per capita VMT drops for 9th straight year

Source: University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute

In addition to the decline in driving behavior, according to a study done by Urban Land Institute's Terwilliger Center for Housing, 60% of Boomers and Millennials prefer "urban-style" living; this being proximity to housing, shops and services, and work via walking and biking, rather than high-density living per se. In essence, a main street community!

Trend 3: We are not running into each other anymore

Effect: People are increasingly seeking out and paying for opportunities to be around other people.

As a result of the increase in screen time (seen in part through trend 1), we as a society have greatly reduced the amount of serendipity and chance interactions with each other. As a response, people are paying to be in places that facilitate these social interactions or even mere proximity to other people, such as special events, cafes, bars, restaurants, and other "Third Places."



The way it can be, a weekly after-work gathering to sing, dance, and play traditional music at a café. Bursa, Turkey. None of this is expensive.

A recent article posted by the real estate advisory firm CBRE noted:

When retailers become a third place they increase their brand awareness in the public space; when developers and property owners actively shape their properties into third places, they attract successful tenants and in turn, consumers. Shopping centers that have a carefully curated tenant mix that provides for the full range of consumer needs like convenience, service and experience do well, but when combined with pleasing architectural design, thoughtfully landscaped outdoor space and easy access for both pedestrian and vehicular traffic, they become a third place. (<http://ucr.com/news-trends/2015/05third-place-retail-meets-community/>)

In short, businesses and organizations cannot force people to show up in a particular place in order to work, purchase goods, access information, socialize, or be entertained. Consequently, both retail and real estate sectors are having to reshape themselves to compete with this "anywhere" access. If people can choose to be anywhere, businesses have to sell the experience along with the product in order

to be successful in capturing and maintaining customer loyalty. And the experience that people want is to be around other people.

This is where placemaking can play a vital role! Using the process of placemaking, we can develop places that kindle personal connections. As discussed previously, by creating a positive and useful experience for the customer, there is immediately an opportunity to generate more value for particular places. **Main streets are particularly well positioned to offer useful, social, and walkable experiences.**

We will look at how placemaking can be used to create those positive and useful experiences in forthcoming sections.

What does this mean for main streets?

In light of these trends, main streets are well-poised to capitalize upon the growing desires for a more localized, walkable lifestyle because the main competitive advantage of main streets is the personalized, tactile experience they can provide users. The chart below compares and contrasts the advantages main street has over online and big box and online retailers.

Competitive Advantages

Online Retailers (and Big Box)	Brick & Mortar Retailers
Limitless Selection	Immediate Gratification
Price Comparisons	Touch, trial, sensory stimuli
Convenience	Social Interaction
Speed	
Product Information	

Main Streets: character, memories, socializing, variety, always evolving

Source: "Why We Buy," by Paul Underhill

The character, memories, and social components (i.e. a sense of place!) of your main street are not just nice to have, they are your central competitive advantage. Use this framework when advocating for enhancements for your main street with more economically minded stakeholders.

To close, a placemaking approach that focuses on delivering an exceptional user experience, serves as a way to enhance the existing competitive advantages of main streets by:

- Encouraging increased opportunities and venues for socializing and creating memories;
- Fostering the creation of positive habits and rituals;
- Making your district less reliant on any one product or retailer; and
- Cause your district to compete less directly with online or big box stores.



Put-Put Parklets at Wander Wabasha Event in St. Paul, MN. Produced by The Musicant Group.



Placemaking in Action



District Analysis

Analyzing your main street is a vital first step to placemaking! So, before you gather your resources and plan your placemaking project, hit the streets to understand what is there and what could be. The following District Analysis is a guide to direct you in asking good questions and assessing the current climate and the future vision of your main street. Broken down into four sections—Perception, Observation, Identification, and Activation—we encourage to spend some time familiarizing yourself with each section before you begin. Remember that this is a creative process, so this is meant to be a framework to help you think critically. There are no right or wrong answers! Feel free to take notes, doodle, map things out—whatever sparks your creative juices—as you go through the process. For the complete District Analysis worksheet, see Appendix A (page 27).

1. Perception

To perceive is to understand something using your senses; a physical sensation interpreted in light of an experience. As human beings, we might all share a similar experience, yet perceive the situation quite differently from one another. This is true of your main street as well. For example, where you may see a vacant storefront as a business opportunity, another may see a canvas for an art project, and another a sign of blight (we'd tend to see the first two!). Additionally, your main street conveys a lot about your community's values through its physical landscape.

Take a few minutes to look at the following 2 pictures. Write down what each place conveys to you. How do you perceive these places even without knowing the context? 🖋️

- What are the local values?
- What types of people are or are not being served?
- What physical elements make you feel or believe particular things about the people who manage each property?
- Which space draws you in more, and why?
- What do these places communicate (about you and/or the community)?





Your answers are based on your perception of the place simply by reviewing the exterior. You have made some conclusions/assumptions about the people and places these pictures represent. Keep in mind your perceptions/feelings about places along your main street as you engage in this analysis.

2. Observation

It is very important to understand the current users and uses of your main street/district. This means you should spend some time observing who is there and how users and stakeholders utilize particular spaces. This means we can shape a place with all the best intentionality for how it will be used, however, we have little control over how it actually is used. Therefore, it is important to pay close attention to actual use of spaces because this will tell you much more about users' desires and needs for main street.

This picture illustrates the reality that users need and want a path that leads between these two sidewalks. One could observe this worn path in the grass and decide to put up fences and carefully manicure the grass back to a healthy state; or, one could recognize the desire of users to have a connection path here and work to implement that instead. *Embrace the desire lines of your community!*



Remember to also keep in mind the people and uses that seem to be missing from your main street. Ask yourself (and others!) why they are absent. Does your main street naturally privilege one user over another? For example, a main street that has no infrastructure for bicycles (parking, signage, paths, etc.) will probably not have many bicyclists present, and is likely privileging those who drive. By observing these realities, you are better able to assess how placemaking can augment current uses and/or fill in gaps.

3. Identification

The next step involves identifying the opportunities that exist for placemaking your main street. This is directly connected to understanding who are the stakeholders and users and what are their needs and desire for main street. Look to build off of what is already strong; those things that are emerging but not fully formed; and “problem” spots that likely provide unique and low cost opportunities to do something new, different, and special.



Vacant storefront: an opportunity or a problem? Platteville, WI, WEDC during a placemaking workshop. We and the participants in the photo think the former!

4. Activation

Taking the first step is the most important, even if it is not the full expression of what you ultimately want to create. Making something real happen, is by definition, a transformative act that can set much into motion.

Now it's time to take you and your community's perceptions, observations, and identifications and turn them into placemaking action.

Think about what you and others want to be able to do, experience, and feel in the space. How could you create these uses and activities with \$10? \$1,000? \$10,000?

\$10 Example



Photo by Max Musicant

Creating a temporary boat-themed play space and photo-op during a WEDC-sponsored placemaking work-shop. Using basic art and office supplies participants created an installation that sparked a broader conversation about how to bring more family-friendly activities to the down-town at Port Washington, Wisconsin's Planning Commission. Produced by The Musicant Group.

\$1,000 Example



Photo by Katherine O'Neil

The addition of plastic Adirondack chairs and lawn games add instant and regular activity to what was a pleasant but unused green space on a university-centered main street. The School Yard at McNamara Alumni Center, University of Minnesota. Produced by The Musicant Group.



\$10,000 Example



With more significant resources, one can really start building out the full ecosystem of physical elements, stewardship processes, and activities and events. Below are examples of how these elements were combined over the course of three years by The Musicant Group's transformation of a long dormant plaza on a retail street into the bustling and family-friendly Piazza on the Mall.

Project Implementation

Placemaking Design Principles

In making places where people want to be and feel alive, our own feelings are our guide, as is trial and error and on-site modification. Many of the following principals and concepts overlap. It is the relationships between elements that makes a place dynamic, rather than the elements in of themselves. Thus, many of the following principles and concepts may seem to overlap because they are, by definition, interconnected.

Edges

We experience the world along edges and thus they deserve special attention.

- Active edges create active interiors: we enter any space from the edge. If that edge is not inviting and active, we will not venture in further. Any pathway we travel can also be seen as an “edge.” That pathway must be inviting and active to keep us engaged as we traverse it. Start seeing the edges in your community: building fronts, sidewalks, boulevards, perimeters of plazas, doorway, isles, etc. Once you see them, how could they be enhanced to bring people in and make them want to stay?
- Borders that bind: borders don’t have to divide us; they can also bring us together. Just as a riverbank binds the land to the water (and is home to more biodiversity than the other two ecosystems), physical boundaries can bring adjoining uses together in a way that enlivens each side. Examples include: a porch that binds the house to the yard, a low sitting wall that binds a yard to the sidewalk, a boulevard that binds the sidewalk to the street, outdoor merchandise that binds a store to the street (and customer!), or a patio that binds a café to the sidewalk. Notice how each effective border is thick, yet permeable. Be sure to strike the right balance of the two.
- Celebrate transitions: part and parcel with the first two principles, anytime you transition from one type of place to another—celebrate! From a doorway, intersection of pathways, or the gateway into your downtown, embellish the point of transition.



Example: Cooks of Crocus Hill, St. Paul, MN.

They use the far setback from the sidewalk to their advantage. A thick active edge is created by the garden, seating, signage, and window display. This edge is a border that binds the store to the sidewalk. The canopy and edge elements also serve to celebrate the transition between public and private realms.

User Experience

It is of course all about the user experience! But what do users actually want and need?

- Protect people’s backs: we as humans don’t like having things happen behind our backs. So when placing seating or creating activity areas, remember that people would prefer to have something behind them (like a building, tree, a low activity area) and look out towards a larger more active area (like the street, pathway, or active space).
- Semi-enclosures and alcoves off of larger spaces feel good .
- Use light to frame areas of congregation. Not everything should be lit to the same degree, use pools of light to frame areas of congregation. String lights are also an easy, cheap, and effective way to add festive boundaries and framing to a street, public space, building or room.

- Let the user adapt their environment to fit their needs (movable chairs over benches). Involve the user in the creation and stewardship of a place whenever possible
- Follow the desire lines of where people want to go
- Have many (and movable) places to sit. If there are not comfortable places to sit, then people will leave after a short while. Movable seats are the best, as they accommodate groups from 1 to 100 and allow the user to stake claim to their environment—putting the chair(s) just where they want them; in the sun or shade, with a certain view, etc.
- Meet people's basic needs: drinking water, bathroom, food, shelter. If the basics are not met, people will leave after a short amount of time. This is particularly true for families with children.
- Fire! We are drawn to it in a way that is fundamental to who we are. Add a fire pit (and s'mores!) to any event, particularly in the Fall and Winter. Fire is warm when it's cold, light when it's dark, and a constantly dynamic feature.
- Consider children (because they bring their parents!): are there things for children to do? Beyond a playground (which are expensive), is your space friendly to children? If it is, you can be sure that parents will like coming to your space. Consider toys, books, things to climb on, water to play with, animals, etc.
- Dogs: people love their dogs. They walk their dogs. Increasingly they are taking their dogs out on the town. Accommodate dogs and watch your daily activity increase. Do this through: waste stations, doggy-water fountains, off-leash dog parks/runs, free doggy treats, etc.



Example: Flea Market, Brooklyn, NY.

While it takes place in New York City, it is a scrappy (in the best sense!) affair, applicable on a smaller scale to any community. The active edge of seating supports the food and craft vendors. The seating allows options for sun and shade (it's hot, most are in the shade). There are bathrooms and water onsite. The back railing, trees, and narrow isles create semi-enclosure.



Example: Lyndale Gardens Winter Festival, Richfield, MN. Produced by The Musicant Group.

The fire serves as the center of the space, surrounded by movable seating. Adults and children use the fire to stay warm and roast marshmallows. The light from the fire frames the social space. People stay warm by the fire and visit the vendors nearby (seen in the back). There is a roving accordion player, "advice elves," and sing-alongs as entertainment. None of this is expensive, but it all is intentional.

Activity

Once the edges are good and the experience user-centered, how does one create everyday activity?

- As a rule of thumb, have ten things to do in a given space. If you don't have much money, start by adding durable lawn games of all kinds. And movable seating of course!

- Focus on the everyday experience and activity first, then build up to larger events.
- Use events as a way to expose people to what is great about a given space every day; as a strategy to get people to come back again and again.

What to do: Bryant Park, New York City, NY.

Bryant Park is the best run public space in the country. It does everything right: active edges, countless semi-enclosures, many types and places to sit, activities that appeal to everyone: reading, ping pong, concerts, food, juggling, ice skating, etc. It has the best kept and most beautiful public bathroom.





What not to do: Boston City Hall and Square, Boston, MA. *Designed by a famous architect, it's lacking almost every element of a great place.*

What Not to Do

While it's best to focus energies on what to do, we have seen some common pitfalls into which communities fall. Be aware not to:

- Copy the end product of what another community did successfully: something was a success elsewhere because of the process that led to an action, rather than that action in of itself. Stay true to who your community is rather than copying verbatim what others are doing.
- View your competition as other communities: your main competition is indifference, sitting on the couch, Netflix, etc. Don't obsess over beating a "rival" community, all main streets need to band together to promote a main street way of life.
- Use lack of money as an excuse for inaction: constraints facilitate creativity. Financial resources are just another constraint, but not a roadblock. Refocus the activities that are already happening everyday to into place-enhancing actions. Start a small experiment using the things you have lying around your office. Avalanches start with a single snowflake.

District Analysis Guide

This guide is intended to be just that! A *guide*.

This means the questions are **open-ended**.

We encourage you to be **creative**.

Use your **imagination**.

Feel free to **draw, doodle, make notes**.

There are no script answers. This is all about the process!

The guide is organized by four sections:

Perception

Identification

Observation

Activation

How would you describe the personality or the vibe of the district? Note what elements contribute to your perception.

District Personality / Vibe

What are the dominant district values that you perceive? Note what elements contribute to your perception.

District Values

What place feels like the center of the district? Describe why it feels that way.

District Center

What particular places feel most inviting and life-giving?
Describe them, utilizing your senses as much as possible (sight, sound, smell, touch, taste).
Note any common characteristics.

😊 Happy Place #1

😊 Happy Place #2

Common Characteristics

😊 Happy Place #3

😊 Happy Place #4

What particular places feel most uninviting and uncomfortable?
Describe them, utilizing your senses as much as possible (sight, sound, smell, touch, taste).
Note any common characteristics.

☹️ Sad Place #1

☹️ Sad Place #2

Common Characteristics

☹️ Sad Place #3

☹️ Sad Place #4

Use this space to draw, map things out, take additional notes!



Key Takeaways / Summary

Who is present in the district? Make note of any predominant demographics.

PEOPLE

Ages

Genders

Family Types

Cultural Groups

Businesses
(restaurant, retail, gov't services, etc.)

Customer Types
(tourists, students, local consumer, etc.)

How do people get here? Make note of any predominant modes and demographics.

PATHWAYS

What are the pathways for the different modes like?
(physical qualities, clear directions & signage, feelings of safety/comfort)

By Car	By Bus	By Bike	By Foot

How are the pathways connected to activities/points of interest in the district?

By Car	By Bus	By Bike	By Foot

**What are people doing here? (shopping, eating, conducting business, socializing, etc.)
Note any predominant activities and corresponding predominant demographics.**



**What activities/experiences are people able to do here (even if not currently happening)?
(sit outside, shop, run errands, etc.)**



What activities/experiences do you want to do here, but can't? (sit outside, ride bikes, shop, etc.)



OBSERVATION

Use this space to draw, map things out, take additional notes!



Key Takeaways / Summary

Who are the stakeholders and what are their needs and aspirations for the district? Talk to visitors, shop owners, etc.

Stakeholder #1

Stakeholder #2

Stakeholder #3

Stakeholder #4

Stakeholder #5

Stakeholder #6

What users are missing from your district that you want to include?

How would you like people (visitors and locals) to:

Use the district

Describe the district

Promote the district

What things (physical attributes, perceptions, etc.) are impeding your desired use and description of the district?

What are the opportunities you see for improving feelings, perceptions, activities, and use of the district?

Design & Physical Elements

Management & Stewardship

Events & Activities

Use this space to draw, map things out, take additional notes!



Key Takeaways / Summary

Choose your top 3 opportunities for improving the district and brainstorm placemaking solutions here.

Opportunity #1

Solution Ideas


Opportunity #2

Solution Ideas

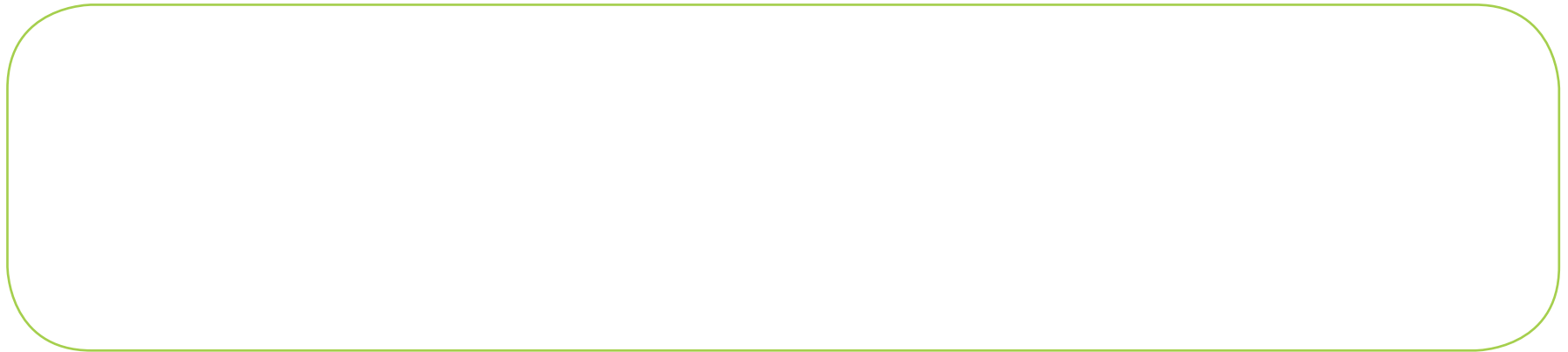
Opportunity #3

Solution Ideas

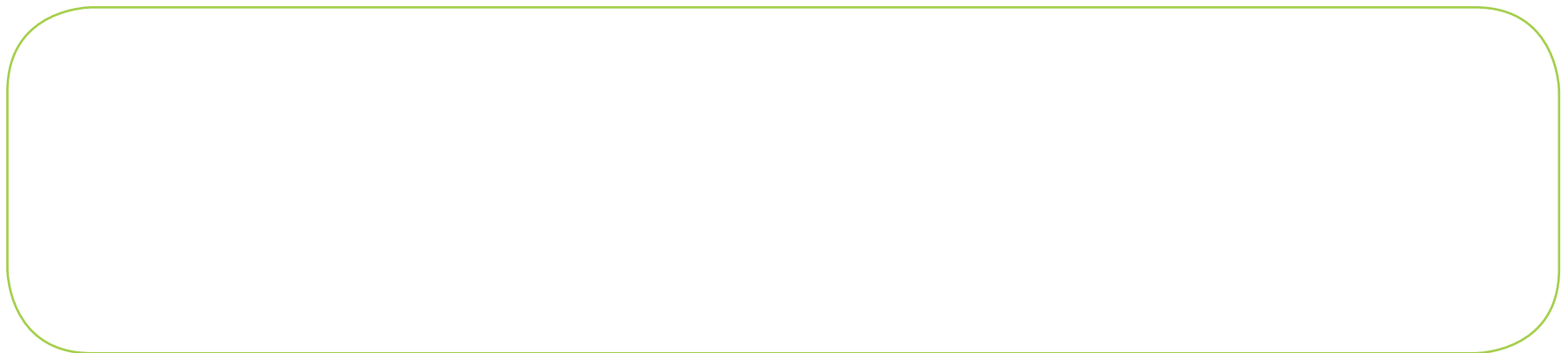
Which ideas are likely the easiest to implement right away? (Fewest obstacles, could be installed temporarily, etc.)



Which ideas require little to no money?



Which ideas harness existing resources, partnerships, and stakeholders the most?



What would you do to improve this main street / District if you had...?

\$10

\$1,000

\$10,000

\$100,000

Use this space to draw, map things out, take additional notes!



Key Takeaways / Summary

Appendix B

Further Reading

These books have inspired us, shaped our thought, and guided our actions as practitioners. As such they have deeply informed the work of this toolkit. If you'd like to dig deeper on a given subject, we recommend the following:

Placemaking and the Built Environment

A Pattern Language – (Christopher Alexander, et al., Oxford, 1977)

If you get one book on this list, this should be it. *A Pattern Language* lays out a new way of looking at and shaping our world; a path that allows all people to create physical places that foster community and commerce. It is both an assessment of and a manual to positively shape our world.

Timeless Way of Building – (Christopher Alexander, et al., Oxford, 1979)

The precursor to *A Pattern Language*, *Timeless Way of Building* provides a compelling critique of how the process used to shape our built environment has gone wildly off-track and how we can get back to a timeless approach.

How Buildings Learn – (Stewart Brand, Penguin, 1994)

This book examines how buildings can get better with time...or not. Brand proposes that buildings adapt best when they are constantly refined and reshaped by their occupants, and that designers need to think more about the human experience of their buildings.

The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces – (William H. Whyte, Project for Public Spaces, 2001)

The book that sparked the placemaking movement in America. Through careful observation of actual spaces, Whyte develops practical and easy to implement strategies on how to create life in small urban spaces.

Urban Planning and Economic Development

Strongtowns.org

Practical and thought provoking content and discussion about the financial and design systems that underlie our communities. One begins to see that the way we have been doing things for the last 50 years may not be working (and probably never did!). There is a treasure trove of data, analysis, and tools to help practitioners engage with stakeholders of all kinds.

The University and Urban Revival – (Judith Rodin, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015)

An extended case study written by the former President of the University of Pennsylvania about how she led the University to reverse years of insulation to transform the troubled community around them. A fantastic resource for how communities can collaborate with their higher education institutions and vice versa.

Retailing

Why We Buy, the Science of Shopping – (Paco Underhill, Simon & Schuster, 2008)

A disciple of William H. Whyte, Underhill went on to apply placemaking to the retail and shopping environment. This classic book lays out compelling theories and practical steps to enhance the shopping experience—and sales!—for individual businesses and districts as a whole.

The Great Good Place – (Ray Oldenburg, Marlowe & Company, 1999)

The Great Good Place argues that “third places”—where people can gather, put aside the concerns of work and home, and hang out simply for the pleasures of good company and lively conversation—are the heart of a community’s social vitality and the grassroots of democracy.

Business and Strategy

Antifragile – (Nassim Taleb, Random House, 2014)

Just as human bones get stronger when subjected to stress and tension, many things in life benefit from stress, disorder, volatility, and turmoil. What Taleb has identified and calls “antifragile” is that category of things that not only gain from chaos but need it in order to survive and flourish. The book provides a new way of looking at the world and how to take measured risks that lead to long-term positive change.

Community: The Structure of Belonging – (Peter Block, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2008)

An insightful guide on how to structure conversations, meetings, and gatherings in order for groups of people to overcome problems and create a future that is better than where we are today.

The Lean Start Up – (Eric Reis, Crown Business, 2011)

A step-by-step guide to creating new programs, organizations, and businesses in an environment with limited resources and extreme uncertainty. While it is geared towards technology start up companies, the approach applies to any new endeavor within an organization or community.

