



Name That Place!!

Michigan Association of Planning Conference 2007
Resource Handout

What is Placemaking?

“Placemaking” is the process of adding value and meaning to the public realm to help make great communities. The term “placemaking” began its use at the beginning of the 1970’s by architects and planners. It was intended to describe the process of creating squares, plazas, parks, streets, and waterfronts that attract people because they are pleasurable or interesting. But “placemaking” has evolved. Its new connotation goes beyond the physical realm to the emotional. Recently, Project for Public Spaces conducted a website survey asking individuals their definition of “placemaking.” Below are some example responses:

“Placemaking is a dynamic human function: it is an act of liberation, of staking claim, and of beautification; it is true human empowerment.”

“Placemaking is the art of creating public ‘places of the soul,’ that uplift and help us connect to each other.”

“Placemaking is making a Public Space a Living Space.”

The common thread of these submissions were the elements of emotion and a sense of belonging and connection, which are part of any successful place.



“The tragic landscape of highway strips, parking lots, housing tracts, mega-malls, junked cities, and ravaged countryside that makes up the everyday environment where most Americans live and work [is] ... a land full of places that are not worth caring about [and] will soon be a nation and a way of life that is not worth defending.”

— James Kunstler



Examples of Great Places...



Traverse City, Michigan

- Access to natural features
- Pedestrian focus
- Mixed-uses
- Public Art



San Antonio RiverWalk, Texas

- Multi-modal
- Historic preservation
- Access to natural features
- Cultural expression



Miami Beach, Florida

- Historic preservation
- Mixed-use
- Cultural expression
- Pedestrian focus



Nantucket, Massachusetts

- Historic preservation
- Cultural expression
- Pedestrian focus
- Mixed-use

Placemaking Implementation Tools for Communities

Master Planning

To initiate the process of “placemaking” within your community it is important to first begin with the creation of a plan. Regardless of whether you are trying to implement changes within a downtown, corridor, neighborhood, or special district, creating a clear vision is an essential first step. A community-based values approach is recommended to create a “place” that reflects the identity and vision of the community. This methodology focuses on recognizing and then exploring local attributes such as history, natural assets, culture and any other unique community characteristic. Through this identification, a direction can be identified, goals can be created and implementation can begin.

Implementation

To implement the vision of a “placemaking” plan, a variety of tools are available. Some of these tools are outlined below:

Design Guidelines

Utilizing design guidelines for the implementation of your vision will provide the most flexibility to your community and developers. Design guidelines are intended as a negotiation tool. They are not hard and fast rules, but strategies for implementation.

Design guidelines can be attached to a particular ordinance of the community, or they can be a stand alone document that must be utilized for every development within your planned area. As an example, guidelines could be incorporated as part of an overlay district to help direct the site and architectural design of buildings.

Form-Based Codes

Form-based codes are a method of regulating development to achieve a specific urban form. These codes concentrate first on the visual aspect of development: building height and bulk, façade treatments, the location of parking, and the relationship of the buildings to the street and to one another. The form of the development becomes the primary consideration, while use is secondary. The appearance and qualities of the public realm, those places created by buildings, is the primary focus of the code. Form-based codes can be extremely useful when trying to create a sense of place. Through this type of regulation, the emphasis can be placed on the site and architectural qualities desired by the community.

Planned Unit Developments (PUD's)

Depending on the type of development or area where the “placemaking” is to occur, a PUD could be utilized. Constructing a project under a PUD ordinance would be a voluntary development option, allowing flexibility to both the community and the developer. Language could be written into the PUD ordinance that requires cohesive site and architectural development. These regulations could be dependent on the project size, location, use type, etc. In addition, the ordinance could provide for development incentives to encourage a sense of place within the project. Some examples of incentives the local community might provide are:

- Increased densities
- Flexibility in bulk, dimensional, and height
- Reduced parking requirements
- Flexible open space calculations
- Reduced review time/expedited review
- Administratively approved instead of hearing
- Reduced application fees

Overlay Zoning Districts

An overlay district is positioned over a specific geographic area to impose additional regulations or provide an extra level of scrutiny without changing the existing underlying zoning. Overlay districts can help to create a sense of place by recognizing the unique characteristics of the area that you are trying to preserve, enhance or create. The flexibility of the overlay ordinance allows the community to focus on specific development issues without having to recreate an entire zoning district. For example, if a certain architectural form is desired, it can be outlined within the overlay. Or, if only bulk, dimensional, and height requirements are important to regulate but architectural style is optional, then site and architectural guidelines can be attached.

Special Zoning Districts

This implementation tool refers to developing a specific district to encompass that area that you are trying to preserve, enhance or create a sense of place. For example, a downtown or corridor district that is unique and would be specific to the uses and character that is desired within its boundaries. The important thing to consider with a special zoning district is that it can cover everything from use to form, allowing it to cover all of the issues that zoning must address.

Contact Information

Wade Trim is made up of trusted professionals delivering America's infrastructure solutions. This is our culture, our brand and what our clients depend on when they hire us for professional consulting services. Our disciplines include engineering, planning, surveying, GIS, operations, landscape architecture and environmental services.

Our staff's ability to deliver these solutions is supported by an excellent work environment. Wade Trim's 19 offices and over 450 staff members comprise a network of resources that are shared to meet specific infrastructure challenges. Diversity of employees makes our project teams strong and flexible.

Presenters



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Resources

There is a vast amount of great resources and information available regarding Placemaking. A few are listed below:

How to Turn a Place Around
Project for Public Spaces (2000)

The Death and Life of Great American
Cities Jane Jacobs (1961)

The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and
Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape
by James Howard Kunstler (1993)

Placemaking: The Art and Practice of
Building Communities by Lynda H.
Schneekloth and Robert G. Shibley (1995)

The New Urbanism – Toward an
Architecture of Community
Peter Katz (1994)

City: Rediscovering the Center
William H. Whyte (1988)

People Places by Clare Cooper Marcus and
Carolyn Francis (1998)

A Pattern Language
Christopher Alexander (1997)

The Art of Placemaking: Interpreting
Community Through Public Art and Urban
Design by Ronald Lee Fleming at The
Townscape Institute (2007)

Project for Public Spaces
[www.pps.org/info/bulletin/
what_is_placemaking](http://www.pps.org/info/bulletin/what_is_placemaking)

Congress for the New Urbanism
www.cnu.org

