



CITY OF KNOXVILLE

Office of Neighborhood Empowerment

Knoxville Neighborhoods Placemaking Guide

Created: January 2023 by Hayley Howard

What is Placemaking?

Placemaking is a multi-faceted approach to the planning, design and management of public spaces. Placemaking capitalizes on a local community's assets, inspiration, and potential, with the intention of creating public spaces that promote people's health, happiness, and well-being.

Placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value. More than just promoting better urban design, placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution.

Placemaking is centered around observing, listening to, and asking questions of the people who live, work, and play in a particular space in order to understand their needs and aspirations for that space and for their community as a whole.

Key Principals of Placemaking

The Community is the Expert

The important starting point in developing an idea for any public space is to identify the talents and assets within the community. In any community there are people who can provide an historical perspective, valuable insights into how the area functions, and an understanding of the critical issues and what is meaningful to people. Tapping this information at the beginning of the process will help to create a sense of community ownership in the project that can be of great benefit to both the project leader and the community.

Create a Place, Not a Design

If your goal is to create a place (which we think it should be), a design will not be enough. The goal is to create a usable place that has both a strong sense of community

and a comfortable image. It should be a diverse place with diverse uses. This is easy to say, but it can be difficult to accomplish.

Look for Partners

Partners are critical to the future success and image of a public space improvement project. Whether you want partners at the beginning to plan for the project or you want to brainstorm and develop scenarios with a dozen partners who might participate in the future, they are important in providing support and getting a project off the ground. They can be City or County officials, schools, non-profits, or other product/service providers.

Sit Back and Observe

We can all learn a great deal from others' successes and failures. By looking at how people are using (or not using) public spaces and finding out what they like and don't like about them, it is possible to assess what makes them work or not work. Through these observations, it will be clear what kinds of activities are missing and what might be incorporated. And when the spaces are built, continuing to observe them will teach even more about how to evolve and manage them over time. You might ask yourself: What is something in my neighborhood that is working well that could be expanded on? Or... What is something I don't like about my neighborhood that I would like to change?

Have a Vision

The vision needs to come from you and your neighbors. Essential to a vision for any public space is an idea of what kinds of activities might be happening in the space, a view that the space should be comfortable and have a good image, and that it should be an important place where people want to be. It should instill a sense of pride in the people who live and work in the surrounding area. A good question to ask would be, "What does the neighborhood dream could be in this space?"

Focus - Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper –

<https://www.pps.org/article/lighter-quicker-cheaper>

Sometimes these projects can be complex. Successful projects often experiment with short-term improvements that can be tested/refined and added on to over many years. Elements such as seating, plantings, public art, adding signs, community gardens and murals are all examples of improvements that can be accomplished in a shorter period of time.

For a list of unique ideas for squares, streets, and parks please visit the link below:

<https://www.pps.org/gps/lqc>

Triangulate

"Triangulation is the process by which some external stimulus provides a linkage between people and prompts strangers to talk to other strangers as if they knew each other" (Holly Whyte). In a public space, the choice and arrangement of different elements in relation to each other can put the triangulation process in motion (or not). For example, if a bench, a wastebasket and a telephone are placed with no connection to each other, each may receive a very limited use, but when they are arranged

together along with other amenities such as a coffee cart, they will naturally bring people together (or triangulate!). On a broader level, if a children's reading room in a new library is located so that it is next to a children's playground in a park and a food kiosk is added, more activity will occur than if these facilities were located separately.

Overcoming the Obstacles

There will likely be obstacles. Working closely with neighbors and other partners to achieve a goal will only strengthen the community. Starting with small-scale community-nurturing improvements can demonstrate the importance of "places" and help to overcome obstacles.

Form Supports Function

The input from the community and potential partners, the understanding of how other spaces function, the experimentation, and overcoming the obstacles and naysayers provides the concept for the space. Although design is important, these other elements tell you what "form" you need to accomplish the future vision for the space.

Create Adaptable Public Spaces

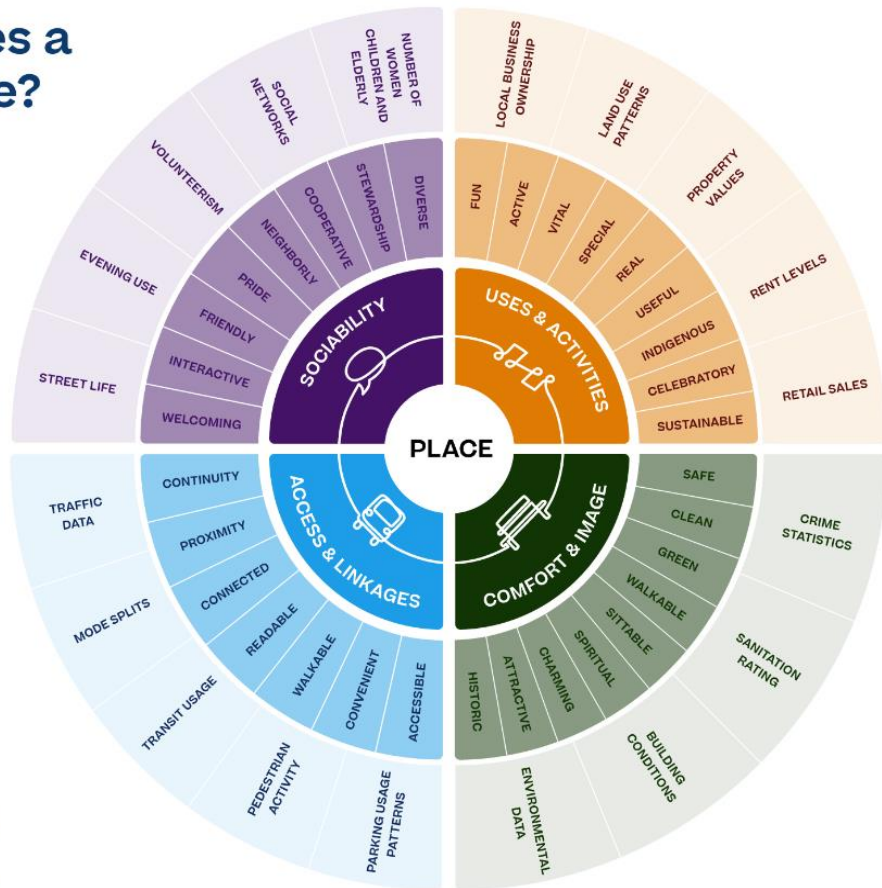
By nature, good public spaces respond to the needs and opinions of the community. Being open to the need for change and having the management flexibility to enact that change is what builds great public spaces and great cities and towns.

Information Pulled From: <https://www.pps.org/article/what-is-placemaking>

More information on creative placemaking:

<https://creativecommunitybuilders.com/wp-content/uploads/Borrupt-Creative-Placemaking-2016-UMASS.pdf>

What Makes a Great Place?



Project
for Public
Spaces

Examples of Placemaking

Parklets - a small seating area or green space created as a public amenity on or alongside a sidewalk, especially in a former roadside parking space.
Pocket Parks





Alley Activations





Paint the Pavement Projects - [CommunityDecorativePainting.pdf](#)





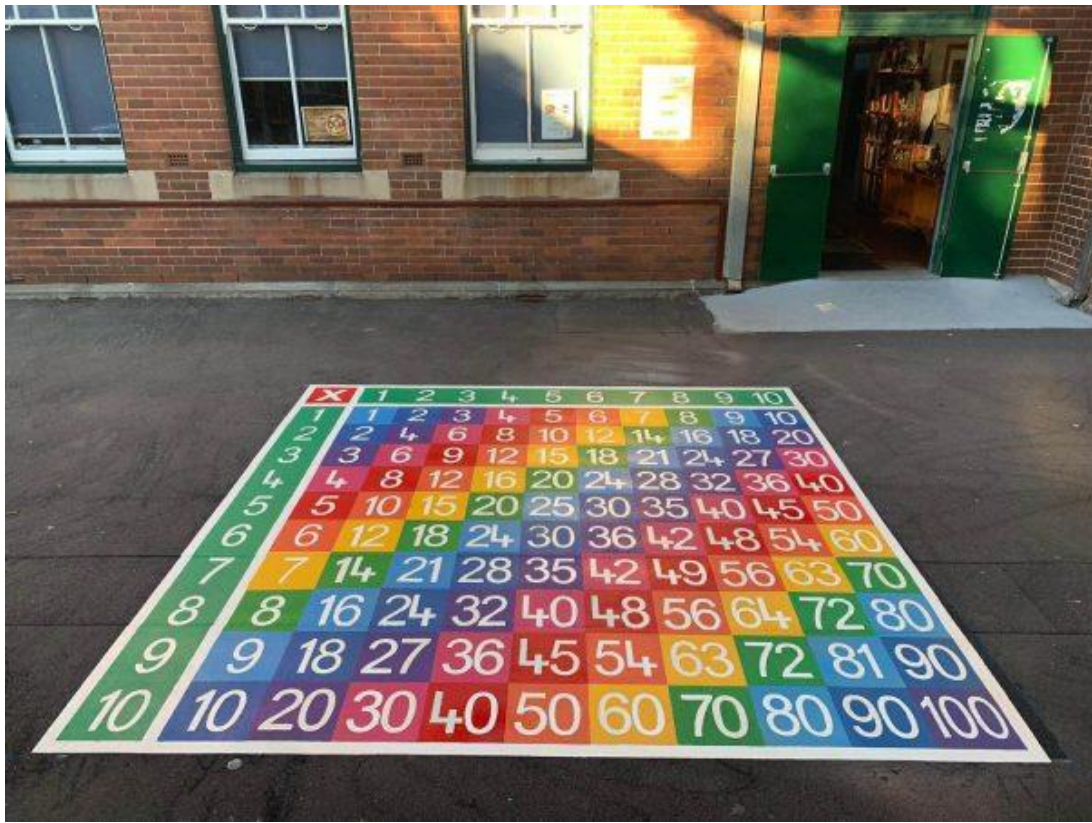
Community Gardens





Playground and Park Improvements

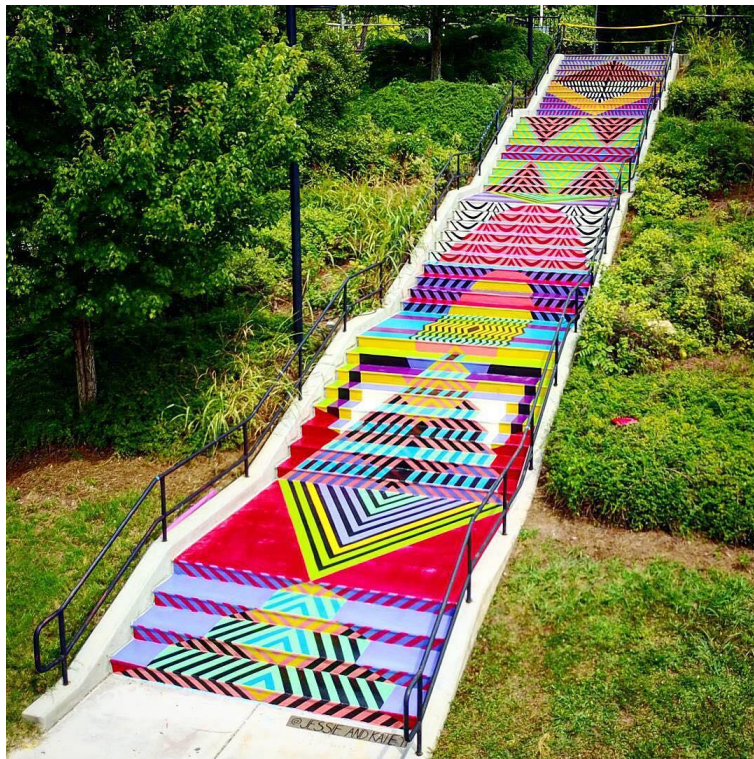




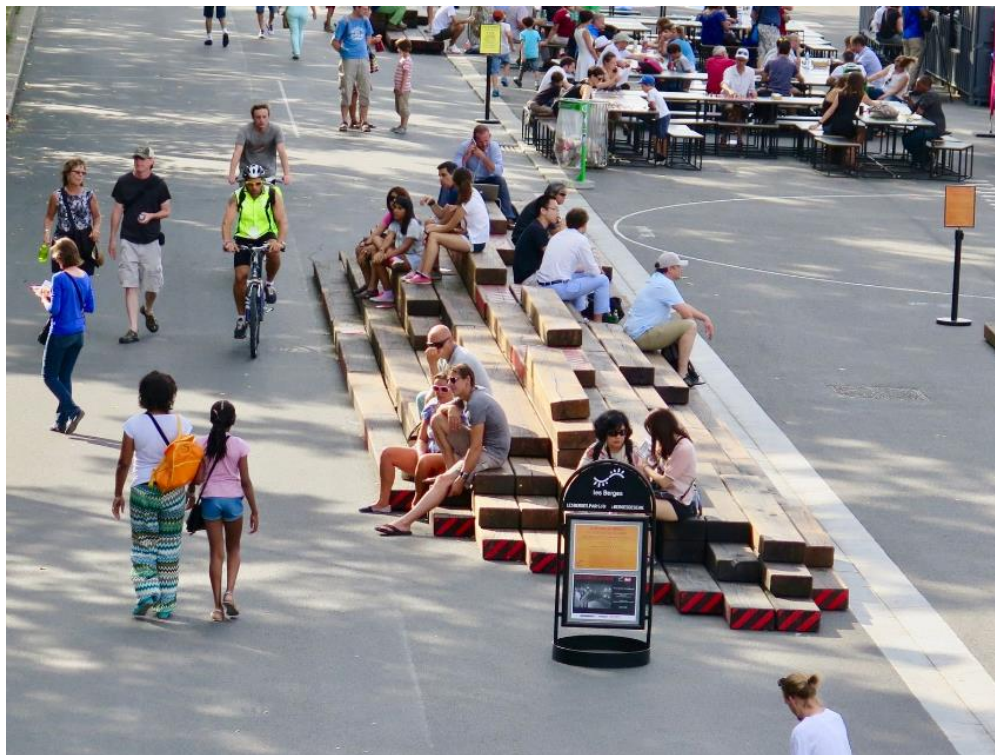


Murals –

<https://www.visitknoxville.com/blog/post/top-5-knoxville-murals/>
<https://www.dma-events.com/our-murals>



Improved and Unique Seating in Public Spaces –
<https://www.sociallifeproject.org/have-a-seat-how-seating-shapes-welcoming-cities/>





Flower Plantings



If your group is interested in installing a neighborhood sign, please visit the City's website for more information:

<https://www.knoxvilletn.gov/cms/one.aspx?portalId=109562&pageId=6368653>

Landscape architects in Europe are doing innovative and unique things with pavers. For ideas, please visit <https://dirt.asla.org/2013/07/11/more-paver-power/>.

Concerns about Gentrification

By common definition, gentrification refers to the social, cultural, and economic “upgrading” of a neighborhood, and the displacement of existing residents and businesses as a result. In contrast to the neighborhood process of gentrification that most often comes to mind (think new artisan coffee shops alongside immigrant family-owned bodegas and laundromats), the process now occurs on such a large scale that it no longer affects just neighborhoods, or low-income neighborhoods in particular, but entire regions within cities (think new-build, skyscraper, or condominium developments complete with corporate retail and over-designed “public space.”) Often, it affects entire cities themselves. Within this complex process, it is difficult to deny the relationship between the improvement or development of an area’s public spaces and increasing value of the surrounding environment as a result. Because this “value” appeals to capital investment, and to people looking to move into areas with such “value,” it seems as though any development of public space somehow contributes to gentrification, regardless of intention, and regardless of who actually implements it. Status quo of blight should not be the norm or expected to prevent gentrification. Rather, your community can be proactive to the type of upgrades your neighborhood receives.

Rather than watching passively as non-local or private developers consume neighborhood public spaces, we can use Placemaking to enable citizens to create their own public spaces, to highlight the unique strengths of their neighborhoods, and to address its specific challenges. While gentrification can divide communities and build upon exclusivity, Placemaking is about inclusion and shared community ownership. It is about increasing “quality of life,” not removing public life. It is the process by which a community defines its own priorities, not someone else’s.

Information pulled from this article:

<https://www.pps.org/article/gentrification#:~:text=While%20gentrification%20can%20divide%20communities,own%20priorities%2C%20not%20someone%20else%27s.>

Scholarly article about placemaking in gentrified neighborhoods:

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Talja-Blokland/publication/248973794_Celebrating_Local_Histories_and_Defining_Neighbourhood_Communities_Place-making_in_a_Gentrified_Neighbourhood/links/55e580ec08aede0b5735aab0/Celebrating-Local-Histories-and-Defining-Neighbourhood-Communities-Place-making-in-a-Gentrified-Neighbourhood.pdf

Funding for Neighborhoods through the *Neighborhood Small Grants Program (NSGP)*

The Neighborhood Small Grants Program (NSGP) strengthens neighborhoods in the City of Knoxville by supporting a wide range of community-based initiatives through grants and technical assistance.

The program is aimed at *resident-controlled, resident-led neighborhood, democratically run* groups such as: **neighborhood watch groups, neighborhood associations, neighborhood organizations, community associations, community organizations, tenant associations, and homeowners associations.**

The NSGP's Primary goals are to:

- A. Encourage neighborhood organizations to connect neighborhood residents with one another — and to engage the skills and knowledge of the residents.
- B. Build neighborhood capacity to plan and implement neighborhood improvement strategies.

The NSGP's Secondary goals are to:

- C. Increase the number of residents and resident leaders (including youth) involved in responding constructively to neighborhood issues, problems, and opportunities.
- D. Strengthen each neighborhood's connection to other neighborhoods, existing community assets, and partnership opportunities.

Your neighborhood's project must meet both Primary goals and at least one Secondary Goal.

To qualify for NSGP funding for the following year, neighborhood groups need to send a representative to ONE of the mandatory grant workshops that take place in the spring in order to qualify for a grant submission.

For more detailed information about the NSGP, please visit <https://www.knoxvilletn.gov/cms/One.aspx?portalId=109562&pageId=1958599>.

Additional Potential Sources of Funding

Additional potential sources of funding for community projects can be found in the Funders Guide located on ONE's website.

<https://www.knoxvilletn.gov/cms/one.aspx?portalId=109562&pageId=1958599>