

The Main Street Guide

10 steps to make a great main street



Village Well
Place School





Welcome

Main streets are the thriving heart of the local economy, influencing the economic, cultural, social and environmental fabric of the surrounding area. They are places where people live, work and play; however in recent years, many main streets have been in decline as the rise of online shopping, increased dependence on cars, and big regional shopping centres have dominated the retail scene.

Today, the old-fashioned pattern of local villages serving their communities is in vogue again. Local villages are seen as the key to supporting a healthier, more walkable and sustainable lifestyle, better connected local communities and greater opportunity for local economic development.

It's becoming more widely recognised that our streets are valuable community assets. Creating a great main street requires a return to human-scale elements (textural building materials, sounds, wafts of delicious food, window shopping, trees, smaller sized retail spaces, park benches), and putting people back as the focus. It requires deep community participation, forward thinking design activities, food, beauty and embedding local identity.

This simple Guide provides 10 key steps to create a great main street and demonstrates that main streets are more than just conduits for traffic and commerce; they are the stages upon which public life is to be celebrated. Enjoy!

Setting the scene

In the 21st century, it is important to acknowledge that old planning legacies continue to impact the public realm and our main streets. The post 1945 modernist urban planning paradigm has shaped our cities significantly.

For obvious health reasons, the zoning of land to separate industrial uses from the places where people live, work and play became more prominent.

With the rise of private transport, town planning began to focus on cars over people, using autocratic means. The results were dormitory suburbs, car-dominated environments, a neglected public realm, social isolation and poor health outcomes. This is especially so on the fringes of our cities and rural towns.

It is becoming more widely recognised that our streets are valuable community assets, and therefore the public realm is currently experiencing a renaissance. However, the intricacies of turning a street into a great public place can still prove elusive.

By tapping into the wisdom of your community, gaining an understanding of the assets and stories of the town, and applying these 10 steps to your co-design process, you will create a main street that is loved and successful.



“Forget the damned motor car and build the cities for lovers and friends.”

Lewis Mumford

What makes a great main street?

EXCELLENT
SERVICE

ACTIVE
DAY & NIGHT

DIVERSE
EXPERIENCES

PUBLIC
ANCHORS

GREAT FOOD
OFFERINGS

ACCESSIBLE
& WALKABLE

ENCOURAGES
WELLNESS

SOCIALLY
CONSCIOUS

HIGHLY
CURATED

INCLUSIVE
& SOCIABLE

FLEXIBLE
SEATING

CREATIVE
FUN & BOLD





10 steps to make a great Main Street



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Step 1.

Bring everyone together to create a shared vision

Keep your vision simple! Start small. You don't have to do everything!

Creating great main streets requires a return to human-scale elements and involving the community, the people that live there, in the planning process. Community participation is one of the fundamental tenets of Placemaking, and it all begins with distilling a collective vision for the place.

This process is important as it brings people together, sometimes for the first time, to share aspirations for their main street and neighbourhood.

Holistic and meaningful engagement at the beginning of planning captures the hearts and minds of people. Done well it can mobilise and unlock enormous creativity, innovation and ownership. It builds community good will and gives businesses and councils the confidence to innovate.

Make sure you address barriers to engagement and get input from a diverse range of people (youth, elderly, people of all abilities). This will help to make an authentic, vibrant and resilient place that is valued by its community and admired by visitors.

The collaborative process of creating a vision for a place is an opportunity to:

- Identify what makes your place special and unique
- Imagine what your place could be. What are the best aspects?
- Set an aspirational tone and direction of the main street
- Collectively re-imagine and reinvent public spaces
- Identify elements that might be overlooked otherwise
- Build partnerships with community, council, developers and traders
- Develop a shared understanding of values concerning a place
- Gain clarity around a problem and create win-win solutions
- Empower community members and give them a sense of pride



Rockhampton CBD

Go where the energy is.
From adversaries to empowered
citizens who are part of the process.

REVITALISING ROCKHAMPTON

Rockhampton businesses and the community were brought together to envision the best approach to reinvigorate Rockhampton's CBD, through a dynamic and integrated placemaking process.

A series of workshops, meetings and events involving community members, council staff, councillors, and traders were held to draw out local knowledge of the area in order to develop concepts to activate and position the city as a unique destination.

The workshops consisted of a series of exercises to imagine what a future Rockhampton would be like, to identify spaces that are working well and others that require more attention, future aspirations, issues and opportunities, small wins, and long-term ideas.



Step 2.

Design your street for people: The physical elements

Great main streets are people-centric, meaning they are designed for people before cars.

They are safe, inspiring, comfortable and pedestrian friendly. They have street trees that provide shade in the summer and drop their leaves during winter to let the warm sunshine in.

A good main street has a diversity of places to sit; sunny spots in the winter, shady spots in the summer (all-year in the tropics). They have places to meet people, landscaped ledges, fixed seats and informal seating located to watch people but out of the way of the flow of pedestrian traffic.

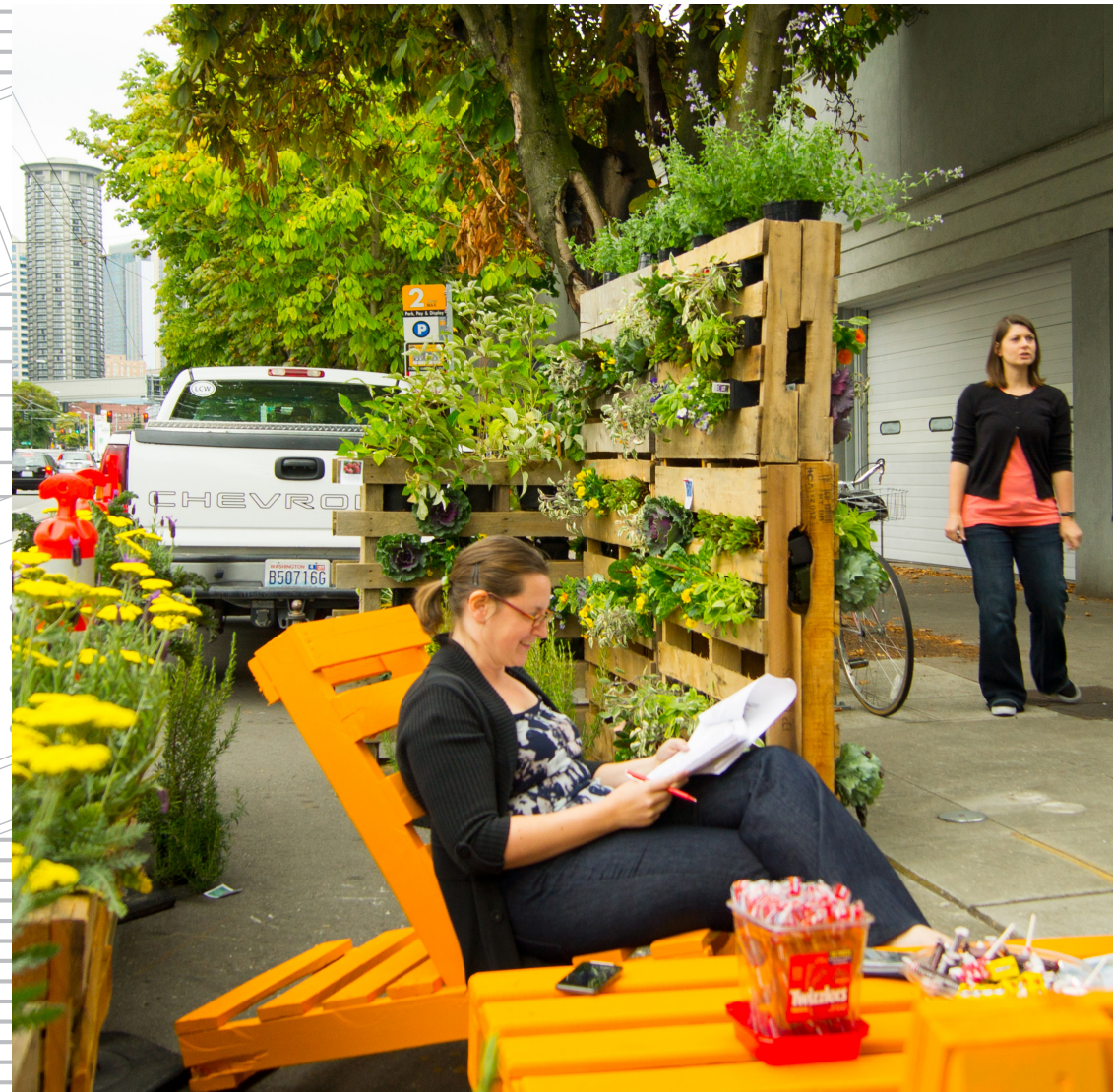
Putting in bicycle paths and expanding footpath space by eliminating a car lane or parking spaces are methods to augment the public realm. Extra greenery will make the place more welcoming, and if pedestrian and retail amenity is lacking, then consider transforming a traffic lane or car spaces into small parklets to enhance the streetscape.

Quality lighting helps to enhance the sense of safety of a street at night. Lighting can also be playful and artistic, adding warmth and atmosphere through options such as catenary lighting or fairy lights. Flood lights are efficient at illumination, but they make streets feel sterile and cold.

It's all about amenity, comfort, safety, and providing those intimate places to linger longer.

"This might not strike you as an intellectual bombshell... but people like to sit where there are places for them to sit."

William H Whyte
The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces





Case Study

Swanston Street, Melbourne

Swanston Street is a main street in the Melbourne CBD, laid out in 1837 as part of the Hoddle Grid. The street is the world's busiest tram corridor, lined with heritage buildings like the State Library, City Baths and Town Hall. It's also a popular retail and food strip.

This main street was one of the busiest in Melbourne, carrying large volumes of cars and suffering toxic pollution levels before being converted to a restricted traffic strip in 1992 and made partially car-free. In the 90s, proposals for the street to become entirely car-free gained support and momentum.

In 1992 a number of public sculptures were established through the Percent for Art Program. The once hot and barren corridor was also planted with trees and a strategy to beautify the strip began being implemented.

The street was being taken from traffic and returned to the people, being transformed into a true civic space for walking, sitting, cycling and recreation - dressed with art, greenery and heritage.

In 2010, it was announced that street would become entirely car-free. The proposal included plans for several city squares along the street, path widening and several large tram stops. Construction commenced in late 2011 and was completed in late 2012.

Today, the once choked, polluted and undesirable strip has become a vibrant and bustling promenade with a heady mix of retail and food offerings, public and educational institutions, lighting, seating and people. It is a popular site for people to congregate for marches, rallies and protests, as well as annual events like the Moomba, Anzac Day, AFL and Melbourne Cup parades.

Today, Swanston Street moves into its next period of transformation as the huge Melbourne Metro project moves in to disrupt the fabric and function of this precinct. The outcome will be an even better civic place, providing better connectivity, and the facilities to support the future city and citizens of Melbourne.

Step 3.

Place Governance

Do the ordinary things extraordinarily well. People will remember you for it.

Every great place operates under some level of organisation. Typically, traders hold the responsibility for making the street function as a whole, and should be regarded as the placemakers of the main street.

Place governance can be thought of as the glue and lifeblood of the main street, enabling different stakeholders to work together and ensure success.

It's strong place governance that helps to initiate events, creates partnerships and makes a place congruent. It also helps neighbour traders support each other and is the reason why Melbourne has created a cross-pollinating food and beverage culture where you can order a drink at the bar while ordering a pizza from next door.

It is important that council strive to develop retail friendly policies, and encourage and enable retailers to curate their spaces and activate the street through alfresco dining, events and trading out onto the footpath.

A dedicated place manager is an effective way to curate a main street, providing a crucial link amongst traders and council. Individual traders often do not have the resources to drive initiatives, and the role of the place manager is to build confidence and momentum by implementing events, curating the public realm and leading marketing and communication strategies in line with the shared vision.

CASE STUDY

Sydney Road Brunswick Association

One of the most successful examples of good place governance is found on Sydney Road Brunswick, Victoria. As one of the southern hemisphere's longest retail strips, Sydney Road is an attractive destination for visitors and Melbourne locals, showcasing a diversity of flavours from around the world, unique cafés, restaurants, pubs, bars, shops and professional services.

The Sydney Road Brunswick Association is largely responsible for place governance. The Association is contracted through Moreland City Council, funded by a 'Special Levy' collected via council rates on over 600 businesses based on Sydney Road.

Guided by a set mission, vision, and business plan, the Association plays a fundamental role in the positioning and marketing of the street, while creating a destination that is authentic and culturally diverse.

The Sydney Road Brunswick Association help to organise a number of events and activities to lift the profile of the street and enhance community cohesion, such as art initiatives and street art, festivals, short film competitions, writers competitions, and the annual Sydney Road street party.



Step 4.

Activate it: Reasons to visit and stay

Make the street experiential

Place Activation refers to the art of bringing a place alive through events, programming and beautification. It's about creating the "vibe".

The best main streets showcase more than just retail, they have events and activities; things to see and offering different ways to participate with the realm and community from morning to night, weekdays and weekends.

We can think of this as the 'software' of a street. The soft components that bring the street to life, as opposed to the hardware (physical elements) of a street. The hardware enables the software.

Good street design will allow for events and activity, as well as passive uses like people watching, eating lunch, or reading a book to happen organically.

The most successful streets have a strong and diverse programme of events for all seasons, making the street more animated and fun, while raising its profile and identity.

Set the stage for daily, weekly, monthly and annual rituals on the street, whether it is a morning coffee, shopping with friends, or sitting in the winter sunshine.

Markets, festivals, art programs, late night trading, community competitions, food and wine festivals, buskers, interactive art exhibitions, street music, tai chi, block parties, salsa nights, the list of potential events and activities is endless!

CASE STUDY

Bathurst Street Hobart Farmgate Market

Located in Hobart's CBD, Bathurst Street is one of the quieter streets in the city on a weekday. However on every Sunday Bathurst Street becomes one of the state's best known attractions, transforming into the vibrant Farmgate Market. It is as an excellent example of what programming can achieve.

Everything sold in the market is produced or grown in Tasmania, from seasonal treasures, heritage and heirloom varieties, and kitchen staples.

What began as 12 market stalls has now grown to fill a large section of the street, setting a stage for the Sunday rituals of Hobart locals, visitors and Tasmanian farmers. Face painters, buskers and street performers can all be found here, adding to the theatre of the street.

The site of the market also takes advantage of the adjacent Mathers Place, a recently upgraded public square and laneway that spills out into the market and is the place to meet friends and enjoy a pastry in the sunshine.

The market has contributed substantially to the local economy and provides another reason to visit the CBD on the weekend.





**“A good city is
like a good party
– people stay longer
than really necessary,
because they are
enjoying themselves.”**

Jan Gehl

Step 5.

Show off your assets

An assets based approach

Streets become interesting places when they provide moments of insight, curiosity and inspiration; local embedded elements that make the street distinct and reflect the local culture, local people, heritage buildings, arts and culture, history, place stories, and the local environment (especially significant for small towns).

These individual and distinctive assets are your point of difference and set the foundation of an authentic place experience.

Reviving a main street should involve tapping into such elements and building upon them. It could be an active local arts community, prominent old buildings, a distinct local identity or demographic, a cluster of shops, an event, a successful anchor patisserie, or a loved park that spills into the street or connects the town.

Whatever elements exist that are working to your favour now should be built upon. They will provide the connections and pause moments that encourage people to slow down and smell the roses.

Displaying pride in your assets through regular maintenance and conservation of the heritage and vibrancy of your main street, and supporting its unique traders, will help to forge local pride and a sense of identity.

Great places are about how they make everyone feel. They are welcoming, safe, inspiring and authentic.

Step 6.

Create places for community

“Every successful individual knows that his or her achievement depends on a community of persons working together.”

Paul Ryan

Connectivity = Wellness

Main streets are the lifeblood of our communities. They provide economic, social, and cultural sustenance to the people who live around them.

Great main streets also play a significant role in enabling us to live in a sustainable way, allowing us to meet the majority of our needs locally. When they work well, they operate as the community's third place. A place to connect with our neighbours and create meaning.

These “third places” are 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. They are the heart of a community's social vitality and the grassroots of democracy.

Community centres, libraries, workshops, creative hubs and town halls provide a means of social connection; a place to express yourself, learn new skills, and be with people of all ages and cultures.

Providing these facilities on your main street ensures that a sense of community is visible at all times.

Small community grants schemes support projects that improve the development and appearance of shared spaces that build social connections. Grants are available for local traders and residents who come together with a good idea to improve their local main street.

CASE STUDY

Bargoonga Nganjin – North Fitzroy Library

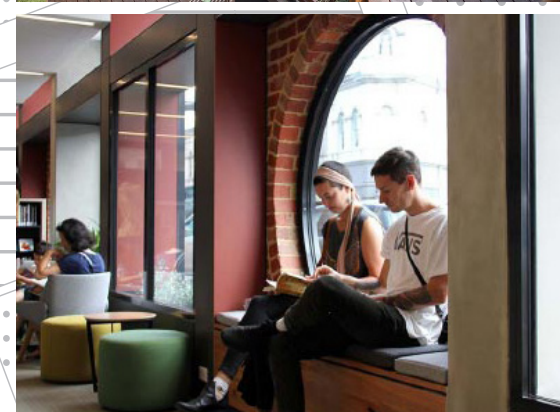
Bargoonga Nganjin means ‘Gather Everybody’ in Woiwurrung, the language of the traditional owners of the land, the Wurundjeri people.

Designed by Collingwood-based architects Group GSA and built by Buxton Constructions, this state-of-the-art community facility in North Fitzroy opened in 2017 and offers a suite of community services for all people.

It houses a library, maternal child health service, playgroup spaces, council customer service centre, community meeting rooms, multi-purpose exhibition spaces and a beautiful roof top garden.

Much of the building's success is a result of collaboration between council, local residents, the Friends of North Fitzroy Library group and the project's Design Reference Group - who worked with the local community to deliver on their vision for a building of the future that will support ongoing learning and health benefits for years to come.

A variety of environmentally sustainable design features have conspired to give the library a six star Green Star rating; the highest environmental rating awarded by the Green Building Council of Australia.



Step 7.

Create gathering spaces

Places for everybody, every day

People attract people. Our main streets and public spaces provide the stage for social connection and incidental interactions; where people can gather to watch, participate, activate and be a part of the buzz.

If a main street is lacking a piazza, mall or park where people can cluster, it is critical to investigate innovative ways of providing an open and flexible, multi-use space for the community to congregate and celebrate.

Gathering spaces within a main street setting should have access to good public amenities and 3-phase power to allow for the creation of day and night activities like pageants, school performances, weekend farmer's markets, night markets, seasonal events like Christmas Carols, and street performance.

Through the development of a good set of busking guidelines, councils can activate these spaces by providing the framework for quality musicians, artists and performers to add a layer of fun and vitality to the street.

It is important that these public gathering spaces feel safe and open to a diversity of people. They should welcome people of all cultures, ages and ability, as diversity creates culture and enhances liveability.

"The basic physical features of vibrant cities are diversity, density, accessibility, and connectivity. These features enable social interaction, face-to-face communication, chance meetings, convenient contact, and so on, long considered positive aspects of cities and urban life." Jane Jacobs.

CASE STUDY

Collins Court, Hobart

Located in the heart of Hobart's CBD, Collins Court is a laneway connecting some of the city's busiest shopping streets, arcades and landmark destinations; however it had long been regarded as 'unloved' and disconnected from the main street neighbourhood activities.

As part of the City of Hobart's Inner City Action Plan, the City recognised that Collins Court offered an opportunity extending beyond a simple structural upgrade, instead transforming the transitional space into an active, welcoming and playful community space.

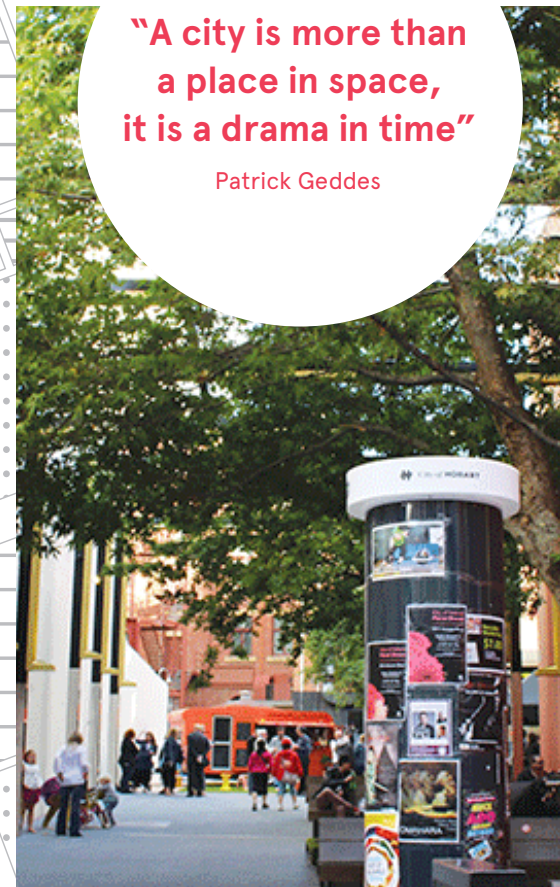
Village Well was engaged by the City of Hobart to develop the Place Story to highlight the physical and programmatic opportunities, together with empowerment of the local community.

A facilitated series of visioning and activation ideas workshops with each of the stakeholder groups, including local businesses, community and council staff, established an action plan to maintain the voice and build momentum of stakeholders and the project.

Following a series of high impact, short-term activations, the once forgotten lane has since been reborn as a quirky gathering place and key inner city connection.

**"A city is more than
a place in space,
it is a drama in time"**

Patrick Geddes





“Places that are more attractive, attract more people, and more people visiting equals greater spending.”

Step 8.

Invest in beauty

Beauty as an economic driver

Openness and beauty are primary drivers for community attachment and audience engagement. Public art, landscaping and greenery, colourful seating, creative signage, elements of water, smell and sound all conspire to evoke emotion and improve wellbeing.

Public art plays a critical role in creating a sense of place within the community. It contributes to a sense of identity by reflecting on a towns' unique character, history and future aspirations.

Diverse and vibrant public art programs are vital to community and cultural development, and it doesn't have to be a costly or complex exercise to weave expressions of beauty and creativity throughout a main street.

Collaborating with local artists, schools, retail traders and community groups can be an effective first step to activating your street with art and enhancing local pride.

Street traders should be inspired to access training and learn the trends that will develop their skills in the art of visual merchandising, sign writing and table dressing. They are the set designers of the main street, and the audience will applaud their efforts.

“The arts have a big impact on child development; our ability to express ourselves; our ability to think creatively and develop new ideas; helping us deal with stress, anxiety or depression and; our sense of wellbeing and happiness.”
(Australia Council for the Arts 2014).



Step 9.

Food is the anchor

Get the mix right.

Good food and retail offerings doesn't necessary mean 'fancy' or expensive. A diverse food mix is a fundamental way to consistently drive activity into a main street. High performing retail streets offer a balance of convenience and destinalional food, giving people a reason to visit seven days a week.

Destinational retail such as cafés, bars, restaurants, music venues and fashion boutiques keep a street vibrant at different times of the day and night. Having a diverse mix of quality food, fashion, homewares, culture and independent traders along your main street will ensure it remains resilient and flourishing with low vacancy rates.

The concept of the 'bakers dozen' is the core of retail, and should have the basics such as a news agent, butcher, grocer, baker and fish monger.

The food and retail mix greatly determines the character of a main street. Prioritising independent traders over chain retailers increases the overall unique sense of place, along with people's attachment and loyalty to a street.

Developing a retail plan helps councils and business associations have some strategic direction and input over the long-term evolution of the main street. A retail plan helps identify gaps in the retail mix and is used to lobby property owners to secure desirable tenancies.

Step 10.

Supporting traders to create spaces and curate the street

Traders are the best Placemakers

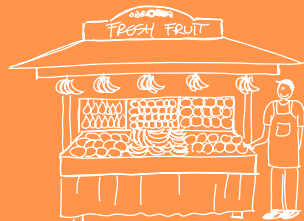
It is critical that main street traders are inspired and given incentives to offer great customer service, have a great understanding of their audience, and be inspired through programming to trade day and night.

Creating an authentic service culture, an authentic and welcoming place, is key to retaining customer loyalty.

Anchor spaces with a third place collaborating with the traders by creating a public anchor, commons and space where the many can meet, chat, eat and play.

Council can support traders by developing good street trading policies, considered liquor licensing, making permits more accessible, and promoting local and state grants.

- Begin with the small interventions
- Activate the edges and shopfronts
- Permeate the access
- Inspire creative visual merchandising
- Create temporary parklets
- Invest with creative signage
- Plan for everyday comfort, amenity and play; including seating along the main street, shade and games.





Main Street Resources

BOOKS

The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces.
William H Whyte
City: Rediscovering the Centre.
William H Whyte
The Death and Life of Great American Cities.
Jane Jacobs
The Economy of Cities. Jane Jacobs
The Placemakers Guide to Building
Communities. Nabeel Hamdi
Tactical Urbanism. Mike Lydon & Anthony
Garcia
The Great Neighbourhood Book. DIY
Placemaking. Jay Walljasper
Liveable Cities Observed. Suzanne
Crowhurst & Henry Lennard
Designing Regenerative Cultures. Daniel
Christian Whal
The Local Economy Solution. Michael H
Shuman
Getting our act together. Glen Ochre
Charter of New Urbanism. Emily Talen
The Village Effect. Susan Pinker
Cities for People Not for Profit. Neil Brenner
Convivial Urban Spaces. Henry Shaftoe
Street Reclaiming. David Engwicht
The Image of the City. Kevin Lynch
The Living City. Roberta Brandes Gratz
The Vertical Village. MVRDV Rotterdam
The Great Good Place. Ray Oldenburg
Dialogues in Public Art. Tom Finkelpearl
Creating Great Town Centres and Urban

Villages. Urban Land Institute
Urban Design Futures. Edited by Malcolm
Moor and Jon Rowland
Shopping Environments: Evolution, Planning
& Design. Peter Coleman

ONLINE PAPERS

Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa
"Creative Placemaking."
Anne Gadwa Nicodemus,
"Fuzzy Vibrancy. Creative placemaking as
ascendant US cultural policy."
Ian David Moss
"Creative Placemaking has an Outcomes
Problem."
Roberto Bedoya,
"Placemaking and the Politics of Belonging
and Dis-belonging."
Susan Silberberg,
"Places In the Making: How placemaking
builds places and communities."

WEBSITES INCLUDING CASE STUDIES

Project for Public Spaces
Village Well
Jan Gehl
Place Leaders Asia Pacific
Placemaking.wordpress.com



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