We tend to take our streets for granted. The lanes and the signals and the signs, they really hold the keys to our economy and safety and the livability of streets.

Janette Sadik-Kahn
Public Realm

Public realm is the term given to the physical environment in a community, and includes streets, parks, plazas, and the physical elements within that space such as street furniture, signage, lighting, landscape, hardscape, public art and sculpture. The public realm is as much about a city’s buildings as it is about the streets, plazas, and parks that link them.

Cathy Wallace 2006
Public Realm
What Has Shaped Our Public Realm?

- Single purpose infrastructure - vehicle transportation AND storage
- Short-term investment returns
What Should Shape Our Public Realm?
- Community and social equity
- Health and environmental impacts
- Accessibility and comfort for all forms of transportation
- Sustainability/long-term economic returns on investment
- Sense of Place
“People develop a "sense of place" through experience and knowledge of a particular area. A sense of place emerges through knowledge of the history, geography and geology of an area, its flora and fauna, the legends of a place, and a growing sense of the land and its history after living there for a time.”

Dr. Thomas Woods

What is Place?

- Both a geographic designation and a positive feeling or perception held by people.
- Fosters an authentic sense of attachment or belonging.
WHAT MAKES A GREAT PLACE?
Case Studies
- Dubuque, IA – Millwork District
- Orlando, FL – Edgewater Drive
- Brooklyn, NY – Willoughby Plaza
- Kansas City’s Streetcar
Dubuque, IA – Millwork District
- Renovations to district’s four main streets
- Concrete streets and sidewalks
- Reclaimed paver details, preserved historic tracks
- Permeable pavers for parking lanes
- Bicycle connections to trail network
Dubuque, IA – Millwork District
- $34 million in new private investment; $150 million planned
- First warehouse renovation complete with 72 residential units, 39,000 SF retail, 20,000 SF arts incubator; two more underway with 120 apartments and 300,000 SF commercial space
- Property values increased 111%
Orlando, FL – Edgewater Drive
- Resurfacing project used as opportunity incorporate complete streets improvements along 1.6 miles
- Four-lane to three, with center turn lane, bike lanes, and wider parking
Orlando, FL – Edgewater Drive
- 77 net new businesses with 560 new jobs
- On-street parking use increased 41%
- Adjacent property values increased by 80%; property within ½ mile increased by 70%
Brooklyn, NY – Willoughby Plaza
- In 2006, one block of Willoughby Street closed with temporary installations
- Six years later, Willoughby Plaza rebuilt connecting to the sidewalk, with trees, lighting, wayfinding, etc.
Brooklyn, NY – Willoughby Plaza  
- In the first year, retail sales on Willoughby Plaza dropped 55% compared to a neighborhood average decrease of 12%  
- In the second year, retail sales on Willoughby Plaza increased 33% compared to a neighborhood average decrease of 9%  
- In the third year, retail sales on Willoughby Plaza increased 47% compared to a neighborhood average increase of 8%
Kansas City, Mo – Streetcar Development
- Approx. 20 block Streetcar loop, from Kansas City’s River Market District to Union Station
- No toll
- $1.2 Billion investments Completed or Under Construction since 2013
- 2,500 Residential Units under construction, 3,900 Planned
Better Block Jefferson Park (CO)
Better Block Jefferson Park (CO)
Better Block Jefferson Park (CO)
Better Block Jefferson Park (CO)
What Could our Public Realm Look Like?
- Great Identity, but no ‘Public Space’
- Wide lanes encourages high speeds
- Very little space for pedestrians
- Public Realm materials don’t speak to architecture
THE VALUE OF PLACEMAKING

- Public Open Space
- Pedestrian and Transit Improvements
- Art and materials to enhance sense of place
- High pedestrian traffic, low vehicular traffic
- Huge intersection with poor accessibility
- Lacks visual identity
- Curbless street for flexibility
- Bold geometry and materials to accent identity and sense of place
- Lighting for multiple types of activities
- ROW dominated by one use and only serves those people traveling on road.
- Signature street frontage that is inaccessible.
- Can easily question if uses are ‘highest and best’ for this location.
- Landscape to improve pedestrian comfort and slow traffic
- ‘Reclaimed’ space for businesses
- Improved environment can spur development that is in keeping with the surrounding neighborhood (single family w/historic character)
- Improves city image
- Attracts private investment
- Increases spending
- Contributes to economic growth
- Increases tourism
- Increases tax revenue

- Traffic calming leads to a 20% increase in housing value
- Investment in walkability increases land value by 70 – 300%
- 20% increase in tree cover increases property value 20%

- Street improvements: 20-30% drop in commercial vacancy, 30% increase sales tax revenue, 200% increase property value
- Quality green space raised rents by 12 – 20%
Thanks!

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