



The Third Place: Planning for a Sense of Community



**MICHIGAN ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION**

What you will learn:

What is the “Third Place”

*Why are Third Places
important*

*How planners can revive
and support Third Places*

Third place is a term coined by sociologist Ray Oldenburg and refers to places where people spend time between home (‘first’ place) and work (‘second’ place). They are settings where we exchange ideas, have a good time, and build relationships.

Think of third places you enjoy. It could be different for different groups: Starbucks, McDonalds, the playground, the gym, a library book group, church, the neighborhood bar. Cheers, where everybody knows your name, is the quintessential third place. In his book, *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam describes the loss of community and decline of traditional third places such as churches, bowling leagues, service clubs like Kiwanis and VFW’s; places that traditionally provided a setting to gather, share, and relax. Development patterns with single use zoning districts have exacerbated this decline.

Recently, social media has become a virtual third place. From Facebook and Instagram to group texts, the traditional third place is often now virtual. But experts note the most effective places for building real community are physical places where people can easily, routinely, and informally connect with each other: churches, parks, recreation centers, hairdressers, gyms, coffee shops bakeries, and even fast-food restaurants.

Third places have a number of important community-building attributes. Depending on their location, social classes and backgrounds can be “leveled-out” with people feeling they are treated as social equals.

Third Place Attributes

- The place must be free or quite inexpensive to enter.
- The place must be highly accessible to neighborhoods so that

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State laws that may also apply:

Public Act 120 of 1961: Principal Shopping Districts and Business Improvement Districts. Authorizes the development or redevelopment of principal shopping districts and business improvement districts; permits the creation of certain boards; provides for the operation of principal shopping districts and business improvement districts; provides for the creation, operation, and dissolution of business improvement zones; and authorizes the collection of revenue and the bonding of certain local governmental units for the development or redevelopment projects.

Public Act 57 of 2018: Recodified Tax Increment Financing Act. Provides for the establishment of certain tax increment finance authorities such as downtown development, corridor improvement, water resource improvement, and neighborhood improvement.

Public Act 33 of 2008: Michigan Planning Enabling Act. Provides for county, township, city, and village planning including the creation, organization, powers, and duties of local planning commissions and the preparation and adoption of master plans.

people find it easy to make the place a regular part of their routine. A critical mass of people should be able to comfortably walk to the place from their home.

- A number of people regularly go to this place on a daily basis.
- People who go there should be able to expect to find both old and new friends each time they visit.

Reviving Third Places

Most third places have disappeared in recent decades, as suburban development practically excludes mixed uses. Communities can take steps to create more hospitable conditions for third places to develop and thrive.

- Make sure zoning accommodates mixed-use functions in residential areas. Allowing a corner store, places of worship, or a small restaurant or bar-- hang-out places--in residential neighborhoods encourages community building.
- Consider the location of potential third places. Bus routes and convenient stopping points can be critical to the survivability of a third-place.
- Free Wi-Fi can turn many places into meeting points and draw people together from a range of ages.

Resources:

Congress for New Urbanism

Project for Public Spaces

“Third Places as Community Builders.” by Stuart Butler and Cameron Diaz. Brookings Institution.

“What Happens When our Third Places Go Away” by Allie Conti. *Grub Street*.

“What is the Third Place and Why Do You Need One.” by Johnny Dzubak. *The Art of the Charm*.

“Why You Need a Third Place and How to Find One.” *The Jordan Harbinger Show*.

This tear sheet was developed by the Michigan Association of Planning (MAP) for the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). The Michigan Association of Planning is a 501 c 3 organization, dedicated to promoting sound community planning that benefits the residents of Michigan. MAP was established in 1945 to achieve a desired quality of life through comprehensive community planning that includes opportunities for a variety of lifestyles and housing, employment, commercial activities, and cultural and recreational amenities.

