

Transformative Placemaking



Brookings Metro
25 YEARS OF IMPACT

Transformative Placemaking



“Brookings is a leader in inclusive economic development. The Bass Center comes along to be the ‘place’ portal in the thought leadership of Brookings that makes it uniquely powerful.”

BILL TAFT

Senior VP Economic Development
Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)

Background

After decades of urbanization, America’s metropolitan areas are now home to 86% of the nation’s population. Yet within these areas, not all communities have experienced the benefits of growth and investment. **Even as many downtowns, waterfronts, and innovation districts have seen significant revitalization, the number of racially segregated and high-poverty neighborhoods have increased.** The intersecting crises of a global pandemic, continuing racial injustice, and a mounting climate catastrophe have exposed and accelerated these inequities. Meanwhile, many suburban communities are continuing to grapple with aging infrastructure and rising economic distress, amid auto-centric designs that lack the walkability and connectivity that both businesses and workers require.

Although these problems are systemic and interconnected, our current approaches to addressing them remain fragmented. Economic development tends to lack a focus on place, placemaking, and racial equity. **Community development often overlooks the role that neighborhoods play in their regional economies.** Land-use and infrastructure planning strategies fail to invest in projects that promote equity and environmental sustainability. And traditional placemaking, for all its efforts to coordinate across these systems, lacks the strategic scope and scale to meaningfully reverse the nation’s uneven growth patterns.

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Opportunity for Impact

The meteoric rise of telework and e-commerce during the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with an increased appreciation of humanity's intrinsic need for social and collaborative spaces, have heightened the imperative to reimagine the way we build communities. Local leaders are eager to reinvent office districts and commercial corridors, expand community ownership and wealth-building models, and better link housing, transportation, and jobs.

The emerging practice of transformative placemaking offers a way forward: it focuses on **strategic hubs and districts within regions where economic, physical, and civic assets cluster and connect. It integrates investments and strategies at this "hyperlocal" scale** to yield more prosperous, equitable, and resilient cities and regions.

Brookings Metro's **Transformative Placemaking Initiative** is at the vanguard of this movement. Led by experts in our Bass Center, the initiative is working with a new generation of leaders in real estate, economic and community development, and land-use and infrastructure planning to deliver significant impact through three key activities in the coming years:

- **Groundbreaking research** that provides new frameworks and data tools for planners, developers, community leaders, and public- and private-sector investors, placing transformative placemaking squarely in the mainstream of local policy and practice.
- **Model solutions** co-designed with local leaders and national partners. These include: inclusive catalytic development strategies that ensure large-scale urban projects benefit existing residents; buy back the block strategies that promote the growth and revitalization of Black businesses and commercial corridors through innovative ownership models; and community-centered economic inclusion strategies in mid-sized cities and towns that build on unique local market trends and assets to drive more equitable economic development.
- **Partnerships, practices, and policy ideas** that translate lessons from the field for a growing nationwide network of transformative placemakers, convened with partner organizations such as Local Initiatives Support Corporation, National Main Street Center, Project for Public Spaces, and Smart Growth America.

The quality of large-scale neighborhoods, main streets, and commercial and mixed-used corridors will determine if post-COVID cities and metro areas foster opportunity for all residents and communities. The Transformative Placemaking Initiative, through the leadership of the Bass Center and Brookings Metro, will partner with local leaders to define, test, and scale an emerging practice whose time has arrived.

About Brookings Metro



As Brookings Metro celebrates 25 years of impact, we are prioritizing collaborations with America's local leaders around five signature initiatives that address the most urgent challenges facing our country. These initiatives—**Inclusive Innovation and Talent Development; Resilient Regions; Transformative Placemaking; Valuing Black Assets; and Worker Pay and Power**—combine original research insights, active problem-solving with local leaders, and venues for spreading and scaling change that ultimately help every community in our nation to be more prosperous, just, and resilient, no matter its starting point.

In the years ahead, Brookings Metro will evolve in two important ways to deliver on our renewed, affirmative vision. We will double down on action, advancing local collaborations that drive larger change. And we will be explicit about our values, using the Brookings platform to better represent the diverse experiences and perspectives of the communities and leaders we serve. It is a vision we hope to achieve in partnership with you and a network of local leaders. Please join us in supporting this important work.