



A Decade of
**Placemaking
in Michigan**



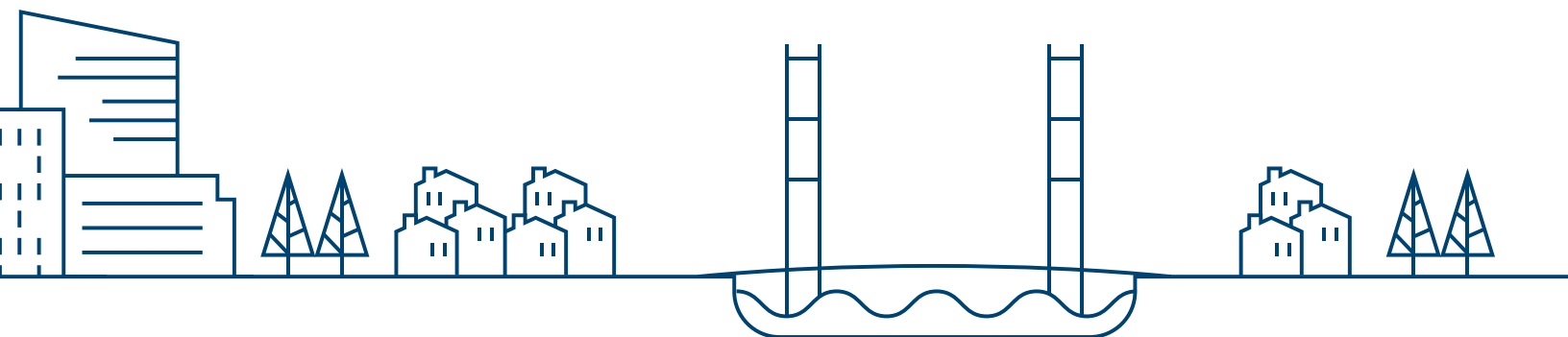
2 A Decade of Placemaking in Michigan





Placemaking is a critical strategy for creating economically prosperous communities—large and small. The Michigan Municipal League (MML/League) recognized this over a decade ago through significant research, and has dedicated tremendous resources to advancing this strategy in Michigan and nationwide. As the beginning of the 21st century got underway, the League's staff and Board of Directors realized that Michigan's economy had radically changed and that new approaches for prosperity had to be employed. The League's deliberate and comprehensive efforts to advance placemaking were done to help Michigan communities survive and thrive in the face of these significant structural changes and the decline of our state's economy.

As the League moves forward in pursuing programs and policies that support prosperous communities, it is important to pause and take stock of where the organization has been. This retrospective highlights the history of placemaking, the programs and efforts the League, with key partnerships, has undertaken in support of placemaking, and how those activities have shaped policies and quality of life in Michigan communities.





What Is Placemaking: Concepts and History

There are many working definitions for “placemaking,” all of which reflect, to some degree, types of community features and people’s emotional connection to their communities. The League and its many state and community partners generally define placemaking as:

The process of creating places that people care about and where they want to spend time. These high-quality places are active, unique locations that are interesting and visually attractive, people-friendly, safe, walkable and bikeable, provide mixed uses of businesses and housing, and offer creative amenities and experiences.

Placemaking capitalizes on the distinctive assets of a community to integrate a mixture of uses that connect people and places on a human scale. At its core, placemaking is designed to make communities attractive to both businesses and workers who are increasingly mobile and are seeking more than just employment when deciding where to live.



...the best way to plan for downtown is to see how people use it today; to look for its strengths and to exploit and reinforce them. There is no logic that can be superimposed on the city; people make it, and it is to them, not buildings, that we must fit our plans.

*Jane Jacobs, urban author
and activist*





HOW DID THE PLACEMAKING MOVEMENT BEGIN?

The concepts behind placemaking date back to the 1970s with work by Jane Jacobs and W.H. Whyte, which focused on the importance of lively neighborhoods, activated street life, and inviting public spaces to communities' social and cultural well-being. The nonprofit organization Project for Public Spaces, now one of the leading placemaking organizations in the world, was launched during this period and built on these concepts of creating vibrant public spaces.

The broader beginnings of the “placemaking movement” took hold in the 1990s though. Authors like Lynda Schneekloth and Robert Shibley, who first coined the term “placemaking” called for a more inclusive, democratic approach to the design of human spaces, and used case studies from their work to demonstrate the importance of integrating design and community engagement to better shape public and private spaces. While there is a lot of debate in the literature about why placemaking emerged as a practice,

early work by architects, planners, and urbanists pointed to the need for revitalizing historic cities, addressing blight through community beautification and public use projects, and addressing social cohesion and connectivity—which had been diminished with the great migration to sprawling suburbs.

In Michigan, placemaking emerged because the League and key state partners like the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA), Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), and Michigan State University (MSU), among others, realized that the old models of creating economic prosperity were no longer relevant and that communities needed hope in the face of an increasingly desperate funding and revenue environment.

Schneekloth, Lynda and Robert Shibley. 1995. Placemaking: The Art and Practice of Building Communities.

During the 1980s and 1990s, only some of the deep urban planning practitioners and academics were talking about placemaking. Municipal leadership was not—it was not on the radar of planners, city managers, community leaders, or economic developers.



Volkswagen AG is moving its North American headquarters from Michigan to northern Virginia to attract a younger skilled workforce.

Detroit Free Press, 2007



In the late 1990s, Michigan's manufacturing and agriculture sectors were declining due to technology advances and movement of jobs and production to other countries—and that decline began to accelerate after 2000. Nationwide, these jobs were displaced by services and “knowledge economy” employment, where higher education and degrees are more in demand and the workforce is more mobile. Technology advances and a global competition for talent were also increasingly allowing people to work from anywhere. As a state that was hugely dependent on manufacturing and agriculture sectors, our economy plummeted.

And these economic impacts were compounded at the local level by state-level policy changes in the 1990s and 2000s which cut funding to local governments and limited their ability to raise revenue. As a result, communities were struggling to provide basic services and make necessary investments in infrastructure. In short, Michigan was not adapting to the new economic reality in the early 2000s:

- Good, high-paying jobs were no longer attracting workers here.
- Our quality of life was diminishing, with both income levels and employment opportunities declining.
- The state was under-investing in cities and higher education.
- Workers in knowledge industries were not coming to or staying in Michigan. Millennials in particular have been leaving the state at a high rate.
- Local revenues were declining and cities were not able to maintain high quality services and infrastructure.

As the League and other urban leaders began to understand these trends and see that people were increasingly choosing places to live and then finding work, it became clear that Michigan needed to substantially increase its investment in places if it hoped to compete economically.



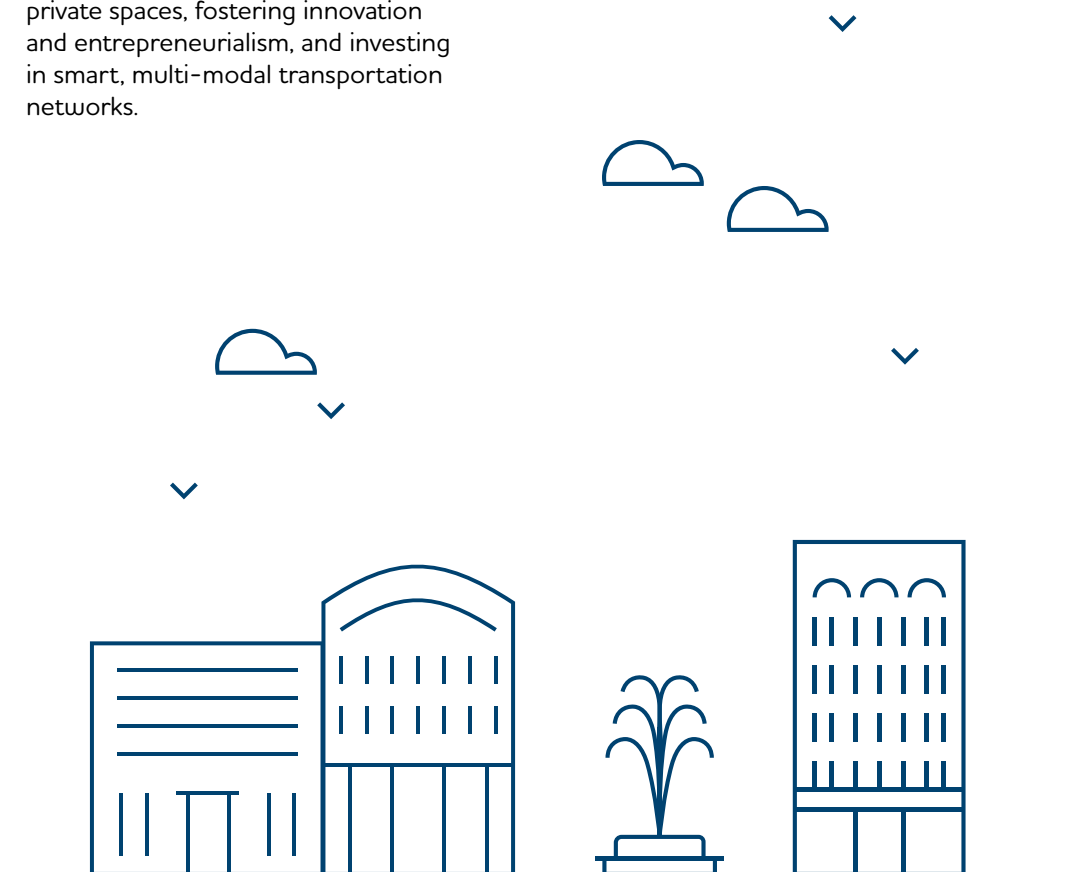
Michigan’s future depends on its ability to attract and retain talent. And what is central to attracting this priceless commodity? Place! Specifically, vibrant communities.

development, including emphases on the development of public and private spaces, fostering innovation and entrepreneurialism, and investing in smart, multi-modal transportation networks.

HOW HAS THE CONCEPT OF PLACEMAKING EVOLVED IN THE LAST DECADE?

As the concept and practice took off in the 1990s and 2000s, it continued to focus mostly on public spaces and public realms, but also included work on how people’s actions at their neighborhood and block contributed to creating quality places. In 2003, then Governor Jennifer Granholm funded Michigan’s Cool Cities Initiative to promote place-based creative jobs and industries across the state, and the League and organizations like Project for Public Spaces, MSHDA, and several state agencies began raising awareness of the importance of creating authentic, unique spaces in our cities.

Over time, the practice has evolved to much more than just public space renovation and “street activation.” Placemaking is now more broadly integrated into planning and economic





Michigan Municipal League's Role in Advancing Placemaking

In the face of declining economic conditions in Michigan, it was clear that one of the best ways to ensure the future economic well-being of communities was to work with state and local partners to incorporate placemaking into planning, infrastructure investments, downtown redevelopment, and talent attraction efforts. Based on strategic planning with our Board of Directors, and with the encouragement of our members, the League decided to become a leader in advocating for, and advancing placemaking as a philosophy and approach to creating 21st century communities in Michigan.

Over the years, the League has played three continuous, inter-looping roles in advancing placemaking in Michigan:

- Learning
- Leading and sharing
- Implementing



We are passionate and committed to creating meaningful change in Michigan that places communities at the center of our state's economic turnaround.

***Michigan Municipal League
Board of Directors, Strategic
Plan***





LEARNING

With the leadership and support of a visionary board, the League set out to understand the role of place in community economic and social prosperity. Staff networked and partnered with leading researchers and practitioners in the placemaking effort including Projects for Public Spaces, Strong Towns, Michigan Future Inc., Brookings Institution, Richard Florida, and others, as well as city leaders who were on the cutting edge of implementing placemaking efforts in cities like Denver, Portland, Seattle, and Chicago. The League interviewed leaders, visited successful placemaking sites, attended national and global conferences focused on investing in place, and researched best practices.

A key part of this early learning phase was the League's policy forums on placemaking. With funding support from MSHDA, the League convened a group of passionate community leaders to participate in a series of four policy forums. The purpose of the forums, which featured expert speakers with cutting-edge, creative solutions for

creating better communities in Michigan, was to discuss placemaking concepts, learn about demographic and other social and economic disruptions that are impacting community prosperity, and identify opportunities for deploying placemaking strategies across Michigan. The forums served as the launching point for the "leading and sharing" activities to come, and the forum participants were challenged to partner with the League and other statewide organizations on those efforts.

LEADING AND SHARING

Having seen the successes that communities around the globe were having in creating authentic, vibrant places—places that were attractive to businesses and talent—the League committed to bringing placemaking concepts and information to local leaders, state policy-makers, media, business organizations, potential partner organizations, and others outside Michigan as well.



MML's role as a consistent and constant champion of placemaking as a community and economic development tool has had a significant impact on cities' ability to understand, plan for, and implement programs that have improved the quality of life in their communities.

Fred Kent, President, Project for Public Spaces





In the mid-2000s “MML really worked hard to push the concepts and importance of placemaking to the consciousness of elected officials. My community at the time (Farmington) came to understand the importance of placemaking in helping to make the city and its downtown a destination. Subsequent efforts such as the new farmers market, zoning that allowed outdoor dining and seating, and investing in streetscaping, all helped build the city’s character and identity. In 2013, when the city was going through an updated visioning and planning process, residents remarked on the importance of these places and placemaking efforts in creating social connections within their community. Now we are doing a lot of this work in Monroe too.

Vince Pastue, Manager, City of Monroe (formerly Farmington)



Through annual Conventions and Capital Conferences, and events with affiliate groups such as the city managers and mayors, the League began preaching the “gospel” of placemaking. This early phase of sharing was focused on connecting the dots between economic vitality, talent attraction, and the elements that create strong, high-quality places. The League has provided information on placemaking concepts, written dozens of case studies on successful placemaking efforts and their impacts on economic revitalization, and created opportunities for communities to share their stories and approaches with each other.

Knowing that information about placemaking needed to be heard much more widely, the League engaged in several other outreach efforts over the years. The target audiences for these broader efforts were economic development and planning practitioners, policy-makers, real estate professionals, workforce development entities, and organizations (public and private) that provide relevant funding (e.g., state agencies, foundations). Staff has been

invited to make presentations at hundreds of placemaking partner events all over the globe such as Project for Public Spaces, Congress for a New Urbanism, Urban Land Institute, Michigan Land Use Institute, Smart Growth America, Michigan Planning Association, MEDC, and MSHDA workshops to help educate and train their constituents. The League has also published dozens of articles and blogs on placemaking, and regularly uses social media like Twitter, Facebook, and Flickr to share placemaking information, articles, and pictures.

A key component in advancing placemaking has been the partnership between the League and over 40 other government, nonprofit, and business organizations through the Sense of Place Council (SOPC). Created in 2007, the SOPC collectively works to promote policies and practices that make Michigan more vibrant and competitive in the 21st century economy. The SOPC, which is co-chaired by the League and MSHDA, developed the MIplace Partnership Initiative, which has provided education, outreach, technical assistance,



and program support to practitioners and communities to understand and implement placemaking efforts throughout the state. An important part of the group's effort was the creation of an award-winning Michigan Placemaking Curriculum at MSU, which includes a 600-page guidebook, slides, dozens of training exercises, and online presentations and modules for general use. Over 15,000 people throughout the state have participated in training using the curriculum.

Beginning in 2009, the League launched three other major placemaking education and outreach efforts. The "Lets Save Michigan" campaign was launched in 2009 to help educate and advocate for placemaking investments in Michigan's communities. For over four years, this grassroots campaign engaged hundreds of citizens and organizations in learning about placemaking, advocating for state policies to improve Michigan cities, and implementing placemaking projects. The campaign hosted "Twitter town halls" to share information through social media, and sponsored a placemaking



poster contest in partnership with the Detroit Institute of Arts. The campaign also launched and sponsored the "It's About Place" competition, which engaged almost 50 individuals or teams to identify an underutilized space in their community, consider how they could improve the location through placemaking, and design a solution to turn it into a community space. Over 17,000 people participated by voting online for the final place projects.

In 2010, the League, with its co-sponsor MSHDA, launched a monthly radio program called the Prosperity Agenda on News Talk 760 WJZR which challenged listeners to help make Michigan a better place to live, work, and play by creating vibrant and prosperous local communities. The hour-long radio program was hosted by the League's Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer, Dan Gilmartin, and featured an impressive line-up of guests from the public and private sectors,





The Economics of Place maps out an arts-driven regeneration plan for Michigan like a modern-day Magna Carta...The Michigan Municipal League provides an array of problems and solutions, but also excellently outlines the principal obstacles to these development patterns.

Michael Dudley, Planetizen News, 2012



including city, state, foundation, nonprofit and business leaders. The radio show format allowed for a more interactive and often provocative forum to discuss key issues related to creating prosperous communities in Michigan. It also significantly broadened the audience for outreach on the importance of investing in place as an economic imperative. Over 70 episodes of the show aired between 2010 and 2016. The show also won a 2014 MarCom Award, an international creative competition that recognizes outstanding achievement by marketing and communication professions.

And in 2011, the League took the bold step of publishing a book on placemaking. *The Economics of Place: The Value of Building Communities Around People* included 11 chapters authored by state and national leaders on urban development, talent attraction, municipal policy, and economic development. Over 5,000 copies of the book were distributed and sold, and it has been referenced and used by both the League and other partners in our work with communities many times. Planetizen rated it as one of the top books of the year in urban

planning, design, and development in 2011. Because the book was so successful in making the case for why placemaking is important to Michigan's prosperity, the League published a second volume that focused on the "how" of placemaking. *The Economics of Place: The Art of Building Great Communities* was published in 2014 and provided placemaking tools and case studies such as arts and culture, agritourism, entrepreneurship, and bike trails.

IMPLEMENTING

Through our public policy forums, research, and education efforts, the League identified eight essential assets that make communities vibrant places in the 21st century: physical design & walkability, green initiatives, cultural economic development, entrepreneurship, welcoming diversity, messaging & technology, multimodal transportation, and education. Helping

Dudley, Michael, et. al. 2011. Top Ten Books. Planetizen News. Online, accessed 4/15/17. Available at: <https://www.planetizen.com/books/2012>.



Michigan's leaders grow these assets in their own communities has been the organization's focus over the last decade.

While the enthusiasm for placemaking principles among communities continued to grow during the late 2000s and into 2010, there wasn't significant progress in deploying placemaking strategies to grow the eight assets in communities across the state. While there was interest, communities still did not have the capacity or all the tools needed to fully activate placemaking.

Understandably then, the next phase of the League's work in this area has been focused on helping to accelerate the implementation of placemaking in our communities. Through work with the Sense of Place Council, and with funding and technical support from MSHDA and MSU, the League helped provide training to target audiences through the MIplace curriculum, documented existing placemaking success stories through the creation of over 40 case studies, and provided communities with technical assistance in creating "PlacePop" projects. These low-cost, high-impact projects

help demonstrate the power of place (e.g., taking over some downtown parking spaces for a short-term parklet.)

The League also partnered with the MSU School of Planning, Design, and Construction (with funding support from MSHDA) in 2013 to launch a program called PlacePlans. The goal of this program was to help accelerate the adoption of placemaking practices by helping develop plans and build local capacity for future efforts. The League and MSU worked with over 20 communities to create physical plans for plazas, streets, parks, or other public spaces, conduct market assessments, and develop other strategies for placemaking priorities. In each of these communities, the league and MSU helped engage residents in the project planning and worked with staff to deploy tools that could be replicated on future projects.

The PlacePlans communities have made significant progress in implementing placemaking projects and in most cases, the effort has spurred additional development and public space improvements in the communities.



The PlacePlan process for Heritage Plaza in Cadillac helped establish a vision for downtown and strengthened communication between the community and stakeholders. It catalyzed a broader placemaking effort downtown that includes the new Heritage Plaza, as well as a renovated pavilion, existing city park, new community market, and trailhead improvements. The result has been increased private sector investment in downtown Cadillac, including redevelopment of a large parcel that the developer noted would not have happened without the community passion and public investment downtown.

Marcus Peccia, Cadillac City Manager





A recent review of the program by Wayne State University found that participants were especially pleased with the League and MSU's assistance in facilitating the process, creating concept designs, and developing pop-up/demonstration projects (Loh, 2017).

As the League was working more directly with communities on placemaking projects, it became clear that one of the biggest impediments to implementation was funding. Faced with increasingly constrained local budgets, many communities struggle to dedicate even nominal funding for placemaking projects. To address some of this need, the League initiated a CrowdfundingMI initiative which was designed to train and assist communities, entrepreneurs, and other organizations in accessing money,

support, and resources for local projects by crowdfunding from individual donors in their communities (and beyond). Through annual Convention sessions, outreach events, and online resources, the League provided information on crowdfunding types, how the state's new Michigan Invests Locally Exemption (MILE) Act could be used to support local businesses, and how communities could access crowdfunding platforms for placemaking projects.

During this same period, the MEDC was developing a new program called Public Spaces, Community Places with Patronicity, a new crowdfunding platform. Knowing about our work in this area, the agency reached out to the League about creating a partnership to help with program design and promotion. This ground-breaking matching grant initiative is transforming public space projects throughout Michigan by providing matching funds to communities who crowd fund at least 50 percent of a proposed community project such as trail expansions, public plazas, park improvements, and other community spaces. To date, the Public Spaces,

Community Places program has funded 110 projects, crowdfunded \$4.2 million, and leveraged over \$26 million.

The learning and sharing efforts continue today. League staff is still conducting research on how placemaking benefits communities—making connections between the eight assets of prosperous 21st century communities with actual economic performance, evaluating how placemaking helps address efficient investment in infrastructure, and identifying new models of funding and financing for place-based development. Recent sessions at the League's Convention and Capital Conference have continued to generate awareness and excitement, and staff and members share stories and tools through Placemaking blogs, articles in the League's Review magazine, and presentations at partner organizations.



Loh, Carolyn. 2017. Michigan Municipal League PlacePlans Survey. Unpublished.

The Impact

When the League began its focus on placemaking, it was with the realization that Michigan communities faced little choice—to survive and thrive in the 21st century, communities must invest in their assets and be authentic, high-quality places where people want to live. For Michigan communities, placemaking could open economic doors that had long felt as if they were closing. Placemaking is not the answer to economic success, but it is a key foundation for building prosperity.

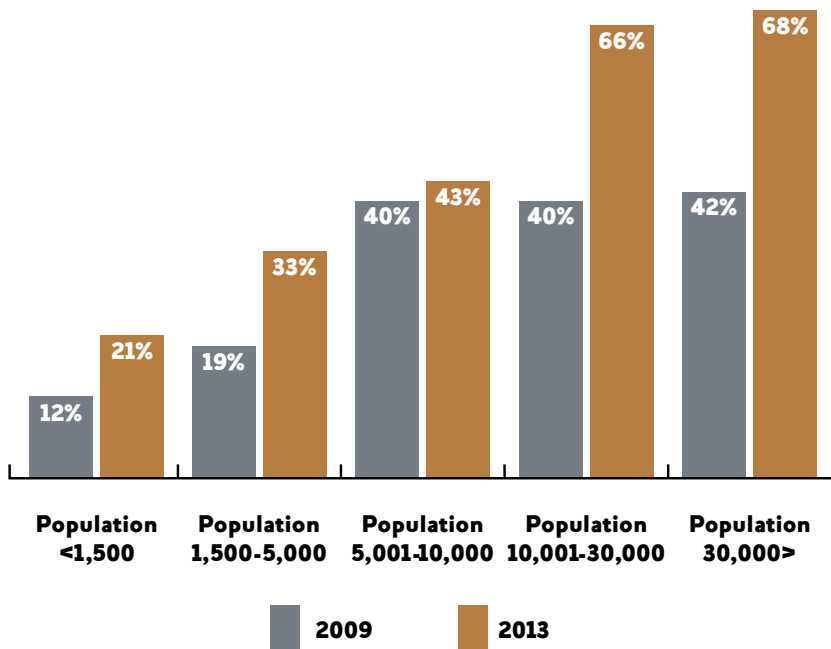


Dan Gilmartin [Executive Director] and Michigan Municipal League staff have been leaders among state leagues on placemaking. It's been exciting to watch the work in Michigan, and we have used their resources and materials as best practices for other states.

***Brooks Rainwater, Director
of the City Solutions and
Applied Research Center,
National League of Cities***



Percentage of Local Jurisdictions Engaged in Placemaking: 2009-2013



In a survey conducted by the Center for Local, State and Urban Policies, researchers found that local communities have increasingly embraced the placemaking approach for economic development. A 2013 survey found that leaders in over 60 percent of villages and 80 percent of cities say they believe placemaking can be effective in their jurisdictions, compared to 44 percent and 62 percent respectively who reported confidence in placemaking's effectiveness in 2009.

Ivacko and Horner, 2014

It is hard to evaluate what impact the league's efforts have had on the prosperity and quality of life in Michigan communities. Impacts can be ambiguous and sometimes only qualitative things to measure. And more importantly, isolating the impact of the League's placemaking efforts is challenging because it has been part of a much broader effort by a multitude of state partners, other community and Michigan-focused nonprofits, and of course communities themselves. While the League has been actively advocating for and activating placemaking efforts for more than a decade, it had very fertile soil to work with in this area.

But there are indicators of success. As an early adopter in the placemaking movement in Michigan, the League has helped shape local and state policies and funding priorities for example. At the state level, its partnership with state agencies through the Sense of Place Council has helped facilitate necessary policy changes to support placemaking. Some of these policy changes have been new programs and others have been changes in program structure or criteria

to better support placemaking. While there have been numerous related state policy and program changes, some of the key efforts the League has helped spur through its placemaking partnerships are summarized below.

- Governor Snyder recognized the importance of placemaking in his 2011 address to the Legislature, appointed a special adviser for city placemaking, and created the Interdepartmental Collaboration Committee partnership to ensure coordination between departments that further economic development and placemaking.
- MSHDA has dedicated a significant amount of funding toward supporting placemaking training and projects in the state, including the PlacePlans program and support for the Sense of Place Council.
- Beginning in 2012, MSHDA also made changes to the agency's Qualified Allocation Plan for its Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program that included additional project scoring points (up to 10 additional points) for

central city and neighborhood projects. In addition, the plan allowed for up to 10 additional points for projects located in areas that contain community amenities (such as retail establishments, parks, and transit) as determined using WalkScore ratings.

- In addition to its new Public Spaces, Community Places program, MEDC has also restructured and created other new programs that support placemaking. For example, the Community Revitalization Program, created in 2012, is designed to accelerate private investment in areas of historical disinvestment by redeveloping blighted, obsolete, and historic properties. Among the criteria used to evaluate projects for funding are the contribution to density, walkability, mixed uses, and historic resources.

Ivacko, Thomas and Debra Horner. January, 2014 and October, 2009. Michigan Public Policy Survey. Online, accessed 5/8/17. Available at: <http://closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey/mpps-2013-spring.php>



- The state passed Complete Streets legislation in 2010 that requires Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and other transportation agencies to design roadways to accommodate not only cars, but bikes, pedestrians, transit, and other forms of transportation. Dozens of local governments in Michigan have followed suit and passed local complete streets policies. MDOT has also used its "context sensitive solutions" policy to ensure that road projects are designed to match local design standards.
- The Michigan Department of Natural Resources has made changes to its land management plans and Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) to prioritize natural resource management and recreation investments that help improve quality of life and attractiveness of Michigan communities. The SCORP, for example, includes recommendations for connecting state recreation resources with local communities, and leveraging parks for economic development.

The placemaking movement has also increasingly had an impact on shaping foundation funding and private sector support in the state. Organizations like the Knight, Kresge, Skillman, Hudson-Weber, Southeast Michigan Community, Kellogg, and Mott Foundations, who have all had existing urban revitalization programs, have been building on those efforts over the last decade to specifically invest in placemaking projects in Michigan cities. The League has been lucky enough to learn from these organizations' long-standing urban revitalization work and share it with our member communities. In turn, its placemaking efforts have helped foundations target some of their funding to support catalytic local projects.

In addition, the League has worked with business organizations in Michigan, such as the Business Leaders for Michigan, the Michigan Association of Realtors, and the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, and they have increasingly advocated for public and private investments in downtown development and placemaking projects as a means of attracting talent and business to the state.

At the local level, the League began to change the dialogue about the future of Michigan communities by providing more technical assistance on projects. Communities have worked alongside staff and leadership to learn about, share information on, and ultimately implement some very catalytic placemaking projects. As residents, businesses, and city staff have seen the success of initial placemaking efforts they have clamored for more. Most of the communities who have participated in PlacePlans, PlacePop, and Public Spaces, Community Places have continued planning for and implementing additional projects in their community.

And they have gone beyond one-off projects. Communities have embraced the importance of investing in the eight assets of thriving 21st century communities. They are incorporating placemaking into many aspects of local planning, and have created new programs and policies to support it.



Placemaking as a term is still relatively new in the conversation about cities. MML was early to recognize that placemaking could be valuable to Michigan’s cities. They have translated placemaking from big cities like Detroit and Grand Rapids to Michigan’s medium and small cities, and made it more likely that policymakers, across the geographic spectrum, understand the value of placemaking efforts. Since MML began this work, I’ve seen state agencies put new focus (and resources) toward the value of “place” and local communities more willing to experiment to improve the quality of life for their residents.

Katy Locker, Program Director, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation



Some examples include:

- Public Art and Percent for Art ordinances which support the funding and installation of public art.
- Form-Based Codes which shift the focus from regulating separate land uses to addressing the relationship between building facades and the public realm, the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another, and the scale and types of streets.
- Complete Streets Ordinances and Non-Motorized Transportation Plans which require investment in multi-modal transportation options and are making communities more walking and bike-friendly.
- Use of economic development incentives to encourage the development of mixed housing and commercial developments, downtown development, and rehabilitation of historic properties.

- Creation of business incubators and other local entrepreneurial support programs that are making communities more economically diverse and encouraging small business retention and development.

While the League has had many partners—local, state, national and international—in placemaking work over the years, it is proud of its efforts to lead in this area. The unique role of representing local governments—where placemaking happens—has enabled the League to focus on demonstrating the proof of concept for placemaking and working in the trenches with communities to put placemaking into action. Its members and Board of Directors made a concerted decision to take a risk and work in an area outside of the League’s usual membership services role. And that risk has paid dividends in the dozens of Michigan communities that are achieving economic growth and revitalization of their communities.

What's Next?

The League has been a strong voice for, and resource on placemaking for over a decade. Its learning, sharing, and implementing efforts have had an impact. The League has watched and participated as communities have engaged with their residents to redevelop formerly blighted or underutilized areas into fun and attractive community amenities, plan and host art and cultural events, and change local policies that enable things like outdoor dining and public gathering spaces that draw people into downtowns. There is much to celebrate.

But the work is not done yet. Because Michigan has a broken municipal finance system, communities are still struggling to provide basic services, let alone make investments in the eight key assets needed for thriving, quality places. For Michigan to truly prosper, its communities should be the economic drivers for the state—places where quality of life and thriving commercial activity go hand-in-hand. The League has long espoused that the state's economic turnaround cannot happen without significant and sustained investment in its cities. The research on this topic is unassailable.

While the League will continue to advocate for improving public community spaces and making our communities more attractive through placemaking projects, its efforts must evolve to meet the remaining challenges of expanding place-led economic development. This means helping to address issues like: the state's broken municipal finance system that limits investment in local infrastructure; the continued financing gap on the types of residential and commercial development projects that create strong, vibrant communities; the need to connect existing and potential talent to good jobs in Michigan communities; the lack of a strong business community voice for placemaking; and of course, the continued demand for funding of catalytic community place projects.

In the coming years, the League will provide a wide range of services and strategies that push the placemaking for economic prosperity agenda forward, and enjoin the state's job creation strategy with efforts to improve civic life.



