

This Month

**The Importance of Public Spaces
Public Spaces Shape Cultural Identity
Is Your Public Space Functional**

Last month we discussed the goals and objectives of Streetscapes, Inc. This month, we discuss why this is important –

Throughout time, public space - green space, parks, recreation areas; courtyards, plazas and public markets have been the heart and soul of neighborhood and communities around the world. Given the amount of public space that these areas represent plus the 30% of space in most cities that are devoted to streets and sidewalk, you'd think we'd know more about them. We don't, but I can tell you that nature and function is more important in public places than we think.

According to the authors of [Public Spaces: How they Humanize Cities](#) - ... the thoroughly "modern city" fails to address many of people's basic psychological needs: to watch, be around, and interact with others at different levels of intimacy, in order to feel part of a community and to reaffirm human connections."

Public places shape the cultural identity of an area, are part of its unique character and provide a sense of place for local communities. They also have a direct impact on the success of local businesses, neighborhood real estate values and community health. And they can attract significant private sector investment. But if you were to take a look at any struggling neighborhood, you'd probably discover that they're missing two key ingredients – a continual in-flow and out-flow of pedestrian activities and a unique destination.

As social space, it is important that public places contain elements that connect with a large variety of potential users and stakeholders. To create the most impact and provide the best outdoor environment to the largest possible pool of users and stakeholders, it's time for us to look at public spaces differently. The many areas surrounding public places are a hodgepodge of different individuals - male and female, different ages - infant, young, old and mature, right brain and left brain - visual, artistic and creative vs. analytical, objective and rational. They all have different reasons for visiting public outdoor spaces - some to socialize, others to relax. Some come for the fresh air and sunshine. Some visit these spaces to test their skills and acquire new knowledge and others just to walk the dog.

Interested in creating real value with tight dollars in your outdoor furnishings budget? Take a close look at your public spaces, their functionality and whether they suit your potential users and stakeholders. Natural elements attract more visitors to public places than man-made elements. Translation - more green space, [large planters](#) with attractive flowers, [living green walls](#) and hanging plants than concrete and asphalt. More activities - [outdoor exercise station](#), game tables and multi-functional outdoor furniture than fixed static benches. More site amenities in interesting configurations, shapes and colors. And more pedestrian and streetscape elements to create, define and enhance community identity and character. Further translation - less thought and selection based on the way we've furnished public spaces in the past and more emphasis on today and tomorrow.

People-centric site amenities won't change struggling public places overnight. But adopting to this new train of thought will send a message to community members, local business owners and neighborhood residents that a new public space attitude is emerging.