

THIRD PLACES

SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE
IN THE CAPITOL REGION

CRCOG Topical Report

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The Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) is a voluntary Council of Governments formed to initiate and implement regional programs of benefit to the towns and the region. It is guided by the chief elected officials of our 38 Metro Hartford municipalities. The mayors, first selectmen, and town council chairmen who make up our governing Policy Board recognize that the future of our individual members is tied to the future of our region. Our members have collaborated for more than 50 years on a wide range of projects to benefit our towns individually and the region as a whole.

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What is a “Third Place”

Simply put, a third place is a social environment where you can enjoy the company of others and is separate from the home (the first place) and the workplace (the second place). Common examples of third places include cafés, bars, or other watering holes where conversation is the primary activity. Places like libraries, barbershops, parks, and countless other examples abound.



Strong, resilient communities make it easy to gather and connect with other people. As we continue to recover from the pandemic and grapple with a growing mental health crisis, the importance of third places as the civic and social glue of communities has never been more important. Local land use and economic development commissions have the opportunity to tangibly improve not only the economic, but social health of their communities through the creation of vital third places.

This report will help municipal decision-makers at the elected, commission, and staff level better understand what third places are, their importance, and examine how to encourage their development. We will highlight great third places in the CRCOG region and outline tools and strategies for communities to help build a more diverse, robust network of third places.

Third Places, Defined

What makes a great third place? Everyone might have their own answer, but they likely revolve around enjoyment and a sense of belonging. Certain places have a distinct vibrancy or lively atmosphere that contributes to an enjoyable experience. Most desirable neighborhoods and communities often have an abundance of third places that appeal to people from various walks of life. In many cases, third places serve as social ‘levelers’ - i.e., neutral, open places where residents from different backgrounds with shared interests can connect while enjoying the same space.

Ray Oldenburg, author of “The Great Good Place,” who is generally credited with popularizing third places as a concept, listed examples such as parks, cafés and piazzas, where people could meet informally. These third places are welcoming to everyone and feel comfortable. These places may be public or civic, like a town square or village green. They may also be commercial spaces, like coffee shops or bars. Whatever the distinction, healthy communities often have a plethora of vibrant third places.

What Makes a Third Place?

01

Neutral Ground - You don't need an invitation, and anyone can enter

02

Proximity - Near your home or work, ideally within walking distance

03

Unstructured - You can come and go as you please and explore the space

04

Communal - It has regulars, but also welcomes newcomers

05

Inexpensive or Free - There should be a low or no cost of entry to access

06

Consistently Active - It's a reliable hub to find people

07

Social - Conversation is typically the main activity

Where Have I Seen a Third Place?

Figure 1: Central Perk (Friends). Despite having unrealistically large New York City apartments, the characters on Friends preferred spending much of their social time together at the Central Perk café.



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Figure 2: Barbershop (Barbershop). Calvin Palmer, Jr. comes to regret the decision of selling his family's barbershop once he realizes how much it meant to the surrounding community as a place to come together.



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Figure 3: Cheers pub (Cheers). The most famous bar in pop culture is a classic third place, where "Where Everybody Knows Your Name".



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Where Have I Seen a Third Place?

Figure 4: Hollywood Star bowling alley (The Big Lebowski). Jeffrey “The Dude” Lebowski was able to relax in pretty much any setting, but the bowling alley was his preferred third place for connecting with friends.



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Figure 5: The Premiere in the 2004 show Drake & Josh was a movie theater that not only employed the brothers, but also served as the favorite spot to go on a date for Drake, and where many of their friends would go after school.

Figure 6: Luke’s Diner sits at the heart of the Stars Hollow in Gilmore Girls. Here, you can reliably find a great cup of coffee and other locals having everyday conversations. The town center of Stars Hollow supports Luke’s Diner as a third place with its walkable, community oriented design with sidewalks, seating, and apartments above the storefronts.



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Why Third Places in the Capitol Region?

The Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) recognizes the importance of third places in its core plans, such as the 2024 Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) as well as the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). Below are some third place-related goals from these plans.

2024 Regional Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD):

- *Build regional economic development capacity and support*
- *Create a 24/7 Capitol City*
- *Reimagine underutilized commercial districts as vibrant destinations*
- *Invest in the power of “fun,” placemaking, and third places*

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS):

- *Develop more collaborative workspaces*
- *Create downtown neighborhood districts Provide spaces that create a strong network for spurring creative talent*
- *Layer resources into neighborhoods disconnected from prosperity – concentrated poverty*

Benefits of Third Places

Third places are significant contributors to what is increasingly referred to as “social infrastructure.” Whereas traditional infrastructure is primarily physical in nature (the electrical grid, water and sewer pipes, roads and bridges, internet broadband, etc.), social infrastructure is broadly defined as the background structures that allow various social connections to occur, most notably as physical spaces where people can assemble.

In addition to simply making neighborhoods and communities more enjoyable, third places have social, mental health, and economic benefits. Research indicates that third places are associated with greater neighborhood cohesion and interaction among neighbors¹ and offer psychological benefits similar to that of urban parks². Neighborhoods with third places (cafés, parks, restaurants, etc.) tend to report higher levels of sociability, with nearly half of residents in such communities reporting conversing with someone in their communities they did not know well at least once a month, in contrast with only one-quarter of those living in very-low-amenity areas³.

Economically, third places provide benefits to development projects. When included in mixed-use developments, third places improve the marketability of a site and create synergy with residential uses. For example, data from the Urban Land Institute notes apartment buildings with robust ground floor third place commercial uses (such as cafés and restaurants) can often generate up to 5 percent higher residential rental premiums⁴.



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Places like libraries, playgrounds, or public markets do not necessarily have socialization as their primary function per se but facilitating social connections is a notable example of what makes them popular destinations for many, proving their value over multiple generations⁵. Eric Klinenberg, author of “Palaces For the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life,” elaborates⁶.

“Public institutions, such as libraries, schools, playgrounds, parks, athletic fields, and swimming pools, are vital parts of the social infrastructure. So too are sidewalks, courtyards, community gardens, and other spaces that invite people into the public realm. Community organizations, including churches and civic associations, act as social infrastructures when they have an established physical space where people can assemble, as do regularly scheduled markets for food, furniture, clothing, art, and other consumer goods. Commercial establishments can also be important parts of the social infrastructure.”

In many cases, this social infrastructure can save lives – strong social networks are significant contributors to post-disaster resiliency and recovery after natural disasters (called “social resiliency”). A Centers for Disease Control (CDC) study of the 1995 Chicago heat wave showed that living alone and not leaving the home increased the risk of death, while participation in group activities, having friends in the immediate area, and having a pet in the home each helped reduce the risk of death, illustrating the impact of living arrangements and social networks on the loss of lives during a disaster⁷.

Local Examples

Semilla (Hartford)

Growing up in Hartford, Aimee Chambers and her business partner dreamed of opening a coffee shop. They knew they wanted to provide a social hub for the very same place they called home as kids. Not only does Semilla stand now as a complete and absolute vibe of a café, but it also is creating safe spaces for historically disenfranchised local communities to come together and support one another through strong social bonds.

When speaking about a recent housing justice event held at Semilla to help raise rent money for some members of the local community, Chambers stated: "We just provided the space for them to feel comfortable and safe coming together and holding an event like that."



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Silk City Coffee (Manchester)

"I grew up in a town just outside of Putnam, CT where I saw a coffee shop transform a town and was inspired to bring the same to Manchester. In the 8 years since we opened, Silk City Coffee has become a staple in our community where people from every walk of life are welcome. Whether it's students studying in the company of strangers, workers collaborating with fellow peers, singles connecting over lattes, parents enjoying cookies with their children, or community leaders coming together to discuss projects despite their differences, our shop provides a safe and relaxing space for ALL! We are grateful to be a place that both helps fight the loneliness epidemic and makes Manchester a vibrant place to work, play and live!"

-Tammy Gerhard, Community Engagement Coordinator/Owner
Silk City Coffee



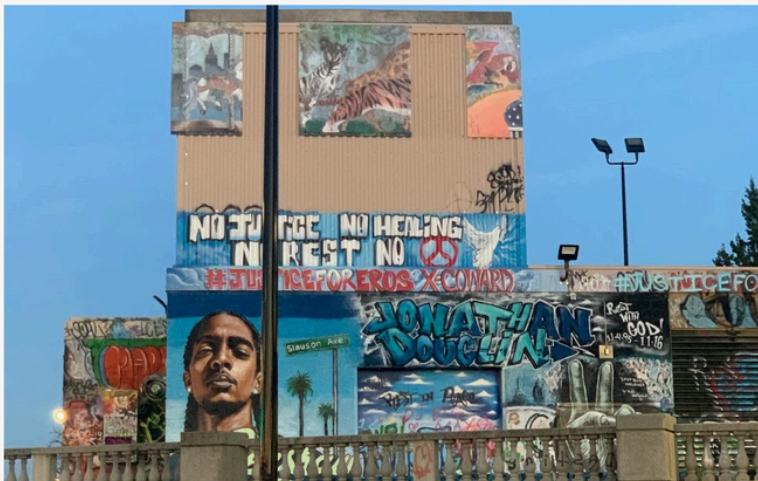
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Local Examples

Heaven Skate Park (Hartford)

Tony Hawk, a famous professional skater, spoke about the importance of Heaven Skate Park and what it means to the broader community when he had heard the parks gates were being locked on occasion despite it being a 24-hour park: "It's a gathering space for artists and musicians and likeminded people, and it's a place of belonging, and that's what a skatepark meant to me as a kid."

Heaven Skate Park is exactly that, a haven for people of all ages to find a sense of belonging and community around shared interests in a space they get to explore and enjoy together. Just as basketball courts, football fields, or dance halls serve as third places for those athletes and participants, Heaven acts in the same way for those who appreciate skating, whether on the board themselves or just there to hang out.



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Mansfield Community Center (Mansfield)

The Mansfield Community Center serves as an incredible resource for the surrounding area. The Center's early hours and event programming provides residents with a place to congregate, whether they are there to exercise or socialize. Younger kids can partake in after school programs and swimming lessons, while many high school students gather together on the basketball courts after school. Seniors are able to participate in strength and stabilization classes, while local artists and local trade laborers have the opportunity to teach skill-based classes in the spare rooms available to reserve.

Without a doubt the Mansfield Community Center is a hub for the residents of Mansfield and helps facilitate social connections for folks across generations.



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The Decline of Third Places

Despite their importance, many third places appear to be on the decline, a trend pre-dating the pandemic⁸. The growth in e-commerce has accelerated the decline in malls and other brick and mortar retail spaces, while on-demand streaming platforms and modern home entertainment systems have imperiled live entertainment and music venues.



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Restaurants and coffee shops operate on thin profit margins in the best of times. The pandemic and ensuing inflation forced many to curtail hours or close entirely. Even profitable companies such as Starbucks, whose founding ethos was based on third place principles, have begun to prioritize “throughput” and turning over tables in order to maximize profits⁹. The CROCOG region has seen its fair share of loss when it comes to third places. Hartford saw the closures of a sizable number of dancing venues in the early 2000's. In more recent years, the City saw the closure of Tisane and 36 Lewis, iconic LGBTQ+ friendly and safe spaces for many in the city and surrounding area. Hartford also lost ZuZu Coffee and Wine Bar, as well as City Steam, a great spot for a beer after work or a comedy show at a historic location. Newington saw the closure of Olympia Diner, and the downsizing of Mortensen's Dairy Ice Cream, favorite spots for students to celebrate after a game or show production at the local high school. The Corner Pug in West Hartford closed after years of being a popular celebration spot for Saint Patrick's Day, while Simsbury lost Blue Fox Rock & Bowl.

Our social behaviors also have changed over time. We have become more solitary compared to previous generations. Research has shown that time spent alone during leisure hours has more than doubled among working-aged adults, from 58 daily minutes in 1965 to 119 in 2018¹⁰. Some of this change is due to household changes - lower marriage rates and an increased number of people living alone - while higher social media usage also appears to play a role. This shift towards social isolation has implications for mental health; surveys indicate that respondents who spend a large fraction of their free time alone report lower subjective well-being¹¹.

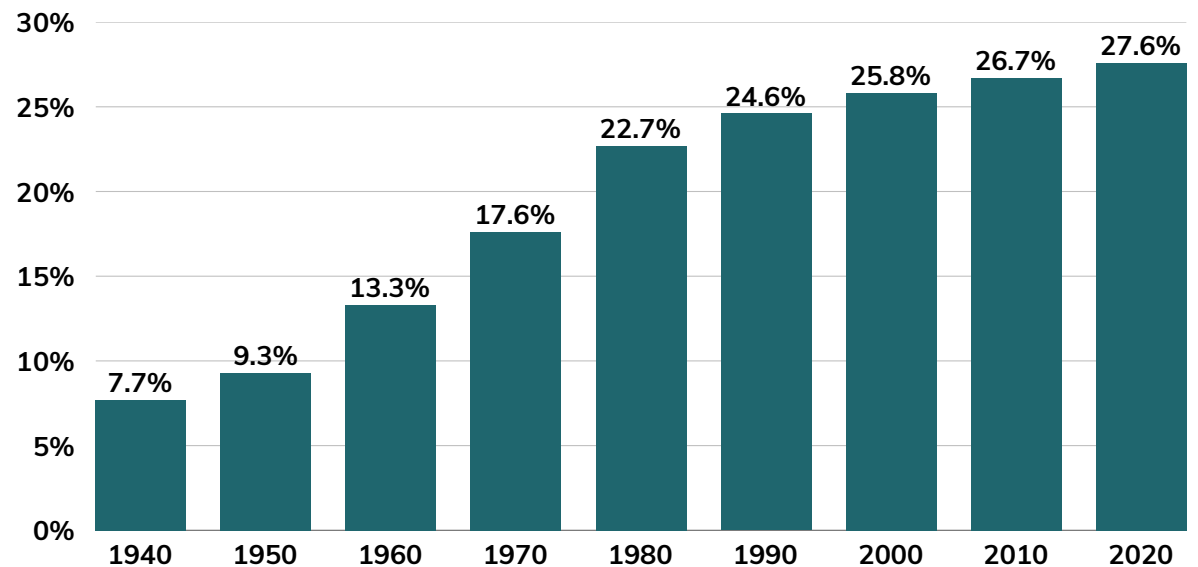
More recently, the rise in remote and hybrid work has significantly impacted the amount of time people interact in person with one another. Despite some decline since the height of the pandemic, three to four times more people work remotely in 2025 than in 2019¹². Roughly 26% of the workforce with remote-capable jobs works fully remote, with about 55% working a hybrid in-person/remote schedule. This shift in workplace practices has measurable benefits for workers, such as less time commuting, better work-life balance, and greater job-accessibility for workers with health challenges or disabilities. However, workers commonly cite the challenge of feeling isolated from their teammates. While some organizations address this challenge by establishing intentional in-person meeting practices, many hybrid and remote workers still feel a need for a place beyond their home office to spend time. They need a proper third place.

Our Fraying Social Connections, By the Numbers

We are suffering from a crisis of reduced social connection. Recent surveys show more than half of U.S. adults (58%) are lonely, consistent with pre-pandemic research and a seven-percentage point increase from 2018¹³. Youth mental health is an increasingly urgent concern. The American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and Children's Hospital Association issued a declaration of a national emergency in child and adolescent mental health in 2021, noting 42% of adolescents reported feelings of sadness and hopelessness – a staggering increase from 28% in 2011.

There are complex, overlapping factors behind our sense of weakened social connections and increased self-reported loneliness. Demographic, technological, and cultural shifts all play important roles and will continue to be studied by researchers. While conclusive explanations are beyond the scope of this paper, broad trends are worth noting to partially help explain why people increasingly feel a sense of isolation.

One-Person Households, 1940-2020



Source: US Census Bureau

Over a quarter of all U.S. households are comprised of a single person living by themselves, more than double the rate from the early 1960s.

Much of this is positive, particularly for women, who have greater economic freedom than in previous generations and voluntarily choose to live alone. For people living by themselves this trend can exacerbate a sense of isolation and fewer strong social connections, especially if they lack access to nearby third places.

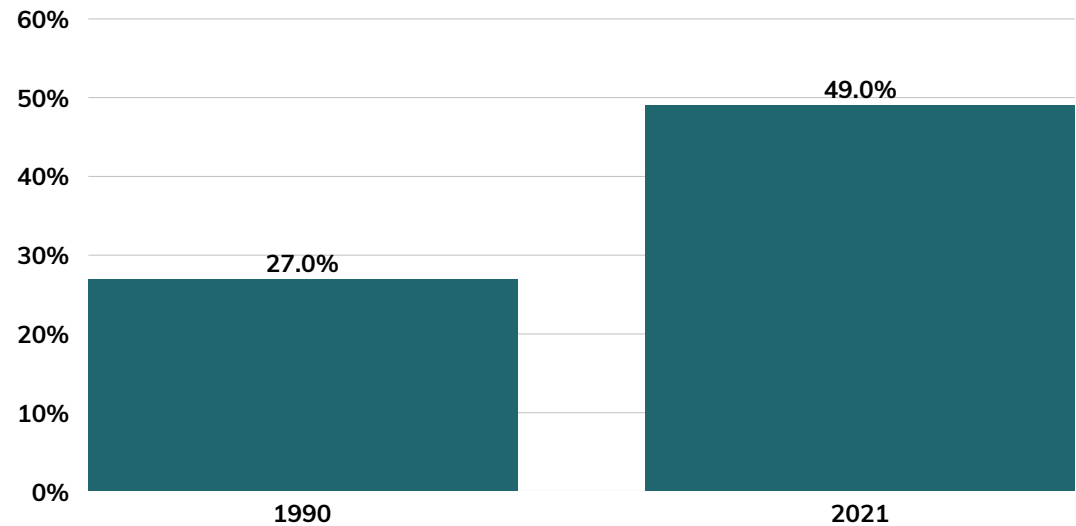
More People are Making Fewer Friends

People increasingly self-report having fewer friends. The sense of crisis has grown so noticeably acute the term “Friendship Recession” was coined to capture the phenomenon. This term originated from 2021 survey data showing Americans report having fewer close friendships than before, talking to them less often, and relying less on friends for personal support.¹⁴ The number of close friendships Americans have appears to have declined considerably over the past several decades. In 1990, less than one-third (27%) reported having three or fewer close friends. In 2021, this figure nearly doubled to 49%. Most alarmingly, the percentage of people reporting zero friends quadrupled between 1990 and 2021, from 3 to 12 percent.

The percentage of men reporting no close friendships at all has increased fivefold over the past thirty years, from 3 percent in 1990 to 15 percent in 2021.¹⁵

While both men and women report decline in the number of friends, the picture is especially stark for men. Thirty years ago, a majority of men (55 percent) reported having at least six close friends. Today, that number is 27 percent.

Percentage of Americans Reporting Having Three or Fewer Friends



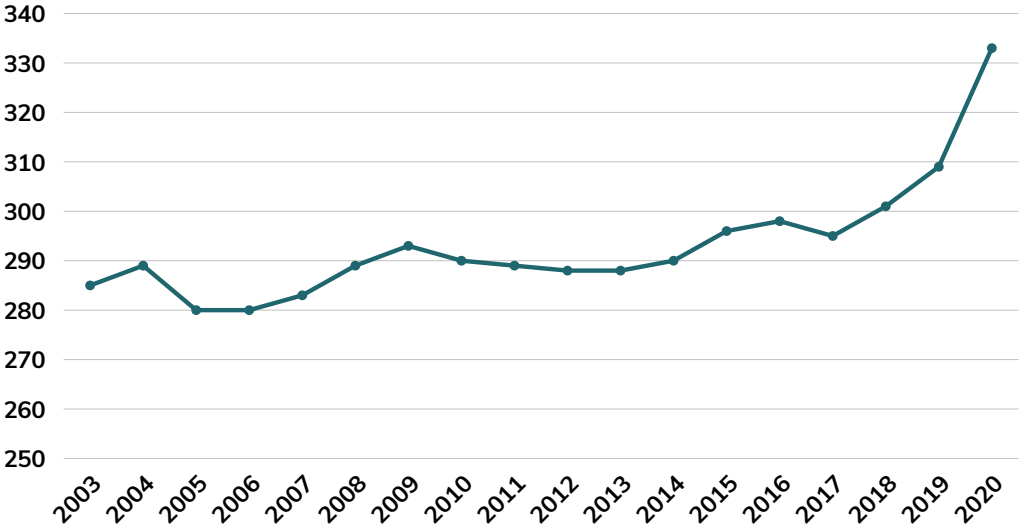
Source: The State of American Friendship: Change, Challenges, and Loss: Findings from the May 2021 American Perspectives Survey



We're Spending More Time Alone...

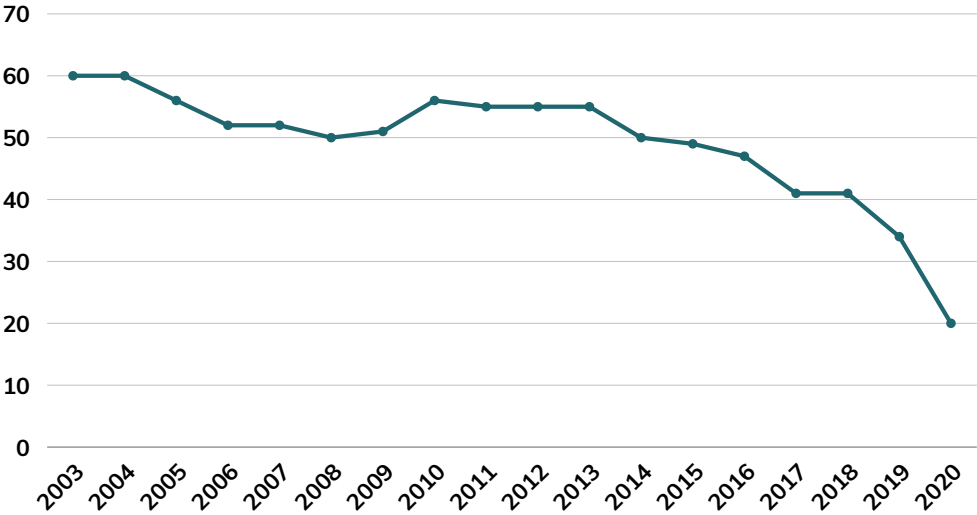
Americans are increasingly spending less time with friends in-person and more time online. In 2003, survey respondents reported spending an average of 60 minutes per day in-person with friends, a figure that declined to 20 minutes per day in 2020 (the pandemic did not significantly alter this trend – the 2019 figure was 29 minutes). Time spent in isolation increased from 285 minutes per day in 2003 to 333 minutes by 2020.

Average Time Spent Alone, in Minutes



...and Less Time With Friends

Average In-Person Time Spent With Friends, in Minutes



Source: Kannan VD, Veazie PJ. "US trends in social isolation, social engagement, and companionship – nationally and by age, sex, race/ethnicity, family income, and work hours, 2003-2020. SSM Popul Health. 2022 Dec; Figures are daily averages for each year.



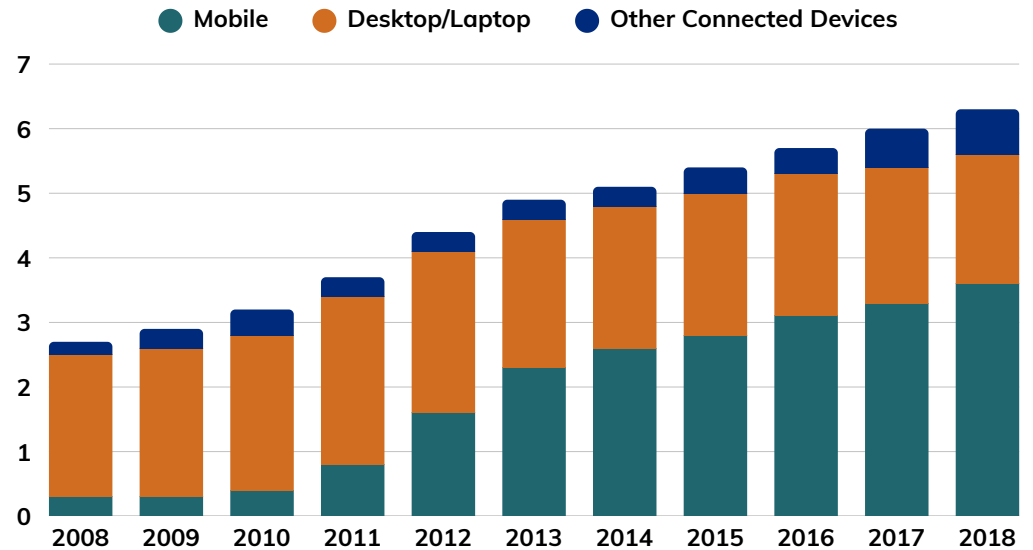
More Time Online Means Less Time Spent Together

Smartphones are now ubiquitous in our daily lives, with over 90% of US adults owning a smartphone, up from roughly 35% in 2011. The convenience and utility of these devices account for their overwhelming adoption worldwide, but many researchers have begun to identify how overreliance on smartphones, particularly social media-based usage, detracts from real life socialization.

People of all ages increasingly spend more time online. Roughly 70% of adults in the United States report using a social media platform of some type, compared with only 5% in 2005.

These technologies have many benefits, such as connecting people from marginalized groups or geographically isolated communities. Potential harms, such as negative impacts on mental health have yet to be fully established by rigorous evidence, but there is a growing popular consensus that excessive time spent online is not only suboptimal but actively harmful.

Daily Hours Spent with Digital Media in the United States



Source: BOND internet trends (2019); Average daily hours spent engaging with digital media (e.g., images and videos, web pages, social media apps, etc.) The data for 'other connected devices' includes game consoles. Mobile includes smartphones & tablets. All data includes usage at home and work for people 18 and older.

Despite their benefits, online-only spaces are not a substitute for in-person connection. We need other people. Our evolutionary history is a social one. Yet despite this innate need for human connection, we are forging fewer deep connections with others. Scrolling social media is far too often a substitute for conversation and connection, often becoming a time-consuming habit that ultimately does not provide long lasting important connections. Chatting with friends on Facebook does not provide support the way in-person friends could. In-person gatherings cannot be replaced with online spaces.

People Feel Lonelier and Less Connected to Their Communities

In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory report highlighting the significant public health challenges created by loneliness and social isolation. The report, “*Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation*” highlights sobering evidence on the costs of frayed social connection, including data suggesting that a lack of social connection can increase the risk of premature death as much as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. The report notes that self-reported loneliness and isolation is more widespread than major health issues such as smoking (12.5% of U.S. adults), diabetes (14.7%), and obesity (41.9%). Social isolation just among older adults accounts for an estimated \$6.7 billion in excess Medicare spending annually, largely due to increased hospital and nursing facility spending, while school age and the workforce population suffer from lower academic achievement and worse work performance.

Only
16%
of Americans say
they feel “very
connected” to their
community



Figure 12: Xanadu Roller Rink in Brooklyn, NY provides a space for local dj's to perform while persons of all ages enjoy some roller blading and dancing with friends.

Third Places Can Provide Vital Social Infrastructure

So how can we counteract these disheartening social connection trends in our cities and towns? To combat this trend of social isolation and loneliness, we can provide accessible and enjoyable spaces in our communities that compel people to get out from behind the screen and participate in-person (or “IRL” in internet parlance) with neighbors, friends, and community. Establishing, promoting, investing in and protecting third places is a critical tool the Capitol Region must prioritize to help create communities where social connections are not only easier, but more fulfilling and a natural part of everyday life.

Supporting and Creating Third Places in Your Community

Given the importance of third places and their risk of decline, municipalities should actively and intentionally work to cultivate these critical community assets. Planning and zoning commissioners, economic development commissions, chambers of commerce, city/town council members, elected leadership, and town staff all play a role in supporting third places. Below are several actions cities and towns can take that are supported by the 2024 Regional POCD and CEDS.

Getting Started

Tasks requiring little time or financial commitment that can be completed by individual staff or small commission working groups

Inventory Existing Third Places in Your Community. You can start with a fun and engaging activity – ask commissioners and residents about their favorite third places in the community. Ask where they enjoy spending time and why. Consider developing broad categories for organizing existing third places (e.g., publicly vs. privately owned, outdoors vs indoors, etc.). This inventory can inform future strategies for creating and even recruiting various types of third places.



Brainstorm How to Encourage Desired Third Places. Once your inventory is complete, ask what types of third places your community lacks. Use this opportunity to make a “wish list” and consider asking questions such as:

- What type of spaces might you need more of?
- What would make the area a place where you would hang out?
- Does your community have demographics or social groups that would benefit from dedicated spaces?
- Is there a lack of public seating?
- Is there a need for shade?
- Is the light in the area too dim to feel safe at night?
- Would decorative lighting enhance the aesthetics?
- Would you feel comfortable allowing children to run around freely?
- Does your downtown/town center/village have a coffee shop where people linger or a bar to unwind after a long shift?
- How do we get the places we identified here?
- Who are some partners, entrepreneurs, or local businesses we can work with to attract these uses?
- Can we host any events to connect entrepreneurs with investors and local property owners?

Meet With the Owners of Third Places. For third places that are commercial enterprises, it is important to understand their business model and what barriers they face in terms of regulations. Many commercial third place-type businesses operate on thin profit margins and are not always equipped to navigate potentially onerous permitting requirements. Hearing their perspective will help your community determine if your regulations should be revised to better encourage third place development.

Talk with Residents about Third Places. Start a conversation with residents about the types of third places they value and would like to see developed in your community. Over time, this can build the necessary support for subsequent steps such as revising land use regulations or planning public investments.

Taking the Next Step

For communities willing to invest more staff and commission time to reducing third places barriers

Review Site Plan and Design Standards to Encourage Unofficial Third Places as Part of Private Developments. Where appropriate, municipal regulations should encourage the development of informal accessible shared spaces, such as pocket parks, areas to sit, pedestrian market plazas, and gardens. Tools such as density bonuses or expedited permitting could be used to incentivize the inclusion of such spaces in private development, while land banking and municipal purchasing can be used to publicly acquire the space to introduce uses like pocket parks.

Audit Zoning Regulations to Identify Barriers. Planning and Zoning Commissions could identify regulations that might make it difficult for third places to thrive and expand. For example, allowing bars in proximity to transit makes gathering easier due to increased accessibility, but also can reduce incidents of drunk driving. Does your zoning allow small, neighborhood-scale retail in certain residential zones, or do residents in your community need to drive across town just to meet friends for coffee? Conversely, is housing allowed in areas that host amenities like sandwich shops and pharmacies? If not, consider zoning that supports people accessing uses and amenities in proximity to where they live. Finally, allow for fun activities! Do your residents have a place to dance, or does your community more resemble the town of Bomont in *Footloose*? The communal aspect of having a variety of accessible, fun activities should not be discounted. Allowing uses like dance clubs, poolhalls, gaming venues, bars and recreational uses in downtowns, or town centers, not only increases vitality but makes them more economically resilient, as they can more easily adapt to shifts in consumer preferences.



Update Your Plan of Conservation and Development. Amend or update the Plan to include the benefits of third Places and goals and actions to support their retention and creation. Incorporate quantitative and qualitative data into the Plan. Look to CRCOG's 2024 Plan of Conservation and Development, along with this guide, for language on the benefits of third Places.

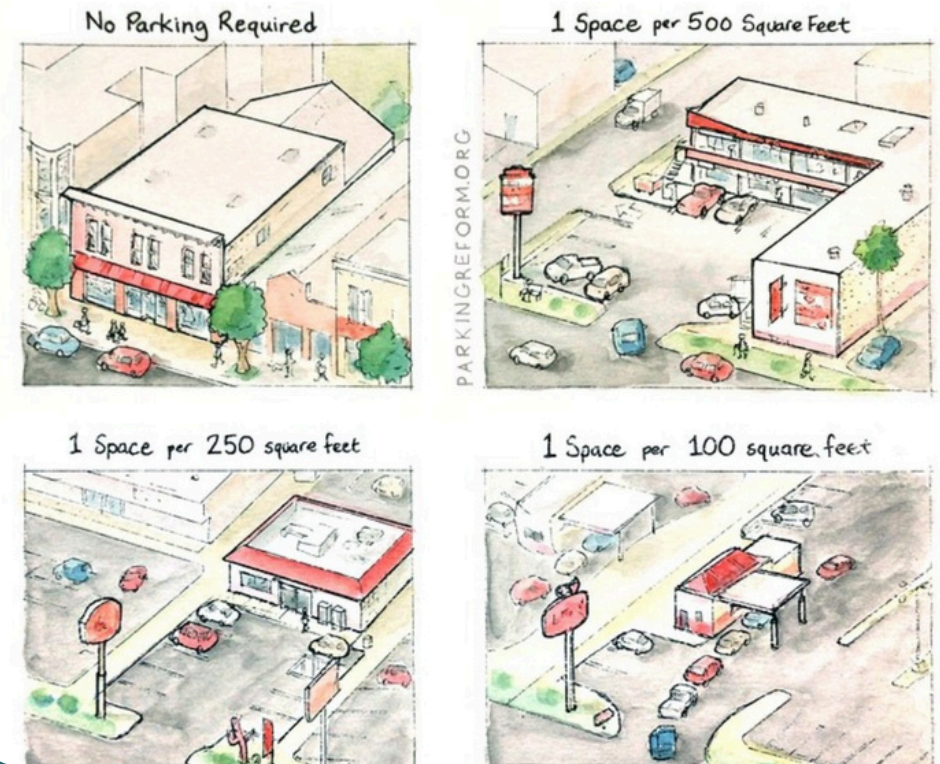
Adopt (and Measure) Social Connection as an Outcome. Success in economic development is often measured in dollars invested and jobs created, but there are other measures of success. Activity and social connection should be considered for benchmarking a project's success - are people coming out more and lingering longer in spaces meant for activity? How many people do you see take a seat and stay to chat? Measuring this requires municipal staff to conduct field work to ask meaningful questions. Even collecting qualitative / anecdotal data and including it in "existing conditions" analyses in a local Plan of Conservation and Development is a great start in the discussion of third places. This solution aligns with measuring the Regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy's action of providing spaces that create a strong network for spurring creative talent.

"All In" Actions

For communities exploring significant regulatory changes or capital investment that would likely require broader community buy-in.

Reduce or Find Alternatives to Minimum Lot Sizes or Floor Areas.

Given modest profit margins, reducing lease costs are often critical for the financial sustainability of retail operations and small businesses. The average square footage of a ramen shop in Japan is only 385 square feet, the average cafe in New York City is in-between 600 and 1000 square feet. We need to account for a diversity of entrepreneurial talent in the region which may have differing operational costs and profit margins. Flexible minimum floor size regulations allow emerging talent to appropriate funds best suited to fit their business model.



-Alfred Twu illustrates the impacts of parking requirements on streetscapes.

Eliminate or Significantly Reduce Parking Mandates. While driving is a necessity for many, places that overemphasize convenience for drivers are typically hostile to comfortable socializing. Very few people inherently enjoy hanging out in parking lots and no one stops for a chat on a turnpike. Beyond safety and comfort, reducing parking mandates makes economic sense. Parking is expensive to build and maintain. Parking mandates create undue cost and spatial burdens for local developers and small business owners. The evidence is clear that excessive parking requirements drive up development costs and makes many worthwhile projects unviable. Best practices such as fee-in lieu of parking, shared parking, or phased parking plans (where the developer can incrementally increase parking as necessary over time as evidenced by demand) are viable alternatives to traditionally inflexible parking requirements.

Proactive Public Investment. The public sector can play a major role in reinvigorating third places by proactively investing in placemaking and improving the public realm. While zoning regulations can help encourage private investment to create third places, municipalities can lead in the creation of public third places. However, not all third places need (or should be) privately-owned commercial entities. Public spaces can support forging connections and a distinct sense of place, but proactive public investment is necessary. If you don't currently have welcoming public space, your community can make it! A great example is investing in pocket parks, a small outdoor space typically no more than ¼ of an acre usually surrounded by commercial and residential development, accessible to the public, and serves as a quick escape to nature. Wide sidewalks and public plazas are also investments of different scales that could create a greater sense of place to support third places. Municipal Plans of Conservation and Development (POCDs), Open Space plans and capital improvement plans can and should identify opportunities to invest in town owned property to create more inviting and engaging public spaces.

Comprehensively Evaluate Your Permitting Process for Unintended Roadblocks. Complicated permitting can delay or prevent development from building altogether, especially smaller businesses operating on smaller margins and with fewer resources. Fee-based permits, especially those requiring a public hearing, can create an additional barrier for developers. In addition to land use regulations, building, fire, and health permit approval processes should also be evaluated for potential bottlenecks. By reducing the cost of permitting, the development process becomes more efficient for developers and ultimately encourages the type of development your community desires. Municipalities should focus on reducing the number of uses which require a special permit to expedite the permitting process for land-use, building, fire, and health codes.

Support Programs to Prevent Quality of Life Concerns. In the Region we have seen some venues close due to noise complaints or be denied due to strict noise regulations. A proactive partnership between venues and the community can ensure an occasional unfortunate incidence of poor behavior does not become the norm, without completely banning these types of social hubs.

To assist with noise complaints, community liaison programs can be used to help facilitate noise complaint conversations between neighbors and venue managers before the presence of the police is necessary, similar to that of urban 311 systems. With noise complaints better managed, third places could be allowed to stay open later which would make a great difference for both the businesses with slim profit margins, as well as young professionals looking for a greater night life presence in the region. These services can be regionalized to help support cost efficiency.



Conclusion...



Third places are not only important economic assets, but they are vital for social, mental and civic health. They come in many shapes and sizes, each serving people with different hobbies, interests, and backgrounds. Not every community wants or needs the exact same types of third places, but wherever people live they need places to connect with others. If we want towns with a strong sense of community and resiliency, we must support space for third places. This should be viewed as critical work for improving the health and wellbeing of our neighbors and ourselves.

We hope this report encourages our member municipalities to recognize the important roles that third places play in community well-being and start to identify local third places to protect, preserve, and promote. Our region is fortunate to have a number of third places that can serve as examples for others to emulate. As we work to promote economic growth, resiliency, and vitality for our communities, remember that an abundance of accessible third places is an essential ingredient.

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