

— Community —
Heart & Soul™

RESOURCE



For Heart & Soul Process Phase



Fostering a Sense of Community



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Mission

The Orton Family Foundation seeks to empower people to shape the future of their communities by improving local decision-making, creating a shared sense of belonging, and ultimately strengthening the social, cultural, and economic vibrancy of each place.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ORTON FAMILY FOUNDATION

The Orton Family Foundation is a small family operating foundation that invests in practices that enhance the ability of citizens to participate in local decision making. Our initiative, Community Heart & Soul™: Guided by What Matters Most, is a new approach to community planning and development designed to help people in small cities and towns navigate change in a way that honors their connection to community and upholds the unique character of each place.

The Foundation wishes to thank the many individuals, local elected and appointed officials, community volunteers, and likeminded practitioners, non-profits, foundations and trade organizations that have contributed in countless ways to our development of the Community Heart & Soul approach.

A special thank you to the residents, volunteers, and leaders in our nine Community Heart & Soul Towns who learned with us—on the ground—to evolve the Heart & Soul method presented in this Field Guide. We could not possibly have done it without all of you, a community of inventive, determined people.

Finally, deep gratitude to Lyman Orton—founder, board chair, and funder of the Orton Family Foundation—for his generosity, passion, and patience. Community Heart & Soul would be a dream, not a growing reality, without his persistent belief in the regular folks who live and work in America's small towns.

Learn more about Heart & Soul at orton.org/heart-soul

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A community with Heart & Soul™ fosters a sense of community.

What does it mean?

A sense of *community*, like community spirit or community pride, is characterized by a feeling of emotional connection to a place and its residents. Where there is a sense of community, residents value their relationships to others in the area, care about the community's well being and are interested in its future. A sense of community is anchored by a culture of good will that cuts across political or cultural differences and even

embraces them. A strong sense of community is often described by the ways that people work together or are friendly with each other, but it can also be seen on display around town: busy parks and sidewalks; packed bleachers at the high school game; celebrated historic buildings; street fairs and parades; well papered bulletin boards; memorials, and public art are all physical evidence of a sense of community.

What does this matter?

A strong sense of community builds social wealth, or social capital. Quality of life can be high in a community with plenty of social wealth, regardless of more tangible factors such as financial wealth (or scarcity). Volunteerism is a product of social wealth. Active participation in civic activities and governance is a product of social wealth. Social wealth means that relationships

translate into both formal and informal social safety nets. By contributing to a community's quality of life, sense of community is also an important economic development advantage—new families and businesses are drawn to places that evince a strong sense of community.

What can a community do?

Fostering a sense of community is not about singing around the campfire with the planning committee, it is something that takes a long time to develop and can be nurtured through physical and social planning. Physical planning can support everyday relationship building and reinforce community history and geography. Everyday relationship building happens in parks and public places that are comfortable, accessible, and inviting. Social interaction happens more when people can

safely walk down the street, cross paths at a café, or yell “good morning” from their front porch. Shared history and experience is reinforced through public art and protection of heritage sites. This physical stage of parks, sidewalks, porches, cafes, and art is set and regulated by the local government. The social stage—such as youth programs, online forums, welcome-to-town committees, or community pot lucks—is set by local government and community organizations.

Setting goals and taking action

Below are potential actions that can support a sense of community. They are organized within five broad goals. This guide provides a review of each action.

Links to examples and additional resources are also provided.



website



pdf



book



video

GOALS

ACTIONS

Support everyday relationship building

- Promote sociable downtowns
- Encourage 'porch and fence zoning' for residential areas
- Make neighborhoods more walkable
- Throw neighborhood/block parties

Reinforce a shared experience of place

- Encourage community festivals and parades
- Support public art
- Encourage interactive, place-based learning
- Identify and protect places of cultural significance

Be more accessible and welcoming

- Promote inclusive/accessible places
- Promote an inclusive/accessible government
- Start a welcoming committee

Create sociable gathering places

- Develop a public square
- Build sociable neighborhood parks
- Build a community hall or neighborhood house
- Encourage third place businesses and organizations
- Create online forums

Promote community stewardship

- Hold a volunteer day
- Coordinate efforts to help






Goal Support everyday relationship building

Promote sociable downtowns

Downtowns and other commercial districts can be the hub of social interaction or they can just be a giant vending machine that pops out goods and services. Sociable downtowns are comfortable: they have wide sidewalks; slower traffic; places to sit; and trees and storefront canopies for shelter. Sociable downtowns

are also engaging: they have sidewalk cafés; balconies overlooking the street; storefronts that open out to the street; and small plazas to sit and eat lunch. These characteristics can all be encouraged or discouraged through land use and zoning policies.

Examples

-  [Outdoor Dining Design Guidelines—Alexandria, Virginia](#)
-  [Main Street Colorado program](#)
-  [Main Street Maine program](#)
-  [Design guidelines for pedestrian-oriented business districts—Kirkland, Washington](#)
-  [Complete Streets resources](#)

Encourage "porch and fence zoning" for residential areas

This term is borrowed from several form-based zoning codes. It refers to the idea that good neighborhoods encourage social interaction by having houses that face the street. This can be regulated through zoning or other land code ordinances, but the essential elements include: houses with front doors facing the street; front porches or balconies that overlook the street and encourage residents to sit out there and see their neighbors; well-defined but transparent boundaries between

public and private spaces such as low fences, plantings, or changes in elevation; open sightlines between the street and the front door or front porch (no tall dense hedges, tall fencing, garages, or car parking); and, minimal setbacks from the street so that the separation from porch to passers-by is within "talking distance". Many older urban neighborhoods and more recent Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) projects model this kind of residential area.

Examples

-  [Albemarle County, Virginia—The Neighborhood Model sections 6-6](#)
-  [Traditional Neighborhood Design factsheet](#)

Make neighborhoods more walkable

It is very hard to meet someone when you are passing each other in your cars (some people do meet by accident, but this is not always a friendly exchange). One of the many benefits of walkable neighborhoods is that neighbors tend to pass each other frequently enough

to become friendly, maybe even friends. Neighborhoods can be made more walkable in a number of ways: slow down traffic; build and maintain sidewalks; build shortcuts to parks and stores; and plant trees along the street to provide shade.

Examples

-  [Complete Streets resources](#)
-  [Walk Score](#)

Throw neighborhood/block parties

Block parties are a way for neighbors to meet each other and celebrate their small corner of the larger community. Many communities support block parties by allocating time for traffic control and providing

"how-to" instructions for residents. Block parties are often combined with green up activities or the launch of Neighborhood Watch groups and civic programs.

Examples

-  [Portland, Oregon block party info](#)
-  [Golden, Colorado block party application packet](#)

Goal Reinforce a shared experience of place

Encourage community festivals and parades

Festivals are important social events that reinforce bonds to each other and to the place itself. These events can celebrate food, music, film, community assets or community history, and they do not have to be on the Fourth of July! Efforts to spruce up for an annual celebration can have year-round benefits in terms of

temporary public art, cleaner streets, or repainted signs and facades. A celebration can also change public perceptions of place, generating pride among locals and new interest from visitors and can highlight a unique tradition or aspect of a place.

Examples




-  [DIY Street Fair—Ferndale, Michigan](#)
-  [Pumpkin Fest & Regatta—Damariscotta, Maine](#)

Support public art

Public art can include many things—traditional memorials and statues, creative sculpture or signage, giant paintings, or custom-made lamp posts. Public art that encourages a sense of place is usually not "off the shelf", it is creative and inspires contemplation or wonder or learning. There are more new ideas for public art than there are communities in North America: there are blackboard walls with chalk (the free speech wall);

poems inscribed on stair risers at the library; lines painted on building walls to show historic flood elevations; buildings made to resemble hamburgers; bike rack sculptures; and artistic manhole covers. Public art can be implemented as a one-off installation or as a broad, community-wide program, and can be regulated by encouraging its inclusion in new development projects.

Examples





-  [Englewood, Colorado code requiring public art](#)
-  [Flickr 'public art' photo pool](#)
-  [Art in public spaces—Bend Oregon](#)

Encourage interactive, place-based learning

Place based learning can prompt residents to explore and better understand and celebrate their community's history, ecology, and culture. Place-based learning can happen on location, on the web, or through programs or activities at the library, for example. Examples include quests and geocaching, storytelling events, online

community mapping, cell phone applications that provide local information, historical tours, ghost tours, telephone poles with historic flood heights, community video projects, community-wide scavenger hunts, or interpretive public art.

Examples




-  [Upper Valley quests](#)
 -  [Museum in the streets](#)
 -  [Community almanac](#)
 -  [Info on community video projects](#)
-

Identify and protect places of cultural significance

Places of significance can include historic buildings, indeed these are typically the focus of this kind of action, but there may be other locations and places worth protecting that are not necessarily buildings. In some cases, the significant place is a distant landmark such as a mountain peak, and the thing to protect is the view of

it from downtown. In other cases, the place is a certain kind of landscape that inspires the community's sense of place, such as agricultural fields at the edge of town or the river that flows through it. This action should begin with an inventory of such places, followed by a plan that outlines a preservation strategy.

Examples

-  [Manteo sacred site mapping](#)
 -  [Protecting local scenic resources—Friends of Mid-Coast Maine](#)
 -  [The Roadscape Guide—Tools to preserve scenic road corridors](#)
-

Goal **Be more accessible and welcoming**

Promote inclusive/accessible places

This refers to the idea that public places should be welcoming and accessible to everyone. Inclusive places can ensure that diverse people—including young people or seniors—are represented and considered in community programs and recognized as being a part of the com-

munity. Basic examples include universal accessibility at least in the public realm, safe street crossings for kids and seniors, playground equipment for disabled children, and signs posted in multiple languages.

Example

-  [ADA accessibility guidelines](#)
-

Promote an inclusive/accessible government

An inclusive government would actively help residents who experience barriers to participating in government or accessing local services (see Resource: [Encouraging Inclusive, Open Government](#)). Simple materials such as a newcomers guide, offered in multiple languages, can

be especially useful for those who are new to the community or may feel like outsiders. Other resources may include municipal websites offered in multiple languages, translators (including sign language) at public meetings, or a special help line for non-English speakers.

Examples

 [Newcomer's guide—Vienna, Virginia](#)

 [Newcomer's guide—Vancouver, British Columbia](#)

Start a welcoming committee

Welcoming committees work to help new community members feel like they belong and understand how to access resources such as trash collection, social services,

or summer recreation programs. Local merchant often will contribute gifts for the committee to distribute.

Goal Create sociable gathering places

Develop a public square

Public squares and village greens in downtowns and neighborhood centers are timeless gathering places, a central stage for developing a sense of community. These are the places where people rendezvous or sit for lunch, hold markets, hear local musicians, watch mov-

ies in the park, and judge the parade. Public squares can be developed in reclaimed, underused spaces such as parking lots along Main Street or the lawn in front of the library.

Examples

 [Fair Haven Village Green—Bellingham, Washington](#)


 [Project for Public Spaces article on public squares](#)

Build sociable neighborhood parks

In larger or more dispersed communities, small neighborhood parks or pocket parks can create local gathering places—an open space to go where you might meet your neighbors. In many examples, neighborhood parks include playgrounds, community gardens, and simple

communication devices such as bulletin boards, which are created and maintained by volunteer neighborhood groups. Park lands can be created from undeveloped lots, unused parking lots, or in the yards of public buildings such as the town hall.

Example

 [Planning for parks, recreation, and open space in your community](#)

Build a community hall or neighborhood house

Community Halls are a classic community amenity that offer multi-use spaces for a wide variety of activities, both public and private. In larger or more dispersed communities, Neighborhood Houses are a smaller version of a Community Hall, located within certain neighborhoods. These can be managed by municipal staff or non-profit organizations, and can often be located in

a repurposed existing building such as an old church. In some cases, the function of a Community Hall can be provided as a room or suite of rooms within a larger development of privately owned or leased housing and commercial spaces. The rooms are donated to the community as an amenity contribution by the developer.

Example

 [Kitsilano neighbourhood house—Vancouver, British Columbia](#)

Encourage third place businesses and organizations

Where the first place is the home, the second place is work, the third place is the local café, bar, or any other place where people congregate and socialize. Third place businesses are an anchor for social networks and friendships and can become cultural landmarks over time. Third places are also gateways into the community

for newcomers. Communities can support these businesses in numerous ways: by relaxing parking standards or permit fees that prohibit their expansion, providing tax incentives, or by providing business by renting space for meetings or purchasing their products.

Examples

 [The Great Good Place by Ray Oldenburg](#)

 [The Good Life: Third Places](#)

Create online forums

Online forums are known to build relationships across the globe, but some internet forums are designed specifically to connect neighbors. Examples such as i-Neighbors and Front Porch Forum, as well as town

Facebook sites are successfully helping community residents share ideas and coordinate community building efforts.

Examples

 [i-Neighbors](#)

 [Front Porch Forum](#)

Goal Promote community stewardship

Hold a volunteer day

Volunteer days can be coordinated by the town, a community organization, or a local business association. Volunteers can be organized around a single task, such as cleaning up a park or a waterfront, or planting a garden. With enough volunteers and coordinators,

multiple projects can span the community. Some organizations, for example, will match volunteers specifically with a family in need of household repairs, such as painting the siding or patching the roof.

Example

 [Lend a Hand Day—El Cajon, California](#)

Coordinate efforts to help

This action is intentionally broad since there are so many ways that community organizations, municipalities, and volunteers can coordinate with each other to support community residents and businesses. Local churches team up to provide a daily lunch service. A non-profit starts a “211” help line to link people to

services. A school service club rakes lawns for seniors. A fundraiser is held to support a business damaged by fire. Whatever the activity is, the local municipality can support these efforts in various ways—by offering coordination or publicity support, public spaces for meetings, or trucks from Public Works for example.

Example

 [Community response to a local farmer’s barn burning down](#)

Learn More

 [The Land Information Access Association—Building a Sense of Place](#)

 [Project for Public Spaces](#)

 [The Townscape Institute—Publications](#)

 [National Trust for Historic Preservation—What is Main Street and Why It Matters](#)

 [Citizen's Handbook: Practical Assistance for Those Who Want to Make a Difference](#)

