

Creating Resilient Communities: 3 Pillars to Build On

A healthy and sustainable community ecosystem incorporates a dynamic system where social, environmental, economic and cultural components interact in a balanced and regenerative way to support long-term well-being and resilience for both people and the environment. It's essential for resilient communities to embody the following pillars:



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Cherry Creek West is a 13-acre mixed-use redevelopment.

1. Inclusive green infrastructure. Walkable neighborhoods with mixed-use development, safe bike paths, public transit, and abundant green spaces where people can recreate. The outcome is promoting physical and mental well-being and a reduction in environmental impact.

2. Vibrant local economic systems. Creating policies and programs that encourage entrepreneurship and workforce development through supporting local businesses, cooperatives and sustainable jobs.

3. Engaged community. Community forums, co-design initiatives and educational programs strengthen social bonds and ensure solutions reflect the needs and values of the people they serve.

These can be found in enhancing and redeveloping places across the country, varying in scale and complexity. In my second-quarter design trend column, I'm sharing a few of our current projects, including Cherry Creek West in Denver, Main Street 2.0 in Houston, and the Benjamin Franklin Parkway in Philadelphia. These examples demonstrate how we are integrating the three essential pillars to create and maintain healthy and sustainable communities.

■ **Cherry Creek West Development** is a great example of how Denver is encouraging healthy, sustainable community ecosystems. This project recently received governmental approval for rezoning, which allows it to move forward. Demolition is scheduled to begin in the next few months, with build-out happening over the next decade. After completing the initial master plan in 2021, the Design Workshop team engaged in the design phase by reimagining the public realm facilities and programming.

Located on the southwest corner of the Cherry Creek neighborhood, Cherry Creek West is a 13-acre mixed-use redevelopment. When completed, it will feature about 825 residences, 600,000 square feet of office space, 100,000 sf of retail, underground parking with over 2,000 spaces, and 4 acres of programmed open space. The goal is

to make Cherry Creek West a 15-minute community where people can live, work, recreate, go to school, get medical care and gather within a 15-minute walk or bike ride.

Cherry Creek West will serve as a gateway to the vibrant Cherry Creek neighborhood and provide a meaningful connection to Cherry Creek, one of Denver's premier public greenways. Through creative placemaking this development will seamlessly integrate into the existing neighborhood and natural environments that surround it. In essence, we are working to fill a gap in the public realm offerings currently found in the Cherry Creek neighborhood by creating a comfortable place to hang out for a few hours and connect to the natural beauty of this place.

■ **Main Street 2.0 in Houston** is another example of how a city is incorporating a sustainable community ecosystem. The Design Workshop team led the initial planning and design study to understand the technical, operational and visionary needs of the project. It resulted in guidelines that set a cohesive vision in place. Implementing those guidelines – with a focus on maintenance and safety, accessibility and placemaking – will establish Main Street as the everyday gathering place for residents and visitors. Main Street is an exciting opportunity as it serves as a vital transit corridor and a historic roadway with a significant character that the city is committed to preserving.

The Main Street 2.0 project builds upon what started during COVID-19 to transform a makeshift outdoor dining experience into a permanently revitalized pedestrian promenade. Now, 11 blocks of Houston's downtown area are on their way to becoming a linear, pedestrian promenade. The planning process has benefitted from extensive stakeholder engagement to capture input from all community members. Construction will begin this summer.

We collaborated with Downtown Houston+ and local businesses to design versatile spaces that can be enjoyed both day and night. A key aspect of the enhancement includes significantly increasing trees, shade, and landscaping to create inviting and comfortable environ-

ments. A central focus of the project is enhanced connectivity, accomplished with the strategic incorporation of the distinct “gateway” element at Commerce Street. The historic birthplace of the city of Houston and a site for public celebrations, this gateway site will build on Allen Landing’s legacy as a beloved gathering space in time for the upcoming FIFA Men’s World Cup 2026.

■ **Benjamin Franklin Parkway**, originally envisioned as Philadelphia’s Garden, is a 1-mile-long boulevard that runs through the cultural heart of the city and has served as an important public space for the citizens and visitors of Philadelphia. Yet, as the city of Philadelphia approaches its 250th birthday, this beloved public space is in decline, choked with high-speed automobile traffic. The parkway’s green spaces are fragmented by roadways, devoid of amenities and lacking features to draw visitors.

The reenvisioned parkway plan dramatically reduces the presence of the automobile within this great space, offering a people-centric approach that significantly improves the appeal, use, traffic safety, functionality and beauty of the parkway. Proposed changes include:

- Creating protected bike lanes for slower-moving cyclists and space for pedestrians to stroll and push baby carriages or jog on a soft surface path.
- The central spine of the parkway will eventually see

a reduction in lanes with accommodations for parades and celebrations.

- Continuous gardens will be revived, with the potential for these green spaces to become the Commons, a great botanical garden for Philadelphia.

- On-site stormwater treatment through green infrastructure, native plants will predominate in the new gardens, and air quality will be improved to align with sustainable sites’ criteria.

- Clusters of new facilities for food service, café, kiosks, and food trucks are combined with bus stops, bike stations and lockers, bathrooms and other amenities to accommodate visitors.

Designing healthy and sustainable community ecosystems is essential because it fosters long-term well-being by integrating environmental protection, economic vitality, social equity and public health into the fabric of everyday life. These communities reduce pollution, support local economies, promote physical and mental wellness, and ensure that everyone – regardless of income or background – has access to essential resources to thrive. By building resilience to climate change and empowering inclusive local decision-making, they help future-proof neighborhoods while nurturing a strong sense of community, belonging and shared responsibility for the planet. \\

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