

Bringing America together through stronger public spaces

Nearly every trend line shows the U.S. is in the grips of increased economic segregation, social isolation and economic inequality.

Americans are more segregated by income than ever before.¹ Research shows that both income and racial segregation have a negative effect on children's income as adults.² By becoming increasingly segregated by income, we are moving away from opportunity.

This at a time when health researchers are pointing to the direct link between social isolation and physical and mental illness, even premature death.³

While the trends of economic and demographic segregation pull us apart, the opportunity to bring America together is right in front of us in civic assets—our parks, trails, libraries and community centers. These places have suffered from long-term underinvestment, meaning communities cannot deliver on the full potential of these shared public places.

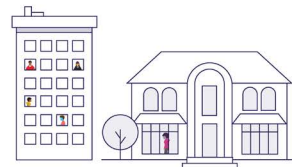
“In Akron, we have prioritized our public spaces because the investments we make in them have a protective function in our neighborhoods. These places are not just where people gather, but are central to our social, economic and environmental policy goals.”

- Mayor Dan Horrigan
CITY OF AKRON

We've designed our communities in ways that make opting-out of community life easier than opting-in.



Americans spend less time with their neighbors.⁴



We rarely encounter people of different backgrounds.⁴



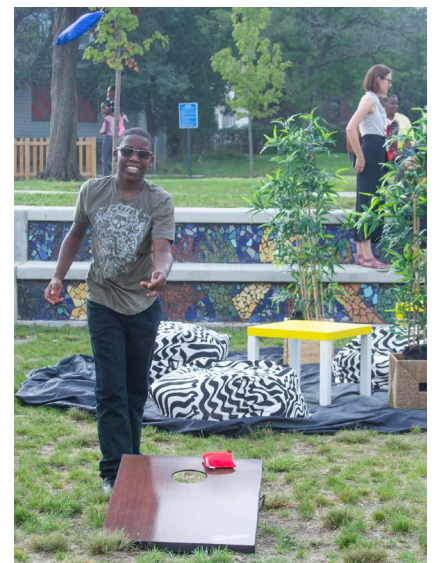
We trust each other less.⁴

Public space improves health and happiness

Americans report greater happiness in states that invest in public spaces like parks and libraries—and this happiness is shared by everyone in a community, not just those who visit the park or library.⁵ People living in communities with more public green space have less mental distress, less anxiety and depression and greater wellbeing.⁶ Access to green space could even reduce the incidence of psychiatric disorders.

Green spaces are also associated with greater trust of strangers and can help promote social connections and mitigate social isolation.⁷ In fact, lower income communities with high levels of green space have mortality rates similar to those of higher income communities.⁸

And you don't need access to undeveloped wilderness to get these benefits—even a transformed vacant lot will do.⁹



**Reimagining
the Civic Commons**

Public space is good business

High quality public space is in high demand because it provides significant economic benefits to communities. Eighty-five percent of U.S. residents identify proximity to high quality parks, recreation centers or public space as an important factor in their decision of where to live,¹⁰ yet 38 percent of Americans say their community lacks convenient outdoor spaces.¹¹

The link between public space and a good economy is also clear: numerous studies have shown that when a property is adjacent to a park or open space, its value is significantly increased by up to 40 percent. Real estate developers are finding that open space can differentiate a development and provide them with a competitive advantage. Seventy-nine percent of surveyed investors believe that open space can act as a “crucial catalyst for economic development.”¹²

Public space is critical infrastructure

Infrastructure is not just roads and bridges, our civic assets are the necessary social infrastructure for our communities. When social infrastructure, like our shared public spaces, is robust, people form strong networks that support longer life expectancy and more resilient communities. But when this social infrastructure is neglected, neighborly interaction is discouraged, and people hunker down to disastrous ends, especially during natural disasters.¹³

Virtually all local government officials (99 percent) agree that their local communities benefit from local parks.¹⁴ Seventy-three percent of Americans say libraries contribute to promoting a sense of connection among different groups in their local community.¹⁵

Our parks, libraries, trails and community centers are more than places—they are vital civic infrastructure. Join us to reinvest in them to bring communities and the country together.

“For decades, we’ve neglected the shared spaces that shape our interactions. The consequences of that neglect may be less visible than crumbling bridges and ports, but they’re no less dire.”

– Eric Klinenberg
RESEARCHER, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

¹ inequality.stanford.edu/income-segregation-maps

² equality-of-opportunity.org/neighborhoods

³ medicalnewstoday.com/articles/318723.php

⁴ cityobservatory.org/less-in-common

⁵ sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0049089X18302801

⁶ ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5663018

⁷ phys.org/news/2019-03-green-spaces-strangers.html

⁸ [thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(08\)61689-X/fulltext](http://thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(08)61689-X/fulltext)

⁹ time.com/5341975/urban-greening-depression-study

¹⁰ nrpa.org/publications-research/research-papers/Engagement

¹¹ uli.org/wp-content/uploads/ULI-Documents/America-in-2015.pdf

¹² americas.uli.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/ULI-Documents/ULI-Case-For-Open-Space_Electronic.pdf

¹³ Klinenberg, Eric. “Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life. New York, New York. Penguin Random House. 2018.

¹⁴ nrpa.org/contentassets/7761bd47adb142aaa62b19d00500fea3/local-officials-report.pdf

¹⁵ urbanlibraries.org/files/ULC_White-Papers_LIBRARIES-TRUST-AND-SOCIAL-CAPITAL.pdf

Reimagining the Civic Commons

A groundbreaking cross-sector group of civic and philanthropic leaders have come together in five U.S. cities to revitalize and connect parks, trails, libraries and other public spaces to advance engagement, equity, environmental sustainability and economic development. Through strategic investments in civic assets we are connecting people of all backgrounds, cultivating trust and countering the trends of social and economic fragmentation in communities across America. Find out how at www.civiccommons.us

Contact: Bridget Marquis, Director, Civic Commons Learning Network, bmarquis@u3advisors.com