

# Reimagining the Civic Commons

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Newly announced investments in public space will address loneliness and nurture trust**

*Documented progress from Reimagining the Civic Commons over eight years  
includes more visitors, social connection and hope*

Reimagining the Civic Commons—a collaboration of national foundations and civic leaders dedicated to revitalizing public spaces in ways that benefit communities—announced its third round of investment today, with national funders allocating nearly \$10 million to be used over the next three years. The funding will support teams of civic leaders in 10 cities to transform public spaces in ways that counteract harmful trends facing America, from social isolation to economic segregation to climate change.

Since 2016, Reimagining the Civic Commons has worked with a network of leaders across the public, private and nonprofit sectors to change how they design, manage and program urban public spaces. [The initiative's innovative model](#) supports cities to invest in civic spaces like parks, trails, community centers, libraries and public gardens in ways that deliver critical social, economic and environmental benefits. The next phase of the initiative is funded by [The JPB Foundation](#), the [John S. and James L. Knight Foundation](#) and [The Kresge Foundation](#).

Launched in 2016 in five cities with an initial \$20 million investment, the initiative expanded to include additional cities in 2020. Cities receiving funding from this round of investment are Akron, Ohio; Camden, New Jersey; Cincinnati, Ohio; Detroit, Michigan; Lexington, Kentucky; Macon, Georgia; Memphis, Tennessee; Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and San José, California.

The cities will use the investments to create or enhance a variety of civic spaces, including trails, parks, community centers, neighborhood main streets, active transportation corridors and public gardens.

Concurrent with the investment announcement, Reimagining the Civic Commons also released [reports showing impacts in three cities](#). Based on data-gathering efforts over eight years, the reports demonstrate that collaborative public space efforts in Akron, Detroit and Memphis are improving neighborhoods and lives. Impacts include an increased number of visitors to public spaces, visitors lingering longer in those spaces, visitors interacting with new people, an increased belief in the importance of civic space to communities and support for greater funding of the public realm. These investments are not only changing the public spaces but also elevating social connection, building trust and generating hope for a better future.

Specifically, the data show:

- In Memphis, weekly yoga classes drew more than 5,000 diverse participants to the city's revitalized riverfront in 2023, with people coming from 37 different zip codes across the region. Further, two-thirds of visitors to the city's civic commons sites say they have met someone for the first time while there.
- In Akron's Summit Lake neighborhood between 2017 and 2023, the percentage of residents who trust local institutions nearly doubled to 57%.
- In Detroit's Fitzgerald neighborhood, 94% of residents say the neighborhood has changed for the better in recent years, compared with just 34% in 2017; 97% feel hopeful about the neighborhood's future.

“For decades, we have seen an increase across America in social isolation and loneliness, and a decline in people's participation in civic life,” said Bridget Marquis, director of Reimagining the Civic Commons. “Yet in these cities, people are connecting across differences of income and race, engaging in local community life and becoming more hopeful about the future. After nearly a decade of collaboration and change, it's clear that intentionally managed public spaces are a part of the solution to restitch America's communities and strengthen our democracy.”

The Reimagining the Civic Commons model represents a paradigm shift in how cities design, program and manage their public spaces. To counteract trends of loneliness, distrust, harmful climate impacts and the economic segregation in American neighborhoods, teams in each city work to:

- Manage public spaces as a portfolio of connected assets rather than as individual sites;
- Collaborate across sectors, agencies and organizations, working together for lasting change;

- Innovate to achieve four key outcomes: civic engagement, socioeconomic mixing, environmental sustainability and value creation;
- Measure progress toward these outcomes;
- Share knowledge and participate in a community of practice composed of public space managers, policymakers, funders, advocates and residents committed to transforming public space.

For more information, visit <https://civiccommons.us/>

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***About Reimagining the Civic Commons.** Reimagining the Civic Commons is an ambitious national initiative demonstrating that strategic investments in public spaces can connect people of all backgrounds, cultivate trust and create more resilient communities. It is a collaboration of [The JPB Foundation](#), the [John S. and James L. Knight Foundation](#), [The Kresge Foundation](#), [William Penn Foundation](#), and local partners. Find tools and inspiration for your city at [civiccommons.us](https://civiccommons.us).*