

INVESTING *in* PLACE

Why Public Space Matters

Physical Infrastructure
Enables Social Infrastructure



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Public spaces

like sidewalks, parks, and community centers are vital parts of our neighborhoods. When we invest in and maintain them properly, these spaces can help support goals related to climate resilience, social equity, mobility justice, and community health and well-being.



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Social

infrastructure includes everything from affordable housing to libraries and public plazas. This idea has gained traction thanks to the hard work of community leaders, sociologists, landscape architects, urban planners and others who've shown how well-designed spaces can bring people together, reduce loneliness, and improve quality of life.



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Studies

on how we interact in public spaces reveal that these areas play a key role in shaping our communities and the way we see ourselves. By focusing on social infrastructure, cities can create more inclusive spaces that make everyone feel welcome and encourage the cooperation needed for communities to thrive.



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Health

Your health largely depends on how you eat, breathe, and move. Do you have access to healthy food and clean air? Is it easy to walk or cycle without risking life and limb? You also need green space, which influences mental health and physical health, and reduces exposure to extreme heat. Our neighborhoods and the built environment have a major impact on our health and well-being ([U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#)).



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Resilience

Green spaces and trees provide shade but require ongoing maintenance and wide, accessible sidewalks. Stormwater management requires thoughtful design to prevent flooding and capture rainwater for beneficial use. Clean energy, through personal and public electric vehicles like cars, bikes, and buses, depends on a well-functioning right-of-way and accessible charging stations. To promote transit, we must improve access by fixing broken sidewalks and adding ramps; enhance safety with shade, shelter, and lighting; respect people by providing public restrooms; and boost reliability with bus-only lanes.



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Connection

Social connection begins with physical connection: the sidewalks, access ramps, and elements of the public right-of-way that give people the ability to safely walk, roll, or ride to a friend's house, to school, to work, to the park, to church. Public spaces hold significant potential for fostering social connections. Whether it's enjoying the shade of a tree, waiting for a bus with friends, or simply observing the bustling life around a park bench, these spaces are vital for nurturing relationships and a sense of belonging.



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Equity

Factors of race, class, and gender create compounded barriers to accessing quality public spaces. LA's low-income and communities of color experience disproportionate rates of severe injuries and fatalities from traffic collisions ([LA's Health Atlas](#)). Two-thirds of LA county's Black and Latino populations live in areas that have disproportionately less green coverage ([UCLA-led study](#)). LA's lower-income neighborhoods of color have the least access to adequate lighting at bus stops because the City has prioritized adding shelter to higher-income neighborhoods with more advertising potential ([UCLA study](#)).



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