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American Planning Association
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Great Places in Pennsylvania

2024 Category Criteria

(Great Public Spaces & Great Transformations)

Great Public Spaces Criteria

What is a Public Space? A public space may be a formal or informal gathering space within a neighborhood, downtown, district, waterfront or other area of a community that is within the public realm, promotes social interaction and community engagement, and fosters a sense of community. Public spaces may be indoors or outdoors, man-made or natural, and provide opportunities for passive or active social interactions. Some examples of public spaces include plazas, parks, public commons, marketplaces, convention centers, monuments, and special areas within public or private buildings.

Nomination Form: The nomination form is the means to describe the planning story and characteristics that make your nominated public space worthy of a Great Places designation. Please use the following criteria to assist with writing your responses. Where possible, quantify the information provided, such as number of visitors, events, activities, and economic impact.

Livable Built Environment: Great Public Spaces are compatible with surrounding land uses, other public spaces, and the community as a whole and are designed to support the quality of life. *Does the public space...*

- Utilize design, scale, form, architecture and other features to create a visually interesting experience that is appropriate to the location?
- Incorporate landscape and hardscape features that are unique or special to the public space?
- Incorporate natural features, topography, and vistas?
- Accommodate multiple types of users by its accessibility and for a variety of purposes/activities?
- Connect to surrounding uses including residential, commercial, and public uses via sidewalks, pathways, transit, or other means?
- Support physical activity and healthy lifestyles?

Unique Characteristics: Great Public Spaces have unique qualities that set it apart from other public spaces. *Does the public space...*

- Convey a sense of importance or extraordinary characteristics that set it apart from other public spaces in the community or region?
- Promote an atmosphere of discovery, inspiration, contemplation, or spiritual reflection?
- Have cultural, economic, historic, or natural importance?
- Incorporate environmentally friendly practices, such as green infrastructure, recycling, and water conservation?

- Promote or act as an example of infill development?
- Conserve or reuse historic resources?

Social Interaction and Interwoven Equity: Great Public Spaces are treasured by their entire community and serve a diverse population's need for safe and healthy recreation and social interaction. *How does the public space...*

- Utilize activities or events to attract people to the space or engage them?
- Encourage users to interact with each other?
- Ensure activities, events, etc. are accessible to residents of the community, regardless of age, income, disability, ethnicity, etc.?
- Provide a sense of comfort and safety to people using the space (ie. traffic calming, lighting, police, etc.)?
- Improve the physical, environmental, and/or economic conditions of the community or neighborhood?

Resilient Economy: Great Public Spaces build a community's capacity to react to changes in economic circumstances by providing a hub for community connections and economic activity. *Does the public space....*

- Provide opportunities for economic activity?
- Support physical activity and healthy lifestyles?
- Attract visitors that support the local economy (# visitors, # events/activities)?
- Serve as a local or regional anchor to spur economic activity in the greater community?

Planning and Authentic Participation: Great Public Spaces reflect the desires of all segments of the community and are designed through a planning process that involves a broad cross-section of community members in analyzing issues, generating visions, developing plans, and monitoring outcomes. *Does the public space (or do its related planning efforts)...*

- Have a plan that has contributed to its development and/or ongoing sustainability?
- Demonstrate the importance of planning through a planning process?
- Involve planners and/or partnerships?
- Engage diverse leadership, participation, and advocacy with the community, including the disadvantaged and underserved?

Great Transformations Criteria

What is a Transformation? A transformation involves revitalizing a place that was not thriving or converting community threats into assets for positive community change. Some examples include a deteriorating shopping center/mall retrofitted into a mixed-use community, a brownfield converted to a community park, a vacant industrial building transformed into apartments, a failing commercial or industrial corridor reenergized to become economically viable, or a rejuvenated neighborhood. Transformations, which begin with a vision, strengthen communities and the local economy.

Nomination Form: The nomination form is the means to describe the planning story and characteristics that make your nominated transformation worthy of a Great Places designation. Please use the following criteria to assist with writing your responses.

Form & Function: *How does the transformation...*

- Connect and fit with surrounding neighborhoods?
- Utilize design, scale, form, architecture, and other features to create a visually interesting and environmentally friendly place?
- Incorporate natural features, landscaping, and streetscaping?
- Accommodate multiple uses/activities for a variety of purposes?
- Serve as a gathering place?
- Accommodate connectivity and/or accessibility to surrounding uses, such as residential, commercial, and public, as well as transit systems and trails?
- Incorporate historic or cultural features?

Unique Characteristics/Strategies: *Does the transformation...*

- Have a sense of importance or extraordinary characteristics that set it apart from other transformations?
- Connect to places of cultural, historic, or natural importance?
- Include innovative ideas, methods, and/or techniques?
- Serve as a site for any special programming or events?
- Demonstrate any unique revitalization strategies?

Environmental and Sustainable Practices: *Does the transformation...*

- Have public/private or multi-municipal investment or commitment for ongoing operations, maintenance, and environmental stewardship?
- Incorporate green infrastructure (i.e. pervious pavement, natural buffers, native plants)?
- Support economic development and vitality of the community?
- Affect the creation of new local businesses?

Planning: *Did or does the transformation....*

- Demonstrate the importance of planning? Did the transformation evolve through a planning process?
- Involve planners and/or partnerships?
- Engage diverse public participation and civic engagement?
- Build synergy in the community?
- Include any special zoning or state/local programs that were important to success?
- Utilize any smart growth or innovative planning tools?