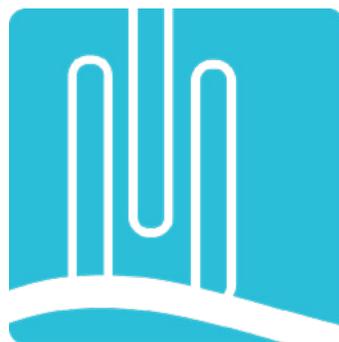


# THE IMPORTANCE OF PLACEMAKING AND PUBLIC SPACE IN A PANDEMIC



downtown  
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Two years ago, practitioners and planning students from around the world gathered in Wuhan, China, for Placemaking Week to reimagine the future of Chinese cities. The participants did not, however, predict that in just twelve months, Wuhan would become the epicentre of COVID-19, a world-pandemic that would threaten the very idea of placemaking itself. Every day, the pandemic tests our ability to improvise and adapt. **Businesses must plan and design for the unknown.** While compromised, creative use of public space has become integral for providing Downtown businesses an opportunity to expand their offering. This report looks at the imperative need for creative placemaking and flexible public space in response to COVID-19.

## The Role of Public Space

Following the Coronavirus pandemic, people around the world are mourning the emptiness of public space and demanding its use. Public space includes parks, roads, sidewalks and squares. These locations offer visitors open and **shared access for exercise, relaxation and travel.** Redesigning and reopening these spaces to allow safe social interaction will help maintain these spaces' economic value while improving overall community wellness.

## Economic Value

Safe, vibrant, well-designed public spaces drive economic growth. High-quality public spaces create benefits for the greater community. In the US, for example, **public parks provide a 5-20% increase in property value** by attracting residents, businesses and private investment, generating jobs, and lowering infrastructure costs.<sup>1</sup> Public space not only offers a location to visit but also area for businesses to safely expand operations outdoors. So too, public space promotes local tourism by providing a safe, aesthetic, leisurely place for visitors to explore Downtown.<sup>2</sup> With travel and

delivery restricted, more residents are looking to Downtown for restaurant, retail and entertainment options. **How will we respond?**

## Urban Isolation

Isolation and feelings of loneliness can increase the risk of depression and reduce connection to the community. Social distanced use of public space is critical for maintaining mental health.

## What is Placemaking?

Placemaking works to reimagine and reinvent public space to **maximize shared value.** A great place offers sociability options, multi-use activities, accessibility, connectivity and comfortability.<sup>3</sup> **Initiatives are low-cost but high impact.** While COVID-19 has gathering restrictions, there are several ways placemaking can continue:

- **Pop-Ups:** develop a pop-up outdoor retail location, public park, take-out booth, drive-in theatre or concert.
- **Empty lots:** convert curbside parking stalls or loading zones into outdoor seating, social distanced activity areas or community programming centers.
- **Urban Farm:** create a communal outdoor garden for visitors to visit, grow and share fruits and vegetables.
- **Public Art:** coordinate with local artists to add art or public service announcements to boarded up storefronts.

## Flexibility is Key

With a significant opportunity to experiment, Downtown businesses can quickly adapt products and services to fit changing needs. When designing for the unknown, taking small, incremental steps is important.<sup>4</sup>

**Beyond reopening, we must consider how to reimagine and repurpose our system to allow for greater flexibility long-term.**

<sup>1</sup> Why are Parks Important to Cities? Mayors For Parks.

<sup>2</sup> Public Space as a Driver for Urban Economies. Learning UCLG.

<sup>3</sup> What is Placemaking? Project for Public Spaces.

<sup>4</sup> Tactical Urbanism by the Street Plans Collaborative. Issue.

# TAPE, PLASTIC, TRAFFIC CONES AND SPRAY PAINT

## Tools to Liberate Your Space

Armed with tape, plastic, traffic cones and spray paint, cities are redefining the shape, boundaries and land-use patterns of public space. These tools provide greater flexibility to business owners to operate safely. Below are a few examples of how to use these new tools:

### Prevention

Use tape and plastic wrap to block restricted areas and unnecessary touch points.

### Protection

Use plastic barriers to protect employees and facilitate safer in-person interactions.

**Tip: Think about how you can use colour to communicate different messages.**

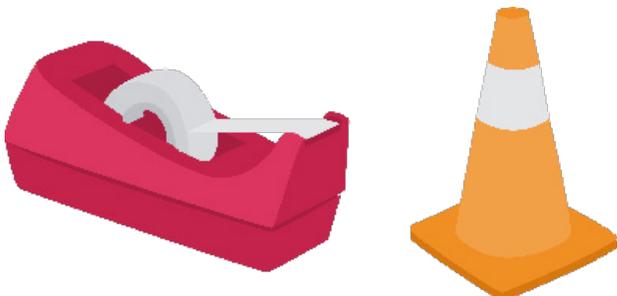
### Direction

Use traffic cones to direct travel, indicate a walking path, mark a location for queuing or highlight entrances/exits.

### Expansion

Use tape, temporary spray paint or chalk to outline pickup areas, standing room and patio space.

Use these tools to **imagine, test and experiment** with potential enduring changes to your business.



## WORLD TRANSFORMATIONS Reframing Public Places

### Outdoor Restaurants and Bars

**WINNIPEG, Canada**

The city of Winnipeg allowed restaurant owners to extend patios and add tables outdoors at a safe distance. [LINK](#)

### Pop-Up Bike Lanes

**BOGOTÁ, Colombia**

Columbia's capital added 76km of temporary bike lanes to lower public transit intake and prevent the spread of COVID-19. [LINK](#)

### Portable Pantries

**TAOS, US**

Community groups created a "no-touch food-sharing" network using portable sidewalk pantries for neighbours to take from and refill. [LINK](#)

### Repurposed Streets

**TORONTO, Canada**

Toronto announced a new program called "ActiveTO" which will close 50km of quiet streets to provide pedestrians more space. [LINK](#)

### Transformed Parking Lots

**PRINCE GEORGE, Canada**

Prince George created an entertainment space by turning an empty parking lot into a drive-in theatre. [LINK](#)

### Adapted Fences

**BERLIN, Germany**

Neighbours turned local fences into message boards and sharing centres to provide needed items and information to those in need. [LINK](#)

### Increased Green Space

**SAN FRANCISCO, US**

City officials opened nine public golf courses as parks to increase social distancing use and enjoyment of green space. [LINK](#)