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## WHAT IS PLACEMAKING AND HOW CAN IT HELP COMMUNITIES GROW THROUGH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT?

*Two of the country's leading experts on the subject share insights on this important trend in commercial real estate.*



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David J. Wilk, CRE, MAI, is National Chair of Corporate Real Estate and Advisory Services for Sperry Van Ness and Corporate Valuation Advisors. Wilk is a real estate management consultant who creates value in today's market by focusing on real estate strategies that generate new earnings, cost savings and shareholder value. He provides valuations and market studies, economic development strategies for municipalities through repositioning key properties, and marketing/branding strategies that optimize challenging real estate assets.

### What do you mean by “Placemaking” to foster economic development?

In today's real estate market, the most important decision people make is the place they choose to live. Communities seeking new economic development and job growth must position themselves to attract new residents by becoming a place of innovation and creativity.

Real estate is the “currency for economic development and job creation” in today's economy. Creatively

**Placemaking** – A movement that reimagines public spaces as the heart of every community, in every city. It's a transformative approach that inspires people to create and improve their public places. Placemaking strengthens the connection between people and the places they share. – *Project for Public Spaces*

**Creative Class** – The socioeconomic theory by economist and social scientist Richard Florida that identifies those who create for a living, the “creative class,” as an emerging economic force. According to Florida's book, “The Rise of the Creative Class,” this creative workforce comes from a variety of areas including engineering and science, education, small business, architecture, arts and entertainment.

repositioning under-productive real estate assets through “Placemaking” economic development strategies will stimulate new demand and private investment in communities.

Generating new demand for under-productive real estate remains a major challenge during these uncertain economic times. That is why understanding the importance of “Placemaking” and the “Creative Class” to driving real estate demand is essential today, since the most important decision in people's lives today is where they choose to live. Communities that recognize this new market paradigm, and develop innovative real estate and “Placemaking” strategies targeting the “Creative Class,” will capture more than their fair share of future market demand, economic growth and new jobs.

### Who are the players and how do we translate the concept into economic development for communities?

Corporations, universities, government, and healthcare providers also play a critical role today in “placemaking”, attracting the “Creative Class,” and developing ecosystems that drive economic development. The challenge facing many communities today is how key stakeholders can take corporate location decisions, downsizings, facility closings, and consolidations and turn them into exciting and innovative new value creation strategies that result in future social value creation and community benefits.

Fostering new economic development and private investment in communities can be accomplished through bringing key stakeholders together and developing innovative strategies that bring new jobs and real estate value to communities who are struggling to find pathways to economic growth by:

- Creating strategic marketing plans and new “market stories” that transform under-productive real estate assets into economic development catalysts that attract new investment.
- Developing “Placemaking” and branding strategies that help communities “tell their market story” and articulate “why” someone would want to choose to locate their company or family there.
- Exploring how corporate, governmental, and university real estate decisions can foster new economic development, business entrepreneurship and acceleration, and

social value creation through rebranding real estate (university research parks, city labs).

### Are these strategies only good for communities with beaches or mountains?

The above initiatives can be customized to fit the unique attributes of any community. Creating “market stories” that capture the essence of an area will lead to catalyst projects that spark new energy and excitement. When communities push for economic development, they often start by commissioning a study with pretty pictures and “blue sky” plans. A more effective way to create new economic development is to create a “wow” market story that “placemakes” the area into a compelling place for companies and professionals to locate.

Creating a “market story” for your community that resonates with today’s lifestyle, professional and personal choices is not easy, but it is the key to future economic development and growth. Without the market story or brand, why would anyone choose your real estate product? The answer is they won’t unless you “hook” them by becoming a great place. Real estate professionals are here to show you the way to achieve this objective.



#### Peter Kageyama

Author of “For the Love of Cities”  
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Peter Kageyama is the co-founder and producer of the Creative Cities Summit, an interdisciplinary event that brings together citizens and practitioners around the big idea of the city. He is the former president of Creative Tampa Bay, a grassroots community change organization. He has spoken all over the world about bottom up community development and the amazing people that are making change happen.

### Why does love matter in city making?

Because love makes things better. If you love something you will be a better caretaker, you will forgive shortcomings in something/someone you love and you will fight for something you love. If more people fall in love with their places, they will go above and beyond ordinary levels of citizenship and do something, perhaps even something extraordinary for the place they care about.

### Any simple solutions for better places?

Increase the opportunities to people watch and you make better places. Human beings are endlessly fascinated by each other and if you account for our nature in your planning and design, you will make spaces that are inherently “better.” And this can be applied to existing places as well.

### What can ordinary citizens do?

We have made city making into something that seems beyond the ordinary citizen. Most people believe that placemaking, city building is a complex process that is done by



mayors, city managers and other professionals. These professionals are operating from a fairly set playbook but the rest of us are not encumbered by the same ideas, traditions, rules and regulations. We need more citizens to step up and make something happen because they see and approach the problem differently and can be a real source of civic innovation and creativity.

### In making a more vibrant downtown should we start with retail or residential?

I always ask cities which do they want more of — retail or residential. Their answer is what they should start with. Build from strength. If you have more retail than residential, work to increase those numbers, upgrade the existing quality of retail and use that to encourage more residents. If you have more residential, how can you expand the demographic of those residents which in turn can attract a new kind of retail? These are symbiotic — one inherently impacts the other.

### You speak about dogs in cities. Why are dogs important in city making?

Unlike cats, birds and fish, we have to walk our dogs and in doing so we get outside, we use the sidewalks, the parks and green spaces which creates a sense of activity and energy in places. And we interact with each other. Dogs are amazing ice breakers and conversation starters. Go to your local dog park and you will see one of the most social and egalitarian places in your entire community. There is also safety. Dog walkers become the “eyes of strangers” that Jane Jacobs wrote about and because they are out there we feel safe as we walk the streets. Dogs in cities humanize cities for the better. ☺



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