Creating Quality Places: Successful Communities by Design

Communities across the metropolitan Kansas City area are growing. Our challenge is to shape future development in ways that will maintain and enhance the high quality of life that our residents enjoy.

Creating Quality Places is intended to foster dialogue and action, resulting in positive changes in the region’s built environment. The program began in 1999 when the Mid-America Regional Council convened a broad range of participants to develop a series of quality design principles.

These 20 principles form a set of affirmative statements and represent a powerful consensus on what is needed to design successful neighborhoods, vibrant mixed-use commercial areas and efficient transportation systems -- all within a healthy natural environment.

The principles are grouped into four categories:

- **Homes and Neighborhoods**
- **Commercial Areas**
- **Transportation and Public Places**
- **Environmental Quality**

These areas are presented separately, but are integrated in practice. For example, a clean and healthy environment is a prerequisite for any type of development. Successful, enduring places often incorporate a mix of land uses, adding vitality to the investment and to the community.

The Creating Quality Places principles are adaptable to any community. This program provides elected officials, planners, private developers and builders with a variety of resource information to facilitate implementation of these principles. Among the resources are case studies documenting local and national project examples, model ordinances, design standards and financing mechanisms.
Homes and Neighborhoods

Neighborhoods are the building blocks of a community. They are more than subdivisions, and are defined as much by the sense of community they create for their residents as by the structures, streets and amenities within their boundaries. Quality neighborhoods offer choices, provide residents with a sense of identity and connections, and encourage continuous renewal and reinvestment.

The Principles:

Choice and Diversity: Quality neighborhoods offer a choice of well designed and maintained housing types and sizes. More>>

Linkages: Quality neighborhoods are linked to surrounding areas, sharing commercial and open spaces. More>>

Reinvestment: Quality neighborhoods encourage actions to preserve, conserve and redevelop. More>>

Identity: Quality neighborhoods have distinct identities that define boundaries and foster pride among residents. More>>

Green Space: A variety of public green spaces are within easy access in a quality neighborhood. More>>

Pedestrian/Bike Friendly: Streets are pedestrian-friendly, interconnected and attractively landscaped to encourage walking. More>>

Live/Work: Quality neighborhoods offer the opportunity for residents to work and live within the neighborhood. More>>
Commercial Development

A quality commercial area is achieved through attention to its design, mix of uses, scale and the ways in which pedestrians, bicycles, public transit and motor vehicles are accommodated.

The Principles:

**Mixed Use:**
Residents can work and live within the neighborhood when the scale and character of business settings are compatible with homes. [More](#)

**Scale:**
Quality developments are integrated within their surroundings, yet flexible enough to accommodate a mix of uses. [More](#)

**Durability:**
Quality places are built to last with quality materials, are designed to allow for changing uses over time, and provide for shifting markets and consumer needs. [More](#)

**Walkability:**
Wide sidewalks, storefronts that open to the street, shade and shelter make the pedestrian feel comfortable in quality shopping areas. [More](#)

**Parking:**
Convenient parking choices consistent with the scale of the development, the location and the type of stores are important to quality commercial development. [More](#)
Transportation and Public Places

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The Principles:

- **Multimodal:** A quality transportation system balances automobiles, public transit, freight, public safety vehicles, pedestrians and bicycles. [More]>

- **Local Streets:** Quality local streets are an integral part of a larger network of routes designed to provide access to homes, shops and businesses. [More]>

- **Bicycle/Pedestrian Access:** Quality local streets encourage pedestrian and bicycle use through features that reduce apparent street width and protect pedestrians from moving traffic. [More]>

- **Transit-Supportive Development:** Quality local streets complement a regional public transit network and allow transit to become a viable alternative to the automobile. [More]>

- **Public Spaces:** Quality public spaces encourage social interaction and foster a distinct sense of place. They include amenities that provide comfort and relaxation in all seasons. [More]>

**Smart Moves** is a regional plan for a transit system that seamlessly connects people with the places they need to go.

**Transit-Supportive Development** rethinks land use and development patterns so they will be effectively served by a balanced transportation system where walking, bicycling, and riding transit work in harmony with the private automobile.
Environmental Quality

Because a clean and healthy environment is a critical element of a quality place, the design of quality places balances environmental, economic and social considerations.

The Principles:

**Water and Air Quality:**
Quality places incorporate features and amenities that minimize environmental impacts on water quality and on air quality. More>>

**Resource Efficiency:**
The design of buildings and properties maximizes the efficient use of environmental and economic resources. More>>

**Natural Elements:**
A quality place preserves major natural features as open space, and links those resources to public places by pedestrian and bike paths. More>>

Related Projects

In 2003, MARC began developing a Natural Resources Inventory of digital map data showing valuable natural resource assets and ecological features in the Kansas City region.

**MetroGreen** is a proposed 1,144-mile interconnected system of public and private open spaces, greenways and trails designed to link seven counties in the Kansas City metropolitan area.
Discussion Starters

The Creating Quality Places committees used the following questions in their discussions of project principles. You may find these questions to be useful in local discussions about how the principles may be applied in your community.

Homes & Neighborhoods Discussion Starters:

- Can we learn from the best features of our older neighborhoods and identify better ways to accommodate our expected growth?
- Can we create a greater mix of housing types and higher overall densities in neighborhoods to make more efficient use of public infrastructure and services and to support more effective public transportation?
- Can we design better homes, homes that are durable and whose design is appropriate to the character and scale of their neighborhood or community?
- Can we connect uses and activities within neighborhoods in ways that encourage residents to walk?
- Can we design neighborhoods that allow workers to live closer to their jobs and that minimize travel time to and from work?

Commercial Development Discussion Starters

- Can we learn from the best features of our older neighborhoods and identify better ways to accommodate our expected growth?
- Can we create a greater mix of housing types and higher overall densities in neighborhoods to make more efficient use of public infrastructure and services and to support more effective public transportation?
- Can we design better homes, homes that are durable and whose design is appropriate to the character and scale of their neighborhood or community?
- Can we connect uses and activities within neighborhoods in ways that encourage residents to walk?
- Can we design neighborhoods that allow workers to live closer to their jobs and that minimize travel time to and from work?

Transportation & Public Spaces Discussion Starters

- Can we design our transportation system to make room for public transit, bicycles and pedestrians?
- Can we design neighborhoods and commercial areas that create the environment for motor vehicles to travel at low speeds?
- Can we design places that reflect the needs of pedestrians and that re-introduce public places in our cities, neighborhoods and suburbs?
- Can we design places that support an increased use of transit?

Environment Discussion Starters

- Can we design and develop places in which the conservation or restoration of the natural environment is integral to the overall quality of the place?
- How can the design of our communities protect natural
resources, spur economic development and provide vital public gathering places at the same time?

• Can we change the mentality of how the environment is considered in urban development projects?