



## FIELD GUIDE 3

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# Placemaking

Leveraging the natural and built environment to positively impact individual and community health. Capitalizing on the foundation of tangible and intangible heritage.

**Saskatchewan Economic Development Alliance(SEDA)**



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## ThriveSask Partners



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## The ThriveSask Program

***"When a community takes the time to get to know itself, it gains a sense of identity and purpose that informs decisions about its future."***

*Lyman Orton, founder and chairman, Orton Family Foundation*

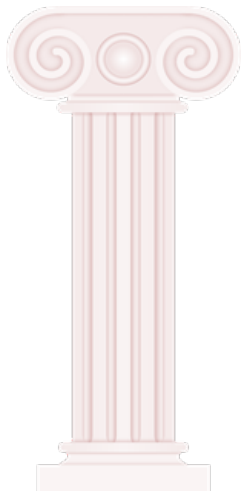
ThriveSask is a program convened and facilitated by the Saskatchewan Economic Development Alliance (SEDA). ThriveSask uses a heritage based action planning framework to guide community development efforts. It aims to harness the social, economic, physical, and cultural assets that set a place apart, and ultimately leads to tangible outcomes that benefit the entire community.

In developing this program, we were inspired by the commitment of many people and organizations. They include the Main Street Program in its various iterations in the United States, Canada (and Saskatchewan) as well as the Heart & Soul Initiative offered by the Orton Family Foundation. Our four

Field Guides draw from these and other resources which are annotated throughout the publications.

ThriveSask encourages communities to take steps to enact long term change, while also implementing short term, inexpensive and place-based activities that support the local business sector and create a sense of enthusiasm and momentum about the community. There is something special about every community. This unique sense of place – where people came from and who they are today – is the living heritage we draw from in the ThriveSask action planning process. Our values, beliefs and way of living we have inherited from past generations inform the present and our choices for the future.

The strength of any community lies in the hands of its residents. These Field Guides align with the program pillars and will support your efforts.



**LEADERSHIP** Formal and informal leaders must be future focused to chart the course and engage citizens in the process. Leaders are action oriented, accountable and partnership driven.

**ECONOMIC VITALITY** A multi-dimensional approach that recognizes economic, environmental and social well-being are interdependent. Asset based with a lens on local and regional market dynamics. Investment ready and entrepreneur friendly.

**PLACEMAKING** Leveraging the natural and built environment to positively impact individual and community health. Capitalizing on the foundation of tangible and intangible heritage.

**PROMOTION** Engaging residents as well as non-residents in celebrating the unique cultural heritage of each community. Supporting local economies.

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## **Saskatchewan Accredited Economic Development Organization (SAEDO)**

SAEDO is an optional program which recognizes professional excellence in municipalities and economic development organizations. Earning the stamp of approval increases the visibility of your economic development efforts with businesses, political leaders, funders and local residents.

The ThriveSask Program is aligned with SAEDO. Benchmarks outlined in each of the four Field Guides are those which require to be met in the accreditation process.

The accreditation process consists of two phases:

1. Documentation Review. Applicants submit documents supporting achievement of benchmarks in each of four areas: Leadership; Economic Vitality; Placemaking and Promotion.
2. Review Team Visit. Certified Saskatchewan Economic Developers will conduct an onsite assessment.

Successful applicants will receive:

- Exclusive use of the SAEDO logo.
- A plaque to proudly display your achievement.
- Recognition on SEDA's online assets and Annual Report.

A one-time accreditation fee applies which includes cost of travel for a review team visit. Successful applicants are expected to participate in a documentation review every three years.

## **Field Guide 3**

The majority of content within this field guide can be attributed to the work of the Project for Public Spaces(PPS), the preeminent knowledge keeper of placemaking worldwide for over forty years. The following six elements will guide your way forward:

1. Evaluate key spaces and identify issues
2. Have a vision
3. Experiment along the way
4. Heritage conservation
5. Design guidelines
6. Obey the rules....or change them

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## How do we define placemaking?

We agree with the Orton Family Foundation in their assertion that “all disciplines converge around place”. Placemaking transcends any one discipline and instead focuses on overall community wellbeing. The local character of a community is about how a community or neighborhood looks and feels. A single building can have its own character, but a community’s character is the composition of many buildings, streets, parks, plazas, trees, gardens, views—essentially anything in the built or natural environments<sup>i</sup>.

Community character can be orderly and dignified, it could be exuberant and creative, it can be some of both, and it can vary from one part of town to another. It can be anchored by an architectural style such as Boomtown facades or Victorian houses, or it can be anchored by a feature in the landscape such as a river or a prairie landscape view. The ‘intangible character’ of a community is usually the first thing that visitors notice in a community, and one of the first things that residents of that community will embrace<sup>ii</sup>.

Is placemaking a process or a philosophy? It can be viewed as both. It is centered around observing, listening to, and asking questions of the people who live, work, and play in a particular space in order to understand their needs and aspirations for that space and for their community as a whole<sup>iii</sup>.

### Evaluate key spaces and identify issues<sup>iv</sup>

# 1

SECTION

The Project for Public Spaces(PPS) maintains that communities need ‘destinations’ that give an identity and image to their locales, and that help attract people – as well as businesses, and investment. A destination might be a downtown square, a main street, a waterfront, a park, or a museum. In evaluating thousands of public spaces around the world, PPS has found that to be successful, they generally share the following four qualities: **they are accessible; people are engaged in activities there; the space is comfortable and has a good image;** and finally, **it is a sociable place:** one where people meet each other and take people when they come to visit.

PPS developed The Place Diagram located on page 8 as a tool to help people evaluate any place, good or bad. We suggest that communities and downtown organizations start here, with an evaluation of your key ‘public spaces’. Depending on the size of your community, you may have multiple public spaces to evaluate, and we urge you to assess each one.

#### ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

##### Comfort and Image

A space that is comfortable and looks inviting is likely to be successful. A sense of comfort includes perceptions about safety, cleanliness, and the availability of places to sit. A lack of seating is the surprising downfall of many otherwise good places. People are drawn to places that give them a choice of places to sit, so they can be either in or out of the sun at various times of day or year.

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### Questions to consider about Comfort and Image:

- Does the place make a good first impression?
- Are there as many women as men?
- Are there enough places to sit? Are seats conveniently located? Do people have a choice of places to sit, either in the sun or shade?
- Are spaces clean and free of litter? Who is responsible for maintenance?
- Does the area feel safe? Are there security personnel present? If so, what do these people do? When are they on duty?
- Are people taking pictures? Are there many photo opportunities available?
- Do vehicles dominate pedestrian use of the space, or prevent them from easily getting to the space?

### **Sociability**

This is the most important quality for a place to achieve—and the most difficult. When a place becomes a favorite spot for people to meet friends, greet their neighbors, and feel comfortable interacting with strangers, then you are well on your way to having a great place.

### Questions to consider about Sociability:

- Is this a place where you would choose to meet your friends? Are others meeting friends here?
- Are people in groups? Are they talking with one another? Do they talk to people in other groups?
- Do people seem to know each other by face or by name?
- Do people bring their friends and relatives to see the place? Do they point to its features with pride?
- Are people smiling? Do people make regular eye contact with each other?
- Do many people use the place frequently?
- Does the mix of ages and ethnic groups generally reflect the community at large?
- Do people tend to pick up litter when they see it?

### **Uses and Activities**

A range of activities are the fundamental building blocks of a great place. Having something to do gives people a reason to come (and return) to a place. When there is nothing interesting to do, a space will sit empty. That's the best measure that something is wrong. A carefully chosen range of activities will help a place attract a variety of people at different times of the day. A playground will draw young kids during the day, while basketball courts draw older kids after school, and concerts bring in everyone during the evening.

### Questions to consider about Uses and Activities:

- Are people using the space, or is it empty?
- Is it used by people of different ages?

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- How many different types of activities are occurring at one time—people walking, eating, playing baseball, chess, relaxing, reading?
  - Which parts of the space are used and which are not?
  - Is there a management presence, or can you identify anyone in charge of the space?

### Access and Linkages

A great public space is easy to get to, easy to enter, and easy to navigate. It is arranged so that you can see most of what is going on there, both from a distance and up close. The edges of a public space also play an important role in making it accessible. A row of shops along a street, for instance, is more interesting and generally safer to walk along than a blank wall or an empty lot. Accessible spaces can be conveniently reached by foot and, ideally, public transit, and they have high parking turnover. Effective wayfinding signage is also a key attribute of accessible communities of all sizes.

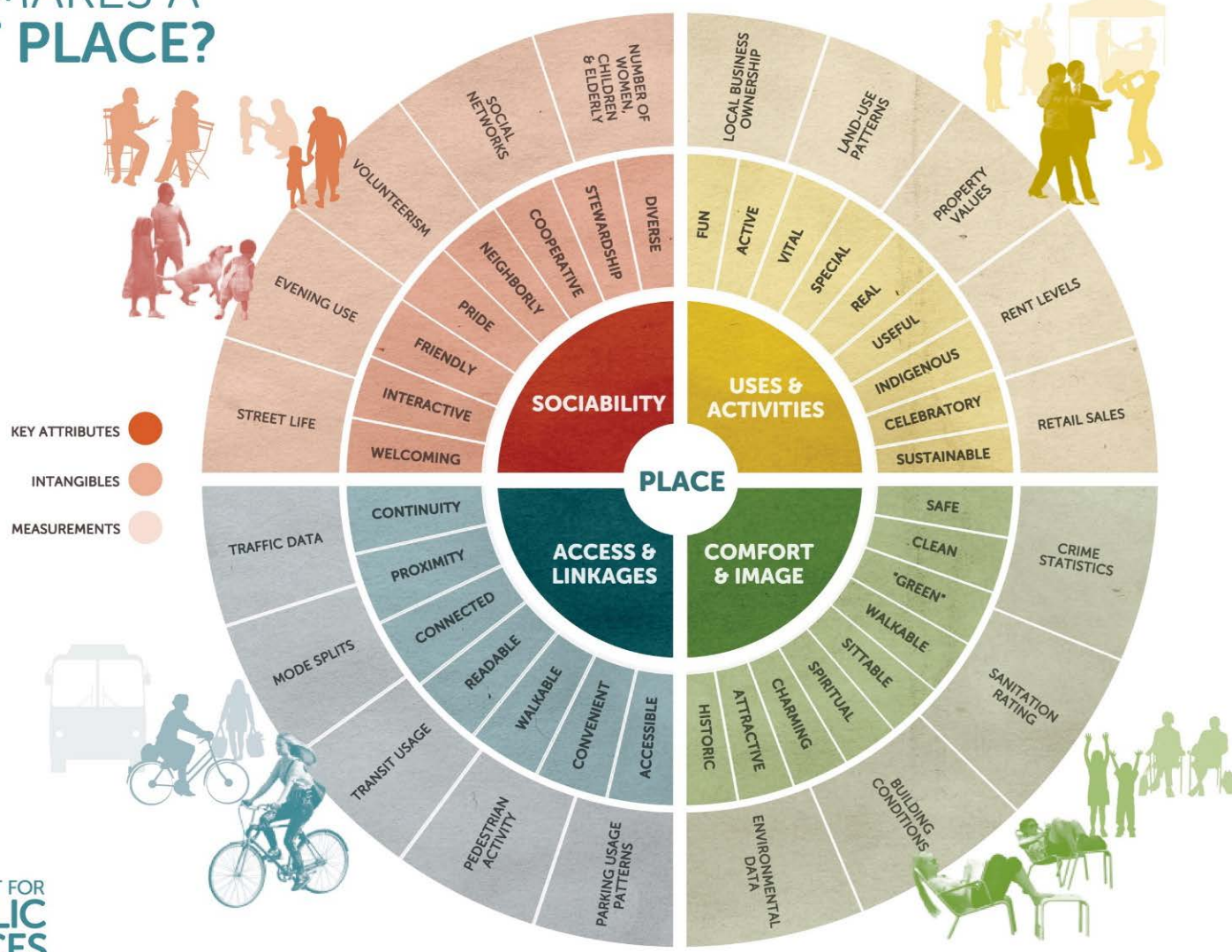
#### Questions to consider about Access & Linkages:

- Can you see the space from a distance? Is its interior visible from the outside?
- Is there a good connection between this place and adjacent buildings? Or, is it surrounded by blank walls, surface parking lots, windowless buildings, or any other elements that discourage people from entering the space?
- Do occupants of adjacent buildings use the space?
- Can people easily walk there? Or are they intimidated by heavy traffic or bleak streetscapes?
- Do sidewalks lead to and from the adjacent areas?
- Does the space function well for people with disabilities and other special needs?
- Do the paths throughout the space take people where they actually want to go?
- Can people use a variety of transportation options—bus, train, car, and bicycle—to reach the place?

### **BENCHMARKS**

- Evaluate your key public spaces according to the aforementioned criteria.

# WHAT MAKES A GREAT PLACE?





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## 2 SECTION

### Have a vision

Working with local residents to create a vision around the places they view as important to community life and to their daily experience is key to building a strategy for implementation. The vision needs to come out of each individual community; however, essential to a vision for any public space is an idea of what kinds of activities might be happening in the space, a vision that the space should be comfortable and have a good image, and that it should be an important place where people want to be. It should instill a sense of pride in the people who live and work in the surrounding area.

Authenticity plays a critical role in creating a downtown or community vibe that is uniquely appealing. It is easy to replicate what others have done but it is much more rewarding to dig deep and develop a special place that no one else can replicate by celebrating local built and intangible heritage, which reinforces the story of your community. The oftentimes hidden character of the community discovered in early conversations with community residents can be used to guide placemaking efforts ranging from signage and public art to special events and building facades.

Consider the distinctive qualities of the area's heritage and try to identify what creates the "sense of place" that is so special, prevalent, and unique. Consider what it is that holds your community to its history, the elements that continue to be evident, elements from years past, elements that speak of the building's history and character, and of the community's unique identity<sup>v</sup>. These are the features and "character-defining elements" that warrant respect, and potential rehabilitation, and conservation.

Generally speaking, to make an under-performing space into a vital "place," physical elements must be introduced that would make people welcome and comfortable, such as seating and new landscaping. Consideration to changing the pedestrian traffic flow may be required to build inclusivity amongst local businesses and attractions. The goal is to create a place that has both a strong sense of community and a comfortable image, as well as a setting and activities and uses that collectively add up to something more than the sum of its often simple parts.

*Additional stakeholder consultation prior to moving ahead with public space initiatives is recommended and/or after testing ideas on a temporary basis.*

#### **BENCHMARKS**

- Ensure a vision for your key public spaces are articulated. This may be incorporated within an official community plan or master plan – or simply included in your action plan documents.

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# 3 SECTION

## Experiment along the way

Short term, experimental improvements can immediately bring benefits to public spaces and the people who use them, and inform longer term improvements over time. Elements such as seating, outdoor cafes, public art, community gardens and murals are examples of improvements that can be accomplished in a short time<sup>vi</sup>.

**Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper (LQC)** is a term for community/place-based projects that are simple, often short-term and always low-cost. They are basic immediate solutions; the possibilities are endless and unique to any given community.

LQC projects can simply showcase what it would be like to bring people to a forgotten public space through the purchase of a few tables and chairs or shutting down a roadway to host an outdoor yoga workshop. Temporary LQC projects can also be implemented to demonstrate the transformative changes of potential larger changes - such as closing traffic lanes for a week to illustrate the impacts/benefits of a pedestrian plaza or installing temporary bike lanes, plants and seating so the community can experience what a potential trail or streetscape project would be like.

**Tactical Urbanism** (also known as Guerilla Urbanism, pop-up Urbanism; and DIY urbanism) is another emerging term referring to taking an incremental approach to the process of placemaking. Upon implementation, results may be observed and measured in real time. In this way, tactical urbanism projects intentionally create a laboratory for experimentation.

When such experiments are done inexpensively, and with flexibility, adjustments may be made before moving forward with large capital expenditures. Indeed, there is real merit in a municipality or community group investing \$300 in a temporary plaza before investing \$30,000 in changes that are permanent. If the project doesn't work as planned, the entire budget is not exhausted and future designs may be calibrated to absorb the lessons learned.

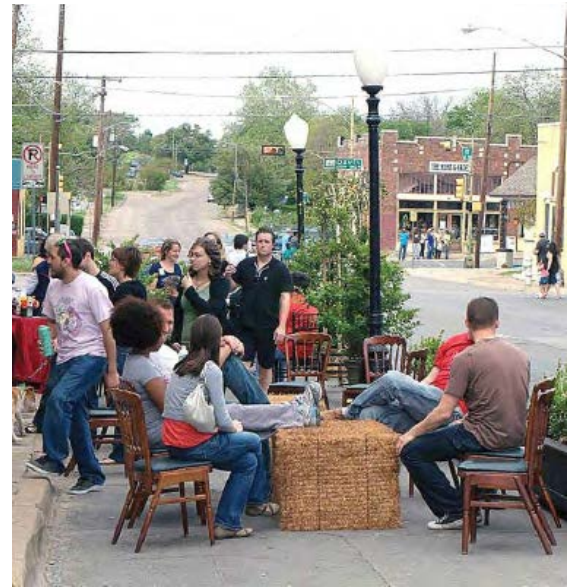
### Additional Resources:

- [Tactical Urbanism 2: Short-Term Action, Long Term Change \[PDF\]](#) was created and offered for free download by the Street Plans Collaborative, an urban planning, design and advocacy firm. It includes examples of low cost interventions.
- [Open Streets Guide](#) profiles initiatives to temporarily close streets to automobile traffic, so that people may use them for just about any activity but driving—walking, jogging, bicycling, dancing, and social activities all flourish.

Engaging the community in something that matters to them



Liberating the pavement



Creating temporary green space!



Concrete Beautification



Liberating Parking Spots in Downtown Regina



Temporary Outdoor Patio Extension & Planters



### Chair Bombing

Using discard shipping pallets and converting them to public seating (Photo courtesy of the Regina Downtown Business Improvement District)



### BENCHMARKS

- There are no minimum benchmarks in Section 3 but we encourage you to experiment!

## Heritage Conservation

Local leaders should be aware of provincial resources to protect and promote historic buildings and sites, such as the Saskatchewan Heritage Foundation and the Heritage Property Act. Under The Heritage Property Act and The Planning and Development Act, municipal governments are empowered to regulate, protect and promote local heritage resources<sup>vii</sup>.

# 4

### SECTION

The Heritage Property Act of Saskatchewan broadly defines heritage property as:

- archaeological objects;
- paleontological objects; and,
- any property of interest for its architectural, historical, cultural, environmental, archaeological, paleontological, aesthetic, or scientific value<sup>viii</sup>.

There are provincial policies and practices governing their management, protection, and promotion. There are numerous resources such as forms, templates and checklists available to help a community designate a heritage property, as well as various heritage planning tools to conserve historic places, develop a heritage inventory, and utilize historic buildings for modern uses.

We recommend compilation of a building inventory to provide basic information on built heritage assets within the community. Consider undertaking a photographic inventory of the buildings as this may come in handy in discussing potential streetscape initiatives. If your community has a significant number of heritage buildings and sites, we suggest hiring a student or utilize a local heritage society to collect archival photographs of individual heritage buildings, and to compile written histories on the buildings and the community in general. This goes hand in hand with

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gathering stories of the customs, language and traditions – intangible heritage of the community – which is often gleaned via storytelling and conversations with local residents.

### **Provincial Provisions to Protect Heritage Sites**

The Heritage Conservation Branch (HCB) of the Province of Saskatchewan provides inventory, regulatory, research, and consultative programs and services to communities who are interested in protecting and promoting their heritage resources. The HCB is also responsible for managing Saskatchewan’s heritage resources and for administering various protection provisions under The Heritage Property Act. These protection provisions include heritage resource impact assessment regulations, investigation permitting, easements and covenants, and Provincial and Municipal Heritage Property designation<sup>ix</sup>.

[Additional Resources: Sample Building Inventory Data Collection Form \(SEDA\)](#)

### **BENCHMARKS**

- An inventory of heritage buildings and heritage sites is in place.

## **Design Guidelines**

In some instances, communities may be inclined to develop policies, rules and guidelines to ensure that physical elements from the past and present that are significant in the community’s vision for the future remain, and that new development will be complementary to the locale’s unique heritage character<sup>x</sup>.

[Additional Resources:](#)

- [Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada](#) are the nationally-developed and sanctioned resource to guide decisions to conserve or reinstate features that express the heritage value (i.e., its “character-defining elements”) of a historic place.

### **Successful Storefront Design**

Working with business owners to animate or refurbish their building may be a key component of your placemaking action plan. The United States National Main Street Center provides the following tips on how to improve the image and profile of a business or institutional building:

- Consider the entire building. Expand a business’s presence and image by utilizing the whole façade – reintegrating upper-story design with the storefront, uncovering facades, and opening up boarded windows.

# 5

## SECTION

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- Take cues from the neighbors. Look at the entire streetscape for clues about the range of colors, styles, size, and character of storefront elements. Unity – not conformity – is the goal.
  - Change dramatically with color. Paint can cover a million problems or pull together a hodge-podge design. It offers an economical way to put a fresh face on a tired façade. Keep the paint scheme simple (no more than three colors), use it to integrate the entire façade, choose shades and tones of the same hue, and select schemes that work with the neighbors.
  - Integrate facades with awnings. A host of alterations, exhaust fans, and other equipment can be concealed with a correctly designed awning. Stay with simple traditional shapes, colors, and materials. Locate the awning within the storefront opening, avoid jarring or faddish colors or designs, and resist the use of backlit plastic sign box awnings.
  - Change an image through use of signage. The most significant changes can be accomplished through creative and sensitively designed signs. Placement, proportion, colors, material, and style should all reflect the building and business image.
  - Develop focal points with lighting. Call attention to merchandise, signs, and architectural details through unobtrusive lighting. For exterior sign illumination, shaded gooseneck lamps work well. Avoid bare bulbs, backlit Plexiglas, and flood lighting, and use spots to highlight details.
  - Use windows to inject vitality. Visual displays not only sell the merchandise selected, they set the image of the business. Fresh, creative displays that target only a few ideas or items come to life with dynamic arrangements, selective color, and good lighting.

#### **BENCHMARKS**

- No benchmark for this element.

# 5

## **SECTION**

### **Obey the rules....or change them**

Planning policies as dictated by the official community plan, including land use and zoning bylaws, must be taken into account when undertaking placemaking initiatives. Alternatively, appropriate changes can be made to said policies with the support of elected officials and a licensed community planner. Working within accepted heritage conservation guidelines is also required.

#### **BENCHMARKS**

- Placemaking initiatives align with current policies' as articulated in the official community plan or master plan – and conform to provincial heritage conservation guidelines.

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- <sup>i</sup> Project for Public Spaces; What if we built our cities around places
  - <sup>ii</sup> *ibid*
  - <sup>iii</sup> Project for Public Spaces; What if we built our cities around places
  - <sup>iv</sup> *ibid*
  - <sup>v</sup> Accredited Community Orientation Manual; Version 1.0 December 2014; Government of Saskatchewan
  - <sup>vi</sup> Project for Public Spaces; What if we built our cities around places
  - <sup>vii</sup> Accredited Community Orientation Manual; Version 1.0 December 2014 Government of Saskatchewan
  - <sup>viii</sup> *ibid*
  - <sup>ix</sup> Accredited Community Orientation Manual; Version 1.0 December 2014 Government of Saskatchewan
  - <sup>x</sup> Saskatchewan Main Street Design Guidelines Toolkit; Government of Saskatchewan