

Main Street as the Ultimate “Third Place”.

Third Places in the 20th Century.

Ray Oldenburg, see sidebar, effectively describes gathering spots that serve as third places; places where people relax and commune; the “in-between” places, not work and not home. His idea extends from small town cafés to the “Cheers” bar in bigger cities. Entry is freely accessible to customers, visitors and a regular clientele; no exclusivity allowed. “Third places” are the idiosyncratic places that are the essence of character towns and their main streets.

Main Street as a “Third Place”.

The Good Great Place alludes to the idea that main street itself can be “third place”. The stores, shops, bars, restaurants, parks, plazas and sidewalk benches can collectively serve as the place where people find an egalitarian neutral place for conversation, comfort and light-heartedness.

Main street as a “third place” is an aspirational idea that can direct the design of parks, plazas, sidewalks and casual meeting places in public and private buildings and spaces.

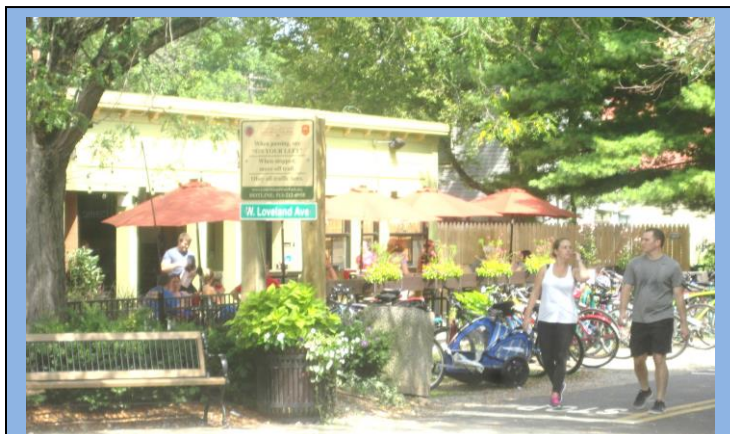
The Good Great Place

Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons and Other Hangouts at the Heart of the Community

Ray Oldenburg

Chapter 2, *The Character of Third Places.*

“Third places exist on neutral ground and serve to level their guests to a condition of social equality. Within these places, conversation is the primary activity and the major vehicle for the display and appreciation of human personality and individuality. Third places are taken for granted and most have a low profile. Since the social institutions of society make stronger claims on the individual, third places are normally open in the off hours, as well as at other times. The character of a third place is determined most of all by its regular clientele marked by a playful mood, which contrasts with people’s more serious involvement in other spheres. Though a radically different kind of setting from the home, the third place is remarkably similar to a good home in the psychological comfort and support that it extends.”



A bike trail café perpendicular to main street.

Features of a “Third Place”.

The quintessential “third place” is:

- Organically located.
- Freely accessible to patrons with “regulars” a big part of the crowd.
- Neutral ground welcoming all socio-economic classes in an egalitarian setting.
- Conversational with an appreciation of individual expression, participation and personalities.
- Light hearted with a playful spirit and atmosphere.

Design Metrics for “Third Places”.

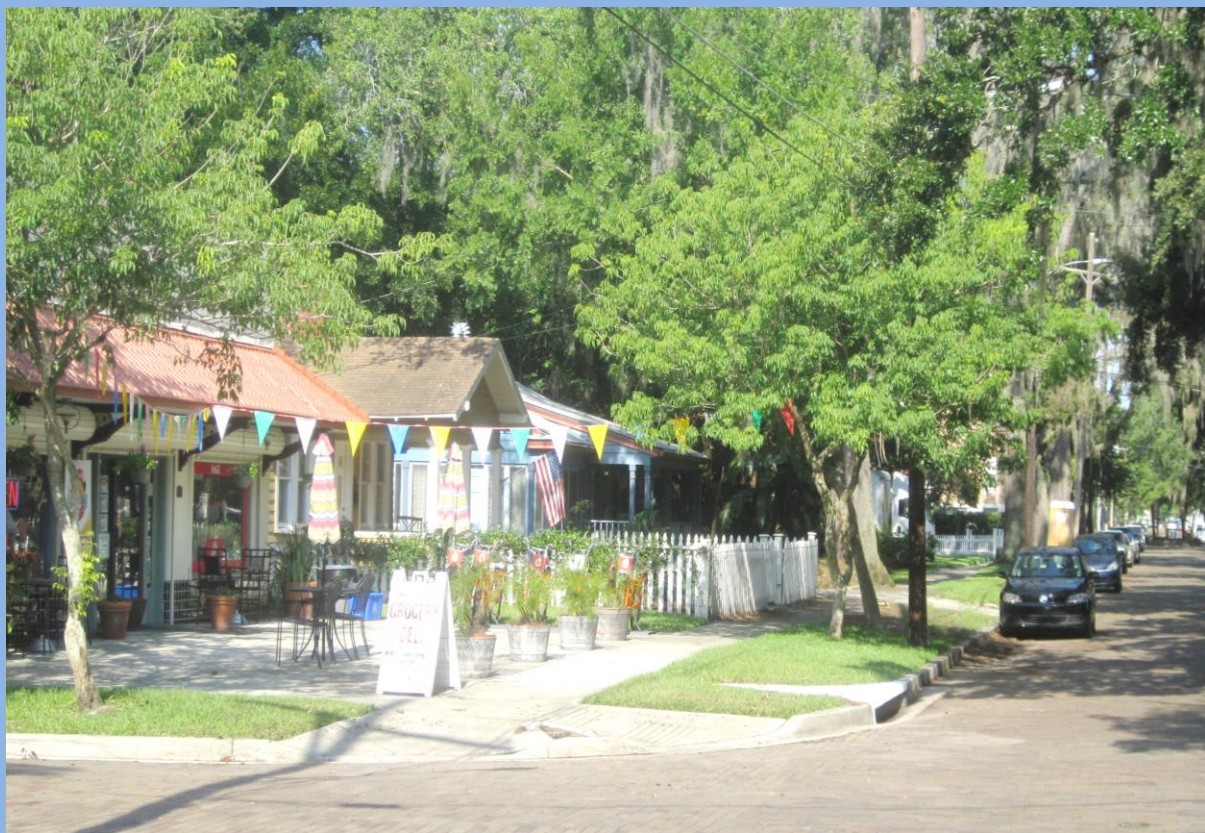
Third places are unique, idiosyncratic and random; defying standard market analysis and location guidelines. “Third places” are usually discovered, not planned.

Main streets and their side streets are good locations for “third places”. City rules should be flexible to accommodate and retain these important social places.

Once an established “third place” is found, cherish it. It is an important thread in the community fabric. Locations are completely site driven. Cafés, book stores, bars and other unexpected places that attract “regular” customers are the prize.

Conclusions.

- “Third places” are major factors in creating character. Individual “third places” are found; main street “third places” can be made.
- Main street can be a “third place” if properly designed by tying together a number of these valuable individual places with conversational sidewalks, benches, plazas with seating, vendors with food and beverages and lots of inviting front doors to shops and cafés. Main street can, in and of itself, function as a “third place”. Cafés in city hall, the library or the local history museum add to the inventory.
- City sociability depends on people wanting to be with other people; main street can be that place.



A downtown neighborhood café and deli...

No on-site parking, only window signs and lighting, among and adjacent to single family homes.