RE-IMAGINING
THE CIVIC COMMONS

CITIES:
WHERE OPPORTUNITY MEETS PLACE

Building City Performance through a Reimagined Civic Commons

CIVIC COMMONS

Civic Assets
Places and Spaces

People
Needs and Desires

Libraries
Knowledge
Town Square
Food
Parks   Community
Arcades   Trade
Ports   Markets
Recreation

Early Days of Conception
City dwellers create assets to fulfill
their needs, wants and aspirations

Cities, historically, had a broad union of civic assets and people's needs. As
collective needs and wants were identified, shared facilities and spaces were
created. The civic commons delivered abundant benefits to city dwellers.

Throughout history, city dwellers have created shared places that make the city a city: places to celebrate, learn, rest, play, trade, make key decisions, express collective aspirations, and provide for themselves and one another. To that end, city governments, in their plans for zoning and land use, have included provisions for a variety of common civic spaces and places, such as parks, libraries, post offices, community centers, markets and public squares. These key facilities, or civic assets, are part of a system, a civic commons, embodying the backbone of the city. Publicly financed and managed, these amenities serve the broader, collective needs of local neighborhoods and benefit the city economically and socially. While these shared spaces offer many practical public benefits, they also present opportunities for social interactions and chance encounters that foster neighborhood cohesion, cultural expression, a sense of belonging, the ability to source the ingenuity of others, and the advancement of our economic pursuits.

City life provides opportunities for people to work and play, share and learn, and create social, cultural and economic value, both as individuals and with others. In 2011, for the first time in over ninety years, the census showed that city growth is outpacing suburban growth. This is particularly true for younger people, who are opting in much greater numbers than ever before to settle in cities.1 The physical city, and how its land is used and its shared spaces are planned and designed, have a direct impact on each resident's quality of life and on how the overall city performs. In a competitive market, with cities competing to attract and retain talent and investment, these factors affect the appeal of our cities and influence people's choice of where they want to live and work.
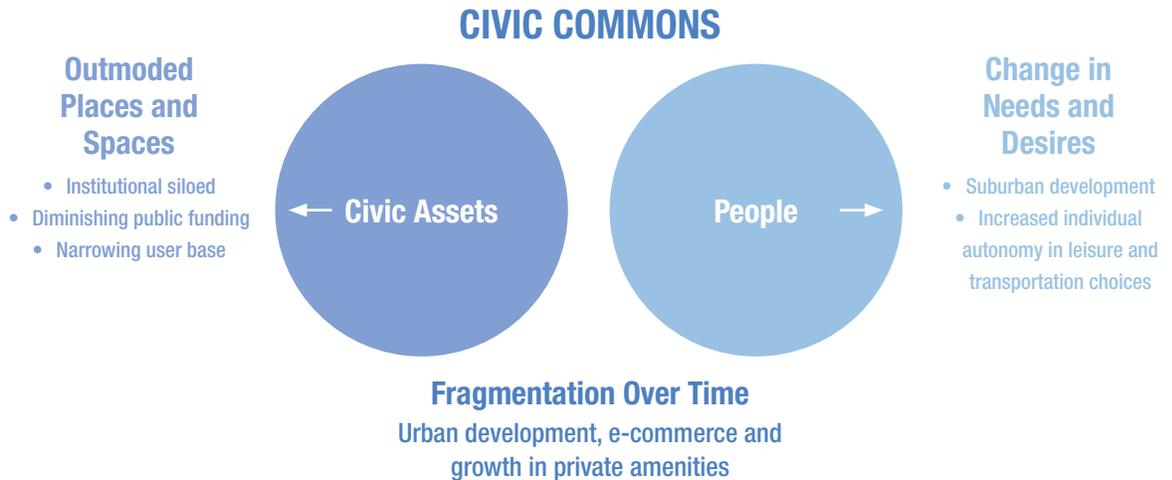
1   "The last time growth in big cities surpassed that in outlying areas occurred prior to 1920, before the rise of mass-produced automobiles spurred expansion beyond city cores" (Wyatt, "Young Adults hoose Cities").

Our city forebearers conceived of and created a variety of civic assets to meet the particular needs of their times. Rich patrons, such as Andrew Carnegie, created public libraries for the democratization of knowledge; private companies built transportation systems that would ultimately convert to publicly owned and managed transit; faith organizations organized schools, settlement houses and community centers, many of which would be converted to public, secular use; and governments created post offices, train stations, public schools and parks to further the healthy functioning of the city. In their time these places enabled leisure and encouraged spontaneity, and ensured within a city's urban fabric physical places where the diversity of the city could co-mingle, where chance encounters could bring city dwellers in contact with strangers with whom they might do business, discover a common interest, and interact socially, creating something that is crucial to enabling a city: social capital. At the outset, these assets' purpose and function aligned well with the needs of the communities that created them, and the assets delivered multiple social, cultural and economic benefits to the city as it grew. Consequently, American cities have inherited a rich legacy of civic assets, their civic commons, that reflects decades of vast, multi-generational, collective investment. But contemporary demands of city dwellers have changed, and the challenges to city governments to invest in and maintain their increasingly aging assets have created a stark reality: the civic commons of our cities are not being used to their full advantage.

As an example, local governments across the country are shuttering community swimming pools: in 2012 the City of Sacramento—faced with competing priorities—had closed all but three public pools, to serve a population of 450,000. Local governments across the country are evaluating their resources and choosing other priorities. In Grand Traverse County, Michigan, the Commissioner stated: "We have to focus on vital services… Clearly a swimming pool is not a vital service" (quoted in Collins, "Public Pools Closing"). At the same time, the proliferation of private pools in the United States is staggering. In 1950, there were just 2,500 private, in-ground pools. By 2009 that number had climbed to about 5.2 million. A similar pattern of inadequate public investment not keeping pace with what city dwellers need and desire is seen across the civic commons—in parks, libraries, public spaces and other traditional community spaces. In today's world, cities cannot afford to have a single asset that is leaking value. How can a renewed, reimagined civic commons deliver new value for citizens and competitive advantage for cities?

*We need a new conversation with city
leaders about investing in a connected, aligned civic commons.*

CIVIC COMMONS

**Outmoded
Places and
Spaces**

- Institutional siloed
- Diminishing public funding
- Narrowing user base

Civic Assets ←

People →

**Change in
Needs and
Desires**

- Suburban development
- Increased individual
  autonomy in leisure and
  transportation choices

Fragmentation Over Time
Urban development, e-commerce and
growth in private amenities

*Beginning in the 1960s, the natural confluence between a city's civic assets and
its people began to dissolve. Disconnected and poorly funded assets lost their
effectiveness; people who could afford to began to opt for private amenities. The
benefits of the civic commons were no longer shared with a diverse mix of users, and
its benefits no longer shared broadly.*

Over the last five decades in North America, development patterns, particularly the growth of suburbs, have led us away from the density of a shared urban life toward sprawling lots, the predominance of single family homes, and the creation of more private spaces and experiences. As suburban development has grown rapidly, the average density—and tax base—of central cities have almost halved.[2] And departure from the commons occurred not only in the suburbs; for many living in the city, recreational and other pursuits essential to daily life, once possible only in the commons, became more affordable to pursue in private.

In trying to close the gap between revenues and costs, and faced with competing priorities and stretched city budgets, civic officials look for the easiest targets. So it is not surprising that flatlining funds to libraries, reducing community center hours, minimizing pool and rink availability, cutting park maintenance, and even eliminating programming in these facilities altogether, are often the choices made to balance the budget.

The civic commons has the potential to deliver a host of benefits to its residents and to the city as whole. But many are underperforming. Dramatic increases in private amenity options,along with public funding that does not keep pace with improvement needs, and inflexibility between competing, disconnected public systems, have created a vicious circle. Poorly maintained and inadequately funded facilities, coupled with unimaginative, limited-interest programming, become less and less attractive to diverse users. The political and financial commitment of urban dwellers—who form the core of the city's tax base—erodes when the city's civic assets no longer serve them.

If public comes to mean only for those who cannot afford private, we have a precarious inversion of the original purpose of the civic commons.

[2]   Population density in central cities declined by more than half, from 7,500 persons per square mile in 1950 to less than 3,000 persons per square mile in 2000 (Hobbs and Stoops, 2002).

EIGHT INDICATORS THAT AMERICANS HAVE LESS IN COMMON

1. Distrust among Americans is increasing.

A key marker of social capital is the generalized feeling of trust. In the early 1970s, Americans were nearly equally divided on this choice, with only a small majority expressing distrust. Since then, with few exceptions, the trend in the share of the population expressing trust has been steadily downward. Today only one-third says that "most people can be trusted."

2. Americans spend significantly less time with their neighbors.

In the 1970s, nearly 29 percent of Americans reported spending time with their neighbors at least twice weekly; only 21 percent reported no interactions with neighbors. Today only about 19 percent say they spend time regularly with neighbors, with 33 percent reporting no interactions with neighbors.

3. Television is the single largest use of waking leisure time.

In 1965, the average American spent about 10 hours per week watching television; by 2013, this had increased to more than 19 hours. Over the past decade the amount of time spent "socializing and communicating" has fallen by about 10 percent, from 47 minutes per day to about 42 minutes per day.

4. Private pools proliferate while public pools have been shuttered.

From the 1920s to the 1950s, municipal pools served as centers of community life and arenas for public discourse. In the post-war period this changed rapidly. In new suburbs, the number of privately owned pools exploded. In 1950 there were just 2,500 private, inground swimming pools. By 2009 there were about 5.2 million private swimming pools in the United States.

5. Driving alone has become the norm, with transit reserved for the poor.

Today, 85 percent of American commuters travel to work in private automobiles, up from 63 percent in 1960. About 20 percent of Americans carpooled in 1980, while fewer than 10 percent do so today. The number who commute via transit has declined from 12 percent in 1960 to less than 5 percent today. Outside of a few very large cities with excellent transit systems (New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and a few others), transit use is the nearly exclusive province of those who can't afford automobiles or who are unable to drive (the young, elderly and disabled).

6. Economic segregation trends upward as middle-income neighborhoods decline.

Between 1970 and 2009, the proportion of families living either in predominantly poor or predominantly affluent neighborhoods doubled from 15 percent to 33 percent. Those living in middle income neighborhoods declined from 65 percent to 42 percent of all families.

7. Gated communities are on the rise.

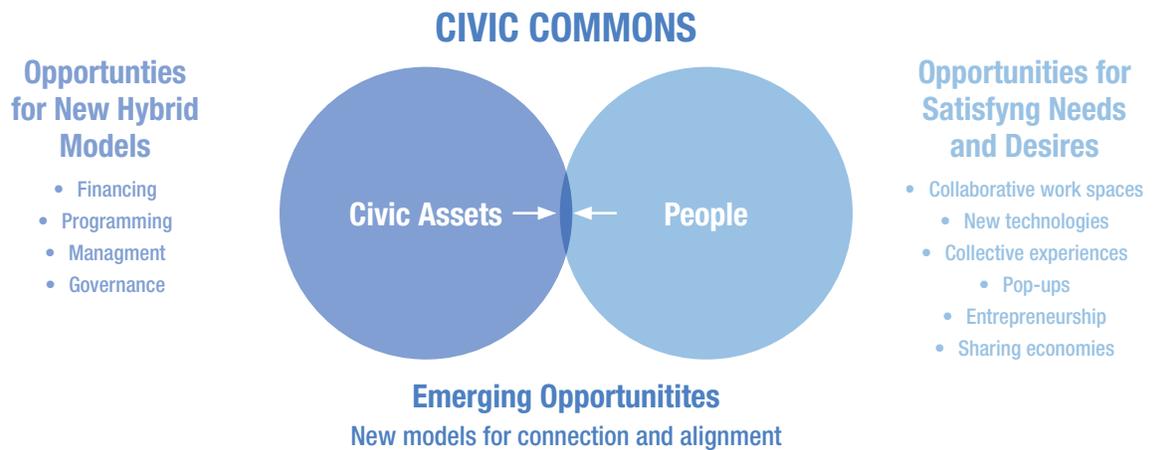By 1997, it was estimated that there were more than 20,000 gated community developments of 3,000 or more residents.

8. America sorts itself into like-minded geographies.

Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of consistent conservatives and about half (49 percent) of consistent liberals say most of their close friends share their political views.

(Excerpted and adapted from Cortright, 2014)

The Challenge for City Leaders: Maximizing the Value of a Rich Legacy

CIVIC COMMONS

Opportunties for New Hybrid Models

- Financing
- Programming
- Managment
- Governance

Civic Assets → ← People

Opportunities for Satisfyng Needs and Desires

- Collaborative work spaces
- New technologies
- Collective experiences
- Pop-ups
- Entrepreneurship
- Sharing economies

Emerging Opportunitites
New models for connection and alignment

City dwellers are presenting new needs and aspirations for how collective spaces can contribute to their livelihoods and enjoyment of the city

Contemporary city governments operate on such a thin edge that they must think strategically about how to maximize the value of every civic asset. Today's existing civic assets operate in fragmented isolation. The harder an asset is made to work, the more value can be extracted from it. For an asset to be fully leveraged, it must work on multiple levels, achieve multiple outcomes and deliver multiple benefits. How can city leaders create the conditions that maximize the value of every asset?

Civic assets continue to have the potential to enable serendipity and experiences that span class, race, ethnicity, and differences of every kind and also to build wealth and opportunity. Over time the original alignment of what people sought to do together and the facilities to do those things has slipped, as a confluence of urban development patterns favoring suburbs led to a slowing of investment. Now, U.S. cities, and others around the world, are beginning to see new migration and a return to the city of people whose collective needs are different from those of decades ago. Public officials now face an incoherent set of demands from multiple stakeholders, and can't explain in a transparent way how the resources they do have are being efficiently deployed.

Cities in the United States are at a crucial inflection point: there is a fundamental disconnection between the physical assets that most cities own and manage and what a cross section of their population needs and wants their city to provide. This disconnection not only compromises the capacity of the city to meet the needs of its residents, it also constrains its own social and economic performance. A quick analysis of any city's key civic assets will expose gaps and disconnections across often competing systems and will identify missed opportunities for collaboration. Municipal bureaucracies, operating within their silos, are constrained in their capacity to share programming among parks, libraries and community centers, let alone with initiatives offered by others outside of government. In some neighborhoods one place or facility may be oversubscribed, while another may be underused, perhaps reflecting changing demographics, or an evolution of community needs and desires. Reallocating resources, or finding ways to share available resources across systems, is very challenging. One notable success is in the Northgate neighborhood of Seattle, where a park, library and community center were redeveloped adjacent to one another, greatly facilitating collaboration

and coordination.

In some cases a more flexible, imaginative use of existing assets may come from a partnership outside government. The City of San José recognized the potential of combining its public library with San José State University's, creating a dynamic hub of learning that attracts a diverse mix of users. Hayes Valley Proxy in San Francisco is largely the initiative of an architect/private real estate developer who accepted the City's offer to "do something" on a few temporarily vacant lots that abutted a strip of city-owned greenspace. Proxy now hosts entrepreneurial pop-up businesses, public art, an outdoor movie theater, and casual seating that significantly enhances the park space.

What if a city invested in ways to connect its civic assets across systems—public, private, institutional and community—to aggregate a city-wide inventory of civic assets into a civic commons that it could then align to current needs and opportunities?

Could this aggregation enable the city to uncover the dormant uses, the unrealized opportunities, for synergy and collaboration? How could current existing designs and plans for these facilities be updated to maximize the kinds of flows a connected civic commons would encourage?

Cities already own significant places and spaces for purposes that may no longer be relevant for contemporary desires. The most obvious examples are school buildings, community hospitals and centers that become obsolete when the local demographics change and are often neglected or sold. The remaining public facilities are often finding themselves overwhelmed in meeting only the demands of a narrower and narrower user group, who have no other options for obtaining the programs and services they need. The civic commons is no longer serving the commons.

Repurposing these places to keep them as part of the civic commons and serve a broader constituency requires imagination and investment, often in short supply in local governments beleaguered with other, more pressing demands. Concurrently we are seeing privately owned and initiated places and events connecting urban dwellers in efficient and productive ways. Connecting these dots into a sustainable, responsive system can unlock the broadest range of social and economic capital. Even as we have witnessed the decline of much of what we share in common, and of the facilities that have historically enabled the sharing, cities with imaginative and resourceful leadership boast attractive public spaces, parks and well-programmed libraries—all full of people. In the summer of 2014, fans in cities around the world came together to watch the FIFA World Cup in all sorts of local, shared places—bars, workplaces, laneways, public plazas—often standing shoulder to shoulder with total strangers.

As at the genesis of many civic assets, now in cities we are once again seeing the importance of gathering places not owned by government, ranging from coffee shops and local "watering holes" to community gardens and maker spaces. Hugely popular, not owned by government, these places attract a mix of patrons that are looking for a place to hang out, create, celebrate or problem-solve. In fact the energy of sharing and pursuing common activities may now exist primarily in spaces created, staffed and managed by the private or community sectors.

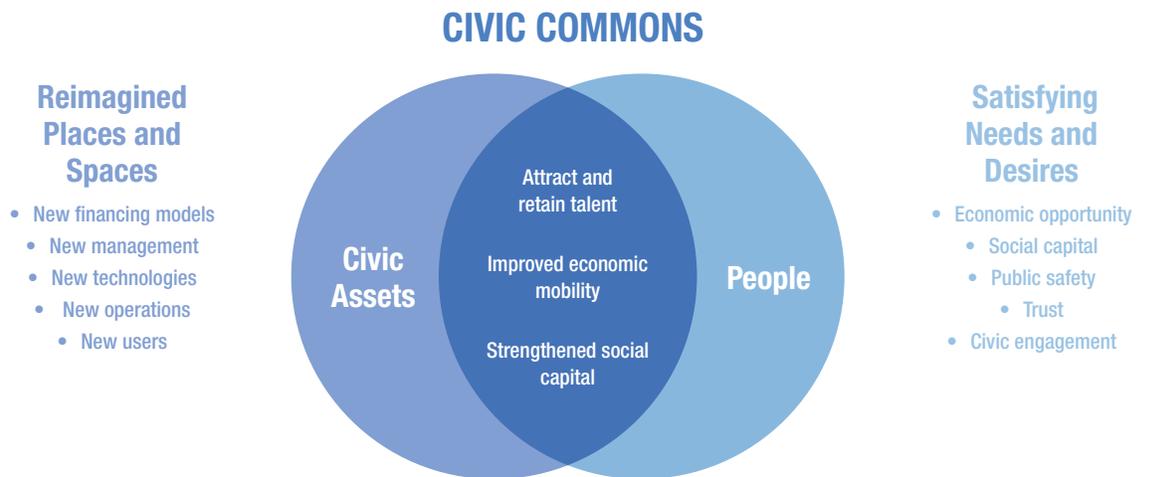## Unlocking the Value of the Civic Commons through Better Connection and Alignment

Cities should recognize the tremendous opportunity to harness the potential of their existing civic assets by looking for ways to reinvent them as part of a hyperconnected, integrated, adaptive civic commons—to create a connected, aligned, strategic network of assets delivering new value in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. A new paradigm is beginning to emerge—a new understanding that harnesses new technologies and leverages new resourcing, management and operations models that reflect current and future civic needs and the dynamism of contemporary urban economies.

The challenge to fully leverage civic assets is a shared one, with leadership needing to come from both the top down (city leadership in the public, private and civil society sectors) and the bottom up (users and local communities). As new useroriented digital technologies continue to develop, the efficiency of service and the diversity of product offerings within the civic commons will only increase. By connecting assets across the system in unique ways, and building on the strengths

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EMERGING TRENDS: THE POWER OF CONNECTION

- Coworking spaces began to appear commercially, and within the community sector, almost twenty years ago, driven by the economics of finding affordable office space, and a realization of the cost and creativity benefits of sharing both hard assets such as office equipment, and human resources such as graphic design and bookkeeping.

- This combination of thrift and synergy—the benefits of sharing—continues to lead innovation in the social and economic entrepreneurial communities. The "sharing economy" is an extension of the same instinct: to identify underused capacity in the system and find ways to repurpose it to a more productive, cost-saving or wealthproducing use.

- Urban planning is reflecting this growing awareness that separating uses and users actually worked against the more organic forces that allow cities to thrive. The demand for mixed-use, hyper-connected neighborhoods continues to grow, bringing us back to locating commercial and residential communities within the same neighborhoods, and also mixing retail and light industrial uses with cultural and recreational places in closer proximity.

- The number of farmers' markets in the United States has quadrupled in the past two decades to more than 8,000 nationally.

- The number of coffee shops in the United States has nearly doubled in the past decade, from about 11,000 in 2003 to about 20,000 in 2012.

- The number of coworking spaces in the United States has gone from only 1 in 2005 to 781 now.

CIVIC COMMONS

Reimagined Places and Spaces

- New financing models
- New management
- New technologies
- New operations
- New users

Civic Assets

Attract and retain talent

Improved economic mobility

Strengthened social capital

People

Satisfying Needs and Desires

- Economic opportunity
- Social capital
- Public safety
- Trust
- Civic engagement

Can a reimagined civic commons build the competitive advantage of the city?

A change to a connected, aligned, and modernized civic commons system results in an emerging reconnection between a city's civic assets and people's needs and wants.

Cities compete with one another to retain their populations, attract newcomers, provide economic and social mobility opportunities, develop new industries and create wealth. These challenges scale to the local: neighborhoods also compete within cities for public attention and private investment. Some cities have the benefit of spectacular natural landscapes that draw people and capital; others have well-endowed anchor institutions that are central to the cities' appeal. But every city possesses some elements of a potentially vibrant civic commons. With a modest but high-quality investment, a city can put itself on the map of urban innovation, harness the potential of its existing assets and punch well above its relative urban weight, by connecting its civic commons in a way that emphasizes local uniqueness.

The benefits of this investment will be realized immediately, because citizens are newly equipped to build social capital and engage in civic and economic life. But, perhaps even more important, by re-creating their civic assets in a more flexible, adaptive, collaborative and responsive way, city leaders can better prepare for the future ways their civic commons will be needed and useful.

A connected, aligned civic commons makes possible:

- Seamless integration of services and access
- Imaginative and diverse shared programming
- Diverse curation of programming for spaces to appeal to the broadest of udiences/users
- Partnerships among the public, private, institutional and community sectors that leverage the expertise and best capacities of each
- A recombining of user needs with physical assets and appropriate staffing

- More flexibility in uses, made possible by an integrated governance model
- New revenue sources and financing tools that enhance facilities and programming minimize dormant capacity and dramatically improve the user experience

Achieving
Competitive
Advantage:
Reimagining
Your Civic
Commons

Considerations for Building the Civic Commons

To maximize its potential, a city needs a civic commons that is flexible and adaptive, and that takes advantage of the possibilities of a broad array of contributing partners and available resources.

A city's quest to reimagine its civic commons will be a highly particular one, reflecting its unique history and traditions, and the assets that it has cultivated over time. But there are principles that can help guide city leaders to develop strategies and commit to a process that breaks down the silos, heals decades of fragmentation, and puts in place a connected, networked civic commons. Creating transparent connections among previously autonomous civic assets that maximize uses, enhance the user experience, and measure quantifiable impacts will generate compelling benefits to every city.

Can colocations and new conceptions deliver multiple benefits?

Assets that are narrowly specialized lack the flexibility to serve a diverse and ever-changing user base. What if essential municipal and state services (such as license renewal and voter registration) were colocated with community kitchens and rehearsal spaces? The idea seems obvious, but in reality the obstacles to creating and maintaining multiple-use spaces are significant.

Adopting this kind of integrated, coordinated system is going to require the commitment of multiple city departments and agencies and community associations such as conservancies, and a serious reform of rules and policies that limit collaboration and new approaches.

Ideally, any element of a reimagined civic commons would embody all aspects of the larger system— perhaps physically and certainly virtually— and have the capacity to deliver learning and social connections, provide economic opportunities, develop human capital, strengthen public safety and health, make connection and serendipity possible, and foster inspiration.

Can obstacles be removed to enable serendipity, self-organization and common experiences across class, race, age, ability, gender?

Sporting events, cultural festivals and pop-ups of diverse activities that are dependent on adaptable, attractive, and accessible spaces, are important to cultivating the uniqueness of a city and building camaraderie among different kinds of people. How can a city's civic commons encourage unique forms of self-organization that differentiate it from someplace else? What old, now arcane zoning restrictions or no-longer-necessary rules can be taken off the books that currently stymie imaginative, creative uses?

Does government have to do it all?

Governments need not be the sole curator of programming in the civic commons, in terms of resources, temperament and skill sets. Strategies that encourage others to offer programming, in partnership, will bring in new, refreshed energy and imagination and attract a much more diverse audience to these spaces.

Local analysis may identify certain functions within the existing civic commons that have emerged from the community or private sectors, such as coworking spaces that are predominantly run as social enterprises or for-profit companies. The dynamism of these "third places," although they are not owned

or managed by government but are nonetheless performing a civic function, must be woven into the fabric of the commons, maximizing their potential as a feeder to other equally critical elements. A city's civic commons can benefit from the social capital created by privately owned places like coffee shops and outdoor cafés, providing there are visible means to connect them with the other elements of the system. A renewed civic commons would emphasize providing connections across a system of diverse offerings and making visible the larger system to all users. The key is for the system to be connected, flexible, visible and responsive to local needs as they change.

Can new financing models be used for the civic commons?

One of the clear ways to find more resources to finance the civic commons is to analyze city budget allocations apportioned to all commons-related uses, and then look for ways to aggregate them and more efficiently deploy them in an integrated, reconfigured way that reflects current demands and anticipates future ones. Further, there are ways to demonstrate to city budgeters that investing in the civic commons will, over the longer term, save the city money in public health, public safety and policing costs, the savings from which can be invested up front to create and sustain these civic amenities.

To raise additional revenues, some cities may take advantage of digital technologies and work with partners to create new apps and social media tools that both enhance the users' experiences of the civic commons and generate revenues toward the operations and management of assets. Another opportunity for financial savings may be building alternative ownership; it may make much more sense for certain assets to be owned privately and their uses leased back to the city or other partners. Incentives for the private sector to accept lower-than-market rents for public uses could include tax abatements and other longer-term incentives. Property in the city has a multiplicity of owners. Local governments can create up-front benefits to real estate developers and other institutional landowners who commit portions of their new or existing asset to communal use. There are also new investment vehicles to raise capital for improvements that could appeal to institutional investors (e.g., foundations, private and sovereign wealth funds) looking for a safe haven for funds and investment that return a social benefit.

Can alternate approaches to staffing, management and governance be developed?

As with programming, the most effective management model for the civic commons may be a hybrid, with staff drawn from the public, commercial, institutional, private and community sectors, depending on specific requirements. As user demand and needs shift and change, new programming areas can engage community partners that have always brought a tremendous level of energy and diverse experience to the staffing of the commons: consider docent duty, peer counseling, choral directing, skills sharing. In fact the civic commons presents city dwellers with one of the most effective and affordable opportunities for meeting and helping others, and potentially for saving money, for households that might otherwise have to purchase certain services. Are there new ways to strengthen and reward this form of civic engagement, beyond the usual class credits and service-learning acknowledgements?

With a heterogeneous civic commons, governance will vary across the system, with some elements under public control and others overseen by independent boards. As with all public–private

partnerships, flexible governance approaches that respect the constraints of the public sector and capitalize on the flexibility of other partners can be developed. Governments can afford to adopt a "lighter touch" with their oversight as long as lines of mutual accountability, and measures of success, are made clear.

Can the civic commons tap the power of great design and innovative programming?

Parks and open spaces, streets and plazas, can be effectively transformed into social gathering places through innovative design and at relatively minimal expense. Great design helps people imagine their use of spaces—and the functions within them—differently.

Some branch libraries are the early adopters of reimagining programming within what are crucial assets to a city's civic commons. The first cultural institutions to embrace the digital world, libraries have the potential to be reconceived as the beacons of civic life in neighborhoods around the world.

Within any city, there are any number of architectural "gems" that are underutilized and perpetually under threat of sale or neglect, or both. Freeing up these places to be incorporated into a larger, connected system (one not so rigidly managed by any singular, territorial city department) will make it much easier to match each asset with the needed resources, user base and management option. And good design will also find ways to create assets that can function, differently, at all hours and serve every kind of user.

Can civic assets act as a system to deliver more value than the sum of their parts?

In Malmö, Sweden, playgrounds each have a different theme and custom design. Each playground attracts families beyond the immediate neighborhood, because each is a unique asset. The design of this aspect of the civic commons makes it easy and convenient for families to visit other neighborhoods and treat the playgrounds as a circuit, encouraging more interaction among citizens from different parts of the city.[3] If a city pursued this strategy of intentional distinctiveness across its civic commons, it would allow each asset to focus on being best in class while the entire system punches above its weight.

Can the civic commons be used to meet the goals of a city?

In Pittsburgh, its City of Learning program activates a collection of civic assets including libraries, museums and public schools to help young people map out pathways to college or career success by making learning and opportunities accessible through a seamless network of partners and incentives. While specific priorities vary by city, a connected civic commons can be aligned to a city's goals and offer a platform for achieving them.

Can technology enable connectivity and transparency in the civic commons?

The still-to-be-realized opportunity is to connect all the assets to create an integrated, porous, transferable, and flexible network. The most transformative contributor to a renewed civic commons will be technology that enables users to move easily through the system and both contribute and derive

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[3]   Malmö Tourism website: http://www.malmotown.com/en/article/themed-playgrounds-in-malmo/

benefits easily and efficiently. Within the civic commons, connectivity is of prime importance, with transparency a close second. Open wireless access to the Internet will have a dramatic impact on the popularity of every civic asset. (Imagine if your local fire hall offered free wireless as well as donuts and coffee?) Although tech-enhanced, the connected civic commons can straddle the digital divide. Imaginative ways to access the network can be created (such as a commons "card" or "passport" that tracks multiple uses and provides incentives and generates rewards for frequent and varied use). Similarly, the key to the sustainability of the civic commons is to openly produce user data that documents user and usage. This will provide system stewards with realtime feedback loops to enable course correction, and will motivate assets within the system to continually evaluate their performance.

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EVERYTHING DIGITAL

- The explosion of shared uses we are seeing in contemporary cities is fueled by digital technologies, a new form of connective tissue that connects underused elements in the city with new users, making the slack in a system quickly transparent, and its redeployment easy and accessible.

- Digital technologies continue to make visible a remarkable web of urban interconnectedness and an appetite for a new form of sharing: including rides, travel arrangements, experiences with a group with similar interests, a book, or an event.

- While the focus of this inquiry has been primarily the physical manifestations of aspects of urban life we choose to share in common, digital technology has created a virtual commons that also needs to be fully harnessed, both as a civic space in its own right, and in its connections to the physical city, for the promise of both to be realized for today's citizens.

- Astra Taylor writes, "In a powerful sense, programmers … are the new urban planners, shaping the virtual frontier into the spaces we occupy, building the boxes into which we fit our lives, and carving out the routes we travel. The choices they make can segregate us further or create new connections; the algorithms they devise can exclude voices or bring more people into the fold; the interfaces they invent can expand our sense of human possibility or limit it to the already familiar" (Taylor).

- There are powerful lessons to learn from how the digital commons continues to enable self- organization, which should inform our understanding of people's behavior and choices in the spatial city, too. For example: In Estonia, every citizen is issued a national identity card embedded with a microchip which allows them access to over 4,000 services including voting, filing taxes, reviewing medical records and banking online. With a small technology budget relative to other EU countries, they are one of the most connected countries in the world allowing for their citizens to be connected to each other and local and national assets and institutions (Scott).

This is a pivotal moment for city leaders in American cities to strengthen the value proposition of their cities and demonstrate their commitment to creating the right conditions for success. More intensive, place-based research is needed to confirm the broader applicability of the key points raised here, specifically:

Can civic assets be connected in ways that make them operate as an integrated system, creating a civic commons that delivers more value and is sustainable?

- What are the levers for modernizing, aligning, connecting and sustaining the civic commons?
- How can a connected and strategically aligned set of civic assets build competitive advantage for cities?
- How can digital technology be used to connect assets to deliver more value and make them more sustainable?

**Lessons Waiting
to Be Learned:
A Provocation**

TESTING THE POTENTIAL OF A REIMAGINED CIVIC COMMONS

- A healthy civic commons will enable economic opportunity through which entrepreneurs can build supply chains and cultivate markets.
- A vibrant civic commons will entice newcomers to invest, and bring their ingenuity and their purchasing power.
- An active civic commons will make physical activities easily accessible, reducing health care costs and encouraging the development of ties that foster trust.
- A well-used civic commons has the potential to increase public safety by providing activities that bring more eyes to the street.
- A well-designed civic commons can build in flexible, adaptive public spaces that can easily accommodate both extraordinary celebrations and sudden disruptions where "staging" spaces become a premium.
- A connected commons will enhance the value of each of its components, realign their uses and functions, and maximize their collective value for urban residents to the benefit of the city as a whole.

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