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- A Sense of Place: Good architectural design recognizes that the world is not made up of individual, isolated, or disconnected elements.
- A Plan of Action: The AIA's 10 Principles for Livable Communities does a great job consolidating a meaningful plan:



Dennis M. King, FAIA is the Public Policy Director for AIA Michigan leading Public Awareness, supporting Government Affairs and enriching Fund Development for the state-wide membership. He is also the Principal of DMKING Consulting LLC.

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Why Design Matters

Dennis M. King, FAIA, FESD, Public Policy Director, AIA Michigan

The Michigan Architectural Foundation (michiganarchitecturalfoundation.org) is dedicated to, "Increasing Public Appreciation of How Architecture Enriches Life." While a lofty aspiration, it is an important vision founded in the concerns of businesses, citizens, and governments regarding livability issues in today's communities.

While it is true that even outstanding physical spaces cannot unilaterally provide solutions to problems of class, race or economic stagnation; the bedrock of livability is physical design that richly reflects the aspirations of a community. Architecture is all about looking at difficult challenges with a broad perspective and discovering opportunities for effective solutions. The process is intensely collaborative and an engine for building community. Consequently, thoughtful and empathetic architectural solutions can pull neighborhoods together, set communities apart and make people happy. Architecture matters.

A Sense of Place

Good architectural design recognizes that the world is not made up of individual, isolated, or disconnected elements. Sensitive design includes consideration of the spaces between buildings as well as the buildings themselves. This approach to community design is commonly described as creating a "sense of place" or "placemaking." Here in the State of Michigan, "MIplace" is a statewide initiative at the forefront of this movement. The State is confident that, by employing sound design principles to revitalize communities, it will strengthen the entire State.

At first the challenges may seem daunting. After all, neighborhoods and communities are built from a collage of independently owned properties and structures. Investment and maintenance often varies widely and is often difficult at best to influence. So what makes some communities more desirable places than others? The American Institute of Architects in its publication, *Communities by Design*, notes that many different elements go into enhancing a community and establishing a sense of civic pride and identity. Communities with a clear identity will be distinctive by definition. The design of the buildings and structures, the layout and character of the streets, the preservation of historic assets and the placement of open gathering spaces all contribute to a sense of place.



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A Plan of Action

The problems may seem insurmountable. But like most challenges, they can be met one step at a time by following a sensible plan of action. The AIA's 10 Principles for Livable Communities does a great job consolidating a meaningful plan:

1. Create Neighborhood Identity – A sense of place gives communities stability and an identity that residents can take pride in.
2. Provide Choices – People want a variety of housing, shopping, recreation, transportation and employment options. Variety adds stability and accommodates residents in different stages of their lives.
3. Conserve Open Landscape – Ensuring open space, agricultural land and wildlife habitat is important for environmental, recreational, cultural and aesthetic reasons.
4. Plan on a Human Scale – Appropriately compact communities allow residents to walk to shops, cultural resources and jobs, and can reduce traffic congestion.
5. Encourage Mixed-Use Development – Integrating different land uses and building types creates a vibrant blend of housing types and socioeconomic groups while making communities more walkable.
6. Vary Transportation Options – An interconnected network of streets, paths, greenways and waterways will reduce traffic and encourage social interaction. Reliable public transportation is important as an alternative to cars.
7. Preserve Urban Centers – Conserving, restoring and infilling urban centers uses existing services and resources instead of creating new infrastructure, and provides a sense of stability and identity. It makes environmental sense.
8. Strengthen the Public Realm – Citizens need dignified and physically defined places, schools, courthouses, libraries and other civic buildings to stimulate interaction, participation, art and civic pride.
9. Protect Environmental Resources – A well-designed blend of nature and development is aesthetically pleasing, protects waterways, preserves ecology and improves property values.
10. Design Matters – All the other principles flow from this one. Design excellence is the foundation of all buildings and of all communities. How our buildings and environments serve the myriad needs of our citizens may be our fundamental aesthetic achievement.