

DEFINITION OF PLACEMAKING: Four Different Types

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Introduction

This purpose of this short article is to address several common questions. *“What is the definition of placemaking?” “What distinguishes different types of placemaking?”* And, *“When should different types of placemaking be used?”*

Placemaking is catching on as another way to improve the quality of various places in a neighborhood, and by extension, the community and region in which those places are located as well. However, the myriad uses of the term are sometimes confusing and contradictory, and this dilutes the value of the concept and undermines its utility in helping neighborhoods and communities imagine and create a better future.

Placemaking was explored in some detail in the November 2010 issue of *Planning & Zoning News*, based on research by others, as well as considerable research at the MSU Land Policy Institute. That article (among other things) identified the origins of the concepts that are fundamental to placemaking and the use of the term by architects, urban planners and urban designers beginning in the 1970's. This article creates a typology comprised of four types of placemaking. It is targeted to those persons that understand concepts best when there is a place for everything and everything is in its place.

Miplace Partnership Initiative

This article grew out of efforts to create Version 4.0 of the Placemaking Curriculum at the MSU Land Policy Institute (LPI). The curriculum is part of the Miplace Partnership Initiative whose goals include effective use of placemaking as a community development, economic development and infrastructure development tool. The principal partners of the initiative are the Michigan State Housing Development Authority, the Michigan Municipal League and the LPI; along with a nearly 40-member stakeholder advisory group called the Sense of Place Council. The initiative maintains a website that includes many resources and case examples on placemaking targeted to Michigan communities: www.miplace.org. In addition to development of the curriculum, the initiative also includes placemaking training, resource sharing on effective placemaking tools, preparation of local PlacePlans, technical assistance and research.

The Placemaking Curriculum

The first three versions of the curriculum were created in 2012 and 2013 by staff of LPI and MSU Extension and were subject to extensive refinement based on review and comment by nearly 80 stakeholders. In 2013, over 5,000 persons attended workshops on one or more levels of the six module curriculum. The levels are organized like a college class: 100 level (1 hour or less of instruction); 200 level (1-3 hours); and 300 level (3-6 hours). In total there are 36 hours of instruction in Version 3.0 at the 300 level (for practitioners or trainers) and includes about 2,000 slides and a dozen training exercises. Version 4.0 will include about 300 additional slides. Currently the six modules are titled:

1. People, Places & Placemaking
2. Economics of Place
3. Neighborhoods, Streets and Connections
4. Form Planning & Regulation
5. Collaborative Public Involvement in Placemaking
6. Applied Placemaking.

Version 4.0 updates include the results of additional research related to placemaking and adds many new examples of placemaking from Michigan communities. However, Module 1 received a substantial

update to reshuffle all the slides on four types of placemaking into a single typology that makes it clearer what the characteristics of each type of placemaking are and how to decide which type of placemaking to use in a particular situation. In addition, one new module is in draft form which shows how specific tools administered by five different state agencies can be used to support placemaking, and another new module will explain how to effectively use Creative Placemaking to better integrate arts, culture and creative projects and activities into Michigan communities. These modules are expected to be complete by Spring 2014.

Quality Places with a Strong Sense of Place

For the time being, the simplest definition will suffice: "Placemaking is the **process of creating quality places that people want to live, work, play and learn in.**" Later I will define "Strategic Placemaking," "Creative Placemaking," and "Tactical Placemaking" and explain how each differs from the standard "placemaking."

What is critical to understand at the outset though, is that placemaking is a *process*, it is a means to an end; the end is the *creation of Quality Places*. People know and understand what Quality Places are when they are in them. However, it is more challenging to describe their characteristics abstractly. Module 1 in the curriculum goes to great lengths to do so. A super-simplified version follows.

A parking lot is a *place*, as is a main street or a house or a residential subdivision. Our concern is with places that people care about and want to be in. That is because those places have a strong *sense of place*. Most people feel that way about their homes. We refer to places with a strong sense of place as Quality Places. These are places where people and businesses want to be. They are active, unique locations, interesting, visually attractive, often with public art and creative activities. They are people-friendly, safe, and walkable with mixed uses; they have good building dimensions relative to the street, and quality façades; they are often alluring with pizzazz. We have more formally separated the key elements of Quality Places, from key characteristics that are the result of good form.

The key elements of Quality Places are:

- Mixed-uses
- Quality public spaces
- Broadband enabled
- Multiple transportation options
- Multiple housing options
- Preservation of historic structures
- Community heritage
- Arts, culture and creativity
- Recreation, and
- Green spaces.

Quality Places have characteristics that are the result of good FORM (and these are presented in detail in Module 3), which includes:

- Mass, density and scale appropriate to place on transect
- Human scale – designed for people
- Walkable – pedestrian oriented; and bikable.

When these form characteristics are in place then the result is Quality Places which are:

- Safe
- Connected
- Welcoming
- Allow authentic experiences

- Accessible – ability to easily circulate within, along and between public places
- Comfortable – address perceptions about cleanliness, character and charm
- Quiet – unless they are designed to be otherwise
- Sociable – have a physical fabric where people can connect with one another
- Promote and facilitate civic engagement.

Inherent in the above description is a simple formula that is critical to understanding the ingredients that are essential for proper placemaking that results in Quality Places:

Proper Physical Form
 + Proper Mix of Land Uses & Functions
 + Proper Mix of Social Opportunity
 = Quality Activities in Quality Places and a Strong Sense of Place

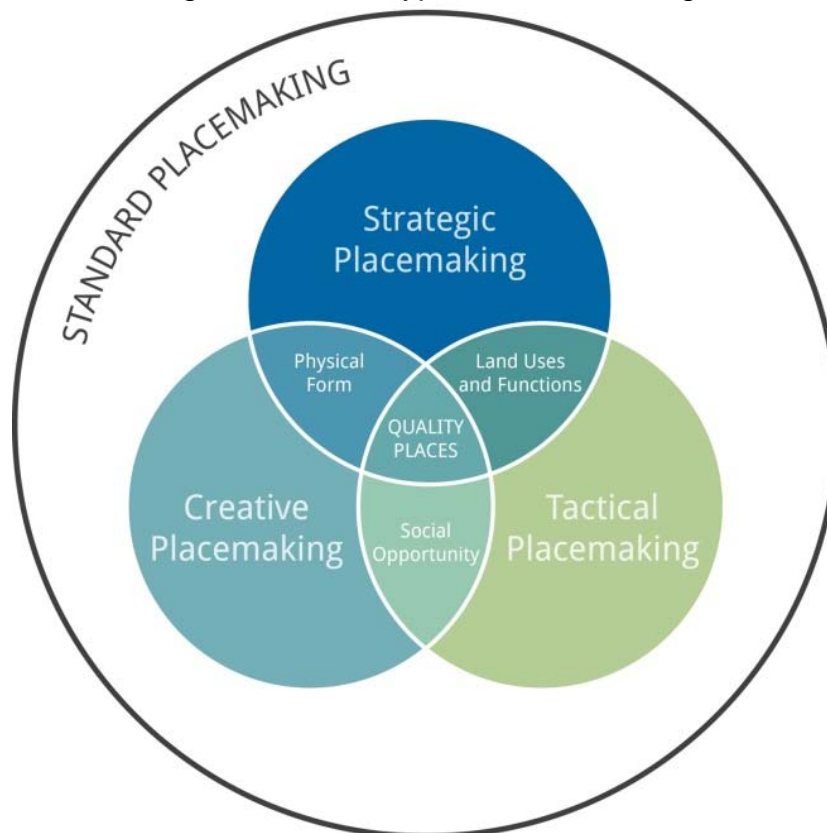
An analogy we use that seems to resonate with many people is:

- Form – creates the *Stage*
- Activity – is the *Play*
- Response – is how you *Feel* about the Play
- Economic – if good, the Play makes *Money* (and so will businesses nearby)
- Sense of Place – is strong if the above are true.

Four Types of Placemaking

Now I can briefly define and differentiate the four types of placemaking. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship of three specialized types of placemaking from the broader, generic or “standard” form. Note the relationship to physical form, land uses and functions, as well as social opportunity in creating Quality Places in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Four Types of Placemaking



“Standard” Placemaking (or just plain “Placemaking”) is the universal term. It is most closely associated with placemaking as advanced by the Project for Public Spaces (PPS, see www.pps.org). This organization led by Fred Kent, has for three decades promoted placemaking and assisted communities across the nation (and more recently around the world) with its implementation. The PPS website is a wealth of information and ideas that anyone interested in placemaking should spend a lot of time with. In this form, placemaking can be used for many different purposes. For the most part placemaking is used as an incremental way to improve the quality of a place over a long period of time with many separate small projects and/or activities. However, placemaking can also be used to create and implement larger scale transformative projects and activities that can convert a place in a relatively short period of time to one with a strong sense of place that serves as a magnet for people and new development.

There are three varieties of specialized placemaking:

- *Strategic Placemaking* (as advocated by MPlace Partnership Initiative).
- *Creative Placemaking* (as advocated by the NEA, U.S. Conference of Mayors, and American Architectural Foundation).
- *Tactical Placemaking* (as advocated by the Tactical Urbanism folks at The Street Plans Collaborative & by PPS).

All placemaking will improve the Quality of Life amenities and choices within a neighborhood, community, or region. The three specialized types of placemaking focus on:

- Certain types of Quality of Life improvements,
- Ways to achieve larger or smaller outcomes/benefits or to achieve them sooner, or
- Ways to try some things out before committing significant money and other resources.

All forms of placemaking depend on broad engagement of stakeholders to design projects and activities. This feature alone distinguishes placemaking from many other community development, economic development, and infrastructure development activities. See Figure 2.

Figure 2



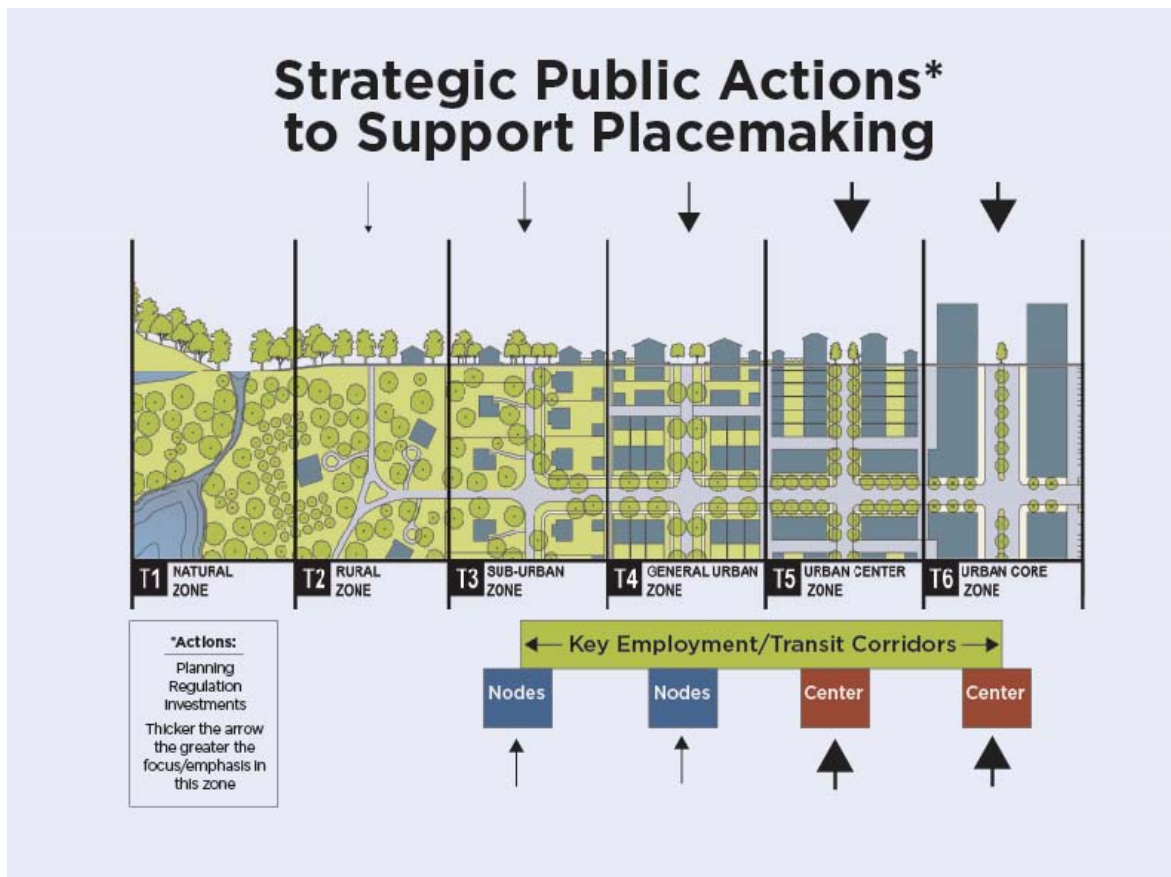
So, **Standard Placemaking is the process of creating Quality Places that people want to live, work, play and learn in.** That requires engaging and empowering people to participate in the process. This embraces a wide range of projects and activities and is pursued by the public, non-profit and private sectors on an incremental or targeted basis, over a long period of time – potentially, forever. Examples include:

- **Projects** – downtown street and façade improvements, neighborhood-based projects such as residential rehabs, residential infill, small scale multi-use projects, park improvements, etc.
- **Activities** – events in public places like sidewalks, streets, town squares, civic buildings, etc.

Strategic Placemaking

Strategic Placemaking is targeted to achieving a particular goal in addition to creating Quality Places. It aims to create Quality Places that are *uniquely attractive to talented workers* so that they want to be there and live there, and by so doing, they create the circumstances for substantial job creation and income growth by attracting businesses that are looking for concentrations of talented workers. This adaptation of placemaking especially targets knowledge workers in the global New Economy who because of their skills, can live anywhere in the world they want, and tend to pick Quality Places with many amenities and other talented workers. Strategic Placemaking embraces a range of targeted projects and activities and are pursued collaboratively by the public, non-profit and private sectors over 5 - 15 years. Projects tend to be larger and in far fewer locations than in Standard Placemaking. In particular, projects are in targeted centers (downtowns), and nodes along key corridors in transect locations with dense urban populations. The term was created by the LPI at MSU based on research into why communities that were gaining population, jobs and income were doing so, compared to communities that were not. See Figure 3.

Figure 3



So, **Strategic Placemaking** is a targeted process (i.e. it is deliberate and not accidental) involving projects/activities in certain locations (defined centers, nodes and corridors) that results in:

- quality, sustainable, human scale, pedestrian-oriented, bicycle-friendly, safe, mixed-use, broadband-enabled, green places,
- with lots of recreation, arts and culture, multiple transportation and housing options, respect for historic buildings, public spaces, and broad civic engagement.

Examples include:

- **Projects** – mixed-use developments in key *centers* (downtowns), along key *corridors* (esp. rapid transit lines), and at key *nodes*; can include rehab and new construction.
- **Activities** – frequent, often cyclical events targeted to talented workers as well as other arts, culture, entertainment and recreational activities that add vitality to Quality Places and attract a wide range of users.

Creative Placemaking

This term was created by Ann Markusen & Anne Gadwa when they wrote **Creative Placemaking** for the National Endowment for the Arts in 2010. Following is their definition:

“In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired.”

It is often the goal of Creative Placemaking to institutionalize arts, culture and creative thinking in all aspects of the built environment. Examples include:

- **Projects** – development built around and inclusive of arts, cultural and creative thinking such as museums and orchestra halls, public art displays, transit stations with art themes, live-work structures for creative people, etc.
- **Activities** – new arts, culture, and entertainment activities that add vitality to Quality Places such as movies in the park, chalk art projects, outdoor concerts, inclusion of children’s ideas in planning projects by means of artwork, etc.

Tactical Placemaking

Two separate, but related approaches are brought together to create Tactical Placemaking. The first is known as “Tactical Urbanism,” from two books (**Tactical Urbanism: Short-Term Action, Long-Term Change**, Vols 1 and 2), by the Streets Plan Collaborative. www.streetplans.org. The second is “Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper” a name given to set of activities by the Project for Public Spaces. www.pps.org.

Tactical Urbanism

As described in the book of the same name by Mike Lydon, Dan Bartman, Tony Garcia, Russ Preston, and Ronald Woudstra, Tactical Urbanism is described as follows:

“Improving the livability of our towns and cities commonly starts at the street, block, or building scale. While larger scale efforts do have their place, incremental, small-scale improvements are increasingly seen as a way to stage more substantial investments. This approach allows a host of local actors to test new concepts before making substantial political and financial commitments. Sometimes sanctioned, sometimes not, the actions are commonly referred to as “querrilla urbanism”, “pop-up urbanism”, “city repair”, or “D.I.Y urbanism”.”

Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper

As characterized by the Project for Public Spaces:

“Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper” (LQC) describes a local development strategy that has produced some of the world’s most successful public spaces — one that is lower risk and lower cost, capitalizing on the creative energy of the community to efficiently generate new uses and revenue for places in transition. It’s a phrase we borrowed from [Eric Reynolds](#) at Urban Space Management.

LQC can take many forms, requiring varying degrees of time, money, and effort, and the spectrum of interventions should be seen as an iterative means to build lasting change. We often start with Amenities and Public Art, followed by Event and Intervention Projects, which lead to Light Development strategies for long-term change. By championing use over design and capital-intensive construction, LQC interventions strike a balance between providing comfortable spaces for people to enjoy while generating the revenue necessary for maintenance and management.”

So, Tactical Placemaking is the process of creating Quality Places that uses a deliberate, often phased approach to change that begins with a short term commitment and realistic expectations that can start quickly (and often at low cost). It targets public spaces (RoWs, plazas, etc.), is low risk, with possibly high rewards. It can be used continuously in neighborhoods with a mix of stakeholders. It includes a mix of small projects and short term activities. Over a long period of time, Tactical Placemaking projects can transform an area. Positive impacts may be slow to observe, but “*steady as she goes*” still gets one to a destination—and often at a lower cost.

Examples include:

- **Projects** – small, short-term projects that may transform underused public spaces into exciting laboratories by leveraging local partnerships in an iterative approach allowing an opportunity to experiment and show what is possible, such as: road diets (shrinking a four-lane road to a three-lane with bicycle paths on both sides) and other Complete Streets projects; pilot construction of a new form of dwelling in a neighborhood, such as a passive solar home, or context sensitive home for a low income family; or temporary conversion of a public storage facility into a boat rental facility along a river, etc.
- **Activities** – chair bombing, parking space conversions, temporary activity spaces, public gatherings over new design options illustrated by temporary facades, or park enlargements, or new bike paths, self-guided historic walks, outdoor music events in town squares, before and after photo renderings to illustrate the potential of removing or adding buildings in certain places, etc.

Comparison of the Four Types of Placemaking

Table 1 is a simple comparison of these four types of placemaking. The format for this table, the column headings, and the third sentence row on Creative Placemaking are from **Creative Placemaking** by Ann Markusen & Anne Gadwa, prepared for the National Endowment for the Arts, 2010. The balance of the text was prepared by the author in order to compare the four types of placemaking against this common set of considerations.

Table 1
Comparison of Four Types of Placemaking

The Problem	The Solution	The Payoffs
Standard Placemaking		
Communities are not effectively using public spaces to create vital, vibrant and livable communities that people want to live, work, play, and learn in.	Broad public and stakeholder engagement in revitalizing, reusing, and creating public spaces using short and long term techniques rooted in social engagement and new urbanist design principles.	More quality places with quality activities and a strong sense of place. More vital, vibrant and livable public spaces, communities and regions that residents, businesses and visitors care deeply about.
Strategic Placemaking		
Communities are not competitive in attracting and retaining talented workers.	Revitalization that increases housing and transportation choices, and urban amenities to attract talented workers.	Faster gains in livability, population, diversity, jobs, income and educational attainment, than by standard placemaking.
Creative Placemaking		
American cities, suburbs and small towns confront structural changes and residential uprooting.	Revitalization by creative initiatives that animate places and spark economic development.	Gains in livability, diversity, jobs and income. Innovative products and services for the cultural industries.
Tactical Placemaking		
Many physical improvements are expensive and policy-makers are understandably reluctant to commit resources due to uncertain risks.	Test various solutions using low cost proxies to gauge effectiveness and public support.	The public and policy-makers can actually see the result and degree of support for various options before committing permanent resources.

What Type of Placemaking to Use

Because the specialized forms of placemaking are still placemaking, and require broad stakeholder involvement before implementation, a person that learns of only one type of placemaking is still likely to be able to initiate a useful placemaking project or activity. However, in an era of increasingly limited funds and volunteer time, it is perhaps more efficient to pick the placemaking approach best suited to what the user is trying to accomplish.

Figure 4 is a flow chart that includes the essential questions that need to be asked to pick the type of placemaking best suited to address the project or activity need of the user. Table 2 illustrates six examples in a single table. The examples are intended to inform the prospective user of different types of placemaking applied to a small set of projects and activities.

Conclusion

Hopefully this short overview into the different types of placemaking will help the reader sort through the options and better understand which has the greatest potential to assist with a particular objective. The Placemaking Curriculum advocates the use of multiple types of placemaking both consecutively or sequentially, depending on the objectives to be achieved in particular places. For information on scheduling a training program on placemaking in your community, contact Julie Hales Smith with the Michigan Municipal League at: juliehalessmith@gmail.com.

Figure 4

Placemaking Decision Flow Chart

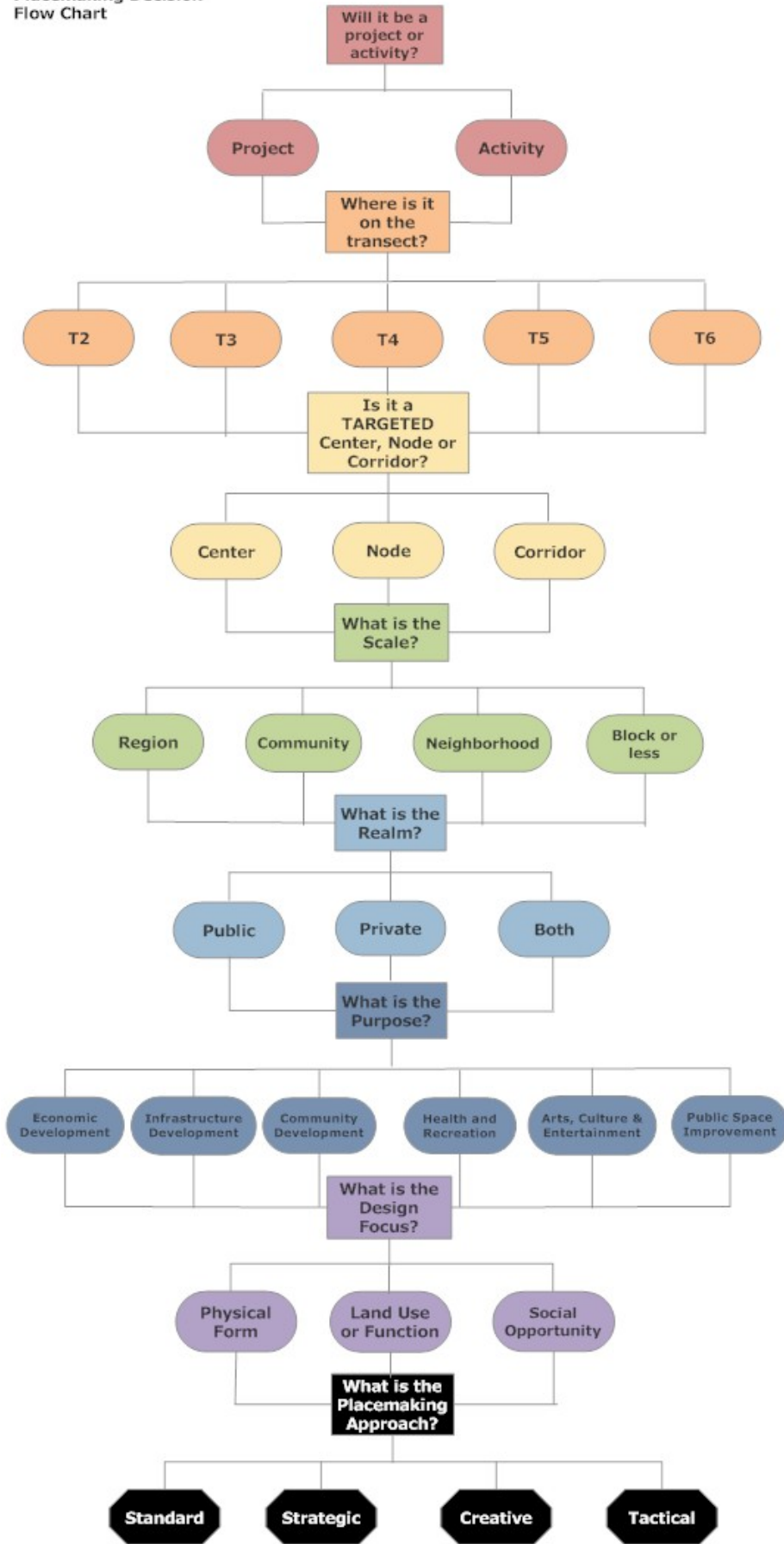


Table 2
Examples of Four Types of Placemaking Projects & Activities

Is it a Project or Activity?	Where is it on the Transect?	In what Realm is it?	What Scale of Significance?	Is it in a targeted center, node or corridor?	What is the Principal Purpose?	What is the Principal Design Focus?
TOD <i>Project</i>	Zones 4-6	Private	Community & Regional	Center, Nodes & Key Corridor	Economic Development – talent attraction	Physical Form, Land Use
Infill S.Family Housing <i>Project</i>	Zone 4	Private	Neighborhood, block and lot	No	Community Development – low cost housing	Physical Form, Land Use
Bus Rapid Transit <i>Project</i>	Zones 4-6	Public	Community & Regional	Center, Nodes & Key Corridor	Infrastructure Development – BRT line	Physical Form, Land Use
Trail Linking Parks <i>Proj./ Activity</i>	Zone 4	Public	Neighborhood & Community (maybe Reg.)	Near a Node	Health & Recreation – expand facil.	Physical Form, Land Use, Social
Start an Artfair <i>Activity</i>	Zone 5	Public & Private	Community & Regional	Center	Arts, Culture & Entertainment – expand access	Social Opportunity
Symphony in Town Square <i>Activity</i>	Zone 6	Public (in town square)	Community (maybe Reg.)	Center	Public Spaces – expand use of	Social Opportunity

Strategic Placemaking	Standard Placemaking	Creative Placemaking	Tactical Placemaking
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Note:
All graphics in this article are by MSU Land Policy Institute.