



## **FOCUS AREA 6: Create places across the region that support economically vibrant and socially diverse communities ●**

**WHAT AND WHY** North Jersey boasts one of the most diverse populations in the country. The region must continue to create and sustain places and communities accessible to all its residents. Such places are welcoming to people of diverse economic and social backgrounds and afford residents the opportunity to lead healthy, active, and fulfilling lives. For example, children require safe neighborhoods to explore, play, and learn independence. Seniors need housing choices, accessible and reliable public transit, meaningful community engagement, and safe places to walk. All need an aesthetically pleasing and healthy environment. To thrive, North Jersey's communities must be as dynamic and diverse as their residents; places must grow by providing a mix of residential neighborhoods, work environments, retail and cultural amenities, and public spaces accessible by walking, biking, and public transit.

Elected officials, community-based groups, builders, residents, and other decision-makers at all levels need to think comprehensively about the kind of places - public and private – that they plan for and build. Diverse places help communities grow in ways that address long-standing economic and social challenges and are characterized by the abundance of homes and businesses, inviting public spaces, engaging cultural activities, and bustling commercial centers threaded by a transportation system making these places accessible. Investing in efforts to increase the well-being of the region's residents will help drive economic competitiveness and prosperity and create more sustainable patterns of development.

**HOW** Creating economically and socially diverse places requires a clear vision supported by government policy through regulations, design guidelines, prioritizing investment, and building local institutional capacity to implement place-making projects and ensure they meet the community's goals. While necessary, diverse places are not just about buildings and infrastructure. They require active community engagement, programs and management that permit sustained focus and attention over time. They also require strengthening partnerships between private, institutional and public sector stakeholders to coordinate investment and ensure it yields benefits for all residents.



**STRATEGY 6.1: Plan for places that promote social and economic diversity**

Places designed for social and economic inclusion integrate housing with work, retail, cultural amenities, healthcare, education, and social opportunities. Diverse places need to be planned through community visions that are reflected in neighborhood, district or municipality-wide plans. Reforms to local land-use regulations and other supporting policies and ordinances are necessary to advance the vision. For example, loosening restrictive zoning to permit more diverse housing types and small businesses, redesigning streets and roadways to prioritize public transit, biking and walking, and identifying where to improve and expand parks and plazas that support economic and social functions are critical actions for local governments. A strong community vision with supportive regulations and policies is the foundation for continued community engagement and investment.

**STRATEGY 6.2: Educate local communities and stakeholders on how to envision and create places that incorporate social and economic diversity**

Creating diverse places is successful when local officials, community-based groups, builders, residents, and other decision-makers have a common understanding of the challenges and opportunities within the community. Educating the region's stakeholders about the imperative need will improve conversations, generate ideas and solutions, and result in more vibrant communities that are equipped to adapt to social and economic changes. We can accomplish these goals by providing resources for communities to develop a values statement and vision plan; marketing our region to emphasize its unique and intrinsic qualities; engaging residents, business owners, community groups and elected officials in the process of developing sustainable design, and supporting leaders at the local level to oversee design standards and implementation.

**STRATEGY 6.3: Prioritize development in areas where people can walk, bike, and make use of public transit**

Walking and biking are associated with better health outcomes for children, families, and communities. Residents of places with bicycle-supportive infrastructure, safe, walkable neighborhoods and nearby destinations are more likely to experience these health benefits. In addition, walkable, bikeable places with transit provide more equitable access for people of all ages, incomes, and abilities. Local municipalities should ensure that planning and redevelopment efforts create places and spaces that are accessible to surrounding districts by foot and bike—whether through new or reimagined existing development. This means locating new development in areas that are or can be made walkable and bikeable, as well as completing pedestrian networks to better link areas of existing development. New public spaces, such as parks and plazas, can provide a framework for adding new infrastructure and fostering walking and biking in places where pedestrian and bike connections do not exist.

**STRATEGY 6.4: Invest strategically in a network of public spaces, rather than stand-alone building projects, can bring people together and create value for communities**

Public spaces can serve as spaces for socializing and community gatherings and retail environments that support local businesses. Investing in public spaces is one way to attract people and spur development. By planning development and public space – such as streets, small parks, squares, green spaces, or waterfronts – in concert with each other, communities can create vibrant and functional places that bring community members together and attract visitors. Communities should work to identify viable sites and reevaluate land use planning and regulations to support the creation of these spaces. Research into the costs and benefits of public space can bolster this approach. North Jersey should also revamp zoning to encourage development around public spaces, work to identify strategic investment opportunities, and support funding for demonstration projects of “lighter, quicker, cheaper” approaches to placemaking.

**STRATEGY 6.5: Build institutional capacity at the local level to implement and sustain community diversity through place-making initiatives**

Creating and sustaining diverse places and neighborhoods requires the coordinated efforts of many different partners at the local level, including civic, religious and municipal leaders, residents, builders, property owners, and merchants, with the support of state and regional agencies. Supporting and sustaining these complex efforts requires organizational knowledge and capacity. One way to build institutional capacity among local organizations is to assist them in identifying community values and offering best management practices that reflect their vision in order to create active, community-based spaces. Streetscapes, public gathering places, parks and outdoor spaces should be creatively activated, effectively managed, and designed to connect people to recreation, retail, and arts and cultural facilities. Programs and attractions—like farmer's markets, public art festivals, and street fairs can draw people into a public space. These efforts require close coordination and input from diverse community partners, including local businesses, residents, arts and culture organizations and others. Establishing a management entity, such as a Business Improvement District or local merchants' association, is essential to effectively activating and maintaining public space.