

The Changing Fabric of Neighborhoods

Discussion Guide



Let's review

At the start of each discussion, review the conversation ground rules for returning and new members alike to set the stage for active participation by all. You may want to use a timer as you go around the room. And don't forget to decide who will take notes and post a discussion recap.

- **Be open and curious:** Everyone has a unique perspective, so be prepared to hear a different point of view. Listen first, and focus on the facts.
- **Be respectful and engaged:** Be sure that everyone has a chance to speak before adding a second comment or perspective. Encourage each other's participation.
- **Be focused and concise:** Keep the conversation centered on the issue and the brief.

The "Table-it" Rule: If the group has gone off-topic but the area is of interest, the group can table the conversation and save it for another time to be addressed in a different manner.

Let's begin

*Each member is invited to give a short **two-three minute reaction** to the brief answering the following questions.*

- What lens did you wear when reviewing this brief (e.g. personal, professional, etc.)?
- What did you find most interesting or surprising from reading the brief?
- What do you most care about/would like to investigate more regarding this issue?

Let's discuss

- How are America's communities and the face of Main Street changing? Have you seen changes in your own neighborhood?
- Is the digital world impacting personal connections in communities? How might this take away from or add to community engagement?
- A few specific topics to address :
 - Do you know your community's policies on affordable housing or zoning?
 - Have you voted in your community's recent local elections?
 - What are the effects of small businesses on your community?

- Does social infrastructure (libraries, newspapers, parks etc.) play an important role in your neighborhood?

Let's spread the word

Pick 2-3 facts that your circle feels best highlights the current state of this topic to develop your talking points on the issue.

- ❓ People who are socially connected to their communities tend to be happier, healthier, and live longer than people who are less connected ([Harvard](#)).
- ❓ Across the United States, there are approximately 46 million rural counties, 175 million suburban counties, and 98 million urban core counties ([Pew](#)).
- ❓ Young Americans ages 25 -29 are 25 percent more likely to move from the city to the suburbs than the suburbs to the city ([NY Times](#)).
- ❓ Home prices are rising at twice the rate of wages. Property taxes rose an average of 4 percent across the U.S. in 2018, bringing the average to almost \$3500 ([CBS](#)).
- ❓ Some estimates show that the U.S. economy as a whole is 14 percent smaller due to constraints such as zoning ([University of Chicago](#)).
- ❓ Small businesses (defined as 500 employees or fewer) made up 99.9 percent of all businesses in the U.S. in 2018 and employed 47.5 percent of U.S. employees, about 60 million people ([Forbes](#)).
- ❓ In the last 15 years, “news deserts” have been on the rise: 1800 newspapers have disappeared, and those that continue printing have lost more than half of their journalists ([PBS](#)).

Let's act

- Who can post a recap of this discussion?
- What organizations, legislators and journalists could we contact to ask questions, learn more and get engaged?

Federal Agencies

- [Housing and Urban Development: Community Development](#)
- [U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business & Entrepreneurship](#)

Local Resources

Individual states and municipalities generally have community development resources as well as neighborhood associations. Use the keywords of your state or community with “neighborhood” or “community development” to find out about your local resources.

- Look at your town, community, or municipality's website
- Challenge yourself to get to know your elected representatives and heads of different agencies in your area

- Talk to your local business owners, entrepreneurs, and the local Chamber of Commerce.

Organizations

- [Aspen Institute: Weave, the Social Fabric Initiative](#) to “spread the values of a cultural revolution that replaces hyper-individualism with relationism.”
- [Nextdoor](#), the “World’s largest social network for the neighborhood,” which supports more than 200,000 neighborhoods in the U.S., UK, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, and Australia. NextDoor depends on NextDoor leaders who act as moderators – this could be a potential role for circle members.
- [Empower LA](#), Los Angeles’ Department of Neighborhood Empowerment through which its neighborhood councils “advocate directly for real change in their communities” and consist of residents, business owners, property owners