



A Virginia Main Street discussion series for
community & neighborhood revitalization teams

Dar Williams'
What I Found in a Thousand Towns
Basic Books (2017)

Think in bridges.

CHAPTER 6: Food

POSITIVE PROXIMITY summary: A community can use proximity to its advantage to integrate the talents and skills of residents. Successful revitalization programs use physical **spaces** to foster positive interaction. They take on **projects** that shape the community identity. Critically, they **engage** the spectrum of the community in making these a reality. (Williams calls this *translation*, the act of a town opening up to itself.)

“...There are **PROJECTS** that build a town’s **IDENTITY**—socially, culturally, and /or historically—helping them become...themselves. These projects bring out the advantages of proximity by attracting the passions and skill sets of people who are like-minded in some ways but very different in others, cross-pollinating abilities and personalities. Citizens tend to see past their partisanship and biases when they’re trying to accomplish something they can’t do alone...”

FOOD: Questions for Discussion

1. What appealed to you about the **Finger Lakes District** and the emphasis on food?
2. Williams calls it an “agrosphere.” Watch **Finding Main Street Video #6** featuring the community of Cape Charles. Nationally, there seems to be a growing consciousness of **food systems**, including local foods, farmers markets, farm to table restaurants, and access for all to healthy, fresh food.
 - a. Who drives this focus in your community?
 - b. What opportunities do you see to do this?
3. About growing and celebrating food locally, Williams writes, “We experience a sense of **self-reliance and even abundance**, a nice counterpoint to feeling subject to the vicissitudes of the larger economy.” Is there a sense of self-reliance in your community?
4. An itinerary can create “a depth of experience that makes you want to come back.” (p. 153) What would a **food itinerary** for your community include?
5. Fermentation involves “a certain kind of careful sustained process and relationships between growers, producers, and sellers. (p. 154) What collaborative system of work in your community **carefully sustains processes and relationships**?
6. Williams describes the bridging work of extension agent Monica Roth. Who in your community goes above and beyond to **bridge socioeconomic gaps** and actively help all boats to rise”? (p. 159)

