



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 9: Positive Proximity

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.)

Questions for Discussion

1. **Watch Finding Main Street Video #9, featuring some future-oriented proximity building projects**
 - a. How do you see positive proximity at work in the example community of Staunton, Virginia?
 - b. What strategies rely on positive proximity?
2. Dar Williams writes, "As a traveler, I can sense **positive proximity** pretty quickly." (p. 240). How do you know Positive Proximity when you see it? What are the signs?
3. Where – in what projects, places, or events - do you experience positive proximity in your community?
4. Where might you experience it in a few years?
5. Williams writes of the Beatles Sing-a-Long—an event that was "just fun"—after a divisive election. (p. 244) Have you recently had a **divisive issue** in your community? How could you use positive proximity to move past it?
6. Williams writes, "When we have built something extraordinary, a place where we have both **hometown pride and a wordly welcome**, our kids come back to us and tell us how well we did by them." How is your community working toward both hometown pride and a worldly welcome?

"When we let our curiosity and interests, and a little trust, lead us outside our doors and onto the village green, we will flourish as citizens and so will our towns." (p. 241)

