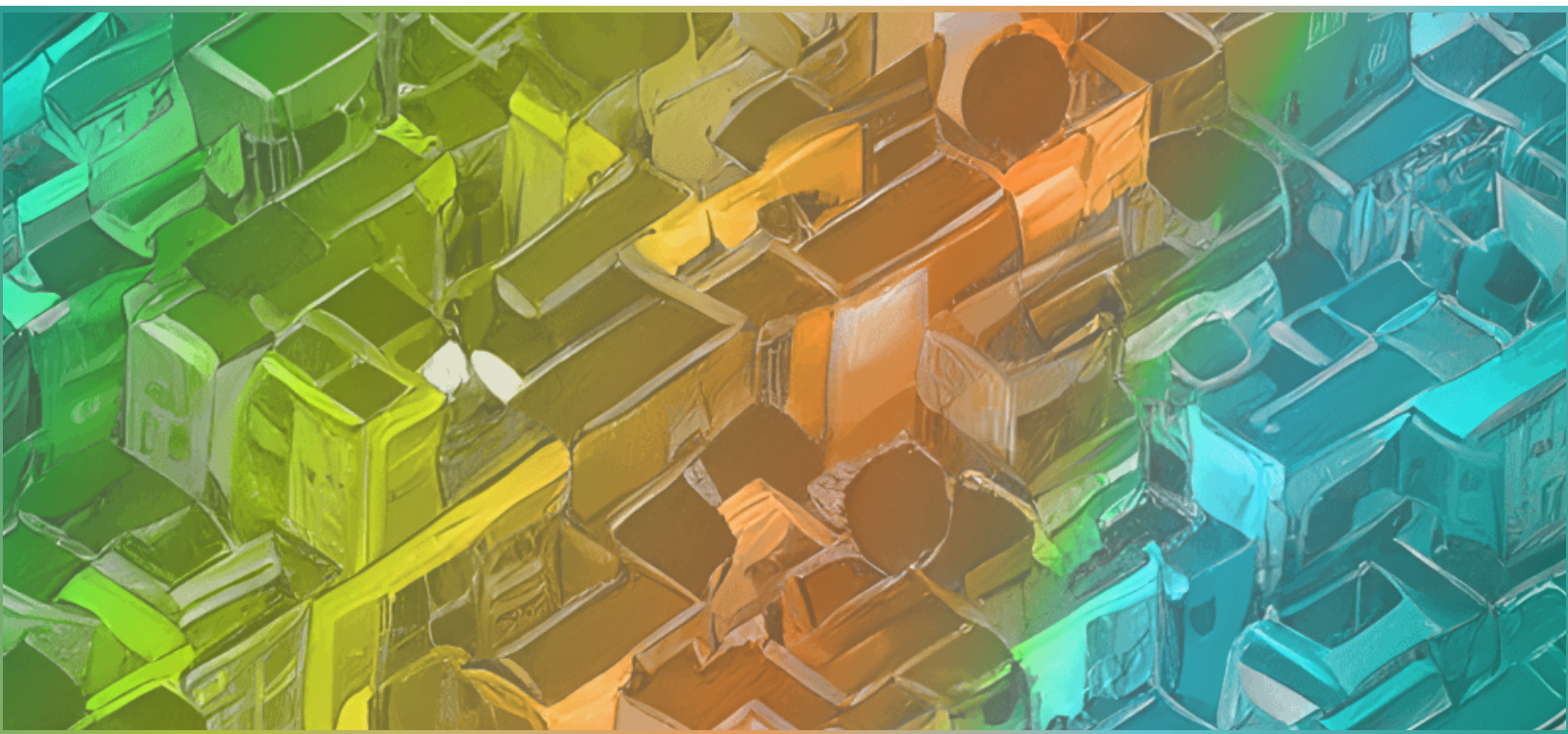


TOOLKIT

Happy City

*Transforming Our Lives
Through Urban Design*



IMAGINE KALAMAZOO READS!

Thank you for being a part of an Imagine Kalamazoo 2035 (IK2035) discussion group! Your input shapes the community vision and the plans created from the IK2035 conversations. Imagine Kalamazoo Reads is a chance to read and discuss a book with fellow community members. The inaugural book is Charles Montgomery's *Happy City: Transforming Our Lives Through Urban Design*.

This toolkit will guide your discussions about *Happy City*. Whether you read the book or watch Charles Montgomery's TED Talk on the topic, this packet includes an introduction to the text, a reflection on key themes throughout the book, discussion questions to get you started, and potential discussion activities. There are also resources with which you can begin to connect the ideas of *Happy City* to the City's Strategic Vision Goals. These resources are meant to be a starting point - please expand and explore your ideas about *Happy City* as you see fit!

After you have discussed *Happy City*, we'd love to hear from you! There are a few options to share your ideas, questions, and comments. You can fill out our online form (accessed through a QR code in the toolkit), or you can physically write in the response section, then use your phone scan or take a photo and email your results! We are also happy to receive a physical paper copy of any notes you took. If you'd like to have City of Kalamazoo staff to help facilitate or record results at any of these meetings, we'd be happy to help. Please reach out to Emerson at wesselhoffe@kalamazoocity.org for more information.

Imagine Kalamazoo is about creating a more prosperous future for our City. Community leaders like you are critical to this process, and we appreciate your willingness to contribute. Your openness to sharing your ideas about happiness and urban connection in Kalamazoo opens doors for the vision and policies of the City to better reflect the desires of our communities. This book discussion is kicking off Imagine Kalamazoo 2035, setting the stage for a decade of progress in Kalamazoo.

Thank you!
City of Kalamazoo

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

1) READ/WATCH IT!

The first step is simple – read the book or watch the TED talk! Read/watch as much as you can/are willing. The more you take in, the more interesting the discussion will be!

2) CHECK IN!

Check in with us at the City, by emailing Emerson (wesselhoffe@kalamazoo.org). Let us know if you would like any additional resources! City staff would be happy to provide further information, instruction, and even to attend or help guide the meeting if you wish!

3) DISCUSS IT!

It's time to have your Happy City discussion! Meet with your group in a shared space – get comfy, enjoy some snacks, and use this toolkit as a guide for your discussion.

4) SHARE

The last step is to share the results of your discussion with us! You can submit the group's collected feedback or your individual thoughts. There are a few ways to do this:

- You can scan the QR code to the right (also located in the "Happy City Resources" section) and fill out the responses on the online form.
- Record your responses down by hand, and:
 - Take a picture or scan with your phone and email it to hello@kalamazoo.org
 - Return in person or in the mail to:
Community Planning & Economic Development
245 North Rose Street, Kalamazoo, MI 49008
(office hours are 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.)



Fill out the
Happy City
discussion
form online!

HAPPY CITY RESOURCES

Please feel free to use the resources provided below to access any content related to Happy City.



Find all
IK Reads
Resources
Online Here



Read Happy
City online
here!



Watch the
Happy City
TED Talk here!



Fill out the
Happy City
discussion
form here!



Learn more
about the
Strategic
Vision here!



Play the
Urbanology
game here!

HAPPY CITY: AN INTRODUCTION

How do our lives in the city – who we see, where we live, and how we get places – shape our sense of happiness?

Happiness, is not an accidental emotion, or something we can feel only casually. It is fundamental to our health and success, and to the health and success of our communities and neighborhoods, too. How are the ideas of happiness and our city really connected? And how can we possibly live our lives in a way that responsibly shows that connection?

Author Charles Montgomery believes the answer to these questions is to make cities that are socially and sustainably connected. Happy cities are safe and accessible. They are cities that contain pockets of nature and places to see and be seen by our neighbors and friends. These aspects of a happy city are real: they take shape with comfortable sidewalks, mixed-use buildings with residences and storefronts, parks with benches and other gathering spots, and all kinds of public art and green space. In each of these areas, residents can take time to talk to one another, find common ground, and build one of the most important parts of any city: trust.

Although Happy City covers urban areas in the United States, Colombia, Denmark, and beyond, you don't have to be a world traveler to find a happy city of your own. This is the point that Montgomery makes: we can all be the true architects of the happy city. By getting to know one another, and learning about the habits, hopes, and dreams of the folks on your street and in your neighborhood, you're that much closer to holding "the good life" in your hands - transforming your city into a truly happy place to be.

HAPPY CITY AND

THE STRATEGIC VISION

The Strategic Vision is the City's guide to help shape the work of the City. The Strategic Vision guides all plans, policies, and programs created across all City departments. The Strategic Vision is made up of Strategic Goals. Strategic Goals are the City's guide to help shape the future direction of the City, and provide a framework from which all other City plans are created. There are ten Strategic Goals:

- Connected City
- Complete Neighborhoods
- Economic Vitality
- Environmental Responsibility
- Good Governance
- Inviting Public Places
- Safe Community
- Shared Prosperity
- Strength Through Diversity
- Youth Development

How might projects or plans that stem from the Strategic Goals promote dense & diverse neighborhoods, strong social networks, or sustainable growth? Do the Goals align with themes from Happy City? Use these questions to jump-start a discussion about how Kalamazoo's future plans might benefit from an understanding of urban happiness.



Learn more about the 2025
Strategic Vision here!

KEY THEMES

CITIES ARE SOCIAL

A shared social network is the key to a strong and happy city.

Social networks are like tree roots! Most of our roots include our immediately family, spouses, parents, and kids. But, we also need relationships with friends and acquaintances to make sure our social tree stands tall!

Cities and neighborhoods that are spread out make building those relationships harder. On the other hand, cities that are built to be dense and accessible make it easier for us to meet neighbors and other citizens, building trustworthy and long-lasting relationships!

THE GOOD LIFE

Montgomery talks about the things that influence our happiness in life. Location is one of them - but so are these:

- Leisure time
- Shorter commutes
- Good health
- Volunteer opportunities
- Environmental quality

More “good life” ingredients may include:

- Self-acceptance, or how well you know and regard yourself
- Mastery of your environment – your ability to navigate and thrive in the world (ie. your ability to maneuver on sidewalks, bike paths, etc.)
- Positive relations with others
- Personal growth throughout life
- Sense of meaning and purpose
- Feelings of autonomy and independence

As you read the items above, do you agree with this list? What aspects of life in your neighborhood or in the City of Kalamazoo might allow you to feel this way?

KEY THEMES

THE CHOICES WE MAKE

How do we ensure that the choices we make for living, work, or mobility/transportation/travel will improve our quality of life? And, how do we make sure that the choices about our own “good lives” are also the choices that make our communities and cities happier?

The good choice and the happy choice are often the same when we move away from the idea of a spread-out city, and towards a city where our homes, workplaces, playscapes, and food sources are close together.

When conditions for the good and happy choices are met, we feel a greater sense of belonging in the city.

TRIANGLES

The tight web connecting trust and life satisfaction also extends to the “misty realm” of our sense of belonging. That web makes a perfect triangle:

- Our sense of belonging is influenced by social contact, like with our neighbors
- People who trust their neighbors feel a greater sense of belonging
- People who say they feel that they “belong” to their community are happier than those who do not



Who or what is in your happy triangle? How did they get there? Where else might these triangles exist in Kalamazoo?

KEY THEMES

DO WE NEED SPEED?

The ideas of trust, belonging, and happiness we talked about before are made possible when we have enough time and room to nurture them - when our days are not taken up by long commutes, and when the places we go are close to the places our neighbors go. We build our happy triangles when the built environment allows us to slow down!

A slower, more connected life includes plenty of options for our day-to-day choices. When we all make the choice about how to get to school, to work, to the doctor's office, grocery store, library, and playground, we should be able to choose from many transportation options.

It also means a life that, on everybody's daily routes, there are plenty of opportunities to have unplanned or informal social time with other residents in your community.

GOING FOR GREEN

When we live in the city, our view of nature outside our windows has important implications in our lives – for example: hospital patients feel less pain, and students feel less stressed when they can see nature scenes from their rooms.

When we can regulate those negative emotions, we interact more kindly with others. In other words, because nature helps us fight against difficult feelings, we build better social networks and happier cities!

Nature and the city are not separate things. Even urban landscapes are still landscapes! Nature can take many forms in the city, from a sidewalk-level garden to towering trees. So the question is - how can we design cities to make sure that nature has a place, where everyone can see it?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following discussion questions can serve as guides to being your Happy City discussion. The first four are the City's priority questions, but you decide how many your group discusses based on your time and the direction of the conversation.

- Happy City brings in a developmental psychologist, Carol Ryff, who has her own list of happiness ingredients (seen in the "Good Life" section of this toolkit). What would you include on your list? Do you have access to all of these ingredients today? Why, or why not – what changes that access?
- If one change could be made to your neighborhood or to the City, which would have the greatest impact on your individual happiness or the happiness of your community, what would that change be?
- Draw your own version of a happy triangle. Who or what is in your happy triangle? How did they get there? Where else might these triangles exist in Kalamazoo?
- An essential part of a happy city is making sure that the happiness which comes from the built environment is accessible and felt by as many communities as possible. How do you see themes of equity and "fair cities" represented in the book? Are there any gaps or inadequacies?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Social networks are key to creating and maintaining strong and connected cities. How has your social network developed as you've lived in Kalamazoo? What helps this development, and what makes it harder?
- What is your idea of "the good life" in Kalamazoo? If you could name 3-5 most important aspects of that life, what would they be? Are they the same for everyone in your discussion group? What factors (social, cultural, financial, environmental, etc.) might influence what you choose?
- What are some examples of nature/green space that contribute to your sense of belonging and happiness in your neighborhood or in the City? Why did you choose your answers? Are they the same as others in the group?
- How should we integrate more green space into the City environment? Are the current spaces accessible? Are there areas we should prioritize?
- Montgomery repeatedly brings up the idea of conviviality, or the quality of being lively and friendly. What are some convivial spaces in Kalamazoo, and what makes them feel that way? Is it spaces where we can have unplanned interactions or gatherings with our neighbors? Something else? What ideas do you have to make spaces in Kalamazoo more inviting?
- Take a minute to think about or write down some notes about your initial reaction to reading Happy City. Have your thoughts or feelings changed since discussing with a group? Are your key takeaways any different? Why or why not?

DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

PLAY URBANOLOGY

Before reading *Happy City*, play this 5-minute online game called Urbanology developed by the BMW Guggenheim Lab (which author Charles Montgomery was involved in). It's a series of yes-or-no questions that get you thinking about the kinds of decisions you would make if you were planning a city! Urbanology helps us understand what kinds of ideas that should or should not be considered when planning a city, and what goes into that decision making process.

Take note of your results (there will be three main "results:" city, highest priority, and lowest priority). Then, during or just before the larger book club meeting, play the game again. Have your results changed? How do they compare to the results of those around you? This could be a great warm up or ice-breaker activity before discussions begin.



Play the
Urbanology
game here!

DISCUSSION RECAP

Fill out the
Happy City
discussion
form online!



**Please share with us a little more about
yourself and your discussion group!**

Name:

Date of discussion:

Name/identity of group who discussed the book:

Location of book discussion:

Host Email:

DISCUSSION RECAP

CONTINUED

These questions are intentionally broad. There are no right or wrong answers! Just fill them out with the details that stuck out to you from your book discussions. You may answer as many or as few questions as you would like.

- Overall, how do you think your discussion went? Were any parts of it particularly productive, interesting, or difficult?

- What would you like us to know about your discussion? Were there any highlights or key takeaways you would like to share with us?

DISCUSSION RECAP

CONTINUED

- How did this discussion make you think about your life in Kalamazoo? In your neighborhood?

- What surprised you most about your discussion?

DISCUSSION RECAP

CONTINUED

- Are there any changes/suggestions you would make as to how this activity works?

- Is there anything else you would like us to know?