



# Placemaking

## tools for community action

Tools that engage the community  
to create a future that works for everyone

CONCERN, Inc.  
Environmental Simulation Center  
Denver Regional Office of the U.S. Department of Energy  
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

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- all who engage in developing and applying tools that encourage public participation in the improvement of their communities.

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## Disclaimer

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Bethesda Row in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Photo: CONCERN, Inc.

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## Development of this Guide

Over the past few years, under the leadership of the Denver Regional Office of the U.S. Department of Energy, a number of tools developers, practitioners, foundations, government agencies and community activists have met to exchange information about placemaking tools, their applications, and benefits, and to explore ways to promote innovative planning efforts that enhance public participation in decision-making.

In early 2002 a new organization, PlaceMatters.com, was formed from this process. PlaceMatters.com is a resource for community leaders, public agencies, and land use planners to learn about and employ new placemaking tools and techniques. In addition to providing information and technical assistance, PlaceMatters.com spreads the word about how using these tools can help manage growth and its impacts.

Another outcome of the exchange is a PowerPoint presentation designed by the Denver Regional Office of the U.S. Department of Energy to educate both the public and professionals about the need, benefits, and applications of tools for community design and decision-making. This guide was developed as a companion to the PowerPoint presentation with the support of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Both resources are available to the public on cd-rom as well as the following websites:

[HTTP://WWW.SUSTAINABLE.DOE.GOV/PLACEMAKING.STML](http://www.sustainable.doe.gov/placemaking.stml)

[HTTP://WWW.PLACEMATTERS.COM/PLACEMAKING](http://www.placematters.com/placemaking)

### For more information

A comprehensive discussion of the tools described in this manual, access to tools, and support to using them may be found at [HTTP://WWW.PLACEMATTERS.COM](http://www.placematters.com).

Database site: [HTTP://WWW.PLACEMAKINGTOOLS.ORG](http://www.placemakingtools.org)



Fountain plaza in Washington, D.C.  
Photo: CONCERN, Inc.

*“I’ve been in city planning for 31 years,  
and this is the best planning tool I’ve  
ever seen used.”*

– Cerritos Assistant City Manager  
Dennis Davis, on his experience  
with MultiGen-Paradigm’s  
3D simulation

# Introduction

## Purpose of the Guide

**T**his guide provides a starter kit for a community member, city official, planner, or design professional to identify currently available planning tools and to assess their applicability and appropriateness to specific projects or issues, alone or in combination. It builds upon the work being done at [HTTP://WWW.PLACEMATTERS.COM](http://www.placematters.com) and provides a springboard for community action.

- For the community member it is intended as a community action guide to further the understanding of the importance of civic engagement and participation processes that draw on the collective wisdom, creativity, and experience of those involved. It will show how to begin the process of leveraging available tools for better decision-making in planning and to understand the requirements, strengths, and limitations of the tools as they apply to particular planning applications.
- For software developers it is a guide to understand how planners use existing visualization software, software limitations, and areas where software can be improved to meet design and planning needs.
- For planners and community members it illustrates the potential of these tools in the planning process and how to use technology to create better decision-support systems in specific planning processes.

Councilman Mike Hernandez of the Los Angeles Mayor's Office explained, "The real value (with virtual reality tools) is to allow citizens to participate in the planning process. It really benefits in developing large projects and in looking at the impacts of those projects on communities. With virtual reality, you can actually see it before you build it."

– Tony Knight, "Virtual L.A. in the Works."  
San Jose Mercury News, San Jose,  
California, August 11, 1997

From Roy Chan's paper, *Urban Simulation: An Innovative Tool for Interactive Planning and*



Photo: CONCERN, Inc.

This document is not meant to be an exhaustive guide to available tools. It represents a sampling of what is currently available and highlights steps a community might take when exploring how cutting-edge tools might be appropriately integrated into their planning process. Feedback on these and other tools are critical to ongoing improvement of planning resources. Contact [HTTP://WWW.PLACEMATTERS.COM](http://www.placematters.com) with your ideas, comments, and examples of tools development and applications, or use the Feedback Form on page 47.

## How to Use the Guide

This guide helps you to understand which tools might be an appropriate match to your community planning needs and goals.

For individuals unfamiliar with community planning tools the first question might be, "What is a design and decision-making tool? What are some examples of its application? Do we need training and technical assistance? How much will it cost?" To answer these questions we have created an this guide to help readers understand the breadth and diversity of available tools. The guide includes:

- Overview
- Discussion of the goals, values, and design principles involved
- Description of selected planning tools
- Sample scenarios
- Case studies
- Resources, and a
- Glossary.