

## Newsletter Article Sample

Title: Reimagining America's Malls for a New Generation

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Long before we had [city center plaza], the Greeks had agoras, the Romans had forums, the Renaissance had plazas, and the postwar generations had malls. A new kind of town square, malls were the modern epicenters of commerce and culture. They were more than a place to buy things, lest we forget, they were once a distinct feature of American teen life.

Brought to us by the postwar suburban sprawl, malls and strip malls were a stronghold in serving the consumerist necessities (and impulses) of a new middle-class. The proliferation of malls hit a peak in the 1990s, but by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the landscape for mass consumerism, and largely, online retail, had changed so much that malls were quickly deserted.

As a Millennial, I know malls well. A common setting for scenes from my youth, it was a place parents would drop off their tweens and teens for several hours and let them experience a taste of social independence, among other things. Kids without parents meant excessive meandering and loitering, eating junk at the food court, and perusing goods that I absolutely didn't have enough cash to buy.

The mall experience brought self-determination and life-experience for the real world that would one day extend beyond the confines of a massive building. Today's kids don't have that same exposure to the mall that I did, instead, they have phones.

According to *U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health*, nearly 95% of youth ages 13–17 report using a social media platform, with more than a third saying they use social media "almost constantly." As the mother of two young children this data is alarming. We know kids and teens are faring worse in mental health today than any of the generations before them—there must be more opportunity for balance—and I'm hopeful.

As some recent studies suggest, short periods away from technology (extra points if it's outside with peers) can help kids immediately begin to feel happier. And while [CITY] may not have a mall, we might have something better: The Common.

Since its opening in 2022, The Common has become a driving force for all ages to gather regularly. The skating rinks promote year-round physical activity and socialization. The Public Market is a place to buy, sell, and see unique goods and art. And the food choices within the Common easily surpass the quality and appeal of any food court. The secret weapon for consistent participation might be the Community Life team that produces fun and appealing programming through every season.

I want my own kids to experience that free reign of activity in a relatively safe public space. It's become a priority for me to advocate for investment in spaces that provide opportunities for belonging and diverse life-experiences, especially for our youth.

When we set out to build the Common, I wasn't thinking of the underlying need for spaces like it, but what we have is a place that promotes recreation, autonomy, and face-to-face social interaction. I'm especially energized and heartened to see groups of teens meandering, eating, skating, or just hanging with friends. I think we have, in essence, built a mall for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.