



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 2: NATURAL SPACE

**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.)

“First: there are **SPACES**, indoors and out, that naturally maximize the number of good interactions in a town. Generally these spaces have some individual character while still being open enough to accommodate the desires and interests of good citizens.” (p. xii)

### NATURAL SPACE: Questions for Discussion

1. Watch **Finding Main Street Video #2** featuring the City of Norton’s natural spaces. Is your community pursuing any outdoor recreation based strategies? What does your community have in common with Norton? With Moab?
2. Williams states that “Outdoor spaces can galvanize a sense of positive proximity.” (35) How do you see that occurring in your community?
3. “Natural beauty can be a transcendent community tie.” (49) How does a shared appreciation for nature connect members of your community?
4. Of Moabites, she writes, “They knew their town inside and out (mostly out) and took responsibility for it. That’s positive proximity.” (39) Who takes responsibility for your town, inside and out?
5. Williams says, “My **index of success** is not based on how well people get along. I see how people get the job done...Moab couldn’t be what it is without common goals...”(p. 37-8). On that index, of common goals and getting things done, how successful (on a scale of 1-10) is your community?
6. How do you balance the **investments in outdoor recreation** opportunities in their benefits to both residents and visitors? (p. 41) How are the investments strengthening your community identity?
7. “Moab has created an economic structure, outside of the hospitality service sector, that benefits from nature. And its citizens participate in it. (46) Does this statement apply to your community. How? Or how could it?

