

STATE OF COMMUNITY FACILITY DESIGN

survey report

2025

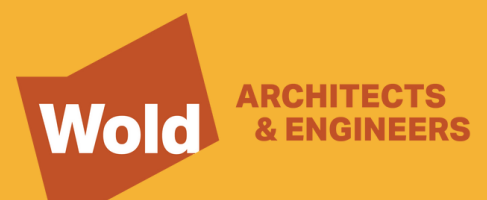


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INTRODUCTION

At Wold Architects & Engineers (Wold), we believe the spaces we create can transform lives and strengthen communities. With expertise in designing public spaces in the education, healthcare and government sectors, we understand the profound impact thoughtful architecture can have on individuals and communities alike.

Our *State of Community Facility Design* survey examines how Americans view the design of public spaces and its influence on their mental health, well-being and overall quality of life. The survey highlights a growing trend: design is no longer just about aesthetics or functionality—it's about creating spaces that promote wellness, safety and connection.

This report provides key insights into how buildings impact the health of individuals, how public spaces can be reimaged to better serve communities and how organizations like Wold are leading the way in integrating wellness into design.

Through this survey, we aim to provide a deeper understanding of what people need from their community spaces and how architecture plays a fundamental role in addressing those needs.

ABOUT THE STATE OF COMMUNITY FACILITY DESIGN SURVEY

In 2024, Wold Architects & Engineers partnered with Wakefield Research to conduct the *State of Community Facility Design* survey. The objective was clear: understand how design impacts Americans' mental health and wellness, particularly within community buildings like schools, civic spaces and healthcare environments.

We surveyed 1,000 U.S. adults spanning multiple generations and locations to find out what they believe makes community buildings effective, not only in terms of functionality but also in their ability to promote positive mental health, a sense of safety and connection.

The survey found that building design has become a crucial aspect of public health, with an overwhelming percentage of Americans acknowledging the impact that well-designed spaces can have on their mental and emotional well-being.

WHY NOW?

The *State of Community Facility Design* survey comes at a pivotal moment. As public spaces around the world continue to evolve, there's a growing recognition that design isn't just about functionality; it's about creating environments that enhance the lives of those who interact with them.

Mental health has moved to the forefront of national conversations, and its intersection with building design is an emerging area of focus. Communities are seeking more than just practical spaces – they are looking for buildings that nurture, support and empower their occupants. This objective is especially important when projects are publicly supported.

Why now? Because as we continue to reshape the way we live, work and interact, it's imperative that we prioritize design solutions that promote well-being. This survey is the first step in understanding how we can collectively build environments that support not just the practical needs of communities but also the mental, emotional and social well-being of their inhabitants.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The *State of Community Facility Design* survey reveals several important insights:

1 MENTAL HEALTH IS A PRIORITY

Americans overwhelmingly agree that mental health and wellness should be central to the design of community buildings.

2 DESIGN INFLUENCES ENGAGEMENT

People are more likely to return to buildings that are designed with care, offering emotional and mental support.



3 FUNCTIONALITY & WELLNESS GO HAND IN HAND

There is a clear demand for buildings that integrate both health and functionality, with a strong focus on wellness features.

4 WELLNESS AMENITIES ARE A PLUS

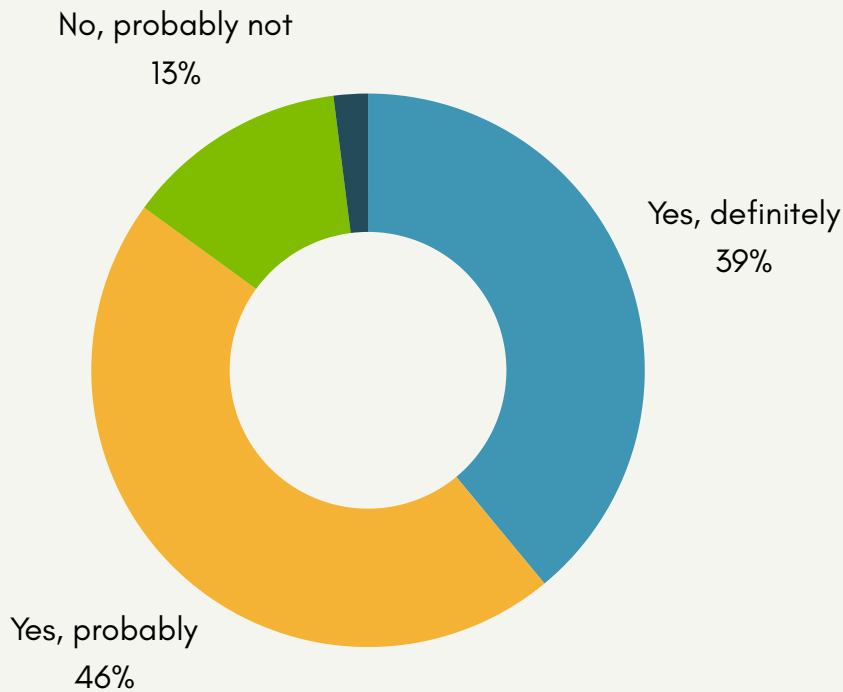
Community buildings with amenities that support well-being, such as cafés, green areas and community gathering spaces, are desired by over half of all Americans.

RESULTS

The results from the *State of Community Facility Design* survey were striking. Below are the key findings that highlight the increasing desire for buildings that do more than just meet functional needs:

MENTAL HEALTH IS A DESIGN PRIORITY

An overwhelming **86% of Americans** believe that mental health and wellness should be prioritized in the design of community buildings. This is especially true among younger generations, with **91% of Gen Z** and **Millennials** advocating for greater mental health consideration in the design process.



58%

Would participate in the design of community buildings as a way to feel more connected to their community.

46%

Believe community buildings in their area are not designed with people's well-being in mind.





79%

Believe the design of community buildings significantly impacts their likelihood of returning.

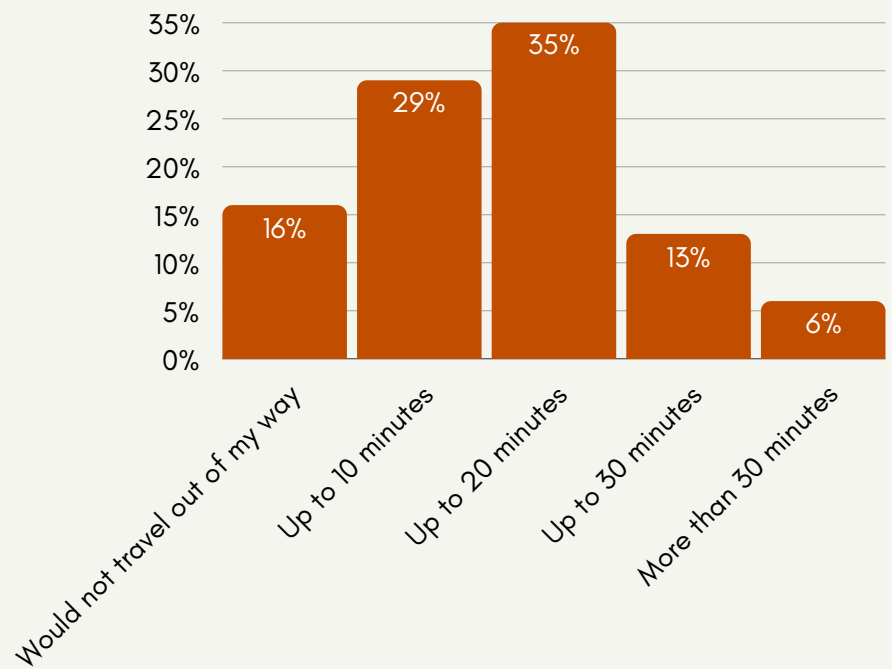
This sentiment was even stronger in metropolitan areas, where...

84%

Of city residents stated that building design plays a critical role in whether they would revisit a community space.

WILL TRAVEL FOR WELL-DESIGNED SPACES

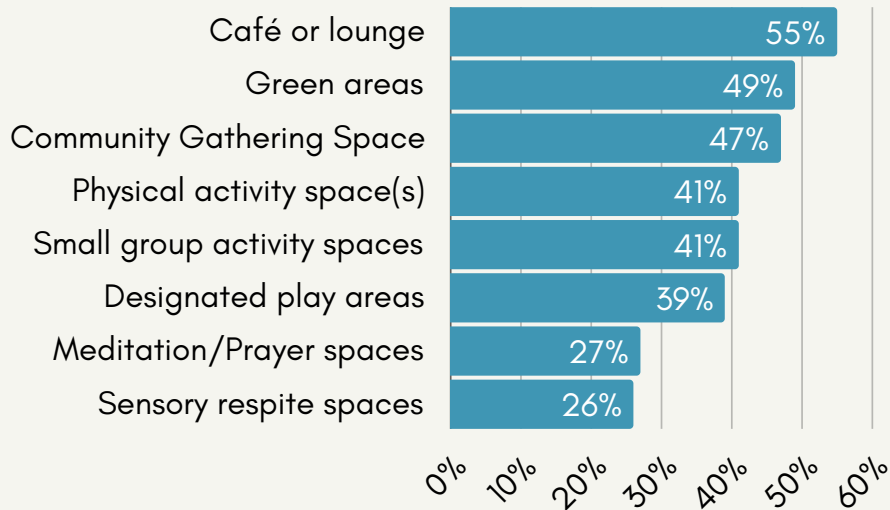
55% of Americans said they would be willing to travel at least 20 minutes further to visit a community building they enjoy spending time in over one that is closer. This speaks to the emotional connection people have with spaces that make them feel good, especially spaces that are thoughtfully designed with wellness in mind.



Why does this matter? It highlights two critical insights. First, it demonstrates that despite busy schedules, people are willing to go out of their way for a positive, engaging experience in community spaces. Second, and more importantly, it underscores the essential role that community spaces play in providing vital services. If these spaces fail to create a welcoming environment, it could be the difference between being a helpful resource or becoming an obstacle when people need support the most.

WELLNESS IS EQUAL TO FUNCTIONALITY

An overwhelming **90% of respondents** expressed that wellness should be central to community building design, not an afterthought. Americans are demanding that the built environment support both health and functionality. As a result, amenities that support well-being, such as **cafés or lounges (55%)**, **green areas (49%)** and **community gathering spaces (47%)**, rank high on the wish list.



42%

Want buildings that help reduce anxiety

42%

Value spaces that encourage diverse interactions

28%

Desire spaces designed to combat depression and burnout



METHODOLOGY

The *State of Community Facility Design* survey was conducted by Wakefield Research among **1,000 nationally representative U.S. adults** ages 18+ between October 23 and November 2, 2024, using an email invitation and online survey. The data was weighted to ensure accurate representation. The margin of error for this survey is ± 3.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

WHAT'S NEXT?

YOUNGER GENERATIONS LEADING THE CHARGE FOR MORE INCLUSIVE DESIGN

The *State of Community Facility Design* survey results reveal that younger generations are the driving force behind the demand for more inclusive and secure spaces. Not only do 91% of both Gen Z and Millennials believe that mental health should be a priority in the design of community spaces, but they're also willing to drive further for those types of buildings.

64% of Gen Z and **62% of Millennials** would travel at least 20 minutes or more to visit spaces that integrate mental health and wellness, compared to 49% of Gen X and 47% of Boomers, highlighting the increasing value younger generations place on well-designed, wellness-focused environments.

Additionally, **84% of Gen Z** and **89% of Millennials** agree that the design of community buildings plays a significant role in how likely they are to return to these spaces, a significant increase compared to 79% of Gen X and 67% of Boomers. This generational shift represents a fundamental change in how communities view public spaces – not just as places for functional use but as environments that must actively contribute to mental and emotional health. As younger generations continue to rise in influence, their focus on safety, accessibility and inclusivity will shape the future of community building design.



INTEGRATING MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS IN DESIGN

As a leader in design innovation, Wold is dedicated to advancing mental health and wellness through the built environment. Below are several strategies and design principles that can help integrate mental health and wellness into community building design:

PRIORITIZE NATURAL LIGHT

Research has consistently shown that exposure to natural light has a significant positive effect on mental well-being, productivity and overall mood. Natural light can reduce stress, enhance focus and improve sleep patterns. Incorporating large windows, skylights and open floor plans that allow for maximum natural light penetration helps create healthier environments.

- **Design Considerations:** Use materials and layouts that allow sunlight to filter through the building, especially in high-traffic areas such as lobbies, hallways and meeting spaces. Consider utilizing light wells or glass walls to maximize daylighting in deeper parts of a building.
- **Design in Action:** Educational and healthcare facilities benefit greatly from ample daylighting, not only supporting mental clarity but also creating a more inviting, uplifting environment for students, patients and staff.

CREATE SENSORY ZONES OR AREAS FOR RESPITE

Sensory zones and respite areas are designed to reduce stress and provide spaces for relaxation, reflection or sensory experiences. These spaces can be particularly beneficial for neurodiverse individuals, those with anxiety or PTSD and anyone seeking a break from overstimulating environments.

- **Design Considerations:** Incorporate features such as soft, muted colors, water features, comfortable seating and natural textures. These elements help create calming spaces that are sensory-friendly and promote relaxation. Sensory rooms can include adjustable lighting, soothing sounds and tactile materials that engage multiple senses without overwhelming users.
- **Design in Action:** Sensory rooms and respite areas in public libraries, schools or hospital floors provide quiet areas where individuals can take a break from the bustling environment, offering a crucial space for mental restoration.



INCLUDE FLEXIBLE, MULTI-PURPOSE SPACES

Flexible spaces promote inclusivity by providing room for a range of activities that support both social and personal wellness. These spaces can be used for quiet reflection, group meetings, yoga or even informal gatherings, depending on the community's needs at any given time.

- **Design Considerations:** Use modular furniture, movable partitions and flexible layouts that can be adjusted to suit various purposes. Having multifunctional spaces and furniture allows communities to maximize their buildings' use and ensure they meet a wide array of mental and social health needs.
- **Design in Action:** Community centers can feature large rooms that serve as open spaces for yoga or fitness classes in the morning and transform into gathering spaces for community meetings or social events later in the day.

INCORPORATE WELLNESS-FOCUSED AMENITIES

To foster physical and mental well-being, provide amenities that support both relaxation and active engagement. These spaces encourage people to engage in self-care, connect with others and lead healthier lifestyles. Popular wellness amenities include fitness areas, quiet lounges and cafés or kitchens that serve nutritious meals.

- **Design Considerations:** When designing wellness-focused spaces, consider incorporating features such as walking or jogging paths, bicycle storage, fitness zones and access to healthy food options. Providing spaces for physical activity encourages people to be more active, which directly impacts mental health by reducing stress and increasing endorphins.
- **Design in Action:** A hospital or clinic might feature an on-site fitness center for staff and patients to use as part of their recovery. Similarly, community buildings or recreation centers can include open spaces for walking or outdoor fitness stations, fostering physical wellness alongside mental well-being.

FOSTER INCLUSIVITY AND SAFETY

People need to feel physically and emotionally secure in their surroundings to thrive. By incorporating universal design principles, buildings are more accessible and welcoming to all individuals, regardless of ability, age or background. This includes designing spaces with appropriate lighting, clear signage, safe access points and inclusive features that accommodate diverse needs.

- **Design Considerations:** Integrate features such as wide doorways, ramps, accessible restrooms and sensory-friendly elements to ensure people with various disabilities feel welcomed and valued. Clear wayfinding systems and lighting also enhance safety, reducing anxiety about navigation.
- **Design in Action:** Government buildings and civic spaces that are fully accessible promote a sense of security and belonging for all visitors, regardless of their physical or cognitive needs.

USE BIOPHILIC DESIGN TO CONNECT WITH NATURE

Biophilic design leverages the natural human connection to the environment, enhancing well-being through elements like indoor plants, wood finishes and green roofs. These features create a calming atmosphere and improve air quality, positively impacting mental health.

- **Design Considerations:** Integrate living walls, indoor gardens or water features into buildings. Even small touches, such as plant installations or access to outdoor green spaces, can significantly affect how people feel in the space.
- **Design in Action:** Public buildings with rooftop gardens or abundant greenery are shown to reduce stress, enhance cognitive function and improve overall happiness.

ENHANCE WELL-BEING WITH OUTDOOR VIEWS

While biophilic design integrates nature within the building, access to views of nature or the outdoors, whether through large windows or nature-inspired artwork, provides a sense of calm and promotes mental clarity.

- **Design Considerations:** Position workstations, seating areas and communal spaces near windows or outdoor areas to maximize daylight and access to natural views. Consider incorporating large glass windows that allow unobstructed views of outdoor greenery or parks.
- **Design in Action:** Hospitals and educational buildings with large windows providing views of nature improve patient recovery and student concentration, promoting an overall sense of well-being and connection to the environment.

DESIGN FOR ACOUSTIC COMFORT

Noise pollution can negatively impact mental health, causing stress and even affecting productivity and mood. Effective sound design can help control ambient noise levels, making spaces more conducive to relaxation, focus and communication.

- **Design Considerations:** Sound-absorbing materials such as acoustic panels, carpeting or even hanging baffles can be used to create a quiet environment. Zoned areas that reduce noise levels in spaces like libraries, offices or community centers are essential for maintaining peace and mental clarity.
- **Design in Action:** A medical facility might incorporate soundproofing in waiting areas to reduce stress, allowing patients and visitors to feel at ease while waiting for appointments.



HOW WOLD CAN SUPPORT YOU

The *State of Community Facility Design* survey results make one thing clear: the role of architecture in supporting mental health and well-being is more critical than ever. As communities increasingly prioritize spaces that support their mental and emotional needs, the demand for thoughtful, wellness-focused design will continue to grow.

At Wold, we are committed to leading the conversation on how buildings can support mental health, enhance community engagement and foster a sense of belonging. With a track record of delivering innovative, sustainable projects across the education, healthcare and government sectors, we understand the profound impact architecture can have on mental health and community engagement. We're excited to continue pushing the boundaries of what's possible in building design and are eager to collaborate with clients, partners and leaders to shape the future of community spaces.

To learn more about how Wold can help you design community spaces that prioritize wellness, visit www.woldae.com.



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