View this email in your browser




## Friends of MICD,

As we continue celebrating MICD's 40th anniversary, I'm especially pleased that this issue gives us an opportunity to recognize the mayor whose vision started it all. Our founder, former Charleston, SC Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr. has recently published a new memoir, *Windows on Washington Square*, reflecting on his remarkable career and the city he helped shape. We're delighted to share news of the book, along with a few words about what his leadership has meant to MICD and to cities across the country.

We're also kicking off "40 Years, 40 Voices," a series featuring reflections from the mayors, designers, and friends who have been part of MICD's story. Check out our Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn to follow along. And our fellows have turned the tables on me this month, asking me to share a few thoughts on why design matters and why it's so important for mayors to understand its power.

I hope you enjoy this next installment of our anniversary celebration, and that you'll follow along as we continue sharing stories, ideas, and voices from MICD's first 40 years.

*Trinity Simons Wagner*
*Executive Director*
*Mayors' Institute on City Design*

## Our Founder

Former Charleston, SC Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr.



It's hard to put into a few paragraphs how much Mayor Riley means to us at MICD. He's the founder of our program, our North Star, and a constant reminder of what visionary leadership can accomplish. He's far too humble to take credit for the revitalization of Charleston during his 40 years as mayor, but plenty of people would give him exactly that credit.

His belief in the power of design, public space, historic preservation, and the importance of beauty in civic life helped shape Charleston into the city we know today.

From Waterfront Park and the revitalization of King Street to the International African American Museum, his influence can be seen and felt throughout the city.

And of course, his vision extended well beyond Charleston. In 1986, he founded MICD on the belief that mayors have both the opportunity and responsibility to shape the physical future of their cities. Forty years later, that idea continues to guide our work with mayors across the country.



So we're especially delighted to celebrate the publication of *Windows on Washington Square*, Mayor Riley's new memoir. Through the stories, decisions, challenges, and relationships that shaped his remarkable career, readers have the opportunity to experience Charleston's transformation through his eyes. For those of us fortunate enough to have learned from him, it's a wonderful opportunity to hear those stories in his own words.

---

## *The Fellows Ask: Why Design?*

*Macy Watson and Sydney Winkler are serving as MICD Fellows from May 2026 to May 2027. They both recently graduated from the University of Arkansas with a Bachelor of Architecture degree.*

As MICD celebrates 40 years, the fellows asked **Executive Director Trinity Simons Wagner** to reflect on the idea at the heart of the program: why should mayors understand design?



**Trinity**: Mayor Riley understood something 40 years ago that remains important today: mayors make decisions every day that shape the physical future of their cities, whether they think of those decisions as design decisions or not.

When people hear the word design, I think they usually think about aesthetics or something reserved for the wealthy. But design is so much more than that! Design shapes how we experience the world around us: it influences how we move through our communities, how we connect with one another, our access to opportunity, and our sense of belonging.

Good design makes our cities work better, yes, but it also makes them places we love. Think about a beautiful park where families gather, a lively main street that gives a community its identity, or a waterfront that brings people together. These places create memories, inspire pride, and give people a sense that their city is worth caring about. Beauty and delight are important parts of civic life, and everyone deserves to experience them.

Design asks us to think deliberately about the places we're creating, whose needs we're meeting, and what kind of future we're building. Mayor Riley understood that the decisions we make today will shape our cities for generations to come, and that we should approach them with both ambition and care. That really, they are a way to put our values into vision into action.

That's why we think design fluency is so important for mayors. We don't expect them to become designers, but we want to equip them to ask better questions, recognize opportunities, challenge assumptions, and set high expectations. I've watched mayors leave MICD seeing familiar challenges in entirely new ways, and realizing they have more power to do something about them than they thought.

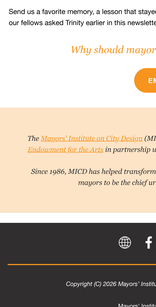
One of my favorite MICD memories is of a mayor who, when asked about the biggest lesson they learned at MICD, exclaimed, "I'm the [expletive] mayor!"

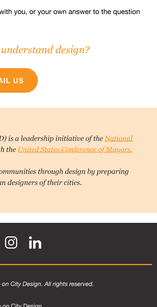
We laugh, and I love that story, but I can't think of a better expression of what we hope mayors take away from MICD: a renewed sense of their own power to make great things happen.

---

## 40 years, 40 voices

Through the end of this year, we'll be sharing reflections from the mayors, designers, and friends who have helped shape MICD over the past four decades. Follow along on Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn as we celebrate the people, stories, and ideas that have made MICD what it is today.




---

## We'd love to hear from you!

Send us a favorite memory, a lesson that stayed with you, or your own answer to the question our fellows asked Trinity earlier in this newsletter:

*Why should mayors understand design?*

EMAIL US

*The Mayors' Institute on City Design (MICD) is a leadership initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with the United States Conference of Mayors.*

*Since 1986, MICD has helped transform communities through design by preparing mayors to be the chief urban designers of their cities.*

*Copyright (C) 2026 Mayors' Institute on City Design. All rights reserved.*

Mayors' Institute on City Design
1620 Eye Street NW, 4th Floor
Washington, DC 20006

Want to change how you receive these emails?
You can update your preferences or unsubscribe from this list.