

## The City's Form and Functions

### A Model for a Complete City based on Sustainable Urbanism

#### THE FORM AND FUNCTIONS OF THE CITY

All cities are different; and the same. For thousands of years the sameness has persisted, as described in *The City in History* by Mumford.

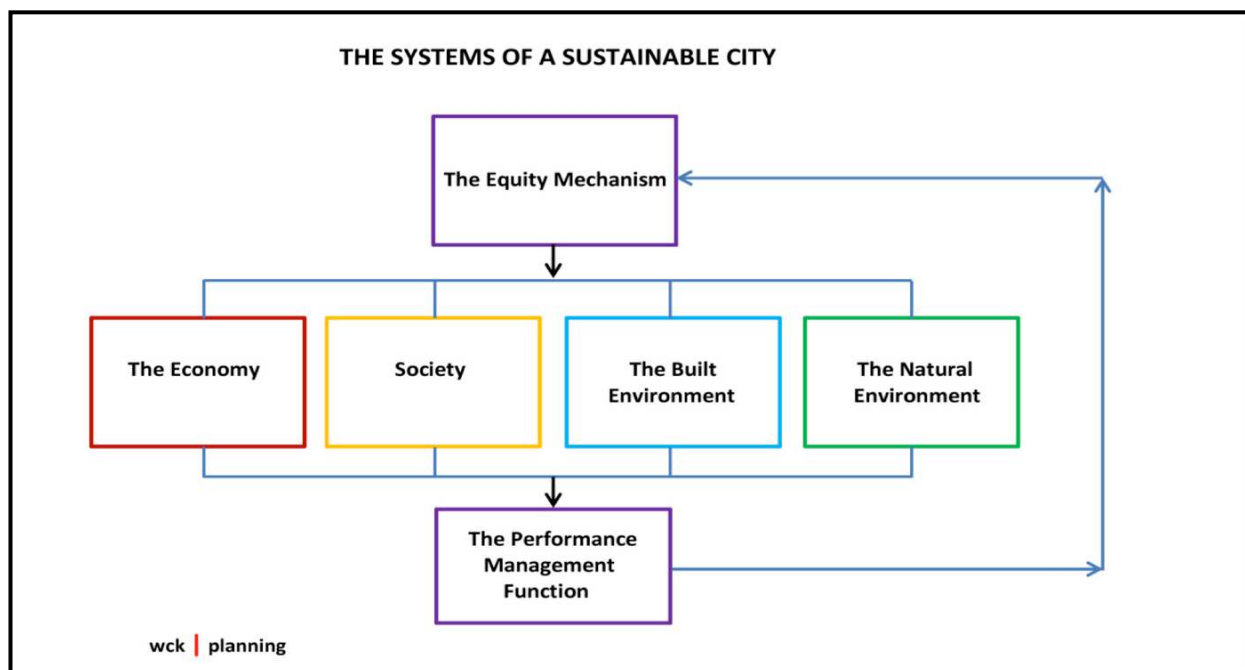
- Cities all have a similar over-riding purpose; they are “containers” for holistic systems of social intercourse, economic exchange and physical development.
- Cities all have similar districts, centers, corridors and neighborhoods.

The model for a complete city is based on the ideas of sustainability, urbanism, open government and comprehensive thinking with its functional parts, as depicted below.

- **The Equity Mechanism** is the system where equity is honored, where macro decisions are made to allocate scarce resources, to resolve systemic conflicts and to host the vision-based strategy for the city.

- **The Economy** is the system designed to generate income and accumulate wealth for individuals, businesses and governments.
- **Society** is the system designed to promote the health, safety, welfare and education of each individual person in society while enabling the productive association of families and groups of people.
- **The Built Environment** is the system that produces buildings and infrastructure.
- **The Natural Environment** is designed to preserve, enhance and restore the natural resources essential for life, namely water, air and land.
- **The Performance Management Function** lets us learn.

In combination, these six systems define the form and functions of the city.



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#### THE COINCIDENCE OF FOUR BIG IDEAS

**Inspiration.** Two direct and powerful ideas intersected in the past millennium: **sustainability** and **new urbanism**. The Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 and the work on the new urbanism of Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk. In combination, these two ideas provide the structure for understanding settlements of all kinds, especially cities. When supplemented by **governance** systems based on democracy, capitalism and the rule of law, they provide the framework for sustainable urbanism and expressing the outcomes through long-range **comprehensive planning**.

#### Sustainability.

The Brundtland Commission Report [1987] states "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

The idea goes on to establish a framework to balance economic and physical growth consistent with societal equity.

#### Urbanism

The Congress for the New Urbanism [CNU] has constructed a way of thinking and doing, with principles to guide public policy, development practices, urban planning and design, all focused on:

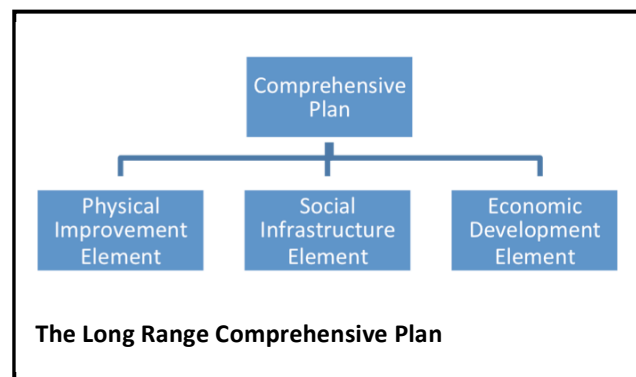
- The region,
- The neighborhood, the district and the corridor, and
- The block, the street and the building.

The basic idea is to preserve the natural environment and construct the built environment in a manner that improves the performance of society and the economy.

**Western Governance Beliefs.** Governance is the mechanism for planning, operating and maintaining society as a functioning and sustainable system. Professor Fukuyama [please see the Readings] establishes the go-forward ideas for fair and functioning governance:

- Liberal Democracy,
- Market Capitalism, and
- The Rule of Law.

**Comprehensive Planning.** The traditional tool used by cities to analyze the past and anticipate the future is the comprehensive plan. These plans feature a long range horizon and a broad range of interests. It is the best vehicle available to the city for consolidating and coordinating its many programs into compact, vision-driven action plans. Community involvement in the decision-making process accompanied by a transparent and learning-oriented performance evaluation completes the framework.



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#### OPERATING PRINCIPLES

Every city has a foundation of principles, spoken or unspoken, that guide decision-making.

Typical principles guiding successful cities seem to be:

- **Insist upon Vision-Driven Plans and Programs:** The city's process for understanding the past and planning for the future involves forming consensus visions with vision-driven strategies; followed with strategic-driven action plans and programs containing policies, codes and budgets.
- **Engage the Public:** Effective engagement of the citizens, both residents and business owners, is critical when making public decisions. Transparent, inclusive and informed public conversation opportunities and issues combine to make a workable city system. The key is not that government be big or little, but that it is effective in creating an environment that is safe, free, participatory and prosperous.
- **Collaborate and Partner:** Strong working relationships between and among the many related entities is critical. Individual free-lance operators do not contribute to achievement of the city's mission over time. In the long run, individual activities undertaken in isolation are generally more expensive and inefficient than concerted, collaborative efforts. People and organizations working together achieve better results. Vision-driven plans based on a consensus vision usually result in better communities.
- **Think Comprehensively and Long Range:** Having a broad and deep view is important.
  - Infrastructure and buildings last for decades, if not centuries; decisions about their location, construction and maintenance must take this distant time horizon into account. Decisions that cannot be easily undone require more forethought. The futurity of current decisions [*see the work of Peter Drucker, Reading #6*] is important.
  - Buildings, infrastructure and people-programs are affected by many external and internal factors. Comprehensive thinking about the connections and implications of individual actions can create outcomes with multiple benefits rather than unexpected, unintended and unpleasant consequences.
- **Be Competent:** Doing the right things and doing things right is the dual objective. Learning about the past and contemplating potential future outcomes of possible actions are essential activities. Evaluating performance and learning from successes and failures creates a long-term environment of competence, innovation and achievement.
- **Be Transparent.** "Open book" government is a vital operating principle. Citizen access to public information creates trust, solicits critique and improves operations; and new ideas and information may emerge. Most non-governmental organizations adhere to this idea.

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#### **THE ECONOMY**

A broad view of the economy includes private and public transactions that affect income and wealth. The blending of public and private processes can strengthen both and encourage public-private partnerships that are beneficial to all parties. Tools for economic development include:

- **The Community Balance Sheet.**  
The balance sheet reports assets and liabilities for individuals and businesses. This tool can improve public asset and liability management by monitoring:
  - **Individual agency assets and liabilities,**
  - **Quality of life indices,**
  - **Community assets, and**
  - **Goodwill.**
- **The Community Income Statement.** The income statement reports the flow of money as it enters and leaves the enterprise.
- **Comprehensive, Long-Range Finance Plans.** Businesses and governments engage in long term financial planning. Planning that is inclusive and extensive enables enterprises to manage their resources and invest in assets that require long timelines to yield results.
- **Economic Development Plans.** The objective is to increase jobs, family incomes and tax receipts. The Economic Development Plan is the vessel to provide the path to retain and expand existing businesses and recruit new ones. Business retention and recruitment are essential for the growth and prosperity of the city.

#### **SOCIETY**

Individual people, and associations of people, form the social fabric of every community. They are dramatically and substantively affected by the economic and physical systems of the city. The community is responsible for establishing and maintaining the social health of the city; not the city government, per se, but of the city's society, the people in the city.

The economic, physical and social systems are inextricably linked. The health care system, the public safety systems, the general welfare systems and the education systems exist to protect and enable active participation in community life.

A Social Infrastructure Plan is the vehicle to outline the objectives and programs for the community's health, safety, welfare and education; and the economic and physical systems necessary for their success.

The basic components of the Social Capital Improvement Plan are:

- **Wellness and Healthcare** including hospitals, clinics, exercise and nutrition programs.
- **Public Safety** including police, fire and rescue.
- **General Welfare** including social and recreation programs, and
- **Education** including formal schooling plus libraries, museums and cultural activities.

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#### **THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

Neighborhoods, mixed-use centers and development corridors comprise the built city. These are the places where people live and learn, work and play. They are supported by the city's open space and infrastructure systems.

#### **THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**

The urban open space system includes parks, trails, wetland and upland preserves, school grounds, public plazas and other open areas. This urban system of open space attempts to replicate the functions and benefits of natural systems that prosper in the rural areas.

Urban areas and systems are surrounded by the rural hinterlands hosting farms and ranches, open lands and the large natural systems that support the region. Preservation, enhancement and creation of natural amenities in the rural areas, as well as appropriate urban areas, improve the community's quality of life.

The financial support for the public open space and infrastructure systems is directly tied to the Economic Element. The benefits of the natural environment accrue directly to society; thus the need for a holistic comprehensive plan to address co-dependent relationship of the city's society, economic and physical form.

#### **THE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FUNCTION**

An open and transparent system that includes evaluation is critical. Citizens have a right and an obligation to be helpful. A transparent metric system tests their performance.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

The comprehensive, long range plan is the best vehicle to address and unite every aspect of the city's social, economic and physical functions.

- **The Economic Development Element** provides a picture of the sources of wealth and income available to private individuals and businesses as well as public and quasi-public enterprises. Without the money, nothing happens; a sound business model for the city outlines a path to prosperity.
- **The Social Infrastructure Element** outlines the systems used by residents, business owners and stakeholders to define the way they interact. Civil, sociable and constructive behavior trumps bickering negativity every time. The social, economic and physical improvement elements and budgets must align to achieve the social expectations of the community.
- **The Physical Improvement Element** is a familiar product; it presents future land use, circulation systems, natural system protection programs and infrastructure system plans for the built and natural environment in the urban and rural areas. The trick is to have the city's vision directly inform this element. Multiple benefits can be achieved by integrating the physical improvement, social infrastructure and economic development approaches.

The community's vision and the resulting vision-driven strategy can lead to strategic action plans that form the comprehensive plan focused on the economic, social and physical aspects of the city.

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#### **READINGS**

The Readings include traditional planning books and business-oriented books used by private enterprises to determine their approach to strategy, governance and management.

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