

Book Review

June 2015

The Small Town Planning Handbook

Thomas L. Daniels, John W. Keller, Mark P. Lapping, Katherine Daniels, James Segedy,
Planners Press, American Planning Association, Chicago, 2007.

Summary

This Handbook is very useful for all towns, and specifically for small towns. The contents include chapters covering all the relevant physical dimensions of city and town planning.

Summary
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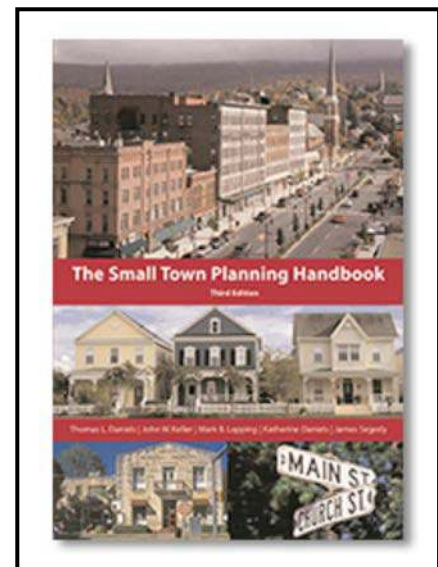
Chapter 19 is particularly interesting in the discussion of "character towns." There are many drawings, sections and illustrations to make the point that good design matters, context matters, historic resources matter, and community involvement in determining good design matters. The authors do not directly address social capital and economic assets as part of the "character" equation although they do point out on page 333 that: "Tourists enjoy visiting aesthetically pleasing places and prospective businesses are drawn to organized communities". Still, the emphasis is on physical planning.

The Chapter 7 discussion is useful about the reasons why some small towns grow while others decline. The quote from Bill Bryson about some town's search for the "lower limits of bad taste" is inciting and insightful [from *The Lost Continent*].

Part III includes three chapters: Chapter 19, The Design and Appearance of Small Towns; Chapter 20, Making Economic Development Happen in Small Towns; and Chapter 21, The Town Plan in Action and Strategic Planning. These nearly 100 pages in the 400 page book provide strong closure for the planning process previously described. Chapter 20 on the mechanics of economic development is really useful.

However, in the bigger scheme of things, discussion of a vision-based strategy that embraces the social and economic aspects of the small town in addition to the physical setting would seem the starting place rather than the conclusion. The physical town plan could be put on par at the outset with the town's plan for infrastructure to support social capital formation and economic development.

A good Handbook for practitioners as a starter-kit for those beginning the trek or refresher for the veterans.



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The American Planning Association

This is *the* go-to guide for planners in small towns.

For decades, *The Small Town Planning Handbook* has helped small towns and rural communities plan for change. It is a step-by-step guide to drafting and implementing a comprehensive plan through zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations, and capital improvements programs, with sensitivity to local character and limited resources.

The third edition shows how technologies such as GIS and the Internet can improve the planning process. This edition contains a wealth of information on ways to maintain or improve the design of small towns and explains how to create a small town economic development plan. The authors emphasize strategic planning for economic, social, and environmental sustainability both in remote towns and in towns on the edge of metropolitan regions.

The authors are planners with more than six decades of experience in small towns, rural counties, and planning departments — including hundreds of evenings before rural planning commissions.

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The Small Town Planning Handbook is intended for use in small cities, rural counties, and towns of about 1,000 to 10,000 people, however, many of the strategies and techniques presented in the handbook can be successfully transferred to communities of up to 25,000 people. Content includes:

- Part one presents a step-by-step method for putting together a community comprehensive plan.
- Part two explains how to draft a zoning ordinance, subdivision and land development regulations, capital improvement programs, and other local land-use regulations. More importantly, it discusses how a community can use these regulations and spending programs to put a comprehensive plan into action.
- Part three presents ways to guide the physical design of small towns, create strategies for economic development, and put together a strategic plan in order to sustain the economy, environment, and society of the community well into the future.

The authors are planners with more than six decades of experience in small towns, rural counties, and planning departments — including hundreds of evenings before local planning commissions.

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