

# City Form and Function: 2014

A Model of a Complete City based on Sustainable Urbanism

March 2014

## THE FORM AND FUNCTION OF THE CITY

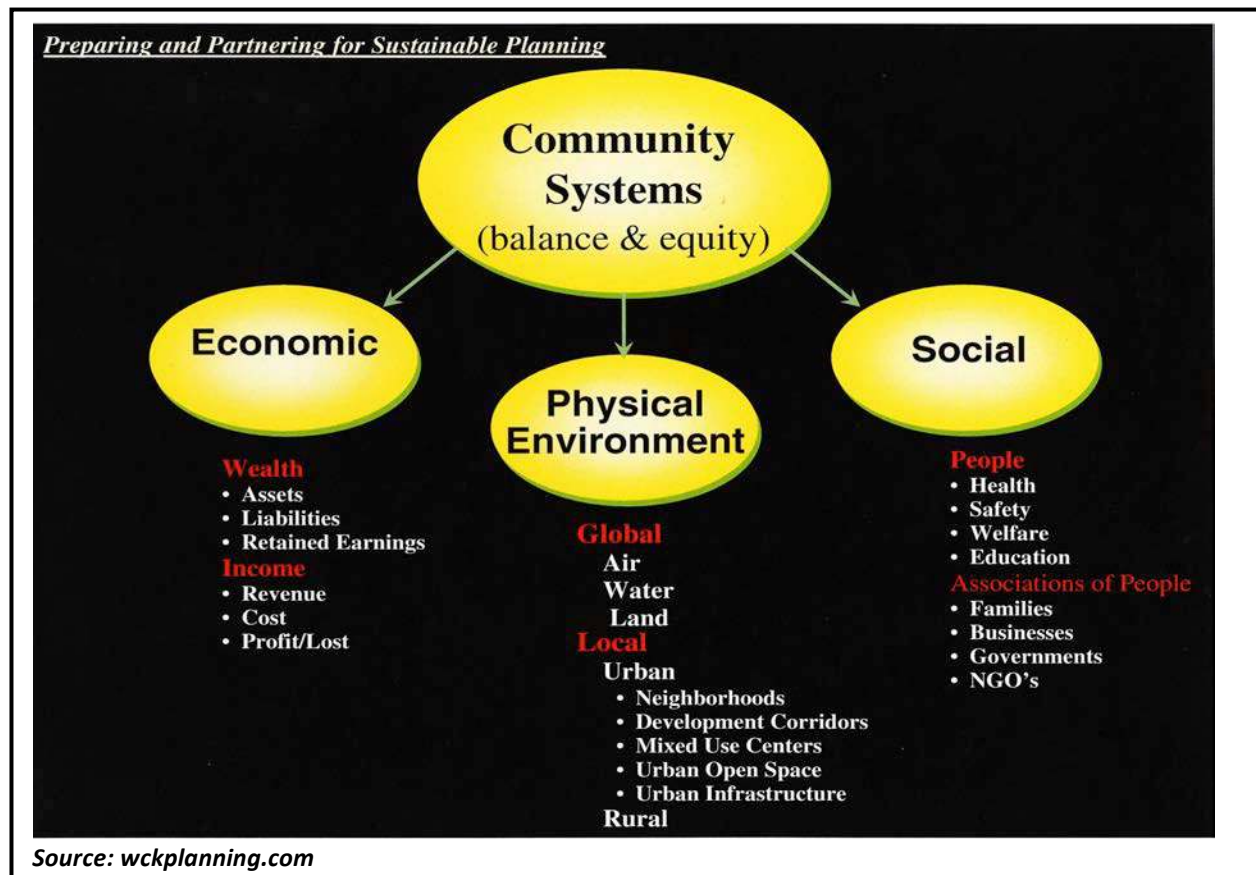
All cities are different; all cities are the same...trite but true. The sameness has persisted for thousands of years as Mumford has described in *The City in History*.

- 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 some work, some don’t, but they are always there.

The Complete Model of a Sustainable City with its functional parts is depicted below.

- **The Community System** of governance that provides balance and equity in the system.

- **The Economic Function** is designed to generate income and to accumulate wealth for individuals, institutions, governments and businesses.
- **The Social Function** is designed to promote the health, safety, welfare and education of each individual person in society while enabling the productive association of groups of people.
- **The Physical Environment Function** is designed to preserve and enhance the natural resources essential for life, namely water, air and land; and to build and preserve the world’s physical assets to accommodate the social and economic functions in urban and rural settings.



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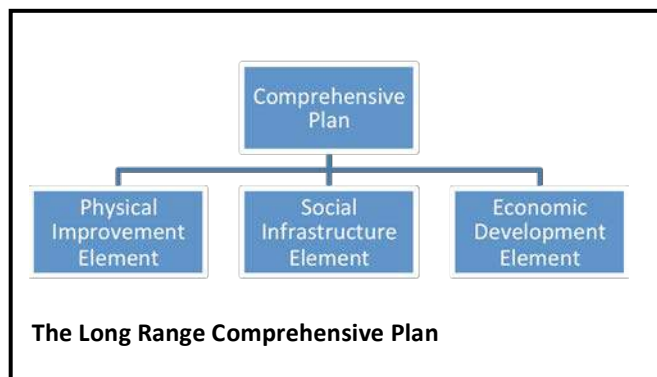
**Inspiration.** Two direct and powerful ideas intersected in my mind in the past millennium: sustainability and new urbanism. The Rio Conference in 1992 and the work of Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, in combination, provide the structure for understanding settlements of all kinds, especially cities.

**Community Governance Beliefs.** Governance is the vessel for planning, operating and maintaining society as a functioning and sustainable system. As Professor Fukuyama [please see Reading #7] establishes the go-forward ideas for functioning governance:

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

**Comprehensive Planning.** The traditional tool used by cities to anticipate the future is the comprehensive plan. It is the best vehicle available to the city for consolidating and coordinating its many programs into compact, vision-driven action plans.

The physical, social and economic plans work in alignment with the implementing codes, programs and budgets of the city. The city's program of citizens participation and performance evaluation overlays the work accomplished in the basic elements.



### OPERATING PRINCIPLES

Every city has a foundation of principles, spoken or unspoken, that guide decision-making. Typical principles guiding successful cities seem to be:

- **Vision-Driven Plans and Programs:** Consensus visions, vision-driven strategies and strategic-driven plans and programs with action plans, codes and budgets constitute the city's process.
- **Public Engagement:** Effective engagement of the citizens, both residents and business owners, in public decision-making. A true public conversation about the future along with free and efficient markets operating with enforceable contracts 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 and prosperous.
- **Collaboration and Partnering:** Strong working relationships between and among the many related entities is critical. Individual free-lance operators do not contribute over the long-run to achievement of the city's mission. Individual activities are generally more expensive and inefficient than concerted, collaborative efforts. People and organizations working together achieves better results. Vision-driven plans using a consensus vision makes for better communities.
- **Comprehensive, Long Range Thinking:** 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 long time horizon into account. The futurity of current decisions [see the work of Peter Drucker, Reading #6] is important.

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- 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.
- **Competence:** Doing the right things and doing them right is the objective. Evaluating performance and learning from successes and failures creates a long-term environment of competence, innovation and achievement.
- **Transparency.** “Open book” government is a vital operating principle. Citizen access to public information creates trust, solicits critique and improves operations. Most non-governmental organizations adhere to this idea.

#### THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ELEMENT

**The Community Balance Sheet.** The economic function is easy to consider through the format of a wealth-oriented balance sheet and an income statement. The balance sheet tabulates wealth, or the accumulation of wealth, in terms and measures defined by the owner. The city has assets and liabilities that form the basis for its balance sheet. Other public and non-governmental organizations also maintain balance sheets. Transparency is an important tool for earning community trust.

Wealth includes financial account balances, reserve funds and the present value of physical assets. The financial strength of a community is of unquestioned importance; it can be measured. It serves as an indicator of success and survival.

While wealth is most easily measured in monetary terms, there are other assets to consider when tabulating the balance sheet for the community:

- **Quality of life measures:** Quality, though harder to measure than quantity, may be more meaningful. Indicator projects have successfully evaluated a community’s progress in preserving natural lands, reducing teen pregnancy and transforming other societal negatives into positives.
- **Community assets:** Natural resources, social networks, peace and tranquility, for example, are all valuable societal assets to record on the community balance sheet.
- **Goodwill:** Goodwill is an important business concept that applies to cities. Goodwill is the measure of trust the community has for institutions that control resources. Maintaining a hefty balance in the goodwill account enables cities and other institutions to be innovative and expansive without being second-guessed and micro-managed by various “watch” groups.

**The Community Income Statement.** City governments call this their annual budget. It has projected costs and anticipated revenues from taxes, fees, grants and other sources. The income statement is an established tool used by business for measuring revenues, expenses and profits. It is of similar value when evaluating the flow of resources in the social and physical development functional areas.

**Economic Development Plans.** A significant work task of the city and its related parties is to increase the well-paid jobs in the community. Business retention and recruitment are essential for the growth and prosperity of the city.

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Growing businesses provide a private benefit by creating jobs and payrolls for the city's residents. Growing businesses also provide a public benefit by paying more taxes and fees to the city so it can provide more and better services to businesses and residents.

Comprehensive plans, capital improvement programs, regulations and civic engagement activities can all be measured through adapted balance sheet and income statement techniques. When so measured, better policy, program and budget decisions can be made. Business retention and recruitment activities improve individual and community wealth and income. The Economic Development Element of the Comprehensive Plan provide the path for generating the resources necessary for the city's prosperity.

### THE SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE ELEMENT

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 Social Infrastructure Plan for the city outlines the objectives and programs for health, safety, welfare and education, and the economic and physical systems necessary for their success.

The people may act individually, through institutions or governments; but they act to establish the social fabric of the town, for better or worse. The old adage, slightly modified, is true...people get the town they deserve.

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.

- **Health...**Hospitals are provided by the private and the public sectors. Physicians are generally privately employed as are supporting services in the health care system. Exercise and dietary programs are increasingly recognized as important to maintain one's health. The physical and economic systems that enable exercise, recreation, education, disease control, health inspections and transportation access to health care and educational institutions are critical to the community's health. The health sector also creates good jobs and requires physical facilities and infrastructure.
- **Safety...**Crime Prevention through Environmental Design [CPTED] is a great program that connects physical design with public safety. A safe city is intuitively healthier and more prosperous. Business looks for a safe environment when expanding or re-locating. Crime prevention is safer, better and cheaper than the "arrest and incarceration" approach. Highway safety fits under this umbrella as do emergency management services.
- **General Welfare...**the general welfare is more amorphous, it implies the overall feeling of the community in addition to "welfare" for the disadvantaged. A city that feels good about itself is hard to define, but visibly evident.

Economic conditions and the quality of the built and natural environment affect the goodness of this communal feeling. Social services, parks and recreation, community center maintenance and public entertainment and celebration activities fall under the aegis of the general welfare.

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- **Education**...the public school system defines a city; it directly reflects a city's attitude about what is important. The physical and economic condition of the school system is immediately evident to residents, businesses and visitors; and reflective of the community's values. Care and nurturing of children through education is an expression of the community's basic values.

### THE PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT ELEMENT

Neighborhoods, development corridors and mixed-use centers 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. These 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.

The financial support for the public open space and infrastructure systems is directly tied to the Economic Element. The location and design of parks, schools, police and fire stations, neighborhoods, streets and mixed-use centers are all entwined; thus the need for a holistic comprehensive plan that addresses social and economic aspects of the community most visibly presented in their physical form.

### PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND METRICS

An open and transparent system that includes a process for evaluation is critical.

### CONCLUSIONS

- The city's comprehensive, long range general plan is the best vehicle to address and unite every aspect of the social, economic and physical functions of the city.
  - **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. 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 approach.
  - **The Economic Development Element** provides a picture of the sources of wealth and income that will be available to private individuals and businesses as well as public and quasi-public enterprises. Without the money, nothing happens; a business model for the community and city government outlines a path to prosperity for both.
- Traditionally, comprehensive plans focused on the physical aspects of the city with physical plans, programs, budgets and regulations for the city's land use, natural resource and infrastructure systems. The city's plans increasingly need to openly address the economic and social infrastructure 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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