

The Case for Prosperous Small Cities and Towns ***Host to Businesses and “Talent” of the New Innovation Economy***

The future of small cities and towns that prepare.

Small cities and towns around the world are re-conceptualizing how they think about their future and their role in the world and the New Innovation Economy. Small cities and towns are feeling empowered to take control of their futures and expect their business and entrepreneurial partners to become full participants in the global business community. Small cities and towns with expanded views of their future are, or can become, great locations for high-tech businesses and their high-skill workers.

This is happening; technological systems for communication, transportation and manufacturing are changing the world and potential participation of small cities seeking prosperity. Many towns and small cities across America do not see the opportunity; they have lesser views about their present and future role in the global economy. Many do not believe they have a viable role in the world, some have not imagined the possibility and there are probably a few wanting to stay the way they are.

Many communities see the future and understand that change is inevitable. With the right vision, most small cities and towns will recognize that they have the qualities wanted by businesses in the New Innovation Economy; they will increasingly become aware that they are great locations for high-tech businesses and their high-skill employees.

Local economic development programs.

Momentum in the global innovation economy requires retention of existing high-tech businesses and attraction of new firms. From the perspective of an economic development program serving a small city or town, the New Economy is:

- **Globally connected** by communications, transportation and manufacturing processes that transcend geography.
- **Technology-based** demanding infrastructure that supports high-speed internet service.
- **Innovation-based** requiring talented workers versed in the computer and information technology sciences.
- **Applications-based** and important to all industries from agriculture to space exploration. Many businesses are in the technology industry, but all businesses are dependent on technologically advanced systems and the “talent” necessary to keep the wheels turning.
- **Talent-based** with businesses always searching for new “talent” to continue the corporation’s pursuit of improved quality and reduced prices for its goods and services.
- **Locationally-neutral** with location of business offices, laboratories and production shops subservient to the locations of customers, employees and suppliers.
- **Educationally-driven** to keep up with ever-changing technologies, customer needs and global conditions.

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The challenge for New Innovation Economy businesses.

The New Innovation Economy businesses have four basic needs:

1. They need global connections with high-speed internet service and reasonable access to an international airport,
2. They need an educable workforce, a population that is trained or trainable with technical education resources ready to respond to the dynamics of the ever-changing demand for skilled labor,
3. They need support systems for established enterprises, startup businesses and entrepreneurs, and
4. They need to be located in a place that is attractive to high-value, high-skill workers; a place high-skill, high-value workers can call home.

The home for “talent”.

There are two types of places with the unique and authentic character that appeal to the highly-demanded high-skill, high-value employees who have a choice of where to live: big cities with dense, busy, intimate and exciting urban villages or neighborhoods; and smaller, quieter places with great neighborhoods, downtowns, schools and interesting cultural venues that are also well-connected to the outside world. Since high-tech businesses follow “talent”, and “talent” gravitates to character places, the preservation, enhancement or creation of a character place is critically important to the future prosperity of every small city and town. It is within the grasp of most small cities and towns to control their future by building an interesting, connected, pleasant and prosperous town.

Building a character town benefits everyone.

In addition to being attractive to global businesses and high-value talent, character towns and small cities appeal to also residents, visitors and local businesses since they are pleasant places to live, interesting places to visit, and prosperous places to have a small business. Museums, theaters, galleries, libraries and entertainment venues are essential parts of the community character needed to have a small town be an interesting and connected place that appeals to “talent” and benefits everyone.

Character is what counts.

Town character. Every town in America wants to be a place that is interesting, pleasant and prosperous: interesting in the sense that there is some stimulant for the mind, body and soul; pleasant in that society is friendly and public discourse is civil; and, prosperous in that everyone who wants to work can have a living wage job.

A “character town” is a small city or town with friendly and inviting neighborhoods and an engaging business community both of which support a sociable and civil society; a society that is proud of its home town, protective of its heritage and committed to its well-being. A character town is an interesting, pleasant and prosperous place to live.

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Character towns are all similar in a different way.

Their emotional foundations are based on enduring civic values; their economic base is sustainable and their physical setting is always uniquely based on authentic assets with their own blend of personality.

- They each have an economic base built on the unique competitive advantages of the town.
- They each have social capital and infrastructure built on the unique assets of the town.
- They each have a solid physical setting with:
 - € Great neighborhoods and affordable housing as their essential feature,
 - € Vibrant downtowns where commerce, civic life and society intersect,
 - € Schools and parks that build and reflect the values of the town and its view of the future,
 - € Respected historic and natural resources valued for their inherent qualities and for their attractiveness to residents, visitors and businesses, and
 - € Connected community venues as interesting, educational and sociable places to gather.
 - € They each have a pride in their town based on enduring and authentic community values.

Community pride.

A character town’s main asset is its pride. The prize is to find, understand and leverage the town’s pride to reinforce its values. Pride incites support for public and private investments in vision-consistent projects, programs and policies that advance the town’s agenda. Community pride drives residents and businesses to strive to be or become a town with character that is the interesting, pleasant and prosperous place they envision.

Principles for developing a town with character and building trust in institutions:

- Make diversity a hallmark of the town,
- Leverage everything; insist on multiple benefits and the co-location of facilities,
- Partner at every prudent opportunity,
- Value the spirit of entrepreneurs and innovators; tolerate responsible risk, learn from failure,
- Provide ubiquitous connections, locally, regionally and globally,
- Promote broad-based respect for commonly-accepted norms of civic behavior,
- Enhance the city’s capacity for self-reliance,
- Celebrate shared traditions and community successes, and
- Promote a common interest in fun and beauty.

Strength comes from “character”.

A character town has an ambitious vision of its future enacted with strategy and actions consistent with the community’s character. Character reflected in the citizenry, the community and governmental leaders, the town’s organizations and its businesses is an asset and a resource necessary to enable a small city or town to be resilient and opportunistic with its future.

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The Action Agenda.

The aspiration is to build a community of character that endures; a city to stand the many tests of time and remains a community with values, principles and purposes commensurate with the community's pride. The actions are directed by the vision-driven strategy that is a commonly-held view of the community's future. The process is described in detail throughout the book with checklists and action items, but in general, the process goes something like this:

1. Envision a prosperous small city or town of character.

Every small city and town is, or over time can become, a town with character; a town with a friendly and inviting physical setting and an active business community that supports a sociable and civil society; a town that appeals to high-tech businesses; a town with a proud society that protects its neighborhoods, celebrates its heritage and commits to universal well-being. A vision based on a community consensus is the starting point. Reach a community-based vision of a successful future.

2. Design the town's strategy to protect and enhance, or build, a character town attractive to residents, visitors and businesses.

A community's vision, or lack thereof, drives everything. No plan or program can be sustained without the community's commitment to a commonly-held view of the future. A vision-based consensus of the community's future drives the town's strategy to achieve its aspirations. In turn, the vision-driven strategy directs every public action including the development of social infrastructure, economic programs and its physical development. The continuum of thought from vision to strategy to actions transparently connects the town's vision with its every action.

3. Leverage everything. Drive the town's growth and development strategy by cross-leveraging every asset to achieve the vision:

- Leverage the town's economic assets to build its social capital and physical presence.
- Leverage the town's social capital to grow the town's economy and its physical development.
- Leverage the town's neighborhoods, downtown, corridors, historic assets and natural resources to build an interesting, prosperous, civil and sociable society.

4. Implement Action Plans each year consistent with and supportive of the town's vision.

- Institute regulations, programs and policies necessary to become the city envisioned by the community's residents and businesses.
- Build traditional infrastructure systems plus the systems that support the New Innovation Economy.
- Take “branding” seriously to tell the town's story to existing and future residents, visitors and businesses. The story could be of a global city, an entrepreneurial city, a “wired” city, an historic town, an environmentally responsible community and/or a town known for its neighborhoods. But, be known for something, something unique and authentic that instills and expands people's pride in their community.
- Prepare and adopt plans, including:

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- € The Social Infrastructure Plan to draw upon economic and physical assets to strengthen the town’s civility and sociability.
- € The Economic Development Plan that ensures a steady in-flow of well-paying jobs; and integrate it with the town’s Comprehensive Long-Range Finance Plan taking a fifty year view of the sources and uses of funds necessary to sustain the town.
- € The Physical Development Plan for neighborhoods, downtown, corridors, schools, open spaces, infrastructure and mobility with supporting regulations, funding and performance management programs to produce the envisioned town.

5. Build Global Partnerships.

Partner with local businesses, multi-national corporations and like-minded cities and towns around the world to create direct connections not requiring state or federal permissions. Go direct, establish relationships, agreements and commercial interactions that benefit local businesses.

6. Consider the many monikers available to an ambitious town:

- Self-Reliant,
- Sustainable,
- “Smart”,
- Entrepreneurial, and ultimately
- Global.

7. Design, build and manage a sustainable character town with:

- **Interactive Social Infrastructure,**
 - € Programs,
 - € Partnerships,
 - € Facilities,
- **Self-Reliant and Connected Economy,**
 - € Economic Development Program,
 - € Comprehensive Long-Range Finance Plan,
- **Engaging Physical Development,**
 - € Great Neighborhoods,
 - € Vibrant Downtown,
 - € Respected Historic and Natural Resources,
 - € Connected Community Venues, and
 - € Community Pride built on Authenticity.