

## Vision-Driven Strategy.

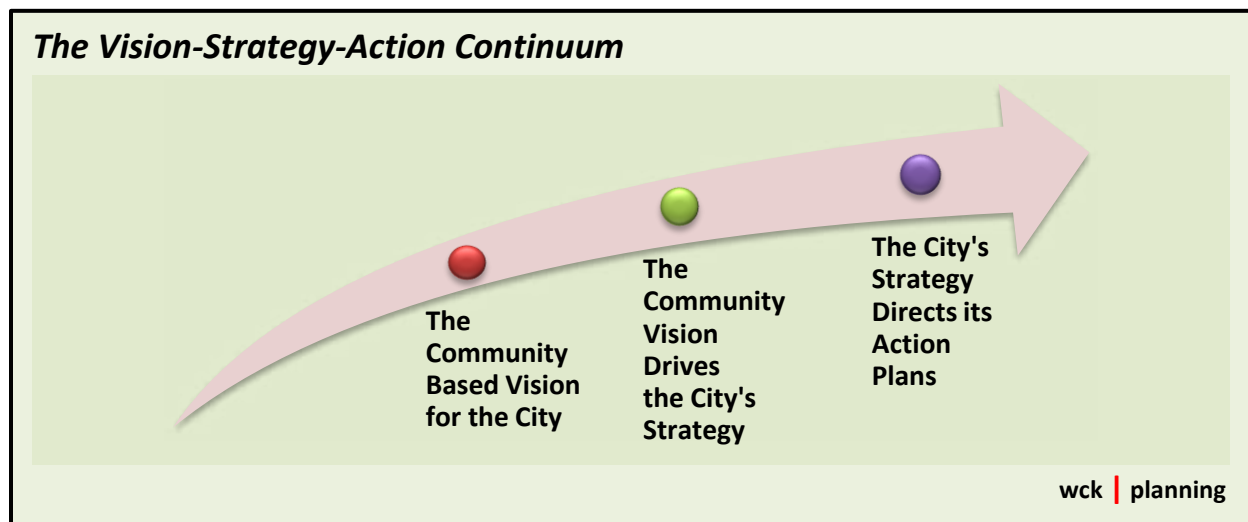
### The Idea of Vision-Driven Strategy.

A strategy is the general idea one has about how to implement a vision. Essentially, strategy is the “thinking” aspect of enacting a vision by planning a change, organizing individuals, preparing a campaign, launching a business or managing a city through coordinated and collaborative actions. Strategy is the pivot point between vision and action.

### The Vision-Strategy-Action Continuum.

*Vision* describes the destination, *strategy* shows the way and *actions* are the steps along the journey. The act of being or becoming a character town requires commitment to a vision backed-up with strategic and action plans. The vision-strategy-action continuum helps by connecting each phase of the town’s progress to every other phase.

1. **Community-Determined Vision.** There must be a reason for the city to take action, expend energy and assume risks. Call it mission, vision, objectives or aspirations, but there must be a concise, articulated reason or motive that inspires the municipal enterprise and its adherents to act. The motivation is an inspirational picture of the future, a vision that activates community action.
2. **Vision-Driven Strategy.** Strategy translates vision into action. It is the thought process that converts the city’s vision into actions. Strategies, and strategic objectives, are comprehensive and long-range, internally and externally aware. They are totally focused on achieving the city’s vision. Strategic Objectives articulate the strategy with more precision.
3. **Strategy-Directed Action Plans.** Action plans are directed by the town’s strategy; each action must be visibly and specifically linked to strategy with a strategic objective. When action plans are directed this way, each action becomes visibly and specifically linked to the town’s strategy and its strategic objectives. Action plans are programs, budgets, policies, procedures, regulations, construction projects, maintenance routines and other measurable activities and tasks directed by the town’s strategy, and hence its vision.



## Vision-Driven Metrics.

Performance measures assure that the vision-driven strategies and action plans are actually achieving the vision. Transparent, up-front, learning-oriented metric systems work best. Establishing the criteria for measuring success right from the start makes sure that the action plans reflect the town’s vision, or not, as the strategy and action plans unfold.

## Simple is Ok.

Strategies do not have to be elaborate, complex or difficult to understand. Simplicity actually has its virtues. This doesn’t mean strategies are quick or easy to construct or execute. Remember the harried apology – “I am sorry I did not have time to write a short letter.” Concise strategic plans that are easy to understand and articulate take time and thoughtfulness. As an example, the vast and complicated Roman Empire had four strategic objectives to direct its actions over centuries.

### *The Roman Empire’s Strategic Plan*

The Roman Empire, and Republic, reigned for over 500 years [100 BC. - 483 AD.] during a tumultuous time for human civilization. The Romans relied on four elements of action to organize for both survival and expansion.

- **Diplomacy.** The skills and energy of their diplomatic corps is renowned. Their diplomacy relied on the threat of armed intervention; a threat that was rarely used. Diplomacy also promoted trade and created the magnetic system for Rome to ingest the world’s riches.
- **Direct Force.** Armed intervention was always an option. By occasionally demonstrating its power, armed intervention was not often needed.
- **Roads.** Roman roads are legendary. The Army could rapidly travel far and wide and demonstrate the presence of force without its actual engagement. The road network also facilitated trade and cultural integration which greatly ameliorated discontent and potential uprisings.
- **Fixed Infrastructure and Forts.** The system of fortifications, roads and walls established the permanent presence of Rome and the Roman Legions throughout the Empire. It also kept the Army occupied and reduced the discontent that springs from idleness.

**Source: The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century A.D. to the Third, Edward N. Luttwak, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1976.**



Envision a vibrant downtown.



Envision parks as classrooms.

## Porter + Lafley and Martin.

Michael Porter [*Competitive Strategies*] inspired A.G. Lafley and Roger L. Martin to write their book, *Playing to Win, How Strategy Really Works*. Lafley and Martin present strategy as “an integrated cascade of choices” that applies to any enterprise, public, private or institution. These thoughts construct the vision-strategy-action continuum. Their five questions are:

1. “What are our winning aspirations?”
2. “Where will we play?”
3. “How will we win?”
4. “What capabilities must be in place?”
5. “What management systems are required?”

### ***An Approach to Strategic Planning for Cities Based on the Lafley/Martin Template***

The five questions presented by Lafley and Martin serve as a great basis for thinking about strategy for a community and a city government. While the translation of their business-oriented approach does not translate one-for-one into a municipal strategic plan, the system for creating an executable aspiration-driven strategic plan for a city organization can consist of a defined approach using their concepts:

- **Aspirations.** Aspirations include the community’s and the city’s thoughts about vision, values, and goals; the more simply and precisely stated the better. A vision of the future is the guiding light for the venture; values provide the ideal parameters for acceptable behavior; goals are the describers of the desired outcome. They collectively constitute the aspirations of the community or organization; think vision.
- **Strategy.** Strategy is the general approach to be taken to achieve the stated aspirations. “Where to play” embodies the idea of defining the field of interest. Determine the services and facilities necessary and desired, the financial resources to be assembled and the role of the citizenry. The aspiration-driven, or vision-driven, strategy provides the motivation for the organization to accept the mission and proceed with the actions necessary to fulfill the organization’s aspirations within the bounds of behavior set by the statement of values. Strategy translates aspirations into actions within the defined field of interest.
- **Strategic objectives.** Strategic objectives refine the basic strategy in a way that helps define and organize the Action Plans. “How to win” lives in the strategic objectives. The strategic objectives articulate the big things that must be achieved to fulfill the aspirations of the community and organization.
- **Actions.** Action plans include the specific, measurable actions to be taken to achieve the strategy to build the infrastructure for the city and the community. Action plans are rules and regulations, capital improvements, operating standards, financial resources, policies, community health programs, operating budgets, partnerships and other community-building activities. Every action must be driven by strategy.
- **Management/Monitoring Systems.** Metrics matter. The management and monitoring systems are essential to know if progress is being made and what lessons are being learned to improve performance. As the aspirations and strategies are articulated, the system for measuring performance should be constructed concurrently as part of the organization’s learning process that constantly improves the city’s capacity to achieve its aspirations.

**Source:** The ideas are from Lafley, A. G. and Martin, Roger L.; *Playing to Win, How Strategy Really Works*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, Mass., 2013; Interpreted for cities by **wck | planning**.

## Analytical Tools for Strategic Planning.

Strategies are comprehensive, long-range and forward-thinking; they consider the full range of internal and external factors that influence and affect the municipal enterprise. The key is to deeply understand the full range of issues facing the city, its residents and businesses before launching a strategic planning process. A sophisticated understanding can result from analysis.

### 1. SWOT Analysis.

There are many ways to develop a strategy for an enterprise, be it a business, municipality or institution. The Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats [SWOT] Analysis is a useful tool for strategic planning. Strengths and weaknesses form the internal evaluation part of the analysis. Opportunities and threats look outside the enterprise to examine the eco-system within which the enterprise operates. A SWOT Analysis can help answer important questions that lead to an approach that includes a vision-driven strategy implemented through strategic-directed action plans.

### 2. Community Scan Analysis.

Before problems can be addressed, they must be understood. Time spent plumbing the depths of community issues and capacities will enable a better understanding of the needs to be addressed through strategic and action plans. Like the SWOT Analysis, the community scan involves examining the city's economy, social capital and infrastructure plus its physical facilities. A city must know its residents, its businesses, their need for public goods and services, their resources and their capacity to support responsive community programs. A city must also understand its own business model. Management needs to know where its money comes from and what influences the growth of its tax and fee base. When thinking about future sources and uses of revenue, consider that:

- More and more households have either single heads of the household, or they are singles. The city's housing stock, school system and business model must get beyond the nuclear family prototype.
- Gas tax rates are fixed, consumption is declining; transportation funding may decline.
- Environmental and health issues are growing and may become a city burden.
- Economic constraints persist as family incomes continue to stagnate.
- Public services are increasingly needed by people less willing or able to pay for them.

### 3. Reverse Engineering Analysis.

Reverse engineering is an instructive exercise to determine if the action plans are linked to the town's vision. It enables entering the vision-strategy-action continuum at any point. Start with an action plan and work backwards to see if its outcome advances the city's vision. If not, question the action plan or the vision or both, and make changes accordingly. The process can also start at the end with the performance measurement system. What do you want to use as a measure of success: improved family incomes? Starting at this outcome, determine what has to happen to increase family incomes? Where does that trail of thought lead? At the end of the trail there must be jobs, business recruitment and an attractive city. By following the thread backwards, the city can construct the specific economic strategy and actions needed to achieve its vision, and its defined outcome.

## Conclusions.

The structure of a collaborative vision-based strategic planning process can unfold as follows:

### 1. The Community-Based Vision.

- The vision is the town’s dream of what it wants to be. The vision can be further articulated through mission and values. Professional help is advised.
- **Mission**, articulated by a mission statement, serves as the stake in the ground defining what “assignment” the enterprise has accepted in order to achieve the vision.
- **Values** are trickier and overlay all aspects of the enterprise from Vision and Mission through Strategy to Actions. Values guide organizational behavior; they set the ethical bounds for actions to be used to achieve the vision. Values must permeate the enterprise to ensure that everyone has the same civic value system, effectively supported and encouraged by leadership, ownership and management.

### 2. The Vision-Driven Strategy.

Essentially, strategy is the “thinking” aspect of planning a change, organizing a plan, a campaign or a series of actions. Strategy responds to the aspirations expressed by the vision statement with a path that connects the vision to the many action plans of the city.

- **Strategy** can be a simple statement or a complex multi-layered plan; but, at the end of the day, it needs to turn vision into action.
- **The Vision-Driven Strategic Plan**, with the starkness of a simple direct strategy supported by strategic objectives, forms the foundation for the long-range, comprehensive plan that will help realize the city’s vision.
- **Strategic Objectives** provide focus for the strategy. These objectives provide a more tangible idea about what needs to be done. They simplify the structure of the plan, always a virtue. Strategic Objectives can be issue-based, geographically-based or program-based. In each case, Strategic Objectives direct the Action Plans.

### 3. The Strategy-Directed Action Plans.

Obvious connections between vision and action are important. Small decisions made by the many people who implement the action plans need to be visibly linked to broader strategies. Make it easy for everyone in the city and the community to understand the rationale behind specific actions by having open discussions and stated connections between the community-based vision, the vision-driven strategy and the strategy-directed actions.

### 4. Action Plans.

Every action, or tactic, must suit the strategy and the strategic objectives. Since strategy is the connection between an action and the established vision, the connection between the two is visible and tangible. If not, then the connection needs to be better established or the action may not be appropriate or necessary.

- Every action should be traceable back to the city’s vision, and conversely.
- The city’s vision is reflected in its every action.
- Thus, the continuum is honored and the process deserves the community’s trust.

**Metrics** are an essential part of the learning process. They may also cause a re-evaluation of vision, strategy or action plans. Evaluation systems can be abused and become punitive; but the useful systems of successful cities are processes for learning and innovation.