

Being Analytical, *Tools to Get the Details Right.*

STRATEGY IS A GUIDE TO A SET OF ACTIONS, BASED ON ANALYSIS.

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 the use of traditional analytical tools.

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.

COMMUNITY SCAN ANALYSIS.

Before problems can be addressed, they must be understood. Time spent plumbing the depths of community and main street issues and capacities will enable a better understanding of the needs to be addressed through strategic and action plans.

Like the SWOT Analysis, the scan of main street issues and resources involves examining the city's economy, social capital and infrastructure plus its fiscal resources and 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. Main street managers need to know where their money comes from and what influences the growth of the tax and fee base. When thinking about future sources and uses of revenue, consider that:

- More and more households are single or have single heads of the households. 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 due to increased efficiency of vehicles and the growth of electric vehicles; traditional transportation funding will decline.
- Environmental and health issues are growing and may become a city burden. Defined benefit pensions add to the 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.

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 with 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.

Reverse engineering is fascinating. By following the thread backwards, the city can construct the specific economic strategy and actions needed to achieve its vision, and its defined outcome.

IMPEDIMENT ANALYSIS.

Infill and redevelopment projects face many obstacles: financing, zoning, neighborhood opposition and infrastructure deficiencies, to name a few. As the main street redevelopment plan is prepared, an important analysis is the one that identifies the obstacles to redevelopment. For example, if residential uses are not permitted on main street, this may preclude a desirable investment; this requires re-examination. Impediments to vision-consistent infill and redevelopment can be identified and fixed.

DATA BASE DEVELOPMENT.

Big Data is a blessing and a curse. A blessing if useful information can be identified for relevant analyses. A curse if the sheer amount of data paralyzes the system. All data collected and generated must be stored in an accessible, organized data base. Re-collecting information is intolerable; create a data base repository at the start of every project. Data base creation and management is a critical planning skill.

Conclusions.

- **Use all available tools.** A variety of analytical tools are available for strategic planning, performance management and planning the full range of operating departments.
 - a. SWOT Analyses
 - b. Community Scans
 - c. Reverse Engineering
 - d. Impediment Analyses
- **Exploit “Big Data”.** Data base management in the face of “Big Data” is critical if data is to be a focused asset rather than an overwhelming torrent of mostly useless information.
- **Get ahead of predictable issues.** As resources continue to be scarce, it is critical to perform before-the-fact analyses, a multiple benefits approach and a top-of-mind leveraging of all assets.
- **Continue to learn.** Finding and using the available analytical tools is a constant, life-long learning task.