

The Secrets of Successful Communities

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Successful Communities

- ▶ Have their own unique Strengths & Weaknesses
- ▶ Involve a broad cross-section of residents to determine/plan the future
- ▶ Capitalize on their distinctive assets.....*e.g., architecture, history, natural surroundings, homegrown businesses, etc.....* rather than trying to adopt/create a new/different identity
- ▶ Utilize a variety of private-sector & market incentives to influence their development, instead of relying solely on government regs & funding

Characteristics of Successful Communities

- ▶ Have a vision for the future
- ▶ Inventory community assets
- ▶ Use education & incentives, not just regulation
- ▶ Pick and choose among development projects
- ▶ Cooperate with neighbors for mutual benefit
- ▶ Pay attention to community aesthetics
- ▶ Have strong leaders and committed citizens

#1: Have a Vision for the Future

- ▶ Successful communities always have a plan for the future
- ▶ There are really only 2 kinds of change in the world:
Planned Change and Unplanned Change
- ▶ Communities can choose to grow by CHOICE or CHANCE

*“The best way to predict the future
is to create it yourself.”*

Abraham Lincoln

#2: Inventory Community Assets

- ▶ 21st Century economic development focuses on *what a community has, rather than what it doesn't have*
- ▶ Creating a vision for the future begins by inventorying a community's assets: natural, architectural, educational, economic, etc.
- ▶ Too many cities/towns spend too much time & money on business recruitment
- ▶ The old economic development paradigm: *cheap land, cheap gas and cheap labor*
- ▶ The new economic development paradigm: *laser recruitment and high value positioning*
- ▶ “*Successful cities think small in a big way*”

Roberta Brandes Gratz in The Living City

#3: Use Education, Incentives, Partnerships & Voluntary Initiatives, Not Just Regulation

- ▶ Regulation prevents the worst in development, but rarely brings out the best, and is subject to shifting political winds
- ▶ Communities need to use carrots, not sticks.....
*Think: Education, Partnerships, Incentives and Voluntary Initiatives:
for example:, conservation easements....purchase of development rights....expedited permit review,tax abatements in return for rehab of historic buildings,..... award & recognition programs,..... density bonuses for saving open space, etc.*

#4: Pick & Choose Among Development Projects

- ▶ All development is not created equal: some projects will make a community a better place to live, work & visit... while other projects will not.
- ▶ *“The biggest impediment to better development in many communities is a fear of saying “no” to anything. In my experience, communities that will not say no to anything, will get the worst of everything”.*
- ▶ *“Communities that set high standards will compete to the top, because they know that if they say “no” to bad development, they will get better development in its place”.*
- ▶ *“The bottom line for most developers is securing access to profitable trade areas. They evaluate locations based on economic potential, but if asked to address local design, historic preservation, site planning or architectural concerns, they will usually do so”.*

#5: Cooperate with Neighbors for Mutual Benefit

- ▶ Successful communities know today's world requires cooperation for mutual benefit. The real competition is between regions.
- ▶ Very few small towns have the resources, by themselves, to attract tourists or to compete with larger communities.
- ▶ But regional cooperation does not mean giving up your autonomy. Problems like: air & water pollution, traffic congestion and loss of green space do not respect jurisdictional boundaries.
- ▶ Regional problems require regional solutions.

#6: Pay Attention to Community Aesthetics

- ▶ “America’s Growing Slow-Growth Movement”: 1980’s Time Magazine cover story article included quote from a civic activists in So. California....” *we were in favor of progress, until we saw what it looked like.*”
- ▶ *“80%” of everything ever build in America has been built since about 1950, and a lot of what we have built is just plain ugly”.*
- ▶ The problem is not development, per se. Rather, *the patterns of development*. Successful communities pay attention to where they put things, how it is arranged and what it looks like.
- ▶ Every day in America, people make decision about where to live, invest, vacation, or retire, based on what communities look like. Successful communities pay attention to aesthetics & appearance, i.e., they control signs & plant trees, protect scenic views & historic buildings & encourage new construction that fits in with the existing community.

#7: Insist on Strong Leaders and Committed Citizens

- ▶ A small number of committed people can make a big difference in a community
- ▶ Every community has naysayers, but leaders of successful communities know that “Yes” is a more powerful word....e.g., “Yes, we can make this town a better place to live in, to look at, to work in and to visit”.
- ▶ A pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity, but an optimist sees opportunity in every difficulty.

Summing Up: It's About Differentiation

- ▶ “The post-recession U.S. economy continues to shape the way we live, work, shop and move around.....
- ▶ “Communities that embrace the future and set themselves apart will prosper, while those that do not will decline.... Quite simply, communities that cannot differentiate themselves will have no competitive advantage and leave their future to chance.”

Author Richard Florida in “The Great Reset”