

CITY OF SMITHVILLE & SMITHVILLE WORKFORCE TRAINING CENTER

A Look Ahead



SMITHVILLE
WORKFORCE
TRAINING CENTER

MARCH 14, 2023

BEING PREPARED

In order for an organization to be effective in both internal and external initiatives, it is important to develop and maintain a set of community, county and regional information that is used in decision-making, prospecting, prospect responses, small business development, marketing outreach, measurability of initiatives and more. These records should be updated on a regular basis and be stored in a manner that allows them to be accessed quickly, digitally and in a professional reporting manner.

Suggested Files to Develop and Maintain

- Workforce Availability Numbers for City, County and Region
- Job Skills required in Existing Businesses
- Classes provided locally or regionally that are considered job skills
- Average Number of High School Graduates
- List of schools, colleges, technical schools, education programs and higher education within 150 miles
- Available Housing and costs (listing specific types)
- List of Local and Regional Realtors and Brokers
- List of available Commercial Property (with condition, owner/realtor, price, etc.)
- List of available greenfield sites (with condition, utilities, owner/realtor, price, etc.)
- List of available downtown/retail sites (with condition, owner/realtor, price, etc.)
- List of existing businesses located in the city & county, along with status, owner and type
- List of target industries
- List local, county and regional transportation options (highways, rail and air)
- List of local, regional, state and federal elected officials who represent your city, county and region
- List of potential incentives (internal document)
- List of available programs & incentives (external document)
- List of monthly sales tax revenues and allocations
- List mileage distance to pertinent benchmark cities
- Number of water hook-ups and planning & zoning requests
- Estimated traffic numbers on major intersections and roadways
- List of all utility providers that serve the region
- List of all events (dates and locations) that are offered in the region
- List of local and regional civic groups
- Contact information for representatives from important state and federal agencies
- Archive all outgoing marketing
- Archive all request for information from local or outside sources
- Maintain all pertinent records for banking, employee, land contracts and GEDC obligations
- Maintain Cost of Living Reports
- Maintain results from all social media, digital and traditional marketing campaigns
- Maintain a list of all who have requested information about Goliad
- Maintain files of all outgoing proposals
- Maintain files of all mentions of Goliad and the Goliad EDC by outside sources
- Maintain files of various maps to be used in presentations and proposals
- and more....

RELATIONSHIPS & PARTNERSHIPS

One of the critical elements of the future success and sustainability of the Liberty Hill EDC and economic growth of the city lies with the array of relationships you maintain with a variety of partners, resources, elected officials, existing industry leaders, community volunteers and more. Make it a priority to build and maintain these relationships at the local, regional, state and federal level. It will pay dividends.

Suggested relationship & partnership building goals:

- City Council
- Planning & Zoning Commission
- County Commissioners
- Chamber of Commerce
- Downtown Revitalization Committee
- Parks & Recreation Committee
- Independent School District and ISD Board Members
- Local Youth Groups
- Local Senior Groups
- Local Business Civic Groups
- Local Arts & Culture Groups
- Surrounding Colleges and Universities
- Local Skills Training Centers
- Texas Department of Transportation
- Texas Department of Economic Development/Governor's Office
- Texas Historical Commission
- Texas Workforce Commission
- Texas Downtown Association
- Texas Film Commission
- Texas Department of Housing & Community Affairs
- Texas Department of Agriculture
- Texas Economic Development Council (State Association)
- Association of Rural Communities in Texas
- Texas Rural Funders
- Local and Regional Realtors and Brokers
- Regional, State and National Site Selectors
- Local and Regional Utility Representatives
- Regional Rail Representative
- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)
- Economic Development Agency-EDA (Federal Agency)
- And more....

POTENTIAL INCENTIVES

Federal Programs

- The Historically Underutilized Business Zones (HUBZone) Program | www.sba.gov/federal-contracting/contracting-assistance-programs/hubzone-program
- Opportunity Zones | <https://opportunityzones.hud.gov/>
- USDA Programs | <https://www.rd.usda.gov/tx>
- EDA Programs | <https://eda.gov/programs/eda-programs/>
- SBA 504 Program | <https://www.sba.gov/funding-programs/loans/504-loans>
- New Markets Tax Credit Program | <https://www.cdfifund.gov/programs-training/programs/new-markets-tax-credit>
- Federal Rehabilitation Tax Program | <https://www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/projects-and-programs/preservation-tax-incentives/federal-rehabilitation-tax-credit-program>

State of Texas <https://gov.texas.gov/business/page/incentives>

- Texas Enterprise Fund Program
- Texas Product/Business Funds
- Texas Enterprise Zone
- Texas Leverage Fund
- Texas Industry Development Revolving Loan Program
- Skills Development Fund
- Texas Historic Tax Credit Program | <https://www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/projects-and-programs/preservation-tax-incentives/federal-rehabilitation-tax-credit-program>

Potential Local Incentives

To encourage revitalization, Liberty Hill Economic Development Corporation's incentive programs would be part of an overall strategy to leverage investments, lower the cost of doing business, and level the playing field for business owners choosing to invest in their properties and in the Liberty Hill Business District. The following is a description of potential programs that could be offered by the Liberty Hill Economic Development Corporation. All Incentives should be considered along with Performance Agreements, Matching Funds or a Rebate, Refund or Forgiveness AFTER certain performance is met. The recipient should always have "skin in the game".

- *Expansion & Relocation Grant Program*
- *Low Interest Revolving Loan Fund (USDA)*
- *Skills Training Programs*
- *TIF Zones*
- *TERZ Zones*
- *Reinvestment Zones*
- *Opportunity Zones*
- *Rent Forgiveness*
- *Downtown Programs*
- *Facade & Sign Programs*
- *Job Creation Programs*
- *Chapter 380 Agreements*
- *Tax Abatement /Rebate Program*
- *Gap Redevelopment Grant Program*
- *Second Floor Development Grant Program*
- *Security Enhancement Grant Program*
- *Utility and Sales Tax Rebate Programs*
- *And more...*

A DYNAMIC EDC WEBSITE

An economic development organization's website is its most effective marketing tool, followed by "planned visits to corporate executives" and "media relations/publicity." With nearly two thirds (66%) of executives and locations advisors indicating they were likely to visit an EDO's website during their next site search—an increase of 18% since 2011—it's more important than ever to make sure your EDO's website is effective in marketing and providing information on your community. Whether you're in the midst of making touchups or are considering a total site overhaul, here are some best practices to make sure your EDO website is at the top of its game.

1. Keep Demographic Data Up-to-Date

Site selectors, executives and other decision makers want to know if your community has the workforce needed to support their business. That's why it's important to include the most recent data sourced from a third party. For best results, make it easily accessible (1-2 clicks) from the homepage.

2. Highlight Key Industries & Assets

Location advisors want to know what your region does best. Tout your top industry sectors with a dedicated page for each. Clearly identify the sector's strategic advantages and list or provide success stories for the top employers in the region to demonstrate a robust industry network. Also a huge competitive advantage would be to highlight the Smithville Workforce Training Center. Potential employers and corporate site selectors would definitely zone in on this. This brings us to our next item...

3. Showcase Leading Employers

Showcasing your community's leading employers is a great way to show decision makers, not only that other major companies are already thriving there, but that strong business and industry networks exist in the area. Include a dedicated page for leading employers and provide additional information (i.e. description of company operations and current employment) on at least five of the top employers. For bonus points, include links to company success stories.

4. Provide Comprehensive Contact Information

If a contact form or general email is the only way to contact your organization, your community will miss out on big opportunities. Location advisors and corporate executives are most likely to contact EDOs for the first time following the development of a shortlist in order to request specific information or to arrange a visit. When they're ready to make that call, a decision maker wants to be able to get on the phone with the right contact—ideally with the phone number easily found within one click from the homepage. Make sure to provide comprehensive contact details (direct phone, e-mail, title) for key members along with a photo so site visitors know exactly who they're talking to.

5. Put Incentives Front and Center

Be sure to provide a comprehensive overview of state and local incentives—again, ideally within 1-2 clicks from the homepage.

6. Info on Available Sites

Information on available sites is something every comprehensive EDO site should have—whether it's a dedicated page or a link to a separate provider. Using graphics and maps is a plus.

7. Share the Latest News

Keep visitors up-to-date on what's going on in your region by posting all the latest announcements, events and accolades. Try to post at least one update per month (if not several) and make sure external news (i.e. company relocations and expansions) outweighs internal news.

8. Consider User Experience

You may have noticed the "1-2 clicks" rule is becoming a pattern. As an exercise, have a colleague or peer who is unfamiliar with the site do a test to see if he or she can find everything a site selector might need within 1-2 clicks of the homepage. If not, your site could be causing visitors unnecessary frustration and a navigation makeover may be something to consider. Another absolute must for a successful EDO website: responsiveness across mobile devices. Now try the "1-2 clicks" exercise from a smartphone.

9. Keep Design Modern and Fresh

While this best practice may be considered somewhat subjective, there are a few good rules of thumb for making sure your site is looking its best. For one, using large, crisp images is a great way to dress up any site. Increasingly, "retina-quality" images—roughly 300 or more pixels per inch—are becoming the web industry standard. High-quality images, balanced with an appropriate amount of "white space," bold colors and text is a great recipe for modern, fresh web design.

10. Don't Let Your Content Get Lost

It's widely accepted that if you're not in the top two or three Google search results (in this case, when a user enters your community followed by "economic development"), you're losing out on site viewers. That's why SEO is arguably one of the most important aspects of web design.

With these 10 tips, you're ready to let your EDO website shine.

SAMPLE DOWNTOWN VIBRANCY PROGRAM

ATTRACT DINING, ENTERTAINMENT & NIGHTLIFE

- Facilitate Open Houses for Empty Businesses
- Conduct parking & lighting assessment for pedestrian friendly business atmosphere
- Develop strategic outreach strategy for targeted businesses to expand into Smithville
- Develop Site Sheets on available spaces to assist in outreach marketing

FOCUS ON DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIC SITES

- Current Building Owner Outreach
- Town Hall Meetings with Building Owners and Interested Buyers
- Develop an Expert Team of Architects, Engineers, Designers, Lenders, etc.
- Other building opportunities as they materialize
- Work with Planning & Zoning Committee to create smart development

DEVELOP DOWNTOWN GREEN SPACE

- Initiate Community Survey of Downtown Space Needs
- Explore pros and cons of green space options
- Consider ideal permanent and temporary options for outdoor green and gathering space
- Consider traffic flow, parking, lighting and permitting
- Consider best space development for desired events, activities, arts, culture and entertainment

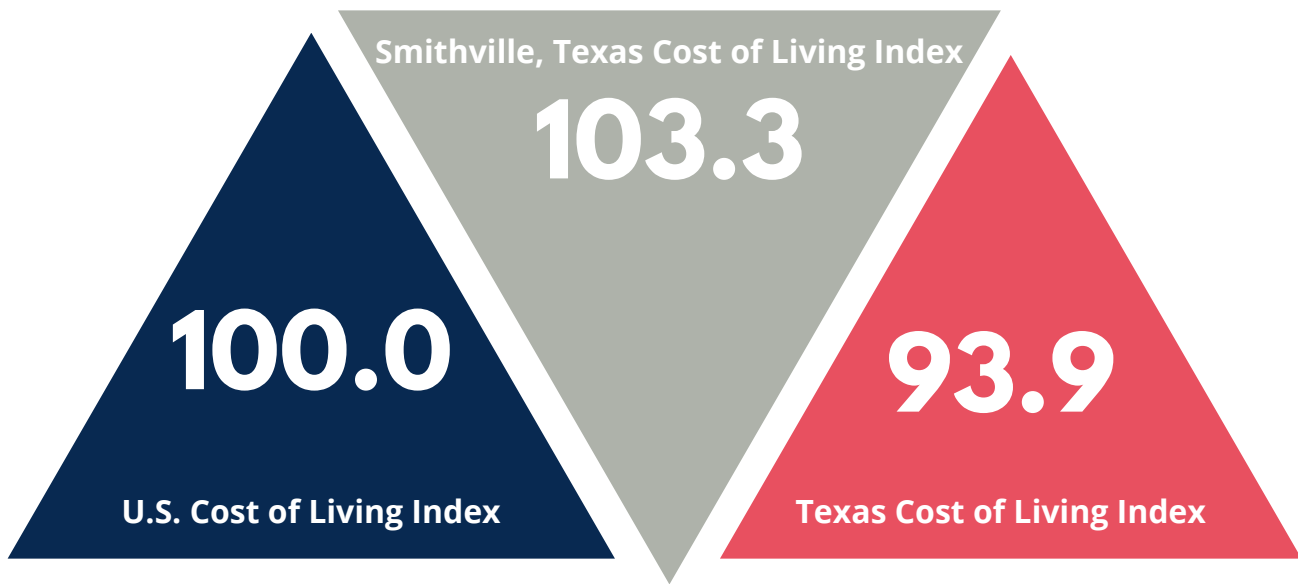
SMALL BUSINESS & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- Information Packets for Small Businesses
- Facilitate Training Workshops
- Obtain Sample Business Plans for popular potential downtown businesses
- Host a "Big Idea" Business Plan Contest for students and adults
- Create a Facade and Signage Matching Grant Program
- Create a Revolving Loan Fund for Downtown

DOWNTOWN MARKETING STRATEGIES

- Aggressive Social Media Outreach
- Campaigns Developed for Specific Audiences (Locals, Tourists, Commuters, Brokers, Etc.)
- Local Transparency about Downtown Activities, Plans and Vision
- Support Chamber, Tourism & Cultural events

COST OF LIVING COMPARISON



Cost of Living scores and indexes are a way to compare the overall price of goods and services between different areas of the United States. The national average is 100, so when you look at a place's COL Index you can instantly see how much more or less you'll have to pay to live there. If a place has a cost of living index of 135, then it is 35% more expensive to live there than the national average. If a place has a cost of living index of 85, then it is 15% cheaper than the average for the entire country.

The biggest factor in Cost of Living is housing costs – buying a house or apartment, or renting one. Cost of living comparisons include **housing, food, utilities, transportation, healthcare costs (including premiums and common surgeries), taxes, and child care prices.**

Smithville has higher than average housing costs, but not out of line with other cities in Williamson and Bastrop County. Other factors are at, or below, the US cost of living averages.

Sources: us census bureau, bestplaces.net and texas.gov

8 PILLARS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The 8 Pillars of Economic Development in Growing Cities By Lorie Vincent, CEcD

Please join me as I share the 8 Pillars of Economic Development in Growing Cities. With 30+ years in the economic development industry and having worked with more than 250 communities, these pillars have emerged as necessary environments for a community, regardless of population, to experience growth, vitality and sustainability. The Pillars are Education, Housing, Infrastructure, Collaboration, Growth Strategies, Livability Factors, Memorable Marketing and Attitude. All Pillars are important, regardless of order of the following articles.

Economic Development Pillar #1: We can't Build for Tomorrow without Education

The first Pillar is **EDUCATION**. It may seem cliché to say, “our children are our future”, but it’s true. Our children ARE our future...our future labor force, future entrepreneurs, future public servants and future leaders. It is our obligation, as a community, to provide them with the best tools and learning environments to reach their maximum potential.

In economic development, we look at the Educational Environment in three capacities: 1) as a measure of a healthy community; 2) as a quality-of-life issue; and 3) as a recruiting tool for growth.

As a professional economic developer, I would pose these questions to the citizens of Goliad...is your school system an asset to the community? Is it a viable and healthy environment for learning? Is it a safe and engaging atmosphere for the students, teachers and administration? What is the physical condition of your facilities, food service, parking, HVAC and technology? Is the Goliad ISD able to recruit and retain a superior level of teaching professionals? Is your school environment competitive with other school systems and other employers in the region? Do the schools in Goliad provide the highest level of technology needed in today's digital world? Is the Goliad school system a reason people live in your community or is it the reason people leave your community? Do school activities serve as a driver to bring the community together? Do extracurricular activities serve as a catalyst for bringing outside tourism into Goliad? Can your schools absorb a growth in population and additional students? Is there a vision for administration to make it the best it can be?

A strong educational system is a critical Pillar for economic growth and prosperity. The underlying objective of economic development is to create jobs, create capital investment, increase the tax base and grow the population to support your existing and new business base. If economic development efforts are to be successful, the excellence of the school system will have played their part.

Lesson Learned: I have often said, that if a downtown is the HEART of your community, then the school system is your BRAIN. We must all feed and nourish our education system to the best of our ability.

After all, our children are our future.

8 PILLARS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic Development Pillar #2: Housing is a Need, not a Want

The second Economic Development Pillar is **HOUSING**. The lack of quality and affordable housing is a critical need that is prevalent throughout Rural America.

But not all housing is created equal. Therefore, when a community gives the rallying cry of “we need housing,” an abundance of questions must be answered. Technically, there are at least seventeen types of housing including single family starter homes to rent, single family starter homes to buy, single family custom homes, multi-family residential to buy, multi-family residential to rent, duplex/four-plexes to rent, townhomes/condos to buy, townhomes/condos to rent, senior active 55+ multifamily rental, senior active 55+ garden homes to buy, independent living, assisted living, modular homes, mobile home parks, mixed-use rentals/lofts, portable worker housing, vacation rentals and more. These housing initiatives require a different level of investment, have different incentive programs available to developers and constitute a very diverse level of affordability.

One of the biggest mistakes I see in communities across the USA is the investment in housing that a community wants, instead of the type of housing that a community needs. I’m highly supportive of pro-actively investing in the types of neighborhoods that match the vision of a community, but only if the overall economic development plan aggressively supports the efforts to create jobs at a salary that can support that type of housing. Otherwise, you will be left with empty homes, mad developers and you will have not solved your problem of providing housing that meets your immediate needs.

A strong housing market helps families build wealth, attend good schools, and live in communities that are more conducive to long-term success. So when you are ready to discuss the “need for housing” in your community, be sure and drill down to identify your actual needs. And don’t forget that housing availability is a chain reaction. In developing your housing flow chart, be sure and consider that inserting new housing opportunities at any level of the inventory will start a domino effect opening up housing at a different level. A well-planned and maintained housing forecast is critical to the viability and sustainability of a community.

Lesson Learned: Give serious thought about your actual market when identifying your housing needs and be willing to invest dollars into the resurgence of historical and long-standing neighborhoods to increase the overall quality of life in your community.

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Economic Development Pillar #3: Do you Have Good Bones?

The third Economic Development Pillar is **INFRASTRUCTURE**. In economic development, we consider infrastructure the “bones” of your community. Do you have good strong bones? Or are they weak, fractured or at risk?

When considering the health of your infrastructure, we are talking about many different facets. All elements are critically important in their own way. A community checklist of infrastructure includes water, sewer, roads, bridges, drainage, curbs and gutters, ADA accessibility, sidewalks, drainage, electric, gas, telecommunications, internet, broadband, WiFi access, rail, airport/airstrips and more.

Like good strong bones, all types of infrastructure should have periodic and in-depth assessments. The maintenance of infrastructure is ongoing and should be consistently budgeted so that a weakness never evolves. Our Texas cities are now 100-150 years old. The roads, water lines, utilities, curbs and gutters, sewer systems and other functioning bones must be maintained, replaced, and renewed to provide a vibrant and modern quality of life for your citizens and prospects. There are numerous funding programs available to assist in the maintenance and replacement of needed infrastructure, but there is heavy process involved, so they are difficult to access in emergency situations. Knowing and keeping up with the various infrastructure programs will greatly benefit the city, county, schools, hospitals and all who are involved in the installation and maintenance of your bones. Everything wears out at some point and new technologies, equipment and materials make it much easier to provide a strong foundation for your community's economy.

When economic development efforts are operating at a highly effective level, the taxes generated by new and consistent sales tax, ad valorem tax and fees are a good investment for the community when used efficiently and effectively for the installation and maintenance of your infrastructure. After all, your citizens deserve safe, clean, strong and effective bones.

Lesson Learned: Being aware of your bones' condition and making a strong multi-year plan for replacement, repairs and new installations are critical to the health of your community. It is much more budget effective to do regular assessments of your infrastructure than to deal with an emergency. If your community is growing, you will want to be proactive in making sure all your infrastructure bones remain strong, resilient and in great working condition. Just as we do what we can to keep our own bones healthy, so we should do with our community's infrastructure.

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Economic Development Pillar #4: Two is Better than One

The fourth Economic Development Pillar is **COLLABORATION**. It is also the hardest. We are all wired to be singularly focused on our own tasks at hand, primarily the objectives of OUR organization and OUR mission. In fact, in today's business world, it seems that is all we would ever have time for. In short, it is simply not sustainable to pursue economic growth alone.

Why is it that some communities have a long history of economic development success and prosperity while others with similar economic assets suffer with continued failure and disinvestment? All communities have economic strengths and weaknesses, but successful ones share an organizational characteristic that eludes the unsuccessful: they are able to manage the two primary economic development functions, leadership and execution, and present them as a single face. Leadership is key in that they establish the framework and plan for successful economic development. The staff plays an important role by executing that plan.

Both leadership and execution of various entities operate as a cross-functional team that manages the community's economic development process from end-to-end. This can prove to be a difficult relationship, however. Even long-established programs can routinely fail to manage conflicts between the various entities' leadership and staff, thus spending unproductive time and resources on turf battles.

Successful communities have boosted cross-functional collaboration and team spirit between several entities and their staff, while unsuccessful communities have allowed the two functions to build independent silos that are sluggish, lack communication, and create zealously guarded roles that hinder collaboration.

Leadership includes elected, professional, and volunteer individuals who provide the sustainable organization structure, the physical infrastructure, a shared community vision, a clearly defined direction, and funding to foster and facilitate execution. Their role includes but is not limited to: basic knowledge of economic development, political will to maintain a predictable pro-business climate, strategic focus and passion for results and a legacy of successful public/private partnerships.

The execution team, which includes professionals and staff, provides the ability to execute a fully integrated economic development plan. Their role includes, but is not limited to: the ability to develop business prospects and economic opportunities, the empowerment to make decisions and commit the community, the agility and quickness in response capabilities, and the ability to organize and function in collective and collaborative efforts.

Lesson Learned: Some communities have attempted to break down conflicts between the two functions and build cross-functional collaboration but have failed. Though it appears to be logical and easy to make cooperation happen, it is actually very difficult. Getting an economic development organization, a city, a county, a school ISD, a hospital district, a chamber and industry to all agree and pursue a common outcome is tricky, but possible. A familiar roadblock is who gets credit for successes. Communities that have achieved economic development successes know that success generates enough credit that all functions can share equally and collaborate for the best interest of the community.

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Economic Development Pillar #5: Are you Growing Weeds or Flowers

The fifth Economic Development Pillar is **GROWTH STRATEGIES**. Yes, it is possible to experience organic growth. Organic growth appears with no effort from the community at all. It may happen because of your geographic location, your natural resources, your proximity to nearby industry expansion, global market needs or other reasons. However, organic growth is not sustainable. It is out of your control. When a piece of property is for sale and a prospect purchases it and creates jobs, it is considered growth. But was that the highest and best use of that property? Would you have been able to cluster that new business with others in order to maximize profits? Is your available property zoned properly? Does your residential and commercial growth feel haphazard? Are you marketing your city to prospects that would bring the kind of salaries that would enhance the growth of your community? How will they impact housing, schools and social services?

Every City needs a plan. Every County needs a Plan. Every Economic Development Corporation needs a plan. Every Chamber, Hospital District and School ISD needs a plan. And in the most successful cities, those entities work together to ensure that their plans complement each other and lead towards the same growth goals. At the very least, they make sure they are not conflicting or redundant. At best, they align with one other and each entity is supportive of objectives that relate to economic growth. After all, if the EDC is recruiting or expanding an existing industry that creates 50 jobs, you have to ask yourself...Where are they going to live? Will they have children in our schools? Can our hospital accommodate the growth? Can our city and county roads accommodate the additional truck traffic? Are there jobs available for trailing spouses or partners? Can the local businesses accommodate the construction needs, materials and labor? Are there even 50 people available to fill those jobs with the appropriate skill set? All things to think about...

When planning for economic development, the goal is to create and maintain a strong, vibrant local economy. Local government economic development planning is part of a region's overall economic development strategy and involves intergovernmental coordination. The economic development plan provides a comprehensive overview of the economy, sets policy direction for economic growth, and identifies strategies, programs, resources and projects to improve the economy.

The top six reasons why a strong economic development plan plays a critical role in any region's economy. 1) Job Creation; 2) Industry Diversification; 3) Business Retention and Expansion; 4) Economic Fortification; 5) Increase in Tax Revenue; and 6) Improved Quality of Life for your residents.

Lessons Learned: You wouldn't build a house or take off for a vacation without a plan, so why would you leave the future of your community at risk with no plan? A blueprint for economic growth will help you achieve directional and intentional growth, resulting in the quality of life you desire. Organic growth is good, but controlling, pursuing, funding and marketing for an economy that enhances your community's vision is even better and much more sustainable.

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Economic Development Pillar #6: Livability Really is a Thing

The sixth Economic Development Pillar is **LIVABILITY**. These are factors that are measured as defining reasons why someone chooses or does not choose to live in a specific city or region. The most common livability factors are adequate housing, access to medical care, quality education and connectivity. In recent years, two additional livability factors have risen in importance, fresh water and safety. In other words, it doesn't do anyone any good to work on other factors if your strongest livability factors are in peril, declining or non-existent. A city, chamber, county, school, hospital district and EDC can all be working on additional quality of life initiatives simultaneously, but these livability factors are the drivers that measure a city's health and sustainability.

Livability blooms locally, not centrally. It cannot be planned but must be tended to organically. It requires the fertilizer of local initiatives and the cultivation of civic responsibility. Livability for all is an equitable distribution of housing, jobs, health care, education and respect.

Livability and livable places are defined as how hard people—local people—are willing to work to make their community a better place. A community must define for itself what livability means. Without the ability to earn a decent income and provide dignity through gainful employment, there is no livable place for the left out or left behind.

Many believe that place triggers action: people's love of place and sense of place leads to a desire to fight for enhancing their place. The impact of the built environment on public health, civic pride and responsiveness, and economic well-being is critical. Place is also unique: every community, large or small, has a distinctive character resulting from its history. Natural and man-made physical elements, social makeup, and combinations of public and private institutions both create and constrain opportunities for expanding and maintaining quality of life.

A community that satisfies the full range of its residents' needs is more attractive as a place to live, work and do business and, therefore, more likely to be economically successful. Believe the glass is half-full, not half-empty. This philosophy of looking at opportunities instead of problems is essential for community change. An optimistic, entrepreneurial approach to problem-solving rather than mere problem-study or moaning and gnashing of teeth is essential to allowing goodwill, collaboration and sense of confidence to enable long-term problems to be addressed. Action speaks louder than planning.

Lessons Learned: Declare success frequently. Nothing spells growth like success and nothing has a better chance for success than a situation in which people can participate, contribute and claim ownership of good civic ideas. Stop and smell the roses. As in any long march, there has to be places of rest; places where there is cause for celebration to acknowledge achievement and to renew determination to succeed. A small victory every six months must be built into a program to create the pleasure of success, the determination to continue, and points for new people to join, be trained, and to be offered opportunities for participation in civic activities.

Your livability factors depend on it.

8 PILLARS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic Development Pillar #7: Memorable Marketing is a Critical

The seventh Economic Development Pillar is **Memorable Marketing**. Economic Development Marketing and Branding is a vital part of economic development. It's the shorthand that communicates who you are to people both inside and outside your community. When it works, it emotionally resonates with stakeholders by inviting them to see why you are different and why people should invest, work and buy in your community.

Here are five principles to drive your strategic and creative work with branding and marketing for economic development.

Principle #1: Understand your stakeholders. Start by acknowledging that the audiences in economic development branding are often more complex than product branding. You are both representing your community and trying to reach targets far beyond your area. That means you have one foot that is local and the other foot that is independent.

Principle #2: Understand your goals. Once you understand your targets, focus on what you want your outcomes to be. Economic initiatives can vary dramatically, from attracting more diverse businesses to creating jobs to stabilizing a downtown or driving tourism. The strategy behind your branding and marketing efforts should connect to exactly what your goals are, and some of them may actually be conflicting.

Principle #3: Differentiate and define. Economic development efforts tend to use the same words and appeal to the same feelings no matter the geographic area. Just look at how everyone talks about the quality of life. That's not a differentiating point. Instead, drill down deeper and define what makes the quality of life special in your area.

Principle #4: Get true community buy-in. Work to get community buy-in, but know that it's also important to challenge your community. While your brand should be believable and authentic, that does not mean boring. You want the community to understand that when it comes to economic development, you cannot market on what feels ordinary and safe. Aim to stand out.

Principle #5: Put actions behind the brand. Economic development is not about nice pictures and words. It goes far beyond an engaging slogan. Instead, aim to live the brand through actions. If your brand is about small-town living with a nostalgic feel, your storefronts should reflect that and your hospitality and retail workers should be welcoming. If your economic development brand is about diversity, your recruitment efforts for businesses should welcome people of all colors and genders. If your efforts are focused on tourism, invest in the attractions that make people want to come to your area over and over.

Lesson Learned: Sadly, when budgets are tight, when the economy is down or when apathy exists in a community, the first thing that gets cut is the marketing budget. But that's when it is more critical than ever to tell your story. Pitch your assets. Brag about your business climate. Promote your existing businesses. Creating consistent, engaging and memorable marketing is what will get you to the front of the line. Without memorable marketing, you aren't even in the game, because no one will know about your city.

Remember, people don't know what they don't know. You have to tell them.

8 PILLARS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic Development Pillar #8: Pursuing Growth is an Attitude

The eighth Economic Development Pillar is **ATTITUDE**. This one is simple: To have a growing community filled with opportunities for all, thriving businesses, affordable housing and strong infrastructure you have to want it. And work at it.

I have been studying more than 300 rural communities across the USA for more than three decades. In that research, there are many tangible factors that can dictate whether a community grows or declines in population. There are many tangible reasons a community can grow including regional industry growth, strategic geographic location, strong organizational efforts, effective marketing etc. All of these factors are measurable. It's the intangibles that are harder to pinpoint. But almost all of the soft reasons a city grows or declines is based on attitude. Attitude of the leadership. Attitude of the residents. Attitudes of the business community. If industry attraction or closures occur, if overall economic condition improves or declines or if a community is considerable "healthy" or not, it all comes down to attitude.

I can't begin to tell you how many prospects that I have taken to visit communities that were perfectly matched on paper. It should have been a slam dunk for the community. But the attitude of the community clearly came through on the visit. Skepticism, distrust, lack of enthusiasm, lack of organization, lack of cohesive talking points, lack of vision, and the very dreaded "we don't want change" clearly comes through. If there is a hint of negativity about the community, it's people or its future, it will show through like a flashing neon light. And the discussion will be over. There are more than 17,000 communities in the USA of 10,000 people or less. This is your competition for residents, teachers, policemen, first responders, medical caregivers, small business owners, retail, industry, and service providers. You are not the only game in town. It is imperative, for the growth of your community, for everyone to embrace a solid plan for growth that everyone can support that will do two things: maintain the personality, character, heritage and history of the city/county while also priming itself for new and expanded business, entrepreneurship, state of the art educational facilities, strong infrastructure, available housing and medical care.

Lesson Learned: Communities that grow and thrive do not do it by accident. It doesn't happen overnight through osmosis. If you love your community, then show it. If you don't love your community, then take steps to fix the issues through positive action. The best way to make sure everyone is on the same page is to keep the channels of communication open, keep the visionary discussions going, practice your message, strengthen your marketing and BELIEVE IT. When I ask someone, anyone, why they love where they live and they can tell me without hesitation or negativity, then I know that there is some magic to work with. You have a great community with immeasurable potential. What are you going to do with that gift?

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