



Blueprints for Your Community's Future: Creating a Strategic Plan for Local Economic Development

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Much effort occurs at the national and state level to address important development issues. Issues including fiscal policy, the trade position of the U.S., and State development policy, are all critical to development in both rural and urban areas. Local leaders need to understand the impact these issues may have on their economic development efforts. Of equal importance is the fact that leaders need to know what policies and strategies are possible to guide economic development at the local level. These local considerations are the topic of this fact sheet. Not only are possible local options important, but sound local plans must be in place if selected options are to become reality.

Business firms are often advised to develop a business plan in order to survive in a constantly changing environment. The plans can be used to assist management in assessing potential opportunities and implementing decisions [1]. Developing a strategy for community economic development is very similar and necessary if communities are to succeed.

Strategic planning implies forward thinking and anticipation of the future. Resources will be utilized and decisions made to achieve desired future goals. Strategic planning is the process of identifying future goals and how to achieve them.

Strategic planning will clarify the process of building a local foundation for economic development. **There is nothing mystical about developing a strategy.** It involves hard work, communication, thought, and cooperation. To succeed in economic development efforts, a community must know where it wants to go and how it is to get there. A strategy is simply a plan or a road map showing how to get there.

Local leaders and citizens must be involved in developing the strategy because it cannot be successful without their total support. It is also important that local leaders and citizens understand at the very beginning that they must make a substantial commitment of their time and effort if they hope to succeed. The objectives of this publication are to:

1. review economic development options and the "CARE" model,
2. review the benefits of strategic planning,
3. summarize the steps required to build an economic development strategy, and
4. provide some tools to do some of the preliminary work in building a strategy.

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"Blueprints for Your Community's Future" presents an overview of options available for local leaders concerned with diversifying the local economy where they live and work. The report begins with a definition of economic development and reviews options for job/income diversification and growth. The "CARE" model for job growth is introduced and discussed.

Economic Development Options and the CARE Model

Defining Economic Development

Many agree that state agencies, universities, governments, the private sector, and others need to be involved in economic development. A problem arises when discussing what economic development means. Often, these various groups have a perception of the problem or issue based only on their point of view. The resulting definition usually involves **only** agricultural activity or **only** industrial recruitment rather than a broader definition that explores all options.

In its basic form, an "economy" is a system for meeting the needs and wants of people in a particular geographic area (community, region, state, nation, etc.). "Development" has been defined as the improvement of well-being for residents in a particular geographic area. This includes such measures as expanding the economic base, improving services, or providing equality of opportunities. This implies that actual development activities will depend on goals and needs identified by residents in the region of concern.

The term "economic development" refers to an expansion of the economic base through efficient allocation and use of available resources. A working definition for economic development could be any activity which provides additional jobs and income given a community's standard or quality of life.

In its broadest sense, economic development is a concept that suggests at least the maintenance of and, more likely, the improvement in the standard of living identified by the people. It is up to the community to insert its will into this ongoing and dynamic process. Quality of life certainly plays a key role in this process.

It is widely noted that all of America is now a part of the "world economy." Events and forces around the globe affect us everyday. The price of oil or the price of wheat, as impacted by world events, are two examples that come to mind. Still,

local leaders want to know what options are available to them that impact their future.

Sources of Jobs and Income

Five options for economic development at the community, small town, and rural area level have been proposed by Pulver [2]:

- 1) Improving a community or areas ability to capture existing income
- 2) Improving the efficiency of existing firms
- 3) Encouraging the formation of new businesses
- 4) Attracting new industry or business
- 5) Increasing financial aid received from other government levels

These options deal primarily with “place” prosperity. At least one additional option can be added: investment in existing resources, especially human resources or people prosperity. The alternative(s) chosen will depend upon the goals and needs of the community. An active economic development effort might include several of the alternatives, shifting emphasis as needs, resources, and opportunities dictate. There are specific methods a community can follow to pursue goals related to each of the alternatives.

Each of these five alternatives offers some potential in one combination or another in communities throughout the South. No universal solution exists, and regional or community development plans should vary depending upon existing local strengths and weaknesses.

The “CARE” Model

The options presented by Pulver have long been utilized by those working in the local economic development arena. The options listed tend to be almost all inclusive for those who care to work with local economies. In fact, the term “CARE” provides another useful approach and summary for economic development options (Exhibit 1).

Creation refers to all local efforts to encourage the formation of new business. In the “age of the entrepreneur,” any concern with emphasis on a local climate helpful for new job formation may lead to greater dividends in the future.

Attraction refers to the traditional industrial recruitment efforts many Southern States have pursued. Community preparation, tax incentives, and other attraction strategies are very familiar tools. This is a highly competitive arena, few businesses relocate every year and there are thousands of local development organizations seeking this relocation or expansion. However, this may be a viable option in some cases.

Retention refers to activities targeted to existing firms. Retaining 100 existing jobs in a community is just as important (or more so) as attracting 100 new jobs.

Expansion takes the concept of retention one step further. Why not encourage expansion of existing firms? After all, there must be a competitive reason for those firms locating in the first place.

Creation

New businesses often need support in several areas including capital financing, labor supply, technology and assistance, and management assistance. A healthy climate for new business formation addresses all these elements.

Resulting new businesses capture additional income for the local economy and provide the often-needed diversification.

Attraction

Industry and business recruitment is perhaps the best-known economic development option. At the state level, this effort receives a great deal of attention. New business recruitment is a viable option. However, local communities should realistically assess their chances of recruiting a basic employer and set appropriate goals.

Major metropolitan areas will attract most larger employers. Factors that influence larger employers include labor supply, transportation, location of related businesses, water or other resource constraints, and community attitude and/or preparedness.

Retention and Expansion

Most consumers spend money for basic goods and services in more than one community. Because of perceived differences in prices, quality, selection, or service, shopping habits will vary. Leakages occur in a community or area when local residents purchase items outside the community or area. This is loss of potential income.

Steps can be taken by local merchants to capture more (not necessarily all) existing income. Surveys of consumer shopping habits can identify potential areas for improvements. Special events and promotions can lead to more local shopping to retain more income. This is one strategy in which most existing local merchants are interested. Careful analysis of various techniques would guide these merchants in determining the “best” approach. The emphasis should be on aiding communities and regions in becoming more competitive.

Much new job growth comes from the expansion of existing firms. If existing small businesses expand, new jobs and additional income result. Retention of existing small businesses also insures a more stable local economy. Training programs, financial assistance, and a supportive local attitude can greatly aid these existing firms.

Training programs are available from universities, the Cooperative Extension Service, Small Business Development Centers, and other sources regarding such topics as financial analysis (for example, cash flow or profit forecasting), personnel management, how to develop a business plan and other management or marketing concerns. The goal of these programs is to increase efficiency of resource use in existing firms so they become more competitive.

There you have it: the CARE model refers to creation, attraction, retention, and expansion of local jobs. These are the principal methods or avenues for bringing new jobs to a locality. Of course, local areas can target specific sectors such as tourism, retirees, mainstreet businesses, manufacturing, or home-based business. Depending upon the local circumstances, you may desire to create, attract, retain, or expand across these specific sectors.

Communities have limited resources (both volunteer/professional time and funds). It is critical that some form of strategic planning be utilized so these resources are utilized in the most effective manner. The CARE model offers alternatives; the community must decide which alternative(s) provides the greatest opportunity. Before reviewing the steps for planning, possible additional benefits of planning are reviewed.

Benefits of Strategic Planning

As noted earlier, strategic planning is the process of identifying future goals and how to achieve them. Successful efforts in strategic planning will not be easy for local communities. Limited funds and precious volunteer hours will be expended. Communities should be clear on the possible benefits of strategic planning before committing to this serious effort. Time spent in developing an economic development strategy will pay big dividends because it will [3]:

1. **Outline the steps to follow.** Economic development does not just happen. It requires the community to identify a number of intermediate steps to reach its final goals.
2. **Promote efficient use of scarce resources.** A significant amount of money, time, and people will be required for economic development efforts and these limited resources must not be wasted. The plan will provide rational for resources allocation.
3. **Improve coordination.** Many programs, activities, groups, and individuals will be involved in the development effort and it is important that they not overlap or conflict. The plan will serve as a communication vehicle for developing activities.
4. **Build consensus.** The public and the private sector must agree on the major issues involved. This will lead to support in implementing the plan.
5. **Increase public awareness.** Without public support, economic development cannot happen. It is important that the public know how development occurs and how it affects the community.
6. **Strengthen the community's competitive position.** A community with a strategy will not only be more like to succeed, it will appear more attractive to potential business or industry, than a community without a plan.
7. **Encourage forward thinking.** The strategy will encourage community leaders to think about the future and to not overlook opportunities for development as they arise.

It should be emphasized that this publication is only intended to provide local leaders with information about strategic planning for local economic development and not as an exhaustive procedure on how to complete such a plan. Sub-state planning and development districts, the Cooperative Extension Service, the Department of Commerce, and other agencies and groups are available to assist communities in developing strategic plans for economic development. Then, once the plan is developed, the real work begins! Implementing the plan includes all the hard work necessary in carrying out the identified action items. Once a community has determined a strategic planning effort is desirable there are steps which can be followed to build a positive future. Those steps are reviewed in the next section.

Ten Steps to Your Community's Future

There are many methodologies available to follow when building a strategic plan. The following model is modified from an excellent approach developed and presented by Mark Peterson [4]. Steps or stages that the planning process should pass through are described by Peterson. In the real world, the steps are not always followed in sequence and some steps may not even be included. However, taken together, the steps form a very sound basis for local planning efforts.

These ten steps presented are typically found in one form or another in strategic planning efforts (Exhibit 2).

1. **Begin/Continue the Process.** Someone or some group must make the initial decision to build a community strategy. At this point, the community decides the benefits of such a process are worth the effort. Often this is the time when an outside resource provider such as the Cooperative Extension Service is contacted.
2. **Engage the Community.** Plans are not successful if only a few individuals are involved. Broad community support is critical. The wider the range of participants, the greater the pool of talent is available to help. Public sector groups, private sector representatives, and volunteer organizations should all be encouraged to participate.
3. **Form an Organized Structure.** Utilize an existing organization or form a new one. Someone and some group needs to be responsible for the effort. If a new group is formed, a more formalized structure with by-laws may be desired as the process continues.
4. **Conduct Community Assessment(s).** Data and information provide useful perspectives for planning. Communities should assess local assets and determine what resources are available to move forward. There are many tools available to assist in assessing community resources. A later section of this report presents some tools that can help.
5. **Develop a Strategic Plan.** Communities should identify goals and measurable objectives. Often a common language is useful. This report provides definitions for mission statements, goals, and objectives.
6. **Seek Community Feedback & Commitment.** Share the initial draft of community goals and objectives. Involve the local media and let local residents know of the effort. Be prepared for new ideas and be receptive to additional suggestions.
7. **Implement the Plan.** Hopefully, adequate resources and volunteers have been identified to follow-through and successfully implement the planned objectives. This is the stage where most plans falter and end up "sitting on the shelf." Lack of adequate resources will probably insure failure and disappointment.
8. **Evaluate the Effort.** Continue to monitor and evaluate to determine when you are successful. If you set benchmarks to measure achievement then you will be able to document success.
9. **Celebrate Successes.** Reward yourself and the entire community when objectives and tasks are accomplished. Organize a community wide celebration to acknowledge both short-term and long-term achievements. This is one way to insure continued interest and excitement.
10. **Create an Ongoing Process.** The effort does not end but is to be continued and evaluated annually. Each year or two you need to re-evaluate and possibly modify or add to the plan. Of course, you will be removing goals and objectives which are accomplished.

Step five above deals with development of a strategic plan. Initial groundwork to be prepared includes assurance of community participation, formation of an organizational structure, and assessment of community resources. After the groundwork, the community is ready to begin development of a plan. Agreement on strategic planning concepts will help the process along.

Strategic Planning Concepts

The following discussion presents definitions and examples for common planning terms including mission statement, goals, and objectives. Communities need to agree on the concepts utilized in local planning efforts.

Mission Statement

Community Philosophy for Development
Broad Goals

Examples of Mission Statements

- To make Clinton a better place to live, to work, and to conduct business.
- To create an environment that allows Stroud to provide reasonable business growth and employment opportunities for Stroud residents.
- To re-establish Oklahoma as a strong economic entity with a more stable economic environment.

A mission statement defines the range and limits of activity for the total organization. Questions such as the following are answered.

Who are we serving?
What markets will be served?
What are the major outputs or products of the organization?
What are the major commitments of the organization?
What defines the organizations' constraints?
What functions does the organization perform?
For whom does the organization perform these functions?
How does the organization fulfill these functions?

Goals

Specific statement of what the community would like to be.
Based on more than wishful thinking.
Must contain sense of economic reality.
Provides specific direction for the planning process.

Examples of Goals

- Bring customers back to the downtown shopping area.
- Become a retirement destination community.
- Expand the agricultural processing industry in the southwestern part of the state.

A goal is an end-state or result to be achieved. The more explicit the goal the more helpful it will be.

Objectives

While goals are aspirations, objectives are targets.
Performance targets allow progress to be measured.
Actions that will help the community reach its goal(s).

Goal- Bring customers back to the downtown shopping area.

Examples of Objectives

- Make the area more attractive to customers by June of next year

- Add street amenities (benches, planters)
- Bring in new stores
- Clean up the downtown area
- Make shopping more convenient by June of next year
 - More short-term on street parking
 - Provide access to alley parking
 - Add parking lot in specified location
- Give the area a town center feeling by January of next year
 - Renovate library and make it a focal point
 - Schedule town events such as parades

Objectives should ideally describe

1. The key result to be achieved
2. Numerical measures of progress
3. Target date for completion

Strategy

A strategy or strategic action is a project or activity undertaken to accomplish the defined objective. For example, adding street amenities, bringing in new stores, and cleaning up the downtown area all help to make the area more attractive to customers.

Key concerns in selecting strategies:

- a) How much will the proposed program cost?
- b) What are the relative costs and benefits of various options?

Even if the community can agree upon strategic planning concepts, there is no guarantee of success. Some planning efforts prove to be successful and useful while others do not. The following sections describes characteristics of successful planning endeavors.

Successful Planning Efforts

Sears and Reid [5] reviewed rural development strategies and current rural development research. They found evidence of success based on several types of strategies and reached the following three conclusions:

1. No strategy for development should be dismissed automatically as inappropriate. This supports the notion that some successful communities have learned to think and reason "outside the box" and have adopted new approaches.
2. There is no unique formula that works in all places under any conditions. Rural development applies to broad and diverse social and economic regions of the country.
3. Patient and careful analysis of unique local situations is required for success in development efforts. In other words, a strategic visioning process is a good starting point for local development efforts.

Recently, program activities that lead to potential success were identified based on survey results. Several states with visioning programs were surveyed to determine keys for success. Also, the literature on factors leading to community success supports these activities, which are listed below:

- **Local Commitment.** If local residents and leaders do not endorse the effort, it probably will not work. Outside forces cannot drive effort, but should be resources.

- **Broad Community Involvement.** The effort should involve more than a few community leaders. Wide participation from many groups within the community is essential; otherwise, the resulting plan will not be “owned” by the community.
- **Community Ownership.** The community should take an active role in planning the program. Outsiders can be facilitators, but the final plan must come from the community if successful implementation is to follow.
- **On-Site Visits.** Successful strategic visioning programs must include the service providers in the community. Events, activities, people who reside in the community, and much of the training and assistance should be available there.
- **Reliable Survey and Secondary Data.** Good planning requires good information. Communities need access to reliable up-to-date data and assistance in interpreting and analyzing that data.
- **Exposure to New Information.** The program should challenge community participants. Old assumptions should be challenged and new ideas explored. The community participants should begin to think strategically about the future.
- **Timely Response.** Often there is a “teachable moment” in the community. Service providers must be flexible and reasonably responsive to community requests for assistance.

There is no single solution for all community problems; thus, each strategic visioning plan will be unique. Programs offering assistance in strategic visioning must be flexible and innovative in dealing with these communities.

Tools to Aid in Developing a Strategy

Many techniques and tools are available to aid communities in building a strategy. Survey instruments are often used to identify issues and concerns the community may have. Several references [3 through 11] were utilized to build the lists, survey instruments, and checklists that follow.

The survey instruments can play three very important roles in developing an economic development strategy. First, they will help identify strengths and weaknesses in the community. Second, the survey will help set priorities for economic development. Third, and perhaps just as important, soliciting opinions from a cross section of the community will inform them of the economic development effort and may gain their support if they feel that they have had the opportunity to voice their opinions.

Exhibit 1 provides an overview of the “CARE” model which reviews economic development options. Exhibit 2 pictures the ten steps to utilize in strategic planning for local economic development. Exhibit 3 is a checklist covering key concerns for community planners involved in economic development.

Exhibit 4 is a quality of life survey that many communities have used to identify strengths, concerns, possible goals and influential leaders. Exhibit 5 is a survey, “What’s Good About Your Community,” analyzing items which may be important to

a town. Items can be ranked good, fair, or poor by the survey respondents.

Potential users of these surveys should note these forms are only a “model” or suggestions. Individual communities may want to modify the questions to suit specific needs. Thought should be given to who is surveyed, and how the results will be tabulated and reported.

After the assessments and surveys, a community vision should be developed. Exhibit 6 describes three scenarios related to possible visions (or lack of shared visions). Exhibits 7-8-9 are worksheets to utilize as community goals and objectives are formed.

References

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- [7] Texas Advisory Commission of Intergovernmental Relations. Comprehensive Planning for Small Texas Cities, Austin, Texas, August 1983.
- [8] Nelson, James R., Gerald Doeksen, and Jack Dressen. A Guidebook for the Planning of Economic Development in Rural Communities, Stillwater: Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, AE 7829, 1978.
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EXHIBIT 1



EXHIBIT 2

TEN STEPS TO YOUR COMMUNITY'S FUTURE

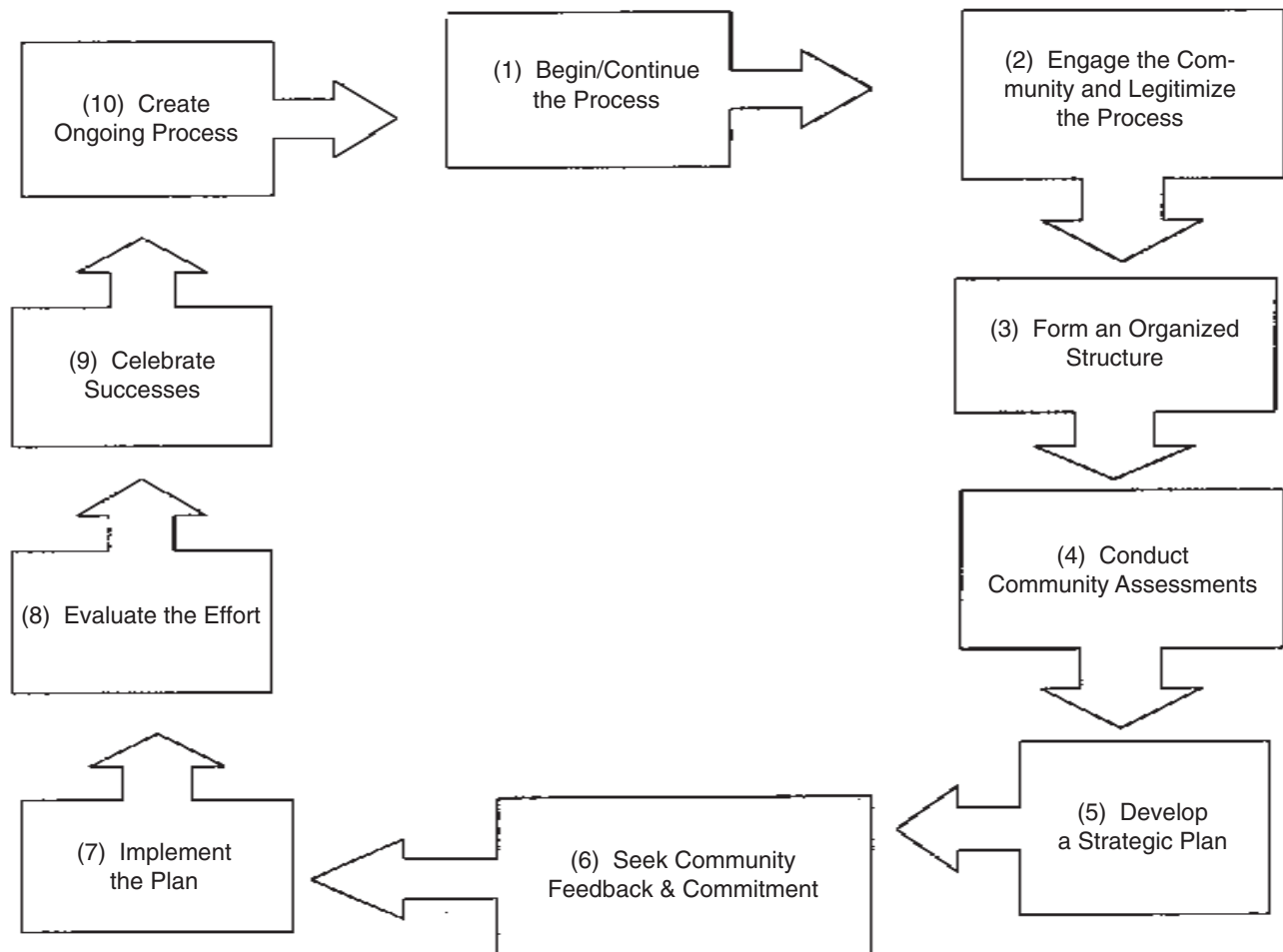


EXHIBIT 3

COMMUNITY PREPAREDNESS CHECKLIST

This checklist is intended to help community leaders analyze preparedness for development efforts.

Does the community have . . . ?

Yes No

Diversity and Participation

Yes No

- _____ _____ 1. An existing local organization for promoting development efforts.
- _____ _____ 2. Widespread community participation in the development effort representing diverse social/ economic segments of the population.
- _____ _____ 3. Public and private sector cooperation.

Resource Availability

- _____ _____ 4. Adequate resources to support some level of local activity.
- _____ _____ 5. Willingness to invest those resources in local projects.
- _____ _____ 6. An inventory of financing sources available from local, state, and federal agencies as well as the private sector.

Networks and Information

- _____ _____ 7. Good coordination among local agencies and organizations promoting community/economic development.
- _____ _____ 8. Working relationships with state and federal sources of assistance.
- _____ _____ 9. Support and involvement of the local media.

Public Infrastructure

- _____ _____ 10. Adequate public infrastructure to support business activities and provide for local quality of life (water, wastewater, electricity, natural gas, telephone, roads).
- _____ _____ 11. Community services and facilities to support the needs of existing and potential residents (education, health care, recreation, police, and fire).
- _____ _____ 12. A capital improvements plan to inventory existing public infrastructure/services/facilities and to anticipate future needs.

Human Resources

- _____ _____ 13. A well-trained work force.
- _____ _____ 14. Capability to provide training and skills when needed.
- _____ _____ 15. Local leadership with the vision and desire to build a community plan for the future.

Source: Modified from Woods and Sloggett (1988).

EXHIBIT 4

QUALITY OF LIFE COMMUNITY PROFILE SURVEY

What are the strengths and weaknesses of our town? Your answers to this survey will assist in the development of the Economic Development Strategy for _____ . Our objective is to identify the needs we have in _____ and to find out what you feel should be done to make this town a better place to live, work, rear children, do business, and enjoy life. Please be as candid and as specific as possible in your answers (each survey is confidential).

A. In your opinion, what are the biggest strengths or advantages in _____, which could lead to future growth?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

B. What would you say are some of the biggest problems and obstacles faced by _____ for the future growth of the area? (note in order of importance)

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 4. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 6. _____ |

C. Identify in your opinion which of the following are most important; with highest priority rated #1.

- | <u>Rank</u> | <u>Rank</u> |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| _____ Attracting New Industry | _____ Create Community Organizations |
| _____ Expand Local Industry | _____ Downtown Revitalization |
| _____ Retail & Commercial Development | _____ Retirement Industry Development |
| _____ Expand Tourism Industry | _____ Create Home Grown Businesses |
| _____ Expand Community Services | _____ Other _____ |

D. In your opinion, what persons are the most influential men and women in _____?

- | <u>Men</u> | <u>Women</u> |
|------------|--------------|
| 1. _____ | 1. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 2. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 3. _____ |

E. What organizations, clubs, businesses, or groups have accomplished the most good for the growth of _____?

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 1. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 2. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 3. _____ |

F. Do you have any other ideas or ways to improve the quality of life in _____?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

EXHIBIT 5

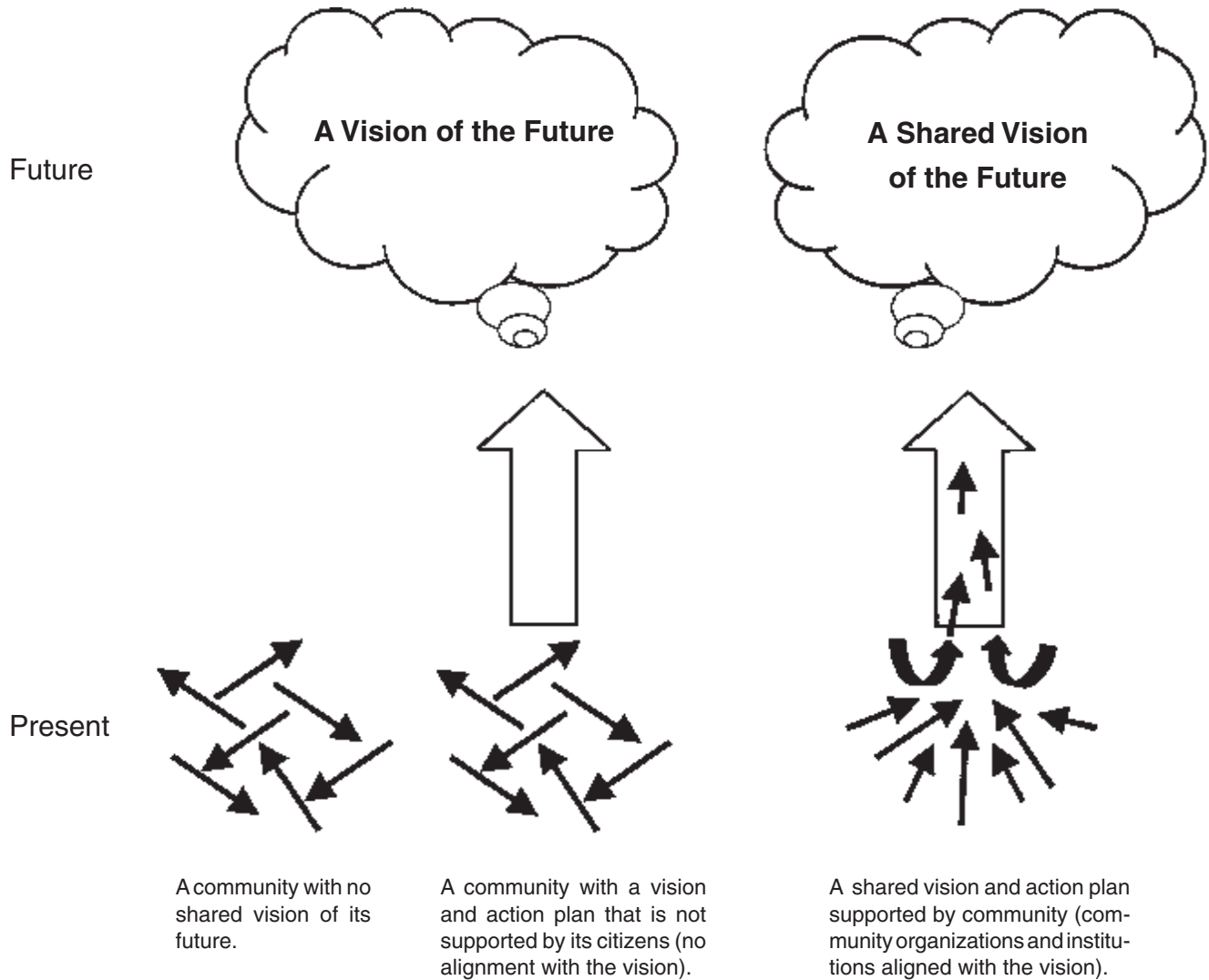
WHAT GOOD ABOUT YOUR COMMUNITY

Here is a list of things that are important to a town. Be absolutely honest, how do you rate your town? In answering the questions below, please make a check mark in the appropriate column.

	Good	Fair	Poor	Do Not Know
1. Streets & Roads				
2. Traffic Conditions				
3. Parking Downtown				
4. Police Protection				
5. Fire Protection				
6. Garbage Collection & Disposal				
7. Water Supply				
8. Sewage Collection & Disposal				
9. Community Parks & Playgrounds				
10. Recreation for Adults				
11. Recreation for Teenagers				
12. Recreation for Children 12 & under				
13. Library				
14. Flood Control				
15. Crime Prevention Programs				
16. Ambulance Service				
17. Availability of Doctors				
18. Availability of Dentists				
19. Availability of Emergency Care				
20. Availability of Care for the Elderly				
21. Availability of Housing				
22. Condition of School Building				
23. Elementary Education				
24. High School Education				
25. Vocational Education-Job Training				
26. Adult Education				
27. Appearance of Neighborhoods				
28. Appearance of Business				
29. Appearance of Public Buildings				
30. Overall Community Appearances				
31. Welcome Given to Newcomers				
32. Friendly & Neighborly People				
33. Progressive Community Spirit				
34. Long-range Planning				
35. Planning & Zoning				
36. Responsiveness of Local Government				
37. Community Civic Organizations				
38. Cooperative Between Community Clubs & Groups				
39. Churches				
40. Local Tax Rates				
41. Day Care for Children				
42. Service in Local Streets				
43. Number & Quality of Eating Places				
44. Variety & Quality of Goods in Stores				
45. Banking & Financing Service				
46. Local Newspaper Service				
47. Hotel & Motel Accommodations				
48. Local Industry				
49. Local Agriculture				
50. Family Living Conditions				

EXHIBIT 6

THREE COMMUNITY SCENARIOS



You are seeking the alignment of organizations - their agendas, their resources, and their actions - to an overall vision for the future which they help develop.

Source: Mark Peterson, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Arkansas.

EXHIBIT 7

STRATEGIC PLANNING/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTION WORKPLAN

Goal:

Objective:

Agency or Group:

Project Manager:

<i>Strategic Action</i>	<i>Time Frame</i>	<i>Possible Contacts or Resource</i>	<i>Staffing Requirements</i>	<i>Estimated Budget \$</i>	<i>Source of Funds</i>

EXHIBIT 8
ACTION WORKSHEET

Goal: _____

Objective: _____

Strategic Action: _____

Key players and resources within the community:

Key players and resources from outside the community:

EXHIBIT 9

STRATEGIC ACTION LIST

Strategic Action	Who is Responsible	By (Timeline)
1) _____		
2) _____		
3) _____		
4) _____		
5) _____		

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