Case Studies in Small Town Community Economic Development: The Four Main Categories.

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I: Small towns that are recreation or retirement destinations or adjacent to an abundance of natural assets

The case studies in this chapter include small towns that are recreation or retirement destinations and those that are otherwise adjacent to an abundance of natural assets. These are the rural communities that have become retirement hot spots or recreation-related tourism destinations. For example, Hayesville, Bakersville, Brevard and Tryon are small communities in western North Carolina that are facing an influx of new retired residents and second-home owners. At the same time, each town is balancing recreation-related demands on its public infrastructure. On the other hand, some of the towns in this chapter abut public land and therefore face physical development limitations. Etowah in Tennessee, Big Stone Gap in Virginia and Chimney Rock in North Carolina are situated on the edge of national forests, which provide opportunities for tourism development but place restrictions on physical development.

II: Small towns with historic downtowns or prominent cultural or heritage assets

Case studies in this chapter include small towns where a historic downtown square or other prominent cultural or heritage assets play a major role in the community’s development strategy. These are rural communities where revitalizing Main Street or rehabilitating a “sore-thumb” piece of real-estate is a prominent activity in their approach to development. For example, Ayden, Black Mountain, Colquitt, Nelsonville and Selma are stories about downtown revitalization. On the other hand, the story from Edenton is about rehabilitating a dilapidated cotton mill village into an economic asset for the community. Rio Dell is a story about simple beautification projects that helped the town to reinvigorate civic pride.

III: Small towns with or adjacent to a college campus

This chapter includes case studies of small towns that are home to or adjacent to a post-secondary educational facility (college or university). These are towns that have come up with ways to leverage their educational institution for the broader community’s economic benefit. For example, Fairfield and Douglas are communities in which a college campus, located in or nearby
the town, serves as an asset for a broad range of economic development opportunities. In a more specific case, Allendale used a regional campus of the state university as a vehicle for delivering leadership development training to local civic leaders. Siler City, Sparta, Wadesboro and Washington are all taking advantage of nearby community colleges to advance their economic interests.

IV: Small towns adjacent to a metropolitan area or an interstate highway

The case studies in this chapter include small towns where the community’s physical location plays a prominent role in the economic development challenges and opportunities facing it. Some of these towns are located in urban counties; others are in rural counties adjoining metro areas. Davidson and Hillsborough, for example, are towns that once were rural, but today face tremendous growth pressures from their more urban neighbors. These case studies represent communities where maintaining a small town identity plays a prominent role in local economic development planning and decision-making. Farmville is, to a certain extent, beginning to feel similar growth pressures from nearby Greenville. Oxford and Morrilton, while not in an urban corridor, are situated along interstate highways.

One town’s organization chart for getting the job done.
Notice the broad based community segments and actions that are involved here and the wider benefits to more people, not just tourism or a single industry.

Second Document:
Municipal Economic Development Readiness Initiative
Best Practices in Rural & Small Town Economic Development
http://www.smallbusinesshuron.ca/publications/edri/best_practices_report_final.PDF

Prepared By: Rick Hundey Management and Planning Services, JANUARY 2004
Huron County EDRI – A Stage II Report: Best Practices Review

A STAGE II REPORT: BEST PRACTICES IN RURAL AND SMALL TOWN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
PART 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
The purpose of a best practices review (BPR) is to learn from the successes of others. In setting a course for community economic development (CED) for Huron County, it is helpful to:

1. learn what has worked in similar circumstances elsewhere and then to,
2. consider whether/how to apply any lessons to satisfy Huron’s CED goals.

**General Observations**

The BPR has shown that there are ingredients or characteristics shared in common by successful rural and small town CED programs. Put another way, successful communities tend to be of a “particular personality type” if we choose to look at it in human terms.

Second (and at the risk of over-generalizing), three strategic approaches to CED seem to rise to the surface throughout the literature as best practice.

The “ingredients for success” and the three general strategic directions are summarized.

**Ingredients for Success**

1. **Political Commitment.** Which includes providing both adequate resources and ‘operating freedom.’
2. **Investment in CED.** Which includes a) having an Economic Development Officer or equivalent, b) multiple funding sources and c) a dedication to research and analysis.
3. **Plan or Strategy.** CED is not random exercise. A vision for the future is needed for community commitment.
4. **Participation.** Broad participation is recommended from Council, business, community groups and the general public.
5. **Collaboration.** Partnering with community groups, business groups, institutions, service clubs, other municipalities and other levels of government has proven to be efficient and effective.

**Recommended Strategic Approaches**

1. **Capacity Building** requires improvement to community infrastructure and is characterized by:
   - Expanding citizenship participation
   - Expanding leadership base
   - Strengthened individual skills
   - Widely shared vision
   - Strategic community agenda
   - Progress toward goals
   - Effective community organizations and institutions.
   - Efficient resource utilization.

2. **Building on Strengths: Business Retention and Expansion**

   A close working relationship allows local government to respond to industry needs more effectively;
   - Strong business relations create the reputation of a good place to do business, (a community’s best advertisement);
   - Working closely with business adds significantly to the municipality’s knowledge base;
   - Such relationships offer early warning of problems and/or reduce the potential for conflict.
3. **Self Development - Local Entrepreneurship**

The literature shows that programs to help business start-ups are effective. HBDC and the County of Huron have adopted a number of such programs with the result that local entrepreneurship, in Huron County, has become an engine for the economy.

The job looking forward may be twofold: 1) to continue to facilitate business start-ups and 2) to focus on the retention and possible expansion of small business enterprises.

**The Municipal Challenge**

There are within Huron County various initiatives underway that fit within these three strategic approaches. The BPR suggests that by applying the 5 ingredients for success and by focusing on CED strategies that work for rural areas, municipalities can take a stronger role (filling a gap in CED), and elevate the current level of effort/success.