

Small City and Town Innovations.

SMALL CITY INNOVATION ADVANTAGES.

Small cities and towns have a tremendous advantage over larger communities when it comes to innovation. Small cities have simpler systems and fewer competing social and economic interests. Communications are more direct and personal. Bad ideas are sorted out quickly and good ideas are appreciated.

Size and character are the keys. A small city can be comprehended, it can be observed in its totality and it can be holistically managed through effective communication with a majority of the citizens. Inherent character based on community heritage, authenticity and social integrity can be more easily discerned.

The disadvantages often cited are money and talent. Small cities do not have the money of larger towns in the aggregate, but they may have as much or more in the margins; plus, small city programs cost less than those of their larger cousins.

Small cities used to have trouble recruiting talent. Given the times, this is changing, especially for small cities in larger metro areas. Small cities are becoming very competitive in attracting private and public sector talent.

The advantages possessed by small cities are only of value if the small city thinks big. Small cities can have: access to the global marketplace with high-speed broadband internet service, access to the regional transportation system, and access to the intellectual capital of their neighboring cities if they embrace “partnering” and “collaboration”.

CRITICAL INNOVATIONS “IN PROCESS”.

An attitude expecting innovation matters. Small city innovations are employing technology and a socialization attitude to create and enhance character. Activities include focus on:

1. Strong neighborhoods that attract people to live in or near downtown.
2. Vibrant downtowns that offer “third place” qualities for residents and visitors.
3. Productive development corridors with growing employment and property values.
4. Social, economic and physical capital and infrastructure.
5. Important historic and natural resources.
6. Multi-modal transportation systems that service neighborhoods.
7. E-commerce and global business opportunities offered by high-speed broadband internet service.
8. Entrepreneurial attitudes that support small businesses and civic investment programs.

Paraphrasing Thomas Friedman’s quote from *The Leopard*:

“For everything to stay the same, everything must change.”

SMALL TOWN TOURISM WILL COME BACK.

Individuals and groups are visiting small towns in growing numbers. While interrupted by the COVID-19 emergency, tourism will return. Now is a good time to refresh facilities, train staffs and prepare to receive guests.

Small towns with theaters, galleries and museums attract regional patrons and New Economy workers. Hotels in small cities and towns are becoming high quality places to stay increasingly offered by national hotel chains.

STRONG NEIGHBORHOODS ARE THE KEY.

Neighborhoods, whether single or multi-family, are the places where people live. Beyond the inherent values of strong neighborhoods is their economic value. They accumulate wealth for the owners, they provide tax receipts for the host government and they support economic development.

Retaining and recruiting businesses depends on providing a comfortable and secure place for business owners and employees. Strong neighborhoods are differentiators when it comes to businesses choosing where to locate.

Neighborhood programs are relatively inexpensive and can show a quick return on the city's investment. Identifying, naming and organizing homeowner associations is not expensive. Identifying infrastructure and service needs can raise expectations but residents should have reasonable expectations. Improvements can be programmed over time with the participation of the stakeholders.

This doesn't sound revolutionary or innovative, but it is an activity often neglected or postponed. Building strong neighborhoods is effective and necessary for subsequent innovations. Resident support for infrastructure and education funding and financing is essential and depends on the trust residents have in their elected officials.

SIEMENS

“Some infrastructure systems can be reinvented as they stand, while others must be replaced entirely”.

The implication of this is that someday massive amounts of money will be spent to upgrade old infrastructure systems with new technologies, for those who are ready.

TRANSPORTATION IS BECOMING A SERVICE.

Transportation systems are being subjected to a variety of innovations: automated vehicles, ridesharing, electric vehicles, delivery vehicles and robots. Bikeways and pedways are growing elements of the community's mobility system.

PUBLIC OPEN SPACES CONTINUE TO BE VALUED.

The community's holistic open space system includes parks, school grounds, upland and wetland conservation areas, stormwater management areas and utility corridors. Connecting bike/ped systems make these active, passive and visual amenities available to the entire community.

“SMART POLES” ARE A NEW APPLICATION OF AVAILABLE TECHNOLOGY.

The internet has been around for decades. The new idea is to connect existing single-purpose infrastructure, like street lights and power poles, to the internet and load them with sensors. Linking the old and the new creates opportunities to monitor and manage public facilities, emergency responses and intragovernmental communications.

A well designed system can also provide the entire community with high-speed broadband internet service along with security, lighting and other information capabilities. A widely accessible internet system can support home education, working from home and connections to the global economic system of customers and vendors.

All this, not to mention shopping and home deliveries of goods and foods. Last-mile warehouses are emerging; they require a regulatory response to protect residential districts and neighborhoods.

RELIANCE ON INSTITUTIONS.

An attitude today is to disdain institutions and disregard their purposes. Without doubt, the institutions that served the world and the cities will for the post-World War II period need refurbishment. The systems and expectations of residents have evolved, but the basic need for shelter, safety and education prevail. Institutions need modernization not destruction.

The institutions that support the city, its neighborhoods and businesses include city government departments, special districts, the utility company, the regional economic development agency, the merchants' association and the county school board, among others. Participation also comes from the NGOs, financial institutions and other institutions that support the community and its individual members.

Innovation comes from understanding each institution, its underlying purpose and its community benefits. Partnering and collaboration are the key attitudes to take maximum advantage of the services offered by institutions. Day care for two employee families, services for people working two jobs, services for the elderly, the young, the infirmed and the impoverished continue to be needed.

The needs persist but may require new service delivery systems with new institutional arrangements using contemporary technology. The challenge is to strengthen institutions with visions and resources that support the community based on a collective vision. Cities and towns across America are de-constructing their systems and re-building more efficient and effective systems.

STUDY BIG CITIES AS FIRST ADOPTERS.

The reason the big cities are leading the experimentation and adoption of new technologies is because they have the leadership and resources to make progress. Small cities can learn from these pioneers, adopt proven methods and avoid some pitfalls.

Money is available to small cities ready to be creative. Partnering is essential. Applying new processes and technologies to a wide range of real situations involves experimentation and risk. Innovative corporations and institutions are looking to small cities for real-world applications and they bring funding.

NLC Partnership - EXCERPT:

Today [11.9.18], the National League of Cities (NLC) is announcing \$100 million in local partnerships to expand America's innovation economy. Cities must lead on the nation's most pressing issues in the absence of federal leadership.

Over the past year, NLC, with support from Schmidt Futures, has worked with city leaders, universities, the business community and the social sector to design innovative partnerships that harness the power of science, technology and entrepreneurship to build stronger, more equitable local economies.

Today, over 50 cities, ranging from rural townships and college towns, to major metros, as well as over 200 local partners, are announcing new and specific partnerships that will be supporting young businesses, leveraging technology and ensuring STEM education and workforce training for all.

Link: <https://www.nlc.org/article/national-league-of-cities-announces-100-million-in-partnerships-to-support-entrepreneurship>

ALWAYS THINK SYSTEMS.

Systems analysis is an explicit formal inquiry carried out to help decision-makers identify a better course of action and make a better decision than s/he might otherwise make.

A systemic view of organizations is trans-disciplinary and integrative. The systems approach gives primacy to the inter-relationships, not to the elements of the system. Systems Analysis, the learned skill, provides tools and techniques for studying systems in a holistic manner, systems like cities.

Systems analysis is called upon when systems are complex and the outcome of any course of action is uncertain.

A great resource is *Thinking in Systems: A Primer* by [Donella H. Meadows](#) (Author) and [Diana Wright](#) (Editor). Ms. Meadows worked on The Limits of Growth for the Club of Rome and fully understands the systems approach to developmental analysis.

MASTER SYSTEMS PLANNING.

The inherent prerequisite for development of every master system is a master plan. A comprehensive, long-term master plan considers the fundamentals of the system being designed plus the external impacts of the system on its environment.

Master systems planning is an essential activity for preserving or creating character main streets.

A systems approach can be applied to many facilities not traditionally systematized, such as, public art locations, calls for artists and artwork rotation and replacement schedules. Public art is only one example of a non-traditional system.

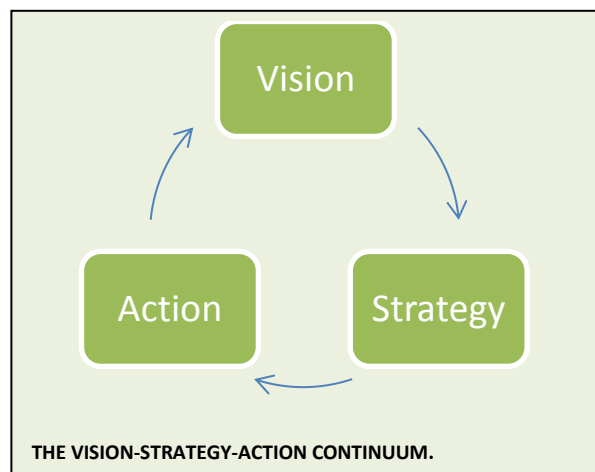
MAIN STREET MASTER SYSTEMS.

The city facilities and services that benefit from a collaborative systems approach are:

- Health Care and Shelter for Homeless and Indigents,
- Marketing and management programs,
- Integrated land use and circulation,
- Parking with drop off/pick up zones,
- Stormwater amenitization,
- Multi-modal transportation services,
- Renewable energy demonstrations,
- Ubiquitous free internet service,
- Omnipresent security and safety,
- Open spaces and connections,
- Rotating public art,
- Reduced solid waste, and
- Recycled water and sewer processes.

THE PROCESS.

The city and its stakeholders start by taking whatever time is necessary to develop a community consensus vision of the future. Nothing lasting happens without a consensus vision. Once done, the vision drives the community's strategy which in turn directs all of its programmatic, budgetary and regulatory activities. The pre-established metric system monitors progress and reports deviations from vision consistent activities.



SUMMARY OF OPTIONS.

At the end of the day, the small city residents, businesses and institutional organizations have choices:

- They can use technology and a citywide attitude that incorporates diversity as the basis for building strong neighborhoods.
- They can encourage city hall to experiment with new technologies and programs in the main street district prior to initiating citywide investments in innovations.
- They can encourage the city to provide high-speed broadband internet service citywide as a utility, readily available to everyone.
- They can find global and regional trading partners and new market interventions.
- They can build “complete” education systems that leverages their colleges, libraries and incubators to offer small business services, local entrepreneurial education, training, financing and resources necessary for local businesses to build a unique character and join the global economy.
- They can foster a community conservation ethic that conserves, preserves and enhances historic and natural resources.

CONCLUSIONS:

Innovations involve much more than technology. Attitudes, social and economic systems that explore new partnerships and collaborations are truly creative and innovative.

An innovative community:

1. Appreciates that character is linked to prosperity.
2. Rediscovered downtown living.
3. Encourages and prepares for the resurgence of small city tourism.
4. Leverages economic and physical systems to strengthen social infrastructure.
5. Builds a high-speed broadband internet system available citywide to enable education, e-commerce and global business.
6. Rebuilds its infrastructure system, over time, as a “green” sustainable system for distributing water and electricity and collecting wastes.
7. Builds a multi-modal transportation system based on frequent, high quality bus service that connects neighborhoods, schools, shopping districts and employment centers.
8. Connects its parks, school grounds, conservation and stormwater lands with a public bike/ped network resulting in a holistic citywide open space system.
9. Transforms downtown to be the city’s social center, the city’s “Third Place”.