

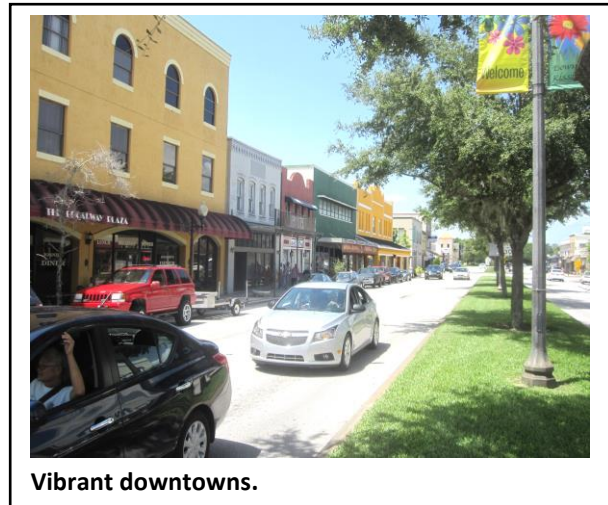
The Character Town, A Preface.

A Character Town is an Emotional Experience.

There is a hometown in our minds where we want to live, to visit or to have a business. It appeals to our senses; all of them, from sights and sounds to tastes and smells. It feels good, sensually and physically. It is a place where we want to live in a home that is safe, comfortable and affordable; a place where we know our neighbors; a place where we can walk; where we can easily go shopping, go out to eat and be entertained or educated.

It's also a place where we visit. We look for small cities and towns with character where we can enjoy an afternoon, a day, a week-end or longer. A newly discovered character town feels good.

A character town is also a great place to locate a business. Character towns and small cities are ideal places for high-tech businesses and their high-skill workers. With a reasonable investment in infrastructure, small towns are accessible to the world and the global economy. Small towns make sense for a small business with a big reach.



The Mission is to Build Communities with Character.

The mission of design professionals, developers and city officials who build the city is to understand how to discern and pursue the town's vision and how to develop a strategy that preserves and enhances community character where it exists, and how to create it where it is absent. Community-based vision drives the town's strategy which then directs every action of the town. In the end, the prize is a small city or town that evokes an emotional attachment between its people and the space they inhabit.

Civic pride is the fundamental factor that drives everything. Where community character exists, some mystical concoction of the town's economic, social and physical attributes has resulted in community spirit and hometown pride. It is the guiding force behind the design of the town's physical setting, the strength of its society, the respect for its historic and natural resources and the material well-being of its citizens. Civic pride, once understood, is the means for protecting and improving the entire community.

Economic Attributes of a Character Town.

Prosperity plays an important role in character towns. Prosperity does not necessarily mean extreme wealth; just good jobs with decent wages based on a strong work ethic and a business community dedicated to the success of the town. A certain level of prosperity is necessary to sustain a community. Social and physical infrastructure work together to support and expand the town's economic base. City incentives and financial support for infill and redevelopment projects help investors help the city. Private-public partnerships can be productive.

Economic Attributes of a Character Town

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS:

- A Strong Data Base that identifies business participation in regional and global commerce.
- Development Plans that build town character to attract New Innovation Economy "talent".
- Collaborative Business Retention and Recruiting Plans.
- Workforce Development Programs prepared in partnership with business sector.
- Marketing and Public Relations Plans with a local council of export-oriented businesses.
- Assignments for each city, institutional and business player.

COMPREHENSIVE LONG-RANGE FINANCE PROGRAMS:

- Annual and capital budgets.
- Special district plans and budgets.
- Capital improvements that support economic development.

INFILL AND REDEVELOPMENT FINANCING AND INCENTIVES:

- Instituting land development entitlements.
- Providing physical infrastructure improvements.
- Offering public finance tools, incentives and partnerships.
- Marketing and promotional assistance.

ENTREPRENEURIAL ATTITUDES AND INFRASTRUCTURE:

- Cross-leveraging social, economic and physical capital.
- Training and support programs for startup companies.
- Connecting to global networks with high-speed internet service.
- Tolerating responsible risk by public entrepreneurs.
- Establishing partnerships and collaborations.
- Providing business resource centers, incubators and accelerators.
- Branding of innovation and innovators.
- Celebrating successes.

Tight coordination of the town's economic development program and its capital improvements budget provides real benefit.

1. The economic development program is the purview of the private sector and is normally lead and funded by the town's business leaders.
2. Entrepreneurs and small businesses are an important part of the mix. Business success is critical to community success.
3. The city's finance plan functions as the town's business plan. The town's financial sustainability requires a comprehensive long view of its sources and uses of funds.

Social Attributes of a Character Town.

Character towns are where we aspire to live; they are the places we visit; they sustain our interest and curiosity; they provide for our safety and well-being. They offer a creative environment for business, education and leisure. Character towns are composed of people who are, for the most part, friendly, welcoming, open and dedicated to community goals that rival personal goals. To paraphrase Sir Winston Churchill, such cities, towns and places build our character, as we build theirs.

Social entrepreneurs are as important to character towns as economic and financial ones. They take action to create value through community programs, partnerships and facilities. Encouraging leaders from cities, institutions and private businesses to venture out, in a transparent way, as social entrepreneurs is a useful role for city and town governments. Community trust enables public officials, institutional leaders and public entrepreneurs to be responsibly aggressive with manageable risk to provide community-serving benefits.

Social Attributes of a Character Town

ENACTMENT OF PROGRAMS:

- Foster mutual expectations by engaging all segments of the town's society.
- Promote broad-based respect for rules of civic behavior.
- Build trust through open and frequent communication.
- Pursue a common interest in fun with community events and celebrations.

USE OF PARTNERSHIPS:

- Celebrate shared rituals and traditions.
- Enhance the city's capacity for self-reliance by building its capacity to solve problems.
- Construct ubiquitous connections.
- Appreciate enlightened civic and municipal leadership.

LEVERAGE PHYSICAL FACILITIES TO PRODUCE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS:

- Understand that public spaces matter; they serve social and economic purposes.
- Insist upon respect for civic assets.
- Showcase the town's great neighborhoods, its vibrant downtown and its system of connected educational, cultural and recreational venues to retain and recruit businesses and their workers.

Physical Attributes of a Character Town.

Small cities and towns of character naturally integrate their physical assets into the social and economic fabric of the town. Few cities have all the physical attributes; but small cities and towns can find success, a step at a time, with a vision of becoming a character town attractive to residents, visitors and businesses. The guide of attributes below may help.

Physical Attributes of a Character Town

GREAT NEIGHBORHOODS include:

- A diversity of housing: A wide variety of housing locations, types, prices and styles.
- Ubiquitous access and pedestrian connections: An interconnected system of walkable streets, sidewalks and trails that connect the places people use as they go about their daily activities.
- Accessible daily need uses: Walk-to shops, schools, parks, theaters, offices and civic buildings.
- Participatory organizations: Neighborhood associations with identifiable boundaries that protect residents from obnoxious intrusions and facilitate partnering with local government.

VIBRANT DOWNTOWNS: The main thing is to keep “Main Street” the main street with:

- Buildings of two to four stories with active and accessible ground floor retail, restaurants and other uses alive beyond nine-to-five weekdays.
- Streets that are inviting, not foreboding, with two travel lanes, wide sidewalks, on-street and off-street parking with tight building face separations across the street, bus stops, crosswalks, street trees, street lights and business friendly signs; plus local ownership of the street.
- Active storefront uses such as restaurants, shops, farmers’ markets with regional foods, convenience shopping for drugs, groceries, books, gifts, clothing, hardware and ice cream.
- Personal and business services such as laundries, dry cleaners, barber shops, car care shops, plus tech support and business services like banks, copy centers and business incubators.
- Hotels and other types of visitor accommodations to support “small town” tourism.
- Venues for community entertainment and personal gatherings including theaters for live performances, local history museums, religious gatherings and weddings.
- Programmed activities such as book fairs, parades, festivals and community celebrations.
- Visitor information centers, physical and virtual, for residents, business and visitors with guides to local places and activities, notice of non-recurring and ticketed events.

RESPECTED HISTORIC AND NATURAL RESOURCES: Hometown pride is engendered through the preservation, display, use and celebration of natural resources and historic places and buildings, parks, lakes and waterfronts.

CONNECTED COMMUNITY VENUES: A system of walkable streets, sidewalks and trails that connect close-in neighborhoods with schools, parks, shopping, libraries, museums, theaters, downtown businesses and civic buildings like city hall, the post office and the civic auditorium.

COMMUNITY PRIDE BUILT ON AUTHENTICITY using an iconic place or traditional event, unique to the town, with Florida examples such as:

- The West Orange Trail in Winter Garden, Ocoee and Apopka; Central Park in Winter Park;
- Haslam’s Book Store in St. Petersburg; S. F. Travis Hardware in Cocoa Village; The Lakeside Inn in Mount Dora; or the lakefront parks in Clermont, Eustis, Kissimmee, Sanford and Tavares;
- The downtown colleges, theaters, art galleries, festivals and local history museums in DeLand, Eustis, Winter Garden, and Winter Park; Carriage rides in Fernandina Beach’s historic neighborhoods.

Conclusions.

1. **Small cities and towns with character have a competitive advantage** when competing in the New Innovation Economy for businesses needing to attract high-skill, high-value “talent”. The town’s physical assets can be leveraged to create social capital that leads to economic development.
 - Great neighborhoods are strong assets for residents and for recruiting new businesses.
 - Vibrant downtowns benefit everyone and are highly visible to prospective businesses.
 - Connections to places in town and around the world provide easy access for:
 - residents to enjoy the town’s civic venues like parks, museums and libraries,
 - visitors to enjoy the town’s history, culture, cuisine and
 - businesses to participate in the global economy.
 - Respected historic and natural resources express the values of the town.
 - Generational longevity deserves respect, but by and large, character towns are open to new people contributing to the town in new ways.
2. **Character counts.** Small cities and towns with personality, civility, authenticity, beauty and humor have a competitive advantage when families, visitors and businesses are deciding where to continue to live, to visit or to re-locate.
3. **Leadership matters.** Effective leadership of community organizations is as important as it is from city management. Both function best with a robust system of civic engagement to plan the city, impose fair regulations, provide responsible infrastructure and be a good steward of the public’s resources. Effective leaders set a progressive tone for the town’s future.
4. **Leverage is powerful.** Cross-leveraging the town’s economic, social and physical attributes can build a successful community. Every part of the city is connected to every other part; collaboration of these elements creates true synergy.
5. **Prosperity is important.** Economic prosperity depends on strong infrastructure, social and physical. Sustainable communities have a strong economic base and a viable city budget.
6. **Sociability succeeds.** Character towns are the places we feel good about. Small cities and towns with character are growing in popularity with families, visitors and businesses.
7. **Physical presence is important.** The visual impression of the town’s neighborhoods, downtowns, schools and parks makes a strong impression on current and future residents.
8. **Beauty and fun are essential.** Towns known for their character are the result of much love and attention. Verdant and active networks of parks, paths, gardens and civic structures host community events that typify character towns.
9. **Every town is, or can become with time, a town with character.** Most cities have the basic building blocks and the emotional strength to preserve and enhance existing character. Cities with little or no character can chart a path of improvement over time. Cities will exist for centuries; there is time to develop leadership and vision. A disciplined strategy applied with persistence is the critical factor. Character towns find a way to prosper.
10. **Get started!** There are over 2,700 small cities and towns in America; opportunity awaits.