Rural Revitalization: A Grassroots Approach

Masters Project by Elaine Zabriskie

Acknowledgments

If not for the help of a few dedicated supporters and friends, I would never have been able to reach past the edge of my knowledge and toward a goal so worthwhile. For helping me to break down that wall and providing endless resources, connections, constructive criticisms, and laughter, I am wholeheartedly grateful to Beth Scott. My friend, you are the kind of advisor we all wish to know, but few have the privilige of working with. For his insightful comments and remarkable patience with my academic ramblings, I must also thank Jacob Bechler, the man who never fails to meet me halfway. Gratitude is due to my family as well– Joe, Morgan, Dad, and Mom in particular – thank you for tolerating my singular focus on landscape architecture for the past two (okay, six) years. I promise to have a personality outside my profession again soon. And to the friends I met along the way, Chad and Trevor, thank you both for consistently raising the academic bar and for being the best studio buds I could have asked for. I am a better friend for the hours we've spent learning, griping, and growing together.

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Moscow, ID farmer's market. Courtesy of the University of Idaho.

Foreword

This masters project was completed in the summer of 2020, a time of great uncertainty for many. As we grapple with the rights that we are owed and the responsibilities we owe our communities, it is an important moment to consider what the word community entails. Is it neighbors and friends? Does it extend to every person in a town? Could it also include our roadways, parks, businesses, and infrastructure? And how does a comunity affect us as individuals?

Perhaps by expanding our understanding of the word community to be more inclusive and dynamic, we can learn what the real extents of our communities are. And perhaps from there we can become better stewards of our neighborhoods, our civic relationships, and our world, learning to provide a happier, more prosperous future for us all.

Approvals Page

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Abstract

Rural communities present unique opportunities toward sustainable resource stewardship and play an essential role in the American cultural identity. However, despite their value, many of these communities are increasingly threatened by a high level of susceptibility to economic shocks and stresses, resulting in a myriad of social and environmental woes as their economies are further strained. In analyzing the interrelated factors of society, finance, the built and natural environment, and technology, this project identifies patterns and leverage points to disrupt the cycle of decline.

To this end, county-level data was sourced from various government agencies and private entities to establish counties' wellbeing in the four categories. In a longitudinal analysis, data were reviewed from a longer time period – typically 1990 to 2017 – and sorted by USDA urbanization code. A comparative analysis of the five most recent years of available data was also conducted, in which deciles were used to create a uniform scoring system for each county and data was normalized per 100,000 people. In general, rural regions averaged poorer scores in economic and technological measures and better scores in social measures compared to their metropolitan counterparts, though individual exceptions of course occur.

This analysis suggests that most rural counties are not in a socioeconomic tailspin, but in fact often retain positive social assets that could be leveraged to halt a cycle of decline. A grassroots planning framework is proposed to facilitate such a positive feedback loop, based on the common assertion that locally-driven investment in a community's public space and assets tends to yield positive results in all wellness categories measured. This framework is grounded in the realistic condition of rural communities developed in the data analysis, case studies, and interviews of rural planning professionals, and aims to leverage social capital and financial investment to improve public spaces, thus creating a starting point for a cycle of sustainable prosperity.

Project Overview

This project investigates the possibility that local assets, particularly social capital, could be leveraged to revitalize rural downtowns and mitigate the economic issues of competition, low diversification, and isolation encountered by rural communities. The research outcomes are directed primarily toward small towns of 700 to 7,500 people, that do not have a tourism-based economy.

The project is rooted in landscape architectural theory and practice in a number of ways. First, the general concept of downtown revitalization resulting in holistic benefits for a community is one firmly rooted in landscape architectural case studies (Oxarango-Ingram, personal communication, April 2020; Community Heart and Soul, 2019; Robertson, 2006). Next, the framework itself is structured around the landscape architectural design process, with the goal of walking rural residents through the early stages in that process in order to empower residents and promote improved collaboration between laypeople and professional designers or planners. Finally, users of the framework are challenged to think holistically and creatively when applying interventions like crosswalks and widened sidewalks, for example.

Research addresses key aspects of rural economics, community planning, and sustainability that are generally applicable to small, isolated communities, then introduce a holistic plan for the development of sustainable livelihoods based on downtown revitalization. Using a deductive perspective with elements combined from both subjective and social constructionist strategies, the framework will be developed to guide rural residents through the early stages of the design process.

"When we do change to people, they experience it as violence. But when people do change for themselves, they experience it as liberation."

-Rosabeth Moss Kanter

Research Question

Is it possible to create a widely generalizable rural revitalization planning framework, where residents would collaborate with professionals and drive project visioning, data collection, and selection of solutions in order to successfully catalyze a sustainable and resilient community?

Problem Statement

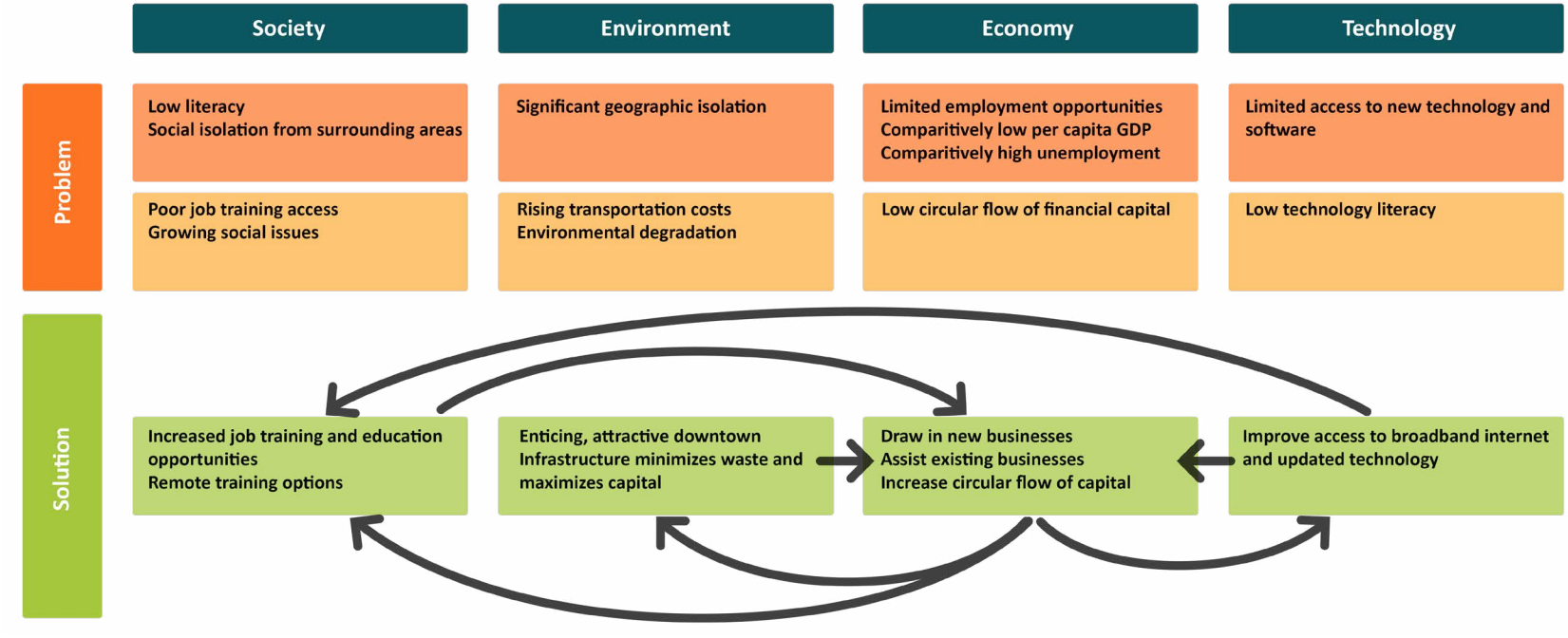
In recent decades, new barriers have sprung up to stand firmly between rural and urban America, resulting in the advancing de facto economic isolation of rural regions. Increased competition from large retailers and internet-based companies, low local diversification, and remote locations have compounded to edge rural economies out of their traditional markets and into financial decline. As economic activity decreases, employment opportunities are stretched thin or eliminated altogether. Unemployment rates rise, people are forced to commute farther to work, or they leave their community altogether.

"Brain drain" occurs as young, ambitious, and educated people leave their rural hometowns for cities that can pay them for their talents. Smaller tax bases strain education budgets, leaving students with fewer options for learning and job training. Finally, limited access to broadband internet completes the social, economic, and geographic isolation of many of rural areas as the technology literacy gap between rural and urban residents widens. Considering the importance of these towns' roles in the national identity, in resource extraction, and in stewarding the 97% of American land that lies outside urban areas, this situation must be taken seriously as untenable.

To mitigate the issues of limited economic opportunity and introduce chances to break this feedback loop of decline, this project proposes a community revitalization framework to kickstart local investment into the future. The input: time, knowledge, and creative problem-solving by a town's residents. The outcome: a set of community-approved solutions that can be tailored to their town by a professional to catalyze economic growth and restore social capital, allowing a town to sustain and regenerate its social, ecological, and financial assets.

Figure 1.01 Problem Diagram

The problem statement outlines a complex issue, one that requires careful planning to develop a successful solution. The diagram below groups recurring themes within the problem of “rural blight” into categories, then outlines direct solutions for the specified problems. Relationships between the solutions are then identified, which makes leverage points for improvement clearly visible. The leverage point or points, in this case the Economy factor, are high priority targets for a design solution.



Chapter 02
Methods

The strategy of inquiry used to support and inform the proposed planning framework involves four distinct steps. First comes a review of the literature and practice regarding rural economic development, community planning, public involvement, and sustainability to identify possible gaps in knowledge and practice. Next, an assessment of the social, environmental, economic, and technological wellbeing of American counties in 47 states using data from a range of government sources. This data was reformatted for clarity into individual "deep dive" charts in each wellness factor, then normalized using a simple scoring system for easy comparison between categories and individual counties. Case studies are used to ground the information gathered in the literature review and evaluate the real-world effectiveness of design solutions for the identified problem. Finally, interviews with professionals provide a contextually-informed basis for the framework, ensuring it could meet the needs of those people intended to implement it.

These methods provide an understanding of the problem from the perspective of academicians, government, and planning practitioners.

Data Selection and Analysis

As each round of information-gathering yielded more questions and clarity, additional research was conducted until the objective and limitations of this project were established clearly enough to proceed forward. At this point, the basic concept of the framework had come together: a process that would carry participants through the early stages of planning and design for a downtown revitalization effort, prioritizing local knowledge to achieve sustainable stewardship of their community's social, built and natural environmental, economic, and technological resources.

Underpinning each concept investigated in the literature review is the existing social and economic function of a community. Solutions must be developed with a realistic understanding of the problem, and this problem is spread across the country in many different contexts. Therefore, several measures were selected to create a basic county wellness assessment, based in part on the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation County Health Rankings (County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2019). The selected datasets focused on social, economic, environmental, and technological factors both over time and in relation to each other, compared between rural and urban communities. USDA definitions of "metropolitan" and "nonmetropolitan" were used at this stage to differentiate the urbanization levels of counties (USDA Rural Classifications, 2013).

The challenges in rural America have been well-reported by the media in recent years, but this coverage may sometimes sensationalize the facts rather than present an unbiased evaluation of the current circumstances. Instead of using individual charts supplied by news articles or government agency press releases, which varied in their date ranges and level of detail, data for each measure was retrieved from the source agencies and analyzed uniformly. This process was composed of two phases: a longitudinal analysis to identify trends over time within each dataset, and a comparison of recent data between each urbanization level. As the overall goal was to identify common trends in community wellbeing with specific regard to social, environmental, and economic performance, the

Figure 2.01 Methods Diagram

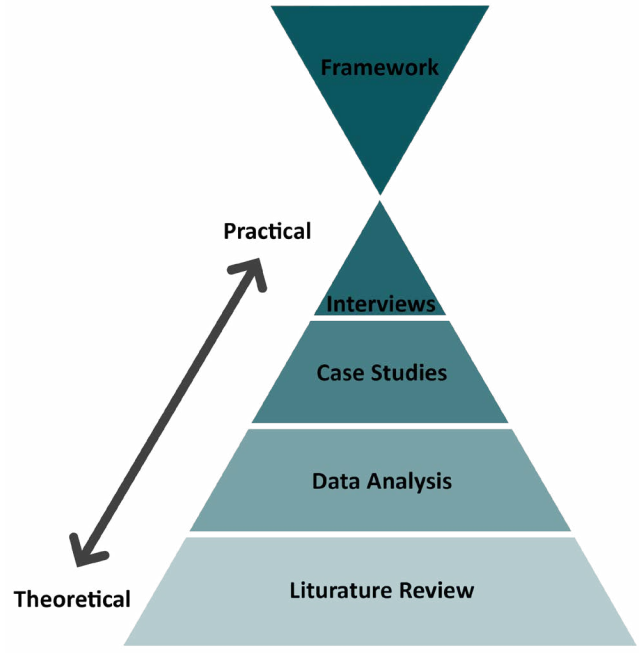


Figure 2.03 Data Sources

Category	Dataset	Units	Agency Name	Longitudinal Analysis Date Range	Comparitive Analysis Date Range
Society	Illiteracy Rates	Percent of population above age 16 lacking basic prose literacy	National Center for Education Statistics	1992, 2003	2003
	Voter Turnout Rates	Votes per population	MIT Election Lab	2000-2016 at 4-year intervals	2000-2016 at 4-year intervals
	Homicide Rate	Deaths per 100,000 population	Center for Disease Control (CDC)	1990-2017	2013-2017
	Suicide Rate	Deaths per 100,000 population	Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA)	1990-2017	2013-2017
Economy	Per Capita Income	Income (thousands of dollars) per total population	Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA)	1990-2017	2013-2017
	Per Capita GDP	Production sum of all industries per population	Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA)	2012-2015	2012-2015
	Unemployment Rate	Unemployed persons per total population	Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)	1990-2017	2013-2017
Environment	Air Quality	PPM particulate air pollution	Center for Disease Control (CDC)	2010-2014	2010-2014
	Access to Open Space	People living within 1/2 mile of a park	Center for Disease Control (CDC)	2010-2015	2010-2015
Technology	Access to Broadband Internt	Per capita household access	Center for Disease Control (CDC)	2013-2017	2013-2017

data retrieved spanned several government agencies and almost three decades in order to provide the most complete picture. The combined datasets were compared with demographic data for each county, including total population, population density, housing density, and USDA urbanization and urban influence codes to add context to the performance measures (USDA Rural Classifications, 2013; American Community Survey, 2019).

Figure 1.3 indicates which data were selected for analysis, the agency that supplied these datasets, and date range used. Datasets were normalized per 100,000 people. Data regarding social, economic, and technological welfare were available with the greatest detail and date range in Excel or CSV format, while environmental data was more readily available in a graphic format through the CDC. County-level data was sought out in each dataset to provide finer-grained but still comprehensible information at the national scale. Data from 47 states was analyzed, excluding Alaska, Hawaii, and Virginia due to frequent inconsistencies in data reporting. Shannon County, South Dakota, was also excluded because of its renaming in 2015, which was inconsistently reflected in the available datasets.

Rates of suicide, homicide, illiteracy, and voter turnout are used to measure social wellness. Suicide is often used as a general indicator of community wellbeing, as a tight-knit community with high morale generally provides the support and connection to preclude such serious situations (Preventing Suicide, 2020). High suicide rates indicate widespread feelings of isolation and a breakdown of community connections and support. Homicide rates aided in determining cases of extreme norm-breaking that resulted in violence rather than self-harm. While high suicide rates are indicative of a lack of social connection, a high homicide rate is evidence of the breakdown of positive social norms, which would strongly discourage violent behavior, or perhaps the presence of norms that accept or encourage violence (Homicide: Behavioral Aspects, 2020). Either case demonstrates a serious threat to quality of life in the community. While these measures are helpful in indicating worst-case scenarios for wellness, suicides and homicides are fairly uncommon, meaning that additional data were needed to measure neutral and positive behaviors. To achieve this end, community participation is gauged using voter turnout data, while adult illiteracy rates are used to measure social investment into the future.

Data for suicides and homicides are sourced from CDC Wonder, the CDC's mortality data archive (CDC WONDER, 2019). Data retrieved at the county level before 2006 were associated with the appropriate 1990 urbanization code. Then, causes of death were consolidated to generate a single homicide or suicide total for each county. Totals were then divided by 100,000 to normalize the rates. Illiteracy rates were available from the National Center for Education Statistics, but the narrow date range (information was available only for 1992 and 2003) limits the possibility for a longitudinal analysis of this wellness factor (National Assessment of Adult Literacy; 1992, 2003). Information for voter turnout was available only at the state level from the US Census Department; to get a finer-grained geographic unit, data were retrieved from the MIT Election Data website (County Presidential Election Returns, 2018). The total number of votes for each county was divided by the total population (population data sourced from the American Community Survey for each year), then

Decile Calculation
$D_i = (x+1)(i/10)$

multiplied by 100 to attain the voter turnout percentage.

Economic wellbeing is markedly easier to measure, as economics are closely watched by government agencies, and data is readily available in an easily analyzed format. Per capita income, GDP, and unemployment were investigated for this analysis to measure the relative health and contributions of each US county. Unemployment rates and per capita income illustrate the economy's effect on individuals' purchasing power and people's ability to meet their needs. Persistent high unemployment rates indicate widespread impediments to workers finding job opportunities, though this can be for a number of reasons not speculated on here. Per capita income is important Per capita gross domestic product (GDP) measures individuals' contributions to the national economy.

Environmental health was measured using CDC data regarding access to open space and particulate matter air pollution. Access to open space measures proximity to positive environmental assets, while pollution indicated a hazardous environment. Since data for air pollution is typically collected by sites of interest, rather than by county, actual data was supplemented by modeled data produced by the CDC.

With the longitudinal analysis of each individual dataset complete, the next step was to compare recent data between the selected categories. The five most recent available years were selected – typically 2013 to 2017 – and averaged. For demographics, only the most recent year was used to provide for the greatest possible accuracy. Illiteracy rates were available only in 1992 and 2003, so 2003 alone was used in the analysis. Data for each wellness factor was sorted in descending order from most to least desirable rates and given a decile ranking to generate a uniform scoring system, using the following formula.

This formula identified where the nine breaks in the data would occur. Where the deciles included an number of entries not evenly divisible by nine, larger groups were absorbed in the early deciles, and smaller groups were absorbed by the later deciles. For the suicide and homicide datasets, any county without reported data received a zero, the most desirable score. In all other datasets, a lack of data was typically due to a reporting error or re-naming event, and the county was therefore excluded.

The sum of each dataset in the social and economic categories represents its score for that category, and the sum of these categories then becomes the total combined score for the county. Golf scoring applies: high scores indicate poor performance in the selected wellness measures, while low scores indicate better performance. The range of possible and actual scores is shown in the table below.

The longitudinal analysis of the data was used to produce line graphs of the performance measures over time compared between urbanization levels, while the decile rankings of recent data were represented geographically on a map. Deciles were useful to directly compare counties between the multiple datasets, indicating how each county performed in comparison with other counties, rather than its rank within a single dataset. Outcomes of the data analysis are reported in the Results section.

Case Studies

Case studies aid in creating a realistic foundation for the Framework in two ways: through examples of solutions applied within the complexity of a real-world context, and by the provision of generalizable principles for the success or failure of a similar project. These factors together ground the theory gleaned from the literature review. Cases were selected after the literature review, once make-or-break points in a project were clearly identified and needed additional investigation.

Two case studies were selected to further refine the information gathered in the literature review and data analysis, and add a realistic dimension to information found. First, a downtown revitalization project in Rupert, Idaho was selected to better inform the process of successful revitalization. Documentation from the city's website, the design firm that completed the project, and from news articles was used to understand the scope, goals, and process of the project. Interviews were also conducted with the project's designers, who could better describe the public outreach process than the hard-copy design documentation.

Next, results of the literature review made it clear that the public process must be conducted very carefully to yield positive results and avoid damaging existing social capital. Therefore, based on the recommendation Diane Kushlan, a local professional planner, the Community Heart and Soul process was investigated (Diane Kushlan, personal communication, October 2019). The intent of this case study was to provide information on principles of a successful public process, rather than to examine an individual project.

The process for both case studies followed the "critical dimensions" identified by Mark Francis in his Case Study Method for Landscape Architecture, identifying important considerations for the project's constraints, goals, design, and execution (Francis, 1999).

Interviews

Each stage in this project's methods was designed to create and build upon firm foundations, as illustrated in Figure 1.2. The point – literally – of this process is to funnel knowledge toward the confluence of best practices and realistic needs. The stages also become increasingly refined as they progress.

The final, most refined, method is the interview. A number of interviews were used to affirm known knowns, clarify known unknowns, and identify unknown unknowns. Filling these knowledge gaps is essential to producing a Framework that is least likely to lead users astray. Interviewees were therefore carefully selected to fill such gaps. The list of interviewees includes the following professionals:

Diane Kushlan: Consulting Community Planner
Matt Adams: principal with The Land Group, Inc.
Julia Oxaca-Ingram: Principal Consultant for CrossRoads Concepts and Consulting
Amy Adams Luft: Planner for COMPASS (Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho)

Interviewees were asked questions from a pre-written list. Transcripts of the interviews as well as the original interview questions are located in Appendices B and C.

Chapter 03
Literature Review

The problems facing rural American regions are long-lived and complex. After so many years of exacerbation, these challenges have compounded one another until it is nearly impossible to identify a consistent root cause for the cycle of decline. However, start and end points may not be necessary to define how a cycle can be disrupted. Understanding the relationship of the problems to one another aids in identifying leverage points where small amounts of change can have a significant impact. Four primary factors for challenges are at play: economy, technology, society, and the environment – both built and natural.

Economic Analysis of Rural America

The Tripartite Threat to Rural Economies

The struggle of isolated rural economies may initially seem unavoidable, but a few primary factors are responsible for the situation. These factors, derived from the literature regarding rural economic development and strain, could be mitigated to improve a small economy's competitiveness.

Diversification

All cities and towns, regardless of population or location, face risks of economic stability and resource scarcity. Diverse assets, including workers' skills and abilities, natural resources, available time, access to transportation systems and communications infrastructure, and a myriad of other factors are critical to easing any community through times of hardship. Due to their isolation, both social and geographic, and comparatively low population, rural communities typically have lower levels of asset diversity, making them more vulnerable to economic shocks and stresses (Besser and Miller, 2013). The instability resulting from a small

economy's primary dependence upon a single resource, such as timber or coal, can devastate a town when the demand, availability, or technology to make use of that resource changes (Robertson, 2006).

Isolation

Another long-standing barrier to the economic development of rural communities is their geographic isolation (Besser and Miller, 2013). Basic infrastructure such as roads and power lines have been difficult to extend and maintain in rural regions, and travel between rural and urban areas remains costly both in terms of time and fuel. Digital infrastructure and broadband internet were hailed as the solution, virtually eliminating the distance between rural lands and urban centers with minimal infrastructure (Parker, 1996). While digital innovations have resulted in employment gains for urban areas with the available education and infrastructure to take advantage of these opportunities, the benefits dwindle for more isolated regions. Though the federal government has increased its efforts to provide broadband internet to the entire country, the gap remains: in 2019, 63% of surveyed rural Americans reported a home broadband connection, compared to 75% in urban areas, and 79% in suburban areas (Perrin, 2019). Rather than bridging the physical gap between regions, differences in technological reliance, availability, and literacy have only further isolated rural areas.

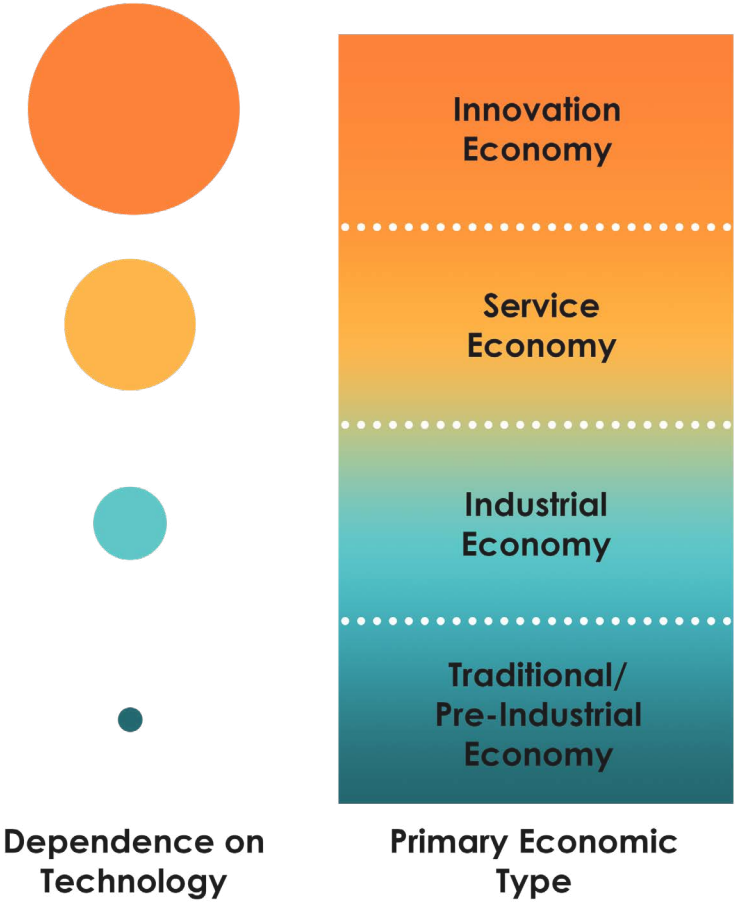
Competition

Compounding rural economies' struggle is the automation or mechanization of low-skill employment opportunities, an effect that is most intensely felt in low-income areas with a larger proportion of manufacturing jobs (Oxford Economics, 2019). The result of technological

If we want to help people in a way that does no harm to them and their capacities and their communities, then the best place to start is with what is strong within them ... and not with what's wrong.

-Cormac Russell

Figure 3.01 Economic Transition



progression for rural communities has been the partial or complete elimination of various full-time employment positions, which have not been adequately replaced. A report released by the USDA in 2005 exemplifies this decline, stating that agricultural employment shrank from 41% of the total workforce in 1900, to 16% in 1945, and finally 1.9% in 2000 (Dimitri, Effland, and Conklin, 2005). Due to the low populations and technology availability typical of rural areas, it is difficult to recoup these livelihoods in the service or information industries that thrive in larger cities. Many workers are therefore forced to commute to urban areas or relocate entirely in search of stable employment, as their local economies are unable to compete with urban goliaths for a share of the market. This decline in available local livelihoods has dramatic consequences for communities with an already low tolerance for economic shocks and stresses, and the effects are evident both in the physical and social fabric of affected regions.

The result of this tripartite threat for many rural communities is de facto economic isolation, the diminished opportunity for small economies to participate in regional or national markets. De facto economic isolation edges rural economies out of larger-scale economic participation, reducing a that economy's resilience and share of the market simultaneously. Because strong economies rely on larger networks to buffer against routine market turbulence, de facto economic isolation leaves rural towns excluded, outcompeted, and highly vulnerable to market changes.

Economic Typologies

How can rural communities resist this kind of isolation? A partial answer may lie in the natural progression of economies over time. As

technology and population levels increase, economies naturally shift along a typology gradient to accommodate larger levels and new types of production. Typically, economies move from an agrarian state with stringent roles and limited production, into industrial economies that tend to be more flexible and capable of meeting higher demands, then service economies that rely more significantly on technology and mechanization, and later becoming innovation-based economies, where tangible product creation is mostly automated and human labor generates ideas as the primary product (Fields, 1999).

One economy may have elements of each economy type at once, but will exist primarily within a single category or location on the gradient. The geographic isolation of rural communities is a barrier to connecting physical and digital infrastructure such as broadband internet, fiber optic connections, cellular service, and well-maintained roads that are necessary to take advantage of a modern service or innovation-based economy. These barriers, coupled with the smaller local demand for services, rapid loss of low-skill jobs, and lack of training opportunities for new jobs have caused rural communities to stagnate somewhere between an industrial and service economy. The possibility for rural towns to transition fully into an innovation-based economy is highly limited at present, for the same reasons that preclude service economy development: a lack of training and demand. Notable exceptions are tourism-driven rural economies, which supplement local demand with that of visitors or temporary seasonal residents.

USDA Investment

The disparity in economic opportunity between rural and urban areas has become increasingly evident in recent years. In 2010, 85% of the United States' GDP was contributed by 259 large cities (Manyika et al., 2012). Meanwhile, rural areas typically have a lower per capita GDP and per capita income, indicating lower contribution and associated gains at the national level (US Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2016; 2018). Ideally, interdependency between rural and urban economies could ensure that cash, as well as goods, moved between these areas, ultimately benefitting both. Unfortunately, urban economies have become increasingly independent of rural contributions as resource extraction and refinement has been outsourced, automated, or agglomerated into a few large companies, typically headquartered and taxed in urban areas (Porter et al., 2004).

Due to this shift and other various changing market conditions, movement of financial capital to rural communities has dwindled with the number and diversity of employment opportunities. The response of the United States government has been heavy financial investments into rural economic development (Porter et al., 2004). These investments typically take the form of loans, grants, and subsidies through the United States Department of Agriculture and tend to focus on individual families, businesses, or economic development projects. However, the failure of these investments to generate sustainable progress in rural economic development is evidenced by the continued plight of rural America (Porter et. al, 2004).

Those rural towns unable to use industry recruitment or tourism to alleviate their economic stress have now come to rely significantly

on government aid. The USDA spends an average of 72.4% of its budget on food stamps, 7% on conservation and forestry, 14.5% on farm and commodity programs, and 5.8% on other services including home loans and utility subsidies, pouring billions of dollars into rural economies annually (Fiscal Year Report, 2012 to 2018; Porter et al., 2004). The principles of capitalism presume that these investments would aid the entire local economy as recipients of the funds spend their money at local businesses, who then hire more employees, who spend more money locally, et cetera in an upward cycle of growth. But with a small economy's limited and often diminishing ability to meet the basic and higher needs of their community, USDA investment tends to flow straight through towns and back toward urban areas, like pouring water into a sieve, particularly as online marketplaces garner larger shares of the market (Porter et al., 2004).

It is unsurprising that disjointed investment has generated often unimpressive results, because rural communities simply do not have the established economic infrastructure to hold on to the invested capital (Kiisel, 2013). Without a healthy social, economic, and environmental context, investment in a single business is unlikely to generate wide-reaching positive results (Besser and Miller, 2013). A healthy community acts as a catch for investments, otherwise money passes almost immediately through rural towns as it is used to survive to the next day rather than invested in the future. This situation demonstrates clearly the need for a community-specific plan that consolidates economic development efforts and invests first in the contextual infrastructure that will allow rural communities to hold on to their financial capital instead of spending it in the next city over where their needs can be more cheaply met. Benefits associated with individual investments accrue only when there is sufficient flow of financial capital within a community (Braak, 2010). The question therefore becomes: how can a small, isolated rural economy increase its internal flow of financial capital?

Downtown Revitalization

The process of downtown revitalization provides an opportunity to enhance the social, economic, and built and natural environmental context in which a small town exists. As early as the mid-1960's, "non-market" factors such as natural amenities, social capital, and quality of life were recognized for their influence on worker migration (Deller et al., 2001). More recent studies have repeatedly identified the importance of social capital, also noted as a "sense of community" in small business performance (Besser and Miller, 2013). These authors assert that high social capital gives entrepreneurs the feeling of a community safety net, thus allowing them to take greater risks understanding that their community will buffer them from hardship, and cater to a town that is more likely to engage in local spending and activities. Communities with high social capital are also more likely to spend funds on public projects and are even willing to levy additional taxes on themselves to pay for these benefits (Besser and Miller, 2013).

The Relationship Between Place and Behavior

Social capital – or social wellbeing – is inextricably tied in a reciprocal relationship to a community's physical setting. Countless examples exist of investments in physical infrastructure and public space generating social benefits within the United States. In Lewisville, Texas, 92% of surveyed residents reported an improved sense of identity after a new public park and plaza were developed outside the courthouse, and 89% reported an improved quality of life (Ozdil

et al., 2017). Houston provides another case, where investment in the pathways and artwork of the Buffalo Bayou Promenade resulted in numerous new music, sporting, and arts events. 99% of surveyed Promenade users reported an increased quality of life, and 66% reported an improved sense of safety at the park. (Ozdil et al., 2013). In both instances, increasing the opportunity of residents to engage socially has resulted in clear improvements in people's self-reported quality of life, indicating a greater level of community cohesion as a whole. Visible evidence of care, order, and community pride reinforce those selfsame qualities, providing a socially sustainable positive feedback loop.

Unfortunately, the reverse is also true. The Broken Windows Theory, a colloquial name for the criminological hypothesis conceived of by Wilson and Kelling in 1982, states that evidence of crime and other antisocial behavior sets the stage for further social distress (Chou and Travis, 2013). The theory asserts that degraded infrastructure, condemned buildings, and other decaying physical aspects of a town – including broken windows –wear on the community's collective morale. Essentially, identifiable visual markers of the social wellbeing, or lack thereof, within a community play a powerful role in setting residents' behavioral patterns. Due to the years-long economic strain on many rural communities, patterns of neglect and isolation have become evident in the physical context of many of these places, a situation known to promote insular or even antisocial behavior in rural families (Conger et al., 1994). This pattern illustrates a critical leverage point in the reinvigoration of rural communities: investment in public space and infrastructure can disrupt a cycle of declining economic viability, environmental quality, and social participation. While the application of the Broken Windows Theory in law enforcement and

Lewisville historic courthouse, pre-design. Image courtesy of Design Workshop

Lewisville's Wayne Ferguson Plaza. Image courtesy of Design Workshop

policymaking has been controversial (Howell, 2009), its applications for infrastructure and aesthetic improvements present a positive opportunity for communities to build their social capital through public space improvements. Such investment provides tangible and intangible benefits which both aid in jumpstarting a small economy and ensuring that social and environmental community assets are retained.

Key Factors for Successful Revitalization

In pursuing these benefits, downtown redevelopment has long been investigated and applied in "blighted" urban areas with varying levels of success, but more recently has become a player on the rural stage (Robertson, 1997). Practical application of planning principles has made it clear that simply scaling down revitalization strategies from urban areas does not create viable solutions for rural regions (Faulk, 2006). This is due to the vast differences in both scale and context between the two regions. Even within small towns, significant disparities exist based on population size, density, geographic isolation, and countless other factors (Robertson, 2006). A more successful means of rural downtown revitalization methods emerges from the literature and is clarified by current best practices. These recurrent themes provide a necessary degree of flexibility for the widely varying situations of small communities.

Community Visioning

First, before time or resources are invested in a revitalization effort, the community must establish a clear goal for their labors (Robertson, 2006). Agreeing upon a shared, clearly stated, and achievable vision allows projects to be pursued in concert and makes each individual effort more meaningful. This should be developed by the community at large and based on a factual understanding of the location's assets and disadvantages. Ideally, this understanding would be generated in a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis or similar evaluation (Robertson, 2006; Faulk, 2006). Not only does a clear vision provide greater forward momentum for a revitalization effort, it also prevents resources from being spent on unpopular projects that would otherwise detract from the community's goals. The visioning process itself also adds value to a project, as it is a community endeavor in which residents can engage in defining that which unites them (Mannarini et al., 2010). This action alone, if undertaken carefully, serves to build social capital and stir support for a project (Kiisel, 2013).

Identification and Utilization of Local Assets

Perhaps the most consistent recurring theme in the literature and in practice is the utilization of local assets (Heyer, 1990). Historic structures abandoned industrial sites, underutilized infrastructure, active grange halls, natural amenities, and countless other resources must all be considered for their present and latent value (Robertson, 2006; Faulk, 2006). A revitalization plan must seek to maximize the value and retention of assets while mitigating challenges to the community. These various features, whether beneficial or detrimental, are physical manifestations of a community's identity. Appropriately managing them yields opportunities to emphasize that identity, generating social, cultural, environmental, and economic benefits through placemaking, particularly when a revitalized place is shaped by the community itself (Project for Public Spaces, n.d.). Therefore, demolishing these assets should be avoided without careful prior consideration, as these places represent past investment that could be efficiently used or repurposed

(Faulk, 2006), and are identifiable markers of a community's history. An understanding of local features can also elucidate a community's unmet needs: abandoned manufacturing plants, social establishments, or infrastructure that has been missed since its closure can make leverage points for investment clear, aiding residents in prioritizing their efforts. Appropriately managing them yields opportunities to emphasize that identity, generating social, cultural, environmental, and economic benefits through placemaking, particularly when a revitalized place is shaped by the community itself (Project for Public Spaces). Therefore, demolishing these assets should be avoided without careful prior consideration, as these places represent past investment that could be efficiently used or repurposed (Faulk, 2006), and are identifiable markers of a community's history. An understanding of local features can also elucidate a community's unmet needs: abandoned manufacturing plants, social establishments, or infrastructure that has been missed since its closure can make leverage points for investment clear, aiding residents in prioritizing their efforts.

The identification of a community's assets is another step that dramatically improves the efficacy of planning efforts. An inventory of local strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (known as a SWOT analysis) can make paths to maximize asset value while minimizing risk clear in strategic planning efforts (Painter, 2019). Such analyses, as well as periodic evaluations based on the community's goals, should be conducted throughout a project's lifespan to ensure that the time and resource investments are achieving the desired yield. At this point, adaptability becomes key. If a plan is not achieving the desired goals, which is not uncommon as projects age within a constantly changing context, then it must be adjusted. Additionally, a shifting circumstances can open up new opportunities that can better allow communities to achieve their goals.

Identify Local Markets and Regional Connections

Due to the low population and high geographic dispersion of rural communities, small and remote economies often find themselves dependent on outside investment or a larger economic network for survival (Murdoch, 2000). Networks in particular can provide the diversity that a single rural community alone lacks, allowing several communities to engage in mutualistic economic relationships where each locality provides unique value to a system whose economic power is greater than the sum of its parts (Murdoch, 2000). These systems can raise the resilience of each small economy within that network through improved diversity and asset-sharing. Networks therefore inherently tackle the issues of isolation and diversification and can also make small economies more competitive with urban giants.

Networking, both within and between rural locales, is another critical factor for redevelopment. Local residents and rural resource managers have not always been respected in planning efforts, and real value in the official sense was not placed on their expertise until as late as the 1960s, and that expertise typically did not have adequate representation until the 1990s (Ellis and Biggs, 2001). Networking and collaboration among residents can enhance the collective voice and bargaining power of whole regions, who may not otherwise be adequately represented. This inter- and intra-community connection can also help to widen the pool of assets available within a region. This enhances potential diversification of livelihoods through opportunities for new partnerships and improved idea-sharing

while also generating relationships that help buffer communities during economic shocks and stresses (Chambers and Conway, 1991; Weinberg, 2000).

Public Involvement

The linchpin for a successful downtown revitalization effort is the involvement of those people who will live in the proposed changes. Public involvement not only informs a project's design, but can become an asset in itself as a means to build social capacity (Mannarini et al., 2010). This requirement is evident in each of the preceding key factors to revitalization, where local voices play a critical role in visioning, asset identification, and social networks. If the community feels their voices will be respected, they are more likely to participate in public engagement events and support solutions (Trentelman, 2003; EPA Public Participation Guide, 2018). This is critical in building social capital and maintaining the impetus behind a project for multiple years. The benefits of public involvement can be difficult to attain, however, and are easily lost to persistent social issues and power imbalances (Kiisel, 2013).

Downtown revitalization is a means of translating a community's shared identity and hopes for the future into the built environment. Revitalization can stimulate business by making the central business district a stronger draw, and by cultivating the pride and sense of place that encourage local spending. While there is opportunity for positive change using revitalization, the tumultuous history of the words "redevelopment" and "revitalization" in the United States is evidence that it is very possible for good intentions to go awry, especially in the case of a wide-reaching plan. Garnering all the benefits of downtown revitalization requires a deep understanding of the site using both quantitative and qualitative information, and support of the plan by stakeholders, once again indicating the importance of grounding any revitalization plan in the proven needs of the public and the place.

Rural Applications of Public Involvement

The Evolution of Public Involvement

At the turn of the 20th century, public involvement was unheard of. Planning itself was a novel concept, only beginning to gain traction as America's urban areas burgeoned with disease and pollution during the Industrial Revolution (Erickson, 2012). Planning was used to relieve some of the industrial stress upon urban land and its people, beginning to separate residents from hazardous land uses and provide minimum standards for housing quality (Planning History Timeline, 2020). In essence, these early standards were a recognition that each factory, tenement building, road, and park affected the city as a whole, and therefore planning for a single structure required consideration of the whole city.

This recognition unfortunately did not give adequate voice to those who suffered in cities and would be affected by planning decisions – minorities, children, and the working poor – and solutions were often designed and implemented by planners who were distant from the situations they were attempting to remedy, a pattern that continues to a lesser extent today (Rojas, 2020). The general public was the most affected by the successive waves of zoning restrictions, housing laws, and redevelopment efforts, but remained largely mute until the end of WWII. This was partly due to a disparaging view of the poor as well as the socioeconomic chasm that existed between the lower and upper classes in America, which both allowed and empowered

the nation's elite to make decisions on behalf of the poor without consultation (1930s High Society, 2014). The severity of the situation was quite literally illustrated in Jacob Riis' *How the Other Half Lives.*

After the end of the second World War, the newfound economic power and access to education by the middle class gave the general public the ability to challenge and collaborate in the decisions made regarding their communities. Unfortunately, just as early planning actions had been pushed onto the masses of disenfranchised urban tenants and residents, specific groups of Americans were once again excluded from the expansion of democracy in planning. Minorities, particularly African Americans, were not only left out of policy-making and planning decisions, but were directly targeted by racist actions that segregated both pre- and postwar America socially and geographically (Planning History Timeline, 2020). Young people and the working poor experienced disenfranchisement of a more de facto nature, but to a similar effect. While citizen participation had become widely accepted in postwar America, it was not representative of the population subject to the plans developed during that time. This history has engendered mistrust between much of the public, particularly socioeconomically disadvantaged and minority groups, and the professionals and institutions that lead planning efforts.

The Ladder of Citizen Participation explicitly articulates the problem of tokenistic or manipulative public involvement (Arnstein, 1969). Neither tokenistic nor manipulative involvement is in the best interests of the public, and both are much less likely to generate viable, supported, long-term results. In organizing the levels of involvement by the degree of power allotted to citizens, Arnstein laid the groundwork for productive public processes. At the lowest levels

Figure 3.02 Ladder of Participation

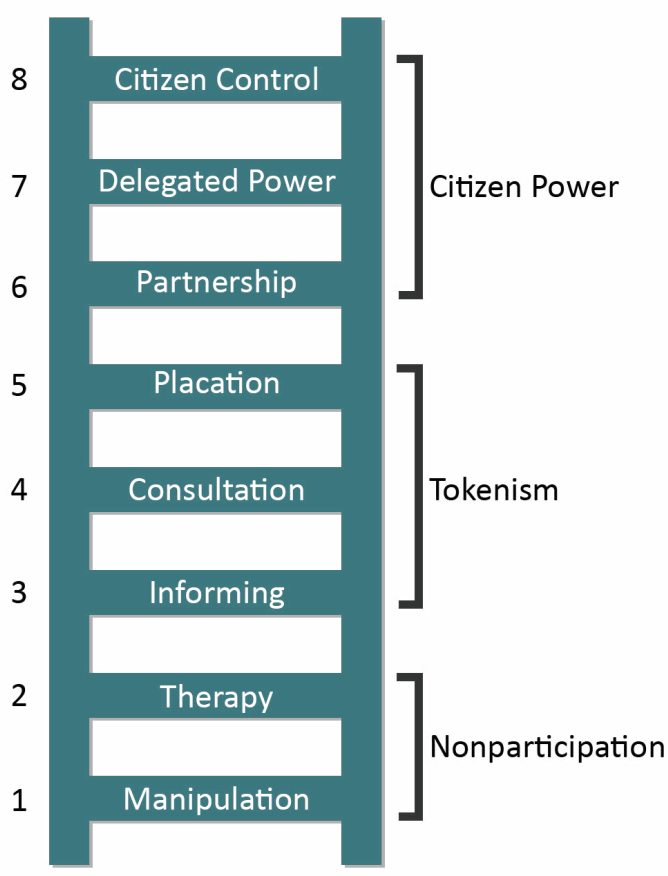


Diagram adapted from Sherry Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969).

of the ladder, manipulation and therapy exist only to more deeply impose an outside will upon a population (Arnstein, 1969). Citizens are viewed as "backwards" or "uneducated," and professionals are likely to see public contribution to the design process as wholly oxymoronic. Informing, consultation, and placation exist on the middle rungs of the ladder, where citizens are notified of the plans that will affect them and may be able to openly share their opinions but have no enforcement power to ensure those views are heard or utilized by professionals. The highest levels of involvement, which require true citizen power, provide enforcement behind community voices, holding planners and professionals firmly accountable to the public. Postwar America has slowly climbed Arnstein's ladder, held back by racism, sexism, and socioeconomic discrimination, but pushed forward by education and dedicated citizens.

Representation

Perhaps the most consistent challenge in public involvement is representation (Barnes et al., 2003). While blatantly discriminatory policies (predominantly on the basis of race, but often including de facto discrimination by sex, gender identity, and socioeconomic status) have been stripped from the law, many of the effects of these policies and the social disputes that shaped them remain (APA Planning History Timeline, n.d.). Minorities, young people, and the working poor remain underrepresented in planning efforts, often due to self-segregation that exists due to bias within the intangible fabric of American society (Silverman and Crawford, 2008). These structural biases are typically referred to in the literature as power structures or power relationships: unwritten behavioral codes that often empower an elite and disenfranchise others (Arnstein, 1969; Kiisel, 2013).

In addition to simply involving participants, a public involvement process should promote a sense of ownership of the project by residents. Decades of federal-level intervention and planning efforts spearheaded by non-resident professionals have too often resulted in projects that either failed to meet communities' needs or introduced additional woes (von Hoffman, 2008). This pattern has sown a serious mistrust of outside influence by governments and professionals in many rural areas (Weinberg, 2000). Ensuring that communities are well-represented in planning efforts, with voices for all major population groups (including age, gender, race, faith, and ethnic groups) is the first step to promote successful and effective public involvement. Second, these community members and the information they supply must be respected and appropriately included in planning efforts. Ongoing respect, involvement, and a degree of influence for local leaders is crucial to generating this sense of ownership that is necessary for long-term community involvement and project success.

Power Distribution

Existing power structures, if not reorganized to a level and egalitarian status, will taint a public involvement process in a number of ways. First, allowing the most powerful voices or institutions in a community to maintain their louder volume will make it difficult for traditionally underrepresented community members to speak up and be heard, thus perpetuating the status quo and leaving no room for innovation. This also eliminates the diversity of information-gathering that is critical to developing a holistic understanding of the community's issues (Silverman and Crawford, 2008). Disenfranchisement that stems from an elite's ownership of a planning endeavor can

also frustrate participants, discouraging future participation and undermining the entire process. This situation can actually degrade social capital, reducing a community's ability to work together and adjust to whatever changes may come their way. Just solutions are the outcome of a just public process, meaning that egalitarianism is essential to developing solutions that the entire community will be willing to work toward (Kiisel, 2013).

A grassroots method of community organization is typically a strong start for an involvement process, because it improves the local sense of community and lends credibility to the participation process (Arnstein, 1969; Silverman and Crawford, 2008; Mannarini et al., 2010). Bottom-up approaches of this kind benefit from typically having widespread community buy-in prior to the first meeting, rather than a top-down approach that may involve convincing residents to participate. Regardless of its structure or origins, a public process must be run carefully and respectfully, for failure will not just damage the outcome in the planning effort, but can damage the society as a whole by reducing residents' trust in institutions and each other (Mannarini et al., 2010). Fortunately, there are predictable means to achieve a successful public process that can be cultivated throughout the stages of organization and involvement.

Participation

Of the five tested variables which may affect people's willingness to participate long-term in a public process, Mannarini et al. identified that a positive emotional experience and lack of negative consequences most strongly influences participation. Processes should therefore be designed to focus not only on the instrumental planning goals at hand, but also on the human needs and preferences

Envision Utah's 2018 Valley Visioning Process. Courtesy of Envision Utah.

Visioning process in McComb, Ohio. Courtesy of Community Heart and Soul.

of participants. Positive emotional experiences can be generated by including time to socialize before and after meetings, reducing antagonistic or unproductive discussions, respecting the opinions of all participants, and showing clear progress toward the community's goals. Organizing meetings so benefits of participation clearly outweigh the costs will also be useful in improving participation. This can be done by ensuring that attending the meeting is convenient (i.e. scheduled outside work hours or during the agricultural off-season), providing childcare and food, negotiating with social groups that might encourage non-participation, and employing other site-specific strategies.

A public process must begin with adequate notice to all potential participants (EPA Public Participation Guide, 2018). These individuals should include more than the "usual suspects," and outreach should be extended to underrepresented groups, including young people, the working poor, and minorities (Silverman and Crawford, 2008). Leadership and the meeting structure should already be established when the community is involved, but the community should be able to question and suggest adjustments to both. Meetings should be widely accessible to the community, and would ideally be directed, but deliberative, with clear goals established (EPA Public Participation Guide, 2018). Access should consider both location – residents' means of physically attending the meeting – and scheduling to minimize time constraints and conflicts.

Clarity

Most of the key factors for a positive public process are nuanced in nature; they involve a detailed understanding of a community's existing social network, distribution of power, and shared identity. Yet the cornerstone of a good public process is not social, but practical. In order to maintain morale and regular involvement of the public, a process must have goals. These goals, the outcomes, and the steps in between must be carefully articulated and publicized to ensure that both the leaders and the general public know what to expect from the process, and if or when they must make adjustments to it.

Mitigation of Social Issues

Finally, careful consideration must be given to a community's persistent social issues. Due to the imperfect nature of humanity, every community – rural or urban – will encounter serious social problems. Whether it is the opioid epidemic, racial segregation, high rates of crime or domestic violence, these issues pose a genuine threat to the long-term success of a redevelopment project. Therefore, such serious, long-term social issues must be discussed before and throughout any redevelopment effort. As Ruttan notes, there are many unpleasant aspects of our society that are very sustainable, in that they would be easy to perpetuate into the future (1998). These aspects will, however, constantly erode a community's cohesion and social sustainability, and will undermine even the noblest of actions unless they are addressed without hesitation or prejudice. To ensure the each of these factors is appropriately addressed throughout the life of a project, metrics to gauge success are necessary for effective project evaluation and long-term maintenance. For these to be most useful, they should be created and applied on a case-by-case basis that considers the specifics of a single project (Hammer and Pivo, 2017).

Sustainability

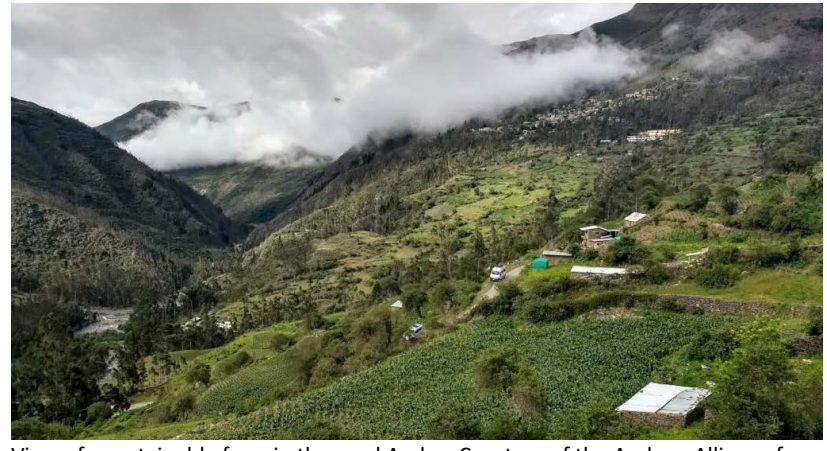
The concepts of economic development, downtown revitalization,

and public participation each plays a role in the development of a solution for the problem at hand: de facto economic isolation. But for any solution to be successful, and indeed for these three concepts to function in harmony, they must be tied together through sustainability. The priority of this project is to weave sustainable thinking and action into every step of the revitalization process. Careful analysis of rural economic struggles allows solutions to be developed with clear outcomes in mind and increases the likelihood of a project's success and ability to generate financial capital. The evaluation of the local context promotes stewardship of valuable assets, both built and natural, so that they may exist long into the future. This improves environmental capital. Finally, deliberative, representative, and authentic public involvement enhances social capital (Kiisel, 2013; Mannarini and Trippetti, 2010). Sustainability allows people to think realistically about what they want for their community one, five, twenty, even fifty years into the future, because it ties a sense of longevity into the planning process (Community Heart and Soul?). Like each concept previously analyzed, however, sustainability must be carefully understood and applied to garner its full benefits. Most important to its application is a unified understanding of the term as it pertains to the project at hand.

Sustainability's Roots in Society

As initially set forth by Aldo Leopold, a "land ethic" that extends rights and value to the land and all its creatures must be embraced to achieve long-lasting social and economic prosperity (Leopold, 1949). This early concept of sustainability came from the novel understanding that the world was finite in its resources, and could be drained of them to the point that human society may collapse. It was a hard sell at the time, but successive waves of the environmental movement

Heritage-informed farming in the rural Andes. Courtesy of the Andean Alliance for Sustainable Development.



View of a sustainable farm in the rural Andes. Courtesy of the Andean Alliance for Sustainable Development.

proved to both political leaders and the American public that humans had come to dominate their environment beyond what was ever thought possible (Leopold, 1949; The Limits To Growth, 1972). The early warnings regarding the effects of unrestrained scientific and technological development were released during this time, pioneered by Rachel Carson in *Silent Spring* (1962). Just as officials in the early twentieth century had learned that the organization of the built environment affected the wellness of the population, postwar American planners were now grappling with the health implications of people's relationship with the natural environment as well.

This nebulous idea of the relationship between people, the environment, and the economy crystallized in 1987, when the Brundtland report debuted the modern concept of sustainability, encompassing more than the land alone (Our Common Future, 1987). That seminal report included a rather relaxed definition, intended to be malleable enough to apply to a broad spectrum of situations while still maintaining its relevance: "Sustainable development seeks to meet the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future" (Our Common Future, 1987). Such generality may have been well-intentioned, but the result in an imperfect world has been the frequent misapplication of the term. It has been glibly tossed about in advertising campaigns, by developers, and even in government to describe ideas or actions that often do not truly satisfy the criteria of sustainability. Academic and practical discussions of sustainable economic development, the triple bottom line, and sustainable livelihoods have been combined and condensed into the definition of sustainability that will be applied throughout this thesis.

Sustainability is the ongoing pursuit to better understand and steward social, economic, and environmental resources, so that they may be utilized and regenerated to the greatest possible degree, yielding equal or greater opportunities for all life on Earth, both today and indefinitely into the future.

The Triple Bottom Line

Each of these factors alludes to a larger guiding concept recurrent in industry, development, and policy since its introduction in 1994. The Triple Bottom Line was originally conceived of by John Elkington as a tool for businesses to better achieve "win-win-win" strategies that provided for social and environmental welfare while generating economic profit (Elkington, 1994). Many entities have adopted the triple bottom line into their goals or policies in some form or another, and its key components (i.e. people, profit, and planet) are often included in definitions of holistic sustainability. It seems that these interdependent concepts are the most basic groups of resources, where each must be stewarded to ensure the welfare of the other two.

For example, economic distress in Venezuela led to rapid environmental resource consumption and shocking environmental degradation (Held, 2019). When the population's basic needs for food, water, and medicine could no longer be met through standard means, people began to pull, unrestricted, from the local environment. The country has yet to recover (Held, 2019). In another similar example, soil degradation in the 1920s and '30s in the United States contributed to an existing economic catastrophe, making it difficult for the country to rebound. Both instances have had devastating social repercussions, including skyrocketing unemployment rates, mass migration, and

even famine. Avoiding such fates therefore mandates the careful stewardship of social, environmental, and economic assets together.

Unfortunately, the triple bottom line has been subjected to same overuse or misuse as the term sustainability, to the point that Elkington wrote a retraction in 2018 (Elkington, 2018). In the short essay, he called for the ideals behind the concept to become the guiding principles in industry and development, rather than the shortsighted bottom line accounting that had begun to occur, which only reflected the triple bottom line in the hollowest means possible (2018). This situation, where a multifaceted issue was framed solely in terms of economics, highlights the recurrent failures of dollar-and-cent accounting alone to adequately address persistent issues of poverty, equality, and environmental longevity. There is a clear need to move toward a more balanced approach.

Sustainable Livelihoods in a Rural Context

Applying sustainability in the context of an entire town requires comprehensive thinking that simultaneously evaluated the three components of the triple bottom line. The sustainable livelihoods perspective focuses on the resources and activities that people utilize to meet their basic needs, encompassing society, environment, and economy. The perspective actively addresses the real world, rather than "single-sector approaches" limited by the scope of a single academic field, and tries to "understand things from local perspectives" (Scoones, 2009). By bridging disciplines and pulling strategies of inquiry from varying sources as needed to generate a holistic analysis, the concept of sustainable livelihoods is one that was designed for action and application, making design a potentially potent partner in this multidisciplinary association. Such diversity begins to open new ideas within an inquiry, such as how rural livelihoods might function under or buffer against strain – a critical concept when considering community revitalization.

Sustainable livelihoods must, by definition, be able to accept shocks and stresses over both short and long time frames. Chambers and Conway take this definition a step further, specifying that a truly sustainable livelihood must "maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihoods opportunities for the next generation." Satisfying the traditional Brundtland definition of sustainability as providing for both the needs and aspirations of today without compromising the needs of tomorrow, Chambers and Conway also specify that resilience is requisite within sustainability, and that regeneration is the next logical step. (WCED, 1987)(1991).

Achieving resilience in planning requires first that the design solutions laid out within a plan are flexible enough to perform well under a variety of conditions in the future. Second, the plan itself must be flexible and adaptable enough to continue to provide effective guidance without massive revision.

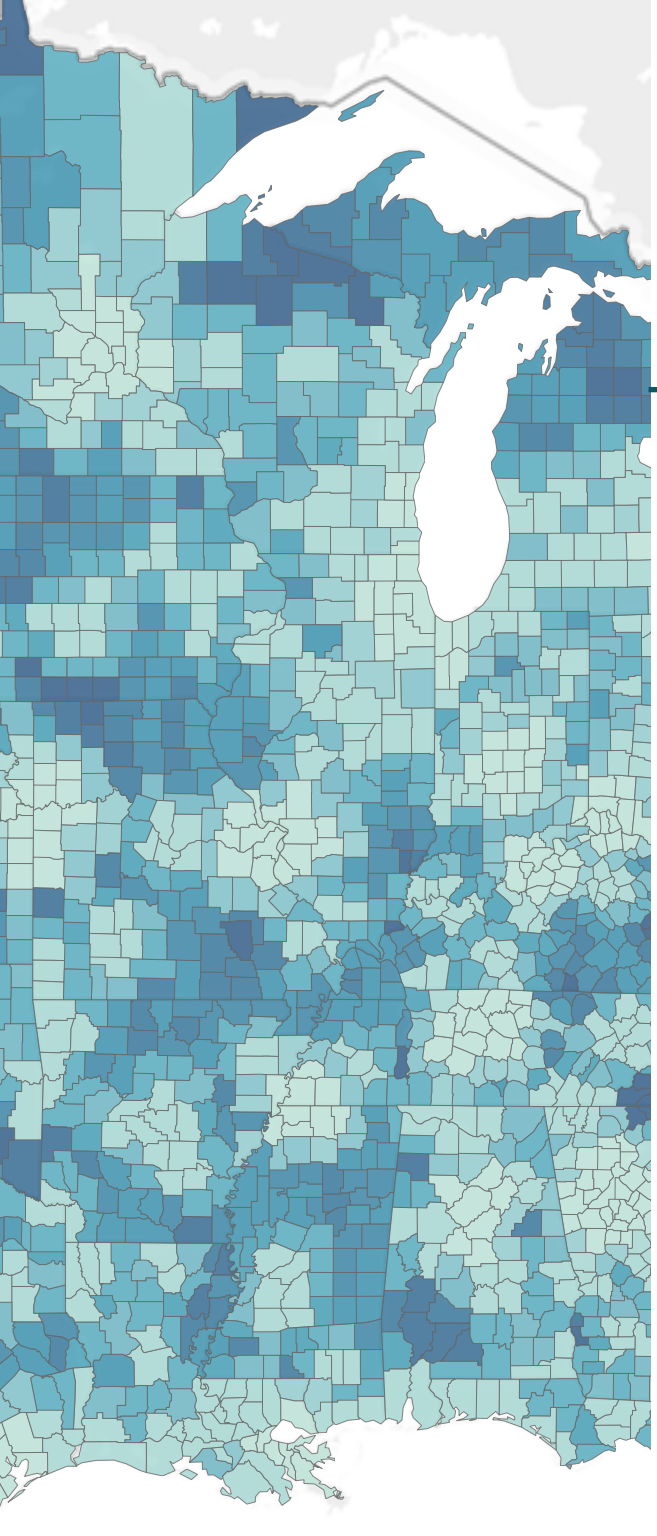
Adjustment may occur for several reasons. Both in cases of economic desperation or excess, people may change their livelihood or livelihood strategy. This may occur through dwindling options (whether they are social, economic, or environmental) forcing people to abandon or alter their means of living, or economic growth spurring a greater number of options and allowing for "education and migration" to pursue to opportunities. As noted by Chambers and Conway, "wider choice is usually generated by economic growth," something that has been clearly linked in past decades to appropriate

resource stewardship (1991) (WCED, 1987). It is critical to keep in mind that, while many shocks are unavoidable, their likelihood can be significantly diminished through various methods. Sustainable livelihoods and sustainable resource management put less strain on the natural environment, producing less waste and pollution that decrease the value and usefulness of various assets over time. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions can affect the likelihood and severity of future natural disasters as well. Adjustment of these efforts over time as situations change also improve the adaptability and efficacy of sustainable livelihoods.

Conclusion

The apparent common theme within the literature concerning all four research topics is the ease of good intentions going astray. When good solutions are applied without regard for individual context, the results may be poor. However, with consideration for the local context and careful application of best practices for the community in question, concepts such as public involvement, sustainability, and downtown revitalization can be applied with a much greater chance of success. In a country as large and diverse as the United States, no two towns can be expected to respond to the same solution, therefore no solution should be applied as if it fit more than one size, or one town. Repeatedly solutions seen by economists and planners and designers who live in urban areas are scaled to "fit" a rural community. It seems almost expected that because rural areas are smaller, they must be simpler. But when the true complexity of rural America's hardships and opportunities is considered, it becomes clear that rural regions need their own, unique solutions, whether in the development of a public process or a revitalization effort. The problems rural areas face and the tools with which they strive for improvement are different. It is not merely a matter of scale, but a matter of type. A matter of identity. While there are of course many similarities between both the structures and functions of rural and urban regions, the differences are significant enough to merit new thinking.

Rather than copying and pasting design or policy solutions from a dense city to a small town, or even from a small town to a different small town, general themes for success should be adhered to while context drives specific actions. Instead of applying one solution that is assumed to work everywhere, guidelines to reliably produce successful context-specific solutions should be used. As recommended by Carl Steinitz through the concept of geodesign (2012), basic "rules" for communication and collaboration should be established as a basic skeleton of a planning effort, while context and project-specific needs can flesh out the detail. Context will provide enough complexity; it is the duty of planners and the intent of this framework to provide succinct direction toward achievable social, economic, and environmental sustainability.



Chapter 04

Data Analysis

The data analyzed in this project do not paint the picture of rural blight and distress that is often described in political and journalistic circles. In general, it does appear that rural communities face more challenges in terms of economic opportunities than urban areas, and are generally more likely to perform poorly in terms of unemployment, per capita income, and per capita GDP. However, many have managed to maintain their social and environmental wellbeing despite financial hardships. It is the counties that struggle significantly with both economic and social wellness that tend to have the a difficult time in all measures analyzed. In these locales, economic problems have begun to affect the built environment and even social wellbeing. Ultimately, the data indicate that a few key social and economic factors can determine whether a rural area will struggle or succeed in a time of economic strain.

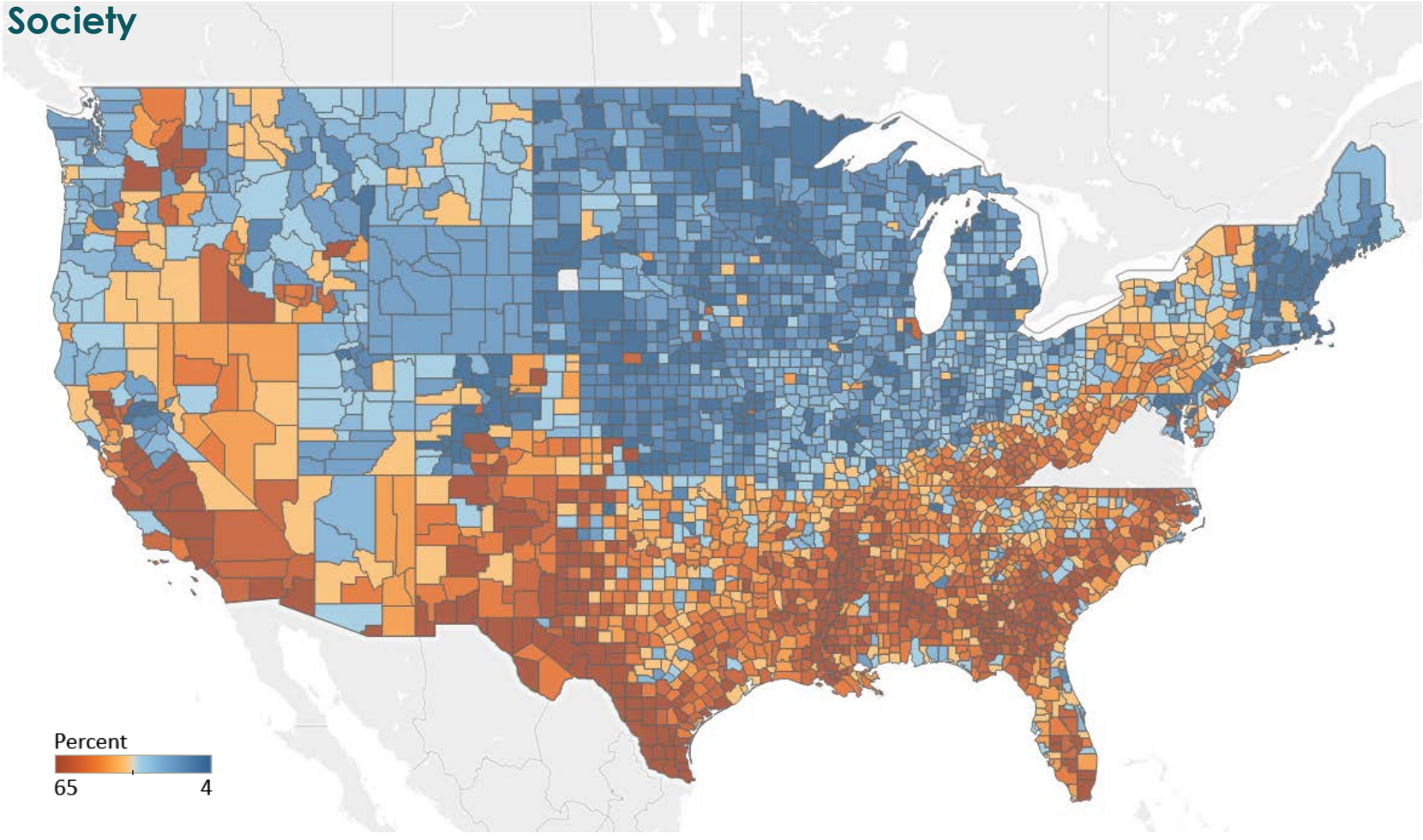


Figure 4.01 Illiteracy Rate, 2003

The data analysis shows an interesting relationship between urbanization and social wellbeing. Large fringe metro areas reported the lowest (best) illiteracy rate in both years of available data, with large central metro and noncore counties scoring highest, or most poorly. Illiteracy did drop significantly from 18.27 to 13.44% in rural noncore areas between 1992 and 2003, while rising from 16.29 to 17.30% in large central metro counties. In general, the most rural and most urban areas reported the highest rates of illiteracy, with moderately urbanized areas reporting lower rates, as is illustrated in Figure 4.01. This distribution of illiteracy is possibly attributable in part to populations of migrant workers in rural regions and refugee or immigrant populations in urban areas, who may not have had the opportunity to learn English fluently.

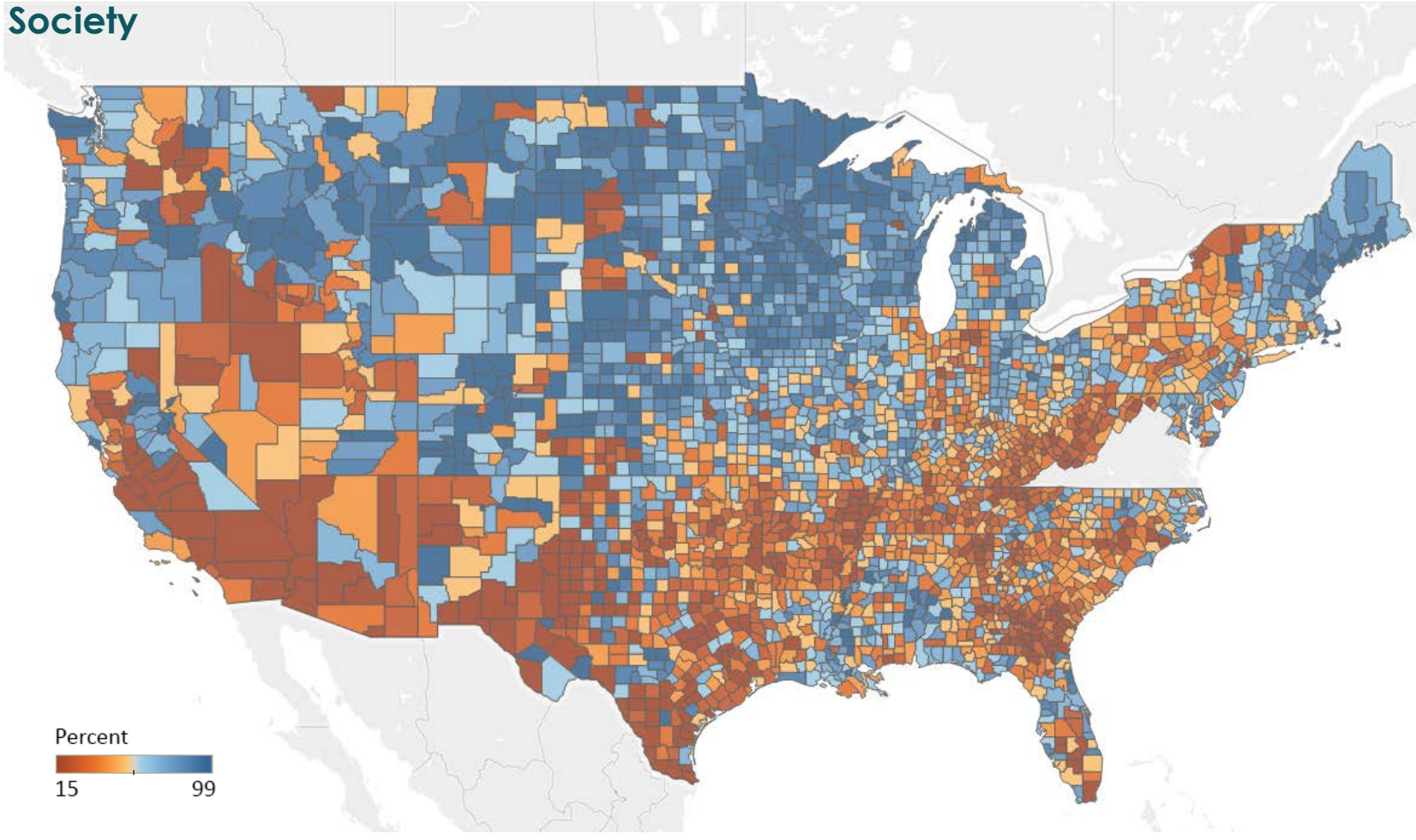


Figure 4.02 Presidental Election Voter Turnout Rate, 2000 – 2016

Further strengthening the case for rural counties' maintenance of positive social assets is their level of community participation, measured using voter turnout for presidential elections from 2000 to 2016. Rates of voter turnout appeared to be less influenced by urbanization for any county, and most influenced by education and per capita income. This essential relationship between society and economy indicates how a challenge in one wellness factor – widespread lack of stable employment, for example – can instigate challenges in other categories, such as access to education. This is not to suggest that one clearly causes the other, but instead that struggles in one wellness factor can affect another in some way.

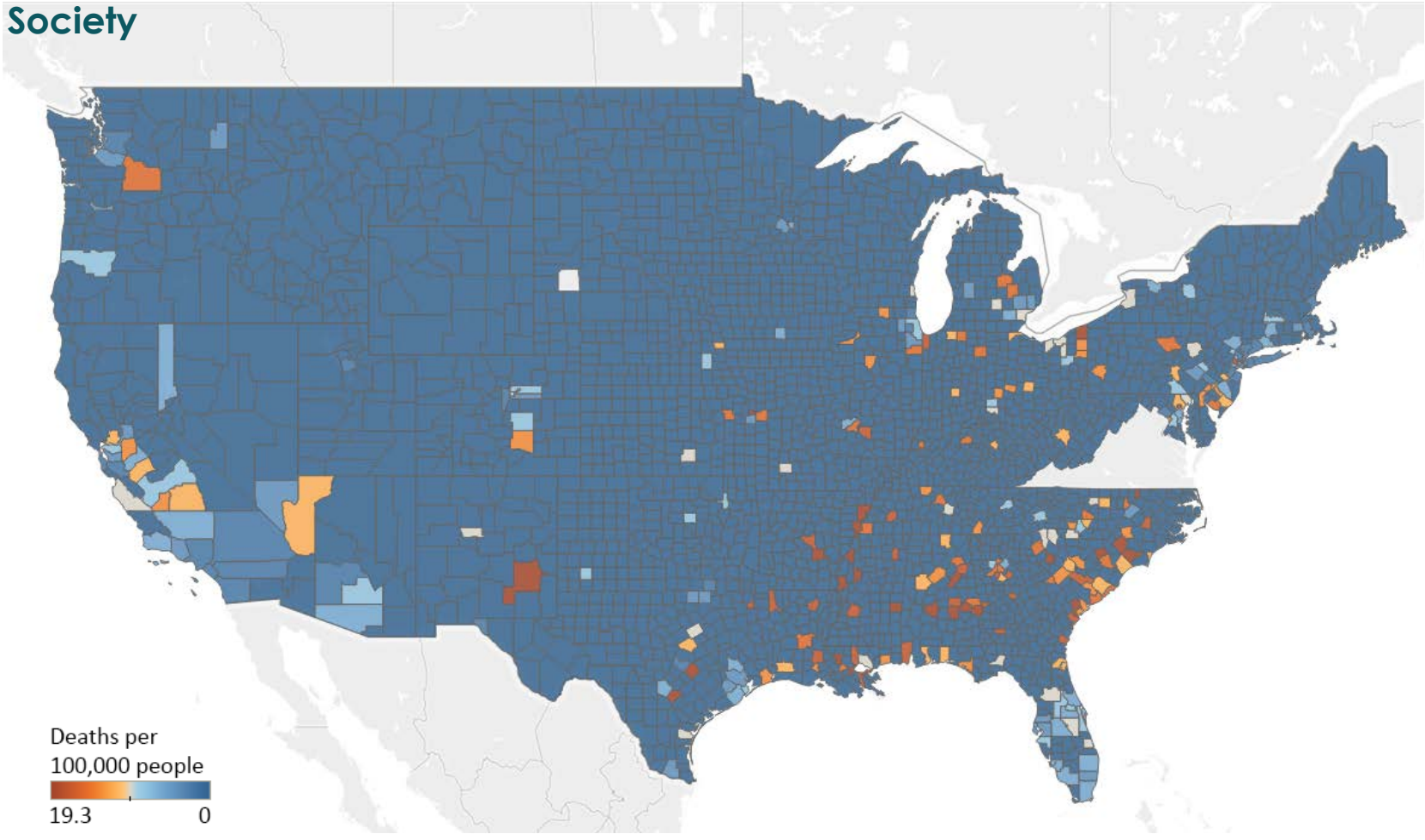


Figure 4.03 Homicide Rate, 2013-2017

A more dramatic measure of social wellbeing includes death rates, particularly for homicides and suicides. Among those counties with reported homicides, rural counties did have notably higher rates than their urban counterparts. However, only 0.15% and 2.5% of noncore and micropolitan counties respectively reported any homicides, compared to 97% of large central metro counties.

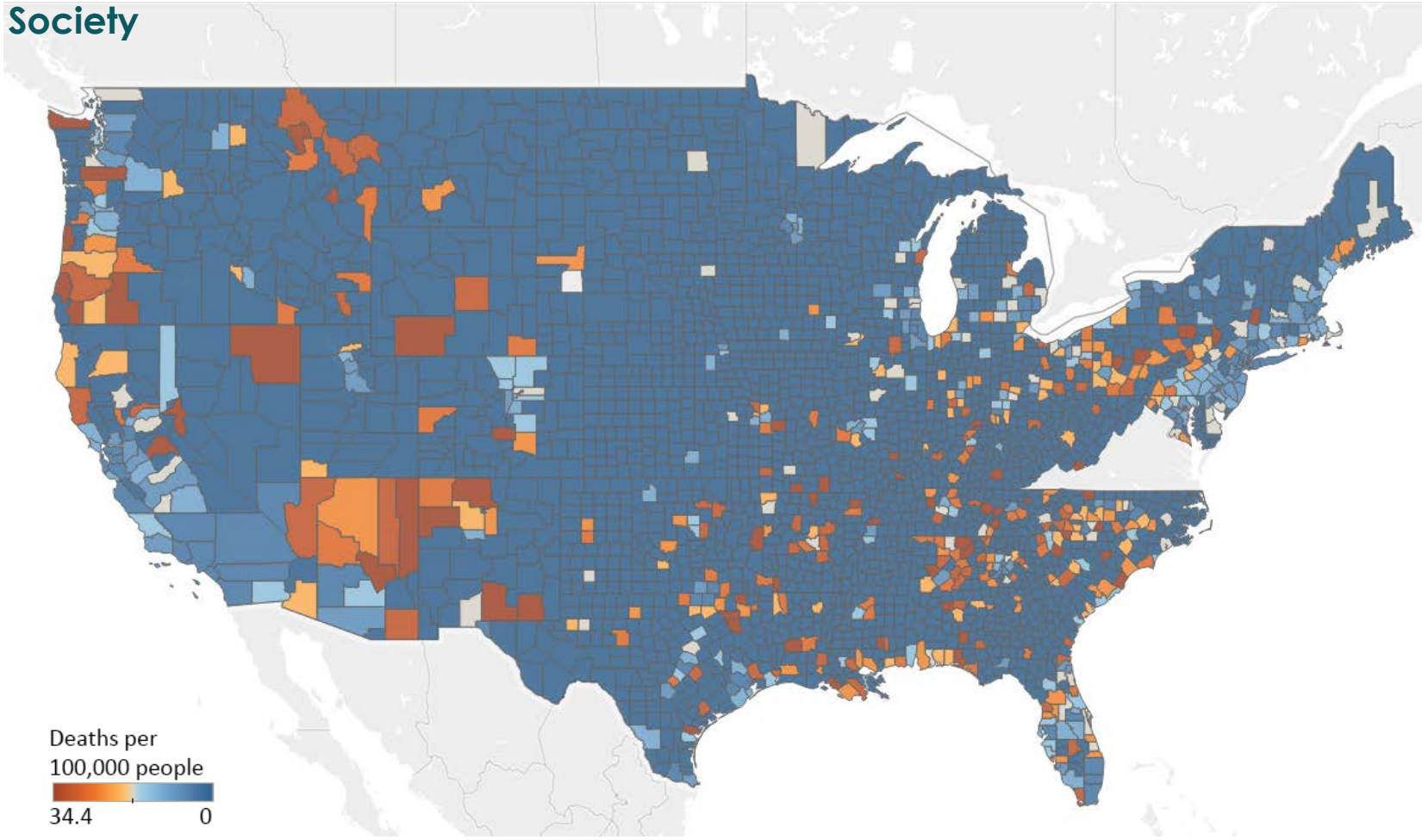


Figure 4.04 Suicide Rate, 2013-2017

A similar pattern is evident for suicides, with 0.5% of noncore counties, 13.3% of micropolitan counties, and 97.1% of large central metro areas reporting suicides. A comparison of all rural to all urban counties – rather than comparing reporting counties alone – shows that rural areas have significantly lower rates for both homicides and suicides, as indicated in Figures 4.3 and 4.4. These results illustrate an absence of extreme norm-breaking involving violence in rural areas, suggesting a higher level of social integration and enforcement of positive norms compared to urban centers. Results also appeared to be regionally-influenced, with clusters or swaths or clusters of similar results occurring in groups, which can again be seen in Figures 4.3 and 4.4.

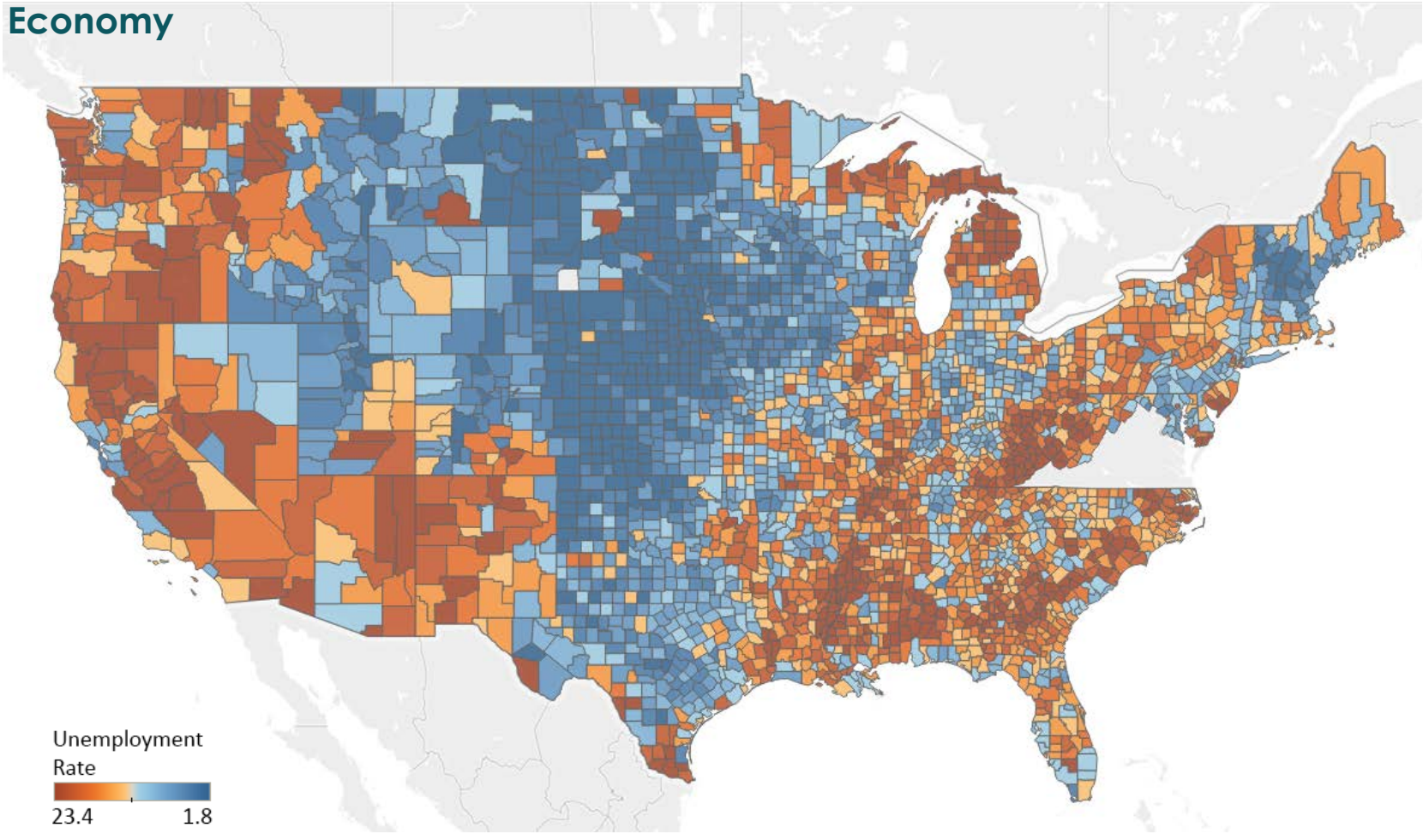


Figure 4.05 Unemployment Rate, 2013-2017

Economic results also appeared to be influenced not only by a county's level of urbanization and isolation, but by regional factors as well. Data for rural areas show generally lower average per capita income, and significantly lower per capita GDP than in urban areas. This may be partly because urban areas include a small number of astronomically high reported incomes and contributions to the GDP in addition to having a generally higher level, making it difficult for even a moderately-performing rural area to appear competitive in comparison.

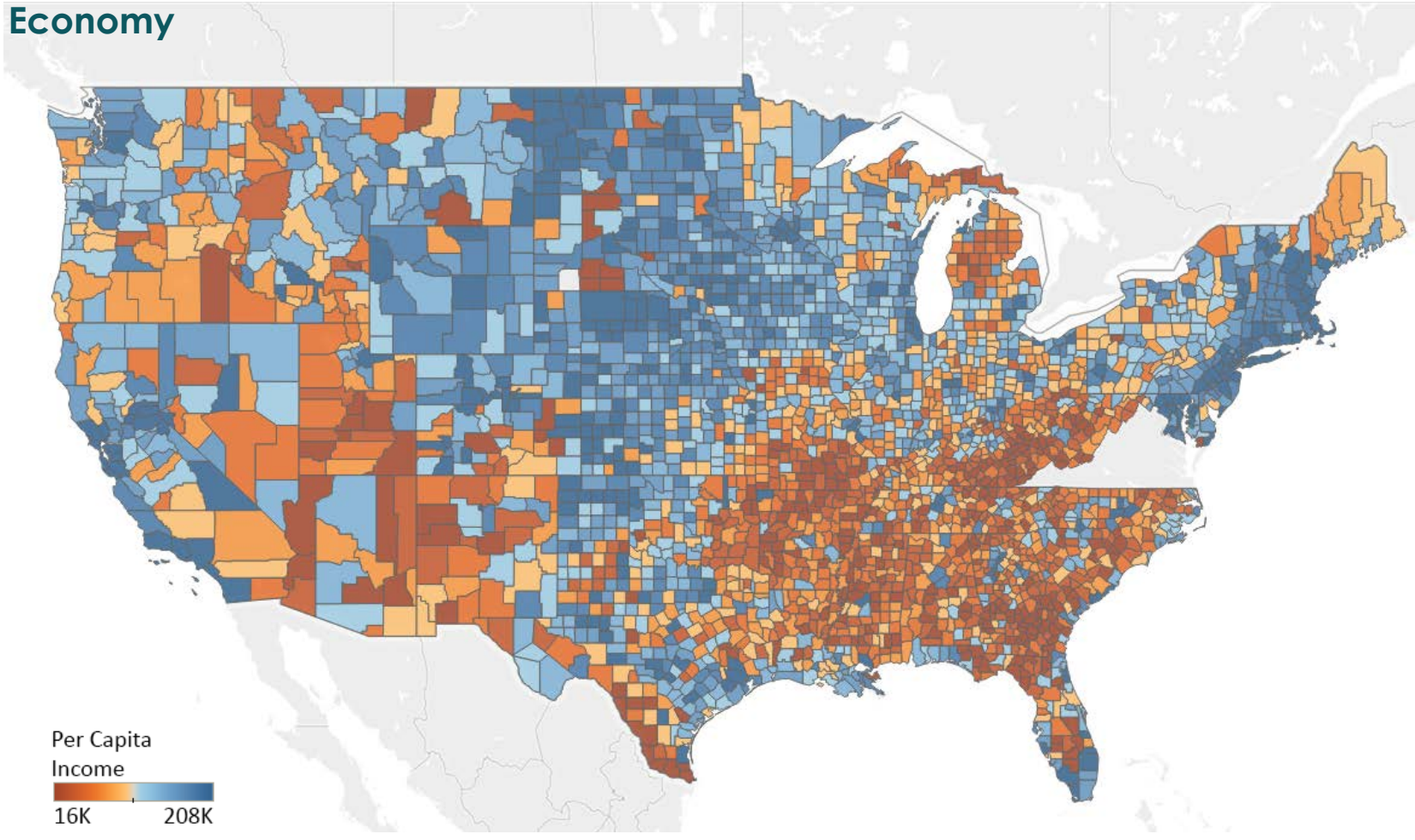


Figure 4.06 Per Capita Income, 2013-2017

Some rural counties fared better than others, typically those in the agricultural core of the country extending from North Dakota and Montana down to Oklahoma and northern Texas, see Figure 4.06. Unemployment in this region is remarkably low, and per capita income and GDP are also notably higher than in other rural areas in the west and southeast. Agriculture may presumably represent a reliable source of income for rural residents, and this income appears to have positive effects on adjacent counties as well.

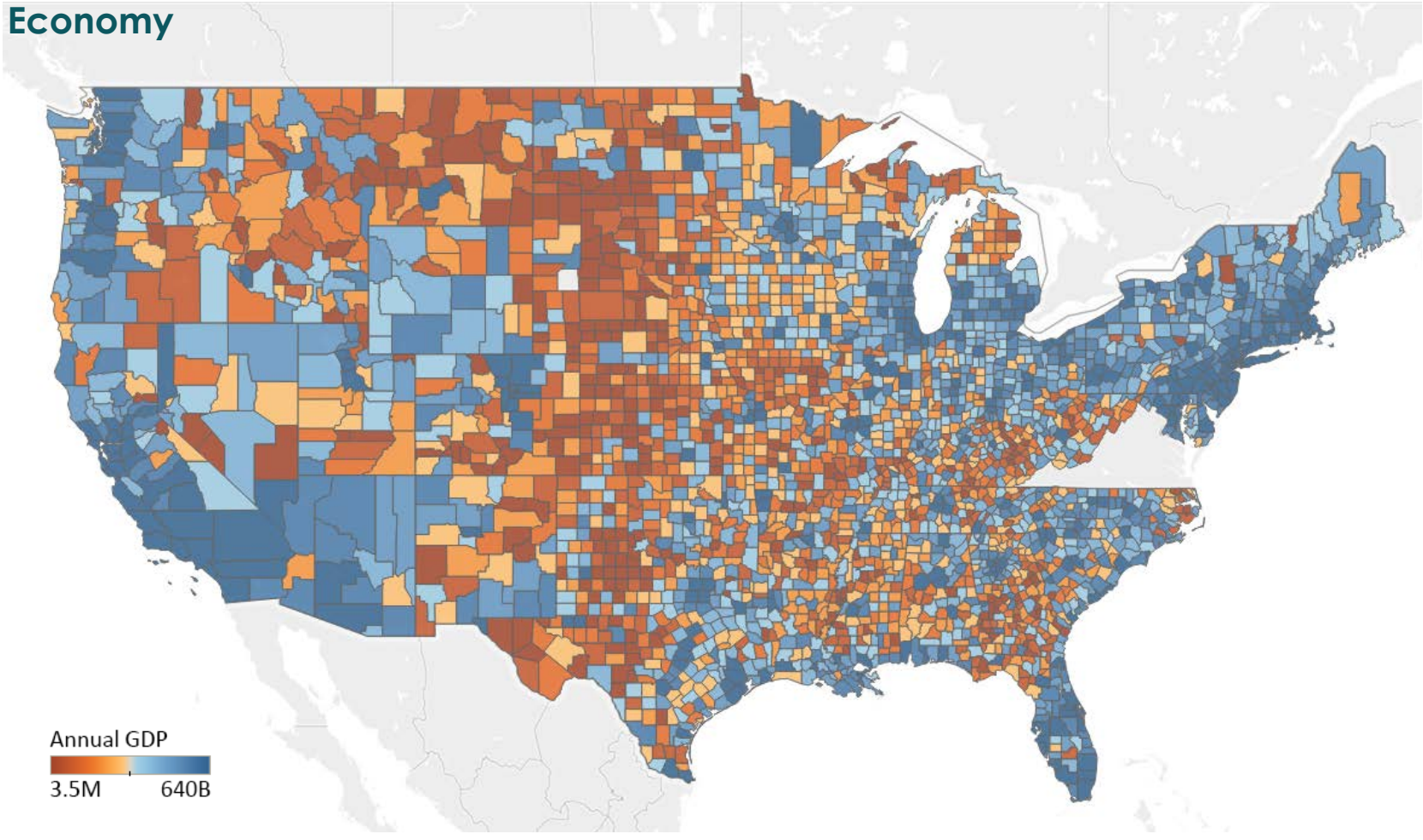


Figure 4.07 Per Capita GDP, 2012-2015

Per capita GDP is strongly correlated with urbanization, with the country's rural agricultural core showing some of the lowest GDP levels. It's worth noting that the United States has areas of extreme prosperity, such as urban financial or cultural centers, as well as areas of extreme poverty. These two extremes, particularly the astronomically high GDP of cities like New York and Los Angeles, can skew the appearance of the data. Fortunately, the decile ranking system helps to neutralize this effect by grouping counties into ten brackets.

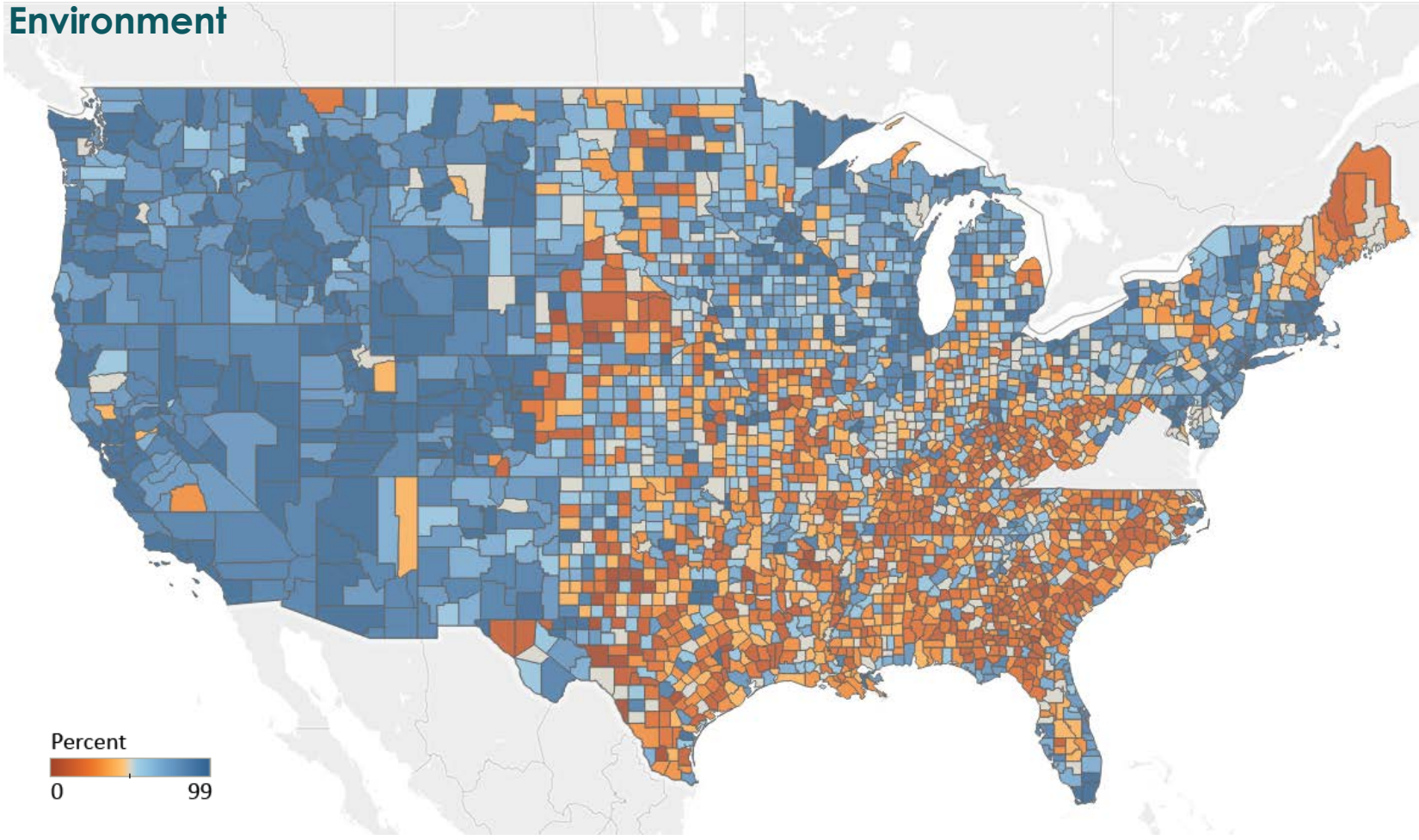


Figure 4.08 Percent of Population Living within a Half Mile of a Park, 2010-2015

Environmental wellbeing seemed to be correlated less with urbanization and more with population density. The less dense western half of the country performs generally better than the eastern half in both measures of environmental health. A higher proportion of the population in western America has access to parks within a half mile from their home, for example. The frequent lack of per capita open space in eastern regions is also possibly due to development patterns that did not prioritize park lands, though dense urban counties tend to fare better in this measure.

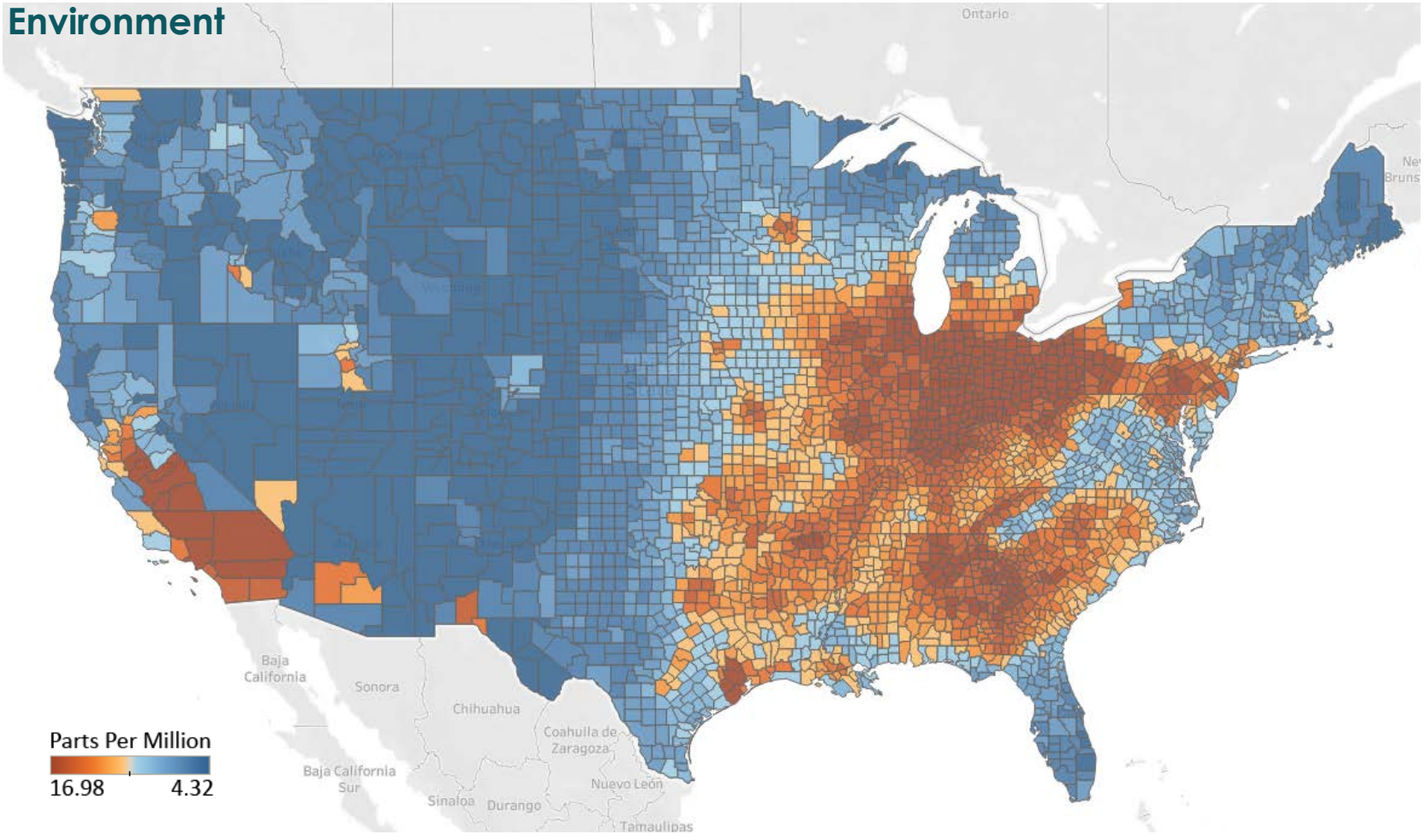


Figure 4.09 Air Pollution Particulates (PPM), 2010-2014

Pollution also tends to linger more over the denser eastern region of the country, which contains a majority of the nation's major cities. This trend is critical to note because rural regions in the east will suffer the consequences of higher levels of pollution and land contamination that result from a denser population, but do not have the abundant financial or medical resources that metropolitan areas do to mitigate these issues. The western half of the country benefits not only from a less dense population causing pollution, but also a higher proportion of state and federal lands that can absorb pollution.

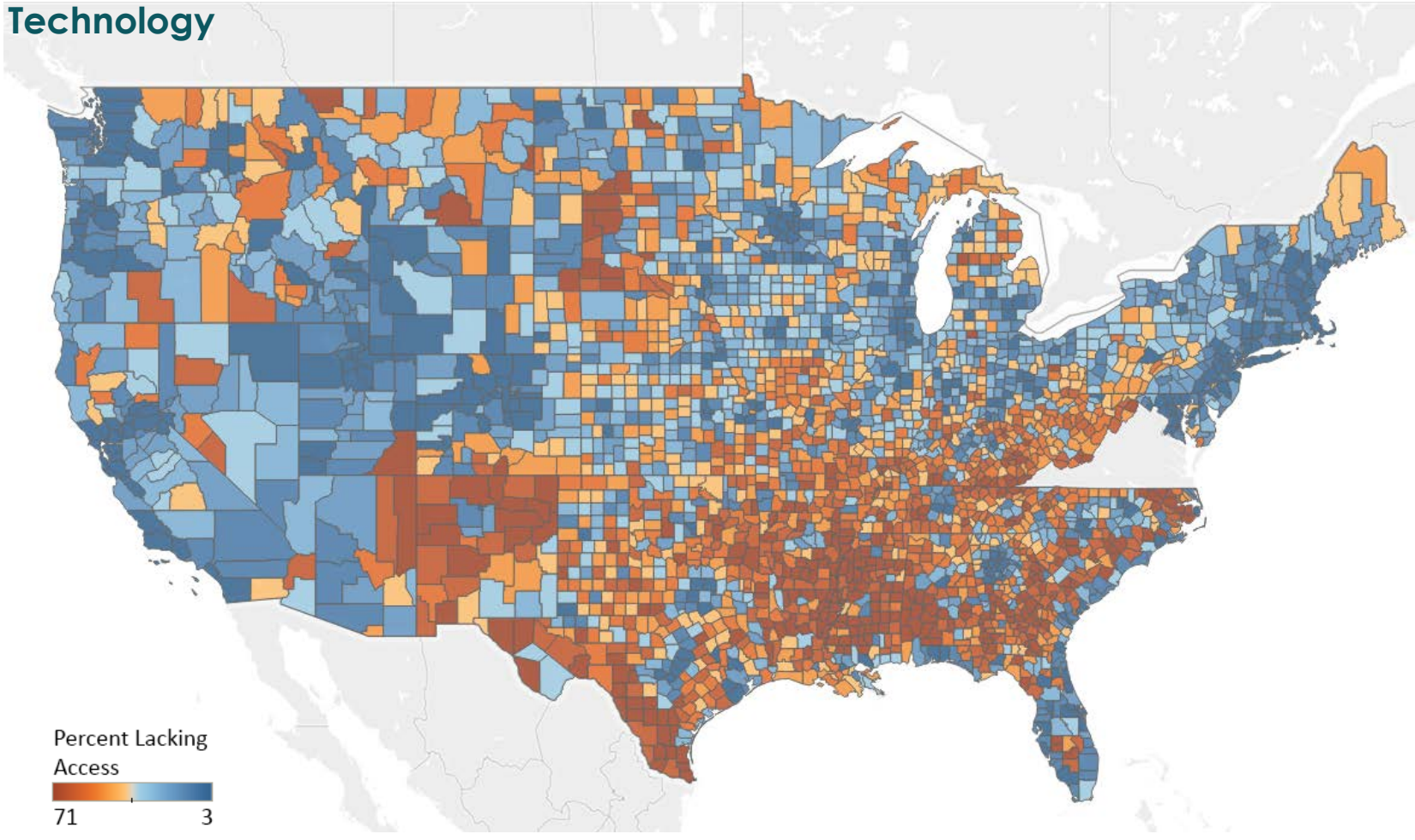
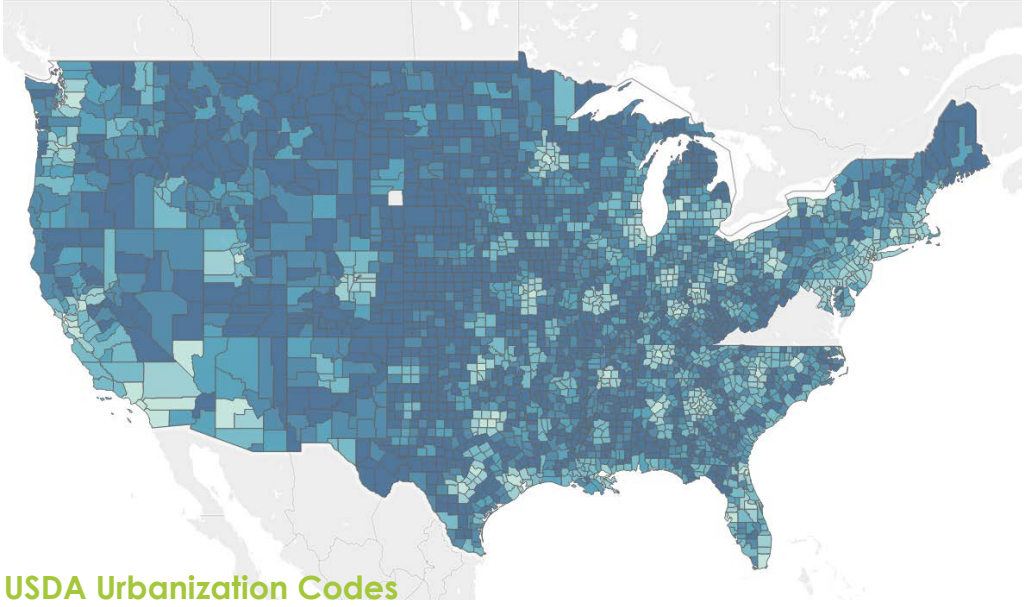


Figure 4.10 Access to Internet

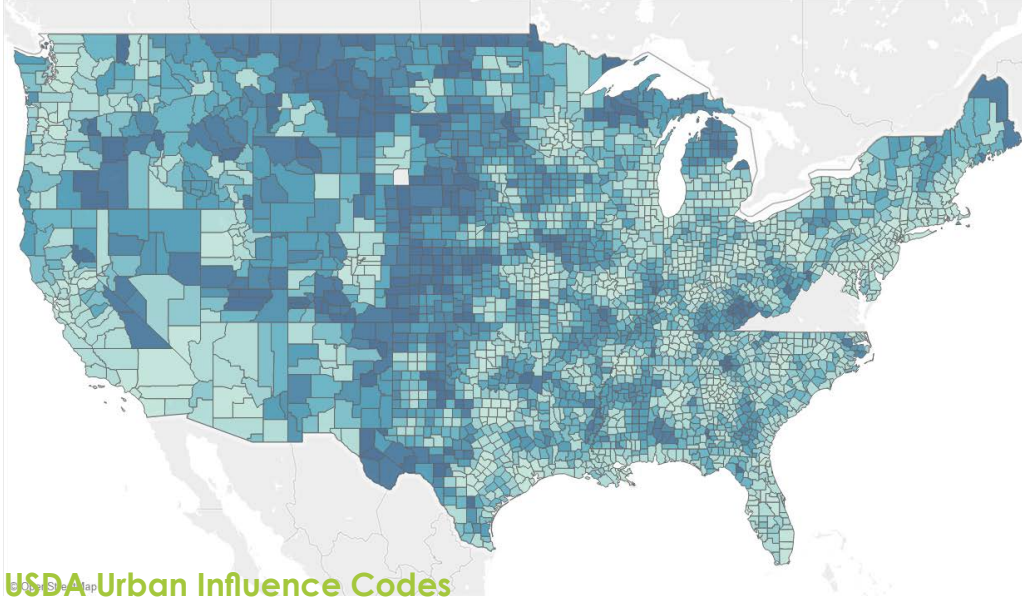
Within each wellness factor – society, environment, economy, and technology – a common theme began to appear. While urban counties generally performed better economically and more poorly socially than rural areas, rural counties were often influenced by regional effects. Central South Dakota, western Montana, the rural southeast, the Texas-Mexico border, the central Florida panhandle, and a large swath of southern Utah, northern Arizona, and northern New Mexico all contained clusters of rural counties that repeatedly scored poorly in most wellness measures. The strongest recurrent theme was a very low score in at least two of the following measures: illiteracy, per capita income, and voter turnout. This trend crystallizes when inspecting Figure 4.10, which displays household access to the internet. Regions that scored poorly in two or more of the aforementioned wellness measures all scored lowest in the nation in access to the internet.

USDA Urbanization Maps

The data together reinforce the importance of considering rural blight as a complex and multifaceted problem. To address one part of the problem alone – such as providing job opportunities and raising per capita income – may not yield successful long-term results. This data analysis clarifies that a powerful relationship exists between income, social engagement, and education. Any solution should therefore seek to first tackle one or two of these challenges first. Creating solutions that encompass the entirety of the problem, starting with a leverage point then gaining momentum as smaller challenges are successively addressed, is much more likely to both halt and reverse a cycle of decline and allow communities to realize their vision for the future.



USDA Urbanization Codes



USDA Urban Influence Codes

Chapter 05

Case Studies: Rupert Square

Project Background

In April 1906, a small settlement deep in the agricultural heart of Southern Idaho was made official when the City of Rupert was founded (City of Rupert website, n.d.). Deriving much of its population and income from agriculture, the development of the town was characterized from the beginning by an abundance of land and a scarcity of water. This was most clearly exemplified by the town's central well, around which the town square sprung up. Here, people would gather and share news while their animals drank, and the space became the core of Rupert's downtown. Buildings and businesses ringed the square, becoming more permanent as Rupert proved it was there to stay. But over the century following the town's establishment, overlapping waves of good intentions, unarticulated guidelines, and infrastructure degradation led to a cluttered Rupert Square that no longer served the community.

109 years after the town's establishment, a planning and design effort was undertaken to renovate the square. The Land Group, Inc., a regionally-located landscape architecture firm, was contracted as the primary consultant for this renovation. In this role, the firm helped to generate a comprehensive public involvement strategy and link the active project team with the ideas of the general public, using professional expertise. The firm's involvement from start to finish ensured they understood and valued the community's input, and that local ideas were reflected in the final design. The project team was organized to maximize public involvement, therefore the team's makeup emphasized local participation. The Rupert Square Task Force included the city manager, members of the city council, representatives of local financial institutions and businesses, and staff from the Renaissance Arts Center (Matthew Adams, personal communication, April 2020).

Public Involvement

The public involvement strategy used a core-to-fringe process to reach individuals usually distant from planning and city government. The Land Group's design team worked closely with the local representatives of the Rupert Square Task Force to reach as many residents as possible. These "ambassadors" held smaller meetings in a range of sizes and locations to share the plan's goals and solicit public opinion (Rupert Square Master Plan, 2015). Smaller meetings were more social than formal, encouraging a range of honest input. This unique and adaptive process allowed community members more autonomy in the engagement process, and solicited input through low-risk social environments that resulted in high-reward outcomes. According to the Rupert Square Master Plan 2015, "this technique gave the plan exceptional, highly thoughtful input and increased medium-touch involvement tenfold with over 100 citizens having tangible influence on the process."

To further extend the reach of the public process, "high-tech" strategies that used social media outreach and digital polls were used. Surveys and digital outreach materials were provided in both Spanish and English to maximize the diversity of the solicited opinions. Rounding out the public involvement effort, "high-touch" approaches such as task force meetings were used to gather information in a more traditional manner. These medium-touch, high-touch, and high-tech efforts had a twofold benefit. First, the project leadership were able to generate a holistic, fact-based understanding of the problem at hand and of what the community wanted to see in the program. Second, the community was able to see their influence on the project, garnering enduring local support for the design.

The information gathered in the public involvement process yielded a few central priorities among residents. Primary concerns were to reconnect the square with the surrounding businesses downtown, improve the aging infrastructure, and make the space safer and more inviting for pedestrians. These goals were clarified through observation and an iterative design process, where design ideas were pitched, adapted, scrapped, or refined in collaboration with the Rupert Square Task Force. This process resulted in a clearly-defined vision, project brand, and set of goals:

Vision Statement:

Reinforce Rupert Square's identity as the heart of the community by leveraging its historic value and present potential to create a happy, active and inviting environment for everyone.

Guiding Principles:

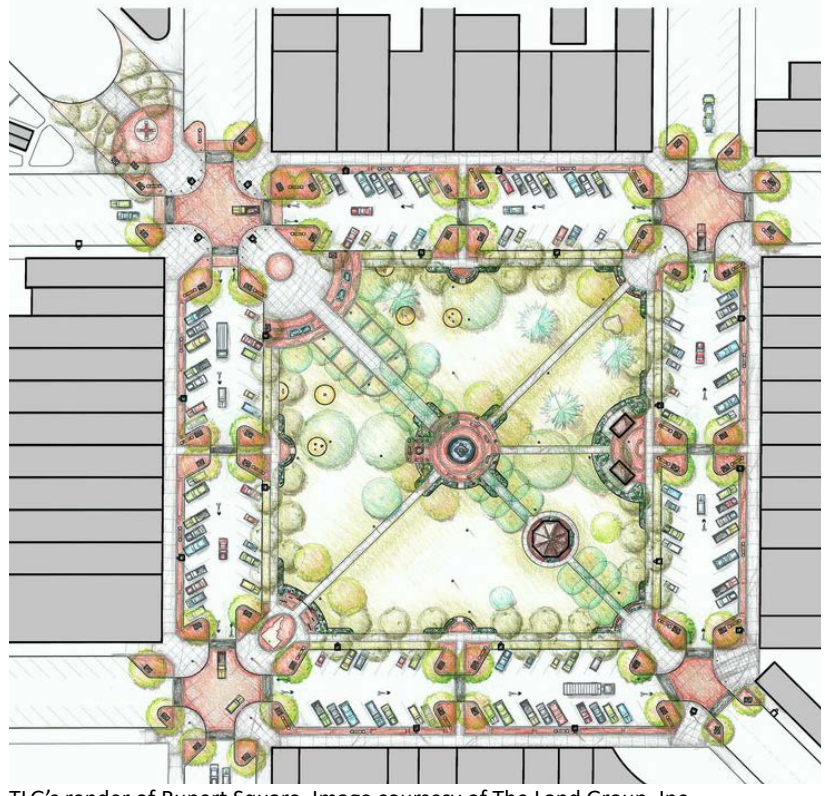
- Respect Rupert Square's historical significance and community values
- Encourage diverse and flexible uses
- Engage all people
- Enhance the quality and beauty of the space to create a welcoming environment
- Make it Rupert's premier destination
- Make it safe and accessible
- Ensure business compatibility and fiscal responsibility

Design

The project's guiding principles drove the design to strike a careful balance between the community's history and its present and future needs. Much of the site's cultural value is based on its historic role as the central gathering the place for the town. Rupert Square has held this tradition through the years with annual celebrations for Christmas and the Fourth of July, as well as hosting smaller seasonal events. The square has a sacred nature to the community, making it a place of high honor to memorialize residents or important events in the town's history. Over a century, the square became a host to many such memorials. While these are important to remember the past, they had begun to look cluttered, rather than reverent.

Over time, other additions to the square included a rose garden, a fountain, a gazebo, and even a decorative windmill. In a limited space without a consistent plan or design guidelines, these alterations consumed more and more of the park, leaving less space for public use – the square's original intent. While the additions increased the value of the space for individual purposes, they began to detract from the square's cohesion as a whole. A design for the renovated square needed to prioritize flexible use by the general public, but also had to pay tribute to the town's memorials and additions.

The master plan responded by dividing the space into a series of experiences, each demarcated with vertical elements, changes in the ground plane and paving, or the use of a unique attraction. With the goal of providing flexible open space that melded comfortably with its downtown context, the spaces were typically higher-activity close to the edges, and most quiet and contemplative at the core of the



TLG's render of Rupert Square. Image coursesy of The Land Group, Inc.

Downtown streetscape improvements. Image courtesy of The Land Group, Inc.

park. These successive active and passive zones provide a high degree of flexibility to meet the community's needs for a range of events over the year. Additional space was also carved out for more formal entries into the square. These areas elicit the "sense of arrival" that visually marks a location as a place of care and importance, both for visitors on foot and those in vehicles.

Of these new entries, particular attention was paid to the Rupert Square Memorial Gateway. Seen as not only the gateway to the park, but also to the community, this location became the planned epicenter for activity, history, and celebration. The plan also designated clear and logical locations for the park's many memorials, where they could be respected and celebrated for years to come. In the continued balancing act between the accumulated history of the site and the provision of ample space for new activity, as many trees as possible were retained and few memorials were moved off-site.

In keeping with the square's original use, a fountain was placed at the center of the park. Shaded by trees and surrounded by a courtyard with seating, the space encourages gatherings at the historic core of Rupert. Almost a memorial in itself, this area pays tribute to Rupert's past while updating the space for the needs of the present and future, exactly as defined in the project's guiding principles.

Utilities and Infrastructure

Some of the most extensive renovations were not visible aspects of the design, but occurred underground. Deteriorating plumbing and electrical connections had to be repaired or replaced to allow for future park amenities, including the fountain to mark the well's

original location. Sidewalks that failed to meet ADA standards were redesigned and replaced. These were adjusted to include ample space for benches, bike racks, street trees, and other amenities, as well as a business-adjacent furnishing zone. Curb extensions were used to improve visibility between pedestrians and vehicles, making the area safer for all users. Designers also used variety of paving materials to add visual interest and give a sense of "uniqueness" to the downtown area.

In keeping with the community-identified goal to "engage everyone," bike lanes were added to street edges, expanding the accessibility of Rupert's downtown to a new transportation option. The streets surrounding the park were maintained as a series of one-way traffic corridors, as they had been before the renovation. These roadways were pocked with potholes and cracks, and in need of reconstruction. Demolishing the existing roads also allowed utilities in the downtown area to be updated at the same time. To maintain the parking capacity of the downtown while affording space for new amenities, the parking design that flanked the streets was altered to a diagonal configuration. The result of these infrastructure improvements was a more functional downtown that is indeed safe and welcoming for all users.

The project's design clearly reflected the desires of the community, giving a sense of ownership and pride. This support resonated throughout the town, catalyzing volunteer efforts to clean up other parks and streets, renovate downtown building facades, and even resulted in a bond passed in 2017 to cover project costs. The $3.96 million bond paid for the majority of Rupert Square's renovations. However, the comprehensive cost of the improvements proposed in the master plan was originally estimated between $4.29 and $5.71 million, significantly higher than the community expected (RSMP 2015)(That one good article, 2018). Fortunately, another $100,000 was raised through donations, $500,000 through a Community Development Block Grant, and $900,000 for a grant to pay for street repairs included in the master plan.

Phasing

To make the price tag more manageable for the rural community as funds became available over time, The Land Group divided the plan into five phases. Phase 1 was meant to show immediate response to some of the community's strongest desires for the space. Consisting of the historic central plaza, the gazebo renovation, restrooms, and the memorial gateway, this first phase would garner support for the remainder of the project and would be celebrated with an opening ceremony at its completion. Comprising both the core and gateways to Rupert Square, Phase 1 was also an attractive standalone design even before the remainder of the plan was executed.

The remaining four phases were each dedicated as "Future Phase," allowing flexibility for the town to construct any of the phases next, based on current needs and funding availability. The streetscape phase was the most expensive of all phases, involving the reconstruction of all four streets surrounding the square. Extensive utility work, changes to parking configuration, and sidewalk expansion were included in this essential utilitarian phase. The intersection phase included curb extensions at three of the park's corners, and extended into two park entry areas. Civic amenities comprised another future

Renovated entry to Rupert Square. Image courtesy of The Land Group, Inc.


Public event in Rupert Square's open lawn. Image courtesy of The Land Group, Inc.

phase, including the historic Wilson Theater Plaza, a civic plaza at one of the square's entries, and a flexible corridor uniting these two spaces. Finally, a general improvements phase to construct smaller nodes and pathways would conclude the project's renovation.

Conclusion

Rupert Square's success is attributable to a few critical factors. First, the designers entered the project wanting to listen to the public's needs and create a design that served those needs successfully. To that end, the public involvement process began early and was designed to maximize input. The design itself remained true to information gained in that process, as well as to the history and future of Rupert, which generated more support for the project among residents. The early steps to build public interest and excitement for the project were then carried through the construction phase, as the city worked to provide regular updates to the public when important goals were accomplished, and hosted larger celebrations as each phase was constructed. This enthusiasm will be important in the park's future, ensuring that it will be cherished and maintained for many years to come.

Case Studies: Community Heart and Soul

Process Background

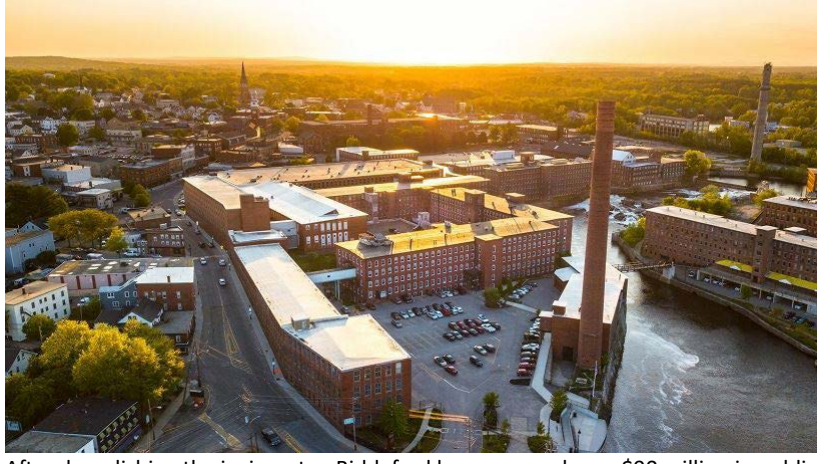
Community Heart and Soul's name effectively sums up the process's purpose: to bring people together, define what unites them, and identify ways to better the community and its connections. The process was developed by the Orton Family Foundation beginning in 1995, and has since been applied in at least 80 towns across the country (Community Heart and Soul Towns, 2020; Community Heart and Soul Field Guide, 2014). Many of these works remain successful, well-maintained projects and are featured prominently on their respective cities' websites. An analysis of the process reveals that Community Heart and Soul's success may lie in its focus on social relationships, rather than on the physical aspects of a project alone.

Public Involvement

The process uses four steps to build these relationships. The first step, Lay the Groundwork, includes a clear directive to "Involve Everyone" (Community Heart and Soul, 2020). Contrary to the directive's name, this begins by winnowing down to the group of people who may be affected by a project. It is within this group that the process emphasizes the importance of not just giving all people a chance to be heard, but actively seeking out their input. Cases of past projects hosting pop-up events, soliciting input at weekend markets, or even having local children conduct man-on-the-street style interviews of the town's residents show the many creative means that people have applied to reach out to their communities.

The process also relies strongly on the Community Network Analysis. This step is described as the single most crucial effort in the project, where project leadership use demographic data to understand and identify the different social groups in their community. After this, the social linkages between groups are identified through interviews or personal experience.

Biddeford, Maine's trash incinerator, pre-demolition.
Image courtesy of Portland Press Herald



After demolishing the incinerator, Biddeford has approved over $90 million in public improvements projects (Community Heart and Sou, 2020). Image courtesy of City of Biddeford website.

These linkages, the people who connect multiple social groups together, as well as leaders of social groups are key members in the existing social network. The links, leaders, and general understanding of the number and type of social groups in a town help the project's leadership to determine who should be involved, and how. This step alone has the capacity to address – at least in part – the challenge of unequal representation in public processes. By identifying all social groups, it becomes more obvious when "the same ten people" who attend public meetings are not representative of the community at large. The Network Analysis also makes it easier to identify those who have been either excluded or more difficult to reach in the past, and elucidates possible means to involve them in the current effort.

This networking component also places the public in a more active role for the project. However, it is still common for a professional planner, architect, landscape architect, or urban designer to be involved to provide construction documents for the project. City governments are also likely to hold an important role in project ideation, financing, and implementation. However, citizens are needed both to provide critical input for these entities to make decisions, and to evaluate those decisions. The primary difference between Community Heart and Soul and other community revitalization processes is the emphasis on the public's involvement in the process and with each other. Rebuilding or reinforcing widespread, positive social relationships then putting those bonds to work towards a goal can push people from bystander to participant, and from participant to leader.

Goals

The goals of most Community Heart and Soul projects are more or less set in the second and third steps of the process: Explore Your Community and Make Decisions. Exploring the community entails more than a site visit. It involves gathering quantitative data about the site's history, local demographics, relevant environmental factors, significant buildings or locations, and more, depending on the specific project. The process relies strongly on people's willingness and ability to seek out reliable quantitative data, and supplies links to useful resources that can help people to better understand their town in a factual sense.

The exploration also involves qualitative data, where project leadership is encouraged to collect and share stories about the place. The stories are given high priority in data collection and are valued alongside demographic data as an important means to understand the community. These details and memories are what help to give the process life, allowing it to build on people's unique local culture and sense of place. This assessment is what is so often missing in a standard landscape architectural inventory and analysis: a three-dimensional sense of a site, not merely in terms of topography or existing vegetation, but in the way it is used, experienced, cherished, and remembered by people. Such knowledge of a site from a human perspective, or the knowledge of how a society currently functions around that site, can make unmet needs and existing assets clear. Appropriate goals can be formed based on those needs.

Goals are further refined in the third step, Make Decisions, as the project leadership work to merge the needs they have identified with the constraints and opportunities of the project to arrive at actionable solutions. The exact design, scale, extents, of the work completed are determined as these solutions are distilled into an action plan. It is important to clarify that Community Heart and Soul's process could result in multiple physical project sites, or none at all, depending one the people's needs. One significant benefit of the process is its ability to maintain key factors for a successful project while being flexible enough to adapt to many different communities' needs.

Lessons Learned

However, the process does have its drawbacks. First, its flexibility becomes almost a hindrance when communities need more specific guidance. While the process is supplemented with external data, publications, and resources, these may be difficult for people to access depending on their financial and technological resources. It is understandable that the process cannot answer every potential question that its participants may have, but the information gap does emphasize the importance of working with experienced professionals to keep a project on track. Just as the process encourages people to build social relationships, it also necessitates relationships between residents, professionals, and local officials.

The process's focus on these social relationships is important to creating a successful project, but at times the emphasis seems so strong that it pushes other values to the side, even those values that go hand-in-hand with reconnecting a community. When Aldo Leopold proposed the land ethic more than seventy years ago, he described an evolution of ethics. At first, rights were afforded only to a privileged few, then they were slowly won by larger and larger

groups of people. Today, even if the fight for rights is not over, there is at least an expectation that all people are "created equal." Community Heart and Soul embraces the idea of equality and fairness, striving to fix relationships rather than individual people or groups. In avoiding that dangerous pitfall, it remains applicable in a world whose inhabitants are still learning that their other people's inherent differences do not imply a hierarchy of value.

But Community Heart and Soul falls short in the last stage of Leopold's evolution: extending rights to the land. While the process does an excellent job of reconnecting people and understanding a town or particular site through the lens of human values, it falls just short of articulating the intrinsic value of the land. In a process focused on capacity-building and mending relationships, this shortcoming seems like a missed opportunity, and a continued inability of people to see the land as a thing of equal value to ourselves. This is not to say that no positive relationship with the land is built through the Heart and Soul process, simply that the value of the landscape could be more clearly articulated so that the relationship people build is one of mutual respect with other living things.

Key Factors for Success

Despite these minor drawbacks, Community Heart and Soul's results remain overwhelmingly successful. By focusing on humanity first, rather than economics, infrastructure, or private development, the process rearranges the usual order of operations for a project (design, involve, construct) to be more socially sustainable (involve, design, construct). This critical change results in projects that are more reflective of the people they serve. These works generally meet towns' self-identified needs, and because people are invested in the process and outcome, the projects are more likely to be cherished, maintained, and adapted to future contexts more readily.

The root of Community Heart and Soul's success lies in its three central tenets: Involve Everyone, Focus on What Matters Most, and Play the Long Game. The prioritization of relationships and subsequent capacity-building that occurs in this process builds a community capable of completing the project at hand dealing with challenges down the road. Gathering stories and valuing the public's input helps to identify what matters most and how it might be improved. Finally, in playing the long game, the process encourages people to consider the long-term needs both of their community and the project itself. Projects are more likely to be to be adaptable when people have planned for its future. Anchoring each of these tenets is the understanding of people as agents of change, where positive social bonds are a catalyst for improvement, while grudges or negative bonds can mire people in inaction. By encouraging people to reach beyond their social groups, form new bonds, mend fences, heal old grievances, Community Heart and Soul enables communities to unite to achieve a common goal.

Chapter 06 | Part II

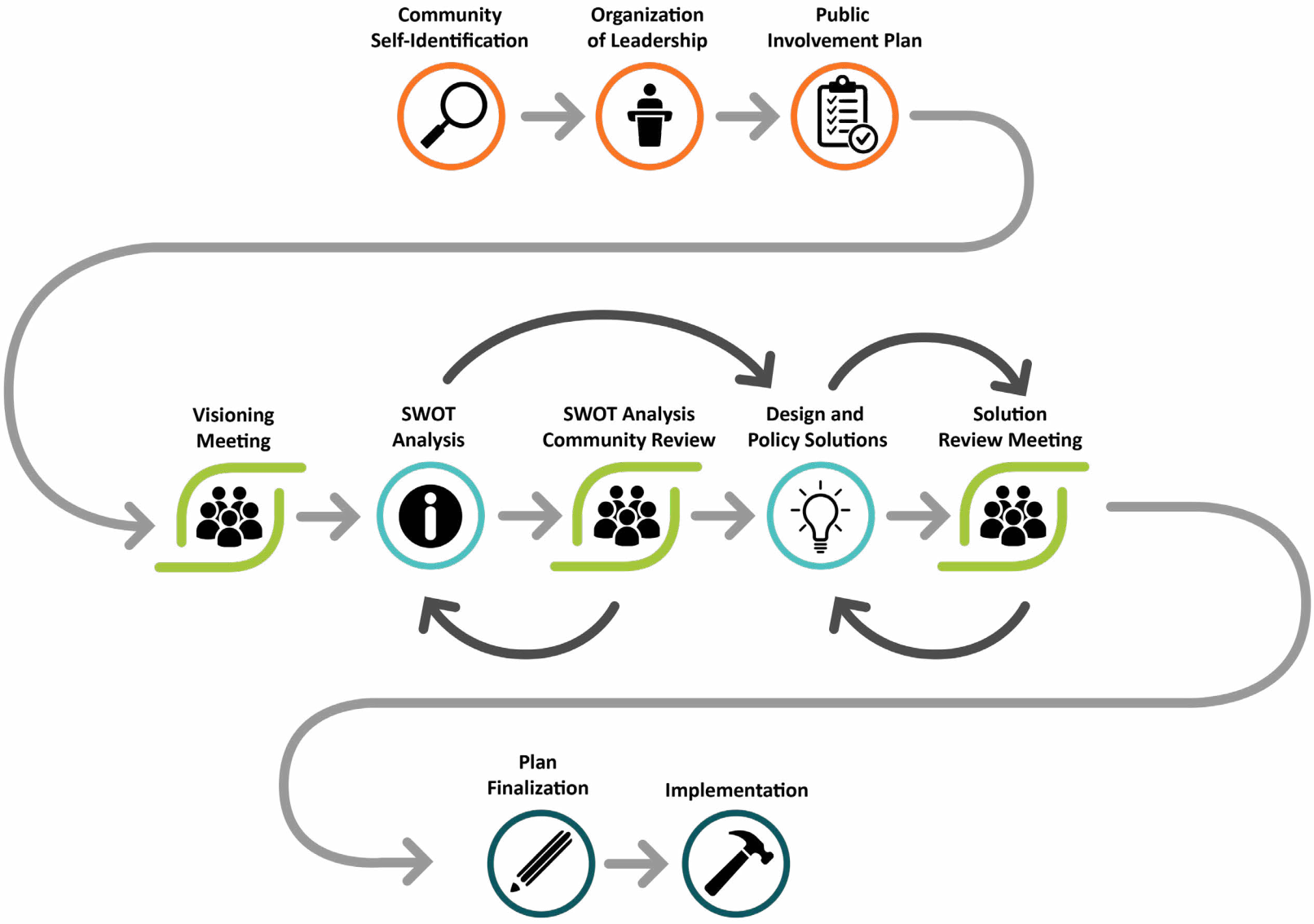
Framework Introduction

Welcome to the grassroots rural revitalization framework, a planning tool to guide small American communities toward sustainable revitalization using local knowledge and professional partnerships. Chapters 6 through 14 of this project will cover the framework's content and direction, with a summary in Chapter 15. This introduction to the framework is imperative to read thoroughly, as it explains how you'll use this tool throughout your planning project and what the limiations of this framework are. By the end of this section, you'll have a strong understanding of the concepts behind this process and the steps that comprise it.

First, this framework is intended for use only by self-identified rural American communities, since the foundational data for this method were sourced from the US alone. The grassroots nature of the framework also implies enthusiasm for locally-driven revitalization by the majority of local residents, which will be necessary for the successful use of this Framework. While this Framework is intended to empower local citizens, partnerships with a design consultant, a community involvement facilitator, state or regional government agencies, and a developer or financial representative will be necessary. The difference in this Framework compared to alternative design processes using these partnerships is consistent, tangible influence of local voices on design decisions.

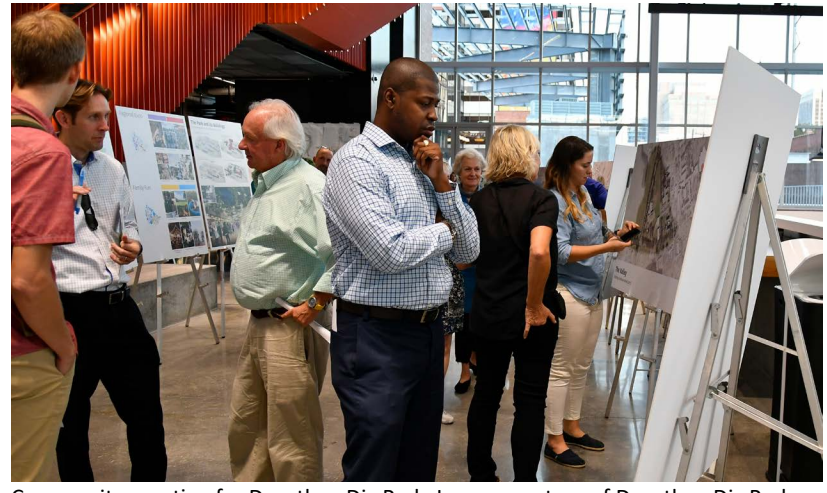
A few basic questions are posed and answered in this introduction to provide a basic overview of the contents and intent of the process. If you have questions about the definition of terms used, bolded terms are defined in a glossary located in the appendices section of this document. Additional resources are also included in each section, and can help to develop your team's understanding of the process, the problem, and the solution.

Figure 6.01 Framework Process Diagram



What are the steps of the Framework?

- Community Self-Selection
  Determine whether the Rural Revitalization Framework is right for your town using locally-available information
- Leadership Organization
  Assemble a Production Team with clear roles and responsibilities who will be excited and able to carry out this planning effort
- Public Outreach Plan
  Decide how you will engage the residents of your community throughout the planning process
- Planning the Visioning Meeting
  Develop a unifying vision for what your community will become when the plan has been completed and implemented
- Strength, Opportunity, Weakness, and Threat Analysis
  Gather information about your community to create a clear understanding of the problems you face and the tools you have to solve them
- Progress Meeting
  Present your finalized vision statement and SWOT analysis findings to your community to allow for final comment before moving into the preliminary design phase.
- Design Solutions
  Choose basic solutions from a menu of options provided in this document to address the problems identified in the previous step
- Solution Review Meeting
  Share agreed-upon design and policy solutions with the general public for approval
- Plan Finalization and Next Steps
  Hand off the vision statement, goals, information gathered in the SWOT analysis, and the selected design solutions to your project's design consultant who will tailor solutions to your community, generating an executable master plan



Community meeting for Dorothea Dix Park. Image courtesy of Dorothea Dix Park.

What is the Rural Revitalization Framework, and what does it do?

The Rural Revitalization Framework is a planning document designed to guide rural American communities through the early steps of the design process for community-scale revitalization. The result at the end of the process will be a set of community-approved design solutions selected to meet a town's unique needs.

How is the Rural Revitalization Framework Used?

It is recommended that interested users at least skim the entire document, reading this introduction, the Community Self-Selection, and the Leadership Organization chapters thoroughly before assembling a preliminary project team. While this process can theoretically be undertaken by anyone, it is strongly recommended that project leadership includes representatives of the local city government, particularly a city manager or planner. These officials can help in the early stages to ensure that this process is right for your community.

Once you have determined that this process will work for you, the project team will need to meet at least once before each new goal (chapter) is undertaken. Team members should read the framework chapter prior to the meeting, and be ready to discuss how the chapter will be applied and executed in your town.

What are the limitations of the Framework?

The Framework's major limit is that it will not provide a finalized plan at the end of this process. For that, you will need to collaborate with a professional consultant. This process is also quite general out of necessity. In order to be successful in any rural community, it must allow for a wide variety of circumstances. The last serious limitation of the Framework is that it may not encompass every problem you encounter or solution you require. As a static document, it cannot think on its feet and solve problems, which is why it falls to the Production Team ot be creative, to nitice when this document is insufficient, and to find new resources and solutions when they are needed. This Framework will guide you through the process, but it is local knowledge and professional expertise that will bring the final product to life.

If this process does not result in a completed plan, why do it?

The steps covered in this Framework are the basic steps in any planning process, but this one is designed for community empowerment. The intent is to encourage your community to choose your vision for the future, and achieve it with solutions you want. By focusing on local knowledge and representation, this Framework will guide you through the early steps of creating a plan that is supported by local residents.

Understanding the process, terminology, and tradeoffs used and encountered by professional planners will also help you to better negotiate with professionals on behalf of your community, and achieve the results you collectively wish to see.

What should I keep in mind throughout this process?

Trust and Transparency

Creating and carrying out a new vision for a community is a difficult task, and will require trust between residents and leadership to accomplish the goal. Know the local, state, and federal rules and regulations that will guide your actions and adhere to them. Do your best to remain accountable to the public with active communication every step of the way, and remember that this process is about grassroots change and public empowerment.

Fairness

To develop a project so closely with the public, a broad cross-section of residents must be involved. Engaging these residents, hearing their hopes and concerns for their town, and using that information to define new solutions is a process that must be conducted without bias. Project leadership must therefore do their best to recognize bias against groups, individuals, and ideas, both within themselves and within the community as a whole in order to pursue the full range of possible solutions.

Ambitious and Achievable

Rural communities have always been places for creative innovation, often out of necessity. This innovative spirit should drive the development of ambitious goals to meet identified needs. However, a plan must also be achievable to keep the community excited as progress is made.

Sustainability

Most rural communities already practice many of the core tenets of sustainability: items are often repaired or repurposed instead of replaced, energy and product use remains comparitively low, and creative problem-solving is commonplace. This framework employs a holistic view of sustainability, focusing on the stewardship of positive social relationships, existing infrastructure, knowledge and traditions, environmental and financial assets, and more. In striving for sustainable revitalization and expanding the scope of susstainability to encompass social, environmental, economic, and technological assets, this Framework aims to maximize future opportunities for rural towns' success.

Flexibility

This framework is structured around the idea of guided flexiblity, and is best applied with that concept in mind. Unforeseeable and unique circumstances will likely arise, and this Framework may not provide every tool needed to deal with those challenges. Therefore, the ability to innovate, be flexible, but remain true to the intent of this process is imperative.

Each section of this Framework will begin with a checklist of what should be already completed, and what will be pursued in that chapter. It is imperative that all items on the "Completed" list be at or near finalization. It is recommended that you skim through the entire Framework at least once before completing any of the exercises. As you read, remember that design is an iterative process.

Chapter 07

Community Self-Selection

Reinvigorating your community with a new vision for the future is an ambitious and exciting undertaking. However, it is important to be certain about the strategy you choose to pursue this goal. This Framework is intended for application in small, relatively isolated rural communities, but it is not a one-size-fits-all approach to rural community revitalization. To benefit from the Framework, a town must fall between a minimum and maximum population and residential density, and already have a minimum level of existing infrastructure and social capacity. In order for you to use your time and resources most efficiently, you can complete the checklists in this chapter to quickly identify if this Framework will provide the type of guidance and solutions pertinent to your town. There are five relevant types of communities.

Community Types

Hamlet

A Hamlet community is generally too small and dispersed to have a centralized downtown, making it a less ideal candidate for revitalization. Without sufficient existing business activity and infrastructure, a revitalization effort may be prohibitively expensive and may not yield strong results. This process is therefore not recommended for a Hamlet community. However, there are many ways to improve a town, regardless of its size. Consider reaching out to local authorities about regional grants or opportunities available to your town, and continue seeking out solutions that are better suited to a community of your size.

Frontier Community

Slightly larger and denser than a Hamlet, Frontier communities typically meet the minimum for existing business activity. With a larger population, these towns will find it easier to pay for

improvements with levies, bonds, or other locally-funded measures. Lower levels of isolation can also improve networking opportunities with nearby towns and between neighbors, though a Frontier community still may struggle with isolation and limited resources. This framework is recommended for Frontier communities, though care must be taken to ensure that the choices made throughout the process are most suitable for a smaller-scale town.

Established Rural Community

Home to a larger population – and typically a higher number of public buildings – most Established rural communities will be strong candidates for this process. With more downtown infrastructure, residents have more options to repurpose existing features of their town and generate new improvements. A larger population can help to provide funds, ideas, and labor. While some of these towns may be too large to qualify as a rural community by Census Bureau standards, they are excellent candidates for revitalization using this framework.

Large Rural Community

At the higher end of the population spectrum, Large rural communities will often have well-developed downtowns that may draw in commerce from smaller satellite communities and dispersed populations. These towns typically contain a greater amount and diversity of businesses, amenities, public services, and infrastructure, meaning that a Large Rural Community will have many ways to rapidly improve their town. However, when describing this community type, it is important not to confuse a Large rural community with a suburb. Suburbs are not viable for this process because they rarely have a significant downtown, and are therefore dependent upon a nearby urban center. The lack of public buildings, businesses, and shared spaces makes a suburb more a residential area and less a true community. A Large rural community will have a workable number of downtown blocks (falling into the green columns) and will be more geographically isolated from other cities and towns. If a town adheres to this description, it is an excellent candidate for revitalization.

Metropolis

Towns with a population greater than 6,000 tend to be clustered in an urbanized area. These towns typically have dramatically different needs and challenges for revitalization, and are therefore not recommended to pursue this grassroots framework. There are, however, an abundance of helpful resources for a small or large city looking to improve itself, and interested parties should certainly pursue these options.

These descriptions are intended for you to begin to understand where your town might fall in the five categories. Use the "sizing chart" at the right to evaluate clearly which your category your community falls into. These scores take an initial look at the social, environmental, economic, and technological assets in your community. While this Framework is intended to build those assets up, a minimum existing level is necessary for success.

Remember, it is important for each stage in this process to be carried out with fairness, honesty, and realism. An outside consultant has the advantage of impartiality, but you must choose to recognize any bias you hold and set it aside. As the project leadership, you must be honest with yourself about the state of your community – good or ill – and act on that honest understanding to improve it.

Figure 7.01 Community Self-Selection Chart

Category	Feature	Description	Data Sources
Demographics and Geography	Total Population	Total number of people living within the town's legal borders	US Census website or American Community Survey
	Population Density	Number of people per square mile	US Census website or American Community Survey
	USDA County Urbanization Code	See Appendix A citations	USDA website
	USDA Urban Influence Code	See Appendix A citations	USDA website
Built Environment	Number of Public Buildings	Post office, library, city hall, police or fire station, grange hall, American Legion, or similar	Your local city hall or county seat
	Number of Consecutive Downtown Street Faces	One face equals a city block (marked between streets or alleys) with at least 50% coverage by a business or public building. Businesses may be located behind parking.	Exploration of your downtown
Society	Educational	Public elementary school, middle school, high school, college campus, or equivalent	US Department of Education website
Technology	Access to Broadband Internet	Average percent of households **lacking** broadband internet	US Federal Communications Commission

Hamlet	Frontier	Established	Large	Metropolis
0-750	750-1,500	1,500-3,000	3,000-6,000	Over 6,000
0-750	750-1250	1250-1750	1750-2500	Over 2500
5 or 6	5 or 6	5 or 6	5 or 6	1-4
12	11, 10	9, 8	7, 6	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
0 or 1	2	3	4	More than 4
0-2	3-4	5-8	9-14	Over 15
0	1	2	3	Over 4
70% or higher	50-70%	30-50%	20-30%	20% or lower

Now that you have completed the self-selection checklist, you can determine if this process is right for your town. If all of your scores fell into the green-highlighted columns, congratulations! You may proceed onto the next step knowing that this process is right for you. Please read the description of the community type(s) that most of your scores fell into to ensure that they accurately describe your town. The descriptions will also give you a sense of what advantages or challenges you may encounter through the framework.

If one or two of your scores fell into the orange-highlighted columns, not to worry. As long as scores are in the Frontier, Established, and Large rural community columns, your town is likely still a strong candidate for revitalization using the grassroots frameowkr. There is one important exception, however: a town of any size or population with zero or one downtown street face does not fit the criteria for this process.

If most of your scores are in the orange Hamlet or Metropolis columns, your community is either too small or too large for this process. Please read through the community descriptions below and confirm that this is the case before proceeding. If this framework is not helpful for your town, there are many resources that can still help you, and you are encouraged to seek them out.

Finally, this framework relies on the strong social bonds often found in rural communities. Unfortunately, social traumas like discrimination (based on sex, sexual orientation or identity, race, religious affiliation, age, ethnicity, or other reason), domestic violence, child abuse, hate group activity, or other widespread acts of cruelty and intolerance erode those social bonds – even among likeminded groups. These issues in isolation are a problem, but in a widespread pattern, as they often occur, they are dangerous to the entire community. If a revitalization effort does not acknowledge and make a strong effort to manage a town's social traumas, it will struggle no matter the budget or buy-in.

Take a moment to review the Obstacles to Growth chart. Consider chatting informally with other members of your community of a different race, sex, or age than yourself to determine if people in your town are experiencing these problems. Local law enforcement may have a good sense of invisible issues like domestic violence based on the calls they receive. Teachers can inform on the wellbeing of a town's children, and residents can often describe the status of local institutions and infrastructure. While no process, including this one, can completely capture the struggles and needs of a town, acknowledging challenges and seeing them as manageable is a strong start.

Every town will struggle with some social issues – possibly many of them at once. But this revitalization process is an excellent time to ask: do we have to struggle with this forever, or can we choose to fix it now?

Figure 7.02 Obstacles to Growth

Category	Feature	Description	Data Resources	Mitigation Resources
Society	Hate Group Activity	May be against a race, sex, ethnicity, religious affiliation, gender identity, or other factor	Southern Poverty Law Center	Bureau of Justice Assistance: A Policymaker's Guide to Hate Crimes
	Residential Segregation	How integrated are neighborhoods of different races?	Robert Wood Johnson Foundation County Health Rankings	Robert Wood Johnson Foundation resources
	Presence of discriminitory policies or statutes	Could be at the local, county, state, or federal level	Examination of local, county, state, or federal statutes and policies	How to Be an Antiracist by Ibram X. Kendi
	Domestic Violence and Abuse	Rates of domestic violence against all groups: children, adults, and the elderly	Your local police station, personal interviews	CDC Violence Prevention for Intimate Partners, Children, and Elders
Environment	Environmental Pollution	Particulate matter air pollution, water pollution, or presence of brownfields	CDC and EPA air quality maps	A Multi-Pollutant, Risk-Based Approach to Air Quality Management by Wesson et. al
Economy	Income Inequality	Inequality based on race, sex, ethnicity, religious affiliation, gender identity, or other factor	US Census data, American Community Survey	Haas Institute's Policy Brief on Responding to Rising Inequality
	Child Poverty	Rate of children living in poverty in your town or county	US Census data, American Community Survey	A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty

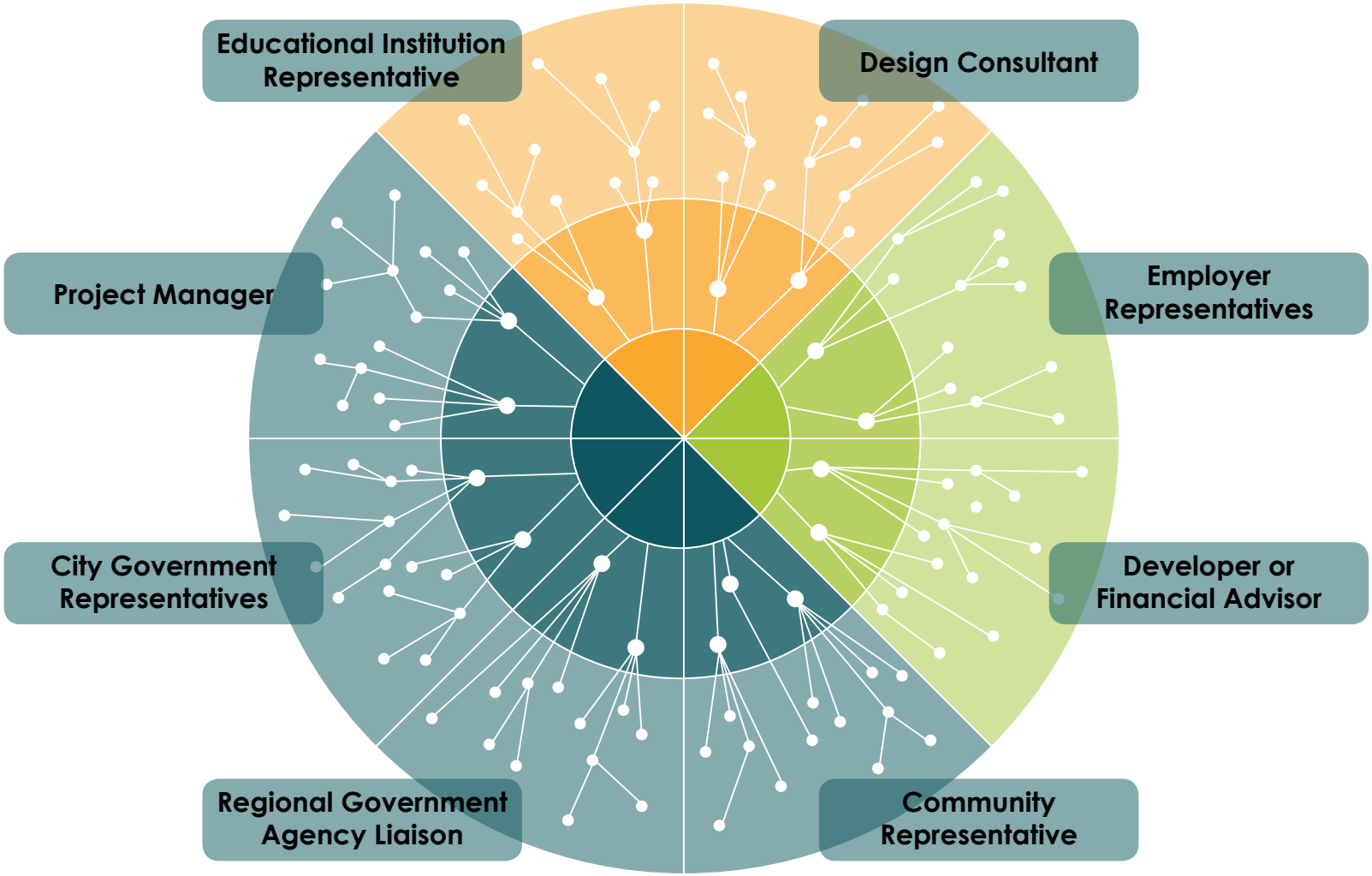
Chapter 08

Leadership Organization

After determining that your town is indeed a good candidate for this revitalization process, you'll need to assemble a dedicated, energetic team to carry out the project from start to finish. This team will act as the primary decision-making body for the project, representing major groups within and outside the community. These key roles will compromise for the groups that they represent and work together to create a quality plan.

Review the descriptions of these roles below to gain an understanding of the personal or professional qualifications necessary for each team member. A diagram is also provided to clearly illustrate how these roles will work together and represent their respective groups. If a team is already partially assembled, ensure that the current members are playing the role best suited to their abilities. If no more than one or two team members have yet been determined, begin brainstorming possible community members to fill local roles and researching candidates for external roles within the Production Team.

Figure 8.01 Tying Leadership to Networks



Project Manager

The role of the manager in this project is to keep the effort moving in a productive direction on a reasonable schedule, and never to make unilateral decisions. Information from the community will be funneled to the project manager through the community advocates and the Production Team themselves. A good project manager will listen to this information carefully, weighing the facts without bias, and promote a positive environment for the Production Team to work .The person in this role sets the tone for team meetings and public engagement, and therefore must approach problems with optimism and confidence. An ability to keep track of deadlines and details is also ideal in this role, as much of the project scheduling will be managed by this person.

Direct Responsibilities:

- Collaborate with the Production Team to create an achievable schedule
- Run Production Team meetings and keep notes about major roadblocks or advances
- Keep track of products created throughout the process in an organized manner
- Communicate positively with the Production Team, community members, and external professionals

Employer Representative

Since economic growth is one primary purpose of this revitalization effort, it is important to represent local business interests in the panning process. The employer representative would ideally have past or present experience as a business owner. This experience is most useful if it is/was within your town. A good representative will listen to the thoughts of local businesses, then communicate those back to the Production Team. The representative must take particular care to include the needs and desires of major employers for the town's population, but will maintain a balanced and thoughtful approach that avoids favoring any business or industry type over the others. They will communicate effectively, listen actively, and collaborate with the Team.

Direct Responsibilities:

- Identify major and small employers important to the town's economy and job market. Note: these business may exist inside or outside town.
- Communicate with identified employers and share information actively with the Production Team, collaborating with the community representative on this effort
- Seek out opportunities for public-private collaboration

Community Representative

There is one essential ingredient in a grassroots planning effort that will fuel the project from the beginning: people. It is the community representative's job to identify major social groups and bring their needs to the attention of the Production Team. This person should be well-ingrained in the community, someone that many people might go to for help, advice, or the latest news around town. In the planning process, they must use their wide-reaching social network to reach all existing social groups, and pay particular attention to groups that are traditionally underrepresented in the community. These often include racial or ethnic minorities, the working poor, and young people. Mitigating bias is important to every role within the Team, but it will likely be the most essential for the community representative. If the community does not feel adequately heard or represented, the public process may not yield consensus or other positive results. Consistent, reliable communication will also be critical to ensure that the public's trust is maintained throughout the process.

Direct Responsibilities:

- Identify local social groups that must be represented, taking note of which groups are often underrepresented
- Collaborate with the team to develop a public process that will best reach all of these groups
- Provide reliable communication between the public and the team regarding progress, meetings, and other important updates

City Government Representative

Any revitalization effort will require consistent collaboration with local government, and it is the city representative's responsibility to make this relationship strong, honest, and communicative. The representative should be a current member of local government with good ties – or the ability to generate these ties – to most offices of the local government. This person may be a reasonable choice for project manager, as they are likely already familiar with the job of representing the public and working toward local needs. A good city representative will keep the city appraised of progress and changes in the planning process and ensure the city is on board with the plan and planning process.

Direct Responsibilities:

- Collaborate with all city government agencies and groups to reduce potential obstacles for the revitalization effort
- Use existing relationships with active civic groups to involve the public, collaborating with the community representative on this effort
- Ensure that proposed design solutions will be code-compliant
- Collaborate with the project's financial advisor to secure finances and seek out grant funding

Design Consultant

A design or planning consultant will be necessary in later stages to he project to tailor community-selected solutions to the local context. This consultant must be involved from the beginning of the process both to provide expert advice and to ensure that decisions made by the community are carried through into the final plan. A consultant should have experience with planning, and experience in rural-scale planning is preferred. They must have – or be able to quickly gain – a balanced understanding of the regional context, and will communicate effectively with the Production Team and local residents. The consulting firm will also need to provide or contract a facilitator for the public involvement process to avoid unnecessary contention.

Direct Responsibilities.

- Inform the planning process with professional knowledge of the industry
- Advise in the development of the public involvement plan as well as each public meeting
- Communicate effectively with the Production Team to understand local needs, and carry decisions made in the planning process through into the final plan

Regional Government Agency Liaison

Revitalization efforts often depend on financing and support by government agencies. The regional agency liaison is present to ensure the smoothest possible collaboration between the Production Team and these agencies. The liaison may or may to be a local resident of your town, but should be a current or recent past employee of a state or regional government agency. The liaison will identify relevant agencies with which to collaborate throughout the process, and solicit their input. These agencies will likely include state departments of transportation, regional USDA offices, or any state agencies offering aid or funding for rural economic development projects. A good liaison will use their knowledge, connections, and communication skills to be an ambassador for the planning effort outside the community and ensure the process is run to the standard necessary to apply for various grant funding opportunities.

Direct Responsibilities:

- Generate a list of government agencies to contact, refine this list to those who only need to be appraised of progress and those that require more direct collaboration
- Ensure the plan is compliant with all relevant government agency regulations
- Update agencies when progress, meetings, and other important events occur
- Communicate findings between the Production Team and relevant agencies

Developer/Financial Advisor

Assist in creating or evaluating cost estimates and provide expertise on how a project will be financed. The financial advisor must be the voice of reason at times, ensuring that the team is setting goals that are realistic and achievable. The role also requires some flexibility and ingenuity, as this person will need to find creative means to make a good solution work. The financial advisor should work closely with the city representative and design consultant throughout the process.

Direct Responsibilities:

- Evaluate cost estimates for the planning phase and determine if current plans must be adjusted to meet the budget
- Collaborate with the design consultant and city representative to ensure that both parties have realistic and consistent expectations for design solutions
- Advise on project funding and help the team secure grant funding if it is sought out
- Ensure that all project financing is legal, well-documented, and easily translated to other members of the production team

Educational Institution Representative

Making rural communities friendly and inviting for young people, particularly young professionals, to put down roots is important to a town's long-term survival. If a town has a major educational institution – a university or university extension, a research center, or a high school, for example – a representative from this institution can help to provide a voice for

Direct Responsibilities:

- Provide a voice for young people, particularly students and young adults, who may not have the time or inclination to attend a public process, but still must be represented
- Reach out to young people in the community when necessary for input, event organization, or to deliver project updates, depending on direction by the community representative and project manager
- Articulate the needs and goals for educational institutions in town to the production team
- Promise only what you believe you can deliver
- Deliver what you have promised
- Demonstrate what you have delivered by communicating effectively

Chapter 09
Public Outreach Plan

The public involvement process will be the most important step in this Framework. To best prepare you for such an important step, this chapter contains an overview of the public process then walks you through the steps of creating a good one. You'll start by identifying your stakeholders, work to reach and involve them in the public process, then learn how to incorporate their ideas into your decision-making process. The role of the wider public is absolutely essential to create a successful plan: only by engaging the entire public, regardless of race, sex, sexual orientation, income, social group, etc. can every known facet of the problem be understood alongside every possible solution. Engaging openly with the public will result in a more thorough and sustainable plan that is better supported by the public, both now and in the future.

Public Process Overview

In a typical project, the first step in the public involvement process would be to identify what level of involvement is best. However, that evaluation is built into this Framework, which aims to achieve the highest level of citizen involvement: empowerment. This means that not only will the public contribute their ideas and preferences throughout the planning process, they will also be given approval power at various stages, including approval of the final plan. During the process, information will flow toward the Production Team to consolidate facts and make informed decisions. Public meetings will then represent interim approval points, where decision-making power will flow back to the public. Sharing power in this way is important to ensure the community represented, that they have a tangible impact on the process, and that the public at large takes pride and ownership in the plan itself.

A successfully run public process will not only allow for improved solutions in planning, it will also aid the community in building its capacity to resolve future problems positively. The knowledge, skills, and relationships gained in this process do not expire when the plan has been completed and implemented. This phenomenon is known as community capacity-building, and is one of the many positive side-benefits of a good public process.

However, an unsuccessful public process can also have long-term effects, though much more detrimental. Reducing the public's trust in local government and each other can make it less likely for people to work with those institutions or relationships in the future. It is this possibility for either exceedingly positive or seriously negative consequences derived from a public process that makes this step so important. Fortunately, there are a number of critical factors for success that can guide you safely through this step.

Key Components of a Successful Public Process

Trust

A public involvement process is built much like any social relationship, and requires trust to be functional. This trust must be both earned and maintained with constant fairness, transparency, and communication. Trust is also dependent on dedicated follow-through of these principles. Remember to promise only what you believe you can deliver, deliver what you have promised, and demonstrate what you have delivered by communicating effectively (EPA Public Participation Guide, 2018).

Clarity

Both the public process and each public meeting should be guided by a set of overarching goals. The purpose, and expected outcomes of the process and meetings must be clearly articulated to avoid setting unrealistic or unachievable expectations. While there is always some flexibility in the public process, once the public involvement plan has been generated, its primary goals and intent should be adhered to. This keeps the vision, goals, and objectives clear to the Production Team as well as the public, and allows the group to continue making steady progress.

Dedication to Public Empowerment

A public involvement process can be a challenge to run well, but its benefits are easily worth the work. It is best if the entire Production Team is completely dedicated to empowering the public. This means devoting the time, financial resources, patience, and effort necessary to ensure the public is represented, heard, has influence over the preliminary decision-making process, and is given the authority to

approve the finalized plan.

It is recommended that training and education for the Production Team also include the following resources, which were summarized in this chapter. These permalinked sources will provide a greater depth and breadth to understand public involvement, and will help you to negotiate difficult situations and generate a successful public process.

Developing Your Public Involvement Plan

Now that you have an understanding of public involvement in general, you can use this basic introduction in conjunction with professional expertise to generate a public involvement plan that's right for your community. This plan will involve four primary steps, summarized below. After reviewing the information on each step, consider the methods provided and their recommendations for each community type.

Situation Assessment

Networks and relationships are already established in your community. To complete the situation assessment, you'll be identifying the nodes (social groups) and links (individual people) of this network. Begin by using demographic data to understand roughly the different economic, racial, age, and ethnic groups in your town. Add to this information with your knowledge of different social groups, including mother's groups, seamstresses or knitting clubs, father's groups, Rotary Club, veterans groups, faith organizations, and more. Most of these demographics and groups will have a leader or representative who can be reached to involve the entire group.

These local leaders are critical communication points to receive and convey information about the project to the entire community and provide information in return to the Production Team. It is important to evaluate how these people can be best reached and to develop a strong, positive relationship with them. Note that it's likely that not all groups identified in the Situation Analysis will have favorable views of one another. However, it is the community liaison's job to treat each group, and each leader, with dignity and respect and to ensure that their voice is heard in the process.

Public Outreach

Public outreach is a necessary step to ensure that a revitalization project meets the community's needs, has good support, and will be financially achievable. It's important for people to see their involvement make tangible progress, and for key deadlines to be met. The outreach plan is an excellent means to build and maintain trust with the public at large and keep people excited for the project and should therefore be carefully crafted and adhered to.

To select the most effective outreach methods for your community, first refer back to your Community Profile. Consider how these groups typically receive information, where folks like to gather, and what medium – word of mouth, physical flyers, or digital notifications – they are most likely to receive. Refer back to the situation assessment to use the existing social networks in your town, and remember that all outreach efforts should seek to involve the entire community. Some of the groups with the least visibility – such as homeless folks and non-English speaking populations – may be very difficult to reach.

Figure 9.01 Public Outreach Methods

Feature	Description	Data Resources	Mitigation Resources
Tabling	$-$$	Building connections	Set up a table at a high traffic location with informational flyers and staff to spread information and discuss the project with residents
Announcements at an Event	$	Disseminating information Reaching specific social groups	Provide an announcement at a popular event, such as Sunday mass, a football game, or a block party
Flyers and Posters	$$	Disseminating information Reaching Non-English speakers	Post information around town using flyers and posters. Have your posters translated into all languages spoken in your town
Website	$-$$	Disseminating information Reaching young people, adults, and professionals	Create a page on an existing website, or develop a new site for your project. Share links or QR codes to the site using flyers and handouts
Social Media	$	Disseminating information Reaching young people	Create an account for your revitalization effort and regularly post information on progress and events
Word of Mouth	$	Building connections Reaching reclusive groups	Use the community network to spread the word about your project
Pop-Up Event	$$	Disseminating information Building connections	Set up a fun activity or event at an existing gathering place to share information about the project
Email Updates	$	Disseminating information	Ask for contact information at one of your events and send out regular project updates
Mailers	$$$	Disseminating information	Send flyers or pamphlets to your contacts through the mail
Media Coverage	$	Disseminating information	Submit a story about the project or event to your local news media outlet

Regardless of their social or economic status, each community group will have something worthwhile to contribute to a revitalization effort.

Now that you have reviewed the outreach methods – or thought of some of your own – it's time to create your schedule and craft an outreach plan. Outreach should be continuous throughout your project, but will have higher or lower levels of activity depending on the project step.

To further enhance public trust, the outreach effort should also acknowledge key input gained from the community, volunteer efforts making a difference for the revitalization effort, and important goals and objectives that have been accomplished. This outreach will be used for a few concurrent primary goals:

- Inform the public about the project's goals
- Celebrate goals accomplished
- Solicit input
- Inform the public about upcoming meetings and events

If the outreach plan is well-executed, it creates a large group that can be mobilized to achieve the shared goals of the revitalization effort. More importantly, it provides an opportunity for the public and the Production Team to engage with each other, ensuring that the project is meeting real needs.

Preliminary Sch edule

TThe public involvement plan itself is a combination of methods and timing. Make a rough schedule for when you will reach out to the public, when meetings will be hosted, and which methods will be employed at these times. It is always better to make a more generous schedule than find yourself constantly behind and exhausted. Public meetings should be held at most once each month, preferably every six to eight weeks to avoid exhausting the participants and ample time should be given for the Production Team to meet before and after each meeting to complete exercises in this framework.

Public Process Implementation

Once the situation assessment, methods, outreach methods, and involvement schedule have been completed, it's time to put your public process to work. Remember to keep a close eye out for the issues of bias and contention that must be caught early and kept from escalating. Be ready to embrace opportunities to involve new groups of people, and realize that the schedule may change in the future. At this point, you're ready to move on to the next step, the visioning meeting.

Chapter 10
Planning the Visioning Meeting

Public meetings, particularly this first one, are critical to developing a positive relationship between the public and the revitalization effort. Consider the major purposes of a meeting: to give a voice to the entire community regarding the project, to build relationships, and to set the public's expectations. Residents will have the opportunity to share stories about their experience in the community, and common themes about what is valued and what is needed should emerge naturally. The Production Team will then craft these themes into a carefully thought-out vision statement.

Agreeing upon a vision for the future of your community is of paramount importance to a revitalization effort. Yet how the vision is created is equally – if not more – important than the vision statement itself. The vision should be based on the collective memories, values, and hopes from people across the community. It must accurately reflect the way the town and its residents see themselves now, and how they hope to see themselves in the future. Creating a community vision is a chance to come to
gether and clearly define what is most important to your town as a whole, both today and tomorrow.

It is recommended that users of this manual follow a two-phase visioning process to maximize participation and thus improve public trust. The first phase involves outreach, seeking out the memories, ideas, and hopes of residents on their own turf where they may be more comfortable sharing their thoughts. In the second phase, the Production Team hosts a structured public meeting that allows the community to share and collaborate all at once. The two phases help to expand representation, improving the odds that every great idea has a chance to be heard.

Tip: It is recommended to consider hiring a facilitator for this and future public meetings or work with your Production Team's contracted professionals to guide the meetings. Facilitators can both provide a neutral third party to negotiate difficult conversations, and draw frustration away from local organizers – or the project itself – if high-tension issues arise.

Outreach

An advantage of this framework is that it puts most of the information-gathering and decision-making authority into the hands of local people. This can make the visioning process much easier, as it is primarily locals asking their neighbors how they would like to improve their own community in the future. Take advantage of existing positive relationships and take the opportunity to build new ties as the Production Team takes on this step. Refer back to the outreach methods table in the previous step to inform your strategy.

Planning the Visioning Meeting

First, it is critical that the visioning meeting be structured to include the entire community. Efforts to involve a broad array of participants should begin in the previous step and continue throughout the project. Use the following steps to carefully plan out and execute your visioning meeting.

Select a time and place for a meeting that will maximize attendance.

- What times of day or days of the week are most attendees busy?
- Do most people have evenings or weekends free, and would they be likely to attend a meeting scheduled during this time?
- What location is most central or convenient to all or most attendees?
- Do any attendee groups – such as the elderly, the homeless, or the working poor – have transportation impediments that might prohibit them from attending?
- Is the meeting time and location friendly to families with young children?

Mitigate challenges to attendance

- Will some social groups encourage their members not to attend the public meeting? Why?
- Does the meeting time, location, or programming exclude one or more groups in particular?

Consider offering carpool services, childcare, and food at the meeting. Better yet, try to make the meeting more social than formal, and turn the event into a welcoming potluck. It is also best to respect your participants' schedules and plan meetings only when the largest and most diverse group of people can attend. Consider holding meetings in a different season – such as late fall or winter – when seasonal work is at a lull.

Plan an Agenda

Finally, work with the Production Team to plan an agenda for the visioning meeting in advance. Be sure to set expectations for your participants, both for that meeting and for the project in its entirety. Remember that your audience is likely already familiar with the challenges of their town and should be worked with as equal collaborators.The following outline may be a helpful means to structure the meeting.

Introduction

Introduce the Production Team, the revitalization effort, and the reasoning behind the project. Give people a clear picture of why they're there and what their role will be as participants. Setting a few clearly stated goals for the meeting is also immensely helpful in keeping attendees on track and ensuring that they feel they have contributed something valuable by the end of the meeting.

Direction

The visioning meeting should be a lively and hopeful event where primary focus is given to future opportunities, rather than dwelling on old grievances. This step will instead help direct participants clearly toward the information you're trying to gather, by posing questions without judgement:

What do you hope for our town in five years? Ten? Fifty?
What parts of our community do you cherish and why?
Where in town is your favorite childhood memory?
Where do you take friends and family to visit when they come to town?

Consider asking these or other questions that you define yourself to identify what holds your community together and how you might help that thing flourish.

Discussion

It is often productive to turn the questions over to the community members themselves to discuss. Consider breaking up into smaller groups where discussion is more natural. The Production Team could be involved, or simply available to answer questions or provide assistance. Ensure that there is a clear directive for the discussion step that the participants can manage in a short amount of time (30 to 45 minutes), or the step may not yield useful results. You may ask participants to generate a list of three to five words that they feel best describe their town, or summarize their hopes in one or two sentences. You may also ask them to simply answer one or more of the questions posed in the direction step.

Directives should be short, clear tasks that are easily completed in less than an hour. Discussions that run too long risk fatiguing participants and getting off track.

Consensus Building

Always keep in mind that a public meeting is not merely a means to achieve the goal of revitalization – it is an integral part of that goal. Positive public meetings where participants can build relationships and feel valued will increase social capital. This is of paramount importance, because revitalization efforts begin not with construction, but with the community itself.

At the end of the visioning meeting, it is therefore valuable to bring all the attendees together and allow groups to share their findings with the entire audience. Groups can elect a "speaker" to share their results, or perhaps pin them up on a wall for other participants to review. Allowing the entire participant group to then choose a few of the phrases, answers, or images (depending on what groups were asked to produce) that they most value can help to build general agreement. A facilitator or the team's contracted professional should be helpful in choosing constructive methods to build consensus.

Creating the Vision Statement and Goals

Crafting a vision statement and set of goals is an important task that should be given ample time and consideration. It is recommended that the Production Team develop these materials together so that the statement is reflective of many perspectives from the beginning. The vision statement should be concise – between one and three sentences – and should focus on the collective hopes that residents have for their town.

Consider using words or phrases that came up frequently in the outreach process and visioning meeting. Incorporate these in positive terms and work to reinforce the tangible and intangible assets that your community has already. You might also try to describe the type of life and day-to-day experiences your residents can expect from their revitalized community. Take your time as a team to draft the vision statement and be open to revisions.

The vision is supported by a short list of goals, which ground the project in achievable tasks. To create a list of goals, it can be helpful to first address prominent concerns or hopes from the visioning meeting. Goals should represent the facets of the vision in greater detail and should always be phrased in positive terms. Since the statement and list of goals must still be approved by the public, iterations for both should be expected. Examples of excellent vision statements and accompanying goals are shown below.

Finally, using the vision statement, set of goals, and the general views gathered in the visioning meeting, you'll wrap up your work for this section by creating a project brand. The example on the following page includes a logo and a unique project name that concisely captures the project's identity. A logo is beneficial, but not necessary if your team does not have the ability to create one. A name, however, is imperative. This unique title for the planning effort will give it an identity that is invaluable when discussing the project within and outside your community, giving the public a clearly-identified effort to rally around.

Once the visioning step is completed, your team will have the direction necessary to complete the Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat analysis.

Project: Your Utah, Your Future
Location: State of Utah

Vision: Utahns envision safe communities that make life convenient. They desire active town and village centers in and around most neighborhoods, so they can choose to live close to where they work, shop, learn, and play. They want to be able to drive short distances, walk, bike, and access public transportation in most communities, so they can live healthy lives and save time and money. Utahns envision their communities having good housing options for them, regardless of their stage of life and whether they want to own a large home or rent a small apartment.

- Accommodate all Utahns in safe, attractive, and neighborly communities.
- Ensure services and amenities (jobs, schools, shopping, parks, etc.) are convenient to where people live.
- Make it convenient to reach destinations by driving, taking public transportation, walking, and biking.
- Build communities that use less land, reduce impacts on farms, and require less money for building and maintaining public infrastructure (e.g., roads and utilities).
- Provide convenient access to nature and recreation.
- Minimize costs related to housing, transportation, taxes, utilities, and other expenses.

Valley Visioning project branding. Image courtesy of Envision Utah.

Project branding for Your Utah, Your Future. Image courtesy of Envision Utah.

Chapter 11
SWOT Analysis

The Vision Statement and Objectives derived from the community visioning meeting will provide the context for the next step: the Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat analysis. In this step, you will take inventory of all relevant features of your community, evaluate their condition, and determine whether they are a strength, weakness, opportunity, or threat. Expanded versions of the Community Self-Selection checklists will guide you through the analysis of your town. As always, objectivity is essential. But in this step, creative problem solving will also come into play. Begin thinking abut the ways the features you inventory may help or hinder your efforts toward revitalization. Can something old and decrepit be repaired or repurposed? Where might a small investment see a big impact? Keep the vision statement in mind as you conduct your review, and think creatively about how you might change you town's built environment to achieve that vision.

It's useful to remember that within the analysis, Strengths and Weaknesses are identified internally, while Opportunities and Threats are external. For example, a strength would be an active local club that volunteers to clean up streets or improve facades. An opportunity might be grant funding from the state to provide better materials and training for that club to do their work. A weakness might be a lack of safe pedestrian infrastructure downtown, while a threat could be a nearby town with a large shopping center that draws people away from your downtown area. Keep in mind that careful planning and negotiation within and beyond your own community can mitigate negative features, or even turn them into strengths.

The SWOT analysis tables are broken into four primary categories, which you are likely familiar with by now: Society, Environment, Economy, and Technology. The condition of each inventory item is measured in terms of how much investment – time, money, of physical

resources – would be required to make the feature reliably functional. For instance, a sidewalk with a few cracks that is still accessible to pedestrians and people using strollers or wheelchairs is functional despite its cosmetic defects. This is considered to be “good” condition, as it requires little to no investment to be safe and useful, and achieves a score of 3. A sidewalk that has heaved sections or large cracks that present a safety hazard requires some investment to be functional and useful to all potential users, meaning it is in “fair” condition, and scores a 2 on the chart. A sidewalk that is not ADA accessible, has large heaved sections that pose a severe safety hazard, and is so cracked and damaged that it is rarely – if ever – used is in “poor” condition with a score of 1.

Finally, if there are no sidewalks to speak of, the score given would be zero. The last two examples would require significant investment to construct, repair, or in some severe cases, replace the feature. As you evaluate each checklist item, ask yourself the question: does this feature need no investment, some investment, or a lot of investment to function safely and reliably? These questions are how you can determine the scores of 3, 2, and 1, respectively. The score columns are left blank for you to fill in.

At the end of each checklist, consider what themes and comments came up in the visioning meeting. Did this checklist consider every feature that is relevant to those themes? If not, use the blank rows to add features unique to your town that should be included in your inventory.

Society

A good understanding of your town's social capital and capacity, culture, and history will inform the types of design solutions you need and how you might employ them. The checklist defines the social needs for design solutions, which can help to directly translate your vision into reality.

Figure 11.01 Society Evaluation

Measure	Feature	Points Possible	Score
Social Cohesion	Community events drawing crowds of 10-50 people	3	
	Community events, drawing 50-500 people	3	
	Grange hall or community gathering place	3	
	Non-governmental, apolitical civic organizations	3	
	Nonviolent, nondiscriminatory local political organizations	3	
	Religious-affiliated volunteer organizations or public services	3	
	Cultural organization(s)	3	
	Social Cohesion Score	**21**	
Public Buildings and Services	Post office	3	
	City hall	3	
	Police and/or fire station	3	
	Hospital or medical facility	3	
	Public Buildings and Services Score	**12**	

Measure	Feature	Points Possible	Score
Access to Education	Public library	3	
	Elementary school	3	
	Middle school	3	
	High school	3	
	University extension or programs	3	
	Access to Education Score	**15**	
Historic and Cultural Assets	Historic preservation district(s)	3	
	Buildings or landmarks on the National Register of Historic Places	3	
	Local museum or science center	3	
	Historic and Cultural Assets Score	**9**	

Environment

The environment checklist is comprised of two categories, previously combined in the Community Self-Selection checklist. These are the built environment, those features of our world that have been constructed by people, and the natural environment. This checklist will be the most significant, as most of the relevant data for community revitalization will be found in either the built or natural environment.

For example, an inventory of the existing roads, sidewalks, storefronts, parks, and public spaces that comprise your town's built environment will give you an idea of which areas are functioning well and which need improvement. Cataloging local and regional parks, as well as the general state of environmental health, then provides an understanding of potential environmental assets that your town's residents could benefit from, and the risks that could harm them. This checklist will be useful in shaping the earliest possible idea of your project's total scope in terms of construction.

Figure 11.02 Environment Evaluation

Measure	Feature	Points Possible	Score
Public Amenities	Downtown public outdoor seating	3	
	Downtown shade structures	3	
	Public artwork	3	
	Public gathering space	3	
	Street planters	3	
	City-branded signage	3	
	Public Amenities Score	**18**	
Natural Systems in the Built Environment	Downtown street trees	3	
	Residential street trees	3	
	Downtown flood mitigation	3	
	Residential flood mitigation	3	
	Native species planting area(s)	3	
	Natural Systems in the Built Environment Score	**15**	
Recreational Opportunities	Local public parks	3	
	Local public playgrounds	3	
	Regional parks	3	
	National parks within 30 miles	3	
	Local trail systems	3	
	Regional trail systems	3	
	Adequate parking at recreational areas	3	
	Aquatic recreational area(s)	3	
	Public amenities at aquatic recreational area(s)	3	
	Recreational Opportunities Score	**27**	

Measure	Feature	Points Possible	Score
Non-vehicular Transportation Options	Dedicated downtown pedestrian walkway	3	
	Dedicated residential pedestrian walkway	3	
	Downtown crosswalks	3	
	Signalized pedestrian crossings	3	
	Downtown bicycle infrastructure	3	
	Residential bicycle infrastructure	3	
	Signalized bicycle crossings	3	
	Local public transit	3	
	Regional public transit	3	
	Horse, ATV, or golf cart paths	3	
	Non-Vehicular Transportation Score	**30**	
Vehicular Transportation Infrastructure	Adequate downtown parking	3	
	Downtown roads	3	
	Residential roads	3	
	Local highways	3	
	Regional highways	3	
	Vehicular Transportation Infrastructure Score	**15**	
Protected Lands	Protected agricultural land	3	
	Protected habitat areas	3	
	Protected cultural land	3	
	Protected Lands Score	**9**	

Economy

Understanding the state of local and regional economic activitiy is a useful step in determining where your local economy is performing well, and where it may be struggling. In identifying unmet market demands, you can better select design solutions that will meet a demonstrated need and therefore be more likely to succeed economically.

Figure 11.03 Economy Evaluation

Measure	Feature	Points Possible	Score
Housing Availability	Housing available for ownership within 1/2 mile of downtown	3	
	Housing available for ownership more than 1/2 mile from downtown	3	
	Rental housing within 1/2 mile of downtown	3	
	Rental housing more than 1/2 mile from downtown	3	
	Housing Availability Score	**12**	
Dining Options and Capacity	Grocery store with fresh produce options	3	
	Seasonal or year-round farmers market	3	
	Downtown restaurants	3	
	Existing vacant restaurant space	3	
	Dining Options and Capacity Score	**12**	
Retail Options and Capacity	Locally-owned retail stores	3	
	Chain or franchise retail stores	3	
	Existing vacant retail space under 10,000 sq ft	3	
	Existing vacant retail space over 10,000	3	
	Retail Options and Capacity Score	**12**	

Measure	Feature	Points Possible	Score
Commercial Options and Capacity	Locally-owned commercial businesses	3	
	Chain or franchise commercial businesses	3	
	Existing vacant commercial space under 15,000 sq ft	3	
	Existing vacant commercial space over 15,000 sq ft	3	
	Commercial Options and Capacity Score	**15**	
Industrial Options and Capacity	Locally-owned industrial operations	3	
	Chain or franchise industrial operations	3	
	Existing vacant industrial space	3	
	Industrial Options and Capacity Score	**9**	

Technology

In the 1990s, the internet was hailed as a possible solution to the geographic isolation of many rural towns. Unfortunately, unequal access to regularly-updated hardware, software, and broadband internet has resulted in the technology literacy gap compounding the existing isolation of many rural areas. Taking an inventory of your town's technological status can will allow you to identify critical points for investment so technology can finally mitigate, rather than exacerbate, the challenges of geographic isolation.

Figure 11.04 Technology Evaluation

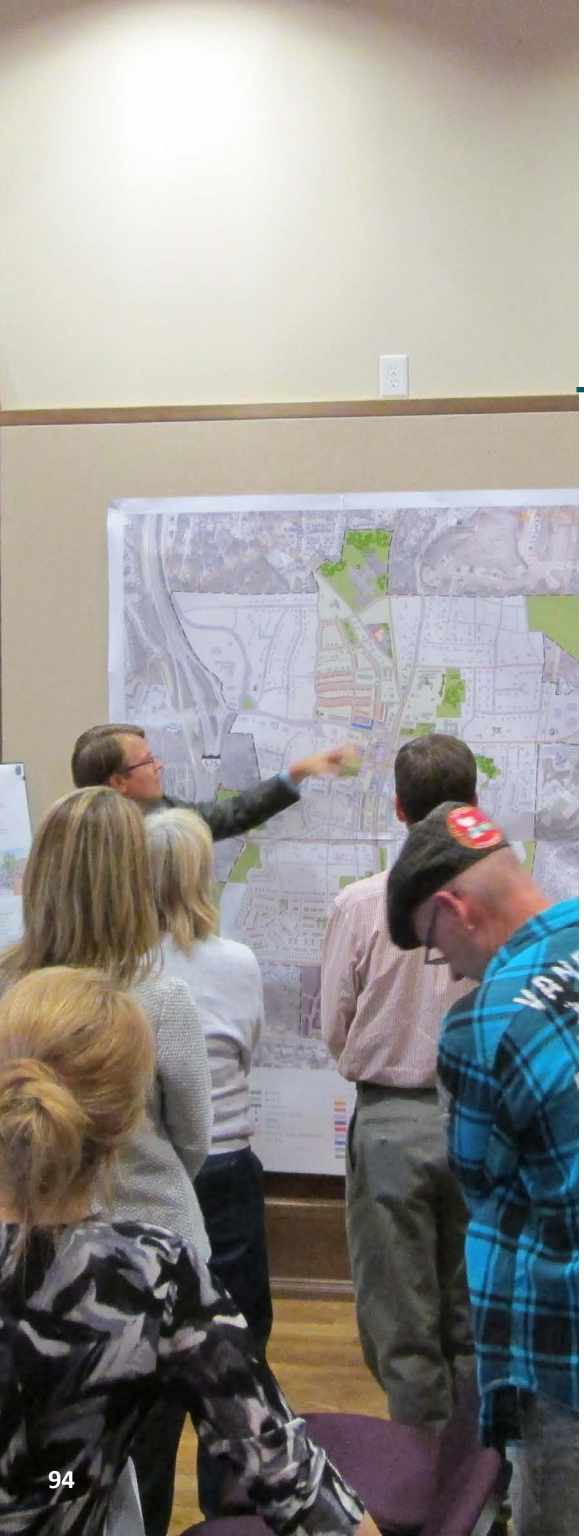
Measure	Feature	Points Possible	Score
Utilities	Telephone lines	3	
	Internet access and infrastructure	3	
	Electrical access and infrastructure	3	
	Clean water access and infrastructure	3	
	Utility Score	**12**	
Dining Options and Capacity	Public use-computers at city hall or a local library	3	
	Public Technology Score	3	

Identifying leverage points from the SWOT analysis

A leverage point is a particular project or challenge that yields a large benefit compared to the amount of resources needed to address the challenge. For example, if the SWOT analysis reveals that the primary reason people do not go downtown to shop is because they feel unsafe walking between businesses that front on a highway, revitalization could be as simple as implementing traffic calming measures or widening sidewalks so shoppers can feel safe.

When you hear statements like “I don’t feel safe because of this” or “I don’t let my children walk to school because of that,” listen to discover if these are common concerns. They could represent a problem that is causing an inordinate amount of strain, and therefore could yield an enormous benefit if solved successfully.

It is also important to keep in mind that biases can come out in statements like these. People may e inclined to blame a group of people, a neighborhood, or even one residential block for large problems in the community. Assumptions like these can come down to racial or cultural divides. It is very important to remember that a good revitalization effort doesn’t try to “fix” a group of people or pass judgement on the value of any one race or culture. Powerful, long-lasting revitalization must instead focus on changing policies, healing and building social relationships with patience and empathy, and improving physical features like building facades, roadways, and paths.



Chapter 12

Progress Meeting

The SWOT analysis review meeting has two purposes, both of which are important to reinforcing the public's role in project ideation and development. First, the Production Team will unveil their final draft of the vision statement, name, and any project branding for a last round of public comment. Second, the team will review and host a discussion on the content of the SWOT analysis.

As always, remember to plan the meeting several weeks in advance, and be sure to use the existing participant network to reach out to as many potential attendees as possible. Just because a person or group missed the first meeting, it doesn't mean they have to miss the second one too. Work with the Production Team before the meeting to select specific methods for the meeting organization from the chart on the opposite page.

The meeting itself will follow a similar pattern to the visioning meeting. It should begin with an introduction, followed by an informational presentation to set expectations and update the public on new developments. Finally, attendees will share their findings with the entire group and the Production Team will work to consolidate the public's opinions into a prioritized list.

Meeting Agenda

Introduction

Be sure to introduce the Production Team and any volunteers assisting, even if the crowd is almost the same as the first meeting. Outline the purpose of the meeting and set expectations for the outcomes. Since most of the vision statement's content has been previously discussed, it may be appropriate to unveil the statement, project name, and branding in the introduction. While these products should be complete and polished, it is important to remain open to any level of public comment.

Direction and Information Dissemination

The SWOT analysis is an information-heavy task. In this step, the team has probably learned an immense amount about floodplains, demographics, infrastructure needs, and historic sites. At the review meeting it may be tempting to share every detail with your town. However, it is best to prioritize and summarize only the key information. Try to keep your presentation under fifteen minutes, and preferably closer to ten.

A shorter time to share information is helpful in identifying which ideas are the most important and which can be left as auxiliary information if questions arise. Before the meeting, collaborate with the Production Team to identify these important ideas. Understanding where the majority of challenges or growth opportunities exist is the critical step toward selecting and implementing solutions. Select three to five of the "best" opportunities and present them to the public at the review meeting.

Discussion

After participants have been given a directive and enough information for discussion, provide time for people to discuss their thoughts on the information presented. Consider asking participants to prioritize which projects they think would provide the most value or meaning to the community, or which would be most likely to solve the problems they encounter on a day-to-day basis as they move about their town.

Consensus Building

As in the visioning meeting, it is useful to reconvene the entire audience to discuss the findings of the smaller group discussions.

After the meeting, convene with key members of the production team to share notes and incorporate feedback from the attendees. If participants were generally satisfied with the vision and project branding, finalize it and prepare to share the official version with the entire public through flyers, posters, announcements, and/or social media. If participants were not satisfied, it may be necessary to do more comprehensive revisions and consider another review meting in a few weeks. Revision opportunities like this are built into the framework, and this is an important time to ensure that the public feels positively about the current work before moving forward.

The team should also review the public's prioritization of growth opportunities to identify what the primary focus of the revitalization effort will be. Select the most important of these leverage points to consolidate into your revitalization plan. Note that if you choose more than one, you should ensure that the goals can still be reasonably incorporated into the same project. If they are related, this may be more easily achieved.

In summary, the SWOT analysis review meeting should use the information already gleaned from research and public input to zero in on the needs and goals of the town. By the end of this step, you will have a clear vision statement, a finalized project name and branding, a set of goals to achieve the vision, and a direction for the next step: choosing design solutions.

Chapter13
Design Solutions

Now that the Production Team and general public have collaborated to generate a shared understanding of the community's strengths and drawbacks, it's time to select design solutions. In the SWOT Analysis and visioning meeting, you gathered three types of information: qualitative data, quantitative data, and the checklist scores. These will all be employed to select viable and effective solutions.

Qualitative Information
Community Values and Identity

The recurring positive themes form the visioning meeting give insight into your towns unique values and identity. These concepts will inform not only the solutions you will choose, but also how you can apply them to maximize their benefit. Remember, every decision is a design decision. This means that even something as simple as a crosswalk or bike path can be designed to celebrate your town's identity.

Quantitative Information
Measurable Understanding of Needed Improvements

Researching the details of your town, such as the average width of a downtown sidewalk or the local population density, lets you understand the town's needs clearly and measurably. Use this information to identify whether a solution is necessary, useful, and feasible.

SWOT Analysis Scores

Similar to the scoring in the Community Self-Selection section that informed your general community type, the scores generated in the SWOT analysis will quickly direct you to the types of solution your town will find the most benefit from. For instance, scoring poorly in pedestrian connectivity will direct you to sidewalk and ADA improvements.

When selecting solutions, there will likely be more than one right answer to solve a given problem. Consider four questions with each possible solution, and seek out the result that will give the best answer to these questions.

- Does it bring my town closer to our vision?
- Is it physically feasible?
- Is it financially feasible?
- Will the community be supportive of the solution?

If the answer to any of these questions is “no,” then alternative solutions or tweaks to the solution in question should be considered. The options provided in the following “cutsheets” are diverse, but not comprehensive for every possible situation. As always, it will be the Production Team’s creativity and understanding of the local context that will make these solutions both effective and attractive.

Complete Pedestrian Networks

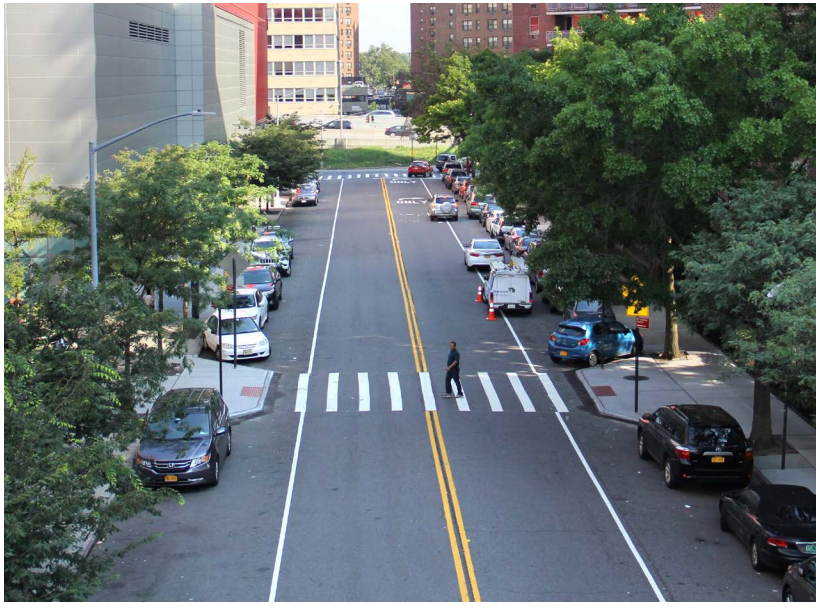
In recent years, the concept of complete streets has popularized the notion that modern American streets should not belong solely to commuter vehicles, but also to bicyclists, pedestrians, and public transit. Roads are the essential network that tie together people, land, and places in a community, and opening this network for the most comprehensive range of transportation possible gives more people more choices about how they move around their community. The benefits of a strong pedestrian network are plenty: increasing foot and bike traffic on local roads can produce higher levels of business patronage, improving safety for non-vehicular travel can reduce traffic injuries and fatalities, and increasing opportunities for exercise can reduce rates of obesity and associated ailments, including heart disease and diabetes. The aesthetic improvements can also help to brand a downtown area and secure its sense of place.

Sidewalks

Likely the first infrastructure that comes to mind when considering a pedestrian network is a sidewalk. Sidewalks are a tried and true method to safely incorporate a pedestrian element on an existing or proposed street. The vertical separation from the street clearly demarcates a boundary between pedestrian and vehicle space, which creates a sense of safety for both user groups. Because they are so commonplace, it can be easy to meet minimum standards for a sidewalk and consider it a success. However, a sidewalk that is successful not just in terms of code compliance but also in practice will prioritize the user's experience and create a sense of safety, providing both convenience and comfort. Sidewalks are an excellent opportunity to think outside the box: how can you make your sidewalks the safest and most enjoyable for users?

Sidewalk Curb Extensions

Curb extensions, also known as sidewalk bump outs or bulb outs, are a popular method to improve visibility between drivers and pedestrians. These are most commonly used on corners connected by a crosswalk when the street includes a parking lane. Allowing pedestrians to queue in a curb extension keeps them from being obscured by parked cars and creates a clear vision line between pedestrians and moving vehicles. This method has the added benefit of traffic calming, as drivers perceive the narrower section of roadway to be a potential hazard or crossing. Curb extensions may be used in creating pinchpoints that narrow the roadway for a short section, neckdowns that narrow the roadway for a longer section, chicanes which offset roadway layout, or bus bulbs to make pedestrian access easier.



Furnishing Zones

Revitalizing a downtown means making it inviting to people both throughout the day and throughout the year. Consider what makes a downtown inviting to you – perhaps it's lights, distant conversations, music, or overflowing planters. Incorporating a furnishing zone is one of the most powerful ways to bring the liveliness happening inside your town's businesses out into the public realm. Furnishing zones are commonly used on downtown blocks and can host a variety of amenities. Businesses can place chairs, tables, and signage outdoors without fear of obstructing the walkway. Bus stops or bike racks can be paced at transportation nodes, or street trees and planters can be used to provide cooling and color to your streetscape If furnishings include decorative streetlights, benches, trash receptacles, or other standard infrastructure, they should have a consistent design throughout the downtown area. Furnishing zones present an excellent opportunity to reinforce your town's unique aesthetic and "brand."

Signals and Signage

Breaks or inconsistencies in a pedestrian network undermine the safety and usefulness of the entire network. These breaks are commonly found at roadway crossings, especially when there are high traffic speeds or volumes. Fortunately, roadway signals and signage can direct pedestrians to safe crossings and alert drivers that they may need to yield. Designated crossings promote more consistent patterns of pedestrian and vehicular movement, creating a sense of reliability and safety for users. Signalized crossings can be expensive, however, and should therefore be carefully placed to maximize their utility. The crossing should also acknowledge where people are most likely to cross, and realize that people will only use crossing infrastructure if it is accessible and convenient.

Pathways

A town's non-motorized circulation doesn't have to be composed only of sidewalks and bike lanes, which are typically constrained to roadways alone. Pathways can expand the pedestrian network into parks, provide safe routes separate from highways, and connect commercial and residential areas in a low-density town. In addition to their use for pedestrian and bicycle circulation, pathways can also be designed to accommodate small motorized vehicles traveling at about the same speed as a bike (15 mph at most). If golf carts, scooters ATV's or four-wheelers are common methods of transportation in your community, design to accommodate that feature.

Sidewalk Alternatives

A lower population and smaller size can give rural communities an advantage when it comes to pedestrian infrastructure. Sidewalks may not always be needed to connect a town; sometimes a designated gravel or asphalt walkway is sufficient. An overly-wide road shoulder can be sectioned off using concrete wheel stops or curbing to provide a road-adjacent pedestrian path. Existing trails can be paved or surfaced with gravel to improve all-weather use. Think outside the box when creating pedestrian infrastructure, and consider contacting your local roadway authority to determine new, safe, and successful sidewalk alternatives.

Bike Infrastructure

Bike and pedestrian infrastructure are often seen as synonymous, but creating a safe bikeway system requires additional planning and infrastructure outside usual pedestrian needs. Since bicyclists often travel on or directly adjacent to roads with vehicular traffic, it's important to choose the right bike infrastructure for a given roadway type to keep bicyclists safe.An unsafe or incomplete network can cause conflicts between vehicles and bicyclists, which can easily result in injuries or fatalities. There are three easy ways to improve the safety of a network.

Education
Infrastructure doesn't matter if people don't know how to use it. Plan an educational session for all elementary school students to ensure the safety of child users. For adults, consider hosting a session or Q and A at a major local employer's building, or at a well-attended Sunday service or other public event. Make sure all demographic groups have an equal opportunity to learn.

Maintenance
Poor maintenance can result in hazardous infrastructure over time. Schedule annual or seasonal maintenance, and make sure users know how to report problems. Never allow construction signage, sand bags, or debris to block a bike lane.

Connectivity
Bike infrastructure can become dangerous when it ends abruptly, spitting users out into roads and intersections with no protection. Minimize breaks in your bicycle network, prioritize the most hazardous areas first, and make sure bicyclists have a designated path through heavily-used intersections.

Bike Lanes

Perhaps the most common type of bike infrastructure, bike lanes are a dedicated, bicycle-only travel lane adjacent to traditional vehicular lanes. When implemented correctly, bike lanes are both safe and cost effective, and typically require minimal changes to existing roadways. The effectiveness of a bike lane is determined both by its construction and its maintenance. Lanes should be marked at the recommended minimum width set by the controlling agency in your area, and the usable width should not include gutters, decaying asphalt edges, or the road paint itself. A quality bike lane is generally three to five feet, where five feet allows bicyclists to travel in small groups or pass each other. Finally, because bike lanes provide no physical barriers between bicyclists and vehicles, they should only be used on streets with a low speed limit, typically between 15 and 30 miles per hour. NACTO recommends a maximum limit of 35 miles per hour, but if speeding is common in your area this may not be appropriate.

Buffered Bike Lane

Similar to a standard bike land, buffered lanes provide a bicycle-only travel lane adjacent to a standard vehicular traffic lane. The important difference is that a buffered bike lane provides a physical barrier between vehicles and bicyclists, therefore improving users' sense of safety. This advantage makes buffered lanes a better choice for roads with higher speeds or traffic volumes. Buffers may be aesthetic or multifunctional. Some municipalities use on-street parking as a buffer, others may use traffic wands, planters, or a concrete curb.

Cycle Track

For roadways with very high traffic speeds or volumes, cycle tracks are the preferred choice for user safety. This type of bikeway completely separates bicyclists and motor traffic and establishes a bicycle-only roadway adjacent to the vehicular road. Cycle tracks are more fully separated from the roadway than a buffered bike lane, and may have street trees or furnishings between the track and the road. This type of bikeways is generally not shared with pedestrians, and may be paved with a different color or pavement marking to indicate this use.

Bikeway Amenities

To ensure that bicycle networks are used and enjoyed by all residents, many cities have begun providing bike amenities along the network. Pump stations and fix stations allow users to fill their tires or repair their bike without purchasing their own equipment, therefore lowering the individual cost of using a bicycle. Restrooms, drinking fountains, trash cans, and benches ensure that bicyclists can use the entire network comfortably and appropriately. Lastly, colder climates may want to provide some weather protection along heavily-used stretches of the network, while warm climates might install water misters or shade.

Traffic Calming

Many rural towns face the challenge of having a highway run through the middle of their downtown. While these roads can bring in visitors and help connect residents to regional destinations, they also reduce perceived and actual safety for pedestrians. Without on-street parking, many highways can make it more difficult for shoppers to access downtown businesses. As a result, highways may do more to obstruct than connect if they aren't planned with multiple shared uses in mind. Fortunately, traffic calming measures can be used to compromise between the needs of vehicular and pedestrian travel. It is important to coordinate any traffic calming measures with the relevant roadway authority, particularly if the road in questions is a state or federal highway

Center Median

A vegetated center median can help to calm traffic by giving the sense that the edges of a roadway are closer than they may seem. As a result, drivers tend to slow down out of caution. Medians can be planted with trees, used to house green infrastructure, or host a section of crosswalk to give pedestrians a safe place to wait between two directions of traffic. Center medians create a safer roadway by providing space for several different uses, including vehicular transportation, pedestrian access, and even some habitat value.

Pinch Point

A pinch point narrows the roadway for a short section, forcing drivers to slow as they move through the space. Contrary to what one may expect, wide lanes with no jogs or changes in the roadway can give drivers a false perception of safety, causing them to drive faster or behave recklessly. Narrow roadways, or the perception of a narrower roadway, often causes drivers to slow down and be more alert. Pinch points work not only by narrowing the lane, but also by signaling to drivers that the area is a potential crossing or entry into a new area with different traffic rules.

Lane Shift

Changing the alignment of a lane at one or more locations can cause drivers to pay more attention to a roadway in order to stay in their own lane. This may result in drivers decreasing their speed, being more aware of their surroundings, and noticing pedestrians more readily. To avoid causing undue confusion, lane shifts are best used on slower sections of streets where drivers can best react to them.

Vertical Elements

Vertical elements such as street trees, buildings, and light posts can have a notable effect on reducing drivers' speed. When these elements are placed closer to the roadway, drivers may feel more wary of their surroundings. When the elements are placed closer to each other, drivers can feel as though they are traveling faster than they actually are. Both options result in drivers voluntarily reducing their speed. While these benefits are significant, it's important to follow appropriate safety guidance and statues to avoid placing elements in locations that are a real threat to drivers.

Speed Humps and Speed Tables

Similar to the speed bumps used in parking lots, speed humps and tables are vertical changes in a roadway surface that cause drivers to decrease their speed. These are different from speed bumps because the yare appropriately scaled and constructed for a roadway with higher speeds (often 15 to 25 mph). Speed bumps, on the other hand, will slow traffic almost to a stop, and are not recommended for use on roadways. It is important for vertical surface changes to be clearly marked with paint, signage, or a change in surfacing material to give drivers the ability to react to the change. While these installations are generally less common on downtown streets, they can be applied to improve the safety and visibility of a pedestrian crossing.

Parking Layout

Adequate parking is critical to downtown businesses – perhaps almost all businesses – in the United States. Because most American towns and cities separate housing from business districts to some degree, vehicles are needed to navigate the sprawling cities that result. This pattern of sprawl can be even more prominent for rural communities, where people may live miles away from their city center out of necessity for work.

While it is necessary and important to downtown areas, parking can also be a blighting influence. Vast expanses of gravel or asphalt are unwelcoming for pedestrians who are the true lifeblood of a downtown. Parking lots in front of or between every downtown business makes an area taxing for people to navigate, whether by car, bicycle, or on foot. Parking must therefore be carefully considered in a revitalization effort to best take advantage of its benefits without being taxed by its flaws.

On-Street Parking

On-street parking on downtown roadways can have a number of positive effects. First, it provides direct accessibility from parking spaces to businesses, which makes a convenient connection for patrons. Second, by separating the roadway from the sidewalk, parked cars reduce road noise and improve pedestrians' sense of safety. Lastly, drivers tend to be wary of parked vehicles where other people may suddenly throw open a door or back out of a space, which results in a traffic calming effect. On-street parking should be free whenever possible, and longer parking time limits should be applied to encourage people to park once and walk between their various downtown destinations.

Parking Lot Infill

Downtowns benefit from having many businesses in a compact location. A compact downtown allows people to come for business and perhaps stay to eat lunch across the street, or pick up a gift or some groceries before going home. However, if all these different destinations are divided by parking lots, they become difficult to access and less likely to see patrons from neighboring stores. Consider filling in infrequently-used parking areas with a park, plaza, new building, or some type of pubic space.

Lot Location

Parking lots can be strategically located to improve access to businesses while diminishing the negative impacts of parking. Locating lots behind businesses can yield easy access for pedestrians and avoid the scenario of business patrons having to walk through a hot or busy parking lot. Narrower lots at the side of a building can have similar positive results and help to diminish future sprawl.

Shared Lots

To reduce downtown sprawl, a single parking lot can be shared by multiple businesses. In some cases, one large lot can service the majority of a downtown area. When this option is chosen, it keeps each individual business from having to build and maintain its own parking lot. Businesses that operate during different hours of the day are excellent candidates to share a parking lot, such as a hair salon open from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM, and a restaurant open from 4:30 PM to 10:00 PM.

Public Open Space

Some rural towns may find that they have condemned buildings, empty lots, or sprawling parking areas that break up their downtown. These gaps can reduce pedestrian accessibility and split up a downtown into disconnected pieces. Adding public space in such areas can help to reconnect and reenergize a downtown by generating a new source of pedestrian traffic. Open space is known to draw business patrons, and can be constructed to add value to adjacent businesses, the downtown, and the community as a whole.

It's not uncommon for a new or revitalized public park to have a profound effect on a downtown. With attention often focused on infrastructure or private development, public spaces may at times fall by the wayside. Providing a space for residents to gather, celebrate, shop, relax, play, and engage with other members of their community is powerfully reinvigorating, and can change the way that people value their community and themselves.

A good open space will be responsive to residents' needs and desires. It will be comfortable in multiple seasons and at all times of day, and will be welcoming for users of all ages and abilities. Ultimately, the space should be reflective of the people it serves, both their history and their hopes for the future. It should provide or be located near amenities such as restrooms, benches, drinking fountains, picnic tables, and ample shade, and should be flexible enough to host an array of events.

A public space may be a large enough effort to become a project in its own right, or at least a full stage of the revitalization effort. Discuss open space opportunities and phasing possibilities as a team, and be realistic about the costs and challenges as well as the potential value.

Pocket Park

A pocket park is an excellent means to repurpose a small vacant or underutilized lot. Pocket parks may serve as overflow seating for a nearby restaurant, provide shade and a resting place for visitors, or mark a significant historical event within the town. Pocket parks are defined by their small size, which can make them more financially feasible, depending on the site-specific conditions.

Community Park

Community parks are larger open space areas often designed to host multiple uses for a town. They frequently include a children's playground, open lawn area for events or recreation, perhaps a bandstand or stage, and may have parking located on-site if large gatherings are expected. Ideally, a park of this size will be accessible to users of any age group, and will have some means to draw crowds at most times of day and all times of year. These may be programmed events, or could be amenities like a splash pad that draw users in the summer months.

Community Garden

By providing a space for people to grow and share together, community gardens have a long track record of bringing people together. These spaces are often used to grow produce or herbs, some of which may be sold at a local market. Community gardens are not an ideal choice if most people have a large backyard already, and therefore have private land to grow on. They also should have a skilled maintenance team who can keep pathways clear and common areas free of weeds so that the area does not become an eyesore. Community flower gardens are an alternative choice, where the maintenance team is a group of volunteer gardeners and no produce is grown.

Public Marketplace

Some rural towns may discover through public outreach and the visioning meeting that their community would benefit from a public space where residents can do business with pop-up stands or semi-permanent storefronts. A public marketplace is valuable because it enhances the social value of shopping.

Vegetation

Integrating vegetation is an effective way to make a downtown more comfortable and attractive, not to mention functional. Not only does greenery provide proven benefits to people's physical and mental health, plantings will also create shade, reduce surface runoff, and mitigate heat island effects. Much like a pedestrian or bicycle network, these benefits of streetscape vegetation accrue when a consistent network is applied across a town. Using a mix of solutions and mimicking the local landscape can further maximize the social, cultural, environmental, and utilitarian benefits of vegetation in a rural setting.

Cultivated Canopy

A network of cultivated trees throughout a community – also referred to as an urban canopy – can provide a litany of health and environmental benefits. Among these are reductions in water and air pollution, lower peak runoff during storm events, provision of shade and wildlife habitat, and mitigation of the heat island effect. A community canopy includes street trees, trees on private property, and trees in local parks. These should be considered as parts of a green network which together maximize the benefits for a town. It's worth noting that it takes time for a tree to become established and provide any benefit, which is why caring for young trees is so important. Planting a tree once and caring for it until it reaches maturity is a very efficient investment compared to replacing a struggling young tree with a healthier one every five to ten years.

Tree Retention Methods

To maximize tree retention and lifespan, soil cells and root zone protection can be installed to prevent compaction in high traffic areas. These additions are more expensive up-front, but can root damage by trees in the future while also keeping trees healthier. Trees should be given the largest possible amount of space for root growth to avoid strangling the plant in later years. Staking, fencing, and wrapping the trunk can also protect younger trees from vandalism and the elements. Finally, adequate bike parking should always be provided so that cyclists do not need to lock their bikes to young trees, which is a common cause of tree damage and mortality.

Chapter 14
Solution Review Meeting

The solution review meeting will be a critical step to seek out the public's approval for the future design. Introducing people to the general solutions selected to achieve their vision and goals will ensure that the public isn't surprised by the finalized plan or its results. While it is the final meeting for this process, it is only a midpoint for the project plan. Following a similar pattern to previous meetings for consistency, this event should have an introduction, information dissemination and direction, discussion, and consensus-building step.

Introduction

Though the project is likely well-known at this point, it is still important to briefly review the Production Team's names and roles, introduce the project's name and purpose, and outline the goals for the meeting. This step will help catch the audience up to speed and orient any new attendees. Be sure to remain consistent with project naming and any branding that has been used in the past.

Information Dissemination and Direction

The information-dissemination step in this meeting will be almost as dense as the previous progress meeting. Here, you will show all the solutions that have been chosen to achieve your goal, using whatever media is necessary to convey how that solution will be applied. Consider using photographs, sketches, or written statements. Keep the descriptions true to the preliminary design intent, but not so detailed that people can comment on the design itself. That will come later. It's also helpful to display the solutions side-by-side with the specific goal(s) they address. Since the vision statement and goals have already been approved by the public, pairing these with solutions can help show people that they have had a real impact on the process.

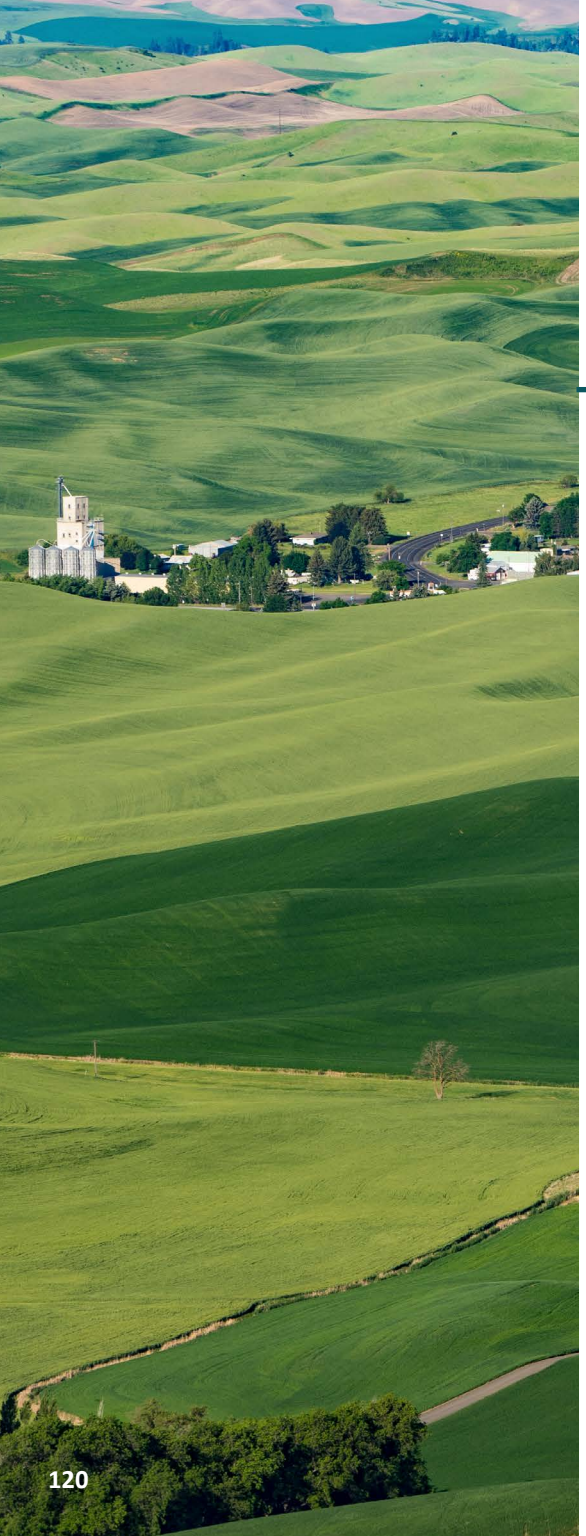
Discussion

The discussion step for this meeting may be a little different than in the past. Since your team will be requesting a simple yes, no, or a few comments from the meeting's participants, it may not be necessary for people to deliberate in smaller groups. Instead, consider lining up the design solutions gallery-style and asking participants to "vote" using stickers. Collaborate with the team's city representative and design professional to decide how this portion of the meeting will be carried out.

Consensus-Building

To conclude the meeting, review which options have been accepted, and which – if any – have been rejected. It may be useful to open up the floor for brief comments, and to be open to suggestions of entirely new solutions. Because people have already voted in the discussion step, the consensus-building will be shorter than in previous meetings.

After the meeting, it will be time to package up all relevant materials and hand them off to the team's design professional. This includes the vision statement, set of goals, critical SWOT analysis data, and community-approved design solutions. The team's professional designer will work to apply those solutions to your town. The design process will take time and will probably require that the designers double back and gather information in more detail using land surveys or building plan research. It is important for the designer to have the leeway they need to craft a beautiful and unique revitalization plan, while also remaining true to the focus of the project and the promises that have been made to the town's residents.



Chapter 14
Plan Finalization and Next Steps

Congratulations! You have reached the end of the Grassroots Rural Revitalization Framework. While there is still a great deal of work ahead, now is a good time to stop and recognize how much work has already been done. Take pride in the hours you have put in, the strong foundation you have built for the project, and all the things that you have learned thus far.

Moving Forward

This framework concludes at this point because an individual project's needs become too specific to be guided by a generalized framework past this point. Fortunately, the next steps for most projects will follow a similar pattern to those you have already completed. The revitalization plan should be drafted, reviewed by the production team, presented to the public, and then finalized. It will be important to continue all public involvement efforts and maintain the positive relationships that have been built.

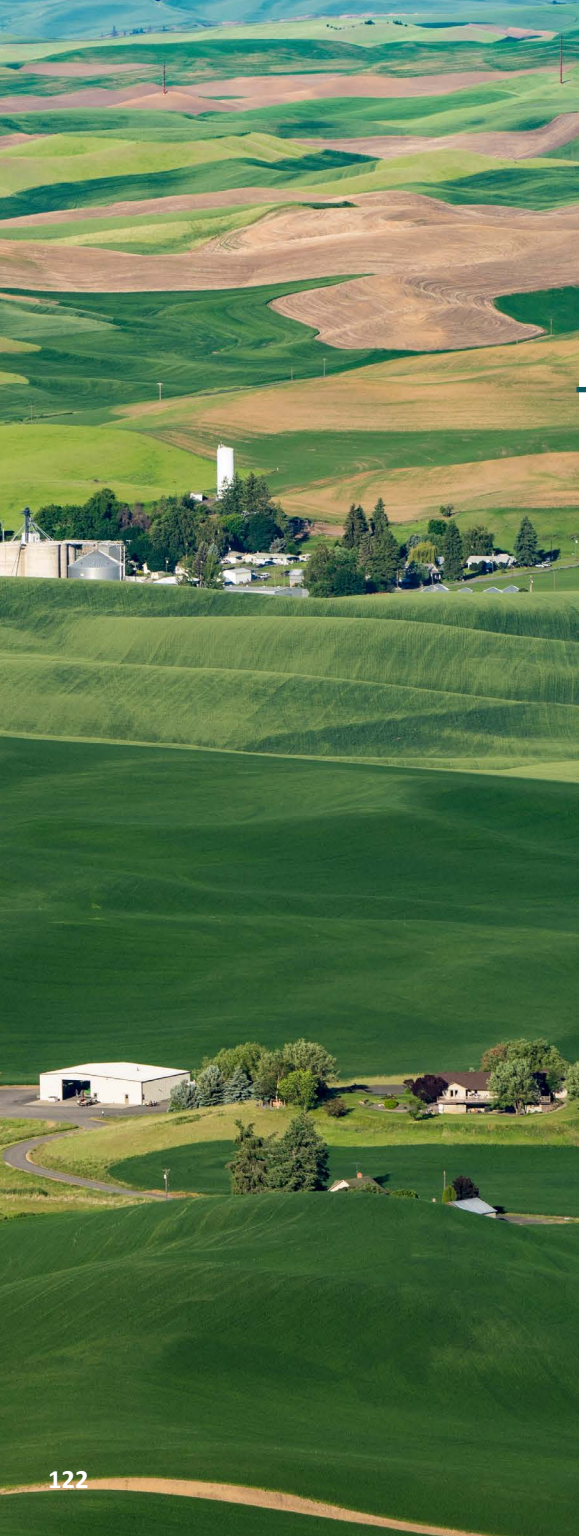
Financing the project will be an important next step. Here, the developer or financial expert will assist on cost estimation and seek out possible funding sources. The city or agency representative can work to secure grant funding, while the community outreach coordinator can gather public support for a bond measure if one is needed or chosen. The amount and timing of available funds should help the team phase the project if it is too large to tackle at once.

It will also be the responsibility of the Production Team to ensure that your respective roles conclude successfully. Some team members may no longer need to be involved once the revitalization plan has been created. Others, such as the city representative, will see their workload increase. Before ground is broken on the project is a good time to hand off the reins

to an Implementation Team, tasked with seeing the construction of the revitalization effort through. This shift should be tidy and well-organized, with new roles and responsibilities for the implementation team clearly articulated. Some members of the Production Team may still be included if they are needed to stay on through project construction.

Finally, when all phases of the revitalization plan have been constructed, it's time to shift into maintenance mode. This should focus both on the physical aspects of the revitalization effort as well as the social relationships built throughout the process. A dedicated maintenance professional or team should be put in charge of any new pathways, roadways, open space, or vegetation that has been constructed. All the improvement in the world will mean nothing if it isn't maintained. Social relationships can be maintained through active programming in the revitalized space, and by hosting inclusive events that celebrate the efforts community members put in to improve their town.

With any luck, the members of the pRoduction Team will continue to reach out to each other when they face a problem that requires collaboration to solve. Residents of the town may find themselves working more with neighbors or community members they had rarely spoken to before. People might come together for gatherings in the space they helped to change. And through these small changes, these new relationships made concrete by a lively and welcoming town, a cycle of prosperity can begin.



Chapter 15 | Part III

Conclusion

This process does not stand alone as a grassroots planning tool. There are shelves, archives, and web directories filled with community planning guidance that emphasizes public involvement. What makes this process different is the degree of involvement recommended – the empowerment of the public – and the focus on rural areas specifically. By defining "rural" by its qualities, not by population or location alone, the process helps to identify a type of town that is most likely to have unmet needs for planning assistance.

This framework is also more comprehensive than most existing tools. Focusing on the four wellness factors of society, environment, economy, and technology creates a more balanced approach to solve local issues, and allows for more detail to be given in each of these areas. Rather than linking to outside resources, the framework provides much of the needed information directly. However, guidance does fall short in the area of sustainability, but this fact opens a door to potential continuing research.

Two opportunities for ancillary research stood out as the best partners: brownfield mitigation and waste management. While the framework asserts that sustainability is important to the health and longevity of a community, it gives little specific guidance to achieve that goal. With the common lack of recycling services in rural communities, and some areas using personal dumps, sustainable waste management research could be paired with this process to leverage significant benefits to small towns across the country. Rural areas also tend to have fewer resources at hand to mitigate polluted areas which can reduce quality of life and negatively impact public health. A brownfield identification and mitigation strategy, as well as information on grant funding, could help to manage this issue.

Additionally, a pilot project to test the results of the framework would be valuable to test the framework in a real-world setting. Such an evaluation could identify flaws and gaps, or even areas that are too prescriptive. Testing the effectiveness of the production team is also important to understand whether the roles – and their associated qualifications – are effective to round out the group's knowledge and allow the team to make well-informed decisions.

Continuing the framework through the construction and long-term maintenance is also a possibility, though the effort may encounter the same challenge of site-specificity that this project did. Some guidance on how to phase a project, seek grant funding, and manage maintenance would be valuable to a community, making the challenge worthwhile.

The lessons learned and opportunities for additional research point toward the single most challenging part of this project: knowing when to put the pen down. There's no doubt perfection could be achieved given limitless time and resources, but even graduate students must rest their heads eventually. For the sheer number of times I wrote the phrase "ambitious and achievable" into this framework, one would think that I would at least practice the same sentiment in my life. One would be wrong – achievable usually fell to the wayside. While the product I have created here is something I'm proud of, I'll probably continue to wonder where else I could take it.

As my first masters degree, this project contained plenty of missteps and lightbulb moments that guided me eventually – sometimes reluctantly – toward success. I have learned how to be a better listener, how to look for the good questions over the easy answers, and when to ask for help (sometimes). I have benefitted from the expertise of an excellent advisor and great colleagues, and I will be grateful to them forever. If anything, this project has taught me where my resources are, and that most of them are people.

My thanks again to the people who have helped me to complete this project.

Appendix A

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Appendix B

Interview Transcripts: Matt Adams

Please note, interviews are edited for length and clarity.

Elaine: So I have a couple questions on Rupert Square that I'd like to ask you. I've gone through all of the project documentation and I have to say, this was a really cool project and it was fun to read through all of it.

Matt: Yeah, it was a great project.

Elaine: From your perspective, as a designer – so Rupert is your hometown?

Matt: That's accurate, yes.

Elaine: How do you think your experience as a local resident influenced your design approach?

Matt: Well I think the big difference it makes is you know a bunch of people that your project is going to impact. You know them personally. So any time you do design, you're thinking about the user of the space. But instead of thinking of the user in terms of their age, or what they're doing, you also see their face. You know who they are. And so that's a different thing. You have a much more vested interest in the outcome of the design. My mom goes there. There's not many projects you do where your parents spend time in the space. And they all hold you accountable too.

Elaine: I'm sure, and especially designing a small town, and the town square, that's a big deal.

Matt: Mhm, since this was built in 1906, this might be the fourth modification if you count the original construction. I think it's the third or second renovation, I can't entirely remember.

Elaine: Okay, great to know. I'm also curious, knowing the local people, can you describe the public involvement structure to me? Particularly who was involved in the core team.

Matt: That's a really long answer, because it started in 2011, and we went through three public involvement stages. Do you want me to go over all that, or is there something in particular you're interested in?

Elaine: So specifically what I was interested in and Christopher and I chatted about this a little bit, was educating public liaisons. Members of the community who would hold smaller meetings and reach out to their peer groups. I was curious what the benefits or challenges were to that.

Matt: Okay, so that was the middle phase of the project. We had formed a task force of people, and these were people that the city had involved. We had some input on that too. It was just active community members, business owners, there was a representative from the county, there was a city council person, like liaison. But mostly in that type of town you can identify who the active community members are so that was the groups. We did visioning, programming, conceptual design, but we also at every step of the way we trained them. We gave them a training and then we asked them to do the same with their own small groups. I think you asked me what the good outcomes were and the challenges?

Elaine: I did.

Matt: The outcomes were that we had a task force of about seven people. But when the community representatives went out and talked to their groups, we effectively grew our task force to 80. And hosting a meeting of 80 people is very challenging, and we never had to do that. We just hosted a seven person meeting; they each hosted their own eight to twelve person meeting then brought the information back. If you're sitting down with your neighbor to talk about it, you're going to be far more open and honest than if you're going to be in a setting with a design professional from out of town where you don't know what to say or how to act. So, I think we got better, more honest feedback. And we also reached into parts of the community that we wouldn't have been able to if it wasn't done this way. The challenge was that we weren't there, so everything we heard back went through a filter. We have no idea what really happened at those meetings. So you kind of have to take the information – you have to be a little conservative with how you use it.

Elaine: So there has to be a lot of trust with the liaisons you train

Matt: Right. And by train – it's like a 20 minute conversation that you have, like, on a Tuesday evening. It's not, you know it's not – there's only so much training you can actually do. But we felt that we got really great information out of it.

Elaine: It certainly seemed that way reading through the project documentation and how the project was received afterwards. People definitely seemed as through they felt heard and represented through the process

Matt: I think so. No one walked up to me and said, 'Wow, you guys really listened, thank you so much.' What they said was 'This is amazing, great job. I don't think people ever said they felt heard. But the more telling thing is that they ran a bond to pay for it, and the community said yes. That's when we knew that people were in favor of the project and felt like they had been informed properly. I think it's about feeling informed far more than 'Oh they listened to me." Usually the city just pays for these things out of their budget, and the city staff kind of pushed them through. We actually had to get the entire citizenry to say yes in an election, and I never had a project like that before. We only gather input to push them through.

Elaine: I remember how excited you were when that passed

Matt: Yeah, it was pretty thrilling

Elaine: That does bring me to the next question, was there any tension with the public on the project? IF so, how was it resolved?

Matt: Yes, the entire time. And still today. And that's just every project, that's normal and that'll never go away. And you don't necessary resolve it, you address it, but that doesn't mean it gets resolved. The tension that's there throughout and remains is generally people who disagree with anything, and I don't know if you can resolve it. You do give those people the opportunity to give their input and talk to you and provide feedback, but you can't change a project based on one person complaining. So yes, there was tension during design and during construction and after. Several people were upset. but almost everyone that was involved felt really good about the project and

felt like it was a success. So I guess, I wasn't quite right. Most of it was resolved just by people seeing the final product, and seeing their neighbors happy and in the space, that resolved most of the tension.

Elaine: Okay, wonderful. You're leading into every next question really well. I'm also curious about how the project was received. In the information I've read though it seems like there were other ancillary efforts that were taken on by the public, like Project Facelift, that were occurring at the same time that may have been catalyzed by the project.

Matt: Well, not Project Facelift. That's been going on for ten or twelve years, so specifically that, no. But how the project was received – it was overwhelming. I think that's evidenced by how many people just show up, in the space. When they opened and cut the ribbon at the Fourth of July festivities, they had four, five, maybe even ten times the number of normal attendance, so you can physically see that there was so much excitement in the community that dramatically more people showed up. Which was good. And they'd watched it being built the whole time, so they knew it was coming. And then there has been far more programming in the space. So was this a catalyst for anything else – yes. But it's mostly been on the programming side, not other community upgrade efforts I would say. But they don't need a lot of that. What they need is active programming and social events in the spaces they have, and that has occurred

Elaine: I know you mentioned the Christmas Bazaar, the celebration?
Matt: Well they have multiple things. They turn on the Christmas lights and do a chili feed. They've always done that, they just do it in the new space now. But they've added a Christmas market and a skating rink in the space, and it was very successful. And then they di a New Years Eve event in the space as well. They have several new events, I'm not aware of all of them. They are constantly being called to ask if people can rent or use the space.

Elaine: That actually brings me to my last question. How was leadership transferred from the design team when moving from design to construction?

Matt: I'm not sure actually what you mean by that.

Elaine: It seems like the land group led the charge for creating a vision, the design, and working for the public. But at some point, the city had to take over and find a contractor.

Matt: Well, we really led the construction as well. All we really do is draw out of the city what their vision is. We don't tell them what their vision is. We're the guide, we're not the hero, or the champion, so they were always in charge the whole way. We gave them guidance, a roadmap on how to get there, and helped them a long the way. So we had a really primary during the design phase, but we also assembled all the bid documents, ran the bid, set up the contracts between the owner and contractor, and we did all the construction administration. So we were the owner's representative the whole way. It was built in three phases, so there was I wouldn't say there was a transition at all between design and construction. It was built in three phases, so there was construction going on for a long time. There was a period when we had one phase closed out, one under construction, and

one was in design, so there was always something going on. The program, though, has been completely transitioned to the owner. We told them, you can't build this space and not activate it with people. SO that follows more of the pattern that you were describing where you kind of hand off as some point. The other thing we handed off was maintenance, you know after it's built the contractor's not there anymore, and you have to maintain the fountain system and the lights and all those kind of things. Does that answer your question?

Elaine: Yes, that was perfect. I was particularly curious about this project because it did seem so well-received and it happened in a small, relatively-isolated community, so it's an excellent example of the type of community I'm researching.

Matt: The other thing about Rupert city is, the reason they're successful – we just happened to be a part of it, and we did a great job, but they have a great group of people. In 1994 they formed a little group called The Renaissance. So, what we did, we came in during the last third of the end of a 20 plus year effort to revitalize their downtown, and there's like hundreds of people that poured a ton of effort into that. The catalyst for that was actually the Wilson Theater remodel. Which then, led people to say, 'We love this great historic building, we need better public space outside of it,' and that gave them better focus on the square. They also have a really top notch public administrator. He and the CFO really guided the city and gave the council, the department heads, and the community the confidence to go for it. I mean, they invested millions, and small towns never have the confidence to invest like that. They get nervous, the don't want to spend the money. So, they were a big part of it. I mean, Jeff secured nearly two million dollars in matching federal grants to what we secured. So their ability to create confidence, be smart enough to hire design professionals, then multiply the money they had really led to great outcomes. We were just a small part of that to be able to partner with them.

Elaine: So it seems like there was a lot of quality leadership happening from the city in particular

Matt: Yes, definitely. Because there's so many times that we work with different groups, we'll work with so many groups and do a great public process, but then there's not any competent leadership, and the whole thing falls apart

Elaine: So part of the reason for the project t that I'm doing is to create a bridge between the local leadership for a project be that city or just a group of volunteers and also design professionals. The goal is to make the design process more representative of the public. Rupert is a great example, but it doesn't always happen that way. And also giving people the skills and knowledge to effectively guide their own process. It's a capacity building exercise so that they would be able to do what Rupert and the city government in Rupert did.

Matt: So, when we did the master plan, the bulk of the master plan was a step-by-step guide to go from master plan to programmed events, and we laid out step one, step two, step three. They basically just followed it. We I think did a good job remembering that it's their space, their project, their city, and we were just there to get put their vision and their ideas on paper and help them build their space.

There was no ego from the design team. We weren't trying to, like, build a monument to ourselves

Elaine: You were effectively acting as the professional translator to get the community's vision built?

Matt: Yeah, we're the guide.

Elaine: Well, I think that answers most of my questions on the process, is there anything you'd like to add?

Matt: Nah, I think I've told you all about it. It was just really great to be down there as they cut the ribbon and observe all the excitement in the community.

Appendix C

Interview Transcripts: Julia Oxarango-Ingram

Elaine: Thank you for taking some time and meeting with me, I really appreciate it!

Julia: Oh, I love it! We've got bright new minds coming at these issues.

Elaine: That's what I'm trying to be.

Julia: Well if you're trying, you will. It's kind of amazing to me. I just think if you love what you do, if you're passionate about it and you're always seeking answers to things, you will be one of those problem solvers that will help us get beyond where we are.

Elaine: Well before we begin, let me give you a background on the project itself. The ultimate goal is community revitalization, so this is basically turning over the early steps of the design process to be run by a local community. It puts the visioning, information-gathering, and the basic design solutions all in the hands of an inclusive design team, which has professionals, local residents, people from local government. What people will end up with at the end of this process is not a fully developed plan, it's a set of community-approved design solutions that can be turned over to a designer to tailor to the community. For me, that was a good place to stop because things get very site-specific after that point. So, with that in mind, I'd like to turn it over to you if you have any questions about the process or goals.

Julia: Sure. Okay, well I'm curious if you're aware of the Gem Community process? But this is a Department of Commerce effort that started in Shoshone, Idaho about 20 years ago. We were trying to figure out what we could do to get some vitality back in these downtown buildings. And the City of Shoshone asked me to head it up right after I moved there. It's actually really similar to what you're describing, which is pretty cool. It started by reaching out and finding all the stakeholders in the community, so parents, youth, business owners, and property owners, and my husband was a judge, so we brought law enforcement into it as well. Religious leaders came out too, they were there. We tried to find anybody in a small community that would be a place where people would go to for resources or for community. That even went to barbershops and beauty parlors. And then we started doing visioning meetings, and we did a SWOT analysis. And the Department of Commerce sent people who were trained to help us do the SWOT analysis and all that. We didn't have anybody to help us out with design options, which was where we were trying to find somebody to help and do that. We were looking for grants and trying to reach out to people who could create designs for the ideas we had. What was really interesting was, out of that – and we did this in several communities, not just in Shoshone – we ended up creating a regional community economic development group and we used this process in all of those towns. And if they went through this process then they got some money that they could reapply for every year. I think it was about ten thousand dollars that they could use for economic development projects, especially in downtown areas. It was used a lot on planter boxes, some signage, building fixes, I think we did some pocket parks and things like that. But the program kind of fizzled out, the money dried up. They were kind of hoping that people would create funds to keep things like this going in the future, but we found that this just wasn't happening in rural communities. There was this sense that every so often people have an idea, they fundraise, there's this whole flurry of activity, and then it dies out.

Julia: I also saw that there was a mindset in rural communities that everything should be volunteer work. Government shouldn't fund these public works. So, if you give money to someone to fix their façade, but the guy next door did it himself, then there's a lot of frustration there.

Julia: But for a while, it worked. Every time they did it, it worked. The trick was to get organizations and government and everyone to agree that it was important to keep a fund maybe made up of public and private partnerships to keep this going. That it was important to start paying people, and thinking, one of the things we would be doing is to create jobs for entrepreneurship and support it, rather than people just accepting empty buildings or expecting everybody to figure it out themselves. It took a long time. I've been out there doing this work for a good 20 years now. I would say that in the last five to ten years, the tables are turning. It feels like people are realizing that governments change over. You don't know who's going to be in charge or what the agenda is going to be. So, you might have a progressive leadership for a few years, then you might have a few years where it's regressive. So you almost have to have entities that work with the government and keep these efforts going, but that don't rely just on the local government. One of the challenges was an idea that you shouldn't have to pay somebody to do anything. The days are gone when you had a stay at home mom who had extra time to volunteer. Now, everybody is working. If there's both in the household, they're working. You can't assume that there will even be those people available to do the work, even if they wanted to. So if you've only got somebody doing it in their few extra hours, a lot of things don't get done. So I do think that part of the process needs to be for building capacity and building more jobs as a part of the process in your community.

Julia: I only started to get a little more successful with that in the last few years when I showed example after example where people had somebody paid to do this. It was really a struggle to get people to pay for folks to go to conferences where they could learn about other ideas and models. But eventually I got larger businesses to sponsor those educational opportunities. That really makes a difference for people to see the opportunity that's out there. Plus you then create a network of people that can talk to you about how you did it and mentor you through the process. I really like that there are design and policy solutions that come out of this. So, are you familiar with the Idaho Rural Partnership Rural Reviews?

Elaine: I'm familiar with the organization, but not the reviews, no.

Julia: The community reviews are really cool. They do about four or five a year. They have to be below a certain size, people can say 'Here's what we're facing,' like we have a large business that just closed, and now we don't know what we're going to do. What IRP would do would be to pull together – depending on what their issues were, maybe they're a community that has a capacity to do more of tourism – they would identify the features of the town that they could work with to meet their needs. So IRP might bring in different people with specialties in a certain area like tourism or utilities, and they'd do a three-day process or something like that. You'd have a group of locals, we'd get an overview of what to expect, then we'd go out and do tours of the community. And then we would do a lot

of interviewing all day of different stakeholder groups. So we might go to a school or a senior center, and we would look at examples of problems or hear what people said the issues were. Then we came back and brainstormed the whole next day to figure out what resources these people could use. We had people in our group getting all that information down, then that evening we would do a big community presentation of the things we were suggesting. Then we'd go home and put all the suggestions and connections together and someone would compile the whole report. So within a few months they'd have a whole report to utilize. Some communities really took it and ran with it, but others really struggled. They had volunteer city councils, and just couldn't keep going. Then the University of Idaho came in and started helping them continue in the process. We wish we had more connections to students that could propose design options or make renderings.

Julia: It would be great to have someone to define, we have these needs and these resources, so who can we identify to write a grant or make a design? I think if we had that, all of these things would be more successful. I know people get frustrated, but sometimes they really need someone to hold their hand through this process.

Elaine: And who can blame them when they have such limited access to the professionals they need to guide them?

Julia: Right! I wish we cold work out some sort of partnership with you guys, some students. It would really help a lot of people.
Elaine: That's definitely something to look into, it would make a great studio project. Do you mind, can I ask how you balanced the economic and community sides of planning? Ideally they go hand in hand, but as a designer we see how sometimes it doesn't go that way.

Julia: I have lots of stories there, and there's definitely tension there sometimes. So I grew up in these rural areas, but lived and traveled in cities all over the world. I got to see other places and how they did things. I learned about how relatives in rural communities in other countries had this bartering system that worked really well, and they were in the middle class. I came back with all these ideas, and felt like 'If I could only do it the way they do it in Spain,' we could d so much. At first people would get angry, like, we're not them, we're us. People would just shut down. So I started just doing it myself. We had a law office, and we couldn't afford an office and a house, so we created an office in the front of our house and did it in such a way that at night we could turn it into our home. And it worked, miraculously. I helped my husband run it, and we had three employees in this office. Then we expanded to a building next door because we needed a yard for our kids. So I had to work form home and do all the bookkeeping, and little by little I brought in extra help while I was working. Then we opened up a little restaurant at a building across the street, then that worked into a coffee shop and that became catering, and that turned into an event planning business. So little by little people saw that this was something you could do. We did it for ourselves, but we ended up being part of rural economic development. When you prove that something can work, people will want to expand it and adopt it. That was a personal example that taught me about how it can work. So it's all about creating this network to make this kind of thing work. We had people that did our baked goods for us. We bought our tea from

over here, our coffee from there, our ice cream from somewhere else. We relied on other people to do business, and that helps their business expand. We kind of just learned by doing.

Julia: When I've gone to other places, I've noticed there's this theme to rural places when they're successful. There was everything from food coming in from the farms, there were schools in the downtown instead of on the outskirts. All of your retail and restaurants and theater – anything that you would look for in a community would be right downtown in a pretty compact area. It makes a huge difference.

Elaine: Definitely, it does. I want to thank you so much for your time today, and all your expertise. It was really helpful.

Julia: Oh yeah, of course. It was a good interview, I'm looking forward to the presentation.