

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLACE DESIGN

INTRODUCTION

What creates economic vitality in communities has changed dramatically over the past decade. We now live in a global economy. For reasons that are discussed in other reports in this series, our economy has shifted from one based on manufacturing to an economy based on technology and innovation. In today's economy, talent recruitment, retention and development are critical components and are directly linked to place design.

Place design is not limited to individual communities. There must be a regional focus.

It stands to reason that communities can accomplish more by working together than on their own. Despite this, successful regional economic development organizations are few and far between. There are reasons for this.

It is imperative that we understand why so many regional economic development organizations fail. It is equally imperative that we understand what makes regional economic development organizations succeed. Then, we must put the lessons learned into practice and create a regional organization that can facilitate place design all across the Central Texas Region.

WHY THEY FAIL

There are many factors that contribute to the failure of regional economic development organizations. Most result from the lack of self-discipline on the part of participants. When participants begin to focus on differences rather than those things they have in common, effective collaboration is near an end.

Community collaboration is not a natural state. It is important to keep in mind that communities within a region have a history of competing. They compete in high school sports, for infrastructure funding, for grants, for private investment, for elected office. And, most importantly, they compete for their life blood – tax revenues. All successful economic development produces tax revenues. It is at that point, when investment occurs and tax revenues are produced, that competitive urges tend to destroy collaboration.

The risks fall into three categories.

ORGANIZATIONAL

To suppress competitive urges, self discipline is required. Processes must be constructed to maintain cohesion, focus and discipline. This must be done at the beginning of the collaboration to keep problems from developing. Too often,

regional groups wait until trouble develops to look for a remedy. That is, often, too late. It is important to take time to:

- Set clear ground rules.
- Develop a clear mission that focuses on the purpose.
- Set attainable goals. Find the low-hanging fruit.
- Limit goals to maintain focus.
- Evaluate, reflect, and celebrate. Nothing breeds success like success.

LEADERSHIP

Effective leaders are trustworthy and predictable. They:

- Know that diversity leads to conflicts about power and control.
- Acknowledge conflict and have the skills and techniques to manage it.
- Maintain control and, at the same time, share power.
- Resist political pressure by demonstrating how individual goals can be achieved through collaborative goals.
- Involve others in decision making.
- Create realistic expectations.

MEMBERSHIP

Members must value relationships and be committed to getting work done with, and through, others. They:

- Establish trust before acting by behaving in a trustworthy manner. What they say is congruent with what they do.
- Stay committed to the organization to avoid problems from frequent turnover.
- Do their share of the work and let others do theirs.
- Freely acknowledge the contributions of others.
- Engage and involve those with different views.
- Avoid turf battles or power struggles.

WHY THEY SUCCEED

Communities are different. But, they are not so different that tremendous benefits cannot occur from effective collaboration. So, how do regional economic development organizations succeed?

First, the leaders of organizations that get things done take the time to develop proactive processes to minimize the risk *before they begin*. They also:

- Develop a clearly understood decision making process and stick to it.
- Get stakeholders to agree on procedures and members roles.
- Run structured, transparent meetings.
- Provide members with job descriptions to clarify expectations and responsibilities.
- Create formal mechanisms to share information.
- Set aside social time for informal interaction to build relationships.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS

There are some issues that you cannot solve yourself. Regional economic development organizations can be effective because they do three things.

First, a collaborative effort creates lasting relationships built on trust. These relationships create a safe environment where participants can discuss and act on issues that may be competitive or threatening in other environments.

Second, participants come to the organization with different resources. The regional organization provides the venue and framework for resources, contributed by participants, to be effectively utilized.

Third, regional organizations provide the vehicle through which members can unite to maximize political influence. Elected officials and bureaucrats may not suffer from failing to listen to individuals and, in fact, some may play one against the other. They are much more attentive to groups.

Central Texas has enjoyed regional success in the past. Improvements to US 195 from Killeen to Georgetown could not have occurred without multiple city, county and TxDOT District collaboration. Texas A&M University – Central Texas would not be a reality today without the Central Texas University Task Force. Fort Hood would not have a \$7.1 billion annual impact on the region without the efforts of the Heart of Texas Defense Alliance.

There is much more to do in the future. Transportation infrastructure must keep pace with growth. Our water supply must be protected and grown to meet future demand. And, Texas A&M University – Central Texas must be planned and built so that the entire region benefits.

TALENT DEVELOPMENT AND PLACE DESIGN

Central Texas, and the communities that comprise it, must become a place where people feel at home. To attract and retain its future workforce, Central Texas must use discipline to prevent sprawling concrete jungles and scale its development to people. Here are examples:

- Several downtowns are being redeveloped. Those that are not, should be. Authenticity is important to talent.
- Communities should share information. City planners can meet on a regular basis to discuss design standards, share best practices, and provide support for each other.

- Parks and green spaces should be connected regionally.
- Regional newcomer information should be developed.
- Regional professional recruitment organizations should be developed for education, medical and other expanding professions.
- Regional activities for young professionals should be developed.
- Central Texas' rich multi-cultural heritage should be celebrated and promoted regionally.

THE FUTURE

Few areas of the state and nation are confronted with opportunity as rich and varied as the Central Texas/Fort Hood region. **Our strategy, just as it should be for any community that wants to survive and prosper in the future, is to proactively create a place where talent wants to reside.**

We cannot reach our full potential unless we develop the will and the skill to work together regionally. This is a challenge we had better come to embrace. Much depends on it.