

A photograph of a lively street in a historic town. The street is lined with multi-story brick buildings featuring ornate architectural details like arched windows and decorative cornices. Some buildings have festive decorations, including wreaths and red bows. Pedestrians are walking on the sidewalks, and several cars are parked along the street. The scene is captured during the day with soft lighting.

Smart Growth As Economic Development:

Helping Communities Find and Create Competitive
Advantage(s)

Speakers

- ▶ Nora Johnson, Policy Fellow, US EPA
- ▶ Kathy Nothstine, Associate Director, NADO
- ▶ William Fulton, Vice President, Smart Growth America



Context/Why We're Interested

- ▶ We all know the US economy has changed, and will continue to change
- ▶ We are seeing that many communities can no longer do what they once did



EPA's Research

- ▶ Trying to understand how communities can reinvent themselves after the loss (or decline) of the primary economic driver
- ▶ We think: a community's place-based assets are key to this reinvention



Defining Competitive Advantage

- ▶ Successful communities are taking new approach to economic development which includes:
 - ▶ Place based investments and connecting those investments to people and workforce development efforts,
 - ▶ Leveraging existing community place/people assets, building off regional and community communities' competitive advantage(s).

- ▶ Competitive advantage is defined as the collection of attributes of a place (community, locality, region, state) that distinguish it from another place and that can be used to help generate economic growth.
 - ▶ The attributes of a place include: people and their skills; condition of technical, educational, infrastructure, and capital resources; natural and scenic resources; and the quality of place and experience that exists in a community and that can be used to attract and grow businesses and talent



With Smart Growth America, we have:

- ▶ Researched and developed case studies in 22 communities
- ▶ Identified key themes and strategies for communities to pursue



Key Themes

- ▶ Create economic development strategies that work
 - ▶ Pursue strategies that target a knowledge-based economy
 - ▶ Pursue strategies that can supplement or build on traditional economic driver

- ▶ Invest in place
 - ▶ Revitalize the downtown and create vibrant neighborhoods
 - ▶ Community can provide the incentive
 - ▶ Façade improvement programs, streetscapes, parks, assistance to address vacancies, etc



Key Strategies

- ▶ Leverage existing assets to support new goals
 - ▶ Communities look to build on what is already there – natural resources, higher education, historic downtowns, cultural institutions

- ▶ Garner citizen input, cultivate support for the vision
 - ▶ Formal or informal planning processes

- ▶ Invest in and commit to planning
 - ▶ Integrate planning processes (comp plans, economic development, etc)
 - ▶ Create action plans

- ▶ Foster leadership and cooperation
 - ▶ Leadership can come from anywhere, but is critical



Key Strategies con't

- ▶ Create and leverage incentives/grants
 - ▶ State/federal incentives and grants can be helpful
 - ▶ But don't forget local opportunities

- ▶ Make it easy to invest in the community
 - ▶ Utilize incentives
 - ▶ Remove red tape, provide assistance, market your community

- ▶ Use public-private partnerships strategically
 - ▶ Can help with financing or fundraising
 - ▶ Create lasting partnerships and private sector investment



Select Case Studies

- ▶ Roanoke, VA
 - ▶ Leverage existing assets to support new goals
 - ▶ Invest in and commit to planning
 - ▶ Foster leadership and cooperation
 - ▶ Create and leverage incentives/grants
 - ▶ Make it easy to invest in the community
 - ▶ Use public-private partnerships strategically



Select Case Studies

- ▶ Emporia, KS
 - ▶ Leverage existing assets to support new goals
 - ▶ Create and leverage incentives/grants
 - ▶ Make it easy to invest in the community
 - ▶ Use public-private partnerships strategically



Final Thoughts

- ▶ Many communities utilize a combination of the strategies above
- ▶ There is no “right” order to do this work
- ▶ Finally, communities need the time and space to evaluate assets, potential incentives, etc and then follow through

