



Community Quality of Life Placemaking

An Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Design Element



February 2020

Introduction – Entrepreneurship Connection

Entrepreneurial ecosystem building is about growing an environment where entrepreneurial talent can be inspired and supported. More and better entrepreneurial ventures are outcomes of strong community-based entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Example from a rural community situated on public lands:

- **Civic entrepreneurship**--Capitalizing on public lands and development of public sector amenities that open these lands to recreational and experiential tourism activities
- **Business entrepreneurship and a gathering space for entrepreneurial talent**--A local coffee shop with unique food items that becomes a gathering spot and networking space for visitors to the community, residents and entrepreneurs
- **A growth venture** focused on guide services tied to a community's public lands. This venture not only helps visitors with better experiences but can become a hub for guide and tour services for other public lands within the larger region. This venture becomes a small corporate headquarters creating jobs in a wide range of careers (e.g., accounting, marketing, communications, human relations, support, logistics and executive officers). This is a growth venture with deeper and broader socio-economic footprints.
- **A vibrant downtown** redeveloped by a nonprofit main street program full of retail and service ventures. At the center of this downtown is a nonprofit community center (run by the area chamber of commerce) that provides networking services to visitors.

Our community example is a community that is committed to quality of life placemaking for its residents, visitors and entrepreneurs. Let's explore a bit more why placemaking is so important for each of these audiences.

Residents. The community is envisioning and building a community with great schools, high quality childcare, housing and amenities that meet and exceed the needs and expectations of residents including workers essential for this community's economy. The commitment to placemaking includes not only the physical environment in which it is functional and attractive, but also with the cultural environment where residents call this community their hometown.

Visitors. This community has the potential to become an attractive and competitive designation for visitors. In doing so this community has the opportunity to grow a stronger economy creating economic opportunities for both workers and entrepreneurs. Placemaking coupled with entrepreneurship can evolve the amenities into the kind of place where visitors want to visit and maybe become residents.

Entrepreneurs. Smart placemaking, rooted in genuine community assets and opportunities, creates an environment with entrepreneurial ventures that can thrive and those engaged in these ventures can enjoy the kind of community where they can personally thrive. Placemaking makes a profound difference in creating the kind of environment where entrepreneurial talent can root and grow.

Now let's take a deeper look at considerations associated with community quality of life placemaking.



Big Picture View – Community Prosperity Framework

Every American community can thrive and should have the opportunity to be successful. We are employing our **Community Prosperity Framework** whereby every community willing to be smart and work hard can achieve prosperity. Within this framework there are three development essentials for achieving greater and more broadly shared community prosperity:

People – Place – Economy

Place = Quality of Life Placemaking

People. Communities need residents to thrive--residents who are consumers supporting health care and local shopping, human talent that meets workforce needs and children ensuring local education. Our economies are structurally changing with automation, outsourcing, offshoring and increasing electronic commerce. These trends are undermining quality local employment and careers and creating challenges for our communities. Additionally, central to demographic and social health are communities welcoming and encouraging diversity of human talent.

Place. Talented people are mobile. They can choose where they want to live. Communities must focus on their assets and develop genuine places through **quality of life placemaking** investments.

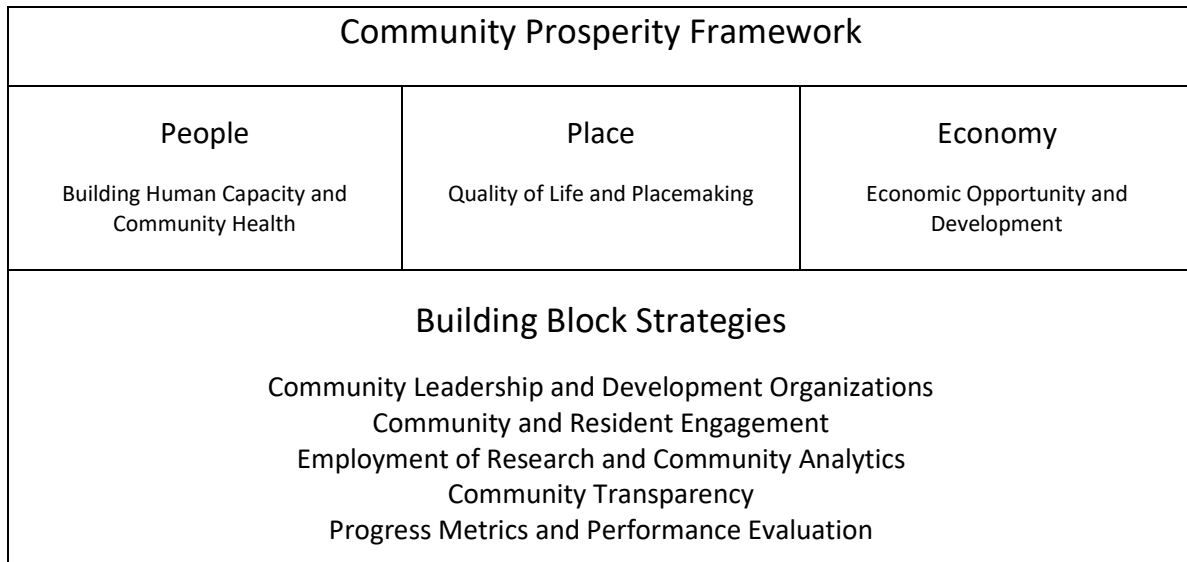
Economy. Communities operate within a global free market economy. Every community, if it is to thrive, must grow a diverse, competitive and resilient economy. Based on our experience and research we believe that **entrepreneur-led development** is a foundational path forward, growing a more diverse and higher value economy that can support quality of life placemaking and ensure demographic health.

Capacity Building

There is actually a fourth essential for community prosperity – **community capacity building**. Community capacity building is the process whereby communities grow their ability to engage in the development process. Successful and vibrant communities vision and support smart and robust community economic development. The more communities engage in strategic and successful development, this very process of doing development builds a community's ability to undertake more development.

The figure below provides a visualization of the **Community Prosperity Framework** including the three strategic development essentials and the building blocks enabling more prosperous communities.

Figure 1 – Community Prosperity Framework Visualized



The following provides a bit more detail on the community prosperity building blocks:

Community Leadership and Development Organizations. Invest in growing diverse and effective community leadership with a purpose is foundational to prosperous communities. Enable community leadership to foster strategic understanding and vision, collaboration and more impactful development that is transformative.

Community and Resident Engagement. The tried and true 4-H value states:

- Never do to me.
- Try not to do for me.
- Always do with me.

Development efforts become more impactful and sustainable when they are rooted in community engagement and particularly resident engagement. Consideration should be given to investing in place and interest-based groups creating the opportunity for more effective, efficient and sustained community co-creation of your development. Finally, strong community and resident engagement can mobilize resources (e.g., vision, money and talent) essential for standing up a more comprehensive and impactful and sustainable development agenda.

Employment of Research and Community Analytics. Every community has challenges and opportunities. Every community is searching for solutions to these challenges and opportunities. Somewhere in America and the world there are communities that are further along that can inspire and inform our development efforts. Equipping your community with strong and ongoing research and analytics is a proven development accelerator and a way to optimize your community’s development investments. Consideration should be given to collaboration with higher education to support this work.



Community Transparency. Americans have a legacy of distrust in government and institutional leaders dating back to the Revolution in the 1770s. Fostering civic engagement with a strong commitment to transparency is critical to developing civic confidence. In turn, growing civic capital empowers more visionary and robust development efforts.

Progress Metrics and Performance Evaluation. Setting goals and tracking progress is important for individuals, organizations and communities. Establishing progress metrics and performance benchmarks can grow civic capital and sustain development efforts over time.

Defining Community

We all view reality through our own lens. We can never assume that others we are working with or want to work with view things the same way. On the positive side, this diversity of view is enriching. From an operational perspective, it can create problems such as confusion that undermines our ability to make commitments and move forward. **Defining community** is one of those potential areas that without clarification can inhibit our collective work in community building. Some of the various views on defining community based on our field work include:

Our Village, Town or City

A Neighborhood or Part of the County

An Area or Region

A School District

A Group of People or Community of Interest

Relevant to **quality of life placemaking**, we encourage folks to think more broadly about community. Whether the place name is Los Angeles or my home area of the Sandhills of Nebraska, there are narrow and broad meanings of community. Today, with advancing information technology, improved transportation and a culture open to doing things differently, a person may live in one community, work in another community, shop in a third community and obtain health care in a fourth community. From a spatial perspective, communities are areas or regions with multiple place name villages, towns and cities. Individual places are neighborhoods within this area community with strong economic and social interconnections.

Diversity

Diversity is an important quality of life development consideration. By diversity we mean the range of people – color, backgrounds, faiths, origins, etc. – making up our community. America has long been a nation of immigrants. The immigration process has created an increasingly diverse county when compared to China, Japan, Australia and much of Europe. Central to successful **people attraction**, development and retention efforts often rests with a community’s ability to embrace and support resident diversity.

Is Resident Diversity an Asset or Challenge?

Quality of life placemaking should be strategically informed by the kinds and diversity of residents, both existing and new, for whom our communities are undertaking placemaking. The above question, **“Is resident diversity an asset or challenge?”** is foundational. If our community wants to attract, develop

and retain not only existing residents but new residents, then coming to terms with this question is very important. Bottom line, diversity can be both an asset and challenge. Given growing diversity in America, chances are good that our opportunities for people attraction includes greater diversity when compared to our home population. This reality represents a potential asset. We know from both experience and research that increasing community diversity can enrich a community culturally, socially and economically. We also know that communities experiencing resident diversification, particularly if it is rapid and robust, can be challenging. New residents with somewhat different preferences, values and lifestyles will create change that in turn can create tension within the community. Great insight can be gained by visiting a community that has become **minority majority** within a generation.

Figure 2 – “Big Four” Diversity Considerations

<p style="text-align: center;">Faith</p> <p>America has always had remarkable faith diversity. This diversity, driven in part by immigration, has increased over time. Faith orientation continues to be a bonding and dividing diversity issue. Addressing your community’s ability to embrace and support faith diversity is important.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Race</p> <p>Despite meaningful progress, race still matters greatly in America. The perceived color of someone’s skin and racism is still rooted in our communities. While younger generations embrace racial diversity more openly, it continues to be an issue for many communities.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Origin</p> <p>Where we come from as immigrants has long been a diversity challenge for America. This challenge continues and is particularly strong given terrorism fear. Our communities continue to struggle with residents from places perceived to be centers of terrorism, creating diversity challenges.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Gender</p> <p>In 1848, women organized nationally to secure the right to vote. In 1920, the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution provided that right. Diversity based on gender is still an issue. This is particularly true today with gender identity challenging many communities with traditional gender identity and roles.</p>

As your community visions potential quality of life placemaking strategies and investments, explore diversity as a key consideration.

Resident Happiness and Quality of Life

Many factors impact our communities’ ability to create environments where our residents are happy – jobs and career opportunities, amenities, culture and the list goes on. Happiness is one of those somewhat abstract bottom-line indicators for communities. If residents indicate they are happy where they live, they are likely getting what they need, which creates resident stickiness (e.g., strong attachment and desire to stay even in times of stress). Understanding what your current residents want from their community is the starting point for visioning and investing in quality of life placemaking investments.



General Quality of Life Considerations

There are general or **basic** quality of life considerations. Figure 3 on the next page provides an overview of some of the most important general quality of life considerations.

Figure 3 – General Quality of Life Considerations

<p>Jobs & Careers</p> <p>People must have a way to make a living. Opportunities for good jobs, and more importantly careers, are essential to quality of life of a community.</p>	<p>Housing</p> <p>Our homes are important, and depending on our targeting, a range of housing options is a quality of life essential.</p>	<p>Health Care</p> <p>Access to health care services, ranging from the basics of a primary care doctor to more advanced services, is part of the quality of life.</p>
<p>Places & Spaces</p> <p>Places and spaces are increasingly important. Traditional spaces like community centers to coffee shops are now part of the quality of life essentials (e.g., vibrant downtowns).</p>	<p>Culture – Peers</p> <p>Possibly the most important factor is culture and peers. The values and feel of a community are paramount. Access to peers who become lifelong friends is very important.</p>	<p>Broadband & Cell Service</p> <p>Smart devices and applications are now mainstream for both life and work. Access to high-speed and affordable broadband and cellular services are foundational.</p>
<p>Unique Amenities</p> <p>Americans want both known (e.g., franchises) and unique amenities. Every community has a unique history and amenities that can enhance its quality of life.</p>	<p>Recreation, Culture & Arts</p> <p>Wellness is an increasingly important concept and value. Community amenities tied to recreational, cultural and art offerings is now foundational to community attractiveness.</p>	<p>Shopping & Services</p> <p>Access (locally or regionally) to shopping and services is still very important. Despite eCommerce, local groceries, clothing, food service and other related amenities is important.</p>

There are multiple resources available that can help your community better identify, assess and prioritize relevant quality of life factors. Consider working with Purdue University Extension or other resources in Indiana that can help you navigate your options for enhancing quality of life through placemaking.

Hometowns and Business Climate Connections

Entrepreneurship is foundational economic development for most communities today in America. Local businesses and entrepreneurs are people with families. There is a powerful connection between the unique and genuine quality of life offered by hometowns and business climates. Businesses challenged to recruit workforce and human talent know that quality of life offerings and amenities are equally important as the jobs themselves. Strong quality of life amenities rooted in the genuine and unique assets of a community can increase your businesses and entrepreneurs’ ability to attract and retain workforce. REMEMBER... not everyone wants to live in a big city like Indianapolis. America is diverse and Americans are looking for a range of lifestyle choices from small towns to dense urban neighborhoods.

Targeted Quality of Life Considerations

General quality of life placemaking is largely envisioned by those who engage in the visioning and strategic planning processes. Those who become engaged have a strong voice in what is important and where placemaking investments should be made. This is a natural and logical starting point for defining what your community should be doing with quality of life placemaking.

The famous professional ice hockey player Wayne Gretzky is often quoted as follows:

***“I skate to where the puck is going to be,
not to where it has been.”***

However, there are two additional important, strategically important considerations:

1. Residents from your community not engaged.
2. Resident attraction targets

Let’s explore each of these a bit more next.

Unengaged Residents. It is easy to make the case that if folks do not engage, they give up their voice. In one sense of fairness this is reasonable. However, with remarkably low resident engagement in community visioning and goal setting, we might consider a higher bar for engagement. There are many reasons people do not engage and share their voice. *Our papers on community and resident engagement might be a helpful supplement to this paper on this point.*

The extra effort necessary to get deeper and broader engagement might be worthwhile. We need to create smart and innovative strategies so that all persons have voices. When meetings are held at breakfast because it works well for civic and business leaders, families and workers may be hard pressed to attend such meetings. Bottom line, before you set your priorities make sure the fuller diversity of your community is represented.

Near South Neighborhood – Lincoln, Nebraska

The Near South Neighborhood in Lincoln (my hometown today) is located just south of the Nebraska State Capital Building and Lincoln’s downtown. This neighborhood has transitioned from stately large single-family homes to one of the most diverse and lower income neighborhoods in Lincoln. This community, or multiple communities, has its challenges. The Lincoln Community Foundation, the city and others are working to revitalize the Near South without gentrifying (replacing low income residents with more affluent residents). Community engagement is hard but possible. To ensure deep and rich resident engagement in envisioning and creating a better future for this neighborhood and its current residents, organizers are committing field staff and volunteers to going door to door, laundromats, churches and other resident gathering places. They are taking time to build more trusting relationships to ensure this process works. Good community and resident engagement can be expensive, challenging and take time – but in the end it ensures more voices are heard and that residents are more likely to engage in their own community’s development.

Resident Attraction Targets. If one of the rationales for quality of life placemaking is to make your community more competitive in attracting new residents, then you need to focus on Wayne Gretzky’s quotation kicking off this section of our paper. Here are some additional thoughts:

- If you want to attract back your own children and grandchildren, you need to have conversations with them. Talk to those who have stayed or came back. Envision through their eyes what is

essential for them to make this location decision. Yes, it may be work, but it may also reveal where your community's culture is indifferent or even hostile to the values of your own offspring.

- If you want to attract younger adults and their families, then you need to talk with these folks and learn what kind of quality of life investments would make a difference. Chances are good the right kind of housing and housing costs are important but access to high quality and affordable childcare may be more important.
- If you want to attract entrepreneurs, then you need to explore your entrepreneurial ecosystem and your culture. Is your culture supportive of entrepreneurial behavior, and do you have right support resources and programs?
- If you want to attract retiring Boomers, access to health care is important, but if they are younger and in good health, other factors might be more important, such as community walkability, peers and a culture with strong arts and humanities.

Ultimately, spending some time exploring who you want to attract, and who you might be able to attract, can help you be smarter and make the best use of the resources you already have to support placemaking. If you are wondering how to get started, begin with folks who have decided to stay or recently moved into your community. Typically, these residents are the leading edge of where you have people attraction opportunities.

Using Data to Help You Better Understand Your Community

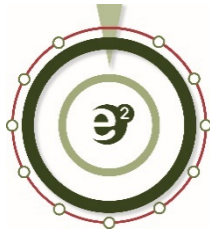
[Esri](#) is a market research company based in northern California. It is among the leaders in this space nationally. At e2 we purchase and use Esri data in our community economic development work. Chances are good companies like Starbucks are using Esri data to locate optimal locations for their stores based on the household types or consumers living within a certain geography.

Esri divides every American household into one of 67 household types they call [Tapestry Segments](#). Every county in America has a tapestry profile. We can help you (1) secure this data and (2) evaluate it. By studying your current household types, you can learn a great deal about the quality of life preferences of your current residents. All Esri Tapestry Segments are sorted into what they call "Life Mode" groups, like seniors or young families. By studying your current household types, you can identify other household groups through the Life Mode typology to identify potential target groups for people attraction. Spending time with this research can help you be smarter in your quality of life and placemaking investments.

In development work, we always want to build from existing and genuine assets and opportunities. Modest changes in or enhancements to your community's quality of life assets can position your community to expand your "attractiveness" for new residents. Understanding their quality of life desires and needs can help you make better decisions and investments.

Conclusion – Growing Entrepreneur-Friendly Environments

Entrepreneurship is a creative process where entrepreneurial talent envisions, creates and grows entrepreneurial ventures. These entrepreneurial ventures shape and impact all three community dimensions – business, social, and civic enterprises. Entrepreneurs, as creative drivers are also residents of communities. The environment where they live, work and play are important to them, their human talent teams and their families. There is a powerful connection between community environment, and therefore quality of life placemaking, and a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem. As your community explores growing its entrepreneurial ecosystem, consider quality of life placemaking as a central consideration and design element.



How e2 Can Help

e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems can help communities increase prosperity through entrepreneur-focused economic development and ecosystem building through:

- **Mentoring.** We mentor and coach new practitioners seeking to pursue entrepreneur-led development. We provide advice and support for building entrepreneurial ecosystem strategies that work.
- **Analytics Support.** E2 helps communities and regions understand their entrepreneurial potential through research. Please view a sampling of our research tools at: <https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/solutions/start.html>
- **Fostering the eMovement.** We support the national entrepreneurship movement along with our partners including the **Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, SourceLink, Edward Lowe Foundation, Kauffman Foundation, and NetWork Kansas.** We are a founding member of [Start Us Up: America's New Business Plan](#), a coalition dedicated to strengthening entrepreneurship across America. Together, we continue to advance the foundational ideas of building entrepreneurial ecosystems and entrepreneurship-led economic development.

e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems is led by Don Macke, who has more than 40 years of community economic development and policy experience. We have a national team of practitioners who bring research, coaching, incubation, market intelligence and other expertise to this work.

The mission of **e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems** is to help communities and regions connect, learn, and share best practices for building sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystems across North America. With more than 25 years of field experience, particularly in rural America, e2 is the preferred resource for communities of all sizes wanting to pursue prosperity.

For tools and resources:

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