

TulsaNow Research Task Force

Factors in achieving regional competitiveness in today's global economy

Based on extensive research into published and website resources on urban development, the TulsaNow Research Task Force submits this reference material to the Dialog/Visioning leadership team. It is clear that among urban experts there is general agreement on the important factors in achieving regional competitiveness in today's global economy, as well as the basic principles for downtown revitalization. Included in the TulsaNow material is a bibliography, useful websites, and a listing of some organizations with germane services. For particularly relevant and current information, we recommend the following sites:

- <http://www.brook.edu/es/urban> (Brookings Institution)
- <http://www.citistates.com> (The Citistates Group)
- <http://www.ceosforcities.org> (CEOS for Cities)
- <http://www.smartgrowth.org> (Smart Growth Network)

We hope this material proves useful to the process.
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As part of the process of developing a context and criteria for assessing projects to be included in a revitalization package, consideration should be given to the following guideposts for achieving metropolitan area competitiveness.

CORE ELEMENTS FOR ACHIEVING REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

Among the many published materials and internet resources that deal with urban development and revitalization is a wealth of research and analyses devoted to questions of future sustainability of cities and metropolitan regions. Urban experts and many not-for-profit organizations are looking at what is required for regional competitiveness in today's global economy. Although the focus of various urban studies varies, common themes are evident and offer a broad framework for successful revitalization.

1. A regional view: It is imperative to see an entire metropolitan region as a single labor market sharing a common environment and future. The Peirce Reports comment: "The inescapable oneness of each citistate covers a breathtaking range. Environmental protection, economic promotion, workforce preparedness, health care, social services, advanced scientific research and

development, philanthropy—success or failure on any one of these fronts ricochets among all the communities of a metropolitan region." The competitive future of an area is regional, and political boundaries and fragmentation must be overcome.

2. Understanding of macro demographic and market trends: What forces are driving decentralization and its economic, social, cultural, and environmental impact? What kinds of jobs and people are critical to the new economy? Without an appreciation of our changing society and world, an area cannot plan strategically for the future.

3. A regional economic development strategy: In today's world, economic infrastructure means people, places, and networks. These are considered the economic assets in which communities should invest. Partners for Livable Communities says that "the new rules of economic development require American communities in the twenty-first century to document and analyze their assets, understand how to combine those assets in innovative ways to complement the global, information-driven economy, and implement their strategies to maximize the return on public-private financial investment in economic development."

People - In an information and knowledge-based economy, the primary goal is to attract top human talent. The importance of what Richard Florida terms the "Creative Class" should not be ignored. For a region to excel, it must have the human skills that build wealth and influence - employees who develop creative marketing strategies, make scientific discoveries or develop venture capital know-how.

Places - Quality of life is a vital asset for attracting and retaining workers. Businesses and individuals seek communities where there is a knowledge-based economic infrastructure. The educational attainment of the workforce, quality of universities, and availability of civic and cultural amenities are important factors.

Networks - A region's development strategy must be built on the foundation of innovative relations and connections among local institutions that may not traditionally be considered economic players. Community colleges, businesses, entertainment, local attractions can be linked assets and strategic partners.

Comprehensive approaches to economic growth are essential. Economic development is considered a process (not an end product) that involves venture capital, employment training, technical assistance, and loans. It is a process that builds on the inherent capabilities and indigenous talents of a work force and strengthens outlets for these talents. One common tool is the establishment of enterprise centers that offer one-stop assistance for entrepreneurs and existing companies. The importance of strong education institutions is emphasized.

4. A vibrant city center: A dynamic, attractive urban center defines a region and provides the urban life style (a place of diversity, opportunity, creativity, learning, etc.) considered a requisite in attracting a competitive workforce. To be competitive an urban center must be distinctive and fun with a critical mass of attractions. It is important to stress that downtown is for everyone. Downtowns must have civic space and the features of a shared public life and culture. Also important is an aggressive housing policy (tax-increment financing, write-downs of mortgages for lower-income people, partnerships with banks and foundations). Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are useful in many cities. Among the many tools for reinvestment in downtowns are special incentives to increase residency and commercial activity. Some communities attract artists to live and work in renovated buildings downtown by exempting them from income tax and sales tax on works they sell.

5. A focus on social deprivation and workforce preparedness: Regions must formulate a coherent strategy to help create a society with less poverty, less violence, and greatly improved educational opportunities. Assistance for the jobless is vital—from helping would-be entrepreneurs with microenterprise loans to affordable day care and transportation.

6. Elimination of further sprawl and promotion of smart growth: Continuing dispersed settlement is unsustainable fiscally, environmentally, and socially. Far-sighted and assertive leadership is needed to channel growth. The Smart Growth Network has developed ten basic principles to create smart, non-sprawling communities.

- Mix land uses
- Take advantage of compact neighborhood design
- Create housing opportunities and choices
- Create walkable communities
- Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas
- Strengthen and direct development toward existing communities
- Provide a variety of transportation choices
- Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost-effective
- Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions

Many national organizations provide tools, resources and examples for addressing the pressing challenges for developing and implementing smart growth strategies. Important to the issue is to price development costs honestly and realistically, looking at streets, water connections, sewers, fire stations, schools, burdens on existing roads as well as the harder to define environmental and social costs. Is the developer, the buyer, or tax payer at large bearing the costs? Most urban areas have reached a point where outward growth

is not revenue-generating. Money spent on new infrastructure means it is not available for investment in vital assets such as health care, education and job training, research and development, and existing roads and bridges.

7. Diversity: Plan for a multiethnic, multiracial society. Again, this is an area that needs focused and strategic attention by area city leaders. Multicultural accord and acceptance translate into peace in communities and an enhanced capacity to do business globally.

8. Quality of life and amenities: These are critical economic factors and include the arts, culture, recreation, entertainment, health care, safety, transportation and traffic congestion, among others.