



FIVE REASONS URBAN COMMUNITIES FAIL

1) FAILURE TO UNDERSTAND MODERN IDENTITY (or Rip Van Winklism)

Oftentimes, there are many platitudes screamed regarding places fighting to sustain their past identities in the world. Whether that identity is tied to industries like steel or automobiles, as examples, “places” often become tied to the identity of their respective areas and fight to maintain them at all costs. This is where many communities make an egregious error.

As is the case in the story of Rip Van Winkle, many leaders fail to understand the changes in the world and how to adjust to them. Over time, because of the neglect, the community finds themselves in a world they have little or no familiarity. Who are you as a City, Village or Township; a Place? Meaning, places should be viewed as living organisms with identities that age, mature, develop physical ailments and at times get stagnant in their ways. But unlike people, the “Place” Organism has the ability to manipulate time. Places do not necessarily have to get old. Places can reinvent themselves repeatedly. As a leader and/or decision-maker for these “places”, it is tantamount to raising a surrendering flag when there is a failure to accurately identify your community’s current identity.

2) FAILURE TO ASSESS THE COMMUNITY’S CAPACITY AND DESIRES

Failing to know your community’s hopes and dreams, as well as their capacity to implement them leads to major failures in the socio-economic structure of a given community. By not knowing what a community desires or their capacity to implement, some leaders often make the mistake of implementing foreign strategies in areas that will never work. This is the “Square Peg in the Round Hole” syndrome. The square peg strategies have no redeeming value for those living in a round community. They need “round” strategies to address their issues.

3) FAILURE TO TAKE REALISTIC INVENTORY OF THE OVERALL EXISTING ASSETS AND LIABILITIES

As is the case in number 2, the failure to take an inventory of your community’s assets and liabilities is simply a matter of not taking the time to look at the details. Many older community’s still rely on the elements of passed successful years and make revisionist plans to revive the “Glory Years” of yesterday. Unfortunately, many of these communities fail to see the evolution of communities. In many cases, the past ideas that made them great were so good, other communities replicated and implemented them and made them better. This, in turn, removed the uniqueness of the community. Failure to consistently monitor the community’s assets and liabilities leads to failure.



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4) LACK OF CLARITY IN VISION

In many failing communities, the decision-maker(s) often create projects and plans that have no boundaries or direction. Each month is seemingly new project announcements that leaves the community confused. The leader/decision-making body has an idea of what they want to see happen, but the community does not. This creates disinvestment into the idea(s) and ultimately failure within the community.

5) LACK OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

As a complimenting part of number 4, the leader/decision-making body fails to communicate their ideas effectively to the community. This leads to major disconnections in communication. In many cases, the ideas are good ideas, but have not been communicated effectively and therefore often appear as misleading or dishonest. Ultimately, the failure to communicate effectively is a major reason for community failure.

FIVE SOLUTIONS FOR THE FAILURES

1) EVALUATE AND DETERMINE WHAT KIND OF PLACE YOU ARE

As alluded to in the previous section, failure to make a realistic determination of a given community's status or identity is one of the leading reasons for community failure. As decision-makers, it is imperative that a modern identity is established; a brand. In this brand, the community is collectively made aware of who they are and what they are. Without it, confusion and disarray is inevitable, which ultimately leads to loss in population, disinvestments, decreased morale and social isolation. Determining what type of community you are creates a "Brand" that the community can collectively embrace and play productive roles in developing and maintaining over time.

2) CREATE AN UP-TO-DATE ASSET MAP OF YOUR COMMUNITY

An "Asset Map" is somewhat self-explanatory. The Asset Map is the tool that highlights and identifies the assets within your community. These assets may come in the form of Human Capital (There are more doctors in the community than any other for 500 miles). The assets may be geographic ("Our community is located on the area's primary lakefront district). Whatever the assets are, it is imperative to identify them and create a narrative, as well as a physical GIS map of them.

3) UNDERSTAND THE PSYCHOGRAPHICS OF YOUR COMMUNITY

Most people are familiar with the demographics of their community, but few know the behaviors of those demographics; the psychographics. Understanding the behaviors and potential behaviors of your community is a vital element to stabilizing and growing a successful



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place. In doing so, one may reasonably be able to forecast a range of future efforts based on the range of behaviors presented by the population.

4) DEVELOP A DETAILED REALISTIC, BUT FLEXIBLE MASTER PLAN

All serious endeavors require some type of plan. The medical profession requires a treatment plan. The legal field requires a plan of defense or prosecution. Having successful communities requires a successful "Master Plan". This plan, upon creation, becomes the guiding reference for the community. It highlights the community's desires and aspirations in a process and procedural manner. The Master Plan becomes the primary tool that drives the community to the successful outcomes desired.

5) CREATE AN EFFECTIVE MESSAGE, AS WELL AS THE TOOLS TO DISSEMINATE THE MESSAGE

Our present time has afforded many technological tools to allow a presenter to effectively communicate with a desired audience. These tools are also capable of receiving feedback. Establish a system for carrying the desired message, simultaneously with receiving feedback for maximum community investment to the message. Effective communication is a two-part process that requires a "Deliverer" and a "Receiver".

As an urban planning and design firm, CP3 is prepared to develop the "specific" strategies needed for you and your community. Contact us today to receive a free initial consultation.

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