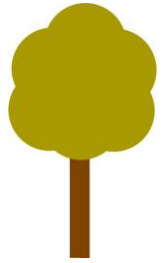


# Planting Strong Communities

## The Importance of Local Soil Conditions



There are many parallels that can be drawn between economic development and farming. The effort a farmer makes to plant crops is much like the efforts a community and economic development professional makes to create jobs and improve local quality of life. In both cases, the quality of the “soil” is key.



Just as soil conditions form the foundation for agricultural success, the quality of a community’s civic discourse dominates and drives the potential future success (or lack thereof) of economic development efforts.

Building Communities offers the *Four Stages of Civic Condition* model to provide insight into the underlying dynamics that form the foundation for successful (or unsuccessful) planning and implementation. These stages are shaped by the *willingness* and *ability* of the community (*Building Communities*, pp. 12-15).

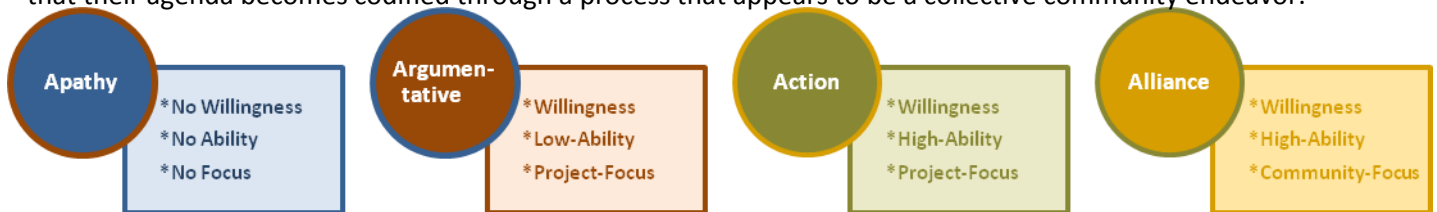
Local reaction to the planning and implementation phases of the process is distinct and somewhat predictable depending on the community’s civic condition stage.

Reaction to the Planning Process		
Civic Condition	Planning Phase	Implementation Phase
Apathy	Engaging, Positive	Disengaged, Disinterested
Argumentative	Regimented, Controlled	Selective, Forced
Action	Engaging, Productive	Collaborative, Effective
Alliance	Studious, Complete	Deliberate, Purposeful

**Apathy Stage.** Communities in the Apathy Stage provide a fascinating study in the planning process. During the planning phase, people show up, show interest, participate, and appear set for progress. Unfortunately, that is very often where progress stops.

When the community shifts to the implementation phase, nothing happens. The proverbial “report sitting on the shelf” is the result (even the Building Communities process can have a tough time breaking through this condition and energizing forward movement).

**Argumentative Stage.** Planning and implementation in the Argumentative Stage is very challenging. Typically, a small group of behind-the-scenes individuals desire to control most, if not all, aspects of the planning effort in order that their agenda becomes codified through a process that appears to be a collective community endeavor.



**Action Stage.** Strategic planning in an Action Stage community is a positive experience for virtually everyone involved. The planning phase reinforces existing efforts, inspires new initiatives, and galvanizes teamwork. The Building Communities methodology thrives, as action-oriented people desire and work toward the completion of an objective and comprehensive roadmap for their future.

**Alliance Stage.** It is rare that a community evolves to the Alliance Stage. A paradigm shift from project-focus to community-focus characterizes this phase. It requires strong and sustained local leadership to achieve this condition. A planning process for a community in the Alliance Stage can be very successful, providing it does not become all-encompassing—planning only for the sake of planning.