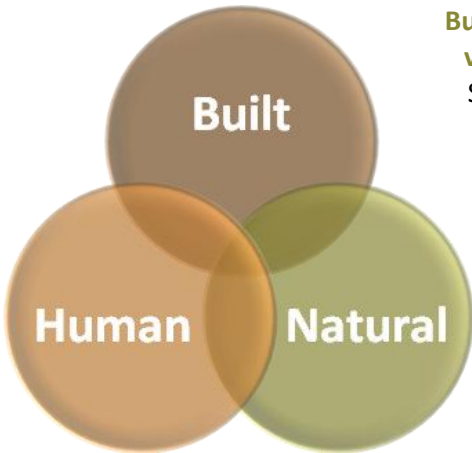




Building Communities & Rural Sustainability Planning

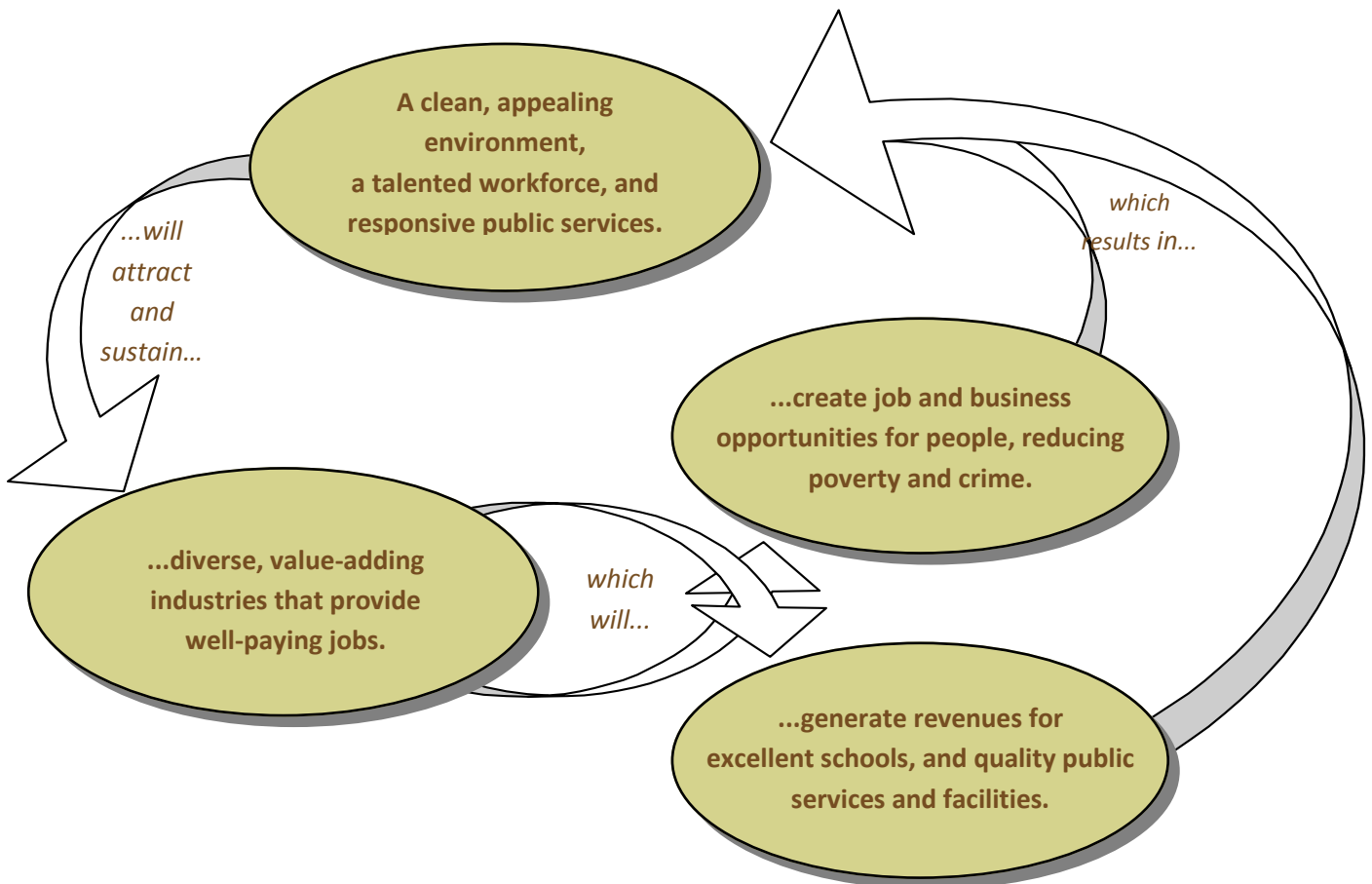
What is “sustainability planning,” and how does it relate to rural communities?



Building Communities emphasizes that rural communities must take a long-term view in order to create resilient local economies and a high quality of life. Specifically, there are three “environments” that must be addressed and sustained: the *built* environment, the *human* environment, and the *natural* environment.

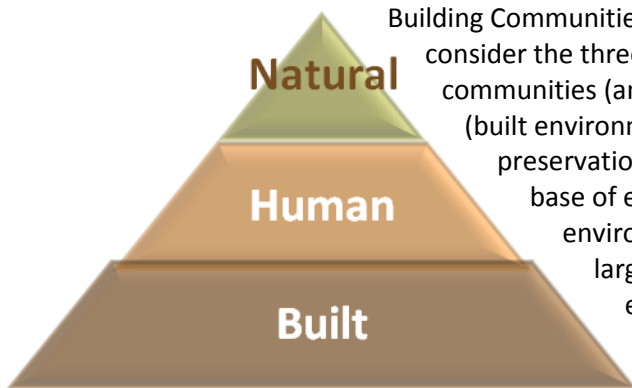
Traditional economic development planning focuses almost exclusively on advancing the built environment (land, buildings, and related infrastructure) while assuming the natural and human environments to be in place to effectively support such plans and initiatives. At the same time, there are a few exceptions to this traditional focus. Exceptions include workforce development initiatives (human environment) and brownfields projects (natural environment).

Sustainability planning is broader. **With sustainability planning, the ultimate goal is a community that is advanced economically while also benefiting the human and natural environments.** This bigger picture was first presented in Oregon in 1989 in a very forward-thinking strategic plan called *Oregon Shines*. The statewide plan introduced the concept of the *Circle of Prosperity* (shown below).





While the *Circle of Prosperity* concept is over 20 years old, it still provides a powerful basis for sustainability planning today. In short, the collective efforts of society should advance sustainable natural environments, wisely invest in people, and generate jobs that in turn provide the financial resources necessary to sustain our society.



Building Communities adds perspective to this model by offering an *order* in which to consider the three environments. Much like Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs*, communities (and even nations) must first have a stable, sustainable economy (built environment) in order to effectively address the advancement and preservation of the health of their people and natural environment. With a base of economic security, policies and programs to benefit the human environment can begin to take shape. Once the human condition is largely satisfied, efforts to sustain the natural environment can emerge.

Because of these dynamics, Building Communities begins with a robust economic development methodology.

Fully 26 community and economic development strategies are presented. Each strategy comes complete with:

- A description of the strategy, its relative job creating ability, and contributions toward livability
- An analysis of six *key inputs*: land, labor, capital, time, quality of life, and overall strategy complexity
- Between 3 and 15 key success factors that must be present to advance the strategy
- Example projects and initiatives
- Advantages and drawbacks of implementation

As the economic strategy emerges, civic leaders are free to consider human and environmental aspects of the sustainability planning process.

Considering the Livability Principles

In 2009, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) joined with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U. S. Department of Transportation (DOT) to help improve access to affordable housing, provide more transportation options, and lower transportation costs while protecting the environment in cities and towns nationwide.



Through a set of guiding **Livability Principles** and a partnership agreement that will guide the agencies' efforts, this partnership coordinates federal housing, transportation, and other infrastructure investments to protect the environment, promote equitable development, and address the challenges of climate change.

Building Communities has integrated the Livability Principles into its methodology. The addition of one new strategy and many new key success factors and essential action steps ensure that the full spirit and intent of the broad integration of federal policies and investments is addressed.

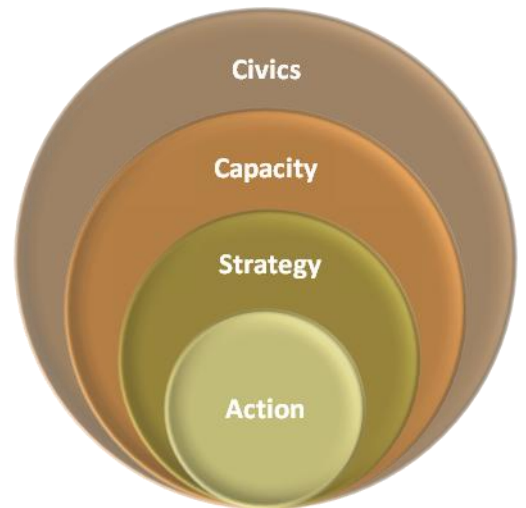
Building Communities is now providing support to northeast Arizona as a part of HUD's \$100 million Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant program. The program is designed to create stronger, more sustainable communities by connecting housing to jobs, fostering local innovation, and building a clean energy economy. Building Communities is developing community-based strategic plans in addition to the Regional Sustainability Plan for the region and three Indian nations in northeast Arizona.

Operationalizing Rural Sustainability Planning

Building Communities *operationalizes* rural sustainability planning by surfacing key concepts, conditions, plans, and projects. Short of understanding and applying the full body of the Building Communities' process, communities will invariably fail to fully capture their potential for achieving long-term sustainability. Effective sustainability planning and implementation is far more than meets the eye.

Civics. Why is it that one community seems to stand still while others advance projects and initiatives like clockwork? It boils down to the willingness and ability of communities to envision and enact their future together. Building Communities offers an insightful model, the *Four Stages of Civic Condition*, to guide community leaders through a thought-provoking discussion of core motivations and political dynamics that underlie all civics and sustainability planning.

Capacity. Communities and regions can have the best sustainability plan in the world, but if the region has inadequate staff, financing, and technical resources, the plan will not be fully implemented, if at all. Building Communities offers the *Community Organizer Tool* to provide an objective analysis of the current and desired capacity of the region. 60 "capacity scenarios" are considered, and very specific actions are prescribed in order to enhance capacity.



Strategy. Once a community has addressed the issues of civics and capacity (which is ongoing), it then identifies the specific sustainability strategies that fit the region. Building Communities presents the *Strategy Selector Tool* for regions to prioritize strategies that strengthen the local economy, enhance quality of life, and address HUD's Livability Principles.

Action. Without action, nothing changes and the planning process is written off as "another report sitting on the shelf". Building Communities offers scores of *Essential Action Steps* for each of the sustainability strategies that help localities define "who will do what by when."

Indeed, from top to bottom, Building Communities is beginning to change the approach that American communities are using to implement sustainability planning. Opportunities can be seized. Problems and threats to the community can be avoided. The future of sustainable communities will be more clearly defined. A true path to a resilient economy and a higher quality of life will emerge.