

# RESILIENT PROSPERITY

**A Guide to Revitalizing Local Futures  
for Governments and Foundations.**



*Revitalizing the future helps revitalize the present in distressed places,  
and creates Resilient Prosperity in healthy, wealthy, happy places.*

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	2
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## **TREATISE – Revitalization: The missing function of government.**

**Many places try to revitalize. Few succeed. Fewer make it last.**

Let's Get Real	5
Who's in Charge of Your Revitalization Strategy? (Do you even have one?)	7
Fearing the God of Revitalization	9
The Costs and Tragedies of Revitalization Ignorance	10
Lessons in Resilient Prosperity from the Practice of Revitalizing Nature	12
An Unstoppable Trend	13
The Rise of Restorative Philanthropy	14
The Role of Private Foundations in Revitalizing Places	17
Place Medicine	19

## **GUIDE – Resilient Prosperity:**

**How & why to revitalize your future (even if you don't need revitalization now).**

Fix #1: Defining Revitalization and Resilient Prosperity	21
Fix #2: Revitalizing the Present and Future Together	24
Fix #3: Forming a Discipline and Profession for Resilient Prosperity	27
Fix #4: Measuring Progress toward Resilient Prosperity	29
Fix #5: Hiring a Professional to Guide Resilient Prosperity	31
Fix #6: Assembling a System to Support Resilient Prosperity	35
Fix #7: Partnering with a Community Foundation for Resilient Prosperity	39
The Calgary Example: Inspiring Confidence in the Future of a Boom & Bust Economy	41
<b>Conclusion</b>	47
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	49
<b>About the Author</b>	50

# INTRODUCTION

## Revitalizing the Future: A Strategy for Resilient Prosperity.

Prosperous places don't feel a need to revitalize their present. But they *do* need to revitalize their future, if they desire *resilient* prosperity. The planet is covered in towns, regions, and nations that used to be healthy, wealthy, and happy...and are now either basket cases, or in the process of becoming one.

Many blighted or declining places are working hard to revitalize their present, but they're not doing it in a resilient manner. Most will fail outright. Of those that succeed, many will achieve a burst of growth and renewal, only to see it fade. This can be even more painful and psychologically devastating to the citizens than outright failure. The central problem is that they focus entirely on revitalizing their present (tactical renewal) and forget about revitalizing their future (strategic renewal).

In these pages, we'll explore how to create Resilient Prosperity by "revitalizing the future". But before we can revitalize the present *or* the future, we need to understand exactly what "revitalize" means, and how to attain it. The level of disorder and confusion is shocking, especially considering that literally billions of struggling people are hoping for it around the globe.

For decades, communities and regions have pinned their welfare on attracting business and real estate developers; the more the better. Little attention was paid to attracting quality employers or developers. Even less attention went to ensuring that all this activity led the community in a desirable direction. The modern nightmare of sterile, unhealthy suburbs and empty, forlorn downtowns is the natural result.

Many communities that are otherwise well-managed are groping in the dark when it comes to revitalization. Those that don't currently perceive a need for revitalization are equally incompetent at creating Resilient Prosperity. They'll almost certainly need revitalizing in the future...probably the *near* future, given how broken our world is, and how fast new "breakage" is occurring.

In this chaotic, visionless environment, most developers became Professional Devitalizers. Instead of aiding local regeneration, they fostered degeneration (Professional Degenerates?). But we shouldn't blame them. We kept electing Local Leaders of Self-Destruction who let Professional Devitalizers create endless Places Without Hearts, populated by over-medicated, underpaid, socially-isolated, traffic-numbed Commuters Seeking Happiness as Consumers. They built places not worthy of revitalization.

But this publication isn't a rant: it's about the Good News. Some developers (actually *redevelopers*) performed magic, bringing blighted places back to life in a spectacular manner. They provided the vision, ethics, and wisdom that local leaders lacked. But these Professional Revitalizers were a rare breed.

The good news: they are now a fast-growing breed. I call them "Fixers". Why? Because *they actually fix problems*. They don't just have the responsibility, or the willingness, or the ability to fix problems: they *do* it. Similarly, many folks know how to write, dream of being published, and make detailed plans to be an author. But none of them are writers if they don't actually write. And so it is with Fixers.

The better news: there are proven ways for places to attract Fixers, such as policies that make them "Fixer-Friendly". The best news: governments are finally starting to take revitalization and resilience seriously. Public and private Fixers working together can conjure miracles.

There is no shortage of money in today's poverty-stricken world. Fixers are ready and willing to invest in your place. The key to attracting them is to inspire confidence in your local future: they want your rising tide to raise their boat. Many distressed places can't afford the capital-intensive projects needed to revitalize their present. But they *can* afford to create a strategy for revitalizing their future.

Most communities, states, and nations blindly pursue the mysterious quarry we call revitalization. They don't know what they're after, how to catch it if they did, or even how to know when they've got it. This Treatise and Guide is an attempt to better understand the nature of the beast we pursue, how to find its trail and stay on track despite storms and obstacles, and how to befriend it when they finally meet.

Revitalization is both journey and destination. It's the process of improving. It's also the emergent quality we hope for when we reconnect, repurpose, and renew the various components of living systems (such as the natural, built, socioeconomic, and human assets of cities). Our human regenerative processes start in the womb. They define aging when they slow down; death when they stop.

Communities are no different in this respect: regenerative processes are the root of their resilience and sustainability. So, why do so few urban or rural revitalization initiatives achieve their goals? Why are so many prosperous places allowed to deteriorate...to lose their future?

A major cause is that local agencies, developers, non-profits, and foundations work in unconnected silos. These various leaders and stakeholders all contribute to the goal, but the goal itself is homeless. This can be fixed when a Revitalization Director, guiding a Resilient Prosperity system, connects those silos. Efficiency and synergy rise, with little or no new bureaucracy. It's low-cost and high-yield.

So why don't more places pursue Resilient Prosperity? We know that many unsuccessful people avoid the risks needed to achieve their dreams because they fear failure. In cities and nations, similar anxieties prevent many public leaders from shooting for revitalization. They'll promote *projects* that fix roads, renew waterfronts, and restore historic buildings. But they won't create an integrated, ongoing revitalization *program* for the entire community, state, or nation. And a program needs a strategy.

Many are happy to work on a piece of the urban, rural, or environmental revitalization puzzle. But we shy away from responsibility for the whole. If a place revitalizes, we share the glory. If it doesn't, it's not our fault: we did our part. Fear of failure is also why we can't earn a degree in revitalization: academics perceive its complexity and worry that it's not understandable. So why risk studying or teaching it?

We're all capable of tapping deep wellsprings of strength and creativity when those we love are in danger. Our economic, ecological, and social future depends on our doing so now. Our very survival might depend on it. Humans and wildlife worldwide are suffering as never before, and both are in graver peril than ever before. Do we love our children enough to raise our sights from merely slowing the rate of new damage to restoring existing damage and revitalizing our existing places?

The universal goal seems to be **Resilient Prosperity**. Places that don't have prosperity want it. Those that do have prosperity want it to last. Resilient Prosperity is what we've *always* wanted; at least for ourselves, if not for others. But that's a false dichotomy, because the more widespread prosperity is, the more resilient it is. Resilient Prosperity is best achieved through a constant process of revitalizing communities and nature. But that revitalization process has two parts, *tactics* and *strategies*. Most places are long on the former, and short—or completely lacking—in the latter.

As a result of constant warfare over millennia, humans have long understood the difference between tactics and strategies. It's not rocket science. So why are so many revitalization efforts strategy-deficient? Maybe most people *don't* understand the difference. Or, if they do, they don't understand the importance of strategy to the revitalization process.

This is especially true in the United States, where we are well-known for our bias towards immediate action, and our bias against long-term planning. The French are known as philosophers and lovers, not fighters. Americans are known as fighters and doers, not thinkers. So be it. We can work with that. Then again, maybe we shouldn't be too worried. Peter Drucker, widely considered the world's greatest management consultant, once said: "*Planning is actually incompatible with an entrepreneurial society and economy. Planning is the kiss of death of entrepreneurship.*"

Rather than try to overcome the failure of our educational system to impart a general understanding of these two words, this paper renames tactics and strategies. Most people seem to have a pretty good grasp of the difference between the present and the future, so **we'll refer to tactics as "revitalizing the present", and strategy as "revitalizing the future"**.

You might be thinking "That's it? What's so new about separating tactics from strategy?" What you need to understand is that most places have no one focusing on revitalization at all. They think it's OK to simply do random renewal activities and hope for the best. Why? Because that's what everyone else is doing. Having an actual strategy would be revolutionary.

Places are like people. It's said that all anyone needs to be happy is something to look forward to. Strategy does this. It's also known that the best way for people to break out of depressing doldrums is to take positive action. Tactics do this. Together they revitalize. Many places enter recession because they treat revitalization as a goal, rather than as a permanent process. They forget to *continue* revitalizing. Having an ongoing program of regeneration produces Resilient Prosperity.

This guide is not about resilience *per se*. There are plenty of excellent books on that subject, since resilience is the latest buzzword in community development. The most recent is *The Resilience Dividend*, by Rockefeller Foundation CEO, Dr. Judith Rodin, which has just come out as I'm finishing this paper. That 384-page work on resilience (which I haven't had a chance to read yet) includes a chapter on revitalization. This guide has the opposite emphasis: this is about revitalization, and its role in resilience.

Let's now explore what Resilient Prosperity is and how it happens. Let's discover how you can locally advance a global trend that's bringing rigor and integration to a fragmented, *ad hoc* industry that already accounts for over \$2 trillion in renewal-oriented spending annually, worldwide. In today's frantic, increasingly broken world, we too often dive straight into solutions without fully understanding the problem, and without perceiving our level of ignorance. To avoid that syndrome, this tome comprises two parts: a **Treatise**, where we'll explore what's blocking our way to a revitalized future, and a **Guide**, in which we'll explore solutions that help create Resilient Prosperity.

If, as author Ben Arment says, "*We are motivated by two conflicting fears in life—the fear of failure and the fear of insignificance*", then getting better at making our world better should solve the conflict.

**Resilient Prosperity improves life for the people of today, for the children of tomorrow, and for the natural world that gives life to us all.**

# TREATISE

## Revitalization: The missing function of government.

**Many places try to revitalize. Few succeed. Fewer make it last.**

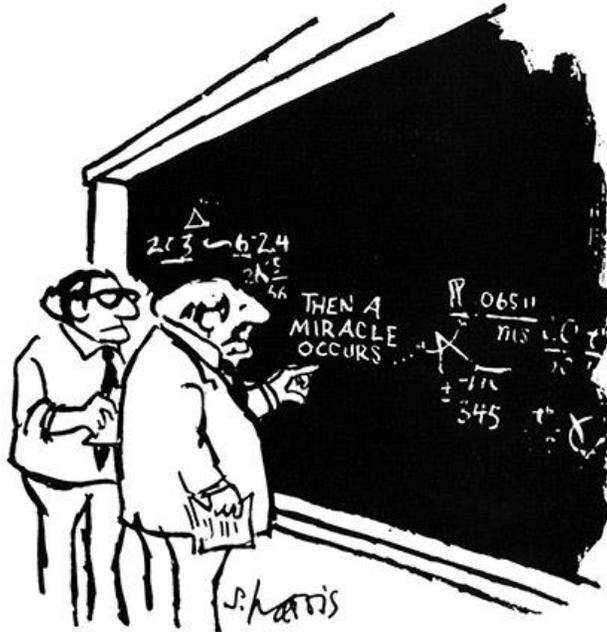
Have you ever felt really great, decided to go for a walk in the park or along a river, and come back announcing “*Wow: I feel revitalized!*”? If so, you know that you don’t need to feel bad in order to feel better. And so it is with places: no matter how good things are, they can always be better.

Resilient Prosperity should be the goal of good public management. An ongoing process of revitalizing the present and future together is the best source of resilience, preventing decline and devitalization. Since few places aim for Resilient Prosperity, eventual devitalization is in the cards for most. Why don’t local, state, and national leaders take revitalization seriously? Why do most rely on hope?

This Treatise is a call to stop ignoring the elephant in the room: We don’t know what we’re trying to achieve, or how to do so. Is revitalization a discipline, or a grand delusion? Is it purely subjective, or objective as well? Is it a destination, or a path? Is it only a dream, or is it real?

## Let’s Get Real

Most public leaders *say* they’re working towards revitalization, but when did you last meet a public Director of Revitalization? When did you last see a substantial, ongoing public budget item with “revitalization” in its name? When did you last meet a Ph.D.—or even a Master’s—in revitalizing places? It’s as if our leaders enjoy promising revitalization, but don’t actually believe it’s real.



“I think you should be more explicit here in step two.”

by Sidney Harris. ©Copyright 2003, The New Yorker.

I've long used the preceding cartoon in my talks and leadership workshops. It's a perfect depiction of the current "practice" of revitalizing places. If most places want revitalization, why don't they allocate money *directly* to achieve it? Why don't we manage it professionally? Why don't we even know what it is? Why is the prevalent paradigm "do a bunch of good stuff and hope a miracle occurs"?

It gets worse. If you ask a city council to define "revitalization", how many different answers will you receive? Hint: take the number of council members, and divide by one.

Mayors, governors, and presidents often assume *they* direct revitalization, but that's like assuming that an MBA running a hospital is a physician. Some mayors succeed, but must learn on the job. Why wait years to find out if they know what they're doing? Why suffer expensive mistakes along the way? Why not immediately assign the job to a revitalization specialist? Oh wait: there *are* none.

If revitalization *isn't* real, let's stop wishing and working for it. Let's go back to just fixing parts of our communities, and hope for the best. Let's cease pretending that we're working towards grand goals, like creating resilient prosperity for healthy places, or reversing the downward spiral of distressed places.

If it *is* real, let's stop the magical thinking. Let's figure out how to define revitalization, how to measure it, how to make it happen, and who to put in charge of it. Let's make it a real discipline, with the requisite research, education, funding, and qualifications of a profession. Otherwise, it's snake oil.

Revitalization is the largest and most important industry for which a corresponding profession has not emerged. This lack of rigor wastes hundreds of billions of dollars of public and private investment worldwide annually. In our rapidly-urbanizing world, the human and environmental consequences are severe and worsening. Would credentials guarantee success? No, but they'd certainly reduce failure.

Saying that redevelopment is real, but not revitalization, is like saying surgery is real, but not regaining health. Doctors will promise to fix your broken leg. They'll promise that this drug will make you happier, that drug will help you sleep, and another drug will relieve pain. But when do they promise to restore your health? How can they promise something they've never been taught, and don't understand?

It's like saying working is real, but being a success isn't, *and* that one can't learn how to become more successful. It's like saying individual brushstrokes are real, but creating a beautiful painting isn't, *and* that one can't learn how to paint more artistically. Health, success, beauty, and revitalization are all real.

Most renewal *projects* have managers with relevant training and licenses: historic restoration, watershed management, civil engineering, etc. Revitalization *programs* designed to achieve Resilient Prosperity (in the few cases where they exist) also have professionals at the helm, but they lack revitalization credentials. These folks usually specialize in one small aspect of renewal.

It's like being put in charge of renovating a region's electrical grid, simply because you know how to change a light bulb. Many public and private leaders work heroically on renewing their cities, regions, and nations. But their efforts are undermined by a combination of revitalization ignorance, and by a crisis-response mentality that produces one-time revitalization efforts.

Revitalizing the present (tactical renewal) and the future (strategic renewal) *together* leads to Resilient Prosperity. If that's what we want, someone—or some organization—needs to have that responsibility.

## Who's in Charge of Your Revitalization Strategy? (Do you even have one?)

Every place approaches the process of improving itself in a different manner. That's as it should be, since every place has different dreams, different challenges, and a different culture.

But one characteristic is universal: With few exceptions, such efforts are **all tactics, no strategy**. In Vietnam, America won most of the battles, but lost the war. It's similar in most communities, regions, and nations: lots of successful projects, but a failure to achieve the goal of revitalization.

Part of the problem is ignorance: they don't have anyone who understands the dynamics of revitalization well enough to create a strategy. The other problem is that—even if they do have such a person—they don't have a Revitalization Director position in their governance structure, from which to exert the necessary influence, adding cohesiveness and momentum to their various projects.

Many folks renew and reuse historic buildings. Others clean and redevelop brownfields. Some restore watersheds, ecosystems, farmlands, or greenspace. Some improve public transit, or make communities more pedestrian-and-bicycle-friendly. Others renew infrastructure. Some specialize in catastrophe recovery and resilience. Others activate vacant lots with community gardens, farmers' markets, pop-up functions, and pocket parks.

Economic development directors would say "Hey: I'm in charge of revitalization, and I have training". However, "economic development" is usually just sales. The pitch to employers is "move here: we're cheaper", but price competition is the weakest form of selling. Most relocating firms have already chosen a new location before demanding public sector handouts (\$80 billion/year in the U.S.).

Wooing employers from another city helps revitalize winners, but devitalizes losers. There's no net gain for the nation: it's a zero-sum game (actually, a negative-sum game) that shuffles jobs while sucking revenue from vital public services. [The good news is that GASB, the Governmental Accounting Standards Board is proposing new rules that would require local governments to annually report on the revenue they've lost to economic development subsidies.] Growth of good jobs is a joy to the unemployed, and a key component of revitalization, but it's not revitalization.

I specify "good" because demeaning, low-paying jobs demoralize a community, and too many economic developers are only concerned with quantity, not quality. As an economic developer in North Carolina once said about his state's strategy: "*We shoot anything that flies and claim anything that falls.*"

Planners will also tell you they're in charge of revitalization. Some are. But few plans actually contain a revitalization process, few plans are implemented, and few of those that *are* implemented succeed. So, land use planning is land use planning: good to do, but not revitalization. Private redevelopers also say they revitalize, but they mostly work on properties, not communities. A Revitalization Director could map local property data to help redevelopers find the right renewal opportunities at the right time.

The "model" one frequently finds in smaller communities that are successfully revitalizing is that a core group of trusted, visionary "doers" are always at the table when a significant new project is being considered. These folks have an "internal system": they're motivated to keep the revitalization process

going by their awareness of continuing needs. They're guided to do the right things by their deep familiarity with—and passion for—their community. They're guided to do the right things right by concern for their neighbors. For those on the private side, a profit motive is often involved, but everyone at the table understands this.

When such core groups desire the long-term good of all, they can be wonderful. If they are bigoted, misogynous old men who are insensitive to the needs of youth and minorities, the place is in trouble. A lot of places are in trouble.

All of the above people, projects and programs are renewing natural, built, and/or socioeconomic assets and contributing to revitalization. But those people aren't Revitalization Directors, nor are those projects and programs *strategic*, revitalizing the present and future together to create Resilient Prosperity.

Some think that executing a redevelopment project is the same as implementing a revitalization strategy. But how can a project do that if there *is* no revitalization strategy, no revitalization agency, and no one in charge who has an understanding of revitalization dynamics? How can we manage something whose existence we don't even acknowledge, other than as a fuzzy, feel-good goal?

In his Harvard Business Review article "[The Execution Trap](#)", Roger Martin, former dean of the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management, says separation of strategy and execution is a major flaw in executive thinking. We argue the relative importance of good strategy versus good execution as if they were unrelated, so thinkers and doers work in dysfunctional isolation from each other.

Communities suffer a worse problem. Not only do they separate implementation from strategy, but what they refer to as "strategy" is often just hope. Dean Martin (no, not that one) recommends that we abandon the old model of brilliant thinkers on top and choiceless doers on the bottom. He recommends a feedback model allowing those on top to dictate broad guidance, and allowing implementers to provide feedback on how well those rules work in reality.

So too should those in charge of revitalization work from a clear vision of their desired future, against which they would compare each new project. That vision would yield a few simple rules: broad decision guidelines that allow innovation at the local level. A good system would allow innovations to flow back to the top, since each place must discover what really works locally. This allows them to abandon false assumptions about what *should* work (usually based on mimicking successes in other places).

Martin says separation of strategy and execution is promulgated by management consulting firms. Why? It allows them to blame failures on clients' flawed implementation of their genius strategy. Urban planning firms also tend to avoid implementation. When a plan fails, they blame the mayor, the city council, unruly developers, or the citizens (NIMBYism, etc.) for screwing up their perfect strategy. Delivering a plan is a guaranteed success for client and vendor alike. Implementing it? Very risky.

## Fearing the God of Revitalization

Adam Smith's widely misunderstood concept of the "invisible hand" of the market has led most cities to believe (consciously or not) in a "magic hand of revitalization". They hope it will miraculously transform their haphazard renewal activities into revitalization, without their having to put any overt focus on achieving that outcome. In other words, they work for redevelopment, but pray for revitalization.

It's similar to offering projects as sacrifices to a fearsome god that one dare not face directly. Don't be afraid to speak Revitalization's name. Don't be afraid to know Revitalization. The essential first step to getting a handle on your place's future is being bold enough to approach the mystery head-on. Don't be distracted from the great (revitalization) by the good (redevelopment). As it says in the Bhagavad Gita: *"We are kept from our goal not by obstacles, but by a clear path to a lesser goal."*

In 2000, Marquette, Michigan created a program to transform their waterfront using modern form-based codes. Here's how their mission was later stated: *"The goal of Marquette's waterfront redevelopment was to transform the former industrial waterfront into a walkable, mixed use waterfront zone that was physically connected to the downtown and supported a host of water depended uses."*

I submit that their goal was actually revitalization, and what they stated as the goal was the strategy. After all, if Marquette had ended up revitalizing their waterfront—but not in the way described above—would they be happy? Probably. If they transformed their waterfront in the above manner, and *didn't* achieve revitalization, would they be happy? Probably not. Thus, revitalization was the goal.

Most cities are being hit with rapid population growth at the same time they're experiencing rapid aging, deterioration, and design obsolescence of their infrastructure. Most young people want to leave the world a better place, but few universities teach restoration or revitalization. Seems like a mismatch. Why isn't community revitalization currently taught in universities? Money and (again) fear.

*Money* because most universities only have one mode for entering a new realm of research and curriculum development: If someone walks through the door with a big check and asks them to focus on a subject, they will endow a research chair and create coursework. Otherwise, forget it. Academic institutions (with very few exceptions) have almost no internal capacity for institutional innovation.

*Fear* because revitalization is emergent and seems magical...non-intellectual. Why do all medical schools teach brain structure and function, but few teach consciousness? Fear of ridicule. Consciousness (like revitalization) is an emergent phenomenon, reeking of mysticism. Appearances are everything in today's image-conscious, corporate sponsor-driven world of academic research. Maybe the best place to develop a revitalization discipline would be at one of the 40+ major universities that already study and teach [complexity science](#). They are already comfortable with the concept of emergence.

Places are like people: About 1% are born into great wealth, and thrive no matter how poorly they perform. For most places and people, life is initial growth, followed by alternating devitalization and revitalization. The causes, frequency, and amplitude of these economic, social, and ecological tides vary from one place to another. But the underlying dynamics are universal, and deserve to be studied.

This Treatise hopes to motivate others to properly document and validate revitalizing practices, moving places from episodic redevelopment and slipshod revitalization efforts to Resilient Prosperity.

## The Costs and Tragedies of Revitalization Ignorance

Revitalization ignorance results in waste, distress, and pessimism...and in community *devitalization*. Leadership ignorance is seen in the constant waves of revitalization fads that sweep through cities. It's similar to how management fads continually wash through the corporate sector, as CEOs desperately try to convince employees, investors, and themselves that they have some control over the future.

We see revitalization ignorance at work in kneejerk attempts to become the next "Silicon Whatever", and in "strategies" based on generic characteristics like innovation, creativity, smart, green, etc. We see it at work when cities copy the physical manifestations of revitalization, rather than the processes that led to them. Witness the explosion of public aquariums aping the successes of Baltimore and Chattanooga. Witness the global frenzy of "starchitecture" museums and arts venues aping Bilbao's Guggenheim Museum (which was only one of many contributors to that city's ongoing regeneration).

All three of those successful urban rebirths had their own unique and locally-appropriate revitalization process and strategy. Baltimore's was primarily developer-led ("impromptu"). Chattanooga's was primarily grassroots and foundation-led ("bottom-up"). Bilbao's was primarily government-led ("top-down"). None were perfect, but all worked very well. Baltimore didn't do a good job of integrating the revitalization of its Inner Harbor with the rest of the city. Chattanooga made the mistake of disbanding their excellent citizen-led visioning organization. Bilbao could have done a better job of engaging the citizens of affected neighborhoods (such as the one around the Guggenheim Museum).

In each case, their spectacular results were preceded by many years of thought, planning, alliance-building, and public engagement. But their imitators didn't want to learn, or change their behavior. They weren't interested in processes. They just wanted to buy products, like casinos, stadiums, and convention centers. And it's not just cities: Nations also jump on one-size-fits-all economic fads, like austerity, industrial clusters, etc. They could instead fix fundamentals, such as restoring natural resources, or reducing economic "friction" via infrastructure renewal, but don't.

Another outcome of revitalization ignorance is when public leaders confuse cause with effect. Mayors tour revitalized cities, and witness the plethora of retail and restaurants. They then return home and artificially stimulate retail and dining in their devitalized downtown via subsidies and other incentives. A year or two later, that downtown—formerly full of long-dead stores—is full of recently-dead stores. The psychological impact on the place can be devastating, as citizens start thinking of themselves as losers.

Retail can be a sign of revitalization, but seldom its cause. Residents have revitalization patience: they can wait far longer for a nearby store than a retailer can wait for nearby clients. This is crucial, since revitalization is often a long, uncertain process. Given the turnover of elected leaders, having a Revitalization Director with a grasp of such regenerative principles and practices is essential.

If you've ever watched the "American Restorations" TV show, you've seen the differences between restoring something old to its original appearance, restoring it to its original functionality, and restoring it to better-than-original functionality (due to availability of modern materials). Whether they're restoring an iron lung or a century-old motorcycle, decisions on conflicting constraints such as aesthetics, performance, time, and budget must be made at every step of the process. I would be nervous about riding a motorcycle that had been restored with aesthetics taking precedence over

function. So too would I be nervous about investing in a city whose revitalization was only skin deep. In the absence of trained revitalization professionals, we often get a focus on form over function.

There's a large "superficial revitalization" industry. Mayors desiring the appearance of action often commission comprehensive plans from private planning firms, with no intention of implementing them. They can buy "instant revitalization" in the form of street banners that provide an illusion of rebirth.

Note: This criticism is only directed at places that confuse such purchases with actual revitalization. Banners are useful in providing visual cues to behind-the-scenes revitalization activities. They can also provide visual cohesiveness for revitalizing urban districts, especially those that reuse existing buildings.

For instance, Ryerson University in Toronto made brilliant use of abandoned buildings to expand its downtown campus, which helped revitalize that area. But the buildings weren't originally designed as part of the campus, there's little shared architectural vernacular for the Ryerson identity. The university inexpensively solved the problem via banners that let people know when they are within the campus.

The painful, expensive ways in which revitalization ignorance manifests are endless. The few mentioned here could all have been avoided with common sense. But that's the point. Even with good intentions, the same mistakes keep getting made and the revitalization "wheel" keeps getting reinvented—community-by-community, nation-by-nation—when no one qualified is focused on revitalization.

Another example is tax increment financing (TIF). It was invented to revitalize blighted areas, and has done so very well for over half a century. Today, TIF suffers from: **1) Misuse** (funding sprawl); **2) Abuse** (handouts to politically-connected developers); and **3) Overuse** (depleting revenue for general services). All three problems result from a combination of insufficient transparency and revitalization ignorance. There's a trend towards greater innovation in cities (such as "Innovation Districts"), but innovation can either improve or damage a place. Tying innovation to a Resilient Prosperity system ensures the former.

The most tragic display of revitalization ignorance took place in the U.S. during the 50s and 60s. No enemy military could have hoped to inflict the physical and economic devastation we did to ourselves. The federal government provided "urban renewal" funding to cities for tearing down old buildings. The premise was "*destroy it, and they will come.*" "They" never came, and—60 years later—many cities still suffer from massive dead spaces in their downtowns, and the lack of restorable, beautiful old buildings.

Most local redevelopment agencies in the U.S. arose during this "urban renewal" fad. In 2011, California governor Jerry Brown killed every one in the state, claiming they were wasteful, corrupt, and autocratic. In 2014, he introduced a smaller, more transparent form of redevelopment agency, and a reformed TIF model. Governor Brown is redeveloping redevelopment, and revitalizing revitalization. The process was painful, as most surgery is, and more than a few great projects were killed or wounded in the transition.

Another outcome of the "urban renewal" debacle was that citizens lost faith in their leaders and planners. Local government power was greatly curtailed, and American cities became overly dependent on private developers to "do the right thing". A few rose to that challenge, such as John Knott and Jonathan Rose. Most didn't, and U.S. cities have missed many opportunities to revitalize as a result. Most improvements in national policy derive from local policy innovations. It's time for the pendulum to swing back, giving cities more control over their future. A Revitalization Director can help ensure that local efforts make places better, not worse, by avoiding destructive fads like urban renewal.

## Lessons for Cities from the Practice of Revitalizing Nature

We need not start from scratch in our search for verifiable revitalization models, principles, taxonomies, and frameworks. Scientists experiment on revitalizing ecosystems in ways that can't be done on human communities. This can lead to useful insights and metaphors for thinking about cities. Three examples:

1. Restoration ecologists speak of “reparative restoration” (fixing damage, such as by reintroducing native species) *versus* “replacement restoration” (providing functional equivalents, such as hunters replacing wolves as top predators). **Lesson:** Cities suffering industrial flight to lower-wage countries could choose between recruiting functionally equivalent employers *versus* restoring jobs by “repurposing” citizens via education, training, and entrepreneurial support.
2. Restoration ecologists can't restore nature 100%, so they aim for resilience, focusing on species that contribute *most* to community stability. They recognize “foundational” species—such as corals, seagrasses, and oysters—that form the structural basis of ecosystems. Nature can then take over, repairing itself and adding diversity without further intervention. **Lesson:** With limited funding, leaders must focus on reaching the tipping point, where the free market takes over. This involves renewing the foundational assets; infrastructure, public services, etc.
3. Here's a quote from the paper “The Rapid Riparian Revegetation (R3) Approach” in ***Ecological Restoration*** (June 2014): “*With hundreds of thousands of kilometers of riparian corridors in need of restoration, and limited public funds for implementation, practitioners need to identify strategies that lower the unit cost and accelerate the pace of reestablishment of native riparian forests in sustainable ways. The R3 approach is grounded in ecological principles and geared towards producing outcomes consistent with restoration programming and the human desire to see “progress” for the investments made.*” **Lesson:** Replace “riparian corridors” with “cities”, have R3 stand for “rapid resilient renewal”, and this passage describes good urban strategies.

We might call this biomimicry-based urban revitalization. The research possibilities are endless, as are the useful metaphors. For instance, there's a global trend towards restoring rivers by removing outdated dams. Once removed, migratory fish—whose spawning grounds have sometimes been blocked for over a century—return, revitalizing economies and ecosystems. A 2014 study by Oregon State University revealed that undammed “rivers can return surprisingly fast to a condition close to their natural state”.

Most cities have significant private money ready to flow into regenerative activities. But antiquated policies, incentives, zoning, and/or building codes block their “migration”. Unblocked, revitalization can be surprisingly fast. In 1996, New Jersey overhauled their rigid, antiquated fire codes. Designed for new construction, the old codes made reusing old buildings cost-prohibitive. The new “Smart Codes” gave redevelopers of abandoned properties the flexibility needed to make renovations comply with safety standards. The cost was virtually zero, but in just two years, renewal of existing buildings in New Jersey's 16 largest cities rose 62.5%, from \$363.3 million in 1997 to \$590.4 million in 1999.

We could call such revitalizing policy revisions “bureaucratic dam removal”. Yvon Chouinard, Founder of Patagonia and philanthropist says “*Time and again, I've witnessed the celebration that comes with the removal of an unnecessary dam. After a river is restored and the fish have returned you never hear a single person say, ‘Gee, I wish we had our dam back’.*” I seriously doubt that anyone in New Jersey is mourning the loss of their old fire codes.

## An Unstoppable Trend

Conservation groups are fast waking up to the fact that there are no pristine places left on Planet Earth. It's no longer a matter of choosing between conservation and restoration; just a matter of determining *how much* restoration is needed. Every square inch of water and soil is now contaminated to some degree, whether by radiation, invasive species, or any of over 10,000 toxic, human-made compounds. The new model is "restore and protect", not just "protect".

I've struggled with the strange phenomenon of "nobody's in charge of what everybody wants" for almost two decades. I've had some clients—such as former Montana governor Brian Schweitzer—who understood the value of quantifying the economic and employment benefits of restoring watersheds, brownfields, and the like. He published the landmark [Montana Restoration Economy](#) report in 2009. But no one has properly documented the revitalization of whole communities or regions.

In 2012, The Nature Conservancy and Oxfam America held a Restoration Economy summit in Thibodeau, Louisiana for over 100 local leaders. Its purpose was to explore the job creation and economic revitalization potential of the post-BP oil spill restoration activities. In 2013, researchers at Yale and the University of North Carolina published a [Restoration Economy report](#). So did [US Fish & Wildlife](#) in 2014.

*"In the field of sustainable cities, Herbert Girardet's name is legendary. He has made the discipline his life's work. Besides being the author of 11 books on the subject he is also co-founder of the World Future Council. But now he's left the concept of sustainability behind, moving on to define a new, more dramatic concept: the idea of regenerative cities." - journalist David Thorpe, Nov. 12, 2014*

Restorative economics is finally gaining momentum, hopefully leading to a "Return On Regenerative Investment" (RORI) metric. But we can't fully capture those values until we climb out of our silos and address the outcome we call revitalization.

On a finite planet with a growing population, the inevitability of basing economic growth primarily on renewing the capacity of our existing natural and urban assets would be obvious to any 5-year-old. But the shift from waging war on the planet to healing and rebuilding is happening locally, not globally. Some cities run out of room for sprawl before others. Some nations run out of natural resources before others. That's where we'll find our "windows on the future", and they are opening rapidly, worldwide.

As Richard Chartres, the Bishop of London said in 2007, *"We talk of sustainable development and sustainable economies, but it is time to move on to restorative development and restorative economies."*

## The Rise of Restorative Philanthropy

What happens when decreasing local, state, and federal funding assistance for community revitalization becomes long-term and widespread? Foundations step in. There are three basic kinds of foundations. *Private* foundations get their funding from an individual, a family, or a company. The best-known are those set up by the industrialists of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: Rockefeller Foundation, Ford Foundation, Carnegie Foundation, and so on.

Private foundations created by commercial banks often focus on community revitalization. This benefits the community and the bank, since revitalization increases both the value of real estate and the success of businesses. This, in turn, reduces mortgage and business loan defaults.

The Bank of America Charitable Foundation was created in 1958. It's most recent mission statement says "*the Foundation funds (local) institutions to help enrich the community and advance overall community revitalization.*" A more-recent such creation is the TD Charitable Foundation, created in 2002 by Canada's TD Bank. Their stated mission includes "*community revitalization and the preservation and development of affordable housing*".

There are also two kinds of *public* foundations: *grant-making charities* (such as fighting diseases or social problems on a national or global basis), and *community foundations*. What they have in common is funding derived from diverse sources; individuals, corporations, public agencies, and other foundations.

An example of a grant-making charitable group is the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (Australia), which has a "Repair-Restore-Renew" disaster recovery program. Community foundations (sometimes referred to as "place-based foundations") are also grant-making public charities, but they differ in that their focus is defined by geography, rather than issue.

We'll focus primarily on the revitalizing roles of private foundations here. We'll return to community foundations in the "Guide" portion of this document. They are especially-well positioned to lead communities into the next generation of effective, efficient, and equitable Resilient Prosperity systems.

For the past two or three decades, most corporate, foundation, and individual philanthropy related to helping communities or the natural environment has been focused on "green" or "sustainable" efforts. This is all well and good, but let's face it: it's a bit late. Sustainable development is what we SHOULD have been doing for the past two centuries, but didn't. The world is now so damaged and depleted that only restorative development can give us a healthier, wealthier, more beautiful future, especially in the face of a rising population.

More recently, with the rise of climate change-related disasters, the focus has shifted from sustainability to resilience. The words are nearly synonymous, but the shift to resilience is a healthy one, since it gets closer to the heart of the issue, which is the regenerative capacity of places. In many cases, restorative philanthropy is hidden behind the labels of "sustainability" or "resilience". Both are noble goals and necessary dialogues, but we can't point to projects and say with confidence that they are sustainable or resilient. For how long? 10 years? 10,000 years? With what population? 7 billion? 70 billion? The best we can say is that they are *less* unsustainable, or *more* resilient.

Restorative development, on the other hand, is eminently measurable, truly sustainable, and resilient. We can measure how many more fish are in a restored river after a dam removal. We can measure how much less contamination is in a remediated industrial site. We can measure how much more a historic building is worth after renovation and reuse. Many aspects of revitalization are also measurable.

Reducing new damage and new waste is vital, of course. But it's too late to rely on that: we need to undo existing damage and clean up existing waste. Anyone who's satisfied with sustaining the world as it is just isn't paying attention. Their heart's in the right place, but who wants to sustain this mess? We need to revitalize the communities we've already created, and replenish the natural resources we've damaged and depleted. That's regeneration, also called restorative development.

Now, restorative philanthropy is taking hold, joining the government and business spending that has long-dominated revitalization efforts. Philanthropic organizations realize that revitalizing communities and restoring natural resources is by far the most effective and sustainable use of their precious funds.

The trend can only grow, since recycling and retrofitting our cities—plus repairing our natural resources—is the **ONLY** way to increase health and wealth in our broken world. Today, it's hard to find a major private foundation that isn't focusing on renewing the natural, built, and/or socioeconomic environments to some degree. A few quick examples:

- The New York Restoration Project is developing a shareable model for community revitalization with \$250,000 from the Knight Foundation;
- The C.S. Mott Foundation funds the Flint Area Economic Revitalization for that stricken city;
- The Kellogg Foundation has given \$2.4 million to LINC Community Revitalization Inc. in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and is supporting many revitalization efforts in Detroit;
- The distressed Anacostia area of Washington, DC wants to repurpose an ugly abandoned river bridge as a public park. The 11<sup>th</sup> St. Bridge Park combines four powerful revitalizing elements: connectivity, water, greenspace, and pedestrianism. Early backers: Educational Foundation of America, Horning Family Fund, Prince Charitable Trusts, and Fetzer Memorial Trust.



Winning design for 11<sup>th</sup> St. Bridge Park by OMA + OLIN (©Copyright 2014, OLIN)

While generally a negative, socially-destabilizing force, today's wealth concentration trend has one positive effect: a growth in philanthropic funding. Zachary Mider, in the May 12-18, 2014 Bloomberg Businessweek, says *"Over the past few decades, the rise in fortunes of the country's richest people has created a golden age of philanthropy, comparable to the one that spawned the Carnegie and Rockefeller foundations a century ago. ...Because Congress offers tax deductions for philanthropy, this growing breed of donor is deciding the fate of billions of dollars that would otherwise flow to the government."*

In the U.S. in 2013, university business schools received 67 single-donor gifts of over \$1 million, the most ever in a single year. A 2014 study from the Boston College Center on Wealth and Philanthropy projects that a record \$27 trillion is expected to be donated by Americans to charities between 2007 and 2061.

The wealth-concentration trend is now converging with the restorative development trend, also known as the Restoration Economy. The convergence of these two trends is producing a powerful new trend: restorative philanthropy, which promises to be far more effective than most current forms of giving.

*"Brain scans reveal that the mere thought of helping others by planning to make a donation makes people happier."*

- from "Philanthropy has more intrinsic benefits than you think", by Bruce DeBoskey, Denver Post, May 11, 2014

It's not just "rising money meets rising need": there's a supreme level of satisfaction that comes with bringing dead or dying places back to life. This is driving the shift from "merely" reducing new damage (green/sustainable)—which is, of course, vitally necessary—to repairing existing damage (restorative).

Restorative philanthropy is now regenerating, renovating, renewing, remediating, replenishing and revitalizing more of our world with each passing year. Add to grants the rapid growth of restorative *impact investments*—often by the same philanthropic entities—and the numbers start to get serious.

## The Role of Private Foundations in Community Revitalization

Some private foundations—such as the Walton Family Foundation, Orton Family Foundation, and Kresge Foundation—have practiced restorative philanthropy for decades, many of them in the U.S. “Rust Belt”. The Surdna Foundation is unique in that they focus on both community revitalization and nature restoration. This gives them a leading position in the fast-growing global restoration economy.

The best way to describe how private foundations can put a distressed city on the path to rapid, resilient renewal is via a dramatic success story. This following story is excerpted and updated from a case study in my 2008 book, *Rewealth* (from McGraw-Hill Professional).

In 1969, Walter Cronkite announced on national TV that Chattanooga, Tennessee had been labeled “the dirtiest city in America” by the U.S. government. Air pollution was sometimes so bad that people had to drive with their headlights on in the middle of the day. Motivated by a potent combination of humiliation and regulation, the city spent the next decade remedying the situation.

Chattanooga eventually won the EPA’s first Clean Air Award, but it’s what the city did *after* they cleaned their air that earned them global renown. By the early 80’s—despite their cleaner air—they were losing 5000 manufacturing jobs annually, crime was high, racial problems were rife, and the city was divided.

In 1986, Chattanooga began a revitalization process that took it from basket case to revitalization poster child. Two private foundations—both built on the fortunes of independent Coca-Cola bottlers—were directly responsible: The Lyndhurst Foundation and the Benwood Foundation.

Their funding kicked off two years of public engagement and visioning, via the non-profit Chattanooga Venture. Virtually every good thing that has happened to the city in the past 30 years have their roots—directly or indirectly—in Chattanooga Venture’s network of “fixers”, and in their revitalization process.

The Lyndhurst Foundation, led by Jack Murrah (now retired), provided *catalytic* funding for virtually every major initiative that has contributed to Chattanooga’s renewal over the past three decades. The Benwood Foundation provided follow-on support for most of these renewal initiatives, with a heavier focus on arts and culture. Chattanooga Venture provided the stakeholder *cohesion*.

Chattanooga Venture’s primary purpose was to engage the public in the creation of a shared *vision* of the community’s future. That vision integrated the renewal of their natural, built, and socioeconomic assets. It provided a home for that shared vision, so as to achieve continuity that would allow renewal momentum to build. Besides visioning, Chattanooga Venture provided lectures by revitalization leaders from other cities, and field trips for local leaders to those cities.

Venture also provided a forum for effective, transparent public-private *partnering*, using a simple-but-effective process. They created a task force whenever new challenges and/or opportunities were identified. They chose people for these task forces—each possessing unique resources of potential value to the solution—who were in a position to create a partnered solution. Chattanooga Venture was led by Mai Bell Hurley and Eleanor Cooper for most of its life.

Chattanooga’s best-known feature, the Tennessee Aquarium, was added to their revitalized waterfront in 1992. The 21st Century Waterfront initiative was created when Bob Corker (now U.S. Senator)

became Mayor in 2001. It expanded and renovated the aquarium, Discovery Museum, and Hunter Museum of American Art, and created pathways from the Hunter to the waterfront. By 2005, when the 21st Century Waterfront plan was finished, the Tennessee Riverwalk had been expanded to 11 miles of trail down to the Chickamauga Dam, and over 1100 trees had been planted on this old industrial land.

Every \$1 of public money invested in recreational space and art tends to attract about \$13 of private investment. Chattanooga spent \$9 million remediating the waterfront site of an old enameling plant. Via ecological restoration, they created the 22-acre Renaissance Park. Developers have now surrounded the park with \$110 million worth of condos, stores, restaurants and a LEED-certified shopping center.

In 2011, Volkswagen opened the world's only LEED Platinum-certified auto manufacturing plant on what was previously a highly-contaminated waterfront brownfield. The 1400-acre parcel was once an ammunition plant, manufacturing up to 30,000,000 pounds of TNT per month for World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. The transformation is dramatic: the new plant has 33,000 solar panels generating 9.5 million watts. VW went beyond green, to regenerative: they restored two creeks on the property to enhance habitat for native species and provide a wildlife corridor around the plant.

How did Chattanooga clinch this \$1 billion, 3200-employee prize for them, over the dozens of other cities vying for it? VW wanted the waterfront trail extended to their site, so employees could enjoy walking to the downtown. Quality of life and connectivity were the differentiators, not economic development incentives (which were offered by all contenders). Mayors and other public leaders from all over the globe make pilgrimages to witness the "miraculous" rebirth of Chattanooga in person.

All of this came about because a private foundation funded the creation of what became a very effective *Resilient Prosperity system*. In the Guide section, we'll explore the potential that community foundations have to be the heart of a Resilient Prosperity system, *a la* Chattanooga Venture. Maybe the ideal would be to have *private foundations* fund *community foundations* for exactly this purpose. *Someone* must take the lead on advancing the practice of revitalizing places. Will it be government? Will it be foundations? Will it be both, working independently? Or will it be both, working together?



Chattanooga's waterfront aquarium. Photo credit: Storm Cunningham

## Place Medicine

A desperate place with weak, visionless, revitalization-ignorant leaders will say “yes” to almost any new development activity, no matter how self-destructive. We see the result in the sterile sameness of the sprawling, traffic-clogged mess, and devitalized downtown, that typifies so many communities today.

In his 2014 book, *Urban Acupuncture*, former Mayor Jaime Lerner, who revitalized Curitiba, Brazil, says: “*The notion of restoring the vital signs of an ailing spot...has everything to do with revitalizing not only that specific place, but also the entire area that surrounds it. I believe some of the magic of medicine should be applied to cities, for many of them are ailing, and some are almost terminal.*”

Revitalization could be called “place medicine”. It restores wellness to communities, regions, and nations. But where are this medicine’s scientists? Where are its schools? Where are its doctors? In Western (allopathic) human medicine, General Practitioners are the old breed, treating the whole person. Specialists are now the rule, so we have dermatologists who have no idea how skin problems can derive from digestive system problems. As with human medicine, we have no shortage of place medicine *specialists*: restoration ecologists, remediation chemists, bridge renovation engineers, etc.

But where are its General Practitioners (GP), who treat the *whole* place? In place medicine, Revitalization Directors would be the GPs, and (hopefully) the new breed. “*We have no money for a Revitalization Director*” you say? That’s also allopathic medical thinking. Billions are spent on drugs to hide symptoms, and on surgeries to extend life. But demand is exploding, so health is deteriorating.

Classical Chinese medicine and Indian Ayurveda focus on health rather than sickness. At one point in China’s history, doctors travelled from village to village, and were paid a retainer to keep people well. If someone got sick, they were treated free of charge. How would that model change our sickness industry, in which each new surgery and drug seems to create 3 new problems for every one they fix?

Don’t get me wrong: as a former Special Forces medic, I’m well aware of the value of Western medicine for treating traumatic injuries. And sometimes cities need surgery, such as the current trend (led by Seoul) towards excising badly-planned urban highways that have devitalized cities worldwide.

But where are the Western *health* specialists? Health isn’t even taught in Western medical schools. Health is the enemy of medical revenue. Similarly, we pay for war, but not for rebuilding, thus creating social sicknesses like terrorism and fundamentalism. There’s no money in peace for the war industry.

Likewise, cities don’t fund revitalization, but pay dearly for projects that fix their broken pieces. Let’s stop playing this game of “fake it ‘til you make it” with our future. Let’s shed some light on this *ad hoc* approach to revitalization. Let’s create a *real* practice...a discipline and profession of revitalizing places that will continually shed new light on a vital mystery that might never be fully understood.

Some places suffer chronic devitalization, others acute devitalization. Some are hypochondriacs. A properly trained Revitalization Director would know how to diagnose and treat such ailments. A Resilient Prosperity system would give her/him the ability to do so.

Let’s now explore a few “place medicine” remedies. The most important of these will be ongoing “healthcare” for communities, regions, and nations in the form of Resilient Prosperity.

# GUIDE

## **Resilient Prosperity:**

### **How & why to revitalize your future (even if you don't need revitalization now).**

The purpose of the preceding Treatise was to increase awareness of a problem too many communities don't know they have, and to launch a dialog that leads to places taking revitalization more seriously. The purpose of the following Guide is to give communities, counties, states/provinces, and nations enough information to pioneer Resilient Prosperity systems that will inspire others to do likewise.

It is hoped that these pioneers will further develop the various "fixes" described in the following section, and that their results will be documented and shared (possibly to be included in an updated version of this publication). In other words, this next section is a guide to exploration and experimentation, not a be-all-end-all blueprint for revitalization.

Here are seven "fixes" that can start a place down the road to Resilient Prosperity. The process starts with better-understanding revitalization, and culminates with the hiring of a Revitalization Director and the creation of a local Resilient Prosperity system. Some of these fixes can be implemented locally. Others need to be addressed more systemically, such as by higher education and national policymakers.

To paraphrase the great Lebanese poet, Khalil Gibran, *"Progress lies in enhancing what is, while advancing toward what will be."*

## Defining Revitalization and Resilient Prosperity

Revitalization makes poor places wealthier, and wealthy places healthier. It makes healthy, wealthy places healthier, wealthier, and happier. It can be triggered by a long period of slow decline, a sudden disaster, or simply by a desire to improve the quality of life; to make a good place better.

To use a tired-but-apt analogy, revitalization is like great art: we can't define it, but we know it when we see it. In today's increasingly-broken and devitalized world, that's not good enough. Treating a process that's so crucial to our future in such a cavalier manner is simply irresponsible.

When folks *do* try to define revitalization, they tend to do so according to their own occupation, needs, and passions. To a historic preservationist, it's about saving, restoring, and/or repurposing heritage structures. To an economic developer, it's about recruiting jobs. To an environmentalist, it's about restoring ecosystem health. To citizens, it's about adding whatever's missing from their neighborhood: safety, greenspace, business opportunities, social justice, clean air, affordable housing, etc. To a developer, it's about boosting real estate values. To a mayor, it's about voter happiness and optimism.

Can we achieve what we can't define? First of all, we need to separate the goal of revitalization from the process of revitalization. To avoid confusion, I'm calling the goal "Resilient Prosperity". Here's my definition: *"Resilient Prosperity is feedback loop of rising levels of optimism, equitable wealth, quality of life, and environmental health, usually deriving from an ongoing, adaptive process of regeneration."*

"Equitable" and "rising" are key words:

- "Equitable" because a society with growing economic disparity and a shrinking middle class is increasingly unstable, usually leading to disharmony, dysfunction, and even violent revolution;
- "Rising" because—given today's global degradation of air, watersheds, fisheries, topsoil, infrastructure, climate, etc.—the only way to increase both quality of life and ecological health (especially with a still-growing population) is by revitalizing the urban environments we've already developed, and by restoring the natural environments we damaged along the way.

I didn't mention "happiness" in that definition, because one of the central contributors to happiness is having something to look forward to, and "optimism" covers that. Optimism comes from confidence that the future is in good hands. There's not much optimism or confidence these days.

As described in the Introduction, this Guide refers to tactical renewal as "revitalizing the present", and strategic renewal as "revitalizing the future". This is an attempt to overcome the seemingly intractable public confusion over the nature of tactics vs. strategies.

A good *strategy* is an adaptive, high-level plan for using available resources to achieve one or more goals under uncertain conditions. A good *tactic* is an action that achieves one or more elements of a strategy. Strategies tend to organize resources, whereas tactics expend resources.

Tactics make sense at their point of action: a strategy ensures that they make sense for the whole. Strategies can adapt and evolve, but not frequently. Tactics can and should adapt to the challenges and opportunities of the moment. Strategies envision, plan, guide, and measure. Tactics deliver.

For the sake of clarity, here are working definitions of revitalizing the present versus the future:

- **Revitalizing the Present** (“tactical renewal”): Relatively short-term projects that renew, replace, reconnect, and/or repurpose natural, built, socioeconomic, or human assets. The goal is to produce immediate new value, usually from discrete properties, organizations, or enterprises.
- **Revitalizing the Future** (“strategic renewal”): Long-term initiatives or ongoing programs that renew, replace, reconnect, and/or repurpose natural, built, socioeconomic, and/or human assets. The goal is usually to redesign or restructure an entire place to better cope with upcoming challenges, and/or reposition it to better respond to upcoming opportunities.

[A word about references to “human assets”: “replacing” usually refers to electing new leadership or appointing new managers who are more revitalization-savvy; “repurposing” usually refers to training the unemployed and underemployed for work in growing, or otherwise secure, industries.]

Strategy makes timing, sequence, and integration of projects important. This is where efficiencies and synergies are found. Without a strategy, leaders say “Who cares about timing? Cleaning up a brownfield or restoring a historic building is *always* good, right?” That’s true enough, but strategy is what can turn those projects into what’s *really* desired: Resilient Prosperity.

Having a strategy for revitalizing the future makes it easier to finance huge projects. Examples are green infrastructure projects, and transportation redesign projects that remake your place in a way that opens it to new opportunities, while making it more physically resilient.

**Boston offers a famous (infamous?) example of revitalizing the future.** In the 70s, Boston was a wealthy (if troubled) city that few would call a candidate for revitalization. Revitalization was for places like Buffalo (which was the #10 city in the U.S. in 1850, and is now #73).

But some very smart Bostonians realized that their city had structural problems that would forever keep them from becoming all they could be. Those problems dated back to auto-centric urban planning mistakes made as far back as the 1930s. The program that became known as “The Big Dig” was born. It was officially completed in 2005 at a total cost of \$14.8 billion.

The Big Dig was a brilliant strategy for revitalizing Boston’s future. I won’t argue with those who say its implementation *wasn’t* brilliant; it was often described as monumentally inept, and rife with corruption.

The Big Dig had no value in the present, other than job creation and (maybe) enhancing confidence in a better future. The opposite was true, in fact: it severely disrupted local traffic flows, and made a lot of people very unhappy for years on end.

If Bostonians aren’t already saying that the Big Dig—along with their heroic clean up and restoration of their (formerly) massively-polluted Boston Harbor—weren’t well-worth the pain and expense, they will soon. Vast swaths of formerly-isolated waterfronts became available for new, green public space (enhancing quality of life) and for redevelopment (enhancing economic growth). The point is that it’s hard to justify essential long-term investments if you can’t quantify their future value.

Revitalization efforts don’t always come from economic need: they often derive from reconstruction after disaster, restoring peace after civil war, making a place safer, cleaner, and more beautiful, etc. So

too would Resilient Prosperity efforts encompass a broad spectrum of coordinated activities, falling into three general categories:

- 1) Attracting new and better opportunities;
- 2) Preventing or reducing new damage; and
- 3) Repairing existing damage and renewing existing assets.

As noted above, prosperity isn't just money. Even if it were, there's no natural limit to economic growth, even on a finite planet. But there are definitely limits to population growth, virgin resource extraction, and sprawl. Some new cities will need to be built, but our existing cities have much untapped capacity.

Improving our economies, our quality of life, and our environmental health together means basing economic growth primarily on renewing our natural, built, and socioeconomic environments. Sprawl can grow an economy, but at the cost of both quality of life (traffic jams, loss of greenspace, etc.) and environmental health (loss of biodiversity and farmland, watershed deterioration, etc.). Many places say they are against sprawl, but subsidize it by not charging developers the full cost of providing services.

Whether a city or nation is moving ahead can be determined by what—and who—it is leaving behind. If it leaves contaminated land and vacant properties in its wake, it's on the way down. If it leaves its citizens illiterate, unemployed, underemployed, homeless, or hopeless, it's on the way down.

Is your community or nation producing restored (or at least restorable) assets? Given the disposable trash that passes for much of today's construction, we're doing a poor job of enabling younger generations to enjoy their own restoration economy. But we're doing a great job of providing opportunities to restore our devastated natural resources. We shouldn't be proud of that.

You've probably seen books and reports in recent years on the subject of happiness, both individual and societal. The trend's origins can be traced to 1972, when Bhutan's former King Wangchuck advocated measuring Gross National Happiness, not just largely-discredited Gross National Product.

The balance of "revitalizing the present" vs. "revitalizing the future" depends on current conditions:

- A place that's in wonderful condition, whose citizens and leadership are "fat and happy", is at risk if they're not revitalizing their future. Their Resilient Prosperity program will likely be strongly skewed—at least in the early years—towards strategy. Activities that revitalize the present will usually focus on specific problem areas, rather than the entire city or nation.
- A blighted, highly-distressed place will probably skew strongly towards the present. Their renewal activities will be more focused on the entire community or nation, and will be more tactical in nature, due to the urgency of their situation.
- An "OK" place will probably come closer to an equal distribution of present and future priorities, assuming they aren't stagnant (doing nothing of a revitalizing nature).

Whatever the balance, revitalizing the present and future together is the path to Resilient Prosperity.

## Revitalizing the Present and Future Together

I lived in the Tampa Bay area for 15 years, and still love it, so my wife and I visit frequently. In the 50s, 60s, and 70s, downtown Tampa was devitalized by horrendously destructive, insensitive urban planning and redevelopment projects. Since then, it's been a typical, sterile "roll up the sidewalks at 5 o'clock" sort of office-rich, resident-poor city center (with the exception of the restored historic Tampa Theater).

Over the past 30 years, city leaders have made many often-bold attempts to undo the mistakes of earlier planners and politicians. They include a beautiful, nicely-located new convention center; the huge Harbour Island redevelopment; a lovely RiverWalk; downtown residential towers; the Tampa Bay Aquarium; the recent Performing Arts Center (on a redeveloped waterfront site); the Channelside redevelopment (now dying); an excellent trolley (now in danger of being decommissioned) that connects the downtown to the fascinating Ybor City area; and more.

They did all the right things, but in the wrong order, with poor timing, and little or no integration. They never had a strategy (if they did, it was either a bad one, or a good one that was ignored). As a result, these ambitious projects never produced the desired revitalization. Each one was usually at death's door by the time the next one started. There was no logical sequence to produce efficiencies and synergies.

Rather than forming an ongoing revitalization program or system, each individual project was expected to produce revitalization on its own. The result has been a series of either outright failures, or temporary successes that faded for lack of follow-through and connectivity. Tampa's most intelligent and strategic project, the RiverWalk, is their most successful. It's the one that will be the most important factor in their eventual success.

A lot of developers and entrepreneurs have lost their shirts along the way, and all for lack of a strategy. The irony is that the strategic, programmatic element is by far the least cost-intensive: it's the projects that consume 99% of the funds. No one can say "we don't have a strategy because we can't afford one."

Tampa was so busy trying to revitalize their present that they forgot about revitalizing their future. They weren't creating a revitalized whole that captured the momentum of each project, creating efficiencies and synergies that supported and added value to the renewed pieces. It was a series of great tactics, but no strategy.

Virtually all places worldwide are in a similar "revitalizing the present" mode. This manifests as a broad assortment of mostly-uncoordinated public and private redevelopment projects. The "revitalization" element is mostly unaddressed in any focused manner: it's simply something they hope will happen.

The simplest way to perceive the difference between revitalizing your present and revitalizing your future is to see the former as *tactical* and the latter as *strategic*. Most communities, especially those with tightly restricted budgets, tend to focus entirely on tactics: projects that provide immediate functional or economic benefits. This is totally understandable, of course. But in today's increasingly broken, rapidly shifting world, not paying attention to strategy can leave a community high and dry, despite a plethora of excellent projects. The ideal, of course, is to ensure that your tactics are part of a strategy. Even those places with comprehensive redevelopment plans focus primarily on land use, and lack a real revitalization strategy.

A place that's effectively working towards Resilient Prosperity will have two distinguishing features:

- **Revitalization Director:** A full-time individual who helps ensure that public and private initiatives are *strategic*—revitalizing the present and future together—and who documents progress.
- **Resilient Prosperity Partnership:** A system that networks the various public and private players via a strategic process that facilitates and coordinates their efforts. It captures momentum to make each subsequent project easier, and inspires greater confidence in the local future.

Strategies are created to achieve goals, so the first step to creating a strategy is to know what you want. If you're now saying "well, duh", you'd be shocked at how many places are spending millions without knowing what they're trying to achieve, other than "more".

The best first step towards a good strategy is facilitating a widely-shared vision of your community's or region's future, and boiling it down to a few easily-remembered "rules" to guide decision-making. In some smaller communities, it might be all that's necessary to add a strategic element to your projects.

Some projects are purely strategic, revitalizing the future, but not the present. Most projects that revitalize the present also revitalize the future, *but not all*. How can you tell whether a project is purely tactical or is advancing a strategic goal? Here's a hypothetical example.

Let's say your community has an old industrial waterfront. As with many such waterfronts, it houses some ugly but still-functioning public infrastructure, such as a power plant or sewage treatment facility. If you decide to renovate and "green" that infrastructure—making it less polluting or more aesthetically pleasing—that would be a *tactic* that contributes to your community's "green" or "sustainability" initiative. That would help revitalize the present. The future? Not so much.

But revitalizing that waterfront—creating a public park, arts/entertainment facilities, and mixed-use redevelopment with good transit connections—might revitalize the entire city for decades to come. But who wants to live, work, or play next to a power or sewage plant? In that case, the *strategic* approach would be to relocate the infrastructure, not improve it. You could still make the new facility green and beautiful, but relocating it would help revitalize your present and future together.

No matter what circumstances have "broken" a place—economically, environmentally, socially, etc.—a rising breed of leaders I refer to in my upcoming third book as "fixers" are at work on the solution. Fixers can be individuals or institutions. Their "fixes" generally fall into one or more of three categories:

- **Contained:** Renewing assets in relative isolation;
- **Catalytic:** Renewing assets in a way that inspires others to do likewise;
- **Cohesive:** Renewing assets in a way that brings together stakeholders, and holds them together long enough to achieve the goal.

If we're going to indulge in an activity with such potentially far-reaching effects as revitalization, it's a good idea to understand its underlying processes...or at least determine whether it has any. Process is cause, effect, and flow. Revitalization's causes, effects, and flows tend to manifest in three ways:

- **Top-Down** (planned): Often characterized by large "magic-bullet" projects;
- **Bottom-up** (self-organized): A neighborhood-by-neighborhood, citizen-led revitalization process;

- **Impromptu:** Miscellaneous “Fixers” (redevelopers, social entrepreneurs, etc.) working opportunistically, often with their own vision and/or strategy in mind.

In places that achieve Resilient Prosperity, all three of these modes are usually evident; sometimes sequentially, other times simultaneously and (ideally) harmoniously. In fact, this is crucial to creating a constant flow of regenerative activities that builds momentum, and optimism about what’s coming next.

**Top-down** efforts come and go with changes in political administration, and with the comings and goings of state and federal funding. But sometimes the top-down approach is best.

*For instance:* Hamburg, Germany recently launched *HafenCity*. It’s a \$14 billion (\$3.25 billion of which was public money) waterfront redevelopment that’s creating 100 buildings to house some 12,000 residents. This is exactly what Hamburg needs, and there’s no way this could happen as a bottom-up, grassroots effort.

**Bottom-up** efforts come and go with changes in the citizens’ level of “pain”: the more discomfort and unhappiness, the more grassroots efforts arise.

*For instance:* Beirut, Lebanon (formerly one of the world’s most beautiful cities) has endured decades of conflict that left their public spaces dirty and dangerous. The city was unwilling or unable to revitalize its parks, so a young lady, Dima Boulad, created a grassroots program called Beirut Green Project. Their first project, to restore Sanayeh Garden, was a great success. A local teenager said “*You can feel the air quality change as you enter the park.*”

**Impromptu** efforts are often small, incremental improvements to a place. But they can sometimes be spectacular and transformative.

*For instance:* Retired New York City police detective Greg O’Connell is a Fixer. He is almost single-handedly revitalizing his current home, the Red Hook neighborhood of Brooklyn, *and* his home town of Mt. Morris (pop. 3000) in upstate New York).

Good impromptu efforts are lovely when they happen, but are unpredictable. However, they can be reliably stimulated by making a place more *Fixer-Friendly*.

In its most rudimentary form, a Resilient Prosperity system could simply comprise a **checklist** that reminds decision-makers of the guiding vision, and that helps them avoid missing basic elements of revitalization. Whether or not the system develops beyond this, such a checklist would be of great use in places large and small, urban and rural.

A real-world example of revitalizing present and future together appears later in this publication.

## Forming a Discipline and Profession for Resilient Prosperity

If a place is happy just doing projects on an *ad hoc* basis to address immediate needs, they'll feel little need of a more-disciplined approach. But if they wish to ensure that these efforts revitalize both the present (tactical renewal) and the future (strategic renewal), *ad hoc* won't cut it.

The psychological and health benefits of living in a revitalizing place are legion. Some are surprising. Did you know it cuts your electricity bill? Research led by Ping Dong of the University of Toronto found that people who feel more hopeless about their economy and employment opportunities prefer brighter lighting. 20.6% more power is used per 1 point less hopeful (9-point scale) folks feel about the future.

The impacts of revitalization are probably far deeper and broader than we know. I'd love to see graduate students comparing the health and psychological factors in revitalizing versus devitalizing places. Even better: randomized controlled trials for various revitalization tools and factors. A great step in this hard-data direction is the creation of the ISO 37120 indicators for city services and quality of life. This combines government-collected "Big Data" with citizen-acquired data. As wearable technology takes off, these quality of life indicators will come closer to real-time.

So again: if communities want revitalization, why is no one in charge of it? Have you ever seen a significant local, state, or federal government agency with "revitalization" in its name? Or seen "revitalization" in the name of a significant ongoing public budget line item, or in the title of an influential public leader? The closest title I've encountered is "Community Development Director". Some folks with that title are effectively Revitalization Directors, but most interpret their role more narrowly. They have the same problem: "community development" is a catch-all phrase, not a discipline.

There are also "Community Economic Developers", but that narrows the scope of action again. Some practitioners rightly differentiate between private business development and the more comprehensive concept of public economic development. But the phrase "economic development" tends to focus efforts on serving the economy in the short term (such as via sprawl), rather than on infill, neighborhood revitalization, and cultural or environmental factors that might be of more long-term economic value.

Those involved in revitalizing places generally operate in silos. They're like heart surgeons who can fix valves, but are stymied if asked to define—much less restore—health. Some silos are defined by asset type or by profession, such as infrastructure or planning. Others by geography or jurisdiction: city, county, region, downtown, neighborhood, etc. But when everyone is in charge, no one is in charge.

**Here are four reasons why there's seldom anyone in charge of revitalization:**

- **It isn't controllable.** Revitalization is what scientists who study living (complex adaptive) systems refer to as an "emergent phenomenon". It's a surprising quality or behavior that appears spontaneously, untraceable to a specific cause. This means that, unlike projects, revitalization can't be done on deadline, or on budget. This terrifies bureaucrats and politicians.
  - Corporate culture is an emergent quality, and CEOs spend much time and money trying to manage it. Herb Kelleher, colorful former CEO of Southwest Airlines, said "*Corporate culture is hard to define, but without it you ain't got shit.*" Ditto revitalization.

- **It's too aspirational.** Most places are already stretching the limits of their self-confidence when they do a large redevelopment or restoration project. Shooting for overall revitalization—especially if the area has been “down” for an extended period—sounds too ambitious. They dream about it, but are too timid to go for it. It's understandable, but a problem nonetheless.
- **It's not a goal with an endpoint.** Regeneration is a constant process of all healthy systems: your body might not have a single cell it had a decade ago. Regeneration is the root of desirable qualities like sustainability and resilience. But most places only think of revitalizing when they're in pain. This crisis mentality prevents healthy places from having a revitalization program: they think it's only for sick places. That kind of thinking *creates* sick places. Ongoing programs help ameliorate the scariness: Without a deadline, there's no point at which we've failed.
- **It isn't a recognized discipline.** Human Resource directors like the protection of requiring degrees and certifications of new hires. They don't want to be solely responsible for determining if a candidate is qualified. It's like the “nobody ever got fired for buying IBM” syndrome in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: IT directors bought IBM equipment—even when it was outdated or overpriced—because it was a safe career move. Your Revitalization Director candidates won't have a relevant degree (there are none), so it's a scary situation for HR.

Little wonder, then, that the word “revitalization” is used more by politicians than by redevelopers. With the exception of some tax increment financing (TIF)-funded endeavors, developers seldom see an RFP/RFQ with “revitalization” in the performance specifications.

A revitalization professional would help ensure that each project increases community vitality. Another key function would be to stay focused on the long-term. Just as publicly-traded corporations tend to focus on quarterly results to please Wall Street, so too do elected leaders tend to focus on expenditures and budget cuts that will produce results within their term of office. The result is usually underfunding what's lasting, important, and intelligent, and over-funding what's quick, superficial, and emotional. Maybe we need to get more emotional about revitalization.

Universities must address this gap and take seriously the crucial challenge of creating careers that revitalize our increasingly urbanized world. They must realize that urban planning degrees don't address revitalization (nor are planners usually in a position to manage revitalization, even if they understood it). Nor do degrees in public administration, public policy, public works, architecture, landscape architecture, civil engineering, and so on.

While pure research is essential, we must prevent revitalization research and curricula from becoming like economics. Most economists have only two career choices: 1) teaching economics, and 2) helping governments or corporations justify decisions they've already made, or actions they've already taken. Preventing such a dismal fate for students of revitalization would require a solid basis in reality, via an intimate partnership between universities and the cities that house them:

- Schools would get access to local data, lessons learned, and government internships.
- Local officials would do classroom lectures plus access to research/curricula, local and global.

Everyone wants to contribute to revitalization, but few want responsibility for achieving it. Why would they, if they don't know what it is, or how it arises? Revitalization professionals are the answer. If a place has a *permanent* Revitalization (or Renewal) Director, they'll more likely achieve Resilient Prosperity.

## Measuring Progress toward Resilient Prosperity

I recently met someone who had just visited a town that had experienced a dramatic rebirth. When I asked him what it was like, he said “Seemed kind of dead to me.” It wasn’t the first time I’d heard such a report about a place that was making great progress.

Why the mismatch between perception and reality? No frame of reference. The visitor had no way of knowing how much worse things had been recently. If you want to attract Fixers, employers, and new residents to your place, you need to make your progress visible.

Even more surprising is that many places are revitalizing, and even their own residents don’t know it. The government has no system for tracking and reporting revitalizing activities and outcomes. The leaders might know how much progress they’re making, but to the citizens, much of it is “invisible revitalization” except for the most visible of projects. Even worse, few leaders have a clear idea of what contributes to revitalization and what retards it, which makes it very hard to stimulate and manage.

Most citizens say they want local and/or national revitalization, so most politicians promise to deliver it. But few agree on how to measure it, and we can't manage what we can't measure. Measuring progress towards revitalization could comprise nothing more than periodic reports on projects that are improving the place. Simple as that is, it’s more than most communities do.

To continue the medical analogy, that would be like listing our surgeries, and having that list suffice as an analysis of our health. The medical analogy also works because there are direct parallels between regaining bodily health and revitalizing a community. Both are defined by renewed vitality, and both have powerful psychological components (like the placebo effect) that had been poo-pooed by “experts” until recently.

I've spent over a dozen full-time years speaking, advising, and listening at revitalization, restoration, reuse, regeneration, redevelopment, and remediation conferences and meetings all around the world. Every nation and city place has different challenges, dreams, and resources. Yet, everywhere I go, I encounter similar factors contributing to revitalization successes and failures.

It’s gotten to the point where I can often tell whether a place is revitalizing within a minute of arriving. Pedestrians, bicyclists, and trails are good visual indicators, and all are easy to quantify. Water quality and public water access are also key: daylighted urban streams, new waterfront parks (often on old industrial sites), and the like are also simple to measure.

Common revitalizing factors I encounter include newcomers (e.g. immigrants); heritage renewal; fiber optic internet; and restored connectivity (e.g. dam or urban highway removal). Activation of dead spaces is key, so "growth of users" is an easy revitalization metric.

Property values and tax revenues are the two most common metrics, of course. But revitalization begets revitalization, creating a positive feedback loop. The pivot point is often when the free market takes over, and public leaders no longer have to push so hard for revitalization.

This could be tracked by comparing public to private investment. That metric would produce trending data directly related to the revitalization process, rather than simply providing economic snapshots.

The list of tangible and intangible measures of revitalization is almost endless. They also vary with the place. If your city has many vacant, abandoned, or foreclosed properties, then measuring the rate at which they return to productive use is a key measure. A place with poor air quality, or many contaminated properties, would measure the cleanup process as a revitalization indicator.

Any measure of “better” will probably be valid, if only in a narrow sense. But, those narrow indicators are often what concern people most, as anyone hacking their lungs out in Beijing can attest. Many standard metrics can be applied to monitoring revitalization: home sales/rentals, business startups/recruitment, business/resident retention, etc.

But can we measure what inspired an 8-year-old to speak at a public hearing on saving a historic building? (true story) Do we need to? So many factors CAN be quantified, that we can leave unsullied the magical aspects of revitalizing places that touch our hearts and souls.

So, there are many facets to revitalization. The measuring challenge is compounded by the fact that revitalization comprises both qualitative and quantitative components.

Many cities spend vast sums on "magic bullet" redevelopment projects intended to revitalize a downtown, waterfront, etc. These projects sometimes succeed in raising real estate values in the redeveloped area, but usually fail to revitalize the community.

As with the definition, this publication merely launches a search for revitalization metrics; it's not the destination. In fact, even with rigorous data that tells us when we've hit our revitalization goals, these successes should be seen only as waypoints and opportunities to celebrate, not as places to stop.

In mountain climbing, “false summits” are a frequent cause of despair. In revitalization, there is no ultimate summit, so we should celebrate each achievement along the way.

It's important to remember that the state of being revitalized is relative to where one started. So, don't forget to fully-document (anecdotally, photographically, and statistically) your “before” condition. Otherwise, your new data will lack the context needed to be fully appreciated.

The qualitative value governments most often fail to measure is confidence in the future. This sounds fluffy and imprecise, but it is probably the most crucial of all Resilient Prosperity metrics. Here's why.

## Hiring a Professional to Guide Resilient Prosperity

If you choose to hire a Revitalization Director (or Resilient Prosperity Director, if you prefer), you'll likely be forced to choose someone whose experience is limited to one or more component silos, due to the absence of focused revitalization credentials. Which of those silos would be most relevant?

The most obvious starting point would be if you already have a Director or Department of Resilience, or a resilience initiative of some kind. Resilience is the latest buzzword, and it captures the crucial missing ingredient of most revitalization efforts.

But many resilience efforts are falling into the usual *project* mentality: a one-time (though large-scale), redesigning of the physical environment (primarily grey and green infrastructure) to cope with climate change. A permanent, *programmatic* approach would better-address the ongoing redesign and repurposing of *all* at-risk natural, built, socioeconomic, and human assets.

A Resilient Prosperity program would connect the goal of resilience to the public desire for equitable prosperity, better quality of life, and more productive natural resources. This focus on what more people *really* care about should greatly facilitate funding.

Experience in running a Main Street program is also a great background. Many of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street initiatives are successful specifically because they're *ongoing* programs, rather than one-time fixes. "Ongoing" is key because, as mentioned earlier, regeneration is constant in all healthy systems (cities, ecosystems, economies, immune systems, etc.). Since we can't force revitalization to happen on a timetable, we must keep doing the right things until it emerges.

Stasis is not an option: if a place isn't revitalizing, it's probably devitalizing. Movement is key: Office workers are being warned of the severe health consequences of too much sitting. Nature avoids stasis like it abhors vacuums.

Main Street programs are also good because they document in hard numbers the economic benefits of restoring and reusing existing assets. But they operate within the silos of "downtown" and "heritage". There are so many other natural, built, and socioeconomic assets that contribute to revitalization that a Main Street background is only a decent starting point for a Revitalization Director.

Relevant experience could come from a community foundation, EcoDistricts, Innovation Districts, BIDs, CDCs, and planning for sustainability, or climate change adaptation. Also excellent would be experience with a Smart Growth program.

The "smart growth" concept emerged in 1992 at the UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro. It's been championed in the U.S. by the American Planning Association, the Environmental Protection Agency, and by the non-profit Smart Growth America. Smart growth isn't revitalization, but it embraces many relevant components.

A Certified Project Manager with *program* management experience might be good. Program management is managing multiple projects in way that derives more benefits than would come from those projects in isolation. Creating a whole that's greater than the sum of the parts, in other words.

You want a systems thinker who embraces complexity, rather than trying to engineer-out the surprises (surprise is a defining characteristic of complexity). Familiarity with adaptive management would be excellent, as this is the managing style that by far the most effective for complex, ongoing challenges. You want a networker who functionally connects diverse players. Experience working with minority, poverty, or homelessness issues would be useful. Skills are learnable: sensitivity and empathy for under-represented stakeholders? Not so much.

A Revitalization Director might be better housed under an appointed **city or county manager** (CAO in Canada), rather than an elected mayor. This would provide crucial continuity: few mayors are public-spirited enough to launch efforts that primarily benefit the next administration. But a long-lived, revitalization-focused “strong mayor” like Joe Riley of Charleston (in office since 1975) could work. Likewise, a state-level RD would report directly to the governor, and a national RD to the president/PM.

What could qualified Revitalization Directors accomplish?

- Could they make revitalization occur on a timetable? No.
- Could they guarantee revitalization will occur at all? No.
- Could they increase the chances of revitalization success? Yes.
- Could they make revitalization faster, more efficient, and more harmonious? Probably.

If most places had Revitalization Directors using shared principles, models, and missions, our ability to solve multi-jurisdictional challenges, like restoring Chesapeake Bay, would be greatly enhanced.

In virtually every long-term revitalization success I’ve encountered, one shared characteristic rises above all others: the presence of an informal revitalization network of political, business, non-profit, and citizen leaders. Despite their success, they all have a similar complaint “*This shouldn’t be so hard: we shouldn’t have to keep reinventing the process—and remaking connections—with each new initiative. We need a system.*” Places need a Revitalization Director, guiding a Resilient Prosperity system.

**What exactly would a Revitalization Director do?** There are many paths to revitalization. In most places, the revitalization quest is typified by aimless wandering: no clear vision of the destination, no map, no professional guide, and inadequate supplies. Over \$2 trillion/year is spent worldwide on redevelopment, regeneration, remediation, restoration, and other “re” projects. Despite this expenditure, most places fail to reach the “Holy Grail”.

Since revitalization is an emergent quality of the whole, a Revitalization Director (RD) would focus on the whole. This means they wouldn’t do physical projects, so they wouldn’t need a large budget. But they would need “teeth”: the ability to say “yay” or “nay” to inappropriate projects and policies (or at least flag them). They would be evangelists with leverage.

Would a Revitalization Director add another layer of project-delaying bureaucracy? The opposite is true: A Revitalization Director would speed decisions and entitlements. Currently, every new project and program in a community must reinvent multiple wheels, such as public engagement, visioning, etc. As the facilitator of the shared vision of the community’s future (and strategy to achieve it), and as the connection to all renewal activities, your RD would help eliminate these redundancies.

Your RD would also help developers avoid wasted time and effort. Currently, the public doesn't get a chance to voice concerns about most projects until they are well into the design process. In many cases, projects are virtually "done deals" by the time the public notices are issued, with the funding already in place. A delay due to citizen protests over heritage, social justice, or environmental issues is then hugely expensive, as the interest accumulates on construction loans. Having a Revitalization Director would give developers someone to consult at the earliest stages, helping them avoid snags.

There's much that communities could do to advance local revitalization, but don't because there's no one with that responsibility. Each place has its own challenges, resources, and aspirations, so each Revitalization Director would have unique responsibilities and priorities. Here are a few obvious ones:

- **Create a strategy, program, and reporting.** Ongoing programs create a flywheel effect: capturing momentum from each success to make the next step easier. Momentum creates confidence. By tracking and communicating successes, citizens perceive recovery. Coming back to life often makes a place "cool", and always makes it joyful. Measuring each project's benefits (and taking "before" photos) enables your RD to issue reports with numbers and "after" photos as proof of progress.
- **Training.** It's difficult to initiate or manage a process if leaders have no idea what that process is. Few understand the dynamics, practices, tools, and models common to revitalization successes worldwide. Your Revitalization Director could provide such training, staying on top of the latest research. An example of such research is the recent study revealing that development impact fees do slow sprawl, but often don't—by themselves—increase investment in the downtown.
- **Policy advice:** Your Revitalization Director could help policymakers imbed a few basic rules into policies, plans, regulations, incentives, projects, and decision-making. This keeps everyone moving in the same direction, without much overt coordination. Here are the three most important such rules:
  - **Renewal.** Economic growth is sustainable if based primarily on renewing and repurposing existing assets. This doesn't mean sprawl is never in the cards, only that asset renewal (redevelopment) should be the default, and sprawl (new development) the exception.
    - We live in the Age of Re. "Re" words are non-partisan. Everyone loves acts of renewal. "Re" words are powerful: Transit-oriented development is good: transit-oriented redevelopment is better; transit-oriented revitalization is best.
  - **Integration.** Much revitalization potential is wasted when renewal projects are done in silos. Watershed restoration here. Brownfields remediation there. Historic building reuse here. Infrastructure renewal there. There are 8 basic sectors of renewable assets and regenerative disciplines, documented in *The Restoration Economy* (Berrett-Koehler, 2002). Integrating the renewal of natural, built, and socioeconomic assets produces efficiency and synergy.
    - An island nation wishing to revitalize its dying fishery must restore its damaged reefs. This requires restoring mangroves (which filter reef-killing sediments from terrestrial runoff), restoring watersheds, restorative farming practices, upgrading sewage systems, and more. Sounds like a job for a Revitalization Director.
  - **Equity.** Increased community harmony is common in revitalized locales. But many places expend copious amounts of money redeveloping blighted areas in a way that's unfair to a portion of the populace (usually low-income families and ethnic minorities). Advances made economically are thus offset by loss of trust in government, which can retard revitalization by making the entitlement process for redevelopers too long and difficult. Citizen anger can scare away residents and employers seeking a place with a better sense of community.

- “Gentrification” has become a dirty word as a result of disregard for equitable redevelopment. There’s nothing innately wrong with increasing property values: it’s a sign of renewal. Neighborhoods must change and evolve to keep a city vibrant and resilient. But *how* we revitalize is often as important as the revitalization itself.
- **Vision facilitation.** Most places focus exclusively on getting deals and projects done. Nothing wrong with projects, but ideally, a *project* is how one implements a plan. A *plan* is how one implements a strategy. And a *strategy* is how one implements a *vision*. Few places have a revitalization plan. Of those with a plan, few have a concise, definable strategy. Of those precious few with strategies, few are based on a clear vision of the desired outcome.
  - A shared vision of the desired future puts *purpose* behind a place’s people, policies, projects, and processes;
  - Facilitating and promulgating a shared vision of a place’s desired future is a perfect first task for a new Revitalization Director.
- **Making a place Fixer-Friendly.** Many redevelopers, investors, entrepreneurs, and volunteers in or near your community are probably willing and able to make renewal happen. But places saddled with outdated zoning, building codes, sprawl incentives, parking requirements, and inefficient bureaucracy will see these “Fixers” work their magic elsewhere. Want to stop sprawling? Make your downtown the easiest and most profitable place in which to invest and operate.
  - Your Revitalization Director could work constantly to make your place more Fixer-Friendly, and a better partner in public-private partnerships.
  - Your RD would track the many federal, state, and local revitalization-related grants and tax credit programs: historic, New Markets, low income, affordable housing, brownfields, etc.
- **Boosting economic development efforts.** Economic developers attract employers via property discounts and tax abatements. Such incentives are now a commodity, no longer making a place stand out. The feature firms most desire in a place is one that helps them attract and retain top-quality talent. That boils down to quality of life. When CEOs make the final decision, they’re seldom thinking about incentives. They’re thinking about their families, and the families of their workers. Are the schools good? Is the place safe? Is it beautiful? Is it interesting? Is it on the way up? Your RD can help your Economic Development Director go into these pitch sessions fully armed.

If any word captures the essence of a Revitalization Director, it’s “connector”. We can’t expect someone who’s coordinating the renewal of a place’s natural, built, and socioeconomic environments to be expert in all the component disciplines. Their expertise must be in effectively connecting those projects; to each other, and to the overarching vision of the area’s desired evolutionary path.

The single most important role of a Revitalization Director would be to foster Resilient Prosperity, and for that, you’ll need some kind of *system*.

# Assembling a System to Achieve Resilient Prosperity

*I work in whatever medium likes me at the moment.*

- Marc Chagall, Russian-French artist

A Resilient Prosperity system is a network of public and private “fixers”, plus a process for revitalizing your present (tactics) and your future (strategy).

A public-private Resilient Prosperity Partnership could be an example of such a system. But *your* system would have a locally-appropriate name focused on the greatest local concerns: “Youngstown Prosperity Network”, “Baghdad Reconstruction Society”, “London Resilience Program”, “Somalia Reinvention Authority”, “Mumbai Revitalization Partnership”, “Asociación Prosperidad Resistente de Panamá”, etc.

In the same way that the name of the system needs to fit the situation, so does the system itself. Local systems of all kinds generally become more sophisticated as the population size increases: what works for Mexico City isn’t likely to work in Puerto Escondido. That said, the *purpose* doesn’t change with size or sophistication.

Is there a correct system for organizing a Resilient Prosperity process? No, just as there’s no single cure for all sick people. But there are certainly principles, dynamics, and frameworks that reliably show up worldwide in revitalization successes, and that are usually absent in revitalization failures.

The central success factor is constant, measurable progress towards Resilient Prosperity: how you achieve that is up to you. But you need not reinvent the wheel: just design a wheel that’s right for you. What material: Steel, aluminum, or alloy? Do you want spokes? If so, how many and what style? What width and diameter? What style tire will you mount? Racing, highway, military, or off-road? And so on.

There’s a paradox at work here. All successful revitalization efforts I’ve encountered are exactly the same in one respect: each is different. While they usually comprise many near-identical processes, values, and characteristics, each is assembled and packaged in a locally-appropriate manner. In other words, those places that care enough to put the time into evolving a locally-appropriate solution succeed. Those who mindlessly copy another place’s (or consultant’s) tactics or strategies tend to fail.

It’s similar to how the various models of Fords, Fiats, and Ferraris sell to different demographics and markets. All share the same overall system, and are composed of very similar components, but each appeals to different needs and personalities. But there’s a crucial difference between the world of automobile manufacturing and the world of community revitalization. The former industry understands exactly how their product works: the latter doesn’t.

The automobile industry has myriad engineers who specialize in a car’s sub-systems—chassis, drivetrain, electrical, electronics, etc.—and designers who create a shape that’s both appealing and aerodynamic. They also have *product managers* who have:

- 1) A technical mastery of all those component systems;
- 2) An understanding of the production system; and
- 3) A vision of the end product they are creating, and how it will be marketed.

The revitalization industry also has many component specialists: planners, architects, civil and structural engineers, restoration ecologists, etc.—but it has no. It lacks two crucial elements:

- **“Product Managers”**: Professionals who have a general understanding of the roles of the component specialists, an ability to communicate effectively with each of them, and who are responsible for ensuring that the end product matches the vision.
- **“Production Systems”**: A flexible, reliable process that ensures each specialist is contributing to the desired goal in the most efficient manner possible.

We’ve already talked *ad nauseum* about the need for Revitalization Directors; the “product managers” who guide local efforts in a way that revitalizes your present and future simultaneously. Now, let’s talk about how to make their job—and everyone else’s job—easier, by giving them a delivery system.

This is why I use the term “assembling” in this section’s title, rather than “designing”: your city, county, or country need not invent the components of a resilient prosperity system from scratch. A “mix-and-match” approach is far more efficient: you can select the elements that work for you, organize them in a way that works for your situation, and ignore the rest. It’s also more adaptive and evolutionary: you can add or replace components as needed over time without disrupting the system itself.

But creating a system is one thing: managing it is another. The good news is that this cafeteria-style system creation lends itself to the world’s simplest and most powerful management tool: the **checklist**. As someone former pilot, former medic, and present-day SCUBA diver, I can attest to the life-saving power of checklists when dealing day-to-day with complexity.

A checklist can help you more quickly and easily design the right Resilient Prosperity system to achieve your goals. Another (very-similar) checklist based on the same principles can help you make decisions for years to come that are in harmony with those goals.

It’s beyond the scope of this document to offer sample checklists for the endless variety of place sizes (village, metropolitan area, etc.), place types (rural, urban, island, etc.), place situations (post-conflict, post-natural disaster, post-industrial, post-rapid growth, etc.), but a careful reading of these pages should supply or inspire most of the items *your* checklist should include.

For instance, immigrants and other newcomers have already been mentioned as a common revitalizing factor. Many small towns are making progress on renewing themselves thanks to a small group of public and private leaders who are lifelong residents. Such people are intimately familiar with the community: its assets and personalities.

But long-time residents are also the ones most like to suffer from a “we’ve already tried that” attitude, thanks to decades of badly-timed ventures. Newcomers don’t know that history, so they are often the ones who see possibilities that the native-born are blind to. Thus, having a simple item like “engage newcomers” on your Resilient Prosperity checklist can make all the difference.

A good Resilient Prosperity system would have three basic characteristics: **1) Continuity**: ensuring that an essential *process* isn’t brought to a halt by the myriad distractions and obstructions that typify daily work; **2) Goal**: ensuring that the *right work* is being done...that it’s moving a place in the desired direction; **3) Process**: ensuring that the right work is being *done right*...efficiently, equitably, legally, etc.

A system can start anywhere, and grow in any direction. The value of a network tends to rise exponentially with each useful new node; not in a linear manner. So, you don't need to connect everyone immediately: start where you have traction, and others will follow the "early adopters".

As noted earlier, there's a vast amount of "wheel reinvention" going on. Each redevelopment project has to investigate the various funding sources and tax credit programs available to them. Each new project must engage stakeholders, often facilitating a citizen-derived vision to drive their strategy.

Your Revitalization Director would have all of this information at their fingertips. Your Resilient Prosperity system would already have the engagement in place, as well as the shared vision.

A Resilient Prosperity system thus becomes your local "immune system", repelling pathogens like sprawl, heritage demolition, unsustainable resource use, and inequitable redevelopment schemes. It would encourage repurposing or replacing decrepit assets, reconnecting isolated healthy assets, and reorienting all activities towards the common goal of Resilient Prosperity.

You could also look at a Resilient Prosperity system as the regenerative "nervous system" of your area. Healthy cities and nations are complex adaptive systems. But our disconnected government agencies only make them complicated, not complex. Adaptability (AKA "resilience") arises from a healthy level of connectivity. This is why a Resilient Prosperity system's network model will often be more appropriate than creating a Revitalization Department or Agency. These would add the cost of more bureaucracy, but often without producing the benefit of increased connectivity.

Talk to people who are knowledgeable about urban revitalization or ecosystem restoration, and you'll hear that word repeatedly: *connectivity*. Effectively connecting assets is often the most cost-effective revitalization strategy. Compared to having to renew those assets, connecting them is usually cheap.

For example, connecting a housing project to a waterfront makes living there far more attractive, without having to change either the housing project or the waterfront. The housing, the waterfront, and the connective corridor are all revitalized in the process.

Likewise, a dying mountaintop ecosystem can be connected to a dying river ecosystem by restoring a wildlife corridor through farmland. This restores both ecosystems (by allowing species to make essential seasonal migrations), without the expense of actually restoring the ecosystems themselves.

A Resilient Prosperity system would itself be resilient: even if the Revitalization Directorship is a government position, it would be difficult—and political suicide—for a new administration to kill it simply because "the other party" that created it. Once a community has a system, being without it becomes unthinkable: it thus becomes a legacy of the leader who created it.

The need for a system is greater in rural regions. They have a relative paucity of renewal experts of any kind. Revitalizing a rural area also demands far more integration of their natural, built, and socioeconomic environments, thus making a holistic approach even more essential. Adaptive strategies—combined with restorative agriculture techniques—are key to farming in a changing climate.

Rural areas need Resilient Prosperity systems at the county, state, and regional level. When most communities in a region have systems with shared characteristics, regional efforts will be far easier.

Federal and foundation grants cause many places to create add-on “buzzword initiatives”: resilient, sustainable, green, smart, climate adaptation, etc. Political leaders feel safe embracing them because these initiatives enhance their image, but—having neither teeth nor metrics—they don’t threaten the status quo or risk failure. That said, the Rockefeller Foundation’s 100 Resilient Cities program is great: this criticism is only focused on places that won’t focus on resilience unless they win that funding.

All are essential dialogs, but this plethora of conversations makes it easy to miss the fact that no one’s focusing on the fundamental process and goal of revitalization. It’s like the person who constantly attends seminars on improving their personality, without altering their behavior. We must distinguish characteristics (like resilience) from functions (like regeneration). Making such initiatives nodes in your Resilient Prosperity system can extend their funding, relevance, and influence. It would make sustainability efforts more sustainable, and resilience efforts more resilient.

We shouldn’t need external parties encouraging us to regenerate, or to become more resilient. That’s like refusing to breathe until someone pays us to. When launched by external funding, these dialogs often die when the OPM (Other Peoples’ Money) runs out. Institutions and governments resist change. That’s one of the key advantages to the network model: it only asks them to connect, not change. Here are some ways to increase your chances of success:

- **Make a trusted, established entity the system’s nexus.** A redevelopment agency might fit the bill, if they’re prepared for greater transparency. But beware institutions’ tendency to revert to their comfort zone. (We’ll return to this in Fix #8, with a specific recommendation.)
- **Executive.** If you create a Resilient Prosperity system, make the Director **high-level**. They must be able to make things happen. Otherwise, it’s lip-service and window dressing. They should probably be the equivalent of a Chief of Staff, only “externally” focused.
- **Take the long view.** If you can’t immediately give your director real power, have them focus on revitalization education, leadership training, and awareness-raising until the barriers dissolve.
- **Don’t link it too closely with a particular politician or party.** Revitalization must be an ongoing non-partisan process: you don’t want it curtailed when there’s a change of administration.
- **Catastrophe recovery** can be an ideal starting point, if you’re “lucky” enough to have a disaster.
- **Green Municipal Bonds** (green infrastructure & climate adaptation) are a logic funding source.

A Resilient Prosperity system would connect your government leaders, departments, and agencies, as well as your non-profits, redevelopers, schools, and foundations. It would make them an intrinsic part of revitalization; not just “stakeholders” to be “engaged” when convenient or politically necessary. “Public engagement” efforts for each new project would be a thing of the past: a throwback to the days when decisions weren’t guided by a shared vision, and when agencies were disconnected from each other.

A Resilient Prosperity system would strengthen good political systems. It would help worthy projects bypass obstructions while enhancing citizens’ control over their local future. The next step will be the creation of appropriate information technologies for Resilient Prosperity systems. If sponsored by state or national government, a Resilient Prosperity system could follow a federal model (copied in the U.S. from the Iroquois Nation). A federal model would require each relevant public entity to have their own “node” connecting to the system. They’d need someone internally—a deputy Revitalization Director—who understands the overall Resilient prosperity vision, process, and players, and who can make relevant connections to projects, programs, and resources within their organization.

## Partnering with a Community Foundation for Resilient Prosperity

For at least two decades, the largest trend in public financing of infrastructure and redevelopment projects in the Americas has been public-private partnerships (P3). I specify “the Americas” because P3s are nothing new in Europe, especially for infrastructure. P3s are a major reason that Europe’s rail system makes U.S. rail look like that of a third-world country.

As with all tools, P3s can and have been abused, especially in the U.S., where “bought” politicians have used them to disguise an outright privatization of public infrastructure that robs the public blind. My 2008 book, *Rewealth* (McGraw-Hill Professional), had two chapters on public-private partnering. It told the story of a one P3 that was so out of control, it tried to charge citizens for the rainwater falling in their yards. But when used properly, P3s can be an ideal solution to the massive challenge of funding the renewal of our outdated power, transportation, sewer, drinking water, and green infrastructure.

While P3s are often used on large urban redevelopment projects, they have never been used to create ongoing revitalization programs. But with what kind of private entity could a city or county partner?

The ideal home for a local Resilient Prosperity system might be a **community foundation**. If you have a strong one, you have a shortcut to a system. If you have a weak one, this new role could strengthen it.

The first community foundation (The Cleveland Foundation) was created by Frederick Goff in Ohio in 1914. There are now over 1700 community foundations around the world, with 700+ in the U.S. Community foundations tend to have a high level of public trust and a broad focus (often related to quality of life). They engage all levels of public and private leadership, and seldom operate in silos.

My first encounter with one came in 2007, when I keynoted a wonderful conference sponsored by the Buffalo (NY) Community Foundation. But I didn’t realize their potential until I keynoted the Vital City event held in 2014 by The Calgary Foundation (Alberta, Canada) and met their CEO, Eva Friesen. The range of regenerative projects they sponsor is truly inspiring.

The Calgary Foundation is playing a key role in shifting a city best known as an “oil town” towards more-diversified economic growth based on renewing their existing assets. They’ve funded a wide array of projects that renew their heritage, neighborhoods, green infrastructure, arts, education, and more.

In other words, they’re perfectly positioned to be the heart of a Resilient Prosperity system. As stated earlier, a Resilient Prosperity system is a network of fixers plus a revitalization process. Most community foundations already have an extensive and functional network of both funders and fixers in place. They only need to add a proven process to turn this valuable resource into a system.

On October 2, 2014, The Council on Foundations (Washington, DC) published an article by Scott Westcott titled “The Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines played a key leadership role in developing and executing a long-range community improvement plan”. Here’s an excerpt that illustrates how well-positioned community foundations are as the potential heart of a Resilient Prosperity system:

“A few years back, leaders in Des Moines, Iowa, faced a common dilemma. While there was no shortage of people and organizations working to better the community, there was little alignment or master planning to coordinate the efforts. *‘The city had a plan, Polk County had a*

*plan, the United Way had a plan – there were lots of plans,’ says Kristi Knous, President of the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines. ‘What was lacking was a process that involved community input and tied everything together to create an integrated approach to moving the Greater Des Moines area forward.’ Recognizing the potential of a more integrated approach, the Community Foundation saw the unique opportunity to play a key leadership role in creating a sustainable future vision for Greater Des Moines.”*

Community foundations would, of course, need to better-understand how revitalization works. But for most, this added responsibility would involve few new activities: just better focus and integration of what they’re already doing.

The downside of this strategy is a community foundation’s lack of authority, but cities and counties could endow them with power via a public-private partnership. The legal mechanism to do so will vary with local laws. For instance, Iowa has statute 28E.4, which says “*Any public agency of this state may enter into an agreement with one or more public or private agencies for joint or cooperative action.*”

The result? A public-private **Revitalization Partnership**. In fact, a formal partnership between a city or county government and the local community foundation might well be the *ideal* solution. Revitalization Partnerships would enable elected leaders to instantly create a Resilient Prosperity system using a trusted, existing infrastructure.

In one fell swoop, the funding mechanisms and project evaluation/ implementation processes of the community foundation enable the city to launch a system with no added bureaucracy, and little new public expense. It would also open significant new public funding sources to the community foundation.

States, provinces, and nations don’t have such a shortcut available to them, of course. But that’s not a problem, since most would prefer to create their Resilient Prosperity system from scratch, in order to have complete control. Such higher-level Renewal Partnerships could actually be extremely simple, with very small budgets. If they did nothing more than encourage and facilitate the creation of local Revitalization Partnerships, and then supported them, they’d be doing a great service.

Given the 1700 currently-active community foundations, this relatively minor repurposing of existing social infrastructure into a global network of *local* Revitalization Partnerships might be the quickest and most efficient path to revitalizing our world.

## The Calgary Example: Inspiring Confidence in the Future of a Boom & Bust Economy

When residents have confidence in a better local future, fewer move away, and more work on improving their community. When outsiders have it, more will move there. When a relocating employer has it, they're more likely to overlook a place's weaknesses, trusting it will get improve. When developers have it, they see the place as having bottomed-out, creating buy-low-sell-high opportunities.

"*Money, in the end, is confidence*" says Avinash Persaud, chairman of Intelligence Capital Limited (London, UK). Thus, any evidence that a place's future will be *at least* as prosperous as the present is a form of "currency". With it, a place can "buy" residents, investors, and employers.

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Confidence in the future creates revitalization, and revitalization creates confidence in the future. Lack of confidence in the future creates devitalization, and devitalization creates lack of confidence.

That feedback loop can rapidly propel places upward or downward. As a result, governments *must* start measuring confidence factors. Without that data, they're flying blind, maybe into the wrong loop. As noted in the previous section, governments mostly measure jobs, population, property values, and tax revenues, all of which fluctuate with myriad transient internal or external factors. But none of these metrics reveal likely *future* prospects.

A simple initial survey could establish the baseline local confidence factor. Repeating it annually would provide an early warning system for approaching economic "storms". It could be an annual poll asking citizens to rate their confidence in the local future on a scale of 1-10, or a single-word answer to "*Do you feel this place is getting better or worse?*". This would give leaders the opportunity to nip the shift in the bud with a confidence-building project or program before a downward spiral gets out of control.

Measuring confidence could alert leaders to hidden devitalizing influences. There's a lag between the time people start perceiving a place as being "on the way down", and the time they start moving away, stop investing locally, etc. As governments increasingly create Resilient Prosperity systems and appoint Revitalization Directors, they'll be better able to "print" this currency by tracking and measuring confidence. In fact, simply *having* a Revitalization Director comprises confidence-enhancing evidence.

Confidence in rising (or at least stable) value is key to any economy. When the U.S. severed its last ties to the gold standard in 1971, the dollar became an abstraction. It has zero value now if shorn of confidence in its future value. Communities are like currency: investors don't care if they're soiled, torn, or faded, as long as they have confidence in their sustained worth.

Some of the cities and regions with the most urgent need to increase confidence in their future aren't presently distressed. Many are, in fact, quite wealthy. Some of these places that are overly-dependent on one industry, as Detroit was. Others are overly-dependent on non-renewable natural resources, like oil and gas. It's essential for places with both of these forms of fragile economies to take advantage of their current prosperity, and make investments in a more diversified economic foundation.

That might sound like you could just ask your economic development folks to recruit a greater diversity of employers, but it's not that simple. We've discussed the essential role of quality of life in attracting new employers to an area. But even quality of life is insufficient if confidence in the future is shaky.

For example: if a city is perceived as an oil and gas town, or a lumber town, or a mining town, it will be expected to have a boom-and-bust economy. The boom years attracts workers looking for jobs, but not employers looking for a growing—or at least stable—economic climate. In good times, such places don't need to revitalize their present, but they *desperately* need to revitalize their future.

How? It's far better to make some *want* to move to your city or nation, rather than offering incentives. If their perception is that you're a one-trick economy, they'll not only worry about your economy: they'll doubt that your place is an interesting place to live.

Cities based on resource extraction usually build in a way that reflects their economic transience. They create the bare necessities; eschewing major arts investments, failing to create inspiring public spaces or world-class higher education, etc. Revitalizing the future (strategic renewal) rebuilds in a way that makes people rethink how they view your place.



Future Calgary Public Library. Image credit: MIR and Snøhetta

**Calgary is sometimes called "Canada's powerhouse".** Not the kind of place you'd expect to find a focus on revitalization, right? For the past decade, Calgary has had one of the strongest performing urban economies in the country, thanks to exploitation of the infamous "tar sands" to their north.

Of the six largest cities in Canada, Calgary has the 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest unemployment rate. Their population of 1.5 million is expected to grow by 120,000 people over the next five years. Calgary is expected to stay on top until 2018. But what then? They aren't waiting to find out. The province of Alberta is known as the "Texas" of Canada: cowboys and oil. Calgary's leaders are working to change that perception for their city. They don't want Calgary to be perceived as a fragile, boom-and-bust economy.

They need more housing, but they're rightly worried about ruining their quality of life and sabotaging their future via too much sprawl. Unlike physically-constrained places like San Francisco (which focuses growth almost exclusively on redevelopment), Calgary is "cursed" with unlimited room for devitalizing developments that congest traffic, reduce greenspace, and fragment community cohesiveness. Here are four local projects designed to create Resilient Prosperity:

- **East Village:** Until very recently, this area—immediately adjacent to Calgary's downtown, comprised 49 acres of blight and crime, and little else. As you read this, the first new homes and condos are being sold in an area that has been thoroughly redeveloped in a delightful manner;
- **ENMAX Park:** Restoring green space is essential to revitalizing most cities. Many Calgarians complain that they have few places locally to take out of town visitors. Most tourists fly into Calgary, and then leave immediately for Banff, maybe after a trip to the excellent Calgary Zoo. This ecological restoration of an industrial park to a waterfront park will help change that.
- **Public Library:** The East Village will get an iconic new public library building. In addition to the pride and joy this will bring local citizens, the national and international attention this building attracts will help outsiders start seeing Calgary as a place that values knowledge and learning;
- **National Music Center:** Calgary's most outrageous project (in the eyes of many Canadians) is building the country's first national center for Canadian music. Calgary is the *last* major city in Canada most would expect to boast such an asset. It's precisely this sort of bold, head-scratching move that can do wonders for the city's image. It, too, will be in the East Village.

Calgary takes a strategic approach to public services, as well. Their highly-popular police chief, Rick Hanson, doesn't just focus on fighting crime (tactical) but on preventing it (strategic). He's created programs that brilliantly revitalize the futures of both at-risk youth and entire at-risk neighborhoods.

Calgary is revitalizing its present and future together, with a good combination of tactics and strategies:

- **Tactic:** Does Calgary *need* to redevelop the East Village? Absolutely. Vital downtowns need residents, not just business. Nothing is more crucial to Calgary ongoing viability than strengthening their downtown. You can't be a suburb of nothing: downtown is the heart of a city, and healthy bodies need healthy hearts. Research shows that people love living in places that are on the rise.
- **Tactic:** Does Calgary *need* a downtown waterfront park? Yes: if they want the East Village full of residents, they need a truly livable downtown. That means greenspace and connectivity to water. A 3-year poll by the Knight Foundation and Gallup found 3 factors that attach people to their place more than all others: social offerings, aesthetics, and open spaces.

- **Strategic:** Does Calgary *need* a new, spectacularly-designed public library? No: from a functional perspective, the old library system is working well enough.
- **Strategic:** Does Calgary *need* a national music center? No. From a functional standpoint, a far more modest venue would suffice.



**Future National Music Centre of Canada in Calgary.** Image credit: Allied Works Architecture

The East Village and the waterfront park projects primarily serve *existing* needs. Both also have strategic value, so we shouldn't get too pedantic or arbitrary about separating tactics from strategy. But the library and the music center projects *reposition* the city's image, so they are primarily strategic (while providing immediate value for residents). They provide the impression of a city with a diverse economy (rather than an oil boom town), so as to attract a more diverse economy. (Fake it 'til you make it.)

In other words, the new library and National Music Center provide the *appearance* of having the kind of diverse economy that spawns a rich arts and learning-based culture. It's a way of breaking out of the "chicken or egg syndrome": a greater diversity of employers creates a richer culture, and a richer culture attracts a greater diversity of employers. Which comes first?

Tactics and strategies have a nested relationship: as new, higher levels of strategy (larger scale or longer duration) are added, old strategies become tactics. The important thing is that *both* are in evidence: that your tactics are serving a strategy, and aren't just reactive activity. It's like what quantum physicists have discovered about matter and energy: they're the same thing viewed from different perspectives.

There's an interesting aspect of the relationship between strategic initiatives and confidence: sometimes, simply *announcing* them is all it takes to trigger revitalization. In Kansas City, Washington, DC, and other cities, announcing new streetcar services *immediately* triggered new investment and redevelopment along their routes. Revitalization of the affected areas started long before the first transit shovel pierced the ground.

Why? Because the announcement created new *confidence in the future* of the neighborhoods along the streetcar routes.

Of course, this dynamic only occurs when government is credible. If it suffers from excess partisanship—whereby one party blocks all initiatives of the other, regardless of merit and heedless of damage to the public good—few will have confidence in its announced policies, programs, or projects. In that case, revitalization *won't* precede the project. In fact, it will probably *lag* the project, with investors and redevelopers not trusting in its completion. That's the cost of lack of confidence.



Future ENMAX Park, Calgary. Image credit: ???

One profound impact of climate change is being ignored: its erosion not just of shorelines and polar icecaps, but of confidence in our local and global futures. **Climate-related loss of confidence is a “hidden” economic calamity.**

A coastal city need not be hit by a record-breaking hurricane to feel the economic effects of climate change. Just the expectation is enough to destroy economies. As people become better educated about climate change, they'll steadily lose confidence in the viability of coastal areas. Few changes would be more economically devitalizing.

Some 44% of the world's population lives within 150km of an ocean. In 2010, 123,300,000 U.S. citizens (39%) lived in coastal counties. That's expected to increase to 47% by 2020. Sea level rise, plus increased frequency and power of storms resulting from climate change, won't only devastate local economies. Payouts from the misguided federal flood insurance program—which encourages people to live in harm's way—plus the cost of federal disaster aid will likely break an already-tenuous federal budget.

It's not just sea-level rise or storm damage: dying coral reefs (from ocean warming) and die-offs of other foundational species (from ocean acidification) are undermining commercial and recreational fishing economies. And it's not only coastal areas whose “confidence factor” is vulnerable to climate change. Inland agricultural economies are being hugely disrupted as traditional crops no longer thrive there, and

when hit by unusually-severe droughts. Paper and lumber-based economies are disrupted when pests and diseases rage out of control as a result of climate change (as we've seen with the pine bark beetle).

Those in industries not related to natural resources might feel protected. They're not. What happens when everyone directly or indirectly dependent on farming, fishing, or timber (which is all of us) can no longer afford to buy a new iPhone? Or car? What happens to someone whose wealth is in real estate when investors lose confidence in the places in which those properties are located.

As noted earlier, most cities have multiple agencies and organizations renewing jobs, housing, infrastructure, brownfields, waterways, heritage, etc., usually in dysfunctional isolation from each other. So too does the United Nations have many fragmented programs working to renew various aspects of our world, often in crisis-response mode. Maybe it's time to recognize that regeneration is the essence of resilience and sustainability on a planetary level, not just the metropolitan level.

Our global economy is an aggregation of local economies. What happens when investors' diminishing confidence in local and national economies reaches a tipping point, and they start losing confidence in the global economy? Climate change is a global phenomenon with many local causes. If it makes sense for cities, counties, states, and nations to have Resilient Prosperity systems, might it also be time for the UN to create a global system, facilitating and supporting national systems?



Calgary's East Village redevelopment area. Photo credit: ???

# CONCLUSION

So, is revitalization a Grand Delusion with no substance, or an industry in need of a profession?

When we look at a place transformed from dirty, hopeless, sickly, divided, and poor to clean, healthy, optimistic, harmonious, and prosperous, are we looking at something real? **Yes.** Is it a process others could learn from? **Yes.** Is it an activity that must be taken more seriously? **Yes.**

I've been studying regeneration since 1996, and working at it full-time since 2002. I've been hired by non-profits, foundations, universities, companies, and government agencies (local, state, and national) worldwide. As a result, I've seen places fail to revitalize. I've seen them moving towards an uncertain outcome. And I've seen some achieve miraculous, back-from-the-dead rebirths. I've met people who would be wonderful Revitalization Directors. I've seen conscientious organizations and agencies that could easily become highly effective leaders of a local Resilient Prosperity system.

**But I've never met a Director of Revitalization.** And I've encountered precious few examples of what could be called any kind of Resilient Prosperity system. [Thus the lack of examples in this guide.]

Let's start taking our future seriously. Governments shouldn't have to rely on geriatric autodidacts such as myself. They need young leaders with relevant training. It can be a great career path: A growing number of institutions—from governments to non-profits to development banks—would benefit greatly from adding revitalization to their mission. It might even be a key to their survival.

After some 12,000 years in the Holocene Epoch (defined as the time when humans started impacting and reshaping the planet), we are now entering a period known as the Anthropocene Epoch, defined as a time in which human impact dominates the planet. The result is widespread fragmentation, depletion, and decline. We spent 12,000 years adapting Earth to our needs, a mode I call Adaptive Conquest. Now we need to adapt to the results of our adaptations, and switch to a mode I call Adaptive Renewal.

In September of 2014, Henry Kissinger—one of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century's masters of devitalization—was asked by TV host Charlie Rose, *"Is there an absence of order in the world right now?"* Kissinger's answer: *"This is one of the most chaotic periods that I know about. Every part of the world is redefining itself."*

In today's hyper-broken world, the first obligation of new mayors, governors, or presidents/PMs must be: **1)** appointing a Revitalization Director, and **2)** launching a Resilient Prosperity system. Today's fuzzy campaign promises tend to all sound the same. A candidate who commits to those two very specific acts would stand out. Actually doing so after taking office could make them a superstar.

Who would be **unhappy** to see a Resilient Prosperity system created, and/or a Revitalization Director appointed? Any existing agency that interprets it as a threat to their influence or funding.

Who would be **happy** to see revitalization pursued in a disciplined way, rather than as wishful thinking?

- **Developers:** Revitalization helps prevent projects from being undermined by overall decline;
- **Businesses:** Revitalization means more customers, with more money to spend;
- **Politicians:** Nothing contributes to re-election—or higher office—like revitalization;
- **Citizens:** Living in a revitalizing place revitalizes us.

This revitalizing revolution won't be fomented by planning, development, policy, or design professionals who are comfortable in their silos. It must come from the top. Failing that, it must start at the bottom, to force it from the top. That would mean citizen advocacy. This Guide is purposely non-technical and informal in order to be accessible to ordinary folks, in case their leaders don't rise to this challenge.

But citizen advocacy shouldn't be necessary on this issue. Government is supposed to be about the whole, not just the pieces. In today's increasingly broken world, voters shouldn't have to push their leaders so hard for what everyone—progressive and conservative—wants: **Resilient Prosperity**.

*Broad prosperity lubricates the machinery of government and is the glue that binds our society together. ...If the West fails to address economic stagnation, other domestic and foreign policy issues will prove intractable.*

- William Galston, Senior Fellow, Governance Studies at the Brookings Institution (2014)

In 1994, Nelson Mandela quoted author Marianne Williamson in his inaugural speech: "*Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.*" What better way to unleash our untapped power than to become more disciplined in our work as revitalizers?

In her response to reading an early draft of this guide, Nina Dauban, CEO of Nottinghamshire Community Foundation (UK) said "*We shouldn't worry that we can't see the future. We should worry about whether the future can see us.*" Becoming a Revitalization Director at the local, state/province, or national level is the finest way I know of for us to become "visible" to the future.

For Resilient Prosperity systems to take off as a common practice requires only a few pioneers. Cities are very me-tooish when they see what works elsewhere, and nations learn from cities. A network can grow and evolve forever, but here's only one opportunity to be your local system's founder.

If elected leaders fail to rise to this challenge and take revitalization seriously, local non-profit, foundation, or grassroots leaders will certainly pounce on this opportunity to grow the size, influence, and relevance of their organizations. Are you ready to lead your place into Resilient Prosperity?

Nothing is more important to your place—and our planet—than confidence in its future. Stop-start renewal efforts, no matter how grand, won't create such confidence. Neither will fragmented renewal efforts, no matter how numerous. Only a Resilient Prosperity program will do it.

Whatever the ultimate solution, it's clear that we need to revitalize the practice of revitalizing places. I'm tempted to say that we need to "fix" it, but that would imply it was unbroken at some point. In truth, we've *never* understood revitalization, or mapped the many paths to Resilient Prosperity.

Let's at least fix *that*.

## Acknowledgements

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Eva Friesen & project leader Reid Henry at Calgary's future \$31 million cSPACE center. Photo credit: Storm Cunningham

## About the Author



Photo credit: Robson Fletcher, Calgary Metro

**Storm Cunningham is CEO of ReCitizen, in Washington, DC.**

He is popular internationally as a consultant, speaker, and workshop leader on community revitalization and nature restoration.

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*The Restoration Economy* (Berrett-Koehler, 2002), and *Rewealth* (McGraw-Hill Professional, 2008).

His third book, *FIXERS: New Leaders for Broken Times* is coming in December, 2015.

### An invitation to readers from the author.

If your city, county, state/province, or nation has hired a Revitalization Director, and/or if it is creating a Resilient Prosperity system, please email me at [storm@recitizen.org](mailto:storm@recitizen.org). I'd love to write about your pioneering work in my upcoming third book, ***FIXERS: New Leaders for Broken Times***.



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