RESILIENCE STRATEGY GUIDE

Do you have a Resilience Strategy and Process, or just a Plan?

After 14 years as an economic resilience author, speaker, & planner for cities & regions worldwide, I offer this guide to help you rebuild a healthier, wealthier, happier future for all.

by Storm Cunningham, Publisher, *Revitalization News*

Want a quicker, easier, more reliable path to true economic resilience? Get help here.

This is a primer on creating resilient renewal in a community or region. It's for:

Mayors, governors, Chambers of Commerce, community foundations, Main Street programs, BIDs, CDCs, CDFIs, environmental groups, regional alliances, redevelopment agencies, and brownfield developers.

Anyone needing to build capacity for sustainable economic growth by deepening or broadening stakeholder engagement, and by boosting interdisciplinary or multi-jurisdictional cooperation.

INTRODUCTION

Visionaries, designers, planners, policymakers, and project managers abound. **Strategists are rare.**

As a result, resilience and revitalization efforts often fail due to 1) **bad strategy**, and 2) **no strategy**.

Worse, many places say they're working towards resilience or revitalization, but have no **process**. When planners talk about urban design, it's usually about **stuff**: buildings, infrastructure, public spaces, etc. But revitalization is a living process; a flow of ideas, images, relationships, and energy.

"Stuff" is essential, but designing urban or regional resilience without designing a **regenerative process** is like basing personal wellness on buying exercise equipment, without ongoing exercise.

This guide is mostly about *economic*–not climate or disaster–resilience, and I use "**resilience**", "**revitalization**", and "**regeneration**" somewhat interchangeably. They are three aspects of the same dynamic. A good revitalization strategy will produce resilient prosperity. Conversely, a good resilience strategy will revitalize your community. One defining quality of "good" is **adaptability**.

A good revitalization strategy will **adapt** to the challenges of a changing climate.

And a good climate resilience strategy will **adapt** to the challenges of a changing economy.

A city can't thrive if its streets are under water. And it can't pay for climate adaptation projects if its economy is under water.

Regeneration is the repurposing, renewing, and reconnecting of your natural, built, and socioeconomic assets. Economic resilience derives from a **constant** pulse of regeneration.

"Constant" is the key word, and constancy necessitates an ongoing process:

- Some places do **visioning** with citizens, but forget to create a **strategy** to deliver the vision;
- Some skip vision and strategy and go straight to the **plan** (which is planning in the dark);
- Some forget to boost resources via public-private **partnerships**, or don't create *good* ones;
- Some do everything right, but don't enact **policies** to allow, fund, or incentivize needed actions;

- Some don't bother preparing at all, and just start doing **projects** (the "blind faith" approach);
- Some complete a project that yields a burst of hope, but it fades for want of an ongoing **program**.

Without an ongoing, comprehensive **process**, disappointment is—sadly—the norm after resilience and revitalization efforts. This is true of rural towns, metropolitan areas, and regions alike.

Why learn the roles of visions, strategies, tactics, plans, programs, and projects?

In the 50s and 60s, Washington policymakers and professional urban planners did more damage to American cities than all foreign enemies combined. Why? Because they didn't know the difference between a tactic and a strategy.

They blindly assumed that, if they demolished all the empty buildings, new development would automatically sprout in its place. The "destroy it and they will come" assumption of "urban renewal" didn't work. Most of those cities (such as Hartford, CT) are still plagued with vast, lifeless downtown surface parking lots as a result. (*Photo is Houston, Texas*)

Cities that didn't buy into the madness, like Charleston, SC (at left) revitalized with a strategy of repurposing old buildings, renewing green spaces, and reconnecting to waterfronts.

But now, some American "Rustbelt" cities are enthusiastically demolishing blighted neighborhoods, again with federal money ($2 billion). **Let's hope they have a revitalization strategy this time, because demolition is only a tactic.**

An understanding of strategy is the basis of being effective in any endeavor: personal or organizational. For those involved in improving their community, it's the primary determinant in success or failure. Strategy thus makes all the difference in the world…and to the world.

Part 1: THE PROBLEM

Many worthwhile initiatives struggle in vain to make a difference, due to lack of strategic skills. Among them are urban / rural regeneration; natural resource restoration; renewable energy;

catastrophe recovery, sustainability, smart growth, climate resilience; corporate social responsibility; brownfields/infrastructure renewal; and social/economic/environmental justice.

In 2010, FaceBook founder Mark Zuckerberg donated $100 million to fix Newark, New Jersey's public school system. It was matched by another $100 million, mostly raised by then-Mayor Cory Booker and Governor Chris Christie. The simple, sensible tactic? Pay the best teachers better.

But there was no strategy for dealing with established teacher contracts or state laws.

For want of a strategy, $200 million was lost.

"Amateur in the art of running government: Lots of horse trading, but little or no strategy."

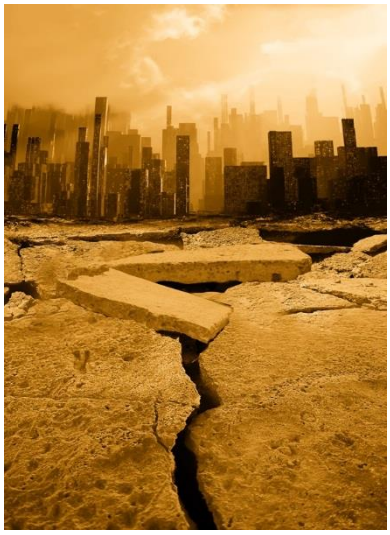
– **Institute for Government**'s criticism of British Treasury (*The Guardian*, Nov. 25, 2015)

Everyone uses the word "strategy", but few understand it.

Everyone says they have a strategy, but few can state it.

Everyone knows what a tactic is, and assume a strategy is a collection of tactics.

Nope: that's a plan.



Some dictionaries even define strategy as a "plan" for achieving a goal. Little wonder, then, that folks are confused as to the difference between a strategy and a plan. One difference is that people with a strategy tend to take action. But with planning, the norm in most cities is "plan and forget".

Even among those who know they need a strategy, few know how to create a good one. And even fewer know how to implement one, so the strategy often gets lost when the plan is being written.

That's akin to an author who forgets the plot while writing a novel. But, unlike a bad novel, a bad plan can ruin millions of lives for decades. **Planning without a strategy is planning for failure.**

In May of 2016, the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil released its excellent resilience "strategy". I say "excellent" because it contains many essential actions. But I put "strategy" in quotes because even the overview is over 1200 words.

A strategy is the core technique that helps ensure success. They come closest to stating it when they say "*Connection, collaboration, and the identification of co-benefits are the foundation of our strategy*." But they call the entire 50-page document a strategy. That's more a plan than a strategy.

Over 90% of urban, rural, and regional plans lack both a clearly-defined strategy and an implementation program.

Most urban, rural, and environmental plans are never implemented. Most that *are* implemented fail…despite having skilled personnel, and despite spending millions, even billions, on projects. As Kevin Bacon said in the movie,***Tremors***. "*We plan ahead. That way, we don't have to do anything right now.*" *(Image: Universal Pictures)*

This sad track record is seldom the fault of the planners: neither strategy nor implementation are their jobs. Worse, mayors often commission plans as ends unto themselves, rather than as a means to an end. Creating a plan is a quick, failure-proof political "win", requiring only the writing of a check. Implementation introduces the risk of failure, so it's safer to shelve the plan. Another guaranteed "win" can be had 5, 10, or 15 years later, with the commissioning of a new plan.

Most corporations at least understand the role of strategy, even if they aren't particularly skilled at strategizing. They know that a strategic analysis is a logical first step in the process. But when was the last time you heard of a city, county, or state/province commissioning even a strategic analysis, much less a full renewal process to ensure implementation? Beyond my own clients, I rarely hear of it. Most places just dive right into writing a plan.

Once we get attuned to the dynamic, we can find strategic lessons everywhere, whether raising children, raising crops, or being entertained.

In the 2015 movie, *Sicario*, for instance, Emily Blunt's character is bewildered when she must abandon the FBI's tactical approach to fighting drug smugglers and adopt the CIA's more-strategic approach. At one point, Benecio Del Toro's CIA character tells Blunt's FBI character, "*You're asking me how the watch works. For now, let's just keep an eye on the time.*" *(Image: Lions Gate Films Inc.)*

Note: I say "more strategic"—rather than "strategic"—because a truly strategic approach would destroy the drug cartels' *raison d'être*, either by **1)** getting 20% of Americans to stop using illegal drugs, or **2)** legalizing drugs (the only strategy that's been proven to work). But the latter approach also threatens the multi-billion-dollar drug enforcement industry, so it's not politically feasible.

Most ordinary folks can figure out that a *strategic* nuclear weapon is designed to win the war, while a*tactical* nuclear weapon is designed to win a battle. Thus, they can surmise that strategies achieve overarching goals, while **tactics** achieve sub-goals. So, if strategies are so simple, why do most cities and regions not have a revitalization strategy?

The primary reason seems to be because few public (or private) leaders know how revitalization works. Generals know that battlefield success comes from killing the enemy or disrupting their logistical flows. CEOs know that business success comes from growing revenue while shrinking expenses. But ask 100 mayors how to revitalize a city, and you'll get 100 answers. How can they devise a successful strategy if they don't know what leads to success?

Part 2: THE SOLUTION

"The best CEOs I know are teachers, and at the core of what they teach is strategy."

– Prof. Michael Porter, Harvard University

Strategy is the key factor in the outcome of most endeavors. A strategy is a small thing, like an ignition spark, without which the best-designed and best-built automobile will go nowhere. So why are the military and business worlds almost alone in teaching it?

A strategy is a technique or method for achieving a goal. A strategy isn't something we do: it guides actions (and

decisions). The right strategy maximizes chances of success, while minimizing time and resource needs. So, what does strategic thinking look like?

Both **Apple** and **Google** seem to be on the verge of selling their own cars. When that news first hit, most folks were bemused. But this was strategic thinking at work. At both firms, a viable new business opportunity must address two strategic issues: *scale* and *connectivity*.

Both are huge companies, so new markets must be vast to satisfy Wall Street's insatiable demand for growth. Personal transportation has the requisite scale. New markets should also connect with existing offerings, for synergy's sake. As accident rates show, automobiles are where we increasingly use Apple's and Google's products or services. Thus, an Apple or Google car.

On August 2, 2006, **Tesla** founder **Elon Musk** publishedhis "secret" strategy (he called it a "master plan"), which most would agree he has successfully implemented: **1)** Build sports car; **2)** Use that money to build an affordable car; **3)** Use that money to build an even more affordable car; **4)** While doing above, also provide zero emission electric power generation options; **5)** Don't tell anyone.

One of Musk's biggest challenges is distribution. In bypassing traditional automobile dealerships, he made enemies of them (and of the politicians they fund). Product manufacturers often fail by focusing so heavily on the product that the distribution or marketing strategy is taken for granted (the "Better Mousetrap" trap). Your product might save consumers tons of money. But if it does so in a way that threatens the income of existing players–such as reducing service revenue or sales of more profitable items–don't expect their cooperation.

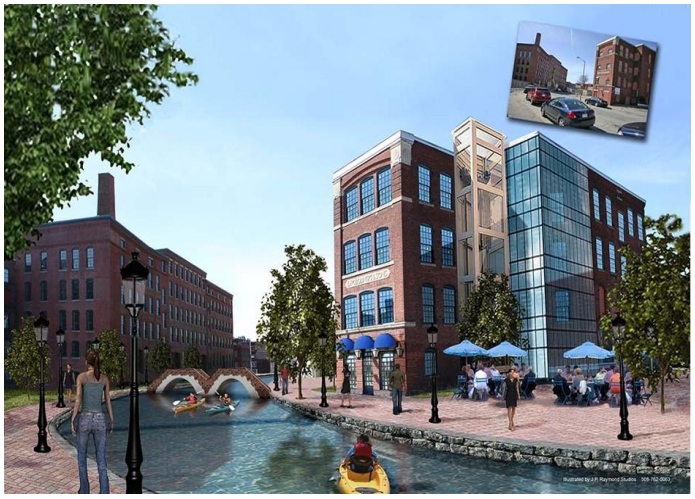
As Charlie Peters of **Emerson** (a 125-year-old manufacturer) says: "*The barriers to adoption are much more severe than the barriers to develop the technology.*" Emerson's design and production expertise is wasted without the right strategy for co-opting or bypassing the *status quo*.

But again: why do we mostly think of strategies in a military or business context? Aren't *all* of us trying to achieve goals? Why so much economic, social, and environmental planning, but so little**pre-planning** (strategy) and **post-planning** (implementation)? The tide might be turning, as we see Memphis, Tennessee embed a blight elimination strategy in the city charter, not just in policy.

The Universal Goal: Increasing confidence in the local future.

Avinash Persaud, chairman, Intelligence Capital Limited (London, UK) once said "*Money, in the end, is confidence.*" Without confidence in the future value of a $20 bill or a €20 note, they are just worthless pieces of paper. And so it is with local economies.

The right revitalization strategy—along with an ongoing program to implement it—should build**confidence** in your local future. That's the key to attracting/retaining residents, employers, and investors. If there's a universal revitalization goal, that's it. "Local", in this case, can mean very local. In several U.S. cities, for instance, merely announcing a future trolley line was enough to revitalize the area along its intended path, before a single track was laid. Why? Confidence in the revitalized future of that corridor.



The long-depressed Canal District of Worcester, Massachusetts is now revitalized, based on confidence that their historic canal—buried for over a century—will someday be daylighted, thereby providing a revitalizing water feature. But they have neither the money to unearth it, nor an official plan for doing so.

What provided that confidence? A clear, credible vision of how the area would be changed for the better, plus a trusted organization (the Canal District Alliance) to devise and follow-through on a strategy. *(image by J.P. Raymond Studios)*

Reduced confidence in the global future is fast becoming one of the largest economic impacts of climate change. The vast majority of the world's population and economic activity is close to coasts. Rising sea levels, combined with the increasing frequency and severity of storms, is rapidly eroding confidence in thefuture of coastal cities worldwide.

Add in the rise of global terrorism, and it's not surprising that Andrew Young, former U.S. Ambassador and former 2-term Mayor of Atlanta, Georgia says "*The environment is so insecure and unstable right now that people are afraid to invest in the future.*" (April 2014)

Good strategies are often so succinct that they look like no-brainers.

The brevity of a good strategy often makes it seem as if not much thought or research went into it.

The Oliver neighborhood of **Baltimore, Maryland** was in rough shape, even before the 2015 protests and (unfortunately) riot that following the brutal death of resident Freddie Gray at the hands of the police. Reportedly, some 250 businesses (most of them minority-owned), were looted or destroyed. Over 150 innocent residents' cars were vandalized, and over 100 fires were set that damaged local residents' homes.

Now, Oliver's starting to come back to life, thanks to a visionary local developer, and a program funded by the **Annie E. Casey Foundation**. (Here's a recent report on the effort.) Their strategy comprised just three words: ***Build On Strength***. "Build On Strength" might seem hopelessly simplistic and generic, but remember that a strategy implements a vision. The vision is what focuses that simple strategy on goals that are unique to–and needed by–that community.

On January 5, 2016, first-term Republican Governor Larry Hogan announced that Maryland would provide $75 million to help Baltimore demolish thousands of vacant buildings. That would be worrisome if there were no strategy for filling those vacant spaces into new residences and employers. But he also announced $600 million in state subsidies to encourage redevelopment of those spaces. Sounds good, right? Wrong.

Two powerful tactics—getting rid of old stuff + subsidizing new stuff—have been announced, but community revitalization isn't just about stuff. It's also about factors like trust, justice, health, education, connectivity, etc. There's no apparent strategy in Baltimore to address such issues. Worse, there's a strong possibility that some of the demolition funding will be taken from the Community Legacy program, which supports rehabilitation. Thus, they would actually be *reducing*their ability to revitalize these neighborhoods.

"Strategy requires thought, tactics require observation."

– Max Euwe, World Chess Champion

Connectivity might be West Baltimore's greatest strategic need: lower-income residents must be able to get to jobs, schools, and shops without owning a car. But one of Governor Hogan's first acts was to kill the Red Line, a long-planned transit project that would have finally connected West Baltimore to the rest of the city. Thus, his $675 million investment in demolition and redevelopment will likely fail to produce lasting revitalization, due to a lack of strategic thinking.

Recently, a coalition of neighborhood groups called the **Baltimore Housing Roundtable** offered a strategy for reducing displacement of citizens during these mass demolitions. I hope it works.

Shakespeare said "*Brevity is the soul of wit.*" It's also the soul of wisdom. Effective strategies should be short enough to write on a napkin. Most good ones are about two or three sentences. But just three words can suffice, if they are the right ones, at the right time, in the right place.

Here's a quick test you can try: the next time you're talking to a mayor, planner, or developer who says they are going to revitalize a place, ask what their strategy is. If they're still talking a minute later, they might have a strategy, but not a good one. If they say "*Read the plan*", they don't have one, but might not know it. If they say "*Go to hell*", they don't have a strategy, and they know it.

Wrong/no vision + right strategy = Failure

Right vision + wrong/no strategy = Failure

Vision and strategy go hand in hand

Like male and female, their union creates new life

Part 3: CREATING A STRATEGY

The right strategy drives our success. The right vision drives us to the right destination.

The same strategy can often be applied to multiple communities, despite differing strengths, weaknesses, and cultures. How is that possible? That's where the **vision** comes in. What does a vision look like? To the left is a good one from Millvale, Pennsylvania, facilitated by **evolveEA**.

Strategies implement visions, and visions are a cohesive set of locally-appropriate goals. If this is true, why do so many cities write plans and start projects without a strategy or vision? Because few public leaders understand the relationship of visions, strategies, plans, and projects (tactics).

Vision = What you want/need

Strategy = Technique for getting it

Plan = Necessary projects/tactics/players that fit available resources and desired time frame

Project/Tactic = Action

These days, leading-edge urban development strategies are **multi-agenda**: mixed-use; mixed-income; mixed-ethnicity; mixed-age (this applies to both buildings and people). And they renew the society, economy, and environment together as a system.

Countless streetscaping and façade renovation projects go by the name "revitalization". If they are, in fact, a tactic/project in a larger revitalization strategy/program, that's fine. But if they are just isolated, one-time projects, then citizens will likely be disappointed when the project is over, and revitalization hasn't manifested.

How are the right strategies created?

Sometimes, an experienced person possessing deep familiarity with a place will be able to intuit the right strategy on the spot (making it look deceptively easy). Other times, a long series of public engagement, visioning, and partnership meetings is needed for the right strategy to emerge.

"Without a vision there is no strategy."

– David Rixter, Outreach Manager, U.S. Treasury (personal communication)

In between those two extremes is conducting (or commissioning) a **process analysis** (my specialty). A process analysis provides the locally-appropriate perspective and understanding needed for the entire comeback lifecycle: vision, strategy, policies, plan, projects, and program.

Visioning is a very different activity from strategizing, and this guide is about strategy. But let me toss in one tip about visioning. A vision that's inspiring, appropriate, and achievable often derives from asking two questions: **1)** Under what circumstances would each problem become an asset? and **2)** What opportunities emerge when we combine our problems?

Take **Detroit**, for example. It's a huge city (140 square miles), and after half a century of population loss, two separate-but-linked problems emerged: too much vacant land and too few people.

Applying Question #1, vacant land becomes an asset if repurposed to produce food or energy, and low population becomes an asset if reducing food or energy consumption is a goal.

Applying Question #2, Detroit is thus uniquely positioned to become the world's first food-and/or-energy-independent city. Not just doing some urban gardens (like everyone else), but 100% self-sufficient. That would be an inspiring, appropriate vision.

It wouldn't be n answer to all the city's problems, of course, but it would dramatically reposition the city in the eyes of the world. Rather than being an iconic victim of the decline of the

manufacturing economy, Detroit would be an icon of the Restoration Economy: repurposing old assets, renewing quality of life, and reconnecting citizens to their food sources.

NOTE: That's only an example of the visioning process; not an actual recommendation. Detroit is doing a lot of things right these days, and might already be well on the way to becoming an icon of the global Restoration Economy.

Who should create the strategy?

Planners plan, just like writers write. But some writers are also publishers, and so too are some planners strategists. But we must avoid the very common tendency to conflate strategizing with planning. They are two very different processes, and two very different skill sets.

"No battle plan ever survives contact with the enemy."

– Field Marshall Helmuth Karl Bernhard Graf von Moltke

It's relatively easy to write a plan if given a clear vision and strategy. So, planning can—and usually*should*—be a separate process run by different people. Planners have a skillset and perspective (especially if they are engineers by training) that is often not appropriate for strategizing.

Strategy is where the process of changing a complex adaptive system is simplified, and where uncertainty and surprise are expected.

A basic function of engineering is to remove surprises from a system. That's a wonderful skill when building tunnels, roads, buildings, and bridges. But it's disastrous when building communities or restoring ecosystems.

Why? Because the ability to surprise is a defining trait of a complex system. Remove it, and you change it from a living system to a mechanical one (AKA: dead). Complex systems have distributed controls; engineers want centralized control. Strategy requires a risk-taking mindset. Engineers are risk-eliminators, not risk-takers. China has very many engineers in government, and it shows.

Ideally, strategies should be created by people who are intimately involved in the visioning process, and who have a vested interest in the outcome (provided it's based on a vision of shared community goals). For example, a mayor might lose the next election if her/his strategy fails. Thus, professional managers are seldom good strategists.

"You have to be fast on your feet and adaptive or else a strategy is useless."

– General Charles de Gaulle, President of France

If your goal in writing a plan is to go through a visioning, strategizing, and planning process, good on you. But if the goal is simply to have a plan, boo on you. In a stable world, a plan could be a good thing, if well-researched and written by someone with deep insight (a big "if"). But who has a stable world?

In today's world, a plan can produce great stress: each day, the assumptions on which it's based diverge further from reality, yet professional managers are required to "stick to the plan". **Adaptive management** is a healthy new trend, allowing places to implement and evolve plans simultaneously.

Strategies and tactics must adapt to the changes they cause. For instance, free parking might be a good tactic for boosting traffic in a dead downtown. But years later, that successfully revitalized city center might see its walkability and quality of life degraded by excessive automobiles. Raising the cost until traffic declines to a livable level is then needed.

DC smart meter (by Kate Patterson, USA TODAY)

We now have real-time adaptability, as withdemand-price parking meters, similar to Uber's surge pricing. Excessive cars can kill a city center. The right number can revitalize it. What revitalizes a dying place might devitalize a vibrant place.

Darrell Sapp./Post-Gazette

Adaptive management is the key to dealing with such evolving challenges and evolving tools, especially when we don't fully understand the dynamics of the system we wish to revitalize (who does?). Pittsburgh's Mayor **Bill Peduto** is taking an adaptive management approach to its multi-decade river restoration challenge. Let's hope other city's leaders are as wise.

Strategic thinking is a hallmark of real leaders, so it's vitally important to provide leadership training and a supportive environment for local residents. Like so many important and mysterious elements of life, leadership is an emergent quality of living systems: we never know when or where in the community it's going to pop up, so we should invest in as many people as possible.

Silos are dysfunctional vestiges of the 20th century, alien to today's hyper-connected, partnering-oriented, stakeholder engagement-driven world. Strategists more often *facilitate the emergence of a strategy*, rather than craft one in isolation. Thanks to modern communications technologies, such "emergent strategies" can often be devised, tested, and revised at a lightning pace.

"Invite people on the journey so they'll embrace the destination."

– Chris Grams, President, New Kind

To recap: there's no particular profession that *should* create the strategy. The important thing is to make sure it's the *right* one. We shouldn't just toss the job to the first person (such as the planner) who comes to mind. What might be more crucial is ensuring that all stakeholders are invited to help create the *vision* that the strategy is meant to deliver. The person or organization responsible for executing the strategy must be clearly identified. If everyone is responsible, no one is responsible.

If your community or organization hires a strategy director, know that their job isn't to sit around dreaming up strategies: it's primarily a research position. Awareness precedes insight. They must be supremely aware of the environment in which you operate: trends, technologies, players, etc.

I spent 6 years as the Director of Strategic Initiatives for a professional society in the construction industry. The organization had some 14,000 members (architects, engineers, and product manufacturers), but it hadn't done anything new in 25 years, and was on the brink of bankruptcy.

The new Executive Director wisely knew that he would have his hands full restructuring the organization, and wouldn't have time to focus on strategic research, so he hired me. A major part of my job was attending industry conferences to get a better feel for where our organization fit in the scheme of things, both present and future. **A good strategy is the outcome of greater awareness.**

Timing, Scope, and Starting Point

The right strategy at the wrong time. Not all places can be revitalized at any given time. Revitalization is like farming: there's a time for preparing the soil, a time for planting, a time for harvesting, and a time for resting.

There's also a time for restoring farmland back to the original ecosystem, and a time for repurposing it, such as for renewable energy production.

The right strategy at the right time can still fail, if you get the scope wrong. Too often, scope is taken for granted. An organization focused on downtown will automatically devise a downtown revitalization program. A city or county agency will automatically create a citywide or countywide program. As with the strategy, the scope should be driven by the vision.

For instance, if your goal is boost quality of life—including air quality, water quality/quantity, human health, recreational opportunities, etc.—that usually can't be done at a downtown, or even a community level. You'll need to restore your surrounding watershed, family farms (local food system), green spaces, and so on. That would require at least a countywide scope, if not a regional or even statewide scope.

But even finding the right time and scope isn't enough if your starting point is wrong. A good strategy will identify the right focal point to begin the revitalization process. You want to score some quick and early "wins" to boost confidence and gather momentum. Few communities have the funds to repurpose, renew, and reconnect all their assets at once.

"I have always found plans to be useless, but planning is indispensable."

– General Dwight D. Eisenhower, President of the United States

In some places, heritage will be the starting point, such as restoring a historic downtown theater. In other places, remediating brownfield sites should be first, in order to create "shovel-ready" opportunities for developers. Elsewhere, restoring natural resources–fisheries, farmland soils, watersheds, ecosystems, etc.–will be the obvious first step towards revitalization. All too frequently these days, disasters are the genesis of revitalization and resilience initiatives.

Identifying your ideal timing, scope, and starting point are all functions of a strategic analysis. But maybe the most important thing to remember is that, at any given time, SOMETHING can be done to move your place closer to revitalization. **For both individuals and communities, action is the best therapy for inertia and depression.**

Part 4: STRATEGIC INSIGHTS

Let's try to clear the air further. The following "tips" relate to common strategic mistakes and successes I've observed. But every place and time is different, so you need to find your own local path to revitalization: these are mostly generalities, not universal rules.

Here are 26 strategic tips for creating green, equitable, resilient revitalization:

1. Projects implement plans. Plans, programs, and policies implement strategies. Strategies implement visions. A vision is a cohesive set of aspirational goals.

2. Revitalization and sustainability success stories usually feature: a) A shared *vision* of the desired future; b) A *strategy* to achieve that vision; and c) An *understanding* of relevant trends, and how similar places achieved similar goals.

3. Good citizens drive *equitable* visions. Good leaders drive *efficient* strategies. Good partnerships drive *effective* action.

4. Strategic public-private partnerships flow opportunity *and risk* to private partners, while flowing resources *and influence* to public partners.

5. Mayors often copy the physical *product* of revitalization in other cities, rather than learn from the innovative, inclusive, locally-appropriate *process* that created it.

6. Most cities that want revitalization or resilience have no one in charge of delivering it. Those goals thus become wishes or dialogues, not programs.

7. Retail is a sign of revitalization; seldom a cause. Boost residents via affordable housing + transit, and retail emerges. Count pedestrians to measure revitalization.

8. Tax Increment Financing: An excellent revitalization tool, but it's often 1) **misused** [for sprawl], 2) **abused** [developer subsidies], and 3) **overused** [revenue depletion].

9. Economic development incentives are commodities; Quality of life and confidence in the local future are usually the key differentiators when recruiting employers.

10. To build a tourism economy, design places that delight residents in your region: Locals provide year-round revenue, and most tourists prefer authentic, working communities.

11. A regional strategy can revitalize communities faster than is possible at a local level, thanks to shared natural resources, infrastructure connectivity, and critical mass.

12. A vision/strategy that can't be recited during an elevator ride is too hazy or too complicated to succeed. If it can't be remembered, it won't affect decision-making.

13. A good vision without a strategy is a pleasant daydream. A good strategy without a vision is the right route to the wrong place.

14. A plan without a strategy is an activity catalog. To implement a plan without adaptive management is to be guided by a relic.

15. Strategies are essential, fluid, and live in minds. Plans are optional, rigid, and (too often) rot on shelves.

16. For a resilient future, climate adaptation strategies: a) restore green infrastructure; b) repurpose energy infrastructure to renewables, c) revitalize today's economy.

17. Devastated cities can leverage their local recovery process to build a new economy as a national or global center for restorative education, workforce, & technology.

18. Size has a logarithmic dynamic in transit and trail strategies: Each new node can double the value of the entire system.

19. Bilateral strategies reward what you desire and repel what you detest: Make redevelopment easier & cheaper while making sprawl harder & more expensive.

20. Schizophrenic strategies self-destruct, such as urban regeneration that exacerbates economic inequity, or policies that encourage both sprawl and redevelopment.

21. The Circular Strategy: Confidence in the local future attracts resources for revitalization; revitalization builds confidence in the local future.

22. Adaptive strategies repurpose, renew, and reconnect your *existing* socioeconomic strengths and physical assets (natural, historic, agricultural, infrastructure, etc.).

23. Revitalization strategies require thought. Magic bullets like a stadium, casino, aquarium, or convention center require only writing a check.

24. A good revitalization strategy is simple, but a good vision is holistic: Beware redevelopment fads focused on a single attribute or asset type.

25. Just as green infrastructure helps cities absorb stormwater to reduce destructive flooding, regenerative strategies help cities absorb population growth to reduce destructive sprawl.

26. In our depleted, fragmented, contaminated world, the heart of a sustainability strategy is restorative development: After all, *who wants to sustain this mess?*

Part 5: EXAMPLES

Strategic thinking on Main Street:

For over three decades, one of the world's most successful revitalization programs has been run by the **National Main Street Center** (NMSC), created by the **National Trust for Historic Preservation**.

From the beginning, they recognized that hundreds of hard-working, well-meaning non-profit groups throughout America were spinning their wheels in efforts to revitalize downtowns via the repurposing and renewal of historic buildings. What they all needed was a strategy, so NMSC devised a simple, generic strategy that all could apply. They call it the Four Point Approach: Organization; Promotion; Design; and Economic Restructuring.

Main Street Shelbyville, Kentucky

Georgetown, Texas main street parade

They also offer eight Guiding Principles to guide the implementation of the Four Point Approach: Comprehensive; Incremental; Self-help; Partnerships; Identifying and capitalizing on existing assets; Quality; Change; Implementation.

The result? The states that have well-organized Main Street Programs have seen tremendous economic revitalization. Kentucky has the oldest state-wide program, and Iowa probably has the best. The 44 communities in the Kentucky Main Street Program reported $76,126,662 of cumulative investment in their commercial downtown districts in 2015. In 2016, it was estimated that the Texas Main Street Program had generated some $3 billion and 30,000 jobs during the course of its existance.

Nationwide, the Main Street Program has triggered some $65.6 billion of public and private investment in physical improvements to downtowns since 1980. About 556,960 jobs were created and over 260,000 buildings were repurposed and/or renewed in the process. The return on investment averages about 26:1.

Iolani Palace, Honolulu: only U.S. royal palace

And they're not resting on their laurels, having recently updated their Four Point strategy. There's room for improvement, of course. I find the relationship of the four points and the eight principles to be a bit of a jumble: a future redo could add some much-needed elegance and logic to its organization.

You've no doubt also noticed a crucial missing element: **reconnecting**. They are repurposing and renewing existing assets, but there's not one mention of the word "connect" on NMSC's pages explaining the Four Point Approach or the Guiding Principles. Connecting downtowns to suburbs (via corridor revitalization, as mentioned elsewhere in this guide), and to surrounding agricultural regions (thus creating local food systems) can supercharge a downtown.

Downtowns can't reach their full potential in isolation. The heart needs the body as much as the body needs the heart.

Strategic thinking in South Africa:

Many metropolises around the world are suddenly realizing that cars kill cities. As a result, they are closing key streets to automobile traffic and are boosting public transit. But many people love their cars, and can't imagine living without them. So, to boost public support for pedestrianization and public transit, communities are declaring car-free days or weekends. The hope is that, when citizens see how much quieter, cleaner, and safer their neighborhoods are without car traffic, they will support more enlightened policies.

You've probably read about the EcoMobility Festivals sponsored by ICLEI. The most recent one took place in October of 2015 in Sandton, a traffic-congested district of Johannesburg, South Africa.

The festival lasted an entire month, which cost millions of dollars. Why so long? **Strategic thinking.** The vision ICLEI wanted to achieve was *lasting change* for the better.

*Johannesburg's Executive Mayor **Parks Tau** is leading urban ecomobility policies in South Africa.*

If a street is closed for a day, people might visit it out of curiosity, but they'll probably drive there. If an area is closed to traffic for a week, people needing to get there—such as for a dental appointment—might reschedule the visit to avoid being inconvenienced in their car. But if an entire district is closed to cars for an entire month, people will *have* to find another way in. They might take a bus for the first time. Or they might realize how few other options there are, and demand more buses, trolleys, or subways. That can lead to lasting change.

The key was to devise a strategy ("close an entire district to cars for a month") that would help ensure that the tactic ("shutting down car traffic") actually accomplishes the goal. Most places just set a goal, and rush right into writing a plan. That plan might be expertly detailed on the best possible ways to close a place to cars for a day or weekend. But it will fail, because nobody took the time to create an overall process (strategy) that optimized the tactic's ability to succeed.

Strategic thinking in Special Forces:

That time element mentioned above is often another differentiation between a tactic and a strategy. When I was with the U.S. Army's 7th Special Forces Group (AKA "Green Berets"), we were taught how to deal with vastly superior forces. Since Green Berets operate in 12-person teams, and usually behind enemy lines, the best tactic was usually to run away. No strategy needed.

But if a Direct Action mission required actively engaging a large army, a good strategy usually employed multiple tactics over time. For instance, sniping a few of them daily, so they were afraid to be in the open. Killing a few in their tents every night, so they were afraid to sleep. Poisoning

some of their food or water, so they were afraid to eat or drink. Living in constant fear is exhausting, and exhausted soldiers make mistakes, or give up entirely. [That scenario is unlikely: the standard Green Beret strategy is a capacity-building mode called Unconventional Warfare, which recruits, trains, and equips locals to do their own fighting.]

Strategies are often more effective if kept ulterior. For instance, U.S. Army Special Forces are working with the Uganda People's Defence Force to hunt down notorious Ugandan war criminal Joseph Kony, leader of the Lord's Resistance Army. Sounds like a simple (not easy) Direct Action mission, right?

But the **real mission** is to strengthen the U.S. role in Africa, which has been weakened by major Chinese investments in badly-needed infrastructure.

The **strategy** is to use Unconventional Warfare (instead of Direct Action). That means local citizens and local troops live with Green Berets, get trained by them, and fight alongside them for months–even years–at a time. That forms deeper, more-lasting bonds with the U.S. than handing billion-yuan checks to politicians (especially in the corrupt C.A.R. and the D.R. of Congo, where Kony operates).

Strategic thinking on Gentrification:

OK: back to civilian applications. One compelling reason to learn strategy is to resolve conflicting constraints. Gentrification is a controversial aspect of revitalization these days, to the point where the American public often uses the two terms as if they were synonymous. Much of the heartbreaking social displacement of revitalization is easily avoidable when planners and developers simply care enough to create a strategy to avoid or minimize it.

Many gentrification debates are actually based on **two false assumptions**:

- That economic growth and increased affordable housing are conflicting goals; and
- That higher-income people moving into lower-income neighborhoods is a Bad Thing.

In fact, boosting affordable housing-especially in downtown areas–is a fairly reliable strategy for lasting revitalization. New research by Michael J. Hicks, PhD, and Dagney Faulk, PhD, of **Ball State University** proved that in today's economy, jobs tend to move to people, whereas people often moved to jobs in the past. Many communities' strategies are based on old assumptions, so they launch revitalization with commercial redevelopment, rather than residential. Or, they forget to include sufficient affordable housing, so there are too few employees to attract businesses.

Affordable housing isn't just a feel-good social responsibility tactic: it's often at the heart of successful revitalization strategies. Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh famously sunk $350 million of his own money into revitalizing downtown Las Vegas (which is quite distant from the famous Strip).

He's had mediocre results so far, largely because he didn't provide sufficient affordable housing, so the area remains somewhat lifeless. It didn't help that some of his partners didn't get the "re" concept.

For instance, the magic of building places out of old shipping containers is that you're giving new life to something that would normally become trash. One of the few bright spots in downtown Las Vegas is the Container Park. Just one problem: they purchased brand new containers for the project. Maybe they had too much money. That's a real problem in some cities (such as in China), where their wealth prevents them from valuing the efficiency of reusing existing buildings, leading to destruction of heritage.

Creating economically diverse neighborhoods by inserting affordable housing into wealthy areas is a strategy for greater social health: poor ghettos and wealthy ghettos are both undesirable. Mixed-income, mixed-ethnicity, mixed-age, mixed-use, mixed-transit (foot, bike, car, bus, train, etc.) neighborhoods will define healthy 21st-century cities. While locally-appropriate strategies are crucial, it's important to remember that some challenges are almost universal. Racial equity is one of these, especially here in the United States.

As a result, it's very likely that another city has already hit on a strategy that will work in yours. Joining organizations like the **Government Alliance on Race and Equity** helps avoid reinventing the wheel (it's a national network of governments working to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all). That said, the process at arriving at a solution is sometimes more important than the solution itself, so be wary of shortcuts.

Part 6: UNIVERSAL STRATEGIES

RE: A Prefix-based Strategy for Global Revitalization via Policymaking

The regeneration of our world could be reduced to change in prefix. We need to replace "**de**" with "**re**". Transitioning to a global (or local) restoration economy happens when we move…

…from development to redevelopment

…from despoilment to remediation

…from depletion to replenishment

…from demolition to restoration

…from degeneration to regeneration.

In other words, we need to stop being degenerates, and start becoming regenerates.

Regarding demolition:

The repurposing, renewing, and reconnecting of existing natural, built, and socioeconomic assets has long been the foundation of my "restoration economy" approach.

That said, not everything is worth saving. Demolition can, in fact, make way for progress.

Some buildings are simply too ugly or too badly-constructed to be worth saving, like the FBI headquarters in Washington, DC. It could have been declared "blight" the day it was commissioned.

Other buildings have been rendered un-reusable by water damage from poorly-maintained roofs, or by vandals (such as copper thieves).

But in general, planners and mayors often avoid the complexity of repurposing and renewing existing assets, and just go for the simplistic "wipe it all clean and start afresh" approach of mass demolition. This can sometimes make sense in places that desperately need to downsize their infrastructure maintenance budget to cope with a drastically lower population (like Youngstown, Ohio), but only if they have a comprehensive revitalization strategy and process in place.

Much research has gone into the new science of complex adaptive systems (economies, immune systems, etc.). It answers some of the most important questions, such as how do living systems arise, how do they evolve, and how do they recover after massive disruption. Today, most of the algorithms that run massively complex tasks (financial trading, weather forecasting, Netflix recommendations, etc.) derive in whole or in part from the insights of complexity science.

Applying these insights at the human level is more of a challenge, but it can be done. For instance, politicians wishing to transform their city or nation should know that complex systems are best altered by changing the most basic decision-making rules of the system. These rules should guide individual "agents" in the desired new direction, while being flexible enough to allow decision makers in the field to adapt them to local needs and challenges.

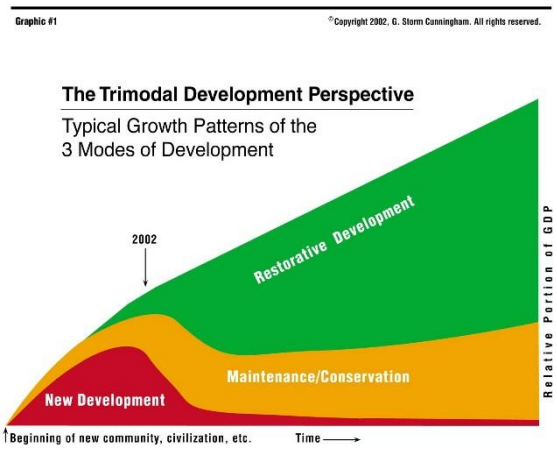
Most urban planning instead tries to make arbitrary decisions for local agents. This is why—of the six action elements (visions, strategies, policies, plans, projects, and programs)—plans are often the least necessary, and the most potentially harmful. This is not a criticism of the *concept* of planning, only the *practice*, which is usually based on strong central, rather than distributed, control.

Sometimes, only one rule needs to be changed. For instance, the struggling downtowns of many small U.S. communities are hampered in their efforts to compete with sprawl malls outside of town by archaic "blue laws" that ban sales of alcohol on Sunday, and prohibit businesses from being open on Sunday. Eliminating those rules might be all that's needed to bring some downtowns back to life (though it's seldom that simple).

"We talk of sustainable development and sustainable economies, but it is time to move on to restorative development and restorative economies."

– Richard Chartres, Bishop of London

Two core problems that undermine sustainability and resilience in worldwide are both related to accounting rules: **1)** lack of *full-cost accounting*, and **2)** lack of what I dubbed *trimodal* accounting and policymaking in my first book, ***The Restoration Economy***. The former is a method of cost accounting that traces direct costs and allocates indirect costs by including the environmental, social and economic costs and benefits (AKA: "triple bottom line"). Due to the lack of full cost accounting, natural disasters and fossil fuels extraction go onto the books as economic growth, because we credit the jobs they create without debiting the lost value in damage or depletion.



The latter, *trimodal accounting*, recognizes that there are three basic modes of development:

1) *New Development* (sprawl and virgin resource extraction);

2) *Maintenance/Conservation* (maintaining the built environment and conserving what's left of the natural environment); and

3) *Restorative Development* (redeveloping existing communities and replenishing natural resources.

Current government reporting only accounts for the first two modes: we're inundated with figures like "new housing starts", but redevelopment and restoration activities are largely invisible (or buried in maintenance as "capital improvements"). We can't manage what we don't measure. Restorative development is where almost all of the good economic news resides.

"Humanity has been destroying Earth's forests for millennia; the 2015 Paris Agreement (calling for massive forest restoration) means we've reached a fundamental turning point in that relationship."

– Doug Boucher, Director, Tropical Forest/Climate Initiative, Union of Concerned Scientists

As we enter the Anthropocene Epoch, restorative development will be—directly or indirectly—the source of most economic growth. Embedding simple rules like repurposing, renewing, and reconnecting into policy is a strategy to accelerate an economy's transition into restorative development. It simultaneously eliminates the frustration of trying to implement fuzzy concepts like "sustainable" and "resilient" (both are noble dialogues, but not rigorous methodologies).

Many folks rightfully bemoan the plague of obsolete, decrepit, vacant structures and toxic, degraded, depleted lands and water bodies. A more positive way of looking at: we have a wealth of**renewable assets**. These are fueling the $3 trillion/year global **restoration economy**.

3Re: A universal revitalization strategy for nature, neighborhoods, and nations?

Water is a powerful revitalizer in both the urban and natural environments. Any community that has a significant waterfront, and that isn't revitalizing, probably isn't trying very hard. Or they don't have the right **strategy**. Or they have an incomplete **renewal process**.

The key to tapping water's power is often a "**3Re Strategy**" (Repurpose-Renew-Reconnect). Sometimes we must *repurpose* a body of water (such as from serving manufacturing to serving recreation). Sometimes we must *renew* it (such as

cleaning and restoring a river). Sometimes we must *reconnect* people to it (such as removing or burying a waterfront highway). All three together can yield magic, as we'll see in a moment.

* Manhattan's **High Line Park**
* Atlanta's **Beltline**
* Chicago's **Bloomingdale Trail**
* Philadelphia's **Reading Viaduct**
* Seoul's **Cheonggyecheon**
* Detroit's **Dequindre Cut Greenway**
* Paris' **Promenade Plantée**
* Toronto's **Under Gardiner**
* Jersey City's **The Embankment**
* Rotterdam's **Hofplein**
* Singapore's **Green Corridor**

What do the revitalizing, leading-edge projects listed above have in common? All are based on:

1) **Repurposing** (adapting) old infrastructure and unused spaces;

2) **Renewing** and greening those spaces for pedestrian and/or bicycle usage; and

3) **Reconnecting** isolated and/or distressed neighborhoods.

The same "**3Re**" approach is also being used to revitalize our natural environment, such as**repurposing** abandoned farms or golf courses as public parks; **renewing** their biodiversity & structure; and **reconnecting** isolated, dying ecosystems (such as via dam removal) to allow migratory activities and nutrient flows.

If forced to use just 3 words, I posit that "**Repurpose. Renew. Reconnect.**" might work as a "universal" revitalization strategy (or resilience strategy, since both are emergent qualities deriving from similar factors). Why? Because worldwide, our cities are plagued by obsolete, damaged / depleted, and fragmented assets.

Repurposing is usually the first step: finding an appropriate new use for an old asset or property attracts funding and public support. That funding and support then enables **renewal** (restoration, redevelopment, etc.). Finally, **reconnecting** that asset provides access, which unleashes social and economic vibrance. Repurposing and renewing are mostly done at the local level, but the most important reconnecting can often only be done at the county, regional, or even national levels.

What happens when repurposing, renewing, and reconnecting meet? **Magic**.

Just look at the High Line Park. New York City planned to spend millions of dollars demolishing this defunct elevated railway. Keeping the ugly relic made no sense, until two local citizens–Robert Hammond and Josh David–envisioned**repurposing** it as a linear park.

That unleashed funding for **renewing** the structure as a beautiful green pedestrian space, which more than doubled nearby real estate values. In its first decade, the High Line generated $2.2 billion in new economic activity. The city expects over $1 billion in increased tax revenues over the next 20 years. It's visited by over 5 million people annually, making it the city's 2nd most visited cultural attraction.

But that's not all. By **reconnecting**neighborhoods on the lower west side of Manhattan with the Hudson Rail Yards, the High Line enabled the city to do something they had envisioned for decades: cap and develop the space above the rail yards.

This is now happening: the $20 billion Hudson Yards mixed-use redevelopment is the largest real estate transaction in New York City history. That's the **3Re** strategy at work.

Reconnecting can be the most effective, least expensive way to revitalize a place. Let's say you have a degraded riparian ecosystem (such as a stream) and a degraded mountaintop ecosystem. The biodiversity of both can be restored simultaneously, without touching either. How? By restoring the land (such as an old farm) that separates them. This reconnects the two systems, allowing seasonal migrations that revitalize both.

One more example: Many downtown revitalization initiatives focus exclusively on the center of the community. But, as mentioned in the Main Street section above, downtowns are the heart of a community, and hearts need healthy blood vessels. Wise communities also focus on revitalizing the corridors leading to the downtown. This reconnects downtown and suburbs to restore healthful flows of residents, shoppers, employers, and employees.

Part 7: STRATEGIC PROGRAMS

At the beginning of this guide, I said there are **two** elements of the revitalization process that are commonly missing. This guide is primarily about one of them: **strategy**. But I'd be remiss in not at least briefly mentioning the other: **program**.

Over the past 14 years (20, if you include the 6 years I spent researching and writing my first book,*The Restoration Economy*), some of the saddest places I've encountered are those that have worked hard on revitalizing their city, only to experience a series of emotional highs, followed by disappointments. This can be hard on the community psyche. I call it Bipolar Redevelopment.

The most common source of these depressing scenarios is a focus on projects, rather than programs. They throw everything they have into projects that revitalize a specific property or area, and then take a few years off. By the time the next big project comes along, the previous one is dead or dying. This same dynamic can apply to landscape-scale environmental restoration efforts.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

This stop-start approach creates no revitalizing flow. Without a flow, no momentum is produced. Momentum is what inspires confidence in the local future. And increasing confidence in the local future—as described earlier—is the most important strategic outcome.

Cities don't build next to ephemeral wetlands: they build next to **flowing rivers**, flowing estuaries, and flowing tides. Inland communities without major water assets build at the intersections of highways or railroads, where flows of people and commerce are high.

Good redevelopment planners are always looking to restore flows, and the opportunities to do so are endless. Much of the urban planning work of the 21st century is based on undoing the planning work of the 20th century: it was largely based on fragmentation (such as single-use zoning, and single-economic-class neighborhoods), and on serving cars at the expense of people.

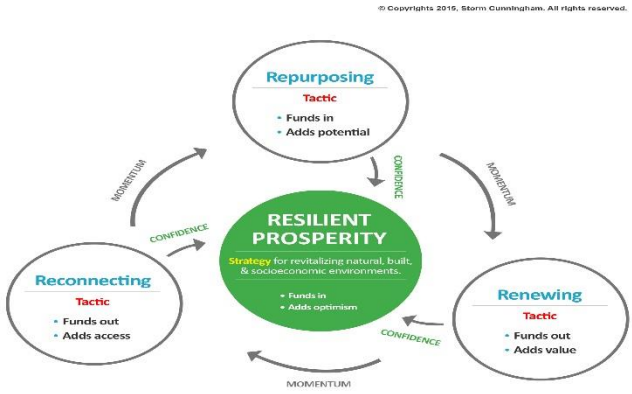
Look at the best regeneration initiatives going on around the world, and the restoration of flow is their basis.

Some are removing badly-planned urban highways to restore flows between neighborhoods, or between **downtowns and waterfronts**. Others are removing obsolete dams to restore fish migrations, and thus economically-vital fisheries.

All such projects are strategic. But to achieve the maximum revitalizing effect, they should cease being isolated, limited-term, restorative *projects*, and become comprehensive, ongoing, revitalization *programs*.

Project Management vs. Program Management

The Project Management Institute (PMI) defines **program management** as: "*A group of related projects managed in a coordinated way to obtain benefits and control not available from managing them individually.*" The whole is greater than the sum of the parts: a way of saying "emergent qualities". [Note: My thanks to PMI for having me keynote their Global Congress, along with Bill Clinton.]



Just as the world has plenty of planners and too few strategists, so too does it have plenty of project managers and too few program managers. As previously mentioned, revitalization is an emergent quality of a complex adaptive system. It's the turning point, where a system hits a critical mass of renewal and shifts to a different state.

At that point, revitalization becomes self-perpetuating–revitalization begets more revitalization–and the public leaders no longer need to keep pushing for it.

Thus, revitalization can't be engineered on a schedule. Reliably reaching the revitalization tipping point means doing the right things until the right time. That requires an ongoing program, which requires a competent program manager.

Part 8: THE RENEWAL PROCESS

Production requires process. A factory producing cars has a process. A school producing graduates has a process. A farmer producing corn has a process, as does a corn plant producing carbohydrates. Farmers might do a great job of tilling and fertilizing, and have excellent harvesting equipment. But if they don't plant the appropriate seeds, they get nothing but weeds.

Generic process chart (anonymous)

A community or region wishing to produce economic growth and enhanced quality of life (revitalization)*should* have a comprehensive process.

Of the places that have a process, it's often **backwards**: they try to attract employers by giving away future tax revenues, assuming that more jobs will translate to better quality of life. Such incentives usually attract low-quality jobs from employers who disappear as soon as the "freebies" run out. Communities should improve their quality of life *first*. That's a more reliable attractor of good employers, and they get a better quality of life, even if the jobs don't come. It's a "can't lose" strategy.

This "can't lose" strategy was how **Chattanooga** became a poster-child of revitalization: they ***first***focused on **repurposing** their waterfront from industrial to residential and recreational use,**renewing** their brownfields and air quality, and **reconnecting** downtown to the waterfront. ***Then***they landed a $4 billion **VW** plant on one of the brownfields with economic development incentives.

Most places have some elements of a process. But with missing steps, their efforts tend to be unproductive or less-productive. The two most common gaps in the regeneration process are*strategy* and ongoing *program*. **So, let's start by clarifying their roles in the overall process:**

- **Visions** adaptively *guide* actions to the desired outcomes;
- **Strategies** *drive* actions to success;
- **Partnerships** *fund* large-scale actions;
- **Policies** *enable* strategic actions;
- **Plans** *organize* actions;
- **Projects** *are* actions;
- **Programs** *perpetuate*, *evaluate*, and *adjust* actions. Ongoing programs create synergies, capture momentum (to grease the wheels for more projects), and inspire confidence in the local future.

Of those six action elements, the **plan**—which often takes longest to produce and approve—will likely be obsolete the soonest. Complex systems (e.g. cities, ecosystems) resist rigid, imposed order.

The fact that the *strategy* and the *program* are usually missing explains why most urban or regional revitalization—and multi-jurisdictional environmental restoration (such as watershed, river, or estuary)—initiatives are outright failures, or only marginally successful at best.

Within the right community strategy, a single regenerative project can trigger a "**restoration contagion**" that ripples out, raising property values and neighborhood health all around it.

This Guide has only focused on **strategy**. Describing the creation of an entire regeneration process would require a book, and is the primary focus of my Resilient Prosperity work with communities.

"The nation behaves well if it treats its natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation INCREASED…in value."

– Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, President of the United States

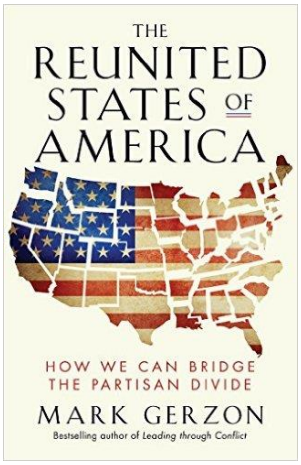
Teddy Roosevelt (shown with John Muir) was in an ideal strategist's position when he voiced the vision quoted above.

At the time, many of the U.S. regions that are today well-forested (such as New England) were ugly, barren, muddy wastelands. Over century of rampant, unregulated deforestation to build ships and cities had ensured that outcome.

Too bad Teddy never created a strategy to activate the vision. The U.S. could have started repurposing, renewing, and reconnecting sooner, and could have launched its restoration economy a century earlier.

"The dream of a better city is always in the heads of its residents."

– Jaime Lerner, former Mayor of Curitiba, Brazil



A vision can be written so as to embody (or at least imply) a strategy. For instance, Mark Gerzon's new book from Berrett-Koehler (publisher of my first book, *The Restoration Economy*) is titled *The Reunited States of America: How We Can Bridge the Partisan Divide*.

In it, he describes a vision/strategy for restoring good governance and social cohesion, which would greatly boost socioeconomic revitalization in the United States. He calls citizens and leaders who put the nation's interests above political interests "transpartisans".

Here's his combined vision/strategy: "*Transpartisans are open to learning from each other, instead of insisting they already have all the answers. They work respectfully with people they disagree with, instead of vilifying and avoiding them. They're willing to try new solutions, instead of clinging to the old approaches. And after the campaign is over, they insist their elected representatives come together to govern, not to just continue campaigning.*"

The renewal process requires constant lubrication to work well, and that lubricant is**trust**. So, each step should be executed in a way that builds trust in the people and institutions behind the process.

The path to revitalization can be as important as the destination. In communities torn apart by internal strife—or where the citizens don't trust the government—a long engagement, visioning, and partnering process might be exactly what's needed to heal and build trust. Order emerges naturally in a just society. So the first responsibility of a political leader should be to impose justice, not order.

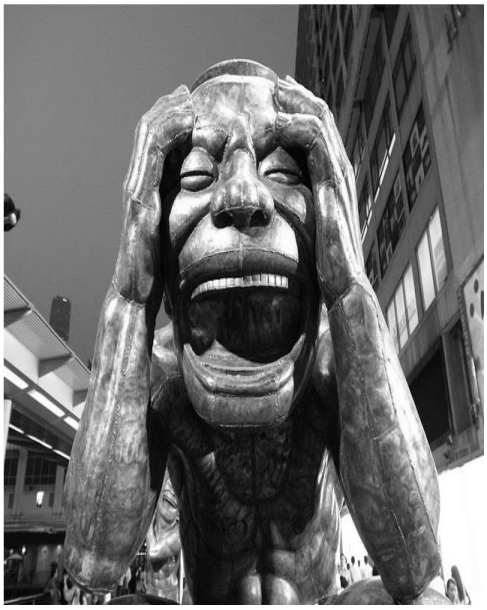
Using a revitalization process to break down silos.

Maybe the biggest obstacle to creating revitalization strategies is silos: everyone works on the pieces, no one on the whole. For instance, you'd think that employment would be a key component of revitalization, right?

But here's the reply I got from the CEO of a county economic development council, when asked if he had been involved in any revitalization successes: "*Hi, Storm: I am not in an urban revitalization role. We are a non-profit. Our focus is recruitment, retention, expansion, entrepreneurship, workforce development, international trade/FDI, and competitiveness. Revitalization and redevelopment is handled by county staff.*" The staff in that same county said that redevelopment and revitalization are handled by developers and non-profit partnerships.

Strategy often falls into the interstitial spaces among the silos. Translation: it's nobody's job. Folks have talked about the silo problem for decades. Does it still exist? You be the judge: On May 3, 2016, I asked a "Chief Economist" if he had any urban revitalization-related material

to contribute to *Revitalization News*. His answer was “no” because “*my work on urbanization is mostly related to economic development and inclusive growth.*” Being an academic, the distinction might be useful, so he knows what journal to submit to. In the real world, it’s the opposite of useful.



Reductionism, the belief that we can understand (or worse, control) the behavior of living systems by isolating and analyzing their parts, is a form of insanity. One thing it leads to is isolated specialization of knowledge: understanding the trees, but being clueless about the forest.

Silos are handy when we wish to keep our barley separate from our hops. Beer makers can access those silos and combine their contents to brew ale. But communities aren’t so good at accessing their siloed resources and expertise when they wish to brew community revitalization.

Managing and funding our parks separately from our water infrastructure might make sense, but there must be an effective way for those two agencies to interface and share when a revitalization effort is underway. The right revitalization process taps these stakeholder and resource silos, without requiring established institutions to change their structure or behavior.

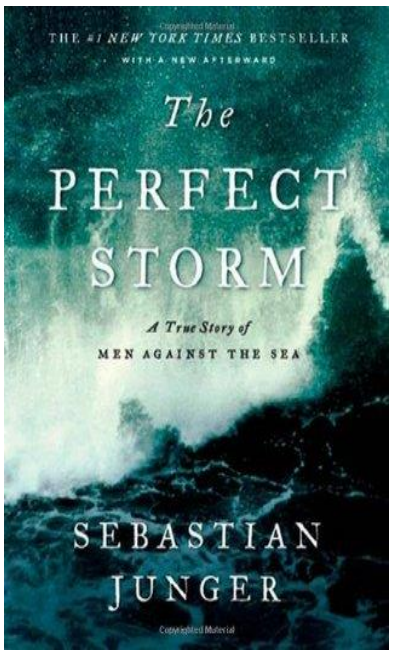
The first silo-busting revitalization processes I studied were those of Chattanooga, Tennessee and Bilbao, Spain. I documented them in my 2008 book,Rewealth (McGraw-Hill Professional).

Chattanooga (photo by author)

It’s insane for a revitalization initiative to focus on just one or two realms, whether economy, jobs, society, health, justice, environment, infrastructure, heritage, brownfields, and buildings. But most do.

It might not be insane to revitalize a downtown without including suburbs and surrounding rural areas in the process, but it certainly wastes potential and hamstrings success. That’s like trying to improve the health of your heart while ignoring the health of your body.

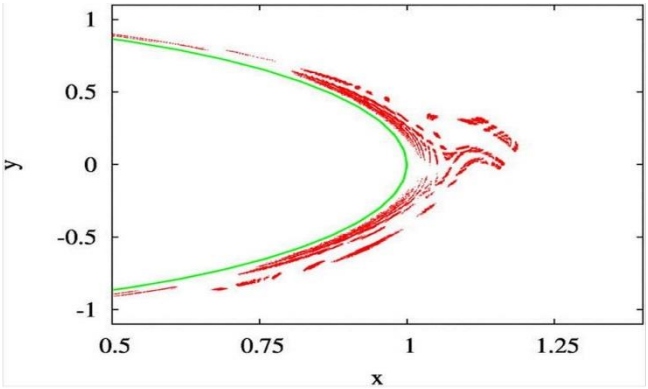
Transitional chaos, pulsing, and false alarms.



The 2000 movie, *The Perfect Storm* (based on the 1997 book of the same title), documented the collision of three violent weather systems in 1991. One story described a private sailboat heading to Bermuda, manned by a captain and two paying passengers.

When the storm hit, the captain did what he was supposed to do: heave-to and go below to ride out the storm. His passengers mistook his inaction as giving up, and radioed the Coast Guard for help. A brave man lost his life unnecessarily "rescuing" the three off the boat. (The boat was later found, safe and sound.)

Citizens in places undergoing revitalization are sometimes like those two panicky passengers, demanding that leaders abandon their plans when things go wrong, or when things stop happening. This is often because they don't understand two key dynamics of living systems that are undergoing change: *transitional chaos* and *pulsing*.



Transitional Chaos graph by György Károlyi

Transitional Chaos: When a complex adaptive system moves from one state to another–such as from a devitalized state to a revitalized state–it often goes through a zone scientists refer to as "transitional chaos".

That "perfect storm" was a period of transitional chaos: one that could not be controlled or managed, but merely experienced and survived.

Just hunker-down, have faith in the process, and don't waste energy fighting the symptoms of progress. Your goal will often be found on the other side of the disruption. Pain is information: Don't fear knowledge.

Pulsing: No matter how prosperous a place is, it needs an ongoing **pulse** of regeneration in order to keep the Good Times going. A place that isn't revitalizing is devitalizing, because nature abhors stasis. This is one of the dangers of the word "sustainable": it implies a static situation in many folks' minds. We have almost no cells in our bodies that we had a decade ago: true sustainability derives from constant regeneration.

Revitalization doesn't come in a constant flow, but rather a pulsing flow. This is important to know, so leaders and citizens don't mistake the resting stage between pulses as a loss of momentum, and thus become discouraged.

All living flows are actually pulses: our blood pulses; rivers pulse with floods; the ocean pulses with tides; the planet pulses with seasons. The entire universe pulses, according to the latest theories of creation: rather than a single, nonsensical "Big Bang", there's a pulse of Big Bangs, with billions of years between the universal heartbeats.

Decline takes places by surprise. Someone asked me *"Why don't more communities take action when they're on the verge of decline. Why do that wait until the situation is desperate?"*

The reason is that–in the absence of some major natural, social, or economic cataclysm–the "verge of decline" is only visible in retrospect. If places could actually perceive that they were on the verge of decline, more would probably take action. Only the decline itself is perceivable, not the verge.

An ongoing "pulse of renewal" (or "pulse of regeneration", if you prefer) helps prevent such delayed-reaction revitalization initiatives. It might even prevent decline. The goal of the pulse of renewal you create locally should be resilient prosperity for all, wildlife and human alike.

CONCLUSION

The good news is that local governments are starting to realize how planning without a strategy wastes both resources and opportunities. Where I live, in **Arlington County, Virginia**, County Board member (and likely next Board Chair) **Libby Garvey** said (on November 14, 2015) that one of her top priorities is to craft a strategic plan for the county. "*We really don't have one*", she admitted.

"The truth about a city's aspirations isn't found in its vision. It's found in its budget."

– Brent Toderian, principal, TODERIAN UrbanWORKS

A Dec. 3, 2015 release from New York state said "***Governor Cuomo*** (designated) *11 new* ***Brownfield Opportunity Areas*** *in communities across New York State. The program helps participants* ***develop revitalization strategies*** *focused on returning dormant and blighted areas into productive communities of economic growth and development.*" (emphasis ours) Now, politicians sometimes announce useless strategic initiatives because they're cheaper than plans.

But Governor Cuomo has thrown **billions** at the revitalization of upstate communities, so that's not likely the case here.

So, what is revitalization? Literally, it would be a return to a state of "vitalization" after a period of devitalization. But in normal usage, it generally means any significant improvement in quality of life, economic vibrance, environmental health, social justice/harmony, and optimism. **Ideally, all of those together.**

Can a mere tactic or one-time project deliver all that? Not bloody likely, mate. Only the right vision, strategy, and program can really revitalize. That, or dumb luck.

"The goal is not always meant to be reached, but to serve as a mark for our aim."

– Joseph Joubert, essayist

Your strategy can start by improving any one of those qualities. But start it must, because Mother Nature abhors stasis as much as she abhors vacuums: A community that isn't planning revitalization is planning devitalization.

Better futures are created by better actions in the present. But these days, people worldwide have been demoralized by the relentless globalization of social, economic, and environmental problems that used to appear only locally. The historic climate accord reached in Paris on December 12, 2015 is a rare example of addressing a global challenge at the global level. However, if appropriate levels of action don't follow quickly, the global gloom will be more intense than ever before.

Virtually all organizations have a stated mission. Few have a strategy to accomplish that mission. Writing an inspiring mission statement is easy. Writing an effective strategy is challenging.

I hope this guide helps you rise to that challenge.

People without hope don't take action.
The right strategy inspires the right action.
The right action restores hope by revitalizing our present.
Restoring hope revitalizes our future.

Want a quicker, easier, more reliable path to true economic resilience? Get help here.

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