### Smart Growth Self-Assessment for Rural Communities *Section II: Strengthen the Local Economy This tool is part of the Smart Growth Self-Assessment for Rural Communities, developed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. EPA suggests that communities using this tool complete Section I: “Revitalize Village and Town Centers,” before filling out other sections. For more information and the tool’s other sections, see* [*https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/smart-growth-self-assessment-rural-communities*](https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/smart-growth-self-assessment-rural-communities)*.*

Encouraging development in traditional downtowns and town centers reduces a community’s infrastructure costs by maximizing the use of existing systems, which allows communities to invest in other needs or keep tax rates stable. Local governments can support development that meets their goals by streamlining the development review process for such proposals. Incentives to attract and maintain local businesses help create a strong commercial corridor that adds to the tax base and helps keep dollars spent within the community.

| Goal: Strengthen the Local Economy | Adopted? | Add or Improve? | Context [[1]](#footnote-1) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Strengthening the Local Economy Through Efficient Current Planning Practices[[2]](#footnote-2)* |  |  |  |
| Do development review procedures efficiently process development proposals? |  |  |  |
| Strategy 1: Development review procedures have an established and well-publicized timeline for processing and review milestones.[[3]](#footnote-3) *[Enter optional notes in gray boxes for all strategies]* |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 2: New development proposals go through a coordinated interdepartmental review procedure.[[4]](#footnote-4),[[5]](#footnote-5) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 3: Development review procedures have an established and expedited timeline for processing and review milestones.97 |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 4: Pre-submittal counseling to educate applicants about local requirements is available and encouraged.[[6]](#footnote-6) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 5: The municipality’s website includes information and educational materials to help applicants learn about the review process.[[7]](#footnote-7) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| ***Strengthening the Local Economy Through Comprehensive Plans and Local Government Policies [[8]](#footnote-8)*** |  |  |  |
| **Is economic development adequately covered in communitywide and comprehensive plans?** |  |  |  |
| Strategy 6: The comprehensive plan includes an economic development element covering the issues and opportunities for strengthening the local economy.[[9]](#footnote-9) |  |  | 1,2[[10]](#footnote-10) |
| Strategy 7: Communitywide plans include performance measures that demonstrate the financial benefits and costs of project recommendations.[[11]](#footnote-11),[[12]](#footnote-12) |  |  | 1,2 |
| **Is there an inventory of local products, resources, or areas prime for development?** |  |  |  |
| Strategy 8: Align local policy documents with county or regional economic development strategies and targeted industries or industry clusters.[[13]](#footnote-13) |  |  | 1,2 |
| Strategy 9: The local economic development strategy includes an inventory of “shovel-ready” development sites with relevant details and contact information.[[14]](#footnote-14) |  |  | 1,2 |
| *Strengthening the Local Economy Through Programs and Services*[[15]](#footnote-15) |  |  |  |
| Do local government officials meet regularly with business groups to discuss the local business climate? |  |  |  |
| Strategy 10: Local government staff visit local businesses periodically to discuss their needs, challenges, and opportunities, which the local government could address with a business retention and expansion program.[[16]](#footnote-16),[[17]](#footnote-17) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 11: The local government participates in chamber of commerce and other local business organizations’ events to build connections with the business community.[[18]](#footnote-18) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 12: Local and regional planning agencies keep track of local development projects and incorporate them into their planning efforts. |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 13: The local government has quantitatively assessed key existing employment sectors to understand the industry mix and the sectors’ relative importance. |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Are funding mechanisms or incentives available for business owners, property owners, or developers? |  |  |  |
| Strategy 14: Local government or a governmental entity such as a redevelopment authority has a low-interest, revolving loan fund for businesses that want to expand or locate in the community, or for other economic development purposes.[[19]](#footnote-19) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 15: Local government or a redevelopment authority offers gap financing for new development projects or building rehabilitation projects, and this policy is well communicated.[[20]](#footnote-20) |  |  | 1,2 |
| Strategy 16: The local government offers temporary property tax or one-time fee abatement for projects in desired growth areas or established centers.[[21]](#footnote-21) |  |  | 1,2 |
| Strategy 17: The local government or a partner organization offers and funds a program to help property owners make façade improvements in the downtown area. [[22]](#footnote-22) |  |  | 1,2 |
| Are there business assistance programs to promote local businesses and jobs? |  |  |  |
| Strategy 18: The municipality or other public- or private-sector entities have workforce development programs such as job training. |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 19: Organize local business alliances to foster community-wide marketing, networking, new business development, and governmental coordination. |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 20: Local government contracting procedures include incentives or requirements to buy local products and services.[[23]](#footnote-23) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 21: A local vendor program exists to encourage and help local companies pursue government contracts.[[24]](#footnote-24) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 22: Business incubator space is available with reduced or temporarily abated rent for startup companies.[[25]](#footnote-25) |  |  | 1 |
| **Is there an organized and developed system to foster community development through public-private partnerships?** |  |  |  |
| Strategy 23: The local government works with a local nonprofit organization focused on implementing programs and projects independently and through public-private partnerships.[[26]](#footnote-26) |  |  | 1,2 |
| Strategy 24: The community has adopted a Main Street Program as a strategy for downtown revitalization.[[27]](#footnote-27),[[28]](#footnote-28) |  |  | 1,2 |
| Strategy 25: A volunteer, staff person, or nonprofit organization is responsible for tracking grant opportunities and applying for appropriate funding sources to advance community development. |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| **Does the community have business educational programs?** |  |  |  |
| Strategy 26: Training programs for skills that are in demand are available through local employers, community colleges, and other state and local vocational resources.[[29]](#footnote-29) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 27: Local high schools and employers have cooperative educational programs to provide on-the-job experience for students who do not plan to attend college.[[30]](#footnote-30) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| **Is there a local or regional marketing or promotion program?** |  |  |  |
| Strategy 28: A “buy local” program is established to promote shopping at locally owned businesses.[[31]](#footnote-31),[[32]](#footnote-32) |  |  | 1,2 |
| Strategy 29: Encourage former residents to return to the region through events such as job fairs held during holiday periods (i.e., “reverse brain drain”).[[33]](#footnote-33) |  |  | 1,2,3 |
| Strategy 30: The community has monthly, bimonthly, or weekly farmers’ markets or street fairs featuring local businesses, goods, and services.[[34]](#footnote-34) |  |  | 1,2,3 |

1. Self-Assessment topics and strategies likely apply to: 1 – large town or small city (approximately 10,000 or more residents); 2 – village or small town (typically under 10,000 residents); 3 – rural (very low-density place, working lands, and natural areas outside of towns, villages, and cities). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Developers prefer a clear, predictable development proposal review process because an unclear process and unanticipated delays cost them money. Having a coordinated interdepartmental review process helps the local government keep the process moving smoothly and ensure that all relevant departments have their chance to review the proposal. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Portland, Oregon Development Services Process and Timelines for zoning and land use reviews (<http://www.portlandonline.com/bds/index.cfm?c=37275>). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A team of designated staff from different departments convenes to discuss and coordinate review comments for applicants seeking development permits. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Hamilton, Ohio Interdepartmental Review Committee for development and site plans (<http://www.hamilton-city.org/index.aspx?page=164>). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Snohomish County, Washington Land Use Pre-Application Meeting (<http://snohomishcountywa.gov/1303/Pre-Application-Meeting>). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Pleasanton, California Development Review Application and Informational Guides (<http://www.cityofpleasantonca.gov/gov/depts/cd/permit/process/planning.asp>). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Targeting growth areas and identifying conservation areas in a comprehensive plan and zoning ordinance indicate to developers and private investors the long-range vision for land use and industry. By identifying priorities and strategies for achieving goals, cities can make private investments less risky and more attractive for developers and business owners. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The city of Ranson, West Virginia, updated its comprehensive plan in 2012. The new plan includes economic development trends, objectives, and actions (pp. 91-102) <http://ransonrenewed.com/?page_id=348>. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. States do not always require comprehensive plans, but many large towns and small cities in rural areas have them. Villages and small towns typically do not have comprehensive plans unless required by states. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Jefferson County 2012 Adopted Budget (<http://jeffco.us/budget-and-risk-management/adopted-budgets/2012-adopted-budget/>). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. City of Middletown Master Plan: Future Land Use (<http://www.cityofmiddletown.org/planning/masterplan.aspx>). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Eugene, Oregon Regional Economic Development Plan (<http://www.eugene-or.gov/index.aspx?NID=815>). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The Caldwell County, North Carolina, Economic Development Commission has information about target sectors and shovel-ready development sites ([http://www.caldwelledc.org](http://www.caldwelledc.org/)). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Municipalities can create programs and services to help local businesses thrive and expand. By creating public/private partnerships of offering incentives, localities can boost their local economy and benefit from ongoing feedback from business owners and would-be investors. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. A business retention plan can be designed and implemented by a local government, economic development agency, or business association. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Richland, Washington Business Retention and Expansion Survey Analysis and Report (<http://www.ci.richland.wa.us/documentcenter/view/941>). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Stafford, Virginia Business Support (<http://www.gostaffordva.com/existing-business-support>). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Brown County, Wisconsin, has established an economic development revolving loan program capitalized with federal Community Development Block Grant funds (<http://www.co.brown.wi.us/departments/?department=2317176c7f00&subdepartment=56759f503d09>). Another example comes from Binghamton, New York, which has established a revolving fund that provides “gap” financing and a micro enterprise loan program (<http://www.cityofbinghamton.com/department.asp?zone=dept-economic-development&pid=6&pm=page>). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Washtenaw County, Michigan Gap Financing for Manufacturing Company Expansion (<http://www.ewashtenaw.org/government/departments/community-and-economic-development/workforce-development/economic-development-programs/news/eastern-washtenaw-county-gap-financing-fund-pilot-program>). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Cincinnati Community Reinvestment Area Residential Tax Abatement (<http://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/community-development/housing-assistance/residential-property-tax-abatement/>). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Portland, Maine Façade Improvement Program (<http://www.portlandmaine.gov/557/Facade-Improvement-Program>). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Cedar Rapids, Iowa Local Preference Purchasing Policy (<http://www.cedar-rapids.org/government/departments/purchasing/pages/buylocal.aspx>). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Santa Barbara Association of Governments Local Vendor Program (<http://www.sbcag.org/documents.html>). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Neshoba County, Mississippi: business incubator that provides space to startup businesses for up to 3 years (<http://www.neshoba.org/businessenterprise.html>). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. St. Louis Community Development Administration (<http://stlouis-mo.gov/government/departments/community-development/>). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. The National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Main Streets Program helps small towns and cities revitalize their downtowns (<http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/about-main-street/#.URqfkx1OzdM>). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Montpelier Main Street Program, Montpelier Alive (<http://www.montpelieralive.com/>). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Commonwealth of Massachusetts Workforce Training Fund Program (<http://www.mass.gov/lwd/employment-services/business-training-support/wtfp/>). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. The Upper Valley Career Center provides career and technical education to students and adults (<http://www.uppervalleycc.org/>). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Examples include the 3/50 Project (<http://www.the350project.net/home.html>) or ShopCity (<http://www.shopcity.com/>). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. This program can also help connect residents to their community; see the “Engage and Connect Community Members” tool section. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Asheville, North Carolina, held a “homecoming job fair” on January 3, 2013, that targeted former residents in town during the holiday season, among other groups (<http://www.ashevillechamber.org/asheville/work/job-fair>). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Norwich, Vermont Farmers Market (<http://www.norwichfarmersmarket.org/>). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)