



AHWAHNEE PRINCIPLES FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Smart Growth: Economic Development for the 21st Century

A Set of Principles for Building Prosperous and Livable Communities

Preamble

Prosperity in the 21st Century will be based on creating and maintaining a sustainable standard of living and a high quality of life for all. To meet this challenge, a comprehensive new model is emerging which recognizes the economic value of natural and human capital. Embracing economic, social, and environmental responsibility, this approach focuses on the most critical building blocks for success, the community and the region. It emphasizes community-wide and regional collaboration for building prosperous and livable places. While each community and region has unique challenges and opportunities, the following common principles should guide an integrated approach by all sectors to promoting economic vitality within their communities, and in partnership with their neighbors in the larger region.

1. Integrated Approach

Government, business, education, and the community should work together to create a vibrant local economy, through a long-term investment strategy that:

- encourages local enterprise
- serves the needs of local residents, workers, and businesses
- promotes stable employment and revenues by building on local competitive advantages
- protects the natural environment
- increases social equity
- is capable of succeeding in the global marketplace.

2. Vision and Inclusion

Communities and regions need a vision and strategy for economic development according to these principles. Visioning, planning and implementation efforts should continually involve all sectors, including the voluntary civic sector and those traditionally left out of the public planning process.

3. Poverty Reduction

Both local and regional economic development efforts should be targeted to reducing poverty, by promoting jobs that match the skills of existing residents, improving the skills of low-income individuals, addressing the needs of families moving off welfare, and insuring the availability in all communities of quality affordable child care, transportation, and housing.

4. Local Focus

Because each community's most valuable assets are the ones they already have, and existing businesses are already contributing to their home communities, economic development efforts should give first priority to supporting existing enterprises as the best source of business expansion and local job growth. Luring businesses away from neighboring communities is a zero-sum game that doesn't create new wealth in the regional economy. Community economic development should focus instead on promoting local entrepreneurship to build locally based industries and businesses that can succeed among national and international competitors.

5. Industry Clusters

Communities and regions should identify specific gaps and niches their economies can fill, and promote a diversified range of specialized industry clusters drawing on local advantages to serve local and international markets.

6. Wired Communities

Communities should use and invest in technology that supports the ability of local enterprises to succeed, improves civic life, and provides open access to information and resources.

7. Long-Term Investment

Publicly supported economic development programs, investments, and subsidies should be evaluated on their long-term benefits and impacts on the whole community, not on short-term job or

revenue increases. Public investments and subsidies should be equitable and targeted, support environmental and social goals, and prioritize infrastructure and supportive services that promote the vitality of all local enterprises, instead of individual firms.

8. Human Investment

Because human resources are so valuable in the information age, communities should provide life-long skills and learning opportunities by investing in excellent schools, post-secondary institutions, and opportunities for continuous education and training available to all.

9. Environmental Responsibility

Communities should support and pursue economic development that maintains or improves, not harms, the environmental and public health.

10. Corporate Responsibility

Enterprises should work as civic partners, contributing to the communities and regions where they operate, protecting the natural environment, and providing workers with good pay, benefits, opportunities for upward mobility, and a healthful work environment.

11. Compact Development

To minimize economic, social, and environmental costs and efficiently use resources and infrastructure, new development should take place in existing urban, suburban, and rural areas before using more agricultural land or open space. Local and regional plans and policies should contain these physical and economic development planning principles to focus development activities in desired existing areas.

12. Livable Communities

To protect the natural environment and increase quality of life, neighborhoods, communities and regions should have compact, multi-dimensional land use patterns that ensure a mix of uses, minimize the impact of cars, and promote walking, bicycling, and transit access to employment, education, recreation, entertainment, shopping, and services. Economic development and transportation investments should reinforce these land use patterns, and the ability to move people and goods by non-automobile alternatives wherever possible.

13. Center Focus

Communities should have an appropriately scaled and economically healthy center focus. At the community level, a wide range of commercial, residential, cultural, civic, and recreational uses should be located in the town center or downtown. At the neighborhood level, neighborhood centers should contain local businesses that serve the daily needs of nearby residents. At the regional level, regional facilities should be located in urban centers that are accessible by transit throughout the metropolitan area.

14. Distinctive Communities

Having a distinctive identity will help communities create a quality of life that is attractive for business retention and future residents and private investment. Community economic development efforts should help to create and preserve each community's sense of uniqueness, attractiveness, history, and cultural and social diversity, and include public gathering places and a strong local sense of place.

15. Regional Collaboration

Since industries, transportation, land uses, natural resources, and other key elements of a healthy economy are regional in scope, communities and the private sector should cooperate to create regional structures that promote a coherent metropolitan whole that respects local character and identity.

(Adopted in 1997)

More information and case studies of each principle are available in our guidebook, "[The Ahwahnee Principles for Smart Economic Development: An Implementation Guidebook](#)".