

Strategic Economic Development Checklist

For City Managers, City Officials, and Infrastructure Leaders
Building for the Long Game

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Before the incentives. Before the shovel. Before the ribbon-cutting.

There's the strategy.

Communities don't rise to the level of their potential—they rise to the level of their planning. And in this day and age, economic development isn't just about attracting new business. It's about leading with purpose, building with foresight, and designing systems that protect what makes your town yours.

This isn't a checklist for beginners. It's a tool for cities that are already in motion—and want to move smarter. If you're balancing job creation with infrastructure strain, growth with heritage, or housing demand with political pressure—this is your roadmap.

Because growth is no longer just about what you build. It's about how *you* lead.

FUTURE-PROOF INFRASTRUCTURE BEFORE GROWTH ARRIVES

- Conduct 10–20 year capacity modeling for water, sewer, transportation, and schools using GIS and AI-backed projections.
- Integrate resilience planning into capital improvements—focusing on flood zones, extreme heat, and long-term climate risk.
- Include digital infrastructure readiness (e.g., broadband, smart grid tie-ins) in all master planning efforts.

BUILD INTELLIGENCE-DRIVEN PLANNING FRAMEWORKS

- Deploy custom zoning overlays to guide mixed-use development without losing community character.
- Use economic impact modeling (not just fiscal impact) to understand job creation, property value shifts, and mobility impacts.
- Track infill pressure points and prepare interim codes or overlay districts to manage uncoordinated growth.

REDESIGN INCENTIVES TO DELIVER PUBLIC RETURN

- Link tax incentives to performance metrics: local hiring, sustainability benchmarks, community benefit contributions.
- Structure tiered developer incentives that reward early alignment with long-range plans and infrastructure co-investment.
- Require transparent reporting and compliance for incentive recipients—measured quarterly, not annually.

MAKE PLACEMAKING AN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

- ❑ Incorporate context-sensitive design standards in industrial and commercial zones.
- ❑ Use public realm improvements (green space, cultural elements, street furniture) to anchor growth areas.
- ❑ Prioritize adaptive reuse and land reclamation over ground-up projects where possible to preserve identity.

ENGAGE EARLY...AND WITH SUSTAINABILITY

- ❑ Conduct pre-project resident sentiment analysis to inform messaging and anticipate resistance.
- ❑ Build an ongoing engagement map with community stakeholders—not just one-time meetings.
- ❑ Offer future scenario workshops using 3D visualizations or interactive tools to co-create vision.

ESTABLISH SMART METRICS THAT GO BEYOND PERMITS

- ❑ Create a Community Prosperity Index (CPI) that blends economic, environmental, and equity metrics.
- ❑ Track Return on Infrastructure Investment (ROI) by category: roads, parks, utilities, stormwater, and public space.
- ❑ Develop a Civic Engagement Scorecard to track trust-building over time.

PLAN FOR SCALABILITY

- ❑ Phase infrastructure to grow with demand, not ahead of it—using growth triggers and development pacing agreements.
- ❑ Invest in regional collaboration models (joint districts, shared infrastructure, annexation partnerships).
- ❑ Plan all major growth projects with a 30–50 year lens, not a 5–10 year political cycle.



WHY IT MATTERS

This isn't just a planning checklist—it's a **leadership framework**.

Communities that win trust, attract business, and remain resilient are the ones that connect vision with execution and prioritize both outcomes and the people behind them.

Because your community doesn't get a second chance to get growth right.

Economic development decisions made today shape everything:

The pace of infrastructure.

The pressure on public services.

The trust your residents place in your leadership.

This checklist isn't about checking boxes. It's about future-proofing your city's identity while building the systems that support sustainable, people-centered growth.

If you wait until the traffic piles up, until the pipes fail, until the public backlash begins—you're already behind. The most successful communities don't just react to growth—they design for it.

This is your framework for doing just that.

Strategically. Sustainable. Confidently.

Because long after the groundbreaking ceremony, your decisions will still be standing.

Your leadership journey starts strong

Would you like to discuss how to maximize your economic development plans? We would love to share proven strategies that have helped other city leaders to make an immediate positive impact in their communities.

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