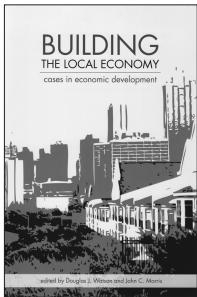


## Economic Development



### *Building the Local Economy: Cases in Economic Development*

Douglas J. Watson and John C. Morris, editors. Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia, Athens, GA, 2008. 264 pages. \$42.95 (paperback).

Those who embrace the case method as a preferred teaching strategy will find *Building the Local Economy* a very useful and valuable addition to their instructional tool kit. The cases included in this text are well researched, carefully cited, and clearly written. They cover a range of geographic contexts (i.e., urban, suburban, and rural) and a rich mix of circumstances that demonstrate the complexities and challenges inherent in virtually every strategy, project, or program encompassed within the big tent of economic development.

The wide range of situations covered by the text can be incorporated very easily into classroom learning environments, either as a core or supplemental resource, at a number of levels, including undergraduate and graduate courses in planning, economic development, and related disciplines, as well as professional development seminars or other training opportunities. The cases encourage creative thinking about real-world issues and how to apply planning and economic development principles and concepts. They are also sure to stimulate discussion and debate, as well as provide direction for further research and investigation.

The collection of cases is also quite successful at illustrating Watson and Morris's overarching theme of "coopertition" as it is likely to unfold between and among communities that are often pitted against one another in their business recruitment and retention efforts. This is a far cry from the no-holds-barred, head-to-head competition that has prevailed in economic development for most of its somewhat brief history and is a welcome respite that can hopefully produce greater efficiency and returns on the expenditure of increasingly scarce resources. As the editors note in their introduction, the pervasive theme of cooperation and collaboration as a competitive tool is largely counterintuitive to most in the economic development field. This is generally not a concept that gains immediate traction with many who probably need to be weaned off of the "shoot anything that flies, claim anything that falls" philosophy. However, the economic realities of the past few years and the significant uncertainties and inevitable structural changes that lie ahead make such a shift in thought and action an absolute necessity. The cases in this text help direct one's thinking into this more productive direction.

Planners and planning students will appreciate case presentations illustrating the place of efficient physical infrastructure as a platform from which to launch successful economic development strategies, programs, and projects. Of particular note are cases discussing the strategic role of town centers in chapter 8 and redeveloped transportation corridors as catalysts for commercial revitalization in chapter 9.

The creative use of financial incentives appears in many cases and is unfolded in ways that should prove useful to students and professionals in planning, public administration, and economic development. This includes the somewhat controversial use of incentives to build major sports venues in cities, such as Arlington, TX, for the Dallas Cowboys, and Birmingham, AL, where there are no major league professional franchises. Less controversial uses of incentives are also presented, as in the case of a second-tier high-technology region such as Portland, OR, where the focus was building intellectual capital through strategic investments in higher education, as discussed in chapter 4.

Significant public policy issues take center stage in a case presented in chapter 15 that addresses the location of state prisons as an economic development strategy and the attendant and somewhat predictable community push-back grounded in the concept of not in my backyard (i.e., NIMBYism). The roles and responsibilities of regional alliances promoting economic development are addressed in several cases in this chapter, as are the significant contributions of nonprofit organizations, which are discussed in chapter 14.

In virtually every case presented, the crucial role of effective community leadership is illustrated in a variety of contexts and situations. These range from cross-jurisdictional leadership collaboration in economically distressed regions of New England and the Southeast, to the response to sudden and severe economic dislocations imposed by the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission process in metropolitan Phoenix, AZ, and major natural disasters such as hurricanes Katrina and Rita in Louisiana.

Planning and economic development intersect at many points in the reality of providing guidance to communities as they progress through various stages of their life cycles. This text provides valuable insights into the how and why of connecting the dots in this process. To this end, students and practitioners alike will gain valuable knowledge from the tested experiences of those who have charted paths for others to follow.

This collection of cases contains a rich supply of best-practice nuggets that have applications across a broad spectrum of planning and economic development issues. However, they also contain a good dose of readily admitted mistakes that can serve as cautionary road markers for those who appreciate and heed their warnings. The nuggets and mistakes both serve as excellent teaching resources for students and practicing professionals alike.

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