

The "Insights" column was designed to give leading experts in site selection a platform from which to express leadership ideas, to raise concerns, or to offer advice for both sides of the site selection/economic development dynamic.

# Location Matters in the Age of Sustainability

By Don Schjeldahl

**Economic survival** has always been about adapting to change. I began my career guiding corporate clients in location strategy for manufacturing, distribution and office operations in the 1970s. From the start it was clear that managing change in its myriad forms was a focal point of location decisions. Correctly interpreting signals about technology, competitor actions, government regulations, resource availability, commodity prices, to name a few, consistently lay at the center of successful business organizations.

I can't help but think that the complexity and rapid pace of change over the past several decades is unprecedented in history. The business landscape grows less and less forgiving at a time when deciphering fad from fact grows ever more difficult.

The guiding principles of sustainability have emerged as an effective approach for companies operating in an uncertain world. Once considered a domain of the environmental movement, sustainability is now viewed as the next generation of good business practices. Corporations adopting sustainability's three-legged stool of people, planet and profit, aim for long-term viability by optimizing resource needs, reducing environmental, energy and social impacts, and managing resources while not compromising profitability.

Effective business organizations are now characterized by a culture open to ideas and are populated by workers who embrace the principles of change management.

## Sustainable Culture as a Location Factor

Recognizing the inevitability of change, companies sustainably guided are best served in locations that can support the evolutionary aspirations of different parts of the organization.

Companies are best served in locations represented by economic development organizations that help local businesses stay in front of change.

Social networks that focus on workforce development and management of waste stream, for example, are often facilitated by regional economic development agencies. Economic development organizations connected with the changing needs of business are more likely to act in an advocacy role to bring about needed investment in education and infrastructure. In addition, forward thinking community planning agencies are likely to foment for the region better traffic management, more reliable utility services and improved quality of life characteristics.

Sustainable communities of distinction can be found around the world and include jurisdictions large and small. Denver, Colorado exhibits a myriad of traits that collectively make this location a front runner for progressive companies. Dramatic transformation of the city center, invested in transportation projects including a world class airport and regional mass transit system, far reaching education reforms geared to next generation business needs, and protection of the regions fragile environment



add to Denver's sustainable image.

Sustainable culture is not the privilege of large cities alone. Oroville, California is a small city 90 miles north of Sacramento. Faced with a structural shift in the economic base, city leaders have sought to re-invent the region through a green economy initiative. Government, institutional and business organizations from around the region have collaborated to re-orient the community from the ground up in support of green jobs.

## Conclusions

In a "sustainable world" corporate and community cultures are colliding like never before. Companies who must be adaptable and open to change in order to remain viable are more likely to achieve success when community and corporate interests are meaningfully aligned. **T&ID**



### About the Author

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