

Who Is Responsible for Building Communities?

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We often use these words interchangeably, but of course there is a significant distinction between them:

COMMUNITY: a **group of people living** in the same place and **often sharing common attitudes, interests and goals.**

MUNICIPALITY: a **place or region** that has **corporate status and local government.**

The interesting question is whether the distinction is important. We all live in a community of some type. We all live in a municipality of some type (except for those rare places with unincorporated jurisdictions). So, who really cares?

The success of our **community** is important to our present and our future. It is important to our family and friends, and to the quality of life we enjoy. Our community is everything around us, and so it touches every part of our lives. We become a reflection of our community. For instance, if our community is crime-ridden, crime is part of the community and crime becomes part of our lives. We need our communities to become successful if we are to become successful. Living in, and being part of, a good community directly corresponds to living a good life.

The success of our **municipality** is important to our present and our future as well. It is important to our family and friends that we have reasonable taxes and good services so we can enjoy a good quality of life. However, the municipality is not everything around us, and for most of us, it does not touch our daily lives. Of course, municipalities build infrastructure and are central to designing our subdivisions and downtowns, but there is so much more to our communities than our municipalities.

Other groups contribute significantly to our **communities**, besides the municipal corporations that run them. We need schools and hospitals, which far exceed the jurisdiction and resources of our municipal governments. We have businesses, professionals and industries, which are critical components of our communities. There are state/provincial and federal government programs and investments in infrastructure that are critical components of our communities as well. And of course, there are those critically important volunteers, who coach sports, plant flowers, assist seniors, help at the library, and do everything else in between. All these components, and many others, make up a community.

So, the issue becomes clear when you ask the question: Who is responsible for building **communities**?

There is no one group that owns that responsibility. Often, the public presumes it is the **municipality's** role, but it doesn't have the authority or the capacity to provide, or even manage, everything that makes a community great. I already pointed out the importance of other levels of government, business, industry, professionals, volunteers, and so on. The municipality is simply the corporate entity that uses taxes to build core infrastructure and helps create the environment for a great community to blossom.

The result is that many **municipalities** aren't sure what to do, so they choose the path on the left or the path on the right, both of which are wrong.

On the left, they decide they are all-powerful and they take on more than they should-becoming the only game in town for business development, or high speed internet service, or land development, or organizational support. Business and industry relinquish their role, volunteers quit showing up, and what you have left is a municipality that now must do it all, because they believed they should. That leads to failure.

On the right, they decide none of it is their responsibility. They do not organize coordination or collective brainstorming for a path forward. They focus completely on their responsibilities as a corporate entity, with the role of building core infrastructure and managing taxes and regulations. They don't dissuade businesses from coming to the community, but neither do they work to attract them. They don't discourage families from moving to the community, but neither do they work to attract them. They don't dissuade volunteers from helping around the community, but neither do they support them. They don't deter beautification, or youth retention, or social activities, but neither do they support them.

The **municipality** is the only organization with the central infrastructure and ability to reach into almost every aspect of the **community**. Municipalities don't need to own it all, but they certainly need to lead the charge, or there is often no one else who will. Success involves finding the middle path, and focusing energy on bringing people together with a common vision and understanding of the type of **community** you are trying to build, and how important everyone's role is in building that **community**. Great municipalities now realize their job is to help create the vision and empower people, groups and organizations within the **community** to coordinate and stay focused on that vision.

Finding that middle path can be difficult at the best of times. Everyone has higher expectations for what will be provided, but our reliance on government and abdication of personal responsibility is at an all-time high. Yet that only makes the task of eliciting vision and ownership from various groups more imperative for the success of a community.

This syndicated content is provided by Doug Griffiths, best-selling author and chief community builder at 13 Ways, a company with a mission to push communities to face their challenges to find their unique path to success. For more information visit www.13ways.ca, or we can start the conversation at info@13ways.ca.