



Changing market forces might bring back “the company town,” but they’ll look nothing like prior iterations.

In recent years, American manufacturing has seen a notable resurgence driven by factors like automation, sustainability, and reshoring efforts, bolstering the “Made in America” movement. **This resurgence has spurred large-scale investments in manufacturing, often facilitated by government subsidies, creating job opportunities, and fostering self-sustaining manufacturing mega sites, and with them nearby “corporate towns” to support the operations and their workers.**

However, corporate towns in the United States have a complex history marred by failures and controversies, highlighting the dangers of excessive corporate control over employees’ lives. Examples like Pullman, Illinois, underscore the risks of corporate paternalism and the need to balance company interests with community well-being.

There’s an opportunity to learn from past mistakes and develop better solutions for corporate towns, considering factors like community autonomy, infrastructure development, and diversification of economic opportunities.

PROPER PLANNING

Some of the most significant challenges faced by past corporate towns has been inadequate planning and weak community engagement efforts. While the success of the business remains a top priority, the overall success of the town depends on factors beyond just business operations. Planning must prioritize future flexibility. Whether building a town from scratch or extending an existing one, meticulous planning is essential to ensure that all components are appropriately located. Analyzing traffic patterns, integrating residential, educational, and commercial areas to support the operations of the town itself as well as the primary industry is vital, with consideration given to the 18 to 24-hour daily operation of these areas throughout the year. Such planning should promote walkability, safety, and cultural cohesion. Moreover, thoughtful planning can address concerns regarding pollution, noise, and other environmental factors by working in harmony with the landscape and preserving natural elements wherever possible. Getting stakeholder alignment and community buy-in is essential, and careful and sensitive planning efforts go a long way in whether a development is embraced by the community.

NIMBLE INFRASTRUCTURE

Developing nimble infrastructure presents a significant opportunity as corporate towns evolve. Greenfield sites, or sometimes outdated brownfield sites, offer the advantage of implementing cutting-edge technologies to enhance efficiency across various functions. Many new developments require more power than local infrastructure can handle, leading to the adoption of site-specific power generation, often quicker to implement than traditional systems. Establishing sustainable electrical systems, especially in manufacturing, is pivotal in modern urban planning and construction. These systems offer greater resilience against weather events and can support not only core business operations but also ancillary functions. Furthermore, there’s a substantial opportunity to deploy more sustainable solutions for power, water, and waste management, alleviating stress on regional systems. Incorporating smart grid technologies and renewable energy sources not only reduces the carbon footprint but also sets a path towards a more environmentally responsible and energy-efficient future. Nimble infrastructure can also contribute to site resiliency as well as redundancy. Smaller power grids can allow one area to be taken offline for maintenance or if event of a weather event, and the neighboring grid can often take on that load temporarily leading to less power outages.

Freshwater is indispensable in manufacturing, serving various critical purposes such as machinery cooling, cleaning, and as a key ingredient in products. Ensuring reliable access to high-quality water is crucial for maintaining product integrity, equipment efficiency, and meeting environmental regulations. Manufacturing sites can utilize onsite wastewater treatment to assist in the areas water cleanliness and often re-use process water in a closed loop system. With increasing pressure on manufacturers to use water responsibly and sustainably, access to a dependable freshwater source becomes even more vital for the sector’s continued growth and environmental stewardship.

DIVERSIFYING INDUSTRIES

Diversifying corporate towns across multiple industries rather than relying solely on one company offers numerous benefits. One key advantage is economic diversification, which helps buffer against fluctuations in specific industries. Depending on a single company leaves the town vulnerable to economic downturns, but by diversifying, corporate towns can create a more stable job market and promote long-term sustainability.

When planning, it’s crucial to consider supporting businesses that complement the main company and provide opportunities for growth. Ancillary services like hotels, office spaces, retail amenities and corporate housing as well as warehousing, logistics, and maintenance facilities can be privatized to support the core operation.

Diverse corporate towns are more resilient as they can adapt to evolving industries and technological advancements. This

flexibility fosters innovation and entrepreneurship, stimulating economic growth and attracting a broader range of businesses, resulting in a more dynamic local economy.

CREATING REGIONAL DESTINATIONS

Introducing regional destinations enhances the sustainability of corporate towns by attracting diverse visitors and businesses. For instance, rural hospitals serve as economic anchors, providing essential healthcare services, creating jobs, and offering education programs. Similarly, investing in youth sports facilities with modern amenities can turn them into regional attractions, hosting tournaments and competitions that generate significant economic activity for the community. Providing support services like accommodation and dining further enhances the appeal of these destinations, solidifying their reputation and contributing to the town’s overall sustainability.

EDUCATION AS THE ANCHOR

Education serves as a cornerstone of any town. For a corporate town, investing in high school career technical education (CTE) classrooms and programs, attracting university and college satellite campuses, junior colleges, and trade schools play an essential role in supporting both white-collar and blue-collar jobs. Satellite campuses offer accessible pathways to higher education, providing students with the necessary knowledge and skills for advancement while Junior colleges and trade schools offer a robust foundation in academic subjects and specialized training, and hands-on skills and certifications. This balanced approach ensures a diverse talent pool, enabling companies to efficiently fill critical roles at all levels. By bridging the skills gap and empowering individuals to enter or advance in the workforce, junior colleges and trade schools contribute significantly to a company’s overall success by providing a versatile and skilled workforce.

CONSIDER REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY

Strategic placement of corporate towns near regional public transportation systems and highways is essential for their success on various fronts. This connectivity provides easier access to major cities and universities, facilitating workforce mobility and reducing congestion and environmental impact. Enhanced transportation infrastructure also benefits businesses by facilitating efficient goods transportation and market access, stimulating economic growth. Proximity to public transportation improves accessibility for employees and visitors, making the town more appealing and convenient, thus attracting businesses and residents, and improving overall economic prospects and quality of life.

EMBRACING PLACE

Balancing growth and modernization with the preservation of history and cultural heritage is crucial for towns’ development. Thoughtful preservation efforts protect historic landmarks and districts, integrating them into contemporary urban designs. Zoning regulations and building codes ensure new construction respects the city’s architectural and cultural legacy. Public



spaces, parks, and museums showcase the city's history, fostering education and appreciation. Collaborative efforts between government bodies, preservation organizations, and the community are vital for effective urban planning that maintains the city's identity across time.

DIVERSE POPULACE

The vitality of a corporate town depends on fostering a diverse community spanning various ages, uses, and income levels. A multigenerational population facilitates knowledge and experience exchange, with young professionals injecting energy while older residents contribute wisdom and volunteer efforts. Diverse resource and space usage ensures town dynamism and resilience, promoting vibrant social interaction and community engagement. A variety of businesses catering to different income levels fosters inclusivity and stabilizes the economy, reducing dependence on a single industry or corporation.

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Environmental stewardship is essential for the long-term sustainability of corporate towns. It involves responsible land use, resource management, and sustainable infrastructure practices. Prioritizing green building practices, renewable energy, and water management reduces ecological footprint. Integrating green spaces mitigates pollution and urban heat island effects while promoting recreation. Eco-friendly transportation options further minimize environmental impact and promote sustainable mobility. Waste reduction, ecosystem preservation, and community engagement initiatives foster a culture of environmental

responsibility, positioning the corporate town as a model for sustainability and promoting a harmonious coexistence with nature for a healthier future.

New corporate towns have the potential to redefine urban development by seamlessly integrating "live, work, and play" elements. The key to their future success lies in treating the town as an equal partner to the business. By strategically blending residential areas, corporate offices, and recreational spaces, these towns create walkable and sustainable environments, reducing long commutes and carbon emissions. Mixed-use development not only enhances convenience but also fosters community spirit, as residents, workers, and visitors can easily interact in shared spaces like parks and cultural centers. Additionally, such planning can boost local economies by attracting businesses, supporting entrepreneurs, and offering diverse entertainment and dining options. As powerful engines of urban development, these corporate towns must embrace a live-work-play concept that is not only feasible but wholly beneficial for the well-being and productivity of residents. Moreover, they must establish a sustainable framework that remains resilient despite changing business dynamics.



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