

A Strategy Map to Placemaking: A Case Study of Janesville, Wisconsin

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1. Introduction

Place is an interesting concept: Place as a physical location, place as a sense of belonging, place as defined by cultural norms or esthetics. There are many interpretations of place. In the world of economic and community development, place and its action-oriented cousin, placemaking, have become a useful net to capture a complex set of ideas that have an enormous impact on the wealth and well-being of nations and society.

Through his scholarship, David Audretsch has developed a cohesive framework in which places (cities, regions, or states) can consciously choose from four elements or areas of impact to drive economic prosperity or simply put, to improve. They are (1) resources and factors of production, (2) organization and spatial structure, (3) the human dimension and (4) public policy. This is in contrast to the more common fragmented academic approach, according to specialty, to development of place. In fact, Audretsch's playbook articulated in his book, *Entrepreneurship and The Strategic Management of Place* (2015), calls upon and gives credit to these distinct models of development. Audretsch does not purport to have a single action list but serves us a menu of key ingredients within his four areas. Much like the entrepreneur's journey, there is no perfect formula for success but rather identifying and capitalizing on unique assets of a place in a coordinated approach and then galvanizing action is the key to superior outcomes.

Using this framework as a magnifying glass, I look at my own city of Janes-

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ville, Wisconsin, incorporated in 1853, five years after Wisconsin's entry into the Union, to evaluate its own development. Through the lens of Audretsch's paradigm, Janesville can be seen through four distinct growth phases that in some shape or form were led not by the invisible hand of the market but through the coordinated work of civic and political leaders to create a road to prosperity for its citizens even in the face of upheaval. The four periods I will briefly examine are 1853-1917, 1918-1986, 1987-2008, and 2009 to the present. In these periods, I will examine specific examples that give evidence of Audretsch's four dimensions to an improved economic state if utilized as an interconnected platform.

Finally, as evidenced by this case study, I will offer that in the four dimensions of the strategic management of place, there is one seminal ingredient without which the other three cannot rise to provide synergies – and that is the human factor. Not just an equal part of a four-part recipe, it is the water that allows the seeds of prosperity to grow. This reframing of the four elements will encourage and support places to not just look for a playbook but to develop a program of civic duty that it is the responsibility of its citizens to implement.

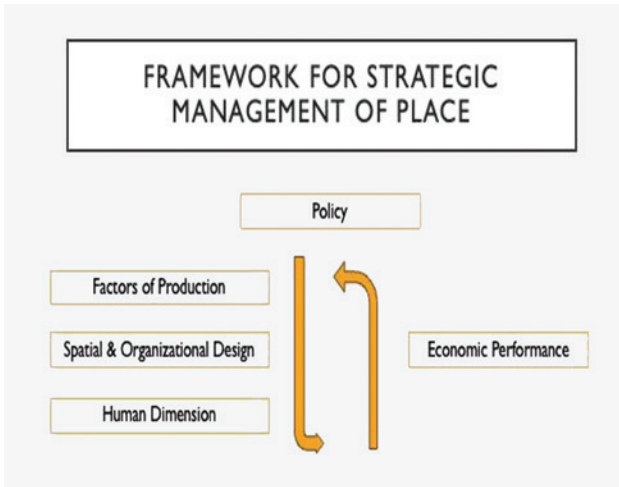
2. *The Main Elements of Placemaking*

Audretsch's conceptual framework, based on the German concept of Standortpolitik—the strategic management of place – provides an “inherent flexibility and elasticity, such that it can contract or expand to fit the dimensions as defined by the interested parties” (2015: 10). And who are those interested parties? Referring to the work of Christian Ketels of Harvard Business School, they are the stakeholders of regions and communities who owe a responsibility to their own future and what they can do to shape economic performance (ibid.: 4). This responsibility became more challenging as the most prominent 20th century economic development strategy of focusing on investment in physical capital (or smokestack chasing) seemed ill-equipped to handle the complexities of the growing global economy. Thomas Friedman in his book, *The World is Flat* (2005), explained why the notion of what was good for General Motors was no longer good for Detroit, something that was all too obvious to those living in Janesville, Wisconsin, another GM town at the turn of the 21st century.

In response, varied models for improvement in economic development have evolved with positive results; models that focused on the creative class (Florida 2002), building the knowledge economy, or creating competitive industry clus-

ters (Porter 1998). With this deep understanding of the various policies, tools, and theories of economic empowerment, Audretsch gives us four elements with which a region or city can craft its own playbook, building on its own uniqueness.

Figure 1: Framework for the Strategic Management of Place



Source: Audretsch 2015: 24

Factors of Production are the most typical leverage point one may think of in the pursuit of economic performance, wage growth, and wealth creation. They include the physical: What natural resources are available, what factories exist, and what type of infrastructure supports the area? Beyond the physical assets are those that come with human capital including skilled and unskilled labor, and in the production of goods and services, what knowledge is being created that can benefit a place and build a R&D center? Great cities tap into their factors of production over time.

The organization of these factors of production matter, which takes us to Audretsch's second element, **Spatial and Organization design**. His work does not say one configuration is preferable. The concentration of market power and impact of Walmart in Bentonville, Arkansas compared to the start-up and entrepreneurial culture of Silicon Valley yield different but positive results and both have their own risks. Is it best to have clusters of like industries or a diversified economic base? There is no silver bullet according to Audretsch's research and citing of various experts.

Layering into the physical and organizational aspects of place is the **Human Dimension** which entertains the idea of civic society explored by Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville (2000) in his travels in the US in the early 1830s, noting the country's unique ability to form volunteer associations. Likewise, the decline of social capital since 1950 as identified in Robert Putnam's 1995 essay entitled "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital" can have profound impact on place and its performance. This human element goes beyond just creating places for people to come and includes physical attachment, love for a place and how a place brands itself. And finally, do in fact the stakeholders do something about their place?

The last element that Audretsch uses to build his model is **Policy** and the ability for action at various public levels (local, regional, state, and national) to have an impact on the economic performance of place. Policy can be varied and controversial as we witness the swinging pendulum of the policy toolkit of different administrations at the federal level. The policy list for housing, energy consumption, tariffs, and regulations is extensive. But policy alone is not the cure-all for economic performance as is none of these four elements. Instead, their power is unleashed when cast as complements to each other in the pursuit of the well-being of a place by invested stakeholders.

3. Janesville, the Case Study of Placemaking

If Audretsch's argument rings true, then reviewing the development and growth of my own hometown, Janesville, Wisconsin through this approach, should yield the answer that a multi-pronged approach has yielded the best possible outcome, even when Lady Fortune deals a bad hand. In fact, I would argue that the development of Janesville, Wisconsin is a testimony to the natural blend of nature and nurture showing how different factors of production, organizational make up, human impact and, yes, policy, can have on a community's well-being.

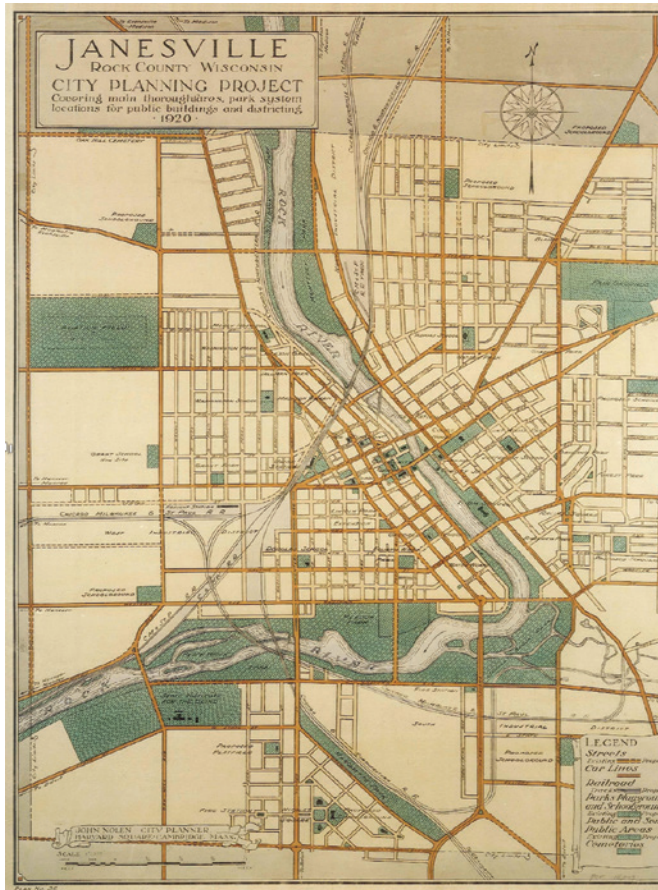
Janesville, Wisconsin was founded in 1835 by Henry Janes in fertile area along the Rock River, home to Ho-Chunk and Pottawatomie Native Americans. Today it is the county seat of Rock County, the southern county of the eight county Madison Area Regional Planning Area (MadRep). Janesville continues to have a growing (albeit modestly) population and is the 10th most populous city in Wisconsin. Equally important, Janesville and Beloit form a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), an important qualification for economic tracking. Four

periods of time will be used to examine Janesville's development organized around Audretsch's model.

3.1 *Janesville 1853-1917: Building a City*

Janesville was incorporated in 1853 and by 1860 had a population of over 7,000 which would more than double by 1920. The map below shows the City at the end of this period and the five wards of the original city all centered around the Rock River. This is a good illustration of the four elements that lent themselves to building this fledgling community.

Figure 2. City of Janesville in 1920



Source: Courtesy of City of Janesville Archives

Factors of production included the Rock River which is a 300-mile tributary of the Mississippi River known as the Sinnissippi to the Sauk and Fox Indians; the name means Rocky Waters. This allowed mills to be developed along the river which refined the raw material from area farms. These products could then be shipped to further distribution points as railroads were laid to reach Chicago, Milwaukee and other places. A manufacturing sector laid its base. Capital was brought from the East by the likes of William Tallman, a lawyer and landowner. Janesville benefited both from skilled and unskilled labor with the Irish and Germans having a strong base, including my husband's own family who came to Wisconsin in the 1850s. Knowledge capital was available as well. A lawyer from Massachusetts, Edward Whiton headed west to the Janesville area to create his legacy, building a Greek Revival home just east of the river and would later serve as the first Supreme Court Justice of the State of Wisconsin. His mark on the state was profound as a key leader in writing the state's Constitution.

The **spatial** relationship of firms was not random but showed a natural formation of clusters around key industries: agriculture, farm equipment, mills, breweries, and lumber. There was no monopolistic hold on this growing town. Entrepreneurialism was thriving. Gray Brewery was founded in 1856 and still produces today. Joseph Craig founded the Janesville Machine Company which created farm implements and would be the predecessor to the General Motors Plant through Samson Tractor in the twentieth century. And Parker Pen was founded by George Stafford Parker, a telegraph agent for the railroad, who by 1888 had true intellectual property when he applied for his first pen patent at age 25.

This abundance of both natural and human capital was leveraged by a strong civic society that showed the power of the **human element**. In *The Good Country* (2022), historian Jon Lauck cites the critical importance of civic organizations that focused on the betterment of man and society in the Northwest Territory in the early 19th century and how this positively impacted and differentiated the region. In this book he acknowledges the key role of women in several movements of the time including women's suffrage, temperance, abolition and prison reform. Lavia Goodell, a Janesville native, was the first woman licensed to practice law in the state of Wisconsin. The Elk Club was founded in 1893 with Rotarians, Lions, Loyal Order of Moose and Optimists to come in the 20th century. Two gentlemen, Levi Alden and Z.A. Stoddard started the weekly *Janesville Gazette* with 300 readers in 1845. Howard Bliss purchased the company in 1883 beginning what would be three generations of ownership.

From a **policy** perspective, the most important element impacting Janesville during this period would have been the support both at the federal and state level for the building of the vast network of railroads. Within Janesville, the laying out of the city wards and roads would help form the foundation from which a city could grow. Rugged individualism balanced with an obligation to do good as noted by de Tocqueville, was in full display in Janesville and the region at this time. This enabled the city to be poised for growth in the 20th century, but not just any growth as will be illustrated.

3.2 Janesville 1918 to 1988: The American Dream

With World War I coming to a close, the world and the United States were looking to a new dawn that would help bring peace and prosperity. This early period was critical for Janesville and what would eventually lead to decades of growth. Janesville's **factors of production** were given a significant boost when city leaders positioned Janesville Machine Company to be purchased by General Motors in 1918 and merged with Samson Tractor. While the plant was opened in 1919, production would pivot to the automobile thanks to the Plant Manager Joseph Craig engaging General Motors following the collapse of Samson Tractor in the face of the farm recession.

Across the river was another growing success story. Parker Pen would create an influx of human and knowledge capital to the city with technical processes that involved mechanical design, engineering, prototyping and testing. Sales for its writing instruments would surpass \$1 million by 1918.² In 1954 production began on the Jotter, Parker Pen's ballpoint instrument which would sell 3.5 million pens in its first year. Combined, these companies would have a significant and enduring impact on Janesville. What was good for GM and Parker Pen was good for Janesville. This was especially true as each of the companies locally had a strong workforce that was encouraged to be part of the community and to form strong social networks.

As GM grew, **clusters** formed around the automobile industry. At the same time these great companies had entrepreneurs who would launch their own businesses, making sure Janesville was not just a one trick pony. While GM would grow to dominate the economy through its largely union workforce, Janesville

2 See Parker Pen website, <https://www.parkerpen.com/parker-history.html>

was also quietly being defined by the engineers from Parker Pen. A Janesville without Parker Pen would look very different today even if the company no longer has a local presence.

Photo 1 and 2: Parker Pen and General Motors



Sources: Nathan Fuller, “Arrow Park (Parker Pen).” *Clio: Your Guide to History*. June 23, 2020 and GM Plant during the 1950s courtesy of Rock County Historical Society Archives.

Perhaps most importantly, **community stakeholders** understood that managed growth was key and using **policy** as a key tool laid the foundation for successful decades to come. In 1918 The Janesville Commerce Club was formed and today survives as Forward Janesville. Invested leaders in this period also worked to pass a referendum for the first million-dollar high school in Wisconsin. It was built by JP Cullen, a company based in Janesville that is now led by its 5th generation. And why this referendum? To recruit General Motors and other employers, it was understood that an educated and able workforce was needed. Looking forward to efficient government, Janesville changed to the City Manager-Council form of municipal government in 1923 via a public vote, making it the longest running city in Wisconsin with this form of government.

Over the decades, public-private partnerships grew as a tool to impact the community. The Commerce Club worked with the City to hire John Nolan to design the park system that today allows Janesville to boast the highest park acreage per 1,000 residents in the state of Wisconsin and gives the City its slogan, “Wisconsin’s Park Place.” Economic development was the role of not one entity but many as evidenced by a Business Recruitment brochure developed by the Janesville Citizen Committee post WW II.

This book has been prepared for the information and guidance of industries that are seeking a new home. It provides, in brief form, the essential information about the city in the country. Janesville, Wisconsin, this city is interested in adding a small number of new companies, each with a limited number of employees, to its industrial family. This selective attitude is, we believe, important in maintaining a sound, natural development of the city (Janesville Citizens Development Committee).

These decades were a classic example of multiple stakeholders taking the responsibility to manage the development of the city, and these multiple stakeholders adopted various practices to build their own playbook. And like any playbook, not every action necessarily created a positive return, especially in the long run. The development of the Janesville Mall near the highway was the early indicator for the demise of downtown, and the placement of a concrete parking lot in downtown over the Rock River in the same decade ignored the very resource that helped put Janesville on the map. But as the American Dream period came to a close, it was becoming all too obvious that the future was not always going to be in city stakeholders' control. As a harbinger of things to come, Parker Pen's eventual departure from Janesville started with a management buyout of the writing component of the company with headquarters moving to England in 1988. The world was flat indeed.

3.3 Janesville 1989-2008: Planning for Disruption

While General Motors announced the idling of the Janesville plant in summer of 2008, that news, while dreaded, was not without anticipation with both plant and local union 95 leaders having worked during the prior decades to keep it open. James Otterstein, a respected economic development leader in Wisconsin, and responsible for Rock County, oversaw the roller coaster ride of that closing period and worked with many public and private leaders to help manage the tsunami created by the plant's status change and the Great Recession. An estimated \$714 million in overall income associated with the GM Plant employment and hence the main **factor of production** in Janesville had evaporated.

Table 1. Employment Impacts (GM Employment)³

	Direct	Indirect	Induced	Total
Jobs	2,196	3,954	2,838	8,988
Labor Income	188,557,930	186,921,610	85,195,420	460,674,958
Total Income	289,735,589	267,212,214	167,095,613	724,043,416

Source: GM IMPLAN generated by Steve Deller, UW Madison extension

Amy Goldstein authored *Janesville: The American Story* (2017) and subsequently revisited the subject in an article for the *Brookings Institute* in 2024 detailing the closing of the plant and its impact on the area. A takeaway from both the book and article may be that a place can never really overcome lost union jobs with excellent pay and benefits despite a community's best efforts. But this is a short-term perspective in the long arc of history, and credit goes to the stakeholders of Janesville who were taking action to plan for this disruption two decades earlier.

In the 1980s the two private economic development organizations, Janesville Chamber of Commerce and Janesville Economic Development Corporation, reorganized to become Forward Janesville, the leading 501c3 of the Rock Region with its sister 501c3, the Forward Foundation. Subsequently in the 1990s two multi-million dollar private economic development funds were raised, New Beginnings and New Century Fund, to help prepare the area for a new century, one that might not have a Parker Pen or GM in its future. The Janesville Foundation, created by the Parker family, would be active participants in other economic development efforts including acquiring and protecting key properties along the Rock River. Recognizing that human capital was outflowing from the area and loss of talent very real, a Leadership Development Academy was formed in 2003 to help prepare young professionals to be civic leaders, showing the power of the **human dimension**. This program grew and took on Rock County as its geographic focus and today has trained hundreds of leaders as its own not for profit organization.

3 IMPLAN works off of an Input / Output analysis, effectively modeling the flow of dollars through a community, region or state before it "leaks or leaves". The model assumes fixed relationships. Changes to these relationships are described as *multipliers*, which are the ratios of the overall effects to changes in one or more of the following areas: sales / production, income and employment.

Civic society continued to activate resources including the creation of Rotary Botanical Gardens in 1988, a new Boys & Girls Club cojoined and reimagined with the YMCA of Northern Rock County, and a new public library, built and led by philanthropists Don and Jerry Hedberg in 1996. Then attention turned to the downtown. In 2004 the Janesville Performing Arts Center (JPAC) was opened with a \$4 million fundraising effort in an adaptive reuse project led by Stonehouse Development, a Madison based developer. The project converted the 1920 school building that was built with that \$1 million referendum into fifty apartments while JPAC took over the old school auditorium. At the same time, the Downtown Design Center was established with mixed public/private funds to help initiate the revitalization of downtown.

The **policy** of the time locally, nationally and at the state level was directed to help these large manufacturing bases remain viable, but in the end, no policy was enough to prevent GM's closing. Locally citizens formed a referendum committee for the Janesville School District and passed what at that time was the largest school referendum in Wisconsin history... for \$74 million. Investing prior to a time of upheaval was critical. Planning, not waiting for disruption was the key.

3.4 Janesville: 2009..... What's Next

In reviewing how places respond to disasters whether natural, economic or human, patterns emerge that the driving force of change is the **human factor** with official and unofficial leaders forming together to create a plan that quite literally is meant to move a place forward, to not get stuck. Jim Collins in *Good to Great* (2001) challenges that for organizations to be great they must accept the brutal facts of today while not relinquishing a vision for the future. This becomes a heavy burden for a place where the brutal facts of today are devastating. Yet if its citizens can embrace the realities of the current crisis to use as a rallying cry, there is evidence that this formation around crisis can be a great motivator for change, a point stressed by a preeminent expert on change, John Kotter.

In relatively short order, a group from across Rock County formed Rock County 5.0, a public private consortium to address the free fall. The closing of the GM Plant in 2009 did not immediately move Janesville and the region into a new post GM era, and for a short period, a contingency of public, union, and private individuals advocated for continued plant operation. But as time progressed it became clear the plant would not return, with its official shuttering in 2009. Rock

5.0 and its leaders began their work to rebuild an economy with local education institutions. Five core industrial areas of focus were established, taking a page from Michael Porter's (1998) strategy for economic advantage through **Clusters**. They were: Advanced Manufacturing, Value-Added Agriculture, Food Processing & Technology, Distribution & Logistics, and Healthcare and Medical Technologies. At the same time the Janesville Innovation Center was created to be an incubator for light manufacturing with contributions from both the City of Janesville, the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, and private foundations.

As this work emerged, a very important tool was utilized for this community and region, the ability to build public-private partnerships to secure better resources and strengthen factors of production. These partnerships would accomplish a great deal and have become almost a way of doing business for economic development in Janesville. Major projects such as expansion of I39/90 between the state-line to Madison, revitalization of downtown through ARISENow partnership, and the Woodman Sports and Convention Center, are all prime examples of the power of public-private partnership that embrace the concept of shared governance.

In Janesville's latest chapter, the traditional factors of production can be viewed as returning to its roots of the 19th century focused around land and location but with a mix of new technology. Rock County has established itself as an **advanced agriculture and food processing technology area** with major players like Seneca and Kerry Ingredients headquartered in Rock County. GEA, one of the world's largest system suppliers for food, beverage, and pharmaceuticals, selected Janesville to open its newest facility in the US in 2024. Distribution and logistics are a dominant industry with Dollar General opening a major distribution center in early 2017. These organizations, while not locally owned, share a corporate culture that embraces and supports the local community. While not all outside firms are as generous or involved locally, multi-generational local companies as well as small businesses represent a key part of the local economic ecosystem and usually have a higher level of community involvement pointing to Audretsch's focus on organizational **type of firm operating** in an area as important.

As firms grow and recruit, the region continues to identify that skilled and unskilled labor are critical, and again one sees public-private partnerships generate programs such as Craftsman with Character or the Janesville Business Academy as specific secondary education programs developed with our educational institutions and private sector to prepare our youth for the future.

Photo 3: “Black Hawk Mural” by Jeff Henriquez



Source: Photo courtesy of Drywater Productions.

And while Rock 5.0’s vision for these strong clusters of industry play out, Janesville has embraced a strategy to proactively protect and enhance its quality of life for all, building upon its strength as Wisconsin’s Park Place. Investments mentioned above in public private partnerships are joined by others ones such as a Children’s Museum, a new Boys & Girls Club, an annual public art festival that has produced twenty large scale murals, and investments to William Tallman’s original home and property at Rock County Historical Society are driving this community forward, recognizing that when a place is rebuilding creating “a sense of place” is paramount.

4. Conclusion

Today, former residents of Janesville who are returning after a long absence, share how much has changed. And while significant progress has been made, Janesville’s average median income falls below the state average, and the local school districts face a growing student population whose families qualify for free and reduced lunch, an economic stress test. The growing use of critical social safety net not-for-profits confirms this trend. For the first time, the city has identified “increase median income” as an outcome measure on its most recently crafted strategic plan.

Opportunities and challenges lay ahead. A survey by the local chamber showed businesses ranked Janesville as a positive place to do business with 83% responding that the Janesville business environment enables growth. The same leaders, however, identified workforce development and housing as top concerns. Focusing on workforce as a key **factor of production** rises to the top as the primary challenge, a message that much of America is facing. And in this way, Janesville is a harbinger of many Midwest if not national trends.

While the elements within this multi-dimensional road map are not unique to Janesville, how leaders come together to act can be a defining moment for a place. In 2024, Janesville's relatively new city manager implemented a quarterly City Leaders forum. Every quarter, one sees the creation of social capital as not-for-profit leaders, elected officials, city directors, private business owners, and community advocates learn about, discuss and hatch new ideas to move this city and region forward.

Ferdinand Foch was the Supreme Allied commander on the Western Front in World War One, serving for over 55 years in the French military. He pointed not to cannons, nor bombs, nor rifles as the key to victory. He said passionately, "The most powerful weapon in the world is the human soul on fire."

And while Audretsch appropriately points to a multi-dimensional approach for placemaking, I would suggest as evidenced by this Janesville Case Study that without the human factor the other elements lose their potency or worse, leave a city without a playbook, for who writes the playbook but its citizens? If this stands true, it places a strong need for civic education on the responsibility of the local citizen, an area of personal interest and advocacy. I am thankful for the opportunity to participate in the prestigious Upton Forum for which the ideals of a liberal society are central, imparting an opportunity for individuals to experience freedom by building intellect and agency.

My own interest, work and research on placemaking began in earnest over a decade ago when I began to see the strong parallels between the tools of strategic planning and organizational development that shape organizations so profoundly and the tools needed for effective community building. My journey was accelerated by having a wonderful mentor and friend, Quint Studer, who parlayed his expertise in improving our healthcare organizations to improving his own city of Pensacola and wrote *Building a Vibrant Community* (2018). Impactful authors such as Richard Florida, Erik Klinenberg and Jane Jacobs among many have furthered my passion and education. In fact, an article by James Fallows in *The*

Atlantic many years ago gave me a powerful but simple eleven-point checklist for a thriving community that included having a local brewery. I would embrace his human centered approach.

In hindsight, my interest in placemaking was most likely set at an early age. As an Army brat, my “places lived” counted to sixteen with two on repeat by the time I turned seven. And while settled in Memphis, Tennessee by the 1st grade, my father, a recently hired pilot for a start-up called Federal Express, and my mother, the key copilot to a young nomadic family, instilled in our family a need for exploration and appreciation of other cultures. Those experiences left me with an understanding that not only did places vary dramatically, but that place had a profound impact on its inhabitants. And if so, then what is our responsibility to that place? And for this, I am so grateful for Professor David Audretsch’s conceptual framework as not a theoretical exercise of academia but a personal gift which I hope to use through its vigorous application and to encourage others to do so for their community as well.

Most importantly I am grateful to the citizens of Janesville who have invited this interloper to find a home in this place and for so many not mentioned who have done so much. I look forward to looking back in twenty years to see the progress made.

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