

PROMOTING COMMUNITY VITALITY & SUSTAINABILITY

The Community Capitals Framework

INTRODUCTION

One of the challenges that local leaders and citizens constantly face is finding a coherent way to address the variety of challenges facing their communities – be they urban, suburban, or rural in nature. In many respects, the intent of most community and economic development initiatives is to advance an area’s “quality of life.” But what does “quality of life” mean and how is it measured? Is it the presence of a strong local economy, sound local leadership, quality government services, top-notch public supported schools, great health care services, or other indicators? The simple answer is yes. In many respects, all of these represent traits that would be associated with a community deemed to have a high quality of life.

As such, the issue at hand is to find a framework that captures the multi-dimensional nature of community life. Most importantly, it has to be one that has been vetted in peer-reviewed scholarly journals and, as result of this process, found to be both scientifically and conceptually sound. Moreover, the framework had to be one that could guide the “on the ground” efforts of community and economic development practitioners.

With these important pre-conditions in mind, the perspective that one may find appealing is the Community Capitals Framework (CCF), a perspective developed and fine-tuned over a span of several years by Cornelia Butler Flora and Jan L. Flora from Iowa State University (2008). The Floras suggest that the lifeblood of any community can be linked to the presence and strength of seven community capitals, resources that can be invested or tapped for the purpose of promoting the long-term well-being of communities (Jacobs, 2011a).

The seven community capitals are natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial, and built. Strong and resilient communities strive for balanced investments in these seven capitals. If communities place too much emphasis on one or two of the capitals, they can end up suppressing the growth of the other community capitals, a condition that can damage the overall health of the community. For example, places that invest aggressively in built capital (through the pursuit of bricks and mortar type of facilities) may contribute to the decline of the community’s natural and cultural capitals, especially if such facilities are constructed in pristine areas or on lands that are part of the rich history of that locality.



natural



cultural



human



social



political

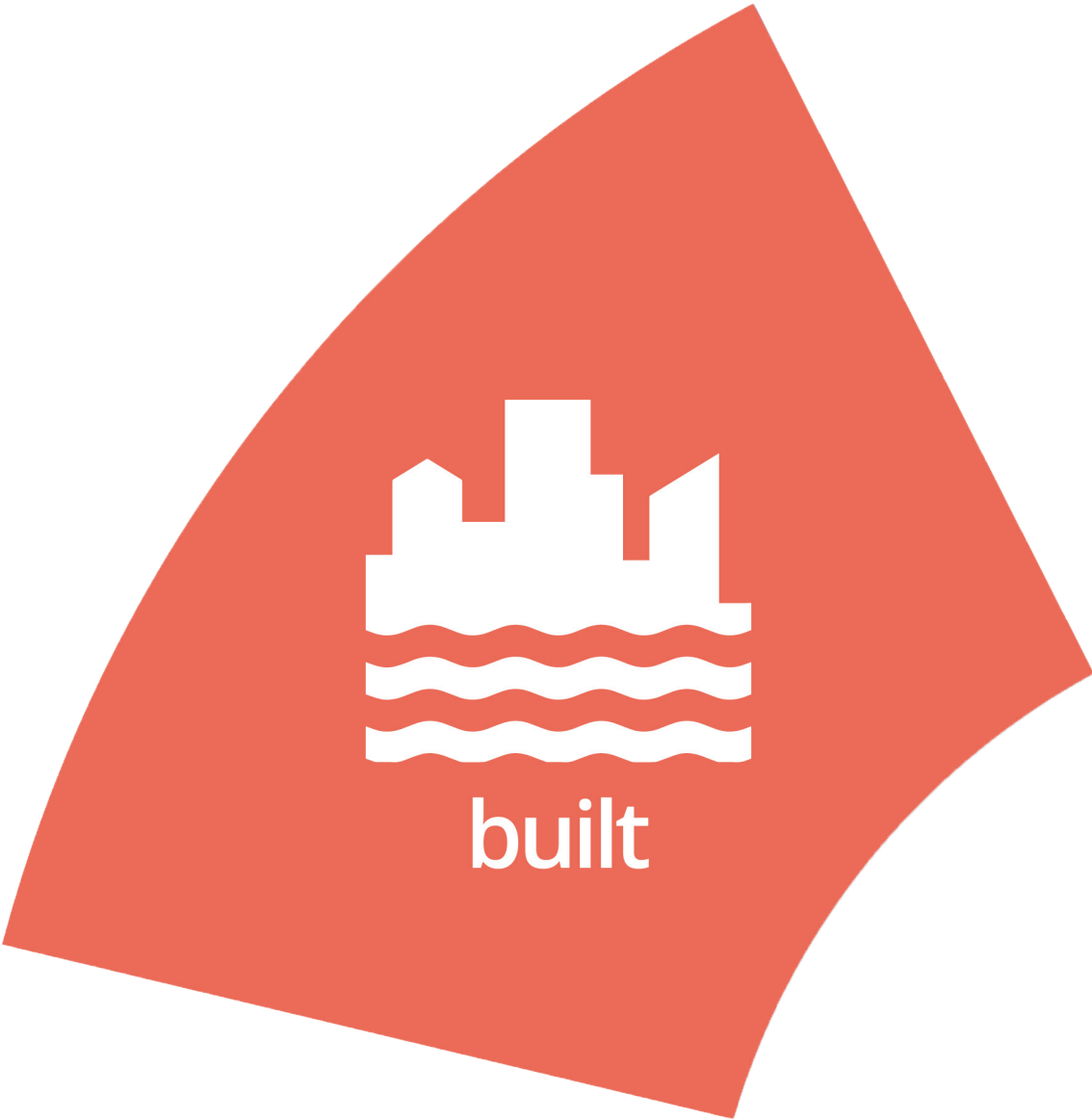


financial



built

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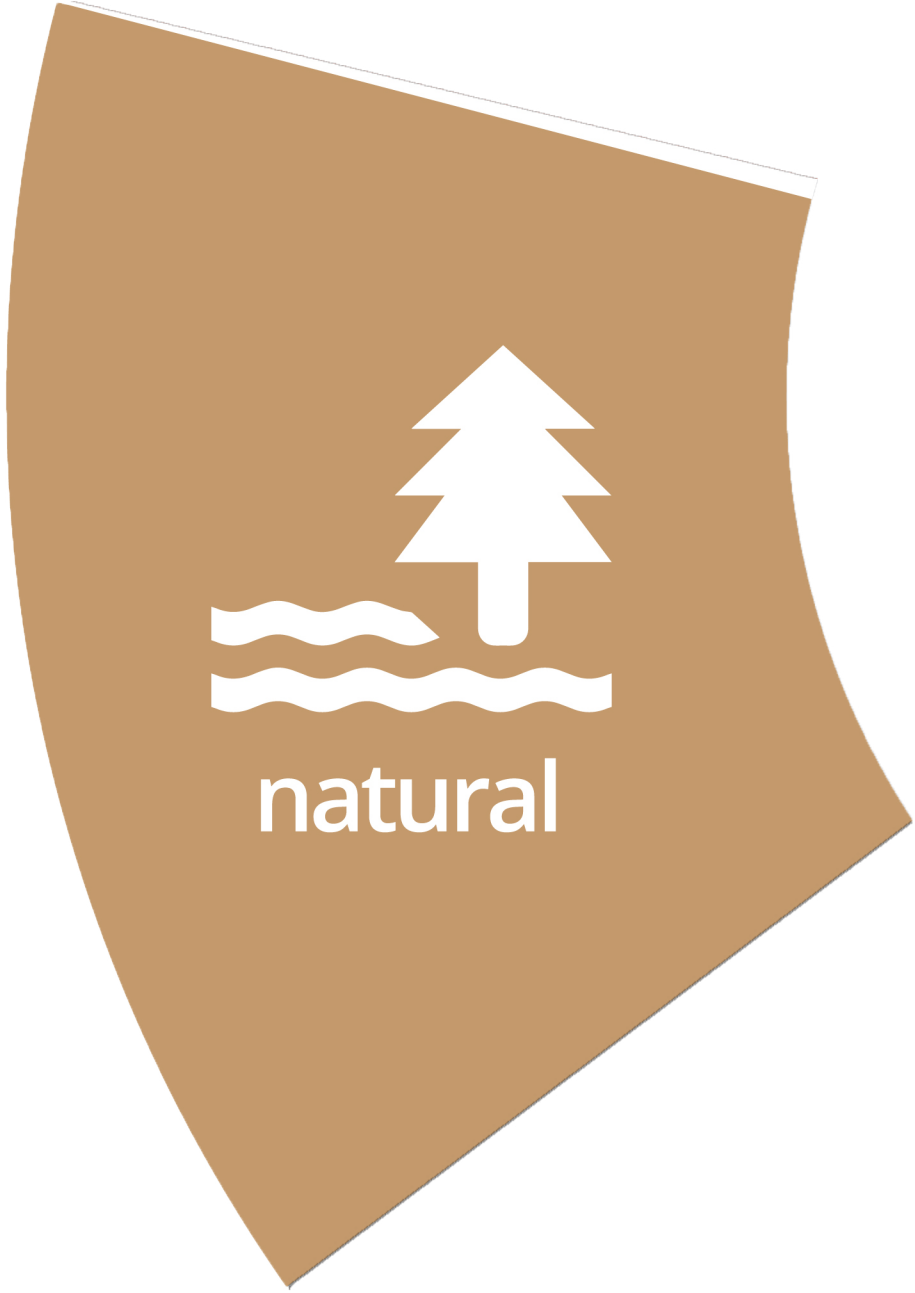
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natural



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social



political

COMMUNITY

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CAPITALS

