

Over the past 30 years Sidney became very dependent upon one industry and employer. When it was lost to acquisition, there was a profound socio-economic crash. But within a few years, Sidney is coming back rooted in an entrepreneurial development strategy. Like Ord, Nebraska¹, and other rural communities, Sidney's story demonstrates the foundational role of entrepreneur-focused community economic development.

Sidney, Nebraska Case Study

Becoming a Transformed Entrepreneurial Community

By Donald W. Macke

Introduction – Transformative Change

The community of Sidney is roughly 160 years old founded in the 1860s with the development of the first U.S. Transcontinental Railroad. Over these 16 decades Sidney has experienced at least 10 boom-and-bust cycles. Few communities thrive and survive such dramatic change and trauma. Over these years Sidney has proven to be remarkably resilient in its ability to pivot ensuring its survival and better times.

The most recent of these boom-and-bust events is Cabela's². It was founded in 1961 by Dick and Mary Cabela on their kitchen table in Chappell, Nebraska just 28 miles down the road from Sidney to the east on U.S. Highway 30. Into the early 2000s, Cabela's evolved, grew, and became a national player in outdoors recreational goods and services. It branded itself as the "*World's Foremost Outfitter*". Up until 2004, Cabela's was privately owned and operated. In 2004, Cabela's went "public" and became an acquisition target. Earlier in this decade, there was economic turbulence with the *9-11 Terrorist Attacks* and the *Dot.Com* mini recession. By December 2007 the *Great Recession*, or the worst economic downturn since the *Great Depression* of the 1930s, hitting discretionary spending hard so essential to Cabela's success.

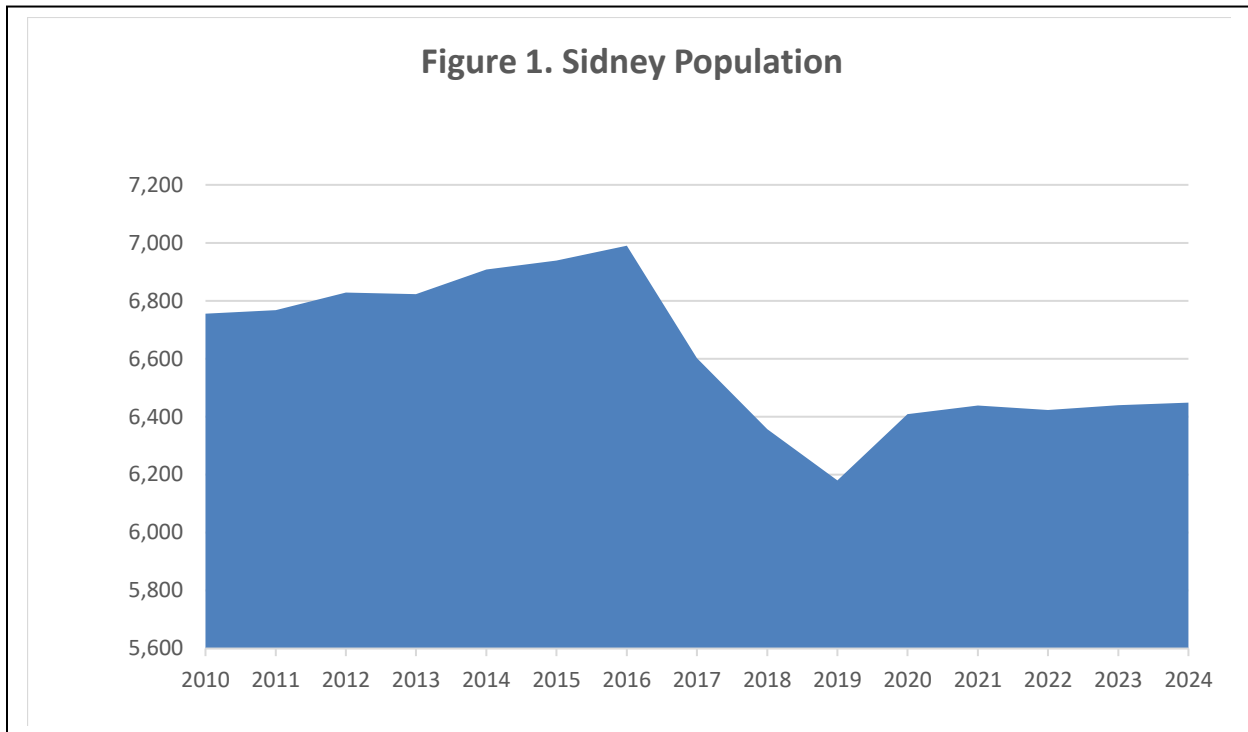
The challenges of the *Great Recession* and contracting recreational spending impacted a rapidly expanding Cabela's. It borrowed heavily and began to sell assets to survive. In 2016 the lifeboat for Cabela's arrived, and the company itself, or an acquisition bid by Bass Pro Shops³ based out of Springfield, Missouri. Leading up to the acquisition and its completion in the summer of 2017, Cabela's began to shed corporate jobs. As a small rural city with a large national corporate headquarters, Cabela's boom was ending, and its bust beginning.

¹ <https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/solutions/how-we-help/rcpd/ord-e-learning.html>

² <https://www.cabelas.com>

³ <https://www.basspro.com>

Figure 1 demonstrates this dramatic change illustrating rapid population loss driven by a community of 7,000 residents losing a corporate headquarters employing 2,000 people.



Sidney continued to grow, peaking in population in 2016, but with the announcement of the acquisition, and the acquisition guidance to end corporate hiring and shedding employees, the outmigration of people from Sidney began creating a deep population plunge.

In 2010, Sidney posted a population of 6,756 residents. Cabela's footprint was regional drawing workers from Nebraska, Colorado, and even Wyoming. Sidney's population grew to nearly 7,000⁴ residents by 2016 or by 3.46 percent. While most rural communities in Nebraska were losing population during this timeframe, Sidney was growing. Between 2016 and 2019, Sidney's population dropped from 6,990 to 6,180 or by 11.59%. Sidney and its region were being hollowed out. Not only was there significant population loss, Sidney, also experienced a dramatic drop in average compensation caused by the loss of relatively higher paying Cabela's corporate jobs.

For most other rural communities when a major employer closes shop, their host communities are adversely impacted for decades. For many, too many, they never recover and transition into chronic decline and deterioration. This did not happen in Sidney for two reasons:

Affordable and Available Housing -- A Surge in Entrepreneurship

⁴ Precise estimate of Sidney's population in 2016 is 6,990 residents.

Housing Market Crash to Attracting New Residents... Sidney's real estate market crashed as unemployed Cabela's workers sought to sell their homes as they exited the community. But in this Cabela's driven market crash, there proved to be a silver lining. The travel time from Sidney to downtown Denver is just two and one-half hours most days. For portions of the Denver Metroplex Sidney is less than two hours away. With bad traffic it can take that much time to transit the width of the Metroplex. Word got out in 2019 on the eve of the *COVID World Health Pandemic* that there was "cheap" and "available" housing to be bought in Sidney and its environs. Over 400 housing units were on the market and with fears of the Pandemic in denser and more controlled⁵ urban areas like Denver, Sidney's housing bust became a housing shortage in about two years fueling its sharp population rebound between 2019 and 2020 (Refer to Figure 1).

Surge in Entrepreneurship... Cabela's was a hometown success story realizing national and international markets. Cabela's gave Sidney and its region an economic boom for over two generations or 56 years! As a national corporation with multiple lines of business, Cabela's also attracted and developed human talent in a wide range of occupations. While significant numbers of Cabela's corporate employees left the area, many did not leave, or returned after spending time in Missouri with Bass Pro Shops or other pursuits. Rooted in this human talent, the potential for an entrepreneurial surge was present. A similar dynamic occurred with the acquisition of then Omaha based *InterNorth* by Houston Natural Gas that creating Enron.⁶

While Sidney has not rebounded in either peak 2016 population, let alone the compensation value when Cabela's corporate headquarters was humming, its population has rebounded and stabilized. Time will tell whether this surge in entrepreneurial activity will do what happened in Omaha over time. What is clear, a new generation of Sidney leaders and community builders are embracing entrepreneurship as the primary pathway to community prosperity, and sustained prosperity through economic diversification. The lesson of the Cabela's crash is rooted for now in the mind of many Sidney residents... *'... never again and this time around we will build a rooted and diverse economy versus depending on a single major employer.'*⁷

Like Ord and its Valley County Region, Sidney is a transforming community with a striking rebound economically and socially. The rest of this powerful story of renewal provides important background and the drivers of this critical pivot from the past to a new vision for

⁵ Economic shutdown and freedom of movement restrictions were much stronger and longer in urban areas compared to rural areas in the United States.

⁶ InterNorth, formerly Northern Natural Gas had its corporate headquarters in Omaha, Nebraska. In 1985 InterNorth while seeking to acquire Houston Natural Gas based in Houston, Texas, was acquired by the Houston company creating Enron. Dr. Ernie Goss, an economist with Creighton University completed analysis that found those InterNorth middle managers who choose not to go to Houston actually create more economic impact in Omaha compared to Enron at its peak and before it collapsed in 2007.

⁷ Paraphrased from community leader Sarah Sinnett.

Sidney’s future. Core to this economic renewal is a smart focus on entrepreneurs and their businesses.

Figure 2 illustrates a graphic that the Sidney E3 team has used in the community to demonstrate its success.

Figure 2 - Illustrating Sidney’s Entrepreneurial Success



By July 2024, just a decade following the Cabela’s economic crash, Sidney has 112 new rooted companies empowering a more dynamic, diverse, and resilient economy.

Now on to Chapter 1 and some Sidney backgrounding.

There are thousands of communities across North America like Sidney. Sidney is unremarkable in so many ways. Its downtown, residential neighborhoods, and interstate interchange look more alike than different when compared to similar communities from New England to the desert Southwest. It is in part, Sidney's sameness, that makes this story so important to capture and tell.

Chapter 1 – Backgrounding Sidney

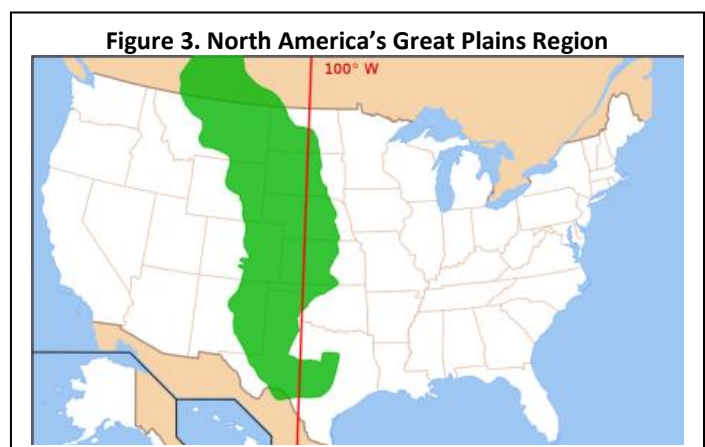
Introduction to Chapter 1

According to the U.S. Census Bureau there are 3,143 counties in the United States. Of these 1,958 or 62% are classified as non-metro or rural by most standards. Nearly 37 million Americans call these communities, home. Sidney and Cheyenne County are one of hundreds, if not thousands of like communities that are spread across the 3.8 million square miles that define America's rural geography. Every community, whether rural or big city has a unique development history, specific development opportunities and challenges, and the potential to create prosperity for its residents. Sidney is such a rural community, rural, but not isolated and in Chapter 1 we background Sidney, Nebraska and its environs.

Part 1 – Sidney's Region

Opening... Sidney and this part of Nebraska is defined by the region where it is located. Sidney's region is unique and has many attributes. Three are particularly important including its rootedness in the High Plains within North America's Great Plains Region, its role as port among three transportation-corridors, and its association with the Denver Metroplex.

High Plains within North America's Great Plains... North America's Great Plains Region, once one of the world's largest grasslands and home to millions of Bison, runs from the Canadian Prairie Provinces into Northern Mexico. It is vast, including over 1.125 million square miles. This Region includes parts of 10 states, and it is where Sidney calls home. Within the Great Plains predictable and substantial moisture is greatest in the east and diminishes to semi-desert conditions in the west. The very western part of the Great Plains is sometimes referred to as the "High Plains." In the High Plains annual precipitation can vary widely and averages just 17 inches per year. Sidney is semi-arid, enjoys a wild continental climate, and most days wind is



a constant. While production agriculture is part of Cheyenne County's economy, these weather and climate conditions constrain productivity and the reliability of good crops each year. Historically, range cattle and winter wheat predominated production agriculture in the Central High Plains Region.

Cabela's Store – Sidney I-80 Interchange



A Transportation Port... It has been millions of years since this part of North America hosted an inland sea. Today this landscape is mostly dryland. But Sidney is closely connected with at least three major U.S. transportation corridors including the mainline of the Union Pacific Railroad, historic U.S. Highway 30, and now for decades Interstate 80 connecting the coasts (e.g., port label). Primary among these three corridors is Sidney's Interstate 80 interchange. Significant services are to be found, and commerce incurred at Sidney's I-80 interchange. There are motels, gas stations, truck stops, cafés, and a major Cabela's retail store. More Americans experience Sidney through its location on I-80 and its interchange amenities, than might be case with Cabela's shoppers.

Denver Metroplex... The Denver Metroplex is vast geographically. It extends from Cheyenne, Wyoming in the north to Pueblo, Colorado in the south running over 225 miles taking over three driving hours via Interstate 25. The Metroplex

reaches into the foothills of the Rocky Mountains in the west and expands out on to the plains in the east. While its geography is expansive, its socio-economic influence reaches into numerous states including Western Nebraska where Sidney is located. Sidney is part of the expanded footprint of the Denver Metroplex. A long two hours will take you from anyplace in Sidney to the Denver International Airport. The distance from Sidney to Cheyenne is a quick 90 minutes on Interstate 80. Sidney, like Denver it is on Mountain Time, receives its television from the Front Range, and significantly closer to metro Denver than Nebraska's largest city Omaha, nearly six hours via Interstate 80 to the east.

Wrapping Up... The old saying in retail goes... *"...location, location, location!"* Location continues to matter in retail, residential real estate, and community economic development. Sidney came into existence in part because of its location as a construction hub during the building of the Transcontinental Railroad. Today its location as a regional hub city, its role as a service hub for Interstate 80, and its adjacency to the Denver Metroplex helps to explain its historic and its future potential for development.

With this regional information as context, now let's take a deeper look at Sidney and Cheyenne County.

Part 2 – Sidney Profiled

Opening... Sidney is the lead community for Cheyenne County. In states like Nebraska, with 93 counties, the size of most counties was defined in the 1800s based on the distance by horse from a farm in the county to the county seat. Sidney is the county seat. As the lead city, there are other smaller communities including the villages of Dalton, Gurley, Lodgepole, and Potter. There are two Census-Designated Places including Lorenzo and Sunol. There are also two unincorporated communities including Brownson and Colton. Like most High Plains counties, Cheyenne County was over-settled in the 1800s. Its agricultural dependent economy could not, with near desert like conditions, support heavy settlement as illustrated by the large number of communities now in decline. Sidney survived and thrived from its founding in the 1860s. The following provides an overview of Sidney, Cheyenne County, and its environs.⁸

Demography... The following provides a quick 2020 Census overview of Sidney:

Sidney and Cheyenne County is Predominately White...

- ✓ 87.82% White
- ✓ 8.0% Hispanic or Latino
- ✓ 1.17% Asian, 0.84% Black or African American & 0.67% Native American

An Overwhelming Percentage of Residents are U.S. Citizens...

- ✓ 98.5% U.S. Citizens & 2.33% Foreign-Born
- ✓ Median Age is 39.4 Years (Younger than most of rural Nebraska)
- ✓ 22.6% of Residents with Bachelors Degrees or Higher
- ✓ 60.8% of Working Age Adults are Employed
- ✓ Only 4.8% of Resident Do Not have Health Insurance

Economy... As part of E3, e2 produced a **Development Opportunity Profile** for Cheyenne County including Sidney. It was produced in September 2021. For most of the Federal data the source year is 2019 or earlier or about the time of Cabela's acquisition by Bass Pro Shops, and the full effects of Cabela's corporate headquarters liquidation and the COVID Pandemic crisis. This profile provides a strong baseline for where Sidney was before it fully lost Cabela's and pivoted to entrepreneur-focused development. Based on 2019 U.S. Bureau of Analysis data, Figure 3 provides the top 10 economic sectors measured by "household earnings generated" and employment. Using household earnings allows us to provide a more complete economic structure overview including non-job sectors like federal transfer payments and commuters. For rural America, inbound commuters⁹ and transfer payments are important.

⁸ e2 has produced two **Development Opportunity Profiles** for Cheyenne County and Sidney in December 2019 and then in September 2021. These Development Opportunity Profiles are available at [web link](#).

⁹ Inbound commuters live outside of the county and commute into the community for work.

Figure 4. Cheyenne County's Top Economic Sectors by Earnings and Jobs, 2019

Economic Sector	Earnings	Change	Economic Sector	Jobs	Change
Retirees	\$179,846,000	41.4%	Retail Trade	940	-9.9%
Government	\$47,138,000	14.0%	Government	811	-8.7%
Health Care	\$40,789,000	117.0%	Health Care	693	23.7%
Retail Trade	\$29,291,000	-0.3%	Farming	588	-25.2%
Transportation	\$27,897,000	99.9%	Hospitality	508	-12.9%
Company Manage.	\$21,410,000	3261.1%	Manufacturing	348	-38.9%
Farming	\$19,824,000	16.7%	Transportation	346	7.8%
Commuters	\$19,617,000	181.4%	Other Services	295	-7.8%
Manufacturing	\$17,354,000	-43.5%	Administration	284	-29.5%
Wholesale Trade	\$17,328,000	-78.8%	Wholesale Trade	272	-77.1%

Key: Change percentages are based on the change in household earnings or jobs between 2001 and 2019.

Looking at an economy based on the household earnings it generates, allows us to consider other economic drivers like retirees, farm payments, or other government transfer payments. Looking at economic drivers based on jobs provides another lens into a community's economy. Focusing on "earnings" first, Sidney and Cheyenne County's economy is driven by:

1. Retirees - \$180 million in 2019
2. Government including Education - \$47 million in 2019
3. Regional Hub City (e.g., Health Care, Retail Trade, etc.)
4. Farming (including Transportation, Warehousing, and Wholesale Trade)
5. Cabela's (e.g., Company Management and Commuters)

In 2017, inbound commuters ranked in the top 10 economic drivers based on household earnings. With the loss of Cabela's by 2019, commuters fell out of the top 10 economic sectors. Sidney, in large part of Cabela's, was an employment hub drawing workers from a vast rural region.

Economic drivers based on jobs created includes:

1. Regional Hub City (e.g., Retail Trade, Health Care Other Services)
2. Farming (including Transportation, Warehousing, and Wholesale Trade)
3. Hospitality¹⁰ (Primarily the Interstate 80 Interchange Services)
4. Cabela's
5. Manufacturing

¹⁰ Sidney is not a destination tourism spot. Its hospitality sector is driven by regional consumers and passing through traffic on Interstate 80. It is a high volume and low value economic activity currently.

In 2024, Sidney's economy is more diverse, lower value (largely due to the loss of high-paying Cabela's corporate jobs), and anchored as follows:

1. Retirees
2. Hub City (e.g., Retail Trade, Health Care, and Other Services)
3. Government including Education
4. Hospitality (Both Downtown and the I-80 Interchange)
5. Farming
6. Manufacturing

It is too soon to evaluate Sidney's evolving economy post-Cabela's, but later in this story we will share indicators of progress rooted in energizing entrepreneurial talent.

Progressive Pragmatic Conservatism... By any definition, politically this part of Nebraska is "RED". In the 2020 Presidential Election nearly 80% of all votes cast in Cheyenne County went for the re-election of Donald Trump. Vice President Joe Biden received about 18% of the County's vote and third-party candidates received 2.26%. The last time a Democrat won Cheyenne County was back in 1936 with the re-election of President Franklin Roosevelt.

But Sidney and Cheyenne County while historically conservative politically, most residents are not dogmatic. In Nebraska, we employ the idea of **progressive pragmatic conservatism**. Opinion survey data would indicate a preference for smaller government, and a likely dislike of Federal and State government, pragmatic progressive conservatives are willing however to actively support community economic development and the use of local government to provide excellence in health care, education, roads, public power, and economic development. Based on our work with Sidney and this rural region, we believe that when there is a strong base of support for collective action with progressive pragmatic conservatism winning the day.

Wrapping Up... Every community has complexities, but Sidney is more alike other communities of its size and situation than different. What is quite unique is its history of boom-and-bust economic cycles and its capacity to capture new opportunities and re-invent itself.

Part 3 – Sidney's Development Journey

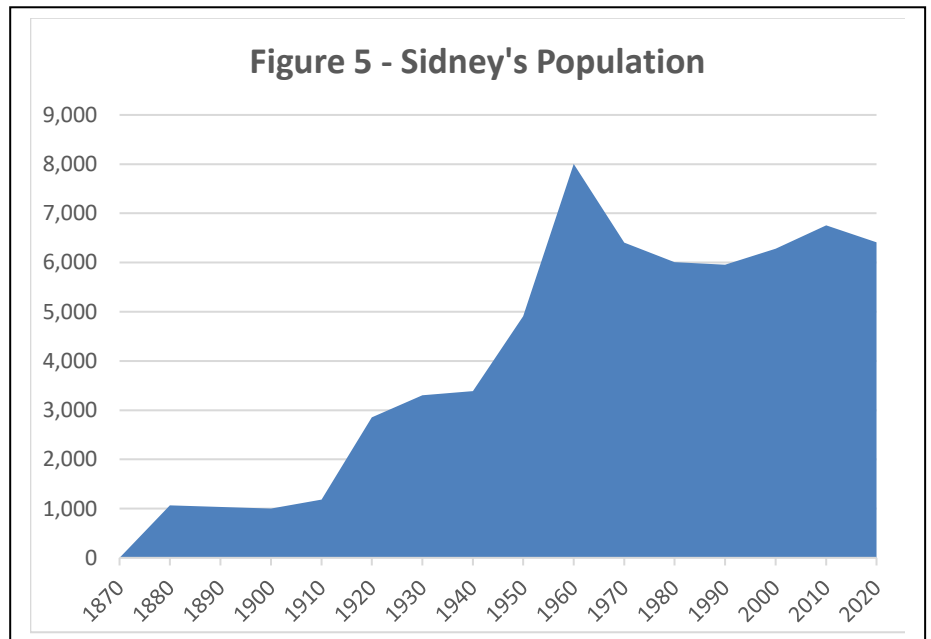
Opening... A History of Booms-and-Busts... Unlike any other Nebraska community, Sidney has experienced more socio-economic booms and busts over its brief history from the 1860s to today. Boom cycles create opportunity, wealth, and temporary prosperity. Conversely, bust cycles wreak havoc on communities, their residents, institutions, and businesses. Sidney has proven remarkably resilient through frequent boom-and-bust cycles. A powerful emerging pivot is Sidney's commitment to more diverse development rooted in entrepreneurship. Time will tell whether Sidney can grow an entrepreneur rooted economy and society resulting in more broadly held and sustained prosperity.

The following recaps Sidney's history of socio-economic booms and busts over its nearly 160 years of existence:

1. 1860s and 1870s - Transcontinental Railroad Boom and Bust
2. 1870s and 1880 - Black Hills Gold Rush Boom and Bust
3. 1870 through 1890s - Settlement Boom and Bust – Over-Settlement
4. Late 1800s – Fort Sidney Boom and Closure
5. 1940s into the 1970s – Sioux Army Ordinance Depot and Closure
6. 1950s into the 1970s – Oil Boom and Contraction
7. 1960s to 2018 – Cabela's Boom and Collapse
8. 1960s to Present – The Cold War and Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles¹¹
9. 1970s – Interstate 80 Boom and Contraction
10. 2020's – The Pandemic Housing Boom and Stabilization

Sidney averages one boom-and-bust cycle every 16 years. Quite remarkable for any community, let alone for a rural community. The economic impacts of boom-and-bust cycles are more obvious with job losses, failed businesses, depressed real estate markets, eroded local spending, and reduced local taxes. What is even more remarkable is Sidney's resiliency and ability to reinvent itself bending back to prosperity. Economic boom-and-bust cycles also create social boom-and-bust cycles. During boom periods social stressors can include rapid

population growth with new residents, housing and school shortages, and disruptions in the social fabric of a community, but also expanded economic opportunity. Bust cycles can translate into increased unemployment, rising poverty, and out-migration of residents. In Great Plains Rural America, when there is a lack of economic opportunities, residents tend to relocate to where better opportunities are perceived.¹²



¹¹ The U.S. Defense Department and the U.S. Airforce are planning to overhaul and upgrade the Ballistic Missile complex west of Sidney. This redevelopment could generate a micro-boom and bust cycle with an economic boom during construction and then a contraction once the construction is done.

¹² Economic distress in other parts of the U.S. often created rooted unemployment, rising disability numbers, and multi-generational poverty. For reference check out Central Appalachia, the Delta, Black Belt or Midwest Rust Belt Cities.

Figure 6 provides a more detailed overview of these socio-economic boom and bust cycles.

Figure 6. Sidney Boom and Bust Cycles Over Time

<p>#1 – 1860s and 1870s – Transcontinental Railroad – Black Hills Gold Rush</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 1862 – Congress Authorizes the Transcontinental Railroad ✓ 1863 – Construction Begins with the Union Pacific in the East and the Central Pacific in the West ✓ 1867 – Camp Sidney is Established to Protect Railroad Construction ✓ 1869 – The Transcontinental Railroad was Completed in Utah <p>During active railroad construction Sidney experienced a short-lived boom with a steep spike and then contraction in activity.</p>
<p>#2 – 1870s into the 1880s - Black Hills Gold Rush</p> <p>The Custer Expedition in 1874 confirmed gold in the Black Hills in what became South Dakota generated a Gold Rush Boom in 1876-1877. With the railroad in Sidney, the Sidney to Deadwood Road was established connecting the gold fields to supplies and people via Sidney. This connection to the Black Hills Gold Rush furthered boom time activity that declined as gold mining activity moderated over time in the Hills.</p>
<p>#3 – 1870 through 1890s - Settlement Boom and Bust – Ranches, Farms and Town Building</p> <p>The railroad, coupled with the 1862 Homestead Act and the end of the Civil War westward settlement in the Great Plains accelerated dramatically. Consider the following with respect to Cheyenne County’s population:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1870 Census – 190 Residents • 1880 Census – 1,558 Residents – 1870 to 1880 Change – 720% Increase • 1890 Census – 5,693 Residents – 1880 to 1890 Change – 265% Increase <p>By the 1900 Census Cheyenne County’s population stabilized at 5,570 residents marking the end of the Settlement Boom. With in-migration stabilization, there was contraction in population dropping to 4,551 residents or a 20% decrease in county population. During this two-decade long period, there was extensive and rapid development of villages, cities like Sidney, businesses, institutions, churches, ranches, farms and infrastructure. All of Nebraska between 1860 and 1900 experienced dramatic European-American settlement booms.</p>
<p>#4 - Late 1800s – Fort Sidney</p> <p>1867 – First Camp Lookout, then Fort Sidney, and finally the Sidney Barracks 1894 – The Frontier Closes – Indian Wars End – Fort Sidney Closes</p> <p>The history of Fort Sidney and the U.S. Army was relatively brief during the settlement phase in the community’s development. With the close of the Indian Wars in this part of America, the necessity for Fort Sidney was undermined. Across the west there are such military forts and posts now historical footnotes or attractions. There was a mini-boom and bust associated with the Fort.</p>

#5 - 1940s into the 1970s – Sioux Army Ordinance Depot

1939 – World War II begins in Europe with the Invasion of Poland

1941 – The U.S. enters the War with the Attack on Pearl Harbor by the Empire of Japan

1942 – The Sioux Army Ordinance Depot Created near Sidney

1970s – The Depot Closes with the U.S. Ending its War in Vietnam

The Depot represents on the largest boom and bust cycles in Sidney's history and included the following assets and activities:

- Nearly 20,000 Acres in Size
- 801 Ammunition Storage Units
- 22 Supply Warehouses
- 392 Support Buildings
- 225 Family Living Quarters
- Over 2,000 Workers at its Peak
- 203 Miles of Roads and 51 Miles of Railroad Spurs
- 600 Prisoners of War from Italy and Germany – Many Worked at the Depot

Given the population of Sidney (3,388) and Cheyenne County (9,505) in 1940, the Depot drew workers from a large region including new residents who moved to Sidney to work at the Depot. With its closing in the 1970s there was a major socio-economic contraction.

#6 - 1950s into the 1970s – Oil Boom and Contraction

1940s – First Oil Wells in Southeastern Nebraska

1950s – Oil Exploration in Southwest and the Southern Panhandle of Nebraska – Rapid Development

1966 – Peak Oil Production in Nebraska at 216 million barrels

1970s – The Oil Boom Moderates and Production Drops Significantly

Present – Oil Production Continues but at Significantly Lower Levels Compared to the Peak

Sidney, as the largest community in the Southern Panhandle, was a center of oil exploration, development and production activity. Sterling played a similar role for oil activity in Northeastern Colorado. This oil boom, like the boom associated with the Depot drove population increased and then declines:

- 1950 Census – 4,912 / Sidney – 12,081 / Cheyenne County
- 1960 Census – 8,004 / Sidney – 14,828 / Cheyenne County
- 1950 to 1960 Change – Sidney = 63% Increase – Cheyenne County = 23% Increase
- 1970 Census – 6,403 / Sidney – 10,778 Cheyenne County
- 1960 to 1970 Change – Sidney = 20% Decrease – Cheyenne County = 27% Decrease

Contraction in the oil fields, and particularly new exploration and development, dramatically decreased workers and drove the population declines. Some of these losses were offset by the construction of Interstate 80. There are still oil reserves in this part of the High Plains along with some modest production. Depending upon future supplies and demand, and particularly prices, these reserves could drive new development employing hydrological fracturing technology.

#7 - 1960s to 2019 – Cabela’s Boom to Collapse

1961 - Cabela’s founded in Chappell, Nebraska by Dick and Mary Cabela at their Kitchen Table
 1963 – Cabela’s Moves to Sidney and Younger Brother Jim Joins Cabela’s
 1965 – Cabela’s is Incorporated
 1972 – Bass Pro Shop is Created in Missouri – Future Owner of Cabela’s
 1986 – Cabela’s Opens a Facility in East Kearney
 1987 – The Sidney Retail Store Opens
 1992 – The Sidney Headquarter Complex Opens
 1996 – Cabela’s Acquires Gander Mountain
 2004 – Cabela’s Goes from Private to Public Ownership (\$230 million value) Making it an Acquisition Candidate
 2007 – The Great Recession Adversely Impacts Cabela’s
 2011 – The Royal Bank of Canada provides \$412 million in Credit
 2014 – Dick Cabela Passes Away
 2014 – Cabela’s Sells Cabela’s Trophy Properties
 2015 – Cabela’s Sells Outdoor Adventures
 2016 – Bass Pro Shop Announces it is Acquiring Cabela’s for \$5.5 billion
 2017 – Cabela’s Sells its Credit Card Operation to CapitalOne
 2017 - Cabela’s is Acquired by Bass Pro Shop – 2,000 Area Jobs Lost

The Cabela’s development never impacted Sidney’s population as dramatically as did the Depot and Oil developments. In 1960 around when Cabela’s was created, Sidney’s population was 8,004 (all-time peak) and dropped to 5,959 in 1990. Development of Cabela’s, like most start-ups, was slow and accelerated in the 1990s until its acquisition in 2017. Between 1990 and 2010 Sidney’s population increased from 5,959 to 6,757 or by nearly 8%.

Cabela’s generated jobs throughout a multi-county region in both Nebraska and Colorado. Each day hundreds of workers commuted into Sidney and other locations for work from across this region. While Cabela’s did not create massive population gains, it did create above average jobs and careers socially and economically diversifying Sidney and its region. The loss of Cabela’s damages Sidney’s brand and has spurred serious exploration around future community economic development.

#8 – 1960s to Present – The Cold War and Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles

Following World War II emerged the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the West including the United States. The development of nuclear weapons created a mutual destruction deterrent policy and environment. Part of this deterrent policy included development of the Minuteman Missiles, and the complex anchored out of Warren Air Force Base near Cheyenne, Wyoming.

This missile complex covers 10,000 square miles in this part of the High Plains including 150 missile silos. 80 of these silos were based in the Southern Nebraska Panhandle near Kimball. Kimball’s population increased from just around 2,000 residents in 1950 to 4,400 residents in 1960. An estimated 2,000 workers were engaged during the construction phase. Sidney benefitted from this development and then suffered when it ended.

The U.S. Air Force is committed to updating this 50-year-old infrastructure likely to create another moderate boom and bust cycle associated with construction activity.

#9 - 1970s – Interstate 80 Boom

1955 – First stretch of I-80 from Kimball to the Cheyenne County Line (before Interstate Authorization)
 1956 – Congress Passes the Federal-Aid Highway Act Launching the Interstate Highway Development
 1957-1961 – Phase 1 Construction – Omaha to Lincoln
 1960-1968 – Phase 2 - Grand Island to North Platte Construction
 1964-1970 – Phase 3 - Lincoln to Grand Island Construction
 1968-1975 – Phase 4 Construction – North Platte to I-76 and I-80 to the Wyoming Border
 October 1974 – The Final I-80 Segment Completed at the Sidney Interchange

Nebraska was the first state to complete its Interstate Highway construction.

Interstate 80 came late to Sidney in the fall of 1974. The final construction between Sidney and Big Springs created intensive direct construction activity as well as allied activities contributing to a mini-boom and bust. The primary I-80 interchange and all the associated commercial activity with it (e.g., lodging, food service, gasoline stations, truck stops, convenience stores, the first Cabela’s retail store, etc.) has had a larger and more lasting economic impact on the community. Traffic on I-80 is projected to continue to grow positioning the Sidney interchange economic cluster for continued success and growth. There will be periodic bursts in activity as the Nebraska Department of Transportation periodically rebuilds the Interstate.

2020’s – The Pandemic Housing Boom

The acquisition of Cabela’s by Bass Pro Shop in 2017 did not result in immediate regional job losses. But over a two-year period, jobs losses accelerated and peaked crashing area and particularly the Sidney’s housing market. At one time over 350 homes, deeply discounted were on the market due to displaced workers and their families leaving the area. But the overall tightening housing market (e.g., both in availability and affordability). In the larger region including the Denver Front Range Metroplex, drove a mini-housing boom as new residents acquired these discounted properties. The Sidney housing boom quickly quieted and moved to a tight once again housing market. Some theories suggest that part of this quick in-migration of new residents was driven by the Pandemic and the desire of people to move out of more densely populated regions like Denver.

This housing event illustrates that today any community capable of generating affordable housing is positioned to attract new residents. Given Sidney’s close location to the Denver Metroplex, this is a significant development opportunity worth further investigation.

The Future – Diversification and Resiliency – The Front Range Opportunity

Sidney has demonstrated an extraordinary capacity for renewal. As a community it has been opportunity focused and willing to invest heavily in development opportunities. But Sidney, has over its history, become overly dependent on narrow economic activities. Central to ensuring both a more prosperous future, as well as less boom-and-bust cycles, Sidney must commit to social and economic diversification.

Lessening of Social Norms and Space for Change... Socio-economic boom-and-bust cycles not only stress the economies of communities like Sidney, but the social fabric. There is a silver lining with these cycles illustrated by Sidney’s current renewal, or the lessening of social norms and political controls. The boom cycles bring new human talent, energy, and opportunity. The

bust cycle opens space for a community to re-envision itself and pursue new directions. *More on this important development later in this case study.*

Sidney's Development Journey... Understanding a community's development journey can provide foundational insight to how a community progresses, deals with stress events, and demonstrates resilience focusing on new opportunities. Figure 7 provides a year-to-year development journey chronology for Sidney and Cheyenne County.

Figure 7. Sidney and Cheyenne County, Nebraska's Development Chronology

Year	Key Event
Transcontinental Railroad	
The development of the first Transcontinental Railroad played a major role in Sidney's early development. The Union Pacific building track from Omaha in the east until connecting with the Central Pacific building from the west in Utah. Construction of the nearly 2,000-mile route began in 1863 and was completed in 1869. Along with a flurry of major Republic Party led national legislation in the 1860s, the <u>Pacific Railway Act</u> was passed by Congress and signed into law by then President Abraham Lincoln in 1862.	
1867	Sidney founded as along with Fort Sidney to protect and support the Union Pacific Railroad
Before Non-Native Settlement	
Long before European American settlers made this part of the High Plains home it, was occupied by a number of Indigenous People or Native Americans organized in linguist groups, Tribes and Clans. Lakota, Cheyenne (e.g., for which the county is named), Arapaho and Pawnee were all active in this part of the High Plains within North America's Great Plains. We must always remember that non-Native development was made possible by the marginalization, displacement of often genocide of Native Peoples like the Cheyenne.	
1870	Census population of Cheyenne County – 190 ¹³ No Census for Sidney
1871	Cheyenne County was formed within the State of Nebraska.
1874	Gold is discovered in the Black Hills (now South Dakota)
1876	Black Hills Gold Rush Peaks (1876 & 1877)
Black Hills Gold Rush and Sidney	
Despite Native American treaties, George Armstrong Custer led an U.S. Army expedition into the Black Hills in 1874 confirming gold. This led to a rush of non-Native persons into the Black Hills driving the 1870s Black Hills Gold Rush. With a bridge over the North Platte River, the Sidney to Deadwood Road was one of the primary routes into the Black Hills. Sidney linked the newly built transcontinental railroad with the Black Hills. The Black Hills Gold Rush accelerated Sidney's development and growth.	
<i>For a great historical fictionalize account of Sidney during these times read Mari Sandoz's <u>Miss Morissa, Doctor of the Gold Trail</u> (1955). In 1955 Nebraska author Mari Sandoz published <u>Miss Morissa, Doctor of the Gold Trail</u>.</i>	

¹³ It was not until the 1890 Census that the U.S. Census Bureau began counting Native Americans. It was in 1879 U.S. District Court case in Omaha, Nebraska, that Native Americans were recognized to have U.S. Civil Rights per the Chief Standing Bear trail. Early Census figures either do not county Native Americans or tend to under-count them due to residency challenges.

This fictionalized story rooted in deep research and facts, captures Sidney during the time of Fort Sidney, the Transcontinental Railroad, the Sidney and Deadwood Road and the Black Hills Gold Rush. In this story one captures these brief years of Sidney as a boom town, dynamic, ever changing and part of the last frontier on the High Plains.

1876	<p align="center">Battle of the Little Bighorn – Southeastern Montana Territory</p> <p>When Sidney was still very nascent it was part of a vast frontier where Plains Indians lived. In June 1876 George Armstrong Custer and parts of his command were destroyed by Plains Indians in the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Sidney was created in this Plains Indians War period. This was just two years after Custer’s expedition into the Black Hills.</p>
1870s	During the 1870s the County grows by 720%!
<p align="center">The First Boom Years</p> <p>Beginning in the mid to late 1870s this part of Nebraska experienced rapid net in-migration, settlement and population growth. In roughly 25 years this country went from “frontier” to fully settled with the formation of communities like Sidney and new farms, ranches, businesses, churches and public facilities.</p>	
1880	County Population = 1,558 - Sidney Census Population = 1,069
1880s	During the 1880s Cheyenne County grows by another 265%!
1889	Initial interest in oil exploration in the Nebraska Panhandle
1890s & 1900s	During the 1890s (-2.2%) and 1900s (-18.3%) Cheyenne County experiences population contraction related to the post-boom bust, drought and outmigration of Homesteaders. In the High Plains of the Great Plains Region that is semi-arid early non-Native settlement exceeded the capacity of the land and economy to support the booming numbers of in-migrants.
1890	County Population = 5,693 - Sidney Census Population = No Census numbers?
1900	County Population = 5,570 - Sidney Census Population = 1,001
1910s & 1920s	The County experiences strong population growth increasing by nearly 85% during the 1910s and another 21.2% in the 1920s.
<p align="center">1890 to 1910 Cheyenne County Population Contraction</p> <p>Between the 1890 to 1910 Census the County experienced a population loss of 20%. Sidney continued to grow. This was a period of dramatic change in agriculture in Nebraska impacting rural populations. Cheyenne County was over settled given the agricultural carrying capacity of the High Plains. Many settlers left, some moved to town, and farms and ranches were consolidated. In 1905 Congress also passed the Kinkaid Act granting 640 acres to settlers. Often called the “ranchers” versus “homesteaders” act, drove land consolidation particularly in western Nebraska and other ranching High Plains regions.</p>	
1910	County Population = 4,510 - Sidney Census Population = 1,185
<p align="center">World War I and Agriculture</p> <p>World War I ran from 1914 into November of 1918. While the U.S. did not enter the war officially until April 1917, this war drove demand for both agricultural and industrial products. This created a boom for this region’s wheat farmers and ranchers. Winner hard red wheat, a major crop in the arid High Plains was particularly in demand during World War I and the U.S.’s rapid industrialization driven by the war effort.</p>	
1920	<p>County Population = 8,405 - Sidney Census Population = 2,852</p> <p><i>Up until the 1930s, most rural counties in the Great Plains had significantly larger populations than lead cities. Over time, lead cities contained more and more of a county’s population.</i></p>

Drought, Dust Bowl and Coming Great Depression	
During World War I the demand for food and fiber drove converting High Plains (e.g., from the foothills of the Rocky Mountains in the west to the 100 th Meridian in the east) range land into intensively cropped agriculture. Most of the country lacked irrigation during this period and when drought socked into the Central High Plains, fragile topsoil began to blow the creating epic Dust Bowl years. These hard times impacted many rural communities. However, Cheyenne County and Sidney continued to grow between 1920 and 1930.	
1930	County Population = 10,187 - Sidney Census Population = 3,306
Great Depression of the 1930s	
Cheyenne County experiences population contraction once again associated with drought, the dust bowl and the Great Depression of the 1930s as rural residents, often tied to and supporting farms and ranches left for urban areas in hope of jobs. The Great Depression along with a crisis in production agriculture drove rural residents to cities like Sidney and larger communities like Denver, Lincoln and Omaha. Farm and ranch consolidation continued.	
1940s	Sidney was home to the World War II era Sioux Army Ordinance Depot.
Military Tradition Continues...	
From the 1870s non-permanent Army camps protecting builders of the Union Pacific Railroad, continuing with Fort Sidney, the military tradition continued with the founding of the Sioux Army Ordinance Depot. The Depot was among hundreds of military ordinance storage sites spread across the United States. Sidney's location along the main line of the Union Pacific Railroad was a major factor in the location of the Depot. Upon retirement of the Depot, this large acreage becoming an important development asset and home to the Sidney branch of the Western Nebraska Community College.	
1940	County Population = 9,505 - Sidney Census Population = 3,388
World War II	
World War II ran from 1939 into the fall of 1945. While the U.S. did not officially join the war until 1941 with Pearl Harbor, this war, like World War I drove demand for agricultural and industrial products. This created boom times for this region's wheat farmers, ranchers and allied industries.	
1950	County Population = 12,081 - Sidney Census Population = 4,912
Southern Panhandle Oil Boom	
During the 1950s and 1960s oil exploration, development and production increased dramatically creating a demographic and economic boom. The entire Tri-State Region (i.e., northeast Colorado, northwest Kansas, southwest Nebraska and the southern Panhandle in Nebraska. Between 1950 and 1960 Cheyenne County population grew by 23% and Sidney grew by 63%. This boom moderated quickly even though overall oil production continued for another decade. The influx of workers and some families drove business development in household and business services sectors. Between 1960 and 1970 Cheyenne County's population contracted by 20% and Sidney lost 27% of its population. Oil exploration and particularly well field drilling and development, creating lots of jobs, but on-going production requires far few workers.	
1960	County Population = 14,828 - Sidney Census Population = 8,004 The County peaks in population with 14,828 residents!
1960s	Southern Panhandle oil exploration and production boom <i>County peak population co-insides with the period's oil boom years.</i>

1961	<p style="text-align: center;">Cabela's Founded</p> <p>Cabela's, branded as the "World's Foremost Outfitter" Was founded in Chappell, Nebraska (1960 population of 1,280) in 1961. Early growth of Cabela's, like most startups, was slow and then accelerated.</p>
1962	Cabela's headquarters moves from Chappell to Sidney.
1965	Western Community College based in Scottsbluff establishes a campus in Sidney on the ground of the World War II Sioux Army Ordinance Depot.
1970	County Population = 10,778 - Sidney Census Population = 6,403
<p>1960 to 1990 – 30 Years of Contraction</p> <p>Sidney experiences population decline and economic contraction between 1960 and 1990. Its population declined by 2,045 residents or 26%. Peak population for Sidney was in 1960. This bust period was more significant when compared to Cabela's bust in the 2020s. Ironically, the boom that was the growth of Cabela's started during 1960s. Sidney and this region double downed in its support for Cabela's and its development and growth. In many ways, in at least the Central Great Plains, Sidney and Cabela's shared an identity.</p>	
1970s	Interstate 80 reaches Sidney and over the years the Sidney interstate interchange has developed into a larger commercial zone with lodging, retail (Cabela's Store), food services, motor vehicle services (e.g., gasoline stations, convenience stores and truck stops), other amenities and non-interstate related commercial and industrial development.
1980	County Population = 10,057 - Sidney Census Population = 6,010
<p>The Cabela's Boom</p> <p>Cabela's experiences sustained and rather dramatic growth contributing to employment and impact in not only Sidney where its headquarters was located, but throughout the entire region with employees coming from a multi-county region including Sterling in northeastern Colorado and creating auxiliary operations in smaller communities in the region. Economic development was focused on supporting and keeping Cabela's in the community and growing. It is unusual today for a company the size of Cabela's at its peak, to be located in an airport isolated and relatively small rural community. Zippia (www.zippia.com) provides a comprehensive development timeline or history for Cabela's including its major plays in Sidney and area communities in Northeastern Colorado and Western Nebraska.</p>	
1990	County Population = 9,494 - Sidney Census Population = 5,959
<p>1990 to 2020 – Population Growth</p> <p>While Cheyenne County has not surpassed its 1960 peak population of nearly 15,000 residents, the depopulation experienced by Sidney between 1960 and 1990 was replaced with 20 years of population growth driven by Interstate 80 interchange development, Cabela's headquarters and allied activities and other development. Between the 1990 Census and 2010, Sidney's population grew from 5,959 to 6,757 or by over 13%. Not only did Sidney benefit from Cabela's expansion, but other communities hosted facilities and jobs. Workers from a multi-county region commuted to Sidney to work at Cabela's and other employers.</p>	
1997	Sidney passes LB840 providing funding for economic development. Sidney was among the first Nebraska communities to use this new tool provided by the State.
2000	County Population = 9,830 - Sidney Census Population = 6,282
2004	Sidney based Cabela's decides to move from private ownership becoming a public company with an estimated initial stock offering of \$230 million. Prior, Cabela's was a privately owned

	company experiencing financial challenges. Once it became public it made its private owners wealthy in most cases, but then became a candidate for acquisition.
<p>Great Recession – December 2007 through June 2009</p> <p>The housing bubble was building and in late 2007 the bubble burst creating a financial crisis in the United States that became the Great Recession. The Great Recession is the most severe economic downturn since the 1930s Great Depression. While the Great Recession technically ended in June 2009, the Great Recession Recovery was slow and weak making it seem like a longer event. Well into the mid-2010s, many cities were still struggling, hammered real estate markets, and owners still underwater. Recreational and sporting goods sales and services are a discretionary consumer area. In retrospect Cabela’s, with its rapid expansions, was severely weakened by the Great Recession contributing to debt, weaker sales and softer profits. These conditions make Cabela’s a strong candidate for consolidation within this retailing space through acquisition.</p>	
2010	County Population = 9,998 - Sidney Census Population = 6,756
<p>Growth Can Be Risky and Even Kill</p> <p>During this new century Cabela’s was aggressive in its development of its retail stores across the country, online retailing expansions, its credit card business and specialty services. Timing is important and growth coinciding with the Great Recession hit Cabela’s hard. Cabela’s could have been acquired by a company that specialized in dismantling companies and extracting maximum gains for investors. Some of this dismantling did happen to Cabela’s (e.g., its Credit Card company spin off), but it was acquisition by Bass Pro Shop continuing its operations if not its Sidney headquarters. Growth with bad timing can kill companies. This is part of Cabela’s and Sidney’s bust history.</p>	
2016	Sidney’s Population Peaks at 6,990 Residents
2017	Cabela’s is acquired by Bass Pro Shop
2018	A major donor gift was made to the community creating a significant Donor Advised Fund hosted by the Nebraska Community Foundation. This Fund is capable of providing additional funding for community economic development.
<p>Cabela’s Acquired by Bass Pro Shop</p> <p>Home grown Cabela’s was acquired by Bass Pro Shop. The estimated purchase price was \$5 billion. Following the acquisition Cabela’s Sidney headquarters was largely transferred to Bass Pro Shop’s headquarters resulting in massive job losses. Between 2010 and 2020 Sidney’s population declined by 642 residents or 9.5%. During this period of Cabela’s downsizing and employment loss, Sidney’s housing market went from strong and tight, to awash in for-sale properties and depressed housing market. Estimates indicate that Cabela’s in Sidney the job loss is estimated at 2,000 workers. Impacts regional are likely larger.</p>	
November 2019	Nebraska Extension is retained by the City of Sidney to support City strategic planning. e2 completed its first Development Opportunity Profile of Cheyenne County. The University team was cautioning the community get ready for massive contraction and possibly crisis
2019	Sidney’s Population Hits a Low at 6,180 Residents – A Loss of 810 Residents in Four Years
<p>World Health Pandemic – Inflow of New Residents – Housing Availability and Affordability</p> <p>In late 2019 America was on the verge of a major world health pandemic associated with COVID-19. By March 2020 the full force of the Pandemic was asserting itself, and in America and folks outside of Sidney (e.g., most likely the Front Range of Colorado) discovered Sidney had housing and it was remarkably affordable. By 2021 Sidney’s surplus housing was gone and the community was experiencing a housing shortage once again.</p>	
2020	County Population = 9,428 - Sidney Census Population = 6,409

<p>Housing Bust to Housing Boom</p> <p>Depending on the source, at times Sidney following the Cabela’s crash had between 300 and 400 housing units on the market. By 2021 all these units were purchased or occupied. We suspect, pending further research, that many of these new families, households and individuals migrated from the housing short and high-cost Denver Front Range Metroplex. The introduction of so many new residents empowered by available and affordable housing is worth future study focusing on this human talent impacts on Sidney’s future development.</p>	
2021	<p>Sidney joins E3 Early Organizing First E3 Gathering in Ord, Nebraska Opportunity Assessments Community Engagement Early E3 Strategy Development</p>
2022	<p>Sidney E3 is focusing on building capacity and exploring creation of an Inter-Local Agreement to foster strategic and more articulated community economic development. Key within this emerging game plan is a commitment to more robust and stable funding, and stable and expanded staffing.</p>
March 2023	<p>SAGA or the Sidney And Area Fund Created An Affiliated Fund of the Nebraska Community Foundation Dedicated fund for Sidney E3</p>
2023	<p>Population recovery continues with 2023 counting 6,440 residents</p>
2024	<p>Sidney continues to recover. 2024 population estimate of 6,448 residents.</p>
<p>The Future – A New Vision...</p> <p>For nearly 60 years Sidney and its region capitalized on the fortunes of the Caleba’s Corporation. It was an amazing ride bringing national name recognition, remarkable human talent, population growth where other rural communities were losing residents, and prosperity. Cabela’s dance ended in 2018 and created a severe recession in this community. But the loss of Cabela’s and its corporate dominance and influence disrupted old thinking and power structures, creating room for new leadership, thinking, and a vision of a communities energized by entrepreneurs and more diverse and resilient economy and society. Time will tell if this future vision is sustained. For now, the indicators are promising, and the recovery from Cabela’s loss remarkable.</p>	

Opportunity Focused – Home Run Mentality... A careful review of the detailed development timeline in Figure 6 illustrates Sidney’s “home run” mentality. Sidney capitalized on major new developments whether the 1960s oil boom or Cabela’s run. Sidney’s development interests tended to double down on their major developments riding them to prosperity until they were gone. The prosperity curse¹⁴ undermines a community’s interest in and willingness for investing in economy diversification. While Sidney was supportive of other business developments during the Cabela’s years, priority number one was growing and sustaining Cabela’s.

¹⁴ The prosperity curse occurs when a community is successful and doing well. It lessens the need and motivation for aggressive development. With single economic drivers like oil or Cabala’s there is a tendency to focus on the major development and not invest in economic diversification, let alone entrepreneurial development.

Demonstrated Resiliency... For too many rural communities once dependent upon single industries¹⁵, when these industries decline or are lost, they do not renew but continue into a long-term period of chronic decline with rising net outmigration hollowing out a region's population base and market. For example, according to the Economic Policy Institute¹⁶ study found that North Carolina lost nearly 120,000 factory related jobs by 2013 following China joining the World Trade Organization in 2001. Rural communities home to these workers were in most cases permanently damaged. Sidney counters this predominate pattern. Following each socio-economic crash, Sidney found a new way forward to renewed population and prosperity. In each of these estimated 10 boom-and-bust cycles, Sidney discovered and focused on a single industry or development opportunity. Such resilience is remarkable. This time around Sidney is taking a different path focusing on developing a more diverse economy rooted in entrepreneurs.

Wrapping Up... Understanding a community's development history is foundational to understanding its possibilities for future development. Key community champions in Sidney have learned about their boom-and-bust history. In understanding this history, they are making the case for a new way forward back to prosperity. These leaders and builders are compelling in making the case for entrepreneurship and its resulting diversification. Beyond understanding a community development past, the next essential is rooted in appreciating asset-based development.

Part 4 – Assets and Opportunities

Opening... An asset has many definitions but according to Wikipedia... *"It is anything (tangible or intangible) that can be used to produce positive economic value."* While we can agree with this definition, in the community context it needs to be modified also including community quality of life, and for rural communities, the ability to attract and retain residents.

Dictionary.com defines opportunity several ways this useful, including... *"(2) a situation or condition favorable for attainment of a goal, and (3) a good position, chance, or prospect, as for advancement or success."*

Every community, even the most poverty stricken and isolated communities, have development assets and opportunities. Unfortunately, too many rural communities focus on their deficiencies and weaknesses, failing to realize core assets and opportunities when activated can lead to material community economic development. Sidney has many development assets and

¹⁵ For example, timber in the Pacific Northwest, furniture in Georgia, textiles in North Carolina, energy production in Wyoming, or railroads in Chicago.

¹⁶ <https://www.citizen.org/article/north-carolina-job-loss-during-the-nafta-wto-period/#:~:text=The%20Economic%20Policy%20Institute%20also,World%20Trade%20Organization%20in%202001.>

opportunities, but there are five inter-related assets and opportunities warranting further description:

Sidney's Primary Development Assets and Opportunities...

1. Regional Hub City
2. Denver Metroplex
3. Interstate 80
4. Affordable High Quality of Life
5. Cabela's Human Talent Legacy

Regional Hub City... In the field of geography there is the ***Hierarchy of Communities Theory***. This theory is somewhat dated but explains how our landscape is settled with a nesting of communities from isolated farms and ranches in the countryside to first tier metropolitan areas like New York City. Our North America landscape reflects this nesting. Sidney is a regional hub city, serving a rather large rural area composed of smaller cities, towns, and villages, as well as rural outposts like farms and ranches. Sidney's trade area extends towards Sterling in northern Colorado to the south, east into Keith County, reaching multiple rural communities and counties to the north, and Scottsbluff/Gering to the west.

As a hub regional city Sidney's economy and society is more diverse providing health care, education, retail, services, government, and entertainment amenities. Sidney's Interstate 80 interchange also provides amenities for truckers and motor vehicle travelers regionally and on transcontinental trips. As a hub city Sidney has additional entrepreneurial development opportunities including exporting via sales taxes part of its tax burden to regional visitors and I-80 travelers. At the other end of the spectrum, Sidney nests within the Greater Denver Metropolitan Area as an outer footprint community to this second-tier metro.

Denver Metroplex... According to the Center for Sustainable Systems and their U.S. Cities Factsheet, 83% of all Americans now live in metropolitan areas like Denver. This share of U.S. population is up from 64% in 1950 and is estimated to grow to 89% by 2050. Denver and its metroplex is a growing and dynamic economy and society. It is vast geographically and now home to over three million residents. Sidney, Cheyenne County, and its region nests within the outer footprint of the Denver metroplex. This association with Denver offers community economic development opportunities. Entrepreneurs based in Sidney's region can tap large urban markets easily. Additionally, there are significant cost of living and doing business differences between Denver and Sidney. Sidney offers lower costs, more affordable land for development, dramatically lower congestion, and less perceived crime. Sidney works well, unlike parts of the Denver metroplex, with strong public and private services including taxpayer provided public schools and other amenities. Optimizing Sidney's development assets and opportunities relative to the Denver metroplex is a material advantage.

Interstate 80... According to the Nebraska Department of Transportation, the current annual daily traffic counts at the Sidney Interstate 80 interchange is 8,371 daily representing over three million motor vehicles annually. This is 500 times greater than Sidney's resident consumer market. While most of these travelers do not stop at Sidney on their way east to Wyoming or west into Nebraska, significant numbers do stop to buy some fuel, purchase a meal, or stay overnight at an interchange motel. Compared to Sidney's traditional downtown area, more commerce occurs at its I-80 interchange. Being a service hub along I-80 creates entrepreneurial development opportunities for Sidney. Additionally, traffic on I-80 is projected to grow substantially over time increasing opportunities to build a stronger entrepreneurial economy rooted in Sidney's I-80 interchange opportunity.

Affordable High Quality of Life... In 2024 the median¹⁷ listing price for a home in Denver was \$585,000. For more preferred neighborhoods, let alone the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, the median house prices can range up to \$800,000 or more.¹⁸ Conversely, the median house price in Sidney is \$225,000¹⁹ or 38% of the cost for a similar house in Denver. Housing costs are a good indicator of overall comparable cost of living and doing business in a community. One cannot see snow-capped Rocky Mountains from Sidney, but Sidney is just two hours drive to the mountains and there is no smog. Additionally, Sidney offers significantly less congestion, crime, and a very high quality of life when considering health care, public education, and other essential and desired amenities.

Cabela's Human Resource Legacy... Every community has development assets and opportunities. Sidney, as noted has unique and important development assets and opportunities. But possibly no development asset and opportunity are more important than Cabela's human resource legacy. Compared to other rural communities like Sidney, Sidney is special in having been recently home to a thriving national corporation. Being home to a growing and entrepreneurial corporation like Cabela's attracted and developed an entire generation of human talent.

Corporate headquarters, particularly those competitive in national and international markets, empower a wide range of professional careers including marketing, communications, management, human resources, retailing, logistics, information technology, social media, and so much more. At one time Cabela's employed around 2,000 workers in its corporate headquarters and retail store. Cabela's I-80 retail store remains open within the Bass Pro Shops corporation branded as a Cabela's store. However, most other corporate employment has been lost.

Capable and Talent Human Talent is Foundational...

¹⁷ Median price means that 50% of the houses listed for sale cost less and 50% cost more.

¹⁸ Zillow

¹⁹ Realtor.com

All research points to the fact that many of these corporate employees left Sidney to work for Bass Pro Shops in its Springfield, Missouri corporate headquarters or migrated to other jobs outside of the community and region. But not all of Cabela's corporate workers left for good. Many chose to stay, and some returned to Sidney after spending time with Bass Pro Shops or other employers. This cluster of former Cabela's employees, with the rich experiences, talents, and professional skills, became core to its E3 entrepreneurial initiative. Based on our analysis we believe that this unique pool of collaborative and talented former Cabela's employees is foundational to Sidney's commitment to entrepreneurship and its success in building a high-performing entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Wrapping Up... With community centered community economic development, asset-based development ensures optimal opportunities and success. Sidney's E3 champions and builders, in understanding Sidney's development assets and opportunities, are engineering a smart and impactful community economic development game plan driving renewal. What is remarkable about Sidney's latest development chapter, is the pace of recovery and renewal following the massive loss of the Cabela's corporate headquarters.

Part 5 – Cabela's

Opening... Central to this story of Sidney and its embrace of entrepreneur focused development is Cabela's, once a national recreational retail giant based in Sidney, and its corporate headquarters demise when acquired by Missouri-based Bass Pro Shops in 2017. With Cabela's, Sidney and its region had become increasingly dependent upon this one company. Cabela's defined the community, its political culture, and its power structure. In understanding Cabela's and its relationship with Sidney, the context for Sidney's renewal via entrepreneur-based community economic development becomes powerful providing many important lessons for other rural communities.

Cabela's Story... There are many stories about the Cabela's family and brothers who birthed Cabela's. The following is from the Cabela's website²⁰...

"Cabela's was born around a kitchen table in 1961 when Dick Cabela started filling fishing fly mail orders with his wife, Mary, from their home in Chappell, Nebraska. Classified ads in newspapers and national outdoor magazines led to a thriving direct-mail catalog business, then Dick convinced his younger brother Jim to join the new company, which he did in 1963. Cabela's grew and built on its foundation as a catalog business, producing nearly 50 catalogs annually and shipping affordable, high-quality outdoor equipment to all 50 states and 125 countries. Cabela's retail division quickly flourished, with locations throughout the United States and Canada providing a truly unique shopping experience for outdoor enthusiasts and their families.

²⁰ <https://www.cabelas.com/shop/en/about-us>

Inspired by a core value of helping connect more people to nature, Bass Pro Shops was founded in 1972 by avid young angler Johnny Morris, who began selling fishing tackle from eight square feet of shelf space in his father's liquor store in Springfield, Missouri. In 2017, Cabela's joined forces with Bass Pro Shops to become North America's premier outdoor and conservation company and leverage our combined purchasing power to deliver better value to customers. Today, we use our shared values to deliver to customers unforgettable retail experiences, unmatched equipment manufacturing, world-class resort destinations and outstanding customer service.

Today, Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's welcomes more than 200 million annual visitors to its 200 retail and marine center locations, winning awards for innovative retail stores and being honored as one of America's top employers and ranking among the most reputable retailers in all of North America. Guided by the visionary leadership of noted conservationist Johnny Morris, together we're doing more than ever to advance conservation, celebrate our cherished outdoor traditions, and inspire everyone to enjoy, love and conserve the great outdoors."

This story of Cabela’s and its founding has a strong corporate twist. While accurate it only captures part of the origin story rooted in the complex stories of brothers Richard and Jim, and Richard’s wife Mary. The brothers’ parents were successful in the furniture business with a widely shopped at store in Chappell just down the road from Sidney. The brothers loved to fish and hunt. These activities were passions. The brothers, to the lament of their parents, had little interest in continuing in the family’s furniture store. Like other successful entrepreneurs, they found a way to make a living rooted in their passions. The following is a quick timeline of the Cabela’s story...

Figure 8. The Cabela’s Timeline

Richard (Dick) Cabela born in Chappell, NE	1936	Died in 2014 at 77 in Sidney, NE
Mary (Cabela) was born in Wyoming	1937	Died at age of 86 in Sidney, NE
James (Jim) Cabela is born in Chappell, NE	1939	In 2024 Jim is 85 and living in Sidney
Cabela’s Founded in Chappell	1961	Dick is 25 and Mary is 24
Growth in Sales Requires Expansion	1962	First Warehouse Established
Jim joins Dick and Mary with Cabela’s	1963	For most of Cabela’s life it was family-held.
Originally a Mail Order and Catalog Business		
Free fishing flies with shipping and handling. These ads began Cabela’s and early in its life its growth rooted in its mail order and catalog business. Eventually, Cabela’s added other lines of related “outdoor” business including 50 major retail stores in the United States and Canada by 2014.		
Cabela’s Moves from Chappell to Sidney Moved into a former John Deere Dealership	1968	In 1960 Sidney had 8,004 residents Compared to Chappell’s population of 1,280
Bass Pro Shops Founded	1972	Springfield, Missouri
Cabela’s Expansion Accelerates	1986	Acquires the Rockwell International Plant in Kearney, NE
Cabela’s Opens its I-80 Store	1991	75,000 Square Feet Store

Warehouse Space Expands in Sidney	1992	Equal in Size to 10 Football Fields
Cabela's Acquires Gander Mountain	1996	Distribution Center in Prairie du Chien Added
Fourth Retail Store Added	1998	Prairie du Chien
Kansas City Expansion	2001	Part of a \$500 Million Development
Purchase of Maiden Mills	2002	Fabrics for Outdoor Activities
Rapid Cabela's Growth		
<p>Leading up to the start of the Great Recession, beginning in December 2007, Cabela's was on a roll. The American economy was booming, and consumers were buying. Discretionary spending, core to Cabela's fiscal health was very strong contributing to a pattern of new investment, expansion, and debt. Timing is everything and with the pending recession Cabela's rapid growth and debt positioned it for hard times.</p>		
Cabela's Becomes a Public Company Initial Stock Offering of \$230 Million	March 2004	Becomes a Candidate for Acquisition Key Founders & Leaders Enriched
2007-2009 – America's Great Recession		
<p>The Great Recession was America's worst economic downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s. With the Great Recession consumers pulled back from discretionary spending adversely impacting Cabela's. As revenues contracted Cabela's was in an expansionary mode incurring overhead and debt. The company begins selling off assets to service debt. Cabela's now as public corporation was weakened and increasingly a candidate for acquisition.</p>		
30% Revenues from Direct Sales	2012	59% of Revenues from Retail Stores
Cabela's Sues Gander Mountain	2013	For Patent Infringement
Cabela's has 50 Stores in the U.S. & Canada Dick Cabela Dies	2014	Loss of a Founder Sidney – February 17, 2014 – Age 77
Sells Outdoor Adventures & T.A.G.S.	2015	To Worldwide Trophy Adventures
Bass Pro Shops Announces <i>Job Hirings Curtailed</i>	2016	An Agreement to Acquire Cabela's Sidney's Population Peaks at 6,990
Cabela's Job Losses		
<p>In 2016 new job hirings stopped and by the time Bass Pro Shops announces its acquisition of Cabela's job terminations at the corporate headquarters began and accelerated. As more and more people lost their Cabela's jobs outmigration increased, population contracted, and the housing market crashes with a glut of homes on the market for sale.</p>		
Bass Pro Shops Acquires <i>Sidney's Population Drops to 6,602</i>	2017	Cabela's – It Becomes a Branded Division A Nearly 6% Population Contraction
Sidney Enters Economic Recession	2018	Population Drops to 6,357 or by 3.7%
Economic Recession Continues	2019	Population Drops to 6,180 or by 2.8%
From Recession to Recovery		
<p>The decline in Sidney's population bottomed out in 2019 at around 6,180 residents. The deep recession was abating and the availability of affordable (relative to the Denver market) housing was drawing new residents motivated also by the World Health Pandemic and its restrictions. From its peak population in 2016 to its bottoming out in 2019, Sidney lost 810 residents or nearly 12% of its pre-Cabela's crash population.</p>		
Population Rebounds at 6,409 or +3.7%	2020	New In-migration Due to Housing Availability

World Health Pandemic

The Pandemic was good for Bass Pro Shops and its Cabela's Division as consumers embraced discretionary spending and outdoor activities. The Pandemic also drove city residents to new and more rural locations. Sidney with considerable affordable and high-quality housing stock, was a magnet for new residents mostly fleeing the Denver metroplex.

Sidney's Population Stabilizes	2021	Sidney Joins E3 Embracing Entrepreneurship
Sidney's E3 team begins building a strong entrepreneurship strategy.	2022	Entrepreneur Navigator Hired & Activated
	2023	Entrepreneur Support Well-Established
Slow Population Rebound 2021-2024	2024	112 New Businesses Founded – 2021-2024

Timeline Sources: <https://www.zippia.com/cabela-s-careers-1863/history/>
Various research and records curated by e2.

Single Industry Community... Throughout rural America, company towns²¹ have determined prosperity and decline. Mining communities in Appalachia or the Rocky Mountain West come to mind where all economic activity is rooted with the predominate company like the coal mine. The company controls or influences housing, schools, amenities, where one shops, and who has jobs. Businesses reliance on workers and the company forge alliance with the company to stay in its good graces. Cabela's never became a company town in the truest sense of the concept. However, its influence in Sidney over five decades grew and became dominate over time. Sidney's development interests focused on supporting Cabela's growth and servicing its interests. A single industry or company community, like Sidney, face a number of development challenges, including:

- 1. Less Attention for Other Development.** A dominate company and employer garners a disproportionate share of a community's development interest and support. Other development opportunities were neglected and there was a failure to adequately diversify the economy beyond Cabela's. This positioned Sidney to crash when the corporate headquarters was eliminated.
- 2. Political and Cultural Control.** A dominate company wheels extensive political and cultural influence and control. Based on interviews with Sidney citizens in the 2018 and 2019 timeframe, any significant new development required Cabela's blessing. Any proposal facing quiet opposition from Cabela's was generally doomed. Over time, Sidney became more and dependent upon sales taxes to fund municipal government employing Tax Increment Financing or TIF to underwrite both Cabela's and non-Cabela's real estate development. As the largest real estate developer in Sidney, Cabela's was a primary beneficiary of TIF that undermined the property tax base and revenues.

²¹ More on Company Towns:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Company_town#:~:text=A%20company%20town%20is%20a,%2C%20markets%2C%20and%20recreation%20facilities.

- 3. Adverse Effects of the Prosperity Curse.** *The concept of the Prosperity Curse is rooted in the reality that when times are good there is less pressure for change. In community economic development, good times undermine a community's willingness to consider alternative development paths and projects. The golden goose or Cabela's was delivering prosperity, dominating development priorities, and negating the necessity for change. With this rather harsh assessment, it is important to note that Sidney's long-time economic developer was aggressive in courting other business attraction and larger employer retention. This focus on traditional development, and did not robustly support grass roots entrepreneurial development, now Sidney's primary focus.*

Motivation for Change... Let's begin with a definition of "status quo" or the "existing state". Vocabulary.com offers the following definition and illustration...

"The status quo is the current state of things. If you are rich and admired, then you're probably not interested in disrupting the status quo. Status quo is Latin for "existing state." When we talk about the status quo, however, we often mean it in a slightly bad way."

The status quo, in this case growing Cabela's was a powerful force for staying the course and not shifting to other development options. While great opportunities can be a motivator for change²², severe distress is generally a greater motivator. For Ord, Nebraska the commitment for fundamental change was driven by the hard times during and following the 1980's *Agricultural Crisis* and its associated chronic and severe socio-economic decline.

Sidney's motivation for change is strongly influenced by Cabela's induced crisis. We can speculate whether Sidney would have mobilized and embraced entrepreneurship if Cabela's corporate headquarters, or even part of it, had remained in Sidney. Nebraska Community Foundation leaders indicated that Sidney was selected for E3 in part because of this crisis. The motivation was present, there were potential leaders, but E3 was essential, in the words of these leaders, in providing Sidney the structure, knowledge and support to embrace entrepreneurship.

Wrapping Up... Cabela's story is foundational to this Sidney story of hope and renewal. The loss of Cabela's is a primary cause of so much that has happened since in Sidney. In understanding Cabela's story, we can better understand Sidney's evolving entrepreneurial story.

²² For example, down I-80 in Ogallala, Nebraska to the east of Sidney, the opportunity to secure a casino and horse racing track mobilized development interests driving change in this comparably sized community.

Conclusion to Chapter 1

Chapter 1 is a long and complex read. This backgrounding of Sidney and its region, and its association with Cabela's, provides the opportunity, motivation, and emerging explanation for Sidney's development pivot, changing power structures, and its renewal toward prosperity. There is more context we could share, but hopefully Chapter 1 provides adequate context for the rest of this Sidney story.

For more detail refer to Attachment B and Sidney and Cheyenne County's E3 Baseline prepared in September 2022 during the first year of E3's entrepreneurial ecosystem building work.



Our next stop is Chapter 2 and the **Path Forward**.

What does it mean to be an “entrepreneurial community.” At e2 being an entrepreneurial community includes three attributes. First, there is a strong community commitment to entrepreneur-focused community economic development. Second, the community has invested in creating and supporting an effective entrepreneurial ecosystem providing customized support to area entrepreneurs. Finally, it means a community that is generating entrepreneurial community economic development outcomes and impacts.

Chapter 2 – Becoming and Entrepreneurial Community

Introduction to Chapter 2

For over 100 years rural America has depended upon extractive natural resources like farming and timber, major real estate development like resorts, and industrial attraction to diversify an otherwise undifferentiated economy and society. From the very beginning of the United States entrepreneurship in the form of farms and small businesses, and then innovative growth companies evolving into Fortune 500 corporations proved paramount. Traditional economic development, vested in incentive-based business attraction and natural resource industries like tourism, continue to hold sway in much of rural America. Some rural communities, like Sidney have begun to pivot focusing real investment and energy into entrepreneur-led development. Chapter 2 our case study focuses on Sidney becoming a rural entrepreneurial community.

Part 1 – Cabela’s Crisis and Change

Opening... In 2016 Sidney was still a community dominated by Cabela’s and its corporate headquarters employing 2,000 workers in a community of just 7,000. Workers from a three-state region commuted to Sidney to work for Cabela’s or Cabela’s satellite operations in neighboring communities. In Chapter 1 our case study dived into Cabela’s central role in Sidney’s story.

Cabela’s demise and the socio-economic crisis empowered the potential for fundamental change in Sidney and its development direction. The Cabela’s crisis generated two powerful forces leading to Sidney’s pivot from traditional to entrepreneurship development:

1. Need for Change
2. Weakening Status Quo Power and Control

Need for Change... A severe and sustained crisis can activate rural communities to undertake major change. Natural disasters like tornados, floods, or wildfires can create a crisis. The loss of a major employer or economic recession can also create a crisis within communities. In Sidney’s

case the loss of Cabela's created an economic but also a demographic and identity crisis. Sidney, unlike most rural communities in the Great Plains was thriving and it had a national positive identity in being home to Cabela's. With the loss of Cabela's corporate headquarters, the need for change was energized within the community. This was also the case with Ord, and the *Agricultural Crisis of the 1980s* that motivated a core group of leaders to empower a new direction back to prosperity.

Weakening of Status Quo Power and Control... In a crisis the established power structure can be enhanced or eroded. The loss of Cabela's undermined its control and influence in the community. Many of the community's leaders left or disengaged, creating a power vacuum or space for new leaders to assert alternative visions and strategies for the community. This was the case with Sidney. While status quo leaders continued to exert power, a newer generation of leaders emerged and successfully navigated their way to influence and change. These leaders proved capable of driving change without tearing, let alone destroying the social and political fabric of the community. They clearly stressed it, a necessity for successfully launching an entrepreneurial community initiative in Sidney and Cheyenne County.

Wrapping Up... Without the Cabela's crisis, and the loosening of the status quo in Sidney, the fundamental change in development directions would likely not have been possible. Sidney's E3 champions embraced E3's analysis calling for increased economic diversification through entrepreneur-focused development. E3's detailed analysis of Sidney's history of boom-and-bust cycles informed these leaders providing foundational rationale for supporting a diversity of businesses and entrepreneurs versus seeking one or two large employers to offset Cabela's loss.

Part 2 – E3 Energizing Entrepreneurial Ecosystems²³

Opening... E3 or *Energizing Entrepreneurial Communities* was an entrepreneurial ecosystem building initiative based in the **e2 Development Framework and Approach** initially developed by the national *Center for Rural Entrepreneurship* and then *e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems* hosted by NetWork Kansas. In this section of Sidney's case study, we explore the role that E3 played in inspiring and supporting Sidney's move into entrepreneur-led community economic development.

About E3... E3 or Energizing Entrepreneurial Communities was an initiative of the Nebraska Community Foundation (NCF) in partnership with e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems hosted by NetWork Kansas. Significant funding was provided by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation,

²³ To learn more about E3 check out: <https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/podcast/exploring-e3-in-nebraska.html>

NCF, e2, and the six partnering E3 communities. The following are key attributes of the E3 initiative:²⁴

- ✓ E3 Partners – Nebraska Community Foundation, e2 and NetWork Kansas, the Kauffman Foundation of Kansas City, and the six E3 communities of Sidney, McCook, Keith County, Red Cloud, Holt County, and Valley County.
- ✓ Selection of the six invited E3 cohort communities undertaken by NCF.
- ✓ A three-year commitment of support to the six partnering communities beginning in the summer of 2021 and completed in June 2024.
- ✓ Two-day in-person gatherings hosted by E3 communities every six months beginning with Valley County and Ord, Holt County, Sidney, Keith County, and then wrapping up with a tour of NetWork Kansas communities in the fall of 2023.
- ✓ Five communities completed E3 including Sidney, Keith County, Valley County, Holt County, and Red Cloud. McCook dropped out of E3 in the summer of 2023.
- ✓ All five continuing E3 communities achieved significant outcomes and impacts, with Sidney and Keith County demonstrating higher performance. Valley County has since re-committed to its entrepreneurship strategy re-employing an entrepreneur navigator.
- ✓ NCF in the spring of 2024 made the decision to discontinue E3, but ongoing E3 work is present in Sidney, Keith County, Valley County, and to a lesser extent in both Holt County and Red Cloud.
- ✓ Sidney has demonstrated the most significant entrepreneurial ecosystem gains and impacts since the start of E3 in the summer of 2021.

What is an Entrepreneurial Community? E3, by design provided a framework and process for a community to become an entrepreneurial community. This framework and process is based in large part on the remarkable 20-year success (2000 to 2020) demonstrated by Ord, Valley County and its region. Valley County was both an E3 cohort community and partner. Robert Stowell, long-term Ord leader when asked what advise he would give to other communities based on the Valley County Region’s transformative success immediate shared the following:

²⁴ Source materials for this E3 overview area associated with the following documents including (1) “E3 – Energizing Entrepreneurial Ecosystems Paper” August 2, 2022, and (2) “E3 Learnings, Energizing Entrepreneurial Ecosystems Paper” January 24, 2024.

1. Empowering community leadership²⁵ is foundational to Ord's success. **Advise to other communities... invest in the identification and development of a community's empowering leadership.**
2. Robust investment into Ord's community economic development including funding development strategies and ventures – government, education, businesses, and nonprofits like the arts. **Advise to other communities... be willing to become serious in taxing yourself and raising capital to support your community's development.**
3. Ord and its Valley County Region focused on entrepreneurship as its foundational community economic development including both business development and community building ranging from housing to better schools and access to the arts. **Advise to other communities... double down on your commitment to entrepreneurship.**

Unbundling the elements of a high-performing entrepreneurial community as demonstrated by Ord over the past quarter century, or Sidney over the past three years consider the following....

1. **Commitment to Entrepreneurs.** *Too many rural communities identify entrepreneurship as a development priority, but do not follow that up with an activated game plan. Two and half years (2nd half of 2022) into Sidney E3 committed to entrepreneur centered development. That commitment was quickly followed up with securing three years of funding, hiring a full-time and professional entrepreneurial navigator, and activating their entrepreneurial ground game.*
2. **The Ground Game - Entrepreneur Navigation.** *The e2 Ground Game involved mapping and targeting actual entrepreneurs in the community, reaching out to them to learn about their development needs and wants, and then networking them, when possible, to relevant assistance. Within the e2 Ground Game the employment of Entrepreneur Navigation, generally through a paid eNavigator, a demonstrated tactic for activating an eGround Game. Sidney by late 2022 funded and hired a capable eNavigator or Alisha Juelfs and activated their eGround Game. Since Alisha's hiring, Sidney E3 has hired a second economic development professional in entrepreneur Melissa Norgard to provide one-on-one assistance to area entrepreneurs.*
3. **Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Development.** *Like any system, an entrepreneurial ecosystem provides 24-7-365 forever comprehensive support for a community's entrepreneurs. At the heart of Sidney's entrepreneurial ecosystem is its eGround Game and eNavigation program.*

²⁵ Communities have many forms of leaders including those who are leaders by virtue of their roles as mayor, school superintendent, or owner of a major business, controlling leaders who effectively protect their interests over the interests of the larger community, and then there are empowering leaders like Robert Stowell in Ord or Sarah Sinnott in Sidney, who recruit and support other leaders and community builders to activate agency in support of community betterment.

Entrepreneurs are receiving customized attention and assistance based on their development stage including their needs and wants. This process creates a positive entrepreneurial culture where more community players become engaged supporting entrepreneurs, relevant resources are secured, and entrepreneurs begin to network with each other providing support. Sidney's entrepreneurial ecosystem now has political influence rooted in its expanding entrepreneurial network.

- 4. Networking to Resources.** *A central element within Sidney's eGround Game is a "demand driven" entrepreneurial resources approach. Most rural communities offer certain entrepreneurial resources like gap financing or periodic business planning classes. While these resources are relevant and can be helpful, Sidney is committed to learning from the entrepreneurs they are working with first providing customized relevant assistance, and then creating more robust resources based on common needs and wants. Listening one-on-one with entrepreneurs to learn about their needs and wants, and then networking them to relevant resources better serves entrepreneurs creating a positive ecosystem reputation within the community. Additionally, Sidney's approach ensures better matching between entrepreneurs and resource providers enhancing impact and efficiency of resource deployment.*
- 5. Community Building Entrepreneurship.** *Sidney is focusing on both business entrepreneurship and community building. This was a central design element advocated by the Nebraska Community Foundation. Simply building a stronger economy is not sufficient for overall community prosperity, community building ranging from affordable housing to accessible parks, early childhood education, to an amenity rich downtown, creates an environment favorable for entrepreneurs, other residents, and a community's ability to attract and retain human talent.*

"Entrepreneurial communities" can have many meanings based on a review of popular literature. In Sidney's case it means a specific entrepreneurial strategy growing entrepreneurial talent and community economic development impacts one entrepreneur at a time.

Impact – Deal Flow... At the heart of an entrepreneurial ground game defined in the previous section is **deal flow**. Deal flow is the most important metric to gauge a community's entrepreneurial performance. For over a decade, NetWork Kansas communities have used deal flow to define success. In NetWork Kansas's case, deal flow is measured by (1) the number of deals done, and (2) business capitalization. Now NetWork Kansas has programs supporting essential services provided by government and nonprofit organizations.

Deal flow is important as both a guiding and performance metric because it can be measured and demonstrates clear community economic development impacts. For a community like Sidney defining how its tracks and measures deal flow is critical to community support.

A broader deal flow definition can include not only the number of deals and venture capitalization, but...

- ✓ Increased Successful Startup Activity
- ✓ New Jobs Created or Jobs Retained
- ✓ Facility Improvements including Buildings, Equipment, and Appearances
- ✓ New Market Developed
- ✓ Successful Venture Transitions
- ✓ Growth Entrepreneurs

Between 2000 and 2020, Ord and its region supported over 150 deals ranging from an overhaul of its health care system including a new hospital and ethanol cluster, to 100 financed entrepreneurial deals. Since 2023, Sidney²⁶ has generated 112 new deals as illustrated in the figure (Provided by Sidney E3) below.

Figure 9. Why Focus on Entrepreneurship?



Sidney’s entrepreneurial deal flow is at a very quick pace considering that it was in deep recession just a short decade ago (2017 into 2019), and its E3 initiative only activated its entrepreneurial ground game starting in 2022 ramping up in 2023.

²⁶ While Sidney is larger with a 2023 estimated population of 6,440 when compared to Ord at 2,121 residents, their immediate regions are similar in size at around 10,000 residents.

A Commitment to a New Generation of Entrepreneurs... Sidney has an excellent public school system. Sidney's schools at the highest levels are committed to youth entrepreneurship. Its schools have a strong reputation for innovative and impactful entrepreneurship and workforce development educational programming including the actual operation of numerous school/student businesses. Remember that Sidney's Public School System is a core partner within Sidney's E3 interlocal agreement providing the employment position for E3's eNavigator.

Sidney E3 has within the past year implemented a youth business competition in partnership with NetWork Kansas' **Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge Program**²⁷ and **Venture Dash**. Youth entrepreneurship can change a community's attitudes and culture where becoming an entrepreneur is a favorable career track, and developing entrepreneurial talents is essential for career success. The following are three YouTube videos of three Sidney youth entrepreneurs...

- ❖ Avery - <https://youtu.be/YvWOqqL0KZc>
- ❖ Kobe - https://youtu.be/OPFA_QQiQ0A
- ❖ Grant - <https://youtu.be/Kb24F7zQZw8>

Sidney is now making a significant investment in fostering both an entrepreneurial culture, but also newer generations of entrepreneurial talent.

Wrapping Up... There are now decades of community centered entrepreneurial ecosystem experience from across North America from pioneering work with Kentucky Highlands Investment Corporation in Appalachian Kentucky, Coastal Enterprises in Maine, the Red Wood Coast Collaborative in Northern California, and Northern Initiatives in Michigan. More recently there is considerable learning from NetWork Kansas, and now eight cycles of field testing and learning through e2 including E3 and Sidney in Nebraska. Sidney is demonstrating its community economic development success and impact through its E3 Initiative as documented by its entrepreneurial deal flow and youth entrepreneurship programming.

Part 3 – New Leaders and Builders

Opening... The right kind of community leadership is foundational to a community's development success. In e2's paper **Leaders are Key** decades of research and field experience illustrates three key findings:

1. Empowering Leaders
2. Community Builders
3. Resident Agency

²⁷ <https://ecommpartnership.com/youth-entrepreneurship-challenge/>

Cabela's Leadership... Rooted in a rich entrepreneurial history, Cabela's, demonstrated a culture with all three of these attributes of empowering leadership, engaged workers or builders, and agency. However, as Cabela's grew larger and more corporate, and with the evolving challenges in 2000s, its entrepreneurial culture began to become more hierarchical. With respect to hometown Sidney, over time Corporate Cabela's asserted ever greater influence over the community. As evidenced by City strategic planning in 2019, City leaders engaged in a largely non-public process and with great influence by Cabela's.

Cabela's and its leaders focusing on their self-interests, and not necessarily the broader community interests were the antithesis of empowering leadership. This ripening culture of behind-the-scenes decision making, limited resident agency and the ability of Sidney to pro-actively and aggressively explore post-Cabela's development opportunities. It was not until Cabela's left Sidney, that there was civic space necessary for new and more empowering leaders to emerge setting the stage for its entrepreneurial pivot.

E3 Leaders and Community Builders... Recall Sidney's key events timeline:

- ❖ 2016 – Bass Pro Shops Announces it is Acquiring Cabela's
- ❖ 2017 – Cabela's is Acquired by Bass Pro Shops of Missouri
- ❖ 2018 – Closing Cabela's Corporate Headquarters Shed's Employees
- ❖ 2019 – City of Sidney Hosts Near Private Strategic Planning
- ❖ **2021 – Sidney Joins E3 and Begins Exploring**
- ❖ 2022 – Sidney and Cheyenne County's Baseline Completed²⁸

In 2021 when Sidney was invited to become part of E3 it was still reeling from the Cabela's deepening socio-economic crash. Like other communities experiencing a major corporate loss, Sidney was searching for solutions back to prosperity. The greatly expanded civic and social space within Sidney allowed new leaders to emerge that otherwise were stifled under Cabela's dominance. Additionally, E3 provided these leaders with a strong relevant development strategy and framework, and a support system of both experts²⁹ and most importantly, a peer network of other communities. This timing was optimal for new thinking and development approaches coupled with a strong supporting network.

Sidney's Resident Agency... It was impossible to assess the qualities of the emerging new leadership within E3 early in 2021 and 2022. By mid-year 2022 this leadership demonstrated both capabilities and empowering leadership styles. They were searchers for solutions and open to counsel. As empowering leaders, they engaged others enabling them to become

²⁸ This baseline completed in September 2022 primarily employed Federal secondary data from 2019, 2020, and preliminary Census data and ESRI estimated from 2021. This is important because the baseline is reflective of pre-E3 work and in beginning to measure changes with the Cabela's loss.

²⁹ Including e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems, NetWork Kansas, the Nebraska Community Foundation and their in-state, regional and national knowledge networks.

community builders, and ultimately generating a more “resident agency” culture. *Check out David Iaquina’s stories for rich detail illustrating Sidney’s E3 empowering leaders, including, **Community Champions, Sarah Sinnett, Corey Keen, Paula Abbot, and Melissa Norgard.*** [Landing Page Web Link here.](#)

Wrapping Up... Community leadership is key. When it is self-serving, or just controlling, versus empowering, a community’s ability to change strategically is prevented. Too often it takes a community crisis to destabilize the status quo and a community’s controlling power structure, enabling new leaders and ideas to emerge and find community support to pivot to more promising development solutions.

Part 4 – Development Pivot

Opening... Oxford Languages defines a “pivot” as... “...*completely change the way in which one does something.*” This definition implies that with a development pivot there is a significant, if not a dramatic shift in development priorities, focus, and direction. e2’s field experience suggests that luck or timing is influential in a community’s ability to create change and progress. There was a bit of luck at play in Sidney during those critical three years from 2019 through 2022, including,

- ✓ Weakened Status Quo – More Space for Change
- ✓ Key Traditional Leadership Changes – Old Power Brokers Left
- ✓ The E3 Opportunity Present
- ✓ Empowering Leaders Emerged
- ✓ Key Partners Like the Sidney Public Schools and the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center

Every community has “luck” opportunities. The question is whether the timing is right and key leaders within a community emerge capturing their opportunities.

All in on Cabela’s... For over 50 years Sidney was all in on Cabela’s and this made perfect development sense until it did not. The signs of dramatic change with Cabela’s surfaced in the early 2000s and were very evident with the Great Recession’s (i.e., 2007-2010) downward impact on discretionary spending as Cabela’s pursued aggressive expansion across North America. But Sidney did not take up these warning signs of over-dependence on Cabela’s seriously doubling down in its support for Cabela’s.

This pattern has repeated itself across North America where rural communities dependent upon timber mills, mining, energy production, fisheries, resorts, manufacturing plants... furniture, textiles, apparel, railroad hubs, and the like, failing, never to recover. For every community like Aspen, Colorado that boomed from 1870s to 1890 (1890 population of 5,108) because of silver mining, then collapsed dropping to just 705 residents in 1930, and renewed

itself as a vacation mecca with snow skiing posting a resident population of 7,004 in 2020 and annual visitors in the hundreds of thousands. Most rural communities never recover from the loss of these dominating industries or employers. Aspen is an outlier.

Sidney's leadership stayed all in on Cabela's till the bitter end. Consider this, the average lifespan for a company listed on the Fortune 500 list is just 15-20 years. These are the best of the best, of for-profit corporations. Even the best, do not stay on top for long. Lesson learned, for Sidney, there is grounded hope rooted in its entrepreneurial development pivot.

Sidney's Traditional Development Orientation... Lexington, Nebraska was among Nebraska's growing and more prosperous rural communities. It supported a strong and diversified agricultural economy and was home to a major farm equipment manufacturer providing economic diversification and higher paying jobs. It peaked in population in 1980 with over 7,000 residents. Then came the dual blow of the *1980's Agricultural Crisis* and the loss of its manufacturer, also a victim of the U.S. agricultural crash. By 1990 Lexington's population dropped by 6.2% to 6,601. With a vacant manufacturing plant and campus, Lexington mobilized to replace what it had lost as commodity agriculture recovered. In 1990, Lexington landed an IBP meat packing plant returning it to greater prosperity. By 2020, Lexington's population reached 10,348, surpassing its 1980 peak population.

Sidney was posed, to follow the Lexington pattern, but most of Cabela's real estate, unlike the case in Lexington, was not available due to Bass Pro Shops' restrictions. Major leadership changes with the City of Sidney, the City's Development Organization, and the Chamber of Commerce weakened Sidney's ability to mobilize as Lexington had done 30 years prior. Stable leadership would have likely pursued a more traditional economic development strategy to replace Cabela's with some other major employer, but the undoing of the status quo, and disruptions in traditional leadership evolved an environment where new leaders with different ideas could emerge and enable the pivot towards grass roots entrepreneurial development.

The Pivot to Grassroots Entrepreneurs... Observationally, E3 was critical in many ways to Sidney's pivot towards entrepreneurship. Central was the employment of analytics to help Sidney's emerging E3 leaders and community builders better understand their development history and the importance of entrepreneurship in growing a more diverse economy. These leaders embraced these ideas and learned from Ord and Valley County the value of a more competitive, diverse, and resilient, entrepreneurially based economy and society. Not without struggles and confusion, over time Sidney's E3 team embraced entrepreneurship as a foundational community economic development strategy.

Wrapping Up... Sidney is still in the early stages of pivoting to entrepreneur led community economic development. While there is strong demonstrated success over a relatively short period of years, it is too soon to judge the future of Sidney and its entrepreneurship

commitment. As noted before this is a story in the making and warrants continued following and observation.

Part 5 – Success and Renewal

Opening... Let's recap some of the key factors contributing to Sidney's short decade of success and renewal. As this case study demonstrates, this is a complex story, but the following three drivers are core to Sidney's path forward rooted in its entrepreneurial pivot, and remarkable progress.

Crisis, Disruption, and Opportunity... The last 10 years of change and progress, most likely, would not have been possible without Cabela's crisis, the disruption introduced into the community, and the E3 opportunity. Had Cabela's continued as its own company, or even if Bass Pro Shops elected to position major corporate activities in Sidney, the imperative for change, the space for change and new leadership, would not have been probable.

From Blame and Conflict to New Vision and Hope... With major crises, the blame game and intra-community conflict rages. This was the case in Sidney beginning in late 2017 well into 2021 when a group of leaders embraced the E3 opportunity. As noted before the timing was right for fundamental change including in Sidney's development leadership. Too many rural communities fall into a chronic cycle of continuing blame, conflict, and inaction. Sidney, did not and is now progressing to renewal from all that was lost with Cabela's,

Passionate and Capable Leaders and Some Outside Help... Empowering leaders, engaged community builders, and expanding resident agency capitalized in Sidney's entrepreneurial pivot. There was a path forward that made sense and is working. Sidney's participation in E3 and particularly its peer community network and learning proved important.

Wrapping Up... E3, as a formal initiative is not more. Once grant funding ended, E3 ended. For Nebraska, resurrecting E3 or something like it, is of paramount importance to Sidney's continued development and other communities seeking to make the entrepreneurial pivot.

Conclusion to Chapter 2

In Chapter 2 our study provides rich insights into the process whereby Sidney is becoming a high-performing entrepreneurial community. Chapter 2 tells part of this important story, but in Chapter 3 our case study goes deeper into core causal factors including strategies and tactics.

Now on to Chapter 3 and a deeper dive into the **Right Stuff**.

Nebraska's Flatwater Press published a story authored by Natalia Alamdari on April 5, 2023, titled... "Six years after Cabela's debacle, the sun hasn't set on Sidney." This story chronicles the transition this community of 7,000 is going through, with the loss of Cabela's corporate headquarters and 2,000 well-paying jobs. Sidney's latest boom-and-bust is resulting in a key development pivot rooted towards entrepreneur-focused community economic development.

Chapter 3 – The Right Stuff

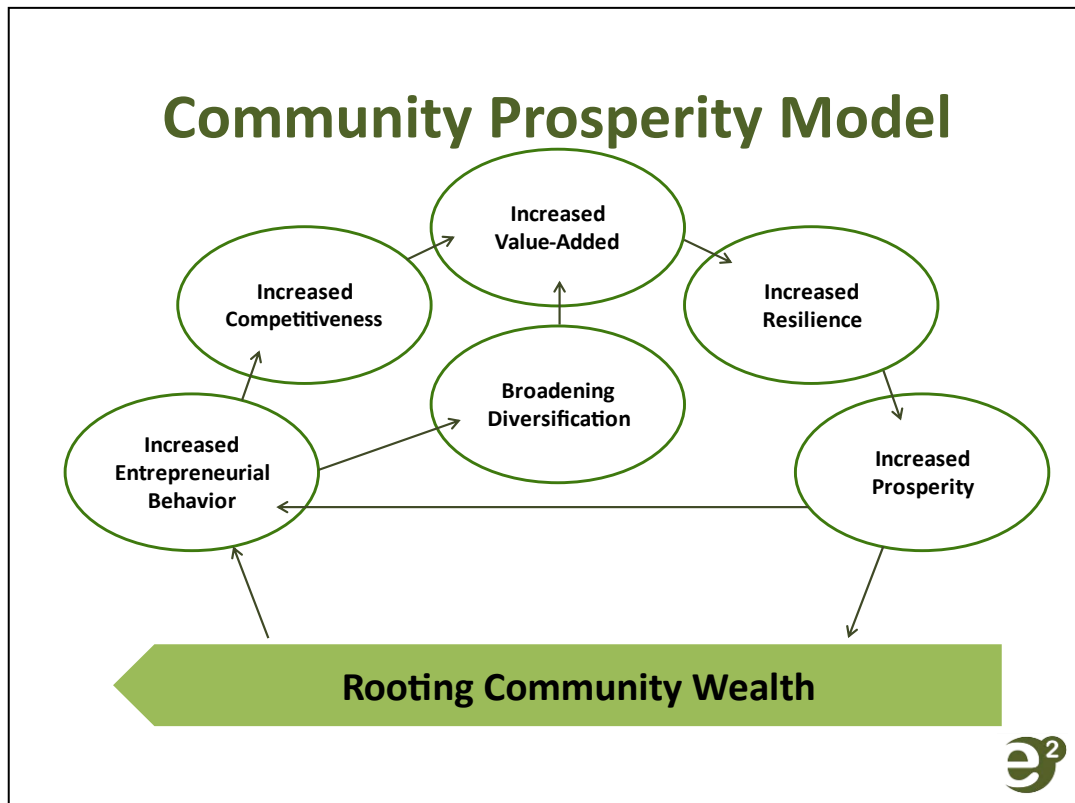
Introduction to Chapter 3

Sidney is positioning itself towards becoming a high performing entrepreneurial community creating new community vitality following the loss of Cabela's. Within this emerging story, there are critical lessons to be learned by other communities specific to **"the right stuff"** essential for rural community revitalization and sustained prosperity. In Chapter 3 we explore the **ingredients** within the **formula** for rural community success during these times. While every community is unique, the right stuff insights from Sidney's experience over the past short decade are relevant to most rural communities across North America. Based on previous e2 field learning, we have curated over the past decades a **Theory of Change Model** illustrating the process whereby robust and sustained entrepreneur driven community economic development can create sustained community prosperity. Figure 10 on the next page graphically displays the components of change within e2's entrepreneurship theory of change model.

The end game for communities is increased, broadly shared, and sustained prosperity. The catalyst in this change process is increasing entrepreneurial behavior and talent in all three community sectors including for-profit businesses, nonprofit organizations and governmental enterprises and institutions. High performing entrepreneurial communities like Ord, Nebraska, and now Sidney are demonstrating, four outcomes materializing, expanding, and contributing to increasing community prosperity, including:

1. Increasing Socio-Economic Competitiveness
2. Broadening Socio-Economic Diversification
3. Enhanced Value Added
4. Increasing Resiliency
5. Expanded and Rooting Community Wealth

Figure 10. e2's Entrepreneurship Theory of Change Model



Increasing Socio-Economic Competitiveness... Sidney, like every other community in the United States, exists within a market economy. The United States, compared to most European counties or Japan, has very weak place-based policies. As such communities must compete for both human talent and economic activity, and ultimately, the right to exist (e.g., relevancy) when compared with other communities. Entrepreneur-based development increases socio-economic competitiveness providing a foundation for the other drivers within this change model.

Broadening Diversification. Socio-economic diversification is essential for increasing community success and wellbeing. Entrepreneurs create a wide range of economic activities that in turn generate greater attractiveness for drawing and retaining human talent. Diversification is also key in providing communities sustainability given socio-economic cycles with both downturns and expansions.

Enhanced Value-Added. Commodity-based economies create lower value economies with too many workers earning non-living wage compensation and a relatively few residents doing well. By their very nature commodity-based economies are designed to extract and shift wealth from the community to investors typically located somewhere else. This dynamic generates a “poverty” economy. Conversely, entrepreneur-based development produces a high value-

economy where wealth is distributed more broadly creating opportunities for rooting. Instead of a few major economic activities that are extractive by their very nature, entrepreneurs create hundreds in small communities and thousands in larger communities, wealth creating centers.

Increasing Resiliency. More competitive, higher value, and more diversified socio-economic communities have inherently greater resilience. This resilience is more capable of sustaining a community and its residents through both economic and social changes, including both manifested economic threats and opportunities. Central to this kind of community resilience is rooted or locally controlled greater wealth³⁰. Wealth represents a reservoir of financial capacity that can be employed immediately addressing both challenges and opportunities enhancing and sustaining community prosperity.

There are many factors contributing to Sidney's remarkable revitalization, but five are core to its resurgence as a successful entrepreneurial community, including:

1. Champions
2. Organization
3. Investment
4. Entrepreneurial Talent
5. Entrepreneur Navigation

Let's begin with the importance of community champions...

Part 1 – Champions

Opening... Margaret Mead, the world-famous American cultural anthropologist made the following statement:

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

Thriving or Declining... Over the past five decades when asked... *“why do some communities thrive while other community decline?”* e2's answer always has been leaders. Milan Wall and Vicki Luther with the Heartland Center for Leadership Development support this conclusion with decades of exhaustive research and analysis. The right kind of leaders are the root rationale for the difference between thriving and declining communities.

³⁰ Community wealth includes household current net worth, built capital, government reserves, business profits, nonprofit endowments, and community foundation endowments including unrestricted funds.

Stories... Sidney's relatively quick pivot from crisis to renewal can be found in a newer generation of leaders. These empowering, versus controlling leaders, engendered a different community future vision rooted in community engagement. To learn more, check out the following David laquinta stories and our podcast with Sarah Sinnett from Sidney and Pam Abbott from Keith County: [Web Page Link Here](#)

- What is a Community Champion?
- The Sarah Sinnett Story
- The Corey Keen Story
- The Paula Abbot Story
- The Melissa Norgard Story
- Sarah Sinnett and Pam Abbott Podcast

Wrapping Up... These stories illustrate the importance of the right kind of leadership, and its ability to effectively and efficiently engage other community builders. Leaders like Sarah, Corey, Paula, and Melissa are enabling and building resident agency, or the capacity for average people living in a community to make a difference in its future. These leaders, according to laquinta exhibit 10 characteristics including...

"...curiosity, visionary, innovative, politically savvy, motivator or inspirational, ability to grow and pivot, ambassadorial, risk taker, perseverance, and role model."

Next let's explore the importance of strategic, effective and efficient organization...

Part 2 – Organization

Opening... Community economic development in rural America is challenged by two realities...

Traditional Development Competition. *Beginning with World War II communities engaged in cut-throat competition for industry and real estate development projects resulting in fierce competition between communities within the same regions of the country. In rural America, entrepreneurial ecosystems work best with regional resource networks and local ground games to identify, connect with, and support area entrepreneurs or collaborative development.*

Intra-Community Development Organization Competition. *In a typical rural community, there are up to six to ten development organizations including counties, cities, downtown associations, tourism groups, hospitality and convention organizations, chambers of commerce, development corporations, and even sectoral groups like agriculture. Rural communities with smaller funding capabilities too often have intense competition among these various development groups challenging and conflicting the community for funding, leaders, volunteers, development priorities, and even status.*

Competitive versus Collaborative Development... Unlike traditional development, entrepreneur-focused development is not inherently competitive. It lends itself to regional collaboration with respect to entrepreneur assistance and resources such as capital, business planning, and the like. Within rural communities the various development interests can collaborate focusing on different entrepreneurial talent segments and supporting both local and regional entrepreneur navigation and resource network development.

Champions in Sidney understand the potential for a collaborative, and community and regional development approach. Early on they reached out to all the development interests in Sidney and Cheyenne County. These initial efforts to employ Nebraska's **Interlocal Cooperation Act** included serious outreach and invitation to all of these development groups – city, county, chamber, tourism group, etc. – to be part of its entrepreneurship initiative. But historic mission focus (e.g., traditional development) and inter-development organization competition derailed early initiative efforts.

Formal and Permanent Organization... Sidney's eChampions after making a strong play at the widest possible interlocal organization supporting entrepreneurship, proved innovative, resilient, and pivoted to an alternative approach. They formed an entrepreneurship interlocal agreement with the Sidney Public Schools and Western Nebraska Community College (i.e., Sidney Campus). Sidney's Public Schools with a strong commitment and programming in youth entrepreneurship offered to hire staff (i.e., eNavigator), and the community college through their Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship provided office space and a one stop eResource Center with convenient access and free parking.

The city, chamber, county, and tourism group remained on the side-lines. But Sidney's eChampions continue to invite these more traditional development groups to the table keeping the door open for their eventual engagement and support. In addition to the public schools and community college, now the community foundation fund has established fiscal capacity and a fund supportive of this eWork or the E3 Fund within the *Sidney And Greart Area Fund*³¹.

Collaborative Partners... Creating the right organizational structure is important and Sidney found an effective and efficient way forward. But operationalizing an organization is another matter. Rooted in the Cabela's corporate talent within the E3 group, Sidney's eChampions created a "lean" approach with very short and effective meetings, the use of a core leadership team and a larger support group, use of social media for communications, and a willingness to network to other eLeaders and communities to learn ways to operate better.

Wrapping Up... In too many rural communities, organizations are not strategic, effective, or efficient resulting in engagement drop off and lesser capacity for development.

³¹ <https://www.nbcmmfound.org/give/saga/>

Part 3 – Investment

Opening... Ord's Robert Stowell³² when asked why Ord was a high-performing rural community listed three things:

1. Empowering Leadership
2. **Serious Community Investment**
3. Entrepreneur Focused Community Economic Development

Bob makes a strong case that communities must be willing to mobilize capital and make investments into their entrepreneurial ecosystem, businesses, nonprofits, and governmental agencies including public education. Mr. Stowell became a mentor to Sidney's Sarah Sinnett and other eChampions. His advice was well received, and Sidney has been very successful in securing both cash and in-kind financial support to hire a professional entrepreneur or eNavigator, now a second staff person who works with area entrepreneurs on business feasibility and planning, and funding other ecosystem costs.

Sidney's Funding Commitment... Sarah is a visionary, and she is now exploring more permanent funding including a dedicated Sidney E3 fund within their community foundation fund hosted by the Nebraska Community Foundation. Additionally, she and her team are also exploring a regional approach that can scale up area eNavigators throughout Nebraska Panhandle and possibly into Northeastern Colorado, and a regional resource network.

Wrapping Up... Successful eCommunities focus early on robust, scalable and sustainable funding and investment for both the ecosystem operations and entrepreneur support. Capital for both economic development and community building is foundational.

Part 4 – Entrepreneurial Talent

Opening... Andy Stoll, formerly with the Kauffman Foundation and co-leader with Victor Wang with the Foundation's Entrepreneurship Summits, often makes this important point...

'Every community has entrepreneurial talent that can be developed. But not every community has a supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem. This is the difference between successful and unsuccessful communities.'

Entrepreneurial Talent... Sidney's eChampions quickly realized that the primary asset within entrepreneur centered development is a community's entrepreneurial talent. Within a year Sidney embraced the idea of the e2's **Entrepreneurial Ground Game** or organizing to identify,

³² To hear Bob in his own words check out this podcast...
<https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/podcast/episode-29.html>

reach out to, engage, and support targeted entrepreneurial talent. For many of Sidney's eLeaders, they experienced first-hand, a very entrepreneurial culture in Cabela's. They were opportunity focused and willing to be smart and strategic in their efforts.

At e2 our experience is most rural communities do not realize how much entrepreneurial talent resides in their immediate market area. Mapping and targeting entrepreneurial talent, is a powerful tool employed by Sidney to gain insight on entrepreneurial talent development opportunities.

Wrapping Up... However, it is important to note that Sidney and its area is not typical with respect to available talent. While every community has entrepreneurial talent that can be supported and developed driving community economic development, one of Sidney's core assets is its legacy Cabela's entrepreneurial talent. While most of Cabela's corporate talent left the area or found new jobs, many Cabela's employees chose to stay or come home after a stint in Missouri with Bass Pro-Shops. An important proportion of these former Cabela's employees took their passions, experience, skills, knowledge of markets and customers, and started or bought businesses in the Sidney area. We believe this legacy of human talent, accelerated Sidney's recovery from the Cabela's crash.

Part 5 – Entrepreneur Navigation

Opening... Community centered entrepreneurial ecosystems can be very complex rooted in the types of entrepreneurs and ventures present in their landscape. For example, a medium sized metropolitan area like Omaha, Nebraska, Columbus, Ohio, or Boise, Idaho will have a wider range of entrepreneurs from nascent startups to high growth. In these metropolitan areas there will be greater economic sector diversity when compared to more rural communities.

Entrepreneur Navigation... Nevertheless, the starting point with any entrepreneurial ecosystem is discovering and supporting whatever available entrepreneurial talent present. In understanding the entrepreneurial talent rooted in a community like Sidney, it is possible to be smarter and more efficient specific to the kinds of resources and assistance most valuable to this talent. Figure 11 on the next page illustrates the "Basic e2 Transaction" foundational within a community's "Entrepreneurial Ground Game".

Entrepreneurial Ground Game... The ground game involves identifying and engaging with targeted entrepreneurs, learning about and clarifying resource needs, and then networking these entrepreneurs to relevant resources and assistance. This **conciierge** function provides greater value to an otherwise very busy entrepreneur. Over time entrepreneurs become more capable of networking on their own to resources and becoming helpful to other entrepreneurs within the community.

Figure 11 – The Entrepreneurial Ground Game Visualized



Ground Game Commitment... Initially Sidney struggled with the merits of the entrepreneurship ground game. In time, after networking with other entrepreneurial communities like Ord or Keith County, Sidney embraced the ground game. Sidney secured funding from a private donor through the Nebraska Community Foundation hiring a full-time and professional entrepreneur or eNavigator³³ activating Sidney's entrepreneurial ground game and triggering more basic entrepreneur transactions – entrepreneur assistance identified and networked to relevant assistance on a real time basis.

Stories... To learn more about the role of an eNavigator check out these podcasts:

- Sidney's eNavigator Alisha Juelfs - <https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/podcast/entrepreneur-navigators-with-alisha-juelfs-and-rachael-barry.html>
- Shawn Kaskie - <https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/podcast/shawn-kaskie-entrepreneur-coaching-in-rural-nebraska.html>
- Ord's Caleb Pollard - <https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/podcast/caleb-pollard-economic-developer-entrepreneur-business-coach.html>
- Luke Mahn - <https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/podcast/luke-mahin-economic-developer-entrepreneur-community-coach.html>

³³ Sidney committed to a full-time, well paid, and benefited eNavigator. These commitments ensured a richer pool of candidates for this key position. Sidney made a smart decision in hiring Alisha Juelfs (AJ) and has provided professional development and support. AJ is an employee of the Sidney Public Schools, and as such she is provided full teacher benefits including a defined pension program. This collaboration with the SPSs enhanced this position drawing stronger candidates.

There are also two David laquinta stories providing deeper insights into the role of eNavigators and Alisha Juelf's experience as Sidney's eNavigator: [Web Site Landing Page Link here](#)

- The eNavigator
- The Alisha Juelfs Story – Navigator

Wrapping Up... These podcasts and stories provide deeper insight into the power and impact of entrepreneur navigation core to any high performing community centered entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Entrepreneur navigation is core to any community centered high performing entrepreneurial ecosystem. For most communities, hiring a professionally trained, funded, and supported eNavigator is the first investment into their ecosystem.

Conclusion to Chapter 3

Community economic development is a 24/7/365 forever obligation of any community in the United States. Communities are primarily responsible for their own development and prosperity. Specific to rural communities, typically with a narrower range of community development opportunities, entrepreneur focused development is foundational. Sidney is now making robust and smart investments into a results-driven entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The primary ingredients within Sidney's entrepreneurial formula for remarkable community economic development success is anchored by:

- ✓ Empowering eChampions and Engaged Community Builders
- ✓ A Lean and Smart eOrganizations with Robust Funding
- ✓ Strong Investment and Commitment to Scalability and Sustainability
- ✓ Recognition of eTalent as the Foundational Development Asset
- ✓ The Employment of a Full-Time and Professional eNavigator

Now on to Chapter 4 and the Path Forward.

Every community must have a “path forward” with a smart and robust community economic development game plan. A community’s path forward is not fixed over time but must recognize changing realities, emerging opportunities, and responsive to socio-economic threats. Entrepreneur focused development provides for a diversified development approach enhancing a community’s competitiveness, potential for increasing an economy’s value-added³⁴, resilience, and rooted wealth.

Chapter 4 – The Path Forward

Introduction to Chapter 4

Over the decades and particularly over the 10 years, Sidney has contributed to e2’s learning about rural community economic development. Sidney is more similar than different when compared to the thousands of like communities across the United States. Its lessons and innovations have relevance for other communities. While exact replication is never possible, learning from communities like Sidney, as they have done in their recent development journey, can empower smarter and more successful development game plans.

Rural America is vast geographically, complex, and full of communities with their own unique development stories. Sidney’s development story is relevant to communities that are:

- ✓ Rural
- ✓ Relatively Remote³⁵
- ✓ Natural Resources Based
- ✓ Industry Diversified
- ✓ Distressed
- ✓ Manifesting Resident Net Outmigration³⁶

Next let’s explore the path forward through a crosswalk between Sidney’s experiences and e2’s broader learning from throughout North America.

³⁴ By value-added we mean the ability of an economy to create more revenues resulting in more income for workers, business owners, charitable giving, and taxes for government organizations.

³⁵ Not adjacent to a growing Micropolitan or Metropolitan Area.

³⁶ In parts of rural America chronic and severe distress is manifested in unemployment, underemployment, and/or poverty.

Part 1 – Rural Change

Opening – There was a Time... There was a time when the vast majority of Americans called rural places home. Even into the early 1900s a majority of Americans made their living in rural landscapes primarily working in natural resource-based industries or support services enabled by these resource extraction activities. Natural resource industries include agriculture, both farming and ranching, mining, energy production, forest products, fishing, and later destination tourism was added. Allied industries connecting these largely extractive activities with urban

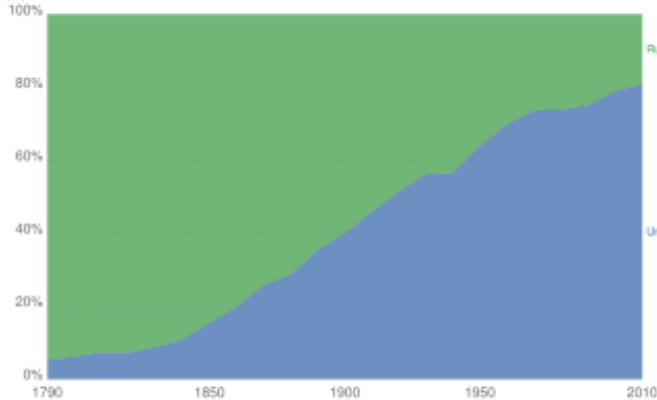
markets was transportation (e.g., railroads, pipelines, highways, etc.). Sidney's early development is part of this story.

Early Sidney... Sidney's origin story centers around four industries including... the building of the transcontinental railroad, assorted U.S. military installations, commodity agriculture, and oil and natural gas exploration and production. During these earlier years Sidney's economy was undiversified and always at risk to boom and bust cycles. This is a core rural experience.

Figure 12. U.S. Urban and Rural Populations Over Time

Urban and rural populations in the United States

Figure illustrates the size of the rural and urban populations in the United States over time. The US Census Bureau's population threshold of an urban place changes over time. The rural population is defined as any population outside urban areas. See the source tab for further information.



Sidney's Diversification... There are smarts in most rural communities. Leaders and citizens in Sidney realized that they must diversify their economy and transition it from traditional natural resource and military related industries. Nebraska was among the first rural states during World War II to pursue industrial attraction to diversify its communities' economies. Sidney was part of this movement. Beginning with World War II well into the mid-1980s there was significant attraction opportunity. Industry first relocated from the coasts to America's interior because of national security concerns, and then the availability of low cost and plentiful land, a capable surplus labor force, less regulation, lower taxes, and incentives fueled industrial relocation, and particularly surging consumer and construction related manufacturing.

For Sidney, with a modest and growing manufacturing base, its diversification opportunity rooted, with the founding and expansion of Cabela's. Over time Cabela's created a major retail shop in Sidney's I-80 interchange, a corporate headquarters, warehouse spaces, and fulfillment centers located in a multi-county area. Cabela's not only diversified Sidney's economy, but it replaced lost activities like oil production and its last military base. Additionally, because of its corporate headquarters and growing national market, Cabela's created lots of jobs, but also above average³⁷ compensated jobs. With Cabela's Sidney was booming.

³⁷ When compared to more traditional rural jobs and earnings.

Entrepreneurial Sidney... For the vast majority of similar sized rural communities, being home to a national corporation like Cabela's makes Sidney an outlier. In the loss of Cabela's, Sidney once again experienced a socio-economic crash and deep recession. Sidney had been through this boom-and-bust reality before. In the last part of the 2010's Sidney was faced with sustained decline and rising distress, and finding a new path forward rooted in another development opportunity. The overwhelming experience for rural communities once dominated by a single or few employers or industries, the pattern is clear. These communities are unable to find a pathway forward to renewed economic relevance and prosperity. Hundreds of once prosperous timber, fishing, mining, energy producing, farming, and ranching communities entered into long-term decline manifesting in net outmigration, high unemployment or underemployment, and often coupled with chronic poverty.

Even communities that diversified like the mill and manufacturing rural communities in the U.S. Southeast where apparel, textiles, carpeting, furniture, and other consumer goods were once produced, these industries were lost costing hundreds of thousands of workers their jobs driving these communities into chronic and severe distress and decline. Sidney is bucking these likely outcomes when a major industry or employer is lost. It is focusing significant development energy on supporting rooted area entrepreneurs. In doing so, Sidney has begun to heal and is positioning itself for a larger, more diverse, resilient, and successful economy.

Wrapping Up – Shaping Change... Elements of the Serenity Prayer³⁸ are relevant to rural community development including:

- Accept the things we cannot change.
- Have the courage to change the things we can change.
- Find the wisdom to know the difference.

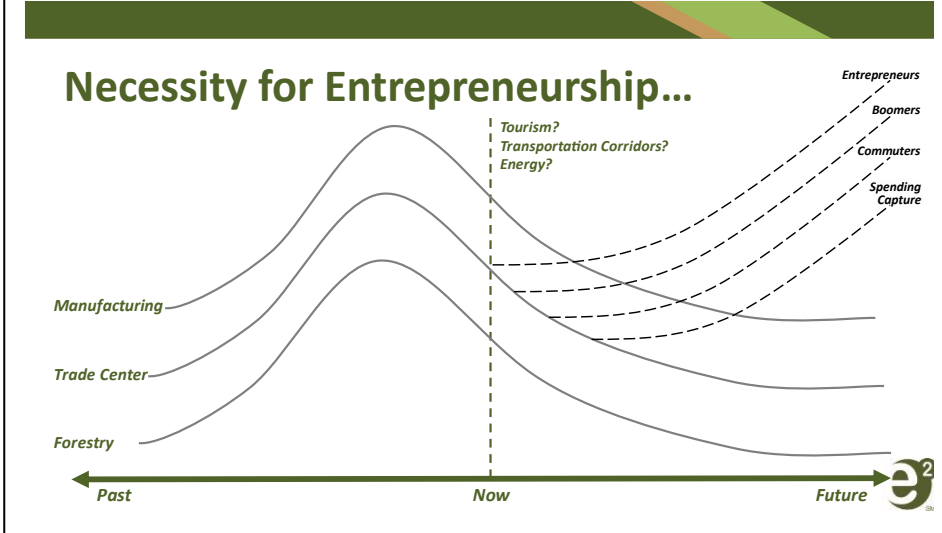
For rural communities, there are a multiplicity of forces outside of their control. For example, rural communities cannot influence trade policies like tariffs that undermine export markets essential area manufacturers or farmers. In embracing entrepreneur-focused development, Sidney is planting seeds in developing area entrepreneurial talent, talent that over time can grow a more dynamic and relevant economy.

Part 2 – Change Model

Opening – Change... Founder of the U.S. Benjamin Franklin is reputed to say... *“nothing is certain except death and taxes.”* We should add “change” to this list. Over time we live in a

³⁸ <https://www.marquette.edu/faith/prayer-serenity.php#:~:text=God%2C%20grant%20me%20the%20serenity,wisdom%20to%20know%20the%20difference.>

Figure 13. e2's Theory of Change Model – Part 1

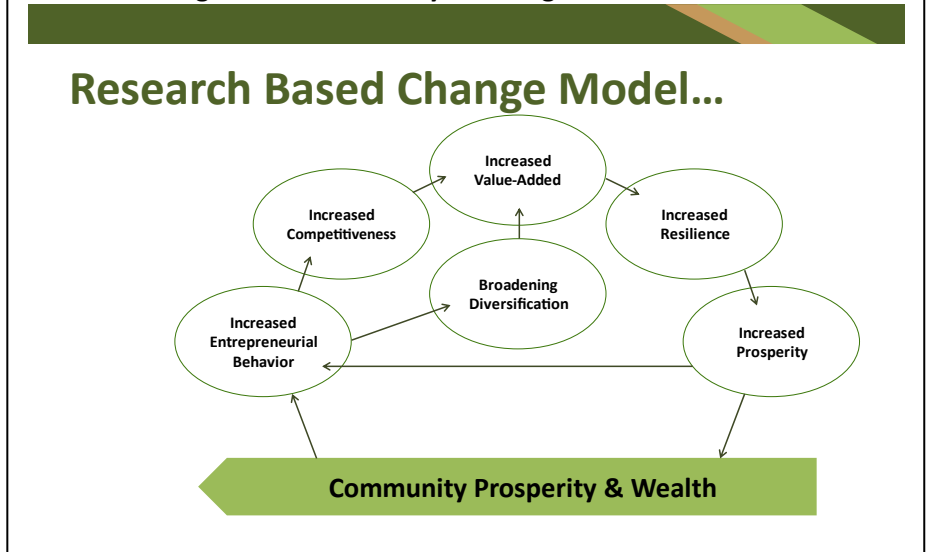


dynamic and ever-changing world with climate change, shifting political powers, dynamic consumer markets, and the relevance of rural communities. The long arch of change for rural communities and regions in the United States, massive transformation has and are occurring. Once prosperous rural communities rooted in producing the raw materials – wheat, cattle, cooper, oil, lumber, fish, etc. now are struggling as these industries

have either disappeared or fundamentally changed. Refer to Figure 13, **e2's Theory of Change Model**. Rural communities were first settled by non-Native peoples to exploit lands to produce agricultural products, harvest timber, or mine for gold. As these extractive activities gained a foothold, these industries and their workers needed support services provided by communities. These rural communities developed off the wealth and spending of these extractive industries providing everything from law enforcement to churches to places to drink. Over time these trade center communities often diversified through the attraction of other industries and particularly manufacturing plants. Throughout rural America, any rural community of sufficient size likely has a manufacturing plant or two.³⁹

For Sidney, and other rural communities, there are still extractive natural resource industries active in the area like farming and ranching. Sidney still has manufacturing activities. But over time, these two industries have increasingly automated reducing the need for workers undermining the

Figure 14. e2's Theory of Change Model – Part 2



³⁹ These manufacturing plants can be homegrown by local entrepreneurs often focusing on producing farm equipment in farming country, or branch plants owned by major regional, national, or international companies.

population base of a community. Sidney continues to be a regional trade center community providing retail, consumer/business services, health care, education, government and other services essential to residents in a multi-county trade area. But box stores, franchises, and now rapidly growing electronic commerce are hollowing out commercial districts like Sidney's downtown.

Developing new generations of entrepreneurial talent, rooted in the community, offers a path forward to a more competitive, diversified, high value-added, resilient, and wealth creating economy and society. Sidney is pioneering this pathway and demonstrating remarkable early success. Over time, we have the opportunity to learn from Sidney tracking its development and seeing if it can achieve transformative change like Ord, Nebraska or Tupelo, Mississippi.

Relevance... Oxford Languages defines "relevance" as... *"the qualify or state of being closely connected or appropriate."* Sidney and other communities must compete in a free market-based economy and a democracy that guarantees the free movement of people. Every community must demonstrate their relevance both economically and socially. This is particularly true for entrepreneurial talent, that when it is successful, can become very mobile and attractive to other communities. Community culture, support systems like Sidney's emerging entrepreneurial ecosystem, quality of life amenities, and access to available and affordable housing, education, and health care are fundamentally essential for today relevance.

Within **e2's Development Framework** being employed by Sidney's E3 team, the north star is the identification, engagement with, and development of entrepreneurial talent. The same is true with respect to community building, place making, and quality of life enhancements. If a community can demonstrate its relevance to its economic and community building entrepreneurial talent, it positions itself to become competitive relative to other communities enhancing its ability to attract new residents and capital, and retain residents and economic activities.

Competitiveness... In traditional development, which Sidney still embraces through its Chamber of Commerce and City managed economic development efforts, traditional economic development activities including:

- ✓ Industry and Business Attraction
- ✓ Larger Scale Real Estate Developments
- ✓ Larger Employer Retention and Expansion

Given Sidney's size, location relative to more expensive Denver, and its development assets, sustaining a focus on traditional development makes sense. However, as Sidney's long arc development story illustrates, traditional development is not necessarily the more optimal or cost-effective development investment. Critical to Sidney's socio-economic diversification is dozens if not hundreds of smaller entrepreneurial ventures, rooted in the community, and able

to generate retained wealth over time. This is true for most rural communities. Leading with entrepreneurship and complementing with traditional development opportunities when they emerge and are cost-effective is a winning path forward strategy.

Diversification... Core to resiliency is diversity. Whether in nature, economies, or societies, increasing diversity is essential to long-term success and vibrancy. Growing a more diverse economy around hundreds of ventures that are more locally owned and operated, than not, is foundational to moderating socio-economic downturns and stress in the community over time. For most rural communities, entrepreneur-focused community economic development is the primary strategy forward. Sidney's E3 champions, leaders, and community builders fundamentally understand and embrace the importance of diversification.

Wrapping Up - Resilience... In an ever-changing world, communities cannot plan out for all contingencies. There will be economic downturns, markets destroyed for farmers due to trade wars and competition, and natural disasters. Sidney cannot control all these possible scenarios. But Sidney in empowering resident agency and a more diverse economy via the development of entrepreneurial talent and their ventures. These two commitments backed up by real investment and smart strategies, can optimally position Sidney for the resiliency necessary to weather unexpected storms or emerging opportunities.

Part 3 – Resistance from Traditional Development

Opening – Sidney's Development Story... Sidney's development story is both common and unique. It is a common rural community story with its beginnings with natural resource and transportation related development. It is unique to other rural communities with its large number of socio-economic boom-and-busts. Some rural communities never navigated into economic diversification from natural resource extraction dependencies. Sidney successfully made this transition. As the industries that have fueled economic diversification and growth over the past 70 years have closed, left, or been automated undermining their workforce value to rural communities, Sidney was able to embrace the Cabela's opportunity riding this success story from the 1960s till Cabela's was acquired by Bass Pro Shops in 2018 losing its corporate headquarters. Now Sidney E3 is challenging Sidney's historical and near total commitment to traditional economic development embracing entrepreneurship.

Traditional Development... Traditional economic development has many attributes, including:

- ✓ A separation between economic and community.
- ✓ Strong focus on business and industrial attraction.
- ✓ Active support for larger real estate developments.
- ✓ Use of tax abatements and incentives.
- ✓ A focus on growing the base part of an economy.
- ✓ Small business development is considered secondary and less important.

Traditional development, the mainstay of economic development in the United States, not just rural, pursues development that contributes to the base economy. Figure 15 illustrates the components of Economic Development 101...

Figure 15. Economic Development Basics



Ventures located in the community that primarily sell to customers outside of the community contribute to the base economy bringing income into the community and creating jobs, tax base, and local spending. Growing the base economy is essential for a competitive and vibrant economy. However, to optimize economic development a focus on area spending capture is also important. Every community experiences spending leakages or spending that flows outside communities and companies. For every dollar of spending internalized by meeting these needs and wants locally, increases the economic multiplier impact within the economy.

Growing a community's base economy, Sidney's primary economic development focus for the past 50 years or more, made sense because of the significant relocation of industry and businesses. But the base economy can also be grown by supporting home grown entrepreneurs like the Cabela family. Area spending capture, or what is often called, secondary venture development is equally important to building the base economy. Developing entrepreneurial talent increases the probability of one or two percent of these smaller ventures growing and either reaching external markets or becoming destination economic activities that draw consumers and their spending to the community. This is the strategy that Sidney is now prioritizing.

Cabela's Domination... Much research has been done, and considerable volumes written, about the relationship between a dominating corporate employer and the community hosting them. Beginning in the early 1970s well into the mid-2010s or nearly 50 years, Cabela's was that kind of dominate corporate presence and influence in Sidney and the surrounding area. While Cabela's was growing and doing well, Sidney in a symbiotic relationship also prospered. Cabela's contributed to Sidney's base economy, generating a wider range of jobs that were, relative to most rural communities, better paying, more secure, and with sizable benefits.

However, dominating major employers, and a community's self-interest to keep them growing and thriving, focused energy on Cabela's and undermined this community's essential need to develop a more diverse economy. Bottomline, Sidney, like other major single employer communities, was overly dependent upon Cabela's and at risk should Cabela's falter, yet alone fail. Cabela's was both Sidney's ticket to prosperity and greatest risk for decline.

Entrepreneurship Neglect... With so much of Sidney’s development attention and resources flowing to keep Cabela’s in Sidney and growing, other development opportunities were at best neglected and under-capitalized, and at worst intentionally under-supported to ensure resources flowing to Cabela’s and allied activities. This neglect was not sinister, but a typical response by any community with a dominate industry. The same dynamic occurred in Detroit, Michigan, once America’s fifth largest city totally in on the Big-Four automakers liked Ford and Chevy. Detroit rode this prosperity generating giant, until foreign competition from Japan, then Korea and Germany, and then the south where even U.S. automakers relocated manufacturing operations.

For Sidney, a three-pronged economic development strategy, equally supported focusing on...

1. Keeping and Growing Cabela’s
2. New Business and Industry Attraction
3. Entrepreneur-Focused Development

...offered a greater potential for more balanced development, lessened dependence on Cabela’s, and over time a more rooted and diverse economy. But while Sidney did pursue Strategy #2 or new business and industry attraction with energy and resources, it did not do embrace Strategy #3 or entrepreneur-focused development. However, Western Nebraska Community College⁴⁰ (WNCC) did make a commitment to Strategy #3.

Wrapping Up – Pivoting... In 2018, WNCC in response to the massive job losses and economic crisis in Sidney due to the Cabela’s evolving corporate headquarters loss through the Bass Pro Shops acquisition created the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center (I&EC) on its Sidney Campus. Three years later in 2021 Sidney was invited by the Nebraska Community Foundation to join E3 – Energizing Entrepreneurial Ecosystems. Paula J. Abbott⁴¹ with WNCC and leader of the I&EC, joined Sidney’s E3 team and became a constructive and influential member guiding Sidney through E3 into a deeper entrepreneurship commitment. The loss of Cabela’s opened up civic space in Sidney to consider the entrepreneurship path long neglected while Cabela’s was booming. *More on WNCC, I&EC, and Paula in Part 4 of this Chapter.*

Part 4 – Two Key Institutional Partners

Opening – The “Willing” Lesson... In research and literature there is this concept of the “Coalition of the Willing.”⁴² The idea is rather simple where those individuals, organizations, and governments willing to commit to an action become the coalition for action. This idea assumes that not every possible partner in such coalitions elects to join. Some may be opposed

⁴⁰ <https://www.wncc.edu/>

⁴¹ <https://nebtechcollab.com/paula-j-abbott-western-nebraska-community-college/>

⁴² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coalition_of_the_willing

to the importance of the issue or the action. Others may be cautious waiting on the sidelines neither committing or opposing but watching how the coalition of the willing and their committed actions unfold. Sidney's E3 team after working tirelessly to get all stakeholders on board through an Interlocal Agreement to support its entrepreneurial ecosystem discovered behind the scenes opposition represented as a "wait and see" commitment from key groups including the Cheyenne County Chamber of Commerce⁴³, Cheyenne County's tourism promotion group⁴⁴ hosted by the County, and Sidney Economic Development⁴⁵.

This development frustrated and angered key E3 Sidney leaders driving them to explore other options for providing organizational and funding support for their ecosystem development and operation. Two willing partners, one expected, and one unlikely partner came to the table enabling the Interlocal Agreement to be created and activated.

1. WNCC and its Sidney Campus through the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center⁴⁶
2. Sidney Public Schools

Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center... Historically, America's community and vocational higher education institutions, by design are more entrepreneurial when compared to colleges and universities. Nebraska's community college system is innovative, responsive, and committed to entrepreneurial talent development. Western Nebraska Community College, based in Scottsbluff serves Nebraska's Panhandle Region including Sidney and its area. WNCC and its Sidney Campus has long supported business and industry responsive workforce development. But in 2018 when Cabela's officially was acquired by Bass Pro Shops, losing its corporate headquarters, and WNCC and its Sidney's Campus responded creating the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center.

It makes lots of sense that WNCC and its Sidney-based Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center would embrace E3. However, existing institutions can be parochial. The Center's leader Paula Abbott did not assert turf concerns, rather she became actively engaged in Sidney's E3 team and then offering to house Sidney's E3 eNavigator at the Center offering space, meeting locations, high-capacity internet and video conferencing, technology, and free and accessible public parking lot.

When Sidney E3 was struggling with getting other development partners involved in the proposed E3 Interlocal Agreement, WNCC and the Center stepped up quickly providing the two public organizations necessary to create an Interlocal Agreement and organization.

⁴³ <https://cheyennecountychamber.com/>

⁴⁴ <https://visitnebraska.com/sidney/cheyenne-county-visitors-center>

⁴⁵ <https://cityofsidney.org/86/Economic-Development>

⁴⁶ For more on Paula Abbot, the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center check out David laquinta's story at [LINK](#)

Sidney's Public School System... Once Sidney was home to a St. Patrick's Academy⁴⁷ (Catholic), and now there are no parochial schools in Sidney. While there are home schooled students, the vast majority of children attend Sidney Public Schools⁴⁸ (SPSc) as follows⁴⁹:

- ✓ Four Elementary Schools – 639 Students (Pre-Kindergarten through 6th Grade)
- ✓ Middle School (7th & 8th Grades) – 180 Students
- ✓ Sidney High School (9th – 12th Grades) – 340 students

SPSs is a higher performing community centered public school system. This observation is significant given that Nebraska's public schools are ranking among the strongest when compared to other states. Relative to entrepreneurship and economic development, SPSs offers program learning centers focusing on both entrepreneurship and workforce development. These programs are experiential in nature including a number of school/student-based businesses.

Sidney's eNavigator is a Public-School Employee!

SPSs became a core partner with E3 and ultimately offered to provide a staff position for Sidney E3's eNavigator. Additionally, SPS's is now partnering with E3 to host Sidney's **Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge** or its youth business plan competition.

Sidney's school system is an unlikely entrepreneurship partner at first glance. But given SPSs' commitment to youth entrepreneurship and workforce development there are strong mission alignment building blocks. SPSs is also entrepreneurial, demonstrating its commitment and flexibility in providing a staff position with full benefits to Sidney's E3 eNavigator.

Use of an Interlocal Agreement Tool... Nebraska, like a number of other states, provide to political subdivisions the ability to legally and operationally collaborate through the **Nebraska Interlocal Cooperation Act**. Valley County and Ord employed this tool back in 2000 when it activated its entrepreneurship initiative. Sidney's E3 team did not want to house its entrepreneurship effort in any of the existing development groups given the historic tension between them. They wanted an accessible⁵⁰ and neutral organization that was entrepreneurial itself. The Interlocal Cooperation Act is a perfect vehicle for achieving this goal. As noted elsewhere in this chapter, initial efforts to form an E3 interlocal agreement and organization, but ultimately succeeded with two willing partners – Sidney Public Schools and the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center with Western Nebraska Community College. This organizational construct allows all interested parties and organizations to collaborate carrying the burden of hosting entrepreneurial ecosystem development and operation.

⁴⁷ <https://www.sidneystpats.com/our-history>

⁴⁸ <https://www.sidneyraiders.org/>

⁴⁹ <https://www.sidneyraiders.org/district-report-cards>

⁵⁰ No paid membership required.

Wrapping Up – Doors are Always Open Mindset... Challenging experiences like the “Big Swap” or the earlier efforts to create an E3 Interlocal Agreement and organization, the E3 team could have become resentful, and these episodes could have damaged the civic, and more importantly social fabric of the community. While the civic and social fabric was stretched, it was not torn enabling future communication and collaboration. E3, with counsel from Keith County, Valley County, and e2, adopted an “open door” mindset. By an “open door” mindset the E3 team made sure that other partners could come to the table and engage. In rural communities the ability for people and organizations to engage later, without bias encouraging an environment for a broader entrepreneurial coalition in the future.

Part 5 – Deal Flow!

Deal flow... the most important ecosystem metric!

Opening – Defining Deal Flow⁵¹... Entrepreneurial deal flow is extremely important in community centered entrepreneurial ecosystem development and operation. Before diving deeply into Part 5 focusing on “EDF” or **Entrepreneurial Deal Flow** we must define what it means. In working with entrepreneurs there are many supporting actions that can lead to outcomes and ultimately community economic development impacts. Deal flow is when an entrepreneur actually does something significant in the development of their venture, such as for example...

- ✓ Buy a new building.
- ✓ Purchase equipment.
- ✓ Hire employees.
- ✓ Develop new customers and markets.
- ✓ Becomes a destination venture.

Central to deal flow as a core entrepreneurial metric is a community’s ability to measure (1) the new development action taken by the entrepreneur, and (2) the associated new investment made necessary for that action. Core to Sidney’s current and future success is tracking, capturing, and using entrepreneurial deal flow. *Reference Figure 9 on page 35.*

Understanding Venture Dynamics... Our experience at e2 is communities have long memories when something bad happens like a closed business, the loss of a major employer, or coming up short in attracting that new industry. Conversely, rural communities too often have short memories with respect to successes. Yes, there are ribbon cutting and positive news on the radio or in the local newspaper, but every year the question is raised, what has our chamber or

⁵¹ Important to NetWork Kansas’ success as a capital led entrepreneur initiative, including their entrepreneurial communities, is deal flow measured in dollars invested and leveraged. This is clean and powerful way to document impact.

development corporation done lately. Countering typical community psychology, a new set of metrics are required measuring venture dynamics⁵² as follows:

- ❖ Establishment⁵³ Changes:
 - Move Ins and Move Outs
 - Startups and Closures
- ❖ Jobs⁵⁴ Related To:
 - Startups and Closures
 - Expansions and Contractions
 - Move Ins and Move Outs

Every community, even the most prosperous communities, will have venture dynamics where in some years there will be more job creation and in other years there will be net job destruction. What matters is over time there are more establishments and jobs as venture dynamics plays out. A smart development game plan will optimize startups, expansions, and move ins while minimizing closures, contractions, and move outs. Winning the net game over a decade is often the difference between a thriving or declining rural community.

Sidney has not yet embraced, let alone deployed this level of venture dynamics. However, active discussions are underway to secure YourEconomy data for Nebraska which would make use of venture dynamics in Sidney with the E3 initiative.

Importance of Rooted Ventures... The Center for Business and Economic Research at Ball State University released an important study⁵⁵ in March of 2017 addressing the job creation or destruction association with footloose and non-footloose economic activity, as follows:

*“Clear decline in the number of footloose jobs.
Growth of more than 90 million non-footloose jobs.”*

⁵² At e2 we recommend and utilize the jobs and establishments time series data provided by YourEconomy at <https://youreconomy.org/>

⁵³ Establishments is the term employed by YourEconomy and includes all kinds of ventures – for-profit businesses, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies and enterprises.

⁵⁴ YourEconomy uses the term “jobs” as measured by any person actively employed or contracted by an establishment contributing to its operations.

⁵⁵ Michael J. Hicks, PhD and David Terrell, MBA. *Footloose Jobs and Urbanization, Recent History and Policy Considerations for Indiana.* Center for Business and Economic Research at Ball State University. Policy Brief: March 28, 2017.

In this study footloose jobs are associated with larger employers who actively move over time versus rooted employers that do not. In other research⁵⁶ from the Northeast Rural Development Center research by David Fleming and Stephan Goetz found the following:

“Resident-owned small firms, with 10-99 workers, have a statistically significant and relatively large positive effect on income growth, regardless of the county’s size or whether it is rural or urban.”

Finally, Claudia Visek, then the CEO of the California Association for Micro Enterprise Opportunity in May 2016 made the point... *“Business ownership will close the wealth gap.”* Entrepreneurship is one of the primary pathways that individuals of lower wealth and income can build wealth over time and gain some control over their family’s wellbeing.

It is for these reasons, that within entrepreneur-focused development, venture dynamics and the longer-term gains in ventures, business owners and operators, and associated workers has the greatest potential in rural communities to generate a more competitive, rooted, and wealth creating economy with greater distribution of income across the community. Sidney should be studied over time to see if these attributes of an entrepreneurial economy manifest in well-established secondary data like personal income, household current net worth, and diversification.

Value Added... Chronically distressed rural communities often are poorer where households, businesses, nonprofit organizations like schools and city government struggle with too little financial capacity to meet basic, let alone desired needs, and ensuring a degree of resilience rooted in economic security. “Value added” is a technical economic term that every development agency should understand and track as part of their metrics. The Corporate Finance Institute⁵⁷ defines value added as:

“Value added is the extra value created over and above the original value of something. It can apply to products, services, companies, management, and other areas of business. In other words, it is an enhancement made by a company/individual to a product or service before offering its for sale to the end customer.”

At e2 we would add community to this definition. A community the size of Sidney with 6,000 residents generates up to \$800 million to \$1.2 billion economy. Communities are like corporations. When the value of an economy relative to its population is closer to \$1.2 billion for example, it has a higher value-added economy generating more income for households, businesses, nonprofits through charitable giving, and taxes for schools to city governments.

⁵⁶ “Does Local Firm Ownership Matter?” Northeast Rural Development Center. March 2011 Quarterly Newsletter.

⁵⁷ <https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/valuation/what-is-value-added/#:~:text=Value%20added%20is%20the%20extra,sale%20to%20the%20end%20customer.>

With Cabela's and its higher wage corporate headquarters Sidney has a higher value economy. Over the two-decade long entrepreneurship run in Ord it built a significantly higher value economy. Over the next decade we will be able to statistically determine if Sidney's E3 initiative is generating these kinds of socio-economic outcomes and impacts.

Wrapping Up – the Deal Flow Metric... Metrics can be wonky and overly complex. Such approaches that try to track and measure too much, often are not executed consistently rendering them less valuable. For rural communities, like Sidney, the use of entrepreneurial deal flow as a primary performance metric, as Sidney is doing, is a key lesson learned from this resurgent community.

Conclusion to Chapter 4

In Chapter 4 or the "Path Forward" our Sidney case study explores and captures lessons learned from Sidney's serious experiment with entrepreneur-driven development. We also identified key areas to remain focused on as Sidney's story unfolds in the coming decade and ultimately a generation out or 25 years.

Our next stop is Chapter 5 focusing on entrepreneur driven community building.



Sidney on the High Plains Horizon View

Core to e2's Rural Community Prosperity Framework there are three essentials: (1) New Resident Attraction and Existing Resident Retention or Demographic Renewal, (2) Quality of Life or Community Building, and (3) Entrepreneur Focused Development. The end game within the Prosperity Framework is enhanced, broadly shared, and sustained community prosperity. Community building is a foundation for becoming a high performing entrepreneurial community.

Chapter 5 – Community Building

Introduction to Chapter 5

Community building can be defined as the (1) process and (2) projects enhancing quality of life amenities and place making offerings, within a community and its immediate region. Examples include...

- ✓ A Vibrant Downtown
- ✓ Availability of Essential Services Like Schools and Health Care
- ✓ Arts and Humanities
- ✓ Availability of Desired Amenities Including:
 - Walkability
 - Biking Trails
 - Eating and Drinking Establishments
 - A Great Coffee Shop and Bakery
 - Public Spaces Where People Can Meet Up
 - Quality Grocery Store(s)
 - Wine Bars and Brew Pubs
 - Recreation Centers
 - Parks and Recreational Assets
- ✓ Farmers Markets and Access to Area Grown Foods

The above list is not all-inclusive. There are other community building attributes defined by the wants and needs of the residents calling these communities' home. Community building or the improvement of "quality of life" amenities is foundational to thriving and entrepreneurial hometowns. Entrepreneurs and their workforces, while often rooted in their hometowns, when they become more successful, may leave searching out communities with more opportunities, a stronger entrepreneurial culture and ecosystem, and places with greater quality of life offerings. Sidney is a community that has energized and supported entrepreneurial talent building a more diversified and dynamic economy, but also engaged in community building enhancing quality of life and the attractiveness to new and existing residents.

Part 1 – Housing, Schools, and Health Care

Opening... “Complete” rural communities provide access to three essential and desired services including housing, schools, and health care. Some within our e2 rural network argue there is a fourth key amenity or early child education and care resources.

Available and Affordable Housing... During the boom years when Cabela’s was growing, providing affordable and the right kinds of housing was a Sidney challenge. It was not easy, but Sidney supported Cabela’s development and attraction of corporate employees with housing solutions. Existing housing was renewed, and new housing was constructed. As Cabela’s Sidney corporate headquarters was closing, with the ensuing housing market crash, this crisis became a development opportunity attracting new residents to Sidney because there was available and affordable housing. Today, Sidney’s housing market is once again tight. Time will tell if Sidney, like Hastings, Nebraska⁵⁸ energizes an entrepreneurial cluster to create more housing positioning it for new resident attraction and population growth.

High Quality Public Schools... In big cities and some rural areas, public schools are struggling. In Nebraska, public schools are locally directed, supported, and according to national standards, excellent. Where public schools are not strong, often parents, particularly influential wealthier parents, send their children to parochial or other private schools. This is not the case in Sidney where its K-12 public school system is exceptional. Residents in Sidney, from the lowest income to the richest can send their children without tuition costs with confidence to the public schools. This is a huge cost savings for average households and a primary community building asset in Sidney.

A hallmark of Sidney’s Public Schools⁵⁹ (SPS) is its commitment to workforce development and entrepreneurship. SPS works closely with Western Nebraska Community College and other higher education institutions, creating dual credit opportunities and high school credit opportunities in vocations from health care to welding. In addition, the SPS’s **Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge** offers students classes on entrepreneurship, business, and opportunities to work in actual school/student businesses like their converted bus serving coffee and bakery items.

Health Care Access... Sidney Regional Medical Center⁶⁰ is a critical access hospital providing core medical services plus visiting specialists. Additionally, there are private health care services ranging from dental to optometrists. Within the region there is Regional West Medical Center in Scottsbluff (1 hour & 19 minutes or 77 miles), Great Plains Health Center in North Platte (1

⁵⁸ Hasting (2020 population of 25,144) located in south central Nebraska has demonstrated how to address a wide range of housing needs from upscale and expensive downtown housing to retiree housing, and affordable housing for younger families.

⁵⁹ <https://www.sidneyraiders.org/>

⁶⁰ <https://www.sidneyrhc.com/>

hour & 51 minutes or 123 miles), and Sterling, Colorado Regional MedCenter (43 minutes & 42 miles). Of course, within several hours drive time and less by medical flight, there is comprehensive specialized medical care in the Denver metroplex. Basic health care services are available locally, and there is access to specialized services within the immediate two-hour region of Sidney. Access to health care services is an essential community building activity and asset enhancing Sidney's attractiveness for new and existing residents.

Closing... For many rural communities they are overwhelmed in how to address issues of housing, childcare, schools, and health care. The challenges seem too vast, and the resources to address them too scarce. But across rural America, and in entrepreneurial communities like Sidney and Ord, innovative solutions are being activated. Developing the right kinds of housing, ensuring our schools are excellent, and our communities have access to quality health care can be entrepreneurial solutions.

Part 2 – A Park's Inclusive Playground⁶¹



Opening... The pictures above include images of the Sidney Inclusive Park ribbon cutting (left) and the playground (right). Sidney was still struggling with the Pandemic and the Cabela's crash and recession when two sisters in Sidney began to advocate for an "expensive" new inclusive park rooted in their work as physical therapists and children often unable to enjoy traditional playgrounds. Initial reaction was not positive or supportive. Concerns were rooted in Sidney's struggling municipal budget, uncertainty about the post-Cabela's future, and the need for such a park. It is in this environment that the playground community building initiative took root.

⁶¹ <https://www.nebcommfound.org/news/two-sisters-had-a-dream-for-an-inclusive-park-sidney-turned-it-into-a-reality/>

Two Sisters had a Dream... Dr. David laquinta in his stories about Sidney, and before about Ord, talks about the powerful force called “resident agency”. Oxford Language’s defines “agency” as...

“...action or intervention, especially such as to produce a particular effect.”

In community economic development, resident agency is rooted in the idea that a few residents within a community can identify a dream or need and are empowered to mobilize the community to address that need or realize a dream. The counterpoint to resident agency is controlling leadership that determines, often in private, what needs are prioritized and dreams supported. Sidney’s power structure was unsupportive of the inclusive playground. It is in this climate that two sisters Ally Benzel and Madi Wilkinson began their journey to vision and then build an inclusive playground in Sidney. As is the case with resident agency, this community building project began with the two sisters that grew to 10 volunteers, then 40 engaged volunteers, and finally Sidney raising more than \$700,000 to fund the project.

Regular Citizens Creating Change... Central to Sidney’s renewal is new leadership, community builders, and a culture of resident agency. When resident agency is empowered versus controlled, a rural community can dream, spawn, and realize multiple development projects annually. As Jeff Yost, the President and CEO of the Nebraska Community Foundation is often to say... *‘...communities have far more capacity to mobilize the resources necessary to support development...’*. This pattern of resident agency is being demonstrated across Sidney from school/student entrepreneurial learning businesses, downtown revival, the Western Nebraska Community College’s Sidney campus and its Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, to E3 and Sidney’s pivot towards entrepreneurial development.

Quality of Life Community Building... The Inclusive Playground idea began years ago in the minds of two Sidney residents. By 2021 they were vocalizing this dream and inviting others to join them. Despite pushback and weak early community support, this small band of caring and thoughtful citizens broke ground in April 2022 on the playground’s construction. Today, the Inclusive Playground located in a city park and managed by the City of Sidney is providing a community attraction drawing children and families from a large multistate region. The Playground is now a point of community pride demonstrating the power of resident agency.

Closing... Our traditional approach to community economic development is rooted in top-down visioning and strategic planning. There is nothing wrong with this approach, but it tends to focus on and set development priorities by leaders in controlling institutions. When there is resident agency, community needs and wants are driven by residents who believe they can bring about change. As is the case with entrepreneurs, these resident development advocates must make their case, engage others, and raise funding. A bottoms-up approach can enrich traditional strategic visioning, planning, and development priority setting. This is entrepreneurship at its core.

Part 3 – The “Swap”

Opening... In February 2024 David Iaquinta completed his story⁶² titled “Stop the Swap.” In “Summing up” this story David penned...

“The combined story these folks tell is one of a successful community. They are not extraordinary people, but they are caring, and solution-directed people. E3 has been a vehicle enabling them to build on past achievements, combining their interests and skills to achieve progress. By working to build mutual trust, they have become a positive and effective force for positive change in Sidney. The entrepreneurial ecosystem is undeniably stronger because of their efforts.”

The entire “Stop the Swap” saga illustrates the power of community building. New social capital was generated through this development crisis. E3 was a constructive force enabling better outcomes, not just the deal, but an engaged community arriving at more confident decisions.

The Back Story... In February 2023, when E3 was still nascent, Worldwide Trophy Adventures⁶³ (WTA) made the pitch to swap some real estate with the City of Sidney. There were clear benefits for both the City and WTA in this proposed deal. The City would have a better property for its police department, shift TIF or Tax Increment Financing obligations to WTA, reduced costs and tax obligations for the City, and a “forever” home with expansion space for WTA

David Scott the City Manager served as the lead in moving this deal through the City Council and the community. At an August 8, 2023, City Council meeting the proposed property swap hit a political firestorm as “anti-tax organizers” charged a lack of transparency and the illegal use of Electric Department funds in support of the deal. Anti-tax leader David Janson not only spoke of and represented citizen distrust of the city, its City Manager, and what was perceived to be an inappropriate inside deal.

In the end, the property swap was achieved. Sidney worked through this conflict. E3 chose to weigh in supporting a rooted and growth-oriented entrepreneur in WTA CEO Ryan Watchorn.

Distrust and Conflict... If polling data is to be believed there is substantial citizen distrust in government. The Trump MAGA movement highlights the depths of this distrust. Generally, citizen distrust in government varies with...

- ✓ Federal Government – Greatest Distrust
- ✓ State Government – Substantial Distrust
- ✓ Local Government – Distrust is Material but Least Comparatively

⁶² [Web link to the Stop the Swap Story.](#)

⁶³ <https://worldwidetrophyadventures.com/>

Sidney, during Cabela's era, was active in doing deals. Cabela's exercised substantial influence with and to a degree, control over the city, and its development efforts. Sidney was among the most active cities in Nebraska during these times employing TIF or Tax Increment Financing and other incentive packages supporting both Cabela's and other business development projects. Anti-tax groups, in fairness had reasonable cause for concern. Given the general anti-government and tax environment nationally and in Nebraska, these concerns focused on the property swap proposal, and particularly the City of Sidney, and its City Manager serving as the lightning rod for anger and opposition.

More was at stake in Sidney than the property swap!

This conflict had all the ingredients to expand and create real and lasting damage to the civic and social capital of the community. How communities deal with these kinds of conflicts can determine their potential to progress or erode into inaction and decline.

E3's Constructive Role... In early 2023, E3 was still organizing and getting its legs. It was a nascent movement and organization. E3 could have been conservative and stayed on the sidelines. It chose to engage. Core to E3's mission is supporting entrepreneurs and the development of entrepreneurial ventures. Here was a legacy venture - Worldwide Trophy Adventures - from Cabela's years committed to staying in Sidney and growing. Serving a world-wide market, WTA contributing to the base economy of Sidney.

In a meeting hosted by E3 at the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center focusing on the WTA/City deal, Dr. Jaquinta summarized City Manager David Scott comments as follows...

"The contrast between the public meeting attended by Stop the Swap and the subsequent one with E3 is stark. The public meeting was a heated powder keg of emotions and loud voices and the other creative and collaborative problem-solving exercise. In the end both meetings served a purpose. E3 was an active and constructive participant in both, and both enhanced E3's visibility in the community and built new relationships."

Newly hired E3 Navigator Alisha Juelfs and other E3 champions took a huge risk to advocate for an entrepreneur. But engage they did and in the end E3 expanded the dialogue, educated citizens and taxpayers, and enabled Sidney to complete this deal. This experience illustrates the power of a community-centered entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Closing... Every community experiences conflicts like "Stop the Swap." Not every community is able to navigate these challenges without lasting and deep social and civil capital tears. Historically, economic development is suspect, as a "smoke and mirrors" activity. It has, does, and will generate concern over tax supported economic development projects. Traditional economic development has since World War II advantaged business attraction and larger real estate deals over grassroots small businesses and entrepreneurs. E3 is making a difference.

Part 4 – Downtown

Opening... In rural America for sure, and generally in urban America, downtowns continue to be important real estate. Embedded in our downtowns is considerable private and public sunk investment. Downtowns are part of our sense of community. During their golden age main streets were the places we met, entertained ourselves, shopped, visited doctors' offices, and so much more. Commercially, downtowns are being replaced by strip malls, box stores, and electronic commerce, but they continue to be an asset and important culturally to communities.

Commercial Real Estate is a Huge Entrepreneurial Asset... A lesson we learned from Central City, Hastings, and particularly Ord is the importance of commercial real estate essential for entrepreneurial development. Ord demonstrated that every vacant lot with utilities, aging downtown building, coupled with municipal and county government facilities, are fundamental assets, like access to capital, for entrepreneurs. Ensuring the optimal business or community use of this real estate is paramount. Essential to optimizing this opportunity was preserving structures and ensuring they were not acquired by speculators or those wishing to use them for storage. Sidney, in its networking with Ord and other communities has learned this lesson, and there is ample evidence of E3, as illustrated in the "Stop the Swap" controversy that Sidney values its downtown and is ensuring its use for active purposes whether with entrepreneurs or community functions.

Cabela's Over Downtown... Sidney over the years has not neglected its downtown, but much of its development energy focused on Cabela's real estate developments and its Interstate 80 Interchange. This prioritization was logically, Sidney's downtown, like main streets all over America, was in decline and looking tired. Downtowns were losing their entrepreneurial punch searching for purpose and function.

On the other hand, Cabela's was growing needing real estate developed. I-80 traffic was increasing consistently and rapidly. Sidney's I-80 interchange was becoming a place to stop between North Platte and Ogallala in the east and Cheyenne in the west. With the massive Cabela's retail store right on the interchange it was also a destination enhancing its stopping traffic.

E3's Role in Redeveloping Downtown Sidney... e2's story capture provides multiple illustrations of E3 and their eNavigator helping startup and nascent expanding businesses find commercial real estate throughout the community. The surge in Sidney's entrepreneurial activity has also generated demand for downtown commercial space whether a dress shop on the second floor of a brick building or the relocation of a brew pub (e.g., Boss City Brewing) or bakery (e.g., Cakes and Creations). Sidney E3 recognizes there is a "win-win" situation when existing real estate is matched with an enhancing entrepreneurial purpose. E3 has taken on a project, working with the schools, to inventory both real estate needs and assets.

Closing... E3 cannot take credit for Sidney's Creative District⁶⁴ anchored in its historic downtown. But E3 has supported this effort. Enhancing arts and humanities in Sidney and its Creative District is one more example of entrepreneurial innovation. Sidney did not create this idea but embraced the opportunity adding to its community building victory list. For entrepreneurs and their employees, vibrant communities with rich arts, entertainment, and humanities offerings are part of the ecosystem. Central to being an entrepreneurial community is looking for and pursuing opportunities when they become available and make sense for a community.⁶⁵



Part 5 – Growing Agency

Opening... Over the 50 years of my professional career as a rural community economic developer, researcher and economist, the debate has raged regarding what rural communities must do to succeed. Critical concepts have emerged including...

- ✓ Business Attraction
- ✓ Asset Based Development
- ✓ Value-Added Natural Resources from Agriculture to Forestry
- ✓ Major Attraction Real Estate Developments like Rural Resorts
- ✓ Slowing and Stopping the Brain Drain
- ✓ Appreciative Inquiry
- ✓ Leadership Development
- ✓ Strategic Visions and Planning

All of these solutions have merit and can contribute to rural community revitalization, particularly for more rural and distressed communities. Thanks to my friend and colleague Dr. David Iaquinta⁶⁶, a partner with e2's story capture, the past decade or so, I now believe we have the keystone to all community revitalization. Empowering leadership and institutions, growing resident agency is the most powerful force for productive and resident desired change.

⁶⁴ Community Creative Districts is an initiative of the Nebraska Arts Council

⁶⁵ Picture thanks to the Nebraska Arts Council, Sidney landing page at <https://www.artsCouncil.nebraska.gov/sidney-creative-district/>

⁶⁶ Check out David's piece "Who Gets the Credit" for more on resident agency at [web link](#).

Agency Revisited... In e2's Sidney Case Study "agency" has been highlighted, defined, and illustrated. In Chapter 5 focusing on community building within the context of becoming an entrepreneurial community. Conventional definitions of "resident agency" do not capture the depth or importance of the meaning of these two words and what they mean for transformative community economic development. Rooted in e2's rural community experience here are some descriptors defining a richer meaning of resident agency...

- ✓ Empowering versus Controlling Leaders
- ✓ Empowering versus Controlling Institutions
- ✓ Higher Levels of Engaged Community Builders and Residents
- ✓ The Ability of a Small Group of Residents to Elevate a Need or Want to Priority Status
- ✓ A Community's Capacity to Start and Activate Multiple Development Projects at Once

Lessons from Ord... There are two major "agency" insights from Ord and its Valley County region over the 20-year period from 2000 to 2020 now being demonstrated in Sidney. First, because of empowering leadership and resident agency the sheer volume of development projects over these two decades. Second, the transition in leadership and changes in Ord's, and now Sidney's culture empowering citizen initiatives.

Illustrating the first lesson from Ord relative to the power of resident agency, consider:

- Development of its Ethanol Cluster
- The Revitalization and Buildout of its Health Care Cluster
- Enhanced Visitor Attraction, Hospitality, and Tourism Cluster
- Housing Development from a new Subdivision to Infill and Rehab
- Investments into Ord's Main Street
- The Repurposing of Shopko when it Closed for Expansion of a Growth Business
- 100 Entrepreneurial Deals Including Startups, Expansions and Transitions
- Major Improvements to the Public Schools
- Overhaul of the County Court House
- A New Fire Barn
- New Municipal Buildings
- Park Improvements and New Parks
- A Brand-New Swim Park – Regional Destination Amenity
- The Husk and Arts and Humanities Programming

It was resident agency rooted in a few empowering leaders that started this ball rolling with a new interlocal agreement creating the Valley County Economic Development Board and the passage (now renewal) of LB840 providing sales tax funding for community economic development. Over these 20 plus years Ord and its region have expanded resident engagement and citizen initiatives resulting in over \$250 million of net new investment or \$25 million per year on average, associated with three to seven major development projects each year!

Ord's leaders mentored Sidney's E3 leaders instilling these lessons on Sidney that are now flourishing just years after the Cabela's crash.

E3 is Illustrating Agency... As is the case in most rural communities, progress begins with a few individuals coming together and taking on the challenge of creating change. In Sidney's case folks like Sarah, Corey, Melissa, Paula, and others instinctively embracing empowering leadership. They were not seeking control but motivated to bring their community back from its Cabela's induced crisis. They opened the door and welcomed others to join them. What is particularly important from Sidney's experience is the effectiveness and efficiency of these emergent E3 leaders. They incorporated their Cabela's skills and talents pursuing a focused and lean approach to community organizing. E3 meetings are well-structured and generally are done on time within one hour. These leaders have enabled other leaders to emerge by allowing control essential for resident agency to thrive. They set goals collaboratively, make plans, assign responsibilities, mobilize money, get things done, and make progress creating momentum.

During two of Sidney E3's biggest challenges (1) creating E3 as a formal organization and (2) engaging in the "Big Swap" community conflict, the E3 team transitioned from an informal group to a formal organization modeled from solutions in Keith and Valley Counties. Both had employed Nebraska Interlocal Cooperation Act to create collaborative development organizations.

The E3 team initially swung for the fences hoping to bring all development groups to the table including the chamber, city/development corporation, and the tourism board. All three traditional development groups pushed back. Instead of stalling or creating conflict, the agency within the E3 team pivoted, finding partners in the Public K-12 School System and Western Nebraska Community College. In Part 3 of this chapter, e2 overviewed how E3 made a difference during the "Big Swap" conflict helping the community support a key growth entrepreneur while salvaging the social fabric between "pro-" and "anti-" development groups.

Closing... Resident agency and a community's resilience are inter-related. Resilience is the capacity of individuals, businesses, organizations, governments, and communities to survive crises like a natural disaster or the loss of a major employer like Cabela's in Sidney's case. When there is rich social and civic capacity rooted deeply in a culture of resident agency, communities do not need to wait for action from the outside or from major institutions to respond with innovative solutions activating resilience more quickly and substantially.

Sidney is demonstrating through its E3 team agency that is moving this community to a better future.

Conclusion to Chapter 5

There are numerous factors that contribute to a community's success over time including...

- ✓ Lots of Good Luck and Fortune
- ✓ Serious Commitment to Community Economic Development
- ✓ Community Economic Development Prioritizes Genuine Opportunities and Assets
- ✓ Empowering Leadership and Activated Resident Agency
- ✓ Entrepreneurship is Foundational to Growing a More Diversified Economy
- ✓ Diversification is Essential to Resiliency and Sustained Prosperity

When entrepreneurially driven community building is coupled with rooted economic development, powerful forces are unleashed, realizing community renewal and prosperity. Agency, whether rooted in the dream of a business entrepreneur or two sisters envisioning an inclusive playground for children, is the primary activating ingredient in thriving community economic development.



On the high plains with few trees, there are vast horizons. This is the landscape where Sidney is located where at sunset there is a thin line of curving earth and a vast sky.

Every community from New York City and Los Angeles to my rural hometowns of Sterling, CO (2020 – 13,735), Mullen, NE (2020 = 500), or Ogallala, NE (2020 = 4,858) must assume responsibility for their own development and future. As communities search for solutions to greater, more broadly shared, and sustained prosperity, insights and answers can be found in other communities and their innovations.

Conclusion – 24-7-365 Forever

In the United States the primary responsibility for a community's development rests with America's nearly 20,000 communities.⁶⁷ In most of the rest of the developed world, community economic development is a shared responsibility among local, regional, provincial (or state), and national governments. Even in the United States, local development responsibilities are often directed by nonprofit organizations like chambers of commerce or development corporations that are volunteer led and funded.⁶⁸

The process of developing our communities, whether rural village or Class A Metro like Chicago or Atlanta, community economic development is a 24-7-365 forever responsibility. Pro-active communities in their development shape their destinies. Too many rural communities are not pro-active or are focusing on development strategies with limited opportunity for success. At e2 we employ the following framework with respect to rural communities' development efforts:

- ❖ Level 1 – Not in the Development
- ❖ Level 2 – Reactive to Development Threats and Opportunities
- ❖ Level 3 – Responsive to Development Threats and Opportunities
- ❖ Level 4 – Pro-Active Focusing on Genuine Development Opportunities
- ❖ Level 5 – Smart Cluster Focused Development

Unfortunately, most rural communities are in the Level 1 and 2 categories, and at best at Level 3. As Level 3 they have development organizations, funding, and are prepared to engage when there are recognized development threats (e.g., loss of a major employer) or opportunities. For most of its history Sidney has been a Level 3 community responsive to both development threats and opportunities. Over the decades this community has been willing to invest and support community economic development projects and initiatives. Sidney's robust and ongoing support of Cabela's and its development is a case in point.

⁶⁷ 19,502 incorporated places according to www.statistica.com in 2019.

⁶⁸ In some communities municipal and county governments take the development lead. Often, municipal and county governments appropriate tax dollars to support private development efforts with chambers or development corporations.

Sidney, in partnership with E3 has become a Level 4 community not only pro-active in its development, but focusing on both economic and community development, and genuine development opportunities. Sidney is developing an economy and society positioning it for competitiveness, diversification, high-value, prosperity, and resiliency. With its new community foundation, Sidney is now focusing on rooting wealth to fund development work into perpetuity. Sidney is now positioned to become a Level 5 community with an increasingly sophisticated cluster center development game plan.⁶⁹

Sidney, like very one of those 20,000 other communities in the United States, is a work in progress. But it is one of those rural communities that can inform us all with respect to becoming an entrepreneurial community. At e2 we will keep watching and visiting Sidney. Pay attention to this community, and you will learn critical insights and lessons that can inform your community's development approach and game plan.

⁶⁹ For more information on Level 5 or cluster development check out e2's book... [Strategies for Rural Prosperity](#) (2022) via Amazon Books.

Attachment A - Sidney Stories

www.energizingentrepreneurs.org – Sidney Landing Page LINK

Other Sidney Stories and Resources

Background Papers

1. Sidney Story Overview by e2 and Don Macke
2. Summary of Sidney Stories by e2 and Don Macke
3. Sidney Case Study by e2 and Don Macke
4. Cheyenne County and Sidney Development Opportunity Profiles by e2 and Don Macke
5. E3 Assessment by the Sidney E3 team by David Iaquina (Confidential)

Stories

6. What is a Community Champion? by David Iaquina
7. The Sarah Sinnett Story – Sidney Champion and E2 Lead by David Iaquina
8. The Cory Keen Story – E3 Champion by David Iaquina
9. The Paula Abbot and Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center Story by David Iaquina
10. The Melissa Norgard Story – Corporate Professional, Economic Development Director, Entrepreneur, and Mother by David Iaquina
11. Stop the Swap Story by David Iaquina
12. The eNavigator by David Iaquina
13. The Alisha Juelfs Story – Navigator by David Iaquina
14. The Amber Fields Entrepreneur Story with Jennifer Powell by David Iaquina

Podcasts

15. *Community Champions...* <https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/podcast/entrepreneur-ecosystem-champions-with-pam-abbot-and-sarah-sinnett.html>
16. *Entrepreneur Navigators...* <https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/podcast/entrepreneur-navigators-with-alisha-juelfs-and-rachael-barry.html>
17. *About E3...* <https://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/podcast/exploring-e3-in-nebraska.html>

Attachment B - Sidney 2022 Baseline Profile⁷⁰ **Confidential**

E3 – Energizing Entrepreneurial Ecosystems Initiative

Introduction and Background

This document provides a baseline for the Sidney and Cheyenne County at the beginning of the E3 or Energizing Entrepreneurial Ecosystems initiative. Before we dive into this profile, keep in mind the following contextual considerations:

What is a Baseline Profile? Communities, even smaller rural communities are too complex to ascertain with degrees of certainty “cause and effect” or **causality**. However, employing “natural experiment” methods we can track **inferences** based on changes in a community with the probability that certain development actions contributed to realizing such changes.

Why is this Baseline Important? E3’s primary focus is to empower Nebraska’s rural communities to achieve greater prosperity through entrepreneur-led community economic development. The ability to scale up E3 with more rural communities, is dependent upon demonstrating impact with the first cohort of six E3 communities. This baseline provides a “starting” reference point to measure change and impact.

About E3. E3 or **Energizing Entrepreneurial Ecosystems** is a community-centered and entrepreneurship-focused community economic development initiative hosted by the Nebraska Community Foundation and in partnership with e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems, NetWork Kansas, Valley County, Nebraska and the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. E3 is employing e2’s **Development Framework** with partner communities.

“Causality is influence by which one event, process, state, or object contributes to the production of another event, process, state, or object where the cause is partly responsible for the effect, and the effect is partly dependent on the cause.”

[Wikipedia](#)

“...the act or process of inferring (see INFER): such as **a**: the act of passing from one proposition, statement, or judgment considered as true to another whose truth is believed to follow from that of the former (and/or) **b**: the act of passing from statistical sample data to generalizations (as of the value of population parameters) usually with calculated degrees of certainty...”

Meriam-Webster

This **Sidney Baseline Profile** is organized into the following content sections:

- A. Sidney and Cheyenne County in 2021
- B. Sidney’s Development Journey
- C. Boom and Bust History
- D. Baseline Socio-Economic Indicators
- E. Dr. David Iaquinta’s Summer 2022 Interviews

Our next stop is **Part A or Sidney and Cheyenne County in 2021**.

⁷⁰ The first E3 gathering was in Ord and Valley County in the fall of 2021 starting the three-year run of Energizing Entrepreneurial Communities. For each of the six E3 partner communities (i.e., Valley County, Sidney, McCook, Red Cloud, Keith County and Holt County) e2 prepared **Baseline Profiles** with Sidney’s completed September 6, 2022 or early in the E3 process and well before Sidney realized its E3 footings.

Every community, region and even nation can be evaluated relative to its socio-economic health and vitality at any given point in time. Establishing a baseline is foundational in enabling future comparative analysis. In Part A we provide a statistical profile of Sidney and Cheyenne County rooted in the most current data available based on e2's **Cheyenne County Development Opportunity Profile** prepared September 2021 at the start of E3.

Part A - Sidney and Cheyenne County in 2021

In 2019 (November) we completed a **Development Opportunity Profile for Cheyenne County and Sidney DOP** through Nebraska Extension, and in support of a strategic planning project with the City of Sidney. We updated this DOP (September 2021) for the Sidney E3 team prior to the first E3 Gathering in Valley County in late September and early October 2021. We encourage the users of this Profile to review both of these statistical profiles and check out the embedded electronic data hyperlinked in the inset on Page 3.

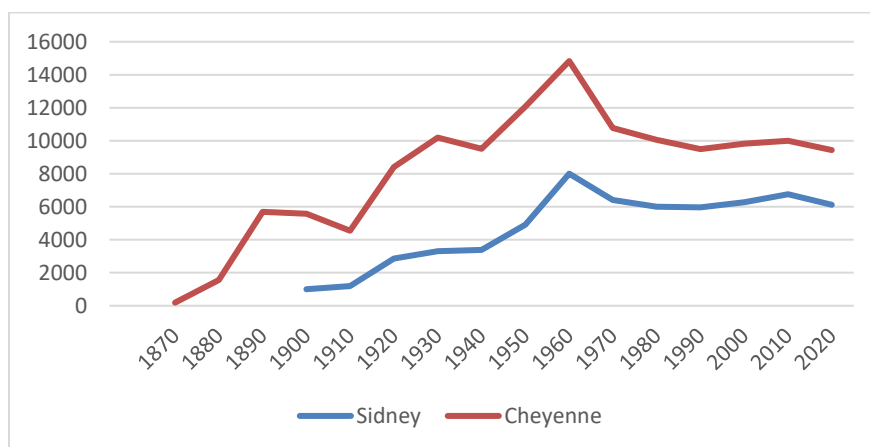
Development Assets

Sidney has the following development assets:

1. Resiliency through Boom-and-Bust Cycles
2. Post-Cabela's Crash Housing Boom
3. Lessons Learned a Renewed Focus on Economic Diversification
4. Emergent Community Leadership and Agency
5. Favorable Location

Resiliency through Boom-and-Bust Cycles. In Part C of this baseline profile, we explore in summary fashion Sidney's legacy of booms, busts and resiliency. Sidney is unique among Nebraska rural communities for its capacity to reinvent itself after major expansions and contractions.

Figure 1. Historical Population Change for Sidney and Cheyenne County, Nebraska



Post-Cabela's Crash Housing Boom. The latest Sidney boom was driven by a local startup (1961) called Cabela's that became a national player in the recreational retail space. But with the acquisition of Cabela's by Bass Pro Shop (2017) Sidney has lost this headquarters and an estimated 2,000 jobs. Cabela's, for about three decades drove Sidney's development, and this community and the adjoining region became over-dependent on this one employer and all the allied activities created by having a national corporation in town. Softening the blow has been a mini housing boom created by lots of affordable housing made available with leaving Cabela's employees and the likely in-migration of new residents from the Denver Front Range and other locations. More on this opportunity later in this section.

Lessons Learned a Renewed Focus on Economic Diversification. Every community experiences business cycles and boom and bust cycles. However, Sidney has tended to become over-dependent on a narrow range of economic activities that drive growth when they are booming, and drive contraction and crisis when they decline. Through grass-roots entrepreneurial venture development, Sidney has the assets and opportunity to grow a more diversified economy and society, less prone to destructive boom and bust cycles, and capable of growing more broadly shared resident prosperity. Such an economy could also wean the city from its extensive use of Tax Increment Financing or TIF thereby rebuilding a stronger local tax base for all local government jurisdictions.

Emergent Community Leadership and Agency. At this stage of Sidney's E3 engagement it is not clear there is sufficient community commitment and leadership to ensure success. It is also too early to assess if there is emerging resident agency to drive diverse community economic development.

Favorable Location. Sidney has a favorable location along Interstate 80 and the outer footprint of the dynamic and growing Denver Metroplex. It is too soon to assess whether Sidney will focus on, let alone optimize this development asset and opportunity.

Development Opportunities

Rooted in this baseline analysis we perceive five primary development opportunities worthy of further exploration. *We will track if and how Sidney optimizes these strategic opportunities.*

1. New Residents and Proximity to the Denver Metroplex
2. Interstate 80 Interchange
3. Regional Hub City
4. Entrepreneur-Led Development
5. Reuse of the Cabela's Assets

New Residents and Proximity to the Denver Metroplex. Sidney, as demonstrated by the in-migration of new residents because of housing availability and affordability, could be one of rural America's **Next Best Places**. A commitment to entrepreneurial led and government supported housing, childcare and family amenities could position Sidney for more development and the ability to support more local owned ventures.

Interstate 80 Interchange. Sidney hosts a major Interstate 80 Interchange between Ogallala and Cheyenne, Wyoming. Traffic on Interstate 80 is projected to grow steadily and Sidney can optimize its role as a stop for travelers and truckers.

Regional Hub City. Sidney is a regional rural hub city. A dual strategy of strengthening Sidney’s rural hinterland communities coupled with increasing spending capture could create development opportunities for Sidney’s interchange, downtown and entrepreneurial community.

Entrepreneur-Led Development. E3 is all about entrepreneurial development. For any community from Sidney to Omaha, the foundation of all economic development is rooted entrepreneurial development. When communities create a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem, they not only grow eTalent and ventures, but position the community attracting eTalent and their ventures.

Reuse of Cabela’s Assets. Years ago, Control Data had a major campus and operation in Aberdeen (2020 population of 28,315) in north central South Dakota. Then Control Data closed shop. Aberdeen was devastated. Control Data gifted its buildings and campus to the area development corporation. For a number of years Aberdeen worked hard to find a company to move into this amazing asset. Ultimately, the development corporation pivoted and made these assets available to local companies wanting to grow. Today, this diverse collection of rooted corporations generates more local economic activity than when Control Data was in operation. The now underused Cabela’s corporate facilities represent a development asset for either venture attraction or growing local entrepreneurial ventures driving greater economic and social diversification.

Figure 2. Continuum of Community-Centered Development

<p>Level 1 Not in the Game</p>	<p>Too many communities, both urban to rural, are really not effectively engaged in community economic development. They are a drift and at risk for trends undermining their economy and very survival.</p>
<p>Level 2 Reactive</p>	<p>Many communities fall into the “reactive” class. They have development organizations, but they primarily react to both threats and opportunities, often too far behind the curve to influence outcomes. Consequently, too many opportunities are lost, and threats adversely affect community vitality.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Where is Sidney? Reactive to Responsive</p> <p>Sidney and its multi-county region took a huge hit with the acquisition of Cabela’s and the associated shutdown of the corporate offices by Bass Pro Shop. With E3, a new generation of community leaders are responding envisioning a new development organization and entrepreneur focused game plan.</p>	
<p>Level 3 Responsive</p>	<p>Some communities and many NetWork Kansas E-Communities fall into Level 3 and are engaged in “responsive” community economic development. These communities have capable development groups and are able to respond to both development opportunities and threats enabling more impactful outcomes.</p>
<p>Level 4</p>	<p>Some communities fall into the Level 4 category. They have development visions and strategic plans actively being executed. These communities have deeper understanding of their development assets and opportunities. Level 4</p>

Pro-Active	communities are “pro-actively” pursuing specific areas of community economic development.
Level 5 Strategic Cluster Development	A very small group of rural communities achieve Level 5 development status and are engaged in strategic cluster community economic development. Opportunity-centered cluster development ensures high-value outcomes and increased niche competitive advantages and greater resiliency.

Development Capacity

Nebraska over its 155-year history (e.g., since Statehood) has been a leader in community economic development rooted in the policies of the then new Republican Party that embraced pro-active and robust federal, state and local development policies and programs. Agricultural development has always been a mainstream and foundational economic development focus. During and following World War II with industry moving into America’s heartlands Nebraska double-downed on industry and business attraction. By the 1970s and early 1980s these attraction opportunities became scarce, expensive and very competitive. During the decades of 1950s into the 1990s Nebraska communities invested heavily in economic development with muscular funding and professional staffing. It was not unusual for economic development staff to spend much of their career in one good and committed community.

However, as the attraction game eroded, communities in Nebraska began to disinvest in economic development undermining the very capacity necessary to grow a diverse, competitive, high-value and resilient economy. Central to success today and into the future is to pivot where the opportunities are as outlined in this paper and Sidney’s DOPs. Essential for optimizing success is increased and stable funding, coloration among development stakeholders and professional and sustained staffing all rooted in a pivot towards entrepreneurial development.

Our next stop is Part B or **Sidney’s Development Journey**.

Every community has a unique development journey and history. Over time communities change and with enough time they sometimes change dramatically. Consider Denver, Colorado in the early days of the Pike's Peak or Colorado Gold Rush (1858). This once humble frontier community is now, just 164 years later a leading mid-sized metropolitan city anchoring the rapidly growing and dynamic Denver Front Range Metroplex. Understanding a community's development journey can provide insight into its realities today and its potential for future development.

Part B - Sidney's Development Journey

To capture, in part, Sidney's development journey we employ a **chronology** specific to key events by year.

Figure 3. Sidney and Cheyenne, Nebraska's Development Chronology

Year	Key Event
Transcontinental Railroad	
The development of the first Transcontinental Railroad played a major role in Sidney's early development. The Union Pacific building track from Omaha in the east until connecting with the Central Pacific building from the west in Utah. Construction of the nearly 2,000-mile route began in 1863 and was completed in 1869. Along with a flurry of major Republican Party led national legislation in the 1860s, the <u>Pacific Railway Act</u> was passed by Congress and signed into law by then President Abraham Lincoln in 1862.	
1867	Sidney founded as along with Fort Sidney to protect and support the Union Pacific Railroad
Before Non-Native Settlement	
Long before European-American settlers made this part of the High Plains home it, was occupied by a number of Indigenous People or Native Americans organized in linguist groups, Tribes and Clans. Lakota, Cheyenne (e.g., for which the county is named), Arapaho and Pawnee were all active in this part of the High Plains within North America's Great Plains. We must always remember that non-Native development was made possible by the marginalization, displacement of often genocide of Native Peoples like the Cheyenne.	
1870	Census population of Cheyenne County – 190 (a) No Census for Sidney
1871	Cheyenne County was formed within the State of Nebraska.
1874	Gold is discovered in the Black Hills (now South Dakota)
1876	Black Hills Gold Rush Peaks (1876 & 1877)
Black Hills Gold Rush and Sidney	
Despite Native American treaties, George Armstrong Custer led an U.S. Army expedition into the Black Hills in 1874 confirming gold. This led to a rush of non-Native persons into the Black Hills driving the 1870s Black Hills Gold Rush. With a bridge over the North Platte River, the Sidney to Deadwood road was one of the primary	

routes into the Black Hills. Sidney linked the newly built transcontinental railroad with the Black Hills. The Black Hills Gold Rush accelerated Sidney’s development and growth.

Mari Sandoz’s Miss Morissa, Doctor of the Gold Trail (1955)

In 1955 Nebraska author Mari Sandoz published Miss Morissa, Doctor of the Gold Trail. This fictional story rooted in deep research and facts captures Sidney during the time of Fort Sidney, the Transcontinental Railroad, the Sidney and Deadwood Road and the Black Hills Gold Rush. In this story one captures these brief years of Sidney as a boom town, dynamic, ever changing and part of the last frontier on the High Plains.

1876	<p>Battle of the Little Bighorn – Southeastern Montana Territory</p> <p>When Sidney was still very nascent it was part of a vast frontier where Plains Indians lived. In June 1876 George Armstrong Custer and parts of his command were destroyed by Plains Indians in the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Sidney was created in this Plains Indians War period. This was just two years after Custer’s expedition into the Black Hills.</p>
1870s	<p>During the 1870s the County grows by 720%!</p>
<p>The First Boom Years</p> <p>Beginning in the mid to late 1870s this part of Nebraska experienced rapid net in-migration, settlement and population growth. In roughly 25 years this country went from “frontier” to fully settled with the formation of communities like Sidney and new farms, ranches, businesses, churches and public facilities.</p>	
1880	<p>County Population = 1,558 - Sidney Census Population = 1,069</p>
1880s	<p>During the 1880s Cheyenne County grows by another 265%!</p>
1889	<p>Initial interest in oil exploration in the Nebraska Panhandle</p>
1890s & 1900s	<p>During the 1890s (-2.2%) and 1900s (-18.3%) Cheyenne County grows by experiences population contraction related to the post-boom bust, drought and outmigration of Homesteaders. In the High Plains of the Great Plains Region that is semi-arid early non-Native settlement exceeded the capacity of the land and economy to support the booming numbers of in-migrants.</p>
1890	<p>County Population = 5,693 - Sidney Census Population = No Census numbers?</p>
1900	<p>County Population = 5,570 - Sidney Census Population = 1,001</p>
1910s & 1920s	<p>The County experiences strong population growth increasing by nearly 85% during the 1910s and another 21.2% in the 1920s.</p>
<p>1890 to 1910 Cheyenne County Population Contraction</p> <p>Between the 1890 to 1910 Census the County experienced a population loss of 20%. Sidney continued to grow. This was a period of dramatic change in agriculture in Nebraska impacting rural populations. Cheyenne County was over settled given the agricultural carrying capacity of the High Plains. Many settlers left, some moved to town, and farms and ranches were consolidated. In 1905 Congress also passed the Kinkaid Act granting 640 acres to settlers. Often called the “ranchers” versus “homesteaders” act, drove land consolidation particularly in western Nebraska and other ranching High Plains regions.</p>	
1910	<p>County Population = 4,510 - Sidney Census Population = 1,185</p>
<p>World War I and Agriculture</p> <p>World War I ran from 1914 into November of 1918. While the U.S. did not enter the war officially until April 1917, this war drove demand for both agricultural and industrial products. This created a boom for this region’s wheat farmers and ranchers.</p>	

1920	County Population = 8,405 - Sidney Census Population = 2,852
Drought, Dust Bowl and Coming Great Depression	
<p>During World War I the demand for food and fiber drove converting High Plains (e.g., from the foothills of the Rocky Mountains in the west to the 100th Meridian in the east) range land into intensively cropped agriculture. Most the country lacked irrigation during this period and when drought socked into the Central High Plains, fragile top soil began to blow the creating epic Dust Bowl years. These hard times impacted many rural communities. However, Cheyenne County and Sidney continued to grow between 1920 and 1930.</p>	
1930	County Population = 10,187 - Sidney Census Population = 3,306
Great Depression of the 1930s	
<p>Cheyenne County experiences population contraction once again associated with drought, the dust bowl and the Great Depression of the 1930s as rural residents, often tied to and supporting farms and ranches left for urban areas in hope of jobs. The Great Depression along with a crisis in production agriculture drove rural residents to cities like Sidney and larger communities like Denver, Lincoln and Omaha. Farm and ranch consolidation continued.</p>	
1940s	Sidney was home to the World War II era Sioux Army Ordinance Depot.
Military Tradition Continues...	
<p>From the 1870s non-permanent Army camps protecting builders of the Union Pacific Railroad, continuing with Fort Sidney, the military tradition continued with the founding of the Sioux Army Ordinance Depot. The Depot was among hundreds of military ordinance storage sites spread across the United States. Sidney's location along the main line of the Union Pacific Railroad was a major factor in the location of the Depot. Upon retirement of the Depot, this large acreage becoming an important development asset and home to the Sidney branch of the Western Nebraska Community College.</p>	
1940	County Population = 9,505 - Sidney Census Population = 3,388
World War II	
<p>World War II ran from 1939 into the fall of 1945. While the U.S. did not officially join the war until 1941 with Pearl Harbor, this war, like World War I drove demand for agricultural and industrial products. This creating boom times for this region's wheat farmers, ranchers and allied industries.</p>	
1950	County Population = 12,081 - Sidney Census Population = 4,912
Southern Panhandle Oil Boom	
<p>During the 1950s and 1960s oil exploration, development and production increased dramatically creating a demographic and economic boom. The entire Tri-State Region (i.e., northeast Colorado, northwest Kansas, southwest Nebraska and the southern Panhandle in Nebraska. Between 1950 and 1960 Cheyenne County population grew by 23% and Sidney grew by 63%. This boom moderated quickly even though overall oil production continued for another decade. The influx of workers and some families drove business development in household and business services sectors. Between 1960 and 1970 Cheyenne County's population contracted by 20% and Sidney lost 27% of its population. Oil exploration and particularly well field drilling and development creates lots of jobs, but on-going production requires far few workers.</p>	
1960	County Population = 14,828 - Sidney Census Population = 8,004 The County peaks in population with 14,828 residents!
1960s	Southern Panhandle oil exploration and production boom

1961	Cabela's Founded Cabela's, branded as the "World's Foremost Outfitter" Was founded in Chappell, Nebraska (1960 population of 1,280) in 1961. Early growth of Cabela's like most startups was slow and then accelerated.
1962	Cabela's headquarters moves from Chappell to Sidney.
1965	Western Community College based in Scottsbluff establishes a campus in Sidney on the ground of the World War II Sioux Army Ordinance Depot.
1970	County Population = 10,778 - Sidney Census Population = 6,403
<p style="text-align: center;">1960 to 1990 – 30 Years of Contraction</p> <p>Sidney experienced population decline and economic contraction between 1960 and 1990. Population declined by 2,045 residents or 26%. Peak population for Sidney was in 1960. This bust period was more significant when compared to Cabela's bust in the 2020s. Ironically, the boom that was the growth of Cabela's started during 1960s. Sidney and this region double downed in its support for Cabela's and its development and growth. In many ways, in at least the Central Great Plains, Sidney and Cabela's shared an identity.</p>	
1970s	Interstate 80 reaches Sidney and over the years the Sidney interstate interchange has developed into a larger commercial zone with lodging, retail (Cabela's Store), food services, motor vehicle services (e.g., gasoline stations, convenience stores and truck stops), other amenities and non-interstate related commercial and industrial development.
1980	County Population = 10,057 - Sidney Census Population = 6,010
<p style="text-align: center;">The Cabela's Boom</p> <p>Cabela's experiences sustained and rather dramatic growth contributing to employment and impact in not only Sidney where its headquarters was located, but throughout the entire region with employees coming from a multi-county region including Sterling in northeastern Colorado and creating auxiliary operations in smaller communities in the region. Economic development was focused on supporting and keeping Cabela's in the community and growing. It is unusual today for a company the size of Cabela's at its peak to be located in an airport isolated and relatively small rural community. Zippia (www.zippia.com) provides a comprehensive development timeline or history for Cabela's including its major plays in Sidney and area communities in Northeastern Colorado and Western Nebraska.</p>	
1990	County Population = 9,494 - Sidney Census Population = 5,959
<p style="text-align: center;">1990 to 2020 – Population Growth</p> <p>While Cheyenne County has not surpassed its 1960 peak population of nearly 15,000 residents, the depopulation experienced by Sidney between 1960 and 1990 was replaced with 20 years of population growth driven by Interstate 80 interchange development, Cabela's headquarters and allied activities and other development. Between the 1990 Census and 2010, Sidney's population grew from 5,959 to 6,757 or by over 13%. Not only did Sidney benefit from Cabela's expansion, but other communities hosted facilities and jobs. Workers from a multi-county region commuted to Sidney to work at Cabela's and other employers.</p>	
1997	Sidney passes LB840 providing funding for economic development. Sidney was among the first Nebraska communities to use this new tool provided by the State.
2000	County Population = 9,830 - Sidney Census Population = 6,282
2004	Cabela's Become a Public Company Sidney based Cabela's decides to move from private ownership becoming a public company with an estimated initial stock offering of \$230 million. Prior, Cabela's was a privately owned

	company experiencing financial challenges. Once it became public it made its private owners wealthy in most cases, but then became a candidate for acquisition.
<p>Great Recession – December 2007 through June 2009</p> <p>The housing bubble was building and in late 2007 the bubble burst creating a financial crisis in the United States that became the Great Recession. The Great Recession is the most severe economic downturn since the 1930s Great Depression. While the Great Recession technically ended in June 2009, the Great Recession Recovery was slow and weak making it seem like a longer event. Well into the mid-2010s, many cities were still struggling, hammered real estate markets and owners still underwater. Recreational and sporting goods sales and services are a discretionary consumer area. In retrospect Cabela’s, with its rapid expansions, was severely weakened by the Great Recession contributing to debt, weaker sales and softer profits. These conditions make Cabela’s a strong candidate for consolidation within this retailing space through acquisition.</p>	
2010	County Population = 9,998 - Sidney Census Population = 6,757 Record peak population for Sidney!
<p>Growth Can Be Risky and Even Kill</p> <p>During this new century Cabela’s was aggressive in its development of its retail stores across the country, online retailing expansions, its credit card business and specialty services. Timing is important and growth coinciding with the Great Recession hit Cabela’s hard. Cabela’s could have been acquired by a company that specialized in dismantling companies and extracting maximum gains for investors. Some of this dismantling did happen to Cabela’s (e.g., its Credit Card company spin off), but it was acquisition by Bass Pro Shop continuing its operations if not its Sidney headquarters. Growth with bad timing can kill companies. This is part of Cabela’s and Sidney’s bust history.</p>	
2017	Cabela’s is acquired by Bass Pro Shop
2018	A major donor gift was made to the community creating a significant Donor Advised Fund hosted by the Nebraska Community Foundation. This Fund is capable of providing additional funding for community economic development.
<p>Cabela’s Acquired by Bass Pro Shop</p> <p>Home grown Cabela’s was acquired by Bass Pro Shop. The estimated purchase price was \$5 billion. Following the acquisition, the Cabela’s Sidney headquarters was largely transferred to Bass Pro Shop’s headquarters resulting in massive job losses. Between 2010 and 2020 Sidney’s population declined by 642 residents or 9.5%. During this period of Cabela’s downsizing and employment loss, Sidney’s housing market went from strong and tight, to awash in for-sale properties and depressed housing market. Estimates indicate that Cabela’s in Sidney the job loss is estimated at 2,000 workers. Impacts regional are likely larger.</p>	
November 2019	Nebraska Extension is retained by the City of Sidney to support City strategic planning. e2 completed its first Development Opportunity Profile of Cheyenne County. The University team was cautioning the community get ready for massive contraction and possibly crisis
<p>World Health Pandemic – Inflow of New Residents – Housing Availability and Affordability</p> <p>In late 2019 America was on the verge of a major world health pandemic associated with COVID-19. By March 2020 the full force of the Pandemic was asserting itself and in America and folks outside of Sidney (e.g., most likely the Front Range of Colorado) discovered Sidney had housing and it was remarkably affordable. By 2021 Sidney’s surplus housing was gone and the community was experiencing a housing shortage once again.</p>	
2020	County Population = 9,428 - Sidney Census Population = 6,115

<p>Housing Bust to Housing Boom</p> <p>Depending on the source, at times Sidney following the Cabela’s crash had between 300 and 400 housing units on the market. By 2021 all these units were purchased or occupied. We suspect, pending further research, that many of these new families, households and individuals migrated from the housing short and high-cost Denver Front Range Metroplex. The introduction of so many residents warranting additional research and representing a significant development opportunity.</p>	
2020	<p>COVID World Health Pandemic Challenges - Closures</p> <p>County Census Population – 9,428</p> <p>Sidney Census Population – 6,115</p>
2021	<p>Sidney joins E3</p> <p>Early Organizing</p> <p>First E3 Gathering in Ord, Nebraska</p> <p>Opportunity Assessments</p> <p>Community Engagement</p> <p>Early E3 Strategy Development</p>
2022	<p>Sidney E3 is focusing on building capacity and exploring creation of an Inter-Local Agreement to foster strategic and more articulated community economic development. Key within this emerging game plan is a commitment to more robust and stable funding, and stable and expanded staffing.</p>
<p>The Future - Sidney’s History of Booms and Busts...</p> <p>Sidney and this part of Nebraska’s southern panhandle and northeastern Colorado has a very rich history of economic and demographic booms and busts. Beginning with the Transcontinental Railroad in the 1860s, Homesteaders with farm and ranch development, military posts and operations, oil and natural gas development and then Cabela’s, Sidney has experienced serious booms and busts. Its development history is also rooted in resiliency and its ability to foster new opportunities and re-invent itself. Possibly, in becoming an entrepreneurial economy and society, Sidney and the region is anchors, can grow a more diverse economy and society more resilient from boom-and-bust cycles.</p>	

*It was not until the 1890 Census that the U.S. Census Bureau began counting Native Americans. It was in 1879 U.S. District Court case in Omaha, Nebraska, that Native Americans were recognized to have U.S. Civil Rights per the Chief Standing Bear trail. Early Census figures either do not county Native Americans or tend to under-count them due to residency challenges.

Our next stop is a quick review of Sidney’s history of boom-and-bust cycles.

Every community has boom and bust cycles within their unique development histories. But Sidney is quite unique with respect to more dramatic boom and bust cycles that have been common in its development journey. When a rural community's economy booms and then bust cycles, many communities never recover fully. Sidney has been able to re-invent itself, and the future will tell if it can ultimately grow a more diverse and resilient economy and society, enabling prosperity without massive boom and bust cycles.

Part C - Boom and Bust History

Figure 2 provides an overview of Sidney and its region's boom and bust cycles since non-Native settlement:

Figure 4. Sidney Boom and Bust Cycles Over Time

<p>#1 – 1860s and 1870s – Transcontinental Railroad – Black Hills Gold Rush</p> <p>1862 – Congress Authorizes the Transcontinental Railroad 1863 – Construction Begins with the Union Pacific in the East and the Central Pacific in the West 1867 – For Sidney is Established to Protect Railroad Construction 1869 – The Transcontinental Railroad was Completed in Utah</p> <p>During active construction Sidney experienced a quick mini-boom with a steep spike and then contraction in activity. But the Custer Expedition in 1874 that confirmed gold in the Black Hills of what became South Dakota generated a Gold Rush Boom in 1876-1877. With the railroad in Sidney, the Sidney to Deadwood Road was established connecting the gold fields to supplies and people via Sidney. This connection to the Black Hills Gold Rush furthered boom time activity that declined as gold mining activity moderated over time in the Hills.</p>
<p>#2 – 1870 through 1890s - Settlement Boom and Bust – Ranches, Farms and Town Building</p> <p>The railroad, coupled with the 1862 Homestead Act and the end of the Civil War westward settlement in the Great Plains accelerated dramatically. Consider the following with respect to Cheyenne County's population:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1870 Census – 190 Residents • 1880 Census – 1,558 Residents – 1870 to 1880 Change – 720% Increase • 1890 Census – 5,693 Residents – 1880 to 1890 Change – 265% Increase <p>By the 1900 Census Cheyenne County's population stabilized at 5,570 residents marking the end of the Settlement Boom. With stabilization there was contraction in population, dropping to 4,551 residents or a 20% decrease in county population. During this two-decade long period, there was extensive and rapid development of villages, cities like Sidney, businesses, institutions, churches, ranches, farms and infrastructure. All of Nebraska between 1860 and 1900 experienced dramatic European-American settlement booms.</p>

#3 - Late 1800s – Fort Sidney

1867 – First Camp Lookout, then Fort Sidney, and finally the Sidney Barracks

1894 – The Frontier Closes – Indian Wars End – Fort Sidney Closes

The history of Fort Sidney and the U.S. Army was relatively brief during the settlement phase in the community's development. There was a mini-boom and bust associated with the Fort.

#4 - 1940s into the 1970s – Sioux Army Ordinance Depot

1939 – World War II begins in Europe with the Invasion of Poland

1941 – The U.S. enters the War with the Attack on Pearl Harbor by the Empire of Japan

1942 – The Sioux Army Ordinance Depot Created near Sidney

1970s – The Depot Closes with the U.S. Ending its War in Vietnam

The Depot represents on the largest boom and bust cycles in Sidney's history and included the following assets and activities:

- Nearly 20,000 Acres in Size
- 801 Ammunition Storage Units
- 22 Supply Warehouses
- 392 Support Buildings
- 225 Family Living Quarters
- Over 2,000 Workers at its Peak
- 203 Miles of Roads and 51 Miles of Railroad Spurs
- 600 Prisoners of War from Italy and Germany – Many Worked at the Depot

Given the population of Sidney (3,388) and Cheyenne County (9,505) in 1940, the Depot drew workers from a large region including new residents who moved to Sidney to work at the Depot. With its closing in the 1970s there was a major socio-economic contraction.

#5 - 1950s into the 1970s – Oil Boom and Contraction

1940s – First Oil Wells in Southeastern Nebraska

1950s – Oil Exploration in Southwest and the Southern Panhandle of Nebraska – Rapid Development

1966 – Peak Oil Production in Nebraska at 216 million barrels

1970s – The Oil Boom Moderates and Production Drops Significantly

Present – Oil Production Continues but at Significantly Lower Levels Compared to the Peak

Sidney as the largest community in the Southern Panhandle was a center of oil exploration, development and production activity. Sterling played a similar role for oil activity in Northeastern Colorado. This oil boom, like the boom associated with the Depot drove population increased and then declines:

- 1950 Census – 4,912 / Sidney – 12,081 / Cheyenne County
- 1960 Census – 8,004 / Sidney – 14,828 / Cheyenne County
- 1950 to 1960 Change – Sidney = 63% Increase – Cheyenne County = 23% Increase
- 1970 Census – 6,403 / Sidney – 10,778 Cheyenne County
- 1960 to 1970 Change – Sidney = 20% Decrease – Cheyenne County = 27% Decrease

Contraction in the oil fields, and particularly new exploration and development, dramatically decreased workers and drove the population declines. Some these losses were offset by the construction of Interstate 80. There are still oil reserves in this part of the High Plains along with some modest production. Depending upon future supplies and demand, and particularly prices, these reserves could drive new development employing hydrological fracturing technology.

#6 - 1960s to Present – Cabela’s Boom to Collapse

1961 - Cabela’s founded in Chappell, Nebraska by Dick and Mary Cabela at their Kitchen Table
 1963 – Cabela’s Moves to Sidney and Younger Brother Jim Joins Cabela’s
 1965 – Cabela’s is Incorporated
 1972 – Bass Pro Shop is Created in Missouri – Future Owner of Cabela’s
 1986 – Cabela’s Opens a Facility in East Kearney
 1987 – The Sidney Retail Store Opens
 1992 – The Sidney Headquarter Complex Opens
 1996 – Cabela’s Acquires Gander Mountain
 2004 – Cabela’s Goes from Private to Public Ownership (\$230 million value) making it an Acquisition Candidate
 2007 – The Great Recession Adversely Impacts Cabela’s
 2011 – The Royal Bank of Canada provides \$412 million in Credit
 2014 – Dick Cabela Passes Away
 2014 – Cabela’s Sells Cabela’s Trophy Properties
 2015 – Cabela’s Sells Outdoor Adventures
 2016 – Bass Pro Shop Announces it is Acquiring Cabela’s for \$5.5 billion
 2017 - Cabela’s is Acquired by Bass Pro Shop – 2,000 Area Jobs Lost
 2017 – Cabela’s Sells its Credit Card Operation to CapitalOne

The Cabela’s development never impacted Sidney’s population as dramatically as did the Depot and Oil developments. In 1960 around when Cabela’s was created, Sidney’s population was 8,004 (all-time peak) and dropped to 5,959 in 1990. Development of Cabela’s, like most start-ups, was slow and accelerated in the 1990s until its acquisition in 2017. Between 1990 and 2010 Sidney’s population increased from 5,959 to 6,757 or by nearly 8%. However, Cabela’s generated jobs throughout a multi-county region in both Nebraska and Colorado. Each day hundreds of workers commuted into Sidney and other locations for work from across this region. While Cabela’s did not create massive population gains, it did create above average jobs and careers socially and economically diversifying Sidney and its region. The loss of Cabela’s damages Sidney’s brand and has spurred serious exploration around future community economic development.

#7 – 1960s to Present – The Cold War and Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles

Following World War II emerged the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the West including the United States. The development of nuclear weapons created a mutual destruction deterrent policy and environment. Part of this deterrent policy included development of the Minuteman Missiles, and the complex anchored out of Warren Air Force Base near Cheyenne, Wyoming. This missile complex covers 10,000 square miles in this part of the High Plains including 150 missile silos. 80 of these silos were based in the Southern Nebraska Panhandle near Kimball. Kimball’s population increased from just around 2,000 residents in 1950 to 4,400 residents in 1960. An estimated 2,000 workers were engaged during the construction phase. Sidney benefitted from this development and then suffered when it ended.

The U.S. Air Force is committed to updating this 50-year-old infrastructure likely to create another moderate boom and bust cycle associated with construction activity.

#5 - 1970s – Interstate 80 Boom

1955 – First stretch of I-80 from Kimball to the Cheyenne County Line (before Interstate Authorization)
 1956 – Congress Passes the Federal-Aid Highway Act Launching the Interstate Highway Development
 1957-1961 – Phase 1 Construction – Omaha to Lincoln
 1960-1968 – Phase 2 - Grand Island to North Platte Construction
 1964-1970 – Phase 3 - Lincoln to Grand Island Construction
 1968-1975 – Phase 4 Construction – North Platte to I-76 and I-80 to the Wyoming Border
 October 1974 – The Final I-80 Segment Completed at the Sidney Interchange

Nebraska was the first state to complete its Interstate Highway construction.

Interstate 80 came late to Sidney in the fall of 1974. The final construction between Sidney and Big Springs created intensive direct construction activity as well as allied activities contributing to a mini-boom and bust. The primary I-80 interchange and all the associated commercial activity with it (e.g., lodging, food service, gasoline stations, truck stops, convenience stores, the first Cabela's retail store, etc.) has had a larger and more lasting economic impact on the community. Traffic on I-80 is projected to continue to grow positioning the Sidney interchange economic cluster for continued success and growth. There will be periodic bursts in activity as the Nebraska Department of Transportation periodically rebuilding the Interstate.

2020's – The Pandemic Housing Boom

The acquisition of Cabela's by Bass Pro Shop in 2017 did not result in immediate regional job losses. But over a two-year period, jobs losses accelerated and peaked crashing area and particularly the Sidney's housing market. At one time over 350 homes, deeply discounted were on the market due to displaced workers and their families leaving the area. But the overall tightening housing market (e.g., both in availability and affordability). In the larger region including the Denver Front Range Metroplex, drove a mini-housing boom as new residents acquired these discounted properties. The Sidney housing boom quickly quieted and moved to a tight once again housing market. Some theories suggest that part of this quick in-migration of new residents was driven by the Pandemic and the desire of people to move out of more densely populated regions like Denver.

This housing event illustrates that today any community capable of generating affordable housing is positioned to attract new residents. Given Sidney's close location to the Denver Metroplex, this is a significant development opportunity worth further investigation.

The Future – Diversification and Resiliency – The Front Range Opportunity

Sidney has demonstrated an extraordinary capacity for renewal. As a community it has been opportunity focused and willing to invest heavily in development opportunities. But Sidney, has over its history, become overly dependent on narrow economic activities. Central to ensuring both a more prosperous future, as well as less boom-and-bust cycles, Sidney must commit to social and economic diversification.

Next stop **Baseline Socio-Economic Indicators.**

The whole point of entrepreneur focused development is to generate desired community economic development outcomes and impacts. e2's **Community Prosperity Change Model** and **Indicators** provides a framework generated from our North American field experience with actual rural communities and regions.

Part D - Baseline Socio-Economic Indicators

The following is the **Sidney and Cheyenne County Baseline Scorecard**:

Leading Indicators

“Leading indicators” are measures, surfacing soonest during a community economic development initiative. Leading indicators for our **E3 Community Baselines** include:

Lagging Indicators – See Separate Paper

Transformative Indicators

“Indicators of transformative change” are reflected in state and federal established statistics measuring socio-economic health. Transformative indicators include:

1. Demographic Health:
 - a. Balance in Generational Age Cohorts
 - b. Changes in Migration Trends
2. Changes in Diversification:
 - a. Economic
 - b. ESRI Household Types
3. Wealth:
 - a. Local Tax Bases (e.g., Property & Sales)
 - b. Household Current Net Worth
 - c. Community Centered Charitable Assets
4. Economic Performance:
 - a. Changes in Disposable Household Income
 - b. Total Full-Time Equivalent Employment
 - c. Growth in Stage 2 Ventures Measured in Job Creation
5. Development Benefits:
 - a. Mean to Median Ratio in Disposable Household Income
 - b. Mean to Median Ratio in Household Current Net Worth

Lagging Indicator Benchmarks		
Changes in Proprietorship Employment:		
Total Employment	5,889	
Wage & Salary Jobs	4,213 / 71.5%	
Proprietorship Employment	1,676 / 28.5%%	
<i>BEA – 2020 Data –Keith County, NE – Headwaters Socio-Economic Profile – July 2022 – Part 32</i>		
Changes in Total Ventures.: (2020 Data – YourEconomy)		
Total	603	
Self-Employed	132	
Stage 1	365	
Stage 2	98	
Stage 3	7	
Stage 4	1	
Changes in Average Earnings Per Job	\$50,107	
<i>BEA – 2020 Data –Keith County, NE - Headwaters Socio-Economic Profile – July 2022</i>		
Deal Flow – Both Actions and Outcomes	At this point in time Sidney E3 does not have a system for generating deal flow. However, very preliminary E-Talent mapping, targeting and some outreach is underway.	
Development of Hub Community Qualities Measured in Changes in Inbound Commuters		
Outflow of Earnings	\$36,862,000	Inbound Commuters
Inflow of Earnings	\$22,354,000	Outbound Commuters
<i>BEA – 2020 Data –Keith County, NE - Headwaters Socio-Economic Profile – July 2022 – Part 36</i>		
Transformative Indicator Benchmarks		
Demographic Health:		
2020 Total Population	9,111	
Balance in Generational Age Cohorts:		(2019 Esri Data)
Pandemic	11.78%	
Gen Z	17.36%	
Millennials	24.45%	
Gen X	18.96%	
Baby Boomers	24.44%	
Silent	2.91%	
Age Cohort Changes:	<i>See Next Page</i>	(2019 Esri Data)
Changes in Migration Trends:		<i>2010 thru 2021 Average Annual Change</i>
Domestic Net In-Migration	(86)	
International Net In-Migration	2	
Overall Net Migration	(85)	
<i>BEA – 2021 Data –Keith County, NE - Headwaters Socio-Economic Profile – July 2022 – Part 6</i>		

Year	2010	2021	Change	% C
<1	125	114	-11	-8.80%
1	132	115	-17	-12.88%
2	126	111	-15	-11.90%
3	130	115	-15	-11.54%
4	143	130	-13	-9.09%
5	136	116	-20	-14.71%
6	150	133	-17	-11.33%
7	125	110	-15	-12.00%
8	122	113	-9	-7.38%
9	147	131	-16	-10.88%
10	152	139	-13	-8.55%
11	117	122	5	4.27%
12	145	142	-3	-2.07%
13	137	128	-9	-6.57%
14	124	121	-3	-2.42%
15	110	111	1	0.91%
16	128	114	-14	-10.94%
17	145	128	-17	-11.72%
18	122	121	-1	-0.82%
19	94	111	17	18.09%
20 to 24	427	513	86	20.14%
25 to 29	706	620	-86	-12.18%
30 to 34	597	524	-73	-12.23%
35 to 39	618	727	109	17.64%
40 to 44	570	605	35	6.14%
45 to 49	799	621	-178	-22.28%
50 to 54	819	540	-279	-34.07%
55 to 59	694	751	57	8.21%
60 to 64	566	782	216	38.16%
65 to 69	384	613	229	59.64%
70 to 74	335	506	171	51.04%
75 to 79	297	327	30	10.10%
80 to 84	299	236	-63	-21.07%
85+	277	293	16	5.78%
MA	40.4	41.9	2	3.71%
Total	9,998	10,083	85	0.85%

Changes in Diversification:	
Economic Sectors	22 active of 24 possible economic sectors present
Concentration (BEA – 2020 Data)	Top Sector 33.76% Top 3 Sectors 79.72% Top 5 Sectors 86.01% Top 10 Sectors 94.09%
Household Diversity (Esri – 2022 Data)	4 of 64 Household Types or 6.25% Diversity Prairie Living 39.5% In Style 30.8% Traditional Living 18.4% Heartland Communities 11.4%
Wealth:	
Local Tax Bases	Property Tax Base Sales Tax Receipts
Household Current Net Worth (2021 Esri Data)	Total = \$3,117,700,000 Median Net Worth = \$139,622 Mean Net Worth = \$710,248
NCF Fund Assets	<i>No NCF affiliated community foundation fund in 2021. There is a large donor advised fund.</i>
Economic Performance:	
Disposable Household Income (2021 Esri Data)	Total = \$263,083,900 Median = \$46,046 Mean = \$59,928
Total Full-Time Equivalent Employment	6,248
Growth in Stage 2 Ventures Measured in Job Creation (YourEconomy, 2020 Data)	2,344
Development Benefits:	
Mean to Median Ratio in Disposable Household Income	1.30x
Mean to Median Ratio in Household Current Net Worth (2021 ESRI Data)	5.09x

Our final stop is an overview of Dr. David laquinta’s summer 2022 community site visits and interview highlights.

With respect to baselines, benchmark statistical indicators employed to track progress this part of the baseline can only tell part of a community's starting point story. This is the quantitative story. There is a qualitative story or baseline that can only be captured by visiting a community, talking with community builders and exploring its development strengths, weaknesses, aspirations and fears. Central to documenting development change is understanding how attitudes, visions and behaviors are evolving as a result of engagement in E3 activities.

Part E - Dr. David Iaquinta's Summer 2022 Interviews

Confidential – Do Not Share

Date of Site Visit: June 7-9, 2022

Persons Interviewed:

Tara Vance (Coach) Zoom
Sarah Sinnett (Lead) Zoom
Paula Abbott – Executive Director WNCC Innovation & Entrepreneurship Center Audio
Liz Borgman – Entrepreneur “Dare to Be” Fitness Audio
Melissa Norgard – Entrepreneur Sam & Louie’s; former ED Director Audio
Jamie Bright – WNCC Extension Educator, Rural Prosperity Nebraska Audio
Cory Keen – Development Manager Nelnet-Sidney Audio
Dawson Sharman – Entrepreneur Petals Florist; Sweetie’s Bakery Audio – Walk about
Kim Rolls – Entrepreneur, Kendall Esthetics Audio – Walk about
Kendra Mitchell – Director Tourism, Chamber Board Chair, Potter Village Board
Trent Santero – entrepreneur Nexgen co-Owner Audio – Walk about
McKailie Carnahan-Kuhns – Entrepreneur photography/web design; former Co. Chamber President
E3 team meeting – Additional contacts:
Wendell Gaston – former Sidney Mayor and City Council (17 yrs)
David Scott – City Manager
Joshua Hanson – NE Dept of Labor Panhandle
Kevin Challburg – Nelnet It Infrastructure Engineer

Analysis:

Sidney is a high energy, high-capacity community. They have entered the E3 initiative with some tremendous assets already in place and a developing entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Sidney benefited from substantial human capital left in place when Cabela’s was bought out by Bass Pro. These were individuals who had substantial corporate experience and a cosmopolitan understanding of business and entrepreneurship.

These individuals also made individual conscious decisions to stay in Sidney because they valued the quality of life they found there.

In consequence they had strong motivations to survive well by being entrepreneurial in their outlook and actualizing that motivation creatively.

Sidney also benefited greatly from the preexisting work by Paula Abbott at the WNCC where she leads the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center. The center: Provides two years of rent-free space to incubate their dream, brought resource providers such as USDA and NE Department of Labor under one roof at the IEC to make it easier for budding entrepreneurs to access resources efficiently, Started business resource meetings in conjunction with the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC). Works with the Nebraska Tech Collaborative (NTC) to host outreach meeting for prospective entrepreneurs.

Sidney is already benefiting from the commitment to a regional IT center through the commitment of Nelnet. Not yet in place but coming is the full installation of a fiber optic network in Sidney which will bring multiple benefits.

Perhaps most important, Sidney benefited in unexpected ways from two contextual factors. First, the loss of some 2,000 jobs when corporate Cabela's left served as an object lesson to individuals and the community of being dependent on a single large enterprise. While Cabela's brought many resources to the community, it also left them vulnerable to decisions made outside of their control. This was a lesson that took deep root in the individual minds of those who stayed and fueled their entrepreneurial motivation. Second, the COVID pandemic created an influx of visitors and more importantly new residents from the front range who were seeking respite from more-risky and restrictive high-density places. These relocating individuals brought with them resources (economic capital, skills, and experience) that turned the depressed housing market around and now provide a tremendous opportunity for expanded capacity that is as yet untapped. Here is a place where E3 could provoke more intentional outreach to bring in volunteers, support and even financial benefits.

These mostly preexisting resources have jumpstarted the E3 process in Sidney. Their impact has fostered the necessary motivation to engage entrepreneurs collectively. This is evidenced by the effectiveness with which they conducted their E3 meeting that I attended. They were all about action down to the details. Follow up with Sarah Sennett confirms that the process of working on the interlocal agreement with various city, county, Chamber personnel continues to bear fruit in unexpected ways.

“All were very supportive and thanked us for our efforts. A city council member actually joined E3 after the meeting and is supporting our efforts. The Chamber and Tourism are also actively involved in E3 when determining the solution.”

Importantly, Sarah also provides insight that I found from a number of individuals in Sidney regarding the direction they experienced from the E3 initiative. Asked about support from the community ecosystem for her own real estate business, she said,

“We have not received support from the city for our investment. We were lucky enough to have a personal relationship with the previous owner of the apartment complex we bought. The previous owner agreed to be our bank over a 15-year period, so he could avoid the tax hit and we could afford

such an expensive building. Several local individuals are starting to take the same approach. We just had paperwork drawn up with a lawyer to protect both of our interests and split the cost.”

When asked more specifically as to whether E3 helped in any way, she said,

“E3 has not benefitted my personal business yet other than introducing me to some truly incredible resources. The community is very supportive as our e3 group is now up to 25 people. Sidney has had LB840 money since 1997 and E3 can't take credit for that but our program mostly funds job creation. Since my husband and I renovate the properties in our free time, we would not qualify. When we look to update the façade down the road, the city's incentives will likely help here. Other team members have noted that they had no idea how many resources were free to them as a business owner and I know many are actively working to leverage the resources the group has shed light on.”

So, one outcome of E3 in Sidney is that the participants themselves have benefitted from expanded resource awareness. This points out that even motivated individuals in a community with tangible assets lack full market knowledge about resources. It also raises an operative question as to how broadly this awareness has spread beyond the E3 participants themselves?

The most often heard challenge from the E3 team members was the lack of connection and buy in from the older cohort of the community. This group encompasses many of the controlling interests in Sidney and reflects older alliances between former top Cabela's management and the city fathers. Today it represents both a loss of significant potential capacity in the form of skills and experience and perceptions of a lack of buy in by government and Chamber old-timers. Significantly, the team members frame the generational disconnect in terms of the lack of participation by the older cohort in Sidney rather than in their own failure to initiate outreach and engagement. Beyond the former corporate executives and government officials there is a large pool of older residents that simply have not been engaged. This might be expected in a community where the engine of motivation is so squarely centered on a youthful entrepreneurial cohort whose natural affinity is for age-graded people like ourselves. Here is an instance where interpersonal comfort and homogamy creates both powerful positive outcomes of in-group identity while also creating blind spots as to the need to intentionally reach out to an important community resource in the form of the older cohorts, including many who have only more recently relocated to the community. By contrast we can compare Sidney's generational cohort challenge to that found in McCook where the engagement flow deficit operates in exactly opposite direction, to wit, the older cohort is the most engaged and their dissatisfaction is with the perceived non-involvement of the younger entrepreneurial generation.

While we have referred to the demographic health of a community primarily in terms of the relative numbers of individuals in the various age classes of the community, it also refers to the flow of participation by these groups within the community. In particular, we can divide the adult population into roughly three segments. The older group, 50+, holds most a disproportionate amount of power, substantial influence, skills, contacts and experience. Their support concerns – whether consciously acknowledged or not – have to do with business succession. The youngest segment is more involved with start-up concerns, limited capital for actualizing entrepreneurial motivation, and often deficiencies in knowledge concerning specific business practices and therefore in greater need of mentoring and gap financing. The middle cohort (30-50) is the most dynamic element typically encompassing relatively new to already established entrepreneurial enterprises and needing support for maintenance,

expansion, and scaling up of their enterprises. In a healthy community and entrepreneurial ecosystem all three of these groups are engaged in a flow of ideas, capitalization, support and coordinated ecosystem services that undergird community development and the quality of life – both perceived and actual – in the community.

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