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Brockton's comeback: Each city, large, small or medium has a uniqueness that is its strength - by Michael Gallerani

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Michael Gallerani,
Brockton 21st Century Corp.

Why do some cities prosper after periods of decline while others struggle to find a strategy that breaks them out of the doldrums brought on by disinvestment, slowed economy, and social disruptions?

Larger cities like Austin, Charlotte, and Pittsburgh have made comebacks.

Pittsburgh is a great example. The city known as the Steel City was viewed as being out-dated with a past deeply rooted in the rust belt. Today Pittsburgh has reinvented itself as an education and health care hub, while promoting its blue collar grittiness. Once on the brink of economic collapse, Pittsburgh is overhauling entire neighborhoods, tech companies are being attracted, its streets and sidewalks are becoming safer, new hotels are now part of the landscape, and Carnegie Mellon University is creating an innovation hub along the city's Forbes Ave.

Others such as Detroit and Oakland have found the path back more difficult, but they are working to overcome negative perceptions. Oakland is promoting its racial and ethnic diversity. It is building off the fact it is a less expensive alternative to nearby San Francisco and offers a more bohemian atmosphere for artists, foodies and other creatives.

The era of building strip centers and non-descript buildings to house social assistance agencies and little else has passed by. Not all cities are the same. Each city, large, small or medium has a uniqueness that is its greatest strength.

The most important element when plotting a comeback is how to improve the quality of life for those who chose to live in the city. The residents need to be heard and their preferences supported but it does not end there. It takes more than declaring that the city that it is now a great place to live, work and visit. People vote with their feet, the choices of where to live or build their business are boundless.

In Brockton not unlike most other cities, was once dominated by its industry and commerce. The factories, neighborhoods and civic buildings and structures that were built on the back of manufacturing (in large part the shoe industry) are gone or being re-thought as part of a strategy that includes changing technologies, accessibility, and a new sense of place. The goal of planners and decision makers is to make Brockton a place that offers a high quality of life and embraces a changed economic environment.

Today's Brockton is affordable and offers the benefit of being central to the regional economy. Education, employment and services are easily reached. Boston's South Station is a thirty minute train ride away.

Brockton is currently in the midst of a comprehensive Master Planning process that is based on a vision of being a city with an "economically strong, fully developed, mixed-use downtown and commercial districts."

The overarching goal is to become a great community for the "middle class" where there is equitable distribution of services, amenities and infrastructure.

With three commuter rail stations Brockton can maximize its transit oriented development opportunities. Central to the downtown is the development of market-rate housing that will professionals, restaurants, creatives, and activities to satisfy the social needs and wants of the new and long-time residents alike. The new downtown will be a vibrant and livable area that has access to services, commuter rail and retail.

The Master Planning process is a key element of Brockton's future as is changing the perception that people have of the city. Again Brockton is not the only city wrestling with the challenge of asking people to take a new look. That can only happen after people have reasons to visit, enjoy a ball game, a new restaurant, an art exhibit, concert or the vibe of being in the city.

The planning team, B21, the city, Brockton Redevelopment Authority, and the Brockton Main Streets Initiative are working together with the community, the businesses and institutions to make Brockton's comeback a reality. We invite you to take a look at the opportunities, learn more and consider investing in a great story that is unfolding.

Michael Gallerani is the executive director of Brockton 21st Century Corp., Brockton, Mass.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540