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# Setting a Vision for the Future in times of Uncertainty

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*“Failing to plan is  
planning to fail.”*

Benjamin  
Franklin

## Setting a Vision and Strategic Priorities

It's 1492 and your ship is about to set sail towards the unknown. Without an idea of where you will end up and what you will encounter, exactly what should you pack? The obvious items include food and water, things that you will need no matter where you end up. But what are the smart, or robust, choices to make about the most important items to "pack"? For example a blanket would serve you well as warmth in the cold or as shade/shelter from a hot sun environment. Similarly, Township of Nutley must plan for an unknown future. Events involving everything from economic conditions, state and federal policies, changing consumer preferences and technological innovations can changed attitudes within the town. The outcomes are not only unpredictable, but also have a high degree of variation. For the Township of Nutley, what are the priorities it should address to ensure sustainability for the future?

Tools and frameworks like scenario planning can help interested leaders and stakeholders to assess the level of uncertainty they face and develop a portfolio of dynamic choices. Regions that strategically plan in a turbulent environment use scenario-based planning to identify the full array of threats and opportunities that may emerge.

## Program Background

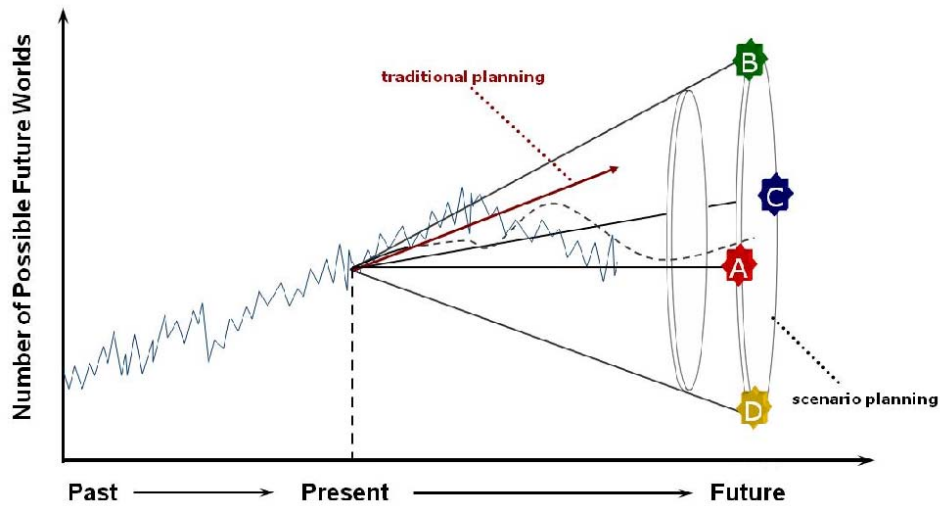
The Mayor's Office and Chamber of Commerce of Nutley identified the opportunity to engage a diverse group of constituents involved in the Master Planning process to consider inputs to the Townships future vision. A morning session was open to a wide participant base and over 25 people attended. The group learned about:

- \* Why organizations and regions that have been highly successful in the past can get blindsided and fail to adapt
- \* Tools for managing uncertainty
- \* Developing and learning from future scenarios of the industry
- \* Critical elements of a future success vision for the Nutley

## Introduction to Scenario Planning

### Process Overview

The first step of the approach to managing uncertainty focuses on experiencing multiple futures. The recommended tool for this step is scenario planning. Scenario planning is an effective tool for helping leaders make sense of the complex world they face. The process is used to capture the range of future uncertainties and qualify them in a few concrete, internally consistent, and relevant stories that describe alternative worlds a group may face. Scenarios typically focus on macro level uncertainties – those factors that the group cannot control and over which it has only minimal influence. These scenarios might be thought of as a cone, as shown in the figure below, which bounds a set of possibilities for the future. The actual future that emerges is expected to fall somewhere in this cone.



A number of key change forces were identified by participants during the Scenario Planning session.

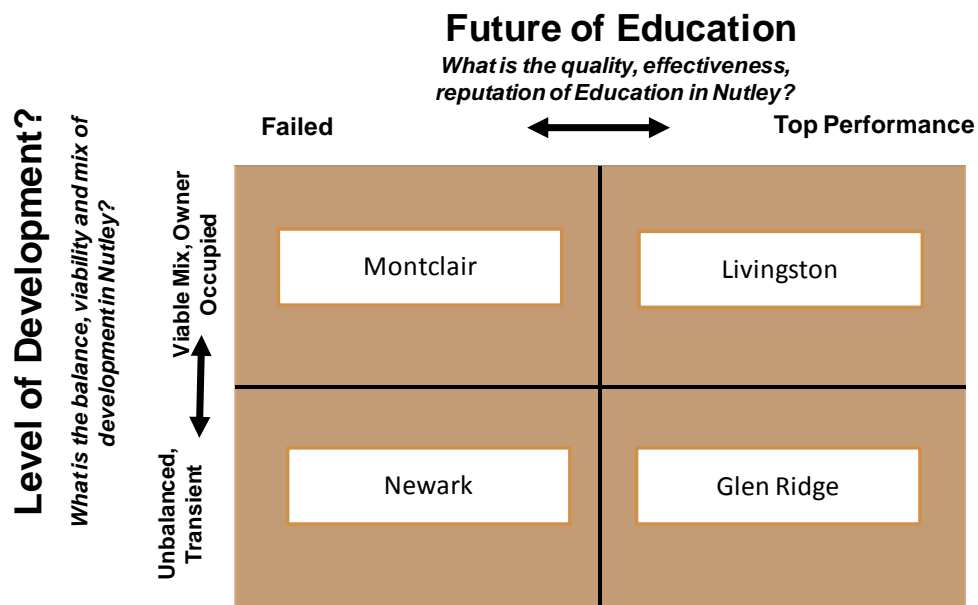
Forces of Change	
Quality and effectiveness of education system	Availability, interest and participation of future leaders
Affordability of housing and living in Nutley	Revitalization of downtown
Level of public safety	Status of Hoffman La Roche (organization and site)
Availability of public services	Level of property taxes
Convenience of Nutley location relative to work	Costs of local infrastructure and capital improvements
Viability and access to transportation options	Changes in how and where people work
Diversity of demographics	Consumer buying habits – where people shop and for what
Availability of houses of worship for diverse population	Future sources and levels of trust in accessible information
Change in family structure	Changes in transportation technology and infrastructure requirements
Makeup of the township population (age, ethnicity, socio-economic, etc)	Environment technology changes and requirements
Level of volunteerism	Costs of maintaining public employees
Diversity of housing options	Level of government regulation
Level of interaction and integration of social groups	Severity and frequency of flooding cycles
Future health and mix of Franklin Avenue	Federal and state environment regulations
Form of community government	Impact of new technology
Level of state and federal funding	Level of public development
Impact of the internet on information access and confidence of citizens	Participation of stakeholder and informal leaders

The list below was identified through the workshop as representing the forces that could cause the most change in the future environment:

1	Future of education – quality/access/effectiveness
2	Affordability of community/level of property taxes
3	Form of transportation/physical access/mobility
4	Form and effectiveness of local government structure
5	Availability/engagement of future leaders
6	Forms of outreach/communication/accessing information
7	Level of revitalization of downtown
8	Perception/image/brand of Nutley
9	Level/form/balance of development and sustainability in township
10	State of local (and macro) economy
11	Future mix of the tax base
12	Level/health/viability of state/surrounding communities

### Scenario Development

The two important, uncorrelated uncertainties were selected for the 2x2 matrix to develop the four scenarios as shown in the figure. These primary uncertainties were: (1) The future effectiveness and quality of Education in Nutley and (2) Level and balance of Development in the township. Groups discussed the types of environments these conditions would create.



## Overview of the Scenario Planning Process

### Robust Key Success Factors

As groups considered the scenarios and the conditions they might create, they identified some key future success criteria (or “KSF”) necessary to ensure long-term sustainability for the Township. If a KSF shows up in most of the scenarios, then it is considered a robust KSF. During the session, the following KSFs were identified as being robust:

- Diverse tax base
- Vibrant, attractive, viable downtown
- Strong education system
- Social destinations and community settings for citizens
- Greater collaboration across business community (public and private interaction)

### Recommended Next Steps

1. Detail out the selected robust KSF areas to further define the vision and plan
2. Understand existing gaps and explore steps the Township can take to close these gaps through focused initiatives
3. Test existing initiatives and investments against the scenarios; are we working on and spending on the right things for the future?
4. Use the scenarios as a tool for budget planning
5. Use the scenarios as an education and communication tool to bring diverse groups together on some common goals and objectives

