



There are few more energetic and powerful champions of sustainability than [Hunter Lovins](#), of RMI, Natural Capitalism (2000), and Natural Capital Solutions fame. Time Magazine named her Hero of the Planet in 2000 and Newsweek dubbed her a “Green Business Icon” in 2009. She has co-authored nine books, including, *Climate Protection Manual for Cities*, an e-book (2006) , among her many accomplishments.

Her most recent book, [The Way Out: Kick-starting Capitalism To Save Our Economic Ass](#), is an excellent summary of the discovery that the smartest businesses on the planet made over the past 20 years. That discovery is that acting in ways that advance sustainability in general, and that advance and seize the business opportunities of the massive 100% fix for climate change in particular (reversal, not adaptation), is the most profitable business move now and best business model for success.

So what do Hunter Lovins and business sustainability have to do with public planning?

Successful sustainability planning is a cross-sector and multi-stakeholder game. Sustainable communities require successful sustainable businesses and economies. These in turn require public leadership based on new patterns of engagement and partnership. That public leadership requires a renewed public sector and public planning reorganized for sustainability success. This need for renewal is particularly true in our era of fiscal scarcity and challenges to the prevailing notions of governance.

Unfortunately, there is no existing, simple formula for this renewal based on sustainability. We must invent it, often co-invent it through effective stakeholder engagement. If there is one obvious common ground on which to begin the effort, it is the notion that whatever the particular sustainability path is for a community, it must be fundable. To be fundable, it must be profitable. Being profitable is the mission of business. If profitability can be based on full-cost economics, as it should be so free markets can deliver efficient resource allocation, then business, as one of society’s institutions and primary economic actors, can become key sustainability instruments. However, without full-cost accounting and pricing, off-book, invisible externalities artificially understate costs and inflate profits. The effects of these distortions may appear to be rational support for “jobs,” but only come back to bite society as social costs that society is now, ostensibly, no longer willing to pay. Alternatively, they come back in the form of real resource impacts (peak oil, water, and other resource supply disruptions, health conditions, etc.) for which there are no adequate responses once they occur.

Understanding the business case for sustainability that Hunter Lovins synthesizes, summarizes, and communicates so well provides public service actors with the basis to forge the right incentives, partnerships, and public renewal required to create sustainable communities. Understanding the business case for sustainability will not only allow municipalities and planning to lead and partner effectively with business, but it will allow the public service actors to understand and begin inventing the larger public policy and



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planning context required for business and community sustainability success. Components of this context range from land use planning, zoning, and building, to general plan policies, to a public service portfolio and budgeting based on full-cost commitments and the real economics and finance of ecological-economics. This approach likely contains a new basis for governance, revenue, and local public finance, all of which is simply waiting for understanding and leadership. Fortunately, many sustainability initiatives have already begun in the SF Bay Area, but they can always be enhanced.

To learn more about the business case for sustainability from one of the masters, [read Hunter's 7th Top Ten accomplishment](#) in 2012, and use it to further enhance your community's sustainability initiatives, and to reinvent the public sector for sustainability and business success.