



communities and if we want to reverse decades of population, economic, and cultural decline. But is that enough? Author Wendell Berry writes that, today, a small town is "like a man on an icy slope, working hard to stay in place and yet slowly sliding downhill." But why is that?

Our needs are easy to identify. It does not require an expert with years of academic training in rural development to identify that our streets are substandard, our water/sewer infrastructure is aging, and we need more housing and more quality of life amenities. But if we fixed all of those things overnight, would people suddenly flock to town for those improvements? I don't know. This is a great "chicken or the egg?" question I struggle with frequently. If we improve the brick and mortar of our communities, will they attract more people, or must we attract more people to finance the improvement of the brick and mortar?

I think it's probably both. Mere brick-and-mortar improvements alone are not

enough to transform a town. Those are, in some respect, deeds without faith. They are action without transformation. You can make it look better, but you haven't given people a reason WHY it is a more desirable place to live in the regional/state/national/global landscape. You can pour enormous sums of money into a town and make it look as beautiful as possible, but if you haven't given people a reason to want to live there, you might just have a beautiful ghost town.

As we move our action and transformation into 2021, we must remember that our actions in our communities must also transform hearts and minds to be effective. I want a beautiful town, but I want a beautiful town that gives more people more reasons to live here.

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