Community development planning should begin with a community assessment (i.e., an environmental scan). This can involve extensive research and the creation of a community statistical profile. It can be performed either by an outside consultant, or citizens themselves. One component of a thorough assessment is a SWOT Analysis. This is a critical assessment of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

**SW** – Strengths and weaknesses are factors internal to the community, those that can be influenced by the community itself (e.g., available land, tax rates, workforce, lighting, recreational activities, town appearance, signage, zoning, law enforcement, and public education). These factors may also include geographic and other physical conditions that influence development (e.g., navigable waterways, flooding, wetlands, rail, road access). It is important when planning to consider how to take advantage of strengths, and how to eliminate or lessen the impact of weaknesses.

Citizens usually generate a long list of community strengths and weaknesses. In most small towns, for example, citizens immediately want to include a “safe, quiet, religious community, and friendly place to live”. How is that really very different from most small rural and suburban towns and cities? The strengths and weaknesses need to be carefully considered so that the critical issues are identified. Citizens should seek to identify significant strengths and weaknesses. These are the factors that truly set the community apart from its competition, or that give it uniqueness and strength.

**OT** – Opportunities and threats generally refer to factors outside the community’s control. Yet, citizens need to consider these factors in their planning activities. Opportunities and threats tend to be more obscure or mysterious. Identifying them requires more careful thought and consideration. For example, if the majority of the town’s citizens are employed in one plant or industry, is that plant or industry in danger of closing? Similarly, is it possible for the plant or industry to expand due to an increase in worldwide demand for its product? While citizens may not be able to control opportunities and threats, they can position the community so as to lessen the impact of threats (e.g., diversify the economy) or take advantage of the opportunity (e.g., aggressively market the area as an expansion location for the industry). How will the appearance of killer bees or West Nile Virus in the region affect the tourism industry? Will the Corps of Engineers have money available for continued improvement of flood protection? Will crop failure or droughts in other areas of the world increase the demand for local agricultural products?

On the sheets that follow, list your opinions of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing your community. When you complete your assessment, mail the completed questionnaire to J. Vincent, Performance Development Plus, LLC, 5000 West Esplanade Ave. # 142, Metairie, LA. The tabulated results will be presented at the planning retreat by the facilitator.
Strengths

In the space provided below, list the factors (descriptive words or phrases) that you believe are the significant strengths of your community. These are the factors that make it a competitive community or that give it a uniqueness that attracts investors and new residents, and supports planned growth and development.

Weaknesses

In the space provided below, list the factors (descriptive words or phrases) that you believe are the significant weaknesses in your community. These are factors that need to be addressed (eliminated or improved) for planned growth and development to occur. Eliminating or lessening these factors will make the community more attractive for the type development citizens seek or enhance its uniqueness to attract new residents and investors.
Opportunities

In the space provided below, list the factors (descriptive words or phrases) that you believe are opportunities for your community. These trends and issues may be regional, national, or global. While you might not be able to control or influence these factors, they may impact your community in a positive way by positioning your community correctly.

Threats

In the space provided below, list the factors (descriptive words or phrases) that you believe are threats to your community. These trends and issues may be regional, national, or global. While you might not be able to control or influence these factors, you may plan actions that help mitigate the threats or that assist the community in making transitions that lessen their potential negative impacts.