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# Gateway Community Planning: Trends, Typologies and Emerging Needs



GATEWAY AND  
NATURAL AMENITY  
REGION INITIATIVE



THE  
UNIVERSITY  
of UTAH



# Quick Introductions

- Lindsey Romaniello
- PhD student at University of Utah
- Work with the GNAR Initiative
- Originally from Ridgway (small town in SW Colorado)
- Worked as a planner for 8 years (public and private sector).

# Presentation Overview

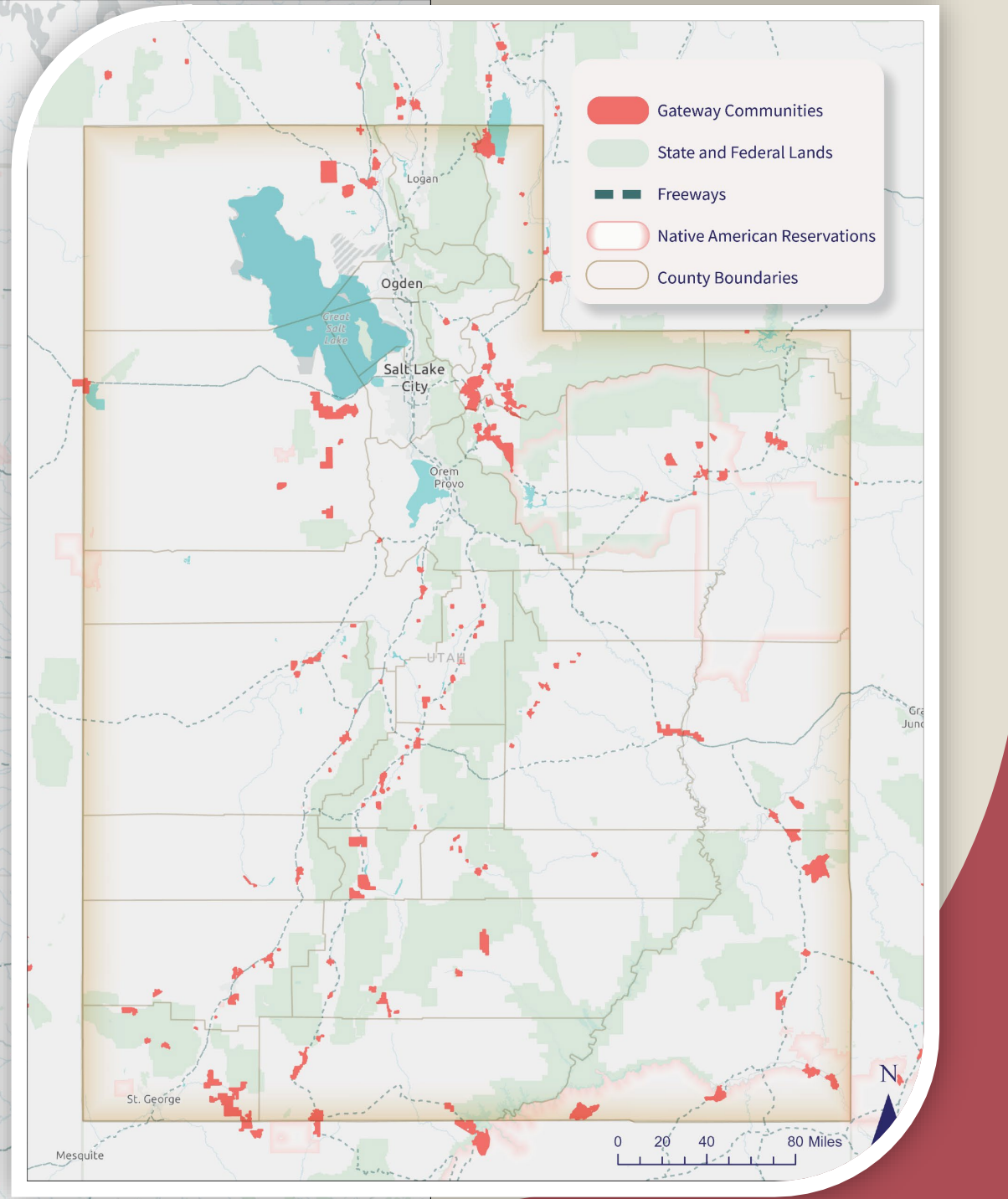


1. What is a Gateway Community?
2. Trends in demographics and planning practice
3. Differences between gateway communities
4. Identifying future needs

# What is a Gateway Community?

- Small, rural communities proximate to major natural amenities.
- Specific focus on the Western US.
- Criteria:
  - Population of 25,000 or less
  - Within 10 linear mile of national park, national monument, national forest, state park, wild and scenic river major river or lake
  - Further than 15 miles from urbanized area





# Major Trends- Demographics 2012-2023

Paired Variable	Mean	P-value	
Pop change 12-18	.05	.247	In gateway communities population grew slightly faster in 2018–2023 than in 2012–2018, but the difference is not statistically significant.
Pop change 18-23	.08		
Housing units change 12-18	.06	*	In gateway communities household growth was somewhat higher in 2012–2018 than 2018–2023, but this difference just misses significance.
Housing units change 18-23	.03		
Median HH Income Change 12-18	.004	***	Income increased significantly more in 2018–2023 than in 2012–2018.
Median HH Income Change 18-23	.31		
Change in Second Home Ownership 12-18	.95	***	Second-home ownership grew dramatically more in 2018–2023 than 2012–2018. The effect is very large (Cohen's $d > 8$ ), reflecting substantial post-2018 growth
Change in Second Home Ownership 18-23	7.17		
Median Home Value Change 12-18	-.04	***	Home values increased much more from 2018–2023 than from 2012–2018. The difference is statistically significant with a strong effect size.
Median Home Value Change 18-23	.61		
Median Gross Rent Change 12-18	.04	***	Median rent grew significantly faster in 2018–2023 compared to 2012–2018
Median Gross Rent Change 18-23	.25		
Change in Recreation/Tourism Jobs 12-18	.30	.404	The number of tourism jobs increased in both periods, with slightly higher growth post-2018, but the difference is not statistically significant.
Change in Recreation/Tourism Jobs 18-23	1.9		

# Major Trends- Planning Concerns

Surveyed of planners in gateway communities in years 2018 & 2022

## What stayed the same between the surveys:

- **Housing Affordability!!!** (no one is surprised).
  - Was a problem in 2018 and still a problem. But reported severity increased. How it is dealt with has changed (more on the next slide).
- **Economic Inequality:**
  - Concern about wages to cost of living, cost burdened households and income inequality.
- **Tourism Increases:**
  - Tourism continues to increase, and planning for tourism remains a major priority
  - Transportation seems to be linked to this- Concerns in both years about tourism traffic.
- **Populations Growth NOT a Concern:**
  - Increases in number of year-round residents was nor reported as a major concern. Matches up with demographic data.
- **Lack of Support:**
  - Funding constraints, limited data and limited planning tools continue to be major barriers to implementing solutions.

# Major Trends- Planning Concerns

Surveyed of planners in gateway communities in years 2018 & 2022

## What changed:

- **Water Challenges:**
  - Drought and water issues emerge as a serious issue and limiting factor.
  - Reported in a variety of ways including-
    - General lack of water
    - An infrastructure issue
    - Water rights issue.
- **Short-Term Rentals:**
  - Was barely discussed in 2018 but 2022 was described as a major issue and priority.
- **Road Safety and Congestion Management:**
  - Emphasis increased here. Higher demand for public transit

# Major Trends- Planning Practice

- Generally more planning happening in 2022.
  - More and different types of plans being adopted
  - More regional collaboration and planning
- More certainty, knowledge and action around housing:
  - 2018- General sentiment was *We know we have housing issues, but we're not doing much yet, and we don't have what we need to start.*
  - 2022- communities are diagnosing causes, identifying specific tools, and demanding political and structural change to actually implement solutions
  - Communities are adopting more housing-related solutions: Housing plans, zoning updates, regional collaboration, and requests for better housing data.
- Increased call for data
- Increased call for funding

# Quick discussion

- What are your major planning priorities?

# Types of gateway communities



# What's the point of differentiating between communities?



To add nuance to the idea of “rural”



Supporting better planning and policy outcomes.



Advocating for different and more appropriate resources from national and state levels.



Provides tool for self-assessment and visioning.

# Amenities + Demographics


Variable	Amenity Score of 1	Amenity Score of 2	Amenity Score of 3	Amenity Score of 4+
Number of communities with this score	602	587	386	276
Population growth rate (2018-2023)	4%	5%	3%	8%
Median household income	\$54,532	\$59,240	\$60,366	\$65,129
Per capita income	\$23,345	\$34,061	\$36,670	\$41,208
Percent 2 <sup>nd</sup> home ownership	5.3%	9.6%	13.5%	18%
Median home value	\$214,934	\$279,976	\$317,546	\$407,745
Median gross rent	\$630	\$740	\$761	\$874

# Limitations


- Findings: Amenity Score & Demographics
  - Communities with higher amenity scores (4+) exhibit **Higher median incomes, Higher second homeownership rates, Higher median home prices...etc.**
  - Example: Jackson, WY; Moab, UT; Whitefish, MT
- Limitations & Next Steps
  - Some **low-score communities** (e.g., Pagosa Springs, CO) still experience high tourism pressures
  - Some **high-score communities** don't face the same impacts
- **Next Step:** Qualitative analysis & community self-evaluation

# Typology Criteria

**Amenity appeal:** The attractiveness of nearby natural amenities, which includes outdoor recreation appeal and scenic beauty.

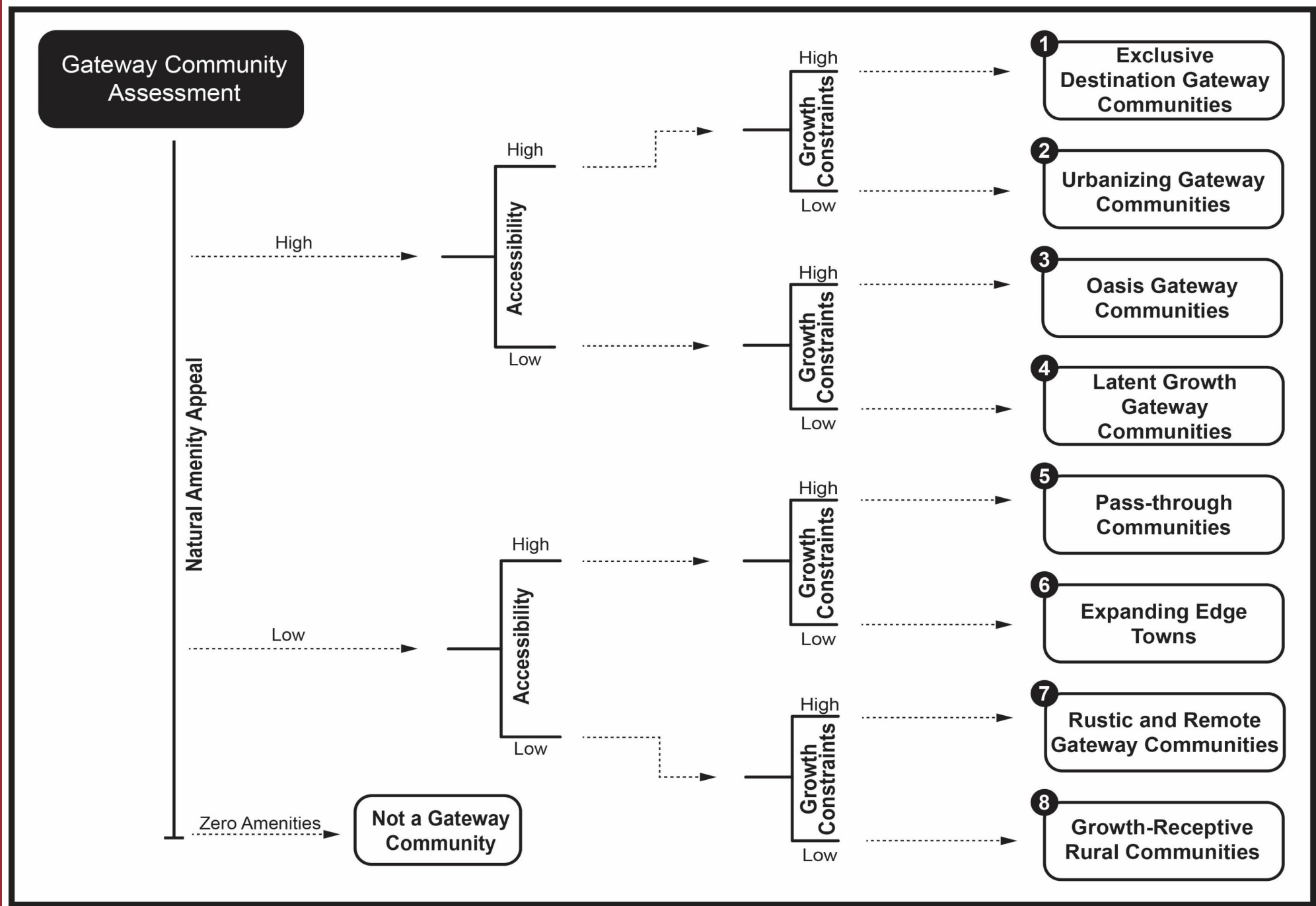


**Accessibility to the outside world:** The accessibility of the community to visitors, second homeowners, and potential amenity migrants.



**Community growth constraints:** The extent to which the community's ability to grow is limited by physical, legal, and/or political constraints.

# Typology



# Types of Communities

## 1. Exclusive Destination Communities

Highly desirable, accessible, and growth-constrained places (e.g., Jackson WY, Aspen CO) where luxury development dominates and housing affordability is critical.

## 2. Urbanizing Gateway Communities

High-amenity, accessible, and unconstrained towns (e.g., Whitefish MT, Driggs ID) that experience rapid expansion, risking loss of rural character and sprawl.

## 3. Oasis Gateway Communities

Scenic but remote and growth-limited towns (e.g., Moab UT, Bishop CA) that retain rural charm but can quickly transform if accessibility improves.

## 4. Latent Growth Gateway Communities

Attractive but remote, unconstrained places (e.g., Baker City OR) poised for growth once they become more accessible or “discovered.”

# Types of Communities

## 5. Pass-Through Communities

Accessible but growth-limited towns (e.g., Julian CA, Rockville UT) that serve visitors en route to destinations but see little lasting development.

## 6. Expanding Edge Towns

Accessible and unconstrained communities (e.g., Belgrade MT, Queen Creek AZ) growing from urban spillover or nearby gateway development.

## 7. Rustic and Remote Communities

Remote, low-amenity, and constrained places (e.g., Ferron UT, Virden NM) that struggle economically and face population decline rather than growth.

## 8. Growth-Receptive Rural Communities

Remote, low-amenity but unconstrained towns (e.g., Trinidad, CO) with potential to leverage nearby recreation or cultural assets for revitalization.

# Typology Game!!!

## Step 1)

### **Is the community's appeal high or low?**

Very scenic? High quality or unique outdoor recreation? Spent a lot of money or time investing in those amenities? Lots of planning around them?

## Step 2)

### **Is the community accessible to the outside world?**

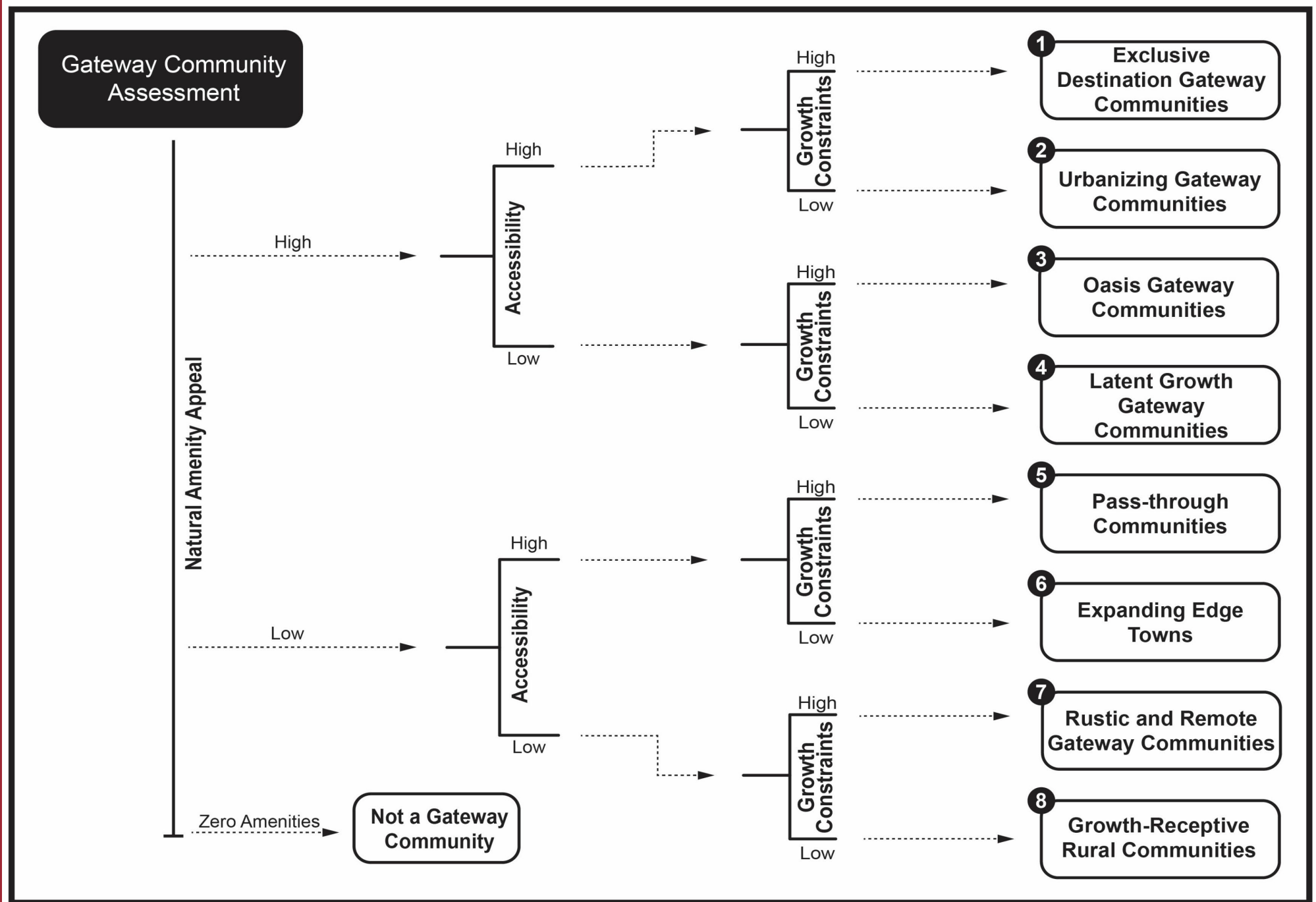
Is it easy for visitors to get here? Is there airport near by? Major highway? How long does it take to get to the nearest metro area?

## Step 3)

### **Is the community growth constrained?**

Are there physical or legal constraints? Can it accommodate the growth? Does the community allow for growth?

# Typology



# Further Discussion- Linking Strategies to Typologies

What are the pros and cons to having a distinction between rural places? Is a typology a helpful way to think about gateway community planning?

Can you think of any specific strategies you might apply to the different types of communities?

Based on what was presented about trends, what do you think are gateway communities biggest planning needs?

A watercolor-style illustration of a mountain town. The scene features a winding road through a valley, with several multi-story wooden buildings and houses on the right. In the background, there are mountains and a prominent church steeple. The color palette is dominated by warm, earthy tones like browns, oranges, and yellows, with some cooler blues and greens in the sky and watercolor washes.

# Questions?

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