

## **Famed urbanist tells NWA: Be mindful of success and development's pitfalls**



- [Worth Sparkman](#)



Richard Florida. Photo: Worth Sparkman/Axios

NWA could be a victim of its own economic success if community leaders aren't strategic about its future development.

**What's happening:** That was a key message at the Northwest Arkansas Council's 2022 annual meeting, held Thursday in Springdale.

- [Richard Florida](#), a University of Toronto professor, author and founder of the Creative Class Group, gave the keynote presentation outlining the council's [strategic plan through 2026](#).

**Context:** The NWA Council is a private, [nonprofit organization](#) working to advance job opportunities, recruitment, infrastructure, access to health care and quality-of-life in the region.

**State of play:** If you build it, they come. Cities like San Francisco and [Austin](#), Texas, that experienced tech-related economic booms attracted people, boosting the price of real estate and making housing less attainable.

- To drive his point home, Florida presented statistics that housing prices shot up by 43% in Benton County and 47% in Washington County in the past five years.
- "Here's the bottom line: With success come challenges, folks," Florida told the group.

**Details:** The council's new strategic plan, authored by Florida's Creative Class Group, centers on five key goals:

1. Continue the focus on developing, attracting and retaining diverse talent.
2. Expand efforts to bolster the innovation economy and entrepreneurial ecosystem.
3. Focus and invest to address the challenges of growth, providing affordable housing, preserving the region's character and quality of life.
4. Keep building on NWA's brand as an up-and-coming, inclusive community.
5. Expand capacity of the NWA council and related organizations to address new challenges and needs.

**What they're saying:** "People want to work on great projects with great colleagues on great challenges in great spaces in great places," Florida said.

- "You're doing all of that, but you have to continue to do it, you can't take your foot off the gas pedal," he added.

**The bottom line:** Reynie Rutledge, chairman and CEO of First Security Bancorp, said his key takeaway was the need to balance preservation of NWA's uniqueness with thoughtful economic growth.

**Meanwhile,** Austin Booth, director of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, announced the agency's plans to build a flagship public sports shooting complex.

- It will be located somewhere in NWA and should attract national sport shooting competitions, he said.
- **Yes, but:** NWA cities will have to compete for the opportunity.
- **What to watch:** A request for proposal will be opened in August.