

Mayor's Column for the February 1, 2012 Review

Blunt Economic Conversations

“Economic development is a team sport.” “I have never known a successful economic development effort without public-private partnerships.” “Tear down silos.” “Never say we have always done it that way.”

“Midwesterners don't like to fail.” “Sometimes the enemy is us.” “You must overcome the status quo—if you are not going forward, you are going backwards.”

“You are complacent, maybe even arrogant, and your attitude must change. In today's global competition, attitude matters.”

“Quality of place is more and more important.” “You must start selling yourself.” “If you've done it, it ain't bragging.”

These are all frank messages delivered by Mac Holladay, CEO of Atlanta-based Market Street, at a Thrive community leaders' summit held on January 18, 2012, in Madison. Thrive, the eight-county economic development organization that includes Evansville and Rock County, is developing an aggressive economic development strategy called Advance Now. With the assistance of consulting firm Market Street, the strategic plan will be completed this spring. Holladay outlined our tremendous regional assets and resources and our failure to effectively market them, stating that “marketing is not up to the quality you deserve.”

Last Thursday evening the Madison consulting firm of Ady Voltedge presented the Evansville Retail Market Analysis recommendations at a meeting with nearly 30 attendees. Ady Voltedge pointed out that retail is just one component of community and economic development, with other generally recognized elements being business retention and expansion, business attraction, entrepreneurship, and tourism. The following comments are some of the observations from Ady Voltedge.

“Downtowns and retail areas are vital to the health of a city. Perceptions of these areas can make a city attractive (or unattractive) to live, recreate, or grow a business.”

“National site selectors will not look at Evansville. They search for locations with vision, evidenced by thriving downtowns and vibrant, active communities. You are not there yet. You must work to successfully implement your vision.”

“We believe that Evansville's retail areas hold much promise, and there is great potential to ‘raising the boat’ for everyone, but that the effort to implement the recommendations must be driven by stakeholders—business owners, property owners, civic groups, and others with a ‘stake’ in the success of the local economy.”

On December 20, 2011, Thrive representatives were in Evansville and presented results of Market Street's Target Cluster Analysis for the Thrive Region, one of the components in the development of Advance Now. Advanced manufacturing and agriculture/food systems were identified as legacy business sectors "with important historical influence and 'next generation' potential." Health care and life sciences are mature, leading cluster business sectors with great growth potential. An emerging target sector is design and technology, with much economic opportunity. Tourism and experience was identified as an opportunity area by "establishing a reputation for individual communities as attractive places to visit and live," bringing revenues to service-oriented businesses and boosting development of additional amenities that enhance residents' quality of life and place.

At the January Thrive summit, Holladay presented five draft goals for successful Madison Region economic development:

- Utilize a regional approach to developing global economic competitiveness.
- Grow and attract top talent for existing and start-up businesses.
- Provide small businesses and entrepreneurs the necessary support and capital for growth opportunities.
- Effectively market our distinctive quality of life and global competitiveness, both within the region and externally.
- Establish regional collaborations and develop a consensus approach to improving our area's economic future.

Holladay emphasized that these goals are interdependent and that all are equally important. He stated that success of Advance Now will only happen with achievement in all the goal areas.

Ady Voltedge provided six recommendations for improving the retail business environment in Evansville:

- Refine the vision for the downtown shopping area.
- Describe the vision for the east side shopping area.
- Identify and act on areas of shared needs among businesses.
- Increase awareness and interest in local shops among area residents.
- Make the outside community aware of Evansville events and businesses.
- Publicize available retail properties more widely.

A committee of key local stakeholders was formed at last week's meeting and will begin work on retail visioning on February 2. Other committees are at the ready to work on the other recommendations.

Meeting participant Roger Berg used the analogy of a wheel with spokes to describe economic development. Roger observed that the retail sector was one spoke in the economic development wheel.

The strength of the wheel is because of many solid spokes. Deficient spokes mean ultimate failure of the wheel. Other obvious elements of successful local economic development are good infrastructure, high quality of life, strong school system, quality workforce, industrial, technical, and service businesses, and tourism. All of these components are identified in the Evansville Smart Growth Comprehensive Plan as important to economic development.

Latest reports are that the national economy will be in recovery until at least 2014. Like Evansville, nearly all local communities in the region are currently economically stressed. Fitchburg, Cambridge, Milton, Janesville, and Stoughton, among others, are working actively to strengthen their economies.

Mac Holladay's messages apply to us. Economic development is a team sport. We must change our attitude. We must tear down the silos. Everyone must work on economic development. We must strengthen all of the spokes of the Evansville economic development wheel.

Status quo means we are moving backwards—others will “eat our lunch.” We all must roll up our sleeves and get to work. Our community will be the beneficiary of our collaborative efforts and hard work.

Community Announcements

In 2011, sixteen building permits were issued for new single family residences. There were eleven new single family residence building permits issued in 2010.

Several residents have asked me about the time I work as mayor. I keep time sheets along with all City staff. In 2011, my recorded hours worked totaled 1827.50; my hours totaled 1824.25 in 2010. As a reference, in a December 5, 2011, “Newsweek” article on the productivity of the American worker, author Paul Begela reported that the average American works 1804 hours annually.

As you begin spring cleaning tasks, remember to dispose of outdated and unused prescription and over-the-counter drugs in their original containers at the drop off box located at the police station. The drugs will be properly destroyed by the Rock County Health Department. Also, a Clean Sweep recycling event for disposal of hazardous materials is scheduled for Evansville on April 27. Additional information will be provided closer to the event.

The Friends of the Eager Free Public Library will hold a winter book sale at the Library on Saturday, February 4, from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

The Evansville Fund's popular Chocolate Extravaganza will be held on February 11 from 6:30-9:00 p.m. at Creekside Place.

A free, family-friendly event sponsored by the Evansville Grove Society, Eager Free Public Library, and Creekside Place will be held from 3-5 p.m. on Sunday, February 12. Celebrate Abe Lincoln's 203rd birthday with games, songs, treats, live Civil War era music, and other fun.

The inaugural Creekside Place Dinner Soiree will be held Sunday evening, February 12, from 5:30- 8:00 p.m. The public is invited to enjoy a social hour and dinner, followed by entertainment that will honor Abe Lincoln's birthday. For ticket information and reservations contact Creekside Place at 882-0407.

E-Arts is presenting a Cabin Fever Reliever variety show on Saturday evening, February 25, at the High School Performing Arts Center. Entertainment will include Alaskan fiddler and poet Ken Waldman, Cajun fiddler, David Greely, and the Barley Brothers, a Madison musical duo. The cost is your donation to support the arts in Evansville.

Check out the new Evansville Calendar website at www.evansville-wisconsin.com for additional details on the above events and the many additional activities occurring in our community.

Community Thanks

Our community thanks Mary Beaver and Evansville EMS for successfully writing a \$50,000 grant to assist with the purchase of new federally-mandated radio equipment for our public safety staff.

Last Saturday I attended a strategic planning session for Evansville Community Partnership. Our community has greatly benefitted from the many efforts of ECP through the years. On behalf of all of us, I thank the many volunteers and supporters of ECP. You have significantly contributed to the betterment of Evansville.