

Mayor's Column for the May 30, 2012, Evansville Review

Public-Private Partnerships

In late March I attended a day-long seminar, part of the Wisconsin Certified Public Manager Program of the UW-Madison, entitled "Developing Public-Private Relationships." The course is timely in view of tight governmental budgets and hard levy limits. The session explored options, especially public-private partnerships, for best leveraging of scarce tax dollars to expand and improve resident and taxpayer services. Much of the day's discussion was based on the book "Reinventing Government," authored by David Osborne and Ted Gaebler.

A public-private partnership, or "P3," is defined as a formal contractual agreement between the public sector and private sector to accomplish a common and mutually beneficial goal. There are a number of components necessary for a healthy, productive, effective P3 over the long-term. Some of the required elements are: basic level of trust, integrity, mutual understanding and vision, open communication, effective cooperation and collaboration, capacity for delivery, identified deliverables, measurement metrics, and delivery deadlines.

P3 separates governance and delivery of service. Government becomes a buyer of direct services. The private sector provides delivery of services; however, governance cannot be turned over to the private sector. Taxpayer dollars are public money and expenditures are subject to many requirements and restrictions, including transparency, conflict of interest, ethics, stewardship, accountability, etc. Oversight of the appropriate expenditure of every taxpayer dollar remains with the public officials.

Three important responsibilities of the government in P3 are ensuring service quality, ensuring equity in the delivery of services, and containing and controlling costs. These responsibilities can be accomplished by becoming knowledgeable of best practices, frequent and effective measurement, monitoring, and audits of deliverables, establishing sanctions for non-delivery, and developing safety-net procedures.

Starting with a smaller, pilot partnership is recommended as a method to build a strong, enduring P3. Pitfalls and problems can more easily be addressed and productive cooperation and collaboration developed.

P3 can be a win-win with the right partner. At a minimum, a partner must have the competency to meet public policy objectives and have a track record of successful results. An effective partnership needs to be flexible, innovative, and entrepreneurial to be responsive to rapidly changing conditions, resources, opportunities, and challenges. Government must always keep the "public good" paramount in any P3.

A P3 contract currently used in our community is for trash collection. We also utilize P3 for expert professional services, such as appraisal, engineering, and legal services.

There can also be “public-private non-profit partnerships.” An example currently utilized by the City of Evansville is for services of the Rock County Humane Society.

“Public-public partnerships” can also be formed. Agreements with other governmental units to share services are often beneficial and economical. Eager Free Public Library participation in the Arrowhead Library System provides additional resources and services to our citizens. The Evansville Fire District is another example of multiple local governments partnering to provide a needed service.

Two years ago I was involved in a Local Government Institute project, partly funded by the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, which resulted in a report on public-public partnerships entitled “A Roadmap for Government Transformation.” An objective of the study was to identify government collaborations that would provide more efficient, productive delivery of services. As with P3, success factors identified in enduring public-public relationships included trust among entities, common vision, transparency, and true collaboration.

In two recent Committee of the Whole meetings, the Common Council and key staff explored effective teamwork as we seek to provide our residents, businesses, and taxpayers with top-notch, equitable, excellent service and quality of life. There was considerable discussion about the importance of openness, responsiveness, transparency, and stewardship in our City government. Evansville officials and staff take very seriously the public trust. We are not interested in reducing service. We are committed to providing more efficient, productive, and improved service. At the same time, we are cognizant of our fiduciary responsibility to be accountable for every scarce tax dollar, seeing that expenditures are leveraged to provide the best results for our community.

We will consider future opportunities for partnerships that provide better, more efficient service to our taxpayers. Prospective partners interested in developing a collaborative relationship with the City of Evansville to provide needed citizen services are encouraged to contact us, recognizing the necessity of the required working parameters identified above.

Community Announcements

The Rock County Dairy Breakfast will be held on Saturday, June 2, at Larson Acres, 18218 West State Highway 59, from 6:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Curbside pick-up of yard waste will occur the week of June 4-8. Please put debris on the terrace, not in the gutter where it can clog storm drains.

The recall election will be held from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on Tuesday, June 5, at Creekside Place, 102 Maple Street, for City of Evansville residents. Town of Union residents vote at the fire station on Water Street.

The first Theodore Robinson Plein Air Competition will be held in the Evansville area from June 8 to June 17. The Competition sponsors are Evansville Community Partnership, Theodore Robinson Society, and the Eager Free Public Library. Additional details are available at www.windmillsonparade.com.

We would like to thank the Evansville residents that purchased terrace trees in celebration of Earth Day. The weather has been warm and dry; please water the trees to assist their growth.

Community Thanks

Our community is grateful for the efforts of the Evansville Girl Scouts and the U.S. Postal Service for their recent food drives to benefit the Evansville Ecumenical Care Closet.

The City of Evansville heartily thanks Nancy Greve-Shannon's third grade class for "spiffing up" Main Street before the summer community activities. The downtown was swept and weeded before the "Rally 'Round the Flag" Civil War commemoration and the Memorial Day weekend activities, including the VFW Rally in the Alley. Our students are to be commended for their service to the downtown businesses.

Nearly 2000 students from as far away as Kaukauna attended the Company K School Day Civil War educational event at Lake Leota Park. The weekend Rally included participants from Wisconsin, Iowa, and Illinois. Kudos to the dozens of volunteers who ensured the success and safety of the weekend. Nancy Kress served as volunteer coordinator and deserves special recognition. Ray Anderson and the Public Works Department readied the Park and Cemetery for event activities. The Water & Light Department provided adequate electrical service. The Police Department and EMS provided safety and security throughout the weekend. The Evansville Community Theater presented wonderful living history cemetery theater. ECP assisted in a variety of ways. Evansville thanks you for your efforts! Congratulations to the Evansville Grove Society for a wholesome, family-friendly, educational community event!