

Open for Business

Mayor Chet Mann's Proposal for Economic Revitalization

(December 2nd, 2013)

More than ever, Sanford's City Council should take an aggressive stance for job creation and the expansion of economic development efforts. We have reached a time in our history where we must focus our efforts on pro-growth initiatives and seek quality of life improvements that will stimulate growth, reward our current citizens, and attract newcomers to our area. Increasingly, we must get out in front of trends, take calculated risks, look for and make investments that will provide a greater rate of return, and provide leadership to the City, its staff, and its taxpayers both corporate and individual. I believe these dynamic actions bring about two results: 1) lead other government entities to follow suit and 2) attract more private sector investment.

It's time for Sanford to declare that we are "Open for Business".

Project #1: Job Creation

- **Make the new Sanford/Lee County Partnership for Prosperity competitive.** We should take a major, pro-active step in the development, funding, and formation of the new EDO (economic development organization) to be named the *Sanford/Lee County Partnership for Prosperity (SLCPP)*. Balanced representation between City, County, and Private Sector on this new board should be a goal. We should increase our funding level from \$86K last year and \$62k currently to \$150k by 2015. This organization, if given the proper resources, will be the single largest driver of our overall economic growth and prosperity.
- **Advocate for the most competitive local incentive/investment policy in the State.** As a community, we must provide the SLCPP with a clear, cohesive policy for attracting business as opposed to our current policy which is confusing and disjointed at best and at worst, keeps us out of the game completely. We should immediately open discussion with our partners in economic development linking a competitive incentive/investment policy with a new strategy on water/wastewater expansion and annexation. If structured correctly, such a strategy will promote job growth and development and protect the City from a shrinking tax base.
- **Create a "one-stop shop" location for economic development.** Consolidate all activities necessary for growth including planning, GIS, inspections, permitting, and the new SLCPP into a true one-stop shop for customers. The preferable location – the Buggy Factory on Chatham Street. This action would create a new hub for combined City/County services and a customer service grand slam. This would also be a highly visible symbol of our commitment to Downtown Revitalization.
- **Continue to foster and develop relationships** with NC Department of Commerce, Research Triangle Regional Partnership, and other state entities responsible for assisting us in our

recruitment of new businesses and investors. Spend necessary dollars and energy sharing our vision of “open for business” with state agencies and partners who we need to convince that we are worth investing in and bringing business to Sanford.

- **Create a Small Business Incubator in Downtown Sanford.** Utilize existing donated buildings in partnership with Lee County, CCCC and DSI to investigate every funding option. We could utilize the donated Hi-Lites building on Steele Street and up fit it to accommodate dozens of workers in an incubator setting. Venture capital companies with connections to start-up businesses should be consulted as to how this investment can earn maximum return. With abundant broadband access and high bandwidth speed as marketing tools, we should recruit high tech start-ups as a priority. For this high salary, high growth industry, we should provide the top incentive package in the southeast.
- **Promote our water supply as a unique asset.** We must maintain our position as a leader in available water and wastewater capacity, using this valuable infrastructure as a competitive advantage to attract future development and growth. With the assistance of the new SLCPP, we must actively recruit industries that need our abundant capacity and that build our tax base. These industries include: metal and wood manufacturing, paper and chemicals manufacturing, food processing, clay, glass and stone manufacturing. We must continue to build our reputation in the southeast as one of the region’s most efficient utility operators.

Project #2: Destination Sanford

- **Support an expansion of the Dennis Wicker Civic Center.** Utilizing the concepts from the Civic Center 20/20 Plan as a blueprint, develop a new, expanded Convention Center as the number one small meeting site in central North Carolina. Transitioning the current Civic Center into a Convention and Business Center would bring thousands of visitors annually to Sanford for overnight meetings, conventions, and community events further promoting our “Open for Business” theme. We would put more “heads in beds” in our hotels and “feet under tables” in our restaurants. Sanford would host the hundreds of small to medium size conventions that are held throughout the state that we are currently not able to with our existing facility. Involve CCCC as a partner to provide state-of-the-art hospitality industry training for students who would use the new Convention Center facility as a learning lab and training opportunity. With the new Convention Center as a major attraction, we can recruit other hospitality business partners such as new hotels, restaurants and convention services.
- **Create a 21st Century Multi-Purpose Sports Complex.** Leverage the Parks and Recreation Bond funds to acquire grant funding to expand OT Sloan Park. Develop multiple soccer, baseball, softball fields and volleyball courts. Partner with SASL, YMCA, Boys & Girls Club and any other involved groups. Coupled with the Sidewalk Bond funds to facilitate a safe and walkable area, this initiative will lead to further economic development by bringing hundreds of visitors to Sanford to stay overnight in our hotels, restaurants, and convention center – all within walking distance in this mid-town location tied together by our new sidewalk initiative. In addition, the

Convention Center and nearby high school and college facilities will add to the creation of a youth sports complex attraction second to none. Sanford could now be the host city for dozens of Youth League Sports Tournaments with teams and their families staying multiple nights in our City from all over the state. We will truly create a Center City Hub.

- **Further promote our railroad heritage by acquiring the Train Depot Building.** Working in partnership with the Sanford Area Association of Realtors, develop a true Area Visitors Center supported and managed by the new SLCPP. As a long term strategy, create a task force to investigate development of an Amtrak stop in Sanford.
- **Advocate for a Tourism Development Authority.** A TDA, with a permanent funding stream to support its activities, can provide marketing and administrative support for festivals and street fairs like Arts and Vine, Second Sunday, Southern Side by Side, Bike Criterium, etc. For efficiency and maximum return on investment, TDA efforts must be coordinated with the SLCPP.
- **Complete our Chinese Sister City Project.** Plan a visit, utilizing the Chamber of Commerce and CCCC's China scholar, to our proposed sister city, Yixing, China in 2015. Look for opportunities for cultural and business exchange in other locations around the world.

Project #3: Quality of Place

- **Leverage our Bond Dollars.** Research every potential funding stream to multiply resources by seeking any and all grants or matching funds.
- **Encourage Live, Work, Play.** Master planned communities or planned unit development (PUD) communities should be supported and promoted. These quality neighborhoods, which offer highly desirable amenities and attract new residents, should be encouraged by offering developers flexibility of development and other incentives, such as increased building height and density. Our city should create an expedited review process for these projects that provide a commendable number or quality of public benefits such as preservation of open space and reserved areas for schools.
- **Encourage and promote infill.** We are the least dense community in the state with 1.71 people per acre and need to begin moving toward the state average of 2.9 persons per acre by developing existing spaces and property from downtown outward.
- **Update City ordinances and code enforcement rules.** Implement common sense changes, update and modernize ordinances which incentivize high quality development and increase our tax base. Encourage aggressive beautification efforts by "inspecting" what we "expect". Implement specific policies for non-occupied/non-standard buildings in the downtown areas. Raise expectations for key properties by identifying "anchor locations" and focus efforts on improving these properties first. Brand a "Mayor's Empty Building Initiative" which would determine barriers to property improvement, reduce obstacles to the sale of these properties and incentivize new investors and purchasers. Assist landlords in obtaining long term tenants.

Seek help from our State Representatives in changing state mandated codes and ordinance policies that will allow Sanford more control over the process.

- **Develop a long term, incremental parking plan.** Plan and build structured parking areas that enhance the architectural and aesthetic quality of our downtown core areas in Sanford and Jonesboro while adding the parking spaces necessary for a vibrant economy downtown. Invest in the plan annually.
- **Create a Visual and Performing Arts District.** Anchored by the Temple Theatre and with appropriate incentives for surrounding areas and properties, develop a district which displays products of the visual and performing arts. Develop methods to acquire properties or incentivize current property owners to adopt the district theme. This arts district would include retail shops, studios, galleries, etc. Partner with the Lee County Arts and Community Center on North Steele Street as a part of the district's focus on performing arts. As the cornerstone of a revitalized downtown core, this district will promote the cultural assets of our city and encourage further beautification, public art, festivals, and public-private investments in our historic business districts. Further support the Temple by assisting in the development of a strategic plan for growth.

Project #4: Community Pride

- **Support with funding a professional administration and financial services organization that would offer its services to area non-profit organizations.** Through the United Way of Lee County, and in cooperation with other funders, develop incentives for non-profits to adopt best practices and standards. Seek to offer bonuses to non-profits for additional training and attainment of benchmarks. Funding from local governments could be conditioned on such benchmarks and standards.
- **Create a Mayor's Community Advisory Council.** Made up of a cross segment of our community to include a diverse group of neighborhood leaders, faith based communities and local business merchants, this organization would meet quarterly to provide citizen input on a wide range of issues – such as public safety, community outreach, growth, transportation, and public works services. These meetings would offer citizens the opportunity to provide ideas for how Sanford grows and how citizens can best nurture each other together.
- **Revitalize Sanford Block Party.** Identify primary corridors for renovation. Focus city efforts on select distressed properties rather than entire blocks for clean up. Consider some properties for acquisition and demolition in order to dramatically impact the future of neighborhoods. Assist landlords in renovation planning and construction. Engage volunteers in the establishment and construction of neighborhood gardens. Brand a new community organization concept: "We Love Our Neighborhood!" with the goal of empowering neighbors helping neighbors.
- **Support Community Policing.** Provide adequate resources, organizational structure and management to strengthen our community policing efforts. Bring together community partners,

the right personnel and state of the art information systems to promote a modern and responsive Police and Fire Community. Adopt measureable goals and test the results. Consider Police Outposts in certain areas of the City, continued use of mobile precincts and foot patrols.

The Take Away and Outlook for Sanford:

Sanford is poised for growth in the coming years. With so many existing assets and our central proximity to all major markets in North Carolina we can parley our strengths into major economic and quality of life gains. With the completion of the Oscar Keller Highway 421 Bypass by 2015, the likely widening of Broadway Road from Horner Blvd to Coty, the new 540 Toll Road in Southern Wake County, the ever strengthening and prominence of Fort Bragg to our South, and the resurgence of our national economy we will experience a renewal in Lee County. What that renewal looks like is up to us. Growth is coming and profits will be made. It is up to us as a City and Local Governments to decide how we invest in it in order to shape our future in the best way. We need to raise the bar in Sanford and begin to ask more of ourselves. By expecting more we will gain more. By supporting and proactively embracing some or all of the Open for Business Agenda Sanford can reclaim its place as one of the best and leading small cities in the South Eastern United States and be a place we are all proud to call home.