



November 29, 2013

As you recall, the Chamber of Commerce Past Presidents conducted informal personal surveys of many of our local business leaders late last summer. The purpose was to help the current Board of Directors prepare for a strategic planning process in anticipation of increased economic development and growth activities in the area, as well as to provide some insight for the city's planning purposes as well.

Attached is a summary of the results of the survey, along with several recommendations that the Past Presidents have made to the current board members of the Chamber. We sincerely appreciate the time you took to be interviewed, and if you have any further comments to make after reading through this material, please contact the person who conducted your interview, or Shirley Jackson/Barb Lang.

Thank you again for your input!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Shirley Jackson".

Shirley Jackson
Chair, Past Presidents Club
701-251-1755

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara Lang".

Barbara Lang
Chair, Survey Task Force
701-320-4570

Chamber of Commerce Past Presidents

Executive Summary

Past Chamber of Commerce Presidents' Express the Need for Sharper Focus on Citywide Growth, Vision, and Management

Because of a growing concern for the improvement of Jamestown, the Past Presidents group of the Jamestown Chamber has been discussing and gathering consensus about matters pertaining to City governance and planning for the future. In the process, a number of interviews with many of the larger employers in the City have been conducted, and this Executive Summary presents an overview of those findings.

The main themes in the response to three broad questions shows a need for greater focus on well-planned, transparent growth for the future and the need for more proactive leadership from City Hall and from our elected Council. The three questions with summary results follow:

Question 1: Should population growth be a priority for the city of Jamestown? And if so, does the city need to take a more aggressive stand?

Growth for growth's sake should not be the focus. Growth should be planned in a transparent manner, with infrastructure and housing needs addressed along the way. We don't need more low-paying minimum wage jobs, but rather need well-paying primary sector jobs. Good jobs add to our economy and also our tax base. Housing is a major problem, and the city needs to be user-friendly and give incentives to developers. We should do all we can as a city to make it easy for them. City hall needs to be more cooperative. City staff seem to be negative and make things unnecessarily complicated. They discourage progress, especially if it makes more work for the city staff. The result of this is that people get frustrated and Jamestown gets a bad reputation in the state and the region. Furthermore, city government (both staff and council) desperately needs visionary leadership, with a can-do, optimistic attitude. Jamestown needs to be business friendly and avoid embarrassing issues like the dispute with Stutsman Rural Water.

Question #2: Do you believe the City of Jamestown is focusing on the right goals? How does that fit with your vision for the city?

With 38 responses to the broad question relating to focus and vision for the City, one might expect a wide range of responses due to the subjective nature of the question. The number of positive responses indicate that 10 are favorably disposed, about half (19) are negative, and a third of the group (13) either don't know the goals or have a differing view of what kinds of goals the City should pursue.

Among the group expressing positive responses, the City's focus on infrastructure projects gets high marks, as does the JSDC. Those who do not know or understand the City's goals see "reactive, not proactive" approaches, a lack of transparency about goals, and distractions such as the water dispute, "compartmentalized problems" such as old signage, and inaction on matters essential to growth (such as housing expansion) as indications that we have a focus problem.

Negative views suggest that Jamestown suffers from weak leadership within the City staff, a lack of commitment to growth in favor of constantly trying to catch up, and a broad strategic vision for the future as opposed to the current strategic plan which is little more than a maintenance schedule.

Question #3: What do you see as the Chamber's role in implementing any needed changes? Is the Chamber spending time on the right issues?

In summary the results overwhelmingly suggested that the Chamber continue to be the voice for the business community. The Chamber needs to continue with the many programs they already operate and promote, but they also need to step it up a level to be more proactive in helping local businesses prosper by taking a more aggressive role in presenting pro-business views to city government and to encourage business friendly, progressive thinking individuals for leadership positions. Many references were made about the need for the Chamber to be a stronger lobbying group for its members in regards to the city council. It was suggested that the Chamber and the City should work to be partners in growth for the city and the chamber should spend more time interacting with all the city and county officials.

Conclusion

The Past President's group believes the City needs a more progressive attitude regarding growth and the role of government in providing infrastructure and services appropriate to growth in a planned and transparent manner. We believe that we have well-intentioned staff and elected leadership, but we expect more visionary thinking, productivity, and leadership. The Chamber should re-focus its efforts to partner more aggressively with City government and officials. By working together constructively, we can achieve success and prosper as a City.

Past Chamber Presidents

Recommendations

1. Investigate what other similar-in-size cities (Devils Lake, Wahpeton, and Dickinson, for example) Chamber of Commerce organizations are doing to interact with their local government entities.
2. Housing development incentives: research what other communities are doing and draft proposals for city government review.
3. The Chamber Board of Directors/Past Presidents should update/develop the Chamber's strategic plan. This plan should include factors to promote positive growth in Jamestown. The plan should be shared with city and county officials.

Included in this strategic plan, should be a review of all the chamber committees to determine what chamber committee(s) should be regularly bringing recommendations to city council/county commission members?

4. Establish a task force to identify and encourage individuals that would be willing to seek city and county leadership positions (both elected and appointed positions) and positions on the Chamber of Commerce board of directors.
5. Transportation needs: research what other cities are doing to meet this need and draft proposals for city government review.