

Davenport: Growth or Ghost Town Depends on New Leadership

Written by

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There are three significant positions to be filled in Davenport's economic development in the near-future: City Director for Economic and Community Director, Director for DavenportOne, and Director for Quad Cities Development Group.

Talk about the opportunity of a lifetime! Here is a chance to enact real change in Davenport, considered by some to be the flagship of the Quad Cities. Those who will influence our new hires will either see the path or they won't - the path being to hire individuals with genuine leadership skills that are foundationally inclusive, versus the exclusive policy that has dominated economic development in Davenport for so long.

The thing is, if the boys' club would step back and allow a new energy source to engage, it would find that it automatically benefits from the new growth of economic activity that would, by sheer momentum alone, evolve. Allowing new blood to enter the arena provides a more robust economy, creating diverse magnets for growth. Unfortunately, business leadership, past and present boards, and those who influence decision-makers have often seen new players as strict competition for resources, and as obstacles or lost opportunities for the select few. Hence, no meaningful growth in Davenport has prevailed for over a decade.

Eventually, younger generations will step up - but, if there is nothing to step up to, not in Davenport. The Quad Cities face the same challenge as in all other cities in America - in the world, for that matter - and that is sustainability. Our time is no different than any other in history, and we will either grow, or eventually become a ghost town. What we won't do is

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remain inert (with zero population growth) for much longer. Things move forward or backward, but they never, ever stay the same.

The Quad Cities has untapped economic potential that is actually quite exciting. We have an economic edge on several levels that many other communities do not have. Size, location, some geographic diversity, the Mississippi River (a huge untapped asset), political diversity (two states, five municipalities) and a strong presence of educational resources all combine to give us a unique competitive edge.

We must not really grasp how incredibly lucky we are geographically, because we ignore the very things that could not only guarantee our sustainability, but could put us on the map in a much bigger way. (Example: Davenport leadership agreeing - against the will of the people - to build a casino hotel on a very limited amount of riverfront in downtown Davenport suggests that the Mississippi is of little value to the community, and therefore disposable to the public at large.)

What we have lacked for so long - with the exception of Rock Island's effective consortium of public and private partners - is aggressively creative, fearlessly innovative leadership that is inclusive, and implements long-term goals that has an entire community as beneficiaries, not just a few special interests. Believe it or not, there is enough economic pie to go around and then some, with the right leadership in place.

Non-negotiable requirements for all three positions should include a demonstrably intrinsic knowledge and understanding of business principles, not just as they apply to government, but to private industry, as well. Core competencies must include a background in economics, marketing, communications, development, real estate, finance and banking, and not just limited to but including public administration, strategic management, land-use planning, human resources, public fundraising, and political science.

But most importantly, the individuals in these three positions should engage their respective organizations as business entities whose investors are the taxpayers (residential, small business, and corporate) as a whole and the residents of the Quad Cities. In other words, taxpayers are the shareholders - the quintessential board of directors - to whom these individuals are accountable. If each kept their eyes on that ball, this community would absolutely thrive, not just because it is a sensible policy, but also because it is the incontrovertible truth.

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