

Rochester City Council - Annual Meeting
Comments from the Council President
January 8, 2014

Undoubtedly, 2013 will be remembered as a milestone year in the history of Rochester. It was a year of significant accomplishment for our city that builds on past achievements but also sets us on a path of growth and progress for the next several decades.

We actually began 2013 with the approval in late 2012 of the citizen authorization to extend the local sales tax. This extension will raise a total of \$139.5 million which will be used to support multiple initiatives that span public safety, education, recreation, senior citizens and public infrastructure. A portion of these funds are also being shared with 17 surrounding communities so that they may also grow and in turn contribute to the greater economic health of southeast Minnesota. I like to think that Rochester and our region demonstrate by example what can happen when we choose to work together. Strong neighbors make for strong neighborhoods and vibrant communities where we all benefit.

While planning for some of the projects occurred in 2013, in 2014 we will see several begin to materialize as we move forward on a new fire station, new senior citizen center, recreation center remodeling and CTECH to name a few.

These are truly dollars that will be invested in the future of our community and will have broad benefit.

Apart from the sales tax projects, we certainly can't ignore Destination Medical Center. I still find it an amazing accomplishment that, in one legislative session, our community was able to formulate a proposal and make a compelling case for what is probably the most significant single economic development initiative in the history of Minnesota. \$5 to \$6 billion of private investment augmented by \$585 million of public investment will be used in ways that set Rochester on a path of vitality almost unimaginable.

As exciting as the potential of DMC is, we will need to be patient and thoughtful as we consider the opportunities that will be presented as part of the plan currently being created. This is a multi-year journey and not a sprint. It is imperative that we are good stewards of the resources made available and wisely use them for the greatest benefit.

While the sales tax projects and DMC are certainly highlights and indicative of the continued economic recovery and our vision for the future, there are a number of other topics that will require our attention in the coming year. I would like to share some goals which I hope the City Council will endorse and act upon over the course of the coming year.

Clearly, there will be a great deal of planning occurring in 2014. We have begun the process for updating our comprehensive land use plan which was last updated in 1979 and, in many respects, has stood the test of time quite well over the past 30 plus years. But it is time to update the plan so that it better reflects our current community and as we position ourselves for the changes ahead.

The population of Rochester in 1980 was about 58,000 and we now stand at roughly 107,000. We have nearly doubled our population since the last plan was developed. On an increasing frequency we are too often dealing with issues related to in-fill, restricted and incentive development. These tend to be stop gap solutions that beg for an updated comprehensive solution.

Apart from the comprehensive plan we have an existing Downtown Master plan, planning occurring as part of DMC, campus planning by the University of Minnesota Rochester and transportation planning that is occurring via the Rochester-Olmsted Council of Governments.

These and other planning initiatives will take time and resources and I call upon the various governmental agencies and planning bodies to work together in their efforts. We must share resources and information in ways that minimize wasteful overlap, are not redundant and perhaps even conflict with one another. We can do this but we need the resolve to work collaboratively.

Another goal, and one that aligns with our planning efforts, is that we must work harder to improve our development process. As good as it is, we know that we can do better. A year-long study, completed by a citizen led group, highlighted several areas where we do quite well but also pointed out opportunities for improvement.

Among the committee's recommendations was that the city create a development coordinator position, a position that has been implemented quite successfully in other communities and effectively used to enhance the development process. This position has received broad community support and should be acted upon by the City Council.

Staffing is not the sole answer though. As a third goal I am calling for the development of a comprehensive technology plan. Technology is used throughout city operations and while Rochester continues to increase our use of technology in areas such as intelligence led law enforcement and the development process, we often still operate in a disjointed fashion. A study was completed in late 2011 that presented many ideas and we need to move forward in implementing solutions that will support both our current needs as well as serve as the foundation for future solutions.

Finally, we cannot accomplish our goals without working together with our many community partners and especially our colleagues from other elected bodies. While each body has its respective responsibilities, we increasingly see the boundaries

blurring. Housing, for example, is an area that may touch not only the city development process but also education and various county services. Working together will require a great deal of communication and joint efforts to achieve the degree of success we all wish for.

I'm asking that we convene a series of joint meetings with other elected bodies the purpose of which will be to allow time for conversation and deliberation of the challenges and opportunities we will face.

Rochester is an incredible community. Regardless of whether you are a recent arrival or someone who is a life-long resident, you should all be proud of what we have accomplished together. Our job, as your representatives, is to continue to listen and make decisions that are viewed as the best for our city as a whole.

As we end 2013 and look forward to 2014, we will experience many changes. These changes will at times challenge us, sometimes confound us but in the end will make us stronger and continue to make Rochester a wonderful community in which to live.

On behalf of myself and my fellow council members, I wish everyone a happy, healthy and prosperous 2014.

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