

Success comes to certain cities that embrace freedom

November 21, 2013

by [Randy Bright](#)



Randy Bright

The last couple of weeks I have written about a report prepared by the Praxis Strategy Group and Joel Kotkin entitled “Enterprising Cities – A Force for American Prosperity.” The report was a study of seven successful American cities – Dayton, Ohio; Irving, Texas; Memphis, Tennessee; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Salt Lake City, Utah; San Antonio, Texas; and Sioux Falls, South Dakota – that outlined why each one had attained economic growth in recent years.

In the context of Tulsa’s recent mayoral election, the principles and policies that these seven cities have used should be observed by our planners. To his credit, Mayor Dewey Bartlett (who was re-elected for another four-year term) has not placed a great deal of public emphasis on PlaniTulsa. Bartlett has received some criticism for doing so, but PlaniTulsa’s focus was on developing light transit and densifying the city. However, our zoning codes are currently being rewritten under his leadership, and according to the PlaniTulsa website, the new zoning code should be ready for public review any time. So we shall see.

The policies identified in the report were:

“Allow businesses to grow and thrive.”

“Free businesses from excessive taxes, unnecessary regulations and onerous local government processes.”

“Focus government on the critical tasks that are the foundation of economic opportunity, such as infrastructure and protective services.”

“Help educate, cultivate and equip the next generation of young entrepreneurs and the workforce of the future.”

Though each city used these basic principles, each one took a different path according to their own circumstances.

City leaders in Dayton, Ohio, recognized that their city population was in severe decline and many of their neighborhoods were in a state of decay. They noticed that one area of growth that they did have was a recent influx of immigrants, specifically from Turkey. They developed a program that would reduce barriers for immigrants that wanted to start businesses, and developed other programs to encourage more immigrants to come to their city.

Irving, Texas, is one of the fastest growing cities in the country. Their programs focus on the workforce of 3.1 million adults that exist within a 30-minute drive, the nearby Dallas-Ft. Worth International Airport, and a “sound business climate” that is the result of taking a “private sector approach to running its city”. Their city government aims to incorporate the best practices of private businesses which include “sound fiscal management, citizen feedback, a team culture, strategic planning and process efficiency, community safety, and sustainability.”

Memphis, Tennessee, has identified crime to be a significant hindrance to their economic development. They realized that local government’s ability to be innovative was being limited because crime, blight and “day-to-day” maintenance saturated them, leaving little time or energy to get beyond their problems. They are working on creating better networks between city leaders and program leaders to reduce their problems and increase business development.

Minneapolis, Minnesota, has an unusual asset – breweries. They have worked with state government to revise old, outdated laws to enable more breweries and other business to operate with less interference from government. Statewide, they have grown from 92 breweries in 1980, to more than 2,500 now. They attribute this success to government deregulation.

Salt Lake City already has a favorable tax structure and regulatory structure, which has made it attractive to high-tech companies. Their focus is on education, recognizing that by improving education they can attract more industries and improve their economy further.

San Antonio is another booming city and has become the seventh largest in the country. It has added 20,000 jobs in the last year alone, and it has done so by creating a “culture of business” that is “friendly to growth and economic expansion”. Their focus is not only on expansion, but on business retention as well, keeping their cost of living down with low taxes and reducing regulatory burdens. This attracts talent to their city, which also attracts business.

Sioux Falls is another fast-growing city that has benefited from the same type of low-tax, low-regulatory burdens.

The report is obviously much more detailed about these than I could be in this article, and it is worth reading to see more specifics. The bottom line is that they are succeeding for one simple reason – freedom.

©2013 Randy W. Bright

Randy W. Bright, AIA, NCARB, is an architect who specializes in church and church-related projects. You may contact him at 918-582-3972, rwbrightchurcharch@sbcglobal.net or www.churcharchitect.net.

© 2013 Tulsa Beacon