



For MAYOR of HENDERSONVILLE
November 3, 2009

Common Sense is defined as beliefs or propositions that most people would consider prudent and of sound judgement!

PUBLIC ART? PUBLIC WORKS? PARKING? HOW ABOUT PUBLIC RESTROOMS!

“Nearly everyone should realize: **The Arts aren’t a frivolous extra**; the Arts are an economic spark plug that can lift your community out of its doldrums, attract industry and stimulate commerce.”

Mayor Joe Riley - Charleston South Carolina

“**Every human being is an artist**, called to participate in transforming and reshaping the conditions, thinking and structures that shape and condition our lives.”

Joseph Beuys, Artist

Public Art, Creative Economics:

Conventional economic improvement techniques are being redefined when it comes to small and medium sized towns. Business subsidies, tax and bond incentives, and real estate development, the traditional considerations for economic strategies are bettered by an infusion of “creativity.” Nearly every strategy for economic growth and development geared towards small to medium sized cities such as Hendersonville include aspects of a strong public arts program.

Our town recently adopted a comprehensive plan which articulates this strategy. But why did it take 30 years for leadership to figure this out? Past Hendersonville leadership has all but overlooked having an organized public arts program. The city today lies a testament to this mentality; absent of murals, statuary, sculptures, gathering spaces, meditation areas, and artist in residence quarters. There is no art museum. There is no significant space for installations, exhibits, or performances. Our library has little art reference material. Schools lack reinforced art education. The town itself lacks affordable studio space.

Hendersonville leadership has rested its laurels on attracting retirees to the city, believing as long as fundamental needs were provided, like water, medical services, power, and roads, residents could go to Asheville or elsewhere to get their art fixes. Well, residents have. And they’ve taken their shopping dollars with them. Art is a basic service. It feeds the soul, sparks creativity, and nurtures the imagination. It can be the difference between small town survival and failure.

The Arts and a “creative economy” can be a salvation for smaller towns in times of economic hardship. In fact I noted on my recent 7000 mile fact finding trip that took my son and I from Hendersonville, NC, to West Thumb, Montana, that every nationally registered small town we visited that was able to maintain or stay close to tourism norms, according to business owners, owed survival to a visible and strong public arts program. I took over 500 photographs to document this. And my son and I talked personally to over 100 business owners.

People, especially entrepreneur/innovators, are naturally attracted to public and community art. They represent the most viable demographic in terms of long term investment for a community. While “charm, quaintness, and ambiance” are highly subjective, a city can itself be a source of stimulation through traditional arts, should they exist. The “livability” of a place, often includes having “significant recreational and cultural opportunities.” High on the list are city centers that attract young people and enrich their imaginations, which in turn lead them to becoming skilled workers. Art is no longer an option for smaller towns, it is a do or die necessity.

As Mayor, I believe Hendersonville, NC can set itself apart from other cities that have fallen into economic ruin because they relied on conventional economic development, like real estate, industry subsidies, and hoping they fell into the sights of a large corporate expansion. This is “proactive economics” and a new direction for the city. And who better to deliver creative economics than an artist with a 30 year history in public art.

Nationally, the nonprofit arts and culture industry generates \$166.2 billion in economic activity every year—\$63.1 billion in spending by organizations and an additional \$103.1 billion in event-related spending by their audiences. In fact, 1 of every 4 persons in the United States is employed in a “creative” industry.

The \$166.2 billion in total economic activity has a significant national impact, generating the following:

- 5.7 million full-time equivalent jobs
- \$104.2 billion in household income
- \$7.9 billion in local government tax revenues
- \$9.1 billion in state government tax revenues
- \$12.6 billion in federal income tax revenue

“Livability” is the new “sizzle” that Chambers of Commerce and economic development councils sell to outsiders to attract them to their “not so livable” areas. It’s a word local leaders often use in the continuing debate over growth, density and historic downtown developments. I’ll work to stimulate residents, tourists, and the economy, with a strong public arts program through creative economics and incentives. An authentic public arts initiative can only serve to promote the city’s livability, and will spur growth, civic ideologies, and a better more viable community.

Regarding Public Works, I think an overhaul is long over due.

Quality control and detail is one of my pet peeves. If our Public Works department is not outfitted with those who are skilled at their positions, I will advocate for their replacement. Additionally, the operations, salaries, and department work criteria will be looked at. I want the city to reflect a commitment to the level of detail seen in previous generations.

Parking must be planned and resolved. Asheville, and many other towns around Hendersonville, are reaping rewards from an approach of “build it - and they will come.” Hendersonville leaders for decades have followed a policy of “if we never build it - no one will ever show up and we’ll never have to worry about it.” This will change if I’m Mayor. Parking, and the best way to resolve the potential impact of attracting more people, is the cart before the horse.

Public Restrooms.

Amazingly enough, Hendersonville has a population of 12,000, has over 100 churches, 1800 businesses, 35 pharmacies, and outside of parks, only 1 public restroom at the visitors center. This is absolutely absurd. I will take three areas on Main street and decommission the planters, relocate the trees, and build historically accurate Gazebos with restrooms beneath them. Another option is to purchase or lease the property that was the underground mall, rebuild it into public restrooms and an information center for the city.