

Oneonta Mayor – DS Column – 07-08-2022

A little healthy skepticism can be a very good thing.

A recent column by Don Mathisen expressed more than a little skepticism about our strategies for improving life and business in the City of Oneonta. It's the goal of my four years.

A more informed understanding of the work that we are doing, the community members and committees that are engaged, and their timelines, goals and benchmarks would probably have given Mr. Mathisen more confidence in our likely success.

No harm. No foul. Providing a clear picture of our strategies and their various levels of implementation is my responsibility.

To be sure, there are a LOT of moving parts, and it's difficult to see the totality of them. There are the actions of the Council and our various committees, boards, and commissions; there's the ongoing support of the City's Planning and Development Department; and an impressive level of collaboration among our institutions, agencies, businesses who share recognition of our most pressing needs.

All this action lies below the surface. Occasional cretings offer public view of the effort, but there is much that is happening out of sight.

However, it couldn't be more important that you – all of you – know the strategy and all its inter-related components. That you look at it. Think about it. Talk to me about it. (Not to dismiss, but rather with suggestions on how to ensure its success.)

Mr. Mathisen rightly points out that my plan to reverse the demographic trend line of Oneonta is to add one thousand, employed members to the community in four years. But... it's important that we have patience. This won't happen tomorrow, but incrementally and then, exponentially.

The first steps have been to strengthen the community's bond and trust in its City Government, and to help create and celebrate opportunities for shared successes in improvements to Oneonta living. It's been to establish new or re-engaged partnerships. And it's been the identification, collection, and expansion of our best assets.

Again, Mr. Mathisen is correct when he identifies the most marketable of our assets as "Quality of Life." This is where we hold a competitive advantage over municipalities that are twice our size.

The marketing of these assets to a target demographic of 25-39 years begins with a concerted effort to reconnect with the alumni of both colleges and our high school. As he stated, we cannot expect that quality of life alone will be enough to convince potential new neighbors and businesses to pack their belongings and drive several hours to begin their lives in Oneonta.

In addition, we must identify and develop housing opportunities, with attractive and affordable apartments and homes to rent or purchase.

Beyond that, we need to create and foster opportunities for social connection. This is a central tenet of our reimagining of Market Street, and our investment of the first portion of ARPA funding in our parks.

Make no mistake, this is a huge undertaking. But with a clear vision and a communication of the needs and purpose of the many efforts required for our success, I have faith that we will be able to mobilize as a community to achieve what some may consider unachievable.

We will reverse the population trend line, and Oneonta will thrive.

I am currently scheduling time with any group that is interested in hearing that vision and the plans for our shared future. Please, reach out. I will be happy to answer any, and all, questions and I look forward to engaging all of Oneonta's citizens in the process.

As I have said repeatedly, "We are all in this together."