

FROM: JIM BENNETT

October 15, 2013

TO: MAYOR, COUNCIL, CITY MANAGER, and CITY CLERK

NASHVILLE TRIP REPORT

VIA CITY EMAIL

As you may remember, the Mayor appointed me to the board charged with city selection for the 2013 Inter-County "Best Practices" trip sponsored by the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce/Economic Development Corporation of Sarasota. That board selected Nashville, and I went on the trip over the period September 29 to October 2. I stayed an extra day, and was able to visit the Tennessee State Capitol complex (including the Supreme Court and the State Library), and get a tour of Franklin, TN and surrounding Williamson County adjacent to Nashville. I have posted a separate item to trip members on the history aspects of this extra day.

The arrival evening Sunday featured the Mayor of consolidated Davidson County/Nashville, Karl Dean, who summarized the history of consolidation and offered his "Triple-T" motto: Technology, Talent, and Tolerance as a characteristic of greater Nashville and a shorthand for its success.

Monday began with presentations by Nashville Area Chamber officials who noted that Nashville had experienced a 60% growth in population in the last 20 years (partly through consolidation, and compared with Sarasota's 39% to half the size of consolidated Nashville). Much of Nashville's new development, such as acquisition of professional sports, construction of a convention center, and growth of a branding culture, came out of their Chamber sponsored trips like this one.

Chamber data revealed a severe increase in traffic congestion to go with this growth, along with a 30.7% level of adults with a bachelor's degree and a 23% self-employed/entrepreneurial workforce (vs. 18% nationally). Besides its large music infrastructure, Nashville also has a majority of jobs in food preparation/serving.

The Mayor's representative to the Music City Music Council noted that a "Gang of Four" had been successful in bringing music and business together: The Mayor, the Music Council, the Chamber, and the Convention and Visitors Corp. Their leadership also led to construction of affordable housing for musicians and other artists (Ryman Lofts).

Leadership Insights were offered by two former vice-mayors (one presently the first black administrator of the Criminal Court), and the CEO of the Center for Non-Profit Management. Concerted action for development began following entry of Nissan to the market, due to perceived insularity of the local culture, so the initial focus was on regionalism and construction infill, with a principal effort to overcome the embarrassment of "hillbilly" music perceptions outside the culture.

Local leadership worked together to defeat an “English only” referendum movement, and to shift to an attitude of moving people in crisis out of criminal circumstances. The non-profit Center is funded $\frac{1}{4}$ by contributions and $\frac{3}{4}$ by consulting fees. Additional specialized courts have been set up for collections, drugs, and mental health cases.

Early afternoon began with three panelists dealing with urban development and land use, comprised of downtown partnership/development/planning interests. In particular, zoning and planning shifted from an emphasis on density to “community character” by use of a kind of form-based regulations. There were broad distinctions between urban and suburban, and subsets moving from parks/open space, through neighborhoods, corridors, centers, to districts.

A separate downtown form-based code was put in place that eliminated significant variance overhead and expense, and residential use was included. Presently over 7,000 people live downtown, with a 51/49% ownership/rental ratio. The downtown partnership developed character themes for planning and design, while the city put in over \$7 million in infrastructure improvements including street realignment.

Three additional panelists elaborated on the Downtown Code itself with specific examples of rehabilitation: A stand-alone row house improvement after pocket park improvement adjacent to it; permitting streamlining; and use of old warehouses, one for a software school.

This was followed by a visit Tuesday morning to the Entrepreneur Center, developed from an old trolley barn in SoBro (South of Broadway), and Rolling Mills Hill (where condos were developed inside an old hospital complex, and the Ryman Lofts were created from the ground up adjacent to the complex, each with a view of downtown.)

Prior to these tours, there were presentations on Nashville’s homeless program and transit system. After a number of years of difficulties, the Metropolitan Homeless Commission hired a full time executive director who was a Nashville native and community organizer. His program emphasizes “housing first” to get chronic homeless off the streets, as well as continuing care programs with shelter opportunities for those who can be rehabilitated. He has persuaded private property owners to donate housing units for these purposes.

Rapid transit has been developed through bus routes that radiate out of the downtown area to specific suburban locations that need subsidized transportation, with the concept of “Lite” express runs that are not non-stop, but have significantly fewer stops than related local bus lines.

Tuesday afternoon began with a session on education at an historic vocational-technical high school that is now a liberal arts magnet school. Six panelists spoke

about a complex of Chamber initiated school reform programs emphasizing public education through specialized “academies” at existing high school facilities. Each school has a basic college preparatory core program around which is wrapped a specialty. A specialty focus can be changed once, in 10th grade.

A high school may contain several academies, since 12 high schools with 16,000 students were restructured into 41 academies, many with business sponsorship to focus on specific job skill needs. Specialties range from “international,” to math. Since the Nashville metro area was the country’s #1 job creator in 2012, it presently projects a deficit of 23,000 more job openings than qualified people to fill them, spurring the need for this academy focus.

In addition, 18 area colleges have worked with business to develop internship programs to support training needs, along with formation by the Chamber of a Young Professionals organization with a website that now reaches 22,000 young professionals a year.

At the Music City Center, Nashville’s new convention center, a presentation was made about the financing of the Center with a “sales tax redirect”: all sales tax revenue derived from use of the center, including rentals and concessions, are dedicated to debt service of the Center. In addition, a tourist development zone was designated around the Center to reflect where the existence of the Center would spur development. All increases in sales tax revenue in the zone over the state collections average are available for Center funding.

The Center has \$637 million in bonds outstanding. (In addition, in the past decade, Nashville has seen construction of a professional ice-hockey arena, which can also host professional basketball and related gym events, and a stadium for the professional football Tennessee Titans. We did not get into how this mix was handled, but certainly “size matters” in terms of Nashville’s ability to support this kind of infrastructure.)

At the Center, we were told of the long and conflicted process to develop the “Music City” brand, which has succeeded in leveraging its music asset into an industry with a direct economic impact of \$3.5 billion and projections of growth to a \$5 billion economic engine. Music tourism has an impact on sports attendance, and presentations by the Sports Council and Bridgestone Arena (Nashville Predators hockey team) representatives illustrated this effect with examples of increased use of the Arena and attendance at Titans events.

Although this visit generated ideas pertinent to the “Sarasota region,” it also brought out many aspects of economic development that pertain to Venice, especially as we have our own music/art/history microcosm here that is amenable to specialized branding. I will be inserting commentary to this effect when economic development issues arise at Council meetings in due course.