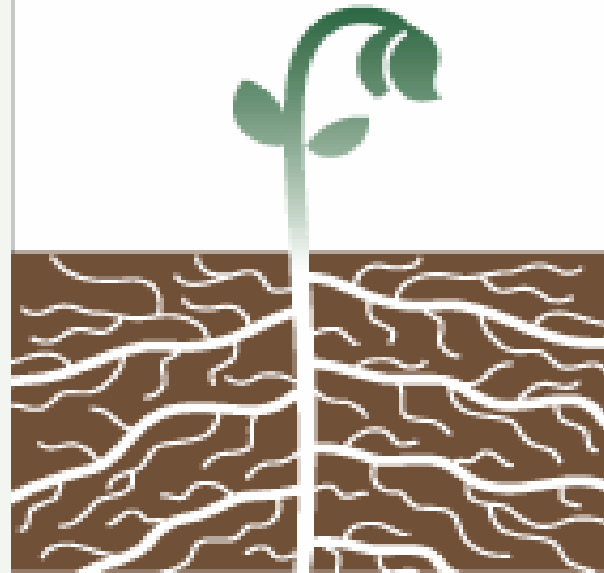
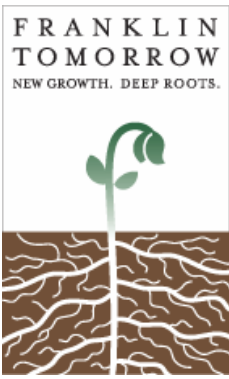


FRANKLIN
TOMORROW
NEW GROWTH. DEEP ROOTS.



Business Task Force Report

Compilation of Ideas gained at the Business Task Force
Breakfasts with the Mayors in October 2009



Summary Of Findings

Report submitted on December 7th of 2009

On October 1, 2009 and October 6, 2009, Franklin Tomorrow held a breakfast meeting for community leaders at Boxwood Bistro in front of The Factory at Franklin in Franklin, Tennessee. We invited the Mayor of Franklin, John Schroer, and the Mayor of Williamson County, Rogers Anderson, to speak and join us as we listened to the Business Community. Between the two meetings, 126 people attended. Attached is the information we gathered.

The structure of the breakfast included several opportunities to share information. We provided questions on cards, which we asked all present to answer anonymously. Each question and the compiled responses are in this report. We also facilitated a discussion between the business leaders and the Mayors. The discussion topics are found in the addendum at the end of this report.

The Business Task Force of Franklin Tomorrow sees the following as the most important items:

- Communication between the Business Community and the Government
- Promotion of Franklin as a viable place to do business
- Streamline approvals and systems for planning and codes
- The availability to money
- Ability to address the new Entrepreneur

We want to invite you to participate in the process of determining what Franklin Tomorrow will focus on and work toward. Please share your ideas or feedback. Also, please know that it is our desire to support our community and work together with local and regional government as well as local businesses to create the best community in which to live, work and play.

Please share your ideas or feedback with our Executive Director, Natalie Dodd. You can reach her at natalie@franklintonmorrow.org or 615.794.0998. Thank you for your feedback and participation in this process.

Sincerely,

Steve Eddy
Chairman, Business Task Force
Franklin Tomorrow

Franklin Tomorrow is a non-profit community organization that communicates a shared and evolving Vision for the future of Franklin and focuses that Vision through education, advocacy, evaluation, implementation, and recognition of the Vision's specific goals and strategies.

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What, if any, local government mandates or regulations serve as obstacles to conducting your business?

1. Design and landscaping requirements.
2. Codes – in getting our building finished.
3. The time it takes to get a project through the various boards and committees needs to be expedited.
4. Attitude.
5. Consistency in Fire Codes, Zoning Process, Traffic.
6. Not a mandate – rather a service. Friendlier, more reasonable and available staff members in codes, regs departments who take the time to explain the process in a simple manner to individuals and make as much information available as possible on the front end to avoid conflict and bad reputations later.
7. I have not found county or city regs to be more restrictive than other cities.
8. Sign ordinances specifically impact my business as it is a sign company. Yet, there are good reasons to have ordinance as they provide boundaries that keep and protect the look and feel of our city and county.
9. In utility business put everyone on a level playing field. Example, franchises.
10. We need to loosen up on zoning regulation, at least temporarily.
11. The “attitude” of City staff in the past has been problematic and confrontational. Has improved greatly with past 12 months; however, still room for improvement. The implementation doesn’t match the message of “we are a welcoming, great southern town!”
12. Impact fees (all together) in Franklin range from 1.25 to 2 times greater than other preferred regions within the country (Denver area, Charlotte, Indianapolis, Dallas, etc.).
13. Excessive red tape related to project approvals. Approval requirements are inconsistent between various City departments.
14. None in my business – private wealth management, but generally, any regulation that is not written in plain language and that cannot be used to craft a business plan is an obstacle. That is, if the “powers that be” can vote one way one day and another way another day with the same data set of facts, it’s a problem.
15. Potential zoning issues in the future; Traffic (Columbia Highway); Environmental possibly in the future.
16. Certain building code regs – attitudes of government employees.
17. Streetscape has not affected our business yet, but it will. Once the construction starts on Columbia, it is going to be difficult to get into our business. That is not a complaint about streetscape, just a reality.
18. None actually – however, non-English speaking customers!
19. Taxes – other than that, the government pretty well leaves me alone. I do have to stay aware of regulations regarding employment.
20. “Power” of the Building Codes associates. Builders and developers spend too much money waiting for a timely response from this Department.
21. I do not experience any obstacles as a result of our local government.
22. I think the biggest challenge is dealing with the red tape encountered with obtaining building permits, etc. Although I’m not in the development business, the existing structure makes it almost impossible to make positive improvements to Franklin.

CONT'D: What, if any, local government mandates or regulations serve as obstacles to conducting your business?

23. Perception that Franklin is difficult to do business, when it comes to building and development.
24. Simplify: If it is zoned for an approved project, why does it take 3 reading, then the permit process, or at least a year of delays?
25. None that makes a challenge.
26. Planning and Codes can be difficult and frustrating to business growth.
27. Often meeting historic/Code's requirements seem heavy handed and often delay process in a way that negatively affects businesses. Sometimes changes or requirements came in a year when not budgeted – needs to be same flexibility in timing for requested changes. (Faster process for approvals of building modifications if needed).
28. Process for building approval.
29. Zoning regulations (BGA).
30. Concerning the relationship between zoning/building codes officials and developers; maintaining a healthy (aesthetic) balance so that the integrity of Williamson County and Franklin is maintained while allowing new projects to advance.
31. Overly burdensome fees related to the service we are getting. County and City rely too much on developers to build City's infrastructure (sewer, water, roads)
32. None that I have become aware of in my 8 + months in Williamson County. Would it be possible to email out summaries of any regs/laws under consideration at local/state/Federal levels that directly impact business?
33. Getting approval for higher density so we can build more than one unit per lot.
34. Become more flexible and come off some of the requirements for development. Work with businesses to find out what is keeping them from growing.
35. Small businesses in Franklin have a hard time getting through codes.
36. Hold ups on building permits (codes). Historical vs. Jobs. Essex Electric good example - do away with more jobs.
37. Unclear and slow building codes (Fire, etc.)
38. City departments slow to respond to questions; makes time critical business decisions difficult to make. Example is zoning questions regarding property for lease. Answers come back slow and property gets leased to others.
39. Too many banks.
40. Lack of consistency in Franklin City Codes Department.
41. Put money into infrastructure.
42. City Codes Department (at least a more friendly and helpful attitude).
43. Getting zoning/rezoning through in a timely process.
44. Slow decision making on property leasing issues – property leased to someone else before decision is made.
45. Zoning regulations that present some challenges for expansion.
46. Loose licensing and insurance requirements for companies providing home services.
47. Sign regulations – you can't get a sign that's effective! Especially in this historic district. The regulations are not followed sometimes – decisions are capricious. Why?

Other than the National economic crisis, general I y what is the biggest hurdle your business has faced in 2009?

1. Lack of partnerships with the banks.
2. The inability of many of our small business customers to survive in this economic climate.
3. Availability of financing (at reasonable terms) being available to our clientele to pursue development interests; Corporate boards seem very indecisive during this period. Would rather “sit on the sidelines and wait it out.”
4. Flexing the size of the business; Foreign competition; Qualified Employees; DOE mandate and involvement.
5. Revenue; local employment opportunities.
6. The sluggish economy is the only thing I can think of.
7. Rising healthcare (medical insurance) costs. It is getting tougher for small business to provide medical insurance for employees. In 2010 we will have to seriously consider other options for employees.
8. Finding qualified borrowers.
9. Cut backs in state spending and especially payrolls hurt local consumer confidence. Anything local government can do to maintain work force and spend bolsters consumer confidence.
10. Non US Citizens.
11. Putting agritourism in state sales tax bracket.
12. Budget issues – lack of sufficient dollars for plant maintenance; i.e., remodeling.
13. Fallout from economic crisis
14. Suicides; Domestic Violence; Civil Lawsuits.
15. I guess this is part of the economic vision... Helping individuals who have lost their job prepare for seeking one to replace it which hopefully will be in the same salary range or maybe better.
16. Working through building codes as we build a new location.
17. Reimbursement cuts from the Federal Government have been tough. Gas prices only make things worse. We are in the service business.
18. On the non-profit front, our biggest challenge has been re-calculating our budget to take into account fewer donors/sponsors.
19. Lack of people moving within or relocating to the area; Difficulty in getting financing for land and home purchases.
20. Local business decline, encourage the growth of locally owned companies. Also, attract and land all the national headquarters we can.
21. Lack of growth, but that is associated with the economy; The local economy is seemingly stable compared to many other markets.
22. Parking.
23. Ready accessible jobs for college grads are down; More part-time students, less full time students; Keeping up with new technology for education.
24. Lack of space. Parking.
25. Reduction in property values.
26. Jobs – Unemployment – Parking

CONT'D: Other than the National economic crisis, general I y what is the biggest hurdle your business has faced in 2009?

27. Lack of consistent foot traffic. The national news and Presidential speeches greatly effected the buying morale of customers. Buyers have money, generally, but are afraid to spend it for fear of job loss in future. The shut down of the home building business has greatly impacted consumer confidence and ability to purchase anything but necessities. My business in retail was greatly impacted by the shut-down in home building. With 1 in 8 Americans afflicted by the home building industry, I saw consumers from all areas diminish.
28. Deterioration in the real estate market has had a significant impact on my business. I would also say the more stringent regulations and capital requirement in banking have been a challenge.
29. Development of small hotels and other competitive issues.
30. Other than typical small business challenges, nothing really jumps out. This is an excellent area to do business.
31. Slow down in commercial and residential growth. Companies going out of business.
32. Slow down in residential building; We need to find a way to make new housing easier to build and sell.
33. Maintaining key staff when there are very limited business opportunities to keep them busy; Maintaining staff morale when professional environment is so constrained.
34. Fraud and deceit in financial services – i.e., Madoff and others that break the law cast a pall on the advisory industry generally. Rational oversight that is effective is needed, but not burdensome ineffective regulation.
35. Lack of confidence and uncertainty of what the future economic conditions will be have made it difficult to conduct business.
36. 2009 continues to be challenging for the real estate industry as a whole. Several factors to include availability of financing, market supply/demand, and a disconnect between buyers and sellers. Transaction volume is expected to remain significantly below 2006/2007 levels for several years and we must adjust our business to reflect these projections.
37. Fundraising in a challenging economy.
38. Difficult time fundraising (which is related to the economic crisis).
39. The bad rap banks have acquired nationally; Interest rates! It's tough in this environment to give customers much help right now.
40. Advertising. How to grow business cost effectively.
41. Maintaining a growth mind set in a time of flat revenue change.
42. Advancing donor relations for campaign completion; Message to incoming business of great public schools makes private school "sell" a littler harder – not impossible though. (BGA).
43. Tax increases.
44. Facing the decision to continue to grow or play it safe and focus on client acquisition.
45. Slow paying receivables; Downtown in investment (acquisitions, development and lending) transactions.
46. Banking in general has been hit hard by the economic crisis, but the insecurity of the people regarding money in general has been a struggle as well.
47. Psychology. "Fear of the unknown."; Unwillingness to try new things. What worked in the past does not work as well today.

CONT'D: Other than the National economic crisis, general l y what is the biggest hurdl e your business has faced in 2009?

48. Governmental uncertainty and banks not lending to small business.
49. Abundant housing inventory. Lending. Appraisals.
50. Finding good employees; even with high unemployment, finding good candidates is difficult.
51. The national economic crisis, specifically, the condition of the housing market, has affected our business like nothing in the last 20 years.
52. Educating other businesses on what we do and why they should support us when things are tough!
53. Hard to say because economic conditions have affected everything – but it is a great time to invest in infrastructure because construction costs are down.
54. Non-payment of accounts. Uneasiness of people to do anything.
55. Too many banks.
56. Drastic reduction in availability of financing has curtailed all aspects of our clients business.. This has resulted in significant account receivable balance.

What could our city or county governments or support organizations like Franklin Tomorrow do to enhance your ability to conduct your business?

1. Make signage less restrictive to advertise business.
2. City policies and zoning ordinances must be aligned with goal of attracting new, quality development and jobs to Franklin. From my perspective, the attitude that we can apply high development fees and not show willingness to compromise on concerns is a strategic mistake!
3. Expedite approval time lines and procedures for proposed projects.
4. Continue to conduct “listening sessions” to gather input from the business community. This approach will produce a well-governed community!
5. Consider business with the same value you do residences. We need a nice hotel in downtown Franklin!
6. Continue to promote and keep Williamson County at the top of places to live and do business.
7. They/you do a good job; We are happy to be in Franklin.
8. Enhance communication.
9. Finish Mack Hatcher; Widen Columbia Highway; Another parking garage downtown.
10. Continued communication.
11. With Some experience in solid waste disposal and land fill closing I would like to speak on this subject – 5 minutes + questions (Bernard Spierer)
12. Being more proactive in promoting “doing business” in Williamson county. Provide a positive voice to consumers instead of the media’s constant negativity. This year’s “tax free weekend” did not help business.
13. Continue to support our Convention & Visitors Bureaus with money and with leadership to grow Franklin as a tourist and convention destination.
14. From a non-profit standpoint: Everyone come together as a whole to help create real affordable housing. We have an opportunity to stimulate our economy with Federal dollars if we can work together.
15. Always work to streamline rules, regs, procedures; Continue to educate business on opportunities; Include them in meetings such as this.
16. Encourage events such as the Chamber’s Business Expo.
17. Reach out to the various organizations – Rotary, etc.
18. Since we do pay Franchise Fees to both County and City, promote our product.
19. It seems often as elected leaders our mandatory policies are based upon their personal desires rather than those of the community.
20. Recognize the importance of companies located in Franklin and committed to local community and provide these companies business opportunities.
21. Infrastructure; Qualified employees (technical) (affordable housing); Franklin Tomorrow – provide a united voice.
22. Provide links on government websites to businesses that pay a fee.
23. Very good plans for steady growth which still maintains uniqueness of our community. This has been done fairly well, needs to continue.
24. Continue to advocate for Franklin to become a friendlier place for business.

CONT'D: What could our city or county governments or support organizations like Franklin Tomorrow do to enhance your ability to conduct your business?

25. Keep taxes low; Promote tourism; Continue to invest in K-12 education.
26. Streamlining the codes procedures.
27. Maintain/enhance quality of education system (K-12, look to improve college access and opportunities).
28. Be highly competitive in terms of service, taxes/cost and overall quality of life.
29. Maintain/enhance public infrastructure –roads, water/sewer, parks.
30. Maintain high quality public safety services.
31. Traffic – Roads
32. Help support and promote local businesses thru public information to encourage these businesses.
33. Parking, Traffic, Congestion – Roads!
34. Help us stay informed and listen to the community. I think both do a good job now and we must keep it up.
35. My firm's results are governed by Federal Government.
36. Most of my business is regulated by the Federal Government.
37. The City and County need to make a commitment to preserve real estate they buy or sell it so it can be preserved – i.e.: Old BGA – Fleming Hall; Old Jail – City; Barns at houses at Harlinsdale.
38. Pretty simple: Do business with local companies. The entities do not realize the talented companies in this town.
39. Continue to develop and enhance the community that would bring in business and new residents.
40. Work to attract new corporations to Franklin.
41. By my count there are only 14 people in Franklin who are available to work during the day for \$8.50 – \$9.00 / hour. The paucity of a labor pool – What is being done?
42. Host networking events to introduce small business owners to the community.
43. Continue to promote a healthy vision of business opportunities and provide tangible support (government) for that vision.
44. Reduce lengthy review times for development plan submittals, i.e., Franklin's "45 work day" turn-around should be reduced to 7 calendars days to expedite. Hire consultants to reduce backlog: back-charge developers.
45. Help educate our entrepreneurs on business development.
46. Make it more open for the establishment of new and support my present business.
47. Continue to promote what a great place it is.
48. Too many banks.
49. Continue to promote Franklin and Williamson County as a GREAT PLACE TO LIVE.
50. Have Franklin Tomorrow facilitate business round tables or seminars, particularly for small companies.

CONT'D: What could our city or county governments or support organizations like Franklin Tomorrow do to enhance your ability to conduct your business?

51. Continue to move forward with affordable housing initiatives/options; Continue the recruitment of new business and the diversity of businesses into the community.
52. Be supportive of small business, i.e., tax increases, etc.
53. Dual marketing, perhaps connections with businesses for networking – continued (BGA).
54. Provide opportunities for marketing to new residents.
55. Quickly complete Carothers Parkway Project; Commit resources to start McEwen Extension East of I-65.
56. More flexibility in zoning and codes administration, not to produce more growth, but to assure greater consistency.
57. Diverse housing options; Collaborative effort to promote higher education in Williamson County.
58. Regionalism.
59. Continue to market the concept that groups of business owners working together can make a difference.
60. As we work toward a global economy we must be aware and include diversity, cultural and otherwise; City and County Mayors started dialogue with the Latin American community. We must continue the dialogues as pressing issues arise like census 2010 and voter registration.
61. Hold more executive level sessions like this to bring out ideas/suggestions; Improve internet communications so that we can stay informed..
62. Make the process significantly more efficient for plan review, codes and permitting.
63. Marketing/Marketing/Marketing (PR); Tell stories of new business that are succeeding! And business that have moved and are growing; Continue to promote education and raising level of business talent. Long-term, smart business leaders will get us back!

Addendum: ideas collected during open discussion

- Affordable Housing: Grabbing stimulus money
- Missed opportunity: Labor availability; Workforce development
- Current/existing business vs. new business incentives
- Safety issues: Fire stations/safety services consistency
- Visitors/New Residents: Hotel/motel tax (\$329 property tax); Currently rated #8; \$7 return for each \$1; Balance large groups vs small family travel
- Regional Transportation: Local governments limited by state/federal issues; Mayor's causes studying variety of issues
- Air Quality
- Storm Water
- Sewer
- Transportation: Gridlock minimization; Mack Hatcher
- Regionalism: How connected are we?; MSA -county – work together
- Development and Government: Partnerships; Work together
- Solid waste and landfill issues
- Support property tax dedicated to transportation? Development hindered?
- Higher education: Post secondary; Lottery \$ affect standards; 13th and 14th grade?
- Employees/Labor Pool: Cost of living; Raising net wage
- Difficulty Borrowing money: Due to regulation; Regs or fear – which is driving the conservatism of banks?; Seems banks want to get rid of everything rather than work through; Bank: tremendous pressure by regulators due to commercial real estate exposure; Uncertainty among regulators themselves - so tend to over-regulate; Over-regulating led to over-correction
- Regulation and zoning: Navigating the process; Stricter regs attract higher quality; Timing and response most important
- Entrepreneurism: Built from within; Innovation; How to start up a company – logistics; Entrepreneur Center – Downtown Nashville www.williamsoninnovates.com – starting in November
- Regionalism: County lines; Schools; MPO; RTA/transportation (Transit system; Roads; Legislation/long-term funding; TMA; Hot zones/HOV; I-65); Water; Air Quality
- Higher Education - Build a high school on a community college campus: Mix classes (HS and college); Achieve associates degree earlier; Model in NC (No restrictions on students who attend this HS; Mentors); Stimulate to higher ed; Open opportunities for lower wage employees
- Housing (affordable/workforce): Public education; Not just public housing; Community issue; Balanced workforce; Housing market shift; Provide ways for builders and developers to build to the market (very nice/smaller homes); What to do with higher expense lots?; Create new markets (split lots, etc); Need to have flexibility and chart a new course; Bring product in \$250-\$300k range; Open up developments that are sitting empty b/c too expensive; Variety – think outside the box; Give developers opportunity for creative solutions