



City of Waukegan
2017 Mayor's Transition
Community Group Report

Mayor Sam Cunningham

WAUKEGAN
City of Progress *Illinois*

2017 Mayor's Transition Community Group Report

July 24, 2017

Shortly following the April 4, 2017 election, Waukegan Mayor Sam Cunningham created the “*Mayor's Transition Community Group*” and invited a selection of stakeholders to evaluate the City of Waukegan and to describe their hopes for the community's future. The group's findings present Waukegan as a place of wonderful diversity limited by slow economic growth, a community with a struggling education system despite mounting public commitment, a county seat with great foundational infrastructure but in need of modernization and expansion, a city of rich culture and history that has diminished in the eyes of some, but also a hopeful community that envisions a Waukegan that in the not-too-distant future can resolve these and other challenges.

The Mayor's Transition Community Group assessed and offered possible remedies for Waukegan regarding 1) Community, Culture and Recreation, 2) Economic Development, 3) Education and 4) Transportation:

Community, Culture and Recreation:

There is a profound appreciation for Waukegan's rich diversity and the positive contribution it makes on the community. This love of culture is exemplified by a significant art district, world-class acts at the Genesee Theatre, restaurants, festivals, active faith groups, and a variety of family-friendly community events that provide regular occasions to come together. However, at times a lack of municipal government support has given community organizations a sense of standing alone in the promotion of these positive attractions. This sense was also felt regarding previous administrations' attitudes toward new business prospects. As a result, when combined with Waukegan's other image challenges such as perceived safety concerns, some residents and outsiders have begun openly expressing a lack of a pride in Waukegan.

This community group believes that while there is a need for improvement to the Waukegan brand, it is not beyond repair. Building upon existing successes and creating new community-focused opportunities, Waukegan can restore and reinforce its positive status through a city administration that is actively engaged in promoting Waukegan, that shares the public's desire for an increase in number and size of festivals, that is willing to consider new concepts for the community such as food trucks or a community smartphone app, and an administration that is looking to attract new activities by developing lakefront recreation.

Economic Development:

The effects of the Great Recession have continued to linger in the Waukegan community even as other Lake County municipalities have appeared to recover. Limitations are attributed to a deficit government that is unable to properly update its roads and sidewalks, an underutilization of grants, perceptions that city government is not always business-friendly (to new and existing businesses), and other factors that have impeded Waukegan from experiencing a complete revitalization.

The good news is there are ample prospects for a reinvigoration with available business sites, a ready, able and desirous workforce, the availability of grants that can assist with projects, a tremendous infrastructure foundation (roads, rail, airport, harbor, etc.), and a community that desires large and small business growth. This community is proud of its City and the many businesses that that have invested here. Residents hope that with the administrative change, the business community will find Waukegan attractive.

Education:

Although Waukegan Community Unit School District 60 is an autonomous body of government with no governing responsibility residing with city government or the Mayor, Waukegan as a community owns the responsibility for its education system. Any student shortcomings reflect on the overall health of the city. When funding is inadequate, when family dysfunction impedes student success, when children don't have access to adequate support networks, and students continue to fall through the proverbial cracks, Waukegan as a whole fails.

The ability for the City of Waukegan to assist and motivate our youth to excel is abundant. District 60 has already made a fantastic stride with the implementation of full-day kindergarten. Education leaders (parents, staff, school board members, and nonprofits) welcome the new Mayor in discussions about how to prepare Waukegan's young men and women. If the city administration wholeheartedly communicates that they support strengthening Waukegan's school district and endorse proven career paths via higher education or skills training for the trades, expectations for a significant number of youth will be raised. Lastly, Waukegan education will continue to benefit from highlighting its nationally-recognized public library, the impending expansion of the Waukegan branch of a renowned College of Lake County, a rich arts community, and a bevy of non-profits that support our youth.

It should be noted that some residents attend other schools than District 60. Portions of the 9th Ward are within Oak Grove School District 68 which feeds into Libertyville Community High School District 128 or Woodland School District 60 which feeds into Warren Township High School District 121. Additionally, some residents of the 8th Ward are within Gurnee School District 56 which feeds into Warren Township High School

District 121. In Waukegan, there is also a private Catholic high school - Cristo Rey St. Martin College Prep - which serves 400 students. These school districts are well-regarded and do not face the same difficulties that exist within Waukegan School District 60. Nonetheless, efforts should be made to assist all Waukegan students.

Transportation:

Waukegan's infrastructure has a strong foundation with components including public buses, a commuter train station, a vast expanse of sidewalks, north-south and east-west roads, interstate access, an airport, and a deep-water harbor. However, this community group identifies a public demand for significant infrastructure investment in order to maintain and expand these assets. Bus hubs are in need of renovations for comfort and safety. Bus routes can be enhanced to better meet the varying schedule demands of residents and workers. Sidewalks citywide require extensive work to ensure ADA compliance. The downtown Metra station is in need of an overhaul, as well as the pedestrian route from the Metra to downtown.

Each of these present different challenges for the city, but this community group envisions that through intergovernmental collaboration and private public partnerships, these issues can be resolved. Suggestions such as evaluating the availability of taxis or ride-sharing within Waukegan, and the establishment of bike-sharing like Divvy are just two of many options for growing Waukegan.

In total, these discussions have provided valuable feedback aiding in the development of the in-depth City of Waukegan Mayoral Transition Report 2017. The deliberations of the Mayor's Transition Community Group have provided useful insights and Mayor Cunningham has asked that members meet annually to continue the collaborative efforts toward community progress and unity.

In this same spirit, Mayor Sam Cunningham has announced that he will also be establishing four advisory councils composed of community leaders and industry experts with the mission of problem solving and identifying areas for improvement.

These councils are:

Mayor's Education Advisory Council
Mayor's Faith Advisory Council

Mayor's Environmental Advisory Council
Mayor's Senior Citizens Advisory Council

Disagreement raises the level of debate. The Transition Community Group has raised that debate level like our residents do on a regular basis and as certain our advisory councils will do in the future. The respectful and constructive debate will continue because all agree that Waukegan can be better. It is with this hope that Mayor Sam Cunningham's Transition Community Group respectfully presents the 2017 Mayor's Transition Community Group Report.

Sincerely,

Mayor's Transition Community Group Members

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