

ECONOMIC CALL TO ACTION ISSUED AT FORT WORTH BOMA MEETING

Fort Worth's economic development situation could be boiled down to one phrase: "good news, but . . ." On the positive side, the west side of the Dallas-Fort Worth area is experiencing robust development and growth. The American Airlines headquarters expansion, the Facebook's data center and various retail, office and residential projects taking place throughout the metro have all made headlines.

However, misperceptions persist about Fort Worth as being little more than a shadow of Dallas, something that Robert Sturns is trying to combat. Sturns, who is the city of Fort Worth's Economic Development director, discussed some of the issues facing the metro, as well as the [recently released "Economic Development Strategic Plan"](#) at the April 3 Fort Worth BOMA meeting.

One challenge is that corporate America is somewhat in the dark about Fort Worth. Once corporate location scouts cross to DFW's western edge, "we can sell it," Sturns said. Fort Worth has plenty to offer, and the region stacks up well against others. The problem, however, is "when corporate real estate committees bring clients into the area, it's difficult to get them across the freeway from Dallas," he acknowledged. "It's that general awareness we're trying to address."

Another issue involves misinformation about population growth. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates from 2017 put Fort Worth as the 16th fastest-growing in America. But Sturns said people thought, on average, that Fort Worth's position was 45th on the list.

Then there is Fort Worth's "Cowtown" nickname, evoking the image of Billy Bob's and the stockyards. While "communities across the country would kill for that unique identifier we have," Sturns said, there also needs to be a "broader vision of the community we want to be." In other words, the western heritage continues to be important for Fort Worth. So is growth.

In an attempt to merge Fort Worth's identifier with a needed community development boost, the city issued the first-of-its-kind "Economic Development Strategic Plan," in December 2017. Sturns said the plan (which is available on the city of Fort Worth's website), boasts 213 strategies, which range from providing more jobs with higher wages, to building a more sustainable tax base fueled by commercial and industrial investment to boosting Fort Worth's visibility to the nation, at large. One objective, for example, is to add one Fortune 1000 company to the Fort Worth community each year. "It's an aggressive goal," Sturns said.

Sturns ended his talk by saying that getting Fort Worth on the map doesn't just involve the city of Fort Worth or the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce. Meeting goals will involve everyone, from the Fort Worth BOMA membership, to citizens who live in and around the metro. "It's a Fort Worth community plan, not just a city plan," he said. "For this to be successful, we have to engage everyone in the process."