

'Go time' in Fort Worth: City elects new leadership in the midst of explosive growth

BY BRANDI SMITH

“Fort Worth’s growth over the past decade has been tremendous – our population has grown by 25% since the 2010 census, and we’re now the 12th largest city in the country. If this growth continues, Fort Worth is projected to have over 1 million residents by 2025.”

Long in the shadow of the ‘D’ of DFW, Fort Worth has emerged into the spotlight in a huge way.

“Fort Worth’s growth over the past decade has been tremendous – our population has grown by 25% since the 2010 census, and we’re now the 12th largest city in the country,” says Robert Sturns, Director of the City of Fort Worth’s Economic Development Department. “If this growth continues, Fort Worth is projected to have over 1 million residents by 2025.”

Location is a huge factor in that growth. Fort Worth is home to DFW Airport, Alliance and Meacham airports, as well as railways, which are anchored by companies such as BNSF. Major highways in and around the city also simplify travel around the Metroplex. Combined with the state’s pro-business approach and low cost of living, that makes Fort Worth a destination for major companies and the employees who work for them.

“With employers like American Airlines, Bell, Alcon, and many others – plus a thriving community of small businesses that are supported and celebrated by locals – there’s a lot of opportunity here,” Sturns says.

He adds with so much new talent flooding the market, the city is focused on supporting those individuals as they start their professional lives here.

“Some of these people may want to open up small businesses locally, so we want to make sure they get connected to our small business development partners at the Fort Worth Business Assistance Center, to help answer their questions and set them up for success,” says Sturns. “And many of these people are raising families here, which means affordable housing, good schools, and entertainment will be in demand as well.”

Those will certainly all be important topics for Fort Worth’s City Council. Voters elected four new council members, dropping the average age of the council from 60 to 45. Also sworn in in June was new Mayor Mattie Parker, who at 37 is the youngest leader of a major American city.



Mattie Parker



Robert Sturns

“We all have a fierce love and desire to leave Fort Worth better than we found it,” Parker said at her June 15 swearing-in ceremony at the Fort Worth Convention Center.

Parker, an attorney with 15 years of experience in national, state and local public affairs, served as chief of staff to outgoing Mayor Betsy Price. A conservative Republican, she reflected on the sometimes partisan nature of council politics.

“The question facing this city isn’t whether we go right or left — it’s how we move forward. My goal is unity,” said Parker. “My purpose for the future and my approach is working together with each member of this City Council.”

She also indicated the more youthful council will be ramping up the city’s economy and brand.

“It is go time in Fort Worth, Texas,” Parker said. “It’s time for us to meet this moment.”

“Fort Worth is a very unique city with a number of distinct business and growth corridors. While many cities are defined by a certain set of industries or commercial areas, Fort Worth is a place where you really have the ability to tap into a multitude of commercial growth opportunities.”

The city’s Economic Development Department will be a huge part of that effort. After all, its focus on growth and job creation has already exhibited results.

“We have attracted a number of companies to Fort Worth including Stanley Black & Decker, McLane Foods, Ariat International and Incora Aircraft,” says Sturns. “We also recently announced the relocation of SmartAction corporate headquarters, a technology firm out of California, and have supported the growth of new firms such as Linear Labs, through a new Research & Development tax credit program.”

All told, he expects those efforts to result in more than 4,000 new jobs created in Fort Worth over the next few years. Companies such as Rhino Health, Chip1 Exchange and Panoramic Doors have opened new operations within the community due to Fort Worth’s excellent business environment and strong workforce, he adds.

When the Economic Development Department completed its strategic plan, it also overhauled its incentive policies to better target the types of companies it would incentivize.

“We are also focused on growing and supporting our own businesses through creative partnerships, such as our work with technology incubator, TechFW,” Sturns says. “In the past five years, five Fort Worth-based biotech startups who have worked with TechFW have achieved multimillion-dollar exits – the largest of which was the sale of ZS Pharma to AstraZeneca for \$2.7 billion.”

The city isn’t doing this all on its own, though. Sturns points out that partnerships with the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce, the Fort Worth Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and the Fort Worth Metropolitan Black Chamber of Commerce are all instrumental in helping Fort Worth grow its business footprint, as well as attract and retain diverse companies, businesses and talent.

“Visit Fort Worth is also a key partner in helping tell Fort Worth’s story, showcasing our city’s nationally-renowned cultural district, thriving food scene, and unique Western heritage to the world,” Sturns adds.

All of that effort adds up to what we’re seeing today in Fort Worth: explosive growth and unparalleled opportunities.

“Fort Worth is a very unique city with a number of distinct business and growth corridors. While many cities are defined by a certain set of industries or commercial areas, Fort Worth is a place where you really have the ability to tap

into a multitude of commercial growth opportunities,” says Sturns. “Whether that’s in the established central business district in Downtown, along the Trinity River waterfront, in a high-growth aerospace/transportation hub like Alliance, or in a growing creative area like the Near Southside, a developer has both the space and the ability to do things in Fort Worth that they may not be able to do elsewhere.”

This, it’s clear, is just the beginning of what’s possible for this Texas city that’s now making waves nationally.

“We’re very excited about Fort Worth becoming the 12th largest city in the country,” Sturns says in summary. “We look forward to capitalizing on its continued growth, which will provide tremendous opportunities for commercial development.”



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