



Community Conversation Notes

Group: Riverview Rotary Club

Conversation Date: November 17 & 21, 2011

Participants: 24

The following information was contributed by members of the Riverview Rotary Club in two sessions, one on November 17 and the second on November 21, 2011.

What are Danville's treasures – the things (whether physical places or intangibles like community character) you love about the city and want to see continued, protected, or improved as Danville plans for the future?

- Dan River -- River City identity
- River District -- its architecture and character, spaces opportunities for buzz and pop art
- Crossing at the Dan -- Community Market, Science Center, Carrington Pavilion and the a trailhead for the Riverwalk Trail
- Riverwalk Trail -- its beauty, location and safety
- Millionaires' Row
- Architectural mix
- History of the area and historic preservation (but at times progress is impeded by too much focus on heritage)
- Dan Daniel Memorial Park -- its athletic fields and facilities superior to most cities; presence of the Veterans Memorial
- Influx of new restaurants
- Danville as a regional shopping hub -- 150,000 person market
- Museums and growing presence of arts, concerts, theater, and special events
- Tourism opportunities
- Community feel that is present in secondary schools -- good learning environment offered
- Safety and support in schools
- Galileo Magnet High School
- People -- citizens here are warm, friendly, and welcoming
- Small town feel
- Lack of congestion -- controlled, smart growth
- New E. Franklin Turnpike extension
- Influx of new people to the community, which is bringing diversity

- Low cost of living
- Location; proximity to beach and mountains; close to other places
- Enhanced appearance of the city due to the landscaped medians and sponsored Danville Interchange Gardens program
- Transportation -- network of roads and highways, access to Amtrak
- Presence of a broadband fiber network in attracting industries
- Municipal control of utilities
- Development of a critical mass of technology companies
- Manageable supply of warehouse buildings and adaptive reuse of warehouse and old buildings for technology
- Workforce training provided by Danville Community College and other institutions
- Higher education research opportunities provided by the Institute of Advanced Learning and Research
- Averett, DCC, and RCATT
- Mix of new and old
- The Institute of Advanced Learning & Research
- Danville is a safe city
- Public Safety/Public Health/Public Education
- Danville Regional Hospital
- Quality of locally-owned businesses (Midtown, Rippes, Main Street Coffee, Foxgloves, etc.)
- Environment that values local investment

What are the community's unmet needs – things not now in place that would improve the general quality of life in Danville or the business environment?

- Improved appearance and safety of downtown
- Missing retail sales – leaving town to grocery shop and will spend other retail dollars; more shopping options are needed and space is available
- Grocery store – higher end, healthier foods
- Grocery stores in the River District near residences and workplaces
- Poor perception of City Schools; must do a better job projecting the good things they are doing; PR campaign needed
- Negative self-image of Danville; instill community pride and higher self-esteem

- Shortage of affordable, safe, higher quality rental housing
- Poor understanding of available mass transit services
- Diversity – putting people in leadership position that reflects our demographics and the world. Should be proud
- Improve the looks of our schools
- Difficulty in opening a business in Danville; must jump through too many hoops
- Less restrictive code enforcement and regulations
- More activities for spouses and family near workplaces
- More white collar jobs
- More jobs for those without a GED
- Reduce street lighting in areas
- Better traffic flow, synchronize traffic lights, better planning
- Remove blight
- Repurpose Schoolfield site (former Dan River Inc. complex)
- Need for a civic center or auditorium
- Activities for disabled population
- Attractions geared toward more highly educated

What are the opportunities that, if seized upon now, have potential to contribute to a better quality of life or business environment if used wisely?

- Redevelop the River District
- Create a downtown master plan
- Create better views of the river
- Improve the cleanliness of downtown
- Expand use of the Carrington pavilion
- Clean up the old residential neighborhoods
- Foster sharing of ideas -- tear down walls between organizations
- Make better use of the Regional Foundation's Bright Spot Program
- Focus on travel related business opportunities/concentrate on our assets to bring people to the City
- Focus tourism efforts on the Wreck of Old 97; Create an attraction; "The Wreck of the Old 97" is an internationally known ballad

- Rally around a vision (something unique) to place us on the map
- Adopt a “green” focus
- Possibly close some schools that are small/underutilized
- Improve attractiveness of main streets leading into Danville
- Place symbols on City entrances showcasing awards
- Design a new City logo

What are the top priorities the City of Danville should focus on during the next fiscal year? What strategies should be used to implement these priorities?

River District revitalization

- ▶ Focus on the Dan River
- ▶ Continue with the plans that are already in place; fund plan to accomplish priorities; seek grants and increase taxes as needed
- ▶ Keep the community involved; continue working with area groups
- ▶ Quickly demolish the Downtowner reuse site so people can see progress
- ▶ Remove some old buildings to make room for more open space and for building newer buildings that blend in with the older
- ▶ Identify building uses appropriate to the River District -- galleries, boutiques, coffee shop, book shop, neighborhood markets, etc.
- ▶ Encourage local business to investment in concentrated areas
- ▶ Work to make it easier to invest in the River District; streamline permitting; provide incentives for targeted businesses to move downtown
- ▶ Work with the Historical Society on signage for a self-guided walking tour of both Danville history and building significance
- ▶ Hold more events like the River Festival
- ▶ Be more diverse in entertainment; more children friendly activities, river park
- ▶ Ease building/zoning restrictions in historical district; tell the Historical Society to lighten up and let people buy/invest and enable growth

Business development and job creation

- ▶ Sustain the good economic development partnership between the City and Pittsylvania County, DCC, and the business community
- ▶ Strive for economic diversity; focus on adding good paying jobs
- ▶ Promote local small business development

- ▶ Stem the decline of Danville’s population; recruit more middle-income people to Danville
- ▶ Be creative in attracting industry to town; use existing businesses to attract others and grow the pie of like-minded employers, employees, and investors; use citizens as ambassadors to promote Danville
- ▶ Work with Tobacco Commission and state and federal officials to secure all the resources we can to recruit new businesses to Danville
- ▶ Publicize and capitalize on the community’s assets, such as IALR, RCATT, Averett, DCC, the Danville Public Schools, the River District, VIR, Carrington Pavilion, Enterprise Zone, fiber optic network, etc.
- ▶ Create more shopping, eating and entertainment options that will keep people local rather than going out of town for those options.
- ▶ Bring in more businesses and attractions that appeal to younger people
- ▶ Work on increasing tourism and travel to Danville
- ▶ Continue developing the Mega Park
- ▶ Use the Dan River, Inc. Schoolfield site for industrial purposes
- ▶ Invest in technology to house new industry
- ▶ Address workforce readiness; reduce the incidents or people unemployed or unemployable due to inability to pass a drug test
- ▶ Work with businesses and services providers to make a good first impression and reflect positively on the community; make sure we have the right people in the right places
- ▶ Become more business friendly; remove roadblocks; evaluate regulations on businesses; make it easier for businesses to get started and operate in Danville
- ▶ Strike a proper balance between maintaining low property taxes and providing needed community services and amenities
- ▶ Reestablish the Downtown Post Office as Danville’s main postal center and convert the Piedmont Drive facility into an upscale grocery store
- ▶ Attend to the “small stuff” that makes a difference
- ▶ Promote Danville as a “green community”

Education

- ▶ Focus on hiring qualified teachers
- ▶ Improve retention and graduation rate
- ▶ Promote the public schools; improve awareness of the good things happening in the schools; celebrate educational success
- ▶ Make safety in schools a priority

- ▶ Close schools as enrollment declines and redistrict
- ▶ Work on a strategy to make the City schools look better

Changing Danville's image

- ▶ Initiate a public image campaign -- it takes 10 positive comments to "clear" a negative one
- ▶ Use ads, billboards (with nice professional graphics), commercials, hotel TV channels, etc. to encourage positive thinking and bringing folks to Danville
- ▶ Evaluate what other communities are doing; look into other national and international out-of-the-box programs ("Singapore Smiles")
- ▶ Identify negative perceptions from new residents and old; identify the problems or the perception of problems
- ▶ Identify what brings people to Danville, why people came here to work, retire, etc.; use the information to market the community
- ▶ Improve perceptions of those living and working here

Crime and public safety perceptions

- ▶ Continue community policing in troubled neighborhoods
- ▶ Continue efforts with police, education, neighborhood watch/community action groups
- ▶ Fund the Police and Fire Department to get out in the City and neighborhoods
- ▶ Improve safety of intersections, proper signage for roads, exits, entrances
- ▶ Patrol downtown

Blight eradication

- ▶ Continue removing housing that is not being maintained by owners
- ▶ Clean up the neighborhoods

Appearance of Danville

- ▶ Improve the City's major entryways
- ▶ Landscape, clean up, and improve roadways and curbing where needed -- it shows the City is taking pride in itself

Budget issues

- ▶ Find a way to use existing properties to generate revenue; for example, the Community Market, if heated or air conditioned, could be used year round thus generating income for the City

- ▶ Combine County/City education, fire and police by changing statute in Virginia City/State code; work with state delegation from our area; build consensus with Pittsylvania County; model 1st showing benefits in cost and return

Miscellaneous

- ▶ Develop leadership among younger residents; invite and encourage what young people there are to take leadership roles
- ▶ Continue to encourage diversity in the workplace and community organizations
- ▶ Fund the PATHS program for those who cannot afford to see a doctor but especially for dental care, which is often not covered by basic insurance and is not covered by Medicaid for those over 18
- ▶ Better serve the special needs community
- ▶ Develop a long range master plan that would shape development; not have everything crowded with stoplights every block; develop zoning codes that prevent crowded development
- ▶ Increase funding for Section 8 to have people move into low income housing

What sort of choices and tradeoffs are we willing to make, especially in this era of economic challenges and budget shortfalls?

Note: Rounding errors may affect totals.

<u>Service Area</u>	<u>% Vote</u>	<u>Budget Options</u>
General municipal services	43%	Raise property taxes as necessary to maintain current municipal service levels
	4%	Reduce service levels as necessary to maintain current property tax rates
	52%	Combine property tax rate increases and service level reductions
Police protection	61%	Raise property taxes as necessary to maintain the current level of police protection
	9%	Reduce police protection levels as necessary to maintain current property tax rates
	30%	Combine property tax rate increases and police protection level reductions
Fire & emergency medical response	61%	Raise property taxes as necessary to maintain current fire and emergency medical response levels
	9%	Close one of Danville's fire stations in order to maintain current property tax rates
	30%	Combine property tax rate increases and service level reductions
Support of the pre-K through 12 public education system	45%	Raise property taxes as necessary to maintain current educational service levels
	41%	Close a school and reduce educational service levels to maintain current property tax rates
	14%	Combine property tax rate increases and educational service level reductions
Industrial development & recruitment	65%	Raise property taxes as necessary to develop industrial sites and buildings and recruit new businesses to Danville
	4%	Put industrial development and recruitment on hold for the next few years in order to maintain current property tax rates
	30%	Combine property tax rate increases and more

Note: Rounding errors may affect totals.

<u>Service Area</u>	<u>% Vote</u>	<u>Budget Options</u>
River District revitalization		modest industrial development efforts
	55%	Raise property taxes as necessary to construct new riverfront parks and landscaped sidewalks, restore blighted buildings, and recruit new businesses to the River District
	5%	Put River District revitalization efforts on hold for the next few years in order to maintain current property tax rates
	41%	Combine property tax rate increases and more modest River District revitalization efforts
Blight eradication		Raise property taxes as necessary to demolish hundreds of abandoned, dilapidated buildings and impose stronger code enforcement measures to combat building and property blight
	5%	Put blight eradication programs on hold for the next four years in order to maintain current property tax rates
	32%	Combine property tax rate increases and more modest blight eradication efforts
Parks, trails & landscaping		Raise property taxes as necessary to maintain Danville's parks, landscaped street intersections and rights-of-way, and trails
	18%	Close some parks and reduce maintenances service levels as necessary to maintain current property tax rates
	36%	Combine property tax rate increases and maintenance level reductions
Streets		Raise property taxes as necessary to maintain current street conditions
	9%	Reduce street maintenance as necessary to maintain current property tax rates
	45%	Combine property tax rate increases and more modest street condition reductions

Note: Rounding errors may affect totals.

<u>Service Area</u>	<u>% Vote</u>	<u>Budget Options</u>
Recreation & culture	36%	Raise property taxes as necessary to maintain recreation programs, community centers, and the branch library
	14%	Reduce programs, hours of facility operations, and/or close community centers and the branch library in order to maintain current property tax rates
	50%	Combine property tax rate increases and service level reductions