



Chair's Column, The Telegram – May 1 2010

Things we have learned

Board of Trade week is coming up in mid-May and I have recently passed the one-quarter mark in my year as Chair of the St. John's Board of Trade. It seems like a good time to take stock of what the business community has been doing locally in 2010.

Obviously, development has dominated the minds of locals, and continues to be at the forefront of discussion. It has been a topic of significant work at the Board of Trade, and we have been very pleased to meet with heritage advocates, architects, developers and other community-minded people to learn more about various perceptions, ideas and perspectives.

One thing that has become quite clear is that we must move beyond defining ourselves as sitting in various development "camps". This characterization is not only divisive but does not reflect the reality of our community and the varied and thoughtful perspectives of our fellow citizens. In recent weeks, it has been a delight for me to discover some of the common perspectives shared in discussions throughout the community whether in boardrooms, on the street or in your favourite coffee shop.

I would like to publicly thank those who have met with us in good faith to figure out how St. John's should evolve and ways to achieve a common goal: how we make our city even better. We all have to live, work and play here.

As much as people might have differing views of how we achieve success in creating a better city, it is reassuring to know we are all pointed towards the same goal. Let's keep that at the top of our minds, because sometimes in all the chaos of public discussion on the finer points, that fact is lost. But it's still very real.

There are many interrelated issues that come with development in the larger sense. Transit, housing, environment, heritage, economics, jobs, parking...these are just a few topics. No single change in any of these areas is going to resolve all the other issues. Nor will it create unchangeable catastrophe. This city will evolve. We have to choose whether it's by design or by default.

What we have learned is that heritage and culture is important for a variety of reasons. We have learned that there are real concerns about forcing development and projects away from the city. Most important though, there are people of good will who want to find solutions. The real solutions will come out when we take on the attitude of 'how do we make this work'. The idea of 'win-win' is cliché, but maybe the reason we have all heard about it is because it can actually work and make a lot of people not only happy but successful.

In my business, I find it very difficult to say 'no' when someone comes to me with a proposal. It still might not happen, but my default setting is closer to asking what the real goal for the project is, are there ways we can add expertise to make this work, and what is a creative method we can use to get

this done so that everyone walks away happy and with their needs met. That's an attitude that I think people want to get to, and we can get there. It just takes a bit of patience and understanding.

We cannot allow ourselves to be blinded by our own affiliations and notions to the exclusion of other ideas. No one has the monopoly on good ideas. By the same token, not everything someone does is bad because of who they are. I have said it before, but it bears saying again: business people are your friends, neighbours, co-workers, volunteer peers and much more. People might not share the same opinion on development or other matters, but we are still community peers.

And we have learned, once again, that our community peers want an even better city than the one we love right now.

Really, that's all any of us want.