

## Is it Time for EDAWN to Throttle Back on Growth?

Jan 9, 2017

The good news is we are growing at an unprecedented rate! The bad news is that we are growing at an unprecedented rate! Growth is not quite as divisive as politics or religion, but it is very much a polarizing issue for many. On the extremes: growth of any kind is good... or growth of any kind is bad. EDAWN, with a great deal of help from the community, has put the region on a path to remarkable economic prosperity. However, with that prosperity comes very real challenges that we must address to mitigate the impacts of this growth. For example, as a community we recently voted to support funding for our school infrastructure. That is what innovative and enlightened communities do; they take on challenges, they don't run from them. However, there are other challenges ahead and given our success and expected rate of growth for years to come, should EDAWN be doing things differently, throttling back on our attraction efforts to mitigate the impacts of growth?

First, let's remember that five years ago we had unemployment at nearly 14% with foreclosures at record rates. The "No Growthers" were wise to remain quiet; they got what they wanted; no lines at their favorite restaurants, depressed housing and rental costs and light traffic which helped them to speed to their job or Pilates class. Meanwhile, tens of thousands of their neighbors and friends were unemployed or underemployed and many were terrified about the prospect of losing their homes or not being able to feed their families. If I sound a bit concerned, it is because I am already hearing the siren call of the no growthers. More traffic, longer lines and higher rents, along with unfounded water availability concerns and school overcrowding issues are the fears I hear most as the reason to *"stop the growth"*.

**Yes, it is possible to grow too quickly**, to outpace the ability of the community and the infrastructure to support the growth; however, that is not the case for us. Knowing there would be challenges associated with growth, a coalition of community leaders participated in the economic planning indicators committee and produced the EPIC report more than two years ago. The report laid out growth projections and helped to identify the challenges that we are starting to face, associated with the growth. The report also provided support for EDAWN's modification of our job creation efforts. While we continue to promote the region in an effort to attract quality jobs to our community, we have modified our program to be more selective and targeted with our company attraction efforts and put new emphasis on some additional areas of focus.

**Target the attraction of higher paying jobs and corporate headquarters.** On the business attraction side, we adjusted our focus to primarily attract advanced manufacturing and technology companies with extra emphasis on company headquarters. The goal was changed from attracting "any job" to attracting the higher paying jobs that we will need to continue to improve and diversify our economy.

**More emphasis on the attraction and development of talent.** More than two years ago, the EDAWN board recognized the need to attract more talent to the region in order to meet the long term employee needs of our existing and new companies coming to the region. After the Tesla announcement in September 2014, there was little doubt, that at some point, we would achieve full employment, which will make it very difficult to continue to grow the existing companies and attract new quality companies to the area. So we updated the economic development strategic plan to address workforce development and attraction. An emphasis on workforce development and attraction has become EDAWN's top priority and must become a priority for all companies in the region, as they will need to creatively market themselves to potential employees within and outside of the region.

**Rebrand the community as a place that is attractive to the talent we need.** One way we can help to attract the talent we need is to foster a "climate" for creative workers. Another term for this is "place" - the quality of "place" is one of the essentials needed to attract this talent, according to Richard Florida who wrote *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002) and *Cities and the Creative Class* (2004). He said that, "cities which attract and retain creative residents prosper, while those that do not stagnate....Creative workers are looking for cultural, social, and technological climates in which they feel they can best "be themselves". While we are making progress in this area, especially along Start-Up Row and other pockets of entrepreneurial activity in our core, we have a long way to go. Additionally, our ability to embrace the University as we cultivate a "College Town" feel will determine much of our success in future branding efforts and greatly assist in the attraction and retention of the workforce that the "new" Reno-Sparks will so desperately need.

**So, Yes and No - To answer the question;** "Is it time to throttle back on growth?" Yes we may need to do things differently and work together to get out in front of issues associated with the coming growth. **But No,** we should not back off on the attraction of quality companies and great new jobs, as they will help us continue to revitalize and diversify our economy, while fueling our transition to becoming a truly great community in the years ahead.