



## **Implementing the Governor's Main Street Initiative into Sloulin Field Redevelopment**

**By Williston Mayor Howard Klug**

The entire Williston City Commission had the opportunity to visit with Governor Doug Burgum last week. The topic was his Main Street Initiative program and how it will affect our Sloulin Field Redevelopment. If you are not familiar with the governor's program; it centers on mixed use, minimal infrastructure, lower tax payer investment and living space for all ages in a community.

While many communities have focused on existing main street improvements, Sloulin Field gives us the opportunity to implement the governor's best ideas in the center of Williston. This project consists of two thoughts; identifying the best uses for the site and connecting it to Downtown Williston through a centralized corridor with walking and biking paths.

Many of you attended the initial planning session for the Sloulin Field Redevelopment project. Your input helped guide the initial planning for the project. The next step is to take those ideas and pair them with the objectives laid out in the governor's initiative. We believe the end result will be a shining example for the state and the country on how to get the best return on an investment that benefits an entire community.

I truly believe that Williston needs a civic center. In order to be competitive in attracting conventions, seminars and business interests, we need a gathering space that fits our needs. Throw in a performing art center and a destination hotel and Williston becomes a go-to place on the Northern Plains. Currently any large gathering such as fundraising banquets, oil field safety meetings and trade

shows that draw over 500 people, either use The Well at Williston State College or the Raymond Family Community Center. Neither of these facilities was designed for those types of gatherings. With that being said, the governor asked us how often would we utilize the civic center and what else could we do to make use of the space on a daily basis? One of his ideas was to attach retail that would use the same parking lot and provide another attraction to the area. It is a simple solution that has merit.

From there we could repurpose existing airport buildings; the terminal may be best suited for an interpretive center to tell our story about what truly happened in northwest North Dakota. An oversized aircraft hangar could be converted into pods for business startups, bringing like-minded entrepreneurs together to advance innovative business ideas that originated in Williston. These buildings could be connected by an outdoor mall that supports multi-use events in the center and allows retail or other businesses to develop along the corridor.

To accomplish this goal, the city will have to embrace the governor's plan and I believe that it is the right path to follow. We also need to continue to work with our development partners to bring in capital funds to start and finish the first phase of the redevelopment. This redevelopment will require commitment from the City of Williston. That commitment will require dollars, time, input from the community and expert advice from our partners and city staff.

So far, I have only talked about 100 acres of the 700-acre project. The redevelopment also will phase in new housing ideas not only for families but also for active seniors that want to remain in their homes. This can be made possible by embracing new technology that allows seniors to monitor what is happening in their daily lives. I attended a seminar in Bismarck last year and it's amazing to see the technology that can be used to make smart homes for seniors. Those ideas will make this redevelopment a place that will keep our seniors in the community.

I can talk about the redevelopment for hours, but it is best that we take our plans, incorporate the governor's initiative, and present the final version to the community in March or April. October of 2019 is approaching rapidly and we will be ready to decommission and redevelop Sloulin Field International Airport.