



News Release

March 1, 2018

By Barbara Peterson, writer

Williston Economic Development

Roger Brooks: Downtowns are Back, Make yours Awesome!

A lot has been said recently about Governor Burgum's Main Street Initiative. About 20 Williston business and civic leaders attended the Main Street Summit Feb. 13-14 in Bismarck. The summit explored resources that are available for creating healthy and vibrant communities that will attract and retain 21st century workers. Williston has already been working on some of the concepts; but admittedly, there is more work to be done.

"We have seen a big change in our downtown the past several years," said Shawn Wenko, Williston Economic Development executive director. "The replacement of infrastructure that promotes a pedestrian friendly atmosphere, the addition of the Renaissance on Main building, and the remodel of several store fronts are some significant accomplishments."

One of the summit's keynote speakers was Roger Brooks, an internationally renowned expert on placemaking, travel trends, community branding, and downtown revitalization. Brooks presented material from his '20 ingredients of an Outstanding Downtown.'

Some of Brooks' recommendations included employing common business hours (days and hours); recruiting an anchor tenant (grocery store, library); coordinating a unique mix of shops, galleries and microbrews; and offering public programming 250 days a year. "North Dakota has 357 cities and towns, what sets your community apart from the other 356?" Brooks challenged summit attendees.

The City of Williston has been orchestrating revitalization efforts in Downtown Williston for several years. Some of the city's significant contributions include the Main Street Reconstruction Project which replaced roadways, sidewalks, street lights and stop lights; the city has installed new sidewalk seating, flower beds and trees; and the Williston STAR Fund has provided grants for new construction projects, remodels and expansions.

The owner of Little Muddy Gifts in Downtown Williston is pleased with the progress; but is concerned about getting property owners on board.

"This is confirmation that Williston is headed in the right direction," said Dana Johnson. "Now the question is how do we get building owners at the table to create the atmosphere that we are trying to create in Downtown Williston?"

Wenko said city leaders are considering other ways it can help make Downtown Williston the best it can be.

"I think we are on the cusp of taking the next step for downtown, which would be bringing in someone like Roger Brooks to visit Williston and provide a Destination Assessment," said Wenko.

Brooks is set to speak again in North Dakota at the 2018 North Dakota Travel Industry Conference, April 16-18 in Fargo.