

DATE: May 1, 2013
TO: George Campbell, City Manager
FROM: Kevin Roden, City Council Member, District 1
SUBJECT: Budget Requests for Consideration

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these requests ahead of the FY 2013-2014 budget discussions. Please let me know if any of these items require further clarification or explanation. I look forward to discussing these and many other items of importance with you and the rest of the City Council.

Updated Economic Development Plan

COST: unknown

I've sat in on several of the community discussions surrounding the Denton Plan 2030 process and economic development continually rises to the top of people's concerns. As far as I can tell, the current trajectory of economic development is based on a plan put together in 2003. It seems prudent to reinvigorate a community conversation about the future economic possibilities for our city in close connection to our work with the Comprehensive Plan.

Along with this, I would like to encourage a detailed analysis of what data and metrics our economic development team, partners, and policy makers should be seeing on a regular basis. There is an unfortunate amount of outdated data living on the EDP website, some of which dates all the way back to 2009. We need to make sure we are asking the right questions and continually getting the best data available to assess our local economic health and activity.

Creative Economy Economic Impact Study

COST: \$7000 - \$20,000

As you are aware, I have been working to assess the current state of Denton's "Creative Economy" through mixers, gatherings, panel discussions, and in collaboration with our economic and university partners. We are annually losing our best and brightest to other cities due to our lack of meaningful employment for college graduates. Meanwhile, it seems a growing number of start-ups, tech firms, entrepreneurs, and creative agencies are taking root in Denton, particularly in the greater downtown area. I would like to see us commission a study to develop a baseline for the current state of our creative economy, assess its possibility as a target for our economic development efforts, and provide data for future policy decisions.

Houston recently did such a study with great results: *The Creative Economy of Houston, A comprehensive study of creative-sector industries and their impact on the Houston economy*. Simply doing and releasing such a study would bring a city our size significant attention. Michael Seman, local expert on this topic, and Dr. Terry Clower from UNT provided the ballpark figure for such a study.

Collaborative Co-working Space Partnership

COST: Unknown

There's been significant interest and discussion of creating a downtown space for the purpose of tech-focused co-working options, business incubator/development/accelerator programs, and an events and training area. I've held several meetings on the topic and have surveyed the community. UNT, local businesses, and downtown developers have also expressed interest in some sort of public/private partnership leading to this. Given the momentum for such a project and the likelihood that a proposal for such a partnership might materialize within the year, I'd like to see the city set aside money with our Economic Development office earmarked for this.

Economic Development Events and Programming

COST: \$50,000

With the advent of UNT's Innovation Greenhouse, increased relationships with various UNT business resources, the success of initiatives such as the Denton Creatives Mixer and Denton's first Startup Weekend, and a growing desire for business development programs, events, and trainings for local businesses and promising local entrepreneurs, I am recommending that we allocate a small budget to our economic development team to give them the chance to be a player/sponsor at this table. We need to leverage such events to market our city as friendly and helpful to small businesses.

Development of a Downtown Innovation District

COST: \$50,000

The success of the downtown has resulted in a new opportunity for targeted economic development in our city: the cultivation and attraction of innovative businesses and startups, businesses most likely to have the potential to scale rather quickly. Already we are seeing a number of tech-related firms gravitate toward downtown. The concentration of smart, creative young people combined with the desired amenities is the "new infrastructure" of our knowledge-based economy. In this sense, Denton has what no other city in the North Texas region has: a recognizable, concentrated sense of place, desirable by our smartest citizens, and in walking distance to two major research institutions. We should be leveraging the hell out of that fact.

Boston has branded an area for their innovation district that ALSO doubles as an arts district – and it has been successful: <http://www.innovationdistrict.org/> This would be mostly a matter of branding, marketing, and targeted leasing by our downtown development community. And this would have the added benefit of bringing several high paying jobs and expendable income right where we want it spent.

City-owned High Speed Internet Utility Downtown **COST: Unknown**

This is connected to the previous topic... I have recently held a meeting with Verizon and city officials to encourage Verizon to increase their Fios connectivity in the downtown area. The lack of a reliable high speed service for businesses in the downtown area will discourage efforts to attract tech-focused firms. In the event Verizon is not willing to do so, I would encourage us to examine the possibility of providing this ourselves and use it as an economic development tool. Consider the Google Fiber initiatives in cities - <https://fiber.google.com/cities/> - and the example of other cities, such as Chattanooga, TN which is selling the highest speed internet in the country to its residents and businesses - <http://chattanoogaigig.com/>. My proposal would be much more limited than these and would simply define an area of service corresponding to a targeted economic development initiative, such as a Downtown Innovation District. And, of course, would only be considered in the event that Verizon is unwilling.

Code for America City Program **COST: \$180,000**

Key Focus Area 1, Organizational Excellence, identifies the utilization of technology and the enhancement of citizen engagement efforts as budget priorities. Code for America, the leader in innovative civic tech solutions, has a year-long program where 3 of their fellows are assigned to the city to identify pressing city issues which are ripe for technological solutions and works with the staff to develop custom made applications. They also help foster an innovation culture within the city and typically attract significant national media attention to their projects. I would like to see us explore the possibility of applying for their city program. Applications for their 2015 City Program will be do at some point in March 2014, so this would need to be budgeted for in advance. For more information, go here: <http://codeforamerica.org/cities/city-impact/>

311 System **COST: Unknown**

This has been discussed by the Committee for Citizen Engagement and it seems there is an internal task force studying the matter and making recommendations to the City Manager. Pending the results of the task force's recommendation, I wanted to express my interest in seeing this program through.

Street Repair Update Web Application **COST: \$10,000**

Given that street repair and maintenance is a major priority of the city council and given that our funding levels are still behind where they need to be, community concern and pressure in this area will continue to be a problem for some time. One cheap and easy way we can publicly demonstrate our commitment to the citizens in

this area is by developing and highlighting a web application that tracks our progress, our successes, our future plans, and provides a way for citizens to give recommendations. You can call it something like “Street Repair Tracker” and place it prominently on the front page of the website. Anyone could go on, put in a street name and get instant information on the current OCI ratings of the street, its history of repair/maintenance, and whether or not it is scheduled for reconstruction through our bond program or other programs. I think we could assemble a local team, similar to what we did with the votedenton.org initiative to use this as another example of the possibility of civic tech and a positive use of open public information.

City Council Interns

COST: \$5000 per intern/year

This could be a great partnership with our universities. I receive offers for volunteer help on a regular basis from university students and plan on piloting such a program with interested students this summer (at no cost). It would be helpful if such a program were formalized. While volunteer possibilities exist, a funded internship would increase the commitment level of the intern and allow for more reliable expectations from week to week. I don’t anticipate every council member finding the need for such help, which could lower the cost.

Neighborhood District Initiative

COST: \$50,000

Connected to the Neighborhood Empowerment Grant we funded this year, this would be an initiative aimed at incentivizing neighborhoods to create distinct neighborhood identities. Austin and Fort Worth have embarked on similar initiatives with great success. The lack of neighborhood identity is a particular issue among the older, core neighborhoods. With the increased development of neighborhood-scale businesses in or near the edges of these neighborhoods, the possibility exists to create, brand, and market these areas in order to increase the number of unique spaces we have in our city. The greater South Austin Street area neighborhood, with its connection to the growing commercial district along Congress Street, is an example of an area that is ripe for such a district identity. The neighbors and businesses are interested, yet there is no clear path on how to do so. We could pilot such a project with neighborhoods such as this and learn from it.

Art Master Plan

COST: Unknown

This was part of the discussion with the Public Art Committee earlier this year.