



Café Conversation Notes

October 25 Café

What is your greatest business challenge today?

- Location – neighborhood and crime (near apartment complexes)
 - Surrounding businesses – need higher quality businesses and complexes
 - Lack of good restaurants in BP – always going to Maple Grove
 - Uncertainty – the overall health of the economy
 - Finding tenants to build businesses
 - Restrictive zoning
 - Theft
 - Helpful to have an officer come and talk about safety in the workplace
 - Poor impression of the area where pet hospital is located
 - Impacted by success of large corporations
 - Competitors are failing – I want everyone to succeed
 - Empty space/businesses nearby
 - Poor image from outsiders
 - Fewer employers – economy up and down
 - Cost of doing business
 - Restrictive zoning
 - Selling/occupying land
 - We entertain our clients in Maple Grove – need more restaurants here
 - I like being in BP and engaging in the community
 - No problem working with the City – one of the most pro-business cities in metro
 - Restrictive zoning along 610 makes sense but maintain focus on the end goal. While we understand the development philosophy and long-term approach, it'll take a while before the right projects come along.
 - Some of the development (industrial) is going elsewhere and could be here (along 610), but holding out will bring more desirable development from the City perspective.
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- For a retail outlet the socio-economic divide creates marketing business challenge.
 - Maple Grove is very different – Woodland Elementary has 3% poverty. Lots of poverty in south BP.

- Cost of business in Brooklyn Park = cost of business in Maple Grove. But business in Maple Grove is more profitable.
- Rent in BP is only \$50 less than Maple Grove but Maple Grove has so much more traffic. BP is dead for retail traffic.
- Nothing about BP in packet to welcome residents. Packet advertised shopping in Arbor Lakes. This says something about what people think of BP.
- Signs – city says they must be taken down. Difficult for retailers.
- Most of workforce doesn't live in BP. Skilled labor lives outside Bp and unskilled live in BP.
- No staff live in BP – 3 grew up here but moved elsewhere
- Customers are large companies and they are impacted by the economy.
- Weak competitors in Twin Cities brings industry down
- Very important to manage costs in this climate, including managing costs/expenses for employees
- Very linked to regional system
- 2 failing businesses on both sides in industrial park – clients tour buildings on daily basis – looks empty on the street
- Inconsistent work flow – more today – requires more adjustment to workforce so using temporary labor
- 50% of employees come from BP – many retired people working part time. Good for employee stability.
- Need more businesses in Park Place Promenade—need more traffic flow
- ADA requirements and other code requirements (i.e. no plastic pipes) have increased cost of development. Example: daycare needs high and low drinking foundation, not just one. Example: In 1995 a \$50k project now is \$100k.
- City of BP is great from developer perspective – support for tenants – two way street approach from staff
- 610 zoning good long term perspective for BP
- Companies are not ready to make investments – uncertain economy and world
- Don't know the direction the city is going

What would make BP the best place for business?

- More restaurants/options to entertain
- Lower taxes compared to other communities
- BP has a variety of businesses – BP needs to have a clear vision of the type of development we are trying to attract. For example, Chanhassen is focused on retail development while Chaska is pursuing industrial development.
- Have clear vision for different sections of BP
- Changing image/perception of BP
- Educate more on what we are doing to change the image
- Confusion between BP and Brooklyn Center
- Encourage/pitch other businesses to come to BP

- Active involvement with local colleges and BP businesses (internships) – we have internships but NO local applicants from BP colleges
- The City should recognize businesses that are successful in the community – it could help bring other businesses into community and gets the businesses name out there. Work together to help build the BP brand.
- Showcase successful businesses
- Streamline process of approving businesses – keep fees reasonable in comparison to surrounding cities

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- Would like to engage students to be in industry – need better connection to the colleges in BP
 - Connect to high school to get interns
 - Diversity is great, but reduce crime and get more workforce housing (rather than low-income). Make diversity more positive for BP
 - Change the perception of BP
 - Capitalize on location
 - Golden Valley is a good model
 - Make BP desirable to young, educated families with kids
 - Geographic integration – socio-economic
 - Diversity is a challenge but also opportunity – example Vietnamese decision-makers are non-English speakers. Requires ads in Vietnamese and someone who can speak on staff to answer phones
 - Change the negative reaction to BP because of perception of crime
 - Make diversity (restaurants and authenticity) a positive asset of the City.
 - Ad campaign to attract young families – focus on location and parks
 - Easier to market some of their sites as retail if it was possible – office space still not moving even with much lower lease rates
 - Shopping + chain restaurants are needed
 - Except for retail – great for manufacturing/tech because of draw from West/north exurbs for workforce. Easy to get to BP from there.
 - Fixing 169 triangle was key – better access
 - More flexibility in zoning would be helpful
 - BP has good demographics but confused with Brooklyn Center
 - Business parks are isolated from community but have good access. Access is key
 - Retail – re-work sign regulation. Keep regulation but make it easier for retailers. Consider temporary signs that have no permit and can be used 2 times per year.
 - Theme is to embrace diversity (ethnic, socio-economic and racial) and make it our strength
 - Fill gap – internships are not linked to local colleges

October 27 Café

What is your greatest business challenge today?

- Business climate – lack of money, people are nervous, lack of knowledge of resources
 - Businesses not investing in workforce development, investing in quality of service
 - Recruiting quality of individuals – lack of courage to invest in business
 - Moving traffic areas – not enough signage – not enough exposure
 - Crime affected decision to move location
 - Reputation – need to overcome
 - Crime perception – hot to address – not a reality but perception
 - Tenant uncomfortable with crime
 - Better education
 - Businesses need to have their own strategies and stay focused on moving business
 - Image/crime/taxes
 - Traffic – shopping patterns
 - Competition from Maple Grove
 - 16 centers in 16 community – real estate taxes are 25% higher in BP
 - Cost and image
 - Private roads developed and costing private development while others get city services
 - Statistics prove all crime is about the same but perception of BP is worse
 - Minimize multi-family Section 8 housing and focus on redevelopment of crime-ridden areas
 - Mad Jacks – security provided? Patrol
 - Diversity in housing, business – how to best represent all of the balance of the population so all can participate in a healing way to the community
 - Minority business – knowledge of this process (Business Forward) – how do you get them involved and present?
 - Where do you get the facts and where do you get the resources – not all businesses know
 - We don't want “pockets” of safety – we want everyone to feel safe everywhere
 - BP not giving incentives like neighboring cities (Coon rapids, etc. – Old North Town)
 - Bedroom community
 - Only pockets of retail
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- Time with small business owners to discuss issues
 - Quality of staff is a challenge; businesses trying to capture a (socioeconomically) diverse customer base.

- Marketing is difficult due to a lack of local options to advertise.
- Credit card rejection rates have been high in BP (as applied to memberships or continual payments). As a result, the business loses out on the money and accumulates debt due to having to cover the transaction fees. Few customers have checking accounts anymore, so credit cards are the only means of paying for many.
- Quality workforce/hard workers – students need to acquire more soft skills before graduation
- Getting clients – referral based – marketing
- Signage restrictions – could use review
- High taxes on property
- Checking/savings account issues for small businesses have issues tracking their finances. Agencies and support organizations having to diversify their services; such as providing financial counseling and calling businesses to warn them when their funds are low.
- Lower incomes in BP so affordability of services is a concern.
- Mentality – there are hard working people watching welfare recipients get handouts and not working. Example: Employee working three jobs and barely getting by while next door neighbor gets welfare, subsidized rent, and is unemployed, but just plays video games all day long.
- Drawing employees in, raise salaries, managers running the business
- Transportation – lack of transit offerings
- BP has poor reputation – difficult to get customers (customers going to Maple Grove and 610 zone which has more restaurant offerings)
- Impression of the City is poor – people moving out (perceptions of safety)
- City is changing, but attitudes are not
- A lot of changes have happened – not enough small business
- Too much fast food – poor lifestyles
- Chamber as a tool for networking – getting leads (getting nothing from newspapers)
- Building lasting relationships with clients

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- Not a lot of walk by traffic
 - Need 610 for more traffic and more businesses to generate traffic
 - Signage – Jeff Johnson received one
 - More concentration of businesses – things are too spread out in BP
 - Credit crunch – clients don't want to spend money
 - Put off business decisions because of economy
 - Appraisers – uncertain values of property – credit tight
 - Land values uncertain and changing
 - August market tank affected consumer confidence
 - Tenant downsizing workforce – hard to find tenants

- No central place in BP – need connections between businesses
- Signage – BP made Galaxy take down sign (no other cities made them take it down). Need to rewrite the sign ordinance. Have 4-5 businesses resolve signage ordinance.
- Need to keep money in BP. Spend local
- Transportation in BP is tough. Local roads. Public transit needs to be considered. East – west.
- Bond fees are high in BP. Way higher than Maple Grove. A lot of money for a start-up.
- Low traffic counts – Zane/610
- Promenade – lots of vacant tenant space
- Real estate market volatile – creates volatile environment for business
- Sometimes City staff are inflexible or not willing to push the policy

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- Marketing and maintaining
 - Advertising restrictions
 - Marketing – getting attention of buyers
 - Cross marketing contacts
 - Limited retail – lack of open retail seen as a drag on local economy
 - Networking situation – limited cash
 - Stigma for getting in new businesses to BP
 - Process to start a business in BP (zoning, planning commission) takes too long to get Council approval. Need more lenient opens and more timely
 - Knowledge of what's available for business resources
 - Image of BP is a hindrance – marketing campaign?
 - This is a bedroom community – difficult to get business during the day
 - Buerkle Acura moving out
 - Economy is tough
 - No viable retail community hurts (reasonable collection of hardware)
 - Lack of traffic hurts businesses – getting them back
 - No single identifier for retail (cluster)

What would make BP the best place for business?

- Clean up image
- Lower cost
- Increase traffic (customers)
- Methods to incorporate diversity into a positive part of the city
- Recruiting more businesses

- I've been telling people my business is in Champlin
- People don't know difference between BP and Brooklyn Center
- Target test store in BP
- Additional incentives to recruit more business here (3-5 year commitment)
- Need an anchor retail to become incentive for smaller businesses
- Improve perception
- You live here - why don't you work and shop here?
- Business could give incentives to live in BP
- Study on where population of BP works – campaign “work where you live”
- Image needs to be owned by more than the City. Business has to own it and contribute to positive -- residents and business alike
- Talk about positives – great roads, great highway access, better transfer time
- This is where it begins – communication starts but how can we execute? Need to make sure action happens after this meeting.
- City newsletter
- Where is BP on social media to attract young workforce?
- Maple Grove not always “at the table”
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- Changing the perception of BP – the City has reputation of not being business friendly (lots of hurdles)
 - Permits tough to get from City, especially for non-traditional uses/tenants. – For example: the mushroom grower in Welcome Square.
 - Easier to challenge assessed value of property
 - Identity of the city – needs to foster a positive image (great parks, atmosphere, doesn't get talked about enough). For example: BP and Champlin have a joint ice-skating class. Same instructors, but BP parents taking kids to Champlin due to concerns over safety.
 - BP seen as “not safe” even for fundraising/volunteer work
 - Met Council slow to respond on SAC/WAC fees
 - Difficult to get skilled employees – working with colleges/help students realize local opportunities
 - Perception of crime
 - Traffic levels – foot traffic/going elsewhere to go dining
 - Signage – temporary signs/restrictions
 - Taxes higher here than other cities – ties into an unfriendly atmosphere for business
 - BP needs to collaborate with other cities – perceived decline in MN quality of life (i.e. state shutdown was negative for state). Greater MSP new regional organization promoting MN – wants to draw 100k new employees to state.
 - Development of areas in BP (Village Creek) – major difference and visible symbol of positive image for the City

- Review taxes for businesses – seems too high now – losing people to the Dakotas
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- Current business owners can sell BP to future owners
- Create business connections – help each other succeed. Example, associations within retail malls
- Media does BP a disservice. PR person should promote BP to regional media
- Could City do press releases for business?
- Too many police/fire sirens. Turn them off – especially at night. Don't need so many fire engines/trucks with sirens. Creates black eye for BP.
- Less regulation. Fees for development. Need more urgency to get things done. BP is not the worst.
- City should act like it wants businesses – less regulation and wait periods.
- Consider expedited processes for development if business is ready to go.
- Chamber needs to get more involved with businesses.
- Retail – 610/Zane is vacant. How can more restaurants come here
- Get business into vacant space. Good honest businesses.
- More face to face connections
- Reputation of unhealthy, unfit people – need more healthy food concepts
- Rather than 180 days process, have process where people have temporary status
- People will come if it is fun, i.e., Farmers Market
- Managers of small shopping centers – City could coach them in having marketing events, i.e. Teddy Bear Band to attract families
- Example of strategy: Networking event – IPN Network – go from restaurant to restaurant
- Family events where businesses can market themselves and meet members of the diverse community
- Probationary period rather than complex planning or permitting process. Owner commits to accomplishing rules, then City checks in and ensures compliance. This would be better than delaying businesses in setting up.
- Get big news stations to get positive stories in the news
- Support shopping centers in doing fun PR events
- Too many respondents/vehicles to emergencies – too many sirens
- Slogan: Shop Local, Eat Local, Hire Local!

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- Put up a fence by Brooklyn Center
 - Promote infrastructure – “no potholes”
 - Turn BP into a cruise ship – one stop shop for entertainment – hire, live, work, play, pray, shop, spend in BP
 - Use our clout/size to attract concentrations of businesses
 - Promote positiveness
 - Disposable income is spent in Maple Grove and Coon Rapids

- Snow plowing is among the best – no delays in service
- One identified location for retail and business
- Commitment to these projects – City being more responsive
- Sign ordinance changes – regulatory changes
- Crime statistics used to change the perception
- Better PR – utilize businesses that are here
- Transportation – buses – movement lateral
- More partnerships with colleges
- Lights and sirens are a detriment
- Financing is tight. Support is good.
- Figure out how to connect with our diverse people
- Coordinating workforce development
- Stronger Chamber with a defined ROI
- Counterbalance the negative. Drive traffic to locations with Farmers Markets

Wrap Up Conversation

- Probationary period for new businesses coming into the community so they can get in and get going without going through long process (20-30 days to get in and get going)
- PR – ensure BP is represented positively in the news media
- Shopping malls – farmers markets, festivals, etc.
- Sirens every 10 minutes – too much response, too many sirens
- Like the Task Force that is coming out of this process. Look at sign ordinance.
- Build electric fence around BP so everyone spends locally
- Image – create positive image, spend locally, attract more office jobs
- Community and business buy-in
- Hire local, shop, local, spend local
- North metro collaboration
- Diversity – “a blessing and a mystery”
- City is friendly toward business but permitting challenges and zoning hard
- Ease with Met Council – permitting, etc.
- Make BP Better!

November 2 Café

What is your greatest business challenge today?

- Image of the neighborhood business is poor. Customers voice this concern but also customers may be from these neighborhoods.
- State funding impacts how successful business is. When the state cuts these funding streams it makes it harder these days. More administrative at state level,

- too many forms, too much red-tape. Fraud in programs make it harder for everyone else in the home healthcare industry.
- New cellular phone company cut my landscaping water lines, dug holes in lawn. No communication from the City when this private business was going to start work. A letter would have been nice from the city. Where does the City stand? Are they on our side?
 - Transportation – at Hennepin Home Health site is bad. Spends more on mailings. North of 85th avenue the transit possibilities/options are much more limited than south of 85th. Bus line is the key to workforce.
 - The results are key from this exercise and action is important. Sustainability.
 - Developing more land when there are empty space in strip mall. Vacancy may create more crime. How many of the same types of restaurants do we need?
 - Why can't the city say no to a new business if it is over concentrated or if they feel it isn't a good use?
 - When vendors and potential customers come to business the image around business will impact if they want to do business or continue business.
 - Work together with businesses to clean up their properties and an education program
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- BP is restrictive. City has campaigned to “make it a better place,” but in reality has driven some business away. Slowed development along 610 (i.e. amphitheater project never built)
- Look at other cities to see what works – lift the restrictions
- Online commerce – quality technology, building the infrastructure (fiber optic)
- Trained employees – working with colleges to get more skilled workers (example: plastic molders)
- Transportation system – lack of transit options/have to drive
- Direction of cities – becoming more user-friendly, realistic expectations for change and development. BP can compete well as it is. Money drives where development goes (i.e. incentives). Twin Cities has high tax base, many start-ups, begin moving to other markets/states when more successful
- Difficult to get people to come to MN, but once they get here, they love it
- Businesses passing up on MN due to logistical issues. Example: Regis Hair salons—had to move their main operations out of MN since their shipping supplies would freeze during our harsh winters. Moved to Tennessee (right to work state, cheaper labor) for easy overnight deliveries. Also opened a western shipment center in Utah.
- High quality of life here in MN, but businesses don't care – it's not enough to keep them here.
- Will any of this (Business Forward) matter when the economy rebounds?
- We are taught to be skeptical based on experiences with past businesses
- City restrictions (i.e. signs) complicate things greatly – changing codes

- Cities trying to “make things perfect,” but is punishing to businesses
- Some cities lose competitiveness with other cities due to restrictions - BP is more restrictive comparatively.
- BP has more code issues than Eden Prairie
- Businesses having to come up with more financing to cover additional costs from City (in the approval process)
- Businesses not understanding regulations – streamline the City Code (grade its user-friendliness)
- Remove the unexpected surprises – need more transparency up front (i.e. Minneapolis and its new one-stop shop for permitting)
- BP is progressive toward small businesses, but access to capital is difficult. Less options. City has been more promotional lately – needs to change attitudes like what Business Forward is doing!

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- In other cities, business was asked what can be done to help them be successful. Not happening in BP. Worst experience among 27 cities opening in BP. Can't promote business without road signs.
 - Nickel and dimed when opening a new building. Biggest challenge is the uncertainty posed by government. Seeing “fees” and “fines.” Don't know what the government is going to come out with next. Government jumping into business concerns. Have to pay for fire inspections.
 - Slow business growth in BP –not as many businesses as in other places. Lost the good breakfast place.
 - Getting enough work to cover the margins – government work that comes with requirements – outdoor storage limitation are problematic
 - Giving City business to non-BP businesses
 - He does business park development in the community. Mixed use development zoning will make it difficult to take advantage of activity that could result in another business park. More traditional office/warehouse space is needed. Can't do this with current zoning.
 - Building a new building was troublesome because of changes required by the building/fire codes. Perception that interpretation of codes is not flexible. Fire code requires businesses to be UL rated.

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- Additional costs on small things (renovation project) such as a drinking fountain
 - Not being able to advertise (city does not allow banners)
 - City does not enforce drive-offs (24 hour gas stations) – this is civic matter (Anoka enforces)
 - Wants to keep lights on gas stations but city wants additional requirements to meet this such as cameras, noise regulations, etc. Restrictions too difficult and is not cost-effective as a business owner. Frustrating

- City should focus on the appearance or neighborhoods who don't care about their properties (the businesses are investing in the community, yet city is too restrictive)
- Disconnect between citizens and demands of City
- Uncertainty (broad) for everyone of what tomorrow will look like...
- Need to be educated about requirements
- Requirements are a hindrance
- Size of city allows for quality planning department and good customer service but leads to a hindrance by adopting international standards that are too detailed and staff isn't flexible in interpreting them
- Fine/skilled people working at City Hall
- Why doesn't planning commissioners advise on these issues? How do we better the communication? How do we make it easier for our businesses?
- Too many laws/regulations – I want the city (experts) to help me to achieve ways around the regulation while being in compliance with the laws – not be too stringent on the black letter law
- Businesses need to be better informed prior to investment and moving forward with the business
- Method of communication is poor
- How do you make connections
- Overcame stigma – bad reputation – crime, perceptions – more positive now
- Rental is an issue – police do a good job
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What would make BP the best place for business?

- Provide more than just a task force but a business board which will work along side of planning and the Council to evaluate the businesses looking to move or expand to BP
- We need more flexibility in zoning for outdoor storage. Limited in office/warehouse use businesses. Outdoor storage needs to be allowed for better use to contractors. More restrictive in BP than surrounding communities. Regulation.
- Need more restaurants, but variety. Food, shops and general merchandise.
- Retail shopping?? Where is it? Keep the business in town.
- Accountability on code enforcement side of the City.
- Why don't we expect more from a design standpoint? Park Place Promenade is nice, why can't that standard be applied throughout?
- Consistency with enforcement.
- Interpret codes / and / business friendly at the same time. Need to have the right type of city staff enforcing codes that gets it.
- Community education is key to workforce
- 70% of employees live in this area (north metro)

- Easier to find good workers and economy may be the reason the climate is where it is.
 - Roadways/access is good in BP. Close to downtown, two colleges, parks/trails.
 - Keep trash cleaned up
 - Target development would bring more meaning to BP
 - Keep the standards along 610 the way they are. Standards in housing stock have not been upheld.
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- Crime/fear issues, especially in southern BP, but it also depends on neighborhood (i.e. squatters moving into homes up here near Edinburgh Golf Course- police and City worked to get rid of them.)
 - Brand the City – get away from the negative image. BP should equate to a positive place to live and do business.
 - BP perceived as an extension of Brooklyn Center
 - Improve perception, attitude, and expense of doing business. Also must take crime seriously. Need rapid response to problem areas.
 - Change name of City?
 - Attract a quality workforce – affordable housing (i.e. not apartments)
 - It's not from a lack of trying – its hard to solve crime issues
 - Border between BP and BC is a problem area
 - Youth issues (coming from apartments) and high foreclosure rates
 - Lots of redevelopment, but is it a success?
 - Managers not wanting to manage BP branches due to reputation.
 - Not the police that's an issue, it's the residents (i.e. don't pursue gas drive-offs here in BP.) Police has improved overall but not there yet.
 - Rental properties an issue. Demolition of Huntington Court – reducing units and site sits empty. Population just disperses. City has tried regulation – how do you stop criminals from moving in?
 - Politics – too much control by Met Council. City should make a stand, band with other cities to fight mandates
 - Decline of apartment complexes over time
 - Transportation an issue – lots of buses on Brooklyn Boulevard but need them throughout the City. No bus pick-up lanes on streets. Many pedestrians walking to work due to a complete lack of transportation options (i.e. getting to 85th).
 - Lack of sidewalks in some areas.
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- Need to bring up the level of the business areas in the city. Perception with police and fire calls (sirens). Would be nice to see higher standards for buildings. What tools can you use to accomplish this? You need good city staff
- Establish consistent standards to apply to all businesses...don't put costs on one and not the others (i.e. the pond at Noble Mobile)

- Establish small ma and pa restaurants in the city
- Focus on appearance of areas
- Streamlining regulations – do an outside analysis of where improvements could be made – encourage a business friendly attitude throughout all of City Hall. Look at why you can build a building in other cities that can't be built here
- Build more businesses
- Group of business people that are an advisory body to the City Council that focus on business needs when considering issues affecting business.
- Consistent standards across all cities to provide ease of understanding
- Communication when you first open your business – newsletter within the community – give them things about the city

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- Successful business park developments – growth
 - City finance – improvements, cutting-edge
 - Limited amount of business land and ownership issues pushes businesses away
 - Focus on strategic planning of land to meet current needs but no inventory – get land into production
 - Too many neighborhood commercial; not strip malls – more commercial businesses
 - Location of BP is good
 - Fix regulation/zoning issues
 - Build on momentum – focus on big projects (high visibility) and small businesses will follow
 - Visibility is important and appearance
 - Quality high school – people do business in BP should live in BP
 - Extend 610 to I94
 - Override naivety – encourage places to eat/meet
 - Deal with transitional issues of resident (13% turnover of students)
 - Help on image – work on the image (not the “hood”)
 - Financing for business – additional money in addition to SBA
 - More resources to educate people about business
 - Better website (City)
 - Better communications between City and business
 - Small businesses are nickel and dimed – small businesses don't know what to ask; do homework head of time
 - Needs to be image-driven (example of Maple Grove requiring brick exterior as a long-term goal)
 - Promote positive relationships/meeting with top 20 businesses
 - Search engine optimization
 - We celebrate diversity – but there is a disconnect of neighbors and community
 - Promote civic organizations such as Rotarys – looking to recruit minorities

Town Hall Conversation

- See opinions are shared between businesses
- Similar themes at tables – image problems are real not imagined
- Glad to see open communication
- People see BP as utopia, others don't
- Not same problems in all area of the City
- Regulations not interpreted in a reasonable manner or consistently
- Bad image in BP
- Less City involvement – eliminate clutter
- Have periodic business meeting opportunities like the kick-off event
- Minority businesses did not attend Business Forward