

Open Letter from Greg Marcus

“The secret of economic development wasn’t incentivizing companies up front – it was about creating a place where businesses wanted to locate.”

Mayor Mick Cornett, Oklahoma City

That philosophy has led to significant public reinvestment in Oklahoma City. It started with their downtown, parks, convention center, arena, and ballpark. Then it was extended to schools and other civic infrastructure. This substantial community wide investment has been the foundation of a booming success.

Do those assets sound familiar?

So many of us believe Milwaukee has significant potential, but for that potential to be realized we must reinvest in the assets that define our quality of life and the vitality of our community.

Given our company’s history and investment in the community I am always on alert for stories of how other cities did it, and recently I came across two great examples I wanted to share with everyone around here. One is a TED talk, and the other a news story.

Mick Cornett, the Mayor of Oklahoma City, gave the TED talk. If you just look at the first five minutes you will be captured by the story. In those first few minutes he powerfully lays out the simple strategy of creating a quality of life that attracts businesses rather than just paying them off with subsidies.



[Click the image to hear more](#)

The news story is about an example closer to home, Millennium Park in Chicago. The example is different, but the concept of investment in an asset focused on the quality of life is similar. Not surprisingly it has produced significant investment in nearby areas while driving up the value of existing real estate developments.



[Click the image to hear more](#)

Any city can give a company money in a quest to attract business, but the special cities develop assets that draw companies to them. The simple truth is we need to invest in our quality of life -- those civic improvements that help bring more people, more customers, more businesses, more workers, more residents and more private investment to our city.

Some people would say that investing in these types of projects is nice, but what we really need to do is take care of those in need. Frankly, if we don't have a community that attracts people/taxpayers, I don't know how we will have the resources to take care of the people in need.

If we don't reinvest in our community, not only will fewer people locate here, existing citizens will leave, and that will leave a deep hole in the pool of resources available to take care of people. Thus, we become even more unattractive causing more to leave. That is what I call a "vicious cycle."

Alternatively, we can work to make Milwaukee a more attractive place to locate, thereby expanding our pool of resources. This permits even more investment and we become even more desirable. That is what I call a "virtuous circle."

The good news is the choice is up to us.

I encourage you to take a few minutes to read, to listen, and to think about these tales of two cities. I believe we are at an inflection point, and I for one would like to see us in a "virtuous circle" not a "vicious cycle."

Please join me and others in calling upon our civic and elected leadership to join forces as they have in other successful cities and start the drive to reinvest in our future.

Sincerely,

Greg Marcus