



The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA®
Office of the President

September 21, 2022

To Mayor Heikkila and Norman City Council:

At a Norman Chamber of Commerce board meeting earlier this year, I expressed my priority to improve and increase the partnerships and collaborations between The City of Norman, the Norman business community, and The University of Oklahoma. One such collaborative initiative that has piqued our interest is the Downtown Norman Business Improvement District. As the university prepares to embark on the athletic department's transition to the Southeastern Conference, the BID is an initiative we support. As a community, there is only one chance to make the best possible impression on visiting SEC fans as they make their initial trips to Norman. We want to make sure their first trip is certainly not their last and the proposed BID that seeks to enhance Historic Downtown Norman to be the best version of itself is a great step in that direction.

Beyond the benefits the BID will generate for the inflow of SEC fans, this initiative will usher Downtown Norman into a new era that will benefit our community all year round. A vibrant, more accessible downtown will boost our local economy and become a source of pride for all who call Norman home.

Benefits of the BID include:

- Enhancing the district's ability to visually serve as an iconic destination through increased beautification and cleanliness
- Providing a dedicated executive director to focus on achieving the district's fullest potential
- Refreshing, overhauling and/or designing the district's brand to appeal to the widest audiences

We believe in the many hours of work that have been put toward planning the Downtown Norman BID and are eager for its successful passage by the Norman City Council on September 27.

Warmest Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Joseph Harroz, Jr." in a cursive style.

Joseph Harroz, Jr.
President
The University Oklahoma

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OF THE CITY CLERK
ON 9-23-22



September 20th, 2022

Mayor and City Council,

Thank you all for your thoughtful consideration of the proposed Downtown Business Improvement District. Over the last year, a very engaged and well-meaning group of individuals have attempted to structure a state development tool to catalyze a more vibrant downtown that will benefit all of Norman, and Cleveland County too. A city's downtown is the most visible indicator of community pride. It is either an asset or a liability in the effort to recruit new residents, new businesses, tourists, and others to our community, as well as being a gathering place for those who already live here. Oklahoma City created a downtown BID years ago, and we are all very much aware of the progress they have achieved. Because our words matter, it is important to understand that this is a voluntary assessment by forward-thinking business leaders and not a "tax" by the "heavy hand of government", as some would have you believe. Although it carries similar legal characteristics, unlike a tax it has a set time limit, a set boundary, a limited purpose, and is budgeted, controlled, and spent by the private sector. In fact, the BID proposal was brought forth by the private sector, not the government. A vote against this BID is not a vote against the government; on the contrary, it is a vote against the private sector's use of the laws afforded us in our state constitution.

On May 25th of this year, I invited Vibrant Community Partners, a Pensacola, Florida firm, to visit Norman. The CEO, Quint Studer, wrote the bestselling book, *Building a Vibrant Community*. Three things he said that day resonated with me. First, on a scale of 1-10, he ranks our downtown a low 2. Second, one-way streets are designed to move traffic, and as long as we have a one-way thoroughfare on Main and Gray streets, shopping traffic will never slow down enough to stop and shop, and downtown Norman will never reach its full potential as a destination. Third, and finally, he said we must have someone working 24/7 on programming downtown to activate downtown engagement. To make our downtown the vibrant, beating heart of Norman, we must invest full-time to ensure there are things going on every weekend like events, activities, and entertainment while also ensuring it is clean and safe for all community citizens. It is important to preserve the historical character and authenticity of our downtown but equally important to facilitate new investment and redevelopment. If we fail now, it will look just the same 20 years into the future as it did 20 years ago.

From my perspective, having been in Norman for less than two years, the status quo is not desirable. Everyone recognizes Norman's "potential", but we've been doing that for years according to hundreds of leaders interviewed. When the BID Board visited NEDC, they said they could only hire a part-time individual to keep the budget small enough to get the most support. Although that proved these leaders want to be fiscally responsible, it simply isn't sufficient to have a part-time person when we require full-time change. NEDC has offered to pay the other half of whoever is hired, making them full-time and putting them on our payroll,

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Dedicated to improving the quality of life of Norman residents through the creation and retention of jobs.

a proposal that has been well received not only by the NEDC Board but by members of the BID Formation Committee and BID Board applicants. This will allow the Downtown Norman BID Board to widen its search, recruiting the best and brightest to fully program the downtown environment. We feel strongly that the time is now for business and community leaders in Norman to change the “status quo is fine” narrative, realize our potential, and invest in the heartbeat of Norman. Approving the proposed BID today does not end our desire and willingness to make changes as we go.

One other thing Mr. Studer said is that it’s been documented through local polling nationwide that 21-24% of the population will be against change and will vote “no” on just about anything on the ballot. As he said, “if God himself wanted to put Heaven in downtown Norman, 23% would vote against it because it’s a gated community.” Although humorous, the truth is that likely leaves just 77% of Normanites open-minded to change and willing to learn when presented with more details and compelling information. In this specific instance, we have more than 51% that want to see progress. With our individual property assessment and our offer to pay half of a BID Executive Director’s salary, no entity – including the City and County – would pay more for this effort than NEDC.

The last thing I want to leave you with is that OU’s decision to enter the SEC is a multi-generational opportunity to realize potential and not just to keep talking about it. This move will generate significant national attention with hundreds of thousands of benefactors and boosters visiting our downtown, a very walkable five blocks from Campus Corner. And for those thinking Campus Corner is where the only impact will be felt, the distance from Campus Corner to the football stadium is the exact same distance as Campus Corner to downtown. Already, NEDC is fielding inquiries from developers in Atlanta, Athens, Boston, Dallas, Kansas City, Los Angeles, and Orlando. Using the words of Ben Franklin on the signing of a much more serious and potentially lethal document, “Thus I consent to this Constitution because I expect no better and because I am not sure that it is not the best. The opinions I have had of its errors I sacrifice to the public good...”

Government, education, and business leaders must unite intentionally and decisively for the public good if Norman is to become the community of choice we all desire.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lawrence McKinney".

Lawrence McKinney, CECD, CCE, IOM
President and CEO