

Knitting a Regional Quilt

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As you might detect from some of my previous articles, I'm relatively optimistic about our regional direction and future. I think that there are some excellent examples of advancement if we just look around.

Yet with that in mind, we still need to keep the pedal-to-the-metal if we want to make up for lost ground and achieve the competitive position we'll need for the future.

We need to make sure that we continue to knit our regional quilt so that it's connected, inclusive and protective.

The state is participating. Governor McAuliffe has been to Hampton Roads many times during his campaign and that trend continues. Whether it's through transportation, business, or other, there seems to be a commitment to "unlocking" Hampton Roads.

Cities need to continue identifying what will enhance their position - what will be needed in their localities to attract business, appeal to millennials, expand their tax base and retain a high quality of life. In business, I learned to always keep my eye on the competition - sometimes to see what you might want to do; sometimes what you might NOT want to do. But watching others develop around you will often times provide the impetus and motivation to also seek advancement (within the means of any given city). To those cities engaging and progressing; THANK YOU for what you do.



To our existing economic pillars of military, shipping and tourism; THANK YOU for what you do. So many of us in the region are in your corner.

Please let us know if we're supporting you correctly. What else is needed? How can we help?

Large and medium sized businesses need to continue with profitable, healthy operations as their first priority, of course. They help generate jobs. If I have one thing to ask, it's that they continue to recognize and acknowledge the importance of their intellectual contribution to the regional quilt (whatever that may be). We need business to participate, and in many cases they already are (and with our thanks).

I still believe we need more fabric and thread. Let's consider some of the following:

New Opportunities for Our Region

Clearly we're trying to invent new opportunities for our businesses. The Hampton Roads Community Foundation has stood up several study groups that are doing deep-dives on: Leadership, Entrepreneurism, Industry Clusters and Workforce Development. Certainly the value of their output remains to be seen, but at least their dialogue can lead to progress as part of our regional quilt.

There's also a great deal going on with the concept of creating "ecosystems" for entrepreneurs. This is because successful small and medium sized businesses are needed as part of our regional quilt. "Ecosystem" is a cool buzzword for



creating an environment for success, comprised of some really good ideas coming forward which will attract the attention and support of state and local government, business, and communities. Part of that ecosystem requires academic support as well. If you're paying attention to announcements of late, that support is coming forward. But additionally, it needs business, finance, connectivity, incubators, accelerators, business simulators (for workforce development), cities (if they choose, but we can't wait), general community, industry cluster evaluation, and (please) marketing of our region to the country and world (regardless of our naming convention). Now THAT'S a great piece of fabric to add to our quilt!

There're more and more new infrastructure ideas out there. Stadiums, rail systems (light and high speed) are all being discussed and acted upon. Sometimes the solutions being discussed aren't perfect, but at least their being discussed and maybe, just maybe, those plans will evolve, improve and become reality.

Another area of interest is that of regional land use. I've recently become involved with Urban Land Institute Hampton Roads, and the amount of value-added opportunity their resources bring to the region is amazing. So much of our regional development relates to land use. Transportation (rail lines, stations, bus routes) ties to land use. Mixed use developments, roads and highways, sea level, city plans, hotels - all are part of that discussion.

The Best Bonding Agent: Interested and Active Citizens

I believe Hampton Roads has an amazing number of examples of philanthropy, commitment and effort. I tip my hat to all.



What would be a great addition is to get more involved in regional efforts. To be clear, there are groups out there with focused presence - Virginia Beach Vision, Greater Norfolk Corporation, Chesapeake Alliance, Portsmouth Partnership and more, I'm sure. These groups are helping their cities via very specific actions, thoughts, voices and ideas. Wouldn't it be great if they were to also talk to one another on occasion? Not to diminish their own city efforts, but to share and expand our regional progress.

At Future of Hampton Roads we had five focus areas:

- 1) Regional Cooperation: Helping to get our municipalities (and organizations) to talk, share and advance with regional quilt in mind. Our collective strength is greater than our individual strength.
- 2) Transportation: Supporting effective regional mobility plans (which are now pretty extensive).
- 3) Economic Competitiveness: Assisting in the establishment of an Entrepreneurial Ecosystem including Business-to-Business Mentoring as well as process and systems to start and grow young companies. Organically grow jobs and add to our regional economic strength.
- 4) Metropolitan Synergy: Helping to ensure that our Peninsula friends are part of our regional quilt.
- 5) Enabling Next Generation Success: What can we do to help our millennials succeed and take over the reins?

Trust me when I tell you that none of this is easy. As one would expect, we have a variety of opinions and recommendations of approach. But dialogue typically allows us to set our path.

I'm interested in all (obviously), but I've really been immersed of late in working with millennials. We're putting together plans for a major event in the fall (a TEDx actually) and related workgroup sessions with many from our younger generations.

So much of what I've learned is about letting them participate and lead in creating what it is that they want (for their own future). It appears to me that they don't want someone else's reality thrust upon them, but rather, they want to create and/or define their own future (since they're the ones who will be living it). Yet everything needs to be balanced with the reality that there are systems in place that sometimes change slowly and trust is required in and from both camps.

Our process committee is doing well (now). But we had to find our way, learn about each other, and be open to sharing, learning and compromise. It's working based on effort. If it works here, and considering this as a microcosm, then what can we do to apply this approach to larger, broader scale? More to come on this topic.

All of what I've discussed (and more) contributes to the Hampton Roads regional quilt.

- Keep the state involved and helping, recognize the cities need to keep driving their agendas (with injections of regional cooperation).
- Maintain the strength of our pillars to keep them going strong.
- Add new opportunities to supplement our existing economy.
- Support the work of certain groups who are attempting to maintain and strengthen our regional quilt.
- Attract engaged and energetic people to jump in to get things done.
- Engage millennials and let them have a voice in the future. Huge voices on transportation, lifestyle, developments and more.
- Think locally AND regionally (they're not always mutually exclusive). Allocate a percentage of what you do to the region to help stitch things together.

Certainly no one has all the answers (especially this author). However, in my 11 years in the region, I am seeing the regional quilt evolve. There's still some old ways, but plenty of new ones arising.

It's an exciting time to be here, don't you think? We may not be a single cloth or fabric, but quilts can work well too. We just have to stitch all the right pieces together.

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