



CITY NOTES

March 29, 2018

Even before starting work as your new City Manager, I was asked what I thought were pressing issues in Fort Bragg. Having been on the job exactly three weeks and two days, I see and hear potential challenges and potential solutions every day. The truth is that in my short time here, I am not sure I am quite ready to properly answer that question.

There is so much more I want to know about this Community. I use the word Community because I meet people who live outside the Fort Bragg city limits but work or own businesses here. These individuals have strong ties to the City through relatives, community participation, and commerce, or just feel strongly about this great town. These individuals, both residents and those outside the City limits, tell me how much the City means to them. They want to make sure I appreciate it as much as they do and want me to promise to care for it. While sharing what they love about Fort Bragg, in the same breath, they confide a fault or two or three about it.

I love these conversations, because I get to hear how much the Community loves Fort Bragg. I hear the good and the bad. The Community's history is an important part of these conversations. I hear about family histories, community bonds, scandals and everything you all are proud of here. What sticks out the most is how much promise and potential the Community holds and how firmly everyone believes in its strong future.

I share this view. I hear, read and observe the excitement surrounding the potential of the Mill Site. Being a part of the Mill Site's future is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for me. I also hear how much of an impact the Coastal Trail has had to the Community and how much we all look forward to the opening of the middle section of the trail (happening next Monday!). The coastal views from the existing trail are part of the reason I now call Fort Bragg home.

When I drive around town, I notice the houses and other commercial buildings that have been and are continuing to be renovated and brought back to their original beauty. I admit that I have dreams of buying one of these gems and restoring it.

Fort Bragg has so much to offer! A recent visit to the CV Starr Center provided me the opportunity to experience this world class facility and to see the amazing Orca skeleton the Community worked so hard to bring back to life. I was also lucky enough to sit in on a City Council meeting in January where the Community came out en masse to support the Noyo Center and the City's transfer of coastal acreage to that organization. I still have over 20 pictures of the Botanical Gardens from last August on my iPhone, including beautiful dahlias in full bloom. I look forward to the many treasures I have yet to experience.

Aside from history and the natural treasures of Fort Bragg, economic development is almost always in the top three issues people bring up in our conversations. In my opinion, effective economic development is about leveraging the local resources and working with the Community assets. It's about getting the word out about all that Fort Bragg has to offer. I agree that it is and should be a City priority. That being said, many challenges exist.

As a new resident of the area, I have firsthand experience of the difficulties around finding housing – both in the rental and the for-sale market. Fort Bragg's isolation makes things more expensive and harder to acquire. The labor market can also be challenging. But that isolation is one of the things I really like about Fort Bragg. You can breathe. You can stand on the coast with a million dollar view and not have anyone near you. You can drive across town in five minutes. You can run across town in 30 minutes.

I once heard a seasoned long-term Mayor of a larger City refer to economic development as a marathon and not a sprint. He said that an elected official shouldn't count on getting any credit for their actions. It is a long process of planting seeds and then carefully tending those seeds. If you think about a qualified work force, it starts today in our schools and takes years to educate and train students to become that qualified labor force. Economic development also takes more than just one group or entity to achieve – it takes an entire Community. I am honored and excited to be a part of that community and will continue to, at Council's direction, make sure economic development remains a top priority.

One of my goals when accepting this position was to make sure that the City is in better shape than when I started. As a result, part of my job is to maintain the accomplishments made by so many others in the past and to continue the great work and momentum without the Community losing ground. Economic development is about acknowledging the good and the bad. It is about looking at it from a newcomer's or outsider's view, so that you understand the potential. It takes a true understanding of the overall value of a town to be able to find the right match for it.

Economic development is about making the Community a place where everyone wants to live and work. It is about everyone marketing the Community. This starts with sharing what I love about Fort Bragg when I visit other places or saying hello to the visitor I pass on the Coastal Trail.

I am truly grateful for the opportunity I have been given and look forward to working with all of you in making Fort Bragg the best place to live, work and play. I would love to hear what your goals and dreams are for Fort Bragg and hope we can work together in shaping the City's future.

City Notes is usually published on the second and fourth Thursday of each month. If you have questions or suggestions regarding this column or any matter of City business, feel free to contact City Manager Tabatha Miller at TMiller@fortbragg.com or (707)961-2829.