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## **The city of Brockton is witnessing a transformation of many ideas into realities**

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Economic Development and Community Building are best done one building, one street, and one neighborhood at a time. At the core of all strategic planning in cities and towns is the need to engage the community in the efforts. Community engagement is widely accepted as critical for the success of economic development initiatives. Often there are substantial obstacles and barriers to reaching success and the desired outcomes. The goal is to achieve a high quality of community engagement that can overcome these obstacles and barriers while serving to give good ideas and thoughts a forum to be heard and discussed.

Those who have experience leading public engagement efforts can attest to the fact that some faces become very familiar over time, while others are seen rarely, if at all. There may be a variety of reasons why some groups (racial, ethnic, long-time residents, newcomers, etc.) that may be more challenging to bring to the conversation. They may choose not to engage, they may not feel their voices are being heard, there may be language and/or technical barriers, or the opposition to their position may just be louder.

In Brockton, Mass., a Gateway City, the process begins with the leadership and their willingness to use old standards as well as new technology to hear what people think and want for a property, street, neighborhood, or the city in total. An example is a well attended community forum that is organized and sponsored by Mayor Bill Carpenter. The Summit concentrated on the goals for the city through the eyes and minds of the participants, participants who represent the diversity of Brockton. Throughout the process some of the long-time voices in the city got to hear the new opinions and ideas that were being offered, and those who are new to Brockton or the process got an opportunity to learn about what transpired before they got here or became involved. As a group, decisions were made as to what is relevant, what is doable, and what, most importantly, will have a positive impact on Brockton and its diverse population and neighborhoods. The result is a set of goals and action plans that have become part of the economic development strategy and efforts.

Oftentimes government and citizen groups are prone to avoid participation in community engagement because they fail to see the true value. Past failures and tensions may then hinder the process and ultimately the success of a project or initiative that would be good for a community. Strong leadership from all sides, development, investors, community leaders, and elected and appointed officials, is a key to the success of a community or economic development program. In Brockton the leadership promotes transparency and improved communication.

There is an effort to manage expectations as well. Whether it is something as grand and as gamechanging as an entertainment resort that has a casino as a core component, a downtown

education collaborative that will bring together the area colleges and universities into one building while introducing hundreds of students to the new downtown Brockton, or the major investment of time, creativity, and finances being invested by W.B Mason, Trinity Financial, the Commonwealth of Mass., and others for new corporate headquarters, market rate apartments, restaurants, retail and offices, the expectations are known and anticipated.

Their economic development strategies begin as small-scale initiatives that are viewed as part of the process of a greater strategy. They approach each piece of the plan, a business, a building, a street, or a neighborhood, singularly as well as within the context of the greater plan.

Participation by the diverse groups in Brockton adds an enjoyable element to the process, a process that yields valuable information. The economic development professionals and volunteers are passionate about engaging with the various communities and groups and are eager to learn from them. Each time there is an interaction with people there is an opportunity to exchange ideas. Each idea, sometimes even the so-called "crazy ideas", can become the seed of something new and exciting.

In Brockton they are witnessing a transformation of many ideas into realities; those realities are shaping one of the great community comeback stories of this century.

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