Wichita Mayor, Sedgwick County Chairman Share Visionary Plans at March Investor Meeting

By Emily Younger Barnwell

Public and private sector alignment is critical to continued economic success within the Wichita region.

The Partnership's March 26 Investor Meeting highlighted the importance of government and industry collaboration as Wichita Mayor Lily Wu and Sedgwick County Chairman Ryan Baty detailed their visionary plans.

Partnership President Jeff Fluhr welcomed a crowd of 110 industry and community leaders to a premier Wichita entertainment venue, WAVE. The dynamic setting captured the unique and growing opportunities within Wichita's core.

"We are witnessing transformational success within our region," emphasized Fluhr. "We are a global city. We continue to make strides in our economic development, talent and quality of life initiatives because of the collective efforts of the individuals in this room and our dedicated partners."

Fluhr thanked the Partnership's investors, noting those who have recently joined the mission or increased their investment.

He explained without their commitment to the community, Wichita would not be witnessing the achievements it is today.

Fluhr pointed to several recent community economic development wins including the groundbreakings of Charlotte Pipe and Foundry Company's manufacturing facility and Exploration Place's amphitheater. He also noted progress on the Wichita Biomedical Campus, Exploration Place's Destination Playscape and the 906 Vantage Project downtown.

Jeff Fluhr,
President, Greater Wichita Partnership

WAVE Co-Owner Jessie Hartke briefly described her and her husband's efforts to bring world-renowned entertainment to Wichita and its direct impact on the region's cultural vitality and talent attraction and retention efforts.

"We are expanding concepts of community through music," explained Hartke. "We are working tirelessly to ingrain our local music scene both nationally and across the globe."

This led seamlessly into the conversation with Mayor Wu and Chairman Baty, moderated by Fluhr. They began with a brief overview of their 2024 aspirations.

"The big vision is to make sure Wichita is a global city and is the best place to live, work and raise a family," stated Mayor Wu. "I want to focus on safety, the economy, restoring trust and building a community that is truly united."

Baty said he is prioritizing the modernization of government, property tax reform and homelessness.

"We live in one of the greatest cities in the world. We have to claim that!" said Chairman Baty. "Partnerships matter. It's about demonstrating leadership to our communities to see the vision. Then, we have to develop a roadmap on how we successfully get there."

The pair then described what they believe to be some of the region's opportunities and challenges.

Opportunities:

- Cultivate continued and enhanced collaboration, communication and engagement among government officials, community members, businesses and organizations to encourage and foster collective problem-solving and pride.
- Celebrate and leverage the Wichita region's robust talent pipeline, encouraging local businesses to actively participate in internship, apprenticeship and mentoring programs to engage with the workforce of the future. The Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas Youth Employment Program currently has more than 500 students searching for internship opportunities.
- Drive the modernization of local government by embracing shared services and resources to mitigate government costs, optimize operational efficiency and foster workforce stability.

Challenges:

- Strengthen the region's commitment to addressing homelessness, ensuring every individual receives the care they need and the chance to thrive in society.
- Embrace crucial discussions surrounding housing, property taxes, behavioral health, government costs and staffing challenges.
- Explore innovative and diverse revenue streams to ensure government efficiency as federal funding like the American Rescue Plan Act grants cease.

Mayor Wu and Chairman Baty shared their closing thoughts on how we, as a community, achieve the opportunities before us and overcome the challenges ahead.

“It comes down to collaboration, communication and connection,” said Wu. “We are trying to solve problems. It doesn’t matter who gets the credit. The credit should be seeing improvement in solving an issue.”

Wu, again, pointed to the region’s highly skilled workforce and called on those in the audience to get involved with the youth. She highlighted her educational experience within Wichita Public Schools and the more than 500 local students who are currently searching for internship opportunities through the Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas.

Baty explained to see positive change throughout the community, individuals must be willing to “push through the hard.” He urged community members to step up, lean into conversations and invest in Wichita and the surrounding region.

“We need you at the table. We need you shaping outcomes. We need you to go big. We need you to take risks. We need you to grow. We need you to invest in our community. We need you,” expressed Baty.

Partnership Co-Chairs Aaron Bastian and Charlie Chandler closed the meeting, reinforcing Mayor Wu and Chairman Baty's dedication to the Partnership's mission and the region's continued economic growth and sustainability.

"When we formed the Partnership, we hoped to create a safe place for public and private sector collaboration and vision. It has taken hard work and dedication and will require continued investment," Chandler shared. "Both of these leaders get it. They are focused on working with the community to see that we achieve the goals that we want in terms of economic development, talent and quality of life."

Bastian echoed Chandler's thoughts, emphasizing the importance of public and private sector alignment and encouraging individuals to invest in the community to ensure a prosperous future for generations to come.

"The answer to our region's opportunities and challenges is growth and that's what we do here at the Partnership," said Bastian. "We live in an amazing city. Building a better city cannot be done by one or two people. It takes everybody pulling in the same direction and believing we can."

To learn more about the Partnership's initiatives and how you can help accelerate economic development and prosperity in our region contact Becca Newman at becca@greaterwichitapartnership.org. We ALL build Wichita.