

# No longer the underdog: Brant Walker announces campaign for reelection

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September 25 2016 10:38 AM



**ALTON - Alton Mayor Brant Walker** announced his campaign for reelection Saturday in front of the fountains at Rock Spring Park his administration was able to repair.

Walker touted his impressive accomplishments done under his administration. His campaign flyer beams about 200 new business licenses issued, \$56 million in capital investment in the form of building permits, a decrease of unemployment from 11.6 percent to 7.4 percent and a 5.8 percent reduction in crime, among other highlights.

"In the past three and a half years, Alton has emerged from the doldrums of stagnation," Walker said in his speech. "We have witnessed immense progress, and we have built a safer, stronger and more prosperous city."

Progress was the focal point of Walker's speech. Like his opponents in this race, Walker said he will work for a better Alton. What he says sets him apart, however, is his track record. Many of those achievements were mentioned in his speech in front of a crowd of around 50 people.

"Over the past three and a half years, my administration has implemented integrated policies focused on economic development, public safety and quality of issues that have led to unprecedented growth and have allowed our great city to emerge from an economic decline that was strangling its potential," Walker said.

One of those policies has been a Business Retention program in which envoys of the city visit local businesses to help ensure they will stay open in Alton. Walker said more than 130 businesses have been helped by this initiative. He said he checks in on both what the businesses like and don't like about doing business in Alton. This model has garnered the attention of the Madison County government as well, Walker said.

"The State of Illinois applauds our efforts and Madison County now wants to meet with my administration to incorporate our model into their economic development program," he said.

When Walker took office in 2013, Alton had \$481 million in retail sales, which Walker said was the worst since 2001. In 2015, that number increased to \$514 million. Walker said he expected 2016 to be even better.

Community policing was another strong point in Walker's administration, he said.

"Immediately upon taking office, my administration began implementation of a community-based policing model in which our department became more proactive in building relationships across our neighborhoods," he said.

Part of that model has been bike patrols and a "Coffee with a Cop" program, which Walker said fostered better relations and communication between the police department and the community. Walker's administration also founded the Community Relations Commission to foster dialogue between citizens and government.

Another public safety accomplishment Walker claimed was the city's ISO rating going from a respectable four to a nearly-unbeatable two, which is the best rating in Madison County. ISO ratings help dictate insurance rates. A lower number correlates with a lower insurance rate.

Rock Spring Park has been another highlight of the Walker administration. With the help of community groups such as the Rock Spring 2020 and the Sierra Club, Rock Spring is having a rebirth in the community with a fixed fountain and a new outdoor classroom, among many other improvements.

Nearly \$1.2 million has been secured in grants to fix Alton's parks. As much as \$850,000 is going to improve the entrance of Gordon Moore Park in 2017, and \$320,000 to complete phase one of a new pedestrian and bicycle path. He said improvements were also being made at Killion, Haskell and Riverview parks.

Walker also praised the amount of activities happening at the Liberty Bank Riverfront Amphitheater, such as big name bands, a popular food truck festival and recently added outdoor movies.

Public works, such as sewer separation and street repairs have occurred across the city during Walker's administration. He also celebrated the city's ability to withstand several major floods during his short time as mayor.

"Since 2013, we have also witnessed four of the top 10 floods Alton has experienced," he said. "The most recent occurred this past December and January. During the flood, our public works department, along with the help of our citizens, was able to save downtown by erecting a 1,000 foot retainer wall to keep businesses from being flooded."

Walker joins the race against Scott Dixon, Joshua Young and Dan Rauschkolb for the April 2017 ballot.