



Brant Walker Announces Candidacy for Alton Mayor

May 15 2012 12:11 PM

Says Alton's best days lie ahead.

Surrounded by friends and family, Brant Walker formally announced his candidacy for Mayor of Alton in the April 2013 election with a press conference today in front of Strategic Search Services in Alton, Illinois.

Citing a staggering 13% unemployment rate, a crime index well above national average, and the need to redevelop the city's neighborhoods, Walker laid out a broad vision for re-establishing Alton as a regional leader and a destination.

"We simply cannot afford to continue down a path where the survival of the political class trumps the progress of our citizens and our city," said Walker. "It is time for proactive leadership based on cooperation and a shared interest in the future of our city in which every citizen has a stake."

"I haven't spent my life going along to get along in our city's political system, and I'm certainly not a career politician," continued Walker. "What I have is a record of investment in our city – a record that includes the restoration of multiple buildings, membership in organizations such as the East End Improvement Association and the Knights of Columbus, and, most importantly, work as a small business owner helping folks in Alton, and across this region, find jobs."

"Even with the challenges we face, this is still a great city with great potential; a city whose best days, I firmly believe, lie ahead," concluded Walker.

Below is a copy of Walker's full remarks.

Campaign Announcement Remarks As Delivered by Brant Walker

May 15, 2012 **• Alton, Illinois

I'd like to begin by thanking you all for being here today.

Alton's streets speak with the words of a great history – a history that, in recent years, we have failed to live up to.

Where factories once stood, we see empty lots. Where small businesses once thrived, we see vacant storefronts.

On one block, we see majestic homes that speak with the history of Lincoln, Lovejoy, and Wadlow. On the next, substandard buildings that are crumbling under the weight of stagnation.

Our crime index is well above the national average.

Our city has faced these and other challenges for a number of years. But all we seem to get from our political leaders are excuses. All we hear is the blame game – be it previous administrations, the county, the state. All the while, our population has been decreasing. Jobs – disappearing. Property values – declining.

The time has come for an end to excuses, an end to the tired old political blame game. We simply cannot afford to continue down a path where the survival of the political class trumps the progress of our citizens and our city. It is time for pro-active leadership based on cooperation and a shared interest in the future of our city in which every citizen has a stake.

My friends, this great city stands at a crossroads. It's a city that once was the economic engine of the region. A city that once was the jewel of the Riverbend. A city that, nearly 20 years ago, I chose to start my family in. That's why, today, surrounded by friends and family, I'm announcing my candidacy for Mayor in next April's election.

I was raised by a union organizer and a public school employee who instilled in me the value of hard work at a young age. I grew up just across the river, visiting Alton often as a child and falling in love with its beauty and history. After graduating from the University of Missouri – St. Louis and spending a few years traveling for work, I moved

to Alton nearly 20 years ago because I believed it would be a better place to live, work, and raise a family – a belief I still hold today. As a small business owner, husband, and the father of a young daughter in St. Mary's School, I'm as invested as anyone in the future of our city.

And that's what this campaign will be about – the future of our city. We have an important choice to make next April; a choice between maintaining the status quo that has allowed us to fall behind our neighbors, or the chance to change course and make Alton a regional leader once again.

Now, I haven't spent my life going along to get along in our city's political system, and I'm certainly not a career politician.

What I have is a record of investment in our city – a record that includes the restoration of multiple buildings, membership in organizations such as the East End Improvement Association and the Knights of Columbus, and, most importantly, work as a small business owner helping folks in Alton, and across this region, find jobs.

And Alton's first step toward recovery and growth begins with just that – jobs.

With a staggering 13 percent unemployment rate in Alton, the job of every elected official needs to be about creating jobs, and making sure that government is looking out for the interests of hardworking people instead of the interests of politicians more concerned with maintaining their own electability.

I've spent over 15 years in the employment industry, helping people find work. Just last year, from this very office, we put over 300 people to work at various companies throughout the region.

It's one thing to talk about jobs; it's another to have a record of developing the business necessary to provide opportunity to hardworking people.

While Alton was once an industrial leader, our elected officials have failed to adjust to the decline of major manufacturing within the American economy, thus allowing Alton to fall behind its neighbors. We can no longer rely on leadership that is unwilling, or unable, to adapt to the economic realities of the 21st century.

In order to create jobs and foster economic growth, we must refocus our business development strategy on small and medium-sized businesses that are invested in our city and not looking for the next incentive to move to another city or state – businesses just like the one I started right here nearly 15 years ago.

We must utilize tools such as small business incubators to help promising entrepreneurs start new businesses while also working to promote our existing businesses. We should also look toward new areas of the economy, such as the burgeoning green technology sector, for opportunities to grow.

Another area in which we aren't reaching our full potential is tourism. Alton sits in a prime location on the river, has an abundance of locally owned restaurants and shops, and has a wealth of history, yet far too many people simply pass through our city on their way to other stops along the Great River Road. Alton should not simply be a spot on the map, it should be a destination.

But, before we can develop new business, create jobs, and foster stronger tourism, we must make Alton an attractive location for potential entrepreneurs, homeowners, and visitors.

As we stand here today, you can travel around this great city and see trash and litter in the streets, weeds on our street corners, substandard buildings that are literally falling in. Too often we turn on the news or open the newspaper to see another instance of theft, assault, even murder.

These issues contribute to an inaccurate, negative image of our city for potential businesses, homeowners, and visitors while decreasing the morale of our own citizens. In order to re-establish Alton as a regional leader and a destination, we must take a proactive approach to reversing the image we've been saddled with in recent years.

We've seen a small effort to address litter and basic city clean-up, but that is merely an elementary step in the transformation of a city. We must go further by doing the heavy lifting necessary to make Alton the jewel of the Riverbend once again.

The vast majority of property owners in our city work very hard to maintain their properties, but those who don't contribute to decreased property values and eye-sores that make our city less and less attractive. For example, there are multiple properties near my home that are not only in disrepair, but actually falling in on themselves. Why are those who invest in their properties across this city being punished with lower property values because the city allows such things to happen?

Any successful city is built on the foundation of strong, safe neighborhoods. This city must take a more proactive approach to code enforcement by providing our building and zoning department with the tools necessary to ensure that those who don't play by the rules are dealt with accordingly. We must also streamline city government to ensure that the city attorney, police department, and building and zoning department are able to share information and address problems quickly and efficiently.

One of the added benefits of more strenuously enforcing our city codes is an increase in property values, which will lead to increased revenue for the city. That itself will help us more effectively deal with the budget constraints we face in these difficult economic times.

Another area of concern for our city is the crime index. Depending on what source you consult, our crime index is between 50-150% above the national average and outpaces that of neighboring cities. Frankly, that should be unacceptable to every mother, father, and citizen in this city.

I have the greatest respect for our police department. Each and every member of that department risks their life daily to keep us safe, and they are doing the best possible job they can with limited resources. But I still believe we can do better, even in the wake of the budget constraints facing our city. We must do more to support our police department to ensure that they're the best trained and best equipped department in the state.

It is important to note that during difficult economic times such as these, crime rates are often directly related to unemployment rates. Alton's high unemployment rate and high level of dilapidated housing stock directly contribute to the instances of crime in our city, and put added stress on our police department.

City government must take a more active approach to aiding our police department in building stronger relationships with our citizens in a proactive effort to root out the causes of crime before it happens. Our police department alone cannot combat crime – we must work to integrate the community into our efforts to ensure a safer, more prosperous city.

If we create jobs and redevelop our neighborhoods, I'm confident we'll also see a steep decline in the instances of crime within our city.

Now, I've laid out just some of the issues causing stagnation within our city and preventing growth, and in the weeks and months ahead, I'll be laying out specific proposals to address those issues.

As a small business owner, homeowner, husband, and father, I believe we can, and must, do better. I'm proud to be a member of this community, and I want it to be a place where my daughter, and every child in this city, can grow and thrive.

With proactive leadership focused on the future, we can make Alton a regional leader once again. If I'm blessed to be elected Mayor next April, rest assured I won't spend my days concerned about the next election. I'm prepared to do the heavy lifting necessary to get Alton moving again, regardless of the political costs.

No group, special interest, or neighborhood will take precedence over another. I'll work each day to bring every corner of this city together in a shared effort to ensure Alton's success.

Even with the challenges we face, this is still a great city with great potential; a city whose best days, I firmly believe, lie ahead.

Again, thank you all for being here today and thank you for your early support of my campaign.