



OP-ED: Establishing a self-sustaining community

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This post came from my Facebook as I was pondering Alton's natural beauty and wonderful citizens. I have been considering all sorts of ideas since last April's pivotal election. I understand some of these ideas may be hard to do, and may take time, but they were sourced from the part of my mind dedicated to Alton's future. I am a journalist here, because I love Alton and want to help in any way I can be its best.

Hey, here's some ideas to steal if you planned on running for any sort of municipal office. Given our federal government is ran by a toddler who needs a nap, and our state is being sucked dry by the Chicago Democratic Machine and conservative cutting, local governments will be more important than ever in Illinois, and probably everywhere.

I covered the elections here in Alton with a fine-tooth comb, and even got the awesome designation of being reason #3 why a certain candidate lost.



Even if you're not running, here's some ideas to work on establishing a self-sustaining community with home-rule, which will be socially and economically stable, even when everyone else isn't:

- Don't promise to lower taxes. If your tax money is currently being used as efficiently as possible toward good public projects, don't be afraid to raise taxes, but take the measure to a ballot. When it comes to raising taxes, honesty beats propaganda. Be real about the use of taxes, and let people decide if they want it. For example: Have a 1% sales tax increase on a ballot to hire a grant writer. If that person cannot make a quota of state, federal, and private/public partnerships by the end of each year, they are let go and the tax is abolished.

- Build strong neighborhoods through mutual trust, not only suspicion. A lot of candidates during the Alton election wanted to strengthen neighborhoods. It's a good goal, and essential to a community policing model. Instead of working toward a mutual goal exclusively through a neighborhood watch platform, people should be encouraged to grow their own food. Grants can be found to distribute seeds to low-income neighborhoods. Each neighbor could have a certain batch someone else may not have to encourage trade.
- Business incubators are great, but useless without some sort of learning annex. Trade schools, community colleges and universities are great, but today's savvy entrepreneurs may not want the debt accrued with those institutions. Some may not be able to afford that. An established learning annex with access to free or cheap programs and classes should be essential in any city of more than 15,000 people.
- Technology working toward transparency. Meetings should be videotaped, archived, and feature time stamps next to when important issues are discussed. Two weeks previous to those meetings, the municipality should reach out to constituents through social media as well as news outlets to properly discuss important issues up for a vote, which may affect people.
- Citizen Review Boards. Alton has done a decent job starting a community policing initiative (despite being 90 days behind on its goals). Such a board should feature a certain amount of permanent members, but also source people from the community for each hearing. Those people could register to be selected and then be selected at random like jury duty for which they previously volunteered.
- Edible trees and berries at the park. These could be attained through several grants. Trees such as walnut, persimmon and paw-paw are native as well. Such things could encourage pollinators and birds as well as curb hunger.
- Everyone's history should be encouraged and celebrated. That's self-explanatory. It isn't hard. There are public libraries, abandoned buildings, and small museums everywhere. Any place with more than 1,000 people should have a designation of some sort.
- Renewable Energy. It's getting cheaper and will save us money down the road. Hand in hand with this is environmental stewardship. A clean community is an attractive community. People bring new ideas with them. New ideas are new businesses and jobs.
- Volunteer Corps. There are so many organizations across the community who work towards some sort of higher purpose. What if they were consolidated and utilized by the city to assist with things such as agriculture, art, cleaning, fundraising, and

in-general attractions to the city.

- Arts + Culture = Revenue. Don't be afraid to paint murals, build statues, encourage festivals and local music. People should associate your city with a brand. Encourage that brand through encouraging culture. Be inclusive. Be diverse. Be unique.

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