Fire Cracker Talks: Part I

Launching an Action-Oriented Sustainable Town/Gown Board
with Brian Rose, VPSA, Binghamton University

Getting the Green Light
with Danny Pugh, VPSA, Texas A&M University
Launching an action-oriented, sustainable Town Gown Advisory Board

Brian T. Rose
Vice President for Student Affairs
Binghamton University
Context: University and Community

University Overview

- 18,000 students (14,000 undergrad)
- R1 — 1 of 4 SUNY university centers (Albany, Buffalo, Stony Brook)
- 6 schools and colleges
  - Harpur College of Arts and Sciences
  - Watson School of Engineering
  - College of Community and Public Affairs
  - Decker School of Nursing and Health Sciences
  - School of Management
  - School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
- Selective (>40,000 undergraduate applications per year — average SAT >1300)
- 3 Greater Binghamton locations
  - 900 acre main campus
  - downtown center
  - health sciences campus
Context: Community Overview

- Population: 245,000 *in decline*
- Poverty rate: 16% *(33% in city of Binghamton)*
- Median income: $50,673
- Median property value: $113,100
- High school degree: 85%
- Baccalaureate degree: 23.5%
- Poor community health statistics
- Broome County ranks 53 of 62 New York counties in Health Index
Map courtesy: John W. Frazier, distinguished SUNY service professor, director of the research team for the Monitoring Johnson City Revitalization project; Binghamton University Geography Department — undergraduate Applied Urban Research course
Controversy over University community investments

Kojo Senoo/contributing photographer — Pipe Dream student newspaper
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Binghamton University Town Gown Advisory Board

Board composition
• Undergraduate and graduate students
• Faculty and staff
• Community members
• Community organizations
• Local businesses
• City government

Full board of ~36 members meets 3 times a year

Structure
• Executive committee
• Steering committee
• Subcommittees
  1. Student Housing
  2. Safety
  3. Promoting and Cultivating Positive Community Engagement
  4. Transportation and Parking
  5. Underage/Dangerous Drinking

Funding
Unspecified budget – in 2 years of operations, allocated ~$100,000 a year
1. Foster improved communication and collaboration among city of Binghamton, students/faculty/staff and University

2. Targeted at concerns related to student, faculty and staff intersections with the community through topically defined subcommittees

3. Proposal/award oriented with annual cycle of defining primary concerns and developing funding proposals for specific responses

4. Board is supported by University, community and municipal expertise when developing proposals (e.g., transit agency and county executive when addressing transportation proposals)

5. Does NOT replace or substitute for municipal or institutional governance or purport to act as a governance body
Meeting Management and Board Member Stewardship

Tightly managed agenda:

- Public interest presentation/examples of successful collaborations beyond scope of TGAB (e.g., Incubator annual update)
- Co-chairs report (updates since previous meeting)
- Open board discussion
- Subcommittee break out and report
- Public comment (not Q and A)

Board members invited to community networking events, socials and project-related events (ground-breakings etc.)

Dedicated website to update members and community (attentive to information transparency)
Successful Project Proposals

- North Side transportation needs assessment
- Enhanced community center staffing and expanded hours
- Student housing code enforcement interns at City Code Enforcement
- Safety consultant to evaluate useful interventions
- Underage drinking study — supplemented existing state grant
- Late night weekend transit center
- Oral history project
- Bus stop improvement program
- LUMA Festival support
- ID scanner grants
- Overdose response training

NOTE: became more competitive in Y2 and we identified some alternative funding sources to supplement activity of board
Where is the “Magic”?

• Project oriented — not a debating society/forum for generalized complaints

• Involvement and attentiveness of senior University and municipal leaders at executive committee level
  • Connected to process and decisions
  • Not operational — so not a target at meetings of board

• Appointment process allows shared governance to nominate appointees — not “hand-picked” but still some ability to shape board

• Discipline in agenda management and co-chairs who are effective in public settings

• Board members supported with expertise from appropriate community, municipal and University resources in project development via subcommittee meetings (do the real work in small, controlled settings)

• Create a sense of importance for board members whenever easy opportunities present