

Speech to Olathe Economic Development Council

September 11, 2000
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I'm very happy to be working in Olathe! Here the words logical, reasonable and friendly are still part of everyday life at City Hall and amongst the staff.

Anyone who has worked on real estate projects in some of the other municipalities in the Kansas City area and around the country knows that the motto of the planning staff members in most communities is "Just say NO"... and they are not talking about drugs.

On their office doors are two large letters "N" "O".

They even wear tattoos that say NO.

Of course there are the tricky few these days that say YES to your plans, stamp them approved and on the final inspection, on the very last day when the company's moving trucks are poised to back into the loading docks to unload furniture, the planner or inspector, with a look on his or her face that says :

"You didn't Really think I Meant YES when I said Yes did you?"

and presents you with a list as long as your arm of changes that need to be made that refer to a building code from an as yet undiscovered planet.

That's not the way it is in Olathe, I'm happy to say. The folks at the City from the Staff to the public officials are smart, competent and interested in doing what is right.

Moreover, they are responsive to inquiries. The motto of Olathe could justifiably be "We return phone calls".

In recent years I've had the good fortune to become acquainted with a real estate developer and investor, originally from England but living in California.

He's 88 now. He told me he's looking for some properties to buy with long term leases.

So I sent him some info on a very nice property, with a 10 year lease with a credit tenant. "NO" he said, "The lease is too short!"

A month or two later I sent him some info on a high quality property with a 15 year lease with an big international company. "NO" he said, "I want a property with at least a 20 year lease, preferably 25 or 30. Have you seen any 99 year leases recently?"

This man is 88! I might add that he still plays a pretty rigorous game of ping pong.

His implicit message though is quite profound: we should take a long term approach to our work. The real successes of our efforts aren't best judged by how things work out over the next couple of years, but how will it effect the community for many years to come.

I learned this lesson from my father, Barney Karbank, who started Karbank & Co. 50 years ago. He likes to mention that he still owns the first building he built in 1952 and nearly all the other buildings he built thereafter. I kid him by saying that I have to live with his mistakes. But I would be very lucky to make as few mistakes as he has!

Our primary emphasis is on the long term and our goal is to build quality, functional buildings that will stand the test of time for generations of users. This philosophy underlies all of our projects and, of course, the I35/119th St. Technology Park at the NW corner of 119th & Renner Blvd. in Olathe.

The I35/119th St Technology Park, when completed, will consist of 6 buildings totaling approx 600,000 sq.ft. Some of the features that make the buildings unique to the area: large floor plates, heavy parking ratios, enormous flexibility of potential uses and the more prosaic things like large scale sundials, fountains, Zen gardens and bamboo groves, which features are just now beginning to take shape.

Two buildings have already been completed: the 65,000 sq.ft. Intertec Publishing and American Freightways office and data center building and the 61,000 sq.ft., Sokkia office and tech building. We are nearing completion of a third building, 150,000 sq.ft. in size, and we are putting the finishing touches on 90,000 sq.ft. of office space for Farmers Insurance. We are in negotiations with a prospective tenant for the remaining 60,000 sq.ft. in that building. The 73,000 fourth building in the Tech Park is under construction and we've submitted an application to Olathe for a permit for the fifth building. We'll start construction on the last building in the Tech Park, a three story, 100,000 sq.ft. office bldg on NW corner of 119th & Renner Blvd. within the next few years.

In the last one and a half years the Tech Park has brought more than 1,000 new high quality jobs to the Olathe. We expect nearly 4,000 people to work in the Park when it's fully completed. All four of the companies that have chosen to locate in the Tech Park are national or international companies and all four are new to Olathe.

As most of you know the City is considering a TIF redevelopment project on the other 3 corners at 119th & Renner. We think the success of our Tech Park opened some eyes as to the real potential of the area. 119th & Renner Boulevard is the gateway to Olathe. The area can redefine what Olathe has to offer and how it is perceived in the Kansas City Metro area and around country. We've submitted a proposal to the City that we think addresses what, in real estate parlance, is the highest and best use of the TIF areas. While this isn't the time to talk about the specifics of our proposal, it is worth considering the message of the 88 year old investor: How this area develops will have a long lasting impact on the City. What is built will be our legacy to those around in the middle of the next century and perhaps much longer.

One legacy of a different kind in which our company is involved in Olathe is a rather unique music education program called MusicConnection. Created and run by The Friends of Chamber Music, the program brings world-renowned musicians to multiple on-site sessions at local high schools, colleges and even companies including Hallmark and DST. As Board

President of the Friends of Chamber Music, I've seen many of these performances and demonstrations, including some in the Olathe school district, which has been a "partner audience" group in the program for the past four years. As Karbank & Company is helping to underwrite the cost of the MusicConnect program this year in the Olathe schools, it's especially pleasing to us that that the musicians nearly always comment that the Olathe students are the most attentive and interested school audience for which they perform. It's clear that many things right are happening in the Olathe schools.

Those of us at Karbank & Company look forward to many more years of working in Olathe. Hopefully the results of our efforts will be to the long-term benefit to the community.