

Quality of life ...Starts with a Good Job!

By DeWayne Granacki

For a decade, public policymakers have talked about how to make Washington more competitive. We've had studies and blue-ribbon commissions; summits and roundtables; and recommendations, bills and initiatives. So why do we have the same uncompetitive tax policies, unnecessary regulation, and inadequate infrastructure blocking economic prosperity? Perhaps, because public officials organize their agendas around what constituents don't like, rather than what needs to be fixed.



The Washington Association of Realtors has a new approach in the Quality of Life Project. It brings people together based on what they want, not by arguing about what they don't want. It starts with the simple premise that quality of life starts with a good job.

Realtors are using the Quality of Life Project to provide a strong voice for economic development in our communities. We want to shape the future of our communities and the health of our local and state economies by starting at the ground level—community discussions about how to accommodate growth. A healthy economy is key to everything people value in their lives: a good job, a nice place to live, quality public schools, varied entertainment options, and more.

We must encourage commercial development, consolidate and coordinate business regulations and permitting, and provide the infrastructure and community amenities everyone wants to enjoy the benefits of a vital economy and provide a good place to live and raise a family.

Vibrant communities are a key factor in attracting and holding on to business. The Quality of Life Project took us one step toward economic vitality during the last legislative session when Realtors received overwhelming, bipartisan support for adding an economic development component to the Growth Management Act.

This legislation recognizes that when the economy isn't thriving, neither is anyone else. It says that as we "manage growth," we also must grow our economy. It directs communities to think about improving their local economy, the capacity of local infrastructure, and how to grow existing business, as well as how to bring new business to the community. In short, it requires all corners of Washington to have a business plan designed to keep their local economies healthy.

The Quality of Life Project identified common ground that can help address two aspects of competitiveness: easing congestion on the region's freeways and improving the availability of homes. Washington residents across the state want more housing opportunities closer to their jobs. It's good economic policy, and it's a tonic for traffic congestion and frustrating commutes.

We know that more people are coming to our state. Data shows housing opportunities are already limited in many communities.

We also know that quality of life means having a roof over your head. We must have strategies to ensure enough buildable land, and roads, water and sewer are available to meet the diverse economic needs of our growing communities.

But it's not just about providing homes for ourselves, our children and new residents. Washington is less attractive to employers when traffic continues to worsen and people must search for affordable homes further away from where they work,

shop and play. When hardworking middle-wage earners have to spend more time commuting, it costs business millions in lost productivity. Communities all over the state are working hard to boost the economy by attracting new high-paying industry. But unless employees can find affordable homes near their workplace, we won't have a healthy economy and a good quality of life.

Returning to economic prosperity means we must find common ground on complex issues including transportation, education, regulation and housing. Each plays a critical role in establishing the quality of life that makes our state and our communities good places to live, work, play and do business. We must think ahead to create a vision of prosperity where economic growth and vitality are a permanent part of our future. The Quality of Life Project recognizes that growth-management plans must address how we will grow and prosper.

It will take courage, creativity and leadership to create the communities we want and the economic growth we need. Communities must create ways to retain and build businesses, while recruiting new industry and new opportunities. We must design local strategies to pump new life into our economy. We need business leaders to join The Quality of Life Project and be advocates for economic development in their communities. We'll have to work together to ensure economic vitality and the improved quality of life we all want and deserve. ■

Editor's note: DeWayne Granacki of Olympia is the president of the Washington Association of Realtors.





Quality OF Life...

...starts with a good job

A healthy economy is necessary for the things people value in their lives: a good job, a nice place to live, quality schools, safe neighborhoods and more. And, vibrant communities are key to attracting and retaining business.

Returning to economic prosperity means finding common ground on complex issues including transportation, education, regulation, and housing.

- *We need to encourage commercial and residential development.*
- *We must streamline business regulation and permitting.*
- *We should seek strategies to ensure enough buildable land is available for jobs and homes.*
- *We need to make sure that roads, water and sewer are available to meet the diverse economic needs of our growing communities.*

Quality of Life means a vibrant economy with good paying jobs. It means giving every family the chance to own a home in a safe neighborhood with good schools, parks and recreational opportunities -- and it means giving businesses the opportunity to grow and prosper.

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