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# Dallas Business Journal

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## Traits for a new mayor

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With the Dallas mayoral election coming up in May, the Dallas Business Journal recently sat down with eight local entrepreneurs to discuss the city's economic future and their expectations for the next mayor.

Crime and quality of the public schools topped the list of concerns. Positive, ethical leadership and business vision are the traits our roundtable participants want most from their mayor.

The entrepreneurs, all local members of international business association EO, are young, successful business operators. While they represent only a niche of the voting public, they and others like them will be creating new jobs, wealth and innovation in this town for years to come. They are worth listening to.

The participants were: Deborah Driskill, CDG & Associates; Tim Storer, New Media Gateway; Kevin Winters, OffSiteCIO; Chuck Butler, Palomino Capital LP; William Rowe II, Pearson Partners International Inc.; J. Justin Whitman, Tejas Textured Stone; J. Carter Tolleson, Tolleson Wealth Management; and Rob Enright, The Ward Group Media Stewards.

These entrepreneurs didn't agree on everything, certainly, but there was consensus on numerous areas:

They see public safety as a core ingredient of any healthy economy, and all expressed serious concern over the direction Dallas is headed in that regard. They blame crime for the decline of once-vibrant business areas such as Deep Ellum and the West End, and they fear similar declines eventually could hit even hot spots such as Victory and the Arts District, unless something is done.

There were differences of opinion about how to improve things -- one participant suggested that the city should take money it was going to spend on the arches of one Trinity River bridge and instead use it to double the size of the police force. All saw opportunity for the next mayor to spend time with police officers and improve department morale, and to push crime-prevention to the forefront of public discourse, as Rudy Giuliani once did in New York.

These entrepreneurs also see poor public schools and ongoing Dallas Independent School District scandals as the main reason why many companies and residents choose, say, Collin County, over Dallas proper. They know that the mayor has little authority to clean house, but they nonetheless expect the next mayor to bring attention to it and offer solutions. One idea cited: The mayor should inspire the business community to get more directly involved with schools in their neighborhoods.

The panel also clearly wants a mayor with business chops. Setbacks such as losing the Dallas Cowboys stadium competition, the loss of the Cotton Bowl game and the city's diminished standing as a convention





market, to name a few things, grated on this group. They blamed Mayor Laura Miller as well as the Dallas City Council, which one called "The Jerry Springer Show."

Some positive developments, such as Victory, the new Hunt tower, etc., happened despite city leadership, not because of it, in the opinion of many in the group.

Said one: "There is an adversarial relationship between City Hall and the business community." The panelists felt Dallas was especially indifferent to small business. "Small business owners can't get Dallas' ear," said one.

The entrepreneurs agreed that the next mayor of Dallas will have to be "extraordinary" to achieve even modest gains, thanks to the city's weak-mayor charter. He or she will have to be charismatic, visionary and diplomatic to get council to work together.

Last week, a poll of Dallas Business Journal readers narrowly picked former councilmember and local banker Max Wells as the winner. This particular panel of entrepreneurs, however, went a different way in a secret ballot at the end of our session. Their votes: Tom Leppert, former CEO of Turner Construction - 5; Sam Coats, former airline executive, 2. One was undecided.

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