

## Ed Walker's Downtown Vision

Developer Ed Walker has been the point man for what has become a downtown living renaissance in Roanoke. His multiple historic building renovations (the Cotton Mill, the Hancock, the Patrick Henry Hotel, the Home-town Bank building) have created a whole new demographically mixed community of center-city residents. That is beginning to result in new services emerging from other property transformations – rehabs of other historic properties and all that entails.

He has gone beyond simply making buildings available for people: He is partially responsible for the dynamic Music Lab at the Jefferson Center, for Kirk Avenue Music Hall, and for what has become a clinic in his "interesting community" of businesses in his bank of offices on Kirk Ave. His idea for the Patrick Henry Hotel is to combine downtown living with that same dynamic business presence in a place "where the lights are always on."

Walker has a plan and an overall vision and here is his explanation of some of it:

"Whether asking about today or 25 years in the future, what's critically important for Roanoke in general is what's critically important for downtown specifically.

"In 25 years I would hope to see greater numbers of dynamic people living, working, and thriving in a comprehensively healthy downtown – interesting people pursuing interesting opportunities of every kind in education, commerce, good government, and arts and culture. Roanoke must also seek opportunities to engage with the 'outside' world by getting to know itself better and by taking some of Roanoke's greatest assets afield and inviting leaders from other cities and countries here for mutually beneficial purposes.

**Education:** "There is no clearer path to greatness for downtown Roanoke than through extraordinary education opportunities. Education at every level and for every age must be the defining characteristic of the community, and it should be focused throughout our urban core.

"We need award-winning public education for our children, an intellectually engaged and curious adult population, and extraordinary cooperation and engagement with all of the area's higher education institutions.

"In 25 years I hope the Jefferson College of Health Sciences and the Virginia Tech/Carilion Medical School students and faculty will be a major and vital presence and that we will successfully engage as many of our regional educational powerhouses as possible. Because we weren't blessed with the alchemy of a four-year higher education presence in Roanoke City, through perseverance and creativity we will have to create cir-



Walker: "No clearer path to greatness than education."

cumstances by which we can create as many of those benefits as possible.

**Commerce and Money:** "We must have conditions and levels of sophistication that allow entrepreneur and business managers every advantage to make as much money as their ability can create. For those who do not choose the accumulation of money for its own end, we must be a community that defines itself by impressive financial and personal finance knowledge. Simply put, whether you are chasing money or not, we must become a wealthier and more financially savvy community.

**Arts and Culture:** "This is an area in which Roanoke's arts and culture mavericks have made amazing progress. Compared to even two or three years ago, Roanoke is a much more interesting and dynamic place to live, and this has an enormous impact on quality of life and economic development. Our arts and culture opportunities are extraordinary. We must continue progress in these areas. Only the strong and smart operations will survive, and we may see fewer but stronger cultural institutions.

**Good Government:** "If Roanoke doesn't have deeply talented, energetic, open-minded, and honest government – both at the professional and political levels – we are doomed. To overcome great obstacles, we must have great government, smart candidates and smart professional management.

**Roanoke and the World:** "Downtown Roanoke will be the focus as Roanoke exports itself and its ideas to major places around the world where cultural, commercial, or educational benefits exist to strengthen this city and for us to help other places and people thrive as well." –Dan Smith

