

Brewer's win lauded by downtown leaders

BY CHRIS MOON

Carl Brewer's election this week as Wichita's next mayor was met with broad approval from downtown business leaders.

They say revitalization efforts in the city's business core will have a smoother road to travel under the leadership of the two-term city councilman.



Bastian

"I don't know that Mayor (Carlos) Mayans was not a supporter of downtown. He just wasn't maybe quite as enthusiastic as Carl Brewer will be," says Clay Bastian, president of Fidelity Bank.

Brewer won Tuesday's election in a landslide — 61 percent to 37 percent.

He will be sworn in next week.

The two candidates differed on a range of issues in downtown Wichita, from creating a large incentive district for much of downtown to the future of the WaterWalk development. They even split over whether the city should install angled parking along East Douglas.

Many downtown leaders sided with Brewer on those issues. And with Brewer's election, at least two proposals are much closer to becoming a reality.

At least four council members supported angled parking before the election, with Mayans the only vocal critic. Brewer as mayor will have the bully pulpit to push it through.

And Mayans was one of just several council members critical of creating a tax-increment financing district for the southern half of downtown to pay for a parking garage. Brewer was the chief supporter and, again, now has the ability to steer the council in that direction.

"I think it was a good election for downtown," says Wichita City Councilwoman Sharon Fearey. "The council as a whole is going to have an easier time with projects we need to be involved in."



Johnson

Wichita architect Joe Johnson, board chairman for the Wichita Downtown Development Corp., says Brewer will look more closely at ways to work with business leaders downtown.

"It's really ready to bloom. I think Carl can help make that happen," says Johnson, who is managing principal of Schaefer, Johnson,

Carl Brewer

Title: Wichita mayor-elect.

Age: 50.

Political: Wichita City Council, 2001 to present.

Professional: Operations and forecasting manager for Spirit AeroSystems.

Views on downtown Wichita: Favors angled parking on East Douglas; would like to establish a tax-increment financing district downtown to pay for a parking garage; wants to spur development at WaterWalk.

Cox, Frey & Associates PA. "Carl thinks for himself. But he listens."

LOSING BASS PRO

Mayans' fallout with downtown leaders never was more acute than following his decisions regarding the WaterWalk development. The mayor sought to adjust the city's contribution to the public-private development shortly after becoming mayor in 2003.

After that, Bass Pro Shops backed out of its plans to come to the development. Many business leaders blamed Mayans. So did some on the council.



Fearey

"He's the main reason we didn't get Bass Pro Shops," Fearey says. "I think that disappointed a lot of people."

Mayans shrugged off the criticism. He says he's always been out to ensure tax dollars aren't wasted.

"It's not whether something is good or bad. It is whether it is financially feasible," Mayans says. "I have always asked the tough questions."

Brewer says he wants to assign a project manager to WaterWalk to help it move along faster.

WaterWalk developer David Burk says the development already has good communication with the city but still sees Brewer's election as a positive one for downtown.

"It's going to be easier to keep things headed in the right direction," Burk says.

Real Development's Michael Elzufon, who is seeking TIF support for the Exchange Place project, says the council didn't work together under Mayans.

"Any sane business person, looking at this proposal, would find it to be economically responsible," he says.