

**By Tom Jacobson, Attorney, on behalf of Advantage Alexandria**

Over the last several weeks, you may have heard about the community stewardship initiative called Advantage Alexandria. In a previous commentary, Jason Murray noted that stewardship means the careful and responsible management of something entrusted in our care. Now, more than ever, we all need to recognize that we have been entrusted with the care and management of our communities. A key to doing this well is collaboration.

Collaboration could be defined as merely working together, but truly successful collaboration involves much more than that. It requires us to work effectively with diverse groups, to be flexible, to compromise, and to assume shared responsibility for the outcome.

The stakes are too high if we do not collaborate. Individual agendas overshadow the common good. As a consequence, projects stall over selfish debates, or they are never completed. If they are finished, the final product pales in comparison to what it could have been had the participants considered the others' perspectives, compromised, then shared a successful outcome.

A friend shared an example of how well collaboration works. Her daughter had worked feverishly on a marketing project for her employer, and she had a great vision for what she thought the final product should be. She and her teammates exchanged their ideas, and together they finished the project. The final product was far from what she had envisioned, but it was not exactly what anyone else expected, either. Rather than be offended that "her" idea was not ultimately adopted, she realized that the result was actually better than anyone had predicted. It was better because of the synergy the group developed through collaboration.

Communities are no different. They are stronger when people collaborate. Likewise, our region will be strengthened when local communities consider their neighbors' perspectives, share common goals, compromise, then work together toward a brighter future.

In his recent commentary Kevin Kopischke emphasized that although Alexandria may be the hub of the region's economic wheel, the wheel will not work without the supporting spokes of surrounding communities. Our neighbors have recognized this and have enjoyed great success by initiating stewardship programs such as Bemidji Leads, Progress Park Rapids, and Stevens (County) Forward. It is time that we, too, collaborate to develop a shared vision for our region.

To further this effort, Advantage Alexandria initiated a Community Perception Survey to give you the opportunity to share your thoughts on educational, environmental, economic, and other resources in our region. Thanks to the hundreds of you who have already completed that survey, we are well on the way to understanding the strengths, challenges and opportunities you see. More importantly, you have shared your vision for the future of our region.

If you want to share your vision, please take the survey at [www.advantagealexandria.com](http://www.advantagealexandria.com), and please consider joining the Advantage Alexandria community stewardship initiative by calling the Alexandria Area Economic Development Commission at 320-763-4545. Together, we can unite our region for a vibrant future!