



From the Mayor's Desk Use It or Lose It

We've all heard the phrase, "Use it or lose it," but what does it really mean? Before we get into that, let me reaffirm what we already know, Wabash is a great city. One I'm proud to call home. We have a strong foundation, a proud history, stellar leaders, and people who care deeply about our city. Like many other cities in the USA, we are not without our challenges.

The culture has changed. As I mentioned before, we are in a microwave era where everything can be done with a touch of a finger. From ordering groceries, clothing, and shopping for a new car, it can all be done online if you choose to shop that way. However, what does this do to our local small businesses? Look around, do you notice anything differently?

Our beautiful downtown is going through a decline in small shops. A stroll through downtown Wabash, the heart of Wabash, is a good example of what happens when we stop supporting local small businesses. As a city we can invest in infrastructure, beautification, parking, sponsor events, and policy that supports small businesses. And we do. But local government alone cannot keep storefronts full.

There is no blame to assign. It's a simple fact, it's easier to shop online 24/7 from the comfort of your home rather than gathering up the crew and going to stores.

A strong downtown is built through partnerships, with business owners who take risks, residents who choose to support local, visitors who explore and experience, organizations that collaborate, and leaders who recognize and take action. When a small local business closes its doors, it leaves more than an empty storefront, it leaves questions, concerns, and a sense of loss that many of us feel personally.

Unlike big box stores or online shops, small local businesses operate on small margins whether customers walk through the door or not. The business financials can be and are challenging. Think about, rent, utilities, POS systems, packaging, inventory, insurance, staffing, advertising expenses, sponsorships, etc. The list of financial responsibilities is long and start before the first sale of the day. Our downtown business owners are not large corporations, they are locally owned shops, restaurants, or service providers owned by the very people who live in our community. They raise families in Wabash and care deeply for our city.

A decline in sales resulting in a business closing does not happen overnight, or with a slow sales week. It's the result of months of declining sales, rising costs, and less foot traffic. The owners of our small business community do not give up easily, many try a variety of things like extending hours, new inventory, promotions, or collaborations.

Supporting a local business does not always mean spending money, although that's nice too. It can be as simple as choosing a small business whenever possible. Writing a Google review, sharing posts about a small business, encouraging friends and family to shop local.

A vibrant downtown doesn't happen by accident. It's sustained by consistent support from the community it serves. When one piece weakens, the entire system feels it.

To say, "use it or lose it," can and does sound harsh and a bit oversimplified. But from a small business perspective, it is a harsh reality.

Please don't take this post as one of assigning blame. It's about understanding the challenges facing downtown businesses. It's understanding reality and working together to figure out a solution. If we want a downtown filled with unique shops, welcoming restaurants, and local character, we all have a role to play in keeping it alive. Let's support the places and the people that make Wabash the great community that it is.

This too shall pass.

Respectfully,

Mayor Scott Long