



Real Points

Daily Reports on Commercial Real Estate

Mike Berry: Get Off the Sidelines and Get in the Game

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Mike Berry

During the past year, many of my RealPoints posts have focused on [infrastructure](#), [air quality](#), and [water](#) issues. This is because I believe the public sector's success in resolving these issues will drive the commercial real estate industry's ability (and the ability of business in general) to be successful in North Texas in the years ahead.

To their credit, our state leaders have worked hard to ensure that Texas has a tax code that provides a favorable environment for business, but that will only get us so far. Our region's ongoing drought, traffic congestion, air quality, and education/workforce development issues will begin to take a toll on our industry's ability to continue recruiting top-tier companies to Texas. And, if our elected officials continue to be motivated by partisan politics and the threat of being voted out of office for making tough decisions, it is likely that the can will be kicked down the road one too many times (until a crisis is irreversible).

Historically speaking, the commercial real estate industry has been admired for its business innovation and ability to provide leadership in the community. Many of our industry's visionary leaders—people like Trammell Crow, Ben Carpenter, John Stemmons and Bob Folsom—understood the symbiotic relationship between the public and private sectors, and they played an important role in bridging the two for the betterment of our North Texas region. Today, we have an opportunity to carry their example forward and provide leadership on issues crucial to the viability of our industry.

I am always asked by others, "How can I get involved?" To that question, I typically respond that it is best to get involved where you have a specific interest and where your expertise lies. For me,

AllianceTexas has a specific interest in infrastructure development. We saw a need for advocacy along Interstate 35-W and worked as a company, in tandem with the regional business community and elected leaders, to form the 35W Coalition. To date, the organization has played a large role in bringing statewide and federal attention to the congestion along the roadway. And, in just the past four years, we've witnessed TxDOT move expansion of the highway to the very top of its list of critical projects, where it is now on track to be four lanes in each direction (from downtown Fort Worth to Highway 287) by 2017.

Within the 35W Coalition, I would point to two individuals from the commercial real estate industry who have been tireless advocates for the cause: Frank Bliss with Cooper & Stebbins and Hillwood's own Russell Laughlin. In fact, Russell has been a leading voice on transportation issues for more than two decades and has played an integral role in bringing Tarrant County's highway congestion problems to the attention of the Texas Legislature. We are very proud of Russell's efforts, and so are the members of the Texas Transportation Commission. In 2007, Russell received the Road Hand Award from TxDOT, which is the department's highest honor for recognizing individuals who have dedicated themselves toward enhancing the transportation system in Texas.

As 2012 kicks into gear, many have made all sorts of New Year's resolutions of a personal nature. This year, I challenge you to make a New Year's resolution of a professional nature. We will have a huge election in 2012, and the results will have a tremendous impact on our industry. This presents a great opportunity for our industry to weigh in heavily on issues that are important to us.

First, we must speak up—and speak loudly—about the problems facing our industry, and not watch the action from the sidelines. Second, we must “roll up our sleeves” and personally get involved, whether it be at City Hall, Austin, or all the way in Washington, D.C. It's not enough to make noise about the problems; we must leverage our private-sector innovation and expertise to help solve them. The burden is on us to write the plan, not the critique. And, by taking this leadership role, we can spark change, rather than suffer from the effects of changes we weren't at the table to prevent.

Serving as president of [Hillwood Properties](#), Mike Berry leads development efforts the 17,000-acre AllianceTexas development north of Fort Worth. Contact him at mike.berry@hillwood.com.

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