

BRANCH FORUM QUESTION: Mike Bomgardner

“how well does the city perform in welcoming and supporting different segments of our population?”  
It is a huge struggle. The challenges as I see them are:

- 1) **History:** It is no secret that our city took a divisive stand on illegal immigration. : Farmers Branch was all over the media both locally and nationally during this period. While the rental ordinance targeted mostly Spanish speaking citizens that were here illegally, the unintended consequence is that it also put a target on roughly 1/3 of our cities residents (Spanish speaking US citizen). This action has built a wall of distrust between large segments of the city’s population that must be torn down to become one community again.
- 2) **Perception:** The perception of many people outside Farmers Branch is that there is still an ongoing battle and minorities of any kind are not welcome. Another unintended consequence is that this perception also creates a barrier for the 25-45 year old, college educated generation who has grown up with an inclusive point of view and embraces the benefits of diversity. Farmers Branch needs the economic developmental benefits (restaurants, retail, future leadership) this younger demographic group can attract. They are also the social glue needed to become a great city.
- 3) **Reality:** Most of the citizens I talk to that had a position on either side of the immigration issue regret that it ever happened and want to move on. Another reality is that great cities embrace their diversity.
- 4) **The Real Problem:**
  - A) **Leadership:** Ultimately everything comes down to leadership. People follow their leaders. Leaders set the tone of discussion, contribute to the vision for the city, and prioritize the agenda to be executed. Looking forward is there any benefit in pursuing an agenda similar to the past? It is time for new leaders, divorced from the past, who can change our tone, lead by their actions and find ways to work together. It is also time to embrace our diversity. As a Council member, I will be that kind of leader.
- 5) **The Solutions:**
  - A) We need to review and adjust our city’s vision and priorities to reunite our community.
  - B) Once our vision is set we need to guard it fiercely and avoid spending our time and resources on issues that do not support or enhance the vision.
  - C) We need to have a plan to intentionally communicate, through our actions and words, that the NEW FARMERS BRANCH has an “Open Door” and is a great place to live and raise families for all law abiding citizens of every race, gender, orientation, religion, ..... We need to “REBRAND” Farmers Branch with an inviting, inclusive, 21<sup>st</sup> century message that sets a foundation for the coming decades.