

Government just moved too slowly for Paetec to build at Midtown

All this back-and-forth on Paetec and Midtown—how did this happen, whose fault is it, what's to become of the project?

It seems everyone has an opinion, and many of those are negative, pointing blaming fingers at city officials and Paetec's CEO and anticipating the worst from Paetec buyer Windstream Corp, an Arkansas telecom. Folks, I suggest we all take a deep breath and a step back, think this through and focus on where we go from here.

Much of the criticism has focused on Paetec "selling out" and reneging on its commitment to the community. Don't get me wrong. I was as disappointed and frustrated as the next person when word came down that Windstream was acquiring Paetec. And yes, I was surprised, which by law we all needed to be. Since Paetec is a public company, its management would have been in violation of federal law if any advance notice had been given to anyone.

But we also have to be realistic. Paetec is in business to make money and to uphold its fiscal responsibility to its shareholders. Anyone following the telecom industry has seen that these companies—including Paetec—have been growing by frequent acquisition. Because of that, it's common in that industry (and others) to have signed non-disclosure agreements with other companies, so possible acquisitions can be investigated.

Who is the real culprit here? Time. As the adage goes, time is money. So business moves fast.

It was almost four years ago, at a press conference in the already nearly empty Midtown Plaza, that then-Gov. Eliot



ON BUSINESS

Sandra Parker

Spitzer and Arunas Chesonis announced that Paetec would move its world headquarters to downtown Rochester. It was viewed by many as a triumph for the city, an ambitious solution to the longtime problem of a crumbling mall and a deteriorating downtown. And it was all that. Plans began to come forward for a beautiful building, reconstructed downtown streets with presence for retail and more green space for walkers and bikers.

But government doesn't move as fast as business. In fact, it moves very, very slowly. And it got in the way of this project.

It simply took too long for the plans to be approved, too long for the various state agencies to sign off on the work. It took too long for the state to deliver the pledged money, too long to make the economic development machine work. Perhaps if the process had gone even a little faster, Windstream would be acquiring a beautiful building downtown and we wouldn't be so worried about what's to become of the corner of Main and Clinton.

So where do we go from here? We should probably thank Paetec for all the jobs it created in this community and for building a company that someone else thought enough of to acquire. We should

be making aggressive plans to woo Windstream, which reportedly has a good track record of community involvement in places where it does business.

And we need to heed the lessons. What happened here perfectly illustrates why we need the regional economic development councils planned by Gov. Andrew Cuomo. As outlined, when a project comes to a regional council, the people who can make it happen will all be there in one place—the regional leaders, the economic development professionals and the state agencies. We will know what needs to be done and who needs to do it. We will get past these cumbersome processes and needless barriers that hamper private-sector job growth, get these projects through the regulatory steps more quickly and get things rolling.

You'll be hearing a lot more about these councils in the coming weeks, as the Fin-

ger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council—which I am privileged to be part of—rolls out its plans to engage the public in setting our agenda. Stay tuned, because if this is all going to work, we need the public—that means you—to help us champion our economic development vision in Albany.

I'm looking forward to the challenge. That's because I know that if we keep going the way we have been, if we keep putting so many obstacles in the way of creating jobs and building projects, we won't see another company like Paetec created in our region, nor will we attract one to set up shop in New York.

In the business world, in the real world, time is of the essence. It's just that simple.

Sandy Parker is president and CEO of the Rochester Business Alliance and a founder of Unshackle Upstate.

Construction projects wanted

In the Sept. 16 Special Report on Construction and Design, the Rochester Business Journal is planning again to feature local "works in progress"—construction projects that have broken ground in the six-county region but are not yet completed.

If you would like your projects to be included, please send a contact name, your company name, street and email addresses and telephone numbers by Sept. 6 to the Rochester Business Journal, 45 East Ave., Suite 500, Rochester, N.Y. 14604, along with the information described below. Entries also may be emailed to production@rbj.net.

A photo or artist's rendering must be mailed or emailed with each project. The following information is also required, if applicable: owner; location; total project cost; project description, including number of buildings, number of lots, square footage; start date; expected completion date; general contractor or construction manager; architect or designer; contractors and subcontractors.

The Editorial Department will publish project descriptions and photos or illustrations on a space-available basis. Contact Velvet Spicer at (585) 546-8303 with questions.