



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Vandalia Civic Advancement Relaunch Highlights Strategic Alignment,

VANDALIA, IL — Vandalia Civic Advancement officially relaunched this week at a public kickoff panel hosted at the Family YMCA of Fayette County and resulted in an overflow of positive substance. The event with over 60 people in attendance, brought together leadership from the City of Vandalia, Vandalia School District, Fayette County, the Park District, the YMCA, and local business leaders to discuss coordinated, long-term growth strategies, and preach unity with a sense of pride in our community.

The evening centered around one guiding question:

“What kind of community do we want to be?” Said Mayor Doug Knebel

Panelists emphasized that this group is not intended to replace existing organizations, but to coordinate efforts across institutions, ensuring strategic alignment, sustainable growth, and improved competitiveness for funding and investment, all while increase the quality of life of our area.

Leaders referenced more than \$50 million in recent community investment, including but not limited to: A library, hospital expansion, YMCA facility and campus expansion, a water treatment infrastructure investment, Vandalia School District athletic facilities, and the broadening of career and technical education programs.

Themes Discussed

- Breaking down institutional silos
- Strengthening and growing quality of life investments
- Coordinated leadership and transparency
- Workforce readiness and talent retention
- Strategic infrastructure investment
- Attracting remote workers and return migration
- Housing and demographic balance
- Celebrating community wins while planning for future growth

Audience participation included ideas such as developing a coworking/incubator space to support entrepreneurs and remote professionals, while also discussion was had to continue servicing our active older adult population. Praise was given by several in the audience of the progress within our community and the strong assets we already possess allows us to be attractive to future growth.

Unified Leadership

This rang true with every panelist as the common denominator was unity.

Mayor Doug Knebel stated:

“For the first time in 20-plus years, we have alignment across all levels of local leadership. Growth must be strategic, and we must preserve quality of life.” “You ask why now? It’s because we have the right people and it’s the right time – we’ve never been stronger.”

Superintendent Dr. Jen Garrison noted:

“People are coming. Our enrollment is growing. Our new challenge is space. That’s a sign of vitality within a community and presents an opportunity for strategic growth”

School Board President Joe Lawson emphasized:

“Trust is built through consistent leadership and transparency and I believe we as a district and community institutions have done that”

YMCA CEO Ben Frazier Stated:

“Communities compete for talent, people, businesses, and long-term relevancy – we have the ingredients already to meet these needs and succeed at doing so.” “What this community is doing and having a unified front put us ahead of the game.”

Matt Murfee Park Board member says that:

“Breaking down silos allows for better use of resources and more efficient development.”

Pat Click County Board member noted:

“This is our opportunity to set an example for the future generations. What we do now will make a difference in the future.”

Next Steps

Vandalia Civic Advancement will continue to gather input and seek opportunities for our community through positive and engaging conversations. The goal is not reactionary development — but intentional, coordinated, and generational progress.