

Episode 80

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SPEAKERS

Jason Duff, Andrew Bowsher, Ethan DeLeon

A

Andrew Bowsher 00:00

So we basically run the day-to-day and make sure that the streets are clean and that your albums are protected and, and making sure that we're creating beautiful spaces.

E

Ethan DeLeon 00:17

Welcome to the Small Nation Podcast, brought to you by CoverLink Insurance, where people are more important than policies. On this show, we unpack lessons from entrepreneurs and break down development strategies and do deep dives on small town success. Our goal is to provide value to our listeners by hosting conversations that teach, inform, and inspire. Hey everyone, my name is Ethan DeLeon and I'm here in the studio with the founder and CEO of Small Nation, Jason Duff. Today we are excited to be hosting entrepreneur and city manager of Sidney, Ohio, Andrew Bowser. Welcome, Andrew.

A

Andrew Bowsher 00:48

Thank you. Glad to be here.

J

Jason Duff 00:49

Yeah, Andrew, great to have you on the show. That is one title you don't— or titles that you don't normally hear. Entrepreneur and city manager. Yep. So I'm excited to have our friend and just someone I really admire, Andrew Bowser here. Andrew, you know, being the city administrator for Sidney and being a business owner, I think he's gonna have a really unique perspective today at both of those brain types. Absolutely. And if you've not been following the news, so I happen to be a subscriber of the Dayton Business Journal, and they have this email list that they kind of update on what's happening in the Dayton region. And for the last like few weeks, Every like emergency breaking news is an emergency, but every breaking news story coming out of the Dayton region actually ties back to Sidney, Ohio. Yeah. And, you know, whether it's this really aspirational project with the Ohio Building, which is a building that I've admired for many years, I think it's like 8 stories, 7.

A

Andrew Bowsher 01:50

It's huge. Close.

J**Jason Duff** 01:51

Yeah, huge, huge building in Sidney. Seeing, you know, developers partner up to take that on working with the city, which will maybe dive deep, deeper on that later in the episode. Or you just hear new business opening, becoming a small town destination, new housing like housing. Right now we're in a housing crisis and it takes creativity to catch a developer's attention to plot out and develop new housing, especially new housing in walking distance of a historic downtown. So I'm excited to unpack that on the episode today. But on that note, you're also a business owner, you and your wife. Yes. The best thing for a marriage is to start a business together.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 02:31

Oh yeah, absolutely. And we're somewhat newlyweds, so everything's still kind of new. So of course, yeah, why not open a business and throw that into it?

J**Jason Duff** 02:39

And this happens to be the Osteria, I wanna say it right. Osteria. Osteria Wine Boutique. Yes. Which looks like you're walking right in a beautiful French village or Italian village somewhere in Europe., and it happens to be in Sidney, Ohio with this amazing collection, probably 200 or 300 bottles of wine. And each one of the bottles have been thoughtfully curated for the store along with a menu of appetizers and lunch and dinner items. Like we had to go check this out with the team. Mm-hmm. And I will be putting in the show notes. Let's put some pictures from that experience along with their menu and website. Sure.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 03:19

Yeah. Love it. Thank you so much. Yeah. When you went out, I was unfortunately in Japan, so we didn't get to see each other.

J**Jason Duff** 03:26

We talked about you while you weren't there.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 03:29

So. Oh, that's good. No, I mean, it's a beautiful 3-story Parisian building, and Taylor and I are very proud. And it means a lot coming from you, as much as you have done for Bellefontaine and so many other communities, to say nice things about what we're doing. So thank you.

J**Jason Duff** 03:42

100%. I want to hear, how did you get started? Like, tell us about your life journey. Did you wake up when you were you know, at 4 or 5 years old said, I want to be a city manager.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 03:54

No, I don't think I even knew what that was. Actually, I think really the love of all of that kind of all ties kind of back to, I think, being an elder millennial and growing up with Lego in my hand.

J**Jason Duff** 04:09

Ooh, I love Legos. Yeah.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 04:11

And I guess just the love of getting to, you know, build things and getting to, you know, come up with fun games with my friends and getting to live real life, you know, creatively. And I think that kind of then bolstered into a love of architecture. And then I saw my life kind of parallel over into the military. And so that was where sort of the acts of service came from and the need to, to want to do something that was much bigger than myself. So when I came back and went to Ohio State for city planning, the idea became, okay, well, you can build and shape things while also coupling together this service aspect. And then soon became the idea of Well, I want to do more than just urban planning. I want to be able to bring economic development to a community and I want to shape the lives that are going to far outlive where I'm at. And so I got to travel around a lot with the military, went out and served in the Department of the Air Force as a federal civilian and got to build space launch complexes for SpaceX, Blue Origin, NASA, all the way out in Vandenberg. Then Air Force Base, now it's a space base, and came back here for family and friends and met Taylor, and we grew our lives together and started out in Reynoldsburg and now city manager here in Sidney.

J**Jason Duff** 05:34

Tell us, what do you think the military, in terms of the training that you went through, the framework that it provided for your life?

A**Andrew Bowsher** 05:41

I think it provided a whole breadth of sort of diversity and a need to sort of, you know, kind of grow these leadership abilities, this desire to give back and build back. And I think from my perspective, it really sort of bolstered what it meant to be sort of a man, if you will, in this world. And it just passed a lot of things down that I was able to kind of sort of build on and kind of bring into everyday life. And I think a lot of it is just duty and respect and leadership and integrity.

J**Jason Duff** 06:22

Yeah, I love that. And then after your whole military experience, which I mean, you, you buzzed over that very quickly, but there's a lot to unpack. How many countries?

A**Andrew Bowsher** 06:31

Uh, maybe 4.

J**Jason Duff** 06:34

Wow.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 06:35

While I was in.

J

Jason Duff 06:36

Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's crazy. But then kind of starting your career in this field, if you will, uh, in, in Reynoldsburg, what was, what was your job there?

A

Andrew Bowsher 06:43

What were your responsibilities?

J

Jason Duff 06:44

And, uh, how long were you there?

A

Andrew Bowsher 06:45

Yeah, I was the development director and then kind of right up until I left, I was also sort of the service director as well. They have a strong mayor that was there. Mayor Brad McLeod brought me in. A lot of love and respect for him. Just like seeing the potential. I was super young and green at the time and had no real city experience outside of other planning sort of roles more in the federal government and then, at Ohio State and getting to take on that role. And that's when it was just super hard charging of, I love community development, I want to bring in jobs, I want to grow the economy. And then understanding the way and plans in which you lay today are literally going to build the future. And that is just really, really exciting. I mean, they're still doing stuff over there that I had a hand in, you know, 5, 6, 7 years ago.

J

Jason Duff 07:38

Yeah, that's super cool. And then what brought you to Sydney? I mean, I feel like people hear your name and they associate you with the things that are happening in Sydney. So what was that transition like for you?

A

Andrew Bowsher 07:48

Yeah, I always joke that I didn't even really know what or where Sydney was sort of on the map. And Taylor and I were living in Grove City, Ohio, which is— I grew up right outside of that in sort of a rural community called Williamsport. And I went to Westfall High School. And we got off for the Circleville Pumpkin Show.

J

Jason Duff 08:10

So— Oh, yeah. Yeah.

A

Andrew Bowsher 08:11

Yeah.

J

Jason Duff 08:12

If you're from Ohio, you know what that is. That's right. Yeah.

A

Andrew Bowsher 08:14

So I always have had a love for like these small towns and being able to sort of raise a family there. And I love Columbus. I mean, there's a lot of amazing things, but there's something about these small towns. And I knew that in order to move up and take over as a city manager, I needed to move into a different type of community. And there was a couple of different possibilities that kind of came up all of a sudden. And then this headhunter kind of reached out and said, hey, said, we've been seeing a lot of great things, things that you're doing there in the Central Ohio market. Have you ever thought about this? I said, yeah, well, I— but I don't know what Sidney is. And there was a couple other towns as well that was sort of on our radar. And we drove out to Sidney, got to meet Mayor Mike Barhorst, and who's a personality in himself. Oh, yes, for sure.

J

Jason Duff 09:01

Great promoter. Yes. And longtime mayor. I mean, a number of public— and the council— he was on council for a number of years.

A

Andrew Bowsher 09:06

Absolutely. Yeah. And then ran Lehman Catholic High School for a while. So anybody that talks about him, it's a love-hate sort of relationship because either he was a teacher for them or principal.

J

Jason Duff 09:16

Or the principal.

A

Andrew Bowsher 09:16

Yeah, exactly. So, but no, he is absolutely a character and really great human being and believed in what we were trying to do. And I think I embodied a lot of the qualities that they wanted to bring into the city. And so we went on vacation actually in California. We were tasting and sipping wine and we were away for a couple of weeks and I said, Taylor, I want to do this. And we fell in love with downtown Sydney, everything that it was. We knew that we wanted to be entrepreneurs as well. We wanted to grow a business and we said, why not do both? Let's start a whole new life here in Sydney. Let's be a part of the change, the diamond in the rough that it was, and let's continue to see all of this evolution happen and let's be proud of the area that we're going to live.

J

Jason Duff 10:03

So, and we joked before the episode started, is there a way to duplicate that. Mhm. And I'm not joking because I think every town is looking for people to fall in love with it and actually then become an invested part of it. For you, I mean, it's not— you mentioned the headhunter and the, the process to, you know, to, to, to learn more about Sidney. But what, what sealed the deal for you?

A

Andrew Bowsher 10:26

Yeah. Um, so we drove through with our kids and, um, we stopped off at the downtown and we got a look at the courthouse and the fountains were going and the kids were kind of splashing around in the fountains and we were on the other side of the street and I got to take kind of like a quick look and it was almost like this snapshot in time that I got to see the kids and I got to kind of build out their future of where we could be at that was here. And that kind of sealed it and said, okay, you could, we could live in a big city. We could, we could do all of that, but could we see ourselves here? Could we grow our family? Could we grow our business? The building that we ended up purchasing was literally right behind us as the backdrop, and it was casting a shadow over. And there's a picture that we have that, that casts it. And so when all of this serendipitous sort of information that flows together, the choice was really easy after that.

J

Jason Duff 11:20

Yeah, super cool. Um, but I believe you are the first city planner on the show, so can you maybe unpack what the role of a city planner is?

A

Andrew Bowsher 11:29

Yeah, so, um, a city administrator Right? Yes.

J

Jason Duff 11:33

City administrator.

A

Andrew Bowsher 11:34

Administrator. No, that's an important job.

J

Jason Duff 11:36

But I am a city planner.

A

Andrew Bowsher 11:36

Yes. Yes.

J

Jason Duff 11:37

That's a big part of the job in there. But city administrator.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 11:39

Yes. So city manager, city administrator, it's called a variety of different things. Ours is specifically called a city manager. So some cities have strong mayors. Bellefontaine is one of those. And then there are city manager forms of governments where it's a manager council form of government where the council acts as basically a board of directors, if you will, of just like a regular business. And then a CEO is appointed and hired to basically run the day-to-day operations. So the police, fire, public works, parks, streets, everything that would be underneath of it, 260 employees for Sydney, then fall underneath of the city manager. And so we basically run the day-to-day and make sure that the streets are clean and that your homes are protected and, and making sure that we're creating beautiful spaces. Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 12:32

Which the, the concept of strong mayor versus the model of government that, that you currently work in, um, that's been a shift where I think more communities are pursuing the idea of hiring that CEO or that city manager, city administrator. Um, do you have perspectives? Have you seen kind of both sides of the pros and cons of that?

A**Andrew Bowsher** 12:53

Yeah, I have. I think I've been around long enough and have kind of worked under both to really get to see the pluses and minuses for that. So from a perspective as like a concerned citizen. Their mindset is we want somebody that we're going to be able to elect. The problem with that becomes very simple is somebody that they may end up electing could be a— let's say it's a mail delivery driver, right? That doesn't necessarily mean that they're the most qualified individual to go and lead an entire organization. Maybe they could and maybe it works out really, really well. And there's a lot of instances where strong mayors are working really, really hard and doing a lot of things. Big cities in general typically have that, but a lot of that is because of a huge support staff and a chief of staff that falls underneath of that, that are really continuing to do the day-to-day operations. I feel when you hire somebody that has the training, the education, the tools necessary, then you're really putting the right person. You wouldn't name a CEO of Apple just somebody that, that can win an election, a popularity contest. You want the best possible person with an MBA and their credentials to be able to run. A major corporation. And so from that perspective, that's where the city manager really continues to, I think, chug along. And I think that's where you've seen the shift here in the United States, where about 55, 56% are actually a manager-council form of government. The other half are kind of split between sort of this, um, this all-council, uh, government, and then obviously a strong mayor-council form of government, um, that kind of rounds out the rest of it. So it just kind of depends on where you're at and, uh, Most people still think that the mayor's the chief executive there in the community, and sometimes that's good because they're not always knocking down my door. But we still keep the trains moving behind the scenes.

J**Jason Duff** 14:39

When you think about your cycles of how you're spending your time in your position, what does that look like on a day-to-day, maybe week, month basis of how you're making an impact in your community?

A

Andrew Bowsher 14:53

Yeah, I think a lot of time one of the biggest things is to is making sure that you are out there within the community. I think that's really, really important. So at any given time that I can go and walk down in the downtown, I can go into the coffee shop, I can have meetings within the community where it's extremely visible. That means a lot.

J

Jason Duff 15:14

Yeah.

A

Andrew Bowsher 15:14

And I think people really resonate to that. So I try to do that as much as I possibly can because sometimes it feels like you're just behind a desk and you're in the office like way too much. And you kind of lose sight of everything that's sort of happening. But most of the time it's a lot of meetings, whether it's community members, whether it's boards and commissions, whether it's city-focused type groups, whether it's meeting with prospective developers and Sidney Shelby Economic Partnerships, land bank meetings. So a lot of that is all geared towards that. City Council meetings, of course. And then, you know, senior staff level sort of meetings, checking in, making sure that we're doing all the right things and, Towards the end of summer, we'll really get into the 5-year planning and the budget cycle, and that will consume pretty much 90% of the time, just making sure that we can get the budget right for next year.

J

Jason Duff 16:04

Important. You got to bring the money in, you got to figure out how to spend it.

A

Andrew Bowsher 16:06

That's right.

J

Jason Duff 16:07

Yeah. Well, you talked about how important in your work in Reynoldsburg that planning was and actually thinking about getting the right pieces and plans and work done to to think about the future. What do you think for a community that are listening, what are those key plans or documents or tools that really need to be in place to set your town up for success?

A**Andrew Bowsher** 16:30

Yeah, I think for any community you're gonna need a heart, right? You can't have a very healthy body if you don't have an extremely healthy heart. That really is going to provide the, really the blood, if you will, to the rest of everything else through the arterial of the roads and the infrastructures and waterways and everything like that. And so you need that place of destination, right? So Bellefontaine obviously has this really beautiful downtown that continues to grow. Sidney the same way. And a lot of these legacy communities and towns has that beating heart. And some of them certainly saw a decay of sort of this disinvestment and moving out and sort of these big box retailers that went out to the highway and kind of closed up a lot of these small shops. And now we see sort of the reverse of that, which is really, really exciting. Some communities are doing a lot of great things, and you don't have to look very far outside of Ohio's market to see all of the success that continues to happen. So I would say that that is definitely one thing we need to make sure that there's still transportation that's through there. Sidney, I-75, Bellefontaine, Route 33, and so many others. Like in Reynoldsburg, it was US 40, it was Main Street, right? Right. And from that area, you know, you've got 70 and 71 that goes around. And from those perspectives, you want to make sure that you can get people in and you get people out. Then making sure that you're building successful housing, because if you're not growing, you're dying.

J**Jason Duff** 17:58

And that housing component on a national level is a big deal right now. But, and it's been a problem for some time, but here in the Columbus region, it's even worse.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 18:08

Right. Absolutely. And I think there's like two, two different types of cities right now. Right. You have a city that these are typically your suburbs right now that are saying enough is enough, where you've got individuals that will move into a community and say, okay, now that I'm here, I don't want anybody else to move in my community.

J**Jason Duff** 18:25

Right. Because it was— I moved here out of the city because I wanted this certain feel or look.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 18:29

Right. Correct.

J**Jason Duff** 18:30

And so they're pushing back and saying no more development. But there's still a lot of people that live in those places that have an aspirational view to want to be bigger. Absolutely different kind of styles that conflict.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 18:43

There very much is. And I think, you know, from an economic development perspective as well, it's houses is where jobs go to sleep at night. And so if we are not building the housing and we're not building some level of affordable housing, and a lot of that is market-driven, right? So if you don't have enough housing, the pricings are going to go up. So the more that we build, the lower those costs are going to be. And I think that's why Ohio has been so successful. You go take a look at L.A. But they don't have enough housing, but it's so, so expensive. Right. So from that perspective, it's a chicken and the egg sort of thing. And then you take a look at shops and restaurants and they're saying, hey, you need to grow the population because I can't stay here and sustain if I don't have more individuals coming into my door.

J**Jason Duff** 19:23

It's usually never the weekends. It's how are you going to survive on the Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday? Yeah, right. And in these small towns. Yeah. And bring in traffic and money and commerce.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 19:31

Absolutely. And I think that, you know, that goes back to sort of the whole aspect of this downtown destination and this idea that there needs to be cluster growth and development. Because if I'm somebody that wants to go out to eat, you know, you can go anywhere, the choices are endless. But what else is going to take me down there to where I can get to spend an evening, a date night, if you will? Now I'm spending more time down there. And it's really collectively helping everything.

J**Jason Duff** 19:55

Yeah. And I want to get into what you guys are doing at Sydney. But before we do that, can you maybe just give us a little bit of a landscape for our listeners of what Sydney is? What's the big industry players there and jobs that are out there?

A**Andrew Bowsher** 20:08

Yeah. So Sidney is the county seat for Shelby County. We're right along 75, about 30 minutes north of Dayton. We're about 22,000 individuals. And I think the biggest issue that they had had in the past sort of 10 years is it was the first time ever since the inception of their city, you know, that they actually lost population.. It wasn't a lot, but it was enough, I think, as a wake-up call and says, whoa, wait, wait a second.

J**Jason Duff** 20:38

Yeah.

A

Andrew Bowsher 20:38

We were actually growing maybe slowly, but now all of a sudden we've become stagnant and we actually went backwards. And so that needed to kind of shift because we have so many jobs where you take a look at like, um, some of the suburbs, um, of Columbus and things like that. You know, you actually see a lot of bedroom communities, right? Most people are living there and then they're commuting and driving someplace else. It's actually the exact reverse. Diverse in Sidney. It really acts as sort of this core-centric. So we actually have over 12,000 additional people that come into our community every single day to come into work. So they're coming from Tipp City, they're coming from Troy, some of them are coming from Bellefontaine and elsewhere, and a lot of the county areas to come into work. They're going to Copeland, which used to be—

J

Jason Duff 21:25

Oh, I should know this too. Adam Rim will work there. It was before— Copeland is what it's called today, but it'll come up later in the show.

A

Andrew Bowsher 21:34

I have no idea why I just blanked on that. No, I— Yeah. So Cargill, Copeland, so many others that are basically there. P&D, Ross Aluminum, Stahli. Now new businesses coming in, a lot of Japanese investment from companies, Hexamerica. You've got Sankyo, you've got Advanced Composites. There's so many that are sort of there and growing. And Klinger just did a \$2 million expansion, several new jobs, engineering jobs that are happening. And so, and there's a lot of things that are in the works right now, some that we can't even talk about, that we're working alongside JobsOhio to grow that. And so if you, if you take a look at that now, all of these individuals are coming in, but then they're not sleeping there at night. Right. And so it almost becomes, I wouldn't say a ghost town in the evening time, but, but it is a very interesting dynamic. But Sidney and Shelby County actually has per capita more manufacturing jobs than any place in the state. And we have more commuters per capita than even downtown Columbus. If you think about that.

J

Jason Duff 22:36

And a few other little points of pride that I really respect from the outside is that you have a very special architectural feature in the downtown of one of your banks.

A

Andrew Bowsher 22:47

Yes.

J

Jason Duff 22:47

So they have a Jewel Box Bank and that architect, Is it— it's not Gibbs.

A

Andrew Bowsher 22:54

Louis Sullivan.

J**Jason Duff** 22:55

Yeah, Louis Sullivan. So, um, really the foundational thinker of American architecture, you know, around the turn of the century. And there's— I think there's less than 15 of these around the country, and it happens— I think Sydney's one of the nicest.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 23:09

12, actually. 12. Yeah, specifically. Yeah, absolutely. Uh, um, so Louis Sullivan, in his later years, he was actually a bit of a drunkard. Uh, quick history lesson. And, uh, modern-day architecture for skyscrapers and whatnot, definitely in Chicago, New York landscape, He was out of money and these banks came and said, "We want to make these opulent jewel box banks." Sidney, up until just a couple of years ago, was the last remaining bank still to have the original bank that commissioned it, which I think is why they've been able to preserve it for as long as they have. It's now Farmers and Merchants, so shout out to them. But they are actually in the process here in the next year going to do some rehab and continue to invest into it and making it as nice as it is. There's only one other one in Ohio and it's over in Newark.

J**Jason Duff** 23:58

Yeah, they just did— they just remodeled theirs too. They did. Yeah.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 24:00

And it's funny because the architect of our courthouses was the exact same and they were built a year apart from each other. So, wow, a couple of sisters.

J**Jason Duff** 24:08

Yeah, that's pretty cool. That's really cool. Well, thanks for giving the layout there. I just think on our call you expressed some of that to me, and I think it's interesting. We talk a lot about economic development on the podcast, and a lot of times it's about attracting your manufacturing manufacturers to, to your community, or we talk to entrepreneurs and, you know, community development, that kind of thing. But you can have the, the opposite problem is you have all these jobs and people, you know, are going back home at the end of the night. So I'm curious, what are some of those things that you have been working on in Sydney to make people— make it more attractive to actually live there?

A**Andrew Bowsher** 24:40

Yeah, so we go back to that downtown destination and the idea that yes, we need to build housing. That is our absolute number one priority and goal. We cannot build and put shovels in the ground fast enough. But it also needs to be an amenity because if you're going to build housing, yeah, you know, it's like, what else can I do outside of my home? Yeah. Now I know there's like a whole generation and COVID certainly exacerbated it where people are just living inside their homes, but they do want to go out to restaurants and they do want to go shopping, right? Like that. So we got to be able to build those amenities. And so last year, we actually started a parks master plan that we developed. So we're going to do a whole lot of new upgrades and developments throughout the town. We're connected to the Great Miami Riverway Trail. So we're actually at the trailhead. So you can start in Sidney and you can actually ride a bike all the way to Cincinnati. That's the longest connected path in the country. So it's exciting. And I think there's ways to still connect. We still want to go north up into Anna and Botkins and the rest of Shelby County. But there is this drive where how do we connect over to east to Bellefontaine, right? Like long term, how do we continue to grow that to where people can all of a sudden start a bike ride here in Bell Fountain and drink a beer here and then go over to Sydney and sip on some wine, you know.

J**Jason Duff** 25:57

Well, and you mentioned that having that strong heart. So in the downtown, the restaurants, of course, are really important amenity, you know, places for people to shop and then actually activities and things for people to do. We were chatting about a business that's based here in Bell Fountain, Triple Moon Designs, which is owned by Jessica Epley. And Jessica is this really talented curator and artist that is doing these paint, canvas paint events. She does macramé workshops and she happens to be— while her studio is here, she pops up in different towns and places around. And your wine boutique is where she's popping up as well. And so those experiences, when people come in to do an activity, They drink, they shop, and they spend money in Sydney. Indeed. And I, I think that's part of what we maybe in our, those of us that are small town champions, it's better integrating our towns to say what are ways that we can be helping and supporting each other or referring those connections, those relationships, those developers that want to do things in those towns, um, to see them win and, and, and succeed too.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 27:12

Yeah, absolutely. And, you know, I think a lot of the aspects that you're, you're talking about, and we, we, before the podcast started, we started actually talking about, uh, her husband Seth, who works for us here at the city. And what's interesting about that is, is that is a great segue into the other aspects of how do you lure other economic development, how can you grow your town with housing, and how can you open up new shops and restaurants and things of that. Well, a lot of it is infrastructure. Like, so when you take a look at Columbus, you know, it's not like they have an endless amount of water supply. They have spent billions of dollars into that investment within able to grow that. And back in the '70s and continuation of just the last few years, we have pumped millions of dollars within our infrastructure within Sydney, and you have to invest in yourself. So from that perspective, you have to have an abundance of water capacity, sewer capacity. You've got to have the right connections with AES Ohio, which is our electric provider. You have to have it with CenterPoint Energy, which is our gas provider. No different than what I'm sure you experience here with AEP and Columbia.

J**Jason Duff** 28:19

And internet too is a big one. Internet. Absolutely. You know, so many of our communities up until recently were not connected to high-speed internet.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 28:27

So. Absolutely. And even in the rural areas, that continues to be a problem. I know Shelby County's commissioners are really really trying very hard to work with our local provider, NK Telco, to continue expanding sort of fiber within the networks of a lot of these homes. But businesses are looking for that. And so it's not just about space. Ohio has the land, but how can you get the infrastructure there to supply them with what they need? And when you start talking about data centers and you start talking about these larger users, the more and more water that they need because they're there to cool the facilities and things of that nature.

J**Jason Duff** 28:59

Well, we in Ohio have been recognized as being a place that is water abundant and electric energy affordable. But, you know, part of what happens with the, the market and, and new investments and new projects, it's using up a lot of our state's resources. And so I do think it goes down to we need to be planning and thinking about how we're preparing, uh, to keep those things, because that is one of the things that makes makes Ohio a great place to live. You mentioned that, you know, we talked about the heart. You talk about the infrastructure of having the right, you know, gas lines, electric lines. One thing me looking from the outside since you have joined Sydney that's very impressive is how you have started with some of the physical aspects of the downtown with adding streetscape elements and investing in your parks. Can you kind of walk us through what's it like and maybe even providing some advice to other people that are listening that have the aspiration to install beautiful archways that brand their town, but then they maybe have other people in the community say, well, that's a waste of money.

A

Andrew Bowsher 30:11

That is so funny that you say that. So it absolutely was a community-led public-private partnership. And I can't stress that enough that individuals that typically are speaking the loudest within your community, it's really leveraging them and saying, Hey, it's only going to be as good as you want it to be, and it's going to take investment, whether it's taxes or whether it's private donors that are coming together and saying, we want to do right by our community because we live here, our kids are here, and we want to stay here. Okay, well then understand that we need to come together to be able to formulate those. And I think those relationships are imperative. Having those meetings biweekly, having an understanding where we're sitting a lot of individuals together and saying, okay, what's next? What else do we need? Let's, take a look at best practices across the country. What can we do to set ourselves out and apart? And then also make sure that we're supplying the need of investment and education for young entrepreneurs and how are we going to make that successful, buying up the right property and making sure that we're putting the people in the right places to succeed. So that was really, really important from those perspectives. And so we leveraged some ARPA dollars, \$1.6 million were raised to put those archways into place. The majority that actually wasn't even publicly funded. It was private dollars that came together and said, this is where we want to put our money because we think that this is the next step and it's going to lead to other further investment, which it did. Um, and I think now that you have that, they're taking a look at what's next. Can we put more brick down? Can we do these things? This is going to leverage now the city to be able to spend other dollars. And now we're looking at the potential of a parking deck, parking garage, right? We don't have a parking issue now, But as we continue to grow and we open up the 50 luxury apartments out of the Ohio building that we talked about right now, we're going to start approaching the potential of a parking problem. Yeah, let's go ahead and plan for that now and put those capital dollars within that aspect. So then we're leveraging and we're bringing in businesses. And I know that there has been other individuals that have knocked on the door and said, hey, we would like to be downtown. We'd like to bring our staff of 50 to 60 people downtown, uh, because of everything that's going on. Where can we go? And so now the next step is, is where do we build those?

J**Jason Duff** 32:25

All right, at this time we're going to take a quick break to hear a word from our sponsors. If you are looking for a dynamic workspace in the heart of Bellefontaine, look no further. Build Coworking Space is your destination for creativity and collaboration. With state-of-the-art facilities in a thriving community, this is where innovation happens. Join them today for as low as \$99 a month and build your success at Build Coworking Space. Big city dining in a small town. Now that's The Syndicate. Join them for fresh steaks, pasta, or seafood for dinner, or stop in for Sunday brunch to experience one of their signature dishes such as chicken and waffles, and maybe even pair it with a mimosa flight. Located at 213 South Main Street in downtown Bellefontaine. Well, and I, I think when your community has a very strong industrial base, one of the shifts that's happened, especially with younger workers, is they want to work in a place that has great coffee. They want to work a place that has a fitness facility nearby and maybe doesn't feel like a factory. And so when you have these beautiful historic buildings that line the streets of so many towns throughout Ohio, and I think Sidney is that perfect example of that courthouse community, and then you get the amenities around it, you see how this starts to work. But in the beginning, the sales pitch of that— how do you overcome naysayers? Like, what's your strategy with that?

A**Andrew Bowsher** 33:48

Yeah, I think sometimes you got to block it out, right? So on social media, you can get on there and you can get disgusted super quick.

J**Jason Duff** 33:56

Everyone loves you on social media, right?

A**Andrew Bowsher** 33:58

Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 33:58

You know what?

A**Andrew Bowsher** 33:59

I still think there's a little bit of a honeymoon phase for me. So I think the majority of the comments are just because technically still pretty good. But even, even the archways, people said, why are we spending the money on it? And then it's also a bit of an education. But sometimes you've got to block a lot of that out, and you've got to be extremely passionate with those naysayers. You're going to meet them where they're at. Any time of day, anybody wants to come into City Hall and we want to talk and we want to walk around the community, I think if, if you are showing them that you're investing within their community, there's all of a sudden this sense of pride. Because of the same individuals that will talk down on their own community, if somebody that is an outsider wants to talk about their community, they're the first jump up and attack them. Yeah, there is. And so that means that there's something that's happening that's right, right? And I think, you know, everybody can be a keyboard warrior and, and say whatever they want behind closed doors and things like that, but when you, when you meet them face to face and you really start to talk to them and you educate them on what's happening— and I think it's, it's constantly ringing your own bell is extremely important because it is as an entrepreneur and as a city manager, it is almost impossible to get the word out of all the great things and the things that are happening to everybody. We constantly hear people are like, oh, I didn't know that that was happening.

J**Jason Duff** 35:15

How frustrating is that? So much noise. Well, you know, and I think that's another issue that we have to work on in our towns and communities. You know, it used to be that you would have a lot of the traditional media sources, so if it was the radio station or the newspaper. And that subscribership was really high. And there were advertisers that were funding those, you know, channels. And it just— sadly, this is not just happening in places like Bellefontaine or Sidney. It's happening everywhere around the nation, around the world. We're losing a lot of those traditional sources. So the rise of social media was, was in the early days, like really great thing for small businesses because we would post in that algorithm. The reach was incredible. Yeah, but now it's not the same. And so how are you kind of thinking about public information, whether it's when we publish our events in the community or important city announcements or council minutes? Like, what are you doing and what, what are things that you think others can be doing to get the word out?

A**Andrew Bowsher** 36:22

Yeah, great question. So first thing that we did actually in 2024, because we, we saw that immediately as we're not doing enough to get the word out there and all of a sudden we're going to start this campaign of doing all these amazing things and nobody's going to know what's going on. Or would they see something that's happening? They're like, oh, it must be another dollar store, right?

J**Jason Duff** 36:42

And so it's like, let's, let's combat that a little bit.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 36:44

Let's get out ahead of it. So we actually hired a communications manager. First time the position has ever been created, any type of of coordination or communication within the community. So that was step number one. She took over, over all social media. We have a newsletter that we push out every single week. We also have an internal newsletter because the other thing that I noticed too was, is that if the internal staff, if they don't buy in to what we're doing, if they are not passionate about our community and what they're living in, then it's never going to exceed. And so you get that buy-in from the staff and they feel real good about what's happening and they feel like they're being taken care of and they're getting pay raises and the benefits that they deserve and that they need to take care of it because it's always a thankless job, then they're— you're the first line of defense and they're the first individuals to go out there and talk about their ambassadors.

J**Jason Duff** 37:33

Absolutely.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 37:34

Yeah, absolutely. So that was really, really important. And then lastly, I think the other aspect, not only just utilizing social media in a different type of way to where You've got to be content creators because you're competing with all of these, all the noise that's out there.

J**Jason Duff** 37:48

Yeah.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 37:48

So it can't just be this information like, oh, hey, we, we were doing this, or, hey, offices are closed. It has to be very content driven. And we've got to go out there and showcase because the city, in a way, it's a, it's a microorganism, but it's also a business and you got to run it and you got to sell it. And there's no way you're going to get more businesses to buy into what you're doing unless you're going to sell your city.

J**Jason Duff** 38:09

That is going to be the sound clip for this segment. Yeah, because I wish more people that were on the public side believed and did exactly that. You see that there are the communities that separate themselves, that are very articulate— articulate about knowing who they are. Yeah. And what they're selling. And their ability to tell their story, it's like directly relates to the success of like new businesses coming in and their downtown thriving, all the things that we've been talking about. So the public information piece piece. Now let's talk about a development director, because you had experience in your previous role doing that. What is a development director? What are they charged to do for a city?

A

Andrew Bowsher 38:52

Yeah, so Reynoldsburg, I think I kind of rewrote what it was, really, because in that capacity previously, what it was, was it was dealing with permits. It was, it was more of like the, the begrudging work that you think of when you think of a city bureaucracy of checking over plans and making sure that it conforms with the zoning code and things like that. I think what you have to do is you have to also think about it in a business perspective. You have to run it like the way that these organizations are saying, okay, well, it's more about marketing and it's about branding and it's about being able to, again, sell the community. And so what I was doing, at least in Reynoldsburg, was I was meeting these developers And for the first time ever, I was reaching across the aisle first and calling them up and saying, we want you in our community. And they're like, yeah, wait a second.

J

Jason Duff 39:39

Who are you?

A

Andrew Bowsher 39:40

What do you mean? We're getting all this pushback from some other communities, all these NIMBY cultures. And so when we approach—

J

Jason Duff 39:47

and NIMBY, for those listening, is not in my backyard.

A

Andrew Bowsher 39:49

100%.

J

Jason Duff 39:50

Which is becoming in a lot of communities. That's— they don't want to change.

A

Andrew Bowsher 39:55

So that's the rhetoric, right? And, you know, even Columbus is dealing with it and so many other larger communities. It goes back to the individuals that want to move into the community and say, okay, nothing else. I don't want anything else.

J

Jason Duff 40:07

Get in and close the door.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 40:08

Exactly. And they don't understand the whole market, you know, of what that means. And, and, um, you know, so we have to fully buy into the idea that we're capitalists and that we have to be able to market ourselves. And so when I talk to, like, say, a Crawford Hwang and a JBM that's building, uh, apartment communities out in our community, you have to show them the value-add that Sydney and, and person, uh, can bring to the table. So it's very relationship-based. There has to be this, this built-up trust. They're going to leverage and spend 20% upfront going through the process and all the red tape and bureaucracy just to get a shovel in the ground. If you can delete the majority of that away and you can show them a preferred pathway to building and constructing, then you've all of a sudden, you've added value-add back to them. And I think that's the biggest thing. And that was the— that was one of the quickest things that I learned. It says, wait a second, why are we doing it that way? And always constantly challenging. I don't know how many times I've ever been told in my life, like, oh, well, we've always done it that way. Why? Exactly. Exactly. Yeah. Well, you've been doing it for 60 years that way. You don't think that the world hasn't changed in 60 years? I've got a phone that has a computer in it.

J**Jason Duff** 41:18

Yeah, exactly.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 41:18

So, exactly. So now we have to all of a sudden relook at what we're doing. And I think that's where you see a lot of these communities redoing zoning codes. Uh, shout out to Sean Suter down in Cincinnati that really helped us with Reynoldsburg to be able to do that. And, and what, what happened was, is you get these old Euclidean zoning, and, and, and that's based off of Euclid, the idea that you want to separate all these different uses. Well, now we have a much cleaner society, meaning that some industry can be located next to commercial, that can be next to residential and all of this mixed use, right? So back to the idea of the downtown living of where you're putting it above these shops and restaurants before they separated everything. And that's where grew all this suburban sprawl.

J**Jason Duff** 42:03

We learned that didn't work. And so it's the pendulum swinging back, which is great. I'm thankful that it is. Yeah. And what historic building stock doesn't exist, they're building new one like Bridge Park, you know, like just creating their own mixed use.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 42:15

Yeah, that's right. I think that they bought into the idea so much and they were like, well, listen, well, like Westerville's got a beautiful downtown and it's got a beautiful downtown. Well, let's just build our own. Yeah. Right.

J**Jason Duff** 42:25

Which, you know, you and Taylor, you and your wife starting your own business, going through that process, what have you learned?

A

Andrew Bowsher 42:36

Never trust a timeline.

J

Jason Duff 42:37

We've been there on that. I can second that.

A

Andrew Bowsher 42:41

How about a budget?

J

Jason Duff 42:41

You want to start number 2? Yeah.

A

Andrew Bowsher 42:43

Number 2 would definitely be never trust the numbers. It's always gonna be 20% more than what you are ever thinking inside of your mind. And never trust that you're communicating correctly. I think the biggest breakdown is just communication and understanding that. Utilize the tools, take a picture of something. I mean, we, I don't know how many Pinterest boards that Taylor and I have of coming up with the ideas and strategies and just really just trying to utilize the value add. And then really getting a team that you can trust and build around was extremely important for us. And so we utilize Freitag and Associates, local firm. Firm out of Sydney, and Settles and Son, uh, really doing the building for us. And it was really, really important. And it was, it was a small outfit, and we looked at several other firms and things like that. Um, and a lot of it was, hey, we need to find ways to do value-add because we don't want to overextend ourselves, but we want to build this beautiful gym within the downtown.

J

Jason Duff 43:38

So, and, you know, now that you have one business, we were talking earlier, the only easier thing to make your life better is to own a few more.

A

Andrew Bowsher 43:46

Right, right. Yeah. So I mean, no pressure. No pressure. Maybe the future is bright. Taylor and I have talked from a variety of different things. Do we branch out and create our own winery? Maybe. Do we open up a boutique hotel? Maybe. There's buildings that are available and things that we are constantly eyeballing and looking into. And what used to be Conversations of, of travel have now turned into conversations of business development.

J

Jason Duff 44:18

Bring all the places that you could travel to right to Sidney, Ohio. Yeah, absolutely.

A

Andrew Bowsher 44:23

I love that. Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 44:24

Cool. Well, I'm going to transition us into our fun show segment today. Today we're going to do a real estate deep dive. So you had mentioned starting the new business, but I know from our previous conversation that you actually bought that whole building in our doing a couple things with it. So tell us a little bit about acquiring that building, what that process was like for you and your decision-making process there.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 44:44

Yeah, so one group that we haven't even got to talk about was Sydney Alive, Amy Brinek, that's downtown and does a lot of the events.

J**Jason Duff** 44:52

Amy's been a staple.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 44:53

She has for a while. And she was actually one of the first individuals that we met when we were going through the process because they appointed me back in September of 2021. And I didn't know officially start until the beginning of November. So there was a lot of time of transition. So I was headed over there and was trying to get myself as familiar as I possibly could with Sydney so I could hit the ground running. Mm-hmm. We knew that we were gonna look for a building. We had actually already locked up that building before the date that I started. Wow. Yeah. And it was actually where Sydney Alive was. It was their sort of downtown building. And it's this beautiful 3-story Parisian-looking building. It looks like it should be in France, in Paris somewhere. It has a sister building next to it.

J**Jason Duff** 45:33

It.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 45:34

Um, so when we looked at it, we, we started talking to, to Steve, the current owner, the previous owner, and, uh, we came up with a price. And then on to the due diligence, trying to figure everything out and enlisting Frytag Associates and going through the process. And, uh, there was a lot of hurdles to jump through because it was also going to be our residence, and still is. Like, we're still working on the top, on the floors, on the upper floors. Yeah, yeah. And so So every floor is about like 1,300, 1,400 square feet. And then upstairs will actually be an 1,800 square feet, 3-bed, 3-bath apartment for us that we'll live in, which is great because I'm close to the downtown business, but I'm also just like a 30-second walk from City Hall. Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 46:18

Wow.

A

Andrew Bowsher 46:18

That's perfect. Yeah.

J

Jason Duff 46:20

Just found the perfect building and went for it.

A

Andrew Bowsher 46:22

Yeah. So I don't know if that's great because I'm too close to work or great for the—

J

Jason Duff 46:27

My dream would be to live above a winery or a wine boutique. Be good for you. No, actually, people that know me, that would not be good for me. But I love that.

A

Andrew Bowsher 46:36

Yeah.

J

Jason Duff 46:36

Cool. Well, thanks for sharing all of this insight. You dropped a lot of good nuggets. I'm going to ask a few closing questions here. And the first one is, what is one professional development resource that was impactful for you along your professional journey?

A

Andrew Bowsher 46:49

I think it's the relationships. I think when I start working with some of these developers, because they build this sense of trust, all of a sudden you really become friends. Several of them actually went to Taylor and I's wedding because that's how friendly we have become with them. Tim Spencer was one of them. Yeah. And I know that he's doing some projects in Sydney and I know he's looking at Bull Fountain and so many others. And so, you know, so it's interesting for us from that perspective, but you know, you lean on those individuals that have been in their trenches doing it and you really start to understand like how they're thinking. Yeah. And I think that's like one of the, going back to sort of the idea of the city needing to break down those barriers. Is understand what their needs and necessities are and make sure that you're meeting them where that's at. Because at the end of the day, if you— if they're successful, the community is successful, and we have to get there. And there's always like this huge wall that everybody wants to put up and say, oh, the city's the greatest, and, ah, we're gonna do this, and if you don't do it my way, then don't worry about it.

J

Jason Duff 47:50

Well, it's getting the ego out of the way. Yeah, right. Like, like what they get in really understanding What's your goal? Well, oftentimes the developer and the city has the same goal, but it's like drop the egos. Like how can we work together to create something awesome?

A**Andrew Bowsher** 48:03

Absolutely. And these zoning codes were like written in such a way to, to the point to where it was like, okay, 'cause one bad apple, all of a sudden you, you made all of these changes and now it doesn't actually keep up with the time. And so, you know, so when you've got a developer that goes in there and says, oh my gosh, I've gotta do this, I've gotta do that. And now I've gotta go get these variances and I've gotta get these zoning changes and it's just, It's a mess.

J**Jason Duff** 48:24

And so the— Time is money too.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 48:25

100%.

J**Jason Duff** 48:26

So the more we waste time running through these processes that may not even serve the community better, everyone loses.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 48:33

It is. And don't get so hung up on certain details. There are really things that matter and stick to those. But if you're worried about the paint color of the sign or this brick or something like that, then that becomes a really, really big hurdle for these developers. And the costs are already outrageous to begin with.

J**Jason Duff** 48:50

I'm not going to name the community, but I had 4-hour design review board Zoom about a year ago that didn't end till like 11:00 at night. And I was the last guy on the agenda. I'm like, oh my gosh, not doing this community again. Yeah. Yep. Not doing this community again.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 49:07

Yeah, that's crazy.

J**Jason Duff** 49:08

Yeah.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 49:09

Wow.

J**Jason Duff** 49:09

Feel for you. And then the last one is, where can people follow you and the work that you're doing in Sydney?

A**Andrew Bowsher** 49:14

Yeah, you can follow us on, you know, SydneyOH.com. Click on our newsletter. It comes out weekly. You can go on our LinkedIn page, Facebook, Instagram. Maybe, maybe we'll start a TikTok. I don't know.

J**Jason Duff** 49:26

Hey, it'll work. Well, all you have to do is just subscribe to the Dayton Business Journal and you'll get a news alert of the next cool thing that's happening in Sydney. And just quick, high level, give us a few of the really cool projects that are getting ready to kick off there.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 49:40

Yeah, so, you know, SimCorp is launching, you know, that's \$1 billion in investment. And they also announced another \$300 million in investment right away because they need to start producing product for GM. Them and Ford and Honda already.

J**Jason Duff** 49:53

It's a big deal in these smaller communities. Huge.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 49:55

It's super big. And there's definitely some irons in the fire. We went to that trip to Japan and a lot of it is because we have 6 different businesses that call Sydney home. And the idea was, is that we wanted to show them the relationships and the investment that we want to make in them so they'll continue to make in us. And what actually came of that was, was one of the businesses actually came back and said, "You know what? We were thinking about taking a trip to Sydney because we we need to grow this segment. But we didn't know where we would place it. And because of that trip, they actually said, we actually now want to investigate into the additional ground that we have.

J**Jason Duff** 50:28

Wow.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 50:28

And maybe we're going to build in Sydney.

J**Jason Duff** 50:30

So that's incredible.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 50:31

So wins that are already kind of happening and kind of building from. So I would definitely say that the Ohio building, I cannot scream that to the top of the mountain. That is just going to be amazing by Woodard Development. The two ground floor tenants haven't been named yet, but that's going to be really exciting. And just all the housing. We actually have 1,200 units of housing, both single-family and multifamily, under development right now. And we haven't had any growth like this in probably 50 years.

J**Jason Duff** 50:56

Yeah. Wow. Super cool. Well, uh, just— you should be really proud of that. And I think for the people that are listening today, this did not just happen because of luck, right? It goes down to focusing on the heart, which is that downtown. It is, um, really getting the right planning. So So Andrew spent time talking about the utilities, the nuts and bolts, so that electric, the gas, the sewer, the internet. And then, you know, the next piece is, is what can we be doing to get more housing? And especially a community like Sidney, Ohio, that has such a strong industrial base, finding places for people to live of all different types and all different housing stock. And so, and then once you've got the housing and maybe the court to close the deal on the It's amenities. What do we have in the downtown? And not only is Andrew saying this wearing his city manager, city administrator hat, he is putting his money where his mouth is with he and his wife buying a downtown building, investing hundreds of thousands of dollars. I mean, just a massive amount of capital. And they're in there working with that business and the dream and the plan to live above that storefront. Dude, you have like in 360, like you're my like spirit animal. You've done all the things. And I say that with all seriousness. You should be really proud of the work that you're doing. It has been awesome to have you as a guest on the show today. And I've learned a lot from this episode. I'm sure many of our other folks will too. Yeah.

A**Andrew Bowsher** 52:32

Thank you, Andrew. Oh, thanks, guys. I really appreciate it.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 52:35

Thanks for tuning in on this episode of the Small Nation Podcast.

E**Ethan DeLeon** 52:37

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