I’m Mick Cornett, I’m the Mayor of Oklahoma City.

Well it seemed to me that we were on a path of unsustainable sprawl. Our city is extremely large, from a city limits standpoint – 620 square miles – and we had started expanding in all those directions. We had to somehow put an infusion of capital into the inner city. So somehow from a market standpoint the inner city can compete with the suburbs. So people who have a choice of where to live would have an equal chance of choosing closer to the city center than on the edges of the city center. So we’ve invested heavily in transportation, we’ve invested heavily in the schools, and we’ve invested heavily in a lot of the amenities that the urban home dweller is looking for.

You’ve got to somehow make a suburban dweller realize that the quality of life in the suburbs is directly related to the intensity of the core of the city. And that’s not instinctual. But you can’t be a suburb of nothing.

I was going to say people in those neighborhoods who want to help make it happen. You’re not going to be able to do it [alone]. You can’t select things on your own. You’ve got to have neighborhood enthusiasts who want to be [there], who are just looking for the city to help partner. And so that’s the first thing to look for – where’s an enthusiastic group of people who want to make their neighborhood better? And how can we partner to help?

There are a lot of federal programs that you can tap in to, try to help lead them to, and get your planning department involved. And a lot of times it takes some creativity and it always takes a lot of hard work. But there are a lot of success stories around the country and Oklahoma City has plenty of them.

I thought the first step toward addressing the obesity issue was getting a conversation going. You’re not going to address a problem unless you acknowledge you have a problem. And in Oklahoma City we weren’t talking about obesity. And so by calling the press conference and announcing that the entire city was going on a diet and that we were going to lose a million pounds, what I was doing was trying to do something to have neighbors talk about it over the back fence or have workers talk about it over the water cooler, or have a husband and wife talk about it for the very first time. And once you acknowledge it and the conversation starts taking place, well then you’ve brought it out in the open. And I was willing to tell my own personal story about my struggles with weight loss, which isn’t fun to do and something that I had to get used to doing. But I think that also kind of allowed the community to come to grips with it. That this isn’t necessarily something to be embarrassed about, but it is something we need to address. And we had become a community where life revolves around the automobile. And from that standpoint on, we said let’s look at this differently. Let’s start looking at creating a city that revolves around people. And that means a whole new way of looking at our streets and our parks, and the way we interact with cars.
And so from this point on the planning department is going to step up, the public works department is going to be listening carefully, and we’re all to do this together.

The best thing I can do for a family who’s underperforming is to try to create one more quality job in the community. For someone who has a job, get them a better job. For someone who doesn’t have a job, have a job created. And so everything that I’ve done, even though it may seem as if I was taking on a health issue or a transportation issue, it was really coming back at economic development and jobs. And in the last eight years we’ve created over 80,000 new jobs and we have the lowest unemployment in the United States. So I think the fact that I and the Chamber of Commerce and the city council and city staff have focused on job creation and raising per capita income, as a way to address the social issues has in a sense helped those situations. But we didn’t directly work at it from City Hall. We went at it from an economic development standpoint.

In Oklahoma City we have addressed the capital needs of the community. We have built up political capital, in that the citizens understand that the city government is going to do what it said it was going to do. And I think that’s a very fragile element. We could lose that public confidence very, very quickly. You’re only as strong as your last initiative and every one of them has to meet or exceed the citizens’ expectations. And you have to kind of assume you know what those expectations are.

Some other aspects to it. From a political standpoint we’re non-partisan, so when I run for mayor it doesn’t say whether I’m a Republican or a Democrat, and the same with the city council. We also have a manager form of government, which allows the mayor and council, to a certain extent, spend some time envisioning and trying to work on problems that aren’t addressing us today as much as they may ten years from now. And so a lot of the things we work on will not be affecting the city at all much until the end of the next decade. And the city manager has the task of performing the day-to-day operations. So I think the council and mayor are removed from the day-to-day operations, and I think that allows us to work on the planning side, and executing a vision and letting the city manager help us get there.

One other aspect is just the unity of the community. The council and I get along. There aren’t any voting cliques and if someone isn’t voting with you on an issue right now, they’re not going to turn around and in retribution vote against you in ten minutes. On our city council we all vote independently what we think is in the best interest of the city.