



## **Farmers Branch Chamber of Commerce Consultation Plan Status**

Vision: Revitalization of the Farmers Branch Chamber of Commerce.

Mission: Develop a practical and inspiring Plan, through a combination of proactive deliverables.

### **Deliverable 1: Understand and Inspire**

- Learn member expectations and needs through one-on-one meetings & Town Hall type meetings

### **Deliverable 2: Revamp and Revitalize**

- Develop ideas and actions to implement and/or revitalize activities and events
- Ideas offered to improve process and image.

### **Deliverable 3: Sales and Marketing**

- Lead creation of a membership drive

## SOAR REVIEW SUMMARY

The SOAR tool is useful for strategic goal planning. Strengths and opportunities originated from a small sampling of stakeholders during SWOT work, while aspirations and results derive from the primary leadership group. Chamber leaders will need to validate and edit as necessary to fully "own" this summary of vision and goals.

### Strengths

Legacy ... Chamber longevity; community service history; Farmers Branch name; a few popular programs  
Leadership ... Board/staff relationships with stakeholders; institutional knowledge; active volunteerism  
Revenue ... Dues; events; donations; some loyalty-based and some duty-based  
Assets ... Staff; website and marketing collateral; phone number; office with equipment and furnishings

### Opportunities

Growth ... Over 4,000 prospective members available; "Plan A" membership campaign being designed  
Merger/Acquisition ... Formal union with Metrocrest or alternative entity; acquire an entity with members  
Confederacy/Alliance ... Reorganization of Chambers into common core with semi-autonomous teams

### Aspirations

Business ... The primary source of support for Farmers Branch organizations, the "go to" for all things business  
Community ... A key facilitator for generosity and activism involving Chamber members and special causes  
Reputation ... Excellence, energy and reliability; events are talk of the town; genuine advocates for members

### Results

Growth ... New members join frequently through sustained campaigning, due to clear benefits message  
Growth ... Revenue from membership fees cover budget expenses; event profits and donations fund growth  
Growth ... Benefits and resource access reduce and expand to match member needs and Chamber purpose  
Feedback ... Members are loyal fans; member pulse check and proactive care is a core system  
Events ... Scheduling is temporary until independent funding and staffing; management is thorough, polished  
Staffing ... Sufficient people to achieve Chamber goals; compensated for needed skills and schedules  
Independence ... Financial freedom from subsidies; new relationship with City is collaborative and collegial  
Engagement ... All Board members actively contribute; members frequently volunteer; two-way communication

Bottom line, once validated as 100% accurate, this view of success can be achieved with reasonable time, money and heavy Board support (or a well-funded, experienced executive action team).

## SWOT ANALYSIS SUMMARY

The SWOT tool is useful as a reality check. Over 4 weeks, I interviewed 49 Chamber stakeholders. This small sampling revealed a reasonably reliable 360 degree view of the Chamber's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The most positive views came from very new business members. All stakeholders, including these outliers, provided helpful feedback along with some hopeful input.

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### Weaknesses

Benefits ... None tangible beyond limited networking, ribbons, favors; member needs not really a factor  
Message ... Poorly defined purpose; forgotten mission and slogan; diverse membership needs/interests  
Processes/Systems ... Antiquated, inefficient and unnecessarily low-tech; staff lacks delegated authority  
Leadership ... Board members lack expectations of required time/talent/treasure; inactive committees  
Membership ... Insufficient to sustain improvements or program growth; mixed loyalty; some apathy  
Facilities ... Dated; lacks modern professional appearance; spotty access; long lease; unneeded space  
Communication ... Access to resources and staff too limited; Chamber software not fully leveraged  
Gatherings ... Meetings more social than networking; some not mission-aligned; event management challenges

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Growth ... Over 4,000 prospective members available; "Plan A" membership campaign being designed  
Merger/Acquisition ... Formal union with Metrocrest or alternative entity; buy an entity with members  
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### Threats

Competition ... Direct from the Metrocrest Chamber;  
Confusion ... many members don't understand benefits  
Cashflow ... City desires Chamber independence; Chamber defunding is highly likely next budget cycle

Bottom line, daily operations are almost ok, with enough support to maintain the status quo for awhile. But the strategic situation is dire, with most stakeholders unable to agree on why the Chamber exists. This Chamber faces an existential crisis that requires not a turnaround, but an extreme makeover. This will take time, money and heavy Board support (or a well-funded, experienced executive action team).

# **FBCC “PLAN A” MEMBERSHIP CAMPAIGN**

Launch Date TBD

## **OVERVIEW**

### **1. Description**

Farmers Branch Chamber of Commerce wants to help business and non-profit organizations prosper. To maximize the impact for the organizations it serves, and to fund the benefits it offers, the Chamber must dramatically increase its number of members.

This plan is the first half of an ambitious campaign to increase current membership after 90 days of intense marketing and sales.

### **2. Scope**

The prerequisites listed for this plan will serve both current and new members, by encouraging active engagement in Chamber programs and providing the basis for testimonial marketing.

The goal of Plan A is to rapidly increase the number of Chamber members. It includes the messaging, resources, methods, and supporting activities to attract members.

Not part of this scope is Plan B, which will be the follow-up activity necessary to fully realize and expand upon the successes of Plan A.

Successful completion of Plan A should lead to increasing total membership (including provisional members). Plus Chamber stakeholder engagement should be higher, measured in terms of volunteer rates, event participation, and responsive input.

### **3. Prerequisite Requirements**

Plan A will be ready to launch when the following prerequisites are ready:

- **Benefits.** A short list must be adopted. Only the minimum quantity and quality required to attract 10% of the target organizations is needed. New benefits and improvements to benefits can be added later. Some benefits suggested by the SOAR research are listed in the Addendum.
- **Programs.** All Chamber activity must support member needs as directly as possible. The majority of Chamber members, and all of the Plan A targets, are for-profit businesses. Most of those are small businesses, whose main priority is to make money and save money. So all programs for Plan A need to match that priority. Some programs suggested by the SOAR research are listed in the Addendum.

- **Message.** From slogan to elevator pitch to marketing collateral, why the Chamber is worth joining needs to be articulated clearly. Since Plan A's prime targets are small businesses, a single message can be crafted. A message suggested by the SOAR research is listed in the Addendum.
- **Collateral.** Marketing materials supporting the campaign will include online and paper collateral. Recommended collateral is listed in the Addendum.
- **Workforce.** Volunteers and contractors qualified and able to execute Plan A must be recruited and scheduled. Some potential temporary labor sources plus work calculations are listed in the Addendum.
- **Technology.** Members and prospects must be able to experience Chamber benefits via improved access to staff and resources. The minimum technology needed to meet projected demand is listed in the Addendum.
- **Media.** Some paid ads will prime the pump of media interest and provide proof of concept to prospective members. Also, free marketing can be acquired creatively. Some potential media sources are listed in the Addendum.
- **Cooperation.** City support would start with the Mayor declaring the special day that would serve as the campaign's main event. Such a public announcement should naturally produce some motivation for various City elements to help ensure the success of the event.

#### **4. Execution Requirements**

The 90 day campaign components include:

- **Special Day.** A day or weekend (similar to Tax Free Day) that motivates consumers to buy from local small businesses. The Mayor will be asked to make the official announcement. Participating Chamber members will offer a free or discounted or upgraded product or service, with a charity tie-in.
- **Free Trial Membership.** Prospects can join the Chamber provisionally for a free trial period. This will be a big confidence builder and lower a sales barrier. This offer will expire on the special day. Trial would last 6 or 12 weeks.
- **Members Only Networking.** Carding network event attendees will add aura of exclusivity and eliminate freeloading. To mitigate requiring membership proof from being too burdensome, it will be super easy to prove membership ...
  - Facial recognition by staff
  - Find membership in directory
  - Show ticket on mobile
  - Show ticket on paper
  - Join on the spot using Free Trial Membership card

- Dual Payment System. When members join or renew, they'll be given the option between annual payment and monthly payments. Both options will auto renew. Credit cards will become the preferred payment method.
- Telethon Campaign. Multiple calls until a decision-maker joins or rejects. With old contact data, this could take several calls to clean up the list.
- Social Marketing Funnel. A combination of targeted ads on social, with retargeting ads and email pitches. Free gifts will be solicited from members and donors to use as landing page inducements.
- Face-to-Face Sales. In person visits to prospects and members, possibly an edutainment or tradeshow style event to draw prospects as a single audience.

## 5. Risk Mitigation

The numerous prerequisites include suggestions that have not been fully vetted by a large sampling of businesses or by the Chamber leadership. The risk of unexpected results can be mitigated by the small sampling of stakeholders, consultant experience, and not overly relying on any single suggestion for overall success.

Poor execution of this plan could risk accelerating a negative spiral where current stakeholders abandon ship. This risk can be mitigated by publicly celebrating every minor success, and by choosing people with professional pride and sense of responsibility.

This plan is somewhat complex in that it relies on multiple marketing initiatives being executed simultaneously with several sales activities. This risk can be mitigated with experienced coordination, constant communication, and considerable grace.

## 6. Timeline/Schedule

General Patton believed, "A good plan violently executed now is better than a perfect plan executed next week." Prerequisites could be prepared as soon as a few weeks, or much longer if enough budget and people cannot be secured. Plan A itself should take 90 days.

## PLAN A ADDENDUM

### Suggested Benefits ...

- Customers. Participating in the campaign's main event will generate more business for members. Plus regular programs aim to attract customers.
- Learning. Free or partially subsidized education/edutainment/masterminds/panels for leaders and their employees will improve skills. Chamber is a SME source.
- Credibility. Co-branded advertising, including free marketing via Chamber social and Chamber presence at member events.
- Advocacy. Helping facilitate member business activity, especially navigating local government. Not a substitute for legal or registered lobby representation.
- Community. Helping facilitate giving back and paying forward via charitable events and programs. Voice of combined business for improving the City.

### Suggested Programs ...

- Sales Oriented Events. For example the main campaign event could be "Small Biz Bonanza Day" or "Local Loyal Day" or something that emphasizes the focus on Chamber members and the benefit for patronizing them on that day or weekend.
- Professional Development. For example a monthly 2-4 hour practical training event, such as "How to Make Your LinkedIn Profile Powerful" and "How to Ace Your Next Inspection". And the first annual industry specific mini-conference.
- Ribbon Cutting. Whether brand new or Grand Re-Opening, the Chamber would facilitate the service plus bring some guaranteed media attention.
- Help My Biz Hotline. Some needs might be referred to SCORE/SBDC/consultants and some would be handled by staff calling/emailing/visiting appropriate officials.
- Help Me Help You. Charitable events during Plan A would crowd source funding and volunteers. A quarterly Business Leaders Memo to the Mayor/City Manager

### Suggested Message ...

- "We help Farmers Branch businesses make money and save money." "Chamber members" could be substituted for businesses. The point is to identify the audience as a niche, and succinctly state the key benefits.

### Suggested Collateral ...

- The Chamber website should articulate message and benefits, plus include new features like member spotlight videos (at least 4 prerequisite spotlight videos needed), and links to frequently needed info.
- Paper collateral like a brochure and a quickie provisional member signup card.

### Suggested Workforce ...

- Approximately 4,000 businesses need to be contacted by phone, email, targeted social, and ideally snail mail and personal visits. To do that in 90 days will require a lot of work hours. To do that as inexpensively as possible will rely on as many volunteers as can be recruited.
- Board members to make sales calls and visits, or they could recruit substitutes.
- Staff, including interim President focusing on member sales and service; current assistant focusing on social marketing and logistics; a temporary receptionist or service to handle increased inbound calls/messages; a temporary sales manager or service to coordinate the Chamber Telethon and sales visits.
- Volunteer members, college marketing interns, entrepreneur capstone students.
- Professional sales call center service. Professionals are likely to be far more effective than volunteers given the short time.

### Suggested Technology ...

- An DIY calendar like Calendly should be integrated into the Chamber website, so that staff can set availability for events and consults; and anyone else can request time within the available slots. Back-and-forth emails/calls/voicemails eliminated.
- A DIY kiosk setup in the Chamber lobby will give limited access to information resources, the website and calendar. Receptionist and executive time can be redirected to member needs that require human intervention.
- Mobile communication devices for out-of-office staff during business hours, and after hours for executives.
- Additional temporary phone lines and equipment may be needed if the volunteers work from the Chamber office.

### Suggested Media Sources ...

- Business journalists, community reporters, local Internet or traditional TV and radio, and the newsletters/magazines of the industry associations that some Chamber members belong to.

### Suggested Member Class Revision ...

- Replace employee count with desired benefit/influence ranking. Perhaps Platinum becomes Business Leadership Council; includes prepaid tables.

### Expedited Launch ...

Although the prerequisites are necessary to ensure ultimate success, the Chamber must balance two adages ... "Haste makes Waste" vs "Perfection is the Enemy of Progress." The longer that the launch is delayed, the less time the Chamber will have to counter likely budget hits and competitor wins.