

Arkansas Business

EXECUTIVE Q&A

Mayor George McGill Finds No Myth in Fort Smith Accomplishments

by **Arkansas Business Staff**

Monday, Nov. 1, 2021 12:00 am 2 min read



Mayor George McGill of Fort Smith (Bob Coleman)

George McGill, a Fort Smith native and Democrat, was elected Fort Smith's first Black mayor in August 2018. Previously, he served three terms in the Arkansas House of Representatives. He was deputy speaker pro tempore; chaired the Aging, Children & Youth, Legislative & Military Affairs Committee; and co-chaired the Policy-Making Subcommittee of the Legislative Governing Board of the Council of State Governments.

McGill has also chaired the Fort Smith Planning Commission. He has served on the Riverfront Task Force Committee, the Fort Smith Boys & Girls Club board, Fort Smith Chamber of Commerce board and Fort Smith Historical Society board.

McGill, an Army veteran, earned his bachelor's degree in education and an MBA from the University of Arkansas.

What are Fort Smith's biggest challenges?

Our biggest challenge is managing the DOJ/EPA consent decree related to our sewer system. The decree will require a massive investment of more than \$300 million in infrastructure. However, I am confident the benefits of completing this work will position the city to accommodate development and population growth already taking place. We will not shy away from this issue, but must clearly communicate the work that is done while also disclosing how funds are spent. It is essential that we, like every other growing city, meet the growing workforce demands. In addition, we are committed to retaining our current talent.

How important is Fort Smith's history as a key gateway to the West to its economic development and tourism strategies?

Certainly, our Western culture is a unique asset in Arkansas and, indeed, in the entire Southwest region. Whenever practical, we highlight it as a one-of-a-kind feature of our city. The National Historic Site along the Arkansas River marks the Western District Court of the famous Judge Isaac C. Parker, and the U.S. Marshals Museum will become a national tourist attraction.

On the other hand, we are more than just Western history. The Unexpected murals have attracted international artists to display their talent all across our city. The riverfront outdoor concerts and nightlife attract people from all across the region. We are making history everyday by combining our Western background with contemporary flare.

What are you happy to have accomplished so far and what's next?

Former Secretary of the Air Force Heather Wilson called Ebbing Air National Guard Base in Fort Smith the future of the United States Air Force. Fort Smith was selected to be the training site for the Air Force's most advanced aircraft: the F-16 and F-35 stealth fighters. Sources project a \$850 million to \$1 billion per year ROI. These are history-defining moments in the narrative of the city.



Fort Smith will be vastly different in just a few short years. The public-private partnerships have been very successful and show the city's willingness to invest in new projects. The development of Chaffee Crossing with more than 40 new residential neighborhoods and the astounding growth of the Arkansas Colleges of Health Education have created more than 3,000 jobs. The expansion of Mercy Hospital and the new VA Clinic and the Peak Innovation Center, our new workforce development center, all further Fort Smith as one of the premier cities in the heartland.

In This Story

[City of Fort Smith](#), [George McGill](#)