



Lawrence Association of Neighborhoods

Re: City of Lawrence 2015 Budget

May 18, 2014

To: Mayor Amyx and Lawrence City Commissioners

I write to you, on behalf of the Lawrence Association of Neighborhoods, to share our comments and recommendations with you regarding how the City of Lawrence funds and executes economic development.

We respect that the Chamber of Commerce has a valid and necessary role in our community, enhancing and marketing local businesses and promoting the shared goals of its members. We also appreciate recent news that the Chamber is beginning efforts at providing a separate accounting for some EDC-related expenses.

Recently, the Joint Economic Development Council (JEDC) recommended that the taxpayers of Lawrence and Douglas County give over \$450,000 per year to the Chamber of Commerce for economic development purposes. We believe the \$220,000 requested from the City of Lawrence should not be allocated to the Chamber to utilize through the Economic Development Corporation (EDC) of Lawrence & Douglas County.

We assert that it is not an appropriate role for the Chamber to conduct economic development planning on behalf of the citizens and taxpayers of our community. The skills necessary to be effective at economic development planning are different from the skills necessary to be a business advocate. The Chamber is a business advocate; it does not have staff members who are appropriately trained in economic development planning. Further, it is unwise to assume that Chamber interests accurately reflect the vision and needs of our community as a whole or that community concerns will dominate in cases where those interests conflict.

It is time for us to adopt procedures that reflect the state of the art in economic development planning. The City of Lawrence can greatly improve public confidence in the local economic development planning process by bringing it inside City Hall. Subcontracting those efforts to an arm of the Chamber of Commerce simply cannot provide the efficiency and transparency needed for best stewardship of taxpayer dollars. To that end, we believe that the City should hire skilled professional planners who have appropriate education and experience and drive our local economic development process with staff that report to the City Manager, and are accountable to both the City Commission and the taxpayers who fund their salaries. At the very least, solutions in this vein should be explored by the JEDC before any similar funding for the Chamber of Commerce/EDC is recommended in the future.

We sincerely appreciate your consideration of our comments,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Linda Bush".

Linda Bush, Chair
Lawrence Association of Neighborhoods