



Lawrence Association of Neighborhoods

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Re: **Proposed changes to the implementation of local economic development planning in Lawrence**

The Lawrence Association of Neighborhoods recommends that the City of Lawrence professionalize and internalize local economic development planning. Lawrence could accomplish this by bringing local economic development inside City Hall with the work done by professionally trained economic development planners who would report to the City Manager, serving the interests of the taxpayers.

Arguments for the recommendation:

1. *Professional training*

There is a lack of professional economic knowledge among the staff of the Chamber of Commerce leading development activities in Lawrence. None of the Chamber staff have advanced education in local economic development planning. Yet, this staff is attempting to lead the Public Incentives Review Committee and the Joint Economic Development Council. Both entities are populated with well-intentioned people, but these people have little or no knowledge of how to make local economic development effective. The Chamber instructs from its own perspective, not from evidence-based research on effectiveness in local economic development planning. If these entities are to guide the City Commission in its economic development decisions, they need to be based upon expert knowledge and evidence-based research.

Solution: Hire professional local economic development planners with graduate level training in the field of local economic development planning.

2. *Cost*

The City and County give over \$400,000 per year to the Chamber for economic development activities. The quality of this work could be improved by hiring professional staff who are better trained to do this work. Two additional staff people could do this work for approximately \$100,000 per person per year including salary, fringe benefits and other overhead. Thus, the job could be done better for less money, saving the taxpayers of the city and the county about \$200,000 per year.

Solution: Hire two professional local economic development planners at lower cost than the taxpayers are now spending on the Chamber of Commerce to support economic development.

3. *Accountability*

The Chamber is not an organization that makes its work public. Recent experience tells us that local economic development projects should be open to public scrutiny as is true of any public-private partnership. Direct reporting to the city improves credibility. If the local economic development staff reported to the City Manager, their actions would be accountable to the City Manager and to the City Commission. The Chamber of Commerce should be at the table when local economic development is being debated, but it should not be in control of the table.

Solution: Hire two professional economic development planners who would work inside City Hall and report to the City Manager.

Recommendation: Consider terminating the economic development contract with the Lawrence Chamber of Commerce and hire two professional economic development planners who will report to the City Manager.

Sincerely,

Candice Davis, Chair Lawrence Association of Neighborhoods

Kirk McClure, Vice Chair Lawrence Association of Neighborhoods