

Columbia LEADS: Business and Economic Development Plan

LEARN

EDUCATE

ADAPT

DEVELOP

STRENGTHEN

Impeccable Customer Service

Business owners rely on the services provided by the City of Columbia to maintain properties, run efficiently, and operate within the law. Columbia must take a deep look into customer service by getting an ample amount of feedback and analyzing the systems that are currently in place. Dealing with the City of Columbia is the first impression a new business owner has and will likely be a factor when determining whether or not this will be their permanent home. 80% of economic growth for an average city comes from the expansion of existing firms. If customer service is not impeccable, then businesses may continue to move elsewhere and never expand here in Columbia.

Advanced Technology

Time is money - it's an old adage, but for business owners it's true. I have received feedback from many business owners in the City of Columbia who complain about the lack of technology that is specific to business in the city. If other entities within this state can provide the necessary documentation and resources online, then so should the City of Columbia. This applies to the permit office, licensing office, water/sewer, etc. Advancing technology will never stray away from the core principle of equity, so alternatives will be available to those who need it. However, the city must take the time and money to invest in a process that is simply common sense in the 21st century.

Smart and Reasonable Regulations

Regulations are a part of doing business in any city, but they should never be considered burdensome. The sentiment of many business owners in Columbia is that doing business is "too expensive and too painful." We need to adjust the processes of obtaining and maintaining a business license to ensure that it is fair and equitable. The city also needs to analyze long-term taxes that affect business continuing to do business, such as property taxes and business personal property taxes. Finally, city officials must strive to be personable and equitable in enforcing regulations across the board.

Streamlined Processes

In some instances, potential business owners and developers have navigated all of the needed steps to starting a business across the river in half the time that it takes in the City of Columbia. Columbia needs to use its resources to analyze business development processes with a fine-tooth comb and determine what's gone wrong. All processes should be streamlined, efficient, and as simple as possible, with promised deadlines and consistent follow-up. This is just one more way to attract new business and development that will want to call Columbia home!

Analyze Spending & Cut Waste

Many business owners feel as though they do not receive the full worth of what they are paying back into the city. For example, Columbia has been negligent in updating and maintaining certain infrastructure, but there is a premium charge to business owners. Some business owners feel that the City of Columbia continues to go up on fees, but the improvements do not align with the cost. Paying taxes is a part of fiscal responsibility to the community, and business owners do not mind paying for what they feel is cost-effective. The city must have some tough conversations and address spending habits. More taxes and extra fees cannot always be the answer - the City of Columbia must evaluate our bottom line just as the business owners do!