

LEGISLATIVE #

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INTER-OFFICE COMMUNICATION

DATE: February 20, 2012
TO: Commissioner Todd Chase, Chairperson EDUCC
FROM: Russ Blackburn, City Manager
SUBJECT: Reestablishment of an Economic Development Coordinator Position

History

In the mid 1990s the City of Gainesville created a position of Economic Development Director. The role of the position was to pursue expansion of Gainesville's economic base particularly focusing on science and technology businesses and serving as a main point of contact for economic development issues within the city. A significant accomplishment of this position was the procurement of a grant to construct the Gainesville technology incubator, better known as GTEC. In addition the position helped to market the Airport Industrial Park and served as a liaison to the Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce, CEO and economic development activities focused in the City of Gainesville. In fiscal year 2007 I reached a decision due to budget constraints to realign our economic development focus by transferring the Economic Development Director to serve as the Planning and Development Services Director. The Planning and Development Services Director would work on economic development initiatives in addition to other duties. The driving force behind this decision was the need to reduce overall expenditures but the consolidation of duties under one position held, and still holds, positive attributes. All economic development in the City ultimately is subject to the development review and building permit process. Having a Planning and Development Services Director familiar with economic development strategy and issues provides a platform which enhances coordination of our economic development initiatives. Since fiscal year 2007, the City has not had a stand-alone economic development position.

Current Practice

The Director of Planning and Development Services, CRA Director and the City Manager serve as a team focused on the City's economic strategy and project implementation. Under my leadership the coordinated economic development team meets at least bi-monthly to share information on the status of economic development initiatives and to work collaboratively to

meet the City's goals. Key issues discussed among team members include the City's role in Innovation Square, GTEC, the status of the Power District, and the City's efforts to lease space at the Airport Industrial Park. A team based approach is successful in continuing the pursuit of economic development strategy and ensures that information is shared among our key players helping to build Gainesville's economy. A weakness of our strategy is that there is no one individual who is the go to person for economic development activities. Each of the members of the economic development team have very full workloads and extensive responsibilities making it difficult for the City to focus proactively on developing and implementing economic development strategy and initiatives.

Future Needs

Subject to the availability of funding, the City Commission should strongly consider reestablishing the position of Economic Development Coordinator. By reestablishing this position the City will have one person whose sole duty is to formulate and implement economic development initiatives. The position will continue to work collaboratively with the CRA Manager and the Planning and Development Services Director. An Economic Development Coordinator would have the ability to develop relationships at a deeper level with representatives working on the Innovation Square project, our Power District, continued development of GTEC and serve as a liaison and point person to the CEO. Over time Gainesville should also fine tune its development of demographic data which is used by site selectors and economic development prospects to determine if Gainesville is the appropriate location for their ventures. Examples of the kind of activities which I would anticipate the Economic Development Coordinator focusing on include:

- Nurturing the relationship with existing major employers to help those employers understand the potential for expansion in our Gainesville market area and to assist employers, if they do expand, to do so in a streamlined and low-stress manner;
- Provide market and demographic information to private industry both in our community and to entities inquiring regarding the Gainesville market;
- Provide relocation assistance/relocation considerations to private industry working cooperatively in partnership of various economic development initiatives; and
- Working on public policy initiatives that promote economic development opportunities and serving as an expeditor to assist companies in procuring development entitlements permits and approvals.

The Economic Development Coordinator will continue to serve as a member of the City's economic development team coordinating and collaborating with the CRA, Planning and Development Services and outside economic entities. Reestablishing the Economic Development Coordinator position helps the City by being ready to respond to opportunities to

grow our economic base and to assist future and existing businesses to navigate through the City's development review process with minimum stress.

I look forward to discussing economic development activities and potential strategies to enhance our economic development focus with the EDUCC members.

RB:kp

Cc: Mayor Craig Lowe
Members of the City Commission