

August 15, 2010

Tim Cooley
Director, Economic Development
City of Madison
215 Martin Luther King, Jr., Blvd.
Madison, WI 52703 (via email)

RE: City of Madison Development Approval Process

Dear Mr. Cooley:

This letter of comments and recommendations regarding the City of Madison Development Approval Process are my personal views as a resident of Madison. Although these are my personal views they are expressed from a context of a small business owner with many years of work with a significant number of business and professional clients in Madison (and across the country) with services in organizational and business development, change processes, operational effectiveness, strategic planning and human resources. I have been very active in community and neighborhood groups advocating community improvement.

My comments about the development approval process will be limited to two major areas of concern.

1. The bases and manner about which city and community organizations have input and influence approval processes:
 - a. Recommendation: Differentiate the levels and nature of involvement of various city committees and commissions, neighborhood associations and other groups.
 - i. The involvement of these groups should be primarily advisory with little or no decision-making authority
 - ii. Recommendations should be accompanied with financial impact statements on the outcomes sought by the group(s)
 - b. Rationale: The present practices which lend credence to the recommendation include
 - i. The non-elected groups have too much 'real' or 'perceived' "veto" power with the movement of projects through the approval process
 - ii. Pressure points and group advocacy is too often obstructionist in nature
 - iii. Groups show a definite lack of, or application of, an understanding of a bigger community picture; short- or long-term economic impacts of their proposed actions
 - iv. A lack of understanding of the value of job retention/development and the contribution of the private sector paying for community services, which in turn, contributes substantially to quality of life

- v. A lack of understanding that by adding requirements and obstacles to the approval process it adds up to time and money for businesses to implement projects, which makes it prohibitive to establish or expand a business here; and, adds to the ultimate costs of products and services to the consumers and adds to the high cost of living in the area.
2. Growth and expansion of business already located here
- a. Recommendation: Streamline, provide incentives and place more emphasis on helping existing business grow and development
 - i. Successful businesses already know what it takes, but need proactive support and assistance to sustaining that success and/or for growing their productivity, performance and profitability
 - ii. It is recognized that Madison and the area have several sectors of viable business enterprises which can be enhanced—build on our assets
 - b. b. Rationale: The present practices which lend credence to the recommendation include
 - i. A substantial base exists with good paying jobs to attract growth in products and services
 - ii. Transportation; city, county and state policies; and, other infrastructure issues are obstacles/inhibitors to not only the growth of existing businesses but to the retention of those businesses
 - iii. The out-migration of businesses and talent is well substantiated—critical work is needed to “stop the bleeding” and fix the problems contributing to this situation.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments and recommendations. I will be appreciative of any opportunity to further discuss these ideas/issues and to move us toward strengthening our business base and quality of life.

Sincerely,
Don Severson
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