

Memorandum

City of Lawrence

Planning & Development Services

TO: David L. Corliss, City Manager

FROM: Scott McCullough, Director

CC: Cynthia Boecker, Assistant City Manager
Diane Stoddard, Assistant City Manager

Date: September 8, 2009

RE: City Commission Economic Development Goal Report –
Improvements to the Development Process

This report updates the City Commission on improvements to the development process to ensure adequate facilitation for quality development, a stated goal of the 2009 City Commission goal setting work session.

One of the main ways the city can facilitate development, while ensuring that the community's values and appropriate site planning principles are upheld, is to revise the development code to balance the needs of the development community and the needs of the city to protect the public's health, safety and welfare.

The [attached](#) list of text amendments demonstrates the significant efforts being undertaken by the Planning and Development Services Department, the Planning Commission, and several stakeholder groups, including LAN, the Chamber of Commerce, individual neighborhood associations, etc. Staff is focusing on ways to streamline the development process while maintaining the core values of how development occurs in the community.

A few of the more notable text amendments include:

1. Revise the parking standards to the benefit of existing commercial developments, recognizing that the development code adopted in 2006 has proven to be an impediment to lease even existing tenant spaces.
2. Exempt certain developments from the requirement to site plan changes of use in the CD (Downtown Commercial) district under certain circumstances.
3. Revise the site plan standards to increase the threshold of when an existing development must comply with the full code. Related to this is language that provides greater authority to the Planning Director to waive code standards if sound site planning principles are otherwise maintained.

4. Increasing the approval timeframe and ability to gain extensions for approved projects from the City Commission. Related is an amendment that increased the notice for site plans from adjacent properties to those within 200 feet of the subject site plan.

These efforts dovetail into efforts recently completed that include merging the Planning and Development Services (PDS) departments, merging the PDS website, reorganizing the plan review division to reduce plan review times for building permit applications, revising specific elements of the plan review process based on LHBA requests, building strong relationships with the Lawrence Homebuilder's Association and the Lawrence Association of Neighborhoods, conducting training sessions for the Planning Commission related to development review, implementing a new database tracking system for development applications to track performance measures, and increasing the communication and coordination between Historic Resources staff and Plan Review staff to reduce permit review times.

One of the challenges to improve the process is understanding where the inefficiencies in the process are from the perspectives of different stakeholders. Recognition of the progress made to date must be shared between the staff, the Planning Commission, and the stakeholders that have been offering specific issues and ideas to make the process more efficient. The LHBA, Chamber members, professional designers, and LAN members have all been helpful in offering specific ideas to resolve issues and affect the process. Staff looks forward to continuing these relationships and process improvements.