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Speed of Government – Another Competitive Advantage

As we work to attract quality companies to the region and assist with the expansion of existing companies, we are often questioned about the attitudes and policies of local and state government. The business friendly nature of a community has become increasingly important to high-growth companies, as they compete in an environment where the ability to get an operation up and running quickly is critical to their success. Their decision to locate in a community is often directly related to their confidence in being able to meet an aggressive timeline - going from zero to fully operational. The wildcard in getting a project totally operational is sometimes referred to as “speed of government”. This is one of our competitive advantages over nearly every other community in the West.

Speed of government encompasses many factors. The permit process is normally the key component, but there can be several other issues as well. These can include: how well do the local and state government agencies work together; excessive or onerous design requirements; frequency and attitude of inspectors; ability to get a variance, zoning change or other adjustment to standard policies; and overall attitude of government toward business.

The permit process is often the most important component of a project. The prospects are looking for clear and reasonable requirements that, in a perfect world, come from a single location and through a single point of contact. The closer a community can get to the “perfect world” scenario the faster they tend to be. The reverse is a model where it is not clear what permits or licenses are required and there are multiple agencies that must get involved. This process often has conflicting requirements, unreasonable response times and fees or fines that clearly make the company feel unwanted.

A subset of the permit process, and one that often dramatically slows a project, is the attitude and availability of inspectors. If the government inspectors have a “gotcha” attitude and fail to appreciate who the customer is, then the project is in trouble. The policies and regulations are complex and may be subject to interpretation. Additionally, failing one inspection can cause a delay or rescheduling of other inspections, exacerbating delays. Without a positive approach, one that says “we’re here to help you get this done” (because you are bringing jobs and investment to our community) the speed of government grinds to a halt.

The more onerous and complicated government is, the more non-business requirements that are imposed, and the harder it is to do something out of the ordinary, the more likely there will be delays. Additionally, overreaching government that sides with activist groups or neighborhoods that feel empowered to tell a company what they can and cannot do, regardless of the zoning or economic impact of the company, all make up this important business climate criteria that has a direct impact on the speed of government. We may not be able to match the incentive programs

used by other states to attract companies, but we can maintain and even improve our speed of government if we want to continue to compete for the quality jobs of the future.