

# THE CITY OF LEE'S SUMMIT DEVELOPMENT CENTER

by Krista Klaus

Early in 2015, commercial broker/developer Mike VanBuskirk placed a call to Mark Dunning, director of Lee's Summit's newly launched Development Center. VanBuskirk was working on the potential sale of a historic building located in downtown Lee's Summit and wanted to attract a neighborhood bar and restaurant chain out of St. Louis that typically locates within historic buildings.

"I made one call, and had an 'all hands' meeting set up with City staff within a week. We had the prospect and everyone else around the table in a very positive and welcoming environment. A single point of contact was designated from the Development Center to lead them through the process. The mayor even came in and said, 'We'd love to welcome you to Lee's Summit.' I can tell you that just doesn't typically happen," said VanBuskirk, senior vice president and principal of Newmark Grubb Zimmer.

Earlier this year, the franchisee for Llewelyn's Pub purchased the historic Hartley building, received approval for their redevelopment plans, and the new restaurant is currently under construction for an opening in early 2016. The Development Center and the designated project manager continue to work with them until they receive their final certificate of occupancy and open for business.

"One of the guys working on the deal said it was the most positive experience he ever had with a city. For a city the size of Lee's Summit, there's nothing else like it," VanBuskirk said.



Llewelyn's Pub, Lee's Summit

VanBuskirk is one of dozens of Kansas City area commercial real estate brokers and developers who are praising the city of Lee's Summit for overhauling and streamlining its development process through the January 2014 launch of the Lee's Summit Development Center.

"Many municipalities will say, 'No, you can't do this. No, you can't do that.' But in Lee's Summit, they say, 'No you can't do that, but you could do this.' That makes all the difference for a project."

The idea of a streamlined, efficient, one-of-a-kind development portal emerged in 2013 after the City sought business and community input to inform a massive rebranding effort and learned from the development community that unnecessary red tape and redundancy in the approval process were

holding up and even killing some projects.

"With a strong desire to boost investment and spur job creation in Lee's Summit, City Hall got busy drafting plans to overhaul and streamline our development process, and that's how the Development Center

## Lee's Summit Development Center By the Numbers 2014-2015

Total projects/proposals: **235**

Completed projects: **38**

Projects currently under construction: **34**

was born," said Steve Arbo, Lee's Summit city manager.

In late 2015, the city of Lee's Summit and the Lee's Summit Economic Development Council hosted a broker outreach meeting to educate the commercial real estate community about the Development Center.



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*~Michael VanBuskirk, Newmark Grubb Zimmer senior vice president and principal*



"Staff is trained to help and assist with whatever business or development needs may arise. They are the 'go to' people who coach and guide applicants, developers, and their teams through the regulatory process so they understand what is needed, why it is needed, and anticipate future needs from these customers," said Mark Dunning, former Development Center director and now Lee's Summit assistant city manager.

The goal is to create an environment of success for all involved while adhering to city standards and processes; at the same time eliminating what is known as 'transactional friction' that can leave the City and the developer frustrated and ready to walk away from the table.

"At the end of the day, we want everyone who has experienced the business or development process, or had interaction with the City to have a positive experience and be an ambassador for the City." □

*The Lee's Summit Development Center is a one-of-a-kind public/private partnership between the City and the investor-supported Economic Development Council. Since early 2014, the two entities have worked to successfully "tag-team business and development projects," with the EDC. They identify and assist with expansion opportunities, including incentives and site selection, while the City focuses on*

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*providing a highly efficient business and development portal aimed at reducing red tape involved in the application processes and speeding up incentive and zoning approvals, infrastructure improvements and other issues related to site delivery.*

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**Mark Dunning speaks with local brokers at a City/LSEDC broker outreach event in October.**