

Town hall highlights: Douglas

Is Douglas business-friendly?

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Town Administrator

We are currently in the stage of the political cycle at the state and federal levels that features the use of undefined terms in the talking points of arguably some of the most articulate and passionate people seeking policy setting roles. For those of us who implement policies, this can be a challenging context to operate in when solving practical problems.

One commonly repeated mantra is, "we need to be more business friendly." Economic development strategy has to achieve this goal with specifics that will be supported by a majority.

Having been an economic development professional before becoming a town administrator, my observation is that we have spent decades talking about being "business friendly" because we have failed to address the fundamental underlying issues with the specificity and completeness required to allow the process to move on to tackle the practical barriers to real economic development.

We live in a heavily regulated society. To address the

abuses that a very small minority have engaged in during development projects or in operating businesses, the regulatory process has produced volumes of rules. Permitting processes involve applications and hearings that typically require a wide range of professional services from engineering to lawyering that drive up the costs of any project.

It is typical for those who swear to uphold the laws to be criticized, often aggressively, for enforcing the laws as they are written. That is completely unfair. If you do not like the rules, engage the democratic process to change the rules. Ar-

guments based on facts have more than a fighting chance of winning the day. We really don't want to live in a world where enforcement authorities make things up as they go along in order to be popular or seen as "reasonable."

What is "business friendly" in the enforcement arena? Apply rules consistently to everyone. Conduct fair hearings, where all relevant evidence is presented in open session and can be debated or challenged. Require public bodies to make findings of fact that are specific and support the decision made. It's harder work than most people realize to

What do *you* think?

achieve these objectives, but a reputation for fair dealing goes a long way in the world of business.

Ultimately a "business friendly" environment is a level playing field, where no one gets a competitive advantage because of political connections or demonstrating a trigger-hair willingness to sue or write letter to the

editor. Information should be provided in timely and clear fashion to anyone approaching a permitting process. When government is involved, there should be a single point of contact that can manage the flow of information to a developer or business, so that messages are not mixed or confused.

Douglas is engaged in the economic development planning process. If you have a point of view, please engage your Economic Development Commission, starting at 7:00 p.m. on September 13, and work within the process to get to "business friendly" and a more diverse, robust tax base for years to come.