

Business Climate Survey Results

Demographics

Total Survey Responses Received- 41

35 respondents have submitted a site plan, prelim/final development plan, annexation request, rezoning request, plat, etc. within the last 2 years.

Site Plan	At least 53 requests
Prelim/final development plan	At least 85 requests
Annexation request	At least 4 requests
Rezoning request	At least 17 requests
Other	Plats, variances, easements, zoning appeals, HRC, site plan for building renovation, outdoor seating request, TUP

Primary contact person for project: property owner, architect, contractor, engineer, consultant, attorney, owner's employee, Paul Werner, Peridian Group, Jack Hope, Paul Veerkamp, Joe Caldwell, Landplan-Tim Herndon, B&G, Mel Raynes, Charles or Ching Wang, Douglas County Bank, Patrick Slabaugh EVP, Fred Schneider- Schneider and Associates, Cecil Kingsley, David Hamby, and J. Stephen Lane.

Reason for Not Receiving Approval, if Applicable:

- City or Planning Commission Issues:
 - Received the “runaround.”
 - Prior mistake on City’s part (had previously approved a handicap ramp which was later determined to be a code violation).
 - Some sites require HRC approval.
 - Land use was denied, over ride approval from County Commissioners granted.
 - Access issues.
 - Request for more information, ultimately approved after architect stepped in to advocate for us.
 - Every issue seems to have political implications rather than meet technical regulations.
 - You name it!
 - City Commissioner told me he was elected to stop or slow growth in Lawrence.
- City Regulations:
 - Planning staff interpreted regulations to imply things that are not stated in the regulations.

- o Rarely applied uniformly. Policies and procedures carry more weight than regulations.
 - o One site plan required continuation of non-conforming uses.
- Public Input/Neighborhood concerns:
 - o Only when generated by staff advocacy.
 - o Too much vocal input at commission meetings.
- Other:
 - o Favoritism and Prejudice
 - o Certain individuals get better treatment and better access to staff and records.

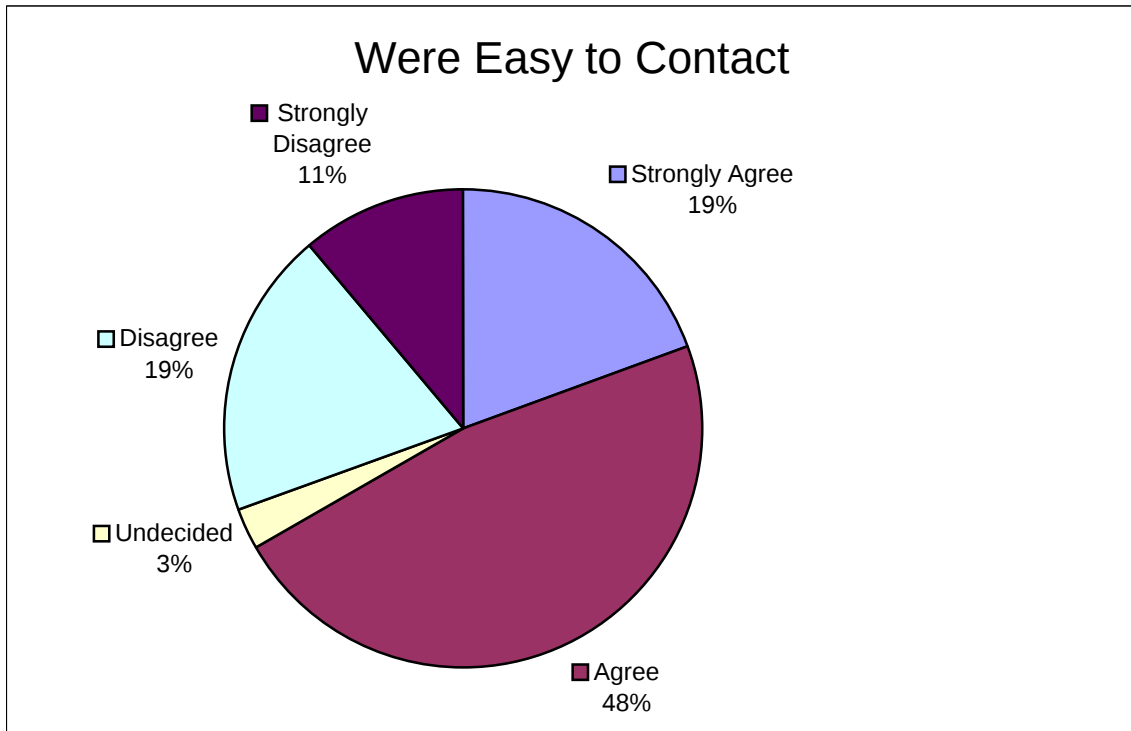
25 respondents have requested a building permit in the last two years, totaling at least 137 requests.

Quality of Service Received

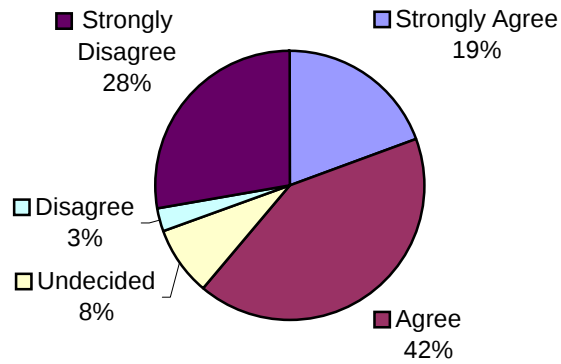
Staff Support-Planning Department

Five respondents did not answer this section in its entirety. Another respondent did not answer questions 3 and 4 only.

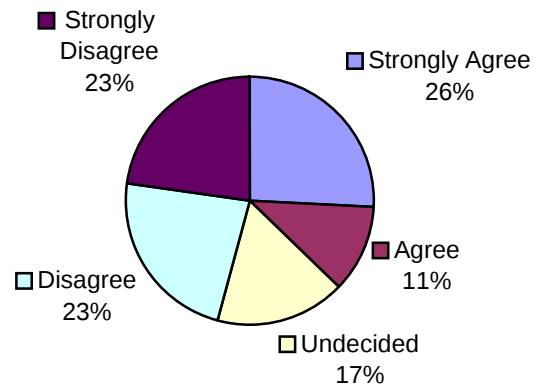
During my application process, staff members:



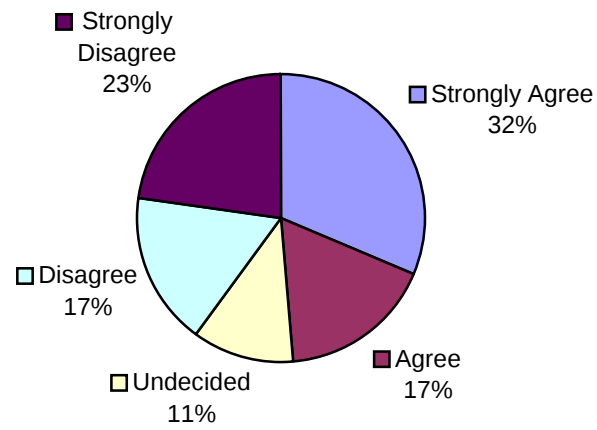
Gave Me the Impression That They Were Interested in Helping Me



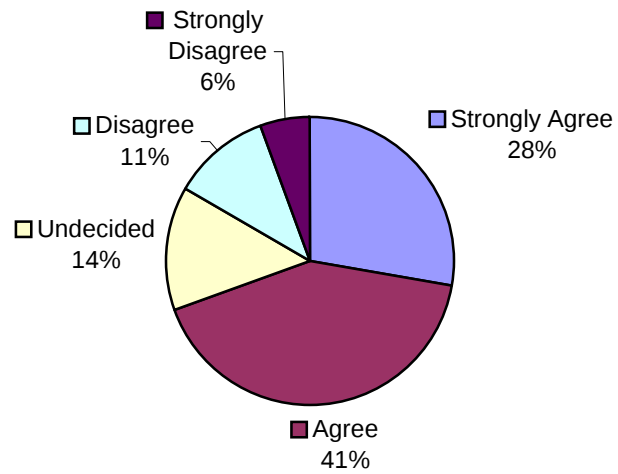
Made Recommendations that Were Contradicted Later in the Process



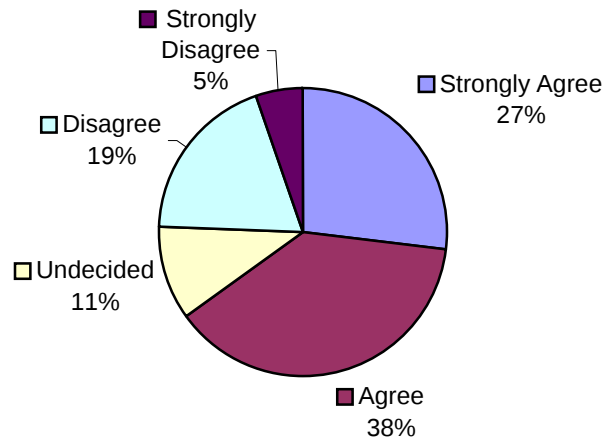
Made the Process More Difficult than Necessary



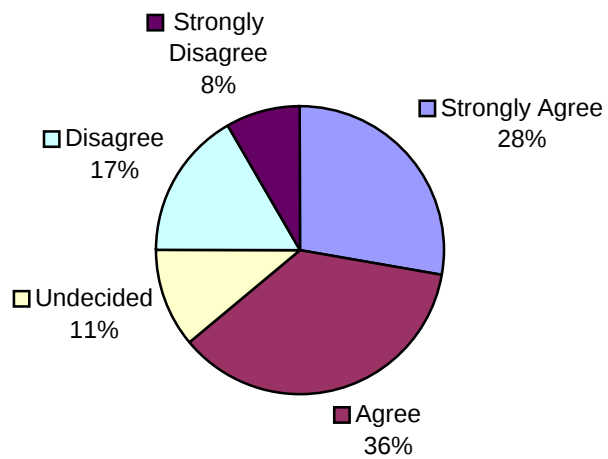
Were Courteous



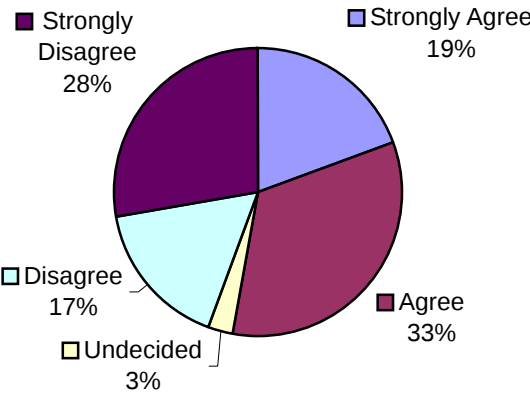
Helped Me Understand What I Needed to Know



Were Knowledgeable



Handled My Application in a Timely Manner



Categorical Numerical Responses for Service Received from Planning Department

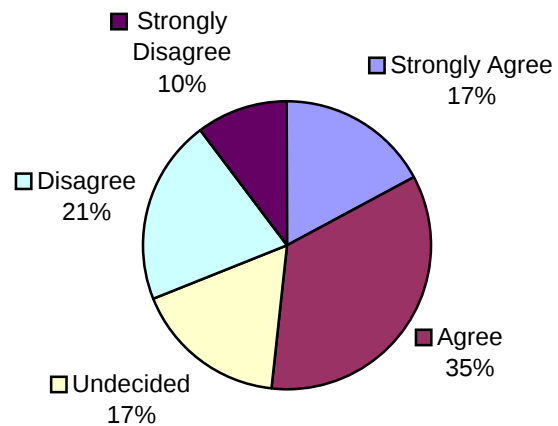
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
(1) Were easy to contact.	7	17	1	7	4
(2) Gave me the impression that they were interested in helping me.	7	15	3	1	10
(3) Made recommendations that were contradicted later in the process.	9	4	6	8	8
(4) Made the process more difficult than necessary.	11	6	4	6	8
(5) Were courteous.	10	15	5	4	2
(6) Helped me understand what I needed to know.	10	14	4	7	2
(7) Were knowledgeable.	10	13	4	6	3
(8) Handled my application in a timely manner.	7	12	1	6	10

Staff Support- Neighborhood Resources Department

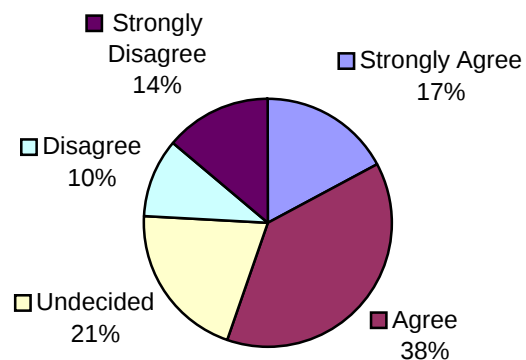
Twelve respondents did not answer this section.

During my application process, staff members:

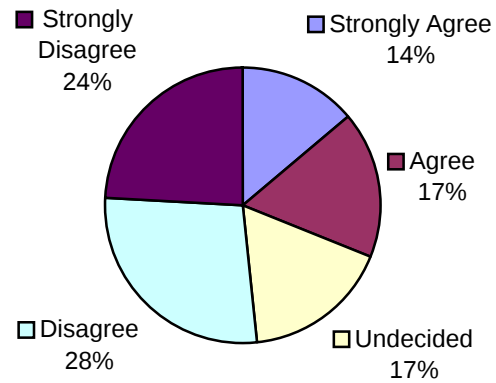
Were Easy to Contact



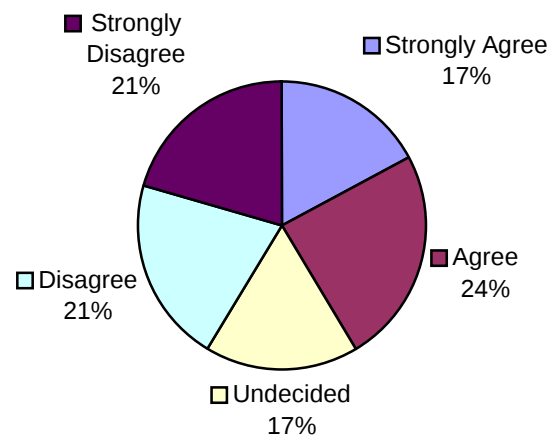
Gave Me the Impression That They Were Interested in Helping Me



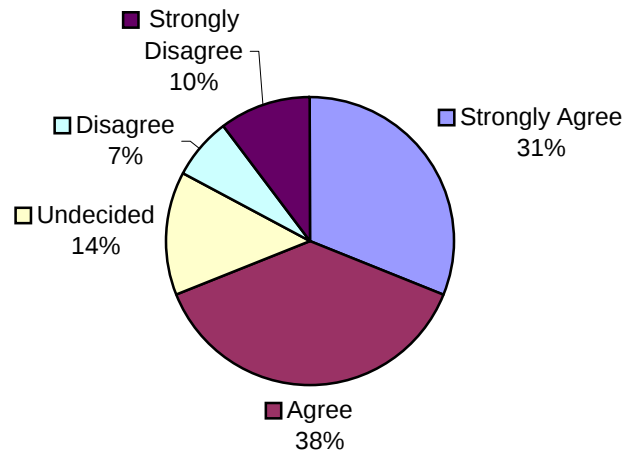
Made Recommendations That Were Contradicted Later in the Process



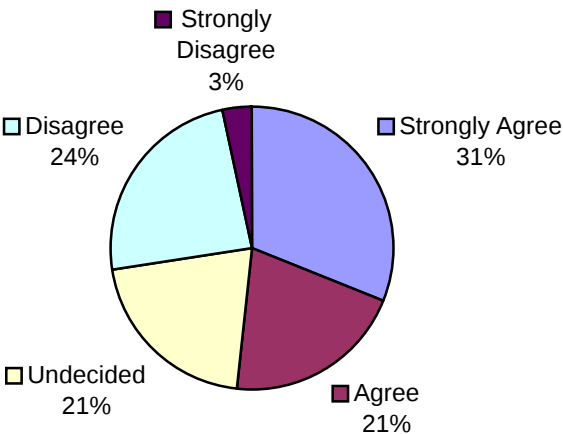
Made the Process More Difficult Than Necessary



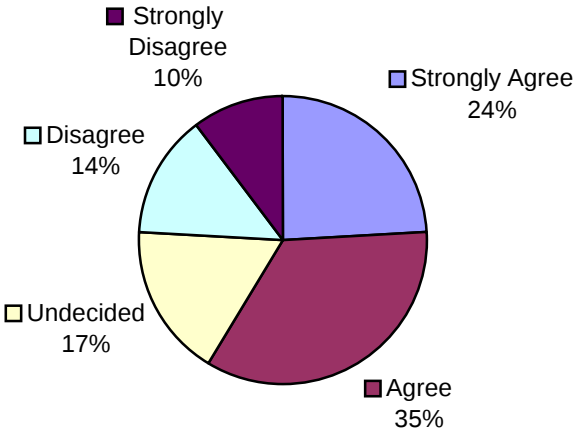
Were Courteous



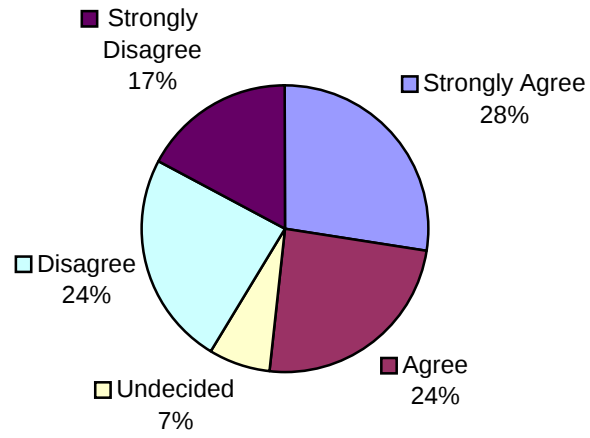
Helped Me Understand What I Needed to Know



Were Knowledgeable



Handled my Application in a Timely Manner



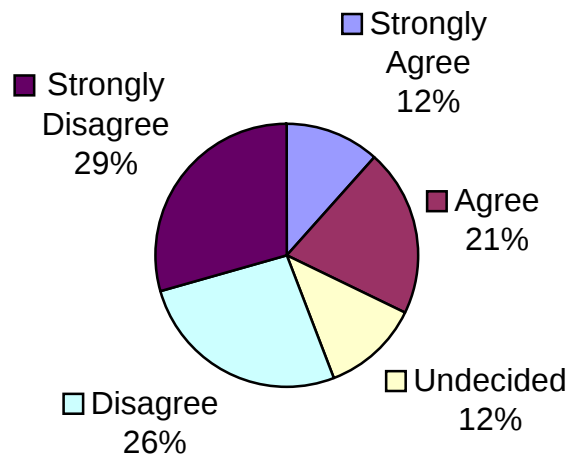
Categorical Numerical Responses for Service Received from Neighborhood Resources

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
(1) Were easy to contact.	5	10	5	6	3
(2) Gave me the impression that they were interested in helping me.	5	11	6	3	4
(3) Made recommendations that were contradicted later in the process.	4	5	5	8	7
(4) Made the process more difficult than necessary.	5	7	5	6	6
(5) Were courteous.	9	11	4	2	3
(6) Helped me understand what I needed to know.	9	6	6	7	1
(7) Were knowledgeable.	7	10	5	4	3
(8) Handled my application in a timely manner.	8	7	2	7	5

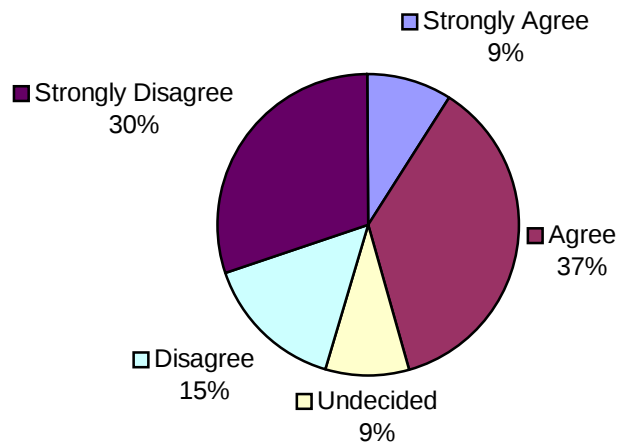
Consistency and Fairness in the Process

Seven respondents did not answer this section. Another respondent did not answer questions 2 and 3 only.

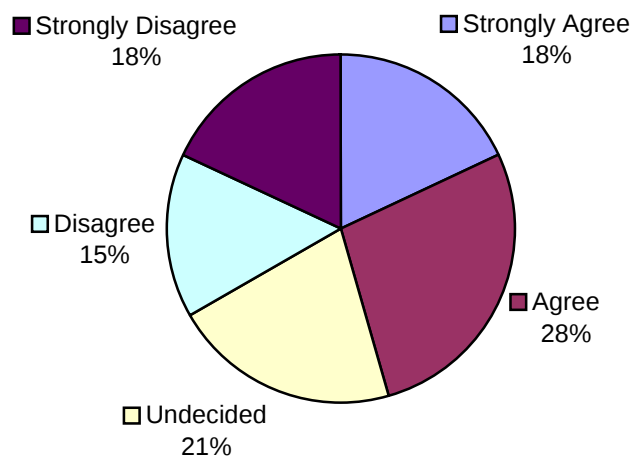
Information Provided by City Staff was Consistent Throughout the Project



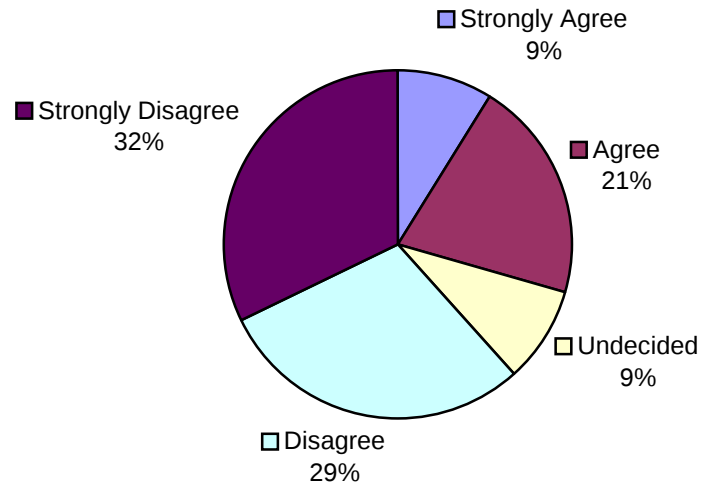
If Information Regarding my Project Changed City Staff Communicated the Changes to Me in a Timely Fashion



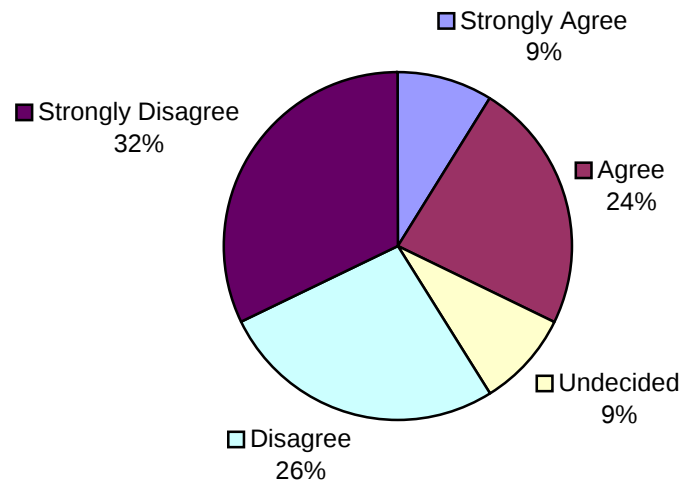
If Information Regarding my Project Changed City Staff Communicated the Reasons for the Changes.



Information Provided by Staff was Consistent Across All City Departments



Requirements Seemed to be Reasonable Throughout the Project



Categorical Numerical Responses to Consistency and Fairness in Process

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
(1) Information provided by City staff was consistent throughout the project.	4	7	4	9	10
(2) If information regarding my project changed, City staff communicated the changes to me in a timely fashion.	3	12	3	5	10
(3) If information regarding my project changed, City staff communicated the reasons for the changes.	6	9	7	5	6
(4) Information provided by staff was consistent across all City departments.	3	7	3	10	11
(5) Requirements seemed to be reasonable throughout the project.	3	8	3	9	11

Miscellaneous Comments

Aspects rated as “positive” or “extremely positive.”

- o Site plan process was good.
- o After establishing some formalities with the staff, there was a flow of useful information. Until then, I was not “getting it” with support as to what I had to do to satisfy the renovation of an existing building. Staff seemed to be cavalier as to my needs and waited until I ran into the “wall” of insufficient plans or inadequate engineering.
- o The work of Lee Smith, Adrian Jones, Tim Pinnick, and Rich Barr has been great.
- o Staff was very knowledgeable and seemed interested in helping. All staff was courteous and professional. We have a good city staff!
- o I consider all of my dealings with the staff in recent years have been positive. I also feel that there has been a noticeable improvement in other attitudes and service. I have no complaints.
- o I appreciate the City staff’s willingness to work with us on projects to achieve results that are consistent with community needs/desires while also being sensitive to the owners needs. I enjoy coming to City Hall to talk to staff. I feel they care about what we are trying to accomplish.
- o Knowledgeable.
- o Changes made at end of process.
- o I have never had a positive dealing with anyone in the City offices. The City Commissioners are a joke and I am sick of them appointing themselves the keepers of all the people in Lawrence. Regardless of what you think the citizens of Lawrence have a brain and can think for themselves.
- o None, except for commissioner Hack. She is the lone voice on the City Commission for small businesses like ours trying to expand in Lawrence. Two other City Commissioners said they were elected to stop or slow growth, and this negative attitude needs to end.
- o Tim Pinnick
- o The front office in the Clerk’s office and the Planning office is very helpful, especially Diane in the Clerk’s office and Carol and Amy in the Planning office.
- o “Intelligible” are friendly albeit superficially.
- o Information gathering from planning department.
- o Informal, courteous, knowledgeable
- o All contacts made were treated with importance. Our reasons for submitting a site plan were supported and encouraged.
- o Attitude
- o Staff demonstrated appropriate support and flexibility for the project.
- o Information provided when requested.
- o At all times all members of City staff were courteous and helpful. Generally, they all seemed willing to examine alternative solutions if the original proposal was not acceptable.
- o Relatively few. Certainly, when I raised objections attention was paid to my situation. However, the resolution to which that attention led was invariably of little use or help.

- o We were finally approved for our project.
- o Planning staff has been professional in dealings. However, the planners seemed limited to express their opinion. County engineer office has been very helpful.
- o Very few. The application of codes by NRD seems to be random. What was acceptable yesterday is taboo today. It appears the director is trying to raise funds by having buildings inspected 2-3 times, when there is nothing wrong or a newly applied code.
- o Education and support of objectives.
- o Dealings with staff at both planning and neighborhood resources department has been extremely positive.
- o Dealing with City employees face to face always goes well, and then you find out that the person you spoke with has been told by higher ups to not pass certain things.
- o Any time I have had to deal with Diane Trybom has been a “wonderful” experience. She is always polite, knowledgeable, friendly and listens to my questions and provides quick answers. I can’t thank her enough for her help in the last 5 years. She is a definite asset to the City.
- o The City Planning Department staff is exemplary. In my dealings with them they have been nothing less than top drawer!

Aspects rated as “negative” or “extremely negative.”

- o I am happier with the city staff and system than I ever have been and don’t really have any recent negative comments and/or experiences. I appreciate that staff is working hard to balance difficult positions between community needs/desires and us individual owners/developers projects. It’s not an easy job.
- o Sometimes the “intelligible” do not do what I think should be done but they have told me why it couldn’t be done. They were very courteous.
- o Our City does not have a good system of dealing with old projects that do not meet current standards or site plans that need building permits for current construction. Staff seems to be knowledgeable and caring but are afraid to recommend or take a position on any issue. I have been told that the commission is so unpredictable that staff never knows how to plan or recommend.
- o It is difficult to speak to Chad Voigt. He seems very busy and has a hard time returning calls. The regulations issued by Mr. Voigt are hard to understand. His requests seem to be “overkill.” Solutions to water drainage are extreme.
- o Once we got underway the City seemed straight forward and as a fellow traveler to get the project moving. Perhaps this was my unfamiliarity with the Lawrence system.
- o Communication between departments was not good. Plans were approved then City changed mind and made other requirements after department approval.
- o Accessibility at times.
- o Poor response time, they change their minds as you go along. Absolutely no concern of costs involved when making changes. Too many undisclosed fees and charges reveal themselves as you go through the process. Developers are treated like the enemy rather than as job creators.

- o One hand never seems to know what the other is doing and cares less. There is the distinct feeling that staff is there to serve and protect staff instead of serving the public. Outside of the two examples above (Diane, Amy and Carol), the public never hears a sincere “how may I help you.” The public is treated like the enemy. It is impossible to get a straight answer.
- o An us against them between departments.
- o Planning department, public works, engineering, city manager, and assistant city manager.
- o City planning staff said they could interpret City regulations any way they want and make requirements that are not in the regulations. One city planning staff person told me it was her job to protect the public from people like me, not to help my company build a new facility.
- o I feel that the way the City has run things has only resulted in a loss of business and unhappy citizens. You have destroyed the climate of Lawrence, this used to be a place people loved to come to or move to. Now you have people looking to move out of the city limits and the custaplo tactics used.
- o The engineering department exceedingly uses their unbridled authority to make costly changes to a project. They present a developer with a moving target, which effects a difficult situation when attempting to budget a project. The culture within city government exhibits a lack of concern of the costly consequences they create. No reasonable person should be treated as if they have unlimited financial resources. The relationship between private engineering firms and the City is too collusive. The developer is always left paying for expensive changes worked out between the two parties. The private engineering firms are after the big City contracts, so they will do everything within their power to please the City. I suggest making changes within the bureaucratic process. The City should separate oversight and approval for private developments through a different channel than City bid projects. There are no protections for the developer. He is at the complete mercy of his engineer and the City. There should be a “point of no return” for changes. This will force the City engineering staff and all other City bureaucrats to do their homework and put real meaning into the term “final approval.” Once ground breaks, the developer should expect no more changes by the government. If they are necessarily important, then the City should pick up the costs due to the City’s approval blunder. The public will then get an idea of who is accountable, and why the price of land is so high.
- o Once site plan was accepted by planning department we waited for comment back from various aspects of agency. Though there was a deadline for response, there was no consequence for those who did not respond and project could not go forward until they chose to respond. Very powerless position to be in.
- o Too many “gray” areas. Anti growth attitude. Look for ways to stop progress rather than assist. No regard for time or money.
- o Director of the Neighborhood Resource department. Aside from his lack of knowledge of building inspection, he clearly only wants to make his department profitable. Not only is it illegal, but does a disservice to the customer.
- o Virtually all aspects.

- o Neighborhood association is constantly late for inspections. Why can you not make a same day inspection/appointment but the schedule works for a \$50.00 charge?
- o Inflexible. It takes entirely too much time to jump through all of the hoops necessary to get a project approved through the many departments and offices.
- o We had to make repeated trips because they kept omitting some crucial information. "Oh, of course you also need to submit X." We would go home and get it, come back and then "Well, of course you must also submit Y." There needs to be a checklist for persons like us who will only deal with these offices once or twice in 20 years.
- o A to Z. The building permit has a terrible front person. The young woman who receives applications is a genuinely unpleasant person! What is more, the whole system is designed to keep homeowners from doing anything without contractors. While I realize that homeowners are probably more work than "professionals," it should nonetheless form part of the office's mission.
- o On a few projects I got involved after the property owner had spent a considerable amount of time attempting to submit a project themselves and had become extremely frustrated. I think the "negative" for the City is that there doesn't seem to be an avenue dealing with the "intelligible" in a manner that the general public can understand.
- o Often difficult to talk to specific inspectors during business hours and calls not always returned the same day.
- o I think the City needs to revise who must complete a traffic impact study. Our project obviously had no appreciable impact, but staff felt bound to follow the regulations.
- o None. Staff was courteous and helpful (compared to Shawnee County.)
- o Misinformation from staff in the NR Dept. led to us expending several thousand dollars. Barry Walthall was very accommodating and professional in our dealings with him to resolve this matter.
- o Trying to get outdoor seating was a nightmare. No one knew the current regulations or who would make the final decision. Very Frustrating.
- o No consistency at all. Sometimes its by the book, other times not so much. The City is by no means "business friendly." I have told several associates to not even consider Lawrence for business relocation or growth. Lawrence is by no means the only city to be difficult. It seems to be a trend actually. Barry Walthall with inspections is incompetent.
- o The general attitude of most City employees is negative. It's like on TV: No, No, No. The City of Topeka planning and building is great to work with. Go study them.

Comments or concerns regarding other areas

- o The split offices, one on either side of the parking lot, were not convenient. Understanding legal system was a roadblock. If the City would sit down with new application presenters, carefully outline the process, there would be less time spent, less frustration, and a better attitude for all to get what is wanted for the desired end product.

- I have a difficult time accepting the mistakes in the local codebook. I am forced by the planning department to continuously repeat these mistakes, project after project. No common sense is applied to the site planning rules. I must follow them even though they are wrong. We should have some in house solutions, variances, instead of going to the Board of Appeals, which takes months.
- We need to review all regulations implemented by past commissions and see if they are still in the best interest of all and not special interest. If we continue to add layers of government we will stifle growth and commerce. It is my belief that we will reach a point where it is no longer profitable to do business in Lawrence, Kansas. Remember: all bureaucracies are self-breeding and self-feeding.
- The fact that some employees don't do what I want them to do doesn't mean that they are negative. In a lot of situations they simply cannot do what people want them to do. They explain the situation and I consider that to be a "positive" response.
- I know staff is more organized and willing to assist then ever, taking as a whole experience. Staff should be commended for the consensus building and honest efforts to go the extra steps to help out. It's appreciated. Just look at this survey for instance. I've been here nearly 2 decades and don't think anyone ever really asked what I thought. I appreciate that management is building a "caring" operation. We won't always get a yes answer, but a willingness to work together is a win win for everyone. Thank you.
- Next time you ask to have a survey completed at least stamp the envelope. Thanks.
- Process too long.
- It is a shame that a few people, not fit to run their own household or business, think they are some kind of God. Ruling from their city chair. I have only one God I worship and it is not the City of Lawrence. You make it impossible to do anything in Lawrence from demo permits to building. The city tries to micromanage everything, losing site on the most important issues. I know this will fall on deaf ears because you ALL think your above doing anything wrong.
- Need to meet with people who have to do business with City hall, i.e. building permits, plats, site plans, zoning, streets and sewers.
- Outside (agitators???) that don't live near developments have too much influence. Elected officials require too many "studies" then seem to enjoy driving the costs of development up.
- All citizens are entitled to voice their opinion to the government, but a more appropriate process needs to be implemented in how this is accomplished. There are too many political action people that show up to create problems for the City staff and developers. Many do not even live in the community, but tie up precious time in an effort to stonewall progress. Their objective is clearly to delay or kill development projects in the performance of their crusade. Perhaps, a solution is to have development opponents voice their grievances only in written form. (Similar format to what developers are required to submit before their project is reviewed.) This would really help in keeping a project moving through the arduous, lengthy system that exists today. It really should not take a year or longer from submittal to ground breaking to get a development going. Nevertheless, that is reality today

in Lawrence. Development opponents are just as sophisticated as the developers and should be treated the same. Showing up to kill a development project in front of the City Commission (after many costly months of hard work and effort) is not an ethical approach to a well-run government. The growth opponent movement pushes their agenda under these misanthropic tactics. They understand that it is easier to manipulate change after all the work and costs had been expended on the part of a developer.

- o Neighborhood Resource brochure suggests they are user friendly. It ultimately required assistance from costly professional service from engineers and architects to satisfy their concerns. Our project was very small, business very small, and their requirements were, in my opinion, inappropriate and cost prohibitions- a huge disincentive for small business growth in community.
- o Our architect did not inform us of whether his experience was good or bad so I assume it was OK.
- o Frequently, it seems that residents may contact either planning or neighborhood resources, satisfy the requirements of that department and feel that they have met all requirements of the "City." They later find out that the other department has a whole-nother-world of regulations that they were unaware of. Both departments should make sure applicants are aware of the relevant requirements of the "other" department.
- o The overall environment of doing business with the City is negative. The information we receive is based on what the department heads want it to be viewed as. I would love to know the overhead costs for every employee of the City. Try outsourcing some of the jobs. I am tired of watching construction crews stand around.
- o I enjoy working and dealing with staff and inspectors. They have always been professional, knowledgeable and courteous.
- o The road in front of my business has been closed for 5 months. 12th and Haskell. This has come close to putting us out of business. We were never even notified this was going to happen. There is no reason the road would have to be closed this long. We built the Empire State Building in 6 months!
- o I do not believe it is feasible to think a new small business has the financial resources to hire an architect to make a site plan (\$5k minimum) to submit to the City to see if a project is doable in regards to codes, historical, etc.
- o Overall very user-friendly environment!