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Mayor Fischer Launches New Economic and Real Estate Development Strategy

Louisville Forward combines economic growth, quality of place into one agency

Note: Mayor Greg Fischer will be available at 10:30 a.m. today at Metro Hall to answer media questions about the changes.

LOUISVILLE (April 30, 2014) — Saying Louisville needs a unified and forward-leaning approach to job creation, Mayor Greg Fischer today announced a new economic strategy for the city that combines into one entity all the city agencies dedicated to business development and the built environment.

“This new strategy, called Louisville Forward, orients us to the future of economic development and recognizes the shifting job creation dynamic,” Fischer said. “The old economic model said people move to where the jobs are. Now jobs locate where talented people are -- and people are moving to cities where the quality of life is high.”

“Changes in the world are happening faster than ever and the need for cities to respond quickly for economic development opportunities while thoughtfully integrating a quality of place strategy with all available public and private tools is more important than ever. This plan will help us achieve that.”

Fischer said Louisville is at pivotal point after 11 years of city-county merger — and his observations following three years as Mayor have led him and his team to this point. Economic development success is frequently correlated with land use and real estate. Land assembly is a significant driver in larger development, and any company seeking to locate or expand in Louisville desires the optimal location for their enterprise. Deliberate place-making activities create an authentic city that attracts talent and offers locations that provide a competitive edge for business to grow. Quality of place creates quantities of opportunities.

Louisville Forward will be led by Mary Ellen Wiederwohl, the Mayor’s current Deputy Chief of Staff and Chief of Strategic Initiatives. The changes will take effect July 1 and be budget neutral, requiring no additional tax dollars but a reallocation of existing resources.

“Mary Ellen has distinguished herself with an ability to sell our city’s assets, move our economic development strategy, and create excitement around Louisville’s many built environment possibilities,” Fischer said.

“I’m excited about the transformational possibilities of Louisville Forward,” Wiederwohl said. “Our team will use an intentional and comprehensive strategy to make Louisville the best place in America to live, work, create, and innovate.”

Louisville Forward represents an evolution of the city’s economic and real estate development policies. Economic Development will now contain the full spectrum of business engagement and support to include retail, commercial and industrial businesses from small business through our large enterprises. The city’s

real estate development arm, called Develop Louisville, will focus on the full range of land development activities, including planning and design, vacant and abandoned properties initiatives, advanced planning, housing programs, permits and licensing, land acquisition, and development partnerships.

As a result of this new comprehensive development strategy, Greater Louisville, Inc.'s contractual economic development relationship with the city will change. The city will now be responsible for the daily work of business attraction and expansion. The city will continue to pay GLI for services related to market and industry research and some client development activities. The balance of the money that the city previously budgeted for GLI's efforts will now be used to fund Louisville Forward.

"These changes come at a time when GLI was already in the process of recalibrating and setting its agenda for the future, one which is centered on serving the interests of our members and the regional business community," said Kerry Stemler, Chair of GLI's Board of Directors. "As outlined in our new strategic plan, Advantage Louisville, those critical areas of focus are retaining and growing existing businesses, including supporting the entrepreneurial and start-up community; increasing our region's human capital and workforce readiness; and expanding our advocacy efforts aimed at creating a more business-friendly environment."

"We have enjoyed a successful partnership with the city for many years, and we look forward to continuing to work together in driving the region forward," Stemler added.

In the coming months, Louisville Metro and GLI will work together on new collaborations that will bring together the public and private sectors around some specific economic development initiatives.

Wiederwohl, who joined the administration in July 2012, already oversees several of the agencies and initiatives becoming part of Louisville Forward, including Vision Louisville, advanced planning, and the city's green and sustainability programs. Jeff Mosley, the current Director of Economic Development will join her as the new agency's Chief Administrative Officer. Mosley came to Metro Government in 2013 with a background in finance, law, and economic and real estate incentive development.

With economic development responsibilities shifting to Wiederwohl, Ted Smith will build upon his nationally recognized innovation results and expand his efforts as the city's Chief of Civic Innovation in the areas of entrepreneurship, 21st century workforce development, community data, and technology initiatives such as gigabit infrastructure.

Metro Council President Jim King said he's pleased that the city is making changes.

"I support the administration's reorganization of the city's economic development strategy. It's time to take Louisville to the next level," King said. "Creating jobs and growing our economy is of the utmost importance to all Louisville citizens and it's critical that our city grows and prospers."

In addition to the Louisville Forward announcement, Mayor Fischer also today promoted Sara Massey as the new Director of Intergovernmental Affairs. Massey, who worked for Wiederwohl, will oversee the city's outreach and coordination with all governmental partners.

Massey joined the administration in 2011 as legislative liaison and is a native of Owensboro. She is a graduate of the University of Alabama with a bachelor's in political science.

"Sara truly distinguished herself as one of the key leaders on my team in Frankfort this past legislative session," Fischer said. "She knows the inner workings of government and will be a great leader for our city."

Mary Ellen Wiederwohl biography

Mary Ellen joined Mayor Greg Fischer's Administration in July 2012 as the Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff and Chief of Strategic Initiatives for Louisville Metro Government. On the Mayor's senior staff, she has overseen policy, intergovernmental affairs, communications, advanced planning, and the city's clean and green initiatives, including the Office of Sustainability, Brightside, and the Tree Commission.

She has provided leadership for several of Mayor Fischer's major initiatives, including the city's 25-year plan – Vision Louisville, the 6-year Strategic Plan, the current update for the metro area's transportation plan – Move Louisville, Sustain Louisville, Local Investments for Transformation (LIFT) – the public/private endeavor to provide a new voter-driven option for funding infrastructure and quality of life amenities, and several cross functional teams working to improve government efficiency. As part of her work around place-making and the improving the built environment, she was named to the city's team of Rose Fellows working with the Urban Land Institute to revitalize Louisville's 4th Street Corridor.

Fischer has tapped Wiederwohl to lead the new Louisville Forward agency, which combines the city's economic and real estate development activities under a single comprehensive approach. The new agency includes traditional economic development functions of business attraction, retention, and growth along with a new department, Develop Louisville, which combines all planning, permitting, housing, sustainability, and built environment initiatives.

Before joining the Fischer administration, Mary Ellen worked in public affairs in the public and private sectors. She was Assistant Director for MML&K Government Solutions, a division of the McBrayer law firm, working for Fortune 500 companies, signature industries, and statewide associations with special expertise in budget, tax, regulatory, and land use policy. Prior to working for MML&K she was Director of Legislative and Public Relations for the Education Professional Standards Board in Frankfort. She began her career as Legislative Aide to the State Senate Majority Leader.

She was nominated by the Business and Professional Women of Louisville for the Woman of Excellence award in 2009, and in 2010 she was named to the Business First Forty under Forty list. The next year she was named to the Louisville Magazine Top Ten list of Louisville's most powerful people under 45.

Mary Ellen has been active in the civic and cultural life of Louisville for several years in many capacities. She is a Past President of the Junior League of Louisville, currently serves as a member of the Louisville Orchestra Board of Directors and Executive Committee, and was elected to the Leadership Louisville Center Board in 2013. She is a member of the International Women's Forum and the Urban Land Institute. She is also a graduate of Leadership Louisville and the Bingham Fellows program.

A native of Meade County, Wiederwohl graduated *summa cum laude* from the University of Louisville with a B.A. She is a candidate for the Master of Arts in Political Science degree at the University of Louisville