

Business visitations have expanded tremendously with at least eight each week and sometimes as many as five in a day. The visits are a chance to thank companies for their contributions to the local economy, find out about any issues facing them, and let them know about ways the city can help. Each visit generates a list of follow-up items such as making contact with the Small Business Development Center, providing assistance with marketing, looking into a code enforcement issue, having the traffic engineer look at red curb needs or having a city planner help with building permits. Many items can be addressed very quickly, and others may be long term. While time consuming for staff, the results are important in addressing concerns and making sure that these companies stay in Carson and grow in Carson.

Each month, staff presents the results of the visits to the Economic Development Commission to develop a better picture of how local firms are doing and identify common issues that may arise.

The next step is to develop systems that help our businesses help each other. Toward that end, staff has been working with them to use social networking in their operations and is now developing a business to business service online. A peer to peer assistance program will group organizations by type to provide support to each other and even share resources. Some communities have started such programs, but Carson aims to be the leader.

The key to these developments and the huge expansion in business visitations has been the addition of staff hours and a redirection of existing resources. At this point, the staffing plan needs two changes to move forward. Alejandra Gutierrez has been working as a consultant on contract to the city. The recommended action is to extend her agreement to the end of the fiscal year.

The other position is responsible for the business to business programs. Fred Steinmann, DPPD has been a part-time employee for almost four years providing primarily research support and strategic planning. He was primarily responsible for last year's application to be named Los Angeles County's most business friendly city and is compiling this year's application. It was the city's first such application, and the city was a finalist. Dr. Steinmann generally works remotely, but these services are now needed in a greater quantity. The new redevelopment law, which is currently being challenged in court and would severely curtail redevelopment activities, does not allow any new staffing. The state's situation argues against a permanent position, so staff recommends adding a temporary position of business development analyst.