# KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI EQUITABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

angelou economics

KANSAS CITY

EDC ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

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# PREFACE

The City of Kansas City, Missouri  stands at a pivotal moment in its economic evolution, one where growth must not only be measured in dollars, but in dignity, opportunity, and inclusion. As we look toward the future, it is clear that a thriving economy is one in which all residents have a genuine opportunity to prosper. This Equitable Economic Development Strategy is rooted in that vision: a Kansas City where economic growth breaks down historic barriers, uplifts marginalized communities, and broadens pathways to prosperity for everyone.

At its core, equitable economic development means investing in people and places in ways that help communities thrive, especially low-income residents and communities of color who have long faced structural barriers to economic advancement. It is about unlocking the full potential of the City of Kansas City's economy by ensuring that no one is left behind.

To that end, this strategy is guided by a comprehensive and intentional approach that embeds equity into the City of Kansas City's broader economic development policies. Specifically, it embraces the following foundational principles:

1. Acknowledging the Past: Recognizing and addressing the legacy of discriminatory policies and systemic inequities that have hindered the ability of people of color to build wealth and access opportunity.
2. Targeted Investment: Prioritizing programs and initiatives that directly support vulnerable and underserved communities, ensuring that investments reach those who need them most.
3. Preventing Displacement: Protecting small businesses, especially in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods and immigrant communities, from the forces of economic displacement that too often accompany growth.

This document sets forth not only a vision, but also a clear set of strategies for achieving economic equity in the City of Kansas City. It is both a call to action and a commitment to a future where economic development serves as a vehicle for justice, shared prosperity, and inclusive progress.

# PREFACE

To that end, the City of Kansas City (MO) has defined equitable economic development as:

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL OF KANSAS CITY:
*Section 1. That the following definition is hereby adopted for equitable economic development:*

*Equitable economic development that breaks barriers and expands opportunities for low-income and minority groups and aims to invest in people and places to help communities thrive and unlock the full potential of the City's economy.*

*Section 2. That the comprehensive economic development policy will incorporate Equitable Economic Development along with specific strategies for achieving Equitable Economic Development, including but not limited to,*

1. *Acknowledging history, discrimination, and systems that have prevented people of color from building wealth;*
2. *Targeting programs and initiatives to vulnerable communities; and*
3. *Ending the displacement of small businesses in low and moderate-income communities of color and immigrant communities.*

"Kansas City is a hidden secret. It's not too big, not too small. A classic Midwest city."

***-Local Stakeholder***

"Everything is too complicated and it doesn't need to be.

***-Local Stakeholder***

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Council of Kansas City: Councilmembers Kevin O'Neill, Nathan Willett, Lindsay French, Wes Rogers, Melissa Patterson Hazley, Melissa Robinson, Crispin Rea, Eric Bunch, Darrell Curls, Ryana Parks-Shaw, Andrea Bough, Johnathan Duncan, and Mayor Quinton Lucas.

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All those who participated in the focus groups and residential and business surveys.

Thank you all!

# MISSION, VISION & FOCUS

The Council of Kansas City is committed to developing a comprehensive and equitable economic development plan that fosters inclusive growth, enhances the fiscal health of the City of Kansas City, and ensures that all communities share in the benefits of prosperity. Our goal is to create a codifiable framework that replaces the existing patchwork of policies with a unified strategy, one that drives revenue generation, promotes long-term sustainability, and reflects the values and needs of every neighborhood in our city.

AngelouEconomics (AE) is proud to partner with the City of Kansas City to develop its comprehensive equitable economic development strategy by first identifying its objectives, big ideas, and actions. This effort will help the City of Kansas City's leadership coordinate economic development growth. At the same time, these efforts serve as an opportunity to showcase the tremendous quality of community and quality of life that the City of Kansas City maintains.

The City of Kansas City engaged AE to listen, to evaluate, and to articulate where the city is now in terms of its economic growth strategies. The Council of Kansas City had a vision for its economic growth and to establish clearly understood and actionable objectives. These objectives are to be lead by the City of Kansas City, its leadership, its businesses, and its people.

To initiate this process, a series of roundtable focus groups were conducted in late 2024 and early 2025 to gather firsthand insights into the City of Kansas City's recent evolution. What emerged was a clear picture of a city that is vibrant, innovative, and driven by residents deeply committed to seeing the City of Kansas City's economy grow in an equitable manner.

These insights help to clarify and align the City of Kansas City's overarching vision:

| **Kansas City's Strategic Focus** |
| --- |
| **VISION:**<br>To ensure an equitable economic development policy will benefit all communities in Kansas City, will generate revenue, will improve the fiscal health of the City, and will be comprehensive and codifiable. |
| **OBJECTIVES:**<br>Align and prioritize economic development tools, funding resources, and projects to intentionally advance equitable economic development across all communities |

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

This strategy is a central component of the City of Kansas City's three-phase economic development framework, which includes stakeholder engagement, target industry analyses, and strategic recommendations. At its core, the strategy prioritizes Equitable Economic Development by acknowledging the legacy of discrimination and systemic barriers that have limited wealth-building opportunities for people of color, directing resources toward vulnerable communities, and preventing the displacement of residents and small businesses in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods, particularly communities of color and immigrant populations.

The recommendations presented here are grounded in insights gained through community engagement and collaborative input. By aligning development efforts with equity-focused goals, the City of Kansas City can build a more inclusive, sustainable economy that benefits all residents. Furthermore, these broad recommendations are accompanied by specific and actionable initiatives, based on successful implementation in other American communities.

This work has been shaped through the leadership and partnership of the City Council, EDCKC, a diverse set of traditional and nontraditional of stakeholders, and City officials. Moving forward, we invite business and community leaders to join in implementing this strategy, recognizing that lasting success depends on collective action and shared commitment to equitable growth.

## How We Got Here - Previous Reports & Stakeholder Engagement

The strategies and action items presented in the following pages are the products of reviewing documents such as the KC Spirit Playbook, the Anti-Displacement Comprehensive Plan, ProspectUS Equitable Transit-Oriented Development Strategic Plan, and Putting Assets to Work. Many of the strategies and action items reference recommendations put forth in those documents. Stakeholders have expressed concerns that they have participated in focus groups and other strategic document sessions with few tangible results. It is our intent to synthesize and thread those recommendations into this document to ensure continuity between past and current economic development efforts.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**How We Got Here - City Council Input**

In addition to the most current stakeholder engagement processes and prior engagements with previous strategic planning efforts, the AE team met with the the City of Kansas City City Council to gain their insights regarding equitable economic development. A particular priority is addressing longstanding historic inequities tied to segregation and redlining. Each councilmember's inputs have been collected in the SWOT analysis below. These inputs are addressed throughout the report.

## Strengths

- **Focus on equity and inclusive growth**
- **Streamlined, codified incentive policy**
- **Localized, district-responsive strategies**
- **Improved interdepartmental coordination**
- **Shift to proactive infrastructure maintenance**
- **Modernized airport as economic driver**
- **Inclusive, community-driven planning emphasized**
- **Support for MWBE mentorship and ecosystem building**
- **Strong community identity and pride**

## Weaknesses

- **Aging infrastructure impedes safety and access**
- **Logistical issues from large geography**
- **Fragmented leadership and reactive policy**
- **Rising crime affects business operations**
- **Bureaucratic, exclusionary permitting processes**
- **Small city perception limits investment**
- **Risk-averse local investor base**
- **Inadequate post-accelerator support**
- **Lack of diversity and follow-through in leadership**

## Opportunities

- **Strategic infrastructure can boost underserved areas**
- **Integrate renewal program with incentive policy**
- **Public-private collaboration for inclusive growth**
- **Mentorship for diverse, emerging developers**
- **Transparent standards improve trust**
- **Rebranding to enhance external appeal**
- **Expand community-driven investment programs**
- **Adopt successful models like Groundbreak Coalition**
- **Better impact storytelling of small projects**

## Threats

- **Escalating crime deters investment**
- **Institutional inertia hinders systemic change**
- **Risk of resident displacement**
- **Bias toward large developers**
- **Limited capital/mentorship for MWBE developers**
- **Talent drain from low VC investment**
- **Community distrust from lack of measurable outcomes**
- **Poor coordination blocks future progress**

# STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

**Initial Discussions**

AngelouEconomics engaged extensively with staff from the City of Kansas City, to explore strategic approaches and effective policy interventions aimed at ensuring equitable and competitive incentive practices within the region. These consultations emphasized the necessity of policy frameworks that not only enhance the City of Kansas City's attractiveness for new investments but also equitably distribute benefits across all city council districts.

Early dialogue identified immediate opportunities to streamline current processes through practical stop-gap solutions. Specifically, stakeholders discussed the implementation of dedicated project liaisons who would collaborate closely with companies and developers navigating the City of Kansas City's permitting procedures. These project liaisons are envisioned as essential points of contact, helping to expedite project timelines, reduce bureaucratic obstacles, and foster a more user-friendly development environment. By simplifying and clarifying the permitting experience, the City of Kansas City aims to significantly enhance its competitiveness and appeal, directly supporting economic development that positively impacts all council districts.

The ultimate objective of these efforts is to position the City of Kansas City as a proactive, efficient, and equitable destination for economic growth. Each city council member can anticipate tangible benefits within their respective districts, ranging from increased local employment opportunities and enhanced community amenities to improved infrastructure and greater overall economic resilience.

# STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

**Site Visits**

AngelouEconomics (AE) initiated its site visit with comprehensive conversations involving all City of Kansas City city councilmembers. These initial discussions aimed to deeply understand the most pressing economic development concerns from each council district's unique perspective. Additionally, AE staff met individually with Mayor Quinton Lucas and key city department staff members, gaining valuable insights into the City of Kansas City's overall economic development approach, policies, and operational challenges.

Following these discussions, the Economic Development Corporation of Kansas City (EDCKC), alongside city government staff, provided AE with an extensive window tour of the city. Given the expansive geography of the City of Kansas City, which covers approximately 314.9 square miles, it became clear that a highly strategic and deliberate approach to economic development is crucial. AE emphasizes that economic development is fundamentally a long-term endeavor. It is a marathon rather than a sprint. However, the city councilmembers rightly expressed urgency and concern regarding the uneven pace of economic progress across various districts, particularly those historically impacted by discrimination and systemic barriers. Many constituents have experienced prolonged periods of time without seeing meaningful economic improvements, underscoring the necessity of immediate, actionable changes alongside strategic long-term plans.

The window tour reinforced many concerns expressed by city councilmembers in earlier meetings, visually illustrating the stark disparities across Kansas City. Despite the valuable visual insights gained from the tour, AE acknowledges this could never fully substitute for the lived experiences and detailed perspectives of councilmembers and their constituents. The need for equity-driven revisions in economic development practices and incentive policies was consistently emphasized throughout these interactions.

# STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

**Peer & Aspirational Cities**

During these collaborative engagements, stakeholders, including city councilmembers, EDCKC personnel, and city staff, were asked to identify peer and aspirational communities. Frequently mentioned aspirational cities were Minneapolis, MN; Denver, CO; Nashville, TN; Austin, TX; and Indianapolis, IN. It is important to recognize, however, that Kansas City faces unique geopolitical challenges, most notably the state boundary dividing the metropolitan statistical area (MSA), which differs significantly from the cited peer communities. Peer communities sharing geopolitical constraints include St. Louis, MO; Cincinnati, OH; Louisville, KY; Memphis, TN; and Omaha, NE.

**Surveys & Focus Groups**

Insights gathered during this initial site visit and stakeholder engagement significantly informed AE's subsequent steps. It became clear from discussions with city councilmembers that the stakeholder engagement process required a more inclusive approach. In response, AE developed resident and business surveys designed to gather diverse perspectives and ensure broad community representation. Additionally, targeted focus groups were established to delve deeper into specific processes and functions within the City of Kansas City's economic development landscape.

Subsequent site visits leveraged the ongoing feedback from these surveys and focus groups to guide focused discussions around economic development priorities. Recognizing the regional nature common to large municipalities, AE found that residents and businesses tended to prioritize economic development initiatives specific to their respective city council districts. Nonetheless, universal concerns emerged, especially regarding the quality of public education and the pervasive issue of crime. Both residents and businesses expressed a deep-seated desire for stability, as well as sustained, long-term opportunities for community advancement, growth, and prosperity.

# STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

**Takeaways**

The City of Kansas City stands at a crossroads of opportunity. Through the strategic leveraging of its unique assets, fostering inclusive growth, modernizing incentive policies, strengthening community engagement, and prioritizing proactive development, the City of Kansas City can achieve sustainable economic vitality. This report synthesizes key insights from recent discussions and stakeholder meetings, organized thematically to provide a comprehensive, forward-looking strategic vision that will serve as a guide for the city's future. It addresses economic development strategies, incentive modernization, equitable community growth, tourism development, infrastructure challenges, transportation needs, innovation districts, regional partnerships, and the critical role of education, workforce development, and governance.

The City of Kansas City must evolve its economic development model by transitioning from the traditional focus on attracting large employers to fostering vibrant "live, work, play" communities. Incentives should be embedded within broader, holistic economic strategies rather than functioning as isolated tools. Strengthening downtown remains critical, but equitable development across all districts must be prioritized to ensure shared prosperity. Corridor-based development strategies that connect neighborhoods and create economic linkages will play a pivotal role. Workforce development initiatives should be tailored to meet the needs of key sectors such as healthcare, engineering, logistics, food science, cybersecurity, and technology.

Regional partnerships will be essential for coordinated growth beyond city limits, ensuring the City of Kansas City remains competitive in the broader metropolitan landscape. Targeted recruitment strategies must be proactive, identifying high-potential companies and cultivating relationships over years, not months. Developing logistic centers and multi-tenant data centers will diversify the economy and take advantage of the City of Kansas City’s geographic strengths. Additionally, city planning must leverage existing industries like agriculture, food tech, and transportation logistics.

# STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

**Takeaways**

The importance of creating innovation districts that connect businesses, educational institutions, and entrepreneurs cannot be overstated. Building a vibrant startup ecosystem, supported by comprehensive accelerator and incubator programs, will ensure the City of Kansas City's long-term competitiveness

The strategic use of incentives must be reimagined to drive measurable community benefits, such as job creation, provision of health insurance, affordable daycare, and workforce development alignment. The City of Kansas City should adopt a transparent, tiered incentive system that includes clawback provisions to protect public investments. A centralized database tracking incentive awards and outcomes will enhance transparency and effectiveness. Incentives should focus on critical sectors like life sciences, specialized manufacturing, energy industries, data centers, and batteries.

The incentive system must be linked to clear community development goals, with higher rewards for developments that offer affordable housing, local hiring, and significant community benefits. Collaboration with school districts is vital to avoid eroding the tax base, particularly given the historic concerns about educational underfunding linked to property tax abatements. Regular evaluation and public reporting on the performance of incentive-backed projects will restore trust and demonstrate commitment to results-driven development.

The commitment to equitable growth must be a guiding principle across all development efforts. Investments in infrastructure, housing, business development, and public spaces must be inclusive, particularly in historically underserved neighborhoods. Strategies should prioritize diverse community engagement, incorporate equity metrics into all development policies, and focus redevelopment efforts on blighted areas while preventing displacement.

# STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

**Takeaways**

Leveraging the City of Kansas City's transportation assets and proximity to major corporations presents an opportunity to foster equitable economic growth. Transportation projects, in particular, can serve as powerful catalysts for development in underserved areas. Public investments must aim to repair historical divides between east-west and north-south communities, recognizing the persistent impact of redlining and segregation.

Additionally, a corridor-based approach, rather than strict reliance on council district lines, will ensure more strategic and fair allocation of resources. Emphasizing mixed-income housing, promoting transit-oriented development, and investing in social infrastructure like parks and libraries will enhance community resilience.

In preparation for the World Cup 2026 and future global events, the City of Kansas City must urgently upgrade transportation systems, enhance visitor experiences, and develop a cohesive citywide tourism strategy. Improvements should include modern wayfinding, increased public transportation options, expansion of hospitality training programs, and a visitor-friendly downtown experience.

Long-term, a regional tourism strategy must be crafted to promote attractions beyond the downtown core, ensuring all areas benefit economically from increased visitor traffic. The City of Kansas City should strengthen its brand as a premier sports tourism destination by attracting tournaments, expanding youth sports facilities, and capitalizing on its professional sports legacy

Short-term rental regulation must strike a balance between maximizing economic opportunity and protecting resident quality of life. Clear rules and enforcement mechanisms are needed to ensure compliance, generate tax revenue, and prevent displacement.

# STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

**Takeaways**

Addressing labor shortages through investment in hospitality workforce development will be critical to supporting a thriving tourism economy.

Building the City of Kansas City's internal capacity is imperative. City staffs across departments and institutional knowledge bases, especially those expert staff in finance, site selection, project management, and incentive analysis, must reevaluate and improvement upon current communication structures and collaboration protocols. Additionally, the City of Kansas City should be working toward establishing robust data systems for decision-making, to enhance operational effectiveness. The City of Kansas City's comprehensive master plan should be updated to integrate land use, transportation, affordability, and economic development goals, using area and corridor plans rather than council district boundaries as the primary framework. Again, the need is paramount for agencies to maintain high levels of communication to ensure that all agencies are aligned and working in the same direction to maximize the use of City of Kansas City resources.

Additionally, proactive intelligence gathering during site selection processes, smarter regional marketing, strong visitor bureau leadership, and emphasizing the City of Kansas City's "heart of the nation" identity will elevate the city as a national and global contender.

Inclusive stakeholder engagement must be the cornerstone of all planning efforts, ensuring transparency, continuous feedback, and community alignment. Broad-based advisory councils that include residents, businesses, faith leaders, and nonprofits will ensure the plan reflects the needs of the entire city.

Establishing an innovation district that leverages the City of Kansas City's existing strengths in healthcare technology, architecture, and engineering will anchor future growth. Regional economic success depends on coordinated growth that spans municipalities, embracing the metro-wide interconnectedness.

Recognizing and addressing historical east-west and north-south socioeconomic divides is essential. Cross-city strategies should focus on equitable investment patterns, repairing past harms while ensuring the City of Kansas City grows together, not apart.

# STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

**Takeaways**

The City of Kansas City is poised for transformational growth. By adopting a strategic vision, grounded in community engagement, smart policy alignment, regional collaboration, and proactive economic planning, the city can create a future defined by prosperity, equity, innovation, and livability for all its residents. The vision offers a roadmap for leaders, stakeholders, and community members to work collectively toward building a stronger, more inclusive the City of Kansas City for generations to come. It embraces the boldness to aim higher, the wisdom to plan strategically, and the compassion to ensure no community is left behind.

# ABOUT AE

**Major Corporate Clients**

Over the past 29 years, AngelouEconomics has executed over 1,000 projects working hand-in-hand with major corporations, towns, cities, regions, states, and countries to develop visions, strategies, and implementation plans to advance regional growth and prosperity.

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