

2022 - 2023



METRO ADVOCACY AGENDA



GREATER MEMPHIS CHAMBER

Presented by the Greater Memphis Chamber, the Metro Advocacy Agenda is an annual set of positions and priorities outlined by local business leaders and stakeholders representing diverse industry sectors and businesses. The information contained was compiled from surveys, interviews, and focus groups with members of the Greater Memphis Chamber and its partners.

ADDRESS UNPRECEDENTED DISRUPTION IN OPERATIONS IN THE SHELBY COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE

PRIORITIZE SITES FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**INCREASE BUSINESS SERVICES OUTREACH AND OPERATIONAL
TRANSPARENCY FOR WORKFORCE MID-SOUTH**

**CREATE ON-RAMPS FOR BUSINESSES TO ENGAGE
EX-OFFENDERS FOR EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

**IMPROVE MLGW ENGAGEMENT WITH AND SUPPORT FOR
NEW AND EXISTING BUSINESSES**

**STANDARDIZE CODE ENFORCEMENT, CLEAN-UP, AND BEAUTIFICATION
ALONG MAJOR CORRIDORS AND AROUND CRITICAL LANDMARKS**

**CREATE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING FUNCTIONALITY
WITHIN LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

**INSTITUTE DISTRICT-SPECIFIC CHAMBER ONBOARDING
FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS**

**REDUCE OPPORTUNITY YOUTH BY INCREASING JOB TRAINING
OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH EMPLOYER/HIGH SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS**

**GALVANIZE SUPPORT FOR NEW BRIDGE ACROSS
THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER AT MEMPHIS**



ADDRESS UNPRECEDENTED DISRUPTION IN OPERATIONS IN THE SHELBY COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE

Ongoing news reports during the spring and summer of 2022 have focused on delays and historic backlogs in the Shelby County Court Clerk's Office with respect to the issuance of vehicle tags and licenses. These reports have highlighted the months-long delays in mailing out tags and licenses to clients who have already paid for the service. Car dealers have been especially impacted given how temporary car tags issued with newly-purchased vehicles are not being replaced by new car tags sent to them from the County Clerk's office.

Additionally, clients waiting for hours to be served at the downtown and satellite offices for the county clerk, many times in scorching summer heat, has been especially concerning when considering how strategies to assign appointment times, extend business hours, and leverage simple technology were not instituted to avoid months of excessive wait times.

With the high-profile attention has been on the challenges receiving car tags, interviews conducted in preparing the Metro Advocacy Agenda also revealed other problems in the processes and function of the Shelby County Clerk's office. These items include:

- **Substantial delays in the issuance of business licenses**
- **No updates in system with respect to business transfers**
- **Inactivity of the Shelby County Alcohol Commission resulting in businesses not able to obtain alcohol licenses or to clear alcohol-related violations**
- **Backlog of refunds for overpayment.**

In an extraordinary move following the August 2022 Shelby County General Election in which the incumbent county clerk was reelected, the Shelby County Commission voted to officially request the intervention of the State of Tennessee into the operations of the Shelby County Clerk's Office. This action punctuated previous requests for state intervention from the Greater Memphis Automobile Association and other concerned officials from West Tennessee.

PRIORITIZE SITES FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development has listed certified sites of varying sizes from across the state for economic development opportunities. These sites are promoted as a part of the state's ongoing efforts to lure jobs and businesses to Tennessee. Currently, there are no sites between 50 - 100 acres listed with the state as certified sites in Memphis and Shelby County.

As our community looks to take full advantage of upcoming job growth opportunities by landing companies interested in bringing jobs to West Tennessee due to proximity to Blue Oval City, a concerted effort is needed to identify and help to prep sites of significant acreage for economic development opportunities in Memphis and Shelby County.

The end goal of maintaining a dynamic portfolio of shovel ready sites (sites and mega sites of significant acreage with sewer and electric capacity) would expand the local ability to recruit major companies and industry leaders to Memphis and Shelby County.

INCREASE BUSINESS SERVICES OUTREACH AND OPERATIONAL TRANSPARENCY FOR WORKFORCE MID-SOUTH

For Shelby, Fayette, Lauderdale, and Tipton Counties in West Tennessee, Workforce Mid-South is the primary organization charged with ensuring that citizens have access to job opportunities and that employers are able to hire and retain skilled workers. These efforts are advanced through direct programs and partnerships with contracted service providers.

Even with the substantial resources in place to support employers hiring and retaining skilled workers, far too many businesses remain uninformed of the various opportunities for support from this critical organization.

An expansion in outreach to businesses and employers from Workforce Mid-South could lead to significant growth in companies and organizations taking advantage of available programs and resources.

Additionally, the need for more transparency in the operations of Workforce Mid-South and the Greater Memphis Local Workforce Development Board has been highlighted as important. This concern is understandable given the unfortunate historical distinction the Greater Memphis area has had across nearly 20 years in returning unused federal funds earmarked for local workforce efforts.

CREATE ON-RAMPS FOR BUSINESSES TO ENGAGE EX-OFFENDERS FOR EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Ex-offenders (individuals who have been previously convicted of a crime) have traditionally been difficult to place in employment due to policies, liabilities, and HR practices governing many businesses.

What has become apparent in recent years is that the perception of ex-offenders as a un-hirable undercuts a valuable opportunity to employ certain members of this population. As industries and businesses of every size have struggled mightily with securing dependable, qualified employees during the COVID-19 pandemic, the training and hiring of select groups of ex-offenders has resurfaced as a viable workforce strategy for certain organizations.

To this end, interested businesses could benefit from programs that help to train and prepare ex-offenders who meet certain criteria for job opportunities. Such programs, with eligibility requirements and training shaped by employers, are fitting on-ramps for businesses seeking to shore up their workforce.

IMPROVE MLGW ENGAGEMENT WITH AND SUPPORT FOR NEW AND EXISTING BUSINESSES

A recurring theme for a number of businesses and industry sectors has been the communication, inconsistency, and delay they have faced in having operational issues and challenges addressed and tracked by MLGW.

In response to concerns from investors, MLGW President J. T. Young suggested the formation of the MLGW Business Advisory Council to bring business and industry leaders together with key members of MLGW's staff to discuss systemic issues and potential remedies.

After a number of delays due to weather events and efforts to ensure overall diversity of the council, an inaugural meeting for the MLGW Business Advisory Council will convene in September 2022.

STANDARDIZE CODE ENFORCEMENT, CLEAN-UP, AND BEAUTIFICATION ALONG MAJOR CORRIDORS AND AROUND CRITICAL LANDMARKS

In addition to an overall community-wide commitment to regaining our status as the Cleanest City in America, code enforcement, clean-up, landscaping, and overall beautification projects should be prioritized along major thoroughfares and around significant landmarks and tourist destinations in support of economic development.

CREATE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING FUNCTIONALITY WITHIN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Memphis is known for its significant geography and strategic positioning as the capital city for the Mid-South region - a title which allows for tremendous synergy with the Memphis Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (Memphis MPO). Founded in 1977, the Memphis MPO is in place to carry out the transportation policy development, planning, and programming for the counties of Shelby and Fayette in Tennessee, and DeSoto and Marshall Counties in Mississippi.

And while long range transportation planning for the metropolitan region is the responsibility of the Memphis MPO, the development and planning for specific high impact transportation plans for Memphis and Shelby County are not currently enshrined in any particular local governmental office as a consistent function or output.

Creating transportation functionality within local government would be an opportunity to invest in, plan for, and help implement high impact transportation priorities for Memphis and Shelby County that may not necessarily be regarded or prioritized as significant for the larger Mid-South region (i.e., highlighted by the Memphis MPO).

It should be noted that any action in advancing this priority should be implemented in partnership and coordination with the work of planning & development, public works, and engineering departments and divisions of government within Shelby County as well as MATA, TDOT, the Memphis Shelby County Airport Authority, the Port Authority, the Chamber's Transportation Committee, and the Memphis MPO.

INSTITUTE DISTRICT-SPECIFIC CHAMBER ONBOARDING FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS

With any community, elected officials should be well-versed as cheerleaders and sales persons on what makes their city and community great.

Elected officials, particularly those who are newly-elected, should receive proactive and ongoing information to assist them in making decisions that impact local businesses and industry, specifically those in their respective districts. In support of this effort, the Chamber is committed to initiating onboarding for key elected officials with the goal of ensuring they are aware of the work of the Chamber, the opportunities for partnership, and the business assets in their districts.

In a larger sense, investors and business leaders have also expressed their interest in wanting community leaders to be comfortable and well-versed on what makes Memphis great for future economic development and investment.

REDUCE OPPORTUNITY YOUTH BY INCREASING JOB TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH EMPLOYER-HIGH SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Each year, thousands of graduating high school seniors make the transition from high school to college, post secondary studies or training, while others join the workforce. Conversely, thousands of other graduating high school seniors join the ranks of “opportunity youth” - individuals between the ages of 16 and 24 who are disconnected from both school and work.

With the current workforce challenges for employers, there is a real opportunity to connect with high school students during their junior and senior year and prepare them for potential employment and job training opportunities after graduation. This synergy between employers and high schools can be particularly beneficial for companies willing to provide some level of work-based training at their job sites and pre-employment training at participating high schools.

This focus and interest aligns with the efforts the Greater Memphis Chamber led in getting the Industry 4.0 diploma passed during the Spring 2022 Legislative Session for the Tennessee General Assembly. The diploma essentially allows high school Juniors and Seniors to use up to 20 of their credits for dual enrollment and work-based learning opportunities with the guidance of a career counselor.

GALVANIZE SUPPORT FOR A NEW BRIDGE ACROSS THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER AT MEMPHIS

The May 2021 discovery of a structural fault in the I-40/ Hernando De Soto Bridge crossing the Mississippi River at Memphis stood as a compelling example of the urgent need to invest in infrastructure. The subsequent three-month shutdown of truck traffic over the bridge created a ripple effect to the supply chain felt nationally and internationally.

Since the early 2000's, a strategic project to provide an additional crossing of the Mississippi River has been part of the long-range planning efforts in the Greater Memphis area. The current iteration of this strategic project has been termed “America's River Crossing” which acknowledges the importance this bridge would have nationally especially when considering Memphis' indispensable role in distribution, transportation, and logistics.

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