



PRESS RELEASE

September 2018 - Columbia Empowerment Zone, Inc. Grand Opening for New Office Building

During the month of September, the Columbia Empowerment Zone, Inc. (CEZ) celebrated 10 years of service to the City of Columbia. The Columbia Empowerment Zone Board of Directors, who oversaw the Empowerment Zone Grant, formed a nonprofit economic development corporation in 2008 and named it Columbia Empowerment Zone Inc. (CEZ, Inc.).

As a continuation of the Columbia Empowerment Zone, Inc. celebration of 10 years, CEZ, Inc. held a grand opening/ribbon cutting ceremony for their new office building on Tuesday, October 9, 2018.

Mayor Steve Benjamin, Columbia City Council, City of Columbia Officials, City staff, Columbia Empowerment Zone, Inc., Judge Mildred Weathers McDuffie's family and friends and Russell A. McCoy, III family and friends all gathered to attend the grand opening/ribbon cutting ceremony for CEZ, Inc. new office building.

"It's an honor to be here," said Mayor Steve Benjamin, "You all know the story of the Empowerment Zones all across this country in 1999, we were blessed with an incredible opportunity here that so many places took advantage of and some did not. When the Empowerment Zones phased out only a select few decided they could indeed take things to another level. I'm so thankful to Felicia and Judge Mildred Weathers McDuffie and the whole entire staff of the Columbia Empowerment Zone, Inc. for really helping to change the landscape of our City."

"I served on the Columbia Empowerment Zone, Inc. board when I first got elected," said Councilwoman Tameika Isaac Devine. "My heart is really with the CEZ, Inc. because not only have they looked at how they can continue to invest in the community, but they have dedicated board members especially Judge McDuffie and Russell McCoy. It's an honor to be able to watch all of the good things CEZ, Inc. is doing in the community."

"Good evening, it is a wonderful day in the City of Columbia to celebrate these two persons Judge McDuffie and Russell McCoy," said Councilman Edward H. McDowell, Jr. "Twenty-one in a half million dollars the city has felt the brunt of redevelopment, creativity and all of the things that goes along with that. Today we celebrate Judge McDuffie, Russell McCoy, CEZ, Inc. and the twenty-one in half million dollars in addition to other projects that we will reinvest in. Thank you all for being here today."

"What a joyous occasion to see Judge McDuffie first and foremost for me is particularly special. She has been a mentor of mine for many years as I grew up in Columbia," said City Manager Teresa Wilson. "It is so exciting to see all of you here to join us and I'm really particularly proud of the growth that I've seen with the development corporation. As a former assistant city manager one of my first tasks was to oversee all of our development corporations, and now Missy Gentry is the assistant city manager who works with these groups every day and they're doing such a great job."

"I represent my copilot Verdine Gleaton, the Columbia Empowerment Zone Grant, the Columbia

Empowerment Zone, Inc., the Economic Development Corporations and the City of Columbia," said Felicia Maloney, Executive Director of CEZ, Inc. "I am blessed by their desire to come together with me, Verdine and each other to accomplish community and economic goals. These goals are established through strategic planning and align with the Columbia City Council's Vision Statement known as Envision Columbia."

CEZ, Inc. is a nonprofit economic development corporation whose mission is to efficiently, effectively and enthusiastically create and support economic development opportunities in the City of Columbia. CEZ, Inc. achieves this mission by ensuring activities create, retain and reinvest wealth in the City of Columbia. The guiding principles and values are: accountability, integrity, inclusion, outcomes and stewardship.

Working closely with City departments and the City administration and other agencies that promote economic development and entrepreneurship CEZ, Inc. is a valuable key to assuring that small businesses have a place to grow and thrive in the City of Columbia.

Over the past 20 years of service to the City, the CEZ grant and CEZ, Inc., the nonprofit development corporation, have implemented many programs that support job training for City residents and incentivized businesses to start and grow in the City of Columbia.

The following programs were implemented in the City:

- Commercial Loan Fund
- CEZ Business Improvement/Façade Program
- Youth Employment Program (YEO)
- Neighborhood Employment Program (NEO)
- Work Initiative Program (WIP)
- EZ Tax Incentives Program
- Vacant & Abandoned Building Incentive Program

CEZ, Inc. accomplished the following projects:

- The purchase of and recruitment of business to the North Main Plaza phase I, II,
- The recruitment of an onsite full service ATM at North Main Plaza phase II
- The recruitment of 3 national chains to the North Main corridor
- The development of mixed income senior housing on phase III and IV of North Main Plaza
- Over 12 million in economic development contributions to North Main Corridor
- The purchase of vacant building on Lady Street and recruitment of small businesses to downtown area
- The purchase of vacant building on Harden Street and recruitment and success of small business establishing a headquarters office and opening up several locations around the state.
- Received the first 9% Low Income Housing Tax Credit award by a City development corporation
- Secured over 6 million in private equity for mixed income affordable housing development
- Invested 1 million in Low Income Housing construction
- Invested over 2 million in job training initiatives for City of Columbia residents
- Provided forgivable loans to 14 businesses to purchase vacant building and renovate
- Invested 1 million in the demolition of blight on Busby Street

2006 – Certificate of Appreciation for valuable contributions to the Richard & Annette Bloch Cancer Survivors Garden at Maxcy Gregg Park.

2009 – National Development Council First Place Award for Innovative Job Creation

2016 - the Columbia Empowerment Zone, Inc. received a Bronze Excellence in Economic Development Award from the International Economic Development Council (IEDC).

2016 – Trailblazer of the Year Award from the North Columbia Business Association.

The Columbia Empowerment Zone, Inc. projects and programs reflects the Columbia City Council's

Vision Statement focus areas and goals:

Focus Area #1: Attracting & Retaining Talent

Focus Area #4: Empowering Our Residents

Focus Area #5: Economic Prosperity/ Endless Possibilities

Focus Area #6: Enhancing Columbia's Neighborhoods

Goal #1: Grow opportunities for entrepreneurship, business development and a skilled workforce to achieve a healthy economy.

#2: Connect the City's neighborhoods and business districts through cohesive land use, infrastructure development, and transportation planning.

Goal #4: Collaborate and partner with entities within the Midlands region to become the state's prime destination for residents, visitors and businesses.

For additional information, please contact the Columbia Empowerment Zone, Inc. at 803-917-5525.