Tech pro: Pueblo needs to change approach to attract tech jobs

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Saying technology jobs are the way of the future, a local tech business owner said there is more the city of Pueblo could be doing to attract those type of jobs here and that the Pueblo Economic Development Corporation will have to change its strategies a bit to do so.

"An industry could take root here and it could be historically beneficial economically for the city," said Justin Holman, president and CEO of Aftermarket Analytics, a company located on North Main Street that helps businesses in the automotive aftermarket improve category management, increase supply chain efficiency, and boost profits with its predictive models and data portals.

Holman said, though, that luring tech businesses to Pueblo won't work with the way things are set up now.

"PEDCO is a great organization and I think they're doing great work, but their approach will not attract tech businesses," Holman said. "And I don't think they'd argue with that; they'd tell you that's by design. They have a strategy for a number of different industries."

Holman said the reason PEDCO's approach won't work for tech businesses is because the focus is on investment and capital expenditure.

"If you want a deal with PEDCO, the money has to be used for capital expenditure, building a factory," he said. "I have a team of software developers. We don't need equipment; we don't need real estate. What I need is help financing growth. I have a team of developers whose average salary is about $60,000. We could grow; we're small."

Holman said tech has become a major hub in cities to the north of Pueblo such as Boulder, Fort Collins, Denver, and Colorado Springs.

"It can spill over to Pueblo," Holman said. "There's probably thousands of millennial-age tech employees who are wondering if they'll ever be able to afford a home in Denver Metro and Pueblo could provide an outlet for that."

Holman said the main thing he wanted to impart upon council and the mayor is that the tech industry could thrive here, but the city needs to help it do so.

"You have the power to help," Holman told council. "I don't know exactly what it looks like. These are primary jobs. If we can get some help, one good, successful software company cold be enough to see additional companies."

Council members and Mayor Nick Gradisar sounded receptive to the idea of working toward some solution in trying to attract tech companies and employees here, though at this point it's not clear what that would be.

"I hope you'll continue to work on this," Councilman Bob Schilling said to Holman.

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