

contract with the center to develop C-Biz, which will enlist university undergraduate and graduate business students to help advise the small businesses in Franklinton, the Hilltop, Main Street, Parsons Avenue, Long Street/Mount Vernon and North and South Linden. In addition to helping the businesses, the project will give students hands-on experience.

The assistance to small businesses run by African-Americans, Latinos, Asians and other minorities, as well as women and veterans, in the targeted neighborhoods will include analysis of their business plans, their websites and their social-media platforms, for example, plus other marketing and consulting advice and help with learning QuickBooks or other accounting software.

Watkins participated in a pilot project last year as the center and the City Council rolled out C-Biz. Reeder and his students at Ohio State created for the electrician a smarter website with a new feature: Potential customers enter information about the electrical work they need, and Watkins receives a notification on his smartphone to then respond with a free price quote.

“My old website didn’t have anything like that,” he said.

The students also helped Watkins rewrite his 15-year-old business plan to target new markets, including the Smart Columbus transportation initiative.

Councilman Shannon Hardin said he can envision the future if C-Biz works as planned.