



Assessment of the Development Process

TOWN OF BLACKSBURG, VIRGINIA

matrix 
consulting group

Project Overview

- ◆ **Assessment** was undertaken to conduct an objective evaluation of the development review process (administrative development review, building permit review and inspections, and engineering reviews).
- ◆ **Overall goal** was to develop a set of recommendations for the Town to undertake to provide a consistent, predictable, and best-in-class level of service to customers.
- ◆ **Stakeholder input** was a critical component of the review to understand customer perceptions regarding their interactions with the Town of Blacksburg on development review activities.
- ◆ **Staff input** through interviews, data collection, and reviews of interim documents was undertaken to engage them in the change process.
- ◆ **A best practices assessment** was conducted to compare existing service approach to recognized industry standards and approaches.

Current Strengths of the Town's Processes

- ◆ Planning utilizes a project manager approach to plan review providing a single point of contact.
- ◆ A single software program is utilized by all departments from time of application through issuance of a certificate of occupancy.
- ◆ Key development review and permitting functions are located in a single location.
- ◆ Significant information regarding the process is available online.
- ◆ Employee interviews and surveys indicated high morale and commitment to service.

Key Themes Raised by Stakeholders

- ◆ Processes are not always clear and understandable.
- ◆ Need for clearer communication regarding submittal requirements to assist them in making complete submittals and understand the process.
- ◆ Technology utilization should be greatly expanded to streamline processes, and provide online services (inspection requests, application submittal, online tracking of status, submittal, etc.).
- ◆ More consistent levels of service to enable predictability in the process.
- ◆ Greater focus needed on providing clarity of expectations to enable applicant to “hit the target”.
- ◆ Need for improved customer service and communication with building inspectors.

Key Recommendations – Process Management:

- ◆ Town should adopt specific performance targets, highly publicize these on website and publicly distribute monthly performance reports.
 - 45 calendar days (first review) and 20 calendar days (2nd review) for plan reviews. (State requirement is 60 days).
 - Building review timeframes would vary from 1 day (simple trade permits) up to 30 days for large complex structures.
- ◆ Building inspections should be scheduled within one day of request.
- ◆ A contingency plan for additional resources should be developed for the building permitting function to address varying workloads and maintain compliance with adopted standards.
- ◆ Desk manuals should be developed for each position involved in development review and permitting.

Key Recommendations - Process:

- ◆ Pre-application meeting approach should be modified to provide written summary of key points discussed.
 - For some types of projects, pre-application meeting may be required.
 - Agenda should be developed in advance of Development Review Committee (DRC) Meeting.
 - All members of DRC meeting should be required to comment in advance of meeting.
- ◆ Assigned Project Manager (or intake personnel) should do completeness review upon submittal.
- ◆ Consolidated review letter should be distributed to applicants following each review cycle.
- ◆ Consider implementation of separate land disturbance plan and permit for larger projects.

Key Recommendations – Process (cont.):

- ◆ Building should develop contingency resourcing approaches to enhance ability to address seasonal workloads.
- ◆ Ensure that re-inspections for minor issues are prioritized for re-inspection (one-day) to prevent construction delays.

Key Recommendations - Technology:

- ◆ Fully Utilize and Expand Functionality of Available Software:
 - Town should expand efforts to transition from manual paper processes to electronic processing to utilize functionality of software system.
 - Comprehensive training should be provided to all staff on the software system.
 - Develop standards, in conjunction with IT, to accept electronic signatures and stamps to enable electronic processing of applications / permits.
 - Implement pilot project for online permitting, electronic document submittal and electronic routing of documents.
 - Implement laptop / tablet use for all field inspectors.

Key Recommendations – Applicant Resources:

- ◆ Increase interaction / dialogue with development community:
 - Quarterly training sessions
 - Newsletter
- ◆ Conduct an annual customer satisfaction survey.
- ◆ Develop a comprehensive development guide outlining key aspects of development process.
- ◆ Application forms should be fillable pdf format.
- ◆ Document interpretations of development code, and building code to educate developers.
- ◆ Develop example specifications and details for common installations to provide guidance to applicants.
- ◆ Centralize all development review / permit information on website.

Next Steps

- ◆ No action necessary from Town Council at this point.
- ◆ Staff will develop an implementation plan for the recommendations the Town chooses to pursue outlining:
 - Anticipated timeframes
 - Necessary resource allocations (staff and financial) needed
- ◆ The implementation plan will be shared with Council at a future workshop session.