



**Discussion: Streamlining County Processes**

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**Description**

Since December 2011, the Planning Department has been working with various County Executive Departments and WSSC to identify ways to streamline the development review and approval process. These efforts have identified numerous processes that can be simplified to reduce the time it takes for a project to move from concept to building permit. Most of the recommendations to date are procedural ones that do not require changes to laws or regulations.

Staff presented an update to the Planning Board on September 20, 2012. Since then the County Executive and County Council have been briefed and a presentation was made to stakeholders identifying the responses to the 67 issues that were identified. The purpose of this discussion is to provide an update to the Planning Board and to seek guidance on other changes that would affect the Planning Department.

**Discussion**

Since September 20, 2012, the various agencies have continued to meet to refine their recommendations and attempt to quantify the savings, both in terms of both time and money, that should accrue once these new procedures are put in place. Attachment 1 includes the 67 issues that were identified during the multiple streamlining discussions and the status of each. Although a final report has not yet been issued, some of the improvements have already been implemented. The changes implemented to date include:

1. Permit inspections for fire alarm and fire protection systems that were being done by both the Department of Permitting Services (DPS) and Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Services (MCFRS) have been consolidated.
2. A forest conservation pre-construction meeting is no longer needed prior to issuance of a building permit.
3. Procedures related to the release of forest conservation and site plan financial securities have been modified to make the process easier for applicants.
4. A weekly report of expedited/green tape applications was created by DPS and is now provided weekly to DPS Land Development, MNCPPC and WSSC so that they can sign off quickly if the application is straightforward.

5. ePlans, the Planning Department's tool for the electronic review of development applications, has been implemented for Preliminary Plans. The program allows each agency's comments to be available to all.
6. The Department of Transportation has completed and posted on their website the design standards for context sensitive road design.
7. The Department of Transportation has approved revisions to existing design standards for cul-de-sacs and temporary turnarounds that accommodate emergency vehicle access concerns from the Fire & Rescue Service.
8. The Planning Board, in many cases, is approving the resolution on the same day as the development application is approved. When that is not possible, the resolution is usually approved only a couple weeks after the hearing.
9. WSSC has started a pilot program to allow, by special request, releases related to completed water and sewer systems when more than 50% of the project is complete. In the past, such releases could not be obtained until the entire project had been finished.

Planning staff has also started to implement a number of other changes to help streamline the development review process. Some of the changes include:

1. Revisions to the Development Review Committee process that will help to ensure that a more complete list of issues is being identified during pre-DRC meetings. The time allocated for an item at DRC is then based on the complexity of the issues that need to be resolved.
2. Agency DRC comments are now being sent to applicants prior to DRC so that they can be better prepared to address those issues at DRC.
3. The DRC chair is keeping records and will issue a report every quarter showing:
  - i. Agency attendance at Pre-DRC and DRC
  - ii. Which agencies failed to submit their comments in a timely manner prior to DRC.
4. Efforts are continuing with the Maryland National Capital Building Industry Association to "de-clutter" record plats by only including that information that is pertinent to the plat.
5. Discussions with DPS are continuing that would allow the Planning Department to conduct the initial intake of all historic preservation permit applications.

Planning staff is considering two other changes and would like some guidance from the Board.

- 1) Some people believe that the Environmental Guidelines need to be revised to differentiate between urban redevelopment and greenfield development. In other words, different standards could be established based on a property's location within the county and potential for redevelopment. Such an effort is not in the Staff's work program and it would take months to devise such revisions, obtain input from stakeholders, conduct public hearings and discuss the revisions with the Planning Board.

- 2) Applicants have often asked if they could see a resolution before it is adopted by the Board in order to catch mistakes that are not substantive in nature. Now that resolutions are often approved on the same day as the application, this is not really possible. However, applicants have requested that resolutions that are not being approved until two or more weeks after the hearing be posted on the web a week before the Board is set to act on the them. In this way, everyone would be able to see the resolution at the same time, and errors could be pointed out and changed prior to adoption. Staff has no issue with this recommendation but is aware that the Board may feel differently.

The streamlining group hopes to produce a draft of their final report early in February.

#### **Attachment**

1. Streamlining Initiative Results Table