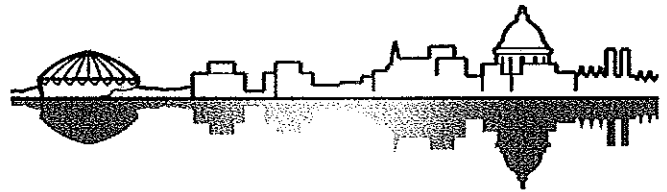


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Date: August 27, 2010
To: Peggy Yessa, Economic Development Division
From: Robert F. Phillips, P.E., City Engineer
Subject: City Development Review and Approval Initiative

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Phillips', written over the 'From:' line of the memo.

In response to your request for feedback regarding the memo from Tim Cooley dated June 30, 2010, City Engineering has gathered comments from Janet Dailey and Eric Pederson regarding the review of approval of projects. Below are general comments regarding the streamlining of the Development Review and Approval Process. Comments have been provided to the questions presented at the August 19th DAT meeting where this process was discussed:

1. *What are the most significant factors that impact the length of time it takes to review and approve a proposal?* In general for Engineering, the most significant delays encountered with approvals generally come from the applicants themselves. Some conditions of approval are more complex than others. There are many times when larger projects do not address many of the required conditions prior to submitting their final site plan for approval. In addition, those same applicants typically do not follow up on the requirements with the appropriate staff as detailed in the Plan Commission Approval letter. When the project gets to the final sign off it is time consuming and expensive for the applicant to make multiple submittals when their site plans are rejected. This leads to frustration from both Applicant and staff.
2. *Do you have any recommendations for improving the Development Assistance Team meeting or the input provided to attendees?* Some issues that are discussed at these meetings could be better suited for smaller groups. For instance, review of the aesthetic components of a project are better suited for planning staff only. If the Applicant wishes to only discuss specific concerns with their plan, then a separate meeting should be held.

A second suggestion is that the applicants supply plans prior to the meetings. This gives a much better feel for what is proposed so any research can be done up front. Most applicants do this but some do not and it makes it hard to provide feedback. But in general, the DAT meetings tend to allow for a good forum for applicants and also for staff.

Finally, making a permanent or laptop computer available within our typical meeting room LL-110 would be very helpful. Access to all city network drives would allow staff to efficiently provide applicants with valuable research and information immediately while attending the meeting. This can reduce the amount of follow-up staff time post meeting. GT Viewer software should be installed for access to all city GIS information. Internet access must also be available.

3. *As part of your agency's site plan review for permitted-use projects, are there any changes you would recommend to improve the development review process?* Plan standards, quality and technical content must be improved for more efficient review. A generalized check list of plan requirements needs to be created and provided up front to applicants so they can include the required information prior to submitting. If the plan is deficient, city staff should not accept and route. Many site plans do not have enough information on them to provide a beneficial review. More complex PU approvals could benefit from a pre-application meeting (if not done already) and this information should be provided.
4. *As part of your agency's review of projects requiring approval by the Plan Commission or Common Council, are there any process changes that you would recommend?* There should be a checklist of minimum plan requirements and QA/QC screening prior to accepting the projects for review. Many times applicants do not include enough basic information for the staff to make specific comments.
5. *In considering the above projects, do you feel that the time provided to agencies to submit comments is adequate, too long, or too short?* Yes, in general this seems to be an appropriate review time for Plan Commission review and comment by staff. There are some projects that are accepted a little too late for adequate review but those are more the exception than the rule.

For Permitted Use approvals or final approvals through DUCKS I think the applicant has an unrealistic expectation on the approval time. We frequently receive calls from applicants requesting final sign off when we have not even received the plans yet. Or have not had time to review the plans. Perhaps more education to the applicants should be provided so they have a realistic idea of the amount of time needed.

In addition to the comments above I think it would be noteworthy to mention that projects have become increasingly complex for numerous reasons (statute and ordinance requirements are the main reasons). As these projects grow in complexity it is important for larger projects to have project managers guide them through the process. This is already taking place on some levels. Additional staffing resources should be considered when reviewing the process.