

Mayor's Development Task Force

October 9, 2014

Meeting Notes

Notes prepared by
 Laura Cohn



On October 9, 2014, the second of the Mayor's Development Task Force meetings was held. This group of stakeholders will engage in a series of four meetings to identify the challenges that they encounter during their work within the development and re-development process in the City of Asheville.

During this meeting the participants reviewed the challenges they have already identified, uncovered some new challenges, divided them into categories, and then selected their priorities. In order to identify priorities, each participant was given three sticky dots to select their top three priorities. All votes were tallied for a final count.

In the table below, their input has been organized. During the summarization, Laura Cohn identified "sub-categories" in an effort to further organize the participant's feedback. In some instances, participants provided thoughts on ways to address their challenge. This input has also been included in a column described as "Request". Finally, the third column represents the total number of votes a challenge received.

Category: Process and Procedure Challenges		
<i>Sub Category: Permit Payment</i>		
Permit payment process.	Request: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Take forms and our credit card information. If all is in order, charge and email a receipt. If not in order, contact us and we'll return to correct problems. 	2
Cost of plan review fees to be paid in advance, especially on large-scale projects. Don't always know full cost when applying. Causes time delays	Request: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Start work with a flat fee, pay any additional fees (based upon needs and complexity of project) 	

for staff and contractors	before the release of permit.	
<i>Sub Category: Fee Fatigue</i>		
The cost of developing larger and more complicated tracks. All the fees associated with planning, water, sewer, storm water, road and pedestrian infrastructure reduce room for profit.		3
<i>Sub Category: Permit Processing and Timeliness of Work</i>		
Too many rounds of submitting, receiving comments, responding to and making changes, and on and on and on and on.	Request: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consider allowing for regular scheduling of a pre-review meeting to look at issues and requirements. This would be particularly useful for existing buildings to problem solve early. ▪ Provide and advertise the availability of online checklists. ▪ Provide education on Asheville policies and procedures to out-of-town professionals. 	7
Lengthy water closeout and approval process. Especially as water sample submitted at start is only good for 30 days.		1
Lack of clear estimates of time required for the process, start to finish.		
<i>Sub Category: Permit Retrieval</i>		
Being surprised by an outstanding permit on a building that is unrelated to new work.		1
<i>Sub Category: Permit Requirements</i>		
Getting surprised with unexpected/unknown additional requirements. (ex. unexpected Green issues)		
Category: Education		
Volunteer commissions can	Request:	

get too focused on critiquing the artistic merits of a project and re-designing it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide better instruction to volunteer commissioners on what their role and purpose is. Provide them with guidelines for their work. ▪ Have the City review the selection process to consider if it is being done in the most effective manner. 	
Lack of understanding in general public, small business owners, and small contractors on the building codes and permitting process.		
Category: Communication		
<i>Sub Category: Communication to Public</i>		
Lack of communication to public and vested stakeholders on changes to City policy that will impact upcoming projects. (ex. easements required for underground utility work)		
<i>Sub Category: Lack of Communication Between Departments and Services</i>		
Inter-department confusion and lack of communication. (ex. water wants one thing, planning wants another. Development Services staff expect one thing and site inspectors another. Lack of communication between Development Services staff.)		5
Cumbersome process to contact each office to send out appropriate staff for final inspection.	Request: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Final Inspection notice should be sent to one office and then the notification should go out to all parties for final. 	1
Disconnect between Transportation and DOT.		
Delays on MSD reviews.	Request: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More communication between MSD staff, City 	

	<p>staff, and developers/designers. Let's meet early to understand each other's needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to add clarity to the timeline. We know MSD tries for a 2-week review, but unknown timeline between City and MSD for example. 	
Category: Culture		
Seems like staff feel it is safer to say "No" right now. They don't feel empowered to make decisions and stick by them.	<p>Request:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shift the Development Services culture to one where staff are empowered to make final decisions. Help them feel safe to say "Yes". Encourage staff to work with designers/developers to solve problems. Collaborate with staff early in the design planning phase, particularly for existing buildings. 	7
Loss of institutional knowledge of staff with deep knowledge of codes.		
Category: Customer Service		
<i>Sub Category: Digital Submission</i>		
Not being able to submit, and re-submit, plans digitally.		9
<i>Sub Category: Staffing</i>		
Development Services office not being opened on Fridays.	<p>Request:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider splitting staff hours to cover more days. 	6
Too much wasted time waiting in line at Development Services office.	<p>Request:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a "by appointment" line. Have a "fast lane" for design and development professionals. 	4
Cannot currently get TCO on Fridays.		2

Time loss during process due to backlogs and delays.		
<i>Sub Category: Credit Card Processing</i>		
Can't use credit card at Water Department	Request: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Update payment process technology to use credit cards. 	
<i>Sub Category: Computer System</i>		
The new computer system isn't smooth. Want to be able to track where in the process a permit is. Miss getting expected completion date. Too many permit numbers.	Request: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide a Master Permit Number. ▪ Provide more tracking information. Such as, whose desk is it on, what action is being taken, where is it going next, and when will it get there? Keeping us informed is an important part of customer service. 	