

STAFF REPORT

TO: Planning & Economic Development Committee **DATE:** May 17, 2016
FROM: Jason Nortz, Director of Development Services
SUBJECT: Mayor's Development Task Force Update

Summary

In 2009 the City of Asheville created the Development Services Department (Department). The primary purpose of the Department was to create a one stop-shop to help streamline the permit process, improve communication, and create more accountability. In the summer of 2014 the Mayor established the Development Task Force (Task Force). The primary purpose of the Task Force was to identify the most significant barriers to the development process and to make recommendations for improving sound growth and development in the City of Asheville.

Beginning in September of 2014, the City hosted a task force designed to review and discuss challenges associated with developing in the City of Asheville. The group of 23 stakeholders met once a month for four months and identified numerous issues commonly experienced during the development process. In March of 2015 staff from the Development Services Department (DSD) presented the outcomes of that process to City Council.

Report

There have been numerous accomplishments since staff last provided City Council with an update in March of 2015. The most notable accomplishment which has helped guide staff and establish a level of accountability has been the formation of the Development Customer Advisory Group (DCAG) in September of 2015. The primary purpose of the DCAG is to discuss strategies for implementation of the Task Force recommendations. The DCAG is comprised of 12 stakeholders that meet with DSD staff once a month to review progress, provide input and make recommendations for moving forward. Included as a goal of the DCAG was to provide the Planning and Economic Development Committee with status updates every 6 months. It's worth noting that two of the stakeholders that were on the Task Force are also part of the DCAG.

In addition to the list of recommendations provided by the Task Force the DCAG provided staff with a list of key areas for improvement based on their experiences with the development process. Key areas identified included:

- Fast track process for professionals
- "Can do" attitude
- Better defined processes/checklists
- More online submittals
- Improved communication

The work of the DCAG helps to focus current and future actions, helps identify what resources are needed and works with staff to establish realistic timelines for implementation. The attached spread sheet identifies the Task Force recommendations and level of priority. Areas identified as “high” priority included:

1. Simplifying/expediting the submittal and review process
 - Offering formalized early assistance
 - Expanding options for on-line submittals
 - Looking at opportunities for expedited submittals and reviews
2. Improving communication between departments, and between customers and staff
 - Improve permitting system to communicate project status
 - Develop consistency meetings between departments
 - Explore options for sharing/posting valuable information
3. Improving the delivery of our service
 - Implement an electronic lobby queueing system
 - Improve permitting system to simplify permit numbers
 - Expand hours of operation

Progress

Staff has been primarily focused on addressing the “high” priority tasks within the last year. Emphasis has been placed on these efforts due to their overall impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of the services we provide. The following notable accomplishments, which align with the high priority tasks identified above, have been completed in the last year:

1. Expanded hours of operation to a 5 day work week
2. Implemented a formalized Early Assistance Program
3. Implemented a lobby queueing system
4. Numerous Accela Phase II improvements
 - a. Created master permit #
 - b. Added 5 more permits available for online application (14 total permits)
 - c. Automated warning delivered to applicant 2 weeks prior to permit expiration
5. Created a Drop-Off Line to reduce lobby wait times
6. Communication improvements
 - a. Formed the Development Customer Advisory Group
 - b. Hired office assistant for purposes of answering calls/voice mails/scheduling inspections
 - c. Created Planner of the Day phone line for specific land use related questions
7. Improved payment process/online payment option

In addition to tackling the high priority items numerous lower level priority tasks have been completed and are provided in the attached Status Report. Progress is still needed and DSD will continue to work on addressing the recommendations of the Task Force. Efforts will continue to be placed on higher priority items such as:

1. Electronic document review/digital submittals
2. Website upgrades
3. Improved communication/processes with outside agencies (MSD, Air Quality, etc...)
4. Increased consistency on city processes, requirements and deadlines
5. Fee study
6. Online fee estimating tool

Recommendation

This report is being provided as an informational update. Staff seeks guidance from the PED based on this information. Staff will also present a summary of this update to City Council at the July 26 City Council meeting.

Attachments:

- 1) Task Force Recommendations
- 2) Status Report