



## CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM

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Date: May 17, 2011

To: John Szerlag, City Manager

From: Mark F. Miller, Acting Assistant City Manager/Economic Development Services  
R. Brent Savidant, Acting Planning Director

Subject: Reduction in Service Delivery – Planning Department

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Due to organizational restructuring and reduction of staff, the number of full time Planning Department staff working on day-to-day Planning and Zoning items was essentially reduced from 5 to 2, a 60% reduction. Due to budgetary constraints, it is not practical to hire additional staff only to lay them off at some point in the future. The Planning Department utilizes the services of a professional Planning Consultant to assist with Planning-related tasks, as needed. Utilization of the Planning Consultant has resulted in an annual cost savings of approximately \$280,000.

Because of staff reductions, the Planning Department can no longer provide the full range of services that were provided in the past. The changes to service delivery are as follows:

### **1. Reduction in Document Maintenance**

The Planning Department no longer maintains land use maps by section.

The Planning Department no longer maintains maps/databases for the following uses:

- Residential developments
- Cell towers
- Churches
- Gas stations
- Hotels
- Restaurants
- Daycare facilities
- Senior facilities
- Financial institutions

### **2. Elimination of “Pre-Preliminary” Reviews and Redesign of Site Plans**

In the past, applicants would submit a site plan to the Planning Department for a “pre-preliminary” review prior to submitting a Preliminary Site Plan application or Special Use application. The Planning Department would redesign site plans, including commercial parking lots and lot and road layouts for residential developments.



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The Planning Department now holds pre-application meetings and provides cursory reviews of site plans, but no longer has the staff to redesign sites. The City's Planning Consultant is now responsible for conducting reviews and preparing reports for development applications. The cost of providing these services is paid for through escrow fees, which are submitted along with the application and fee.

### **3. Reduction in Office Coverage**

Due to staff reductions, there are times when the office is not covered. For example, one person may be on vacation and another may be conducting a site visit. The remaining person in the office may have a meeting, resulting in the office being uncovered for periods of time. Nobody is available to answer the phone or assist at the counter during these times. Reduced office coverage results in lengthened response time to provide answers to questions related to planning, zoning, code enforcement and signs. When the office is empty, callers may leave voice mail messages or send an email. For those visiting in person, a sign is placed on the counter informing the public of the lack of coverage, and a sign-up sheet is provided for the person to leave contact information. A representative of the Planning Department will contact those leaving messages at our earliest convenience. This may be eliminated through cross training and by consolidating staff into a one-stop shopping arrangement.

It should be noted that the Planning Department undertook a number of initiatives that had the effect of increasing efficiencies following staff reduction. These include a reduction in the number of monthly Planning Commission meetings, electronic agendas for Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals, and an improved Planning Department website. Additionally, the Planning Commission and Board of Zoning Appeals prepare abbreviated minutes, which saves approximately \$300 per month.

### **4. Elimination of Deliveries**

The Planning Department no longer delivers hard copy agenda packets to the Planning Department or Board of Zoning Appeals. Both of these boards utilize electronic agendas, which eliminates the need for hard copies.