



Recommendations for Improvement of Development Services

February 10, 2009



Recommendations to the Raleigh City Council

Introduction

The City of Raleigh is at the forefront of economic development and employment for North Carolina and much of the nation. Our universities and schools are energized with new students, new ideas and new developments in technology. The opportunities for growth and the potential expansion of the tax base for the region will drive our quality of life for many years to come. For those opportunities to reach their full potential, an atmosphere of cooperative and progressive development must be generated between those that push for growth and those responsible for planning and regulating quality growth. The chance to participate in the creation of this balanced and proactive approach is exciting.

The Development Services Advisory Committee appreciates the City Council and staff of the City of Raleigh for allowing our active participation in the examination, review and development of ideas that may help us bring this balance of quality growth to our region.

Charter

The Charter for the DSAC has its origins in the Farragut report—*Land Development Process Improvement*—conducted by Farragut Systems, Inc. and submitted to the City of Raleigh on March 8, 2006. The Farragut report identified the need to “conduct regular external stakeholder meetings and to develop an objective measurement for measuring progress and placing individual complaints in context.”

“Clearly the development and design community is eager for opportunities to interact with City staff and have their ideas heard,” the Farragut report says. “It is recommended that the Land Development teams institute a standing practice of hosting external stakeholder status meetings twice a year. This is not just a transitional practice, but one which should become a regular part of managing the process...Presenting objective data and proactively soliciting input from the development community would be an excellent way to establish and maintain a partnership environment as opposed to the sometimes adversarial environment in which these issues have recently arisen.”

History

The Development Services Advisory Committee’s creation is the result of an attempt to once again tackle the difficulties in producing simple customer-focused procedures that comply with City of Raleigh Policies and Ordinances. The issue is not new. Process improvements take time and are not always immediately successful at addressing the key issues.

The Farragut Study confirmed that as a result of the many attempts to modify the processes and departments to address these key issues, hurdles to success are still in place. The report says, **“As a result, many of the people who know the process problems and potential solutions the best are reluctant to provide honest and open input. This problem is particularly acute when process problems involve inter-departmental hand-offs, making staff extremely reluctant to raise multi-department issues and offer suggested changes.”**

Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Harvard Business School, says all change involves closing a gap between the expectations of the customer and those delivering services. Restructured programs need to be developed, but change can only be sustained through active participation, open systems for communication, and collaboration with allies and partners.

This hurdle is recognized by the members of the DSAC as one of the major issues to be addressed. The members of the committee cannot solve the issue but we can provide recommendations and ideas that might be explored. During this committee's investigation of several benchmark municipalities to explore their problems and successes overcoming this hurdle, the City of Austin offered these comments, "Don't underestimate the resistance to change from within, create a well-rounded implementation team, and the support of the City Manager and City Council is paramount."

Mission

The mission of the Development Services Advisory Committee (DSAC) is to review administrative policies and procedures to ensure consistent compliance with the City's development standards, while proposing new ways to do so in measurable, predictable, transparent, cost-effective, seamless and efficient ways that provide the level of services that customers define.

Organization

On the basis of the Farragut report's recommendation, and at the invitation of the Raleigh City Council, the Development Services Advisory Committee was formed. Seventy-one people participated in developing the DSAC's recommendations. Participants included but were not limited to) representatives from commercial real estate development firms; realtors; land-use attorneys; architects; engineers; land planners; commercial building contractors and subcontractors; commercial, public and institutional building owners; residential builders and developers; and business interest groups including the Greater Raleigh Chamber of Commerce and Downtown Raleigh Alliance. A list of participants and DSAC leadership chairs is included as an attachment to this report.

The DSAC formed three Groups:

1. The **Executive Leadership Group** established the vision, providing overall leadership and identifying broad strategies for improving Raleigh's development review process. This group also focused intently on developing recommendations for the most effective possible **organizational structure** to deliver development services
2. The **Customer Service Group** was charged with identifying benchmarks for the industry's expectations for excellent, predictable, transparent and responsive customer service.
3. The **Plan Review/Field Inspections Group** identified measurable expectations for the delivery of consistent, predictable, cost-efficient plan review and field inspections processes.

Process By Which These Recommendations Were Established

DSAC groups met several times, and communicated between meetings via email, telephone, informal meetings, and by the posting information including meeting minutes on the City's website. Formal meeting dates took place on the following dates:

- 10/16/08 DSAC Kick Off Meeting
- 11/06/08 Executive Leadership Group
- 12/04/08 Customer Service Group
- 12/04/08 Executive Leadership/Plan Review / Field Inspections
- 01/08/09 Plan Review / Field Inspections
- 01/20/09 Executive Leadership Group subcommittee
- 01/23/09 Executive Leadership Group
- 02/05/09 Executive Leadership Group

A contingent of Executive Leadership Group members also met with City Managers Russell Allen and Dan Howe on December 8, 2008.

Summary

In many respects, the DSAC's work and findings are endorsements of the findings of the Farragut report. There are simple questions to be answered, but the answers beg sweeping and possibly difficult solutions. As the Farragut report suggests, "making meaningful change is not easy and will require re-thinking the way many departments do business."

The most basic questions the DSAC addressed are these:

1) Do the City of Raleigh and its development services users want the development services process to be primarily regulatory, focused predominantly on applying regulatory standards without respect to the efficiency and cost of the process to the user? This, we believe, is the current culture and process of development services, and it acts as a barrier to efficient approval of development projects.

2) Or, do we want to develop a culture, organization, and set of processes in development services that are more service oriented and customer- and project-centric while still thoroughly and consistently enforcing applicable regulatory standards? This is the approach the DSAC endorses, and our recommendations reflect these values.

Our recommended approach echoes the findings of the Farragut report. "There are problems with interdepartmental coordination of the development process," according to stakeholders, it says. This does not mean, nor does the DSAC suggest, that any individual City of Raleigh employee involved in development services is deficient in the performance of their duties in any way. Rather, we believe that in order to develop the level of customer service we desire, changes in process, culture, and organization are the key concerns, not primarily personnel.

Guiding Principles and Fundamental Values

The DSAC has developed a set of recommendations that reflect the following values, which we have applied as guiding principles:

Predictability - the cooperative expectations of city staff and the public regarding the standards of development review, the interpretation and application of those standards, and the time required for review.

Transparency - the public's accessibility to individual staff expectations and the process of intra-departmental, concurrent review between departments. The clarity with which comments are communicated by the reviewer that promotes successful responses by the public reducing extraneous dialog between city staff and the public and furthers the goal of efficient review and quality development.

Efficiency - the timely process for thorough plan review given the level of service desired by the public and corresponding fees, promoted by the clear understanding of development review standards by the public, qualified consultants, and the city's unified, concurrent review process.

Consistency - the predictable and congruent interpretation and application of design standards, and the expectation of the same standards of performance between intra-departmental staff members, inter-departmental staff members, and a staff member and citizen.

Accountability – that the process for plan review and its corresponding value sets (Consistency, Predictability, Transparency, and Efficiency) would be upheld by a single, administrative decisionmaker; and the corresponding confidence of a staff member to make a decision and the responsibility of the staff member to defend the decision, subject to an inter-departmental, hierarchical chain of review, with one ultimate administrative decision-maker.

Our report is organized into three sections of recommendations:

1. **Customer service recommendations.**
2. **Plan review and inspections recommendations.**
3. **Organizational structure recommendations.**

Section One

Customer Service Recommendations

Objectives

1. Establish an effective culture of customer service, and a clear, unequivocal commitment to customer service.
2. In order to establish an effective culture of customer service, a clear and unequivocal commitment to customer service and effective Development Services processes and protocols must be mandated and enthusiastically supported from the top down by the City's elected and executive leadership.

The specific intent of these recommendations is to set forth fundamental criteria that will **foster an organizational culture** within the Development Services Department ("DSD") **that is committed to delivering excellent customer service and satisfaction** that citizens expect of a well-managed and economically and culturally vibrant city like Raleigh.

Summary

- A. One person responsible for application with authority to make final decisions
- B. Schedule: predefined tracks for predictable completion dates
- C. Web-based, real-time postings of staff comments and application status
- D. Conflict resolution process to maintain schedule

The new organizational structure would enable these objectives (A-D) to be met.

Recommendations

1. Objective Recommendations (with Guiding Principals identified)

- Meet or exceed the established benchmark for response time for each review function ninety percent (90%) of the time within the first year following reorganization, with a one percent (1%) incremental improvement each year thereafter. (PREDICTABILITY and CONSISTENCY)
- Expedite Official Code Interpretations (PREDICTABILITY and EFFICIENCY)
 - Staff interpretations to be issued within forty-eight (48) hours of receipt of written request.
- Establish process for addressing internal interpretation of policies and procedures within a specific time frame. (PREDICTABILITY, CONSISTENCY and EFFICIENCY).
 - Once official interpretation of internal policy is established, the outcome shall be published using a web based system for external and internal use

- Establish a system for conducting exit interviews by senior managers upon completion of certain types of development approvals in order to gauge customer satisfaction. (CONSISTENCY, EFFICIENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY and TRANSPARENCY)
- Establish a **Project Coordinator position** for each development approval request. The person in this position becomes the key customer service expeditor for the project (ACCOUNTABILITY, PREDICTABILITY, CONSISTENCY)
 - Track and coordinate resolution of issues.
 - Keep review process moving by coordinating between customer and review team.

2. Subjective Recommendations

- Create/modify job descriptions to match the required knowledge, skills and abilities (“KSA”) for a particular function with employees having those KSA’s. (EFFICIENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY)
 - The following KSA’s are to be encouraged:
 - Care
 - Vested in outcome
 - Customer service is personal
 - Willing to take ownership of project
 - Adequate training for the job, system and process
 - Problem solvers
 - Sense of urgency
 - Be proactive
- Ensure managers are empowered to select and shift/move people (EFFICIENCY and ACCOUNTABILITY)
 - Get the right people in the right jobs
- Empower and encourage employees to resolve problems or issues directly with customers

3. Implementing an organizational culture that values excellent customer service

- Customer Service to be a specific measurement (stand-alone metric) for performance review (ACCOUNTABILITY)
 - “Team” results should also be a part of individual evaluations
 - Customer Feedback should be incorporated into evaluation process
- Establish non-monetary incentives based on internal and external customer feedback (ACCOUNTABILITY)
 - City Bucks
 - ‘Prime’ parking space
 - Days off
 - Newsletter recognition—highlight project & people
 - Website recognition
- Encourage and emphasize obtaining customer feedback (ACCOUNTABILITY, TRANSPARENCY, CONSISTENCY AND EFFICIENCY)
 - Provide various types of customer feedback portals (comment boxes, web based, and feedback forms attached to staff comments). (TRANSPARENCY, EFFICIENCY)
 - Promotional campaign emphasizing City’s commitment to customer feedback.
 - Encourage commitment and participation by customers
 - Encourage staff to solicit feedback
 - Establish exit interview process

- Designate an independent person responsible for monitoring customer feedback (ACCOUNTABILITY)
 - Reports to 'management'
 - Establish protocol for responding directly to customer feedback
 - Publicize results of feedback both internally and externally
- Encourage customer participation and commitment to the process (TRANSPARENCY) and publicize results of feedback both internally and externally.

Section Two

Plan Review and Inspections Recommendations

General:

1. To improve the efficiency and predictability of the plan submittal and plan review process.
2. To increase the transparency of the plan review process, and provide automated status reporting.
3. To establish performance benchmarks that provide the review team with sufficient time for a complete review and provide the customer with a predictable process.
4. To improve consistency between plan review and field inspections.

Purpose

The purpose of the Plan Review/Field Inspections subcommittee is to *identify reasonable expectations* for the delivery of consistent, predictable, and efficient plan review and field inspection operations, and to focus on improving the plan review process by moving toward a *transparent system that promotes the five value sets* identified in the Farragut Study and *lends accountability to actions by the reviewing staff member and the customer*. Our analysis took us well beyond the boundaries of this City and caused us to probe into other successful systems in jurisdictions that have successfully coped with growth and demand for improved development services.

Process By Which These Recommendations Were Established

The subcommittee offers this set of objective recommendations with an acknowledgement that some parts of the process may independently function satisfactorily, but *desiring a systematic improvement to the entire process which will benefit both the City and the development community*. This subcommittee understands that these preliminary recommendations are broad, general statements of desired outcomes. But, these reflect the subcommittee's commitment to working with staff members who are involved in the development review process to further define detailed solutions and performance benchmarks. We envision a partnership with staff and management, focused on developing a better process.

Objectives

1. To have the plan submittal and intake queue administered by a qualified, cross-trained staff member capable of validating each submittal as complete, and efficiently routing the project into the review system, and initiating the plan review time line.
2. To have a process that includes regular, periodic reporting to an internet portal where the Customer can see the progression of every plan review from discipline to discipline, including his/her own project plan review, without having to call or e-mail the review staff;

and that data from this reporting system be collected to justify the costs of services being supported by the Customer's fee-based initiative.

3. To be able to rely upon the process to produce complete, and comprehensive review comments by a qualified review staff member(s) especially in the first, as well as all successive reviews, to remove the City Attorney's office from the plan review process, establish definite time periods for each queue in the review process, and result in conditional approvals by the end of the second review.
4. To be able to depend upon a plan approval such that once project plans are approved, they remain approved and are not questioned at a later stage in the process; and that field inspectors follow a defined protocol for making field changes to the set of plans that involves getting certified approval from the qualified reviewing staff member.

Recommendations

Recommendations follow (with guiding principles identified).

- That a customer, knowledgeable of the submittal and submittal requirements, should be able to submit plans for review, which are reviewed by a cross-trained gatekeeper, qualified to determine and certify whether the submittal is complete and whether the customer is pursuing the correct path to achieve the stated goal. The knowledgeable customer and the cross-trained gatekeeper should be able to have a meaningful discussion about whether the submittal meets the conditions of a complete submittal. (PREDICTABILITY)
- That once the gatekeeper certifies that the submittal is complete, the review period begins. (EFFICIENCY)
- That at the time of construction drawing submittal, the gatekeeper, in keeping with the function of verifying a complete and satisfactory submittal, should verify whether the initial construction drawing submittal is consistent with, and reflects the approved preliminary plan and any conditions that may apply. (CONSISTENCY)
- That the definition of a "complete submittal," should be clearly defined through dialogue between staff and the DSAC for various common submittals. This should include an agreement as to what items are not needed. (TRANSPARENCY)
- That an on-line data reporting system be created to collect regular, periodic updates as to status of each project in each reviewer's queue. The status should be posted so all Customers can see where plans are in the review cycle and where they stand in each queue. Even if the plans have not yet been reviewed, the status report will indicate where the plans are in the queue and when that reviewer expects to review those plans. That the online tracking system be implemented, so that comments from each reviewer are available online after the reviewer enters the comments into the online database. These comments should be available to the customer in real-time, so that the customer does not have to wait to view the comments until all reviewers are finished. After completing the review and posting the comments online, the reviewer should also denote the disposition of the plans, where they are, and what remains to be done to them. (TRANSPARENCY)
- That the data collected from the on-line tracking system be used for monitoring and reporting the effectiveness of the process, to identify obstructions and solutions to improving the process, as well as compare efficiency month-to-month and year-over-year to make sure the system adapts to changes in demand and continues to be effective. That the data collection

system be congruent with the accounting of costs of services by reviewing staff such that the fee-based system can be justified to the customer funding it. (TRANSPARENCY)

- That a specific time period for each sequence, and each queue in the plan review process be established by staff through dialogue with DSAC including a reasonable time for the customer's consultant to respond to comments, such that a timeline, can be estimated for the plan review process. (PREDICTABILITY)
- That the first round of review comments should be complete, comprehensive and posted electronically by the target deadline. Each comment should contain a reference to an internal policy or code provision on which the comment is based. (ACCOUNTABILITY)
- That given a complete and comprehensive first round of comments, and given the customer's cooperation in resolving all issues, a preliminary plan should receive conditional approval after the second review. A second review should only raise those issues not resolved by the customer according to the first review comments or that are caused by changes made to the plans by the customer. Approved conditions would not be subject to additional review while the submittal is waiting for other conditions to be satisfied. Some conditions might be incorporated into mylars for final review and signature, while others might be conditions of construction drawing submittal. (PREDICTABILITY)
- That the City Attorney's Office is removed from plan review. (EFFICIENCY)
- That a customer should have the option to schedule a face-to-face meeting with necessary development review staff after the first round of comments within an established time benchmark/standard. (ACCOUNTABILITY)
- That in the event inconsistent comments, as defined by the Team Captain, arise between disciplines in the review process, those reviewers involved in the inconsistency should resolve the inconsistency prior to the target deadline for that review period. (ACCOUNTABILITY)
- That once a set of plans are approved, the plans should remain approved such that the approved plan is not subject to re-review by the same disciplines at another level of the development plan review process. (CONSISTENCY, PREDICTABILITY)
- That the inspections function be clearly defined through dialogue between staff and the DSAC so that the inspector's review strictly adheres to the plans approved by the qualified plan review team. Should the inspector identify a need for alteration in the field, the Team Captain would resolve the issue with the respective discipline in a timely manner so as not to hinder progress of construction, secure approval by the qualified plan reviewer, and document the approved alteration to the plans. (CONSISTENCY)

Conclusion

The subcommittee believes that the successful implementation of the aforementioned recommendations will be facilitated by a robust culture of customer service and changes to organizational structure. Changes are necessary to the process and procedures and should result in a more dependable process for both customer and review team.

Future Work for DSAC

These recommendations are a jumping-off point for future dialogue between the DSAC, staff and management. They are global statements, intended to lay the groundwork for more detailed recommendations. Future work should focus on (a) defining specific performance standards and time-line sensitive benchmarks for reviews; (b) identifying efficient, effective problem solving techniques; (c) analyzing performance enhancing options such as electronic plan submittal, cooperative plan review processes with reciprocity between municipalities, and communication measures that do not burden the reviewer; (d) devising a process for resolving issues between plan review and field inspection, (e) pursuing training sessions for applicants to achieve high-quality submittals, and (f) establishing a roundtable group to work through future issues. We also foresee a transparent plan review process in which the customer can observe the real-time progress of each submittal.

Section Three

Organizational Structure

Objectives

1. Establish an organizational structure that is internally accountable for meeting the customer service and process standards established by the rest of this report.
2. Establish an organizational structure that has a sole source of accountability within the development Services Department in the person of the Development Services Director.

Recommendations

The DSAC subcommittee on organizational structure recommends implementing the following: (refer to graphic attachment following this section)

- Consolidation of personnel delivering development services into one department
- Consolidation of policy implementation and approvals of development submittals into one department (while policy setting, ordinance development and ultimate resolution of calls for interpretation will remain within the existing operational departments).
- Review Teams provide full service, one stop, customer-oriented delivery of development services
- Customer service and the delivery of the product on time is THE core value of DS department

Per the previous Farragut study reports, the DSAC focused on five expectations.

- **Accountability**
- **Predictability**
- **Consistency**
- **Transparency**
- **Efficiency**

Accountability

The project review teams should consist of 5-8 qualified individuals with expertise in Public Works, Fire Plan reviews and inspections, Building Code review and inspections, Zoning, Planning, Transportation and Storm water. Each of the teams has a captain selected by the individuals on that team. The captain is responsible for providing open communication and collaboration between team members. The teams' captains report directly to the Project Coordinator.

The Project Coordinator(s) evaluates the teams' performance, develops internal procedures and consistency and expediency, and acts in an ombudsman role between Development Services and the Policy Setting Operational Department and the Customer. The Project Coordinator(s) reports directly to the DS Department Head.

The DS Department Head provides support services, training and technology services to the project review teams and DS department. The DS Department Head is the spokesperson for the department and liaison to the DSAC. The DS Department Head is responsible timely referral of calls for interpretation to and Operations Departments and retrieval of those interpretations within a benchmarked/standard period of time. It is worth noting that since interpretations would require intra-departmental coordination, and since meeting the time objective for the return of referrals is NOT under the direct control of the DS Head, that adherence to time standards will require top-down management from the City Manager's office. The DS Head is responsible for the department's budget, costs, receipts, production and performance.

Predictability

The City of Raleigh is progressive. Driven by the community around us, the City has moved ahead with comprehensive planning, proactive approaches to watershed protection and storm water management. The staff has a process for drafting, public input and Council approvals of most ordinances, fees and planning. It is the discipline to follow these steps that is difficult for leaders and decision makers to follow that often initiate poor policy and implementation. Ms. Moss-Kanter writes, "Process disciplines, used in a consistent fashion throughout an organization, permit people to take more responsibility, even those 'not-ready'."

The DSAC recommends consistency and discipline in the development of policy, ordinance procedures, and their delivery schedules to the customer and Development Services for implementation. With the restructuring of the DS Department, we recommend the City's continued use of internal personnel to develop the processes within the DS Review Teams to insure expected delivery of document reviews.

We recommend the City provide training to the DS Department personnel on leadership and how to empower the employee and supervisor to make decisions and create processes that focus on customer service. The committee also recommends development of team and department metrics to set expectations of service and measure compliance with the goals.

The DS Department should present quarterly reports to DSAC and Council addressing the key issues of process improvement and schedule of policy and ordinance implementation. Regular reports on the progress towards reaching the customers' expectations of customer service should be provided. The reports should summarize customer surveys that address predictability of the development review process, timeliness, costs, and the client's understanding of their project's positive and negative experiences.

Consistency

With the responsibility for crafting policy and the expected documentation to insure compliance left with the Operational Department, it is imperative that consistency of that required information be respected and adhered to. By establishing relevant requirements for documentation, community input and scheduled dates for modifications, the development community can consistently address those items through creation of their own processes for compliance.

The DS Department should post the plan review process, train the customer in its use, and schedule bi-annual changes or errata to address modifications. An example of this process is found on the US Green Building Council website. The USGBC's process for LEED certification establishes a standard before any submittal is started. It provides a template for review of the project documentation and a method for posting interpretations relevant to the current procedures. Changes in procedures or requirements are drafted, publicly debated and voted on by the MEMBERS (users).

Process discipline is the key to consistency. Changes in documentation requirements should be minimal, difficult to add, and scrutinized for overlap, waste and intent.

Transparency

Common to all of the successful benchmarked communities was a transparency of the development process, policy establishment and success of the implementation by the development team. Most often this was accomplished by the full utilization of technology, web services and customer support. The City of Henderson, NV provided the most information on their website and in posted metrics on the department's performance.

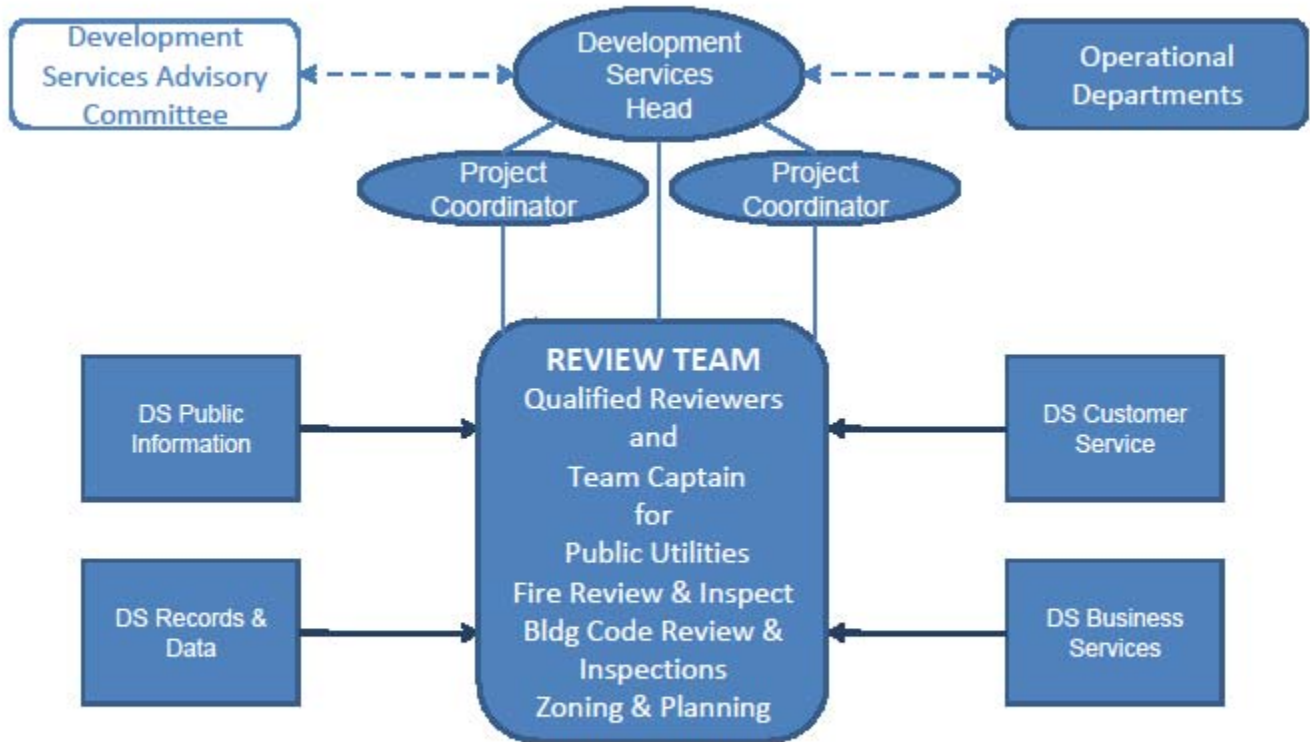
The core value of customer service delivered by the Review Teams is supported from outside the review teams but within Development Services by four groups. Public Information, Records and Data, Customer Service and Business Services provide their support service to the review teams and the customer, the development community. These logistics of providing these groups with the personnel, training and technology to perform their mission is provided by the Development Services Head.

Efficiency

By having the responsibility and authority to plan, organize, fund, and implement, the Development Services Department can address the issues confronting our development community. If these support services are delivered from outside the group, their enthusiasm for the project is split. While coordination and cooperation is necessary to remain within the City's full scope of services, leadership must come from within the department requiring the service. Just as the Operational Departments must establish their standards for policy and documentation, so should the other business services. Otherwise, innovation, creation and success are compromised and decisions are forced to be made at the top instead of by trained, well-supported front-line personnel.

The mission of the Review Team(s) is the critical element, all others provide support. The captain of the Review Team provides leadership, communication and motivation. The rest of the department focuses on helping the team succeed.

Organizational Structure



Section Four

Conclusion

Various departments have struggled over the years to grasp the changes required to radically improve the development review and approval process within the City of Raleigh. Both customer and provider have worked to improve the outcome, yet both seem unsatisfied that the goal has been met.

The Development Services Advisory Committee has wrestled with these recommendations. Our group wants the best for the City of Raleigh and will pledge its continued efforts to move ahead with the implementation of changes that work for everyone involved—development services providers, customers, citizens and taxpayers.

We believe that the ideas we have proposed in this report may help overcome the hesitation we all seem to have had in crossing the divide between the status quo and a more customer-friendly delivery approach.

We should all not expect to reach the summit of performance without working hard—and cooperatively--to get there.

It has been three years since the Farragut Study. We ask you: if not now, when?

Section Five

DSAC MEMBERS:

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Thomas Moorman, Holland Companies
Michael Barr
Sara Kusan, NC Surveyors Society
Donnie Parker, Wake County Public Schools
Jerry Bradley, Wake County Public Schools
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Mark Valand, IS Design
Mike Phillips, Phillips Architecture
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