RE: Commercial Plan Review
Review Times – Stakeholder Meeting

Friday, October 7, September 15, 2016, 9:00 – 10:30AM
505 Barton Springs Road, Room 500

REVIEW TIME QUESTIONS/COMMENTS:

1. Agreement that there is a need to prioritize small projects so they are not caught behind the large projects. Smaller projects should be reviewed faster.

2. Projects are ready to go when the Site Plan & Tap Fees have been paid. These reviews should not pay the same fee or have the same review time as other reviews.

   Response: A reduced review time has been added for Site Plan & Tap Fee only reviews. A reduced fee to pay for the processing and Site Plan Coordination review will be looked at in the fee study this fall. A site plan coordination review is still required by most review staff as well as stamping of the plans on this final review which takes time. Additional site plan coordination review is currently being requested by Land Use Review. Since concurrent reviews are typical, the site plan coordination review cannot be completed until the end. Stamping plans will no longer take an inordinate amount of time with electronic plan review and should speed up the process.

3. Small revisions should not have to pay the same fee or have the same review time as other revisions.

   Response: Minor Revisions with a reduced review time will be added as an option. Review staff or their supervisors will determine if the revisions is qualified to be processed as a Minor Revision. A Minor Revision Fee will be requested in the fee study this fall. This is similar to Residential Review which has a minor revision fee and the assigned review staff makes the determination.

4. Intake Coordination is causing up to 2 weeks of delay in finalizing the permits after the reviews are completed.

   Response: Plan Review is considering adding a reduced “internal deadline” to allow Intake Coordinators 2-3 days for processing the permit after review approval while staying within the published review times. Management and supervisors will work with Intake Coordinators to speed up the permit creation process.
5. Why do we generate more work and time by requesting Site Plans and Tap Receipts when these are viewable on AMANDA?

Response: Paper copies of the site plan are required to accompany the paper copies of the record set. With electronic plan review, staff will be required to review the plans in AMANDA. Tap receipts can be viewed in AMANDA now, yet the applicant will still need to submit an “update” so that Intake staff can reopen the process in AMANDA and process any fees when applicable.

OTHER QUESTIONS/COMMENTS:

1. Would like to see something similar to San Antonio where there is 1 contact person (project manager) who is your contact throughout the project instead of having to contact everyone individually.

Response: This will be taken into consideration. It would not be a change that would occur quickly.

2. Provide better communication on the website, similar to San Antonio. Such as current review time, comments available as they are completed. It’s understood that we don’t issue comments early because they may not be complete and we don’t want applicants to do unnecessary work, however that’s the risk the applicant takes. Having access to comments early would help them put together their response much quicker.

Response: This has previously been communicated to our IT group. We will continue to look into this with new staff that has been hired to improve communication with the public.

3. Improved communication in the comments is necessary. Comments are too general and not specific enough so the comment is often misunderstood. Comments need to include more code section references.

Example: “X is required” so the applicant says, “We will provide X” but not show it on the plans in the manner the reviewer was expecting. Improved comments would prevent this confusion).

Response: Staff is encouraged to do so, but it is apparent that more training is required. We do realize that some staff is reluctant to change the way they have always conducted review.

4. Will electronic plan review allow reviewers to show where on the plans the comment applies?

Response: Yes, ProjectDox allows the reviewer to mark up the plan to show where the comment applies. They can draw on the plans and attach the comment to that location.

See the Community Training link on the ePlan website: [https://austintexas.gov/eplan](https://austintexas.gov/eplan)

5. More redlining is needed but also when redlining occurs, this needs to be communicated to the applicant at approval instead of simply marking the plans. Newer staff has been good about redlining and contacting the applicant/design professional in order to not hold up the review. Some staff say they are not comfortable marking up a sealed set of plans.
Response: There are ways to comment on plans without revising them and violating the conditions of professional license. We have been working on conveying this to staff and realize that some staff are reluctant to do so.

6. Provide a code analysis template that must be submitted. It was understood that staff was working on this but it hasn’t been made available.
   Response: Management will check with staff to make that available.

7. A top 10 rejection comment list would be helpful for applicants.
   Response: This could be provided and will be added as a project for staff. In the future it is intended to publish checklists to cover most of the items in plan review. Checklists do not limit the reviews our staff performs.

8. Customer hours are limited with the understanding that supervisors and management would be available. Why are they still attending meetings during that time?
   Response: It is intended for supervisors to be available during customer hours. Meetings called by upper management may be out of our control as well as training. However, we can do a better job of ensuring there is adequate back-up or notification when this occurs.

9. The building should allow parking on the 1st floor of the garage.
   Response: Our department does not have control over parking, this is handled by the building management. However they recently changed parking requirements so that City employees are not allowed to park in the front parking lot. This has helped increase the number of available space.

10. Concern about new technology not working and not having appropriate tech support. The QLess system stopped working in the Service Center one day because someone had opened up a separate browser window. Technical support took 45 minutes and a customer fixed the problem in the meantime. The system has other glitches such as being very slow at the kiosk compared to using your phone and the wrong names were listed including former employees and the wrong employees for the division. Rolling out each item piece by piece is also not helpful.
    Response: This has been forwarded on to our IT group.

11. Staff is not responding in a timely manner. It takes weeks to set up a meeting with a reviewer. There is a fear of retaliation/sore feelings if they were to include supervisors in second email requests. Customers would like to have an organizational chart so they know who reports to which supervisor.
    Response: Staff is required to respond within 24 hours. Management just reiterated the requirement to staff this week. Please do not hesitate to cc: supervisors in repeat communication if you are not getting a response. We cannot help our staff manage their time better or come up with improved ways to handle communication unless we know there is a problem. An organizational chart is being worked on, attached is a draft copy for Commercial Plan Review.