



Memo

To: Tom Brymer, City Manager
From: Joey Dunn, Director of Planning & Development Services
Date: October 12, 2004
Re: Development Services Department Changes

I would like to take the opportunity to give you an overview of the restructuring and change currently taking place in the Development Services Department. As you know, there has been a lot of activity in the Department over the past several months. My involvement began on August 16th, almost two months ago. I must say that it is great to be back with the City of College Station, and to be a part of a dynamic and exciting rebuilding process.

It has been my belief from the beginning that much can and will be accomplished with sustained positive leadership and teamwork among all people involved in the planning and development process, both internal and external to the organization. However, my role has been clear from day one: to lead by example, be an agent for change, and to take action to improve the Department's service to the community.

Up to this point, I have been able to gather a significant amount of information from a variety of sources to guide me in the decision-making process. General guidance for change has come from a combination of personal observation and input from a number of stakeholders and individuals involved in the planning and development process, both internal and external to the organization. As you know, the Blue Ribbon Development Review Committee issued its Final Report on September 15, 2004. In specific regard to the Development Services Department, the Report identified a significant number of items and issues that need to be addressed, including the following:

- There exists a pervasive anti-business attitude, mistrust of development community, longstanding culture of isolationism and victimization, and inadequate communications in the Department.
- The Department is regarded by the development community as inconsistent, unreliable, lacking in a service mentality and professional appearance, with limited job knowledge, a preoccupation with speed versus quality, and a hesitancy, reluctance and resistance to change.

Bottom line, the overall lack of effectiveness and credibility of the Department among the community appears to have reached a critical point where significant change is necessary, and the most important change lies within the restructuring of the Department itself.

There are a number of changes currently in the works for the Department:

- **Department Name Change.** Attached is a copy of the new organizational chart for the Department, which illustrates a couple of significant changes. First of all, the department name has now been changed to **Planning & Development Services**. Although not significantly different from the original department name, adding the word “Planning” in the title reflects adequately the two main functions of the department that are now compressed into one work group: Long Rang Planning and Development Review. It is critical for the Department to continue its focus on long range comprehensive planning issues, while at the same time being equipped to handle the daily load of development review applications. From my perspective, it is important to manage workflow among all of the professional planners, requiring all of the planning positions to handle *both* long range *and* current planning projects.

It is important to note here that we do not anticipate any impact on development review processes. In fact, this change involves broadening the areas of responsibility among all of the planning positions, equipping a greater number of staff that can assist our customers through the various processes.

- **Assistant Director Position.** The Department will also have additional management oversight from an Assistant Director position, which will work closely with the Director in the long-term implementation of the new department structure. The Department support staff, including three Customer Service Representatives, and three Staff Assistant Positions, are now supervised by the Development Coordinator, who is responsible for monitoring all development procedures in general, making sure the multiple projects and plans are processed appropriately, and managing project communications with development applicants and other departments within the City. A fourth Staff Assistant Position now answers directly to the Department Director/ Assistant Director. This position will continue to handle similar workloads as the other Staff Assistants, with specific administrative duties for the Department Director/ Assistant Director.

The Neighborhood Planning and Mapping areas involve important specialized tasks from staff that devote a majority of their time to these specific areas. Therefore, these positions now answer directly to the Department Director/ Assistant Director.

- **Staffer on Call (SOC) Schedule.** We now have an on-call schedule/rotation of 9 planning staff members who are available to assist any walk-in customer or caller at any time during normal 8am to 5pm office hours. This is a method I have used before to ensure that staff availability exists at all times for development customers who need information or advice on any development related issue or project. I have found that this system improves customer relations, while providing a broad training of staff in the knowledge and application of the various development ordinances, standards and processes.
- **Office space changes:**
 - We have added the **Customer Resource Center**, which features a new waist-high counter space along the right side of the entry area, equipped with a computer and printer for our customers to view and print maps and other information from the department website. The Staffers on Call will use this space to assist customers, and walk them through the various resources available on our website. The counter is also getting a lot of use for customers filling out permit applications and finalizing development submittals.
 - **Removal of door at rear of reception area.** We have replaced this door with a large open threshold which opens up the area for customers to enter the office core area.

- **Conference room space.** An existing office within the Department office area will soon be converted to a conference room to more conveniently accommodate meetings up to 10 people. This new conference room will be centrally located at the end of the short hallway, with clear visibility from the front reception area.
- **Website improvements.** Several software improvements have been considered which will provide a more user-friendly interface to development project maps, reports, and other information. We recently began posting on the website copies of our weekly development submittal lists, which provides more current information on “what’s going on” development-wise around the City. Some of the older, out-of-date information has been removed from the website, and we are currently updating the Development Guide, which is a “how to” guide on how to navigate through the various development processes.
- **Development Review Process Improvements.** A number of improvements were identified through recent efforts of an interdepartmental staff committee, known as the Continuous Improvement Team. We are at work in addressing these recommendations. Also in the coming months, we will be working to bring in a development review process consultant to provide additional review and advice regarding these and other improvements for the Department.
- **Interdepartmental Communication.** We are in the process of scheduling standing meetings among Planning & Development, Public Works & Engineering Staff, the City Manager, and other executive management staff to be sure everyone is briefed on department changes, as well as current and anticipated development projects.
- **Community forums.** Due to the high level of public interest in the recent changes within the Department, we also anticipate holding bi-monthly forums with our customers and the community in general to receive input and suggestions, and to keep everyone informed of these and other various changes within the Department.
- **Subdivision Regulations Overhaul.** The Blue Ribbon Committee Report indicated a dire need for a major revision to this document, which guides all current subdivision platting procedures. Planning & Development Services staff will be working closely with Public Works Director Mark Smith and his staff in an effort to completely revise this document within the desired 6-month time frame.

Of course, the list of short- and long-term departmental changes continues to grow as we find new ways to respond to the input we have been given.

I want to say again that I am excited to be a part of the challenge before us, and I look forward to some exciting days ahead!