City Manager's Blue Ribbon Development Review Committee
April, 2004

Scope & Charge- to review the City of College Station's Development Services Department and make advisory recommendations to the City Manager on ways to improve the development review services offered by that department.

Responsibility- this group is an extension of the City's executive branch (City Manager) and as such is appointed by and directs their recommendations to that office.

Mission- to make recommendations regarding the City of College Station's development review processes and related issues that will result in processes that improve the community's quality of life for all citizens commensurate with that of a world class community.

Goals- To examine:

- The City's development review process
- Development Services' organizational structure
- Development Services' response efficiency
- Development Services' response effectiveness
- Development Services' user friendliness
- Development Services' business relationships

Desired Outcome- a Development Services Department and a development review process regarded statewide as a "best practice" by other local governments, the development community, and College Station citizens.

What Might a "Best Practice" Development Review Process and Development Services Department Look Like? What Would Be Some of the Attributes of a "Best Practice"?

1. **Easily accessible-** to both the party going through the development review process and to any party wishing to inquire as to the status of or provide input regarding a project going through that process.
2. **Standards and processes are easily understood-** by both laymen and professionals in the field; standards and alternatives are well documented; process is well documented.
3. **Equitable service -** the process is viewed as fair by both those using it and citizens in general. Additionally, outcomes in the process are not dependent on relationships with the staff, but instead on the quality and completeness of submitted plans.
4. **Predictable and consistent-** the process is administered consistently and that its outcome is predictable with no "surprises" for those going through the process and not dependent on variations of interpretation based on the particular employee performing the review. Timeframes for review are clear.
5. **Process and submission requirements are clearly defined-** the process must be easily tracked by laymen, staff and professional developers as well as questions regarding the status of a review must be easy to answer in a timely fashion. Those

going through the process must have an explicit, clear idea of what constitutes complete plans before they will be accepted by the City for development review.

6. **Cross-trained personnel-** that are competent and well trained across-the-board.
7. **Planning considered continuous cycle-** that development review and long range planning are regarded by staff as equally important and prestigious sub-disciplines of urban planning. Reward and promotional systems reflect this philosophy.
8. **Outcome oriented-** while this is a process, the focus should be on outcomes, not additional process.
9. **Adherence to good ethics**
10. **Quality development-** outcome matches standards and the standards align with desired outcome (aesthetic and operational).
11. **Allows/promotes innovation-** both on the part of the staff and the developer.
12. **Clear priorities and mission-** the staff, community, and developers all have a clear and mutually agreed upon consensus on what the department's focus should be.
13. **Staff empowerment-** the staff who have direct customer contact must be empowered to and can make decisions that solves problems and moves the development process along. Those decisions should be consistent and not based on who the developer is.
14. **Problem solving skills-** staff who have the skills to problem solve and suggest acceptable alternatives consistent with the code. When necessary, staff has the ability to say “no” without discouraging the customer.
15. **"Customer ombudsman"-** that the development review process has one employee point of contact that can obtain answers to questions in a timely fashion for citizens and those going through the process as well as "trouble shoot" problems.
16. **Commitment to a "One Stop Shop"-** the City, its citizens, and the development community is committed to using one location for acceptance and review of all development submissions. Department communications are handled by one person.

Some Suggested Areas of Examination (Possible "Low Hanging Fruit")

Process Questions

1. Are the City's development processes clearly defined and flow-charted (process, forms, applications, schedule, etc)?
2. Is every step necessary? How long does each step take?
3. Which steps are requirements of State law, which are requirements of City ordinance, and which are a "custom" (that is, "the way we've always done it")?
4. Are there well-defined time frames? What are they? Are they met? Are they reasonable? If not, what would be reasonable? What do other "best practice" cities have in the way of time frames?
5. Are ordinances and standards well defined and understandable to both staff, development professionals, and the general public? (no unwritten policies).

Customer Service Questions

1. Is there a single point of contact identified for the applicant? Does the applicant know that and use it correctly? How/when does staff communicate with the client to ensure excellent customer service?

2. Is there a true "one stop shop" process?
3. Is the system a "closed loop"? IE- can ANYONE with a computer and internet access find out the status of a project going through development review?
4. Is it clear to the applicant what constitutes a complete set of plans?
5. What written information and electronic information (via the internet or email newsletters) is given to or available to the public that can effectively communicate the development review process?
6. Does the user of the system know how long it will take to go through the development review process (in terms of number of days) if their plans are complete at the time of submission?
7. Who checks plans at the front counter for completeness?
8. Are staff development review decisions consistent and based on clear written guidelines?

Human Resource/Teamwork Questions

1. Is the staff cross-trained? Should staff be rotated between long range planning and development review?
2. What level of cooperation and communication exists with other City departments involved in the development review process? What mechanisms can be put in place so that other department's interests are represented (ex: operations and maintenance)?
3. Can allocation of work (repetitive and special projects) be improved?

Suggested Approaches

- Review written information provided, determine what other information would be helpful to the group
- Interviews of users of the development review process (ex: engineers, surveyors, developers, builders)
- Interviews with staff
- Contact and staff interviews with other cities considered to be "best practices"

Protocol

- **Meetings with staff-** to be scheduled through the City Manager's office.
- **Meetings with users of the development review process-** the City Manager's office will be glad to assist in the logistics of setting those meetings up OR those can be arranged directly by the group.
- **Subcommittees-** may be used subject to prior approval of the Chairman.
- **Individual member activities-** these may be taken at the direction of the Chairman or the City Manager.
- **Staff support-** if the group needs staff support, (IE- a meeting room at a City building, or someone to take/type notes, or a phone to make long distance phone

calls from, or legal advice) please let the City Manager know and he will be glad to arrange it. Also, a development review consultant may be available as a resource depending on cost.

- **Meeting agendas-** will be formulated by the Chair in collaboration with the group and then communicated to the City Manager for distribution to the group.
- **Meeting Days & Times-** to be established by the group.
- **Length of Time Allocated to this Work-** to be established by the group.