Development Review in Local Government: Benchmarking Best Practices

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Printed in the United States of America
13 12 11 10 09 1 2 3 4 5
This publication is printed on permanent, acid-free paper in compliance with the North Carolina General Statutes.
# Contents

Acknowledgments                              vii  
Introduction                                 1  
Methodology: Corporate-Style Benchmarking    3  
Overview of Development Review in the Participating North Carolina Cities and Towns 9  
Selection of Benchmarking Partners           17  
Intriguing Ideas from Other Nominated Local Governments 21  
Characteristics of the Three Benchmarking Partners 25  
Features Shared by the Three Benchmarking Partners 49  
Implementation Prospects                     59  
Conclusion                                  63  
Appendixes                                  65  
A Survey to Measure Likelihood of Implementing Ideas Encountered during Site Visits  
C Additional Documents from Henderson, Nevada 81  
D Additional Documents from Tallahassee, Florida 89  
E Additional Documents from San Diego, California 95  
F Fee Schedules                             109  
About the Authors                           117
Acknowledgments

A benchmarking project of the nature and magnitude of the one described in this report requires a great deal of cooperation from many parties. We benefited from having such cooperation in countless ways over the past two years.

Officials from nine North Carolina cities and towns recognized the potential value of this project and supported it not only financially but, more importantly, by devoting staff time and expertise to ensure its success. Staff members in Asheville, Cary, Concord, Durham, High Point, Matthews, Salisbury, Wilson, and Winston-Salem patiently taught us about the development review process and how it has been conducted in their communities. They prepared us for our task of screening nominees from across the nation and selecting benchmarking partners for this project.

We are grateful to the North Carolina officials who assisted us and especially to those who accompanied us on site visits to examine the development review operations of our benchmarking partners: Evans Ballard, Robin Barham, Ricky Barker, Ed Brown, Robert Griffin, Kim Hamel, Janet Holland, Tom Horstman, Sue Hyde, Roger Lentz, Dan Matthys, Steve Medlin, Dan Mikkelson, Ken Millett, Chris Murphy, Wayne Nicholas, Kevin O’Brien, Margaret Pearson, Renee Pierson, Robert Prestwood, Jay Reinstein, Bob Robbins, Mark Schroeder, Shannon Tuch, Jeff Ulma, and Ted Voorhees. They were not only our travel companions; they were our closest advisors and our primary source of development review expertise as well. When they were impressed by what they saw on a site visit, we took note of their reactions and focused our attention on key elements they discovered. We hope they will find that we have conveyed our observations accurately and have reached reasonable conclusions.

We gratefully acknowledge the many experts and development review officials across the nation who answered our inquiries and helped us find national leaders in this field. More than a hundred of these individuals contributed names to our list of leading local governments. In addition, information provided by officials in these communities assisted us in narrowing that list.

We wish to thank Justin Amos for his help during the project’s first year and Doug Paris and Heather Jankowski Chartier, who stepped in temporarily while Ryan Davidson and
Ryan Ewalt were away completing summer internship requirements. They moved us forward masterfully and kept the project on schedule.

Our thanks go also to our School of Government colleagues Dale Roenigk and Lisa Sheffield, who helped us coordinate many aspects of the project behind the scenes, and to David Owens and Rich Ducker, who provided helpful suggestions for this report.

We are especially indebted to the municipal officials of our benchmarking partners — Henderson, Nevada; Tallahassee, Florida; and San Diego, California — who assisted us at every turn and graciously hosted our visits to their cities to see their development review processes firsthand. Christine Kidd of Henderson, Karen Jumonville of Tallahassee, and Kelly Broughton of San Diego, key officials in the development review operations of these cities, could not have been more cooperative. They must have grown weary of all our questions and requests, but they never showed it. They and their colleagues generously shared their time, their insights, and a wealth of information about their excellent operations. This project would not have succeeded without their collaboration, and we thank them very, very much.

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Chapel Hill, North Carolina
June 2008
Introduction

The local government development review process is multifaceted and complex. Although common elements are found across all local governments, variations abound and specific processes are influenced by community characteristics and desires. Nevertheless, most communities desire a development review process that is fast, thorough, and fair. These desirable qualities were the foci of this project and led project researchers and participants to three local governments with exceptionally strong development review operations — the cities of Henderson, Nevada; Tallahassee, Florida; and San Diego, California. Administrative officials in these municipalities graciously accepted our invitation to participate in this benchmarking project and provided a wealth of process information to support this study.

A careful review of documents pertaining to the development review operations of our benchmarking partners, followed by site visits to all three, revealed five common characteristics among these development review leaders:

- A commitment to delivering services at a level and cost that match the scale of development in their communities
- Customer-focused services
- Transparency
- Reliance on high-functioning technology
- Extraordinary relationships with information technology support personnel

During site visits project participants were exposed to a wide array of ideas regarding specific project elements. These ideas pertained to process financing, stakeholder engagement, and process management. Many of the ideas participants encountered during the site visits already have been adapted for use and implemented in some of the nine North Carolina cities and towns that sponsored this project. Many others have been rated by community officials as likely to be implemented in the months ahead.