

Mayor Castor's Transition Advisory Teams
Development Services Advisory Team – Chair Julia Mandell
Monday, July 15, 2019 at 9:30 A.M.
Visit Tampa Bay - Conference Room Suite 2900
201 N. Franklin Street
Tampa, Florida 33602

Advisory Members present: Chair Julia Mandell, Lakshmi Shenoy, John Diaz, Mike Loomis, Charlie Rollins, Fred Hames, Andy Joe Scaglione, Rhea Law, Carroll Ann Bennett, Chase Collier, Meredith Freeman, and Jennifer Motsinger.

Transition Team and staff present: Transition Lead, Carole Post, Co-Chair CFO Sonya Little, Co-Chair Harry Cohen, Transition Team Member and Retired Assistant Chief of Police John Bennett, Assistant City Attorney II Kristin Mora, City Clerk Support Technician Karencia Ciagala.

Transition Lead Carole Post welcomed everyone and provided a brief update since the last meeting. An online form is now available for the public to add comments and participate in this process. Ms. Post gave members a printed copy of comments received to date. She then provided a quick overview of the last meeting and asked members to focus today on identifying the most critical issues that can be addressed for positive impact.

Ms. Post advised that Mayor Castor is positioned to respond to recommendations as quickly as possible and welcomes fresh ideas and perspective on short- and long-term suggestions. That the team has a 90-day process does not mean we have to wait 90 days to begin making changes and we should begin to look at the top issues, such as staff hiring. The city is working with human resources to come up with creative hiring processes and aggressively recruiting additional talent.

Similarly, the Development Services team is working on making web information more user friendly, transparent, and using plain language for everyone to understand. Changes will happen to navigate the website to make it more easily accessible and accurate.

Recurring public Accela 101 Workshops will begin as early as August of 2019. They will also have various other public workshops of other topics including zoning, driveways, signs, trees and landscaping. The team will also look to update Accela communications to plain language and provide access for owners to view and have more control over their destiny regarding on-going projects. The workshops will provide access to the program, giving hands-on guidance to learn how to navigate through the program.

Ms. Post introduced the newly appointed incoming City Attorney, Gina K. Grimes. Ms. Grimes explained how she has experienced both sides of development, as a previous attorney for the City of Tampa, and most recently as an attorney representing development clients. She has offered her assistance to the team during this process.

Team Chair Julia Mandell, asked members to introduce themselves. She then began discussions about trying to expand resources/time, and getting the inspectors to have final say about project changes without requiring applicants to start the process over from the

beginning.

Team members began discussions about their experiences, and about what they are hearing out in the field.

Issues that were raised included:

Plans previously approved, and then during the process have to make changes reversing the approval, causing applicant to begin process from the beginning.

No one answers phones, due to staff shortages/workloads. How do you get answers?

Clients and the public having issues accessing Accela system. Cannot look up progress or know what is expected.

Staff may not feel empowered to make decisions which can cause major delays to projects and higher costs to applicants.

Some issues are not being identified on first approvals, and when a different inspector performs additional inspections it sometimes causes reversals of approvals.

Constant changes in the code, and not being transparent so everyone understands and readily knows what is required.

There is currently no known expectations of when a project or the approvals are normally completed.

Leadership and/or inspectors do not take discretion to promote progress, but rather use interpretations of code and decisions differently to make changes and reverse previous approvals.

Some codes are outdated or when interpreted differently cause an unnecessary burden on property owners, stalling projects for weeks or months.

Property owners buying property do not know what they can do with it, and the city should not be governing by exceptions. Codes are too complicated and force applicants to apply for petition-to-review or go before a special magistrate.

Parking requirements and alcohol and beverage zoning codes written when the area was not as populated, are now outdated.

Possible Solutions:

Hiring process needs to take less time and we need to aggressively identify experienced staff.

Temp-hires and third-party providers could help implement improvements now, instead of later.

Need to improve communication and being able to understand workflow of permitting and development processes, to save applicants time and money, as well as lessen workload/phone calls going unanswered.

Need to identify a point person so that internally and externally everyone knows who has the authority to make decisions and define code pertaining to that decision.

Create interactive web pages, such as the site plan with links to permit types, so that the public can have questions answered online quickly and be specific type of permit/development issues at hand.

Follow St Petersburg's lead implement a call-ahead text/phone system that notifies applicant that an inspector is scheduled to arrive. Avoiding delays in approval process.

Create a "Hotline" set up to answer calls and have more accessibility. Develop FAQ's for the most common issues in permitting and provide answers in plain language so everyone understands. No acronyms. Example: No one should have to guess what R-O-W (right-of-way) stands for.

Co-Chair Cohen would like the city to be more pro-active by simplifying and defining the code.

Code needs to be clearly defined and updated to be more flexible and change with the times.

Give inspectors authority to approve changes when identified, to avoid additional processing.

Empower and support staff to want to help projects progress and not wait for someone else to make decisions.

There is current legislation that may affect development/permitting and may require permits issued within specified time frame – how to make that happen?

Need dedicated person for technical/cultural issues. Look at City of Tampa policy for historic preservation, trees and landscaping, urban design and overlay...

While Accela system keeps everything online in one place, some members still want to interact with staff. Hiring third party providers for some of the workload would free up some time to allow more availability to reach staff.

Educating the general public as well as applicants as to process, defined time frames, and using plain language of to expect and when. Need consistency and transparency.

Ask inspectors about better processing of applications. Inspectors need to be empowered to have the authority to use common sense and make decisions within the law.

For bigger projects with bigger scale, identify a single point of contact to navigate the

process end-to-end; include all stakeholders in the process, e.g., building official and fire marshal. In other areas, such as Austin, Texas, they have permit expeditors and the process is much quicker.

When working with Nashville they have a specific timeframe and you know what to expect, but here you do not.

It was suggested that Hillsborough County had far less interpretation issues and Pasco County has third party providers; both jurisdictions seem to be more streamline and easier to work with.

Agreed to poll the team members offline for individual input and suggestions and return for further discussion and attempt to refine the recommendations.

**Next Meeting:
Thursday, August 8, 2019 at 010:00 A.M.**

TPD Conference Room, 5th Floor
Tampa, Florida 33602

Minutes prepared by City Clerk Support Technician Karencia Ciagala