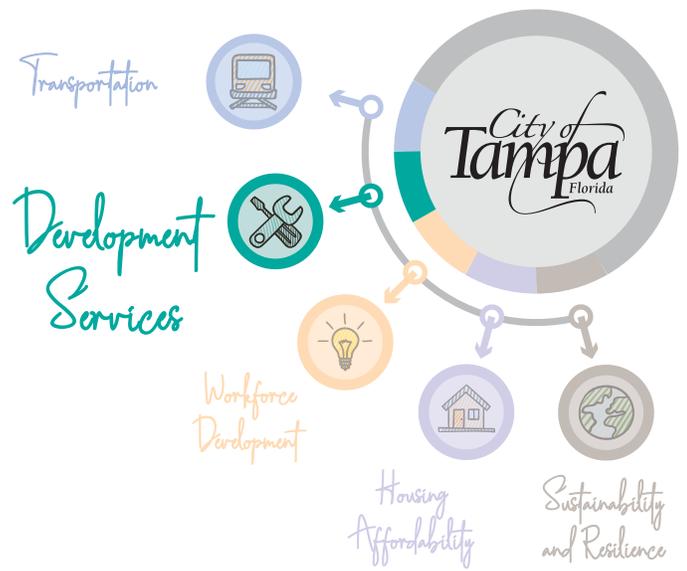


Mayor Jane Castor

Transforming Tampa's Tomorrow



Recommendations and Final Report



Mayor's Transition Advisory Teams

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Advisory Team

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November 21, 2019



A Letter from Mayor Jane Castor

When I took office in May 2019, one of the first things I did was to initiate a series of advisory teams that could provide insight and guidance on five of the City's most critical paths to its future - Transportation, Development Services, Workforce Development, Affordable Housing, and Sustainability and Resilience. Tampa is at a transformative time and the way in which we approach solutions to these issues will make a difference for generations to come. That is why it has been so important to have robust and informed input to develop my plans.

With that in mind, I asked dozens of individuals across the community and the region to participate in this process. Representing all factions of our City - business, not-for-profit, academia, advocacy, government, and more. These individuals came together over 90-day periods with each person volunteering their time and their talent to a specific subject area. I am deeply grateful for their commitment and dedication to this effort and for their wisdom in providing valuable input to this planning process.

I am pleased to share this 'Recommendations and Final Report' for the Development Services Advisory Team which represents both visionary and tactical recommendations. In sharing this report, I welcome continued dialogue and input on how to successfully navigate one of our City's most important issues.

These recommendations will provide a path for us to achieve transformational goals, and I am committed to providing the leadership and direction to take us there.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Castor". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jane" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Castor".

Mayor Jane Castor



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Introduction and Background

Mayor Castor's Transition Advisory Teams

As part of the Mayoral transition, Mayor Jane Castor initiated five transition advisory teams to provide a roadmap for guiding the implementation of key priorities of the Castor Administration: Transportation, Development Services, Workforce Development, Affordable Housing, and Sustainability/Resilience. Each team was charged with an objective tied to the challenges and opportunities of its subject area. The overarching goal is to connect each team's recommendations into a strategic roadmap that supports the Mayor's vision for transforming Tampa's tomorrow.

Development Services Advisory Team Introduction

On June 24, 2019, Mayor Jane Castor kicked off this Advisory Team and challenged it to think creatively, but tactically, about opportunities to improve the delivery of City services to the citizens of Tampa and all members of the development community including contractors, trades, home and business owners, developers, architects, engineers, and others.

The group was asked to focus its attention on several key subject areas.



The first was *people*, specifically the talent and staff who operate the department, with a focus on how to ensure the City has sufficient bandwidth to meet growing demand and still deliver quality services.



The second was the *user experience*, specifically increasing transparency and accountability to streamline the process and improve communications with all stakeholders and customers.



The third was *process*, specifically identifying opportunities to reduce or eliminate bottlenecks.



The fourth was the *regulatory environment* and the need to identify outdated or outmoded requirements that could be modified or eliminated as needs have evolved.



Initially, the Team was provided a briefing on the current state of the Development Services environment at the City of Tampa, current and projected activities and initiatives, and a summary of the capability and functionality of its Accela system, the web-based portal used to process development-related applications. Each subsequent meeting provided a deeper well of input and feedback on the key focus areas resulting in numerous recommendations that fall into one of the following categories:



Immediate solutions for universal issues – Some recommendations focus on matters that are entirely within the control of the department and do not require major fiscal investment including web content improvements, improved outreach, and updated guidance materials. Most of these are small, incremental advancements, however, the cumulative effect is intended to be far-reaching and have long-term positive impact.



Medium-term solutions for common, but not universal issues – Other recommendations focus on issues that are not universal but occur frequently enough to warrant attention. A recurring theme was that providing clear and transparent guidance could resolve many common process issues. For example, if applicants consistently make the same filing errors, we should provide better instructions to resolve the common point of failure.



Long-term solutions for systemic issues – A third set of recommendations concerns issues that are rooted in code and other regulatory requirements. In some cases, the codes are outdated and no longer represent the most effective approach to achieving compliance. In other cases, multiple layers of codes present unnecessary complexity.

General Findings and Recommendations

These general findings and recommendations are global in nature and are intended to drive positive outcomes for the other recommendations described in the report.

1. **Ensure Continuous Improvement and Track Progress** – The Team recommends that the City establish and maintain a process to institutionalize continuous improvement and track progress. Over the years, there have been numerous process improvement efforts focused on the economic development and construction sectors. This group reviewed those efforts and acknowledges the implementation of many useful recommendations over time.

However, in the absence of an on-going improvement process, operational performance can deteriorate over time and process improvements that may have met prior needs can become outdated. For this reason, the Team recommends an on-going evaluation of processes.

2. **Assess Development Fees** – The Team recommends assessing the City's fee structure for development filings and applications. Many fees date back to 2006. Since then, the City has invested in new people, new electronic technologies, a new central one-stop office, and other tools to maintain a modern delivery system, yet the fee structure has not kept pace. The Advisory Team recommends establishing fees to appropriately enable the department to ensure quality and timely service delivery.
3. **Focus on Staff Empowerment** – The Team recommends cultivating a workplace environment and culture that invites staff inclusion, participation in process and planning, and empowers everyone to effectively and consistently carry out their respective responsibility with a focus on delivering quality and customer service.





- SECTION 1 -

Ensure Sufficient Capacity and Resources to Meet Demand

One of the critical observations made by the Advisory Team was the need for the department to maintain sufficient resources to meet the growing demand for services. As Tampa grows, the department needs to keep pace. During the Advisory Team’s assessment, it identified certain vacancies that had not been filled or aggressively recruited. In addition, there were no programs focused on retaining talent.

While not all issues can be resolved by adding more personnel, it was acknowledged that certain key roles are understaffed based on growing demand, and that leadership should prioritize staff retention. As such, the Advisory Team recommends the following actions and initiatives:

1. **Recruit Talent** - Working with City staff, the Team helped to prioritize several key roles to be recruited and filled. Some of these positions are back-fill and some are new positions intended to respond to projected needs. Many critical recruitments were initiated during the time the Advisory Team was convened, including a national search to fill the vacant role of the Construction Services Manager / Chief Building Officer. Other vital roles that are currently being recruited, or have already been filled, include the following:
 - Construction Inspector
 - Client Facilitator/Coordinator
 - Planning Permit Technician
 - Right-of-Way engineering staff
 - Lead Professional Plans Reviewer
 - Lead Construction Inspectors
 - Senior GIS Analyst
 - Forester Examiner
 - Accela Analyst

Over time, the department should identify recruitment initiatives to better attract talent and fill vacancies quickly. Some tactical suggestions include retaining hiring professionals (headhunters) for key searches; improving job descriptions, postings, and pitch materials; updating the content and navigation of the City’s recruitment web page; implementing career days, job fairs, and focused recruitments, as needed; and recruiting from local talent as well as outside the Tampa Bay region.

2. **Retain Talent** - Once talent is recruited and hired, it is incumbent on department leadership to enable a rewarding workplace that cultivates a culture of inclusiveness and encourages idea sharing, open communications, teamwork, and pride. In addition to developing these fundamental workplace standards, the Advisory Team recommends the following:
 - a. Conduct a compensation assessment of current staff for alignment with local standards for like or similar roles.
 - b. Identify creative methods to balance workload and evolving workplace expectations such as flex workdays or flex work weeks. Flex schedules can help provide more hours of service to the public, as well as appeal to a wider variety of current and future work force needs.

3. **Continuously Assess Staffing Needs** – As positions are filled, the department leadership needs to continuously monitor trending needs to ensure that the staffing model remains aligned with demand. The Advisory Team recommended developing and managing metrics to inform and drive staff and capacity planning.

In addition, the department should continue to work with Human Resources to identify roadblocks that delay the hiring process; develop a 'pipeline' hiring approach to keep recruitment efforts 'open until filled'; present qualified candidates for review as soon as identified; enable hiring managers to engage in the job offer process; and consider referral incentive programs for existing staff.





4. **Expand Internal Resources** – There are several options for local jurisdictions to contract with external entities to perform critical functions such as plan review and inspections. Commonly referred to ‘Third Party Providers,’ the Advisory Team recommends that the department expand its use of these resources to enable greater band width for peak demand, as well as for some of the larger projects that are in process or on the horizon. This would enable City staff to better handle day-to-day demands of small projects and individual homeowners.

5. **Expand External Resources** – Currently, there are several approved methods for local jurisdictions to accept plan reviews and inspections conducted by qualified private entities retained directly by the applicant. This can be in the form of ‘Private Providers.’ An audit component must be implemented to prevent mistakes or abuse of the system. The Advisory Team recommends the following:
 - a. Restructure and expand the use of ‘Private Providers’ through one or more pilot initiatives focused on key demand areas.
 - b. Implement a ‘certified arborist’ program to provide an additional option for the public to meet City tree code requirements.
 - c. Consider positioning Tampa to lead an effort to unify resource policies across neighboring jurisdictions to standardize qualifications and policies and drive down costs.

- SECTION 2 -

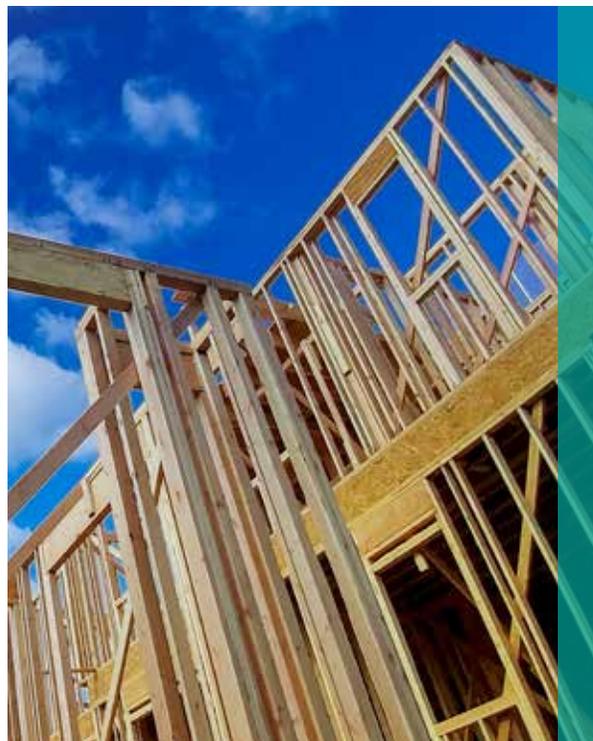
Increase Transparency and Accountability

Following is an outline of key recommendations related to improving the user experience. The 'user' is described as any one of a wide range of stakeholders including builders, architects, engineers, contractors, tradespeople, developers, arborists, and of course – land and property owners. It may also include members of the public who are interested in knowing more about construction work going on around them.

These recommendations focus on improving the experience of interacting with the City, optimizing the use of existing technology, and identifying potential new tools to better serve the public's needs. There should also be an increased focus on improved communication and outreach about how the department operates and what users need to know to effectively navigate the system.

The Advisory Team recommends the following:

1. **Expand In-Person Support** – While electronic filing has created a streamlined process for most functions, the Advisory Team recognized that many users still need hands-on support. The Team recommended developing a temporary 'Hotline' function to improve customer service during peak demand times. It also focused on expanding and better utilizing the Client Facilitators/ Coordinators who are trained to assist users and the public in navigating the process. As such, the Team recommended the following:
 - a. Develop criteria and a business model for increased Client Facilitator support
 - b. Set clear parameters for use of the service
 - c. Promote and increase the visibility of the service once parameters are defined
2. **Develop and Publish Transparent Workflows** - To improve transparency, manage expectations, and better identify bottlenecks over time, develop and post user-friendly guidance materials and workflows for each essential filing process; where able, assign a key performance indicator (KPI) for turnaround times.





3. **Refine and Maintain Useful Key Performance Indicators; Incorporate State Requirements** - Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) are standard practice for any service organization to monitor its most vital performance functions and maintain standards for expected turnaround times for the public. There are currently many KPI's that need to be updated and regularly maintained so that the public can access reliable data when managing construction projects.

In addition, the State of Florida recently issued legislation concerning mandatory turnaround times for certain development-related functions. The Planning & Development Department will need to adopt and maintain these required standards.

4. **Improve Web Content and Navigation** – The Planning & Development Department has volumes of information and content on the web, however, some of the content is outdated and the web navigation is driven by organizational structure rather than functional needs. The Advisory Team recommends an overhaul of the department website with a focus on simplicity and functionality. In the short term, the Team recommends the following actions:
 - a. Update and maintain contact information for Planning & Development staff
 - b. Refresh navigation to align with current process and work flows rather than organizational divisions
 - c. Refresh reporting dashboards to reflect useful key performance indicators, e.g. estimated wait time for an inspection
 - d. Refresh all hyperlinks and forms for accuracy
 - e. Address ADA requirements

5. **Improve Accela Navigation and User Interaction** – Similar to the department’s general web presence, the Advisory Team identified opportunities for improvement to its electronic filing system. The Accela system, named after the company that developed it, is a construction and building department software tool that is used across the country and is commonly known for being ‘best-in-breed’ for its functionality. Implemented in late 2014, it is an improvement over paper and manual processes for a growing and evolving City. However, many novice users, and even sophisticated and experienced builders, often criticize the system for not being user-friendly.

The Advisory Team recommended that the Planning & Development team conduct a comprehensive assessment of the system to identify the critical issues that are particularly challenging for users. During its short-term assessment, the Advisory Team identified the following areas for immediate improvement:

- a. **Improve Public Access** – The system is open and accessible to members of the public - you do not have to have an application in process to access basic searches. The Accela main landing page needs to be updated to simplify the functionality for non-registered users.
- b. **Improve Property/Home Owner Access** – Currently, the Accela system provides access to detailed information only to the party that submits the application. In cases where the property or homeowner uses a professional for building or contracting services, they may not have visibility into the status of their project unless the professional grants it. The Advisory Team recommends that the system be modified to enable a property or homeowner to have direct access to their project filings, without the consent of the professional who filed the application. This enables the end user to have direct access to project status every step of the way.

- c. **Clarify and Simplify Accela Communications** – The department needs to assess and simplify all Accela auto-messages to be user-friendly and in plain language. For example, use of the default message ‘awaiting client reply’ without access to more information is not useful and results in client frustration.
- d. **Maintain an Inter-department Tech Working Group** – The Advisory Team recommends that the Planning & Development team and the City’s Technology & Innovation team maintain a continuous Tech Working Group to ensure that all technology solutions are meeting expectations and new solutions are identified as needed. The Working Group should report its progress to City leadership on a regular basis.





6. **Initiate Accela Public Workshops** – Even as the Accela system will be systematically improved over time, the Advisory Team recommended that the Planning & Development Department initiate and maintain regular training workshops for the public to enable hands-on support to navigate the system. These training sessions were initiated in September and have been held monthly since then. New training sessions will be added in 2020.
7. **Develop and Maintain User Guidance Materials** – There was a universal need for more information about policies and procedures to improve the public’s understanding of key processes and to help ensure consistency in applying the policies and procedures by staff. The Advisory Team recommends updating all current materials and developing new customer guidance materials (handbooks, FAQ’s, on-line tutorials, etc.) for all stakeholders. Of particular interest is providing information for the most common activities as well as the most common ‘mistakes’ that are made when interacting with the department.





- SECTION 3 - Streamline the Process

A. Applications, Filing, and Permits Process

1. **Reduce Re-submittals by Improving Filing Instructions and Guidance** - Clients often miss steps in the filing process which results in having to resubmit the entire filing package. The Advisory Team recommends publishing a transparent process workflow identifying at each stage of the process what conditions most typically trigger a re-submittal and what to do to prevent it from happening. In addition, there should be guidance material setting forth how to navigate the re-submittal process, should it occur.
2. **Clarify and Consider Expanding Conditional / Partial Approvals** – The Planning & Development Department currently provides ‘approved with conditions’ for certain filing circumstances. The Advisory Team recommends making these conditions more transparent and considering expanding the list to enable more projects to move forward, even if certain reviews have not been completed. Suggested examples may include interior remodels, tree removal (subject to arborist’s report), or instances where the only remaining issue is non-structural, e.g., while awaiting FAA approval, pending a traffic study or a maintenance agreement, or when only a single department has an unresolved issue. These scenarios may involve applicants to ‘proceed at risk.’
3. **Incentivize Complete Filings** – Consider ways to increase the number of complete and appropriate filings on the first submission by developing an incentive program that expedites these filings.
4. **Provide Guidance on Filing Options** - Clarify the option to file either a ‘consolidated’ application (all approvals tied together, one permit covers everything) vs a ‘federated’ application (each approval stands on its own; must obtain permit for each component of the project, e.g. site and foundation, trades, etc.). Provide option to cross from consolidated to federated upon encountering a complex issue.

5. **Expand Express Permits/Approvals (Walk-through Permitting)** - Expand the list of application types that qualify for expedited approval, for example temporary tents, small residential additions within specific defined parameters, interior buildouts with non-structural changes, canopies, and awnings.
6. **Evaluate the Right-of-Way (ROW) Permit Process** – Evaluate the entire ROW application and approval process and implement immediate, medium- and long-term improvements to address growing demand and backlog issues.
7. **Develop Guidance Materials for Recent Tree Code and Private Provider Legislation** – Provide immediate, medium- and long-term guidance on implementing the City’s new tree code and the State’s new Private Provider legislation.
8. **Assess Filing Fees** – As stated in the general findings and recommendations, staff should evaluate fees for services (some fees date back to 2006); increase some fees, consider reduction of others. Consider incentivizing use of online processes vs in-person processing.
9. **Adopt Applicable Best Practices** - Identify best practices from similarly situated jurisdictions that would improve efficiencies, specifically processes for handling first review turnaround times; the conditional approval process and use of third-party providers; inspector communications; and the use of external advisory groups.
10. **Implement General Process Improvements for Streamlining**
 - a. Eliminate a water/wastewater review and a FEMA certification for applications that do not trigger these functions
 - b. Eliminate the duplicate review process for projects that have been reviewed and certified by a private provider, as now mandated by legislative changes to Sec. 553.791, Fla. Stat.
 - c. Designate ‘walk through’ days to expedite small projects
 - d. Implement evening or weekend office hours for small builders and homeowners
 - e. Evaluate using different processes and employee teams for small v. large projects
 - f. Assign a dedicated team member for large volume projects
 - g. Better integrate coordination of inter-department planning, permitting, and inspecting dependencies





Streamline the Process continued

B. Inspections Process

1. **Implement an Inspector Tracking and Contact Process** - Implement a tool or system that enables clients to track status of inspector and/or enable inspector to contact client within a designated 'notice' window, e.g. text ahead functionality.
2. **Prioritize Essential System Improvements** - Modify the Accela tool, or replace it, to ensure that the scheduling and mapping function, and the client contact information are more functional and streamlined. Alternatively, or in addition to, provide tools that enable inspections to be streamlined and more effective for the client and the inspector.
3. **Reporting** - Add inspection turnaround time to the online reporting dashboard.
4. **Same Day Service** - Consider a pilot 'on-demand' inspection team (engage private contract services and first-come, first-served pilot approach).

- SECTION 4 -

Update the Land Development Code

These concepts set the foundation for the recommendations that follow. The Advisory Team recommended review of several specific code provisions. A comprehensive review is a time-consuming process and the resolution will only be achieved with the participation of other bodies such as the City Council. Notwithstanding, the Team strongly encourages the administration to assess the codes it identified as being the most cumbersome and/or problematic to navigate.

1. Assess Key Provisions of the Land Development Code (LDC)

- a. Identify provisions that should be simplified and/or clarified based on best practices.
- b. Eliminate/ modify provisions that create unnecessary confusion and cause delay.
- c. Simplify or re-state provisions that have the highest incidence of interpretation requests.
- d. Assess code requirements that are routinely waived and/or varied and eliminate or modify them to provide greater consistency and predictability for how the code is applied.
- e. Evaluate increasing existing staff administrative authority to waive certain code requirements, e.g. current administrative authority can waive parking requirements up to 10% from the required number, the Team suggested increasing the authority to 15%.
- f. Evaluate a pilot for allowing applicants to swap a certain number of parking requirements for a vehicle drop off zone, subject to certain criteria.

2. Simplify Public Notice Requirements

Modify public notice requirements for 'non-discretionary administrative decisions.' Non-discretionary administrative decisions do not require, and typically do not provide for, a public hearing; the administrator has no discretion as to rendering the decision, and a member of the public who would have received notice has no influence over the decision. The Team recommended eliminating the notice requirement, or changing the message to clarify that it is ONLY a notice, to reduce confusion and frustration for notice recipients.



3. **Clarify and update code and internal processes for recent statutory changes**

Develop and publish guidance materials and other documents to reconcile the specific 2019 legislative changes noted below:

- a. §163.045, Fla. Stat. regarding tree pruning, trimming, removal on residential property
 - b. §166.033, Fla. Stat. regarding timeframes for staff review of development permit/development order applications
 - c. §166.04151, Fla. Stat. regarding providing incentives for any inclusionary housing requirements
 - d. § 553.791, Fla. Stat. regarding plan review or inspections performed by a private provider
 - e. §337.401, Fla. Stat. regarding right-of-way permitting for communications providers
 - f. Other recently adopted legislation that may be identified
4. **Explore cross-jurisdiction coordination** – Identify opportunities to coordinate with other nearby jurisdictions the application of new legislation to achieve economies, consistency, and cost-savings.
5. **Ensure Continuous Assessment** - Implement a process to review and, where necessary, make improvements to these key code subjects on an ongoing basis.





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