

Development Review Process Task Force Survey Summary of Results – Development Community

Development Community Survey – 30 total respondents

Question 1. Your role in the development process

Job/Development Role	# of Respondents
Developer/Property Owner	22
Engineer/ Surveyor/Pre-Construction Services	3
Architect	3
Applicant Assistant/Attorney	2

Question 2. Do you believe that the current review process works adequately? (If No)

Too Time Consuming

- No. Review process gets bogged down in departmental review.
- I think the amount of time would be the number one complaint. Albemarle County should look at the review process from adjacent county's to see how they function.
- Total time it takes from application to approved plans for construction. Our Consultants rush to get plans back to meet deadlines and in doing so, they tend to submit insufficient or incomplete plans. Consultants complain that they are rushed to make deadlines so that they will not fall out of the project review schedule.
- To long in the queue for review and feedback, w/ no feedback until all the evaluation information is received by the county
- The process takes entirely too long, even for projects that the staff, public, PC and BOS support and encourage. There are not nearly enough staff members to review projects in a timely fashion given the scope of review expected by the public, PC and BOS. Lots of time is wasted with poor forms, poor communication, and outdated policies, procedures and ordinances.
- The time it takes to review, respond, revise and get before the PC/BOS is too long. Avenues need to be established to get their input much sooner. Staff seems hesitate to get the Boards' input early on when developers want it up front. ARB weighs in along Entrance Corridors but they seem overloaded with submission to get their comments in on time. It is obvious that along an EC their approval will be necessary prior to construction. Both PC/BOS members should not require their comments prior to reviewing a SUP or rezoning. Let these reviews be separate processes.
- The primary inadequacy is the amount of time which it takes for the review process. Another inadequacy is the actual application (and lack of directions) on the County website. A detailed checklist, very clear instructions, or sample forms would be a vast improvement.
- Process takes much too long. The County review process is very time consuming, costly and frustrating. I believe strongly that there is insufficient staff with enough experience to address the work load caused by ill-conceived regulations. Also, two public hearings should be held. The initial, to air concerns. The second, to present the concerns addressed. This would make decisions by the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors easier and quicker. Excuses such as "we need more time or information" will have already been addressed.

Conflicting Goals and Priorities

- I think the process slows in many of the wrong areas, and overlooks or fails to set up situations to deal with important details. The lack of leadership and prioritization of conflicting goals is terrible.

What is more important affordable housing, County ARB guidelines, or interconnected streets? Someone needs to have the authority and willingness to use it.

- The legislative review is bogged down entirely too much by individual agendas. No one, short of developer with his repeated submittals and the BOS with their eventual approval/denial, exercises the leadership required to balance conflicting goals, objectives and agendas. None of stakeholders are held accountable. Citizens (understanding and accepting the current development area/rural area policy), developers (designing and executing projects consistent with that policy), the County (establishing a clear growth management policy and applying it). Each of the stakeholders should be held responsible for presenting clear and precise expectations which are consistent with the current growth management policy.
- In my opinion problems arise as a result of lack of agreement between various groups (developers/staff/different staff departments/public/BOS/PC) relative to growth management intent, i.e. , "Neighborhood Model", resolution of inherent conflict in the twelve principles, etc. Earlier involvement of PC as to relative importance of principles, intent of comp. plan with respect to specific project being planned would be desirable.

Lack of Clear/Consistent Guidelines

- Lack of objective, immutable criteria in zoning decisions
- Change in procedures and guidelines in middle of review process results in inability of developer to accurately plan and adds increase costs and additional time delays. unclear/changing guidelines on proffers for CIP and affordable. New comments received on items that have previously been reviewed without comment.
- The requirements vary depending on which planner or engineer you may get assigned to, based on their interpretation of the ordinances and the extent of detail that is requested per rezoning plan. Even minor zoning amendments take a long time and larger commercial rezonings take an long>>> time to go through. Often times the requirements seem to be a moving target or even someones personal opinion that causes question as to the ultimate goal. I also feel that the ARB has no body to guide them and that they self determine what character or design a building and site needs to have, even at distances of over 1000 feet from the road. The engineering review process is very tedious and lengthy and even after minor revisions that were requested for the final review of a plan have been corrected, it still takes forever and many emails and phone calls to get it done.

Inappropriate Citizen Involvement

- It would be helpful if there could be some process or restrictions put in place to insure only citizens who are directly impacted by the particular project have input into the particular development and not citizens who simply use the public input process as a platform to push their own policy agendas or beliefs but who aren't really directly affected by the project at hand.

Too Much Detail Required at Early Stages

- No, a Special Use Permit OR Rezoning raises a LAND USE QUESTION. Current reviews require street sections, utility locations, trip generation figures, etc. . . these are engineering and planning concerns.
- The process, itself, is far too time consuming, contentious and costly. In addition, for land use decisions, too much information (costly and, for large projects that will take years to develop, too detailed) is being required.
- Too much detail is reviewed at the SUP and Zoning stages. County engineers review things like storm water management, which is wholly inappropriate for a rezoning or SUP. Unless there are proffers relevant to engineering, the concept should be reviewed at that stage, and that's all. There is no reason a zoning application should go through multiple staff reviews and engineering comments in order to get entitlements.
- The process is not adequate. It is extremely burdensom and subject to interpretation by each of the staff members. Each application for a similar rezoning has completely different requirements.

The approval process requires so much detail that there is very little flexibility for adjustments during the siteplan process. This is primarily for rezoning properties to NMD.

- 1. The level of specificity required at the rezoning stage is excessive, expensive, and demands that the applicant predict far into the future with little flexibility to change. Most of the big projects have very long time horizons, and it is simply impossible to predict the market forces and changing planning standards so far in advance, when everything is at risk. 2. There is a hesitancy, in my opinion, to let the rest of the zoning ordinance take care of matters that should not be addressed in a rezoning. Instead, everything has to be controlled in the rezoning stage. For example, excessive effort may be spent on matters of a project's design aesthetic at the rezoning stage when those matters will get a full hearing at the appropriate time in a project's life, the site plan process, by the ARB. We have a very rigorous ordinance. Let it take care of the details, and let the policy decisions of land use be decided at the rezoning stage. 3. The rules are unclear at times. There is a disconnect between what is demanded by the ordinance and what is expected in the public process, especially in terms of the level of specificity required.
- 1. Planning Commission and community is not involved early enough in process to direct staff through application processing. 2. Review of applications is focused too much on Sections 4 through 32 of zoning ordinance. 3. Review of applications is not focused enough on Sections 1.4 through 1.6 of zoning ordinance as required. 4. There is no "checklist" (Section 1.4.1 through 1.4.11 is seldom reviewed throughout months (or years) of application process). 5. The only "fast track" alternative is By-Right zoning, which was typically created 26 years ago. 6. Too many staff members are reviewing too much information, and the result is poor direction. 7. NMD applications should not be longer than SDP applications. 8. NMD Code of Development should not need to be longer than the specific code for all other districts in Albemarle County.

Question 3. Specific Improvements you would like to see made to the process

Hire Additional Staff/Resources

- Additional staff to expedite review process.
- Start a tutelage program - when a private sector firm hires new engineers, planners, etc the county offers a "review school" of sorts. the private firm pays the new employee's salary / the private employee assists county employees in the review process of other projects brought by other firms - learning the system and community expectations.
- More resources for plan review, ability to access comments real time as reviews occur.
- We need to do a better job of recruiting and retaining qualified review staff. The turnover in the departments has been very difficult on the staff and the public. I would rather see us increase the application and user fees and use the money on staffing and upgrading the COB, versus dealing with the massive cost of delays and frustration experienced by both sides.

Simultaneous Review/Tiered Approach to Review

- One, allow as many of the review processed to occur simultaneously as possible.
- 1) Assign a team (consisting of an engineer and a planner) to a project. this team should facilitate the review process and guide the developer.
- 1. Most important is to write in flexibility to section 8.5.5.3 so the director of planning has greater latitude in approving changes to the application plans. Absent this change, then the level of specificity required at the rezoning stage should be relaxed.
- Related to changes in 8.5.5.3, even if the director of planning does not have the authority to make administrative changes, it would be ideal if a second type of approval could be granted through the public process without opening up the entire project to a full-blown rezoning.
- 5. Fast-track a ZTA that revises Section 8 of the zoning ordinance so that Application Plans for Planned Districts do not have to be so detailed, and to grant the Director of Community Development greater/broader discretion to approve more significant variations to approved plans than is currently permitted by the narrow parameters of Section 8. 6. Similarly, the BOS should adopt a policy declaration that states that such plans do not have to be so detailed. 7. Communicate/advertise to the development community the ability to start with PC review of a

concept plan early on (pre-submittal). Although this procedure exists in theory, it is not communicated to the development community, so no one uses it.

- Only one person should be responsible for a particular submittal. All comments of review should be made at one time to the submitter. At that time, a meeting with the submitter should be held to reduce the need for resubmittals. County comments and citizen comments after a public hearing should be addressed by the developer/submitter.
- Reduce the number of items reviewed at rezoning. Establish clear proffer guidelines
- How about initial meeting with PC/staff/developer/public with property characteristics (topo/streams/etc) to discuss general design parameters such as uses, interconnections, form as related to required grading, i.e., what impact do gridded patterns of various scales have on existing terrain, etc.
- 1. Institute Neighborhood meeting and/or Development Review Committee meeting and/or Technical Review Committee meetings similar to Louisa and Fluvanna Counties at beginning of application process
- Shorten the review time and involve the commission members with staff and the developer in small work sessions to address concerns and design issues.

Clear and Consistent Requirements and Criteria

- Clear understanding of what is required and/or requested
- 1. Make zoning decisions based on criteria that can be communicated verbally: Type of Use, Square footage, Density, Hours of Operation, Visual Impact, etc..
- . 3. Create a process for reviewing engineering aspects of site plans that doesn't require County staff to double check everything a professional engineer has done. This work should be sub'd out to "Certified" firms, ensuring no direct links to the engineering firm that did the original engineering.
- More consistency in the interpretation of the ordinance. Reduce the level of detail during the approval process or allow the staff to make adjustments to the approved application plan during the site plan process without having to go back to the planning commission for review and approval.
- Make clear what expectations are and be consistent about applying rules/guidelines.

More Autonomy by Development Professionals

- Two, LET US WORK! Most property developers know considerably more about financing, construction, and current sales trends, etc. than do the County staff because the developers are doing it for a living! That's called "professional". And the county staff and administration should be taking advantage of that professional experience available, not constantly second-guessing and working with a rule book in their hand. Virtually no professional wants to build something wrong
- Establish a stepped process for dealing with the big issues first and the details as they become necessary. I accept that density in a specific location may only be acceptable in the right form, but there are bigger issues which have to be resolved before we even start a discussion on form, these include infrastructure constraints and the comp plan consistency.

More time to Consider Staff Comments

- Deadlines need to be adhered to and, most importantly, there should be no "dark" period between the turn in deadline and issuance of a staff report, which generally comes out only a very few days before scheduled public meetings and often too late for important errors to be discussed in advance of the meetings.
- . By the time staff reports are issued and made public, there should be agreement between staff and the applicant as to the contents with those issues that cannot be agreed upon listed as issues on which staff and the applicant have agreed to disagree. In addition, even after public hearings are closed and matters are before the Commission or the Board, applicants should be allowed to interject and provide clarifying information when discussion takes off on a tangent based on incorrect information or assumptions and staff will not interject to redirect that discussion.

Question 5. Any additional methods that you think would be helpful in creating successful projects?

More Open Work Sessions/Citizen Engagement with Developers

- Open work sessions are useful. For example, increased traffic is often a citizen concern. In the informal environment of a work session, the realities of traffic generation can be put in an appropriate perspective.
- I think they should be included at the beginning as described in #3 with staff/PC - it should be explained that preventing any development is not the goal, but rather it is setting parameters to guide the project design.
- 1. Proactive Pre-application conferences (with a PC'er sitting in). 2. Neighbor meeting 4 weeks after application submittal. 3. Development Review Committee (with PC and BOS participation) 4 weeks after neighbor meeting. 4 PC Hearing 4 weeks after Development Review Committee...

No Additional Input is Necessary

- No because you hear the voices of a few who have the time that then speak for the many. I think better leadership from elected officials, political will, and a better staff approach could guide our community in a much better direction.
- Lack of citizen input is not the problem. Successful projects in the development area result from decreasing roadblocks for developers who comply with comp plan, master plan and work with county staff. If a project meets the goals of comp plan and master plan, then it should be approved.
- Residents should not be empowered to make decisions regarding appropriate planning. When the BOS adopts a policy such as interconnectivity, they need stand by the policy even in the face of neighborhood opposition or they need to abandon the policy. There is plenty of opportunity in the current system for input but most residents choose not to get involved until the process is almost complete.

Better Citizen Education/Information/Notification

- I think the county needs to reinforce to the public the openness of the process. An interested citizen can find out anything they want to know... Angry people showing up the night of a meeting stating they just found about the project should be angry with themselves.
- Create a readily-available public-viewable on-line computer-based Project Scheduling Calendar that allows anyone, and everyone, to track a project -- with varying steps of details, so that one can simply look up whether a project passed or failed, or go steps deeper and see what elements are pending, or otherwise holding up the project. Create ---AND USE --- a true "Ombudsman" team of project coordinators that are trained to deal directly with the public, and yet are fluent enough in the development procedures that they can pursue the status of individual projects,
- Yes. We need better citizen input, better involvement from the public during Comp Plan amendments. The majority of the big issues we encounter during rezoning highlight the conflict between what individual citizen's want and what the comp plan states. Since the Comp Plan deals with macro issues, these citizen concerns are often difficult to resolve at rezoning level to everyone's satisfaction.
- We lack a process which communicates why we have not incorporated other comments and clearly establishes future expectations.
- Perhaps, websites for each project, accessible by the public, that are continually updated. The County, by the way, currently has a very good over-all website. Continuation of a public hearing with the same citizens being allowed to speak at the follow-up hearing(s) should not be the norm unless there is some material new information that comes to light.
- Ways to email the County for projects in their neighborhood and then have the County share the input with the developer prior to the commission or board meetings. This way the developers have a chance of addressing public concerns in advance.