

Land Development Services

LOB #63:

SITE PLAN REVIEW AND INSPECTIONS

Purpose

The Site Plan Review and Inspections LOB is responsible for plan review and inspections of public and private land development sites within the County under the Fairfax County Codes summarized in the Mandates section of this LOB.

In addition to ensuring that project plans and associated construction meet the appropriate codes and regulations, staff within this LOB facilitate economic development within the County by providing intake and processing services associated with land development projects. Staff within this LOB also work with the public and industry stakeholders, the Engineering Review Standards Committee, the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors to ensure that ordinances and regulations remain current, relevant and appropriate. Goals for such regulations include:

- Protect the health, safety and welfare of the public;
- Protect the environment;
- Adhere to industry standards;
- Meet state regulations, permit regulations and delegated authorities; and
- Reflect Community interests and values.

Description

The Site Plan Review and Inspections LOB includes 119/119.0 FTE positions from the Site Development and Inspections Division and various staff resources from the Code Development and Compliance Division of LDS. The following outlines key functions of this LOB:

- **Intake and Processing.** Staff serve as the acceptance and processing authority for proposed land development construction plans and plats and provide the overall coordination of the various reviews by other agencies and specialty fields. In FY 2014, the County realized over \$9.7 million in revenue from this line of business.
- **Project Coordination.** The agency tracks progress and coalesces efforts of internal and specialty field reviewers to ensure that plans are processed within the 60 day mandated timeframe and cohesive responses to applicants result. On average, staff process 3,900 site development plans annually.
- **Code Compliance Review.** Staff review proposed land development construction plans and plats against applicable codes, regulations and engineering standards (i.e., ADA, VDOT Road and Bridge Standards).
- **Zoning Entitlements Review.** The agency provides support review for the Department of Planning and Zoning as projects work through the Zoning entitlements process.
- **Code Administration and Development.** Staff administer and amend the relevant sections of the Fairfax County Code, Zoning Ordinance and Public Facilities Manual pertaining to the land development process.
- **Inspection Services.** The agency manages inspection services for active land development construction projects and permitted landfills located within the County. In FY 2015, staff performed close to 48,000 inspections on land development projects.
- **Complaint Response.** Staff respond to complaints and provide inspection services related to land disturbance, tree preservation and drainage issues related to development activities. In FY 2015, staff responded to 283 development related complaints.

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- **Project Closeout.** This agency executes project closures including final proffer compliance inspections and bond release. On average, staff process 800 project closeouts annually.
- **Outreach.** Provide technical training and outreach services to assist homeowners, builders, engineers and contractors in complying with land development and building code regulations. Through a dedicated staff position, the agency assists places of worship and non-profit community groups in the land development process.
- **Information Technology.** Provide information technology (IT) support for LDS systems, including the Plans and Waivers System (PAWS) and the Site Inspection Database (SI2K) as well as numerous small to moderately sized applications, directly impacting customer service and operational efficiency.

Benefits

Through the enforcement of County codes and industry standards related to land development, this agency benefits the community by:

- **Protecting Health, Safety and Welfare of the Population.** Compliance with County and state regulations ensure that potential natural hazards (e.g., flooding, problem soils) are mitigated to minimize flooding and drainage issues onsite and off as well as structural damage concerns. Moreover, staff review of site plans ensures that emergency services are available and include sufficient access. Additionally, compliance with road and bridge standards and the ADA ensures that projects are designed in a way that achieves expected levels of safety and universal access.
- **Ensuring Environmental Stewardship.** Land development necessarily impacts land and the environment both locally at the developing property and beyond on adjacent areas upstream and downstream. Compliance with stormwater management, problem soils and tree preservation requirements as well as other related regulations ensure that any impacts to the environment stemming from development are minimized.
- **Compliance with State and Federal Mandates.** The County is bound by numerous state and federal obligations. The work performed by the staff in this LOB helps to achieve the County's obligation for many of these high profile mandates (i.e., ADA, the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Permit, Erosion and Sediment Control (E&S) Program, National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP); Chesapeake Bay Program; Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Stream Protection; Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)).
- **Public Infrastructure Investment.** Much of the County's natural and manmade infrastructure is constructed and rehabilitated through private development work. By ensuring that roadways, storm sewers, sanitary sewers, trails, sidewalks, street lights, grading, trees, parking lots and proffered elements (i.e., stream restoration and open spaces) are designed and constructed in accordance with approved plans and applicable County and state requirements this LOB oversees a tremendous investment into the County's infrastructure.
- **Creating Ideal Places to Live.** Through enforcement of the Zoning Ordinance and adherence to the County's Comprehensive Plan and related master planning efforts (i.e., trails, parks, and watersheds) staff ensure that development projects meet the community's expectations for character, safety and environmental stewardship.
- **Evaluating New Materials, Methods, Technologies.** Engineering practices and technologies are constantly evolving. Through work with stakeholders and the Board, staff strive to ensure that County codes, ordinances and standard operating procedures remain relevant and reflect current industry standards.
- **Facilitating Economic Success.** A land development process that balances mandated life safety with a customer's economic needs can bring a small house or large development project to market in time to begin earning revenue for its owners and the County. Partnerships between developers and County staff to address any potential project deficiencies found in plan review ensures that those issues do not create stumbling blocks during construction or project closeout.

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- **Aligning the Costs of Development.** By Board direction, the agency recovers 90 percent or more of the costs associated with the permitting process. By doing so, the burden of compliance is borne by developers and not passed to taxpayers (FY 2012 – 93 percent, FY 2013 – 95 percent, FY 2014 – 93 percent).

Listed below are the primary County Vision Elements related to the LOB.

- **Maintaining Safe and Caring Communities** through the land development process public infrastructure and private facilities are constructed to meet the diverse needs of the community.
- **Building Livable Spaces** through design and construction based on County codes and master planning, agency efforts incorporate the community's desire for livable spaces as well as through customer assistance and innovative programs designed to help overcome hurdles in the regulatory process.
- **Connecting People and Places** through design and construction based on County and state codes and master planning efforts road, trail and transit networks meet the needs of our community.
- **Maintaining Healthy Economies** by maintaining a fair and balanced process and by staff availability and support for customers who contribute to Fairfax County's economy when construction or rehabilitation is part of their business or personal needs the agency contributes to a robust construction sector of the Fairfax Economy.
- **Practicing Environmental Stewardship** by enforcing the environmental code provisions of County and state codes the County realizes its environmental stewardship goals.

Mandates

This LOB is state mandated. The percentage of resources utilized to satisfy the mandate is 100 percent. See the January 2007 Mandate Study, reference page 39 and 40 for the specific federal or state code and a brief description. The Site Plan Review and Inspections LOB is responsible for plan review and inspections of land public and private development sites within the County under the following Chapters of the Fairfax County Code:

- Chapter 2 – Property Under County Control;
- Chapter 101 – Subdivision Provisions;
- Chapter 102 – Streets and Sidewalks;
- Chapter 104 – Erosion and Sediment Control;
- Chapter 107 – Problem Soils;
- Chapter 112 – Zoning Ordinance;
- Chapter 117 – Expedited Land Development Review;
- Chapter 118 – Chesapeake Bay Preservation;
- Chapter 122 – Tree Conservation Ordinance;
- Chapter 124 – Stormwater Management Ordinance;
- Appendix Q – Land Development Services Fee Schedule; and
- Public Facilities Manual (PFM).

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Trends and Challenges

Current development and County conditions have created the following trends, challenges and opportunities within this LOB.

Complexity of Design and Regulations. As open space and easily developable property continues to diminish in the County, new development now routinely occurs on more complex sites, which previously were less economically favorable. Considerations include problem soils, proximity to flood plains, inadequate infrastructure, and densely developed surrounding neighborhoods. As land values have increased, the economics to develop these areas have now become viable. The result is greater technical challenges for both the design engineers and County staff. More difficult sites require more coordination and review of the proposed construction documents as well as more special studies and reports to address special issues.

In addition, Fairfax County is experiencing a leveling in new commercial construction. However, the types of commercial projects have grown exceedingly more complex due to the Metro Silver Line, revitalization efforts, mixed use development, environmental stewardship and other trends in the development community. These complexities take more time to process, review and inspect.

Residential Construction. Residential construction has shifted from new subdivision projects to infill lots or the tear down of existing homes and construction of new ones. This shift often requires greater scrutiny of the new constructions' impact on existing systems.

Increased Customer Expectations. With an educated and wired population, customers have a high level of expectations for service delivery. Additionally, the development community demands information 24/7, precise times for inspector jobsite arrivals, expansion of online permitting capabilities, electronic plan submission and other adaptable services that meet the work needs. Separately, there are now increased expectations to facilitate and mediate solutions to problems between developers and homeowners. Complaint resolutions continue to become more complex due to multi-issues, such as the increase in unlicensed contractors and unpermitted construction activity.

Evolving Technology. Both aging technology and new technologies currently force adjustments and adoption by the agency to move to new systems. Three areas of technology that the agency is focusing on are:

- 1) Land Development System (LDS) database provides multi-agency application for all County agencies involved in the land development and building permitting process. A two year capital project is currently underway to modernize this system;
- 2) E-plan submission. The agency has launched a pilot project to fully explore electronic plan submissions to create efficiencies for County staff and developers; and
- 3) Increased mobile technologies for onsite inspectors, will result in greater efficiency and responsiveness for land use customers.

Goal Three of the County's Economic Success Strategies. In early 2015, the Board of Supervisors adopted a six goal plan for economic success. Goal number three of that plan seeks to "Improve the speed, consistency and predictability for the development review process." This goal drives every action that the agency takes measured from the individual plan review and inspection to process improvements.

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Resources

Category	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Adopted
LOB #63: Site Plan Review and Inspections			
FUNDING			
<u>Expenditures:</u>			
Compensation	\$7,656,704	\$7,953,579	\$8,959,524
Operating Expenses	1,943,536	2,081,929	2,138,827
Work Performed for Others	(171,149)	(157,300)	(154,758)
Capital Equipment	23,144	3,217	0
Total Expenditures	\$9,452,235	\$9,881,425	\$10,943,593
General Fund Revenue	\$9,724,358	\$10,960,424	\$11,677,342
Net Cost/(Savings) to General Fund	(\$272,123)	(\$1,078,999)	(\$733,749)
POSITIONS			
Authorized Positions/Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs)			
<u>Positions:</u>			
Regular	116 / 116	120 / 120	119 / 119
Total Positions	116 / 116	120 / 120	119 / 119

Metrics

Metric Indicator	FY 2013 Actual	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Estimate	FY 2017 Estimate
Number of Plans Processed	3,889	3,874	4,013	4,200	4,200
Number of Inspections Performed	48,319	45,475	47,784	48,000	48,000
Number of Reviews Per FTE	185	185	223	233	233
Number of Inspections per FTE	1,726	1,624	1,838	1,920	1,920
Average Days to Process Major Plans Per Submission	83	63	59	60	60

Annually, the Site Plan Review and Inspections LOB processes roughly 4,000 plans. These plans range from small infill residential lot projects to large-scale, mixed-use developments. As part of the LDS service improvement efforts, Site Review staff spends more time with applicants and developers to assist in resolving issues and addressing stakeholder concerns.

In addition, the agency conducts approximately 48,000 inspections, to insure environmental stewardship and sound investment in the County's infrastructure. The majority of inspections conducted under this LOB are not customer driver but are performed as an integral facet of the County's regulatory framework and are mandated by provisions of the Fairfax County Code or state or federal obligations. As the number of approved site plans increased in FY 2015, the increased workload was borne across existing staff. The Site Plan Review and Inspections staff processes roughly 4,000 plans ranging from small infill residential lot projects to large-scale, mixed-use developments. Regardless of plan type the state mandates a 60 day turn around for plan review. The agency has worked diligently to meet this metric which is made possible through additional positions and enhanced training. Furthermore, the agency significantly beats the 60 day timeframe on subsequent submission for single family home infill plans and plans submitted under the County's expedited plan review program, "Designated Plan Examiner" (DPE).