

## Response to Questions on the FY 2006 Advertised Budget Plan

**Request By:** Supervisor Hudgins

**Question:** Does the FY 2006 Budget include any funding associated with technological enhancements of the County's plan review capabilities?

**Response:** The FY 2006 Advertised Budget Plan includes funding for technology enhancements that are expected to increase efficiency for plan review, such as continued Fairfax Inspection Database Online (FIDO) enhancements that provide the foundation for future e-government applications related to land development and building construction. The enhanced cross-agency information flow provided by the new system will significantly simplify the permitting process and improve the efficiency of building permit review and inspection by creating a virtual one-stop shop consisting of multiple review agencies and allowing real time access to inspection information by inspectors and builders. However, funding specifically for electronic plan submission is not included in the budget at this time as this technology is not at a point where it will effectively improve the level of service provided by Land Development Services (LDS). Staff will continue to evaluate electronic plan submission as the technology is advanced and will request funding in future years as appropriate to pilot specific efforts in this area.

For several years, County staff has been reviewing technology options for enhancing efficiencies in plan review, particularly site development plan submission and building plan submissions. Land Development Services has worked closely over the last several years with numerous organizations (including the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Commonwealth of Virginia, State of Maryland, New York City, and the National Conference of States on Building Codes and Standards) to streamline the building regulatory process through the adoption and use of information technology tools. Despite significant advances made recently in the ability to design and draw construction plans in electronic formats, the tools required for the submission and review of building-related plans in digital form represent emerging technologies which are still being developed and refined.

Challenges associated with implementing an electronic plan submission/review system include significant hardware costs (such as LCD/plasma screens for viewing and large plotters) for all the agencies involved in the review process; servers to provide electronic storage; software and software maintenance; safeguarding of copyright and intellectual property when using electronic plans; revision of business processes to support the distribution and coordination of plans—particularly those reviewed by state review agencies such as the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT); and the lack of standardization in the use of a Computer Aided Design & Drafting (CADD) system for land development plans (although much progress has been realized, final agreement in this area would require substantial effort and might burden some smaller engineering firms who continue to use the hand drafting method). The prospects have become very promising over the last few years, but use of these tools has not yet become practical or affordable for use in day-to-day operations of local jurisdictions. It should also be noted that the length of time it takes to review a set of plans would only be marginally improved by electronic plan submission. The current paper process requires multiple sets

of drawings going to multiple review agencies for site plans and the drawings are moved quickly on the building side. Delays in plan review are really a function of not having enough reviewers to keep up with the demand and plans having to sit in a queue, not the movement of the paper plans. The additional positions recommended in the FY 2006 Advertised Budget will help to alleviate this issue.

One of the purposes of replacing the County's current legacy inspection services system (ISIS) with the new Fairfax Inspections Database Online (FIDO) system was to provide an adaptable technology platform that will enable the County to adopt new technologies and provide new e-services as they become practical. With the implementation of FIDO, the County is positioning itself to make these future enhancements possible and to make incorporation of new features more affordable. Staff will continue to partner with organizations that are working to move the construction industry and local governments in this direction.

Additionally it should be noted that the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services is sponsoring a program for participating businesses to electronically enter their own site development plan information into the Plans and Waivers System (PAWS) to shorten the initial plan acceptance process. Although the information entered by the partnering business will still be verified against the plan that is submitted, it is anticipated that this revision will help provide for more efficient review processing and increase the speed for plan review. The program is scheduled to begin in late spring 2005.

In an ongoing effort to reach out for business constituent input for future technical enhancements, LDS will be working with industry over the next several months on making improvements to the development review process. The goal of this effort is to make the review process as efficient and effective as possible. As part of this effort, LDS will solicit feedback from industry regarding potential benefits of electronic plan submission and determine an appropriate pilot effort for the future.