

To: Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

From: Dan Storck, Supervisor
Mount Vernon District

Subject: **BOARD MATTERS for September 12, 2017**

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For your consideration, I submit the following Board Matters accompanied by a brief explanation. Your support will be appreciated.

- 1. Thank you to the Land Development Services (LDS) Team for their Exemplary Project Management Expertise and Response to the River Towers Building Event**

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Background

Recently, an unfortunate event in our county met with a successful resolution through effective collaboration among stakeholders, facilitated by an innovative new Project Management Program in Land Development Services.

On Sunday, October 2, 2016, a serious structural failure occurred at 6631 Wakefield Drive, a 9-story T-shaped condominium building built in the 1960s as part of a development known as River Towers. Columns that were supporting the stem of the building had partially collapsed, resulting in a sudden shift in portions of the building. Residents of the building described the event as similar to the shaking felt during an earthquake. The Building Official immediately ordered the evacuation of 32 of the units while the damage was assessed and repaired, leaving the affected tenants displaced for an unknown amount of time. The River Towers Association, led by a board of volunteers, was understandably overwhelmed with the gravity and significance of the situation as they tackled the task of suddenly managing a multi-million-dollar repair project, while addressing the needs of residents who had temporarily lost their homes.

Recognizing the critical nature of the project, Land Development Services volunteered to assign a project manager from its newly established Project Management Team. The project manager liaised between the Association, the structural engineer and contractor, and multiple Fairfax County agencies. These agencies included the Building Division, the Department of Code Compliance, the Fire Marshal's office, Zoning, Site Review, Department of Housing & Community Development, and the Department of Tax Administration. The project manager communicated regularly with representatives from each of these agencies to understand the status of their individual issues and to ensure processes were aligned to best serve the owners and tenants of River Towers.

The project manager stepped in to connect the dots for all involved, maintaining regular contact, following up on tasks and deadlines, and scheduling coordination meetings to resolve issues as they arose. A weekly report to the Mount Vernon District Office provided updates on the status of plan preparation, permits, repair work, and communications. These regular communications and overall coordination helped to keep the project progressing efficiently. I am pleased to report that the structural repairs to the building were completed and residents could return to their units on June 8, 2017.

River Towers is just one of the examples of the key role a member of the Project Management Team has played in coordinating a complex project with multiple stakeholders. Project managers have assisted developers in efficiently navigating the land development approval process, acting as a liaison for high profile projects, and partnering with stakeholders to help meet a project's goals and milestones.

Project managers use a variety of project coordination tools, which lead to positive outcomes:

- **Driving Effective Communication:** The project manager establishes a regular plan for communication on a project, which could include regular status updates, conference calls, coordination meetings or other methods. Delays are minimized when the project manager proactively tracks communication.
- **Maintaining Schedules:** The project manager can work with the applicant and the various review agencies involved to identify a comprehensive schedule agreed upon by all stakeholders. The project manager will follow up with individuals responsible for tasks listed in the schedule and track the actual time table. The schedule will illustrate how changes in schedule dates will affect later milestones, so that all stakeholders fully understand how to minimize the chance of delays.
- **Establishing Project Continuity:** The project manager is one of the few county staff who stays involved in the project throughout every phase of review and approval. This “common thread” provides a voice of continuity, ensuring that requirements and requests made early in the process do not lose their intent as the project evolves. Similarly, the project manager’s experience with implementation and enforcement of approved plans can maximize the chance that the project will get implemented as intended, by recommending strategies to reviewers early in the process.

The Project Management Program, which began as a pilot in June of 2016 as part of the Fairfax First initiative, has been a successful strategy to achieve Goal Three of the Board of Supervisor’s Economic Success Strategic Plan: To Improve the Speed, Consistency, and Predictability of the Development Review Process.

I would like to thank Bill Hicks, Helman Castro, Brian Foley, Kirsten Munz, Ellie Coddington, and the LDS team for their immediate and exemplary response to this event. The LDS team provided very professional services and hands-on support both before, during and after the event.