

***Report and Recommendations to
The Walton County Manager
Regarding Planning and Development Department
Organization and Performance***

**Submitted by:
The John Scott Dailey Florida Institute of Government at FSU**

**Lead Evaluator:
Dan Beeman, Ph.D.**

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**(Provided through the John Scott Dailey Florida Institute of Government at FSU)
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Thank you for the opportunity to help evaluate the Planning and Development Department's performance, with particular emphasis on service to the public. We applaud you for committing your time and resources to endorse the study of this issue, a study that we all agree is very important to the County's overall and long-term success. As requested, this document constitutes our Report and Recommendations for your further consideration and possible action.

We would particularly like to acknowledge with great appreciation the substantial contributions of Mr. Mike Lane, Director of the Planning and Development Department. His wisdom, experience and insight have been invaluable in this analysis and the development of recommendations. Likewise, we would express our sincere appreciation to the staff for their candor, support and assistance as we gathered data and other information, their unique first-hand perspective, and for their genuine demonstrated interest in serving the best interests of the citizens of Walton County.

Nothing in existence today is without history. Getting where we are in the Planning and Development Department took a long time. Likewise, the improvements may not occur overnight either, but will need time to show results. Nevertheless, these improvements need quick attention, thorough action and complete support. Additionally, some improvements were begun while this study was underway. Because of timing relative to this Report, this progress may not be entirely reflected herein.

BACKGROUND:

The *John Scott Dailey Florida Institute of Government at FSU* was contacted on April 21, 2004 and asked to undertake a business case analysis of the overall structure and system for providing growth management services to Walton County. We began the study following initial discussions and mutual agreement on the approach with Mr. Ronnie Bell and Ms. Shirl Williams. Dr. Beeman conducted a series of interviews and group discussions with Department staff, citizens and developers beginning on April 27. On July 27, 2004, we presented to the County Manager the Final Report that is intended to serve as a basis for ensuring that he and the County Commission have the best available information on which to make decisions on this very important issue.

The Planning and Development Department currently incorporates the Divisions of Planning, Building, and Code Enforcement. These departments interpret, administer and enforce the Walton County Comprehensive Plan, the Walton County Land Development Code and the Florida Building Code, and other related codes and ordinances. The Department coordinates and provides staff support to the Board of County Commissioners, the Planning Commission, the Design Review Board, the

Zoning Board of Adjustments, the Code Enforcement Board, the Contractors Competency Board, and the Coastal Dunes Lakes Advisory Board.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS: The following assumptions underlay the study:

- The citizen is the most important part of the process;
- Our focus is primarily on results achieved through the process, applied resources, and information used;
- Public (citizens and developers) and employee involvement are important, and;
- Recommendations will be based on evidence and on professional judgment.

APPROACH: The evaluator interviewed staff, citizen group representatives from the South Walton Community Council, builders and developers (including a group from the Building Industry Association of Okaloosa and Walton Counties, Gary Vorbeck (County Attorney) and Gary Mattison (Human Resource Director). Additional follow-up meetings were conducted with individual select staff as appropriate. Processes and performance issues were generally compared with other cities and counties.

EVIDENCE, OBSERVATION, ANALYSIS, AND IMPRESSIONS:

- **General Observations:** The process flow is not a significant problem. Many of the problems that plague the review process are caused by high workload, increasing complexity of regulatory requirements, unclear or conflicting language, policy decisions (e.g., between the Comprehensive Plan and the Code), shortage of qualified professional staff and incomplete or incorrect submitted applications. Processing times are frequently slowed because staff has difficulty enforcing and reconciling past and present policy decisions and conflicting regulatory language (much of which is externally imposed) for ensuring public safety, environmental quality, wetland management, and higher density development. Inadequate tracking systems and procedures have adversely affected performance. The development review process tends to be fragmented.
- **Public Service:**
 - Observation of public interaction at the window in the South Annex and in the North Office indicated that the public is being reasonably well served. However, "first contact" staff at the South Annex were new to the job and had not yet learned the answers or points of referral to many of the questions and requests that arose at the window.
 - At some time in the past, a program of soliciting and evaluating Customer Service Cards was proposed but has not been implemented.
 - A representative from the South Walton Community Council said that citizens feel disenfranchised from government, generally. Several builders with whom the evaluator talked said that they considered many of the staff to be non-

responsive. The extent to which this condition might be borne out in fact was not apparent. Even though these two groups may have different perspectives and interests, they both seem to feel that responsiveness is less than what they would like. It does appear, however, that (1) staff judgment is sometimes inconsistent between incidents; (2) the process takes longer than it was expected or wanted to; and, (3) decisions do not always appear to have been based on agreed-upon past decisions or practices.

- According to several builders, developers of significant projects may spend "a minimum of \$30-40 thousand" for such expenses as engineering fees before getting into the development process. This study did not verify the accuracy of this assertion.
- Data showing citizen waiting time data were gathered at the South Walton Annex covered the period from April 1, 2004 through June 4, 2004 for those doing business with the Planning, Building, and Code Enforcement departments. Waiting time is generally very reasonable for all three units. The average wait over the period studied was 11 minutes for Planning, 11 minutes for Building (down to an average of 5.5 minutes for a recent four week period) and 3 minutes for Code Enforcement. Appendix F shows these data.

- **Workflow:**

- The volume of work has substantially grown during the past few years as development has increased, particularly in the southern part of the county. Additionally, increasing complexity of regulatory requirements and the unavoidable greater involvement of external regulatory entities has slowed production.
- Appendix A shows the volume of work in key process areas over the past six months. It has been estimated that at least 65% of the County's development occurs in the southern part of the county (e.g., 13,000 of 16,000 building permit requests during the past year were said to have initiated in the South Walton Annex), yet only the North Office reviews and approves plans, receives requests for inspections, licenses contractors, and notifies utilities of properties approved for hook-ups. Other than receiving plans, etc. for subsequent forwarding to the north office, the south office only answers questions from the walk-in public and issues permits.
- Systematic cross training is generally lacking whereas it should be conducted to equip staff for additional tasks. For example, only one person (located in the South Annex) is able to approve lot splits, construction trailers, home occupational licenses, or vending permits. Errors tend to increase, multiple tasking slows the process, and communication is hampered. NOTE: Widespread cross training, as opposed to training for purposes of backing up staff, would not be conducive to efficient or effective performance.

- There are significant inefficiencies resulting from the fact that many of the development process core aspects, including files, reside in the north office and much of the work emanates from South Walton. Two prime examples of the resulting problems are: (1) the use of both employees who ferry documents and money and paid courier services beyond what should be needed; and, (2) building inspectors who must report to the north office to receive their daily work assignments then frequently travel to the south part of the county to perform the inspections and then travel back to the north office to conclude the workday. In the interest of trying to use travel time more wisely, they may stop at the South Annex at 1:30 or 2pm to pick up material to be carried to the north office to deliver it earlier in the day.

- **Workforce:**

- While morale and attitude when dealing with the public is generally good, staff appears to feel overwhelmed, mostly by the volume of work and the number of vacant/needed positions. Partly as a result of workload demand, there is a greater-than-normal tendency by some to find fault and blame others and to be unusually impatient when dealing with the public.
- Also partly because the volume of work presses the staff and time is in short supply there has been little attention to training. This is particularly evident in the cases of new employees coming onboard and the introduction of a major new computer system. In the former instances, virtually no orientation or training was provided, either to County organization and operation or to the specifics of their new job. In the second, the software vendor provided limited training and one staff member has provided nominal coaching to other staff to date. Overall, there is no systematic effort to identify training needs and meet them. It was said by several interviewees that some staff do not know the Comprehensive Plan nor do they use it as a basis for decisions.
- Additional space would be needed in the South Annex to accommodate additional and relocated staff should the County move in that direction. Specific details of space acquisition and allocation are beyond the scope of this initiative and were not studied. County managers should determine those matters.

- **Technical Systems and Support:**

- Recent problems in office operations have partly been the result of a new computer system that is initially complex for new users and into which historical data had not been entered prior to system startup. The situation has improved since data for the past two years are now in the system.
- Other than the above-referenced system, there are no other significant uses of computerized, online or web-based applications. Consequently, the

development process remains largely manual, not automated, subject to delay and error, and not user-friendly by not being on-line and easily accessible to citizens. Essentially, involvement is "in-line" rather than "on-line."

- There are no online payment capabilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Public Service:**

- Improve the results of the initial contact the public has with staff by enabling staff to quickly and accurately respond to requests for service or to questions. An excellent beginning is underway. First contact staff in the South Annex were asked to identify the questions and requests that they frequently received. Under the guidance of Jennifer Christensen, an Access database is being developed and installed that should provide them immediate reference for handling those questions and requests. As new first contact staff come onboard they should immediately be trained on the use of this system. Similarly, the receptionist in the North Office should also have the software installed on her computer, receive this training and be required to use the system and her performance monitored.
- Simplify fee processing by setting up escrow accounts for builders and providing online fee payment. Any costs associated with online fee payment should be passed to the citizen. (NOTE: Establishing escrow accounts can be problematic because of associated legal issues such as holding private monies without providing interest earnings to the respective citizen.)
- Improve outreach and education efforts, especially to inform applicants of county requirements. Develop and conduct a much more proactive program to work with builders and developers up front in the process. This might include items such as workshops, focus groups, posters, web pages, and dedicated contact staff. The Planning and Development Director might regularly meet with key constituent groups to hear and share issues and solicit feedback.
- The design of the public contact area is presently reasonably inviting and easily accessed in both the north and south offices. However, forms, checklists, and other information should be made more visible and readily available to serve those who need no staff contact for their visit. Should online services become more available, computer access should be provided.
- Develop a user-friendly development manual and information brochures that include brief checklists and graphics. Distribute them widely and make them easily available to those who visit the Planning and Development Department.

- Develop and implement a program of soliciting and evaluating Customer Service Cards, then respond to citizen concerns as effectively as possible. Make the changes and the improved results known to the public.

- **Workflow:**

- Move the building process, plan review processing, document storage, and the revenue deposit process to the South Walton office. Space needs may be problematic but are not likely to be insurmountable.
- Put into writing and disseminate Policy Directives within the Department. These would be developed or changed/deleted as necessary and essentially be internal policy statements.
- The four core processes (Comprehensive Planning, Development Services Review and Approval, Building Development and Code Enforcement) are reasonably efficient as they are (see Appendices B, C, D and E) but do not achieve their maximum potential. The problems are not with the flow of the processes but primarily with the effect of the other problems cited in this Report (relatively high work volume, too few employees, lack of modern technological support, etc.). The net effect is that the processes take a great deal more time than they should because of these other problems. Therefore, no specific improvements to the processes themselves are recommended or considered appropriate at this time. Improvements can be made once these processes are supported by additional technology (GIS linked databases, online plan review and permit processing, etc.) and sufficient staff employed. For example, an improvement that would come from improved technical support would be that citizens who use the online systems would enjoy much greater access to information and the capability of initiating quick response to their requests.

- **Workforce:**

- The County should hire more staff (a listing of current planning-related positions and incumbents appears below). First, the four current vacancies should be filled (Planning Manager-vacated by Mike Lane, Senior Planner-vacated by Ken Shannon, Planning Technician III-vacated by Tim Durbin, and half-time Administrative Assistant-established in 2003-2004 budget). Additionally, the County needs an Environmental Specialist whose job would be to identify potential wetland, floodplain, preservation and coastal issues early in the process (NOTE: The 2004-2005 budget provides for a half-time position). The Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) program requires a team of two fulltime people (having shared duties) to (1) coordinate meetings and manage data regarding the Comprehensive Plan and (2) evaluate the Plan and related county issues and make recommendations. The County also needs a Concurrency Management Planner to monitor and analyze the

level of service standards of the infrastructure capacity and a Building Inspector to provide additional coverage for current Inspectors' staff training and annual leave. The 2004-2005 budget provides for two additional Planners. We recommend creating these new positions rather than hiring professionals on a temporary basis because the subsequent workflow of the Department will require additional staff familiar with planning, the Comprehensive Plan, Code and related issues. In Code Enforcement, three new positions are required, more if the units assumes code enforcement work for the cities of Paxton and Freeport.

Current Planning-related positions and incumbents:

Planning and Development Director	Mike Lane
Planning Administrative Coordinator	Jennifer Christensen
Senior Planner	Latilda Henninger
Senior Planner	Tom Blackshear
Senior Planner	Carl Hammonds
Environmental Planner	Erica Teets
Planning Technician III	Mary Margaret Stallings
Planning Technician I	Renee Bradley
Development Order Inspector	Jim Harman
Planning Assistant	Melissa Ward
Planning Assistant	Vivian Shamel
Administrative Assistant	Sherry Sylvester
Administrative Assistant	Debra Boblitt
Planning Clerk	Doris Cooper

- One person in the Building Department should be designated as the "Deputy Building Official" to answer questions, meet with builders and make appropriate decisions in the absence of the Building Official. This person should float between the north and south offices.
- New employees should receive systematic orientation, much of which should be mandatory, within the first few weeks of starting their employment. For example, at a minimum, orientation should include an hour with each manager in his or her Department to learn about that unit's purpose, its relationship to other units and overall performance objectives, staff and their successes. Also, new employees should receive a map of all county facilities with explanations of who and what can be found in each. The names, position titles and extension numbers should be given to all Department receptionists and be available to operators of centralized phone systems.
- Develop a step pay plan. Stepped (i.e., incremental) pay increases could be based on such work performance facts as work quantity and quality, applicable course completion or professional credentials bestowed, and so forth. This program would also serve as a way of beginning a fact-based pay for performance system. At some later point the program could be further developed into a full pay for performance system by identifying critical

performance measures tied to key strategic objectives and tying performance to pay (above baseline pay).

- Salary adjustments should be based on position audits rather than job titles. For example, a Clerk doing the work of an Administrative Assistant should be reclassified and paid accordingly, based on the audit. The converse is very difficult to satisfactorily accomplish.
 - One person is needed in the South Walton office as the Revenue Accounting Manager. The current staff member handling revenue is located in the north office. No additional staff would be required. Planning revenue is currently separate from building revenue and should be combined. All staff who handle public money should be bonded. Currently none are. NOTE: Code Enforcement revenue is currently handled directly by the Clerk of Court.
 - We recommend that the county use as an enticement to employment, when appropriate in employment negotiations, a reasonable "cost-of-moving allowance." This expense may be a significant consideration for employees not living in or near the county prior to employment and may make the difference in attracting the right person for a reasonable salary (comparable to others in similar positions in the county) or not. It is a one-time expense that a new employee would otherwise have to cover at a time when they would be facing other costs of moving and possibly a hiatus in earnings.
- **Training (technical and soft skills):**
 - Technical training on Naviline is needed and addressed elsewhere herein;
 - Few of the unit managers have ever had much basic management training and all would benefit. We specifically recommend: Time Management, Performance Management, Conflict Resolution, Dealing with Difficult People, Delegating Effectively, Implementing Change, Coaching for Improved Performance, and Using Positive Discipline.
 - Additionally, senior managers should receive advanced training in Process and Performance Management (more advanced than "Performance Management" cited above).
 - **Technical Support:**
 - Data for the past two years have been entered and many of the initial data entry errors have now been corrected in Naviline. Employees who regularly use the system have become more comfortable with it and have received nominal training by the system provider and have been coached by at least one staff member. Additional hands-on experience and systematic coaching will significantly improve performance. We recommend that employees who

regularly use Naviline (i.e., most employees) keep lists of issues with which they would like help and that one key staff person periodically (at least monthly early-on) gather those lists, determine the best resolutions and provide the necessary coaching. Further, that the key people explore system capabilities, short cuts, and the experience of other city and county planning departments using Naviline and then systematically share the findings with associates.

- Develop or purchase an online system for the building permit, licensing and code enforcement processes. The City of Tampa (and other cities and counties outside Florida) use software supplied by Hansen Information Technologies. We believe the potential return on investment would likely be substantial.
- Refine the Geographic Information System (GIS) to bring together geographic and other data on land, property and infrastructure into a single database to help speed the review of development proposals and to provide greater access by the public to information relevant to development in the county. This evaluator recommends establishing a centralized GIS that would serve not only the needs of Planning and Development but other Departments under the Commission as well, such as Public Works. In addition, it could support the programs of the county constitutional officers.
- Pending developments (e.g., major and minor developments, subdivisions, plat approvals, commercial developments and Planned Unit Developments) should be available online for quick and easy public access and review.
- The County should outsource the digitizing of the old building permits, planning project files, and code enforcement cases.
- Two more phone lines should be added to the south office phone system.
- Provide an online fee payment system, with payment either by credit card (for which there would likely be a pass-through cost to the citizen user) or by electronic fund transfer.

• **Other Recommendations:**

- Consider revising definitions, such as of "Minor versus Major Development" that now require public review for anything 5,000 square feet or above. Requiring public review only for larger buildings would reduce overhead.
- Once improvements are in place, performance measures need to be developed, data gathered, performance monitored, and appropriate actions taken (i.e., reward, replicate, repair, replace) based on performance data. It would be premature to initiate a performance measurement system until improvements are in place. The measures should be carefully developed to

include operational areas of critical importance and to avoid superfluous measures. A few examples of measures that should be implemented include:

1. Time required for plan review;
 2. Percent of building inspections for which no permit was issued;
 3. Number of successful court cases;
 4. Average time spent by the public waiting at the counter;
 5. # of permits issued the denial of which are successfully challenged;
 6. # of approved permits not issued within 10 days;
 7. # of deposits more than one day late;
 8. # of audit criticism received from external auditing entities.
- Explore an increase in planning and building fees to put them more on a cost recovery basis. The current fee schedule appears to be an expense not adequately offset by user fees.

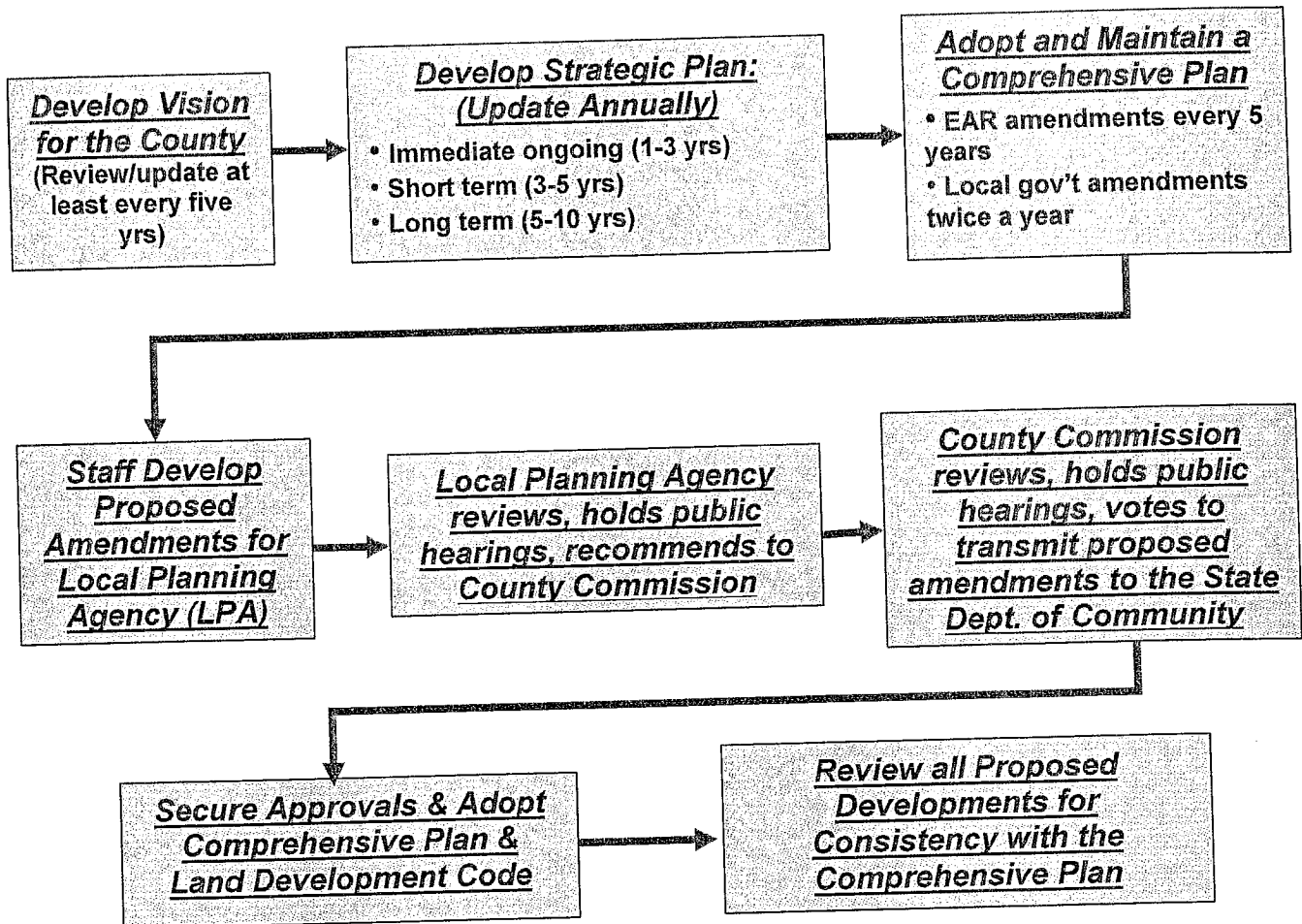
Appendix A

Average Production Volume (November 2003 – April 2004)

Planning:	6-month total
Projects in Process:	802
Development Orders Issued:	88
Land Use Determinations:	1135
Plats submitted for review:	31
Plats approved:	22
Building Permits Reviewed (incl. Clearing):	1515
Building:	
# of Permits	11,557
Permits and related fees received:	\$803,955.56

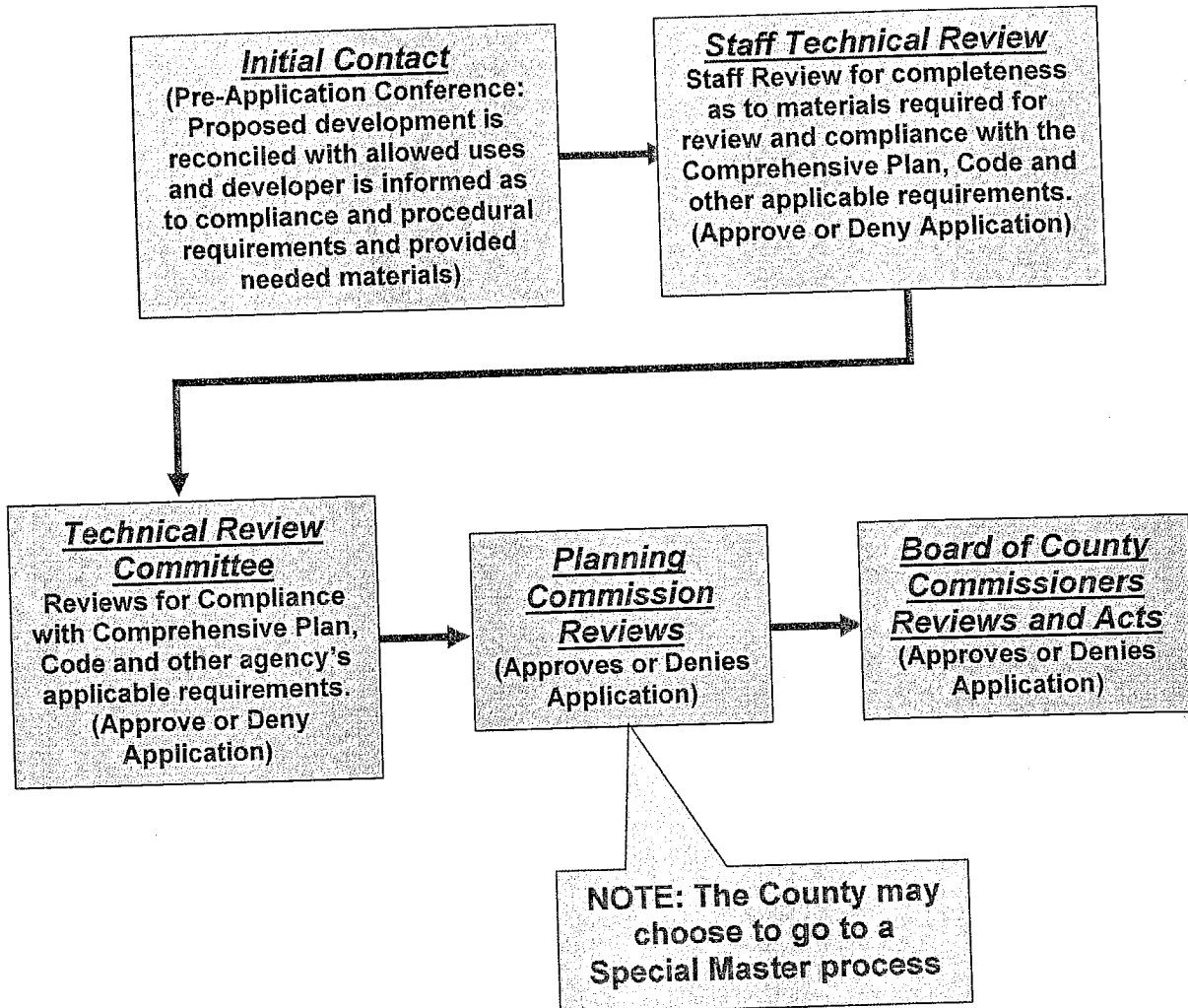
Appendix B

Comprehensive Planning Process



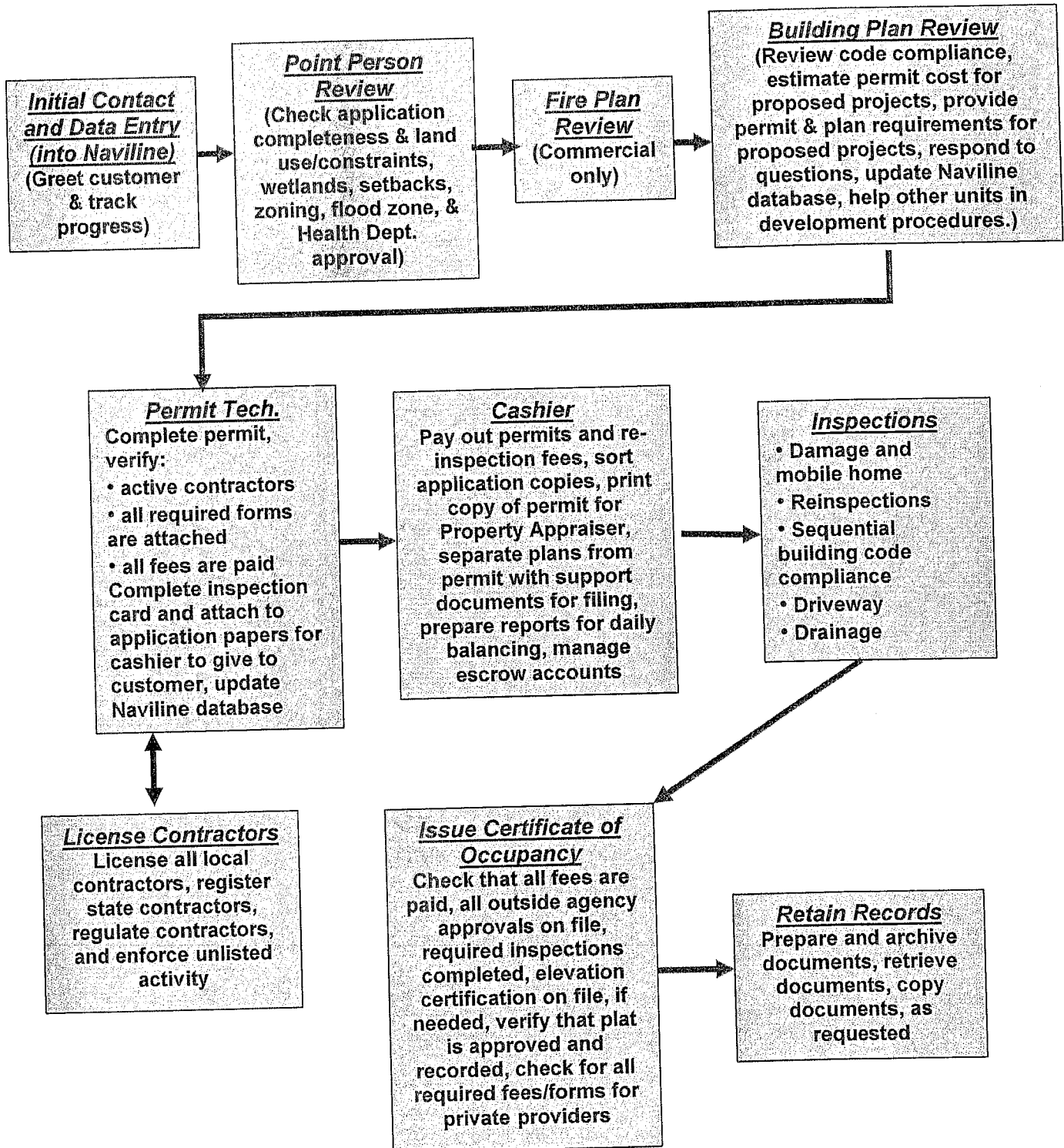
Appendix C

Development Services Review and Approval Process



Appendix D

Building Development Process



Appendix F – Citizen Waiting Times

Planning Department Walk-Ins Wait Times

Week of:	Total # walk-ins	Less those where no time logged	Total walk-ins with minutes accounted for	Total wait minutes for week	Average wait
4/1/04-4/2/04**	55	10	45	746	17
4/5/04-4/9/04*	167	36	131	4,207	32
4/12/04-4/16/04	178	48	130	1,414	11
4/19/04-4/23/04	179	52	127	1,224	10
4/26/04-4/30/04	201	109	92	990	11
5/3/04-5/7/04	190	76	114	874	8
5/10/04-5/14/04	201	57	144	1,058	7
5/17/04-5/21/04	270	138	132	328	4
5/24/04-5/28/04	178	105	73	589	8
6/1/04-6/4/04***	138	38	100	312	3

Average Wait:

11 min.

* Only two clerks on duty and the system may have been down that week

** Two days recorded

*** Four day work week

Note: Records will become more accurate with more careful monitoring of check-in times at the front desk

Building Department Walk-ins Average Wait Times

Week of:	Total # walk-ins	Less those where no time logged	Total walk-ins with minutes accounted for	Total wait minutes for week	Average wait
4/1/04-4/2/04*	33	12	21	327	16
4/5/04-4/9/04	82	58	24	397	17
4/12/04-4/16/04	88	56	32	530	17
4/19/04-4/23/04	57	24	23	298	13
4/26/04-4/30/04	89	74	15	221	15
5/3/04-5/7/04	101	72	29	116	4
5/10/04-5/14/04	93	73	20	130	7
5/17/04-5/21/04	64	57	7	40	6
5/24/04-5/28/04	90	70	20	261	13
6/1/04-6/4/04**	84	55	29	289	10
6/7/04-6/11/04	115	85	30	397	13
6/14/04-6/18/04	109	43	66	689	11
6/21/04-6/24/04***	97	27	80	512	6

AVERAGE WAIT:

11 min.

*Two days recorded

** Four day work week

*** Four days recorded

Note: As can be seen, there are many weeks where the wait times were recorded very poorly; see week of 5/17 as an example with only 7 times recorded. This has improved dramatically with Doris watching the sign-in sheets carefully at the front desk and we will have more accurate records in the near future.

Code Enforcement Department Walk-ins -- Average Wait Times

Week of:	Total # walk-ins	Less those where no time logged	Total walk-ins with minutes accounted for	Total wait minutes for week	Average wait
4/19/04-4/23/04	9	3	6	10	2
4/26/04-4/30/04	6	4	2	4	2
5/3/04-5/7/04	11	6	5	19	4
5/10/04-5/14/04	4	3	1	0	no wait
5/17/04-5/21/04	8	5	3	9	3
5/24/04-5/28/04	14	6	8	30	4
6/1/04-6/4/04*	7	1	6	8	1
6/7/04-6/11/04	9	4	5	14	3
6/14/04-6/18/04	5	2	3	20	6

AVERAGE WAIT:	3 min.
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* Four day work week