

Improvements to Rockville's Development and Permitting Processes

Faster, Accountable, Smarter and Transparent (FAST) Project Charter Version 2

Introduction

Project Charter

The first step to initiate this project is to establish a “plan to do the project” or a Project Charter. This document contains information on:

1. Reason and purpose, and outcomes for the project;
2. Organizational structure with roles, responsibilities, decision-making authority, and project assignments;
3. Description of the community outreach and engagement strategy;
4. Reasonable schedules for project components; and
5. An implementation and monitoring plan.

1. Reason and Purpose

The new Mayor and Council have selected Economic Development and Housing as two of the three main focus areas for their term. They have explicitly stated the expectation that our development and permitting process must significantly change to streamline these processes to attract more economic development and to significantly grow the number of market rate and affordable housing in the City. The Comprehensive Plan also endorses these objectives.

There is a sense of urgency by the Mayor and Council, the City Manager, and our customers to successfully develop and follow-through with implementing improvements to these processes. Progress must be shown throughout the project including initial short-term accomplishments. Specific ordinance and code changes must be incorporated into the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite.

Outcomes

This project's proposed outcomes are grouped into four areas – **F**aster, **A**ccountable, **S**marter and **T**ransparent. All four outcomes are equally important. We are not focusing solely on faster because faster is not always the best outcome. Taking more time may be a smarter choice to gain the needed information to make the right decisions. In turn, we shouldn't analyze items to the extent that we unnecessarily slow down the process. Likewise, we need to establish processes that are understandable, fair, and provide information that is accessible to the public to create a truly transparent process.

Faster

The 2040 Plan and Mayor and Council's priorities demand an efficient development and permitting process. At the end of this project, non-value-added steps and procedures need to be identified and eliminated, and others streamlined, to improve processes that yield *faster* turn-around times and decisions on most applications.

To ensure that these changes make Rockville the premier location for high-quality development in the region, we must benchmark development review and permitting processes from other jurisdictions such as Montgomery County, Gaithersburg, and others and propose changes (zoning ordinance and other codes/standards as well as needed resources) to match or exceed the most effective and efficient processes.

Accountable

The City must continue and build on the focus on meeting a higher level of customer service established in the first phase of FAST. The City is accountable for delivering this higher level of customer service and the recommended actions from this effort needs to reflect and measure our progress toward this end. In these recommended actions, the applicants/customers also need to be accountable for the submission of complete/accurate applications and timely resubmissions.

Smarter

Improvements to the development and permitting process should result in gains in staff's efficiency and effectiveness. Staff within multiple departments need to work smarter by delivering seamless service through:

- Processes that are accessible and easily understood;
- Sound and timely decisions;
- Reasonable ordinances and regulations that are consistently applied;
- Solution-oriented approaches;
- Processes that balance and respect private and community interests; and
- Unified delivery of services (multiple departmental staff working as one for customers).

The project team will identify and propose innovative and creative actions to improve the customer experience.

In addition to drawing on staff's expertise for how to work smarter, we must seek recommendations from a "developer/builder" focus group on what changes are needed to make Rockville the premier place for development and propose how to make these changes.

Transparent

The City must provide for a transparent process through openness, accountability, and honesty. Our customers should know what is expected and have access to the public information they need to develop within the city.

Transparency is an obligation by the City to share information with citizens on the development and permitting process and how decisions are made based on adopted

ordinances, plans, and requirements. This outcome is important to maintain trust with the citizens and customers we serve and holds staff and other public officials accountable for our actions.

Project Name:

Since these outcomes are critical to the success of this project and their prominence is important, the name of the project is **FAST** (**F**aster, **A**ccountable, **S**marter, and **T**ransparent). This name will keep our expected results always in the forefront among staff and stakeholders and will be a constant measurement for our progress and success.

2. Organizational Structure

The organizational structure is composed of:

- **Mayor and Council (M&C)** – The Mayor and Council has provided the priority initiatives and overall purpose of this project. M&C must be kept informed of our efforts and progress. They also need to approve code changes that will be required to implement certain process improvements. The Mayor and Council must ultimately decide the balance needed to respect both public and private interest when considering code and process changes. The Mayor and Council provides guidance and direction on policy and process changes.
- **City Manager** – The City Manager helps develop and ultimately approves the Project Charter and provides overall direction to the Executive Team and Project Manager at key points throughout the project.
- **Executive Team** – This team is composed of the Directors of Public Works and Community Planning and Development Services. Craig Simoneau and Ricky Barker are responsible for the development and execution of the Project Charter, making executive decisions for the Project Team when appropriate, providing overall communication to staff within their departments, providing resources, encouragement, and support for staff working on the project. The Executive Team, in conjunction with the City Manager, will have final say over the recommendations, actions, and implementation schedule. This Team will also play a critical role in establishing an effective process for making key decisions among competing objectives. The Executive Team will need to coordinate closely with the City Attorney's Office on changes to codes and processes. The Team, with the City Attorney, will need to determine how best to accomplish this (e.g., representation on a team or teams). This Team will also provide regular progress reports to the Mayor and Council.

- **Project Manager (PM)** – The project manager is the Development Services Manager, John Foreman. John is accountable to the Executive Team and the City Manager to ensure that the Project Charter is implemented, progress reports are provided, and recommendations are acted upon. John will promote engagement, collaboration, and accountability among the Project Team. He is also accessible and available to the Team for support, guidance, and direction.
- **Project Team** – The project team will contain front line staff and management from CPDS and Public Works.

3. Community Outreach and Engagement Strategy

In anticipation of launching this next phase of FAST, staff established an internal working group, which developed a statement of purpose and outcomes as shown in the draft charter. The team also assessed the development and permitting process and created a list of priority items to improve. In addition, the team engaged external customers through a survey and a listening session, and staff met and received feedback from both REDI and the Chamber of Commerce.

4. FAST Schedule

The overall time frame to complete this phase of the FAST project is approximately a year to eighteen months. Since many of the recommended action items are changes associated with other processes such as the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite (ZOR) and updates to other sections of the code, the FAST schedule will coincide with the schedules for these processes. For other actions, the Project Manager will work with the Project Team to develop schedules as appropriate.

5. Implementation and Monitoring Plan

The long-term success of this project depends upon the effectiveness of the solutions that are implemented. It will be important to include ways to measure our success to achieve our outcomes (Faster and Smarter), and to determine if additional changes are needed. This evaluation should be based on internal/external evaluations by our customers. Time-periods will be established by the Executive Team for evaluating results and making adjustments as needed.

6. Key Issues and Recommended Action Items

Issue 1: Numerous items require Planning Commission and/or Mayor and Council approval. Limited administrative approvals.

1. For all processes, consider changes to the approving authority where a different body or process could ensure that all requirements are met while reducing time, cost, and risk.
2. ~~Adjust the approving authority for site plans as follows:~~

- ~~Designate the Planning Commission as the approving authority for site plans that request modifications to development standards such as setbacks, building height, buffer width or other similar items.~~
 - ~~Allow for administrative approval for site plans that meet all standards and requirements can be approved administratively.~~
2. Make certain types of projects that align with current City plans, policies and priorities eligible for administrative approval of site plans.
 3. ~~Change the focus of the project plan to be for large multiphase developments (for example on sites greater than ten acres) to gain conceptional approval, including Adequate Public Facilities (APF) for the entire project with subsequent site plans to be approved administratively unless relief from development standards is requested. Streamline the process to be achievable within six months.~~
 3. Streamline the project plan process by combining the two area meetings into one meeting, removing mandatory briefings before Planning Commission and Mayor and Council, and allowing subsequent site plans to be approved administratively. The process should be achievable within six months.
 4. ~~For properties within a Planned Development (PD) zone, provide the option to develop either (a) according to the PD or (b) through a PD amendment subject to Planning Commission approval. Currently, property within a PD must follow the more extensive project plan process even when developing under the equivalent zone.~~
 4. Create a new streamlined Planned Development (PD) amendment process with one required area meeting followed by a decision from the Mayor and Council, with subsequent site plans to be approved by the Planning Commission.
[Note these three action items are the subject of the March 3 Works Session with updated recommendations]
 5. Allow certain changes of use such as changes to similar commercial uses or changes from higher impact uses to lower impact uses to be processed through the Occupancy Permit process without triggering a site plan amendment. This action would significantly reduce the requirements for certain changes of use that do not produce the need for improvements on the site.
 6. Allow the Planning Commission to delegate final plat approval to an administrative officer as allowed by state law.
 7. As identified in the Historic Resources Work Plan, review and add an Administrative Level Certificate of Approval (COA) into Chapter 25. Assess Historic District Commission applications and develop a proposed list of Administrative or Staff-Level Approvals.
 8. Convert most special exceptions to conditional uses to yield a shorter, less costly process.
 9. Chapter 21 (Road Code & ROW Agreements) – allow staff additional flexibility by further delegating more common approvals to the Director for efficiencies and to approve some waivers based upon criteria.

Issue 2: Lots of required public meetings

1. Streamline the process by combining the preapplication and postapplication area meetings into a single meeting with the neighborhood.

Issue 3: Notification requirements are overly reliant on mailed notices.

1. Require mailed notification only for area meetings and public hearings before the Planning Commission and Mayor and Council.
2. Continue to provide the initial packet of information for public notice on applications while limiting subsequent mailings to postcards.
3. Encourage residents to sign up for online notification or through social media for those who want to do so.
4. Improve our notifications of public meetings on the city's webpage by creating a central location for all notices.
5. Improve posting sign requirements.

Issue 4: Projects take longer than other jurisdictions, with different processes

1. Benchmark key processes to similar processes from other jurisdictions to match or exceed the most effective and efficient processes. In addition to benchmarking, examining other jurisdictions' processes provides an opportunity to identify and implement their effective practices.

Issue 5: Comprehensive Transportation Review (CTR) requirements extend application processing timelines for small projects without providing actionable benefits.

1. Develop new thresholds for transportation report requirements through the CTR, allowing for de minimis cases where qualifying small or minor projects would be exempt from the requirement of submitting a transportation report.
2. Clarify the transportation report requirements for all types of projects through the CTR.

Issue 6: Variety of guidelines separate from the code.

1. Incorporate guidelines as requirements into relevant sections of City code, as appropriate.
2. For others, update the guidelines.

Issue 7: No single point of application, multiple applications required.

1. Complete virtual One-Stop Shop by including all development and permitting applications in a comprehensive system.
2. Where possible, streamline the process by combining separate applications and fees.

Issue 8: Incomplete information and resources for customers

1. Update guidance documents such as the Development Review Procedures Guide and application checklists. Update the City's website to make this information more accessible.
2. Post information such as approved site plans, use permits, and other information online for the public to access.

Issue 9: Building Permit Review Process:

1. Consistently meet published review targets.
2. Ensure we are on par or faster than neighboring municipalities building permit process.
3. Build on the current expedited process for residential sheds and fences, which are currently reviewed by CPDS within 3 days of submittal.
4. Through benchmarking with other localities, implement an effective "Expedited Review" program.

In summary, initial focus on the above items will make a positive impact and provide an improved level of service for our customers.