



Legislation Text

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Development Review Process Recommendations (B)

Following the visit by City officials to Norfolk, Virginia, the City Commission established several committees to formulate recommendations regarding action items to implement in Gainesville. One committee was the City Government Committee, which has developed several recommendations about City government and processes. One of the City Government Committee's recommendations was to amend the development review process. The City Government Committee made its recommendations to the Economic Development/University Community Committee (EDUCC), which heard the recommendations and then discussed them twice more, on October 5, 2004 and December 8, 2004. The Community Development Committee (CDC) also expressed interest to the City Commission in reviewing the recommendations so that it could make its own recommendations to the City Commission. The CDC discussed the proposed changes several times, most recently at its January 6, 2005 meeting.

The City Government Committee recommended that staff provide more information to citizens participating in the first step process about what materials they could bring to first step in order to have the most productive first step meeting. This has been implemented. The City Government Committee also recommended that staff develop a firm cycle for minor reviews (the staff-level reviews of smaller projects), with clear cut-off dates and turnaround times, just as the City has for larger projects that go to the Development Review Board (DRB). This has also been implemented.

The City Government Committee recommended eliminating neighborhood meetings. (The Committee is proposing a different type of informal early meeting on design input for projects in some areas.) The Committee recommended creating a consent agenda process for the Development Review Board, much like the City Commission has for items unlikely to generate controversy or need discussion.

The City Government Committee recommended that the development review process be restructured. The Committee's recommendation is that, like now, the City offer a first step meeting at the beginning of the process. The Committee also recommended that thresholds be raised so that projects of considerably larger size be reviewed and approved administratively by staff, so that only projects of 20 houses or more, 50 multifamily units or more, 10,000 or more square feet of commercial, or 5 acres or more of industrial, go to the DRB for discussion and hearings. The City Government Committee recommends that projects in the urban core (those covered by the Special Area Plans or within the Community Redevelopment Agency districts) be required to meet with a landscape architect or architect (the City would probably need two of each on contract in order to avoid conflicts on specific projects) at the Florida Community Design Center. The meeting could take place prior to application, anytime up to staff's technical review of the application, at the petitioner's convenience as to when the input would be the most productive. The meeting would be suggestions-only. The petitioner could choose any of the meeting times which would be regularly scheduled and noticed, either once every two weeks or once a month at the Design Center, whichever the need turns out to be. Finally, the City Government Committee recommended slotted positions (particular backgrounds) for the DRB members.

The recommendations of the City Government Committee are summarized in a PowerPoint printout and the proposed changes to the development review process are shown on a chart. Community Development Director Tom Saunders also summarized the City Government Committee's proposed changes in a memorandum dated December 8, 2004.

EDUCC discussed the recommendations and moved them forward to the City Commission. Areas of discussion included a need for staff to be able to "bump" projects of particular concern to the DRB, even if the project does not meet the thresholds. No formal action was taken on this issue; however, there was discussion that mid-size projects would be on DRB consent and that a DRB member could pull the item to the discussion agenda if there are concerns. The EDUCC discussed possible changes to the slotted positions for the DRB members and including a citizen at large position. A change from the City Government Committee recommendations was that EDUCC asked staff to review the consent agenda recommendation with the City Attorney's office, and EDUCC ultimately supported a consent agenda only for DRB and not for the City Plan Board.

The CDC met after EDUCC, so their recommendations are in the form of adjustments and are listed below. (The CDC discussed this item under Design Review Process, Legistar item number 002555.)

Under the proposal, staff could handle as many as 35 additional developments per year as minor reviews without DRB discussion and hearing. Staff reassignments would be made as needed to increase the number of planning staff involved in development review. The City would also need to enter into a contract with architects and landscape architects - probably two of each in order to avoid conflicts. Costs for such contracts would need to be proposed in this summer's budget discussion for the 05-06 budget year. The Florida Community Design Center has indicated that it could make space available at the Design Center under this year's contract within the already approved annual contract amount.

Economic Development Committee to the City Commission: The City Commission adopt the City Government Subcommittee's recommendations for the development review process: 1) provide additional information to first step applicants; 2) create a cycle for minor reviews; 3) eliminate neighborhood meetings; 4) create a consent agenda process applicable to the Development Review Board; and 5) restructure the development review process as indicated.

Community Development Committee to the City Commission: Approve with the following modifications: 1) use the nomenclature "restructure" the neighborhood meeting requirement rather than "eliminate" it, and for projects outside the special area plan/CRA areas that meet current criteria for requiring neighborhood meetings, send notices to those within 400 feet offering the meeting rather than requiring it automatically, eliminate the newspaper ad for the meeting, and use a modest notice period for the meeting; 2) require the DRB to move items from consent to discussion if there is a citizen request; 3) continue to require that all subdivision plats except minor subdivisions, as now, be reviewed by the DRB, rather than using a 20-lot threshold for single-family subdivisions; 4) use 25 units rather than 50 as the multi-family cut-off; 5) use 10,000 square feet rather than 5 acres for the industrial cutoff; 6) include natural scientist and citizen slots on the DRB; and 7) include all projects over current cutoffs but under the proposed cutoffs on the DRB consent agenda, and remove the item called "Advisory Boards and Committees - Review of Large Site Plan (030266) from the referral list.