

Clark County Development Engineering Advisory Board

2007 Annual Report to the BOCC

The Development Engineering Advisory Board (DEAB) was formed by the Board of Clark County Commissioners in late 2006. DEAB serves as a procedural step in reviewing new policy and code changes and works with Community Development Engineering Services staff on issues related to process improvements and technical engineering issues.

The commissioners initially appointed seven advisory board members: three private consulting engineers, one construction contractor, one land developer, one local municipality representative, and one Building Industry Association representative:

Tim Schauer, Chair, *MacKay & Sposito*

Greg Jellison, Vice-Chair, *Hopper Dennis Jellison*

David Commeree, *New Tradition Homes*

Steve Madsen, *Building Industry Association of Clark County*

Jerry Nutter, *Nutter Corporation*

Scott Sawyer, *City of Washougal*

Greg Westrand, *Hagedorn, Inc.*

In November 2007, the BOCC appointed Steven Wall, *City of Ridgefield*, to complete the term of Scott Sawyer who resigned due to a job change.

2007 Accomplishments

The DEAB had a busy first year, typically meeting twice per month since November 2006. As a new board, DEAB's first priorities were to create their bylaws and goals. On January 18, 2007, DEAB hosted an open house to receive comments from the private development community about the engineering division's performance. This information was used to create an annual work plan that was shared with the BOCC at a March 14th work session.

The following is a summary of DEAB's 2007 accomplishments. The format follows the six goals established by the advisory board.

Goal #1 - Achieve department-wide consistency in submittal review.

1. Developed a fully-complete presubmittal checklist for consultants to complete before final review begins.
2. Staff is using a final engineering submittal checklist to improve consistency of reviews.
3. Staff engineers are directed to focus their reviews on code compliance instead of professional judgment.

Goal #2 - Standardize and accelerate Engineering Division processes.

1. The customer service level is improved. Communication to resolve issues occurs regularly.
2. The first engineering review is identifying most of the significant issues, resulting in fewer new comments on subsequent submittals.
3. A simplified grading permit submittal process was approved through the bi-annual code.

Goal #3 - Ensure adequate staffing levels, expertise, resources, and customer service attitudes.

1. Reviewed engineering division's workload, staffing resources, and timeline performance.
2. DEAB is preparing to make personnel/resource recommendations to the BOCC.
3. Discussed the importance and need for leadership for the development inspectors, as they are the last step in the engineering process. In November, a team leader was reassigned to supervise this team.

Goal #4 - Facilitate collaborative partnering between the public and private sectors.

1. Number of complaints from the development community is reduced.
2. There is a higher level of respect for the staff; issues are being worked out through the process as opposed to developers/consultants complaining directly to the BOCC.
3. Consultants are more consciously complying with the code; there is more consistency among the consultants.
4. Using the DEAB general email distribution list to inform private sector of county code and process changes.
5. Information on DEAB is on the county web page.
6. Each meeting has a public comment period that is actively used by local development consultants.
7. Received a presentation of 2007 development fees proposal.

Goal #5 - Review and comment as requested by the BOCC and/or senior staff on project specific technical engineering issues.

1. Proposed bi-annual code changes are reviewed; comments are prepared for the Planning Commission and BOCC.
2. Active participation in reviewing the stormwater ordinance revisions. DEAB members, or their delegates, are active on both the Technical Advisory Committee and the Stakeholders Advisory Committee.
3. Interpretation was provided on one technical issue, street taper standards.

Goal #6 - Continue to reevaluate and refine the implementation of duties in the bylaws.

1. The annual work plan or parking lot items are reviewed each meeting.

Ongoing Challenges

DEAB discussed the challenge of complaints still being targeted at the engineering division that may not actually be relevant to the division, but are a result of engineering being the last step before plans are approved for construction. DEAB also discussed the difficulty of inexperienced clients getting upset with delays because they do not understand the formal process required. In order for the complaints to be constructive, DEAB believes the issues should be directed to them. If DEAB is not aware of the problems, they cannot do anything about them.

DEAB discussed ongoing challenges facing the engineering review process, including:

- Reviews not being done until the last minute they are due, as a result of staff's workload.
- Consultants not studying staff reports before hearings and waiting until construction to protest decisions.
- Projects being bought and sold, so that the person bringing a project to a hearing is not the same person bringing it to construction.
- Staff interpretation in determining whether a project is a type I or type II.
- Current code not allowing for reasonable engineering judgment.
- Delays being more visible in larger projects where the stakes are bigger.

Recommendations/2008 Work Items

During January 2008, DEAB will prepare their annual work plan. The following items, in no particular order, will be considered and prioritized:

Processes

1. Explore viability of a "single point plan submittal and tracking resource" for final engineering plans. Do not require separate submittals for traffic striping and site work.
2. Evaluate the road modification and post-decision review processes for simplicity and predictability with the goal to reduce the volume of requests.
3. Evaluate the viability of concurrent site plan and final engineering review within defined timelines (90 or 120 days).
4. Re-look at grading application requirements (clarify early- and stand-alone grading permits in code).
5. Create a case log (reference manual) that organizes memos regarding special situations that come up and how they are resolved. DEAB should review formal policies and provide input.
6. Limit technical review time on detailed calculations. This should only be done if the reviewer suspects that there is a problem.
7. Establish a county design standards manual.
8. Refine the submittal and review process, requirements, and timelines, such as evaluating the 21/14/7 calendar day concept for final review. Have a formal process

- to stop the clock if issues come up until the issue has been resolved. This will help in perceptions of long turn-around times.
9. Formalize the process of code interpretations. Stop creating policy judgments; change code if necessary. Gray areas of code take up staff's time.
 10. Evaluate process of construction inspection through project completion, including performance and maintenance bonds.
 11. Move level of review analysis away from "lowest common denominator" of private expertise.
 12. Explore the concept of offering faster review times for technically complete submittals.
 13. Develop training programs for the private sector that offer incentives for compliance.

Resources

1. Allocate more staff time to actual final plan review, either with less "other mandates" or more staff, based upon predicted (not historical) workload. Approximately 2 FTE staff perform non-project related work.
2. Need for Project Coordinator. This is a technician-level position to serve as a "primary portal" / "project manager" for providing status and processing permits.
3. Create staff feedback mechanisms, both positive and negative.
4. Evaluate use of private consultants (instead of temporary employees) to review during peak workloads. This is preferred due to the difficulty in hiring temporary engineers during boom economies.
5. More review staff are needed. There doesn't appear to be enough qualified staff to meet deadlines.
6. Accountability. Provide appropriate level of staffing, but hold the division accountable for meeting their deadlines.

Fees

1. Implement a cost-of-service analysis for all of the department's development fees. Work towards developing a true cost-of-service model so staff time and costs are properly charged to developers.
2. Separate development services and engineering services revenue budgets/expenses and hold each division accountable for performance.
3. Consider a fee schedule that captures actual cost of reviews (penalizes consultants/developers with an excessive number of review iterations).
4. Consider lower fees for small property owners.
5. Provide another funding source (not development fees) for general program activities, such as the floodplain program.

DEAB Bylaws

1. Change bylaws to one monthly DEAB meeting (instead of two) and hold work sessions as necessary.

The DEAB looks forward to continued collaboration between Clark County's development community and county staff during 2008.

Respectfully submitted,

Development Engineering Advisory Board



Tim Schauer, P.E., Chair



Greg Jellison, P.E., Vice-Chair

SUBMITTED TO THE BOARD OF CLARK COUNTY COMMISSIONERS JANUARY 8, 2008.