

# LAND DEVELOPMENT AD HOC COMMITTEE

August 5, 2002

The Land Development Ad Hoc Committee of the City of Mesa met in the lower level meeting room of the Council Chambers, 57 East 1st Street, on August 5, 2002 at 8:30 a.m.

## COMMITTEE PRESENT

Rex Griswold, Chairman  
Kyle Jones  
Claudia Walters

## COUNCIL PRESENT

Mayor Keno Hawker  
Janie Thom

## OFFICERS PRESENT

Paul Wenbert

Chairman Griswold welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Land Development Ad Hoc Committee.

### 1. Discuss proposed Ad Hoc Committee work plan.

Building Safety Director Crystal Pearl addressed the Committee relative to this agenda item. She explained that the purpose of the Committee is to acquaint its members with the various City divisions that participate in land development activities within Mesa. She also outlined a proposed schedule of upcoming Committee meetings.

### 2. Discuss – Who are our Customers?

#### A. Building Safety:

Deputy Director for Plan Review Dave Harding addressed the Committee and advised that it is the mission of the Building Safety Division to promote effective communication, customer relationships and continuous employee training, thereby facilitating quality land development through the fair application of codes and standards. He emphasized that this country's building codes are universally adopted and promulgated not only for underwriting purposes, but most importantly to ensure the safety of its citizens.

Deputy Building Safety Director Jeff Welker provided the Committee with a brief overview of this agenda item. He explained that the Building Safety Division has a broad and varied customer base during the various stages of a construction project (developers, architects, contractors, property owners, tenants), and that it is an ongoing challenge for staff to satisfy the competing interests of the different entities. Mr. Welker commented that the Building Safety Division also considers the Council a primary customer inasmuch as the Council sets City policy and adopts

ordinances that the Division is charged with enforcing. He added that the Emergency Management Services Division and the Mesa Fire Department are also considered internal customers of the Division.

Mr. Welker provided a brief explanation of the existing Building Safety processes. He advised that Development Engineering is charged with the enforcement of Mesa's offsite and public improvement regulations and ordinances whenever an individual makes application to develop within the City; that Development Planning participates in the preliminary planning process; that Core Plan Review provides a full review of plans, and that Permit Services initially accepts an applicant's plans, conducts a preliminary screening, enters data, calculates, assesses and collects fees, and issues permits.

#### B. Planning Division

Planning Director Frank Mizner addressed the Committee relative to this agenda item and reported that in addition to the list of customers delineated by Mr. Welker, the Planning Division also considers the general public as one of its primary customers. He explained that citizen surveys conducted periodically by staff have revealed that Mesa residents do not believe that the quality of the City's new developments compare to those of neighboring communities; expressed concerns regarding the appearance of the City's arterial streets, and also questioned the type of planning and development that is permitted within Mesa.

Mr. Mizner commented that the Planning Division interacts on a regular basis with a number of citizen advisory boards such as the Design Review Board, the Board of Adjustment and the Planning & Zoning Board. He added that like the Building Safety Division, the Planning Division is charged with carrying out City Council direction, especially with regard to zoning cases and the Mesa General Plan.

Mr. Mizner encouraged the Committeemembers to attend the upcoming board meetings and hearings to familiarize themselves with the complex nature of the land development process.

Discussion ensued relative to the challenges of both the Planning and Building Safety Divisions to provide quality and consistent customer service to all entities who conduct business with the City of Mesa; ongoing training programs for staff; the implementation by the Planning Division of a pre-submittal process; updated Design Guidelines and Desert Uplands Guidelines, and the adoption of the Mesa General Plan.

Committeemember Griswold stated that it is the goal of the Land Development Ad Hoc Committee to ensure that Mesa becomes one of the most attractive and desirable municipalities in the Southwest in which to conduct business. He added that in an effort to achieve this objective, it is imperative that staff be trained to provide customers with efficient and effective customer service.

#### C. Fire Department

Fire Chief Dennis Compton, Assistant Fire Chief Bob DeLeon, Fire Marshall Dan Stubbs and Management Assistant Dorinda Larsen addressed the Committee relative to this agenda item. Chief Compton provided a brief overview of the various components of the fire and life safety infrastructure.

Chief DeLeon reported that in addition to the many internal customers within the City organization, the Fire Department's external customers include everyone (residents, public schools and public buildings) affected by the City's fire and life safety infrastructure. He advised that it is the mission of the Department to educate its customers regarding the Fire Code and a variety of fire-safety issues; enforce regulations through education; conduct ongoing evaluations of the Fire Code, and address the financial aspects of various fire safety systems.

3. Discuss Mesa's Land Development Processes.

A. Building Safety

Ms. Pearl reported that last year, for the first time, the entire staff of the Building Safety Division attended mandatory training sessions which focused on a variety of topics including team building and customer service. She noted that ongoing training will continue in an effort to provide staff with the necessary skills to make Mesa a more "business friendly" environment.

Mr. Welker provided the Committee with additional information regarding the course and scope of Development Engineering, the plan review process, and the permit process.

Mr. Harding addressed the Committee and provided a brief overview of the plan review process. He stated that the Plans Coordinator initially reviews a set of plans for completeness, and that the plans are logged into the Division's tracking mechanism and subsequently reviewed by a variety of disciplines for conformance with and compliance to various codes, ordinances and other applicable rules and regulations. Mr. Harding commented that one of the Division's biggest challenges is to reduce the number of plan resubmissions, which is not only a time consuming process for the applicant and staff, but is also not conducive to a project's completion. Mr. Harding added that staff has also met with some of Mesa's major development customers in an effort to solicit feedback regarding their experiences, concerns and methods in which the City can better serve their needs.

Discussion ensued relative to the fact that the first and second submissions on commercial projects have turnaround times of 25 to 30 days, and a third submission of 12 days; that staff is currently achieving approximately 80% of the target turnaround times due in part to several unfilled staff positions, and an expedited review process, wherein a plan review can be accomplished in-house by City staff, or in the alternative, the applicant can request an outsource review be conducted by an independent engineering firm.

Mr. Harding advised the Committee that staff will continue to engage in customer service training in a variety of areas including telephone manners, the tracking of projects, and greater consistency relative to plan reviews.

Councilmember Thom voiced concerns regarding the difficulties small business owners have experienced in obtaining building permits and completing the plan review process in a timely manner. She stated that it is imperative that the process become more streamlined and user friendly to encourage small businesses to remain in or relocate to the City of Mesa.

Further discussion ensued relative to the need for revised checklists; the creation of an employee procedures manual to achieve greater consistency in the plan review process; the development of a series of brochures to disseminate the correct information to applicants

submitting plans; the implementation of the Preliminary Plan Review Team; the creation of a Screening Team to screen out incomplete projects at the permit counter, and the recent implementation of Residential Plan Reviewers to initially screen plans before they are placed into the City's system.

Committeemember Walters expressed support for the implementation of a checklist to ensure that the applicant has submitted all of the necessary items to proceed with the plan review process.

In response to a question from Committeemember Walters, Ms. Pearl explained that staff is in the process of conducting a Customer Service Survey to solicit feedback from applicants regarding their contact with the City of Mesa Building Safety Division. She added that she engages in ongoing dialogues with industrial customers relative to implementing schedules and plans to more expeditiously process their projects.

Deputy Building Safety Director Steve Hether reported that his staff is charged with on-site enforcement of building codes, violations of building ordinances and various inspection requests. He noted, however, that all engineering-related inspections are conducted under the purview of the City's Engineering Department. Mr. Hether stated that at the present time, the City's 24 inspectors conduct approximately 4500 inspection stops per month and perform between 10,000 to 12,000 inspections.

Additional discussion ensued relative to remedying building deficiencies through compliance alternatives on approved plans; the implementation of cross training programs for inspectors and plan examiners to "close the gap" of inconsistencies between the two areas, and the configuration of the Building Safety Division's automation system.

Ms. Pearl informed the Committee that there is great disparity among Valley municipalities regarding which building codes are utilized by the respective Building Safety Divisions. She explained that the City of Mesa currently uses the 1994 Uniform Building Code, whereas most other jurisdictions use updated "I" Codes or Uniform Codes. Ms. Pearl added that the fees imposed by the surrounding cities are also disproportionate and noted that Mesa currently charges the second to the lowest fees in the Valley.

(Chairman Griswold declared a recess at 10:15 a.m. The meeting reconvened at 10:20 a.m.)

B. Planning:

Mr. Mizner provided the Committee with a brief presentation on "Planning and Zoning 101." He commented on the importance of planning with respect to development and redevelopment within the City of Mesa. Mr. Mizner discussed State law mandates and enabling legislation that pertain to municipal planning. He also commented on Growing Smarter requirements regarding zoning and General Plan coordination, the public participation process and major vs. minor General Plan amendments and reviewed the various means of implementing the City's General Plan, including capital improvement projects, policies, zoning and annexations.

Mr. Mizner provided a brief history of zoning in the United States and said that the purpose behind zoning is to ensure that land uses are compatible, orderly, and consistent with planning. He reported that local zoning authority is granted through State law.

Mr. Mizner defined and commented on the various aspects of zoning including site plan approval, time limits, conceptual zoning, conditional use permits, design review, site plan modification, special use permits, council use permits, citizen participation and rezoning. He noted that staff follows specific procedures in conjunction with each aspect of zoning.

C. Fire

Fire Marshall Dan Stubbs addressed the Committee and provided a brief overview of the Fire Department's involvement in Mesa's land development process. He reported that the Department's process entails emergency operations, which includes the safety infrastructure of a building, the structure's water supply, vehicle access, the building's access for rescue and firefighting, and building challenges to protecting life and property; Fire Code interpretations; the ongoing evaluations of structure, systems and processes, and Fire Code consistency.

Fire Marshall Stubbs added that staff meets on a monthly basis to discuss Fire Code issues and to ensure that the codes will be interpreted and applied consistently by individuals throughout the Department.

Discussion ensued relative to Fire Department statistics regarding responses to emergency calls, and a comparison of property losses in buildings equipped with or without automatic sprinkler systems.

4. Discuss – Staying Business “Friendly” in a Regulatory Environment.

Due to time constraints, this agenda item was continued to a future Land Development Ad Hoc Committee meeting.

Ms. Pearl advised the Committee that due to scheduling conflicts, the next meeting will be held on August 20, 2002.

Committeemember Griswold thanked staff for the informative presentations.

5. Adjournment.

Without objection, the Land Development Ad Hoc Committee meeting adjourned at 11:00 a.m.

I hereby certify that the foregoing minutes are a true and correct copy of the minutes of the meeting of the Land Development Ad Hoc Committee of the City of Mesa, Arizona, held on the 5<sup>th</sup> day of August 2002. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that a quorum was present.

---

BARBARA JONES, CITY CLERK