

# LAND DEVELOPMENT AD HOC COMMITTEE

August 20, 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 20, 2002 at 9:00 a.m.

COMMITTEE PRESENT

Rex Griswold, Chairman  
Kyle Jones  
Claudia Walters

COUNCIL PRESENT

None

OFFICERS PRESENT

Paul Wenbert

(Chairman Griswold excused Committeemember Walters from the beginning of the meeting.)

1. Staying Business "Friendly" in a Regulatory Environment.

Building Safety Director Crystal Pearl welcomed everyone to the second meeting of the Land Development Ad Hoc Committee.

A. Building Safety

Deputy Director for Plan Review Dave Harding addressed the Committee relative to this agenda item. He reported that one of the biggest challenges that the Building Safety Division encounters is a lack of desire on the part of the development community to comply with various codes and standards. Mr. Harding commented that he has also discovered that many customers often have preconceived notions regarding the manner in which they will be treated by City staff. He added that due to Mesa's ever increasing population, it has been necessary for the Building Safety Division to institute a more formalized series of improvement processes.

Deputy Building Safety Director Jeff Welker commented that staff has also encountered challenges from the development community relative to the assessment of fees and charges which are necessary to recover the cost of various City services; that staff is often confronted by applicants/developers who request a reduction or waiver in fees; that only the City Council has the authority to make such modifications; that the current fee schedule does not recognize different areas of the City for redevelopment, and that Mesa charges the lowest fees in the Valley when compared to other municipalities of a similar size. He explained that another challenge encountered by the Building Safety Division involves developers who operate exclusively in Mesa and are often concerned when incremental fee changes are imposed, per

City Code amendments. Mr. Welker noted that in an effort to address the above-referenced challenges, the Building Safety Division staff has undergone a series of training sessions to more effectively respond to the needs and concerns of the development community.

Discussion ensued relative to the fact that the Building Safety Division now employs licensed professionals (i.e. architects and engineers) as opposed to plan checkers to review plans, and that staff no longer "red lines" plans as extensively as in the past.

Deputy Building Safety Director Steve Hether reported that in an effort to stay business "friendly" with the development community, the Building Safety Division field inspectors have the ability to grant an applicant a temporary Certificate of Occupancy pending final approval of all life safety issues. He explained that such inspections enable a business owner to commence operations, stock products at the business site, and ensure the safety of employees despite the fact that not all aspects of the project, such as landscaping, have been completed.

#### B. Planning

Planning Director Frank Mizner addressed the Committee relative to this agenda item, and commented that Mesa did not become a community with over 430,000 residents by being unfriendly to the business community. He explained that although the City has always been receptive to residential, commercial and industrial developers, problems have arisen due to the fact that the City's fee schedules, as well as regulations and standards, have not kept pace with those of other Valley communities.

Mr. Mizner provided a brief overview of Mesa's Zoning Ordinance, which was adopted by the Council to regulate land usage, signage, building design, and the configuration of subdivisions. He explained that every city has a zoning ordinance, and although the process may be somewhat different, the general criteria to regulate such laws are consistent from city to city.

Mr. Mizner informed the members of the Committee that Mesa's Design Guidelines have recently been updated to achieve a comparable level with other Valley communities; that Mesa business owners are going through a transition phase with the new Guidelines which were not in existence 20 years ago, and that the Guidelines represent a document which reflects the priorities of the Council, as well as the will of the community.

Mr. Mizner provided a short presentation on the Desert Uplands Guidelines and reported that the purpose of the document is to ensure that the unique quality of Mesa's Upper Sonoran Desert area remains in place. He stated that the Guidelines address various provisions such as street design, street lighting, the preservation of native plants, and the non-disturbance of required open spaces.

(Committeemember Walters arrived at the meeting at 9:17 a.m.)

Discussion ensued relative to the fact that Mesa has planning requirements for citizen participation, as established by State law; that staff is called upon to address legal protests when citizens express opposition to issues such as a zoning case or a site plan modification; that the Mesa City Code authorizes the Planning Director to make minor changes to a site plan through the use of an administrative amendment; that staff must be consistent in their enforcement of regulations and not display favoritism to one developer over another; that staff

attempts to balance regulations with flexibility relative to life safety issues, and that staff offers applicants the opportunity to participate in pre-submittal meetings to discuss the feasibility of a proposed project.

C. Fire

Assistant Fire Chief Bob Deleon and Fire Marshall Dan Stubbs addressed the Committee relative to this agenda item.

Chief Deleon displayed graphics in the Council Chambers and provided a brief overview on the various methods by which the Mesa Fire Department endeavors to be business "friendly."

Fire Marshall Stubbs outlined the process improvements that the Fire Department has undertaken including accreditation, review of current processes, evaluation of staff needs, and action planning with current customers.

Discussion ensued relative to the fire sprinkler codes utilized throughout the surrounding Valley communities.

Development Services Director Jack Friedline assured the members of the Committee that staff is committed to conveying professionalism and friendliness throughout their involvement with the development community. He also thanked the Committee for its input and suggestions relative to improving staff performance within various divisions.

2. Discuss Process Improvements, Past and Current.

A. Building Safety

Mr. Welker provided a short synopsis of various Building Safety Division process improvements including the creation of the Development Advisory Forum, wherein City staff and members of the development community meet to address a wide range of development topics; the newly created Building Board of Appeals, and the recently remodeled customer service area located in the Building Safety Division building.

Mr. Harding commented further on a series of current and ongoing process improvements in the Building Safety Division. He reported that a program entitled Tenant Improvement Thursday has been implemented, whereby staff focuses on reviewing tenant improvement projects on Thursdays in an effort to expedite turnaround and eliminate the current backlog. Mr. Harding added that Resubmittal Fridays is a similar program wherein staff reviews resubmittals on Fridays to again lessen turnaround time relative to the processing of such documents. He also briefly outlined a number of other process improvements including Residential Counter Review; the hiring of Technical Development Consultant Registrants to assist City Plan Examiners with various disciplines; weekly Plan Examiner meetings and interdepartmental meetings and the cross training of staff.

Mr. Hether briefly outlined a number of process improvements in the area of field inspections including, but not limited to, the reorganization of staff to provide additional supervision in the field and to improve customer service; the utilization of Senior Inspectors to provide greater consistency in the interpretation of various building codes, and the installation of the Building

Inspection Process (ABIP), an automated building inspection system designed to allow inspections to occur at any time during the day. He added, however, that twice-a-day inspections have been eliminated due to staffing limitations.

Ms. Pearl acknowledged that all of the previously outlined process improvements were a joint effort of not only the Building Safety Division, but the Planning Division and the Fire Department as well.

Mr. Welker discussed current process improvements including the implementation of a Plan Review Fee process and the collection of upfront plan review fees. He also briefly outlined an enhanced communication pilot program whereby a Civil Plans Examiner will contact the applicant prior to reviewing a set of plans, introduce himself/herself, provide a phone number to the applicant if there are any questions or concerns, communicate the results of the plan review, and also contact the owner/developer in addition to the professional registrant.

Chairman Griswold commended Mr. Welker for the fresh and innovative process improvements to make Mesa a more business "friendly" community.

Mr. Harding outlined ongoing process improvements in his area of the Building Safety Division, which include staff reorganization designed to maximize production; staff training; the creation of a handbook which addresses turnaround times for the various plan submission categories; and the formation of a Screening Team, comprised of staff from the Fire Department, Building Safety Division and Planning and Zoning Division, to ascertain and ensure that an applicant's plan submission is complete and meets all necessary criteria.

Discussion ensued relative to the proposed criteria and scope of the Screening Team.

(Chairman Griswold declared a recess at 10:45 a.m. The meeting reconvened at 10:55 a.m.)

Mr. Harding concluded his remarks by noting that the Building Safety Division is also in the process of implementing a tag mark system, which is designed to alleviate manual processing; improved website enhancements for the online processing of permits, permit status and other documents that will be more accessible to the public, and a simplified fee valuation table.

Mr. Hether advised that the Building Safety Inspection area has a number of ongoing process improvements such as the transfer of landscaping and building design inspections to the Planning Division; improved wireless communication; an ongoing audit to assess the department's processes, and a customer survey.

Committeemember Walters requested that staff provide the Committeemembers with an updated Land Development Process Work Plan, which includes a timeline of project implementation.

In response to a series of questions from Committeemember Jones, Ms. Pearl commented that staff has created a series of informational brochures to educate the public with regard to the processes and procedures that must be followed in order to complete various projects within the City of Mesa. She added that staff has also begun to write a Rehab Code specific to Mesa which addresses the manner in which the City processes construction to existing buildings.

Committeemember Jones commended staff for their efforts and hard work relative to the current and ongoing process improvements. He also stressed that in order for Mesa to be a business "friendly" environment, it is imperative that staff receive the necessary training to enable them to effectively respond to the needs of citizens and the development community as well.

Further discussion ensued relative to the fact that the Building Safety Division staff has begun to meet with representatives of various corporations that use the City's services on a regular basis to obtain input relative to the City's performance and ways in which the City may better serve the development community.

#### B. Planning

Mr. Mizner briefly outlined the Planning Division's process improvements including the Division's presubmittal meetings; the recent adoption by the City Council of the Mesa 2025 General Plan; the completion and adoption of the new Design Guidelines, and the reorganization of the Plan Review Section to address zoning issues relative to the plan review process.

#### C. Fire

Chief Deleon addressed the Committee, referred to graphics displayed in the Council Chambers, and discussed a number of process improvements pertaining to the Fire Department, including Fire Code Review; Partners In Prevention; Fire Department/Prevention Accreditation; Fire and Life System Maintenance Program, updating standard operating procedures as needed, and a monthly training program.

Discussion ensued relative to sprinkler inspection.

Technical Development Engineer James Frater provided the Committee with a brief overview of the Building Safety Division/Fire Department Task Force. He explained that the purpose of the group is to establish greater consistency and teamwork between both divisions relative to fire-related construction code interpretations, inspections and plan review. He also noted that the cross-functional team has reengineered the fire inspection process and established eight recommendations including one that measures and monitors data; one prime inspector per permit; ID training and qualifications; developing written procedures; scheduling inspections on real time; an internal appeal process; a joint statement of understanding, and joint process improvement.

Committeemember Jones requested that staff provide the members of the Committee with a description of the type of training that staff will receive to improve customer service skills, as well as a list of reward programs that are currently available to staff.

Chairman Griswold thanked staff for their informative presentations.

### 3. Adjournment.

Without objection, the Land Development Ad Hoc Committee meeting adjourned at 12:00 p.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 20<sup>th</sup> day of August 2002. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that a quorum was present.

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BARBARA JONES, CITY CLERK

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