

BRIEFING NOTES

NAME OF GROUP: PLANNING COMMISSION

DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF MEETING: Wednesday, December 2, 2009, 12:00 Noon
Room 113, County-City Building, 555 S. 10th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE: Lynn Sunderman, Wendy Francis, Jim Partington, Michael Cornelius, Dick Esseks, Tommy Taylor, Jeanelle Lust, Roger Larson and Leirion Gaylor Baird.

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE: Mayor Chris Beutler and Trish Owen, Mayor's office; Marvin Krout, Steve Henrichsen, David Cary, Brian Will, Christy Eichorn, Tom Cajka, Mike DeKalb, Ed Zimmer, Nicole Fleck-Tooze and Jean Preister of the Planning Department; Fred Hoke, Mike Lang and Virendra Singh on behalf of the Development Services Center; and other interested parties.

STATED PURPOSE OF MEETING: The Executive Management Team's Vision for the Development Services Center (DSC)

Chair Sunderman called the meeting to order at 12:00 noon and acknowledged the posting of the Open Meetings Act.

Marvin Krout introduced Fred Hoke as the Development Services Center (DSC) Manager. The Planning Department will be part of the DSC, which is an effort to improve coordination and customer service in the development review process.

Fred Hoke stated that he has made this presentation to the Chamber of Commerce and the Realtors Association of Lincoln, and will soon be making a presentation to engineers and the Home Builders Association. Hoke prefaced his remarks stating, "What you see is a vision – it is not cast in stone – it is constantly evolving and we want to be sensitive to the interests of all five departments: Building & Safety, Planning, Public Works, Urban Development, and Health."

Hoke advised that the DSC has been on a wish list of a number of mayors for about 20 years. Mayor Beutler is now in a position to help influence the development of this vision. It is basically an opportunity to define our external and internal customers and determine how to increase our customer service. This is a good time to implement this vision because construction costs are down, people are looking for work, and building permits are down.

The DSC will open on Monday, March 1, 2010. One of the issues we face is whether all of the processes and procedures will be in place on March 1st. The answer to that question is "no" because this is an evolutionary process that is going to take some time. Some city staff have reviewed the Web sites and information available for almost 100 DSC's across the country and have personally visited five. Lincoln has the opportunity to have one of the better development services centers.

Hoke then reviewed the DSC decision process. The Executive Management Team (EMT) consists of the Directors of the five departments in the DSC. The EMT has been meeting on a weekly basis. The goal is to speed up the process – we want to take out all of the glitches that sometimes exist in the process; want to make sure the proposal has not ended up in some in-basket somewhere and been delayed. The EMT is reviewing everything that affects the orderly development and implementation of a project that comes forward. We are looking at a much more simplified review process.

Hoke then shared some history which has brought the project to this point. About a year ago, the Mayor appointed a Citizen Advisory Committee, consisting of players and stakeholders in the development community, whose responsibility was to take a look at the concept of the DSC and make recommendations. During those deliberations there was a lot of heated discussion about the administration structure. Over a number of iterations of the administration structure, the Mayor believed that there needed to be a DSC Manager and appointed Fred Hoke. Mike Lang, Mayoral Aide, is going to continue to have some input into the DSC for some time and, as the Economic Development Director for the City, is going to serve as the DSC Manager's manager.

Hoke advised that all applications will come through the DSC. Some may come through electronically, but there will be an opportunity for the DSC Manager to know what's out there and what's coming through these five departments.

Hoke then reviewed the floor plan for the reconstruction on the second floor of the County-City Building for the DSC. The goal is to be operationally efficient and accountable, and to communicate. The bottom line is to make sure that the customer walks away from the experience positively and comfortable. The customer services of the DSC will include permit intake and issuance, plan review questions, inspection services, and centralized cashiering. Economic development is the heart of this city and we must have a positive economic impact. We need to be competitive with developers from all over the country.

From the standpoint of technology, Hoke advised that the DSC will eventually include an upgrade to software, which will be an upgrade to Permits Plus. It is anticipated that as the years go by, more and more individuals will walk into the DSC with their laptop. The entire second floor will have wireless capability. Records management is going to take a lot of work. The whole E-commerce issue will come to the forefront (credit cards, debit cards, etc.).

Hoke then reviewed some key items that are being "considered" during implementation of the DSC, i.e. continuous improvement including process improvement teams and codes/ordinance/requirement review teams.

Hoke acknowledged that the Planning Department has been doing project meetings or pre-application meetings for some time. As part of the DSC, it is being suggested that a lot of these pre-application meetings can still remain within the departments but the DSC needs to have

these entered into the system so that they can be monitored and provide feedback. There will be something like a progress evaluation meeting put in place with the right people at the table to work with the applicant.

The DSC Advisory Committee will now be meeting quarterly. And there is the intent to have a public development forum every three months to gather feedback and issues.

Communications will be supported among all departments. There will be regular updates on the status of the DSC with quarterly performance reports.

Larson inquired whether all of the departments are in this as a team. Hoke responded, "yes, very much so." There have been many discussions and everyone has had an opportunity to voice their opinion and to be heard. This is not cast in stone – it is an evolving process.

Larson inquired whether there would be some kind of alarm system if an application comes in and somehow gets stalled. Hoke stated that such a system is being built as part of the DSC. All of the projects need to come through the DSC and be recorded in the DSC. There is an understanding of how long it should take and Hoke himself will have the opportunity to monitor all of those projects. He will be responsible for investigating and resolving any stalled projects.

Esseks wondered how the Planning Department and Planning Commission fit into this process. Hoke advised that the Planning Department will continue to operate as a planning department – there is a team of individuals that will be invited to help put that flow together. The DSC needs to be aware of the projects that come in, and then the Planning Department and Planning Commission can continue to function just as they do today. We are ironing out how all of that is going to work. Our goal is a seamless continuation of how things are going now.

Larson asked Hoke whether he has personal authority to get something going. Hoke indicated that he does have authority, but he is not in a position to override legitimate decisions that have been made by the staff. He will be responsible to determine whether the staff did their due diligence to get to the decision that was made.

Partington recited a quote and suggested that success comes from changing the priorities of the staff as opposed to reorganization.

Francis assumes the Web site will be enhanced continually so that the applicant can track their project on-line. Hoke agreed. The DSC is in the process of creating a Web site and interviewing Web developers. This will not change the city Web site whatsoever. The requirement for the Web developer is that anyone can get to where they want from the DSC Web site.

Esseks asked how a change of zone would be submitted. Would the applicant have to go to the DSC first? Hoke responded that somehow or another at some point that request needs to be registered within the DSC and then it may go back out to the various departments. If the individual goes to Planning, then Planning will input the information into the DSC software. These are issues that still need to be resolved and Hoke will be working with the Project Managers. "We want to be more solution-oriented."

Marvin Krout pointed out that another area where Planning Commission is involved is standards and processes. Part of the job of the DSC is to continue to look at where we can improve, clarify, simplify, and streamline the standards and processes we have in place. The Planning Commission will have the role of evaluating where we can and should change those standards and processes.

Larson believes the meat of the whole thing is the attitude of the people involved. Hoke believes the staff will accommodate the changes that come about as part of the DSC.

Sunderman commented that 95% of all problems is communication and he likes the idea about communication between departments. And the process improvement team concept is exciting.

Meetings adjourned at 12:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jean Preister, Administrative Officer
Planning Department