

January 17, 2001; rev 11/11/04

Mecklenburg County
Engineering and Building Standards Department

Expedited Plan Review Options

Available to Customers in Commercial Permitting

Over the last four years, the Department has developed 3 expedited plan review options in Commercial Permitting:

- Express Review
- Professional Certification
- Added Plan Review Service

Using these options gives customers greater control of the time required to acquire a building permit. The first 3 options are available today.

Note that a 4th expedited plan review options, the Professional Priority Review Program, was proposed by the Plan Review Task Force in 2001, but was never activated as there was no consensus between the professional community and the Department on the reporting mechanism and criteria required by such an option.

Brief descriptions of each of the programs are attached. Questions on any of these programs may be directed to Willis Horton (336-4363), Kathleen Batey (336-3534) or Jim Bartl (336-3827).

Express Review Program Description

1. Background

Express Review is the first track created by Engineering & Building Standards (E&BS) for projects with special scheduling needs. In Spring, 1997, we initiated Express Review for renovations and upfits. In Summer, 1998, the program was expanded to include new construction projects of a defined scope.

Express Review is a premium service for a premium fee. E&BS maintains first review time goals of 5 days on small projects and 15 days on large projects, however some projects have schedules more aggressive than this. Express Review allows a project to obtain the building permit in 24 hours, subject to successful completion of the review.

One of the critical benefits of Express Review is its high success rate. Express Reviews typically are successful 80-85% of the time, in contrast to the regular reviews' average success rate of 21%.

2. Program Description

Submittal requirements and a full program description may be obtained from the Express Review Coordinator, however in brief, the program works as follows.

- Every week (subject to holidays), E&BS makes 3-one hour slots available for Express Review on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday nights.
- Express Reviews are scheduled in advance, typically requiring 3-4 weeks lead time.
- Review slots are allocated on a first come/first serve basis, no exceptions.
- A full application must be submitted with a non-refundable security deposit before the Express Review Coordinator will reserve a review.
- Only projects with a NC licensed Architect or Engineer are allowed to participate.
- The seal holding Architect and Engineer must be present at the review; failure of all seal holders to attend will terminate the review slot.
- The project team must be on time; late arrival will terminate the review.
- Terminated projects will be charged fully for the reserved Express Review slot.
- A preliminary code review is required on all new construction projects. At their discretion, E&BS staff may require a preliminary code review on renovations or upfits.
- The project description on the Express Review application is critical to the allocation of adequate time slots (1, 2 or 3 hours). The owner's team is responsible for clearly and accurately describing the scope of the work and subsequent review required.
- Express Review fees are in addition to all regular permitting fees: Currently the fee structure is:
 - a) Renovations and upfits: \$800.00 per hour
 - b) New Construction: \$950.00 per hour.
- For projects successfully completing their Express Review, permits will be issued the following morning

Additional detailed requirements are included in the Express Review packet. Please obtain and read this information carefully.

Inquiries regarding participating in Express Review should be directed to the Express Review Coordinator, Melanie Sellers (336-4963).

Mecklenburg County Engineering and Building Standards

October 15, 1999; revised 3/16/00, 3/18/00, 3/31/00, 1/17/01

Commercial Permits Plan Review Professional Certification Program Program Description

1. Introduction

Engineering and Building Standards Department (E&BS) is interested in providing customers with another plan review option and more control over permitting time, while at the same time promoting professional responsibility for code compliance. To that end, E&BS proposes initiating a commercial plan review Professional Certification Program component as a regular option available to projects with teams composed of qualifying professionals as the designers of record.

The proposed Professional Certification Program is the successor to the Commercial Permits Pilot Program Stages 1 & 2. The latter program is 3 years old and, though having seen limited use in the context of overall commercial plan review volume, has consistently exhibited an extremely low defect rate.

The idea for this new program is very simple.

- a) professionals qualify to participate in the program
- b) preliminary plan reviews are required at drawing 90% completion stage
- c) professionals provide a certification statement on code compliance on the 100% permit drawings
- d) the building permit is issued on application

The program will be available to all project types, subject to consensus being reached on the code logic presented in the preliminary review at 90% completion. Projects requiring review by the Department of Insurance or other authorities, may participate if a letter of approval from those authorities is presented at the preliminary review.

2. How the program will work

The Commercial Plan Review Professional Certification Program would consist of the following.

1. Projects must be submitted by qualifying professionals. Where review of more than one discipline is involved, each discipline must have a qualifying professional.
2. The qualifying professional must be the designer of record, that is, the professional sealing the construction documents.
 - Exception: where a professional firm's Professional Certification Program qualifying professional certifies another professional designer of record's work within that firm, both parties shall seal the construction documents. The qualifying professional's seal shall indicate it covers code compliance issues, in language stipulated by E&BS. In this case only, the certification statement signature shall be labeled "signature of qualifying professional".
3. A preliminary code review with Department staff will be required at the 90% drawing completion stage. The preliminary reviewed will be detailed and each professional shall provide a typewritten outline or notes summarizing their code logic.

4. Plans must be submitted with a statement, by the designer of record in each discipline, certifying compliance with 1999 NCSBC. Only the attached Department certification statement may be used.
5. Other earlier preliminary reviews may be requested by the design team as they feel appropriate, but a preliminary review at 90% drawing completion is required.
6. Permits will be issued the same day if applied for by noon. Permits applied for after noon will be issued the following day.
7. Construction may proceed at the risk of correcting changes found later by code enforcement officials (CEO).
8. Items identified by CEO's as not in compliance with code requirements, must be brought into compliance, regardless of whether or not they are in place in the field.
9. There is no fee for Commercial Permits Professional Certification Program projects, other than the normal building permit fee.
10. Definitions:
 - a.) 90% preliminary review drawing content: set must include 100% code compliance on key life safety issues, including: use declaration, construction type, fire ratings, fire separation, means of egress, special use requirements, and accessibility.
 - b.) What will be considered a major oversight or strike:
 - strikes only accumulate after the permit is issued
 - strikes may consist of any of the following.
 - Any key life safety issues missed
 - Details commented on in the 90% meeting which are subsequently not addressed in the permit drawings
 - A strike is a project event that falls in the above criteria, not each individual oversight or detail *in error*.

3. How professionals qualify for participation

1. Qualifying professionals must:
 - Hold a license as a North Carolina Architect or Engineer
 - pass the NC Building Officials Level III class and test, for their particular discipline
 - pass the NC Building Officials Law and Administration class and test
 - pass the NC Building Officials Level III certification exam, for their particular discipline
 - provide to E&BS a copy of the pre-certification letter from the Code Qualification Board, as a Level III Code Official, for their particular discipline
2. Professional Certification Program qualified participants who perform poorly, will be subject to disqualification from the program.

The criteria for disqualification will be 3 projects showing major oversights in adherence to process or code requirements (*also referred to as strikes*). Disqualification will be for a minimum of 1 year. Reinstatement will be through a joint interview with, and at the discretion of, the head of commercial plan review, the CPM of the affected trade, and the Director of Code Enforcement.

4. Benefits

- for owners, an expedited permitting process
- for owners, fewer code related field problems and delays in construction
- for E&BS, a higher level of code compliant documents submitted for permitting
- for E&BS, a decrease in projects requiring 2nd, 3rd and 4th reviews
- for professionals, a marketing edge as a qualifier for the Professional Certification Program.

5. Program initiation date

This program is effective immediately.

**Mecklenburg County
Engineering and Building Standards**

March 16, 2000; *revised January, 17, 2001*

**Commercial Permits Plan Review
Professional Certification Program**

Certification Statement – Version 7

To be included on the lead sheet of each discipline

I certify that these construction documents, *as prepared by me or under my responsible supervision for the (insert applicable discipline) portions of this project*, have been thoroughly reviewed for code compliance and, in my professional opinion, are in compliance with the *applicable* requirements of the North Carolina State Building Code, 1999 Edition, including all amendments by the North Carolina Building Code Council adopted and *published* as of the date of *this statement*.

January 17, 2001

Mecklenburg County
Engineering & Building Standards Department

Added Plan Review Service

program description using independent contractor CEO resources.

1. Background

In June, 1999, the North Carolina General Assembly passed initiatives removing conflict of interest criteria as a roadblock to the use of independent contractor (3rd party) code enforcement officials (CEO) by the Department. However, this legislation was written generically excluding some elements which we wish to incorporate in a Department policy. Specifically, the legislation makes no reference to the use of NC licensed architects and engineers.

In order to develop a comprehensive policy, the Department held several management meetings to outline concerns and policy needs. During the fall, 1999, these points were reviewed with E&BS Director Bobbie Shields, as well as CEO's on staff. The policy was further refined, reviewed with the BDC on 11/8/99 and became effective on January 4, 2000. The Department is currently running a very successful first year pilot, in both field inspections and plan review.

This program will be a premium service for a premium fee.

1. Customers participating

- Customers would voluntarily enter into an agreement with E&BS for added plan review services.
- The added plan review will be a premium service, with fees charged in addition to any regular project permit fee.

2. Who may participate as CEO's in the Added Plan Review Program

- By law, anyone may participate who does not have a conflict of interest, that is;
 - a) has not worked for the owner or developer in the last two years
 - b) is not related to the owner or developer
 - c) does not have a commercial interest in the project
- NC licensed architects or engineers, holding a standard level III (by Certification Exam) in their area of work.
- CEO's who have formerly worked for Mecklenburg County as CEO's in plan review or inspections, provided their field or office experience qualifies them for the specific project type.
- CEO's who work for Mecklenburg County as part time employees, provided their field or office experience qualifies them for the specific project type.

3. Notes on contract, A/E selection and discipline

- Project defined as: work on a defined site agreed to by Director and Core Process Manager's (CPM), and assigned to the independent contractor 3rd party CEO, or part time employee CEO.
 - Exact project type range subject to pilot testing
 - single family residential is excluded from the program

- Owner voluntarily enters into an agreement with Mecklenburg County to provide added plan review service on the defined project.
- In turn, the independent contractor (3rd party) CEO enters into a contract with Mecklenburg County for this specific project
- The cost of the contract is passed along to the owner, as defined by the Building Development Fee ordinance. The owner pays Mecklenburg County; Mecklenburg County pays the independent contractor CEO.
- Selection of engineers as independent contractor CEO's
 - Based on experience in discipline in question
 - Experience in project type to be inspected; (Minimum Projects)
 - Interview with core process manager (CPM), inspector, plan review rep (trade specific), and Director of Code Enforcement
- Architect selection as independent contractor CEO's: same as above
- Misrepresentation in interview may be cause for termination
- Contract to name the independent contractor CEO person or part time employee CEO:
 - This person to be among interviewees
- independent contractor CEO is the one with:
 - Level III experience
 - A or E NC license
- Contract form as stipulated by the County Attorney
- E&O conditions as stipulated by County Attorney:
- Conflict of Interest Verification as stipulated by the County Attorney
- Availability
 - During project: stipulated to be immediate
 - After project completed: strictly records based
- Discipline: as in express review, to be 3 strikes and you're out:
 - with automatic referral to Qualification Board and Licensing Board
 - Reinstatement will be through a joint interview with, and at the discretion of, the head of commercial plan review, the CPM of the affected trade, and the Director of Code Enforcement.

4. How the specific plan review component works in this program

- independent contractor CEO answers to an assigned plan reviewer
- E&BS designated reviewer is point person on:
 - Grey areas
 - Disputes / interpretations
 - Consistency
 - It is not another check of the review
- Plan Review process:
 - Plans reside with independent contractor reviewer
 - Questions/communication move directly between the owner's professional team and independent contractor reviewer
 - On completion of the successful review, the independent contractor provides 2 sets, with his/her approval signature, to E&BS for permitting
- revisions to approved plans may be included on an added service basis

5. Other

- Regular department CEO's must do either plan review or inspection, that is, a project may not have both plan review and field inspections done by an independent contractor CEO
- Definition of gross negligence: either
 - a.) Significant oversight impacting life safety
 - b.) Pattern of lesser oversights indicating lax, or improper code enforcement