

Plan Review Task Force

Final Report to the Building Development Commission

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Memo

Date: December 1, 2010
To: All Customers
From: James N. Bartl, AIA, Director of Code Enforcement
Re: Plan Review Task Force Reconvene Report

In the October 19, 2010 BDC meeting, the Department reported that all current Commercial Plan Review and Permitting changes planned over the last three years were in place and functioning well. This brought closure to a sweeping series of initiatives, developed jointly by the Department and the local professional community, to improve the process on both sides. This report briefly overviews the problems targeted by that effort, the participants involved, and the full range of changes resulting from this three year effort.

In late 2006, spurred by a slipping commercial plan review pass rate, the Building Development Commission (BDC) requested the reconvene of the Plan Review Task Force (PRTF). While the Task Force began meeting again in 2007 to address this problem, as well as the overall performance of OnSchedule and the Architects/Engineers (AE's) using these services, the effort quickly grew into a larger three pronged evaluation of the plan review and permitting process at large, including:

- a) Process engineering assessment; mapping the current plan review and permitting steps involved, identifying those of questionable value, as well as changes to improve process efficiency.
- b) PRTF reconvene; focusing on evaluating performance of Approved As Noted, developing a high performing AE stream, and other changes identified in the initial 2001 PRTF work, but postponed until the first round of 2001 changes could be measured for effect.
- c) Plan Review scope and benchmarking; evaluated the specific items checked by plan review staff on the full range of projects submitted. Also, surveyed authorities nationwide regarding how they document plan review expectations on projects and convey the same to their staff.

In January, 2008 the Department consolidated all three initiatives into a strategy entitled 2008 Proposed Commercial Plan Review Revisions, summarized on the following chart, and began to focus on the most challenging initiative, creating a hi-performing A/E stream, aka AE Pass Rate Incentives. In summer 2008, the local Chapters of the American Institute of Architects and Professional Engineers of North Carolina expressed concerns regarding the intent of AE Pass Rate Incentives, and in response the BDC and Department created the AE Pass Rate Subcommittee (of the PRTF) to work with AIA and PENC representatives, with a goal of creating a program that addressed the misuse of Department resources, while at the same time being fair to all AE's using the process. The AE Pass Rate Sub-committee worked from July through December, 2008, producing a concept program, which the Department detailed out and began phasing in starting on July 1, 2009. Along the way, the Department held two public hearings at the Charlotte Mecklenburg Government Center, on February 11, 2008 and February 9, 2009. Both hearings were heavily attended by the professional community. Concerns expressed were noted, reported to the BDC and reviewed for appropriate follow up with both the PRTF and AE Pass Rate Subcommittee.

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The following pages briefly summarize the results of this three year effort, including the following.

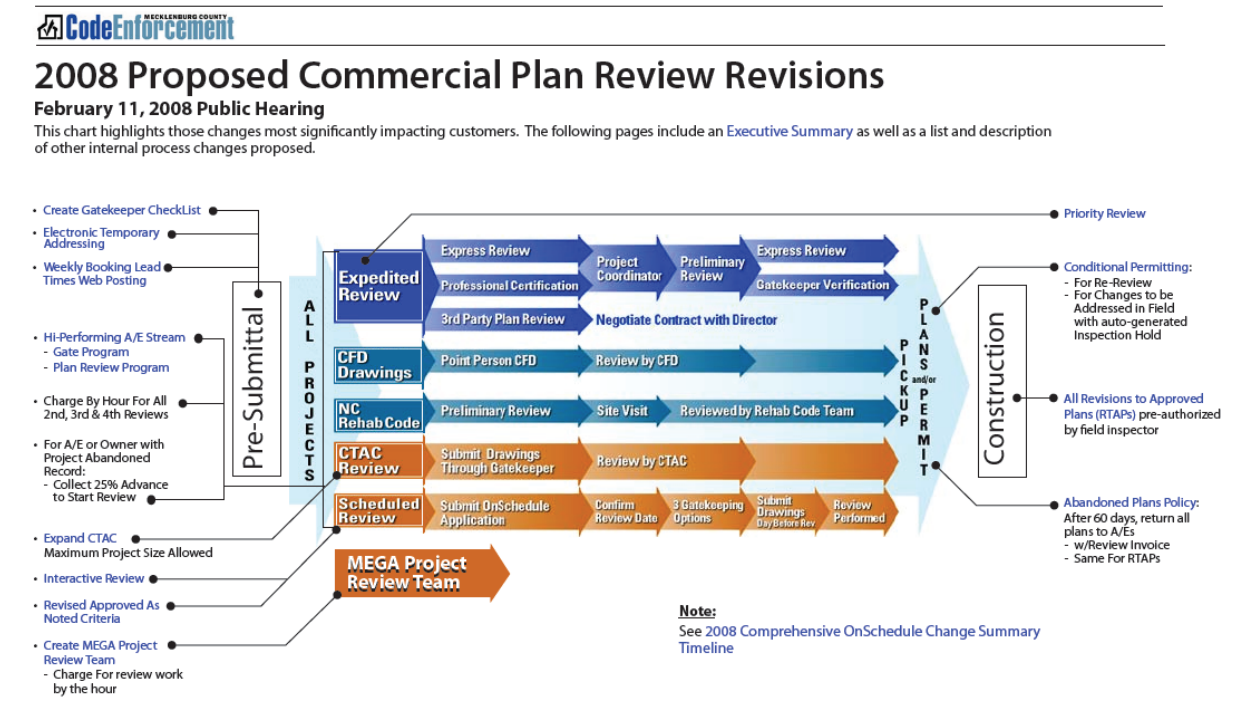
- 2008 Proposed Commercial Plan Review Revisions chart
- Program or initiative descriptions, listed in the order of their placement in service;
 - Electronic Temporary Addressing Tool
 - Lead Time Chart
 - Revised AAN criteria
 - Gatekeeper Pass/Fail Initiative
 - Expand CTAC
 - MEGA project Review Team
 - Interactive Review
 - Abandoned Plans
 - Gatekeeper Checklist
 - Revisions to Approved Plans policy
 - AE Pass Rate Program
 - AE Performance Level Chart
 - Failures Not a Failure Chart
 - Priority Review
 - Walk Thru Review
 - Review Schedule Preference
 - Peer Review Program
 - Preliminary Review/Advanced Appendix B Meeting
 - Auto Delay Program
 - Quarterly grading of AE
 - Posting of AE grades on internet
 - Conditional Review Program
 - Team Plan Review Program
 - Collaborative Review Program

Note: where detailed program work plans or rules are available, the related web page addresses are listed in the description.

- Appendices, including;
 - List of Architect, Engineer, BDC and Department participants in the PRTF and AE Pass Rate Subcommittee
 - Gatekeeper Pass Fail Initiative Document

The BDC and Department wish to express our gratitude to the members of the AE community who contributed their time to the PRTF and AE Pass Rate Subcommittee. Their efforts, along with contributions by Department staff, have significantly improved the commercial plan review and permitting process for all customers.

Part I



Temporary Addressing is used in limited circumstances; if it is not possible to provide a permanent address at the time of the submittal of the OnSchedule application. In these instances, it is possible to work with Addressing to create a temporary address in order to begin the process. The temporary address will be used **ONLY** during the plan review process. Permanent addresses must be established prior to permitting. The types of Projects eligible for temporary address are as follows:

- Projects that require Multi-Family approval
- Projects that require Subdivision approval
- Projects that require Planning approval

<http://charmeck.org/mecklenburg/county/CodeEnforcement/CommercialBuilding/Pages/Address%20Verification.aspx>

Lead Time Chart- This chart is a snap shot in time that enables our customer to formulate a reasonable expectation of when their project may be scheduled or reviewed through OnSchedule, Express Review, or CTAC.

<http://charmeck.org/mecklenburg/county/CodeEnforcement/PlanReview/Pages/LeadTimeChart.aspx>

Revised Approved as Noted Criteria provides a method for the Plans Examiner the ability to mark up minor items on construction drawings in order to approve a project without requiring it to be returned for a another review cycle. The PRTF reviewed the established Approved as Noted Criteria and made appropriate changes to refine and enhance the program.

<http://charmeck.org/mecklenburg/county/CodeEnforcement/PlanReview/Documents/RevisedApprovedasNotedCriteria.pdf>

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Gatekeeper Pass/Fail Initiative – (This initiative was undertaken, however does not currently operate due to the self gatekeeping tool.) One specific goal set by the PRTF was to identify strategies to stop gatekeeper failure rate growth and drive that rate down to a new lower plateau. The gatekeeper process was put in place in Spring 2001 to lower the amount of failures in the plan review process by ensuring plans are ready to be submitted for review. After a 6 year period, the gatekeeper failure rate has maintained a steady rate and has not significantly improved. The PRTF has met periodically from January 30, 2007, with meetings covering the following topics:

- Discussion of recent trends in industry gatekeeper failure rates, including review of most recent historical data
- Discuss and identify the causes of an increasing gatekeeper failure rate
- Outline possible strategies to mitigate the problem
- Review of ideas from members of the PRTF and selected outside parties
- Agree on a list of preferred actions and prioritize same

Expanding of the Commercial Technical Assistance Center (CTAC) - Beginning March 5, 2008, CTAC Review will review Business and Mercantile upfits and renovations up to 10,000 sf. This is a change from the previous threshold of 7,500 sf.

<http://charmcheck.org/mecklenburg/county/CodeEnforcement/CommercialBuilding/Pages/CTAC.aspx>

Mega Team - Effective July 1, 2008, all projects that meet the "Mega Project definition" will be subject to hourly permitting charges. Mega Projects are defined as (Per Section 106 of Building Development Ordinance):

Any high rise project (bldg with height at or above 75 feet above Fire Department access, as defined by the Building Code);

- Any assembly project w/ a gross square foot area of 100,000sf or larger;
- Any mixed use project with a gross square foot area of 200,000sf or larger;
- Any commercial or industrial projects with a gross square foot area of 300,000sf or larger;
- Any institutional project with two smoke compartments or a gross sq ft area of 50,000sf or larger;
- Other projects of similar size or complexity, requiring staff resources comparable to the above, as determined by the Director or his designee.

<http://charmcheck.org/mecklenburg/county/CodeEnforcement/PlanReview/Pages/Mega%20Project.aspx>

Interactive Review - The intention for Interactive Review is to reduce the number of review cycles needed during a review by encouraging communication between the reviewer and the designer of record during the first review cycle. Interactive Review will be used if Approved as Noted can not address the issues. The expectation is this communication will clarify questions and allow a response to correct the code issue(s) at hand. Utilization of Interactive Review will reduce the overall time to obtain an approved set of drawings. This initiative will apply to projects that typically take 1 – 8 hours of review.

The design professionals will be available by phone, fax, email or in person to participate in this program. Once contacted regarding a review, the design professional will respond within 48 hours (2 business days) or the review will be disapproved and the drawings returned. The plans examiners will have the comments to the designers no later than 3:00 pm and the designers will

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respond no later than 3:00 pm 2 business days later. The lead designer will provide to Mecklenburg County Code Enforcement a list of designers and their contact information (phone, fax, email) and the contact information of their alternatives, as needed, in an electronic form (ie, Word document) and on the Appendix B.

<http://charmeck.org/mecklenburg/county/CodeEnforcement/PlanReview/Documents/InteractiveReview.pdf>

Abandoned Plans- Included in the 2008 Proposed Commercial Plan Review Revisions is a significant change to our policy on abandoned plans. In the past, the Department has not aggressively pursued cases where the owner's team applied for a permit (with a detailed plan review proceeding through some or all cycles of the permitting process) and subsequently abandoned the project. Recent Department research indicates this practice leads to significant Department revenue loss, perhaps totaling \$300,000 to \$400,000 annually, while at the same time, consuming plan review resources which are unavailable to other projects. In a time of both continued high levels of plan review service demand and diminishing permit revenue, we've targeted this problem for mitigation.

The Department put in a series of simple steps to prevent this.

- Projects will be tracked after completion of each review cycle.
- The Department will contact projects with any completed review cycle abandoned for 60 days.
 - The point person for contact on these issues will be the owner's lead project design firm.
- We will invoice the lead project design firm for the cost of the plan review, based on review hours expended.
- The lead project design firm must pay the abandoned project plan review charge prior to submitting any other projects to the Department for review.
- In the event the abandoned project plan review charge remains unpaid 60 days after the invoice date, the lead project design firm will be required to submit an advance plan review deposit for all future project permit plan review work.

We believe this will address the problem effectively. In addition, it matches with the Department's position of aligning permit fees with the actual cost of services provided on projects, where possible. Currently these projects are using significant Department plan review resources, but other customers are bearing the cost.

<http://charmeck.org/mecklenburg/county/CodeEnforcement/PlanReview/Pages/Revised%20OnSchedule%20Fee%20Policy%20-%20Abandoned%20Plans%20Policy.aspx>

Self Gate Keeping Tool Starting on July 1, 2009, commercial projects entering the Mecklenburg County Code Enforcement Plan Review process will no longer have a formal gatekeeping review. Customers will be responsible for reviewing the [self-gatekeeping checklist](#) to ensure all necessary information is present on the construction drawings and all necessary accompanying paperwork is incorporated into the submittal sets. The self-gatekeeping checklist is a pdf with electronic form fields that can be saved, completed and emailed to the coordinator when it is time to submit drawings. It may also be printed and completed by hand for customers who prefer this method.

<http://charmeck.org/mecklenburg/county/CodeEnforcement/CommercialBuilding/Pages/Gatekeeper%20Checklist.aspx>

Revisions to Approved Plans

Mecklenburg County Code Enforcement now has several forms to guide the customer through the Revisions to Approved Plans (RTAP) process. In summary, plans should be re-submitted and reviewed for compliance if a permit has been issued for a project and code related changes to the approved set of plans are required. (NOTE: All scope changes do not require re-submittal of plans but should be addressed in the field with the Code Enforcement Official/Field Inspector.)

<http://charmeck.org/mecklenburg/county/CodeEnforcement/PlanReview/Documents/RevisionstoApprovedPlans42110%5b1%5d.pdf>

Part II

Architect and Engineer (AE) Pass Rate program The AE (Architect and Engineer) Pass Rate Incentives program goal is to support A&E's by moving them up in the plan review process because they take the profession and the OnSchedule process seriously, and have earned resulting high pass rates. Conversely, those professionals who abuse the OnSchedule process will move back, until they improve.

The program will categorize AE's into four major groups, Superior, Successful, Not Yet Graded and Poor performers. The AE Performance Level Chart outlines the incentives given to Superior performers, the services provided to Successful and Not Yet Graded performers and the disincentives for Poor performers.

<http://charmeck.org/mecklenburg/county/CodeEnforcement/PlanReview/Pages/AEPassFailRate.aspx>

AE Performance Level Chart – This chart outlines the incentives given to Superior performers, the services provided to Successful and Not Yet Graded performers and the disincentives for Poor performers.

<http://charmeck.org/mecklenburg/county/CodeEnforcement/PlanReview/Documents/OnSchAEperformancelevelchartV12at41510%5b1%5d.pdf>

Failures not Failures is a key component to the AE pass rate program. It identifies 16 key items that cause a project to be disapproved, however it does not count as a failure for the AE grades.

<http://charmeck.org/mecklenburg/county/CodeEnforcement/PlanReview/Documents/AEPassRatefailurenoreallyfailures12508wcolchgJNB%5b1%5d.pdf>

Priority Review allows Superior Performing teams to schedule an appointment for the 2nd review where the sealholder will be present for the review and can answer questions as they arise during the review.

<http://charmeck.org/mecklenburg/county/CodeEnforcement/PlanReview/Documents/PriorityReviewProgram%5b1%5d.pdf>

Walk Thru Review via Commercial Technical Assistance Center (CTAC) allows Superior Performing Teams to submit small projects through the CTAC area and wait for the plan review to be completed. The sealholders must be present for the review and the permit application must be complete. This is offered from 8:30 - 10:30 daily, first come first serve, with no more than 5 projects reviewed per day.

<http://charmeck.org/mecklenburg/county/CodeEnforcement/CommercialBuilding/Documents/AEWalkThruReviewProgramDescription41410.pdf>

Review Schedule Preference gives Superior Performing teams the ability to be scheduled first each day, giving them the first choice at the available times.

<http://charmeck.org/mecklenburg/county/CodeEnforcement/PlanReview/Documents/ReviewSchedulePreferenceProgram%5b1%5d.pdf>

Peer Reviews requires the poor performing individuals to obtain a peer review on their project prior to the required preliminary review. The peer reviewer will review the project and complete a **Peer Review Form** that will be submitted by the poor performing individual at the preliminary review meeting.

<http://charmeck.org/mecklenburg/county/CodeEnforcement/PlanReview/Documents/PeerReviewProgram%5b1%5d.pdf>

Preliminary Review Advance Appendix B Meeting requires poor performing individual(s) to attend a preliminary review meeting prior to the scheduled review date of the project. This

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meeting gives an opportunity for the poor performing individual(s) to walk through their code logic for the project and identify any potential pitfalls that could arise during the review of the project. The peer review form is submitted at this meeting.

<http://charmeck.org/mecklenburg/county/CodeEnforcement/PlanReview/Documents/PreliminaryReviewAdvAppBProgram%5b1%5d.pdf>

Auto Delay is a program that will automatically delay the scheduling of projects that are submitted by a poor performing team.

<http://charmeck.org/mecklenburg/county/CodeEnforcement/PlanReview/Documents/AutoDelayProgram%5b1%5d.pdf>

Quarterly grading of AE

AE grades are determined based on the pass/fail rate based on the most current 14 events in the plan review system. An event is defined as a plan review cycle. At the program start, each

Individual will receive 3 free passes. At the 7th event, a grade will be established. At the 15th event, the 1st event will fall off, so that the grade will be based on the most current 14.

The grades will be posted quarterly and will remain the same until the next quarter. Once posted, individuals have 10 days to appeal the grade.

<http://charmeck.org/mecklenburg/county/CodeEnforcement/PlanReview/Pages/AEPassFailRate.aspx>

Posting of grades on internet

The grades are posted on the Mecklenburg County Code Enforcement website quarterly. The public may query information by license number or name.

<http://webpermit.mecklenburgcountync.gov/ViewAEScore/default.aspx>

Conditional Permits - The Conditional Review Program allows projects that have Superior Performing design teams and High Performing Contractors the ability to begin work in the field on code compliant areas of the project while noted non-code compliant areas will be addressed through plan review. The program requires agreement between all parties and requires the **Conditional Review Form** to be completed as part of the process.

<http://charmeck.org/mecklenburg/county/CodeEnforcement/PlanReview/Documents/ConditionalPermittingProgramDescription%5b1%5d.pdf>

Team Plan Review is a program which allows Superior Performing teams to request the appropriate trade inspector(s) to be present at a preliminary review and subsequent plan review to discuss key code related items which may arise during the construction of the project. This is a premium service that will be charged additional fees above and beyond the traditional permitting fees. The charges will follow the pricing guidelines for the Inspection by Appointment program.

<http://charmeck.org/mecklenburg/county/CodeEnforcement/PlanReview/Documents/TeamPlanReviewProgramDescription%5b1%5d.pdf>

Collaborative Review is a program which allows Superior and Successful Performing teams the ability for the Plans Examiners and Architects/Engineers to discuss code related issues during the design of the project, prior to formal plan review. The level of formal plan review at the conclusion of the design of the project will be directly related to the level of "collaboration" performed during the design of the project. This is a premium service that will be charged at an hourly rate, similar to the Mega Review process.

<http://charmeck.org/mecklenburg/county/CodeEnforcement/PlanReview/Documents/CollaborativeReviewProgramDescription%5b1%5d.pdf>

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Appendices

PRTF Membership/Attendance

PRTF-PLAN REVIEW TASK FORCE		1/30/07	2/19/07	3/19/07	4/16/07	5/14/07	6/18/07	7/16/07	8/20/07	9/17/07	10/4/07	10/18/07
Member Name	Industry											
Bartl, James*	MCCE	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Barton, Steve	Axiom Architecture	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1
Brigham, Dale	Little	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Copeland, Jack	E.H. Copeland, Jr.	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1
Granson, Patrick*	MCCE	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Horton, Willis*	MCCE	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Manley, Roger	BB+M Architecture	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Pehl, Keith	Optima Engineering	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0
Rakatansky, William	Architect	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Sellers, Melanie*	MCCE	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
Sherrill, Harry	STV Architects	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1
Shultz, Dave	DSA/BDC	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Simcox, Rebecca*	MCCE	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1
Walker, Chuck*	MCCE	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Walton, Geri*	MCCE	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
PRTF-PLAN REVIEW TASK FORCE		11/1/07	11/15/07	11/29/07	12/13/07	1/10/08	5/13/08	6/24/08	8/13/08	9/30/08	11/24/08	12/10/08
Member Name	Industry											
Bartl, James*	MCCE	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1
Barton, Steve	Axiom Architecture	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1
Brigham, Dale	Little	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1
Copeland, Jack	E.H. Copeland, Jr.	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1
Granson, Patrick*	MCCE	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Horton, Willis*	MCCE	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1
Manley, Roger	BB+M Architecture	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1
Pehl, Keith	Optima Engineering	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
Rakatansky, William	Architect	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Sellers, Melanie*	MCCE	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
Sherrill, Harry	STV Architects	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
Shultz, Dave	DSA/BDC	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Simcox, Rebecca*	MCCE	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Walker, Chuck*	MCCE	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0
Walton, Geri*	MCCE	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0

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AE Sub Committee Membership/Attendance

AE PASS RATE SUBCOMMITTEE		7/8/08	7/29/08	10/8/08	11/3/08	11/24/08	3/10/09	4/23/09	7/22/09	11/9/09	3/31/10	9/30/10
Member Name	Industry											
Bartl, James*	MCCE	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
Barton, Steve	Axiom	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
Brigham, Dale	Little	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Casali, Renee'	Duke Energy	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0
Case, Ray	Architect	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Copeland, Jack	E.H. Copeland, Jr.	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1
Edwards, Ken	Edwards Architecture	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
Fink, Stephen	Signet Engineering	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
Granson, Patrick*	MCCE	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Hare, Mike*	MCCE	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Horton, Willis*	MCCE	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0
Kennedy, Hugh	Gas & Kennedy Engine	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
Manley, Roger	BB+M Architecture	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Mottern, Shawn	LS3P	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Onxley, Steve	Onxley	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Pethel, David*	MCCE	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Priest, Daniel	Priest Architecture	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
Prince, Eddie*	MCCE	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Rakatansky, William	Architect	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1
Schmitt, Steve	MSA	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Sellers, Melanie*	MCCE	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Sherrill, Harry	STV Architects	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1
Simcox, Rebecca*	MCCE	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1
Walker, Chuck*	MCCE	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1
Walton, Geri*	MCCE	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Walters, Larry	Gantt Huberman	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0
Watts, Charlie	Watts Leaf Architects	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0

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AE Performance Level Chart

OnSchedule A/E Grade Driven Service Summary

April 15, 2010

A/E Performance Level	SUPERIOR	SUCCESSFUL	NOT YET GRADED	POOR
Submittal Tools or Requirements	PASS RATE = 85% & ABOVE	PASS RATE = 50% TO <85%	No Pass Rate Recorded	PASS RATE < 50%
Basic services:				
-CTAC	√	√	√	√3
-Gatekeeping required	√	√	√	√
-OnSchedule	√	√	√	√
-Rehab Code Team	√	√	√	√
-Express Review	√1	√1	√1	-
-Professional Certification	√	√	√	-
-3rd Party Plan Review	√	√	√	-
-Pool Reviews	√	√	√	-
-Preliminary Code Reviews	√	√	√	√2
Other Services or Requirements				
-Approved as Noted	√	√	√	√3
-Interactive Review**	√	√	√	√4
-Priority Review	√	-	-	-
-"Walk Through" service	√	-	-	-
-Review schedule preference	√	-	-	-
-Conditional Permitting	√6	-	-	-
-Collaborative Review	√	-	-	-
-Team Plan Review	√5	-	-	-
-Auto schedule delay if poor performer on team 3	√	√	√	√
-Peer reviews required prior to scheduled review	-	-	-	√
-Electronic gatekeeping option (id)(EPS/EPR)	√	-	-	-
-"Gatekeeper Ready" documentation required (id)	-	-	-	√
-Advance Appendix B meeting required	-	-	-	√
-2nd, 3rd, 4th review charge by the hour applies (id)	√	√	√	√
-others to be identified				
Key: √ indicates tool is either available or required				
Notes:				
√1 - indicates teams with poor performers are allowed to use Express Review only if they perform a team prelim review and formally document same				
√2 - indicates poor performers are required to perform preliminary reviews on all projects, documenting meeting conclusions with formal notes submitted to the Department				
√3 - indicates changes made to the chart per 11-18-08 meeting				
√4 - Time limit reduced to 30 minutes and turnaround time 1 day, subject to director review				
√5 - During the initial phase, this program is available to Superior Performers only				
√6 - Pilot program				
(id) - indicates in development				

Memo

Plan Review Task Force Pass Rate Incentive Program - Gatekeeper

November 29, 2007

Auto-notification, Point of Contact, Gatekeeper Pass Rate Incentives

1. Introduction, issue and background

In Winter 2007 the Plan Review Task Force (PRTF) reconvened to review issues pertaining to the plan review services provided by Mecklenburg County Code Enforcement (MCCE). Once specific goal set by the PRTF was **to identify strategies to stop gatekeeper failure rate growth and drive that rate down to a new lower plateau**. The gatekeeper process was put in place in Spring 2001 to lower the amount of failures in the plan review process by ensuring plans are ready to be submitted for review. After a 6 year period, the gatekeeper failure rate has maintained a steady rate and has not significantly improved. The PRTF has met periodically from January 30, 2007, with meetings covering the following topics:

- Discussion of recent trends in industry gatekeeper failure rates, including review of most recent historical data
- Discuss and identify the causes of an increasing gatekeeper failure rate
- Outline possible strategies to mitigate the problem
- Review of ideas from members of the PRTF and selected outside parties
- Agree on a list of preferred actions and prioritize same

The Three Part Program as described below. The scheduled begin date is to be determined.

2. Plan Review Task Force Three Part Program

2.1 Email notification:

Customers will be notified by email when their project is schedule for review, the dates they may submit drawings, the deadline for submitting the drawings and a gatekeeper checklist to ensure the project package will include all necessary information. The customer is responsible for confirming the appointment by responding to the email.

2.1.1 This program requires agreement on expectations of service provided as follows:

- A. OnSchedule Coordinator will set the project appointment and notify the customer by phone and email. The email will include a gatekeeping checklist for the project.
- B. Customers have the option accepting the project appointment. The customer will need to send an email confirmation of acceptance.
- C. If the customer does not accept the project appointment:

1. The customer must notify the OnSchedule Coordinator of the request for a new project appointment.
 2. The customer must outline the dates the project appointment should be scheduled.
 3. If the customer wishes to change the project appointment and it results in changing the requested reviewers, the customer must verify in writing this is acceptable.
- D. Once the new project appointment is set, the customer will send an email confirmation of acceptance.

2.2 Point of Contact:

This will be the Architect, Engineer, Design Professional, Designer of Record or person responsible for the drawings (hereto known as Project Designer). This should be the person most familiar with day-to-day construction activities and the impact of gatekeeper inspection failure rates on the same. Only one Point of Contact is allowed. The reports sent to the “Point of Contact” will include but are not limited to:

- A. Quarterly Reports (as previously posted on the web)
- B. New quarterly summary for a contractors defect rate and re-inspection fee charge results.

The “Point of Contact” list will also serve as a contact list for industry notification of interpretation changes, process changes, etc.

2.2.1 Other details:

- A. The startup will be achieved by a targeted letter writing campaign and intense solicitation of Project Designers designees via e-mail or snail mail. This process is similar to how the contractors/A&E e-mail lists were created.
- B. Renewal is self-maintaining (i.e.: once the “program” goes into place, it is in the Project Designers interest to have the appropriate Point of Contact information on file.
- C. Tied to the plan submittal process; therefore the Point of Contact is verified electronically at plan submittal; the system will be programmed to request a current or new name, if required.

2.3 Gatekeeper Pass Rate Incentives:

- 2.3.1 **Purpose:** To improve project document readiness and to develop educational incentive opportunities for customers with high gatekeeper failure rates to aid them in improving their pass rates.

Background: Many project designers are very diligent regarding checking their work for compliance in advance of the gatekeeping station. This program rewards them by placing them ahead in the line of those who are less diligent (have high gatekeeping failure rates). Since history shows that project designers with high failure rates have trouble passing a second turn at gatekeeping, this program focuses on the gatekeeping resubmittal schedule and strives to give them more time to prepare for that event. Where the gatekeeping failure problem persists on resubmittals, the program requires more extensive pre-submittal work to increase the pass rate.

Result: Gatekeeping failure rates will decrease, saving gatekeeper resources, positively impacting our gatekeeping response times, and benefiting the conscientious customers with faster gatekeeping.

2.3.2 The Threshold:

- A. For the purpose of this initiative, “high gatekeeper failure rates” are considered by the Industry, Department and BDC as 40% or greater.
- B. The Industry and Department agree that at or above the 40% threshold, special gatekeeping process steps are applied.
- C. Calculate base gatekeeper failure rates on ten (10) events. An event is each contact at the gatekeeping station.
- D. Project designers falling into the “high failure rate performance net” would receive notice by the 10th day of the new quarter that they have been shifted out of the normal gatekeeping service process track and into a “high failure rate gatekeeping track”, in addition noting:

D.1. They will stay in that track until their gatekeeping failure rate falls below 40%.

2.3.3 The high gatekeeper failure rate track or process: The gatekeeping process for project designers in the “high failure rate gatekeeping track” will be determined based on two considerations:

1. Is the contractor considered a low or a high activity contractor as it relates to inspections count and:
2. Is the permitted work associated with other trade work or is it a stand alone project?

If the high failure rate contractor’s inspection activity count for the previous (reporting) quarter is a total of nineteen (19) inspections or less, but more than six (6), and the permitted work is not associated with any other trade (permit is a stand alone permit), the contractor’s permit fees will be adjusted as follows:

- For permit fees otherwise \$38.00 to \$500.00, the fee is tripled.
- For permit fees otherwise \$501.00 or greater, the fee is doubled.

****For this group; Section 2.3.4 does not apply.**

If the high failure rate contractor’s inspection activity count for the previous (reporting) quarter is twenty or more inspections or the permitted work is associated with other trade work (not a stand alone permit) the inspection process will be as follows:

2.3.4 The high failure rate contractor’s inspection requests will automatically be delayed for two days (all other contractors’ step in front of them on the priority list). After two days, the “high failure rate contractors” assume a position of parity with the other contractors, with respect to inspection requests.

- A. In addition, the high failure rate contractor picks from the following options on assuring the work is code compliant, advising the Department electronically at the time of the inspection request:
 - A.1. For the initial inspection: there will be no penalty if the inspection passes.
 - A.2. In the event the initial inspection fails, on the first re-inspection, prior to having the work re-inspected, the contractor will verify that the work is ready for re-inspection by having it pre-inspected using one of the following options:
 - A.2.1. Pre-inspection by the license holder (qualifier) and completing the Mecklenburg County pre-inspection form, posted on the site prior to the inspector’s arrival following the required two day delay. There will be no added charge under this option (however, calculation in overall project re-inspection fee charges will remain in this case).

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- A2.2. Pre-inspection by a seal holder (Architect/Engineer) or by a NC Code Enforcement Official not employed by Mecklenburg County and completing the Mecklenburg County pre-inspection form, posted on the site prior to the inspector's arrival following the required two day delay. There will be no added charge under this option (however, calculation in overall project re-inspection fee charges will remain in this case).
 - A2.3. Have the work re-inspected by utilizing the Inspection by Appointment (IBA) Program with the minimum two hour block at a cost of \$230 (two day delay required).
 - In this event, this inspection will be removed from the re-inspection fee charge calculation described in the fee ordinance, but will remain in the individual contractor's failure rate calculation
 - A2.4. Utilize the Department Inspector at \$90.00 per inspection after the minimum five (5) day delay, if available.
 - In this event, this inspection will be removed from the re-inspection fee charge calculation described in the fee ordinance, but will remain in the individual contractor's failure rate calculation.
- A.3. After the work fails a second time, only options A2.2, A2.3, and A2.4 are available.
- B. Contractors will be eligible to rotate off the "high failure rate contractors" list by one of two methods:
- B.1. Either successfully complete at least 12 contact hours of technical training in the NC Building Code. Accepted classes will be those offered through the NC Code Official Certification Program (upon presentation of documentation on passing the class, contractor is removed from the "high failure rate inspections track"), or
 - B.2. Maintain an inspection failure rate of less than 40%, on average, for a 3 month (full quarter) period.
- C. Contractors who rotate off the "high failure rate contractors" list, but thereafter have the quarterly failure rate exceed the 40% threshold in the next 5 years will be subject to the following:
- C.1. Successfully complete at least 12 contact hours of technical training in the NC Building Code. Accepted classes will be those offered through the NC Code Official Certification Program.
 - C.2. Maintain an inspection failure rate of less than 40%, on average, for a three month (full quarter) period.
 - C.3. Department has the discretion of notifying the appropriate NC Contractor Licensing Board advising them of issue. Such referrals will be made per the Department's February 26, 2004 Policy on A/E/Contractor case referral.

2.3.5 Assumptions:

Assumption #1: CC/CO/TCO changes will be in place, creating re-inspection fee calculation at Certificate of Occupancy.

Assumption #2: Program will have no exception (political or otherwise) and is applied across the board. Advise upper management that special allowances will undermine the program and service to the Industry.

Assumption #3: "Auto-notification" and "Point of Contact" are in place at program startup

Assumption #4: The POSSE system is audited to assure accuracy of the failure rate numbers used in the “program” calculations.

Assumption #5: Before program startup, the Industry and Department will review the defect codes classified as “non chargeable”, or in previous CCTF discussions “failures that are not really failures”. Part of this work will be to review how contractor failure rates are posted on the web, to assure contractors have all necessary information available.

2.3.6 The “Inspection Pass Rate Incentives” startup will be phased in.

- A. The threshold for the first six months will be 50%, those contractors immediately becoming subject to the “program”.
- B. During the first six months, contractors between 35% and less than 50%, will be notified of their performance and the impending change:
 - 1. By quarterly notice via e-mail
 - 2. By electronic notice at each inspection request
- C. After the first six months the program threshold is scheduled to fall to 40%, so all contractors at or above 40% will be subject to the “program”.

2.3.7 Industry notification of the “Inspection Pass Rate Incentives” startup.

- A. As soon as the public hearing is complete and the BDC votes in support of the program description, a targeted letter writing campaign will be affected to advise all contractors of the program startup.
 - 1. Plus an intense public presentation and information campaign will be planned with the HBA, MGCA, and other trade associations.
 - 2. At least four public presentations will be held in brown bag lunches at the Hal Marshall Service Center
- B. Electronic notification in advance of program start will include the following:
 - 1. Contractors over 45% will be notified in a first quarter electronic or snail mailing, of the program they are vulnerable to, noting that contractors at or over 50% will be fully subject to the new program on (date)
 - 2. Contractors between 35-45% will be notified in a first quarter electronic or snail mailing, of the phased in program they will be subject to from (date) through (date). In addition, they will be advised the contractors at or over 40% will be fully subject to the program on (date).
- C. Post program startup notification for contractors between 35% and less than 50%, will be as described in 2.3.6.B.