

Development Review in Local Government: Benchmarking Best Practices

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Introduction

The local government development review process is multifaceted and complex. Although common elements are found across all local governments, variations abound and specific processes are influenced by community characteristics and desires. Nevertheless, most communities desire a development review process that is fast, thorough, and fair. These desirable qualities were the foci of this project and led project researchers and participants to three local governments with exceptionally strong development review operations — the cities of Henderson, Nevada; Tallahassee, Florida; and San Diego, California. Administrative officials in these municipalities graciously accepted our invitation to participate in this benchmarking project and provided a wealth of process information to support this study.

A careful review of documents pertaining to the development review operations of our benchmarking partners, followed by site visits to all three, revealed five common characteristics among these development review leaders:

- A commitment to delivering services at a level and cost that match the scale of development in their communities
- Customer-focused services
- Transparency
- Reliance on high-functioning technology
- Extraordinary relationships with information technology support personnel

During site visits project participants were exposed to a wide array of ideas regarding specific project elements. These ideas pertained to process financing, stakeholder engagement, and process management. Many of the ideas participants encountered during the site visits already have been adapted for use and implemented in some of the nine North Carolina cities and towns that sponsored this project. Many others have been rated by community officials as likely to be implemented in the months ahead.