






COBB COUNTY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Tim Lee, Chairman; Helen Goreham, Commissioner; Bob Ott, Commissioner; JoAnn K. Birrell, Commissioner; Lisa Cupid, Commissioner; Judy Williams, Planning Commissioner; Bob Hovey, Planning Commissioner; Mike Terry, Planning Commissioner; Christi Trombetti, Planning Commissioner; and Galt Porter, Planning Commissioner

FROM:  Rob Hosack, Director;  John Pederson, Manager; and  Dana Johnson, Manager

CC: David Hankerson, County Manager; Deborah Dance, County Attorney; and Candace Ellison, County Clerk

DATE: August 23, 2013

SUBJECT: NNI program staff response

On June 25, 2013, the Board of Commissioners heard a presentation from Ms. Carol Brown at their Work Session regarding a proposal to establish a neighborhood planning methodology in Cobb County called the Neighborhood Notification Initiative (NNI). This program was developed locally by Athens-Clarke County as a baby step towards creating a more comprehensive neighborhood planning system as seen in cities such as Atlanta and Seattle among many others. At the June meeting, Chairman Lee requested staff to return at another Work Session to respond to Ms. Brown's request. Below is the response from staff as to the process for creating, implementing, and administering the NNI concept and what the staffing requirements would be to undertake this new program.

Step #1 - Establishing NNI Program (one time process)

1. Draft comprehensive plan policies for neighborhood planning;
2. Planning Commission and BOC approval of neighborhood planning policies through comprehensive plan amendment;
3. Draft codes for establishing NNI;
4. Public hearings during normal Planning Commission and Board of Commissioners code amendment process;
5. Develop procedures and applications for administering NNI program; and
6. BOC approval of procedures and application.

Step #2 - Community Education (continual process)

1. Advertise NNI program to community groups in local media, e-mail, on-line, newsletters, and other types of communication;
2. Community education about how to establish “certified” neighborhoods under the NNI; and
3. Community education about the information to be provided by the county as it relates to the program.
 - a. This is a necessary step because “John and Jane Q Public” will not know the difference between a One-stop or Plan Review process; a Special Land Use Permit and a Temporary Land Use Permit; a Comprehensive Plan Amendment and a change to the Zoning Designation; a License Review Board Hearing and a Certificate of Appropriateness; etc. Providing the information directly to the public without this additional step of educating the community about the information being provided will cause more confusion. This will burden staff, Planning Commission, Historic Preservation Commission, and the Board of Commissioners with questions that they may not be able to do anything about. Therefore, this additional and continual step of education is necessary to ensure those that receive the information understand what they are getting.

Step #3 – Establish “certified” neighborhoods and Neighborhood Advisory Council (continual process)

1. One-on-one work with community representatives during neighborhood certification process;
2. Review of “certified” neighborhood applications for completeness;
3. Administration of approval process for “certified” neighborhoods through BOC approval;
4. Creation of Neighborhood Advisory Council to be lead by new staff planner; and
5. Quarterly Neighborhood Advisory Council meetings to discuss the program, its efficiency, community involvement, and other neighborhood based issues.

Step #4 – NNI information dispersal (continual process)

1. Certified neighborhood information updates (current contact information and distribution lists);
2. Mapping of “certified” neighborhoods after adoption by BOC;
3. GIS Database creation and upkeep for the following:
 - a. Site plan review;
 - b. One-stop;
 - c. Certificates of appropriateness;
 - d. License review board;
 - e. Comprehensive plan amendments; and
 - f. Planning study areas.
4. On-going coordination with DOT, Water, Public Safety, PRCA, and other Departments on upcoming public meetings and community building issues;
5. On-going compilation of all upcoming permits, meetings, and applications for each “certified” neighborhood based upon GIS geographic reference and buffer as determined in the adopted code;
6. On-going distribution of upcoming permits, meetings, and application for each “certified” neighborhood;
7. Answering questions and providing more specific information to neighborhood representatives as information is sent out about upcoming permits, meetings, and applications; and

8. On-going verification back to Division Manager's or staff leads at respective Departments confirming information dispersal (required step if this program is to be administered as part of the zoning procedures).

The system will require codification of the neighborhood planning process and failure to deliver information per the code may have an impact on the timing of applications being considered by the Board of Commissioners, Planning Commission, and/or Board of Zoning Appeals. This burden of responsibility should not be placed upon an intern, part-time, or temporary employee due to a possibility that a procedural taking could result from a violation of the new county code. This work will need to be completed by a full-time permanent professional planner that will be able to explain the process to the public, reach out to the community and educate them about the various processes and initiatives, and have the burden of responsibility of administering the code in a manner that does not deny an applicant their right to consideration of an application.

The following are workload measures comparing the Athens-Clarke County NNI, which is the basis for Ms. Carol Brown's proposal and a projection of what the workload would have been for Cobb County in the same time period if we were undertaking the similar program.

Calendar Year 2012		
	<i>Athens-Clarke County</i>	<i>Cobb County</i>
<i>Agenda Items</i>	308	1,068*
<i>Notices Sent</i>	764	1,499**
<i>Agenda to Notice Ratio</i>	0.403	
<i>County Population</i>	116,714	697,553
<i>County Size</i>	121.28 sq miles	344.51 sq miles
<i>Staff Hired for NNI</i>	1.5	2.9**
<i>Notice to staff ratio</i>	509.3	
* - note- development activity has increased substantially between 2012 and 2013		
** - projection for Cobb County		

Based upon the workload and workload measures listed above the following new staff positions will need to be created and funded to create and implement the Neighborhood Notification Initiative:

1. GIS Specialist to create, upkeep, and manipulate GIS databases (full time);
2. Planner III to operate and manage the Neighborhood Notification Initiative program (full time);
and
3. Administrative Assistant to assist the GIS Specialist and Planner III in administration of the program (part time).

The approximate cost, based upon the entry level position of each salary grade, for the three positions are \$36,504, \$48,560, and \$22,000 respectively for a total of \$107,064. Please note that this figure may be higher depending on the salaries negotiated as part of the hiring process. In addition, the full time positions would require additional expenditures or approximately 15% of salary to cover the cost of benefits. It does not appear that there will be a substantial start-up cost for the program from a technological standpoint, but there may be a need for a web portal to be created. If this were to be done by the private sector it could result in an additional one-time monetary allocation to the program of approximately \$5,000.