

## STAFF REPORT

### Planning Application Processing Schedule

July 8, 2008

Back in November 2007, the Department of Planning and Housing sent notice to our customers that the Department would not be processing zoning applications according to its normal schedule due to temporary staffing deficiencies. Now that we are fully staffed and operational, we are ready to again implement a more defined processing timeframe for applications. However, there were practical problems associated with our old processing schedule, including: (a) conflicts between Code defined processes and the published review schedule; (b) lack of time to fully coordinate internal review before sending comments to applicants, which sometimes resulted in incomplete and seemingly conflicting information to applicants; (c) applicants submitting incomplete applications in order to lock in a scheduled Council review and decision date; and (d) a schedule that doesn't account for down time while waiting for responses or information from applicants.

Staff has therefore drafted a new processing schedule that identifies key steps in the review process and identifies both City staff's and the applicant's responsibilities at each level in the review process. This would be a departure from our previous "deadline in – deadline out" approach, which set up expectations that often could not be met. The proposed new schedule puts deadlines on intermittent steps in the process rather than on the entire process, and better accounts for the submittal of any supplemental information or revisions. This approach would (a) give the applicant more control over when the "clock" starts and stops, (b) provide enough time for each step to be completed more accurately, and (c) provide a more realistic view of the total time it takes staff to process an application.

Before drafting this new schedule, staff surveyed numerous cities throughout Iowa to determine the average number of days they take to process the same or similar types of applications. The results of the survey are attached. From that information, we found that the City of Ames wasn't too different from other jurisdictions on average. It was significantly quicker on some types of applications, and clearly longer on others. The reasons for some of the differences were obvious; for example, a Special Use Permit involves review by two review boards in Ames rather than one, which lengthens that process by approximately 30 days. Reasons for other differences were less clear. However, staff is anxious to determine a processing schedule that is not only competitive, but also reflective of local codes, areas of focus, and operational differences in Ames.

The differences between other jurisdictions and the City of Ames processing times, both by past practice and under the proposed review schedule, are identified in the attached list of Examples of Application Processing Times. The list identifies the time frame that applicants should anticipate for the intermittent steps in various types of applications, as well as a possible shorter time frame that staff will strive to achieve. It then compares

these to the turn-around time of other jurisdictions, as well as the average time taken under the original review schedule.

Staff shared this information and the draft schedule with the development community during an early morning meeting on May 13, 2008. There was a good turn out, and comments were constructive and helpful. Primarily, there was voiced favor for the changes, with the understanding that any additional time for processing would result in less piece-mealed information. There was a request for a process that allowed informal review prior to submitting a formal application. (Staff explained that this is possible now by requesting a pre-application meeting with full DRC staff.) Most comments focused on what attendees believed were needed Code amendments to address some specific areas of frustration in the permitting process, including:

1. The timing of exterior lighting information. The Code requires detailed information on lighting lumens as part of a complete application. Can this be submitted at a later date in the approval process? The architect is responsible for doing the lighting plan, and this is the type of detail he or she would typically do at the building permit stage.
2. Remove erosion control review from DRC process. Make provisions for a separate SWPPP permit so that grading can commence more quickly.
3. Take Planning & Zoning review out of Special Use Permit (SUP) process. This would have SUPs reviewed only by the Zoning Board of Adjustment.

Staff can discuss the implications of these changes, and suggest amendments that would balance developer interests with the intent of current regulations, if the Council wishes to pursue further review of these items.

**Recommendation:**

The proposed application-processing schedule better defines the essential steps in the review process and identifies more clearly the responsibilities of both the applicant and City staff. It also provides a more realistic time frame for providing complete information and performing quality review, while yet being competitive with other jurisdictions across the state. It is therefore the recommendation of the City Manager that the Council direct staff to implement the proposed processing schedule.

## APPLICATION PROCESSING TIME SURVEY (2007 Calendar year)

The following is a summary of application processing times for various jurisdictions across the state of Iowa, including Ames, Des Moines, West Des Moines, Davenport, Waterloo, Council Bluffs, Dubuque, Ankeny, Urbandale, Cedar Falls, Marshalltown, and Johnston:

**Summary Notes:**

1. Averages are based only upon the number of jurisdictions to which an application type is applicable; not the total number of jurisdictions.
2. Figures do not include City of Ames except as noted. A separate column is listed for Ames for comparison purposes.

	Number of Jurisdictions	Days to process	City of Ames
Preliminary Plat	10	39	28 (West Towne not included because applicant put on hold)
Final Plat	10	41	20
Major Site Plan	9	30	28 East 13 <sup>th</sup> Mall not included - still in process
Minor Site Plan	9 <sup>(a)</sup>	21	50
Variance	10	25	17
Special Use Permit	10	26	57 <sup>(b)</sup>
Rezone	10	78	85 Excludes East 13 <sup>th</sup> Mall (in process) and withdrawn application for Stange/Bloomington.
Home Occupation	5 <sup>(c)</sup>	27 <sup>(d)</sup>	22

(a) Ankeny excluded due to undefined time frame

(b) Ames and Marshalltown are the only jurisdictions that require review of two boards

(c) Urbandale excluded due to undefined time frame

(d) Numbers reflect only those jurisdictions that require ZBA approval

**PROPOSED REVIEW SCHEDULE FOR CURRENT PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

The following tables reflect typical processing times for each of the City's current planning applications. The timelines address the number of days to process after specified stages of submittal. The specified days are 24 hour days, except that the final day ends at 5:00 p.m. regardless of submittal time.

<b>MAJOR SITE DEVELOPMENT PLAN PROCESSING SCHEDULE</b>						
<b>Submittal Date</b>	<b>Notice of Application Completeness</b>	<b>Begin DRC Review Process</b>	<b>DRC Final Comment to Applicant</b>	<b>Revisions submitted (if applicable)</b>	<b>Planning &amp; Zoning Commission Review</b>	<b>City Council Review and Action</b>
Determined by applicant	Within 3 working days of submittal	Tuesday following notice of <u>complete</u> application	Friday of following week	Determined by applicant	Between 12 & 26 days after final revisions submitted, or after request to process as is.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Council meeting following P&Z recommendation (generally 20 days)
	If application is incomplete, process begins anew on submittal date of new information.		If no revisions or additional information required, project will be scheduled for P&Z review within 12-26 days of final DRC comments.	Staff response to revisions within 7 working days of submittal. Applicant may revise again or request to process as is.	Number of days depends upon both date of submittal and the number of weeks in a month.	

<b>MINOR SITE DEVELOPMENT PLAN PROCESSING SCHEDULE</b>					
<b>Submittal Date</b>	<b>Notice of Application Completeness</b>	<b>Begin DRC Review Process</b>	<b>DRC Final Comment to Applicant or Decision</b>	<b>Revisions or request for decision submitted</b>	<b>Staff final action / decision</b>
Determined by applicant	Within 3 working days of submittal	Tuesday following notice of <u>complete</u> application	Friday of following week	Determined by applicant	Within 7 days of submitting revisions or request for decision.
	If application is incomplete, process begins anew on submittal date of new information.		For fully compliant projects, a decision to approve will be rendered. If revisions or additional information required, DRC comments will be sent to applicant.	Staff response to revisions within 3 working days of submittal. Applicant may revise again or request decision as is.	

<b>VARIANCE, EXCEPTION, AND SPECIAL HOME OCCUPATION APPLICATION PROCESSING SCHEDULE</b>				
<b>Submittal Date</b>	<b>Notice of Application Completeness</b>	<b>Staff Comment to Applicant</b>	<b>Additional information submitted (if applicable)</b>	<b>Zoning Board of Adjustment Review</b>
Determined by applicant	Within 3 working days of submittal	Within 3 working days of notice of complete application	Determined by applicant	Between 12 & 26 days after final revisions submitted, or after request to process as is.
	If application is incomplete, process begins anew on submittal date of new information.	If no additional information required, project will be scheduled for ZBA review within 12-26 days of final staff comments.	Staff response to additional information within 3 working days of submittal. Applicant may provide information or request to process as is.	Number of days depends upon both date of submittal and the number of weeks in a month.

<b>SPECIAL USE PERMIT APPLICATION PROCESSING SCHEDULE</b>						
<b>Submittal Date</b>	<b>Notice of Application Completeness</b>	<b>Begin DRC Review Process</b>	<b>DRC Final Comment to Applicant</b>	<b>Revisions submitted (if applicable)</b>	<b>Planning &amp; Zoning Commission Review</b>	<b>Zoning Board of Adjustment Review</b>
Determined by applicant	Within 3 working days of submittal	Tuesday following notice of <u>complete</u> application	Friday of following week	Determined by applicant	Between 12 & 26 days after additional information submitted, or after request to process as is.	ZBA meeting following P&Z recommendation (7 days)
	If application is incomplete, process begins anew on submittal date of new information.		If no additional information required, proposal will be scheduled for P&Z review within 12-26 days of final DRC comments.	Staff response to additional information within 3 working days of submittal. Applicant may provide information or request to process as is.	Number of days depends upon both date of submittal and the number of weeks in a month.	

**CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT APPLICATION PROCESSING SCHEDULE**

<b>Submittal Date</b>	<b>Notice of Application Completeness</b>	<b>Begin DRC Review Process</b>	<b>DRC Final Comment to Applicant</b>	<b>Revisions submitted (if applicable)</b>	<b>Zoning Board of Adjustment Review</b>
Determined by applicant	Within 3 working days of submittal	Tuesday following notice of <u>complete</u> application	Friday of following week	Determined by applicant	Between 12 & 26 days after additional information submitted, or after request to process as is.
	If application is incomplete, process begins anew on submittal date of new information.		If no additional information required, proposal will be scheduled for ZBA review within 12-26 days of final DRC comments.	Staff response to additional information within 3 working days of submittal. Applicant may provide information or request to process as is.	Number of days depends upon both date of submittal and the number of weeks in a month.

**PRELIMINARY PLAT APPLICATION PROCESSING SCHEDULE**

<b>Submittal Date</b>	<b>Notice of Application Completeness</b>	<b>Begin DRC Review Process</b>	<b>DRC Final Comment to Applicant</b>	<b>Revisions submitted (if applicable)</b>	<b>Planning &amp; Zoning Commission Review</b>	<b>City Council Review and Action</b>
Determined by applicant	Within 3 working days of submittal	Tuesday following notice of <u>complete</u> application	Friday of following week	Determined by applicant	Between 12 & 26 days after final revisions submitted, or after request to process as is.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Council meeting following P&Z recommendation (generally 20 days)
	If application is incomplete, process begins anew on submittal date of new information.		If no revisions or additional information required, project will be scheduled for P&Z* review within 12-26 days of final DRC comments.	Staff response to revisions within 7 working days of submittal. Applicant may revise again or request to process as is.	Number of days depends upon both date of submittal and the number of weeks in a month.	

**FINAL PLAT APPLICATION PROCESSING SCHEDULE**

<b>Submittal Date</b>	<b>Notice of Application Completeness</b>	<b>Staff Review Begins</b>	<b>Staff Comments to Applicant</b>	<b>Revisions submitted (if applicable)</b>	<b>City Council Review and Action</b>
Determined by applicant	Within 3 working days of submittal	Immediately following notice of <u>complete</u> application	Within 7 days of notice of complete application	Determined by applicant	Between 12 & 26 days after final revisions submitted, or after request to process as is.
	If application is incomplete, process begins anew on submittal date of new information.		If no revisions or additional information required, project will be scheduled for City Council review within 12-26 days of final staff comments.	Staff response to revisions within 7 working days of submittal. Applicant may revise again or request to process as is.	Number of days depends upon both date of submittal and the number of weeks in a month.

**CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS APPLICATION PROCESSING SCHEDULE**

<b>Submittal Date</b>	<b>Notice of Application Completeness</b>	<b>Begin Planning Staff Review Process</b>	<b>Staff Comment to Applicant or Decision</b>	<b>Additional information submitted (if applicable)</b>	<b>Historic Preservation Commission Review</b>
Determined by applicant	Within 3 working days of submittal	Tuesday following notice of <u>complete</u> application	Friday of following week	Determined by applicant	Between 7 & 33 days after final revisions submitted, or after request to process as is.
	If application is incomplete, process begins anew on submittal date of new information.		For fully compliant administrative review proposals, a decision to approve will be rendered. If revisions or additional information required, or if major project is ready for HPC review, staff comments will be sent to applicant.	Staff response to additional information within 3 working days of submittal. Applicant may provide information or request to process as is.	Number of days depends upon both date of submittal and the number of weeks in a month.

## EXAMPLES OF APPLICATION PROCESSING TIMES

### Major Site Development Plan

Submitted March 10<sup>th</sup>  
Deemed complete March 13<sup>th</sup> (possibly March 10th)  
DRC review begins March 18<sup>th</sup> (possibly March 11th)  
DRC comments sent March 28<sup>th</sup> (possibly March 14th)  
P&Z review (assuming no changes needed) –April 16<sup>th</sup> (possibly April 2nd)  
CC review/action – May 13<sup>th</sup> (possibly April 22nd)

**Active Days to Process – 29 to 64** (Survey Average – 30, Ames, 28)

### Minor Site Development Plan

Submitted March 10<sup>th</sup>  
Deemed complete March 13<sup>th</sup> (possibly March 10th)  
DRC review begins March 18<sup>th</sup> (possibly March 11th)  
DRC comments (or decision) sent March 28<sup>th</sup> (possibly sent March 14th)

**Active Days to Process – 4 to 18** (Survey Average 21, Ames 50)

### Variance, Exception, and Special Home Occupation Applications

Submitted March 10<sup>th</sup>  
Deemed complete March 13<sup>th</sup>  
Staff comments sent March 18<sup>th</sup>  
ZBA review (assuming no changes needed) –April 9<sup>th</sup> (possibly March 26th)

**Active Days to Process – 16 to 30** (Survey Average 25, Ames 17)

### Special Use Permit Application

Submitted March 10<sup>th</sup>  
Deemed complete March 13<sup>th</sup> (possibly March 10th)  
DRC review March 18<sup>th</sup> (possibly March 12th)  
DRC comments sent March 28<sup>th</sup> (possibly March 14th)  
P&Z review (assuming no changes needed) –April 16<sup>th</sup> (possibly April 2nd)  
ZBA review/action – April 23<sup>rd</sup> (possibly April 9th)

**Active Days to Process – 30 to 44** (Survey Average 26, Ames 57)

### Preliminary Plat Application

Submitted March 10<sup>th</sup>  
Deemed complete March 13<sup>th</sup> (possibly March 10th)  
DRC review begins March 18<sup>th</sup> (possibly March 11th)  
DRC comments sent March 28<sup>th</sup> (possibly March 14th)  
P&Z review (assuming no changes needed) –April 16<sup>th</sup> (possibly April 2nd)  
CC review/action – May 13<sup>th</sup> (possibly April 8th)

**Active Days to Process – 29 to 64** (Survey Average 39, Ames 28)



CAF APPROVAL

SS \_\_\_\_\_ BK *[Signature]* SL \_\_\_\_\_

DM *[Signature]* JP *[Signature]*

To be sent to: