

**Flathead County Planning and Zoning
Interim Assessment/Work Plan**

***CONTINUOUS WORKING DRAFT
AUGUST-OCTOBER 2010***

With the recent departure of the Planning Director, the Flathead County Planning and Zoning Office (FCPZ) enters an interim period during the process of hiring a permanent replacement. The interim period should not be viewed as time to “wait and see,” but rather an opportunity to take inventory and prepare for the future. An interim period provides a “checkpoint” at which FCPZ can internally assess office functions and performance and then seek external feedback on that assessment from the many customer bases served by FCPZ.

This “Interim Assessment” document should be used like moldable clay. The initial shape of the clay will be created by FCPZ as an internal review of office functions and performance. The assessment will be organized by core competencies followed by opportunities for improvement. Core competencies will list maintenance actions, and opportunities for improvement will list interim and long-range actions to implementing improvements.

The document will then be externally vetted by the 3 primary “customer bases” served by FCPZ. Commissioners, boards and committees, the professional community, and the general public will be engaged and asked to review and consider the document. Feedback will be incorporated through updates, revisions and expansions as needed. Through this method, multiple groups will have a hand in molding the clay.

The desired outcome of this assessment (and final form of the clay) is a consensus-built assessment of how FCPZ is functioning as well as a work plan of short-range actions for FCPZ to follow during the interim period. The document can further serve as a “stepping off” point for a new Planning Director by providing a baseline of office functions and performance coupled with a work plan of more long-range actions beyond the scope of an interim period.

CORE COMPETENCIES

- **Staff Experience and Job-Specific Knowledge**
Years of high staff turnover have ended and current staff has 2 years or more of experience with FCPZ. Flathead County benefits on a daily basis as staff can provide more experienced, accurate and consistent answers to the public’s questions.
 - **Maintenance Action:** Work to maintain/improve office morale by regularly communicating to staff their value to Flathead County. Provide positive feedback on work well done and seek to match incoming projects to planner’s individual talents/interests.

- **Quality of Daily Work Products/Service to General Public**
 Staff reports now begin with comprehensive templates, are researched and written by experienced staff and are then reviewed by the Interim Planning Director for consistency and accuracy prior to being distributed to public and Boards. Routine permit processing is being completed more quickly and accurately. Daily, routine customer service to members of the general public is excellent, with few complaints to supervisors.

 - **Maintenance Action:** Continue updates to templates to enhance clarity and defensibility. Continue to allocate resources to review and revision of all reports prior to distribution to public. Continue prioritizing “Planner on Duty” functions to be available to and serve the general public.

- **Inventory & Diversity of Projects Underway**
 FCPZ currently has a variety of projects underway. Floodplain Regulations and Subdivision Regulations are being updated and simplified, CTEP trail construction continues, “Continuity of Operations” planning is ongoing and a Reserve Drive Master Plan update, Trails Plan and Large Tract Rural Zoning District are all in various stages of public process.

 - **Maintenance Action:** Continue to carry out non-revenue generating projects that are underway, as investments of public resources have been made.

- **Functioning Within Budget**
 Recent proactive reductions in staff and office reorganization have coincided with a reduction in planning fees, property taxes and state entitlement share.

 - **Maintenance Action:** Continue to monitor fee revenue and planner workloads on a weekly/monthly basis and respond accordingly based on mandatory v. non-mandatory and revenue generating v. non-revenue generating workload.
 Compare costs of new projects requested of FCPZ to public benefits of outcome.

- **Technical Assistance for Land Use Boards and Land Use Advisory Committees.**
 FCPZ staff provides high-quality administrative and technical services to Planning Board, Board of Adjustment and Land Use Advisory Committees.

 - **Maintenance Action:** Maintain routine minute-taking, meeting scheduling, email follow-ups, continue recent cost-saving measures during advertising and filling of Board and Committee vacancies as well as “packet” distribution. Maintain regular “Board training” session to inform and educate new LUAC members on Robert’s Rules of order, standard operating procedures, etc.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

- **Community Outreach**

FCPZ has had limited time and resources to engage and educate the public about planning and the work of the office. Our working relationships with many technical representatives have improved and planners meet face to face with applicants more than ever. However, there is still an opportunity to more proactively engage both the public and the development community and inform them of planning trends, issues etc. and listen to their concerns

- **Interim Improvement Action(s):** Assemble list of email addresses of those interested in planning issues. Assemble list of civic groups, schools, businesses that may be interested in presentations about planning by staff. Investigate interest in Q&A-type sessions with technical representative community and general public.
- **Long-term Improvement Action(s):** Establish routine, predictable method(s) of disseminating planning information via email. Communicate with civic groups, schools and businesses and offer presentations/Q&A sessions on planning in Flathead County. Initiate regular Q&A-style sessions with technical representatives and general public. Increase one-on-one direct contact with community leaders.

- **Code Enforcement**

Current complaint-based code enforcement methods are resource-consuming. Violation investigations frequently take many months due to staff workload, unresponsive violators, ongoing neighborhood feuds, unreasonable resolution alternatives and a general lack of public will to support aggressive enforcement of zoning. Recent adoption of enforcement policies and procedures has improved consistency of enforcement actions, but effectiveness and efficiency remains problematic.

- **Interim Improvement Action(s):** Research code enforcement in other similarly situated jurisdictions in MT (Ravalli Co., Lewis & Clark Co., Gallatin Co., etc.). Research alternatives for code enforcement w/ Flathead County, MACo, CTAP and attorneys. Compile a report outlining code-enforcement alternatives w/ approximate costs and benefits of each alternative. Conclude w/ improvement suggestions ranked by perceived appropriateness for Flathead County.
- **Long-term Improvement Action(s):** Present report to Flathead County Commissioners and Planning Board. Seek guidance on most desirable enforcement alternative and implement change to policies, practices and procedures. Follow-up on existing case load and work to resolve pending violations.

- **Clarity/User Friendliness of Regulatory Documents**

Regulatory documents originally adopted years ago lack reference to modern situations, contain procedures that have evolved over time and have become disjointed, or are no longer “user-friendly” due to amendments, poor cross-referencing etc.

- **Interim Improvement Action(s):** Assemble list of problematic portions of the zoning regulations. Request Planning Board subcommittee to review/revise and

initiate text amendments to zoning regulations. Continue processing of ongoing subdivision and floodplain regulation updates.

- **Long-term Improvement Action(s):** Administer/process zoning text amendments as they are initiated by Planning Board subcommittee, assign professional staff to work with Planning Board subcommittee to update Flathead County Lake and Lakeshore Protection Regulations, vet through public process.

- **Efficiency of Administrative Procedures**

Administrative procedures/policies developed during recent “boom years” with higher staffing to accommodate large application loads are not ideally suited to provide efficiency with lower staffing and fewer applications.

- **Interim Improvement Action(s):** Follow administrative procedures for each type of application and examine opportunities for improved efficiency. Inventory internal procedures such as processing timelines, pre application scheduling, etc. Seek alternatives for procedures with high fixed costs, high labor intensity.
- **Long-term Improvement Action(s):** Implement changes and quantify fiscal impacts of results. Report to Commission to assess savings over time.

- **Economic Development Planning**

Flathead County’s economic development efforts are currently the responsibility of Montana West Economic Development (MWED). FCPZ has the professional resources to partner with MWED and offer technical assistance on a comprehensive and/or project specific basis.

- **Interim Improvement Action(s):** Identify and initiate a convenient method to communicate regularly with MWED and identify opportunities for assisting with economic development planning.
- **Long-term Improvement Action(s):** Incorporate FCPZ resources into those regularly used by MWED to attract and retain a diversity of economic interests in Flathead County. Seek to create and maintain a culture of shared economic development planning resources.

- **Clarity/Consistency of Land Use Advisory Committee Functions**

There are currently 11 Land Use Advisory Committees (LUACs) in Flathead County. Each LUAC has their own adopted bylaws as well as their own understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the application review process. An opportunity exists to improve the consistency of the procedural framework within which all LUACs operate.

- **Interim Improvement Action(s):** Review by-laws and work with LUAC leaders on making bylaws consistent. Work with Planning Board and Commissioners on a document that will clarify the roles and responsibilities of all LUACs (i.e. what they do, what they don’t do).
- **Long-term Improvement Action(s):** Schedule time to meet with each committee in their neighborhood, and review bylaws and roles and responsibilities. Initiate semi-annual “LUAC Summits” to share the latest “best practices” and inventory concerns.