

# Working Together

*A best-practices approach  
to improving the City of Missoula's  
development review system*

*Report to the City Of Missoula  
By Dennis Taylor  
January 2011*

# Introduction

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*"Forced with the choice between changing one's mind and proving that there is no need to do so, almost everyone gets busy on the proof."*

John Kenneth Galbraith

# About the author

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Dennis Taylor is a long-time public servant who served as chief administrative officer for the City of Missoula, chief of staff for the Montana Attorney General Joe Mazurek, city manager for Helena, city administrator for Billings, city manager for Eugene, Oregon. He authored this report at the request of Mayor John Engen and Chief Administrative Officer Bruce Bender.

# About the report



The charge was to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the current organizational structure and recommend improvements and to identify the steps necessary to provide a “one-stop” customer service model for permitting and licensing services for the citizens of Missoula.

# Methods

Taylor interviewed citizens, policymakers and staff during a five month period from July to November, 2010, to find out their views and opinions on the positive and negative aspects of the planning and development review system and to solicit their ideas for improvements.

More than 70 key internal and external stakeholders, local government leaders, practitioners and other interested people familiar with the Missoula planning and development processes were interviewed.

The first task was to determine the strengths, weaknesses and perceived problems of Missoula's planning and development review process.

The next task compared the Missoula planning and development review process, organization structure and current practices to the models used by five other Montana cities and selected "best management practices" cities in the region.

# The message



All those interviewed generally agreed that the City of Missoula needs to develop a modern, effective and efficient planning and development review system. A new, improved system must be faster, better, concurrent, more predictable, customer-focused, and transparent, and it must maintain high-quality community standards and protect the public interest.

We can build on our strengths, which include good, competent people who are dedicated to meeting the needs of the community we serve.

In addition, Title 20, our updated zoning code, provides a modern framework for managing development review.

# Critical issues

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- **Timeliness**
- **Communication**
- **Leadership**
- **Customer service**
- **Organizational cultures**

# Recommendations



- **Structural and organizational change**
- **Process improvement**
- **One-stop shop**



# Structure and organization

- Consolidate functions in a single city department with one department head responsible for management.
- Option 1: Robust department that includes planning, engineering, building inspection, economic development and redevelopment, CDBG, HOME, BID, housing, historic preservation and parking.
- Option 2: Integrated department with engineering, planning, building inspection.

# Process improvement

- Compile a list of best management practices.
- Move from sequential to concurrent development review.
- Ensure that one manager is responsible for the system.
- Create a multi-member inter-agency review committee.
- Establish a project-manager approach to coordinate review and projects.
- Upgrade to an automated permit system that allows simultaneous tracking on the internet.
- Create agreed upon timelines and monitor those timelines.
- Adopt expedited review alternatives.
- Create easy public access to information, procedures and processes.
- Train for efficiency and improved customer-service quality.
- Create a feedback and evaluation system.
- Create business-assistance teams to help navigate the process.

# Process improvement, continued

- Create an industry advisory council.
- Conduct city-sponsored training for the development community.
- Create and implement a communications plan.
- Conduct an annual survey of stakeholders.

# One-stop shop



- The City of Missoula should create a one-stop permit information and development services center.

# Conclusion



- Little has changed in our process since the Mullen Report, initiated by Missoula County, in 2005.
- Today presents an opportunity, an imperative, to improve the system.
- This will take time, energy and commitment, but if we don't make change, frustration will continue to fester.

# Thank you

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*"I was seldom able to see an opportunity until it had ceased to be one."*

Mark Twain