

OBJECTIVE #2

**INCREASE DEPARTMENTAL EFFECTIVENESS AND
IMPROVE SERVICE TO THOSE WHO DEPEND UPON
COUNTY OFFICES**

ACCESSIBILITY TO SERVICE

FINDINGS:

Over the past 10 years, Jefferson County has increasingly become of a bedroom community to Washington, D C and Montgomery and Fairfax Counties. A survey conducted by the Development Authority revealed that 53.5% of Jefferson County residents work outside the County, which means that Jefferson County has a large commuting population.

As indicated in the County's Comprehensive plan, the County has undergone significant change in the makeup of its population. To meet the needs of this different population requires new methods for outreach and accessibility to the services of the County. Greater accessibility to County services can be provided in many different ways:

RECOMMENDATIONS:

TELEPHONE ACCESSIBILITY:

- 1) Direct dial telephone numbers of all county employees should be placed on the internet. Currently only some Department telephone numbers appear on the internet and in the telephone book. The result: callers often have to be transferred within departments, between departments and between the central operator and the appropriate department. *Such a policy would ignore the function of a secretary in filtering calls. If all numbers are available to the public, professionals will spend precious time answering random phone calls instead of completing assigned work. If a secretary is the direct line, then he or she may answer the phone and the department head or other professional can prioritize those calls that need to be answered immediately and those that can wait. Otherwise, the department head or professional will spend most of the day answering calls, including both important calls requiring immediate attention and those calls that can wait until more important work has been completed.*
- 2) To make County government more user friendly, every county employee should provide his/her name when answering an incoming telephone call. This consultant recommends using one's name when answering the telephone for several reasons:
 - the interaction is more personal
 - there is an implicit assumption of accountability when a service provider

- introduces him/herself to a caller at the outset of a phone call
- it has long been established that the first person to speak sets the tone of a conversation, therefore, on an incoming telephone call as a service provider and public servant, the responsibility is on the County employee to set a positive tone to the conversation;
- if follow up is needed, the caller knows to whom he/she was talking

INTERNET/WEBSITE ACCESSIBILITY:

- 1) According to research figures, at the end of 2003, 57.6% of all Americans were using the internet. That number has been steadily increasing since that time. Given the increased reliance on the internet, we recommend greater use of the internet. In October, at the request of Commissioner Rusty Morgan, this consultant presented several recommendations regarding improvements to the county's website. Many of these recommendations were promptly implemented. The following are recommendations (some carried forward from October; some others are new) to improve the accessibility of the public to County services via the County's website:
 - a) The County's email directory should include each department and each employee under the jurisdiction of the County Commission and preferably every County employee.
 - b) A County telephone directory, with the name of each County employee, should be included on the website.
 - c) Photos of every County Commissioner should appear on the website,
 - d) A Committee/Volunteer Application (already cited in Objective # 1 of this report) should be put onto the website to encourage volunteerism in the County.
 - e) The County's employment application should be placed on the website.
 - f) A job posting section should be added to the website. *The County's website currently contains a section for available jobs. In fact, the position of long range planner was advertised on the County's web page.*

PARKS AND RECREATION

Customer service would be greatly enhanced by development of the website and the creation of on-line registrations.

TECHNOLOGICAL AND EQUIPMENT SUPPORT

Several department personnel reported needs for upgraded hardware and/or software and other equipment needs (e.g., more powerful copiers, better telephone instruments, etc.) It has been reported to me that “there isn’t enough money in the budget for these expenses.”

It is the opinion of this consultant that, with reduced turnover costs, reduced recruitment costs, and reduced costs to Software Systems (as well as other increased efficiency savings) there would be sufficient funds for upgraded equipment to support our services.

The following recommendations relate to specific departments and will greatly increase efficiency and improve service to county residents and others who depend on County offices for services:

ANIMAL CONTROL

This department currently has no internet access. Internet access would greatly facilitate the ability of this department to “adopt out” more animals rather than subject them to euthanasia. *This suggestion does not take into account the duties of Animal Control, which are outlined in the West Virginia Code. Animal Control exists to pick up stray animals or vicious dogs, and enforce the County’s dog tax, not to place animals in permanent homes. Further both the West Virginia Code and the County Ordinance provide for the return of animals retrieved by Animal Control to their owners if possible. However, even though Animal Control is not tasked with “adopting out” animals, they currently work with both the Jefferson County Animal Welfare Society and the Briggs Animal Adoption Center to place stray animals into permanent homes. Both of those agencies have a website that contain pictures and descriptions of animals available for adoption.*

DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

This department needs a fax machine to replace the one that is, at best, 10 years old (if not older).

The department presently lacks a color copier. The only large size copier is shared by several departments in the Public Services Center and is located in the area of the Health

Department. A color copier would enable this department to enhance the quality of its materials and make more professional presentations to prospective employers. Attracting more prospective employers would, in turn, enhance the opportunities for local citizens to find employment consistent with their goals – to work closer to home.

This department needs enhancements to its server. It is currently running out of space.

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING, ZONING AND ENGINEERING

Service delivery from the Department of Planning, Zoning and Engineering has been problematic for many in the community. This consultant has identified several areas for improvement.

- 1) Many processes and procedures in the department are in need of automation. Technology improvements could vastly reduce turnaround times and service to department customers (e.g., by enabling staff to better track files and the flow of files).
- 2) There is a duplication and triplication of effort in this department. Every preliminary plat, final plat and other developer submission documents are reviewed several times by multiple people. *As required by the County Ordinance, each plat is reviewed by several individuals because every plat is reviewed for compliance in several areas. For example, the Planner reviews the plat to ensure it complies with all planning standards and the engineer reviews the plat to ensure that it complies with engineering standards. It would be impossible for these two differing professions to review a plat for compliance in an area that is outside their professional training or knowledge.* Each has final review by the Department Head.
- 3) Employees are not allowed to fax out of the department, which often causes an inconvenience to the department's customers.
- 4) There is a lack of accessibility by the public to individual employees. Most employee phone numbers are not publicized and telephone calls come through office administration, where they are scrutinized and logged. This process often interrupts administrative staff from dealing with face-to-face customers or from completing other time-sensitive matters. Walk-in customers must be personally ushered to the correct department employee, again causing a disruption to the flow of work. The only email addresses for this department on the County website are for the Department Head, the Compliance Officer, the Chief County Engineer and the Building Plan Reviewer.
- 6) Members of the public and staff of the County government receive an "Autoresponse" when an email is delivered to the Department email box. This "Autoresponse" does not represent netiquette.

- 11) Developers report that turnaround times for preliminary plats, minor subdivisions, and other submissions can be 6-8 weeks – a long time for a developer. The process is: re-submissions are placed on the bottom of the pile causing extensive delays.

In addition, there needs to be greater accountability put on developers and their engineers.

- 1) Often, documents are submitted for review multiple times. For example, developers may need entrance permits from Department of Highways, well and septic from the Jefferson County Health Department, and/or water/sewer permits from State Health Department and sewer certifications to get staff approval. Developers will send documents without these permits, causing the documents to go back and forth. Staff reports that developers will re-submit documents multiple times without addressing staff issues.
- 2) Developers bring in items at the last minute and file updates without public scrutiny. Developers should be held accountable for missing deadlines.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1) Assuming that the County hires an Information Technology Manager, one area for review is the Department of Planning, Zoning and Engineering. Many functions in this department would be more efficient with automation.
- 2) These are possible suggestions that may improve the service of the department
 - a) Eliminate the single department email box.
 - b) Disseminate email addresses and telephone numbers of other service providers in the department. For example, the telephone number and email address of the Permits Clerk, the Compliance Officer, the Planner, the Engineer and the Construction Manager should be on the website.
 - c) Voice mail capability on each department telephone would enable callers to leave a message. This is common practice in the business world. This enhancement would enable those in the administration area to perform their functions with greater efficiency.
- 3) Utilize the fax capabilities and eliminate the prohibition on faxing out of the department.
- 4) Create a speedier process for re-submissions so that re-reviews can be processed more expeditiously.

- 6) Because of the high volume of customers served by this department – and the nature of the work performed by the customers of this department – it is the recommendation of this consultant that this department expand its hours and stagger the work hours of its employees to make the department more accessible.

SUPPORT TO A SERVICE CULTURE

FINDINGS:

It is a fact that people are motivated by positive consequences.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The consultant recommends creation of an incentive program whereby employees are rewarded for providing positive customer service. Members of the public can provide commendations to the County Commission (or the Director of Human Resources) when they receive positive performance from a County employee. Bonuses, or incentives, can be attached to commendations.

Such a program can be developed by a Director of Human Resources.

PURCHASE ORDER PROCEDURE

FINDINGS:

This is a procedure that impacts every department in the County. The current process of writing purchase orders by hand or manually on typewriters (the current procedure in several departments) is time consuming and wasteful.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Automating this process will save time for every department and expedite a procedure that is used by all. Development of an automated process can be done by an Information Technology Manager (as recommended in Objective #1).