

PWD Development Services Committee 2012 Meeting Summary

The Development Services Committee (DSC) was established by Philadelphia Water Department (PWD) Commissioner Howard Neukrug to help improve the PWD Stormwater Plan Review process to become more business friendly and better streamline development.

Four meetings of this Committee were held in 2012.

Meeting 1:

The first meeting focused on listening to Committee Member's concerns about PWD's Stormwater Plan Review process.

Concerns identified by the DSC included:

- Lack of predictability and transparency during project review
- Need for more predictable review fees
- Need for faster review times
- Greater continuity needed between Concept and Technical Review
- Technical Review too subjective and detail-focused
- Re-submissions cause project delays and increase costs

Improvements identified by the DSC included:

- Improve coordination between other PWD units
- Assign a PWD representative to shepherd project through entire review process
- Develop a "one stop shop" for plan review and permit needs for all city approvals
- Create interactive capacity on website and for electronic submittals
- Restructure and improve the O&M Agreement and process
- Increase outreach and communication during construction administration
- Make greater use of incentives

Meeting 2:

The theme for the second meeting was "Time is Money". The meeting focused on identifying how misunderstandings in Concept Review can lead to delayed approval and resulting increase in developer cost.

PWD Staff provided an overview of the Concept Review Phase and described:

- Concept Review Process
- Level of detail required
- Opportunities for error or misinterpretation that create delays during Technical Review, especially in site layout

The following new approaches were discussed:

- Create staffing consistency between concept and technical review
- Develop an expedited review process
- Make use of a third party review system

Meeting 3:

Continuing with the “Time is Money” theme, the third meeting included discussion of technical review submittals.

A new “two-track” review process was presented.

PWD Staff provided an overview of Technical Review Phase and provided:

- Breakdown of plans meeting regulatory requirements on first submittal
- Breakdown of plans containing design errors and calculation errors
- Rationale for PWD’s detailed technical review
- Discussion of ways to better align developer submittals with PWD’s expectations

The Two-Track review process was also described and discussed. The purpose of the proposed process is to allow developers to select a review process that best meets their project needs:

Track-One “Front Loaded” Review - This review approach is for projects with greater up-front certainty, including funding. This approach entails:

1. Mandatory pre-application meeting is held with applicant, engineer, and PWD
2. Technical Reviewer is assigned at time of pre-application meeting
3. The design team presents as much information about the project as possible, up front
4. Early concept agreement on stormwater design decreases chance of major PWD changes
5. Concept Approval enables developer to apply for their Zoning Permit

Track-Two “Back Loaded” Review – This approach is intended for projects with less initial certainty from the developer’s perspective (i.e. is the project viable?). This approach includes:

1. Minimal stormwater design information required early in the process
2. Standard letter and plan notes for each project explaining future expectations for technical review
3. PWD not liable for anticipating every technical issue that could arise later
4. Concept Approval (with noted limitations) enables applicant to apply for their Zoning Permit
5. Preferred option for projects willing to risk major design changes later in return for less investment in early project stages

Meeting 4:

The fourth DSC meeting included a presentation from the Department of Licenses and Inspections and Philadelphia City Planning Commission about the new Zoning Code.

- Major changes were highlighted, specifically the Civic Design Review (CDR)
- The new requirements present unknown elements in project approval
- Staff noted that the current PWD Stormwater Plan Review process will likely fit within the CDR framework

A pilot project for the Two-Track review process was described. The project was being undertaken by the University of Pennsylvania and would use the “Front Loaded” Review process.