

Recognizing the Best in County Government Programs!



2011 Achievement Awards

ATTN: 2011 Achievement Awards Program
Virginia Association of Counties
1207 East Main Street, Suite 300
Richmond, Va. 23219-3627

Call for Entries



2011 VACo Achievement Awards

Deadline: June 1, 2011

Application Form

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. Deadline: June 1, 2011.

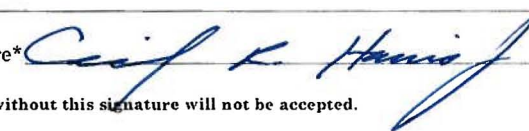
Program Information

Locality Hanover County
Program Title Customer Service Initiative
Program Category Customer Service
Population Category 50,001 - 100,000

Contact Information

Name Mary B. Pennock
Title Principal Planner - Project Manager
Department Planning Department
Complete Mailing Address P.O. Box 470 Hanover, VA 23069
Telephone # 804-365-6171 Fax # 804-365-6540
E-mail mbpennock@co.hanover.va.us

Signature of county administrator or chief administrative officer

Name Cecil R. Harris, Jr.
Title County Administrator
Signature* 

*Entries without this signature will not be accepted.



CUSTOMER SERVICE INITIATIVE

VACo ACHIEVEMENT AWARD APPLICATION

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Customer Service

POPULATION CATEGORY: 50,001-100,000

May 2011

1. Abstract of the Program

Seeking to improve development review processes, the Hanover County Board of Supervisors established a Community Development Customer Service Initiative in Fiscal Year 2008. That initiative resulted in the re-engineering of most of the County's development review processes, including the review and approval of zoning applications, conditional use permits, special exceptions, site plans and subdivisions. The processes were streamlined and processing timelines were reduced. For example, for the administrative review processes such as site plan and subdivision approval the review time for first submittals was reduced between 25% and 50% depending on complexity; review times for additional submittals were cut by approximately 60%. Firm review deadlines were established to make these processes more predictable. The regulatory approach was replaced with a "how can we help you" approach and performance tracking mechanisms were created. These improvements were made possible in part by the implementation of multi-departmental case management teams consisting of Planning, Public Works and Public Utilities review staff. After a case management team has been assigned to a project, the same team remains with the project throughout the process, from zoning through subdivision. The case management teams report to a Project Manager who monitors on-time performance and serves as the liaison with the development community.

2. The Problem/Need for the Program

Hanover County elected officials and the County Administrator's Office staff were receiving complaints from the development community about various development review processes. Those concerns came from a variety of sources including owners, engineers and land development attorneys. Concerns included lack of predictability in the processes, excessive

review times with occasional inconsistent review comments from various agencies, and lack of guidance from Hanover staff to help correct plan deficiencies. The Board of Supervisors was concerned that the problems, whether real or perceived, could affect economic development activities as well as the ability of Hanover businesses to expand. The Board desired to create a business friendly atmosphere in Hanover County and a development review process that was responsive to applicant needs and that proactively addressed challenges that may arise during the review process.

3. Description of the Program

Objectives

- Encourage both private and public agencies customers to share their experiences (good, bad or indifferent) and candid recommendations for improving customer service
- Solicit input from the public development review staff and agencies, both at the County and State level, on their objective assessment of the review process
- Obtain objective assessment of the County's process versus best management practices of other jurisdictions with recommendations for improvement
- Provide for a public information process to inform the development community as well the general public of the results of the program
- Establish ongoing monitoring and reporting mechanisms

Program Steps

- **Stakeholder Oriented Approach:** Conducted focused conversation with over 30 representatives of development community with non-development review staff using questionnaire prepared by County staff to assure consistency and confidentiality.

- **“Diagnostic Assessment Matrix”** provided by Matrix Consulting Group involving review of County-conducted interviews and interview of County and State development review staff on current practices to provide objective assessment in report format.
- **Public Agency Participation:** Conducted Strength, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threat (SWOT) analysis with over 50 representatives of local and state agencies including staff from all levels of the process from customer service agents to department heads and County administration.
- **Public-Private Collaboration in Making Recommendations:** Established joint steering committee with representatives of the engineering and development community recommended by business organizations. This committee reviewed recommendations from the consultants’ report and approves a report.
- **Bottom-Up Reengineering/Process Analysis and Design:** Established internal “CSI” (Customer Service Initiative) Subcommittees with frontline review agency representatives from the Public Works, Public Utilities, Planning and IT Departments. This was a collaborative and consensus-driven environment with community development and economic development heads and administration representative (bottom-up review process).
- **Ongoing Monitoring and Feedback:** Established customer service survey for County Administrator to send to applicants soliciting their experience with and comments on the review process. Establish “Dashboard” of expectations versus results for each department with explanations for not meeting established criteria to be reviewed quarterly.

Implementation

Following completion of the report, which was delivered to Hanover in March 2008, an Implementation Steering Committee was formed which included the Deputy County Administrator for Community Development, engineering managers, project managers and department directors for each involved department. An aggressive implementation schedule was developed with 60 and 120 day milestones and each milestone was followed by a presentation to the Board of Supervisors. The Implementation Steering Committee met bi-weekly from March to October 2008 reviewing the work of the case management teams and their deliverables as they went about defining the new processes, and providing guidance and decision making on policy matters. As questions arose during the implementation process that would affect the development community, a development community focus group was formed. New ideas and process revisions were shared with the focus group for input. Also during this time Hanover's Information Technology Department was working to modify the standard reports available from the computer based planning and zoning system so that project status and the performance of each department could be analyzed.

The new processes were implemented on July 1, 2008.

Clientele being Served

The new processes serve anyone who is involved with Hanover's development review process, which includes developers and property owners seeking rezonings, conditional use permits, special exceptions, site plan approval and subdivision approval. The processes also serve the architecture and engineering communities that deal directly with the design of new projects along with land development attorneys.

County's Role in Devising and Implementing the Program

Hanover County staff took an active role in the review of the processes in effect at the time the Board's initiative was adopted. As noted above, the County Administrator's and County Attorney's Office staffs interviewed over 30 individuals involved in the development process. In addition, all departments that are involved in the development process spent considerable time compiling information and working with the consultant while the report was being prepared. The staff also provided input on how the process would best work in Hanover. For example, the case management team approach, which is the key to the revised process, was developed by the County.

The County staff handled the entire implementation phase, refining the processes, generating the material suggested by the consultant's report and modifying the website to increase material available via the Internet. County staff also kept the development community advised of the progress and introduced the revised processes to them through a series of quarterly meetings.

4. The Cost of the Program

The only direct costs incurred by Hanover was the hiring of a consultant to assist with the data analysis and to offer recommendations related to best management practices, and additional training on Hanover's computer based planning and zoning module. The total consultant cost was \$46,000. The remainder of the cost was spent in staff utilization, including additional training in the use of the Sungard H.T.E. planning and zoning module, interviewing stakeholders, identifying areas of improvement, and input on how the process would best work in Hanover. For example the case management team approach was developed by the County. The implementation discussed above also required extensive staff resources.

5. The Results/Success of the Program

- During the first two years of implementation of the 1011 reviews conducted, 98% were completed within the established time period
- The customer surveys returned by applicants that have gone through a revised process overwhelmingly indicate the staff has met its goals and met or exceeded the customer's expectations
- Engineers have stated the revised processes and predictable timelines have helped identify issues and reach resolution earlier therefore fewer submittals are necessary
- Project Manager and Case Management Teams have been established to handle each case from beginning to completion
- Use of the County's web-site has been enhanced with the addition of instructions, forms, checklists, and access to project status and comments through e-Gov! Services
- On-going quarterly meetings with the development community to get input, followed by CSI committee meetings to allow for continuous review and process improvements based on comments received.

6. Worthiness of an Award

The results of the Community Development Customer Service Initiative satisfy the four criteria.

Criteria 1 – Offer an innovative solution to a problem, situation or delivery of services

The results of the Community Development Customer Service Initiative fill the gaps in the availability of existing services and taps new revenue sources. Prior to implementation there was no stated policy that County staff would help applicants prepare approvable applications. This led to a constant string of re-submittals with projects that never seemed to end. Subsequent to the implementation, the processes now include meetings during which staff helps the

applicants address project shortfalls. And, due to the increased staff assistance and the projected decrease in the number of submittals, a new re-submittal fee was established for 3 or more submittals.

The administration and cost effectiveness of the plan review process have been improved. Mechanisms have been put in place to track the time spent by staff reviewing applications and the data is reviewed by departmental managers. It also allows the County to report to the owner the status of a project, the amount of review time differentiated between County and the owner's engineer, and allows the County to contact the owner in the event major challenges are discovered.

By engaging the development community including owners, developers and engineers, those citizens gained a better understanding of the development review process and helped shape the revised process. The quarterly meetings with this group will be continued and the County is open to tweaking the processes based on their input.

Criteria 2 – Promote intergovernmental cooperation

Private partners played an important role. The Board adopted the Initiative based on input from the development community and therefore the development community was involved all along the way, from being involved in the initial interview process through serving on the focus group and providing feedback as each revised process was rolled out.

The Virginia Department of Transportation and Virginia Health Department are both involved in the development review processes; thus these agencies were consulting during the report preparation and implementation to ensure the processes were acceptable to them.

A consultant was hired to assist with the data analysis and to offer recommendations related to best management practices.

Criteria 3 – Provide a model for other local governments

Since implementation of the program, the County has received numerous inquiries from other local jurisdictions seeking to improve their development review processes. Hanover County staff has held meetings with representatives from King William, Albemarle, and Powhatan Counties as well. Additionally, representatives from Henrico County and the Town of Ashland attend the Quarterly Development Meetings.

Criteria 4 – Local innovation and customization

The feedback the County has received is that its approach to undertaking the program, the involvement in the highest levels of the County Administrator's and County Attorney's Offices and the aggressive implementation schedule were unique. A review of plan review processes of other localities did not reveal any that implemented the case management team/project manager approach, which has been described by our customers as innovative and an excellent improvement to the process.