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NEWS

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CROW WING COUNTY DRT PROCESS CONTINUES TO BE A SUCCESS

Environmental Services applicants are pleased with the development review process established by Crow Wing County, according to a survey released by the County's Land Services Department.

The survey, conducted annually in January, polls persons who participated in the County's Development Review Team (DRT) process. The DRT process brings together zoning applicants, township officials, and relevant government agencies along with County staff in a pre-application meeting to discuss proposed rezoning, variance, conditional use, and plat applications prior to actually submitting such applications.

The DRT process was established by the Crow Wing County Board of Commissioners in 2009, and is modeled after a similar successful program in Scott County. This is the second year in which the survey has been conducted.

94% of the respondents indicated the DRT process was helpful or very helpful, 94% indicated that the time, date and location of the meeting was convenient or very convenient, and 88% reported that the presence of township representatives and relevant county and state agency decision-makers was a valuable addition to the pre-application process.

The survey also collected general comments from DRT participants. Christopher Pence, Land Services Supervisor for Environmental Services stated "We are very appreciative of all the comments received so that we can make the public hearing process as straightforward as possible. These comments will help us further refine the DRT process to improve our level of customer service."

One customer comment from the survey indicated that Crow Wing County "is doing an excellent job and have been very professional." Other positive feedback from participants included the following comments:

- We have worked with four counties in Minnesota doing large projects and felt the Crow Wing County is doing an excellent job and have been very professional. We think that having a DRT meeting is a great improvement, as it provides facts and rule requirements. As a result, it saves time and cost to both the county and the person making the application.
- It was a very user friendly process.
- I feel that the DRT committee was very helpful, Sue Maske in particular. Her guidance through the process was very beneficial.
- Staff did an excellent job setting expectations about the process.
- Provided great service.
- The staff was very helpful with the process.
- Service was very good and participants were courteous.
- The team of Chris, Sue and Mitch were outstanding in providing me with options for a very complicated build out on my lot. They were very professional and looked at my particular situation fairly.
- Do not change. The response time was great, the people friendly, and the process is very fair.
- Everyone was very professional and helpful.
- We were pleased to be able to review our project before the public hearing. The informality of the meeting was very helpful.
- The info packet was great. The meeting and dialogue with the team was key to helping me understand the process. The team was clear in their explanations and very friendly.
- I was unable to attend but accomplished our rezoning with the help of staff
- I had a very positive experience at my DRT meeting

Among the comments suggested areas for improvement were:

- Speed the process up!!! Be sure land owners are aware of any changes in land descriptions or classifications. These things would help the confusion.
- Maybe try to speed up the time between the processes.
- We would have appreciated knowing ahead of time that the meeting was private, and we would have to wait until our turn came up on the agenda.
- DRT meetings are very long, but we need to learn to be patient also.
- Make getting a variance less painful.
- As I had prior business experience, I understood the variance procedures and that DRT was a process designed to assure complete understanding of the procedures and requests. I am not so sure all county residents would understand that concept.
- Long Lake Township seemed very hostile and close minded rather than encouraging improvements that will in turn benefit the local economy.

The survey, conducted via email utilizing the Survey Monkey online service, polled 80 land owner/applicants, government officials, contractors and private consultants who participated in the DRT process in 2010. 20 participants responded, which was a response rate of 25%. Of those who responded, 79% were landowners/applicants and 21% were other representatives. 26% of the projects that the landowner/applicant brought to DRT related to building permits, another 26% were variances, 21% were for land subdivision or development, 5% were for rezoning property, 5% for dirt moving, and 16% were for other projects such as conditional use permits.

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