

Building Permit and Subdivision Process Review

Sheridan, Wyoming

By

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June 2008

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. BACKGROUND

This study was initiated by the Mayor for a study of the City's building permit and inspection process and subdivision process.

B. STRENGTHS AND POSITIVES

This assessment found many exemplary features within the building permit and subdivision processes as well as a number of areas where improvement is possible.

Areas of Strength

- Co-location of development related functions in City Hall.
- Competent and helpful staff.
- New permitting systems, once properly installed and used.
- Generally reasonable timelines on building permits and subdivisions.
- Friendly staff.
- Excellent drafts of the Development Manual by Engineering.

C. KEY PRIORITY AREAS

It can be difficult to invite an outside agency into your place of business and invite candid comment. The City of Sheridan - staff, Mayor and Council - are to be commended for doing so. This report contains a number of improvement recommendations and comments. It is important to look at these in the overall context of the report. Focusing on any one comment or series of observations can create a misimpression of the organization, staff or the development community. In fact, the City of Sheridan has good staff, working hard within the existing processes. Constructive input on improvement of the process should not be taken as criticism. Rather, process improvement is a path to better performance. The implementation process as outlined in this report is phased and the complete implementation is proposed to take place over 18 months. This ultimate duration of this process is dependant on political support, financial support, and community support.

This report includes 96 recommendations for improving the policies and processes. While all the recommendations are important, we believe there are five key areas or groupings that need the highest priority as follows:

1. STANDARDS

Findings

Although the City has a variety of ordinances and policies, they are neither well developed nor communicated to the developers, staff and the public. Additionally, some of the existing policies have proven to be unworkable or out of sync with the current policy direction for the City. City staff has been working to address these issues but a more rapid approach would be useful.

Recommendations

This report includes a variety of recommendations to address these issues including:

- Accelerating completion of the construction standard documents which is about 50% completed, Recommendation 8.
- Referring the construction standard documents to the Development Implementation Task Force for review, Recommendation 9.
- Drafting a policy manual for the development process, Recommendation 19.
- Developing a policy regarding when soils reports will be required, Recommendation 46.
- Develop and monitor specific subdivision standards, Recommendation 83.
- Developing consistent standards for subdivisions, Recommendation 84.

2. COMMUNICATION

Findings

Although most of the related building and subdivision functions are located in the Department of Public Works, there are still major communication issues between functions. Some of this is due to having functions located on four separate floors of City Hall. Others are created as staff does a good job working on their specific issues without adequate recognition of the impact on other functions. This is often referred to as the “silo” effect. Additionally, no one is designated to coordinate the entire development process.

Recommendation

Recommendations designed to improve communication include:

- Establishing written policies for inter-division communication, Recommendation 3.

- Having weekly staff meetings between Building and Planning, Recommendation 4.
- Having managers take a more pro-active role in communications, Recommendation 5.
- Having staff review the draft developers handbook, Recommendation 7.
- Having the City work in partnership with the Development Implementation Process Task Force to improve the City’s development policy and processes, Recommendation 10.
- Examine alternative ways to coordinate the systems for all aspects of the development process, Recommendation 14.

3. STAFF/MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Findings

There are a variety of communication issues between the City policy makers and staff. On the one hand, staff feels that they are not adequately consulted with regarding City policy direction. On the other hand, we believe staff could take a more proactive role in anticipating policy direction for the City.

Recommendation

To address this issue we recommend:

- Items should not be placed on the City Council agenda on the day of the meeting, Recommendation 20.
- Staff should be consulted on Mayor and City Council initiatives, Recommendation 21.
- The Mayor and City Council should consult with staff prior to making commitments to developers, Recommendation 22.
- Staff should make brief presentations on development items at City Council meetings, Recommendation 23.
- City staff managers should play a stronger role in being sensitive to the political process, Recommendation 24.

4. SUBDIVISION PROCESS

Findings

The subdivision process generally operates within accepted approaches being used in other parts of the country as well as the County. We particularly like the approach being used by the Development Review Committee. However, the process can be improved by the development of better standards, a closer monitoring of timelines, and a few changes to the process.

Recommendation

The subdivision process can be improved by:

- Modifying the processes for the Sketch Plat, Replat, Minor Subdivision, and Major Subdivision processes; Recommendations 89 to 93. These changes are summarized in the following Table 1.

Table 1
Summary of Recommended Changes to Subdivision Process

Existing Process	Proposed Process
Applications accepted on walk-in basis by Thursday noon cut-off.	Thursday noon cut-off remains but applications are only accepted by appointment
Brief screening of applications. Partially completed applications are accepted	Screening of applications and only complete applications are accepted
Logged into computer same or next day	Logged into computer as part of application acceptance – same day
Distributed to reviewing function on Thursday or Friday	Distributed to reviewing function on Thursday, 95% of the time
All applications go to the Development Review Committee (DRC)	For very minor Replats, Planning can handle these without the need of a DRC meeting.
DRC on Tuesdays at 2 pm following Thursday submittal	No change for Replats but for all others, change DRC to two Tuesdays following the Thursday submittal
Written comments to Planning by reviewers, no set timeline	Reviewer's comments due to Planning no later than 4 pm on Friday following the DRC meeting
Written comments reside on server and paper files	Written comments placed in EnerGove Solutions permitting system
Combined comments to applicant one to two weeks after the DRC meeting	Comments to applicant no later than one week following the DRC meeting by 5 pm
Replats approved by City Council	Replats approved by staff
Major Subdivision Preliminary Plats reviewed by Planning Commission but not by City Council	Major Subdivision Preliminary Plats should be reviewed by the City Council or as an alternative, Council should be notified and have the right to call up the project for their review.
Major Subdivision Final Plats reviewed by Planning Commission and approved by City Council.	Major Subdivision Final Plats not required to be reviewed by the Planning Commission
Minor and Major Subdivision Plats signed by landowners, Mayor, Public Works Director, Planning Commission Chair and Planning Commission Vice Chair	Planning Commission Chair and Planning Commission Vice Chair do not need to sign.
Mail notice to neighbors and newspaper advertising 7 days prior to scheduled meeting	Notices and advertising as soon as meeting is set.
Variances mostly by Planning Commission or City Council	Staff takes a more aggressive role re variances in order to have better projects.

5. BUILDING PERMIT PROCESS

Findings

The building permit and inspection process in Sheridan works reasonably well. Nevertheless, this report includes 56 recommendations that can improve the process. Most importantly is our observation that the City uses specialty inspectors rather than combination inspectors which is the new national norm. Although specialty inspectors are useful for commercial and industrial developments, they are not needed for most single-family residential development, remodels and tenant improvements.

Recommendation

- We suggest the City begin cross training of inspectors and move to a residential combination inspector program, Recommendation 64 and 65.
- We suggest that residential plan review be completed in 10 working days and commercial plan review within 20 working days for 95% of the applications, Recommendation 55.

II. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

A. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

This study was initiated by the Mayor of Sheridan to review Sheridan's building permit and subdivision process under a contract dated 4/17/08, in order to determine areas of strength and opportunities for improvement to improve efficiency and overall effectiveness.

B. METHODOLOGY

Specific activities conducted for this study included the following:

Customer Input

- Two customer focus groups of 16 people.

Policy Maker Input

- Interview with the Mayor.

Staff Input

- Group meetings with 19 managers and staff who also completed a short anonymous questionnaire.
- A long employee questionnaire completed by eight staff.
- Individual interviews with people listed in Appendix A.
- Various meetings with staff to discuss issues and processes.

Meetings, Observations and Research

- Review of the building and subdivision processes.
- Review of forms, handouts, policies, files, and ordinances.
- Observation of staff at work.
- Tour of City offices.
- Observation of one Development Review Committee meeting.
- Attendance at part of one City Council meeting.
- Two Zucker Systems staff spent three days in Sheridan April 21, 22, and 23.
- Meeting with County to discuss subdivision process.

C. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This assessment found many exemplary features within the building permit and subdivision processes as well as a number of areas where improvement is possible.

It can be difficult to invite an outside agency into your place of business and invite candid comment. The City of Sheridan - staff, Mayor and Council - are to be commended for doing so. This report contains a number of improvement recommendations and comments. It is important to look at these in the overall context of the report. Focusing on any one comment or series of observations can create a misimpression of the organization, staff or the development community. In fact, the City of Sheridan has good staff, working hard within the existing processes. Constructive input on improvement of the process should not be taken as criticism. Rather, process improvement is a path to better performance. The implementation process as outlined in this report is phased and the complete implementation is proposed to take place over 18 months. This ultimate duration of this process is dependent on political support, financial support, and community support.

Areas of Strength

- Co-location of development related functions in City Hall.
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- New permitting systems, once properly installed and used.
- Generally reasonable timelines on building permits and subdivisions.
- Friendly staff.
- Excellent drafts of the Development Manual by Engineering.

Opportunities for Improvement

Problem areas and opportunities for improvement are described throughout this report. What we consider to be five key areas, or themes, are discussed in the Executive Summary, the first chapter in this report.

Table 2 summarizes the 96 recommendations and opportunities for improvement which are made throughout this study. To assist the reader, each summarized recommendation is cross-referenced to the page on which the supporting text appears. Although all of these recommendations are important, each was given a priority number in order to help the City with implementation. There are 23 priority number one recommendations, 52 priority number two recommendations and 21 priority number three recommendations. We assume that existing staff will implement many of the recommendations and the cost, except for new staffing, generally should be absorbed through greater efficiency.

To further help the City and departments in implementation, we have also coded all the recommendations. “Phase One Actions” are recommendations, which we believe should be completed in the first nine months. “Phase Two Actions” we believe should be completed within 18 months.

There are 75 Phase One Action recommendations. Some of these are given priority 1, 2 or 3. However, that does not mean that only the priority 1 recommendations should be addressed. There are 21 Phase Two Action recommendations. The departments should develop a detailed implementation plan with time targets for these recommendations.

For each recommendation, we also indicate a responsible party for implementation.

While the above priorities and action schedules should help the City with its implementation plan, it’s essential to initially focus on the five key priorities discussed in the Executive Summary.

**Table 2
Table of Recommendations**

#	Recommendation	Responsibility	Page	Priority	Phase One Actions	Phase Two Actions
1.	Agree on an implementation plan	Mayor and Public Works Director	12	1	X	
OVERVIEW ISSUES						
2.	Consider full cost recovery for development activities	Mayor and City Council	14	3		X
3.	Establish written policies for inter-Division communication	Public Works Director	14	1	X	
4.	Weekly staff meetings between Planning and Building	Building Official and Planning and Development Director	15	2	X	
5.	Management to take a pro-active role in communication process	All Managers	15	1	X	
6.	Delegate DEQ reviews to Sheridan	Mayor and Utility Division	15	2		X
7.	Staff’s review of Developer’s Handbook to be completed in 30 days and then consultant to complete final Handbook in 30 days	Planning and Development Director	16	1	X	
8.	Complete construction standard documents	Senior Engineer Project Manager and Committee	16	1	X	
9.	Development Implementation Task Force to review Handbook and construction standards	Development Implementation Process Task Force	16	1	X	
10.	Development Implementation Process Task Force and City to work in partnership re improvement ideas	Mayor and Development Implementation Process Task Force	16	1		X
11.	Long-term create one-level one-stop permit center	Mayor and City Council	17	2		X
12.	Keep Utility Engineer co-located with Public Works Engineers	Mayor, Public Works Director and Utility Director	18	2	X	

#	Recommendation	Responsibility	Page	Priority	Phase One Actions	Phase Two Actions
13.	Provide back up to the Utility Engineer	Utility Director	18	2	X	
14.	Examine alternative ways to coordinate the systems for all aspects of the development process	Mayor	18	1	X	
PERMITTING SYSTEM ISSUES						
15.	Designate staff "owner" for new permitting system	Mayor	20	2	X	
16.	Designate one staff person as permit system expert	Mayor	20	2	X	
17.	Attempt to obtain improved service from permit system vendor	Mayor	21	2	X	
18.	Consider consultant to assist with permitting system	Mayor	21	2	X	
STAFFING/MANAGEMENT ISSUES						
19.	Develop policy manual re the development process	Public Works Director	21	1	X	
20.	Do not add items to City Council agenda on day of meeting	Mayor and City Council	22	1	X	
21.	Obtain staff consultation on Mayor and City Council initiatives	Mayor and City Council	22	1	X	
22.	Consult with staff prior to making commitments to developers	Mayor and City Council	22	1	X	
23.	Staff to make brief presentation on development items at City Council meeting	Mayor and City Council	22	2	X	
24.	City staff managers to play stronger role in being sensitive to the political process	Development related managers	23	1	X	
25.	Department and Division heads to attend self assessment management training	Development related Department and Division heads	23	2	X	
26.	All staff supervisors to participate in supervision and management training	Staff supervisors	23	2	X	
27.	Encourage more open communication within City Hall	All Managers and Supervisors	23	2	X	
BUILDING DIVISION						
28.	Establish chain of command in Building Division	Building Official	27	2	X	
29.	Building Official to be IT lead for Building Division	Building Official	27	2	X	
30.	Always conduct weekly Building Division staff meetings	Building Official	28	2	X	
31.	Have informational bulletins re code changes	Building Official	28	2		X
32.	Create policy re capping off existing utility lines	Public Works Director	28	3		X
33.	Remodel Building Division front counter area	Building Official	29	3	X	
34.	Develop handouts for Building Division	Building Official	29	2		X
35.	Locate public handouts at front counter display	Building Official	29	2	X	
36.	Include handouts on web page	Building Official	30	2		X
37.	Advertise available handouts	Building Official	30	3		X

#	Recommendation	Responsibility	Page	Priority	Phase One Actions	Phase Two Actions
38.	Establish policy re handling of building permit records	Building Official	30	3	X	
39.	Move Permit Technician location	Building Official	30	3	X	
40.	Install mirror so Permit Technician can see front counter	Building Official	31	3	X	
41.	Apply for simple permits over the Internet	Building Official	31	2	X	
42.	File plans on a timely basis	Permit Technicians	31	2	X	
43.	Change plan filing systems	Building Official	31	2		X
44.	More training for Permit Technicians	Building Official	32	2	X	
45.	Remodel front counter area re security	Building Official	32	3		X
46.	Develop policy re when soils report will be required	Building Official and Senior Engineer Project Manager	33	1	X	
47.	Establish yearly training schedule for Building Division staff	Building Official	33	2	X	
48.	Building Official to take active role with Wyoming Building Official Organization	Building Official	34	3	X	
49.	Building Official to attend the ICC Code Change Hearings	Building Official	34	3		X
50.	Building Official to attend the ICC Annual Business Meeting	Building Official	34	3		X
51.	Develop policy re Foundation Only Permits	Building Official	34	3		X
52.	Field inspection staff to sign office copy of the permit	Building Official	35	3	X	
BUILDING DIVISION – PLAN REVIEW						
53.	Train Permit Technicians re complete plans	Building Official	36	2	X	
54.	Require three sets of plans for building permits	Building Official	36	2	X	
55.	Complete plan review within 10 working days for residential and 20 working days for commercial for 95% of the applications	Building Official	36	1	X	
56.	Cross train Planners for Planning review of building permits	Planning and Development Director	37	2	X	
57.	Planner to review building plans each day	Planning and Development Director	37	2	X	
58.	Develop policy for repeat plan check process	Building Official and Plan Reviewer	37	3		X
59.	Provide back-up for Utility plan review	Utility Director	38	2	X	
60.	Utilities Division staff to review plans each day	Utility Director	38	2	X	

#	Recommendation	Responsibility	Page	Priority	Phase One Actions	Phase Two Actions
BUILDING DIVISION – INSPECTIONS						
61.	Post address or lot number on building sites	Building Official	38	3	X	
62.	Keep inspection appointments but group them for efficiency	Building Official	39	2	X	
63.	Develop policy re allowed inspections	Building Official	40	2	X	
64.	New fee schedule for multiple inspections	Building Official	40	3		X
65.	Cross training for Building Inspectors	Building Official	41	1		X
66.	Implement residential combination inspection program	Building Official	41	1		X
67.	Maintain current inspection staffing levels	Building Official	42	2	X	
68.	Frequently check answering machine	Permit Technicians	42	3	X	
69.	Notify Building Inspectors on any cancelled appointments	Permit Technicians	42	2	X	
70.	Use IVR system for building inspection requests	Building Official	42	3		X
71.	Provide ICC training for Permit Technicians	Building Official	43	2	X	
72.	Permit Technicians to report to Plan Reviewer	Building Official	43	2	X	
73.	More office time for Building Inspectors	Building Official	43	3	X	
74.	Field Inspectors to return to office at end of day	Building Official	44	3	X	
75.	Require job cards on each site	Building Official	44	2	X	
76.	Leave written correction on site	Building Official	44	2	X	
77.	Have approved plans and job car on site	Building Official	45	2	X	
78.	Changes to approved plans to be approved by Plan Reviewer	Building Official	45	2	X	
79.	Inspectors to sign off office copy of plans	Building Official	45	3		
SUBDIVISION PROCESS						
80.	Senior Engineer to handle fewer direct projects	Senior Engineer	47	2	X	
81.	Improve the monitoring of subdivision construction	Senior Engineer	48	2	X	

#	Recommendation	Responsibility	Page	Priority	Phase One Actions	Phase Two Actions
82.	Implement GIS recommendations from Development Implementation Process Task Force	GIS Coordinator	48	2		X
83.	Permitting software to monitor timelines for subdivision process	Planning and Development Director	49	2	X	
84.	Develop specific subdivision standards	Public Works Director	50	1	X	
85.	Develop consistent standards for subdivisions	Public Works Director	50	1	X	
86.	Develop policies for Temporary Certificates of Occupancy	Building Official	50	2	X	
87.	Review Subdivision Variance conditions	Planning and Development Director	50	2		X
88.	Take initiatives on Variances	Planning and Development Director	51	2	X	
89.	Modify Sketch Plat process	Planning and Development Director	53	1	X	
90.	Modify Replat process	Planning and Development Director	57	1	X	
91.	Modify Minor Subdivision process	Planning and Development Director	62	1	X	
92.	Modify Major Subdivision process	Planning and Development Director	70	1	X	
93.	Consider possible schedule for subdivision review	Public Works Department	72	2	X	
EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS						
94.	Monitor application completeness	Building Official	74	2	X	
95.	Engineering Division to discuss employee questionnaire	Senior Engineer	75	2	X	
96.	Public Works Direct to discuss employee questionnaire in staff meeting	Public Works Director	75	2	X	

Before the City begins implementing this study, we suggest that it take the following action.

1. Recommendation: The Mayor and City Departments should review the study and agree on an implementation plan, which should include:

- **An agreed-upon timetable and work program**
- **Costs estimates and method of funding**
- **Confirmation where necessary by the City Council**

The Departments already have many important tasks they are undertaking and may find the 96 recommendations overwhelming. However, as improvements take place and staff becomes empowered to change, the City may be surprised at how fast implementation can occur.

III. OVERVIEW ISSUES

A. BUDGETS

Many communities today attempt to have full cost recover for the development activities. We support this approach; however it only works well if all permit funds go to a special account rather the General Fund. It is also necessary to build a reserve account to handle revenue needs in a time of reduced permit activity.

- 2. *Recommendation:* the City should consider use of a full cost recovery approach to the development activities with revenues being isolated in a special account.**

B. COMMUNICATION

The Senior Engineer, Utilities Manager and Planning and Development Director all report to the Public Works Director. The Building Official reports directly to the Planning and Development Director. Often times the Building Division staff feels left out of the loop on development related issues and often times on City related issues as a whole. The Building Official is not recognized as a Department Head and does not attend Department Head Staff Meetings.

There are evident communication issues within each of the Divisions as well as internally in the Divisions. These communication issues must be addressed. Often times the staff will not find out a specific requirement on a specific development project until a mistake is made because a new procedure has been developed or established and the staff is not informed about the changes. From the staff's point of view, this type of change seems to happen on a daily basis and the management staff has not addressed the communication problems.

Additional leadership roles are also not defined and no one appears to volunteer to take the lead for problem solving or to implement changes for the betterment of the Department and for the development process. Improvement and change does not appear to be implemented until after a problem has developed or has been discovered. None of the changes to the process appear to be in the written form. Everything appears to be verbal which also causes confusion between staff members, the public and the development community who do not all hear the same message.

- 3. *Recommendation:* Establish written policies for communication between divisions to inform the staff of changes to the development process. This can be completed through the internal e-mail process and thorough the Cities existing memo process.**

- 4. Recommendation: Establish regular weekly staff meetings with the Planning and Building staff to inform all the staff of issues and of possible changes to the process and seek input from staff on the proposals.**
- 5. Recommendation: Management staff should take a pro-active role in the communication process.**

C. DEQ

Any water requirements exceeding a 2” diameter requires a review by the State Department of Environmental Quality. This would include most subdivisions and commercial development. The State allows this function to be delegated to the local community but it requires a licensed engineer. The State requires 60 days for its review so delegating this function to the City could be a time saver.

- 6. Recommendation: The City should explore having the DEQ reviews delegated to the City.**

D. DEVELOPER HANDBOOK

The customers for building and subdivisions want clear policies and procedures. The Development Implementation Process Task Force has suggested a Developer’s Manual that contains all procedures and forms required for any phase of development and including checklists, flow charts, and time lines. We are highly supportive of this direction.

A useful example can be seen at the County. In the lobby of the Public Works Department is a handout rack with various handouts including a 46-page handout on the subdivision process. While we did not review the quality of the handouts, the approach being used and the display of the material is excellent.

Sheridan has recognized the need for good policy, procedures and handouts but has been slow in getting this accomplished. We were given a draft Developer’s Handbook that has been underway for over a year and is being prepared by a consultant. At the time of our field work, relevant staff had not yet seen the draft. We are now told that the Draft is 90% complete and is currently being reviewed by staff. Additionally, the Senior Engineer Project Manager is working on a new construction standards document. This is being reviewed by a committee of local consultants participating with the Forward Sheridan Development Implementation Process Task Force. It is roughly 50% completed.

- 7. Recommendation:** Staff's review of the draft Developer's Handbook should be completed in no more than 30 days. Then the consultant should be given only 30 more days to complete a final draft.
- 8. Recommendation:** The Senior Engineer Project Manager and the local committee should give high priority to completing the construction standard documents. This work should be targeted for completion in 60 days.
- 9. Recommendation:** Both the Developer's Handbook and the Construction Standards drafts should be given to the Development Implementation Process Task Force for review and comment.

E. DEVELOPMENT IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS TASK FORCE

At the request of the City, FORWARD SHERIDAN agreed to facilitate a development implementation process task force, consisting of building contractors, developers, engineers, lenders, and realtors. The task force met on numerous occasions to define the top areas of concern for both the building process and the development process. Many members of this group participated in the two focus groups we held for this study.

The Task Force shared with us an April 2008 draft report. While we did not have the opportunity to discuss or analyze this work in detail, it does appear to include many useful suggestions. The Task Force indicated that they met with City department heads to achieve mutual understanding and positive change. While this was useful, it appears that the next step should be a more active participation with City staff. We see improvement as a joint partnership between the City and development industry representatives. This partnership could not only work to understand, agree on and implement the Task Force recommendations, but also advise on the recommendations included in this City report.

We are not in a position to have a conclusion on all the Task Force recommendations. Many of them are consistent with our own thoughts and recommendations. To the extent we see concerns with any of the recommendations we will so note.

- 10. Recommendation:** City development staff and the FORWARD SHERIDAN Development Implementation Process Task Force should work in partnership to understand, agree upon and implement the Task

Force recommendations as well as the recommendations from this City review of the building permit and subdivision process.

F. OFFICE SPACE

The national trend for development related functions is to create a “one-stop” permit center, which consists of the co-location of all functions in one office and often with joint application intake. The best of these so called “one-stop” permit centers locate everyone on one floor. While this is ideal, cities and counties often need to make compromises as related to existing facilities and budgets.

Sheridan does have a good feature in having Building, Engineering, Planning and Utilities along with a hearing room all located within City Hall. The problem is that they are located on four separate floors, which produces inefficiencies for both staff and applicants. It also, reduces the synergism that would be possible with a different layout. As noted elsewhere in this report, we believe the various functions could do a better job of working together in a coordinated way. However, given the relatively low volume of development activity, the functions can work reasonably well as currently housed.

11. Recommendation: Should the City ever need more office space for the various City functions, or should an opportunity present itself, consideration should be given to creating a one level “one-stop” permit center.

G. ORGANIZATION

As mentioned above, the national trend is to merge development related functions into the same department. This generally includes Building, Code Enforcement, Engineering and Planning. Other functions that are sometimes included are Health, Transportation and Utilities.

Sheridan has a good structure, in that it already includes Building, Engineering, Planning and Utilities within the Public Works Department. Since Sheridan’s organization does not include either a City Manager or City Administrator, this grouping of functions under the Public Works Director is particularly critical. In many ways, the Public Works Director can or should function like a Deputy City Administrator would function.

The one problem that is evident is the very large span of control for the Public Works Director. Discussions are underway to split the Department into two departments, consisting of Public Works and Utilities. This would address the span of control

issues and group the Utility Enterprise function in a separate department. One of the Engineers who currently reports to the Senior Engineer in Public Works and who currently handles Utility Engineering issues would continue the same function but report to the Utilities Director.

Based on our limited review, we have no objection to this change as it relates to the building and subdivision processes but suggest the following features:

- The Utility Engineer should continue to be co-located with the Public Works Engineers in City Hall.
- Some cross training should be available to handle utility reviews when the Utility Engineer is on vacation or absent from the office.

12. Recommendation: Any re-structuring of Public Works and Utilities should co-locate the Utility Engineer with the Public Works Engineers.

13. Recommendation: Any re-structuring of Public Works and Utilities should provide for back up to the Utility Engineer.

Coordination between the various functions appears to work reasonably well between the various Divisions and functions as related to specific applications. However, no one is designated to be concerned about the various systems and aspects of the development process that cuts across all divisions. Someone should be designated this task which would include looking at coordinated technology, process flows, policies, timelines, handouts, website, etc.

We see two logical alternatives for this designation. One would be for the Planning Department and the Planning and Development Director. This Department already is a central point for many types of applications. The other would be an assistant to the Public Works Director. The benefit of this location is that the Public Works function organizationally includes most of the relevant functions. This responsibility would be for all aspects of the development process, not just building permits and subdivisions. AS such, we were not in a position to determine if existing staff could handle this function or if supplemental staff would be required.

14. Recommendation: The City should examine alternative ways for someone to coordinate the systems for all aspects of the development process.

H. PERMITTING SYSTEM

We were not under contract to examine the permitting technology but did conduct a brief review since it is so central to creating an efficient building permit and inspection and subdivision processes.

The national trend is to gradually move to the long anticipated “paper-less” office. Features of this, which are just now beginning to appear in a variety of communities, include:

- Integrated permit software that tie together and is used by all participants in the development process.
- The permitting software and GIS are carefully and seamlessly integrated.
- Virtually all ordinances, data, applications, and handouts are on the community’s web site.
- Field computers are used by inspectors.
- Applicants can track progress on their application over the Internet.
- Applicants can apply for many types of permits over the Internet.
- Plans are handled electronically, including transfer via the Internet.

Sheridan started to head in this direction, but much more needs to be done. For example, a considerable amount of information is on the City website and a GIS system is in place. The City also had a permitting system (Permits Plus) but this was an early version of permitting systems and had many problems. In 2007 the City purchased a new system called EnerGov Solutions. At least part of the system has been in operation over the last four to six months. Staff expressed considerable frustration about implementing the new system. They particularly feel that the vendor has been slow to answer their questions and fix problems with the system.

We were also told that the City is contemplating a new system for accounting and personal and such systems could have a permitting sub-component. The City is working with the Government Finance Officers Association to assist in writing an RFP, writing scripts and helping select a vendor. Interestingly, Zucker Systems recently was involved in a similar effort for a mid-sized community in California and it may be useful for Sheridan to talk with that City about its experience. The City has completed its selection of both an ERP system (Enterprise Resource Planning) and a new permitting system. Zucker Systems participated in the selection of the permitting system as well as preparing for installation. The system is now live and in use.

Many of the ERP systems do have a permitting sub-component. However, in our experience some of these systems are inferior to stand-alone permitting systems. In the California example, the City allowed vendors to bid either with an integrated system or with a stand-alone permitting system. A key requirement was that both

systems be capable of good interface. The permitting system selected for this community was a stand-alone system.

At this point in time, Sheridan appears to have the following choices:

- It could select a new permitting system as part of a new ERP system.
- It could select a new stand-alone permitting system that is compatible with the new ERP system.
- It could work to solve problems with the EnerGov Solutions system.

Based on our limited analysis, the third alternative would appear to be the first course of action. Some of the City's problems may relate to the vendor, but others may relate to the way the City has implemented the system. Note:

- In our experience, virtually all the systems have considerable frustration in early phases of implementation. However, Sheridan's systems have now been in place long enough that these should be diminishing.
- The City does not have a clear "owner" of the system and it appears that the City IT function can provide only limited support. There is no one staff member assigned from the Building Division, from the Planning Department or from the City as a whole to work directly with the software vendor and communicate the issues from the staff to the vendor. There is no one responsible for the implementation process for the new software system. Every staff member will at times contact the software vendor directly to attempt to work out the issues.
- The vendor may not be sufficiently supporting the system. This could relate to the nature of the City's contract.

A number of our clients have found it useful to have a contract with a consultant not associated with the vendor to both solve problems and assist with vendor interface issues. Our technology expert could assist in this area should the City so desire.

15. Recommendation: The City should designate who should be the key "owner" of the permitting systems for the City. The owner should work with all the functions to coordinate improvement and use of the system.

16. Recommendation: The City should designate one staff person who becomes a part-time expert in solving small issues and staff training. This would normally be an existing staff member who is technology savvy and interested in this role. Often this may be one of the City's "super-users."

- 17. Recommendation:** The City should examine its service contract with the vendor and attempt to obtain improved service.
- 18. Recommendation:** The City should consider hiring a consultant to assist in working with the permitting system problems and also advising on possible interfacing with a new ERP system.

I. POLICY DOCUMENTS

The City's does not have many written polices to help guide the public, development community, Inspectors, Plan reviewers and other City staff through the development process. There are also no written and adopted policies to assist the staff with code related issues or with special or unusual circumstances.

- 19. Recommendation:** The Public Works Director should develop a complete set of adopted written policies in the form of a policy manual to assist the general public, the development community and the staff with the development process and with code related issues.

J. STAFFING

The Sheridan community has experienced considerable growth pressures related to energy development. Unemployment is low and many employers are experiencing unfilled positions and high turnover. As an employer, the City has likewise experience considerable staff turnover. The citywide turnover rate in 2006 was 20%, in 2007 it was 16%, and the trend for 2008 is 8%. Though turnover has primarily been in entry level or frontline positions, rather than in the engineering planning and building departments, we believe turn over that exceeds 10% create staffing and organizational pressures on the functions.

At the same time, to keep up with workload, the City has added staffing in the engineering planning and building departments. Since 2006 Engineering has added three positions, Planning has added two positions and Building has added three positions.

Turnover has been a particular problem with the Director of Public Works that has had three Directors in six years. Part of the problem here may have been the span of control being too large which will be corrected if and when Utilities is made a separate department.

The lack of a City Manager or City Administrator may also create staffing issues. The Mayor has to perform both his political responsibilities as well as the non-political executive responsibilities. Many staff and managers feel that this mix tends to marginalize their roles which can lead to discontent.

This situation can be helped by both the Mayor and City Council having adequate sensitivity as to how their responsibilities and staff responsibilities interface. An example would be when items are added to a City Council agenda without consultation with staff or public notice. Another example would be where first readings or ordinances take place when ordinances are still being prepared. At the meeting we attended, changes were still being made at the third reading. Staff also feels that there are cases where the Mayor or Council takes the initiative on an issue without adequate staff consultation or when a policy is adopted without adequately considering its implications. It could also reinforce staff if staff were asked to make a brief presentation on all items before the applicant is asked to present.

On the other hand, managers and staff need to recognize that they are advisors to the Mayor and Council and need to carry out the directions set by the elected officials. Staff may not always proceed at a pace that is in tune with the Mayor and Council or aggressively anticipate the City needs and directions.

Additionally, in a city without a City Manager or City Administrator, the managers need to play a stronger role in working with the political process. They also need to play a strong role in interpreting political directions for subordinate staff.

- 20. *Recommendation:* The Mayor and City Council should not add items to the agenda on the day of the meeting, particularly without adequate staff input or analysis.**
- 21. *Recommendation:* The Mayor and City Council should be sensitive to obtaining good staff consultation on their initiatives.**
- 22. *Recommendation:* Staff should be consulted before either Mayor or Council make commitments to developers.**
- 23. *Recommendation:* Staff should be asked to make a brief presentation on City Council agenda items prior to having a presentation or comments from the applicant.**

- 24. *Recommendation:* Various City Department Heads and/or Division Managers should play a stronger role in being sensitive to the political process and assisting the Mayor and City Council with their initiatives.**
- 25. *Recommendation:* Consider having the Department and Division heads attend professional self assessment management training.**
- 26. *Recommendation:* Have all the supervisors participate in supervision and management training programs.**
- 27. *Recommendation:* More open communication channels should be encouraged within the entire City hall staff.**

We did not conduct a staffing study as part of this contract. However, in discussions with staff and from our own observations, it appears that most of the building and subdivision related functions are adequately staffed. However, many of these staff members are new, so extra time is needed for training and generally getting familiar with the City. Based on recommendations from Forward Sheridan, it is possible that the GIS function could use additional resources.

IV. BUILDING DIVISION

A. PROFILE

Overview

The Building and Safety Division of the Planning Department serves the public and the City by providing local enforcement of City adopted Building Codes, mandatory State Regulations and local Municipal Ordinances pertaining to construction and development standards. Currently the State of Wyoming only adopts a State Fire Code and the local jurisdictions are required to adopt that specific State Fire code, which in this case is the International Fire Code, 2006 edition, as published by the International Code Council. Each City and or County in Wyoming can adopt the other building, plumbing, mechanical and electrical codes along with related references and standards as they choose.

Authority

The current adopted codes for the City of Sheridan which are published by the International Code Council (ICC) are:

- International Building Code 2006 edition.
- International Residential Code, 2006 edition.
- International Existing Building Code, 2006 edition.
- International Plumbing Code, 2006 edition.
- International Fuel Gas Code, 2006 edition.
- International Mechanical Code, 2006 edition.
- Uniform Code for the Abatement of Dangerous Buildings, 1997 edition.
- National Electric Code, 2008 edition as published by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

Activity

The Division's implementation of the adopted codes, standards and ordinances is achieved through comprehensive plan review, investigation and inspection of the work performed by the development community. This plan review and inspection process is designed to provide the minimum life, health and fire safety for the protection of the property and the public.

The Division is also responsible for responding to complaints generated by the public for the enforcement of substandard living conditions as outlined in the “Uniform Code for the Abatement of Dangerous Buildings.”

The Division provides recommendations to the City Council for the adoption of building codes and recommends more restrictive amendments to the adopted codes for the protection of life, fire and health safety reasons, based on local conditions.

Additional areas of responsibility include the accountability for damage assessment, evaluation and determination of building safety after a natural or manmade disaster such as an earthquake, flood, fire or terrorist act. The Division is responsible for ordering demolition or repair of damaged structures.

The Division also works closely with the Planning, Engineering, and Public Works Departments for the review and inspections of all development related projects within the City limits of Sheridan. The Division also works closely with the public and the development community on a daily basis.

The annual average activity for the function is shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Annual Building Division Activity

Activity	Number of Applications
Single Family Dwellings	100
Single Family Additions or Remodels	900
Multi-Family Projects	5
Commercial Construction	15
Industrial Construction	2
Plan Checks	1,000
Subdivisions	15
Building Inspections	1,300

Staffing

The Building and Safety Division currently consists of nine (9) staff members as shown in Table 4 and receives input from the City’s Fire Marshal on a daily basis.

**Table 4
Building Division Staffing**

Classification	Number of Positions	Responsibilities
Building Official	1	Oversees the Division, provides direction to staff with their daily work load and reports directly to the Planning and Development Director.
Plans Examiner	1	Reviews the structural aspects of residential, commercial and industrial plans for compliance to minimum adopted codes and regulations. Also assists the public at the counter, inputs fees into the computer, issues permits and assists with the development of counter handouts. Reviews on the average about ten (10) plans a week, reports to the Building Official.
Building Inspector	1	Provides daily inspections for the review of structural aspects of a building project. Is assigned an area of the City to perform daily inspections. Assists with fee inputs, issues building permits. Performs on the average about eight (8) building inspections a day, drives about 40 miles a day, assists with one or two building plan reviews a week and reports to the Building Official.
Building Inspector	1	Provides daily inspections for the review of structural aspects of a building project. Is assigned an area of the City to perform daily inspection. Assists with fee inputs, issues building permits. Performs on the average about eight (8) building inspections a day, drives about 40 miles a day, assists with one or two plan reviews a week and reports to the Building Official.
Electrical Inspector	1	Provides daily inspections for the review of electrical aspects of a building project. Performs these inspection functions on a City wide basis. Assists with fee inputs for electrical items, issues electrical permits and assists with the electrical plan review for all building projects. Additional required duties for the City include the requirement to maintain an Electrical Contractor's License, and to install and supervise electrical related items for City owned projects. In addition to his other duties, performs on the average 5 electrical inspections a day, drives about 40 miles a day, performs on the average eight (8) electrical plan reviews a week, and reports to the Building Official.
Mechanical/HVAC Inspector	1	Provides daily inspections for the review of mechanical aspects of a building project. Performs these inspections functions on a City wide basis. Assists with fee inputs, assists with the phones, issues mechanical permits for mechanical items and assists with the mechanical plan review for all building projects. Performs on the average about three (3) mechanical inspections a day, drives about 30 miles a day, performs about five (5) mechanical plan reviews a week and reports to the Building Official.
Plumbing Inspector	1	Provides daily inspections for the review of plumbing aspects of a building project. Performs these functions on a City wide basis. Assists with fee inputs, issues plumbing permits for plumbing items and assists with the plumbing plan review for all building projects. Performs on the average about six (6) plumbing inspections a day, drives about 35 miles a day, performs about five (5) plan reviews a week and reports to the Building official.
Permit Technician	1	Assists the public at the front counter, answers phones, retrieves inspection requests from the answering machine, files plans, files permits, inputs simple permit fees, issues simple building permits at the front counter, schedule inspections and assists with the Contractor's licensing issuance and tracking requirements. On the average between five (5) to ten (10) people are assisted at the front counter each day. On the average about twenty (20) to twenty-five (25) phone calls are received each day, about two (2) permits are issued each day and, the Permit Technician reports to the Building Official.
Permit Technician	1	Assists the public at the front counter, answers phones, retrieves inspection requests from the answering machine, files plans, files permits, inputs simple permit fees, issues simple building permits at the front counter, schedule inspections and assists with the Contractor's Licensing issuance and tracking requirements. On the average between five (5) to ten (10) people are assisted at the front counter each day. On the average about twenty (20) to twenty-five (25) phone calls are received each day, about two (2) permits are issued each day and, the Permit Technician reports to the Building Official.

B. ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES

Chain of Command

The current Building Division consists of nine (9) staff member with everyone reporting to the Building Official. There is no chain of command established. The

current job descriptions for the individual staff members vary from position to position. Most of the inspections are similar in nature but perform different and varied functions for the City. The current pay scales are also not consistent for similar positions.

28. Recommendation: Establish a specific supervisor chain of command for the Building Division and consider assigning the Plan Reviewer as the next staff person in charge of the Division when the Building Official is absent from the office.

Computer Software Program

The Building Division is currently utilizing a new computer permit software program, called “EnerGov”. The current computer software program has been difficult to implement and the City has not had a lot of success obtaining assistance from the software vendor. The system currently is very limited in the aspect of report writing and does not meet the minimum requirements for the Division. Additionally, according to the staff, it takes about fifteen (15) minutes to complete and print a simple building permit. Currently, all of the inspection staff issues permits. The Permit Technicians issue very few permits each day.

The daily inspection print out that each inspector utilizes often will print a complete inspection history of a job site rather than just printing the minimum information required to complete the inspection. Sometimes the software system will print ten (10) or more pages just for a single address. Each staff member expressed their concerns for the implementation of the software system.

29. Recommendation: The Building Official should also be assigned as the lead person for the Building Division and he should work closely with the IT or Department staff person and with the software vendor to work out the problems and implement the permit software programs.

Communications

There is a need for additional communication amongst the Building Division staff. A good way to improve this is through the weekly staff meeting. The Division has had weekly staff meetings; however, sometimes they are missed. Additionally, there is a need for improved communication with the development community on code changes or interpretations. Many communities use a newsletter and the web site for this purpose.

30. Recommendation: The Building Official should always conduct weekly staff meetings with all the Building Division staff members to insure that the development process and development related policies are understood and processed by all.

31. Recommendation: Implement and maintain an informational bulletin service for all code related changes and development related changes for the development community. This can be accomplished on the City's web site and through a periodic newsletter published by the Building official.

Contractor Licensing

The State of Wyoming does not have a State mandated contractor licensing program. A person who wishes to become a licensed contractor within a specific jurisdiction simply comes into that specific City, pays the required fees, and requests certification as a licensed contractor. The City of Sheridan's Building and Safety Division has had two (2) ways to issue individual contractor's licenses. The City staff asked them to complete a form and indicate their individual experience. Additionally, the person seeking the license was required to take a test that is offered by the Wyoming Association of Municipalities or a local test. After we completed our field work, the City changed its policy to know use only the Wyoming Association of Municipalities test. We strongly support this change.

Demolition Process

The development community in the City has been recently developing both in fill lots and has been buying older single family dwelling units with the intent of demolishing those older homes and building newer ones in those locations. The current demolishing process requires the developer to remove all the existing utilities on that property to point of connection with the City mains. This requirement often will add additional time and money to the development process for both the developer and for the City. If the existing utility lines are in good shape, it is common practice in other jurisdictions to allow contractors to simply cap off all the existing utilities on the property, rather than removing them. The capped off utilities are then shown on a plot plan for possible future use for that specific project. Additional service credits can also be given to the developer for the existing utilities on the property.

32. Recommendation: The Building Official, Senior Engineer Project Manager, Utility Director and the Public Works Director should develop a written policy to address the possibility of capping off existing utility lines on the property for the demolition process.

Front Counter

The public and the development community as well as the staff currently come into the Building and Safety Division through the basement stairs or through the elevator. The front counter operations consist of two desks with a small 12-inch wide public counter area. This area is not big enough for the Permit Technicians or for the public to unroll the plans to insure that the minimum sets of plans and minimum amount of information is on the plans for submittal.

- 33. Recommendation: Remodel the front counter area and install an actual front counter area large enough for the public and the staff to unroll the plans and to review the plans.**

Handouts

The City's Building Division currently has only fifteen (15) handouts available for the public to utilize. These handouts are very general in nature and do not have any identifying marks, City logos or anything else that would indicate to the public that these handouts are official and issued by the City of Sheridan and are approved for use. Some of the handouts are copies of adopted code sections and some of the handouts are drawings. These handouts are also not available at the public counter and are not readily available for the public's use. None of the handouts are on the City's web page. The majority of the handouts are either kept in a file cabinet or in a small display holder back in the rear of the offices. The public and the development community are not aware that any handouts exist. In order to obtain a copy of a handout the public must ask the correct questions of staff before they will be made aware that a handout even exists.

- 34. Recommendation: The City's Building Official should develop new official City-approved handouts, containing the City's logo. At a minimum, five new handouts per month should be generated until there is a sufficient amount to fit the needs of the public. Many Cities will have as many as 50 to 100 different handouts available for general use by the public.**

- 35. Recommendation: The Division staff should relocate the public handouts to the front of the public counter and make these handouts available for the general public's use. The new location should be well marked and advertised to let the public know that these handouts are available for their use.**

36. Recommendation: Make sure all handouts are available for the public on the City's web page.

37. Recommendation: Take an add out in the local newspaper to inform the public that the City has several Building and Safety handouts available to the public that can assist them with their individual construction projects and that can help them through the permit process.

Inspection Records

The building inspection records are maintained by all the inspection division staff. One of the primary responsibilities for the Permit Technicians is to track and file the building inspection records. Almost on a daily basis, other Divisions and Department staff within the City request building permit information. Existing unwritten policies allows personnel from other Divisions and Departments to come down to the Building Division and go through the files and also take building inspection records from the area. Often times these files and records are not logged out by the other City staff and the records are lost or never returned to the Building Division.

38. Recommendation: The Building Official should develop a written policy and implement that policy for the retention of the building permit records and files within the Division. The retention policy should require any records leaving the Division to be dully signed out by the individual taking the specific file and that all the requests for permit records must be routed through the Permit Technicians for proper tracking and accountability.

Location of Permit Technicians

There are two (2) Permit Technicians, one sits at the front counter area and has most of the contact with the public while the other sits behind a wall and has only a partial view of the front counter area. Neither has enough space at their desks or at the front counter to unroll the plans for proper review and information verification. As a result, often times the plans that are submitted are incomplete, and do not meet the minimum requirements for plan review.

39. Recommendation: Move the one permit technician who is stationed at the front counter area to the back area where the other Permit Technician is located. This will allow them both to share the public work load on a more even basis.

- 40. Recommendation: Install a mirror or window to allow the relocated permit technician to view the front counter area and to better assist the public.**

On-line Permitting

The new permitting system has an option to allow customers to file for simple permits on line with a credit card. This is a good service for both customers and the Building Division and should be pursued as soon as possible.

- 41. Recommendation: Allow simple permits to be applied for over the Internet.**

Plan Filing

The Permit Technicians are responsible for the proper filing of the issued permits and for the filing of the approved plans. Staff is behind in their filing of approved plans there are several plans waiting to be filed. The small amount of plan reviews that are submitted each week should allow for these plans to be filed in a timely basis.

- 42. Recommendation: Require the Permit Technicians to file the approved plans in a timely basis and to set aside time each day to complete that task.**

The Permit Technicians are also responsible for the filing of the approved plans. The staff currently utilizes large filing cabinets located by the Plan Reviewers desk. The current filing system does not allow for quick and easy access to the plan files. It takes a concentrated effort to file the approved plans and a bigger effort to remove the plans from the filing system if you ever need to review the plans. As a result there are several sets of approved plans that need to be filed and these are left on an empty desk. There are other plan filing systems that are easy to utilize and easy to find plans.

- 43. Recommendation: The City should invest time to review other plan file options and then to purchase a new filing system and establish a better plan filing system for the approved plans.**

Processing of Permits

The Permit Technicians back each other up for phone, counter coverage and for lunch times. Additionally one staff member comes to work at 7:00 AM in order to assist the inspection staff with their calls and inspections for the day and departs at 4:00 PM

each day. The other staff member comes into work at 8:00 AM and stays till 5:00 PM each day in order to insure proper counter coverage.

The Permit Technicians process about twenty permits a week each. Part of their main function is to process permits and to input that information into the computer. The Building Inspectors input most of the daily information into the computer and process most of the permit activity for the Division. This time spent in the office takes time away from the field.

44. Recommendation: Provide training for the Permit Technicians to enable them to process and issue all the different types of permit activity for the City, efficiently.

Security and Office Control

Upon a brief review of the front counter operations and after a discussion with the office staff, it is evident that the public feels that they can walk right past the staff and go either directly to the Building Official's offices or to one of the other offices in the Division. Sometimes the public is irate with the staff and/or is very upset about an issue and the staff feels unsafe.

45. Recommendation: Remodel the front counter area and install a small gate that would keep the public out of the offices unless invited back and that would still allow the staff to buzz the public or other city staff back into the offices. This would provide for a safer environment for the staff and at the same time still allow the public to gain access to each staff member if needed.

Soils Reports

The City of Sheridan has a wide variety of different soils conditions throughout the City. In some cases different soil types can even be found in the same subdivision. Soils reports and foundation requirements can vary from lot to lot in the same subdivision. The Building Division currently requires soils reports to be submitted for every new development project within the City limits. This practice is a good one since it is better to discover these soil conditions before the foundation is started. The requirement to submit soils reports can save the developer both time and money. However there is no existing policy or procedure that addresses the requirement to submit soils reports. A majority of the soils reports are not required until the plans are submitted for the plan review process. During the DRC process the staff can and should notify the development of the requirement to address the soil conditions for each proposed development project.

- 46. Recommendation:** The Building Official and the Senior Engineer Project Manager should develop a written policy and implement that policy that will address exactly when and where a soils report will be required and at what point in the process that soils report is required.

Training

The Building Division staff has received limited amounts of specific code related training. The City has recently adopted a complete set of new International Codes. These new codes have completely different formats and in some cases different code requirements. It is important for the Building Division staff to stay up to date with the code related changes. This will assist them in providing better and more complete service to the public and the development community. There is a Wyoming Association of Building Officials organization that does conduct code-related seminars and classes three times a year at an adjacent City. The seminars are given for three-day periods. Additionally the International Code Council (ICC), the International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials (IAPMO), and the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) all have established training programs that are available through the internet and that are also provided at different parts of the State and Country several times a year.

The Building Official does not actively participate in the Wyoming State Building Official organization or with the International Code Council and does not attend code change hearings or the Annual Business Meetings (ABM). The code change hearings are a vital part of the Building Officials position. Attendance at the code change hearings will help to keep the Building Official up to date on issues, new regulations and code changes. This will enable him to also keep the Building Division staff and the City aware of changes that will affect them and the development community in the future. The attendance at the ICC Annual Business Meeting is also an important part of the Building Officials networking possibilities. This meeting will allow the Building Official to network with other Building Officials from around the country and will allow him to pick up vital information to make improvements to the development process and to adopted policies.

- 47. Recommendation:** The Building Inspectors, Permit Technicians, Plan Reviewers and the Building Official should establish a regular yearly training schedule and attend regular ICC, IAPMO, IAIEI and NFPA seminars. At the very least, each staff person should attend one such professional seminar a year.

- 48. Recommendation:** The Building Official should be encouraged to take an active role with the State of Wyoming Building Official Organization and attend those yearly meetings.
- 49. Recommendation:** The Building Official should attend the ICC Code Change Hearings which take place every 18 months at different location across the Country.
- 50. Recommendation:** The Building Official should attend the ICC Annual Business Meeting that takes place once per year usually in September and is held at different locations across the Country.

C. POLICIES

Foundation Only Permits

The Building Division issues “Foundation Only Permits” on a very limited basis. There is currently no adopted policy or procedure for the issuance of Foundation Only Permits” Several issues are related to this process. The Division must be able to insure that the minimum information is available for both the Inspector to inspect by and for the developer to build by. In order to do this the Division does require the developer to make the request for a “Foundation only Permit” and require that he or she submit a separate set of foundation only plans for review and approval. Often times the developer does not want to take this extra step in order to be issued the “Foundation Only Permit.” It is a small added expense to the developer but the process can also allow the developer to proceed at his own risk with his or her project in a timely manner.

- 51. Recommendation:** The Building Official should develop and implement a written policy to allow for the issuance of a “Foundation Only Permit” when deemed appropriate. Additionally the policy should include a “hold harmless” statement indicating that the Developer understands the possible risk and that he or she is willing to take that risk in case there are required changes to the plans further down the line in the approval process.

D. PLAN REVIEW

Overview

Inspectors' individual workloads vary, but still allow time to assist with the plan review process, as well as code related study.

The plan review process is simple and the amount of written corrections is limited. The Plan reviewer will contact the designer and/or developer to discuss the plan check related concerns and issues and will work these issues out during the plan review process and simply red line the plans with the required corrections.

Fire Review

The Division's working relationship with the Fire Department is excellent and the Fire Marshall is in the Building Division offices on a daily basis to perform daily plan reviews and to communicate with the Building Division staff as well as with the public.

The Fire Marshal provides a complete plan review of the submitted plans. He will also complete a written correction for each plan review completed. The written correction notice is complete and easy to understand. His written corrections are accepted by the development community.

The Building Inspectors currently only sign off the permits in the computer. So there is no hard copy of the inspection records in the office other than in the computer. The Building Division staff has also indicated that the existing computer software is hard to utilize and that it is not easy to track down which inspections have been approved or denied on the system.

52. Recommendation: The Building Official should develop a written policy and implement that policy that directs the field inspection staff to also sign off the office copy of the permit. This will come in handy if the computer ever fails and will prove useful for the office staff to access those permit records in a timely manner.

Plan Review

The current plan review process indicates that the initial plan review will be completed within ten (10) working days for residential type developments, and within twenty (20) working days for commercial and industrial type projects. The actual times for residential plan review in 2007 are shown in Table 5. As can be seen, 70.5% met the 10 working day target. We suggest that the target should be met 95% of the time.

Table 5
Residential Plan Check Times for 2007

Days	Number	Percent
0 to 5	24	20.9%
6 to 10	57	49.6%
11 to 15	17	14.8%
16 to 20	12	10.4%
Over 20	5	4.3%
	115	

The actual time frames for the initial plan review process to be completed are thirty (30) to forty (40) days for commercial and industrial projects. The applicant is required to submit two (2) sets of complete plans for review. These plans are supposed to be reviewed at the front counter for completeness by the Permit Technicians. However the majority of plans submitted are not complete enough for review. The plans are then logged into the computer and on the log sheet by the Permit Technicians and are routed directly to the Planning Department for their review and approval.

53. Recommendation: Provide training for the Permit Technicians to understand the minimum amount of information required in order to accept a set of plans for review. This will assist with the overall development process.

54. Recommendation: Require the development community to submit three (3) complete sets of plans for the plan review process and develop a concurrent plan review process where one set of complete plans is routed to the Planning Division for their review and approval while the other set is held in the Building Division for their review and approval.

55. Recommendation: Plan review for residential should be completed within 10 working days and for commercial within 20 working days for 95% of the applications.

Planning Review

Currently there is only one (1) Planning staff member, an Assistant Planner who is assigned to review plans. One (1) copy of the plans is submitted to the Assistant Planner for review, prior to the Building Division staff reviewing the plans. Often times the Assistant Planner will have the plans for a week or longer. No set time frame has been established for the review of plans. Additionally there is no other Planning staff person cross-trained or assigned to assist with the plan review process if the Assistant Planner is overwhelmed with the amounts of plans submitted or is out sick or on vacation. This system delays the plan review process. Commercial and Industrial projects larger than 10,000 square feet in size are also routed to the Utilities Division for their review and approval.

56. *Recommendation:* Provide cross training to other Planning staff members in the plan review process to allow for increased workloads, and for sick and vacation time back up.

57. *Recommendation:* Develop a specific daily requirement for plan review for the Assistant Planner to review plans each day.

Repeat Plan Checks

The City's existing plan review process requires that each and every set of single family residential plans being submitted be completely reviewed. This requirement applies to plans that are being built throughout the City on a regular basis such as in a tract development with several different model plans being built. The current plan review system does not take into account repeat plan reviews for the same product. This can add some additional time to the plan review process. Allowances can be provided for those developers who design and build the same single family dwelling unit throughout the City.

58. *Recommendation:* The Building Official and Plan Reviewer should develop a written policy and implement that policy to address the repeat plan check process and provide for a shorter time frame for the review of these types of plans.

Utility Review

Currently there is only one (1) Utilities staff member a Utilities Services Coordinator who is assigned to review plans. Once the Assistant Planner has completed the review

of the plans, they are routed to Utilities for their review. Often times the Utilities Coordinator will review the plans as soon as possible. However, he often receives a large number of plans to review all at once. Additionally if he is out on vacation or out sick the plans will remain on his desk until he comes back from vacation. There is no one assigned as back-up or cross trained to handle plan review in the case of his absence from the office. This has delayed the plan review process for up to an additional month for commercial and industrial projects.

59. Recommendation: Provide cross training for other Utility staff members in the plan review process in order to provide workload backup, sick leave and vacation leave backup for the Utilities Services Coordinator position.

60. Develop a specific daily requirement for plan review for the Utilities Division staff to review plans each day.

E. INSPECTIONS

Addresses

The inspection staff has also indicated that often times they will attempt to find a specific site to perform an inspection that was called in for the day. On occasion they spend a lot of time looking for a specific site or can not find the site because no address is posted at the site or no lot number is posted in case of a tract development.

61. Recommendation: It is recommended that the Building Official develop a written policy and implement that policy that requires all permitted construction sites to either post the address or lot number in a site that will be easily located by the Building Inspector for the entire time the project is under construction. Additionally is recommended that the Building Official perform some outreach with the development community to inform them of the new policies.

Appointments

The Building Inspectors perform daily inspections on an appointment basis. This approach allows the contractors to know exactly when a Building Inspector will show up to their specific job site. However this appointment inspection system requires the Building Inspectors to travel back and forth around the City in order to meet specific

appointment times. The appointment system cost the City additional money for gas and mileages for the City vehicles and at the same time adds additional inspection time to the daily work load for each Building Inspector.

Often times the Building Inspectors will make a morning inspection on a specific street and because of the appointment schedule they will travel across town and then have to come back to that same street again in the afternoon to perform another inspection.

The City could keep the appointment system but control it on a tighter basis. Appointments could be made but only when grouped with other inspections.

62. Recommendation: The Building Division should keep the appointment system but group appointments for better efficiency.

The daily appointment inspection system as established by the Building Official, allows the development community to call in for partial inspections for all the specific specialty inspection fields. As an example the Hampton Inn has called for and received a total of fifty-five (55) rough electrical inspections at no additional charge to the City. Granted this is a large project however generally the electrical contractor on large construction projects will be allowed to call in for an inspection, as arranged by the Building Inspector, on a floor by floor or area by area basis which would break down to only ten (10) to fifteen (15) rough electrical inspections rather than then current fifty-five (55). Each inspector does have the ability to control the amount of inspections they will do on each project.

This type of appointment inspection schedule is also required for the Plumbing, Mechanical, and Building Inspectors. As a result, one large project can lead to providing over two – hundred (200) inspections. The number of inspections on a large project can be greatly reduced, (~sixty (60)) by employing a floor inspection system. This type of appointment inspection system can be very beneficial to the development community, but can prove to be very costly to the City and does create additional paper work and additional inspection times for the staff. The City may wish to continue with the existing system or change that system to a more reasonable inspection and less demanding inspection system.

The current adopted fee schedule for the City does not take into consideration the amount of additional inspection time each Inspector is providing for large projects. The existing appointment inspection process also does not allow or take into consideration the amount of time each Inspector is required to spend on each inspection. Instead, the current appointment inspection systems requires the inspection staff to provide a large amount of additional time on the construction project and spend a large amount of additional time keeping records of all the inspections performed.

63. Recommendation: The Building Official should develop a written policy and implement that policy that limits the amount of allowed scheduled appointment inspections on all construction projects to a maximum amount and that would still allow each Building Inspector the flexibility to increase that maximum amount when necessary.

If the City would still like to maintain the existing appointment inspection schedule than the City should consider adjusting the fees accordingly.

64. Recommendation: The City should establish a new fee schedule that takes into consideration the additional time and effort required of the inspection staff to maintain the existing appointment inspection schedule.

Combination Inspections

The current Appointment Inspection systems and staffing levels requires a minimum of four (4) different staff Inspectors, depending on the project type and specialty, to perform a complete inspection. The Building Inspectors make an appointment to visit the site and will only inspect the structural aspects of a construction project, the development community will then make an appointment with the Electrical Inspector to visit the site and he will only inspect the electrical portions of that project. The development community will once again call into the office and make an appointment with the Mechanical Inspector to visit the site and he will only inspect the mechanical portions of that project. Once again the development community will contact the Building Division and make an appointment for an inspection with the Plumbing inspector, and he will visit the site and only inspect the plumbing portions of that project.

There is no State law or local Ordinance that requires the use of a Plumbing and Mechanical Special Inspector. There is currently a State law that requires all Electrical work to be installed and inspected by a State certified master electrician.

Although the City's current staffing levels and work load allow for the use of specific Plumbing, Mechanical, Electrical and Building Inspectors, most jurisdictions have gone to the use of Combination Building Inspectors for most residential projects and some minor tenant improvements who can perform structural, plumbing, mechanical and electrical inspections. The use of Combination Building Inspectors can provide for more timely inspections for the development community by requiring only one (1) Combination Building inspector to go to a specific site rather than the current four (4) different inspectors to complete the entire inspection process. The use of Combination Building Inspectors can also save time and money for the City by reducing the

required number of Inspectors on staff and by reducing the use of City Vehicles and maintenance for those vehicles as well as saving in staff costs.

Additionally in order for the development to obtain their requested Certificate of Occupancy (C of O) the current inspection system requires four (4) different inspectors to go out to the site to perform an inspection. The use of Residential Combination Building Inspectors will reduce that requirement down to only one (1) inspector visiting the site to perform that C of O final inspection.

The total average daily inspection load is only about twenty-five (25) inspections between all of the five (5) Inspectors. This averages out to only five (5) inspections each per day. Since the current State law requires the use of a master Electrical Building Inspector, and the City utilizes that specific staff member for other City functions besides inspections, this specific Electrical Inspector position is necessary. However several options still exists for the use of Residential Combination Building Inspectors that the City might want to consider.

There are a lot of training seminars established by ICC, IAEE, NFPA and IAPMO that would allow for each of the existing Building Inspection staff members to be crossed trained. The current staff levels seem to fit the needs of the City and of the development community.

The City could develop a cross training program with the assistance of the professional organizations and develop each of the existing building inspectors into Combination Building Inspectors. The City could consider reducing their current building inspection staffing levels down from five (5) inspectors to three (3) Combination Building Inspectors plus one (1) Electrical Inspector. Each of the three Combination Building Inspectors would average about eight (8) inspections per day instead of the five (5) currently performed. The Electrical Inspector indicates that he only performs on the average of five (5) inspections per day. The Electrical Inspector could still be maintained on staff to review the electrical inspections, assist with the plan reviews and perform his other current City duties.

65. Recommendation: Develop a cross training program, utilizing the existing professional seminars developed by ICC, NFPA, IAPMO and IAEE for all the existing building inspectors to allow for their development into Residential Combination Building Inspectors.

66. Recommendation: Convert the existing inspectors into Residential Combination Building Inspectors and implement a combination inspection program.

- 67. Recommendation:** Maintain the current inspection staffing levels even after the inspectors are converted into Residential Combination Building Inspectors in order to provide better inspection time frames for the development community and in order to provide both sick leave, and vacation coverage as well as coverage for training proposes.

Inspection Calls

There is a phone answering machine in the Division where the calls will be automatically forwarded if the phone lines are busy and for after hour calls. This answering machine is supposed to be checked, by the Permit Technicians, each morning and several times a day. However it appears that the answering machine is seldom checked and often times, daily inspections are missed. In addition, when inspection requests are cancelled, this information is often not received by the inspectors until after they have reported to the site.

The Building Division does not utilize any other type of phone back-up systems. There are several Interactive Voice Response (IVR) phone systems on the market that would allow the public and the development community to utilize the IVR system to check on the status of their plan checks, results of inspections, request inspections, change inspections, as well as leave voice messages for the staff, and still allow the opportunity to contact staff directly. The IVR system would allow the staff to have better control and provide more accurate and timely information to the public. The new permitting system should also allow the same information to be available on the City Web Site.

- 68. Recommendation:** The Building Official should establish a specific schedule for the Permit Technicians to check the answering machine each morning and at least four (4) other times during the day.
- 69. Recommendation:** The Building official should establish a policy to require the Permit Technicians to contact the Building Inspectors on a timely basis to notify them of any inspection appointment cancellations.
- 70. Recommendation:** The Building Division should investigate the use of an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) for their phone system and also provide the ability to request inspections and monitor inspection via the Web Site.

A problem occurs daily between the Permit Technicians and the Building Inspectors when the Building Inspectors do not get notified of a cancelled inspection appointment request or when a developer calls in that same day for an inspection.

The daily building inspection process has evolved into a specific appointment schedule for each Building Inspector. This requires the Permit Technicians to set up specific appointment times for each Building Inspector. However the building Inspectors also set up their own schedules, which is not always coordinated between the staff members.

One of the Permit Technicians is ICC Certified and the other is working on becoming Certified. This is an excellent approach and it can also be supplemented by continuous training as processes and policies change over time.

71. Recommendation: Provide ICC Counter Technician training and continuous training for City Permit Technicians.

72. Recommendation: Have the Permit Technicians report directly to the Plan Reviewer instead of to the Building Official for better day to day supervision.

Inspector Office Time

Currently the homeowners and the development community must call into the Building Division 24 hours ahead of time to request an appointment for an inspection for the following day. However if the developers call into the office by 7:00 AM of the day of the requested inspection they can sometimes also obtain an inspection appointment for that day, if the workload is light enough to accommodate that request.

The inspection staff does not have specified office hours, but are typically out in the field by 8:00 AM each morning. The inspectors are also not required to return to the office after their daily inspections are completed. This process leaves very little time in the office to answer questions from the public and the development community. The only interaction occurs in the field and does not allow for enough time for the developers to call into the office to speak to the inspectors about specific issues on their jobs.

73. Recommendation: The Building Official should develop a written policy that requires the Building Division inspection staff to stay in the office till 8:30 AM each day in order to assist the public and to be available to answer phone questions from the development community. Given the

inspectors current work load there is sufficient time available each day for established office hours.

- 74. Recommendation:** The Building Official should develop a written policy that requires each field inspector to return back to the office each day in order to get a head start on the completion of his paper work each evening and to assist with the counter if necessary.

Job Cards and Correction Notices

The Building Division has had a requirement to have a job card on site. The job card allows the inspector to sign off the job and informs the developer or contractor that the inspectors have been at the site and either approved the inspection or left a correction notice.

However, the inspectors indicate that they usually do not leave a written correction notice on site for the contractor. Almost everything they do is in the verbal form. The use of a written correction notice is a vital part of the process and leads to better communication between the staff and the public. Additionally the written correction also can be clearer and more specific and indicate exactly what must be accomplished in order for that inspection to be signed off. Also in case one of the inspectors is off sick or on vacation the other inspectors can perform the re-inspection and review the written correction notice and be able to sign off the inspection if everything has been corrected. This process cannot happen correctly or efficiently if all communication is verbal.

- 75. Recommendation:** It is recommended that the Building Official requires that a job card to be on the job site for each inspection.

- 76. Recommendation:** It is recommended that the Building Official require the inspection staff to leave written corrections at the site for every inspection that is not approved or has failed. Further, we suggest that the policy also require that the inspection staff to quote specific code sections that apply on the correction notices and put a copy in the permit file.

On-site Job Cards and Plans

The Building Inspectors have indicated that there is no existing policy or requirement to have the approved project plans on the job for each required inspection. This often

will cause a problem for the inspection staff and result in miscommunication between the staff and the public. The adopted code requires that the approved plans and job card be on site for all required inspections.

77. Recommendation: It is recommended that the Building Official implement the adopted code by requiring the contractor and/or developer to have the approved plans and job card on site for each required inspection.

Additionally, there have been a few cases where a set of plans has been submitted for plan review, as an example for modular units, and the plans were approved for construction. However when the inspectors went to perform their first inspection it was discovered that instead of the approved modular units being constructed a stick built home was being constructed. When this was pointed out to the Building Official for clarification it was indicated that the project could proceed except that new electrical plans would need to be submitted for review. This is only one example there appears to be more occurrences of this type of issue. As a rule, plans are only approved when they are in compliance with the codes. Red lined plans are allowed to be processed for minor corrections only.

78. Recommendation: It is recommended that the Building official develop and implement a written policy that requires the Building Inspectors to leave a written correction notice anytime there are changes to the approved plans and require the developer or contractor to resubmit those changes to the approved plans for review by the Plan Reviewer before proceeding with the project.

Signing Permits

The Building Inspectors currently only sign off on permits in the computer system. So, there isn't a hard copy of the inspection record. Although the inspectors do not sign off on the permit, the office does have a file copy of a separate form for each inspection. The Building Division staff has also indicated that the existing computer software is hard to utilize and that it is not easy to tract down in order to determine which inspections have been approved or denied in the system.

79. Recommendation: The Building Official should develop and implement a written policy that directs the field inspection staff to also sign off the office copy of the permit until the computer software program is fully operational. This will come in handy if the computer ever fails and will prove useful for the office staff to access those permit records in a timely manner.

V. SUBDIVISION PROCESS

A. OVERVIEW

Authority

Subdivision requirements in the City of Sheridan follow the standards and procedures as outlined in Appendix B Subdivision Regulations of the Sheridan Municipal Code.

There are three different types or categories of subdivisions and the process for each is slightly different. They are:

1.Replat

Any plat in which lot lines are dissolved or rearranged in an existing subdivision, which results in an equal number or fewer lots.

2. Minor Subdivision

Any subdivision that does not result in more than five lots, does not create any new streets or vacate any existing streets and does not require the extension of any municipal utilities or the creation of any new public improvements.

3.Major Subdivision

Any subdivision that does not fall into any of the above classifications, or which involves the dedication of any new streets or alleys or the extension of existing municipal utilities.

Activity

The number of subdivisions completed for 2005, 2006 and 2007 are shown in Table 6.

Table 6
Number of Subdivisions Completed

Type	2005	2006	2007
Replats	4	3	1
Minor Subdivisions	10	18	10
Major Subdivisions			
Regular	5	5	4
PUD's	6	0	2
Total	25	26	17

Appeals

Any applicant can appeal staff decisions to the Planning Commission and if not satisfied here, can also appeal to the City Council.

Development Review Committee Meetings

City staff conducts a development review meeting with the applicant and various technical review functions. This is an excellent process and appears to work quite well.

Engineering

The engineering aspects of subdivisions are handled by the Senior Engineer, three Engineering Project Managers and an Engineering Project Manager for Utilities. It appears that there are roughly some 25 subdivisions in process. The Senior Engineer is handling 10 projects and each of the Engineering Project Managers is handling five projects each. As the Project Managers become more experienced, the workload can be distributed so that the Senior Engineer handles fewer projects. This will be essential if the Senior Engineer is to provide needed leadership to policy and process development.

80. Recommendation: As Engineering Project Managers become more experienced, the Senior Engineer should take on fewer projects and focus on policy and procedure improvements.

The engineering and utility staff review construction plans for infrastructure construction. According to staff, most reviews are handled in a review cycle which requires roughly two weeks to complete. During construction, the developer is required to have a designated engineering representative on site to certify the construction. However, staff indicated that the quality of the private inspections has varied considerably from project to project. We have seen three approaches used for this issue.

- The City staff conducts the inspection
- The City rather than the developer hires the consultant
- The City develops specifications as to what is required by the consultant and spot checks performance

This latter approach is the one being used by Sheridan but staff feels it has created some quality issues. Staff is in the midst of completing a new Chapter 11 to the Developer's Handbook which addresses this issue. We suggest an initial approach of completing the handbook, conducting training or orientation sessions for the private

consultants and improving performance monitoring. Should this prove ineffective, the City should consider the other two options.

81. Recommendation: As related to the quality of construction, the Engineering Division should take an initial approach of completing the handbook, conducting training or orientation sessions for the private consultants and improving performance monitoring. Should this prove ineffective, the City should consider the other two options as described in the report.

Geographic Information System

We were not under contract to complete a technology review but did note that the Development Implementation Process Task Force included a number of recommendations to improve the City's GIS system to be used in the subdivision process. We are strongly supportive of having good GIS information of the suggestions of the Task Force seem reasonable.

82. Recommendation: The GIS recommendations from the Development Implementation Process Task Force should be implemented.

Timing

The Planning Department does not have a comprehensive account of the actual staff process time for subdivision applications, but the new permitting system should have this feature available for the future. Staff did develop data for subdivisions that went to the City Council between October 2007 and April 2008.

There were two Replat applications processed during this time period. One was processed from the application time to City Council in eight days. The other appeared to have many technical problems including not submitting required technical reports and took 293 days.

During this same time period, there were two Minor Subdivisions. One required 78 days to process and the other 247 days to process, for an average of 162 days. This means the range was roughly 2.6 months to 8.2 months with an average of 5.4 months. The County indicates that they require 4 to 6 months to process minor subdivisions. It is difficult to examine these timelines since the files do not separate out applicant time from the City time and only two applications were noted.

There were eight major subdivisions during this time period. One was withdrawn and one was a second filing that took only 63 days. The other six ranged from a timeline of 103 days to 246 days with an average of 150 days. This would be 3.4 months to

roughly 8.2 months with the average of 5 months. The County indicates that they require 8 to 12 months for its major subdivisions. This would tend to indicate that the City's timelines are better than those in the County. It is difficult to examine these timelines since the files do not separate out applicant time from the City time.

Since the City cannot control applicant time, it is important that the City focus on how to best control the time it takes for its part of the process. The tracking system should monitor both City and applicant time.

83. Recommendation: The new permitting software should be programmed to carefully monitor the timelines for all aspects of the subdivision process and separate out applicant from City time.

B. POLICIES

There are twenty (25) subdivisions under development within the City limits of Sheridan. Each subdivision has a different set of restrictions for the issuance of building permits and for the approval of Occupancy. The City has adopted a set of standards for the subdivision development process. However these adopted standards have been changed from subdivision to subdivision and are no longer consistent.

As a result of this inconsistency, the Building Division staff must attempt to keep track of the differences by both keeping a log at the front counter and calling the project manager for that specific project, in order to determine which subdivisions can be issued building permits and under what conditions these permits can be issued. In addition, the logs are necessary in order to keep track of exactly what subdivisions can be allowed to be granted a Certificate of Occupancy (C of O) and under what conditions these C of O's can be issued.

This subdivision approval process adds additional time to the inspections process and to the final approval process and causes problems for the Building Division staff, Planning Division staff, Engineering Division staff and for the development community as a whole. Often times a certificate of occupancy (C of O) will be issued to a single family dwelling unit located in a subdivision when the sidewalks are not in, or when the streets are not in, or when the minimum amount of base material is not in for the streets or even when all the required infrastructure is not in place. Each of the existing subdivisions has a different set of issues and a different set of allowances for the issuance of the C of O's.

The existence of different standards can lead to health and safety issues for those owners who are allowed to move into the subdivision prior to having all the required infrastructure installed.

There are special circumstances and cases where a modification of a subdivision standard or process is reasonable. However, the City has tended to vary too much from what are reasonable standards. There should be allowances and specific standards developed for the issuance of a Temporary Certificate of Occupancy (T C of O) for those developments who can still meet the minimum life, fire and health safety issues. The issuance of a T C of O can benefit both the City and the development community.

84. Recommendation: Develop and implement a specific set of subdivision standards and policies and communicate those polices and standards to the general public and to the staff.

85. Recommendation: Modify and/or change the existing subdivision standards and policies to insure specific consistent standards are met and communicate those changes to the staff and to the general public.

86. Recommendation: Develop a new set of policies and specific standards that would allow for the issuance of Temporary Certificates of Occupancy for residential, commercial and industrial developments that will meet minimum life, fire and health safety standards.

Variances

Section 204 of the Subdivision Regulations says:

“(A) Where the Planning Commission finds that extraordinary hardships or practical difficulties may result from strict compliance with these regulations or that the purposes of these regulations may be served to a greater extent by an alternative proposal, it may recommend a variance.....”

However, later on in the regulations conditions are established that we believe can make it difficult or impossible to make the finding that *–“the purposes of these regulations may be served to a greater extent by an alternative proposal.”*

At times staff and the Planning Commission are pushed by the Mayor or City Council to grant subdivision variances. Staff tends to resist these actions and often feels they are inappropriate. While this may be true in some cases, we believe staff and the Planning Commission should always be looking for ways to have better subdivisions that meet the over-all intent of the regulations.

87. Recommendation: The City should review the Subdivision Regulations as applied to the Variance conditions.

- 88. Recommendation:** Staff and the Planning Commission should take initiative to suggest variances of the Subdivision Regulations when they can produce an equal or superior product.

C. SKETCH PLAT PHASE

The City provides for an optional sketch plat phase as shown in Figure 1. This process may be used for all three types of subdivisions as well as other types of applications. The numbers in the boxes correspond to the following text.

1. The applicant submits a sketch proposal to the Planning Division using a one page application form provided by the Division. This can be a very conceptual idea or can be in more detail. The more detail that is provided, the better the review. The cut-off for this submittal is Thursday at noon. The application is given a number, date stamped, and logged into the computer the same day or next day. *We suggest that all applications be logged into the computer when they are received.*
2. At the time of application, Planning staff conducts a brief screening and can turn down the submittal if sufficient detail is not provided. However, this is seldom the case. If it is a large submittal, the Development Review Committee (DRC) may be delayed for one week to give the reviewing departments more time to review. The applicant will be so informed at the time of application.
3. The Planning staff distributes to reviewing functions either on Thursday but no later than Friday. *We suggest that distribution be made on Thursday for 95% of the cases.*
4. The application is given to the Building Division.
5. The application is given to the Engineering Division.
6. The application is given to the Fire Department.
7. The application is given to the Utility Division.
8. The application is given to Sheridan County.
9. The application is given to Montana Dakota Utilities (MDU).
10. The application is given to Wyoming Department of Transportation (WDOT).
11. The various reviewers meet with the applicant at a DRC meeting which is held in the City Council Chambers. The meeting is chaired by the Senior Planner. Each review function provides verbal comments to the applicant. When possible suggestions are made to the applicant and an attempt is made to solve any conflicts between functions.

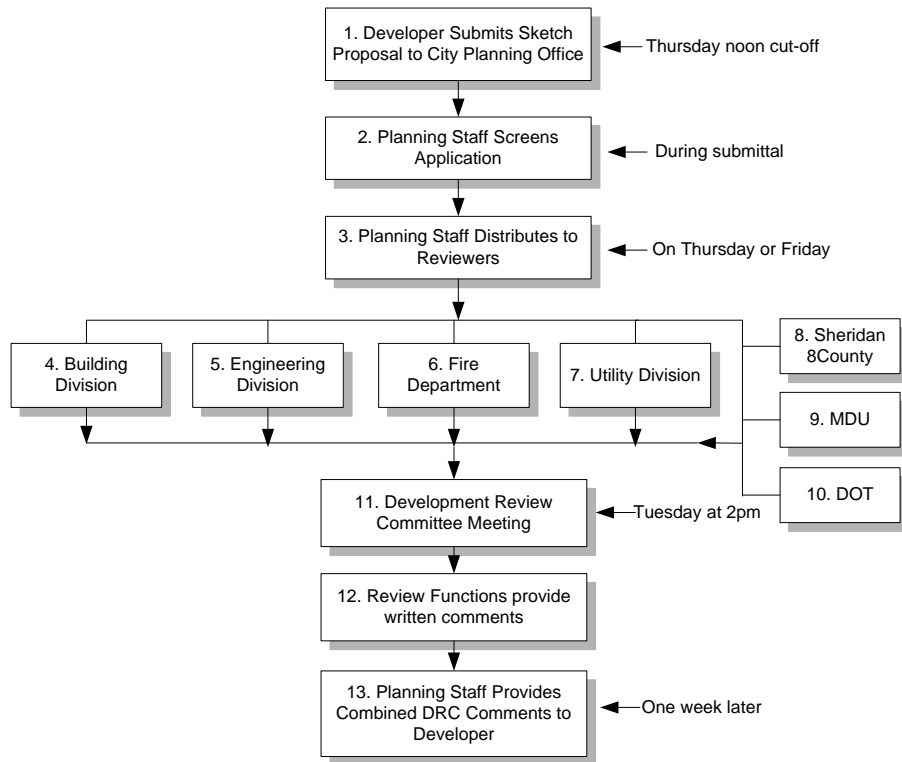
12. Following the meeting, each review function provides the comments they made at the DRC meeting to Planning by email. There is no set deadline for these comments. *We suggest that a firm deadline be set so that these comments are delivered to Planning no later than 4 pm on Friday following the Tuesday meeting.*

13. Planning attempts to clarify and edit the various comments and prepares a combined response for the applicant. Planning attempts to get the comments to the applicant within one week but it often runs two weeks. *We suggest that a standard should be adopted to provide these comments to the applicant within one week and by no later than 5 pm at least 95% of the time.*

The application and comments are placed in a paper file and the emails are available on the server. However, we believe they should be memorialized in the EnerGov Solutions permitting system.

Although the Sketch Plat Phase is shown as optional, Section 111 of the Subdivision Regulations says that “no application shall be considered as a valid submittal for processing until a pre-application conference has been held between the Director of Public Works and the applicant or his agent and a determination made as to the proper classification of filing.” The regulations do not describe the nature of this conference but it would appear that the same process used for the Sketch Plan would be a good approach to this topic. *We suggest that City staff provide a definition of the pre-application conference.*

**Figure 1
Optional Sketch Plat Phase**



89. Recommendation: the Sketch Plat process should be slightly modified using the suggestions outlined in *Italic* above.

D. REPLAT PROCESS

The Replat Process is any plat in which lot lines are dissolved or rearranged in an existing subdivision, which results in an equal number or fewer lots. The process is shown in Figure 2 and the numbers in the boxes correspond to the following text.

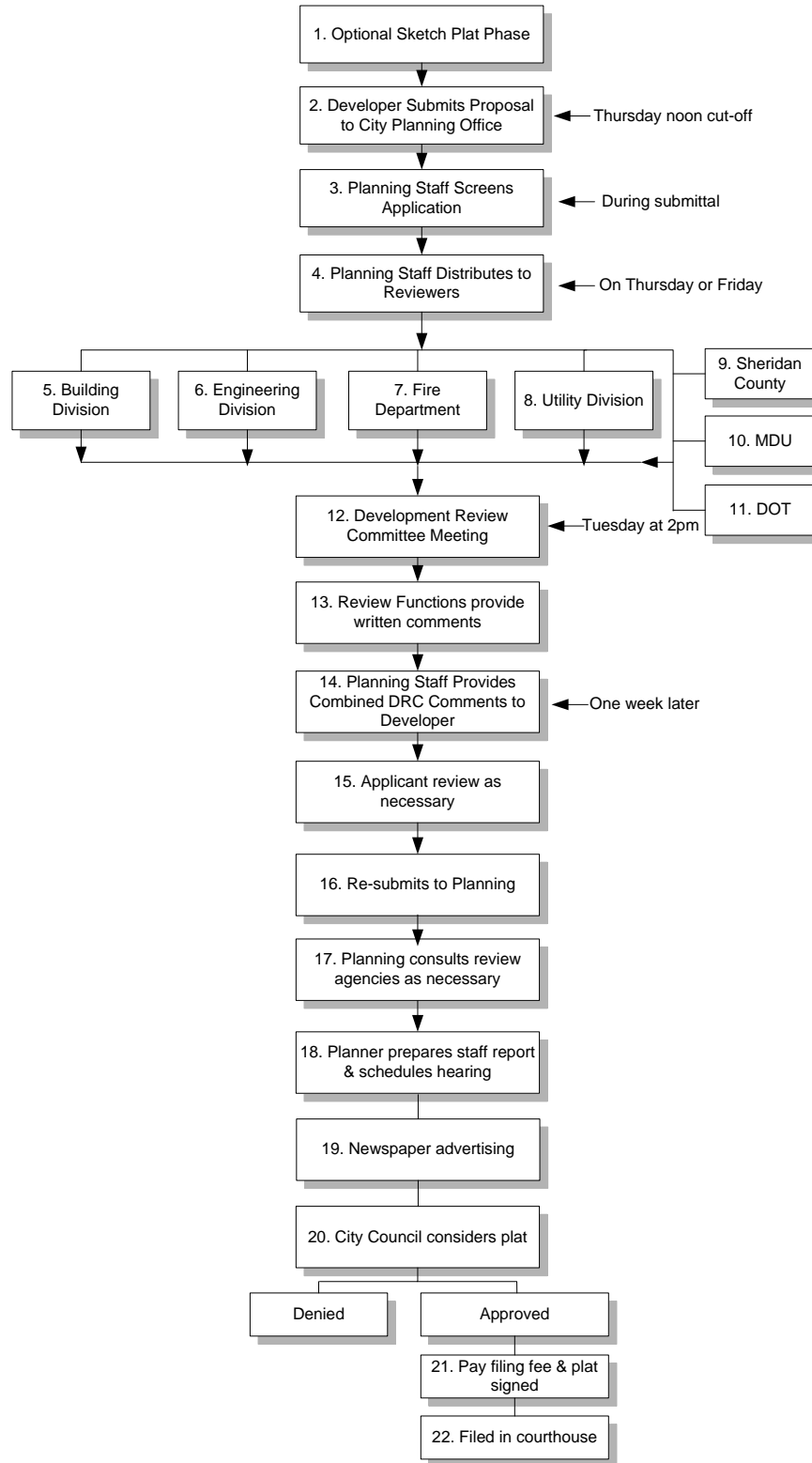
1. The applicant may chose to use the Optional Sketch Plat Process as shown in Figure 1.
2. The applicant submits to the Planning Division a Replat application form, a Final Plat, and a Final Plat Fee. The cut-off for this submittal is Thursday at noon. The application is given a number, date stamped, and logged into the computer the same day or next day. *We suggest that all applications be logged into the computer when they are received.*

3. At the time of application Planning staff conducts a brief screening and can turn down the submittal if sufficient detail is not provided. However, this is seldom the case. ***We suggest that the joint staff reviewers agree on what should constitute a complete submittal and only complete applications should be accepted. If not complete the staff should not take in the material but should give it back to the applicant. For this to work properly, we suggest that applications only be accepted with an appointment. This is similar to the system being used by the County.***
4. The Planning staff distributes to reviewing functions either on Thursday but no later than Friday. ***We suggest that distribution be made on Thursday for 95 % of the applications.***
5. The application is given to the Building Division.
6. The application is given to the Engineering Division.
7. The application is given to the Fire Department.
8. The application is given to the Utility Division.
9. The application is given to Sheridan County.
10. The application is given to Montana Dakota Utilities (MDU).
11. The application is given to Wyoming Department of Transportation (WDOT)
12. The various reviewers meet with the applicant at a DRC meeting which is held in the City Council Chambers on the Tuesday following the prior Thursday submittal. The meeting is chaired by the Senior Planner. Each review function provides verbal comments to the applicant. When possible suggestions are made to the applicant and an attempt is made to solve any conflicts between functions. ***For extremely minor Replats, it may not be necessary to have a DRC meeting and the Planning staff can handle these directly with the applicant and if necessary one other division.***
13. Following the meeting, each review function provides the comments they made at the DRC meeting to Planning by email. There is no set deadline for these comments. ***We suggest that a firm deadline be set so that these comments are delivered to Planning no later than 4 pm on Friday following the Tuesday meeting.***
14. Planning attempts to clarify and edit the various comments and prepares a combined response for the applicant. Planning attempts to get the comments to the applicant within one week but it often runs two weeks. ***We suggest that a standard should be adopted to provide these comments to the applicant within one week and by no later than 5 pm at least 95% of the time. The application and comments are placed in a paper file and the emails are***

available on the server. However, we believe they should be memorialized in the EnerGov Solutions permitting system.

15. The applicant revises the material as necessary.
16. The Plat is re-submitted to Planning.
17. The Planning Division consults with any of the reviewing agencies as deemed necessary.
18. The Planning Division prepares a joint staff report and schedules the item for the next available City Council meeting.
19. The Planning Division places an ad in the newspaper to advertise for the City Council meeting. This must be at least 7 days prior to the scheduled meeting. *We believe in what we call “early notice” to neighbors and interested parties. As such, the newspaper ad should take place as soon as the date for the City Council meeting is determined.*
20. The City Council considers the Final Plat. If the Plat is approved, it is adopted via resolution requiring a total of one reading before the City Council. *Replats tend to be minor in nature. We suggest that their approval be delegated to approval by the Development Review Committee or as an option, by the Planning Commission instead of the City Council.*
21. The applicant pays a filing fee and the Plat is signed by the landowners and Mayor as required by state law. The City additionally requires the Public Works Director to sign.
22. The Plat is filed at the County Courthouse by one of the City’s planners. The timing for filing the Plat varies. The County Clerk requires that the title be realistically recent to match property records. Many applicants hold filing the plat to finalize real estate deals, financing, DEQ permits to contract etc. The City has allowed a six month filing window to accommodate these issues. After six months, City Council action is deemed null and void unless an extension is requested.

**Figure 2
Replat Process**



- 90. Recommendation:** the Replat process should be slightly modified using the suggestions outlined in *Italics* above.

E. MINOR SUBDIVISION PROCESS

The Minor Subdivision Process is for any subdivision that does not result in more than five lots, does not create any new streets or vacate any existing streets and does not require the extension of any municipal utilities or the creation of any new public improvements. The process is shown in Figure 3 and the numbers in the boxes correspond to the following text.

1. The applicant may chose to use the Optional Sketch Plat Process as shown in Figure 1.
2. The applicant submits to the Planning Division a Minor Subdivision application form, a Final Plat, a Final Plat Fee, Traffic Plan (if required), Drainage Plan (if required), Geotechnical Report (if required), and Construction Drawings (if required). The cut-off for this submittal is Thursday at noon. *Although the Sketch Plat Process is optional, it may be difficult to determine all the technical reports that will be required without having a Sketch Plat process. As such, staff should indicate to all prospective applicants that it is desirable to have a Sketch Plat Development Review Committee meeting.*

The application is given a number, date stamped, and logged into the computer the same day or next day. *We suggest that all applications be logged into the computer when they are received.*

3. At the time of application Planning staff conducts a brief screening and can turn down the submittal if sufficient detail is not provided or if needed reports are not submitted. However, this is seldom the case. *We suggest that the joint staff reviewers agree on what should constitute a complete submittal and only complete applications should be accepted. If not complete the staff should not take in the material but should give it back to the applicant. For this to work properly, we suggest that applications only be accepted with an appointment. This is similar to the system being used by the County.*
4. The Planning staff distributes to reviewing functions either on Thursday but no later than Friday. *We suggest that distribution be made on Thursday for 95 % of the applications.*
5. The application is given to the Building Division.
6. The application is given to the Engineering Division.
7. The application is given to the Fire Department.

8. The application is given to the Utility Division.
9. The application is given to Sheridan County.
10. The application is given to Montana Dakota Utilities (MDU).
11. The application is given to Wyoming Department of Transportation (WDOT).
12. The various reviewers meet with the applicant at a Development Review Committee meeting which is held in the City Council Chambers on the Tuesday following the prior Thursday submittal. The meeting is chaired by the Senior Planner. Each review function provides verbal comments to the applicant. When possible suggestions are made to the applicant and an attempt is made to solve any conflicts between functions. ***We believe that this meeting time does not give reviewing functions adequate time to review the proposal. Instead we recommend that an additional week be added to the process and the DRC review is held two Tuesdays following the Thursday submittal.***
13. Following the meeting, each review function provides the comments they made at the DRC meeting to Planning by email. There is no set deadline for these comments. ***We suggest that a firm deadline be set so that these comments are delivered to Planning no later than 4 pm on Friday following the Tuesday meeting.***
14. Planning attempts to clarify and edit the various comments and prepares a combined response for the applicant. Planning attempts to get the comments to the applicant within one week but it often runs two weeks. ***We suggest that a standard should be adopted to provide these comments to the applicant within one week and by no later than 5 pm at least 95% of the time. The application and comments are placed in a paper file and the emails are available on the server. However, we believe they should be memorialized in the EnerGov Solutions permitting system.***
15. The applicant revises the material as necessary.
16. The Minor Subdivision or reports are re-submitted to Planning.
17. The Planning Division consults with any of the reviewing agencies as deemed necessary.
18. The Planning Division and Engineering Division prepare a joint staff report and Planning schedules the item for the next available Planning Commission meeting.
19. The Planning Division sends notification of the Planning Commission meeting to neighbors within 300 feet.
20. The Planning Division places an ad in the newspaper to advertise for the Planning Commission meeting. This must be at least 7 days prior to the scheduled meeting. ***We believe in what we call “early notice” to neighbors***

and interested parties. As such, the mailing notification and the newspaper ad should take place as soon as the date for the Planning Commission meeting is determined.

21. The Planning Commission considers the application and, after holding a public hearing, makes a recommendation to the City Council regarding the application.
22. If applicable, the Engineering staff reviews the construction plan and approves prior to the signing of the plat.
23. The applicant revises the plans if necessary to conform to the Planning Commission recommendation.
24. Applicant re-submits to Planning.
25. Planning consults as necessary with any of the reviewing agencies.
26. Planning schedules the item for the next available City Council meeting.
27. The Planning Division places an ad in the newspaper to advertise for the City Council meeting. This must be at least 7 days prior to the scheduled meeting. ***We believe in what we call “early notice” to neighbors and interested parties. As such, the newspaper ad should take place as soon as the date for the City Council meeting is determined.***
28. City Council considers the Minor Subdivision and acts on the Planning Commission recommendation. If the petition is approved, it is adopted via resolution requiring a total of one reading before the City Council.
29. The applicant pays a filing fee and the Plat is signed by the landowners and Mayor as required by state law. The City additionally requires the Public Works Director, Planning Commission Chair and Planning Commission Vice Chair to sign. If public improvements are to be made by the developer, the City requires a letter of credit equal to 100% of the improvement cost. ***We believe that all these signatures should not be required. The signature of the Mayor and Public Works Director should be sufficient.***
30. The Plat is filed at the County Courthouse by one of the City’s planners. The timing for filing the Plat varies. The County Clerk requires that the title be realistically recent to match property records. Many applicants hold filing the plat to finalize real estate deals, financing, DEQ permits to contract etc. The City has allowed a six month filing window to accommodate these issues. After six months, City Council action is deemed null and void unless an extension is requested.
31. The developer constructs the project.
32. LOC Reduction: Once preliminary acceptance has been made by the City (underground utilities are in), the developer can request their letter of credit be

reduced to 25% of the original value or the remaining construction costs, whichever is greater.

33. Final acceptance of infrastructure and signing of warranty.

**Figure 3
Minor Subdivision Process**

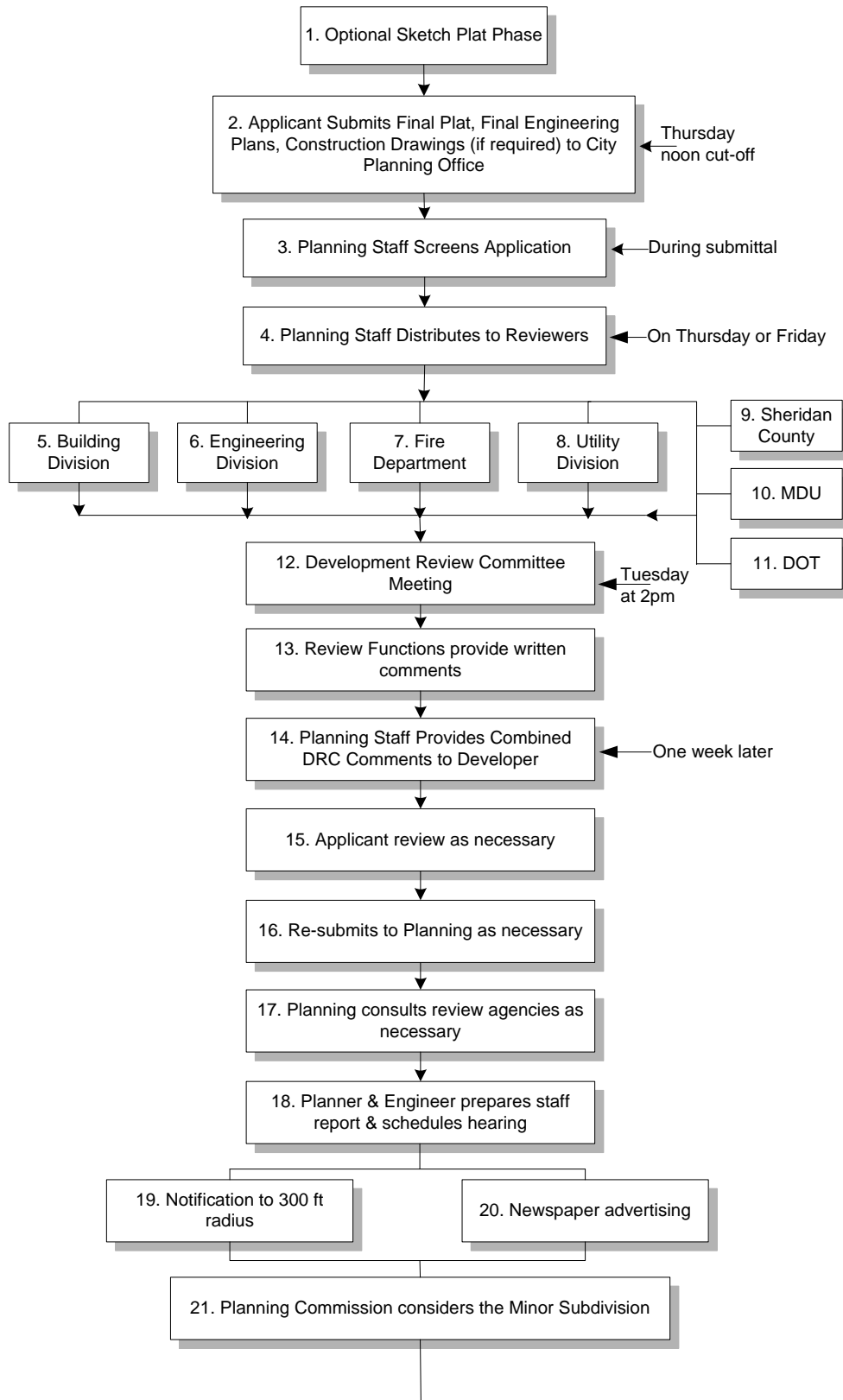
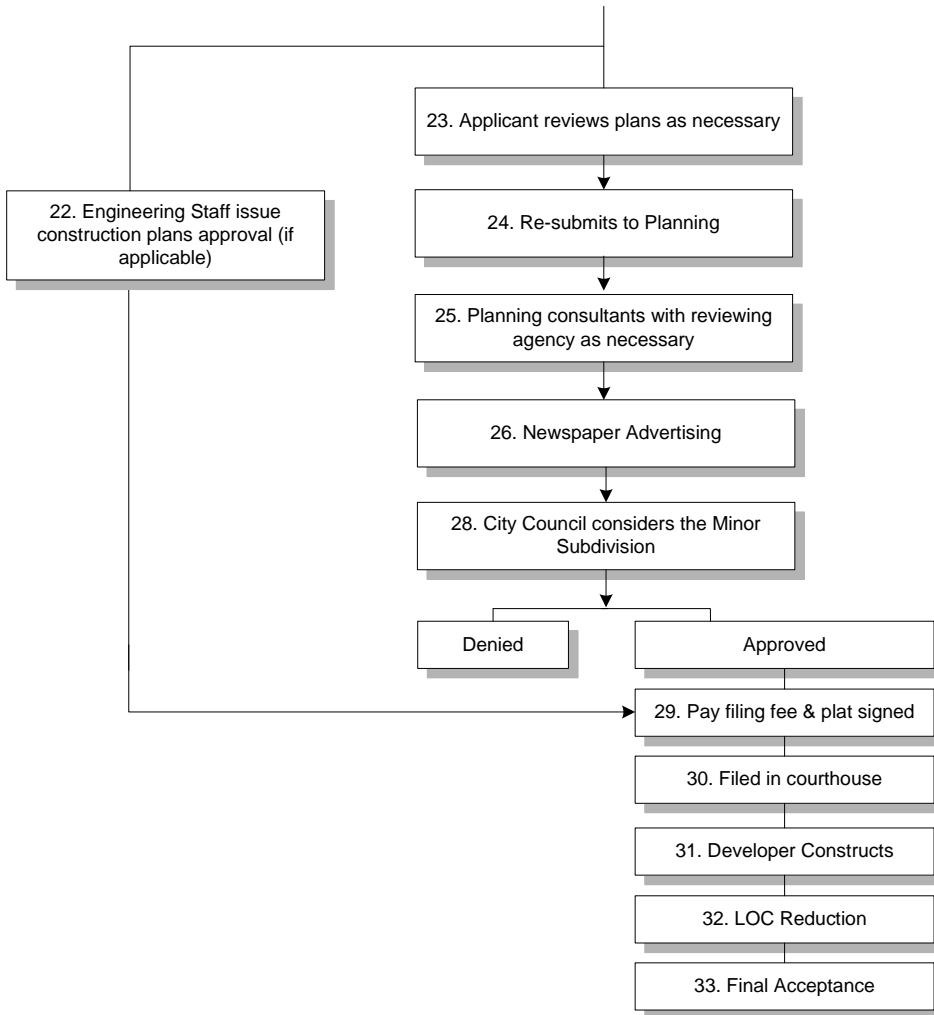


Figure 3 Continued



91. Recommendation: the Minor Subdivision process should be slightly modified using the suggestions outlined in Italics above.

F. MAJOR SUBDIVISION PROCESS

The Major Subdivision Process is for any subdivision that does not fall into any of the above classifications, or which involves the dedication of any new streets or alleys or the extension of existing municipal utilities. The process is shown in Figure 4 and the numbers in the boxes correspond to the following text.

1. The applicant may chose to use the Optional Sketch Plat Process as shown in Figure 1.

2. The applicant submits to the Planning Division a Major Subdivision application form which includes a Preliminary Plat Package. This includes a Preliminary Plat, Preliminary Plat Fee, Preliminary Water Plan, Preliminary Sewer Plan, Preliminary Traffic Plan, Preliminary Drainage Plan and Preliminary Geotechnical Report. ***Although the Sketch Plat Process is optional, it may be difficult to determine all the technical reports that will be required without having a Sketch Plat process. As such, staff should indicate to all prospective applicants that it is desirable to have a Sketch Plat Development Review Committee meeting.***

The application is given a number, date stamped, and logged into the computer the same day or next day. ***We suggest that all applications be logged into the computer when they are received.***

3. At the time of application Planning staff conducts a brief screening and can turn down the submittal if sufficient detail is not provided or if needed reports are not submitted. However, this is seldom the case. ***We suggest that the joint staff reviewers agree on what should constitute a complete Preliminary Plat submittal and only complete applications should be accepted. If not complete the staff should not take in the material but should give it back to the applicant. For this to work properly, we suggest that applications only be accepted with an appointment. This is similar to the system being used by the County.***

Staff should be careful so as not to require more detailed engineering drawings or studies than are absolutely necessary to approve a Preliminary Plat.

4. The Planning staff distributes to reviewing functions either on Thursday but no later than Friday. ***We suggest that distribution be made on Thursday for 95 % of the applications..***
5. The application is given to the Building Division.
6. The application is given to the Engineering Division.
7. The application is given to the Fire Department.
8. The application is given to the Utility Division.
9. The application is given to Sheridan County.
10. The application is given to Montana Dakota Utilities (MDU).
11. The application is given to Wyoming Department of Transportation (WDOT).
12. The various reviewers meet with the applicant at a DRC meeting which may be held in the City Council Chambers on the Tuesday following the prior Thursday submittal. However, for major proposals, staff normally adds a week

- before the meeting. The meeting is chaired by the Senior Planner. Each review function provides verbal comments to the applicant. When possible suggestions are made to the applicant and an attempt is made to solve any conflicts between functions. *We believe that this meeting time does not give reviewing functions adequate time to review the proposal. Instead we recommend that an additional week be added to the process and the DRC review is held two Tuesdays following the Thursday submittal.*
13. Following the meeting, each review function provides the comments they made at the DRC meeting to Planning staff by email. There is no set deadline for these comments. *We suggest that a firm deadline be set so that these comments are delivered to Planning no later than 4 pm on Friday following the Tuesday meeting.*
 14. Planning attempts to clarify and edit the various comments and prepares a combined response for the applicant. Planning attempts to get the comments to the applicant within one week but it often runs two weeks. *We suggest that a standard should be adopted to provide these comments to the applicant within one week and by no later than 5 pm at least 95% of the time.*
The application and comments are placed in a paper file and the emails are available on the server. However, we believe they should be memorialized in the EnerGov Solutions permitting system.
 15. The applicant revises the material as necessary.
 16. The Major Subdivision Preliminary Plat or reports are re-submitted to Planning.
 17. The Planning Division consults with any of the reviewing agencies as deemed necessary.
 18. The Planning Division and Engineering Division prepare a joint staff report and Planning schedules the item for the next available Planning Commission meeting.
 19. The Planning Division sends notification of the Planning Commission meeting to neighbors within 300 feet.
 20. The Planning Division places an ad in the newspaper to advertise for the Planning Commission meeting. This must be at least 7 days prior to the scheduled meeting. *We believe in what we call “early notice” to neighbors and interested parties. As such, the mailing notification and the newspaper ad should take place as soon as the date for the Planning Commission meeting is determined.*
 21. The Planning Commission considers the Preliminary Plat and, after holding a public hearing, makes recommendations. *Most policy for Major Subdivisions*

- should take place at the Preliminary Plat stage rather than the Final Plat stage. As such, it is strange that Final Plats go to the Council (likely required by state law) but Preliminary Plats do not. We suggest that either Preliminary Plats go to the City Council or City Council be given notice of Planning Commission action so they may call up the Preliminary Plat for Council action.*
22. The applicant revises the plans if necessary to conform to the Planning Commission recommendations.
 23. The applicant submits to the Planning Division, a Final Plat, Final Engineering Plans and Construction Drawings. The cut-off for this submittal is Thursday at noon.
 24. At the time of application Planning staff conducts a brief screening and can turn down the submittal if sufficient detail is not provided or if needed reports are not submitted. However, this is seldom the case. *We suggest that the joint staff reviewers agree on what should constitute a complete submittal for a Major Subdivision Final Plat and only complete applications should be accepted. If not complete the staff should not take in the material but should give it back to the applicant. For this to work properly, we suggest that applications only be accepted with an appointment. This is similar to the system being used by the County.*
 25. The Planning staff distributes to reviewing functions either on Thursday but no later than Friday. *We suggest that distribution be made on Thursday for 95 % of the applications.*
 26. The application is given to the Building Division.
 27. The application is given to the Engineering Division.
 28. The application is given to the Fire Department.
 29. The application is given to the Utility Division.
 30. The application is given to Sheridan County.
 31. The application is given to Montana Dakota Utilities (MDU).
 32. The application is given to Wyoming Department of Transportation (WDOT).
 33. The various reviewers meet with the applicant at a Development Review Committee meeting which is held in the City Council Chambers on the Tuesday following the prior Thursday submittal. The meeting is chaired by the Senior Planner. Each review function provides verbal comments to the applicant. When possible suggestions are made to the applicant and an attempt is made to solve any conflicts between functions. *We believe that this meeting time does not give reviewing functions adequate time to review the proposal. Instead we recommend that an additional two weeks be added to the process*

and the DRC review is held three Tuesdays following the Thursday submittal.

34. Following the meeting, each review function provides the comments they made at the DRC meeting to Planning by email. There is no set deadline for these comments. *We suggest that a firm deadline be set so that these comments are delivered to Planning no later than 4 pm on Friday following the Tuesday meeting.*

35. Planning attempts to clarify and edit the various comments and prepares a combined response for the applicant. Planning attempts to get the comments to the applicant within one week but it often runs two weeks. *We suggest that a standard should be adopted to provide these comments to the applicant within one week and by no later than 5 pm at least 95% of the time.*

The application and comments are placed in a paper file and the emails are available on the server. However, we believe they should be memorialized in the EnerGov Solutions permitting system.

36. The applicant revises the material as necessary.

37. Revised plans or reports are re-submitted to Planning.

38. The Planning Division consults with any of the reviewing agencies as deemed necessary.

39. The Planning Division and Engineering Division prepare a joint staff report and Planning schedules the item for the next available Planning Commission meeting.

40. The Planning Division sends notification of the Planning Commission meeting to neighbors within 300 feet.

41. The Planning Division places an ad in the newspaper to advertise for the Planning Commission meeting. This must be at least 7 days prior to the scheduled meeting. *We believe in what we call “early notice” to neighbors and interested parties. As such, the mailing notification and the newspaper ad should take place as soon as the date for the Planning Commission meeting is determined.*

42. The Planning Commission considers the Final Plat and, after holding a public hearing, makes a recommendation to the City Council.

43. The Planning Division and Engineering Division prepare a joint staff report and Planning schedules the item for the next available City Council meeting.

44. The Planning Division places an ad in the newspaper to advertise for the City Council meeting. This must be at least 7 days prior to the scheduled meeting. *We believe in what we call “early notice” to neighbors and interested parties.*

As such, the mailing notification and the newspaper ad should take place as soon as the date for the City Council meeting is determined.

45. The Engineering staff reviews the construction plans.
46. Engineering staff approves construction plans prior to the signing of the plat.
47. City Council considers the Final Plat and acts on the Planning Commission recommendation. If the petition is approved, it is adopted via resolution requiring a total of one reading before the City Council.
48. The applicant pays a filing fee and the Final Plat is signed by the landowners and Mayor as required by state law. The City additionally requires the Public Works Director, Planning Commission Chair and Planning Commission Vice Chair to sign. If public improvements are to be made by the developer, the City requires a letter of credit equal to 100% of the improvement cost. ***We believe that all these signatures should not be required. The signature of the Mayor and Public Works Director should be sufficient.***
49. The Plat is filed at the County Courthouse by one of the City's planners. The timing for filing the Plat varies. The County Clerk requires that the title be realistically recent to match property records. Many applicants hold filing the plat to finalize real estate deals, financing, DEQ permits to contract etc. The City has allowed a six month filing window to accommodate these issues. After six months, City Council action is deemed null and void unless an extension is requested.
50. The developer constructs the project.
51. LOC Reduction: Once preliminary acceptance has been made by the City (underground utilities are in), the developer can request their letter of credit be reduced to 25% of the original value or the remaining construction costs, whichever is greater.
52. Final acceptance of infrastructure and signing of warranty.

**Figure 4
Major Subdivision Process**

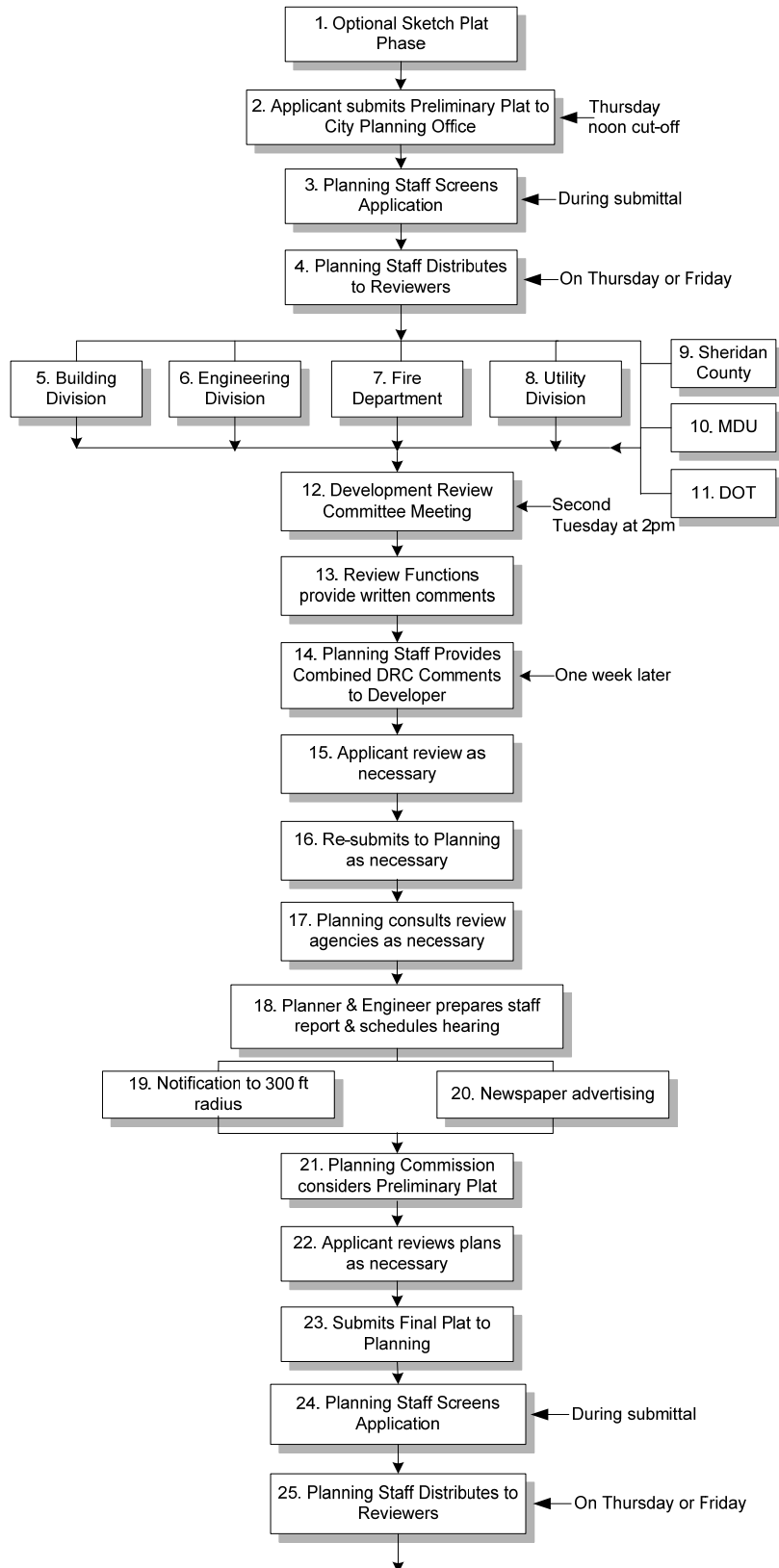
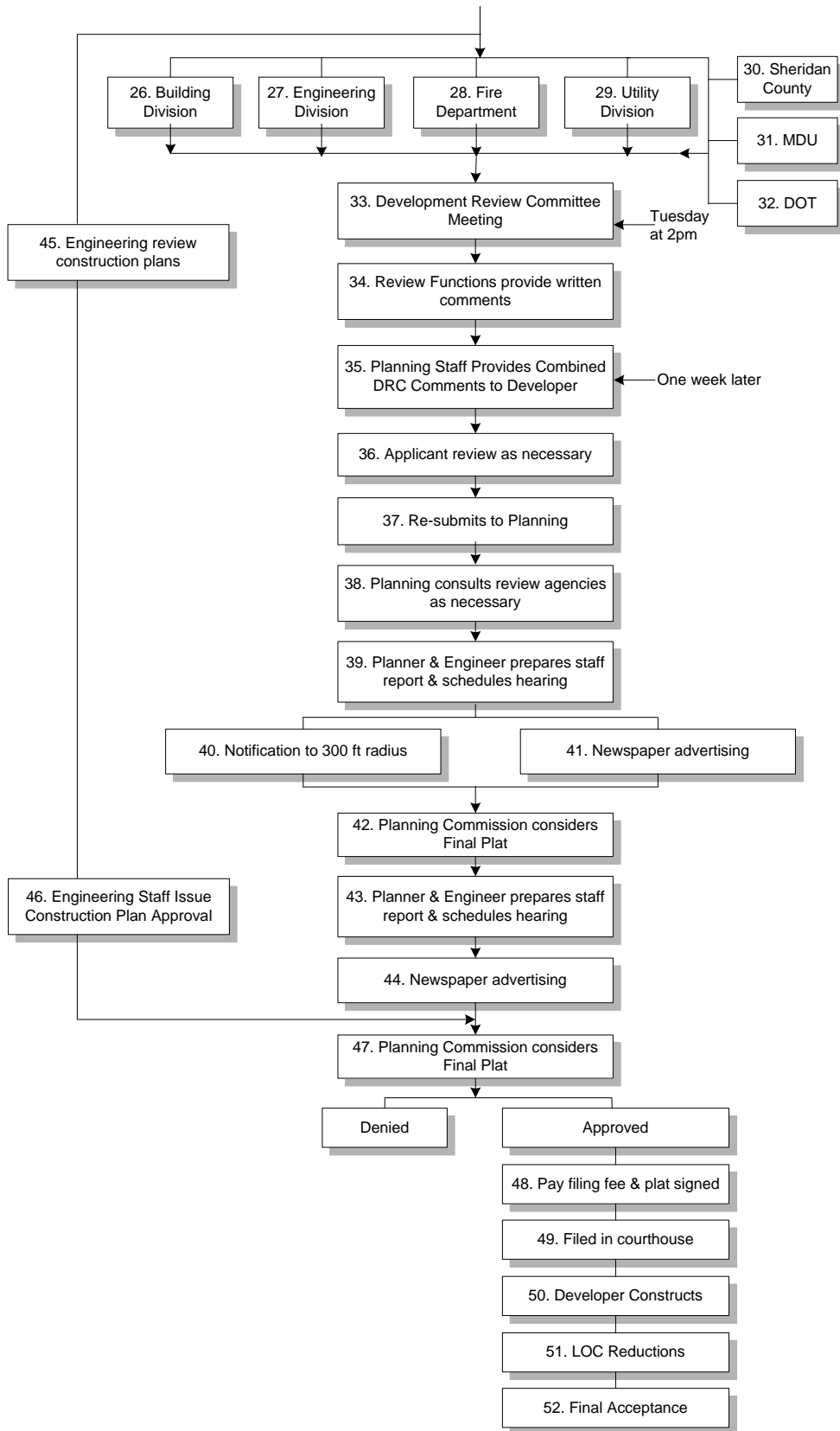


Figure 4 Continued



92. Recommendation: the Major Subdivision process should be slightly modified using the suggestions outlined in Italics above.

G. SUMMARY OF SUBDIVISION PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS

Table 7 shows a summary of the recommended changes to the Subdivision process as outlined above.

**Table 7
Summary of Recommended Changes to Subdivision Process**

Existing Process	Proposed Process
Applications accepted on walk-in basis by Thursday noon cut-off.	Thursday noon cut-off remains but applications are only accepted by appointment
Brief screening of applications. Partially completed applications are accepted	Screening of applications and only complete applications are accepted
Logged into computer same or next day	Logged into computer as part of application acceptance – same day
Distributed to reviewing function on Thursday or Friday	Distributed to reviewing function on Thursday, 95% of the time
All application go to the Development Review Committee	For very minor Replats, Planning can handle these without the need of a DRC meeting.
Development Review Committee on Tuesdays at 2 pm following Thursday submittal	No change for Replats but for all others, change DRC to two Tuesdays following the Thursday submittal
Written comments to Planning by reviewers, no set timeline	Reviewers comments due to Planning no later than 4 pm on Friday following the DRC meeting
Written comments reside on server and paper files	Written comments placed in EnerGove Solutions permitting system
Combined comments to applicant one to two weeks after the DRC meeting	Comments to applicant no later than one week following the DRC meeting by 5 pm
Replats approved by City Council	Replats approved by staff
Major Subdivision Preliminary Plats reviewed by Planning Commission but not by City Council	Major Subdivision Preliminary Plats should be reviewed by the City Council or as an alternative, Council should be notified and have the right to call up the project for their review.
Major Subdivision Final Plats reviewed by Planning Commission and approved by City Council.	Major Subdivision Final Plats not required to be reviewed by the Planning Commission
Minor and Major Subdivision Plats signed by landowners, Mayor, Public Works Director, Planning Commission Chair and Planning Commission Vice Chair	Planning Commission Chair and Planning Commission Vice Chair do not need to sign.
Mail notice to neighbors and newspaper advertising 7 days prior to scheduled meeting	Notices and advertising as soon as meeting is set.
Variances mostly by Planning Commission or City Council	Staff takes a more aggressive role re variances in order to have better projects.

H. FIXED SCHEDULE FOR SUBDIVISION REVIEW

Some communities use a fixed schedule for subdivision review as well as other types of review. The schedule uses a cut-off date similar to that already being used by Sheridan. At time of application, the schedule indicates the possible Planning Commission or City Council hearing date. Meeting the schedule is contingent on having a complete application at submittal and the developer making required changes to the project on a timely basis. As the hearing dates approach and the developer has not responded, the hearing can either be continued or staff can recommend denial since the application is not ready to proceed.

In Table 8 we have shown how a typical schedule would look using the recommendations we have included in this report. Using this schedule, Replats would be completed in slightly over 5 weeks, Minor Subdivisions slightly over 9 week, Preliminary Plats for Major Subdivisions in 14 weeks and Major Subdivision Final Plats in slightly over 7 weeks. If this approach is adopted, staff would need to review the dates in detail to determine if they are workable based on their experience in Sheridan. The nice thing about this type of schedule is that it sets clear performance dates for staff and gives an indication to the developers as to likely timelines.

Table 8
Sample Schedule for Subdivision Processing

	Re-Plat	Minor Subdivision	Major Subdivision Preliminary	Major Subdivision Final
Submittal Cut-off Thursday noon	5-Jun	5-Jun	5-Jun	5-Jun
Distribute to reviewing agencies on Thursday	5-Jun	5-Jun	5-Jun	5-Jun
Development Review Committee	1 st . Tuesday following submittal June 10	2 nd . Tuesday following submittal June 17	3 rd . Tuesday following submittal June 24	2 nd . Tuesday following submittal June 18
Reviewers comments to Planning, Friday 4 pm	13-Jun	20-Jun	27-Jun	20-Jun
Written comments to applicant Tuesday 5 pm	17-Jun	24-Jun	1-Jul	24-Jun
Applicant revises as necessary	Assume one week here	Assume one week here	Assume two weeks here	Assume one week here
Planning consults with reviewers as necessary	24-Jun	1-Jul	15-Jul	1-Jul
Staff Report prepared	27-Jun	3-Jul	18-Jul	3-Jul
Mail to neighbors within 300 feet	N/A	3-Jul	18-Jul	N/A
Newspaper ad, must be 7 days prior	N/A	3-Jul	18-Jul	N/A
Planning Commission 2 nd . & 4 th . Mondays, June 9, June 23	N/A	21-Jul	11-Aug	N/A
Advertise for Council, 7 days prior	27-Jun	22-Jul	12-Aug	3-Jul
Approval by staff	14-Jul	N/A	N/A	N/A
City Council, Alternate Mondays	N/A	11-Aug	8-Sep	28-Jul

93. Recommendation: The City should look at the possibility of publishing a schedule for subdivision review.

I. SHERIDAN COUNTY DOUGHNUT ZONE PROCESS

State law provided for both City and County review of subdivisions within a one mile Extra-Territorial area, generally referred to as the Doughnut Zone. Two years ago the City and County negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding concerning how the subdivision review process was to take place in this area. The MOU has been changed a number of times with the most recent change being approved by the City Council 12/17/07. No subdivisions have yet to be processed under the new MOU.

At one time, subdivisions in this area were processed by the City with County input. Under the new MOU they will be process by the County with City input. The City and County standards are very similar with a few exceptions. The County processes septic tanks and also has a rural road standard. The MOU also requires the City to adopt a rural-type road section suitable for the one-mile area. Subdivisions in this area are required to be reviewed by the City Planning Commission. A key part of the MOU is:

“7. For subdivisions within the one-mile area, the County will add to its current subdivision “checklist” any item required by the City, but not currently required by the County. Review of these items shall be completed by appropriate City staff with written comments provided to County staff. All negotiations, deliberations, and design determinations pertaining to urban infrastructure shall be conducted between the developer and City staff. City staff shall notify the County in writing once they have determined that it adequately meets City standards, at which time the County will schedule the application before the County Planning and Zoning Commission.”

The City and County process are similar; however the County has a number of additional good features including:

- There are a variety of subdivision handouts.
- Appointments are required in order to submit subdivisions.
- Applications are not accepted if all supporting materials are not submitted at the time of filing of the application.

County staff indicates that they believe County Minor Subdivisions take 4 to 6 months to complete and major subdivisions take 8 to 12 months to complete.

Although, we received some negative comments in relation to the County process, we were not under contract to examine this process.

VI. EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS

Two confidential questionnaires were completed by many of the employees in the building permit and subdivision related functions.

A short, closed-ended questionnaire (shown in Appendix B) was completed at two staff meetings by 19 employees and collected by the consultants. The raw scores and tallies of this survey are also shown in Appendix B.

A longer, nine-page questionnaire (shown in Appendix C) was completed by six employees and emailed to the consultants in San Diego to assure confidentiality. Information obtained from these questionnaires was essential to our analysis. The number of questionnaires returned is shown in Table 9. In most of our studies, only half of the employees that complete the short questionnaire take the time to complete the long questionnaire

**Table 9
Number of Employees Responding to Questionnaires**

Function	Number of Short Questionnaires	Average Response to Short Questionnaire	Number of Responses With Averages Under 3.0	Number of Long Questionnaires
Building Division	8	3.85	1	4
Engineering	3	3.15	4	1
Management	5	3.62	4	2
Planning	2	3.79	1	2
Utilities	1	*	*	
Total	19			9

* Only one questionnaire so data is not shown.

The short questionnaire also asked employees to list pet peeves and give suggestions for improvements. These comments were used as part of our analysis for this report and are shown in Appendix B.

The short, closed-ended questionnaire consisted of a series of statements to be rated by the respondents. Responses were tallied and averaged and the raw scores are displayed in Appendix B. The statements were designed to elicit the mood and feelings of each employee about overall division or department excellence. For each of the 28 statements, the employee was asked to respond as follows:

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 1 – Strongly Disagree | 4 – Somewhat Agree |
| 2 – Somewhat Disagree | 5 – Strongly Agree |
| 3 – Neutral | 6 – Not Applicable |

Generally, the higher the rating (i.e., 4's and 5's) the better the employee perceives the subject area and the more excellent the division or department.

We've conducted this survey in many planning and building departments and divisions. Generally, a score below 3.0 is an indication of issues that need to be addressed. We like to see average scores in the high 3's and 4's. We believe that the scores give a reasonably accurate assessment of the employee's view of their division or department. The average scores for all divisions were 3.15 or higher indicating generally positive feelings about their Division.

Questions with average scores below 3.0 are discussed below.

Building Division

The only Building Division score below 3.0 was Question 17 indicating applications from the counter are not complete and ready for processing. Three of the eight employees scored this below 3.0. We found this somewhat surprising since the Division indicated to us that they only accept complete applications.

94. Recommendation: Building Division management should monitor a number of applications to determine if any process changes are needed to assure complete applications.

Engineering

Engineering had four questions scoring below 3.0.

- Question 3: This organization has an effective process for listening to citizen or client concerns, was scored 2.0

This question surprised us since we are told engineering is working with a developers group to develop design standards. Since many of the engineers are new, it could be an internal communication issue.

- Question 4: We have a strong emphasis on training in this organization, was scored 2.33.

We did not review the engineers training program, but in order to provide consistency considerable training is necessary. This is also critical with new employees.

- Question 13: Building Permit or subdivision review in the City is undertaken in a consistent manner, was scored 2.33.

It appears that staff and the customers are in agreement on the matter of consistency so this provided some common ground for improvement. However, to the extent that any inconsistency comes from the elected officials, solving this can be difficult.

- Question 17: The applications we receive from the counter are complete and ready for processing, was scored 1.5.

Elsewhere in this report we talk about better screening of applications at intake. Since the applications are taken in by Planning, the engineers should make certain they communicate their needs to Planning.

95. Recommendation: The Engineering Division should discuss the employee questionnaire at a staff meeting and discuss how to best address the issues that were raised.

Managers

The five key managers met as a group to complete the questionnaire. Four questions were scored below 3.0 including:

- Question 7: We have an efficient records management and documentation system in our organization, was scored 2.80.

We were not able to review the records management in detail. Some of the issues here may relate to problems with the new permitting system. Others could relate to the need for additional information on the GIS system. Given the relatively low volume of development activity, this issue should lend itself to early resolution.

- Question 8: I have enough time to do my work as it needs to be done, was scored 2.0.

We always find it troubling when managers score low on this question. Managers have the ability to train their staff and increase delegation. This may be particularly relevant for Sheridan since staff by and large indicated that they have enough time to do their work.

- Question 9: I am kept abreast of changes that affect me, was scored 2.6.

We believe this low score relates to communication issues with the elected officials. Elsewhere in this report we have indicated a variety of ways to strengthen this communication.

- Question 17: The applications we receive from the counter are complete and ready for processing, was scored 2.0.

Managers can take an aggressive role in determining the completeness of applications that are accepted for processing. This issue is discussed elsewhere in this report.

96. Recommendation: The Public Works Director should discuss the manager's questionnaire at a staff meeting and discuss how to best address the issues that were raised.

Planning

Question 17: The applications we receive from the counter are complete and ready for processing, was scored 2.0. Since Planning is in charge of accepting most applications, it is in a position to require more complete applications. We understand that this will require working with applicants. The issue is discussed elsewhere in this report.

VII. CUSTOMER PERCEPTIONS

In today's environment, governmental performance is measured by customer satisfaction. In order to determine Sheridan's performance, we used two customer focus groups, and interviewed the Mayor. One of the focus groups was the Forward Sheridan's Development Implementation Process Task Force. The other was a group of local developers.

This Chapter includes customer comments for improving the City's building permit and subdivision process. The intent of this customer input was to elicit views and opinions on positive and negative aspects of activities and to seek ideas for change that can improve and enhance the functions. However, as would be expected, the focus was on perceived problems and real issues.

In considering the results, the reader must bear in mind that, unlike documents and statistics, the views expressed by individuals are subjective and may reflect personal biases. Nonetheless, these views are at least as important as objective material because it is these people, with their feelings and prejudices that work with or are often affected by City activities. A second important consideration is that in analyzing the material, it may not be as important to determine whether a particular response is "correct" as it is to simply accept a response or try to determine why customers feel the way they do. Tom Peters, the noted management consultant, has said that in relation to customer service, "Perception is everything." In other words, perception is reality to the person holding the perception.

It should be noted that the purpose of this chapter is to report on the customer input so that the reader of the report can view the comments as customer perceptions without our editing. These comments are not the conclusions of the consultants. The customer comments are taken as one form of input to be merged by input of others and our own judgment. Our specific response is in the form of the various recommendations included in this report.

A. FOCUS GROUPS

Sixteen people who had been applicants in the City's building permit or subdivision process met in two groups for two hours each at the Forward Sheridan office. The meeting was held in confidence and no staff members were present. The groups included builders, developers, and engineers. Focus group comments are included below. Topics are arranged in alphabetical order.

Overview

- Focus Group members support this study and want to expose staff to best practices.
- With better systems and organization the City could make giant leaps.

Building Permits

- Valuation should not be used to set fees.
- Applications are not logged when you go in.
- The new permit tracking system appears to be a problem.
- Fees were not increased for 10 years and then there was a major increase.
- Single family review is normally two weeks and that is acceptable.
- Commercial review is normally three to four weeks. The City should consider accepting the private consultant's signature for plan check.
- Inspection is normally the next day and consistency is good except for new people.

County

- There is a MOU with the County related to subdivisions but the process actually worked better before the MOU. The MOU doesn't work well.
- There is a power struggle between the City and the County.
- Subdivisions in the Donut Area pay a double fee.

DEQ

The State will allow the City to handle this review and staff is willing to do it but it has not gotten done.

Design Review Committee

This group is too subjective.

Development Implementation Process Task Force

Forward Sheridan has had a Development Implementation Process Task Force developing a variety of recommendations that are in draft form. The Task Force has not worked closely with staff so as to be independent of the Mayor and Council.

Design Planning

There should be more design planning in the City.

Geographic Information System

The GIS system lacks good information related to plats and utilities. It is possible that this function is understaffed.

Planning Commission

Members need more experience and a few members are against development.

Subdivisions

- There is a lack of good policies. Issues include use of the word “natural.” There are problems with the FAR and street frontage.
- There is a lack of good procedures.
- There is no good logging system.
- It is hard to know where your application is at any one point in time.
- There is a lack of consistency with staff.
- Approval takes 9 to 18 months, “it is a black hole.”
- Desired is clarity, short timelines and consistency. Consistency is at the top of the list.
- There are problems with the Letters of Credit.

Staff

- Generally there are good staff, but they are working in a bad system.
- Staff is given too much discretion
- Staff can give a variance or recommend a variance to the City Council but they generally won't take the initiative to send variances to the Council.
- Staff often says, “Talk to the Mayor.”