

## Development-Ready Communities

4th in a series of 4 briefs geared towards creating an effective and efficient approach to development



Great communities need to put their best foot forward to attract the kind of economic development that maintains or improves their quality of life. Up-to-date plan review services and development-related ordinances that incorporate state-of-the-art practices will send the message to prospective developers that the community values development and is therefore a sound investment. **This issue focuses on Training Staff & Officials**

No matter how it is defined and what methods are used, on-going training and education for public officials and staff is essential to the success of a community. While political changes may alter the composition of boards and commissions, the economy has led to shrinking budgets for training activities. Public officials are entrusted with making decisions that affect residents and business owners in their daily lives as well as in the future, and these public officials need more than good intentions to make community-appropriate choices. They need **training and education** on an on-going basis to give them the background to understand the impact that their decisions have now and in the future. Further, they need to understand what current planning and zoning law enables them to do, or prevents them from doing. Board and commission officers, including the chair, vice-chair, and secretary, should be trained in running efficient meetings as well as Robert's rules of order.

In addition, **planning and zoning staff** face challenges as well. Laws impacting land use decisions change often and it is important to be up to date in this knowledge. Continuing education for professionals allows them to tap into the resources of the national and regional planning community, gaining additional insights into common land use issues. Beyond planning and zoning training, customer service training may often be helpful as well for staff who are on the "front lines" with the public.

Fortunately, with today's technology, communities have a wide variety of training and education opportunities available for staff and public officials:

- Ensure that all planning staff and public officials are members of state and national planning organizations. These groups offer a wide variety of news and information, as well as networking opportunities to help communities help each other.
- Host in-house workshops. Bring in qualified trainers on a variety of topics, including site plan review, zoning board of appeals training, master plans, and the roles of planning commissions. Consider partnering with nearby communities to share the costs.
- Encourage commissioners/staff to attend regional and state conferences & workshops. The return on the investment in these opportunities comes in the form of efficient meetings, solid land use planning and reliable decision making.
- Utilize online training, including webinars and planning forums. Often these types of training can be viewed by multiple people for one cost (and many can be found that are free of charge). Many such presentations are archived and could be shared at a board or commission meeting.
- Purchase audio cd's of national conferences. This is a good way to bring the information available from around the country back to benefit everyone.
- Share planning-related articles and books with staff and public officials. Encourage staff and officials to read planning publications and be involved in planning-related networking.