



**HISTORIC  
FRANKLIN  
TENNESSEE**

**CITY OF FRANKLIN  
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES ADVISORY COMMISSION**

**A meeting of the Development Services Advisory Commission was held at City Hall, on Tuesday, November 5th, 2024, 8:00 am – 9:00 am.**

**Committee Members**

<b>Matt Bryant, Chair</b>	P
<b>Robert Winston, Vice Chair</b>	P
<b>Kate McDonald</b>	P
<b>Nathan Zipper</b>	A
<b>Ben Crenshaw</b>	P
<b>Scotty Bernick</b>	P
<b>Mary McGowan</b>	P
<b>Paige Parham</b>	A
<b>Dana Kose</b>	P
<b>Michael Walters Young</b>	P
<b>Matt Brown</b>	A

**Employees Present**

Vernon Gerth, Assistant City Administrator  
Amy Diaz-Barriga, Asst. Director of Planning & Sustainability  
Tom Marsh, Director of Building & Neighborhood Services  
Katherine Harelson, Dev. Services Ops. Analyst  
Dillon Gaster, Management Fellow

The purpose of the regular meeting will be to discuss matters regarding Development Services and will include the following items:

Matt Bryant, Chair began the meeting at 8:00 am.

**1. Approval of Minutes/Review of Meeting Notes from October 1, 2024, meeting.**

- Meeting minutes were approved by acclamation.

**2. Approval of 2025 Development Services Advisory Commission Meeting Schedule.**

- Katherine Harelson made an announcement regarding the 2025 meeting schedule. Meetings will remain at 8AM on the first Tuesday of the month. Staff will be moving out of City Hall beginning in January, and future Commission meetings will take place at Eastern Flank Battlefield Park Event Facility while the new City Hall is being constructed.

**3. Presentation of Development Customer Survey Results.**

- Katherine introduced the guest speaker for this meeting, Gary McClure. He is a senior consultant with the firm, Thrivence, and was selected to help develop and collect responses for the Development Services Customer Survey.



- Gary McClure began his presentation saying that this was a quick, anonymous survey. There were 66 respondents out of over 400 development professionals that were contacted.
  - This response rate is consistent with other surveys although there is disappointment that there weren't more professionals engaging with this survey.
- Respondents were found to most likely engage with permitting and entitlements, with inspections following in third place. Half of respondents interact with departments at least several times a month. Customer service and communication were rated extremely high by respondents. However, clarity in responses had fewer positive responses and requires more attention.
  - Research also showed that this was a common theme amongst "super users" and the less interactive respondents. Gary also stressed to the Commission to not dismiss the more negative comments. Even though they are in the minority, there are often “nuggets of truth” in them.
- When looking at entitlements, the customer service and communications were very highly rated (75% positive). However, that decreases once questions go towards responses and comments.
  - Comments by respondents asked for more clarity and explanations when reviewing projects. They also ask for more help finding solutions rather than just pointing out problems. Respondents also had negative comments regarding the timeline of reviews.
- Permitting had the highest ratings for customer service and communications (84% positive) but had similar negative comments regarding responses and clarity.
  - One comment specifically stated that new comments are added after reviews are completed, which leads to delays.
- Inspections are still rated very high on customer service and communications and more negative ratings on responses and clarity. One comment mentioned that it's particularly tough on an individual homeowner to figure out what inspections are needed.
  - It is also worth exploring responses regarding the coordination of inspections from different departments. This one had a lot of neutral responses.
  - Scotty Bernick pointed out that this might mean that the question might not have applied to some respondents.
- Generally, respondents said that the City’s processes were predictable, staff met their time commitments, and provided good customer service. Gary finishes his presentation by bringing forward four recommendations:
  - 1. Ensure customer service and communication best practices are embraced across all departments.
  - 2. Read all comments.
  - 3. Deconstruct the processes. This could help discover some “pinch points.”
  - 4. Communicate to participants and convey that they have been heard and lay out what the City plans to do to improve their experience.
- Matt Bryant started the discussion by congratulating city staff on receiving such high marks on the survey, especially for customer service and communications. Just because some people are unhappy with the process doesn't necessarily mean that the City's process is flawed.



- Scotty asked how often this survey should be done and how can we get more people to respond.
  - Gary responded saying that keeping in touch with those who were reached out to is a huge step in getting more people to participate. It shows that the City is really listening to their feedback and wants to improve. It helps if the participant can see what's in it for them. Lastly, it's good to promise the participants a copy of the results.
- Michael Walters Young added that doing surveys frequently (but not overly frequent) helps keep up participation. He's learned that doing the citizen's survey. Response rates have been going down nation-wide. The challenge is deciphering the end user's definition of "being heard."
- Vernon Gerth said that this presentation will eventually go before the Board of Mayor and Aldermen. Ben Crenshaw mentioned that the timing is interesting. He has received a lot of comments from people who do a lot of work in Franklin, and the comments he hears fall in line with the survey results. He asked what staff will do to try and get more input on how to improve.
  - Vernon responded saying that there are some people who left their name and contact information to come and discuss issues before the Commission. This Commission was created to help staff with their processes and help make them more efficient.
  - Vernon added that he realizes that craftsmanship today is not what it used to be. The standard used to be that inspectors would never find a violation when they came on site. A design team recently submitted a plan with over 100 deficiencies. When staff has projects that are deemed incomplete, it takes time away from other projects that are ready and prepared. Some of these comments are even asking staff to change their role from reviewers to more of a quality control person.
- Matt Bryant agreed saying that a lot of these comments are asking staff to give solutions, but that is not really staff's job. It is not staff's role to be the designer. Michael also said that staff has reached out over the last ten years to the development community for feedback to understand if there needs to be more changes to the process or if staff needs to focus more on educating new developers on the process.
  - Katherine added that education is a huge piece. There are often examples where a design professional or an owner brings up an issue of "new comments being added on a resubmittal." Most of the time, the new comment is based on new information that was provided in the resubmittal rather than an issue that should have been caught in the initial review. It is easy for someone unfamiliar with the process to get confused on these kinds of situations. This is an area that staff could likely focus more on education rather than changing the process.
- The meeting ended with Gary McClure asking Commissioners to reach out if they have any questions or would like to provide additional feedback.
- **Next meeting – Tuesday, January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

#### 4. Adjourn.

**BUILDING AND  
NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES**



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