

# **Memorandum of Understanding City of Raleigh and Mecklenburg County**

Joint Residential Master Plan Approval Reciprocity and Electronic Review Process  
Mecklenburg-Raleigh Reciprocal Review (MR<sup>3</sup>)  
June 1, 2008

## **1. Introduction/Background**

The City of Raleigh (the “City”) and Mecklenburg County (the “County”) face similar challenges in permitting and inspections (“P&I”) service delivery, compounded by rapid economic growth in development, design and construction. Consequently, the City and the County have been involved in developing a joint service delivery program and the development of supporting technology for the past three years. In that time, both jurisdictions have gained significantly from sharing the cost of computer program development as well as sharing the valuable perspective of two innovative P&I agencies. The current focus of this joint effort is the collaborative review process and reciprocity of approved master plans on single family residential construction.

## **2. Purpose of the Program**

Recognizing that residential home building in 2008 is performed (on a volume basis) more often by national corporations than local firms, the City and County targeted this as an area to improve customer service efficiency. Both the City and County hope to eliminate needless duplication of residential reviews where the same builders are constructing new single family dwellings off the same master plans in both jurisdictions. In that case, the City and County would agree to accept the other jurisdiction’s residential master plan review as equivalent to their own and issue permits based on that review. This is referred to as Mecklenburg-Raleigh Reciprocal Review (MR<sup>3</sup>), a residential master plan reciprocal review program.

The benefits from pooling plan review resources in such an effort are wide ranging, including saving staff hours, improving permit issuance service to customers, and moving consistency of interpretation of the North Carolina State Building Code beyond the local level to a larger, regional basis. The City and County believe that MR<sup>3</sup> will help each jurisdiction manage the re-review of master plans reflective of the annual three year code change cycle and numerous other benefits to both jurisdictions.

## **3. How the Program Will Work for Raleigh**

The City initiates a residential master plan review only when a customer is ready to permit a new project. In that case, the City performs its review electronically (see supporting technology notes in item 4) via a web based submittal, review and storage process. On approval, the project is earmarked by an individual alpha numeric identifier for use in the permitting process.

Thereafter, the same plan can be identified and used in the permitting process, without re-review, in either the City or the County, subject to compliance with local ordinance requirements applicable to the particular project site (see item 5-C).

### **How the Program Will Work for Mecklenburg County**

In contrast, the County initiates residential master plan reviews any time a customer requests them by formal submittal. Other than that, the County's review steps and review criteria are almost identical to the City's. Master plan review concludes with approval, assignment of an alpha numeric identifier, and storage on a common web based site for use by either the City or the County in the permitting process without re-review.

### **Balancing Work Loads**

The City and County will develop a report-based method of balancing work loads to assure that neither jurisdiction is overburdened beyond its proportional benefit. This tool will also serve to discourage builders who submit to one authority with low expectation of actually building there. The balancing tool will include a means of recording plan review staff costs and allocating them to the program at-large while balancing this against the benefit each jurisdiction receives from the program (whether by permits issued, construction value permitted, or a combination thereof).

## **4. Supporting Technology**

The desire to create MR<sup>3</sup> has driven Raleigh and Mecklenburg to advance electronic plan review sooner than either jurisdiction originally anticipated. The City and County quickly realized that the path to making a reciprocal review program work between the two jurisdictions ran through abandoning the conventional paper process in favor of an electronic submittal/review medium. MR<sup>3</sup> also requires use of a common software program by both City and County staff, with the program also functioning well for customers holding a strong background in electronic drawing technology. Finally, this program will only work if it is internet based. Other technology components include:

- The City and County will share a secure common access and server(s).
- Builders will submit/load their electronic drawings to the website, requesting review.
- Plan review staff will perform reviews on the website in as many cycles as necessary to move the project to approval. Both drawing iterations and plan review comments will be retained on the website for reference.
- Final approved master plans will be permanently stored on the website, both for reference in the permitting process, as well as to comply with any applicable requirements of North Carolina law, including, but not limited to, requirements regarding the retention of public records.
- The website will include a tool allowing builders to print out only those drawings necessary at a particular site, rather than the entire master plan (the current practice). This is a significant benefit to both the builders (saving printing costs) and field inspectors (saving plan reference time).

**5. Liability, Alternate Methods and other Program Conditions**

- **Liability:** the jurisdiction issuing the permit assumes all responsibility for the plan review, regardless of which jurisdiction’s staff conducted the plan review. As such, the permit issuing jurisdiction will be responsible for resolving any conflicts that arise with the permit holder in their jurisdiction.
- **Alternate Methods:** use of alternate methods will not be allowed in this program.
- **Site Specific Issues:** this program addresses only review for compliance with the North Carolina State Building Code and is not intended to address compliance with local ordinance requirements (setbacks, fire access, appearance requirements, etc). Each authority will be responsible for verifying local ordinance compliance through their own P&I system tools (or other methods they choose) rather than through this program.
- **Review Criteria Maintenance:** to support the web based submittal program, the City and County have created common plan submittal and review criteria. If MR<sup>3</sup> is to be a long term success, it is critical that this common review criteria base be maintained in the future.
- **System Maintenance:** the cost of maintaining the website and software programs will be shared by the two authorities, with cost allocation proportional to the benefit gained by each (again, calculated based on by permits issued, construction value permitted, a combination thereof, or other mutually agreed upon criteria).

**6. Acknowledgements**


Both the City and County acknowledge that this Memorandum of Understanding creates no binding obligations of either jurisdiction and that any financial obligations stated herein shall be entirely subject to the appropriation of each jurisdiction’s governing authority as part of its regular budget process. The intent of each jurisdiction to further the objectives stated herein shall be at the discretion of the administration of each jurisdiction unless the terms and conditions stated herein are formalized through an interlocal agreement between the City and the County.

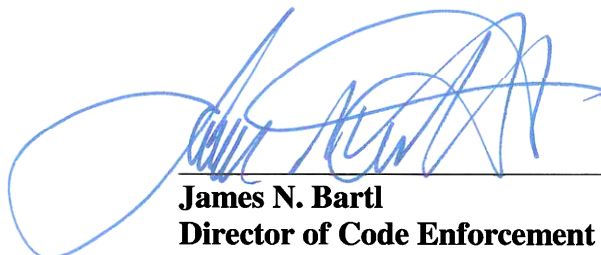
**7. Program Contacts**

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