

# Jackson County

North Carolina

## Permitting & Code Enforcement

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### Audit Assessment Report

**Prepared for**  
Jackson County

**Prepared by**  
Benchmark Planning

**October 2015**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This summary highlights the process and methods of evaluation used to perform an audit of Permitting and Code Enforcement Department and Planning Department services. It also summarizes the results of the audit and recommendations for improvement.

## INTRODUCTION

In an effort to improve services, Jackson County commissioned the study of the Permitting and Code Enforcement Department operations. The County retained the services of Benchmark Planning to conduct a performance audit of the departments in relation to cross-departmental interaction, overall organizational structure, effectiveness, and regulation enforcement.

## PROCESS

As part of this study, the project team reviewed the following specific areas and related topics:

- Organizational structure for the Permitting and Code Enforcement Department;
- Organizational structure and departmental overlap with the Planning Department
- Work flow of permit applications;
- Applicant/contractor experience with the review process;
- Technology and management systems' use and

accessibility;

- Responsibilities of Permitting and Code Enforcement Department and Planning Department;
- Permit and activity reporting system; and
- Staff professional development

In order to conduct this study, the project team engaged in the following activities to compile research:

- Conducted detailed interviews with key staff in the Permitting and Code Enforcement Department and Planning Department;
- Reviewed work flow of each application type;
- Reviewed the technological capabilities in the main Sylva office and satellite Cashiers office;
- Interviewed a sampling of contractors that engage the services of the Permitting and Code Enforcement Department and Planning Department on a regular basis; and
- Completed a comparison of Jackson County's organization to similarly sized North Carolina Counties and general best management practices.

## Executive Summary

As part of the assessment of the County's Permitting and Code Enforcement and Planning Departments, surveys were conducted to discern each Departments' performance and the Departments' ability to serve the citizens of Jackson County. Two surveys were conducted: a public survey and a survey of the County Board of Commissioners and Planning Board members.

## EVALUATION RESULTS

The evaluation results are based on observations made from the surveys and interviews that were conducted and review of ordinances, workflow, and a sampling of projects.

Generally, the public is satisfied with the level of services being provided by the Permitting and Code Enforcement Department as well as the Planning Department. Board Members perceive higher service levels being provided by the Planning Department as compared to the Permitting and Code Enforcement Department.

The focus of the evaluation was on the following areas:

- Plan Review
- Permitting
- Field Inspections
- Ordinances
- Organizational Structure and Staffing

- Interdepartmental/Jurisdiction Coordination and Communication
- Performance Measures
- Board Training

Each focus area was analyzed based on best management practices, and opportunities for improvement were noted and crafted into recommendations.

The evaluation showed no major problems in the function of the individual departments or in the overall quality of work produced by any staff members. Any perceived deficiencies in these areas have been the results of isolated incidents and do not reflect the high quality of work performed on a regular basis. Any issues, once discovered, have been resolved in a responsible manner. Most of the areas noted for improvement include organizational structure and staffing,

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following actions are recommended to improve upon the already exemplary services provided by the Permitting and Code Enforcement Department and Planning Department. Some of the recommendations are discussed in more detail in the "Recommendations" section of this report. Additionally, steps for implementation are outlined in the "Implementation Plan" of this report.

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND STAFFING

1. Fill the Planning Director position.
2. Create and maintain a minimum staff of four positions for the Planning Department, and review workload on annual basis to ensure that the staffing level is appropriate.
3. Move most Ordinance related review to Planning Department once fully staffed.
4. Create an Development Services Director (Assistant County Manager) position to oversee a consolidated Development Services Department with a distinct Planning Division and distinct Permitting and Inspections Division.
5. Amend the County organizational chart to reflect the actual chain of command and departmental divisions.
6. Make both the Sylva and Cashiers offices complete "One-Stop Shops".
7. Relocate the Planning Division to be immediately adjacent to the Permitting and Inspections Division.
8. Complete an annual review of Permitting and Inspections Division staffing levels to ensure that enough field inspectors are available to keep up with an increase in construction activity.

## TECHNOLOGY

1. Fully implement the use proprietary ROK software.
2. Unlock internet searches on the field inspection tablets.

## REGULATIONS

1. Produce a comprehensive Land Development Ordinance that consolidates all 18 development ordinances into one document.
2. Either have the designated department or division carry out administrative and approval functions, or amend the ordinances to designate the preferred approval authority.
3. Further illustrate approval procedures with flow charts within a comprehensive Land Development Ordinance so that all procedures can be viewed in one document.
4. Either amend the Mountain and Hillside Development Ordinance to reflect current administrative calculation methods or follow the calculation method currently shown in the ordinance.

## ADMINISTRATION

1. Add a line on the New Residential/New Commercial Application for work by an unlicensed General Contractor or property owner.

## Executive Summary

2. Formalize the Plan Review Committee by establishing guidelines for the Committee. Provide regular updates and reports to the County Manager, County Commissioners, and Planning Board about the Committee's activity.
3. Set other jurisdictional meeting dates to work with Planning Department schedule in order to avoid coverage conflicts as much as possible.
4. Provide additional report details including turnaround times, comments/complaints/surveys, updates on training, as well as online reports of activity as a means to convey workload and increase transparency.
5. Review the permitting and inspection fee schedule to ensure that adequate fees are being collected to reach a higher level of cost recoup.
3. Provide joint annual training sessions for all jurisdictional Planning Boards/Committees, Boards of Adjustment, and elected officials.
4. Either amend the Mountain and Hillside Development Ordinance to reflect current administrative calculation methods or follow the calculation method currently shown in the ordinance.

## TRAINING

1. Train and certify Permitting and Inspections staff in the Cashiers office to review commercial plans.
2. Continue to encourage and incentivize inspectors to further pursue training and gain more levels through pay raises (sometimes referred to as a Career Development Plan).