

** Will print automatically! If it doesn't, click [here](#). **

crain's new york business.com

Article can be found at http://www.craainsnewyork.com/article/20120621/REAL_ESTATE/120629984

Land-use application process gets radical remake

The new system aims to streamline a multi-year series of complex environmental and land-use analyses that take place before developers' projects can enter their formal city review.

By [Amanda Fung @amandafung](#)

Published: June 21, 2012 - 10:07 am

In a move designed to streamline the hugely cumbersome process by which developers apply to get their projects approved, the Department of City Planning rolled out a new system that will make things easier, faster and more predictable.

"This is a total transformation of how we review all land-use applications," said City Planning Director Amanda Burden. "We think it will foster growth in the city and get projects in the ground faster."

Dubbed BluePRint, which stands for Business Process Reform, the new system will be used in what is known as projects' pre-certification review period, during which they undergo complex environmental and land-use analyses. That process can drag on for several years —if not longer. Following that, projects enter the formal city public review known as the Uniform Land User Review Procedure, which typically takes another six months or so.

Deputy Mayor Robert Steel, who played a key role in the creation of BluePRint, announced its launch Thursday morning at a forum sponsored by the Association for a Better New York. The system will go live July 2, and by the time it is fully implemented in about two years, it is expected to allow City Planning to review two-thirds of all applications 25% to 50% faster than it does today. What's more, the streamlining is expected to save developers up to \$100 million annually in various costs.

"Streamlining the review of development applications is exactly what New York City needs to build upon the economic progress we've made and help us prepare for the future," Mr. Steel said, in a statement. "More development means more jobs for New Yorkers, and BluePRint simplifies the way applications are reviewed so those jobs can be created as soon as possible."

The new system was developed and has had a pilot run over the past 18 months. Close to \$2 million in city funding was allocated to BluePRint. Accenture consulted City Planning on creating the system. MetLife provided skills training and human resource assistance on a pro bono basis. Additionally, the agency will add three new senior positions to manage and implement BluePRint.

Ironically, it was the recession that allowed City Planning to review how it approached the land-use application



Buck Ennis

Deputy Mayor Robert Steel, who played a key role in the creation of BluePRint, announced its launch Thursday morning.

process. Since there was a dip in the number of projects being submitted to the agency for review, there was more time to step back and analyze. Currently, there are roughly 523 land-use applications in the pipeline, the agency said.

"Before we couldn't take a breath and look at the process," Ms. Burden said.

Prior to the new system, there were no written standards to guide developers through the process. Under BluePRint, there will be detailed templates that developers can follow and City Planning will be able to track the application from the time a developer steps into the agency's office to propose a project.

"It will create speed, predictability and accountability," Ms. Burden said, adding that issues in the project will be caught much earlier way before it enters ULURP.

In the pilot phase, five rezoning applications have used the new BluePRint system. Among them are the proposed expansion of St. Francis Prep High School in Fresh Meadows, Queens and a proposed mixed-use project at 515 W. 57th St., where the property owner wants to build a facility with a television studio, offices and residential units on land that is zoned for manufacturing and commercial.

"The application is moving along more smoothly than it might have in the past," said Paul Selver, partner at the law firm of Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel, who represents the owner of 515 W. 57th St. "By having standards the agency has the potential to significantly decrease the amount of time reviewing the details of the application."

Mr. Selver added that BluePRint requires applicants to pull together far more information up front. This may be a burden, but "it allows the agency to make decisions earlier and with more certainty," he said.

City Planning said BluePRint will allow the public to review applications and allow developers to file land use applications online by the end of 2015. Once the new system is fully implemented the agency expects the pre-certification process to become more transparent and structured.

"It will become a robust system and one of the legacies of the Bloomberg administration," Ms. Burden said. As of Thursday, under her leadership the city has approved 116 rezonings covering more than 10,000 blocks.

Entire contents ©2012 Crain Communications Inc.
