

Harrisonburg
VIRGINIA



CITY OF HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA
BUILDING INSPECTION STUDY

*Conducted By DecideSmart, LLC
April-May 2015*

Prosperous City

- Historic
- Growing City
 - 52,000 population
- University City
 - JMU
 - Eastern Mennonite University
- Long History of Council-Manager Form of Government

DecideSmart

- **Lane Ramsey** is a Principal in DecideSmart. He served in local government leadership positions for 35 years, including 20 years as County Administrator for Chesterfield County, Virginia.
- **Bill Leighty** is a Principal in DecideSmart. He is the former Chief of Staff to Governors Mark Warner and Tim Kaine. He served in many state government leadership positions including the CEO of the Virginia Retirement System
- **Dr. Bob Holsworth** is a Principal in DecideSmart. He is a former Dean of the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) College of Humanities and Sciences and the founder of both the VCU Center for Public Policy and the VCU Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs.

Purpose of Study

Review the building permit process to assist the City to help resolve complaints from the building and development community regarding timeliness and customer service issues

Interviews

- Development Community Representatives
- Staff
- City Council
- Focus Group With Community Development Staff

Outcome

- Development community concerned about Building permit process
 - Had some positive comments about staff
 - Want to be a part of the solution
 - Others believed there were hidden agendas related to building permit process
 - Customer service concerns
- Very little communication between city staff and development community

Outcome (Continued)

- Lack of communication between staff
- Desire by all to “fix the problem” and work on solutions
- All understand the importance of quality building and development to the city
- All understand the importance of process free of interference and illegal influence
- There is no routine communication mechanism with development community and between city departments

Recommendations

- City manager should appoint a team of staff to implement recommendations
- Implement a survey process asking applicants to rate their experience with the city process
- City administration should establish a formal communication and meeting process with development community
 - Community Development leadership
 - Agenda for each meeting
 - Place open item on agenda for development community

Recommendation (Continued)

- Building inspectors should begin leaving a ticket at inspection site after inspection
- Training for development related staff
 - Flow chart city processes
 - Complaints
 - Customer service expectations
 - Seek state assistance (DHCD)
- How to handle violations found after approved inspections
- Consider adding staff to plans review

Technology

- Tracking of permits not available to applicants
- DS recommends automation of BP process and commends city for budgeting a system
- Consider a fee increase to help pay for system
- Visit other localities to find best practice

Other

- Many of the same issues were communicated about site plan review process
- Consider “Fast Track” process for economic development projects