



The City of Novi redesigned the Community Development Department office (top left). Top right, Community Development staff members Rick Meader and Barb McBeth go over some construction plans.

An Eye on the Future

Revamped city department streamlines development process

The success of community development in Novi begins and ends with collaboration.

It is the lifeblood of the department both internally and externally, playing a key role in the growth of Novi's residential and business community over the years - even during the tough economic times.

So earlier this year, when the nearly 30-year-old office of the Novi Community Development Department was redesigned, collaboration was at the forefront of the plans. The 3,700-square-foot space is a state-of-the-art area complete with new technology, prepped for future advancement and designed in such a way that improves workflow throughout the department.

Prior to the improvements, there was no place to share digital drawings, review plans or discuss a project, and the various employees in planning, building and code compliance were organized in such a way that hindered efficiency and collaboration.

There is now a distinct flow throughout the department, which Director Charles Boulard said not only makes processes faster but also fosters teamwork. There are even hoteling spaces for consultants so they do not have to leave to complete their work.

"It really allows us to function as a team," Boulard said.

That team's efforts extend beyond the department walls as well, as staff works with residents, business owners and developers in the field. Permitting,

scheduling inspections and even paying fees can all be done online, and there is even a kiosk in the lobby of the Novi Civic Center that can be used when the building is open but the department is closed.

Since 2011, the department has overseen the building of 1,195 single-family homes, issued 884 commercial building permits valued at \$348 million, approved 2,014 residential alterations/additions and completed 6,552 code compliance inspections.

Boulard said the department has reduced its single-family home reviews to two weeks or less, and is working with commercial developers to approve preliminary plans and let them start doing site work before final approval (Harman, Magna and Autoneum are a few of the businesses that took advantage of that process).

In terms of planning for the future, the groundwork has been laid toward a paperless department. Plans are in the works to have digital plan submission and review, and also have the ability to store all records electronically, thus making them more accessible.

Getting projects in the ground sooner is always the focus, Boulard said.

For a developer like Gary Jonna, president of Whitehall Community Management, project delivery, timeliness and reliability are important. He said he

has always had strong communication with the department and appreciates their willingness to accommodate "some challenging timelines."

"Instead of a reactionary process it is more of a collaborative process," he said. "They make a conscious effort to streamline the

process and have been sensitive to deadlines."

Jonna said Novi's structured and thorough process "demands high-caliber development," which he sees as a huge benefit.

"We always feel when we finish a project in Novi it is a valuable asset because they upheld their development standards," he said. "And that in turn protects our real estate investments."

The Community Development Department is open from 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday-Friday. For more information, call (248) 347-0415.

BY THE NUMBERS

Here are some of Novi's community development statistics for 2015:

198	New single family homes valued at \$29.7 million
7	New multi-family homes valued at \$2.1 million
515	Residential alterations/additions valued at \$8.8 million
201	Commercial permits issued valued at \$115 million
12,455	Inspections performed
1,237	Code compliance inspections
102	Stamped site plans