

Town of Grand Chute

Commercial Building Plan Review
2004 - 2008

Allen Davis,
Community Development Director

History of Plan Reviews

- Town of Grand Chute – certified municipality – mostly building inspections.
- Town staff could perform plan reviews in structures under 50,000 cubic feet.
- Two Commercial/Residential building inspectors have done the local plan reviews and inspections.

Grand Chute

Growth & Development

- 1998 to 2008: growth steady and relatively high
- Home to Fox River Mall, Fox Cities Stadium, 20 hotels/motels with 1,800 rooms and surrounding development
- Average annual value increase about \$60,000,000
- Average annual population increase of 300 to 350 people.

Town of Grand Chute Staff

- Chief Building Inspector Cary Nate - 21 years of experience, UDC/Commercial certified.
- Building Inspector Jeff Kopecky – 7 years of experience, UDC/Commercial certified.
- Cost Recovery – covers all costs including share of Department secretary, mapping and code enforcement.
- Number of all permits issued ranges from 1,100 to 1,500 including signs, sheds, siding, subcontractors etc.

Site Plan Approval

- Not the same as Building Plan Reviews
- All exterior improvements – drainage, stormwater detention, landscaping, lighting, parking lot design, loading zones, fire department access, dumpster enclosures, wall and pole signs, utility hook-ups, erosion control, driveway permits etc.

Site Plan Approval Process

- Based on Zoning Code - Staff review – all department representatives
- Community Development Director coordinates all
- Chief Building Inspector, Fire Department, Police Department, Sewer and Water Department, Street Department, We Energies
- Plan Commission action usually required

Historical Commercial Building Plan Review and Approval Process

- Town reviews and approves Site Plan
- Department of Commerce reviews and approves Building Plan based on IBC.
- Building Inspector issues permit based on approvals.
- Building Inspector performs inspections.
- Building Inspector issues occupancy permit.

Concerns with the Building Plan Review Process

- Applicants want to start the project “yesterday”
- Building Inspectors can sometimes know little or nothing of the project – esp. remodels
- Building Inspectors do not know about history of decisions or special requirements.
- Site Plan approval can be completed, but the Building Plan Review may not be done – can be confusing to the applicant.

Other Town Concerns

- ISO review – no Architect on Town staff.
- Problem buildings – no easy way to get answers in the field.
- Change Orders – changes to the design during construction.
- Problem builders or owners – abandoned, absentee, condemnation etc. sometimes the Town needs a professional opinion.
- Town staff wanted an Architect “on-call”

Events in 2003

- Henry Kosarzycki visits the Town to “audit” building inspections – we passed.
- Town and Dept. of Commerce discuss Commercial Plan Review alternatives.
- Town review of staff and/or consultant qualifications, training and certifications.
- Town staff review of possible Consultant services.

2003 - Developing a Business Model

- Informal survey of designers, architects and builders in the Town – generally in favor.
- Town will not subsidize the Commercial Plan Review services.
- Projected revenue estimates and cost estimates.
- Staff only added if the position pays for itself.

Community Development is familiar with Contracted Services

- Private Sector Consultant for 10 years
- Wetland Delineations
- Drainage Plan Reviews
- Street Plan Reviews
- Erosion Control Plan Reviews
- Stormwater Management Plan Reviews
- Drainage Plan field checks and Erosion Control inspections
- Town Assessor

Key Assumptions

- Grand Chute would use the Commerce Fee Schedule.
- Architects and designers would use the Town's plan review service if the Town was fast enough.
- Plan reviews and documentation would be done by the Town - some plan reviews would be done by a consulting architect depending on time and project complexity.

Town Approval Process

- 2004 Budget preparation – Commerce and consultant costs and Town revenues
- Proposal for Architectural Review services from the “Town Engineer”, McMahon Group in Town of Menasha (next door)
- Town Board action – 2004 Budget, Contract with Architect and Enabling Resolution for “Delegated Agent” provided by Commerce

Consultant Architectural Services

- McMahan Group is also “Town Architect”.
- Fees determined by Commerce Fee Schedule less Town administrative fee and Department of Commerce fee.
- Contracted review completed within 5 business days.
- Comments to Chief Building Inspector, Town still approving agent.

Town Plan Review Process

- Designer submit Plans to the Community Development Department.
- Town uses Dept. of Commerce form and fee schedule.
- Chief Building Inspector does preliminary review and logs plan – determines Town review or Consultant?
- When Town review is complete, Town Chief Building Inspector issues approval letter and stamps plans.

Plan Review Coordination with Consultant

- Plans delivered to Consultant Architect as needed (5 miles away).
- Consultant Architect does most of the reviews, but gets assistance from others PEs or AIAs as needed.
- Consultant emails questions or requests for more information to designer, cc to Town. Resubmittals go through the Town.
- Consultant provides conditions of approval to Chief Building Inspector for Town Approval Letter and Town stamps plans.
- Consultant bills Town monthly at predetermined rate, Town reviews and pays bill.

Avoiding Conflict of Interest

- McMahan projects in the Town are not reviewed by McMahan – Town review or State review only.
- Lead Architect contacts Community Development Director regarding possible projects.
- McMahan could not review 4 or 5 projects since 2004.

2004 – The Test Year

- A good start.
 - Building Plans – 99
 - Revenue \$52,670
 - Expenses \$32,915
-
- One Architect did not want his “competition” reviewing his plans, he continues to submit to Commerce.

2005 – Fine Tuning

- Getting even better.
 - Building Plans – 110
 - Revenue \$67,600
 - Expenses \$36,565
-
- Staff – building plan reviews and inspections kept the staff very busy

2006 – adjusting staffing

- Town does most of plan reviews
 - Building Plans – 89
 - Revenue \$40,130
 - Expenses \$12,695
-
- 2007 Budget preparation included part-time Permit Technician to process non-UDC and Commerce permits.

2006 "Non-audit" Audit

- Commerce review of files, plans and specifications, correspondence, inspections etc.
- Generally satisfactory – some improvement was needed in documentation and communications.
- Results: “Town of Grand Chute is meeting and exceeding expectations of an agent municipality”

2007 – Plan Review continues

- Construction declines in number of permits and total value; however, Plan Review continues at 2006 rates
- Building Plans - 85
- Revenues - \$41,080
- Expenses - \$8,760
- Permit Technician hired – UDC credentials included
- Another Inspector for vacations and other absences
- More timely Plan reviews, permitting and inspections

2008 - Continued success

- Year to date has been good
- Number of plan reviews and revenue on pace with 2007
- Town Administrator has highlighted the program to the Town Board
- Budgeting again for 2009

What have I learned?

- Grand Chute staff is very good and was willing to try the new system and accept this new responsibility.
- Dept. of Commerce was very helpful and able to provide examples of review checklists, sample letters, and answers to Town's questions.
- Architects and contractors seem to be happy with the service.
- Use Dept. of Commerce for municipal buildings

Advantages for the Applicant

- Plan Review time has been less.
- The Plan Reviewer is more accessible.
- The Site Plan approval and building plan approval are better coordinated.
- The Plan Reviewer/Building Inspector is on site regularly – on-going contact with the contractor.
- The consulting Architect can easily meet with Plan Reviewer/Building Inspector and the designer on-site or in local office to better understand questions and resolve the situation quicker.

Advantages for the Town

- Town staff better understands the Site Plan and Building Plan conditions for approval.
- Town staff have the consulting Architect available for questions and interpretations.
- Town staff can be more helpful with economic development projects, remodels and new construction.
- Additional revenue = additional staff.
- Closer to a “one-stop shop”.

Advantages for the State

- Revenue - Annual Town check sent to Dept. of Commerce with log of all Building Plan Reviews.
- Eases the burden on State Plan Reviewers.
- Better Plan Reviews – Town inspectors know history of buildings and environment, do not have to rely on designer's assumptions.

The Future?

- Fire Department participates in Site Plan Review, they are looking to perform Building Plan Review as part of their Fire Prevention goals.
- May need to look at review fees, depending on consultant costs and staffing.
- Can the Town replace other permitting agencies like Outagamie County and WisDNR?