

<b>Project ID</b>	PIP-7
<b>Title of Program</b>	Development Activity Page
<b>Program Category</b>	Public Information and Participation
<b>Submission Date</b>	5/25/2017 5:49:18 PM
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<b>Implementation Date</b>	11/1/2016
<b>FLSA Designation</b>	Both (if applicable to a team)
<b>Project Team Members</b>	Planning and Land Use Department Information Technology Department Communication and Outreach Department

## **LGFCU Excellence in Innovation Award Project Evaluation**

### **Description of Productivity Improvement**

Hearing the concerns presented by New Hanover County citizens during the development review process, New Hanover County's Department of Planning & Land Use decided to create a webpage that would provide a one-stop shop for the general public to obtain application documents, meeting dates, and other relevant materials related to recent major development applications and ongoing development projects in the unincorporated areas of the county. The department named this webpage the Development Activity Page (DAP), and during the creation of it, ensured the following objectives were achieved:

- Making the webpage easy to locate. At the time, the agenda packets took several clicks from the county's main webpage to locate. A noticeable link on the DAP was included on the department's main webpage.
- The inclusion of comprehensive information. The DAP is a one-stop shop for development-related information. The general public can easily locate specific development applications, public meeting dates and outcomes, staff contacts, community meeting notices, county ordinances and plans, links to other relevant sites (the online GIS portal, for example), and a development activity map.

- Quicker publishing of information. The DAP created a location that development application documents could be placed on the county's website. Therefore, the Department of Planning & Land Use created a policy to add all major development applications to the DAP within a few days of receiving them. This policy also became a requirement added to the Zoning Ordinance for special use permit applications. In addition, the department sends a notice to a public notification e-mail list immediately after applications that will require Planning Board consideration are posted to the DAP. So the public can easily link to the DAP to learn about the application.
- Creation of a Development Activity Map. Residents may know of the general area where a development is proposed, but may not know the exact address or development name. Therefore, in addition to posting application documents to the DAP, county staff wanted to ensure specific applications were easy to locate. This was achieved by creating a Development Activity Map. This map illustrates the exact location where major development applications have been submitted. The user can then click on the specific icon to obtain the information regarding that development application.
- Advertising of community information meeting notices. In New Hanover County, certain development applications require the applicant to hold a community meeting with the surrounding residents. The creation of the DAP created a convenient place to advertise these notices for these meetings to the general public.
- Creation of an online development application archive. During the creation of the DAP, county staff realized that in order to keep the page from getting cluttered with hundreds of development applications, older applications would need to eventually be removed from the page. However, staff wanted to ensure that those documents would still be available on the website. Utilizing LaserFiche, a document management solution, staff created an online application archive that would keep every application document ever posted to the page in an easily accessible database.

### **Description of why this project was initiated**

Often during the development review process, the general public expresses interest and a desire to learn more about development projects being proposed or constructed in their neighborhood. This leads to frequent calls and inquiries to the county requesting information about these developments. Further, while some applications and documents have been made available online as part of the agenda packet for Planning Board and Board of Commissioners meetings, these packets are published just a few days prior to the meeting. Occasionally, this generates comments from the general public, who feel that they have not had a sufficient opportunity to review the application documents. In addition, the agenda packet was not located in a prominent location on the website, requiring several clicks to locate specific information regarding a development proposal.

County staff recognized a need to inform the general public of major development proposal earlier in the review process and to make this information easy to locate. The Development Activity Page is a mechanism to ensure the public receives all information related to a development throughout the planning process. It provides the public easier access to information and creates greater transparency in the development review process.

### **Quantifiable results (sustainability, cost savings, cost avoidance and/or a higher level of service).**

### **Indication of what resources were used and what was done with any accrued time savings**

From a qualitative perspective, the DAP and its web map have received nothing but positive feedback since it went live. The DAP has functioned exceptionally well and has only needed minor adjustments and additions, such as links to other important department documents and functions. This is a testament to the DAP being a well thought out and soundly implemented initiative.

The DAP has become Planning's third most visited page since it went live in November of 2016. Since November, the DAP has been visited over 5,800 times, which makes it the third most visited page for the Planning & Land Use Department, after the department's home page and the development application page.

The average visit length to any Planning & Land Use website is just over two minutes. However, on average, users spend twice this amount of time, four minutes, on the DAP. This indicates that users are actively interacting with the information presented on the page. The analytics also suggest that users found the information they were looking for from the DAP and did not feel the need to seek out additional webpages or contact staff.

Staff also frequently use the DAP to find information about specific development projects quickly. Overall, the DAP has been useful for the general public, as well as staff, elected officials, and other governmental agencies.

The DAP and its associated web map were created and are being maintain in-house, so there was no additional cost, outside of staff time committed, to implement this project. Additionally, the county already had access to the software and systems used to create the website, including WordPress, ArcGIS Online, and Laserfiche. Therefore, there was no additional cost in terms of software required to create the DAP and its web map.

In terms of staff time for the project, the creation of the webpage required about twelve hours of IT staff time, and the web map took about fifteen hours of staff time. Planning and Land Use staff was responsible for updating the DAP with recent development applications (rezonings, special use permits, subdivisions, etc.). This portion of the project required around thirty hours of staff time.

Overall, there was no extra allocation of county funds to create and implement the DAP.

### **Other descriptive information**

The creation of the DAP was a team effort among three county departments. While it was initially conceived by the Planning & Land Use Department, it became a reality thanks to the abilities of the county's Information Technology (IT) Department. After the DAP was live to the general public, the Communications & Outreach Department then promoted the webpage by sending out a press release, coordinating business journal articles, and producing a short video which was aired on the county's public television station (NHCTV) and publicized through the county's social media platforms.

Overall, the DAP has provided a higher level of service to the residents of New Hanover County with no additional cost. Specifically, it has provided sought-after information to the public earlier in the review process. This allows interested parties more time to review this information and provide better input to county officials.

Extra Links:

1: Link to the Development Activity Page

We highly encourage for everyone to visit the page and explore all of its features!

<http://planningdevelopment.nhcgov.com/development-activity/>

2: Link to a short video created by the County's Communications & Outreach Department advertising the page:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKcWhLfQU8Y>