The Division of Code Inspection and Compliance

A Recommendation to Implement a Structural Consolidation, and Streamlining of DeKalb County's Inspection, Compliance and Regulatory Enforcement Services

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Table of Contents

Background……

…….. 2

Purpose…….....

..... 3 Regulatory Enforcement

Framework…….....……... 3

Current Organizational

Structure…..……. 4

Model

Jurisdictions……

…….. 5

Recommended Approach

…….. 6

Benefits of

Consolidation……

……. 8

Training Requirements and Policy

Changes…… 8

Conclusion……

…….... 8

Background

DeKalb County is gifted with unique and numerous assets, including proximity and accessibility to major highways, the presence of the National Centers for Disease Control, nationally recognized institutions of higher education, including Emory University, Agnes Scott College, Oglethorpe University, and Mercer University, as well as regionally recognized technical colleges, such as Georgia Piedmont Technical College and Georgia Perimeter College, the presence of several industrial parks and commercial corridors, the existence of large and continuous greenspace areas, such as Arabia Mountain and Stone Mountain, and sustainable resources and practices.

Over the last five years, however, the County has experienced a high rate of foreclosures, and municipal incorporations and annexations of highly desirable residential and commercial areas. The foreclosure rate has significantly decreased property values, while incorporations and annexations have diminished resources at the County's disposal to provide services to areas hit the hardest. The County has experienced prolonged budgetary constraints, and has significantly downsized staff across several departments. These obstacles have made it difficult for the County to attract new investments, improve service delivery, and grow its economic base.

To remain viable and become competitive within the metro region, nationally, and globally, DeKalb County has recognized the need to evaluate its internal core functions, and identify opportunities to reorganize operations to create greater efficiencies and better respond to the needs of its constituents. The County developed a strategic plan with the following goals:

- Enhance Public Safety
- Facilitate Jobs and Economic Development
- Ensure Efficient Operations
- Ensure Fiscal Integrity
- Invest in Employees
- Develop and Maintain Sustainable Neighborhoods and Communities

Consistent with these strategic goals, County Management officials have analyzed strengths and opportunities in the areas of Inspections and Code Compliance Operations, and have identified the potential for cost savings through the greater efficiencies that could result from a strategic review and transformation of some of its organizational and functional structures. This analysis has led to the conclusion that there is a unique opportunity to consolidate, streamline and enhance the coverage of the County's Code Compliance operations. This opportunity enables the creation of synergies between existing divisions and functional areas, and leverages resources to ensure greater flexibility in resource allocation, and larger coverage of code compliance and inspection functions while contributing to the fiscal integrity of the organization.

Purpose

The purpose of this white paper is to discuss the opportunity for consolidation and streamlining of inspection, compliance and regulatory enforcement functions into one division in Dekalb County: The Division of Inspection and Code Compliance. Several studies and examples demonstrate that this approach offers greater service efficiency and cost savings, as many municipalities in Georgia and throughout the country have employed this strategy (i.e. Prince George, MA; Sandy Springs, GA and Johns Creek, GA). The consolidation of functional areas eliminates duplication of efforts and creates a more nimble operational unit that maximizes utilization of resources. The fear of losing the "personalized" service in the traditional municipal model has crippled communities and wasted taxpayer money, while a consolidated approach can offer greater consistency in policy applications and service delivery, and engender greater public confidence in the County's ability to deliver services.

Regulatory Enforcement Framework

While decreasing tax revenues have diminished the resources available to provide code compliance services, the economic downturn and high foreclosure rate necessitate enhanced services. Abandoned properties attract crime, and present unique challenges to Law Enforcement and Code Compliance Officers. Demands for service have increased, but the County has been obliged to decrease personnel, and has been unable to invest in appropriate technologies that would facilitate a more efficient approach to service delivery.

The need for enhanced code compliance and enforcement has also increased the burden on Code Compliance Officers to report and follow-up on a variety of ancillary issues that are traditionally handled by other service or functional areas. Exacerbating the problem of how to deal effectively and efficiently with these additional service demands are increased resident needs for specialized services.

DeKalb County currently follows the traditional approach to providing code compliance services, which gives limited authority to Code Compliance Officers, places restrictions on the specific issues each functional area can address, and creates costly and duplicative processes (i.e. vehicles; data management; travel time; etc.). A more efficient approach allows for greater enforcement flexibility by concentrating the management, oversight, and responsibilities of performing a diverse number of inspection, enforcement and compliance tasks in a single division.

Due to restrictions in the existing Code of DeKalb County, compliance staff is often unable to address or resolve certain field-related issues without the need for referral to another functional area of the County. For example, if a Code Compliance Officer visits a restaurant to follow-up on a complaint about illegal signage, and he or she notices that the business does not have a business license or a Fats, Oils, and Grease Certificate, he or she would have to contact the Business License Division and FOG Division, then each division would send a separate inspector to verify non-compliance and issue a violations notice when/if appropriate.

This fragmented approach to Code Compliance and Enforcement is highly inefficient, as these redundancies cost the County in higher resource utilization and decreased service delivery. This approach also delays response times, has a negative effect on public expectations, and diminishes the County's capacity to promptly remediate existing problems. As the county continues to seek cost-saving opportunities, the idea of consolidating inspection, compliance, and regulatory enforcement services should be considered a strategic priority.

Realigning and streamlining Code Compliance via consolidation of the structural functions is aligned with the County's strategic priorities, such as increased operational efficiency, customer service, fiscal integrity, and investing in employees. Eliminating redundancies and ensuring that existing resources are available to provide a wide range of services at a higher rate of speed will restore public confidence and will enable greater economic development opportunities for DeKalb County.

Current Organizational Structure

DeKalb County currently has an array of inspections and enforcement services spread across seven departments. This organizational structure has inherent coordination and communication difficulties, and puts the county at a disadvantage compared to surrounding communities with whom it competes for economic development investments.

The current "silo" structure makes up for a diversity of pay grades and titles such as Code Compliance Officer, Compliance Inspector, Development Construction Inspector, Environmental Land Development Inspector, License Inspector and Sanitation Inspector, and results in misalignments of compensation for staff who are essentially performing very similar services. These misalignments also result in disconnected community outcomes, and ultimately in a failure of consistent delivery of public services.

The Code Compliance Division of DeKalb County has a scope of work that includes capacity for enforcement, inspection and courtroom expertise. This division has the experienced leadership and capability to serve as the leading organization to create a consolidation plan and manage it to fruition. The division has already shown leadership by providing training for other divisions, assistance in preparation for legal cases, in addition to the desire to serve as the path setter for other regulatory entities within the County.

Furthermore, while several compliance and enforcement functional areas may in fact require specific training and expertise, the foundation and overall construct of all regulatory and inspection services for the County lies within the mission of the Code Compliance Division. The table below shows the County's service areas.

Department	Division/Unit/Branch	Functional Areas/Regulation	Approx. FTE's

Finance	Business License	Inspects businesses licenses, health and fire certificates, certificates of occupancy, vending licenses, alcoholic beverage licenses.	3
Planning & Sustainability	Code Compliance	Enforces Nuisance, Property Maintenance, Noise, Zoning and Sign Ordinances.	25
Public Safety	Animal Control	Investigates complaints relating to excessive animal noise, including barking dogs and crowing fowl.	-
Public Safety	Police Services	Regulates Noise, Parking on street	-
Public Works	Sanitation Inspection	Enforces Solid Waste code violations	2
Public Works	Engineering Services	Regulates silt and sediment leaving construction sites	5
Watershed Management	Compliance and Infrastructure (FOG Unit)	Regulates Illegal dumping and unauthorized discharge of nontoxic substance into the sewer system.	5

Public Safety (Police and Animal Control) Officers have an expanded scope of services; however, there are specific provisions (mentioned above) that are better suited to be enforced or regulated through this consolidate approach without the migration of FTE's from this Department.

Model Jurisdictions

Prince George's County, Maryland- Prince George's County is a county located in the U.S. state of Maryland, immediately north, east, and south of Washington, D.C. According to the 2011 census, it is estimated the County has a population of 871,233, and it is the wealthiest African American-majority County in the United States. The mission statement for its *Department of Environmental Services* is "to protect and enhance the natural and built environments of Prince George's County by enforcing Federal, State and County laws to create a healthy, safe and aesthetically pleasing environment for all residents and businesses of the County". This department utilizes a streamlined approach to service delivery by combining the following programs and services into one department:

Abandoned Vehicles	Air Quality Program	Animal Management
Brown Station Road Sanitary Landfill	Building Inspections	Building Permit Requirements
Bulky Trash Collection	Business Licenses	Cemetery Regulations

Commercial/Industrial Property Maintenance	Drainage Complaints	Flood Management
Homeowner's Guide to Property Maintenance	Household Hazardous Waste Collection	Single and Multifamily Housing Code Enforcement
Permit Center	Pet Adoptions	Pet Licensing

Minneapolis, Minnesota – Minneapolis is the county seat of Hennepin County, the largest city in the state of Minnesota, and the 48th largest in the United States. As of 2011, the estimated population of the city of Minneapolis is 387,753. Known as the Twin Cities, Minneapolis–Saint Paul is the 16th-largest metropolitan area in the U.S., with approximately 3.3 million residents. The *Regulatory Services Department*, in the City of Minneapolis, is responsible for the supervision and management of Regulatory Services sections including Housing Inspections, Fire Inspection Services, Problem Properties Unit, Minneapolis Animal Care & Control, and Traffic Control. The Department is charged with the responsibility of protecting the health, safety and welfare of Minneapolis residents through a program of regulation, inspection, and enforcement of laws and ordinances pertaining to housing inspection, fire inspections, traffic control, problem properties, and animal care and control.

Quincy, Massachusetts– In 1997, the City of Quincy created the *Department of Inspectional Services* to bring several small departments that provided related inspectional service under one roof. The departments that were combined were Building Inspections, Zoning Board of Appeals, Conservation, Wire Inspections, Plumbing & Gas Inspections, Code Enforcement, and Weights and Measures. According their website, the purpose of consolidating these departments was to "streamline the construction permitting process to better serve homeowners and contractors."

Recommended Approach

In order to increase the efficiency of regulatory services, increase revenue related to these services, decrease costs (vehicles, vehicles maintenance, etc.), and achieve a greater level of effectiveness and efficiency, we propose to develop an implementation plan leading to the establishment of a consolidated management structure and service delivery. The plan will also make recommendations for necessary changes in the existing code of ordinances to enable the appropriate regulatory framework to support this new structure.

Following best practice models, the adoption of a consolidated approach to the field inspection and Code Compliance processes will break up current silos and realign service

delivery to maximize customer service. This new structure will create a more nimble workforce with greater flexibility and capacity for service delivery across Code Compliance and Inspection functions.

A full implementation plan to execute these reforms in service delivery will create the path to direct County resources and funding toward unified goals and outcomes. The ultimate impact will be felt in revitalized neighborhoods, complying with environmental regulations that attract and support economic development. The new Division of Inspections and Code Compliance will also result in direct revenue enhancements, as the County's capacity to for example enforce and collect business licenses fees will be greater.

This recommendation of a streamlined consolidation of all Code Compliance and Inspection efforts will redefine service delivery, and make each function stronger and more effective. Instead of separate departments acting as stakeholders and partners in serving the best interest of the citizens a single functional unit will serve as point of service delivery.

The following graphic depicts the consolidation of functions into one functional service area.



Benefits of Consolidation

- Greater Efficiency – Expanded service delivery by existing staff
- Elevated skill sets -Sharing knowledge applicable to different service areas; cross training
- Shared Resources – Technology, access to information, tools and budgeting
- Fleet Maximization – Potential implementation of vehicle pool process; lesser miles traveled
- Streamlined and Consistent Processes – Inspection activities, courtroom procedures, customer service
- Cost Reduction – Enhanced service with less staff

Training Requirements and Policy Changes

The practices and procedures associated with the enforcement and adjudication of code and ordinance violations are universal in their applicability throughout the County, therefore the training and cross-training costs associated with the consolidation of these service areas are expected to be minimal. However, in order to effectively cross-train all staff on all regulatory functions, the following training and certifications would be required: Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission (GSWCC) Level 1 B Inspector Certification –NPDES, Capacity, Management, Operation and Maintenance (CMOM) Federal and State regulation training, as well as Georgia Association of Code Enforcement Certification. This investment in DeKalb County employees will result in greater internal efficiencies and regulatory compliance across Code Compliance and Inspection functions.

The Code of DeKalb County must be modified to allow the proposed consolidation effort. Currently, the Code establishes responsibility for these functions in the Finance Department, Development Department, and others. The Code will need to recognize the authority of this new, unified Division of Code Compliance and Inspections for it to operate effectively.

Conclusion

This structure would not only meet immediate policy concerns, but would create a rational system of service delivery that will result in greater effectiveness and improved code compliance and regulatory performance. This proposed form of vertical integration to service delivery will require a new culture and new approaches to service delivery by current and future stakeholders.

A number of services performed by governments lend themselves to attaining economies of scale, whereby unit costs of the services decrease as the volume of the services increases; these services present opportunities for cooperation by eliminating duplication of efforts. By merging these services, the County can develop and measure accountability objectives, and transparent processes to allow the public to assess the County's performance toward these objectives.

The recommendations for restructuring this service delivery area will require the full engagement, cooperation, and support of the County's leadership, as well as all entities involved in the consolidation. Additionally, the recommended consolidation effort will require the creation of a detailed development and implementation plan, along with a series of changes to the Code of DeKalb County which will be necessary to effectuate this plan.