Supervisor Mark Lesko (right) with (left to right) PELM Commissioner Tullio Bertoli, Councilwoman Connie Kepert, PELM Deputy Commissioner Inez Birbiglia and Councilman Steve Fiore-Rosenfeld during a tour of the Department of Planning, Environment, and Land Management (PELM).

New client-oriented, streamlined processes will institutionalize efficiency

Farmingville, NY - Today, Supervisor Lesko introduced the Town of Brookhaven Department of the Planning, Environment, and Land Management (PELM)’s new space at Brookhaven Town Hall to showcase operational procedures that were recently implemented. PELM has aggressively reorganized its infrastructure throughout 2010 to increase efficiency, improve quality, and produce more comprehensive and thorough outcomes.

"The Planning Department has received a facelift," said Supervisor Mark Lesko, "I applaud the staff in Planning for their tremendous work over the past year to bring the Department of Planning, Environment, and Land Management into the 21st Century. When the economy finally changes and applications start pouring in, we are going to be ready to handle them."

Councilwoman Connie Kepert, Town Council liaison to the Planning Department, said, "The Planning Department is a point of contact with the Town for many of our residents. Its new location and the updated procedures that have been implemented will help it run more efficiently and make it more user-friendly. I commend the staff for getting this done so quickly." Councilwoman Kepert established the Red Tape Commission in 2008, which identified a number of policies, strategies and recommendations to "cut through the red tape." Many of the operational changes in the Department are in response to the recommendations of the Red Tape Commission.

Councilman Steve Fiore-Rosenfeld, Town Council liaison to Planning’s Environmental Protection & Land Management Division said, "Promoting efficiency and transparency in government for the public which we serve should always be forefront in our town's agenda- and these operational changes in our planning department appear to assist in achieving those critical goals. Our Planning Department handles such a large number of development applications
each year so it is vital that we process them in the most effective, timely and open way possible. The planning staff has done a great job to modernize the department and I thank them for their efforts."

The changes to the Planning Department will not only assist in creating more accountability, transparency, and coordination, but will also prepare the department for when the economy improves and more applications come into the Department. The institutionalization of these procedures will also facilitate the progress of some of Supervisor Mark Lesko's major projects, including the Blight to Light initiative, the Ronkonkoma Hub transit-oriented development, and ongoing efforts to protect open space.

The reforms to the Planning Department institutionalizes new procedures in all aspects of its operation, introduces new streamlined processes and increased usage of information technology, and includes a move to a new physical location. The planning for these reforms started in February of 2010 and is still ongoing.

The Team Structure

PELM was transitioned into a Team structure starting in August 2010. This new structure blends the approaches of various disciplines in the application review process and to produce more comprehensive and thorough outcomes. These Teams combine the knowledge and expertise of Planning, Engineering, and Environmental staff to ensure a coordinated, comprehensive, and expedited review. Each Team has a leader, who is responsible for managing staff, assigning tasks, monitoring progress of applications, and reporting regularly to management about productivity and challenges. There are four teams that process land applications: Green, Red, Yellow, and Blue. There are also established Teams that handle other various aspects of the Planning process, including Team Management, Team Frontline, Team Inspection, Team Traffic, Team Streetlighting, Team Special Projects, Team Long Range, Team Support, Team Safety, and Team Solar/Green.

In addition to the new Team structure, Planning drafted more than 65 standard operating procedures.

The New Location

In October 2010, PELM moved from the first floor to space on the second floor of Brookhaven Town Hall. This new space is a more functional open floor plan that promotes teamwork and increases communication among employees. The new space includes a unified customer service counter. Previously, the counters for the Planning Department and the Environmental Division were separate and they are consolidated in the new space. It is anticipated by May 2011 all divisions of PELM (including Traffic Safety, Streetlighting, and the Go Solar/Go Green program), will join this new space. One of the more tedious aspects of this move was relocating a badly organized file room with more than 400 cabinets and 85 years of documents and maps into new space. The Planning Department is currently creating a new file system and has already established procedures for staff to pick up and drop off files. PELM also created a resource library and quiet room for bringing all of the different division's land use plans, reference books and research materials into one place for use of the entire department. Resource materials will be catalogued and shared on the PELM network for accessibility. There is now also a central copy area, central office supply area, and large tables available to staff to view maps and plans.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEAM NAME</th>
<th>FUNCTION</th>
<th>GEOGRAPHIC AREA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Process and review all land use applications</td>
<td>Serves Council Districts 3 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Process and review all land use applications</td>
<td>Serves Council Districts 4 &amp; 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Process and review all land use applications</td>
<td>Serves Council Districts 2 &amp; 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Process and review high visibility land use applications &amp; manage PELM special projects</td>
<td>Serves all Council Districts</td>
</tr>
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</table>
The Planning Department has also comprehensively addressed the way it communicates with each other and manages information. Earlier in 2010, PELM made all aerial maps, zoning maps, and concept plans for Town Board and Planning Board public hearings available on the Town website for the first time. This year, Planning has concentrated on making its electronic communication more efficient with assistance from the Division of Information Technology by eliminating unnecessary data from its servers and consolidating its databases that contain application information. It is also trained staff on various electronic communication platforms.
Thousands of GIS documents, aerial maps, application data, photographs, land use plans, and archived files occupied an enormous amount of precious space on Town digital servers. A one month effort resulted in the removal of more than 50,000 files from 7,000 folders from the Town servers—this represents a total of 120 GB removed permanently. In response to frustration on behalf of Planning staff, who sometimes could not access the files on the databases, and Information Technology staff, who would receive 4 to 10 requests daily for new security permissions and accesses to files on the Town networks, Planning worked with IT to establish a new file structure to ensure that all PELM staff has access to all information.

PELM then started a database "scrubbing" project to develop a unified database that stores application information, which will bring all 13 PELM databases into one information warehouse, providing Teams with the ability to prioritize projects and produce progress reports. PELM utilized Microsoft Access, a program that was familiar to many Planning Department employees, to unify the databases. This project is currently in the first of three phases needed for completion.

In reviewing the site plan database, PELM found nearly 23 years of applications records with considerable errors and outdated applications. PELM scrutinized these records and prioritized them so the Teams could focus on realistic deliverables. In total, Planning eliminated over 5,000 inactive applications pending from its databases, some which went back to the 1980's. There are approximately 2,000 active applications pending in the database, which span subdivision, site plans, change of use, change of zone, relief of covenant, and single family residential applications. Standard operating procedures were developed to ensure the future maintenance of the databases. PELM is also starting to track turnaround time for processing applications to ensure they are handled expeditiously.

Since Supervisor Lesko took office in 2009, he has made it a priority to improve the operations of Town government to deliver more efficient services at a lower cost to taxpayers. In addition to the operational changes at the Planning Department, Supervisor Lesko has consolidated all of the human service divisions, including Women's Services, the Youth Bureau, and Senior Citizens, with the Housing Department to create the Department of Housing and Human Services. He has implemented several reforms to increase efficiency, including the Central Receiving Pilot Project, which is designed to control spending on office supplies. He recently announced the Quality Initiative program, which is a modified version of the Continuous Quality Improvement construct that was developed by Stony Brook University Medical Center, and will focus on improving Town processes. Supervisor Lesko has increased accountability through reforms to the Request for Proposal policy, Procurement Policy, and Management Policy, and recently proposed a law to establish minimum qualifications for judicial hearing officers.