

Changes are Coming to ISD



RELATED PRACTICE AREAS

Zoning & Land Use

RELATED INDUSTRIES

Real Estate Development & Investment

Lauren Keenan Rote

BKK Construction & Land Use Newsletter

December 2014

Changes may be on their way to Arlington County Inspection Services Division, according to Shahriar Amiri. Early this month, Mr. Amiri, director of Inspection Services for Arlington County, addressed NAIOP-Arlington and explained his plans to change the way permits are issued in Arlington County.

In the next 6-9 months, a cashier will be added to the 10th floor of the Arlington County building at Courthouse, allowing for more convenient payment for permitting and zoning applications. Currently, the only cashier is on the second floor, so adding a second cashier should make payment for permits and zoning applications more efficient.

Applicants will be able to electronically file plans with ISD in the near future. In fact, Mr. Amiri ultimately would like to see a system where inspectors and reviewers on his staff can work remotely, reducing overhead within the County offices. Amiri's hope is that such cost-savings could be used to allow for extended hours for inspections, which currently end at 3 p.m. Mr. Amiri is committed to incorporating technology in a way that reduces costs, increases efficiency and, he hopes, even appeals to the modern-day workforce who want more flexibility.

During the NAIOP meeting, Amiri asked for help from the NAIOP community, specifically architects and engineers, to help beta-test the system by presenting plans and testing the electronically filing process.

This isn't the first time that Mr Amiri has talked about "shaking things up" within his division; in recent years, Mr. Amiri has announced efforts to streamline the permitting/inspection review process. In 2013, he reduced permitting fees, and has suggested that he would like to review the zoning fees next to see if any changes might make sense there as well.

It's clear that Mr. Amiri has strong conviction about overhauling the permitting and inspection process within his department to function more seamlessly, but in the short run, such changes will come at a cost. While permitting fees were lowered by Amiri, prior changes to the system did result in the addition of an automation fee to standard zoning fees. Amiri explained that in the short-term, as in the next two to three years, permit fees may be raised again to cover costs of implementing the new technology. However, he feels that ultimately costs should fall, as this remote-electronic filing system promises to be a cost-saver. Amiri has also said that eventually he would pass such savings on to the applicants.

It will be telling to see how the initial changes in the coming year will affect the overall review process. The plans Mr. Amiri has articulated are long-term in nature and he appears to be open to feedback and suggestions from the development community, as

well as other end-users of the system, to try to continue to improve its overall efficiency.