Appendix G
Opportunities and Best Practices for a Streamlined Review and Approval Process

Communities have been processing applications for land use approval for decades, encountering new challenges and difficulties and crafting solutions to each one when encountered. Because of this, many communities have developed their land use approval processes, standards, and forms incrementally over years, resulting in an inefficient process. In many municipalities, the land use review and approval process has become hard to understand, time consuming, and expensive. In some cases, the process prevents developers and municipalities from undertaking priority economic development projects. To reduce these obstacles, municipalities can streamline the review and approval process by clarifying how the process works for applicants, consolidating and simplifying processes for approvals where possible, and reducing process length.

This appendix offers streamlining strategies and best practices that have been used to improve project review and approval process. In some instances, a strategy may supplement existing best practices employed in the Town. Other strategies present new approaches to consider if appropriate or if local conditions change. This appendix first presents a comprehensive list of streamlining strategies. It then presents local examples of these best-practice strategies from the region and across the nation.

Process Streamlining Strategies

Municipalities can streamline the review and approval process by implementing one or more of the following strategies.

Simplified Process

Reduce complexities in the review and approval process by simplifying application requirements, coordinating board reviews, engaging the public early in the review process, and allowing administrative approvals when appropriate.

> *Reduced application requirements*. Applications should require an appropriate level of detail. Municipalities should review all application forms and remove unnecessary or cumbersome requirements.
>
> *Coordinated board reviews*. Amend the schedule of meetings for all local boards to ensure the smoothest possible sequence of most applications. Whenever possible, allow for concurrent, not additive or sequential, reviews. Simultaneous reviews allow different steps in an application to be reviewed together as a package or at least during the same time frame, reducing review time. Introducing liaisons between boards can also improve coordination.

Early public engagement. For appropriate projects, hold public meetings before project approval to involve the public early, foster community engagement, and build support for projects. Early public engagement and support paves the way for smoother approvals.

Consolidated Review and Approval Process

Further simplify the review and approval process by consolidating process steps to avoid backtracking to boards and to create one-stop permitting. Process consolidation involves forming a central permitting desk, developing a consolidated application form, consolidating administrative staff and boards as appropriate. Consolidation also entails creating an interdepartmental review committee with a designated coordinator to help coordinate reviews and cross-training staff on the consolidated process. Use a universal computerized tracking system for this consolidated process as described below in "automate the process."

Central permit desk. Create a central permit information desk or office that manages all permit applications and approval processes. In this position, a process manager should handle the intake of all applications, manage any pre-application meetings or workshops, guide sequencing of approvals, schedule and manage cut-off dates and public meetings, and guide applicants through each stage of the approval process. The process manager should ensure that this central process incorporates all federal, state (DEC, DOS, CAF) and county[1] processes into pre-application steps, sequencing, and scheduling.

Consolidated application. To ensure different permit applications are not duplicative and do not require applicants to submit the same information multiple times, consolidate all permit and approval applications into one form. The consolidated application form should collect all the applicant and project information the planning board, zoning board, and other local boards will require for all review and approval processes.

Consolidated administrative staff and boards. To break down informational silos, consolidate, as appropriate, the roles of municipal officials and staff, local boards' secretarial staff, and boards with overlapping or related functions. Consolidating local boards that share functions helps speed the approval process. Some municipalities have achieved efficiencies by combining related boards like a shade tree commission, conservation advisory council, and waterfront advisory committee into a single environmental advisory board.

Cross-trained staff. Cross-train staff to reduce specialization, ensure all staff understand how different approvals work together, and improve coordination. Staff training helps expedite the approval process while increasing the number of employees who can staff a central permit desk.

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[1] *See* General Municipal Law § 239(m).

Clarified Review and Approval Process

The review and approval process can be complicated and difficult for applicants to understand. Consider clarifying the process for applicants by creating clear guidelines, developing a road map for them, revising application materials, ensuring transparency throughout the process, and proactively educating the public about the process.

Clear guidelines and helpful information. Clear guidelines should present an overview of the permit process and provide tips for navigating this process. Helpful guidelines for applicants may include:

- A short, descriptive guide to project review.
- A list of all permits and approvals with short descriptions.
- A table listing which office applicants should go to for various permits and services, along with anticipated timelines.
- How-to instructions for the most frequent approvals.
- Checklists for each approval that describe what applicants must include in each application, the materials and information they must gather to undertake the process, how to calculate permit fees, and how to record and file approvals after they are obtained.
- A list of regularly scheduled meetings for land use boards, committees, and commissions that includes meeting times and addresses.
- Contact information for each department and board.
- Frequently asked questions.

Clear road map that delineates all process steps for applicants. To help applicants navigate the project review and approval process, create a clear "road map" for approvals of various types of projects. The road map should feature process flowcharts showing specific steps applicants must take for each approval and demonstrating the most efficient approval sequence for applicants who must obtain more than one permit. Flowcharts should feature optional, but recommended, steps that further assist applicants and should explain the process responsibilities of all agencies and governmental bodies involved in the approval processes. Flowcharts also should include relevant county, state, and federal processes; mandatory timeframes as necessary for certain steps; and steps for recording and filing approvals after they are obtained.

Clear application materials. Application materials should define key terms using simple, direct language in layman's terms and, as applicable, should be available in languages other than English. Additionally, applications should clearly state submittal requirements, including where to submit applications.

Online resources. To ensure ease of access, municipal websites should provide links to all application materials and resources, along with information related to board meetings and answers to frequently asked questions regarding the approval process.

Transparency. Municipal staff should ensure a transparent process that everyone can follow by documenting everything during review and approval procedures for each application and making these records publicly available in real time.

Public education. Once the land use approval process is streamlined, municipalities should proactively reach out to land owners to educate them about the process.

Clarified Roles

To successfully navigate the approval process, applicants must understand the specific roles of municipal staff, land use boards, and the local legislature. Clarified process roles also help municipal staff and boards identify potential overlap in reviews, implement process efficiencies, and find opportunities for collaboration. Guidance for applicants should identify the land use approvals for which each municipal department is responsible. Process guidance should also clarify each land use board's jurisdiction and its scope of review. Finally, guidance for applicants should clarify the local legislature's role to help applicants understand when the local legislature is involved in the review process.

Automated Process

Simplify the submission and progress of applications by automating the permitting system and making it as user friendly as possible. Expanding the municipal website to include an online permitting system and a computerized tracking system helps automate the process.

Online permitting system. Online permitting systems provide electronic permit applications and submittals for applicants, as well as easy-to-access guidelines and helpful information. Online systems can receive applicants' required plans and other documentation electronically and can facilitate board coordination and communication by alerting boards immediately to newly submitted applications and providing internal results for projects that come before boards.

Centralized electronic tracking system. Communities should also invest in universal computerized tracking systems that enable staff to communicate application status to applicants and identify coordination problems between departments and boards.

Pre-application Consultations

Pre-application informational reports, workshops, and roundtables help get all parties on the same page early in the process, avoiding conflict and confusion later. Municipalities can offer applicants a range of pre-application services based on project type.

Informational reports. Upon request, municipalities could prepare informational reports for potential new development projects. Reports could indicate whether a proposed use is permitted under current zoning; note existing certificates of occupancy; and describe necessary approvals, process steps, and requirements that the applicant must achieve and meet to obtain permits.

Pre-application workshops. For more complicated projects like commercial developments, subdivisions, or projects that involve more than one board, workshops or work sessions with staff are very useful. During pre-application workshops, staff review relevant code and application requirements with applicants to ensure proposed projects comply. Staff also help applicants identify and map the sequence of required approvals and may provide applicants with technical assistance for complicated application requirements. Workshops may be mandatory or voluntary as appropriate.

Monthly roundtables. Municipalities can offer monthly roundtables or informationals for smaller project applicants and other interested landowners. Monthly roundtables should offer general information and advice regarding development permits, requirements, and incentives to multiple applicants at one time and help familiarize attendees with the locality's approval processes. Roundtables should include municipal staff and members from all boards, and staff could require applicants to submit completed questionnaires prior to attending a roundtable.

Standardized Board Procedures

Meeting procedures that differ widely between boards contribute to applicant confusion. To ensure applicants understand and adhere to meeting requirements, municipalities should standardize meeting procedures across all land use boards. Standardized procedures also ensure that all meeting minutes and other records are organized and preserved in the same format, making them easier for applicants, municipal staff, and board members to review.

Record Maintenance

A well-organized municipal record filing system helps speed the review process by making it easier for municipal staff and applicants to locate and retrieve relevant files for proposed projects. Municipalities frequently struggle to maintain records efficiently. Because the length of time required for record retention is often unclear, a municipality may become burdened with a large quantity paper records. Also, each land use board in a locality may keep separate records for the same project in different filing systems and with different project identifiers. Often, hard-copy files for each board are stored in separate locations. These practices make it difficult to identify relevant records and result in expensive record searches for subsequent applications and other processes such as Freedom of Information Law (FOIA) requests. Municipalities can make record management more time and resource efficient by clarifying record retention requirements; adopting an online, consolidated record management system; and appointing an advisory board or council to guide municipal record management.

Clarified Record Retention Requirements. Several legal authorities control what records NYS municipalities must keep and for how long and in what format these records must be kept. NYS has established record retention schedules for municipal documents that are available on the NYS Archives website at

http://www.archives.nysed.gov/. For example, *Records Retention and Disposition Schedule MU 1* provides specific information about record retention periods. Schedule MU 1 is available at www.archives.nysed.gov/records/retention_mu-1. For a comprehensive understanding of its exact record retention requirements, a local government should consult with its municipal attorney or outside counsel.

Electronic Record System. When possible, municipalities should adopt electronic document management programs that efficiently organize and manage documents as PDFs. Fast, electronic document searches save time, and physical space is saved when not dedicated to hard-copy storage. Electronic record systems also improve efficiency, as multiple municipal departments can rely on one source to obtain documents. Risks are also reduced, as these systems can enhance conformance with record retention laws.

Advisory Councils. Municipalities can establish local advisory councils or committees that provide advice on policies and procedures for document retention, management, and disposition and that help eliminate inefficiencies in document tracking. To reduce a municipality's liability, advisory councils also make recommendations regarding the release of documents in response to FOIL and other requests. Additionally, these councils may provide guidance to NYS on proposed legislation dealing with record retention and release.

Escrow Account Management

Municipalities use applicant-funded escrow accounts to pay for consultants who assist municipal staff and boards during the land use review process. Although often necessary to ensure adequate review of proposed development projects, escrow and consultant management can sometimes delay the approval process. Frequent consultant billing, electronic management systems, and flexible escrow policies can help prevent escrow-related delays.

Frequent Consultant Billing. When escrow-funded consultants are involved in the review process, the reviewing board often may not issue an approval until all consultants have received final payment for services rendered. Escrow agreements or municipal codes set temporal payment requirements, such as billing increments, for consultants that may result in delayed final invoices. To avoid approval delays, escrow agreements should require monthly billing increments for consultants, and consultant contracts should reflect this requirement. Municipal staff then should enforce the requirement throughout the consultant's period of performance. A municipality can work proactively with the consultant to ensure timely payments and avoid process delays.

Electronic Escrow Account Management. Insufficient escrow funds also cause process delays if consultants cannot be paid on time. To avoid this, municipalities can use escrow account management software to notify staff when escrow funds

decrease below a threshold amount, giving staff and applicant adequate time to replenish the account.

Flexible Insufficient Escrow Policy. When appropriate, a municipality can allow the review process to continue when an applicant's escrow account is insufficiently funded. In some cases, municipalities find that such escrow-related delays are unnecessary due to the scale of a project, the potential benefits a project will produce, the magnitude of the underfunding, or other reasons.

Dutchess County Real Property Tax Agency. Municipalities can access help with escrow accounts from the Dutchess County Real Property Tax Agency, which provides escrow account management services to Dutchess County municipalities. For more information visit, http://www.dutchessny.gov/CountyGov/Departments/RealPropertyTax/RPIndex.htm.

Fast Track Process for Priority Projects

Create a fast track process for priority projects through board resolutions that commit to a firm review process and timeline for certain economic development projects. The fast track process should result in final action on applications within a fixed period, subject to developer cooperation. This process would place priority projects first on all board meeting agendas and would avoid re-opening settled issues. Once a fast track process is in place, create a system for consistently evaluating and improving the process, and advertise the process to developers.

Trained Local Boards

Trained boards help create a smooth process. Adopt a formal policy for board member training that complies with New York State law, which requires all board members to attend four hours of training annually, and require all local board members to receive training in accordance with that policy. Training should ensure that board members understand their boards' unique functions within the overall system and should teach members the rules for approvals, public participation, and ethics. Trainings also should ensure that local board members are familiar with any new clarified and expedited development review process and their roles within the new process. Typically, municipalities approve a list of training providers and allow board members to choose which trainings to attend. To better ensure board members receive suitable training, local governments can identify and approve specific trainings that cover appropriate topics or organize internal, community-specific trainings for board members. Finally, develop a tracking system that logs required and completed trainings for individual board members and certify that each serving board member has completed the training program satisfactorily.

Zoning Enforcement

The project review and approval process provides an opportunity for municipalities to search for zoning violations associated with applicant properties. This proactive enforcement approach helps municipalities identify zoning violations that would otherwise remain uncured for an extended period of time and prevents any proliferation of nonconforming uses. Additionally, municipalities should create helpful resources that explain the zoning enforcement process so residents understand what to expect. Transparent enforcement procedures help residents act swiftly to cure zoning violations.

Best Practice Examples

The following examples show how municipalities have implemented the streamlining strategies outlined above. Although these local examples do not comprehensively demonstrate all streamlining strategies listed above, they are instructive and provide helpful illustrations.

Consolidated Process

Central Permitting Office: Randolph County, NC
Randolph County, North Carolina has a Central Permitting Office where cross-trained technicians guide applicants through the review process. The types of permits that can be obtained from, and submitted to, this office include zoning, building, electrical, plumbing, and other specialized zoning permits, i.e., flood permits, special use permits, etc. For more information about this central permitting office, see http://www.randolphcountync.gov/Your-Government/Central-Permitting.

Consolidated Administrative Staff: Town of LaGrange
In LaGrange, one staff person fills the roles of zoning administrator, fire inspector, and building inspector. This staff person is responsible for all enforcement and approval decisions, freeing Town planners and building inspectors to focus on their other roles. The consolidated position enables LaGrange to track each department's issues with a particular application, avoid repetition, and gain a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between building code and zoning code enforcement. The administrator consults with experts to resolve a project's technical problems. Find out more about LaGrange's organizational structure at http://www.lagrangeny.gov/government/buildingzoningfire.htm.

Land Use Board Coordinator: City of Saratoga Springs
Saratoga Springs has a Land Use Board Coordinator that oversees all of the City's land use boards from a secretarial perspective. In addition, the Coordinator staffs the Planning and Economic Development Department. Learn more about Saratoga Springs's organizational structure at http://www.saratoga-springs.org/192/Planning-Department.

Consolidated Environmental Advisory Committee: Town of Fishkill
Fishkill's Environmental Advisory Committee advises the Town Board and Planning Board on a wide range of environmental issues. Its scope includes areas often overseen by separate advisory boards, such as shade tree protection, land conservation, and sustainability. Learn more about this board at https://www.fishkill-ny.gov/advisory-boards--committees.html.

Clarified Process

Clear, Informative Applications: City of Rye
Rye's planning department website provides applicants with well-organized and user-friendly applications for various permits and approvals all in one place. The applications include clear instructions. A consolidated land development application is available for site plan, subdivision, and special use approvals. Additionally, the City provides applicants with detailed submission requirements for subdivision applications and a helpful checklist for site plan applications. Learn more at http://www.ryeny.gov/planning.cfm.

Online Developer's Guide: City of New Rochelle
New Rochelle offers an online developer's guide to facilitate development in the City's Downtown Overlay Zone (DOZ). The guide provides step-by-step guidance for developing a parcel in the DOZ. Learn more at http://newrochelleny.com/1205/Developing-in-the-DOZ.

Online Application Resources & FAQs: Town of Poughkeepsie
The Town of Poughkeepsie's building department webpage provides a substantive list of answers to frequently asked questions regarding building applications, as well as a detailed look at the process by which building permits are issued. The planning department's webpage offers a method for submitting questions and provides deadlines for submittals and links to application forms. The zoning department's webpage offers links to applications and application instructions, a description of procedures, and the zoning board's monthly meeting schedule. For more information, visit these departments' webpages at http://townofpoughkeepsie.com/departments/index.html.

Building Permit Flowchart Review Procedure: Town of Red Hook
Red Hook offers applicants a flowchart illustrating the building permit review process, from application submission to the issuance of a certificate of occupancy. The flowchart shows three potential paths to approval, detailing the necessary steps for each path. Access the flowchart at
https://redhook.org/DocumentCenter/View/72/Building-Permit-Flow-Chart-Review-Procedure-PDF.

Process Guides: Town of Clarence
Clarence offers a Subdivision Review Process Guide and Commercial Project Review Process Guide to help applicants navigate these processes. The guides spell out the process steps and include helpful checklists. Access the guides at
http://www2.erie.gov/clarence/index.php?q=forms.

Applicant Workshops: City of Portland, OR
Portland, Oregon offers the "ABCs of Land Use," which is a free workshop designed to teach neighborhood activists, business association members, and land use volunteers how the City develops its land use policies and plans, how the development review process works, and how community members and neighborhood/business associations can take action. More can be found out about this workshop at
https://www.portlandoregon.gov/civic/66053.

Clarified Roles

Clear Board Roles: Town of Southampton
Southampton's website includes a web page for each land use board. The board web pages describe each board's purpose in detail, clarifying the board's jurisdiction over projects and its scope of review. The web pages also include contact information and information about each board's meetings and calendar. Access these web pages at:
https://www.southamptontownny.gov/279/Appointed-Boards.

Clear Local Legislature Role: Town of Bethlehem
Bethlehem's Citizen's Guide to Land Use, Planning and Development clearly states the Town Board's role in Bethlehem's land use approval processes. Required Town Board approvals include rezonings, Mixed Economic Development District approvals, and
Planned Development District approvals. Access the guide at
http://www.townofbethlehem.org/DocumentCenter/View/3147/Land-Use-Planning-and-Development-Guide?bidId=.

Automated Process

eProperty Information Portal: City of New Rochelle
New Rochelle's eProperty Information Portal is a central, online system for building permits and board approvals that helps the City streamline its various review processes. The portal allows applicants to submit and modify applications, extend or amend a permit, add a contractor, submit required information, pay permit fees, and track approval status. It also provides applicants with specific property information, including information regarding title and certificate of occupancy. City staff use the portal to communicate with applicants and track applications and existing permits. Access the portal at
https://epropertyportal.com/.

Online Permit Applications: Village of Dobbs Ferry
Dobbs Ferry uses an eProperty Information Portal to facilitate convenient access to basic property information, online applications for building permits, and board approvals. The portal streamlines the delivery of a wide range of services. Access the application portal at
https://www.dobbsferry.com/building-department/pages/building-department-info.

Online Site Plans: City of White Plains
White Plains has an online Projects and Proposals Dashboard that features information about all submitted site plans and revised site plans for easy access and transparency. Access the dashboard at https://www.cityofwhiteplains.com/521/Projects-and-Proposals.

DOB Now Website: New York City
Part of NYC's Building One City plan to provide better customer service and increased access to information, the DOB Now website is an online tool that allows applicants to submit applications, make payments, schedule appointments, check the status of an application or inspection, pull permits, and make renewals. For more information about DOB Now, visit https://www1.nyc.gov/site/buildings/industry/dob-now.page. To learn more about Building Once City, visit https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/buildings/pdf/building_one_city.pdf.

Pre-application consultations

Pre-application Meeting: Village of Bronxville
For a fee and prior to submitting a development application, an applicant may request an informal conference with Bronxville's Planning Board and Design Review Committee to obtain information and guidance and to discuss the proposed development. This review is voluntary and not required. Although not a hearing, the meeting is open to the public. Find out more at www.villageofbronxville.com/sites/bronxvilleny/files/file/file/planning_board_application_6-25-14_fillable_form.pdf.

Pre-application Meeting: Town of Cortlandt
Cortlandt requires all applicants seeking building permits for single- and two-family homes to attend a pre-application meeting with Town planning and building staff. Additionally, applicants seeking subdivision approvals are encouraged to meet with the Planning Board in a pre-application meeting to discuss subdivision proposals and to become familiar with the board's procedures. To learn more about pre-application meetings for building permits, visit http://www.townofcortlandt.com/cn/formcenter/. For information about subdivision pre-application meetings see section 265-5 of the Town Code, available at https://ecode360.com/7695332.

Pre-application Processes: Towns of Amenia, Dover & Rhinebeck
Amenia, Dover, and Rhinebeck provide either optional or mandatory pre-application conferences with a planning board member for projects requiring subdivision approval. In Dover, the applicant must bring a vicinity map, sketch plan, and general subdivision information to the meeting. In Amenia, the planning board may hold a subsequent informational conference with the subdivision applicant if appropriate. For applicants seeking special permits or certain site plan approvals, the Towns require mandatory pre-application conferences. In Amenia and Dover, the applicant meets with the Town's Code Enforcement Official to discuss the nature of the proposed use and classify the proposed development as major or minor. If classified as a major project, the Amenia and Dover applicants must attend a preliminary meeting with the Planning Board to discuss the

proposed use and required site plan content. In Rhinebeck, the applicant must bring a written statement or rough sketch plan to the meeting, where attendees will determine required site plan content. Dover's major site plan applicants are encouraged to meet with the Architectural and Community Appearance Board of Review before submitting a site plan application. Rhinebeck engages in pre-application conferences with the vast majority of proposed developments and highly encourages applicants seeking wetland permits to attend one of these meetings with the Planning Board to review submission requirements. *See* Town of Amenia, NY Code Sections 121-62, -66 and 105-8 (available at https://www.ecode360.com/AM1016); Town of Dover Code Sections 125-16 and 145-62, -66 (available at https://www.ecode360.com/DO1139); Town of Rhinebeck Code Sections 101-4.2, 120-9, 125-74 (available at https://ecode360.com/RH0960).

Informational Report: City of Newburgh

Newburgh allows applicants to request an Informational Report for potential new development proposals. The report notes whether the proposed use is permitted under current zoning, as well as any existing certificates of occupancy. The report also indicates whether the applicant must apply for a use, area, and/or parking variance from the Zoning Board of Appeals; a special permit, site plan approval, subdivision approval, lot line change, or sign permit from the Planning Board; or a certificate of appropriateness from the Architectural Review Commission. Finally, the report lists required process steps the applicant must take after obtaining all approvals. These include submitting a building permit application, using a City-licensed electrician and plumber for trades work, and obtaining a certificate of occupancy. The request application for this Informational Report is on file with the Land Use Law Center.

Bimonthly Pre-development Meetings: Washoe County, NV

Washoe County, Nevada offers a pre-development meeting twice a month with developers, design professionals, owner-builders, and contractors to address permit issues related to their projects prior to application submission. The roundtable discussions include municipal staff from the planning, building, engineering, fire, health, parks, utilities, and air quality departments, as well as the regional transportation commission. Attendees are asked to fill out a questionnaire before attending a meeting. Find out more at https://www.washoecounty.us/csd/planning_and_development/applications/files-planning-development/application_files/Request%20a%20Predev%20Meeting.pdf.

Board Meeting Procedures

Public Meeting and Hearing Guidance: New York State

The NYS Department of State's Division of Local Government Services published a technical guide, entitled Conducting Public Meetings and Public Hearings, to educate municipal officials about NYS law governing public meetings and hearings. The guide also offers advice for conducting compliant and efficient public meetings, including how to plan and organize a public meeting and the specific steps these meetings should include. View the guide at https://www.dos.ny.gov/lg/publications/Conducting_Public_Meetings_and_Public_Hearings.pdf.

Record Maintenance

Electronic Record System: Towns of Amenia, Beekman, Dover, North East, and Rhinebeck
Amenia, Beekman, Dover, North East, and Rhinebeck each rely on the Laserfiche Electronic Content Management System (LECMS), in tandem with Municity Enterprise software, to manage municipal documents. Documents are scanned and uploaded to the system, which tracks and accesses permits, photos, maps, and other documents. Users can save files in the system using one geocoded address as the file identifier, reducing the need for duplicate files between departments. Users can then find files instantaneously through address searches. The system also generates reports identifying records that should be archived or destroyed, as well as documents that are ready for disposition. Learn more about LECMS and Municity Enterprise at https://www.laserfiche.com/support-learn/what-is-ecm/ and https://cms.generalcode.com/municity-enterprise/, respectively.

Shared Electronic Document Management System: Towns of Williamsburg, Westhampton, Chesterfield, Goshen, and Southampton, MA
Five towns in Massachusetts jointly leveraged state resources to coordinate the implementation of a shared electronic document management system. The shared system uses an existing secured and accessible electronic public records management system at the City of Northampton's Data Center, with Northampton serving as the host municipality. The shared system utilizes the Laserfiche Document Management System. Find out more about this collaborative effort at http://www.pvpc.org/sites/default/files/doc-shared-document-management-system3199.pdf.

Local Government Records Advisory Council: City of Beacon
Along with a Records Management Officer, Beacon has established a Local Government Records Advisory Council that provides advice on state legislation related to record maintenance. The Council also provides guidance on local government record retention and disposition procedures, advises on the development and delivery of the State Archives and Records Administration's Services, and encourages organizations to work for improved local government records management. For more information see Section 55-15 of the City of Beacon, NY City Code, available at https://www.ecode360.com/7062436.

Records Advisory Board: Town of Dover
Dover has established a Records Advisory Board designated to work with the Town's Records Management Officer to provide advice on record management. Together, they review the Town's record management performance and propose improvements, review certain changes in retention periods proposed by the Records Manage Officer, provide advice on the appraisal of records for archival value, and serve as the final sign-off entity prior to record archival. Town Code suggests that board members include the Town Historian, a department head, a Council person, a library representative, a member of the IT Department, and a member of the community. To learn more, see Section 22-5 of the Town of Dover, NY Town Code, available at https://ecode360.com/10567608.

Escrow Account Management

Monthly Billing Increments for Consultants: Village of Ossining and Town of Dover
Ossining requires consultants assisting with the review process to submit invoices on a monthly basis. Alternatively, Dover requires monthly or bi-monthly billing, based on the contractor's needs. For an example escrow agreement from Dover, visit http://townofdoverny.us/uploads/DKEscrowAgreementWAttachments0406.pdf.

Electronic Escrow Account Tracking: Town of Newburgh and Village of Ossining
Most municipalities in Dutchess County use tracking software to manage escrow accounts. The Town of Newburgh uses an electronic tracking system that notifies staff if an escrow account falls below 40 percent of an applicant's initial deposit. When this occurs, the Planning Board may require the applicant to make an additional payment of up to 75 percent of the initial deposit into the escrow account. Ossining relies on a general ledger system built in an Excel spreadsheet, along with the Municity system, to track escrow account funds. The general ledger system issues an alert when an account dips below a threshold amount. The system could also provide an "early warning" when an account begins to deplete. For more information about the Town of Newburgh's escrow requirements, see Town of Newburgh, NY Town Code Section 104-2(E), available at https://ecode360.com/9610322.

Flexible Insufficient Escrow Policy: Town of Dover
Dover has the discretion to decide whether to stop the review process for an application when the applicant's escrow account becomes insufficiently funded. When this happens, any approval, permit, or certificate of occupancy may be withheld or suspended by the reviewing board, officer, or employee. For more information, see Town of Dover Code Section 145-58(F), available at https://ecode360.com/11751591.

Zoning Enforcement

Proactive Zoning Enforcement: City of Urbana, IL
Urbana, Illinois assigns planning staff to different areas of the community and requires the planners to inspect these areas for zoning code violations on a regular basis.[2]

Transparent Zoning Enforcement Policy: Town of Westport, CT
Westport, Connecticut's Zoning Enforcement Policy clearly states the Town's enforcement policies and priorities. It also lists the Town's enforcement procedure steps and explains when the Town's Planning and Zoning Department will take a proactive enforcement approach versus a reactive approach. The policy guide is available at https://www.westportct.gov/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=358.

[2] Personal communication with Maximillian Mahalek, former Community Development Associate with the City of Urbana, IL.