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Newton County misses state planning deadline

Ineligible to receive new state money during July, August

For the second time in 2010, Newton County has missed a deadline to turn in required planning documents to the state and will be ineligible to receive some new state funding during July and most of August.

Newton County was late turning in its Capital Improvement Elements plan to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs; the plan spells out which projects the county will build with its collected impact fees, when they will be built and how much they will cost.

The county does not expect to miss out on any new grants during July and August, Chairman Kathy Morgan said, but the DCA does recommend that the county not collect impact fees on any new development because it is out of compliance, said Jim Frederick, director of the DCA's Office of Sustainable Development. Although development has been slow, this could still cost the county a small amount of money. Morgan said the non-compliance issue will not affect the county's state loan for its landfill.

The county also missed a March 1 deadline to turn in parts of its service delivery strategy; which, at the time, Morgan said was due to an error in trying to submit some files electronically.

Similarly, Morgan said this missed deadline was due to personnel turnover at the county and a lack of information given by the state. As with many state planning requirements, the procedure for turning in this impact fee is fairly complex, Frederick said.

Officially, the CIE plan was due by June 30. The county actually turned in its plan June 23, Morgan said and Frederick confirmed. However, the county is required to turn in its plan and then wait 60 days for DCA to approve and review the plan, he said. Then the county's board of commissioners passes a resolution to officially adopt the plan; therefore, the effective deadline date is April 30.

Morgan said the error was the result of the county simply not being aware of the 60-day waiting period; Frederick said this is not unusual. Morgan said former Impact Fee Coordinator Kelli Lundi retired last year. Lundi had the June 30 deadline on her calendar, but not the 60-day notice deadline.

In addition, the county talked to the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission and DCA and neither agency informed them of the 60-day review period, Morgan said. Because of the 60-day delay, the BOC will pass the resolution on August 23, she said, which once sent to DCA will immediately bring them back into compliance, Frederick said.

"Those are the types of things that cutbacks will cause. When they leave we lose their institutional knowledge. We have to modernize and implement a better monitoring system, so that it doesn't matter who holds the job," Morgan said. "The lesson we've

learned is that we don't need to rely on one person to remember the deadlines for compliance for grants and planning projects. Now we see the need to cross train and have multiple people understand processes."

In addition, Morgan said the county is in the process of trying to indentify these types of deadlines in all departments and put them onto electronic calendars so multiple people will see them. She said the county will use an electronic tickler file calendar system. A tickler file system sends periodic reminders of deadlines or events. Morgan said for this CIE plan, a six month reminder would be sent in a certain colored popup, then a three month reminder in a different color and so on. She said this system will help when employees become unexpectedly sick or otherwise incapacitated.

"We had another instance where an employee is out, and she relayed a message from the hospital that a report was due. We don't them to have that additional stress on them," Morgan said.

She said the county has also instituted a more in-depth exit interview process when employees leave, so they can pass on their institutional knowledge more effectively.

"It's an honest mistake when it happens the first time, but we're doing our best to make sure these don't happen again. DCA needs its t's to be crossed and i's dotted, to provide checks and balances, because there are counties that regularly fall out of compliance. We don't want to be one of those," she said.

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