

"Federation Corner" column  
The Montgomery Sentinel - August 7, 2014

### **Software problems at the Planning Department**

by Ulysses Glee  
real estate developer

*The following are portions of a letter sent to the Planning Board on July 14 by Ulysses Glee, a self-described small minority developer in Montgomery County. Dr. Glee details the problems his staff had using the new ePlans software program now required for electronic submission to the Planning Department of all developer project plans and, in his case, requested changes to an already approved plan. The letter shows dissatisfaction with government processes is not limited to county residents. Fortunately for him, on July 24 the Board approved Dr. Glee's request.*

"When I was told that we would have to utilize the new ePlans program for the submission of my Site Plan amendment and Forest Conservation Plan submission, I was told this new program offered an innovate way to process applications and made the process easier for both developer and the Montgomery County staff. However, following my latest experience with ePlans, I would argue that the program hinders the process so immensely for the development team that it should be shut down until the defects can be repaired.

\* \* \* \* \*

"We first started working with the site in mid-April of this year. When my Development Manager, Kristine Adey, initially tried to work with the site, it would not download onto her machine. She was informed that the program does not work with any other browser than Internet Explorer, commonly known across the industry as the worst browser available. Due to its poor reputation our company didn't even have Internet Explorer loaded on our machines so she was forced to install a program known for its bugs and disruptions onto our work computers knowing full well we will never use it for anything else. Once installed, she was unable to get ePlans to work properly. After reaching out to Catherine Conlon, she was provided with a 7 page document outlining all of the settings which had to be changed both on the machine and in Internet Explorer just to get the program to work properly. After making all of the necessary changes, still it did not work properly and so Kristine was told to contact Scott Stickerod, Park and Planning's IT support. At this point it was the end of April, we had lost two full weeks, and still Kristine had not been able to get ePlans to function properly. After an entire day on the phone with Scott all issues were finally resolved and Kristine was able to upload the necessary documents for the first submission. However, when it was time for our Civil Engineer to upload his files, he too was unable to get ePlans to work and eventually had to send the files to Kristine to upload as the issues with ePlans could not be resolved. This made the process far more confusing, as Kristine does not have an engineering background and had to work over several days with our engineer to ensure we had the right files uploaded. It was also at this time that we discovered that although the login Kristine received was supposed to be proprietary, only one login could be assigned per project number so our engineer would have to use Kristine's login in the event he ever got the program to work. Therefore, his changes and uploads could not be directly linked to him, causing more issues when reviews were sent back to our team.

"Once we were finally able to upload files, Kristine was contacted and told her file names were incorrect. We had never been provided with any instructions as to how to use ePlans so she was not aware that there was a specific naming convention. After going through the file naming instructions for 2 days and changing each one to match what she was given to the best of her ability, upon first review, the reviewer asked that she rename and re-upload almost every single document. This was a tremendous waste of her time and as well as the reviewer's. When she attempted to do so,

something had gone wrong with the program and her upload feature no longer worked and so she had to wait two days for this issue to be corrected before she could complete the revisions requested by the reviewer.

"Up to this point, the program had caused delays but the major issues had yet to arise. In the beginning of July we met with Park and Planning staff to discuss how to make the consent agenda for the Boards final meeting in July, as the closing on the sale is dependent on the final approvals being in place and time is of the essence.

"We were told that if we had everything submitted and all responses to the latest review by Monday, July 7<sup>th</sup>, we would have a good shot at making the July 24<sup>th</sup> date. We rushed and were able to upload everything to ePlans Monday and then Kristine went in and cleared all review items and resubmitted. Little did we know there is a glitch in the ePlans program that requires a user to check the box that confirms the user has made all requested changes, then uncheck it, and then check it again to get the correct submit button to light up. So Kristine, unaware of this issue, pressed the complete button since the other button did not light up. Thinking she had submitted everything she closed the program confident that we had made the deadline. However, due to this glitch nothing was submitted and because no correspondence is sent to the applicant nor is a confirmation screen generated (the only correspondence confirming a submission is sent to Park and Planning) we were unaware of the error until that Thursday, leading to a 4 day delay! Upon hearing of the issue, Kristine was out of the office and was forced to have another of our staff attempt to upload the item the reviewer was requesting and clear the review. Again, my staff was unable to upload due to an issue with ePlans, forcing the Park and Planning reviewer to do it for her but she was finally able to resubmit.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I feel that delays caused by ePlans have significantly negatively affected my project...and I ask that someone review these issues."

*The views expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect formal positions adopted by the Federation. To submit an 800-1000 word column for consideration, send as an email attachment to [montgomerycivic@yahoo.com](mailto:montgomerycivic@yahoo.com)*