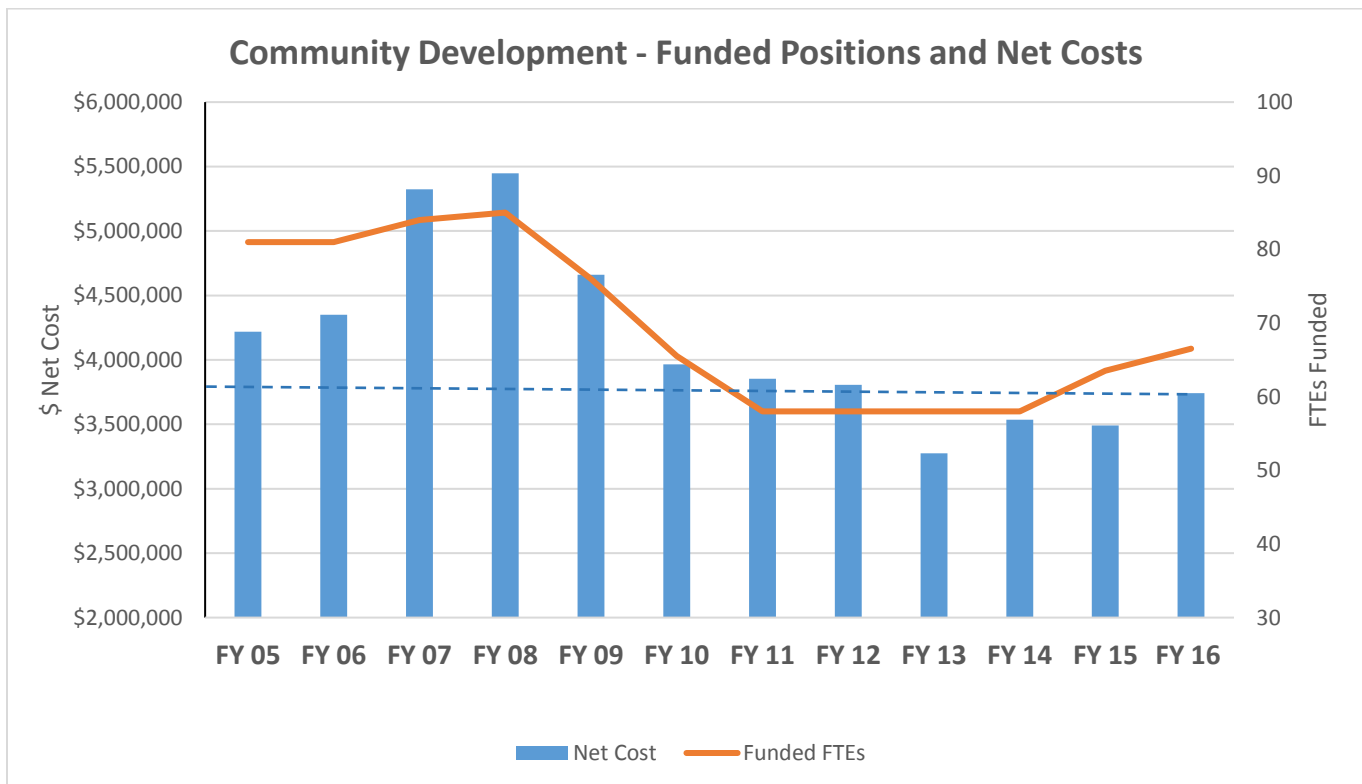


Community Development – Development Activity

Perhaps more than any other department in Albemarle County, the Community Development Department (CDD) has seen dramatic changes over the last decade. This report is intended to provide some background on the extent of those changes and explain why a rapidly increasing level of development activity supports the need for additional staffing prior to the start of the next fiscal year. While CDD's priorities are aligned with the Board's priorities, its workload is primarily determined by development activity. The Board establishes the expectations for that development review, but the market determines how many applications will be submitted and that activity level fundamentally determines CDD's workload.

Staffing and Funding



In the period of FY05 to FY08, CDD experienced a significant increase in workload as a result of the nationwide development boom. The volume of applications reached record levels yet staffing levels did not rise to meet the growing demand, which resulted in issues of work quality and increased employee turnover.

The Great Recession, beginning in FY08 created a marked reduction in workload; and, CDD had a corresponding reduction in staff (through attrition and reassignment) over the next three years.

By FY11, CDD staff had reduced to 58 FTEs, roughly a one-third reduction. There has been a gradual increase in staffing and CDD now has 66.5 FTEs funded. However, none of this increased staffing was related to development review. Engineering positions were added as a result of the new Virginia Stormwater Management Program (VSMP), a Building Inspector position was added as it was fully offset by increased fees, a Transportation Planner and Natural Resource Manager were added to address the Board's interest in expanded programs, and a Zoning position was added to address an interest for improving code compliance.

Two other things happened in FY11-FY14 period: first, as a result of 2010 Board initiatives, development processes were streamlined to improve effectiveness and reduce costs; second, the Board updated fee rates so that a larger share of application costs would be offset by fee revenue.. As a result of both efforts, process improvements have improved efficiency and the net cost of the department is now significantly lower. The outcome being that staff effectiveness has been optimized and net costs have been kept low.

Finally, related to future staffing requirements, CDD has 7 employees currently eligible for full retirement and 6 more who will be eligible within the next 5 years. That equates to 20% of the CDD workforce and will represent over 450 years of County experience. Irrespective of turnover challenges, these pending retirements create a compelling need for CDD to have a sufficient number of high-quality professional staff ready for advancement into key positions

Workload

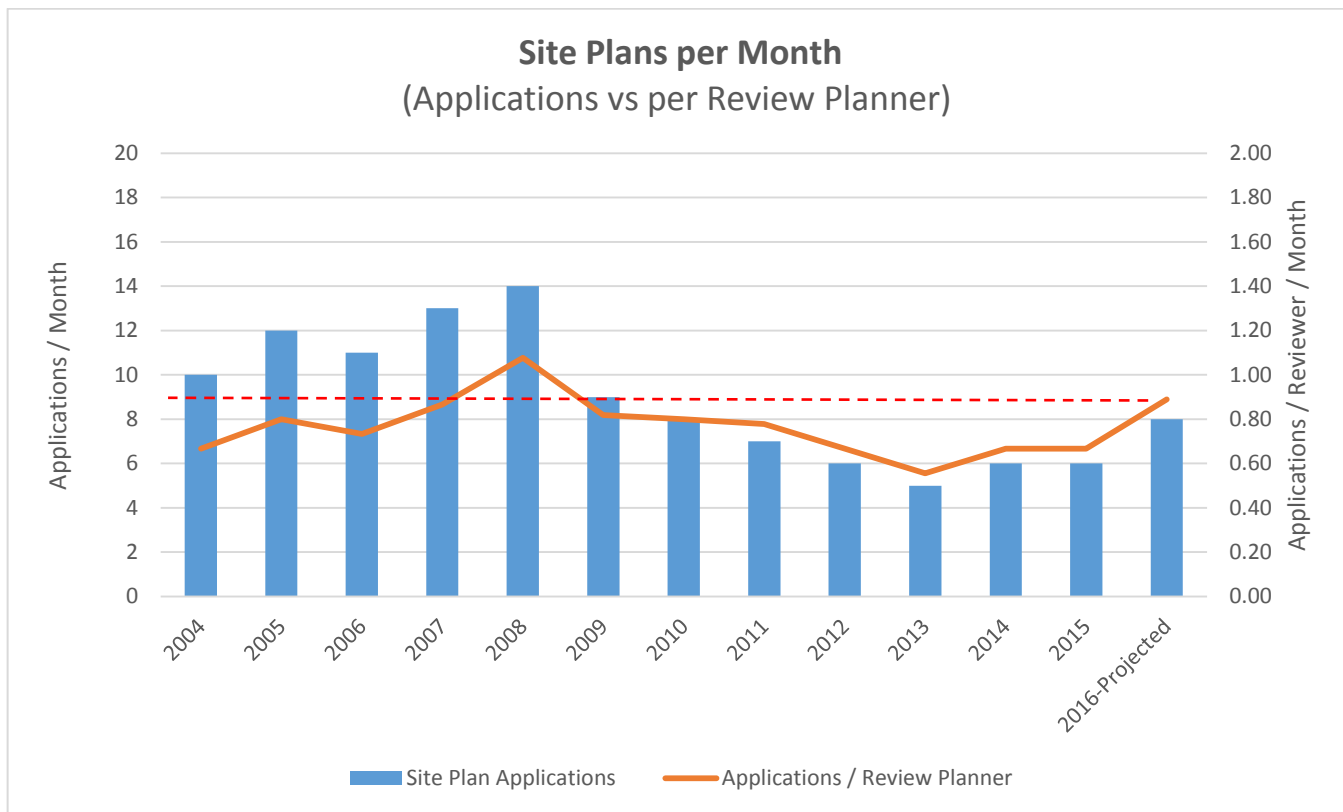
CDD workload is largely a function of the number of applications submitted. Most applications (e.g. site plans, subdivisions, rezonings) have State defined timeframes for acting on the application and some applications (e.g. VSMP) are automatically approved if CDD does not meet that timeframe. Recognizing the County doesn't control the number of applications and has legal timeframes for acting, the remaining strategies for managing workload are to 1) adjust the staff resources to match the workload and 2) adjust the expectations to match the workload.

There are a number of variables to consider with each strategy. The County can adjust this workload by reducing its expectations for applications. For example, eliminating the Entrance Corridor requirements would reduce workload by roughly two planners. Similarly, accepting self-certifications for plan compliance would reduce plan review times.

For resource adjustments, staff resources have already been maximized through the use of overtime, but this can be further increased, as long as there is funding for that overtime and staff burnout does not become an issue. It is worth considering, however, that six planners working 10 hours/week in overtime yields 60 hours/week of work for approximately the same cost as hiring two planners to work 80 hours/week. Additionally, given the adversarial nature of development review, that additional 10 hours/week adds considerable stress to those workers and decreases the discretionary time to "decompress". This can accelerate burnout and increase turnover.

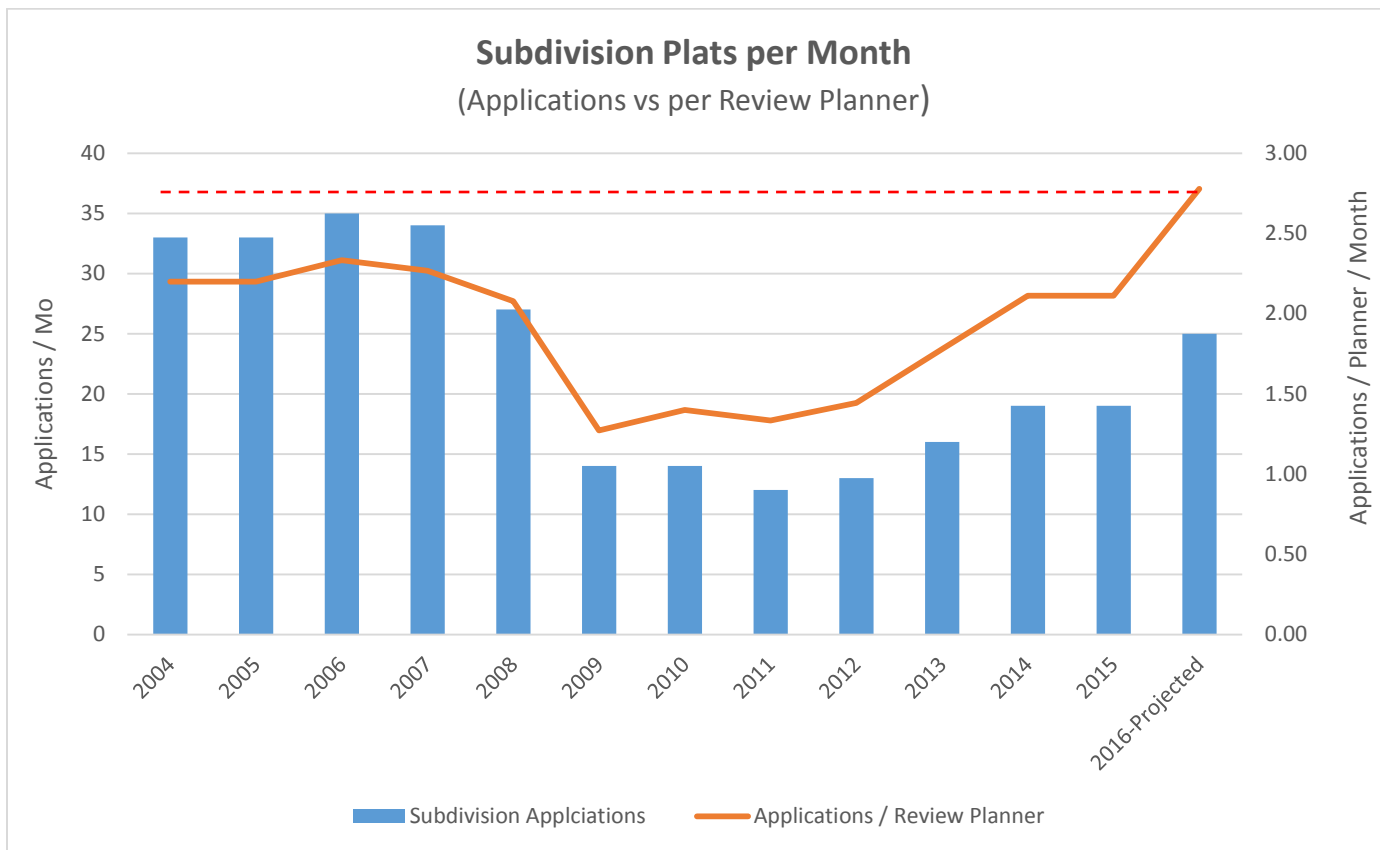
Recognizing CDD's primary concern is the planner workload, a few graphs and explanations are provided to illustrate the current workload.

Site Plans



While CDD is not averaging as many applications as the 2004-2008 period, the number of applications per planner is matching that development boom. It is also noted that the 2004-2008 period had a number of applications that have been replaced with less complex processes that don't count towards this total (minor site plan amendment may be a simpler letter of revision).

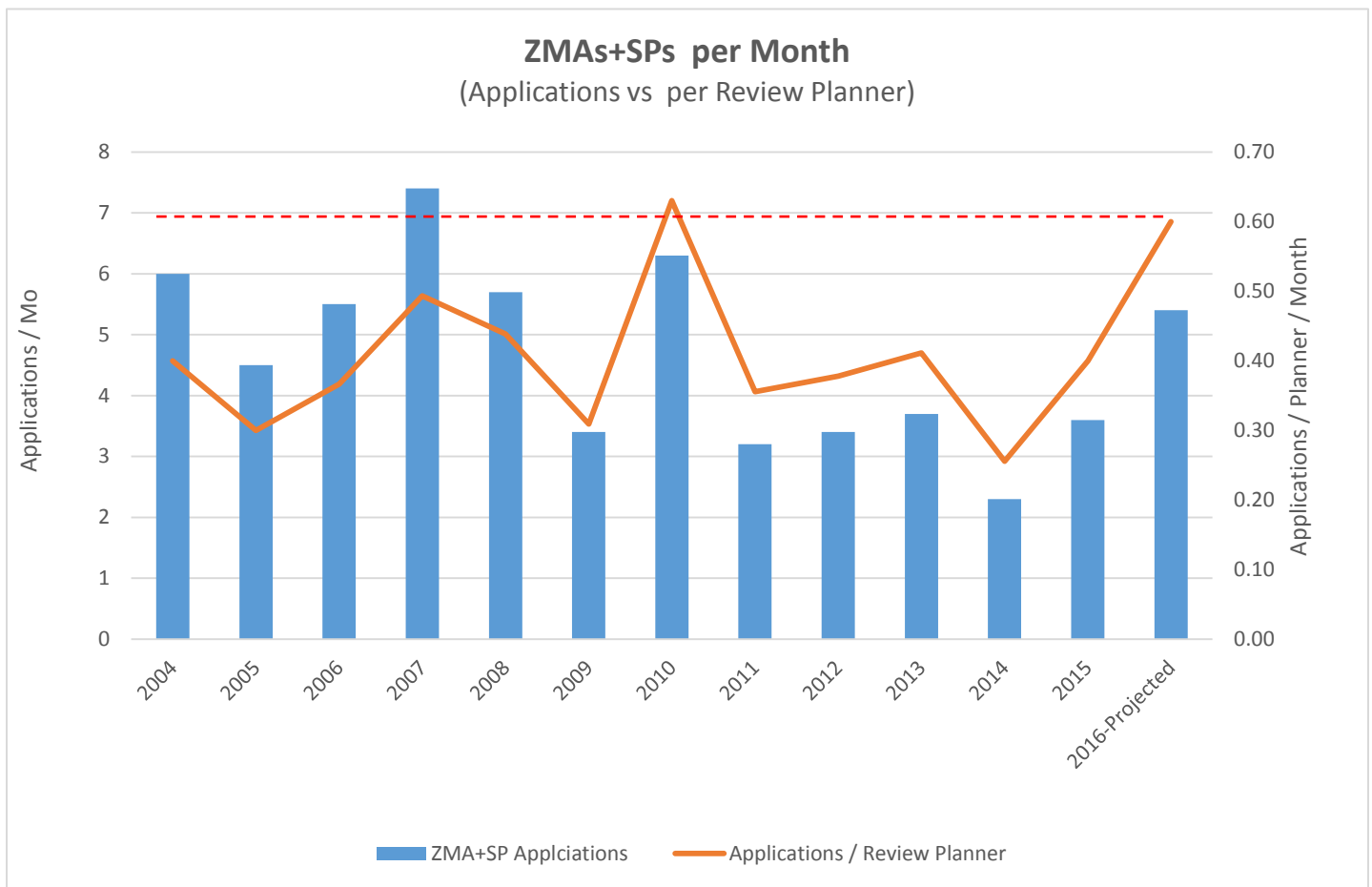
Subdivisions



Similar to site plans, the number of subdivision applications is currently less than the development boom, but the number of applications per review planner is substantially higher. The number of applications per planner has doubled in the last five years.

Anecdotally, staff notes CDD received large numbers of Rural and Family Subdivisions in the 2004-2008 period, but that trend has not picked up with the recent upturn. That type of subdivision application is by far the simplest and quickest to process.

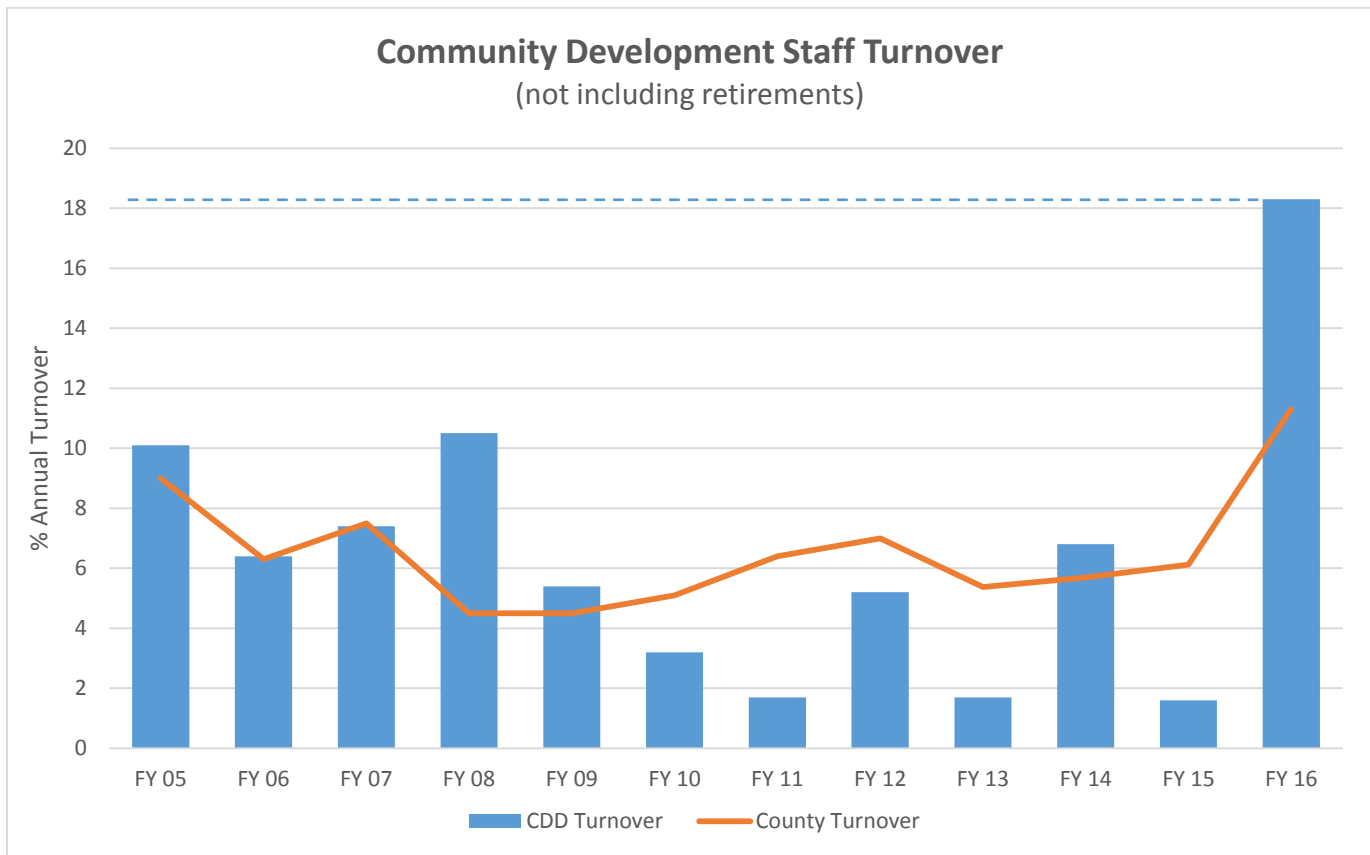
Rezoning and Special Use Permits



Legislative applications have also increased in the last year, with the number of applications reaching the levels seen in 2004-2008 boom. In terms of applications per reviewer, the number of applications is now exceeding the peak levels of the 2004-2008 boom. However, this does require some qualification. First, several of the current applications are simple proffer amendments requiring much less work than a typical application. Second, there can be large differences in the time to review applications. For example, a major rezoning could require hundreds of staff hours while a Special Use Permit may only require 40 hours of staff time. Finally, these applications are much harder to track in terms of review efforts, as they often call for a collaborative approach, rather than formal submissions, to address comments raised by staff, the public, Planning Commission or Board. While this informality in process improves the overall review quality and provides for better customer service, it makes it makes formally defining a “review” difficult.

CDD is seeing similar increases across the spectrum of application types including for other development activity such as Architectural Review Board applications, Zoning Clearances, and Sign Permits.

Turnover



The replacement of an employee is an expensive proposition. The expense comes predominantly in the form of lost productivity, as managers divert their attention from County priorities to the training of new employees. On average it takes a minimum of 6 months for a building inspector, code compliance officer, engineer, or planner to be able to work independently and in some cases several years of experience before the employee is considered to be fully trained. While there are generally many causes of turnover, burnout and market competition for skilled employees are primary considerations in cases where turnover increases at the same time as workload.

As demonstrated by the Community Development Staff Turnover graph above, FY16 was an alarming year for turnover. Prior to this, CDD was experiencing manageable turnover as equilibrium had been established in FY11. Noting that there has been no significant changes in supervision or advancement opportunities since FY11, CDD's focus has turned to workload and a need for additional review planners and permit intake staff appears to be the most serious concern.

Conclusions

The current reality of sustained increases in workload displayed by the data presented, demonstrates the significant challenges faced by the Community Development Department in keeping pace with the demands of steadily increasing development activity, while maintaining attention to the standards of quality and customer service this County is known to value.

What appeared to be a workload spike in early 2015 has now been recognized as an established trend. Staffing capacity issues driven by development must be addressed in order to mitigate the effects of the critical workload issue evidenced by the data presented in this report. CDD recommends the hiring of an additional two planners to bring workload per employee back to the 2014 level and one additional administrative support position for processing the increased number of applications.