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Acknowledgments

A benchmarking project of the nature and magnitude of the one described in this report requires a great deal of cooperation from many parties. We benefited from having such cooperation in countless ways over the past two years.

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We are grateful to the North Carolina officials who assisted us and especially to those who accompanied us on site visits to examine the development review operations of our benchmarking partners: Evans Ballard, Robin Barham, Ricky Barker, Ed Brown, Robert Griffin, Kim Hamel, Janet Holland, Tom Horstman, Sue Hyde, Roger Lentz, Dan Matthys, Steve Medlin, Dan Mikkelson, Ken Millett, Chris Murphy, Wayne Nicholas, Kevin O’Brien, Margaret Pearson, Renee Pierson, Robert Prestwood, Jay Reinstein, Bob Robbins, Mark Schroeder, Shannon Tuch, Jeff Ulma, and Ted Voorhees. They were not only our travel companions; they were our closest advisors and our primary source of development review expertise as well. When they were impressed by what they saw on a site visit, we took note of their reactions and focused our attention on key elements they discovered. We hope they will find that we have conveyed our observations accurately and have reached reasonable conclusions.

We gratefully acknowledge the many experts and development review officials across the nation who answered our inquiries and helped us find national leaders in this field. More than a hundred of these individuals contributed names to our list of leading local governments. In addition, information provided by officials in these communities assisted us in narrowing that list.

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Introduction

The local government development review process is multifaceted and complex. Although common elements are found across all local governments, variations abound and specific processes are influenced by community characteristics and desires. Nevertheless, most communities desire a development review process that is fast, thorough, and fair. These desirable qualities were the foci of this project and led project researchers and participants to three local governments with exceptionally strong development review operations — the cities of Henderson, Nevada; Tallahassee, Florida; and San Diego, California. Administrative officials in these municipalities graciously accepted our invitation to participate in this benchmarking project and provided a wealth of process information to support this study.

A careful review of documents pertaining to the development review operations of our benchmarking partners, followed by site visits to all three, revealed five common characteristics among these development review leaders:

- A commitment to delivering services at a level and cost that match the scale of development in their communities
- Customer-focused services
- Transparency
- Reliance on high-functioning technology
- Extraordinary relationships with information technology support personnel

During site visits project participants were exposed to a wide array of ideas regarding specific project elements. These ideas pertained to process financing, stakeholder engagement, and process management. Many of the ideas participants encountered during the site visits already have been adapted for use and implemented in some of the nine North Carolina cities and towns that sponsored this project. Many others have been rated by community officials as likely to be implemented in the months ahead.
Best practice benchmarking (benchmarking for short) generally refers to the pursuit by organizations of enhanced performance by learning from the successful practices of others. Comparisons of key processes which contribute to organizational success are made with other... Benchmarking is an integral part of the planning and ongoing review process to ensure a focus on the external environment and to strengthen the use of factual information in developing plans. Benchmarking in local government is set to increase with the forthcoming requirement to use it to demonstrate ‘best value’ – the long-awaited replacement for compulsory competitive tendering. Local and sector-specific benchmarking networks continue to be set up, and many. Benchmarking for Best Practice uses up-to-the-minute case-studies of individual companies and industry-wide quality schemes to show how and why implementation has succeeded. For any practitioner wanting to establish best practice in a wide variety of business areas, this book makes essential reading. It is also an ideal textbook on the applications of TQM since it describes concepts, covers definitions and illustrates the applications with first-hand examples. Professor Mohamed Zairi is an international expert and leading figure in the field of benchmarking.