Examining the basis for change in Clark County non-conforming zone change process: Was it needed?

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EXAMINING THE BASIS FOR CHANGE IN CLARK COUNTY NON-CONFORMING ZONE CHANGE PROCESS

WAS IT NEEDED?

by

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2005

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Science Degree in Environmental Studies
Department of Environmental Science
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Graduate College
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May 2005
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Examining the Basis for Change in Clark County Non-Conforming Zone Change Process. Was it needed?

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

M.S. in Environmental Policy

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ABSTRACT

Examining the Basis for Change in
Clark County Non-Conforming
Zone Change Process

Was it needed?

by

Maria D. Kaseko

Dr. Krystyna Stave, Examination Committee Chair
Associate Professor of Environmental Studies
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This study reviews Clark County’s non-conforming zone change process from 1990 to 2002. A non-conforming zone change, sometimes known as a non-conforming zone boundary amendment is a proposed request that is not within the range of residential densities and/or non-residential intensities indicated on the applicable land use plan map, master plan, or concept plan. This research explores and examines two questions raised by the Clark County’s new implementation plan, which was approved in April 2003 to amend the non-conforming zone change process.

1) Clark County assumed there was a public perception that non-conforming zone changes were being approved without regard to the master plan. Was this assumption correct?

2) Are decisions in approving non-conforming zone changes consistent among all levels of decision-making?
According to the new implementation plan, the change is an effort to improve the negative public perception that land use plans are unimportant because of the continuous number of approved non-conforming zone changes. In addition, the ordinance indicates the need to improve public participation in the non-conforming zone change process. The changes in the new non-conforming zone change process have been principally based on the assumption that the old regulations were not effective. There is no clear knowledge of what was deemed effective or ineffective in the old process because neither data nor interviews were collected to support the statements and subsequent changes made. In order to test the two hypotheses: 1) Yes, there were too many non-conforming zone changes approved that did not adhere to the master plan, and 2) Yes, consistency of decisions among levels of decision making is low. This research evaluates and analyses randomly selected 687 non-conforming zone change reports in Clark County.

The results from the non-conforming zone change reports will be used to propose recommendations that can be used by the Clark County Department of Comprehensive Planning to help improve the planning process in general, restore public confidence, and improve the public's involvement in the non-conforming zone change process.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

In April 2003, the Clark County, Nevada, Board of County Commissioners (BCC) approved new regulations regarding the non-conforming zone change process. The purpose of the new regulations is to “reinforce the importance of land use planning and achieve a more effective planning and development review process in conjunction with non-conforming zone changes” (Current Planning, 2003, 1). A non-conforming zone change is a request to amend an existing zoning that is not within the range of residential densities and/or non-residential intensities indicated on applicable land use plan or master plans (Current Planning, 2000). The new regulations state that the change in the requesting process is an effort to improve the “negative public perception” that land use plans were of little value because of the continuous approval of non-conforming zone changes (Current Planning, 2003, 1). In addition, the purpose of new regulations was to instill public confidence and invite their involvement throughout the non-conforming zone change process (Current Planning, 2003).

The Clark County Board of County Commissioners is a governing body of Clark County, Nevada, consisting of seven elected officials representing seven districts (Current Planning, 2000) as shown on the Clark County commissioners’ district map (see Appendix II). The Board of County Commissioners is the final authority in approving or
denying non-conforming zone change applications.

The problem statements of this research are:

1) Clark County assumed there was a public perception that non-conforming zone changes were being approved without regard to the master plan. Was this assumption correct?

2) Are decisions in approving non-conforming zone changes consistent among all levels of decision-making?

To answer the two aforementioned questions, research on the history of Clark County’s non-conforming zone change process was conducted, evaluated, and analyzed. The research reviewed and analyzed 687 randomly selected non-conforming zone change reports approved from 1990 to 2002.

The researcher examined the data to determine the validity of the argument that the public did not see the importance of land use plans because there were continuous approvals of non-conforming zone changes. In addition, the researcher examined whether public involvement is low and needs improvement, as stated in the regulation document.

Tonn, English, and Travis (2000), in their paper titled “A Framework for Understanding and Improving Environmental Decision Making,” state that the evaluation process is very important if environmental decision making is to be improved over time. Officials’ changing policies or regulations to improve a process without a clear prior knowledge of the process cannot be expected to solve the problem, as there are no clear indicators of what needs to be improved.

Recent changes in the non-conforming zone change regulations have been principally based on the assumption that the old regulations were not effective. Proponents for the
change agreed with the unsubstantiated perception that land use plans are unimportant, particularly if non-conforming zone changes were, indeed, continuously being approved. Moreover, one of the intents of the change was to eventually instill public confidence and improve public involvement in the non-conforming zone change process. There is no clear knowledge of what was deemed effective or ineffective in the old process because neither data nor interviews were collected or conducted to date to support the statement and the subsequent changes made.

Hypotheses

In approaching and answering the problem statements, the researcher assumes two hypotheses:

1) Yes, there were too many non-conforming zone changes approved that did not adhere to the master plan.

2) Yes, consistency of decisions among levels of decision making is low.

According to the Nevada Revised Statute (NRS 278.230), whenever the governing body of a county has adopted a master plan, it shall consult the recommendation of the planning commission to determine the reasonable and practical means for putting it into effect. The master plan is meant to serve as both a pattern and guide, and Clark County, therefore, has an obligation to follow the established land use plans within the master plan in order to create a systematically better community. Planning, the master plan, and zoning are interrelated components of a system that depend on each other for success.
The Relationships Among Planning, the Master Plan, and Zoning

The term “planning” has a broad connotation. It includes the physical development of the community and its environment in relation to its social and economic well-being for the fulfillment of the rightful, common destiny (So & Getzels, 1988). Wildavsky (1973) defines planning as a control of the future, and planning will not succeed if there is less conformity to what was originally planned. Wildavsky (1981) further defines planning as an activity of any community designed to reach a desired goal projected to be implemented. In addition, Vasu (1979) states that planning in the United States commonly refers to the function of local government concerned primarily with the construction of physical space.

The nature of local government planning can vary significantly in both focal point and style, depending on the type of community being planned (So & Getzels, 1988). For example, planning in Clark County will be different from planning in Washoe County in the northern part of the state because these two counties have different senses of economic well-being and environment. According to So and Getzels (1988), planning creates products such as comprehensive plans or master plans and zoning, which interacts to achieve certain planning goals.

Master plans provide a big picture of how and where development will occur in an area. They are long-range statements and guiding visions for land use development and the provision of community services and facilities. According to the Nevada Revised Statue (NRS 278.230), whenever the governing body of any city or county has adopted a
master plan, it shall, upon recommendation of the planning commission, determine reasonable and practical means for putting it into effect. The master plan will serve as:

1) A pattern and guide for orderly physical growth and development of county, causing the least amount of natural resource impairment, and one that will conform to the adopted population plan where required. It will also ensure an adequate supply of housing, including affordable housing.

2) A basis for the efficient expenditure of funds thereof relating to the subjects of the master plan.

Clark County’s Title 30 defines the master plan/comprehensive plan as “the plan,” and refers to the one adopted by the Board of County Commissioners on December 15, 1983. It includes all land use plans, including the general plan map adopted by the Board of County of Commissioners on January 21, 1974, for areas not included in a more recently adopted land use plan map and other elements subsequently adopted.

The land use plan, sometimes known as the land use guide, is part of a master plan used to guide development within a certain geographical area. The land use plan represents a set of policies and goals that specifically guide the growth and development of a certain area. For example, “RE” designates “rural estates,” indicating that there is a limit of two houses per gross acre (Current Planning, 2000).

Zoning is part of the planning process; it is the basic means of land use control engaged by local governments in the United States (So & Getzels, 1988). The first zoning law was first adopted in New York in 1916. In 1926, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled zoning was constitutional, and by the late 1930s, most states had adopted some sort of
legislation to allow zoning by the local government. Currently, zoning is a major component of local and urban planning areas in the United States.

The intent of zoning is to divide the community into districts (zones) and impose different land use regulations on each district, by specifying the allowed uses, types of buildings, intensity or density of such uses, and the bulk of building on the land (So & Getzels, 1988). Likewise, Goetz, and Wofford (1979) define zoning as a formulation of rules for land allocation that are influenced by the self-interest of actors in the decision-making process.

The main job of zoning is to implement land use regulations, and review and develop plans (Fleischmann, 1989). As Patterson (1979) notes, zoning was introduced for the purpose of protecting and preserving the value of properties through control over the physical character of the local area and historical preservation. In Clark County, the zoning process allows two types of zoning requests: 1) conforming zone change; and 2) non-conforming zone change (Current Planning, 2000).

A zone change, sometimes called a zone boundary amendment, is a request filed with Clark County’s Department of Comprehensive Planning to amend the official Zoning Map of Clark County by reclassifying property from one zoning district to another (Current Planning, 2000).

A conforming zone change, sometimes called a conforming boundary amendment, is a proposed zone change request within the range of residential densities and/or non-residential intensities indicated on the applicable land use plan map, specific plan, neighborhood plan, concept plan, or community district map (Current Planning, 2000).
In contrast, a non-conforming zone change, also known as a non-conforming zone boundary amendment, is a proposed change that is not within the range of residential densities and/or non-residential intensities indicated on the applicable land use plan map, specific neighborhood plan, and concept plan (Current Planning, 2002).

Table 1 summarizes commonly used zoning classifications in Clark County.

Table 1  Samples of Clark County Zoning Classifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Type</th>
<th>Principle Uses</th>
<th>Alternate Uses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural Density Residential</td>
<td>Residential/Agriculture</td>
<td>Schools, Churches, Public Facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-U, R-A, R-E, R-D</td>
<td>Livestock Rural lifestyle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low/Medium Density Residential</td>
<td>Single Family Units, Parks</td>
<td>Child Care, Churches, Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-1, R-2, RUD</td>
<td></td>
<td>Public Facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multifamily Residential</td>
<td>Dormitories, Multifamily Units, Nursing and Senior Homes</td>
<td>Hospitals, Public Facilities, Schools, Child Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-3, R-4, R-5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Transitional District</td>
<td>Offices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Office</td>
<td>Offices</td>
<td>Schools, Child Care, Parks, Parking Lots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-P</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Business</td>
<td>Banks, Retail, Clubs, Small Outlets</td>
<td>Theatres, Gas Stations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Business</td>
<td>Auto Sales, Shopping Centers, Bakeries, Veterinary Offices, Taverns</td>
<td>Dry Cleaners, Schools, Churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Industrial/Designed</td>
<td>Outside Storage, Manufacturing Assembly, Kernels, Adult Entertainment in M-1 only</td>
<td>Animal Storage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M-1, M-D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Industrial</td>
<td>Chemical Processing, Heavy Manufacturing</td>
<td>Paper Mills, Recycling Facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited Resort and Apartments H-1</td>
<td>Casinos and Gambling, Live Entertainment, Restaurants</td>
<td>Payday/Check Cashing, Daycare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Village U-V</td>
<td>Mixed Use Development Commercial, Office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Clark County, Title 30

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Clark County Non-Conforming Zone

Change Procedure

From 1990 to 2002, the proposed non-conforming zone changes in Clark County were reviewed at four levels. First was the review from the Clark County Comprehensive Planning staff, who is a team of professionals that are responsible for urban planning, design, and implementation of planning policies and regulations in Clark County.

The second level was a public hearing by the representing town board, which are comprised of members appointed by the Board of County Commissioners to represent certain geographic areas (see Appendix II) and make recommendations to the Planning Commission or Board of County Commissioners (Current Planning, 2000).

The third level was a public hearing hosted by the Planning Commission, which is a body usually comprised of seven members appointed by the county’s commissioners. Nevada law requires the county’s planning functions to be assigned to a planning department, or the Planning Commission, and a legislative body, the Board of County Commissioners (State of Nevada, 2004).

Lastly, the Planning Commission recommends the boundaries of zoning districts and determines appropriate requirements relative to site plan review, forwarding its recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners, which recommends a final action (Davidson & Dolnick, 1999).

The new regulations approved by the Board of County Commissioners in 2003 increased the process to seven levels through which any non-conforming zone change requests must be reviewed. The differences between the old and new non-conforming
zone change processes are shown in Figure 1. Table 2 further explains the requirements of the two processes.

Figure 1  Old and New Non-Conforming Zone Change Processes
Source: Current Planning, 2003
Table 2  Clark County Old and New Non-Conforming Zone Change Requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Process, January 1990 to November 2003</th>
<th>New Process, December 2003 to Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Applicant calls the planning department to schedule an appointment.</td>
<td>• Applicant submits a pre-application package of 15 copies of the site plan, 15 copies of description of the project, and 15 copies of a compelling justification letter at the front counter of Current Planning within the specified dates on each planning area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Applicant meets with a planner to submit a completed application.</td>
<td>• The applicant is given a specific date to meet with planning staff to discuss the proposed project and all the issues related to the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If the application is complete*, it is taken, assigned a number, and scheduled for Town Board, Planning Commission, and Board of County Commissioners meetings.</td>
<td>• The applicant is required to mail notices of a neighborhood meeting ten working days prior to the actual neighborhood meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Staff does research and prepares report.</td>
<td>• The applicant is required to provide staff with a copy of the notice including the date, time, and location of the neighborhood meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Public notifications are sent to all the property owners within a 750-feet radius from the subject parcel(s).</td>
<td>• Staff attends the neighborhood meeting as a resource for information on the county code or land use plans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Applicant attends a Town Board meeting and presents the case. It approves or denies the application.</td>
<td>• The applicant makes an appointment with appropriate Current Planning staff to submit the non-conforming zone change application package. Only completed applications are accepted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Applicant attends the Planning Commission for a public hearing. It approves or denies the application.</td>
<td>• The application is assigned dates for the Town Board, Public Commission and BCC meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Applicant presents his non-conforming zone change request to the BCC at a public hearing.</td>
<td>• The applicant is required to address all issues discussed during the pre-conference meeting with staff and a summary of what happened with the neighborhood meeting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*A completed application means the applicant provided all the required documents for the non-conforming zone change submittal.

Note: Required documents for non-conforming zone changes requests include:
- Application Form
- Deed
- Legal Description
- Site Plan
- Elevation
- Floor Plan
- Assessor’s Maps
- Non-Conforming Reports (Related to water, fire, school, traffic etc.)

Source: Current Planning, 2003

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Major Differences Between the Old and New Non-Conforming Zone Change Processes

The new process requires the applicant to file a pre-application, which adds a discussion of the request at an early stage with all the approving agencies that may have concerns with the project, such as the Regional Transportation Commission, the various public works, Clark County School District, Regional Flood Control, and Department of Parks and Recreation.

The new process also requires the applicant to conduct a neighborhood meeting. The purpose of the neighborhood meeting is for the applicant to address, disclose, and discuss with neighbors the proposed zoning changes, uses, site development, and impact to infrastructures, including the submission of a traffic impact analysis as well as compelling justification for the changes.

The new process further requires the applicant to address all issues discussed during the pre-conference meeting with planning staff and to provide a summary of what happened at the neighborhood meeting. Given these added steps, there is a significant time difference between the old and new non-conforming zone change approval processes. The old process took approximately two and a half to three months from application submittal to the final approval by the Board of County Commissioners, while the new process takes approximately five to six months from the pre-submittal date to the final approval.

The public notification distance in the new process was increased from the required public notification to all within a 750-foot radius from the property requesting a non-conforming zone change to a new 1,500-foot radius compared. The increase in distance
allows the Department of Comprehensive Planning to notify more citizens of what is being proposed close to or within their communities.

In order to improve the non-conforming zone change process, it is important to know what happened historically, as it will provide supporting data on whether the "negative public perception" about the non-conforming zone change process is accurate. Relying on perceptions of unsubstantiated information will not adequately provide the information needed to evaluate and improve the process.

Why Historical Review?

The history of non-conforming zone changes is significant to the Clark County Department of Comprehensive Planning because it potentially provides information that can either support or reject justification for the new regulations. The new regulations state that the intent of the change is to improve public involvement in the non-conforming zone change process. It suggests that the old process did not involve the public nearly enough in the consideration process. The question begs, however, how did the Department of Comprehensive Planning come to that conclusion without substantive data or interviews to support the statement?

A historical review can provide information that can be used by the Department of Comprehensive Planning to evaluate and enhance its existing policies and regulations regarding the non-conforming zone change process. It is hoped that the results will either support or reject the alleged negative public perception that land use plans are unimportant. Since the state of Nevada has established statues that require each city or
county to reasonably follow their respective master plans, Clark County has the obligation to do so and share it with its citizens (State of Nevada, 2004).

In addition, if the research reveals a large number of non-conforming zone changes were approved throughout the four levels of decision making (i.e. reviews by the planning staff, local town boards, Planning Commission, and Board of County Commissioners bodies), then it reflects yet another problem—the difficulty of keeping up with the rapid growth and changes that are occurring within Clark County because the zoning map is changing faster than what the master plans were designed for. The results from this research can provide comments that can be used to formulate or enhance existing policies and serve as guidelines for the decision makers to follow even when the population and economic growth is faster than the process of updating the master plans. So and Getzels (1988) point out that master plans should include a statement of growth management policy in order to guide decision makers when dealing with community growth issues.

If the research discovers a higher percentage of non-conforming zone changes were consistently recommended denial by both planning staff and the respective town board, but approved by the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners, the data would then support the argument that the land use plan could be deemed unimportant as suggested in the new regulations. If the master plan or land use plan is not used to guide development and provide smart growth initiatives, as intended by the Nevada statutes and Clark County codes, then it loses its meaning.

Social scientists such as Seasons (2003) state that good policies and wonderful staff recommendations can be consistent with established policies, though the end result is not
so much if the policies are effective, but whether the political motivation exists to implement the established policies. Therefore, it is important for Clark County’s Planning Department to establish policies and regulations that will emphasize the importance of using a master plan and restore its public perception of integrity within the planning process.

The results of this research will help identify areas of concerns related to the non-conforming zone change process, specifically on the importance of land use plans, public involvement, and consistency in decision making. The research will provide recommendations that can be used to formulate new policies and goals that can be incorporated in the new regulations. The recommendations can be used to improve and bring an understanding on the importance of monitoring and evaluating as a tool to improve either the policies or the process.

To accentuate the importance of this research, the next chapter presents review of the literature that will provide discussion for the arguments presented in this research. Chapter 2 will discuss the interrelationships among the different elements within the planning process of any community. These elements include comprehensive planning and its role in zoning, public involvement in the planning process, the role of politics in decision making, and the importance of monitoring and evaluating in and for policy improvements. These elements are significant, when integrated together, in establishing policies and regulations that can be used to develop a better community.
CHAPTER 2

ACCORDING TO LITERATURE

This research is significant because it seeks to support or reject whether an alleged negative public perception that land use plans are unimportant because non-conforming zone changes were continuously being approved by the Board of County Commissioners exists, and if there is a need to instill public confidence and invite their participation in the non-conforming zone change process. These points are noted in the new regulations of the non-conforming zone change process. As stated in these regulations, the change in process is to “alleviate the negative public perception that land use plans were of little value” (Current Planning, 2003, 1). Before making changes of any policy or regulation, it is important to have feedback as to what happened prior in order to help focus and improve that particular area (Rossi, Freeman, & Lipsey, 1999). The new regulations did not have any supporting data or interviews to determine if the statement about the public’s negative perception is true or not. Therefore, the intent of this research is to seek information that will support or disapprove these arguments. A comprehensive plan is essential in community planning because it provides guidance and direction of what the zoning would be.
Comprehensive Planning and its Role in Zoning

In order to achieve a certain future in any community, there is a need to establish goals that can be used to guide and direct it (Solnit, Reed, Glassford, & Erley, 1988). They propose the following five major steps that allow a community to achieve a desired future:

1) A local planning organization needs to establish basic goals of what it wants the community to look like in the future.

2) Planning staff needs to learn and understand the land use, population, economic growth, environmental issues, and all physiological features of a community in order to provide good planning.

3) Planning staff needs to prepare and create policies that will formulate statements of how the community will develop and grow.

4) Planning staff needs to determine implementation and effectuation to achieve the desired future, which requires all levels of decision makers to use the tools provided to them, such as zoning ordinances, capital improvements, land subdivision regulations, environmental regulations, and other guidelines.

5) Planning staff needs to monitor and obtain feedback as the final step in enabling the planning organization to evaluate how well the goals and objectives are being used. The information can provide comments for future guidelines, serving as a foundation for improving the planning process.

McLoughlin (1969) points out that the goal of planning is to seek to regulate or control the activities of individuals and groups to minimize negative impacts and promote
better performance of the physical environment, in accordance with the goals and objectives set out in the land use plan.

Zoning is part of the planning process undertaken by a local government. It divides the community or municipality into districts (zones) and imposes land use regulations on each district such as the allowed uses of land, types of buildings, and the intensity or density of such uses on the land (Solnit et al., 1988). For example, Clark County allows two units per gross acre in Rural Estate zoning (R-E), and livestock animals such as cows, goats, and chickens are permitted in this zone (Current Planning, 2000). There is an increased number of states, including Nevada, requiring that zoning conform to a “well established and approved plan or comprehensive plan” (Solnit et al., 1988, 20). In addition, Solnit et al. argues that the zoning process cannot really be effective unless a long-term plan is established and followed, because a land use plan provides goals and policies to guide a community to a better land allocation and a preferred future.

The purpose of a comprehensive land use plan is to provide information about existing development and zoning and goals, objectives, policies, and potential location and characteristics of future development. In addition, the master plans/land use plan initiation was to protect property values. However, Ferguson and Platter (1987) argue that land use control and regulations may prohibit profitable use of a specific parcel of land, adjacent land use may impact market value, or changes in zoning may call for the abandonment of existing profitable uses. Therefore, zoning can not only destroy pre-existing worth, but it can be instrumental in changing the entire future of an area (Ferguson & Plattner, 1987).
When the community fails to follow its master plan or land use plan because of its multiple non-conforming zone changes, there is a chance of creating an unsuitable development area within that community. Razin (1998) argues that unplanned, scattered, and piecemeal residential and commercial development results in urban sprawl that infringes on rural-urban (outskirt areas with low density) areas and becomes a source of environmental problems, such as increased pollution because of increased carbon monoxide emissions from increased automobiles. Likewise, Clark County's change in regulation regarding the non-conforming zone change process is to emphasize and strengthen the use of land use plan in order to improve development within Clark County (Current Planning, 2003).

Some communities like Clark County have experienced development patterns, which are similar to urban sprawl. Reid (1997) defines sprawl as not suburbanization, generally, but rather forms of suburban development that lack accessibility and open space. He adds that planned communities have preserved anywhere from 18% to 57% of the total land area as open space, compared to unplanned communities that have no or little open space. Some researchers point out that suburban sprawl is associated with the decline of central cities and older suburbia. As a result, it negatively affects the future of the metropolis (Razin, 1998; Savitch, Collins, Sanders, & Markham, 1993). Therefore, planning and maintaining the master plan enables communities to achieve smart growth development.

According to Kaiser, Godschild, and Chapin (1995), a land use plan/master plan serves several purposes. One is to provide guidelines by which the community can participate in a democratic way with elected and appointed officials to create better policies and regulations for their communities. Second, a land use plan acts as a tool to
communicate policies and regulations to property owners, developers, citizens, elected officials, and other affected parties. Third, the intent of a land use plan is to educate, inspire, and convince all stakeholders that planned communities are socially and economically good. Lastly, a land use plan helps to implement all policies and regulations by incorporating plans through the approval of conforming and non-conforming zone changes.

Sometimes it can be difficult for some cities or counties to keep up with upgrading their master plans/land use plans because of the tremendous pressure of urban growth. Patterson (1979) argues that zoning has a problem with time gap between the present reality of the zoning map and the future orientation of a land use plan. As a result, the time gap encourages a larger number of non-conforming zone change applications from developers. For example, Clark County’s Department of Comprehensive Planning used to update the land use plan every 10 years. Meanwhile, non-conforming zone changes were accepted continuously, creating a huge difference between the zoning map and the land use plan. The new regulations changed the time frame to every 5 years for updating the land use plan of a certain geographical area within unincorporated Clark County.

Urban growth attracts new businesses and more people that eventually contribute to the area’s economic growth. However, urban growth increases the pressure of approving non-conforming zone changes because developers are eager to develop anything that the market demands. Over time, the process can have significant environmental impact on the surrounding neighborhoods and community in general. Clark County has experienced tremendous growth in terms of its economy, population, and developed land. For example, the county’s average annual growth rate between 1995 and 2000 was 6.4%
(Comprehensive Planning, 2004). In 1990, the county’s population was 797,142, while in 2002, the population expanded to 1,578,332 (Comprehensive Planning, 2004). As a result, the county is experiencing significant environmental problems such as bad air quality because of the increased carbon monoxide emissions from the increased number of automobiles and less open space with respect to the population. Soon the county may experience problems with water consumption and solid waste management. Therefore, there is a great need to turn around the negative public perception, if found to exist, that land use plans are unimportant because of the continuous approval of non-conforming zone changes. By eliminating the negative perception, the county will make the master plan a significant tool to guide the community to a better future.

The Clark County non-conforming zone change process involves many stakeholders, many of which include the Clark County decision-making bodies (i.e. planning staff, town boards, Planning Commission, and the Board of County Commissioners), citizens, and developers. Cooperation and common vision among stakeholders are essential in achieving consensual policy and improving the planning process. Therefore, these instill public confidence and restores public trust towards the non-conforming zone change process.

Kumar, et al. (2000), Luhmann (1979), and Williamson (1993) argue that trust is very important to human existence because it enhances the understanding and believing among all stakeholders who participate and work for a common cause. For example, the new regulations of the non-conforming zone change process state that the public has a negative perception that the land use plans are unimportant because non-conforming zone changes were continuously approved by the Board of County Commissioners despite
objections from planning staff and the town boards. When expectations are not fulfilled, as intended in the planning process, it is difficult to re-establish it and convey an understanding among all stakeholders.

To achieve better planning, an organization needs to establish conviction and cooperation among all stakeholders. Likewise, Clark County’s Department of Comprehensive Planning will need to fulfill its expectation by emphasizing common vision and the importance of the land use plan in the non-conforming zone change process. If the expectations of the importance of land use are fulfilled, the public will start believing in the non-conforming zone change process and their confidence in the planning will be boosted.

Consistency in decision making, public participation, and involvement are vital to the non-conforming zone change process and planning, in general. The following section discusses the importance of public participation in the planning process.

Public Participation in the Planning Process

Democracy in the United States is built on the belief that authority resides with the people and that the actions of government should be constantly subject to review and limit (Sharpe, 1973). Public participation, sometimes referred to as public involvement, is a fundamental tenet of democracy that gives control to and delegates power for its citizens (Arnstein, 1969). Zimmerman and Rappaport (1988) argue that in order to achieve a true public participation in planning, there is a need to allow citizens to shape planning decisions and outcomes while increasing their levels of social and political empowerment. Thus, public participation has the potential to strengthen the planning
process, which eventually increases the value of planning in the public’s eye. Public participation empowers citizens as they seek a stronger voice in decisions that affect their communities.

Fainstein and Fainstein (1985) define public participation as a process whereby particular constituencies influence governmental activities through a set of specified modes that affect the output. Public participation forces agencies to be accountable to the public they serve and enables the inclusion of ordinary citizens in decision making (Forester, 1999). Bickerstaff and Walker (2001) state that public participation improves support for policies, and it improves the planning process in general.

Public mobilization and participation in the zoning process is crucial since it can influence decision making. Hutcheson and Prather (1988) state that citizen participation can influence change in governmental activities through a set of actions that affect the final decision of government decision makers. Rosener (1982) supports Prather’s argument by adding that public opinion expressed during public hearing meetings did have an impact on the decision of regulatory board members in California. Pierannunzi (1987) also states that the role of citizen participation is a key element in the policy process.

Do citizens and business interest have influence on local land use decision? Fleischman and Pierannuzi (1990) state that county commissioners and city councils decide re-zoning strategies by attempting to satisfy as many constituents as possible in order to be re-elected and are mostly likely to deny or modify applications that generate public interest. Fleischman and Pierannuzi (1990) argue that there are three types of variables affecting the result of re-zoning strategies.
1) Characteristics of the citizens participating in the process
2) Value and type of the proposal being considered by decision makers
3) Structure of the zoning process

To test whether these theories are true in Clark County, it would be necessary to examine how many applications were denied by the Board of County Commissioners because of the public or business pressure who influenced the decisions. However, that notion is beyond the scope of this research, as this researcher is looking for approved non-conforming zone changes.

The new regulations stated its intent of improving public involvement in the non-conforming zone change process because participation can influence change in decision making. The opinion presented by the public can change the way decision makers approve non-conforming zone changes. Therefore, the Department of Comprehensive Planning should encourage public involvement in the non-conforming zone change. Campbell and Marshall (2000) indicate that increasing the effectiveness of the public sector requires greater engagement between the elected officials and the population they serve.

Public withdraw from participation is more likely to occur if there is no support from the government. For example, Hutcheson and Prather (1988) argue that participation without influence may cause withdrawal, but tangible results are likely to reinforce and broaden participation. In addition, Hutcheson and Prather (1988) view public participation as a mechanism for extending the democratic base of the political system, and thus, public participation has been sought for ideological reasons.
Some policy makers believe that economic status of the people and the area in which they live can influence public participation. Hutcheson and Prather (1988) argue that being of a lower-socioeconomic status may cause individuals to participate less in public decision making. In addition, they point out that complex urban or city life encourages individual isolation, and the resulting decline of the community hinders participation.

The result from this research will help future researchers analyze the role of both the town boards and citizens' participation in each planning area. By reviewing the demographics and socio-economic status of these planning areas and providing a comparison to the number of non-conforming zone changes approved from each area can provide an insight of whether socio-economic status plays a role in public participation.

Public involvement in the non-conforming zone changes is crucial not only to the public, but also to the decision makers and planning staff because it allows interaction among them to achieve whatever goals the community has. However, public involvement does not achieve its goal without the presence of politics.

The Role of Politics in Zoning Decision-Making

Zoning seeks to protect individuals by separating land use in a manner that maximizes the well-being of the entire community (Friedman, 1968; Williams, 1975). Shlay and Rossi (1981) state that the intent of zoning is to protect neighborhoods from the congestion, noise, traffic, pollution, and all bad things associated with commerce and industry. Likewise, the purpose of the county zoning code is to implement the comprehensive plan in order to promote the general prosperity, health, safety, and welfare of its residents (Current Planning, 2000). The zoning code sets forth the
regulations that govern the subdivision, use, and development of land, divides the County into Zoning Districts, and sets forth the regulations pertaining to such districts (Current Planning, 2000).

Before the 1990s, Clark County was small in terms of economic and population growth. However, after the 1990s there has been significant economic growth, which attracted even more people to come to the area seeking jobs in new casinos and construction (Comprehensive Planning, 2004). Most of Clark County was master planned for Residential Estates (R-E) that allowed a density of up to two dwelling units per gross acre, except for a few areas that were specifically identified as tourism and commercial areas (Clark County General Plan, 1974). Because of the economic growth, many people started moving to Clark County to find jobs, resulting in a huge shift in population growth. This growth created change in the Clark County planning process, too, because developers requested non-conforming zone changes to develop residential subdivisions of higher density than the existing master plan of two dwelling units per gross acre, in order to accommodate the growing population. It can be inferred that the Board of County Commissioners approved these non-conforming zone changes for the purpose of promoting development and stimulating the economy.

Fainstein (1991) states that most local governments in the United States have changed their focus in planning over the years from regulating to promoting development within their communities. In support of this statement, Clark County is one of the local governments that has experienced change from the early 1990s where there was 148,568 developed acres compared to the 2000s where there was 238,229 developed acres, which is a noticeable boom of development throughout (Comprehensive Planning, 2004).
Fainstein (1991) argues that the causes of this change have been economic restructuring, a conservative national administration, and a learning process resulting in a proactive approach. Likewise, land development in Clark County provides tax revenue for the local government, some of which is used to run social services, schools, and community programs. Thus, the financial rewards of the zoning process may be linked to why sometimes government officials or politicians can lead to approving non-conforming zone changes (Razin, 1998). However, it is difficult to support the argument within this study.

Population and economic changes within a community can be good because it improves the standard of living. However, change will not be successful unless all aspects that affect the environment—air quality, water, waste management, transportation system, and open space—are taken into consideration in decision-making.

Political influence in the non-conforming zone change process can be minimized by relying on data and feedback to provide facts about the effectiveness of land use plans and why the public does not see the importance of these plans. The following section addresses the importance of monitoring and evaluating in the planning process.

Importance of Monitoring and Evaluating in Decision Making

Season (2003) defines monitoring as a continuous assessment of activities in policies, process programs, or plans. On one hand, monitoring involves the collection and interpretation of data on a regular basis. In addition, Rossi et al. (1999) interpreted monitoring as the systematic documentation of events/activities of performance that
indicate whether or not activities are working as indicated to the original principles or procedures. On the other hand, Weiss (1998) defined evaluation as the systematic assessment of the function of any program or policy, compared to a set of explicit or implicit standards as a means of contributing to the improvement of the policy.

Monitoring and evaluating were important topics of good planning literature of the late 1960s and 1970s (Boyce, 1970; Calkins, 1970; Hemmens, 1968; Dakin, 1973; Duecker, 1970; and Teitz, 1968). These books advocated structured, quantitative, and technical methods of analyzing planning goals and objectives, which demanded the use of computer modeling to achieve better results. However, these highly technical methods faded away and modern planners did not use them for evaluation. Bracken (1981), Forester (1989), and Lee (1994) argue that the highly technical methods of monitoring and evaluating washed out because of cost, time, and the problem of how most organizations managed and interpreted the data.

Planning in the 21st century has the burden of not only cost, time, and interpretive problems, but also with politics, public demands, and environmental issues. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of any policy or procedure, it is important to monitor what goes on in a regular basis. The best way to monitor any program is to collect data and information that will be relevant to the evaluation of the program. Reviewing progress of any policy, process, or procedure should be a regular practice since it gives feedback to planners on what needs to improve in the process, policy, or procedure. Seasons (2003) points out that the monitoring and evaluation process improves the effectiveness of the policy and procedure by providing feedback that can be used to address important issues in the community. He adds that if this process is
implemented carefully, it should help planners solve challenging practices within their communities. For example, understanding what happened to the community after a policy or process is introduced helps with future decision making because it gives comments on what to correct or modify. Season (2003) argues that land use design and planning has changed from its traditional form in the old days to modern planning in the 21st century because most American cities are changing fast, and monitoring and evaluating is needed to guide that change. Seasons (2003) adds that planners will need a realistic and objective evaluation on all projects and their respective impact to the environment in order to serve their communities well.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Collection of Data

The two hypotheses of the research are: 1) Yes, there were too many non-conforming zone changes approved that did not adhere to the master plan, and 2) Yes, consistency of decisions among levels of decision making is low.

In order to test the two hypotheses, I looked at randomly selected Clark County’s non-conforming zone change reports that were ultimately approved by the Board of County Commissioners from 1990 to 2002. I researched only approved, non-conforming zone changes because the public concerns, as stated in the new regulations, were about the continuous approval of non-conforming zone changes by the Board of County Commissioners. By looking at approved applications, I can get the basic facts needed to support the research questions. Therefore, denied non-conforming zone changes were not taken into consideration in this study.

A total of 687 non-conforming zoning changes were sampled and randomly selected from the six selected town boards (See Table 3) in Clark County. The non-conforming zone change reports were analyzed to find out the recommendations from the four levels of decision making. The sampling of data clarified and deepened the understanding of the actual facts regarding the non-conforming zone change approval process. The reports
were reviewed to identify recommendations by the planning staff (PS), town boards (TB), Planning Commission (PC), and Board of County Commissioners (BCC). All the data collected were compiled in a Microsoft Excel database, indicating the number of the non-conforming zone changes, the town board area where the zone change was applied, and the recommendations from the four different levels of decision making in the process of land use approval (see Appendix I). The zone changes were categorized by each community's already-established town boards in the Valley.

The six selected town boards and their formal abbreviations already in use by Clark County are listed in Table 3. The location of each town board is shown on the map located in the Appendix.

Table 3  Clark County's Town Boards/Advisory Councils

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Town Board</th>
<th>Initial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enterprise Town Board</td>
<td>ET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Valley Town Board</td>
<td>SV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winchester/Paradise Town Board</td>
<td>WP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitney Town Board</td>
<td>WT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunrise Manor Town Board and</td>
<td>SM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone Mountain Town Board.</td>
<td>LM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Organization of Data

All zone changes are organized by an 8-digit code. The first two letters are ZC, abbreviations for the words"Zone Change." The next four digits indicate the specific series number of that particular ZC. The last two digits represent the year when the zone change was requested. For example, ZC-0044-02 is a zone change approved in 2002.
The subject recommendations from each non-conforming zone change were summarized using the type of decision that was made at each level of decision-making. The summary of the recommendations is represented in Table 4. If a non-conforming zone change request was approved, it is indicated by the letter A. If the request was denied it is indicated by the letter D. Any non-conforming zone change request that was approved subject to reduction of density or intensity is indicated by the letter R.

Table 4 Types of Recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If Final Recommendation Was:</th>
<th>Represented By:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approved</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denied</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Appendix shows the randomly sampled non-conforming zone change numbers (ZC), the town board initials as indicated above, and recommendations from the planning staff (PS), town boards (TB), Planning Commission (PC), and Board of County Commissioners (BCC).

The research followed the statistical model seen in the book Statistics by McClave and Sincich (2003) and the SPSS computer program. Since the data collected are non-numerical in nature, the qualitative variables were classified into classes. Obtaining approval in the non-conforming zone change process in Clark County involves different types of recommendations from each level of decision-making (see Table 4). For example, a request that was denied by planning staff, approved by the town board, Planning Commission, and Board of County Commissioners will be classified as D A A.
A. These accumulated answers are listed as one class, and will be reviewed to find its frequency in relation to the total number of classes. By running the SPSS computer statistical program, the results show a total of thirty eighty classes with variety of recommendations from all four levels of decision-making. The classes and their meaning are summarized in Tables 5 and 6. Table 5 shows the 38 class types, their frequencies, and percentages, while Table 6 shows the 38 classes, individually defined, and explained in relation to the rest of the other classes.
Table 5  Summary of 38 Classes Indicating Recommendations From Different Levels and Stages of Clark County's Non-Conforming Zone Change Decision Makers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAAAA</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>37.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDA</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAAA</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADA</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAAA</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDDA</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDA</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRRR</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RARR</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDRR</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAAA</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AADA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DARA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADAA</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DARR</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDRR</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDRA</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDSS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARSS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRSS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSSA</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARSS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RYR</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YSAIN</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RADN</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDAN</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AASN</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AARN</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARRN</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRAN</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDDA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDSS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YARN</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YRD</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RYAR</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YRDA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YRDR</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YARR</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The summary of the 38 classes obtained from Table 5 are defined and described in detail on Table 6.

To further categorize and help the evaluation and analysis portion of the research, the classes presented in Table 5 and defined in Table 6 were narrowed down and combined, according to their similarities and meanings to create seven classes. The seven classes are created using the denial (D) recommendation as a main or strongest part of the class. For example, if one level of decision-making recommended denial (D) on a non-conforming zone change, and the other three levels either approved or reduced it, then the one level denied the application will be the main subject of the new class. The other levels will all be treated as if they had approved the application. For example, in Class R D R R the planning staff recommended reduction in density or intensity (R) of the non-conforming zone change request, the town board recommended denial (D), and both the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners also recommended reduction in density or intensity (R). In this case, all classes who have a denial (D) from the town board and an approval (A) or reduction (R) from the other levels of decision making will be combined to form one class such as $^R_{/A}D^A_{/A}R^R_{/A}$. Also, for a class where one level of decision making recommended reduction and the remaining three levels represented approval, this class was added on the denial classes. The following seven tables show how the classes are combined and formulated to create new classes.

Table 7 represents all the non-conforming zone changes denied (D) by the planning staff but were approved (A) or reduced (R) by the town boards, Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners.
Table 6 Definition of the 38 Classes Indicating Recommendations From Different Levels of Clark County's Non-Conforming Zone Changes Decision Makers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Description of the Recommendations From the Four Levels of Decision-Making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAAA</td>
<td>Represents the approval decision of the non-conforming zone changes by all levels of decision-making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AADA</td>
<td>Represents the approval of the non-conforming zone changes by staff, Town Board (TB), and Board of County Commissioners (BCC) and denial by the Planning Commission (PC).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AARA</td>
<td>Represents the approval of the non-conforming zone changes by staff, TB, and BCC, however the PC recommended reduction of density of intensity (approved a lower zoning than requested).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AARR</td>
<td>Represents the approval of the non-conforming zone changes by staff, TB, however, the PC and BCC recommended reduction in zoning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADAA</td>
<td>Represents the approval of the non-conforming zone changes by staff, PC and BCC; however, the Town Board denied the application.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADDA</td>
<td>Represents the approval of the non-conforming zone changes by staff and the Board of County Commissioners; however, the Town Board and PC denied it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARAA</td>
<td>Represents the approval of the non-conforming zone changes by staff, PC, and BCC, however the TB recommended reduction in zoning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARRR</td>
<td>Represents the approval of the non-conforming zone changes by staff; however, the TB, PC and BCC recommended reduction in zoning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAAA</td>
<td>Represents the denial of the non-conforming zone changes by staff; however, TB, PC, and BCC approved the applications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DADA</td>
<td>Represents the denial of the non-conforming zone changes by staff and PC; however, the TB and BCC approved the applications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DARA</td>
<td>Represents the denial of the non-conforming zone changes by staff, and reduction in zoning by the PC, but the TB and BCC recommended approval.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DARR</td>
<td>Represents the denial of the non-conforming zone changes by staff, and reduction in zoning by the PC and BCC; however, the TB recommended approval.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDAA</td>
<td>Represents the denial of the non-conforming zone changes by staff and TB; however, PC and BCC approved them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDAR</td>
<td>Represents the denial of the non-conforming zone changes by staff and TB; the PC recommended approval and the BCC recommended reduction in zoning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDDA</td>
<td>Represents the denial of the non-conforming zone changes by three levels; staff, TB, and PC; however the BCC approved the applications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDDR</td>
<td>Represents the denial of the non-conforming zone changes by three levels; staff, TB, and PC; however the BCC recommended reduction in zoning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDRA</td>
<td>Represents the denial of the non-conforming zone changes by staff, TB, and reduction in zoning by PC; however, the BBC approved the applications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDRR</td>
<td>Represents the denial of the non-conforming zone changes by staff and Town Board but the PC and BCC recommended reduction in zoning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRAA</td>
<td>Represents the denial of the non-conforming zone changes by staff, and TB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>recommended reduction in zoning; however, the PC and BCC approved the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>applications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRDA</td>
<td>Represents the denial of the non-conforming zone changes by staff and PC,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the TB recommended reduction in zoning; however, the BCC approved the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>applications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRRA</td>
<td>Represents the denial of the non-conforming zone changes by staff and the TB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and PC recommended reduction in zoning but the BCC approved the applications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAAA</td>
<td>Represents the recommendation of reduction in zoning of the non-conforming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>zone changes by staff; however, the TB, PC and BCC approved them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RADR</td>
<td>Represents the approval of the non-conforming zone changes by the TB, and the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PC denied; however, staff and BCC recommended reduction in zoning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RARR</td>
<td>Represents the recommendation of reduction in zoning of the non-conforming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>zone changes by staff, PC and BCC; however, the TB recommended approval.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDAA</td>
<td>Represents the denial of the non-conforming zone changes by the Town Board,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>staff recommended reduction in zoning; however, the PC and BCC approved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDAR</td>
<td>Represents the denial of the non-conforming zone changes by the Town, the PC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>recommended approval; however, staff and BCC recommended reduction in zoning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDDA</td>
<td>Represents the denial of the non-conforming zone changes by the TB and PC;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>staff recommended reduction in zoning; however, the BCC approved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDDR</td>
<td>Represents the denial of the non-conforming zone changes by the TB and PC;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>however, they were recommended reduction in zoning by staff and BCC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDRA</td>
<td>Represents the denial of the non-conforming zone changes by the TB, reduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in zoning by staff and PC; however, they were approved by the BCC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDRR</td>
<td>Represents the denial of the non-conforming zone changes by the TB; however,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the applications were recommended reduction in zoning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAAA</td>
<td>Represents the reduction in zoning of the non-conforming zone changes by staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and TB; however, the PC and BCC approved the applications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRAR</td>
<td>Represents the reduction in zoning of the non-conforming zone changes by staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TB and BCC; the PC recommended approval.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRDA</td>
<td>Represents the denial of the non-conforming zone changes by the PC, staff and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TB recommended reduction in zoning; however, the BCC approved them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRDR</td>
<td>Represents the denial of the non-conforming zone changes by the PC but they</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>were recommended reduction in zoning by staff, TB and BCC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRRR</td>
<td>Represents a reduction on zoning of the non-conforming zone changes by all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>levels of decision-making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RARR</td>
<td>Represents the approval of the non-conforming zone changes by TB; however,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the three levels (TB, PC and BCC) recommended reduction in zoning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 7  Applications Denied Only by Planning Staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Percentage of Denials</th>
<th>New Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DAAA</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DARA</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DARR</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>$D^A_{/A}^R_{/A}^R_{/R}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRAA</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRRA</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAAA</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8 represents all non-conforming zone changes denied (D) by the town board but were approved (A) or reduced (R) by the planning staff, Planning Commission, and Board of County Commissioners.

Table 8  ApplicationsDenied Only by Town Boards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Percentage of Denials</th>
<th>New Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADAA</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDAA</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDAR</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>$A^A_{/R}D^A_{/A}^R_{/A}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDRA</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDRR</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARAA</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9 represents all non-conforming zone changes denied (D) by the planning staff and town board but approved (A) or reduced (R) by the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners.
Table 9 Applications Denied by Planning Staff and Town Board

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Percentage of Denials</th>
<th>New Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DDAA</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDAR</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDRA</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>DD(_R/_A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDRR</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRAA</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10 represents all non-conforming zone changes denied (D) by the planning staff, town board, or both but were approved (A) or reduced (R) by the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners.

Table 10 Applications Denied by Planning Staff, Town Boards, or Both

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Percentage of Denials</th>
<th>New Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D(_A/_R)/A(_R/_A)</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A(_R/_D)/A(_R/_A)</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>DD/DD(_R/_A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DD(_R/_A)/A(_R/_A)</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11 represents all non-conforming zone changes denied (D) by the Planning Commission but were approved (A) or reduced (R) by the planning staff, town board, and Board of County Commissioners.

Table 11 Applications Denied by the Planning Commission

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Percentage of Denials</th>
<th>New Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AADA</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RADR</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRDA</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>R(_R/_D)/A(_A/_A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRDR</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 12 represents all the non-conforming zone changes denied (D) by the planning staff, town board, and Planning Commission but were approved by the Board of County Commissioners.

Table 12  Applications Denied by Planning Staff, Town Board, and Planning Commission

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Percentage of Denials</th>
<th>New Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DDDA</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDDDR</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>DDD\textsuperscript{A/R}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13 represents all non-conforming zone changes denied (D) by the planning staff and Planning Commission but were approved (A) or reduced (R) by the town board and Board of County Commissioners.

Table 13  Applications Denied by Planning Staff and Planning Commission

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Percentage of Denials</th>
<th>New Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DADA</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRDA</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>\textsuperscript{D/A/D/A}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14 shows the summary of the seven new classes created from the data represented in Tables 7 to 13, using the total percentage from each class created.
Table 14  **Overall Denial Recommendations by the Four Levels**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Class</th>
<th>Percentage of Denials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$D^{R}<em>{A}/D^{R}</em>{A}$</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$D^{R}<em>{A}/D^{R}</em>{A}$</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$D^{R}<em>{A}/D^{R}</em>{A}$</td>
<td>37.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$D^{R}<em>{A}/D^{R}</em>{A}$</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$D^{R}<em>{A}/D^{R}</em>{A}$</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2** Newly Created Classes and Their Corresponding Action Percentages

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CHAPTER 4

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Analysis of the Data

An in-depth analysis of the historical trend of the Clark County non-conforming zone change approval process may identify the degree to which current concerns and policies regarding the importance of its land use plan and continuous approval of non-conforming zone changes can be improved. The study attempts to test the two hypotheses and find whether the negative public perception exists and questioning if it does, is it justified? The purpose of using the historical data of what happened at different levels of the non-conforming zone change process as shown on Table 5 and the summary on Table 14 is to determine whether past experiences can support the alleged negative public perception if it exists as stated in the Clark County’s new regulations. In addition, the goal of the research is to find whether the change was needed. The findings will be used to propose recommendations to improve and enhance the Clark County’s new non-conforming zone change process. As an example, Moskowitz (1990) argues that planning and management is an interactive learning process, whereby information gained from past experiences is used to reassess future actions, thus reducing uncertainty in subsequent management decisions.
Statistical Analysis of Research Questions

The statistical evaluation and analysis of this research focused on testing the two hypotheses. The two hypotheses are: 1) Yes, there were too many non-conforming zone changes approved that did not adhere to the master plan. The guidelines used to test the hypothesis were as follows: a) if final decision by the Board of County Commissioners is the same as staff's recommendations in a large number of approval cases, I would conclude that the Board of County Commissioners were following master plan, or b) if final decision by the Board of County Commissioners is not the same as the staff recommendation in a large number of cases, I would conclude they did not follow the master plans; and 2) Yes, consistency of decisions among levels of decision making is low. The guidelines used to test the hypothesis were as follows: a) if final Board of County Commissioners decision same as planning staff, town board, and Planning Commission in a large number of cases, I would conclude that there is consistency and public participation in the non-conforming zone change process, or b) if final decision is not same as the planning staff, town board, and Planning Commission in a large number of cases, I would conclude there is no consistency.

The non-conforming zone change recommendations from each level of decision makers are summarized in Tables 7 to 14. The overall results show 37% of all non-conforming zone changes were approved at all levels (AAAA). All levels reduced the density or intensity of the requested non-conforming zone changes by 3%, and 60% of all non-conforming zone changes were denied by the planning staff, town board, and Planning Commission, but were later approved by the Board of County Commissioners. The planning staff, alone, recommended denial on 23.1% of the non-conforming zone changes approved.
changes researched, but the requests were later approved or reduced by the town boards, Planning Commission, and Board of County Commissioners (See Table 7). The town boards, alone, denied 9.7% of the non-conforming zone changes researched, but the requests were approved or reduced by the planning staff, Planning Commission, and Board of County Commissioners (See Table 8). The planning staff and town boards, together, denied 20.7% of the non-conforming zone changes, but the requests were later approved or reduced by the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners (See Table 9). Therefore, the planning staff denied a total of 43.8% (23.1% + 20.7% = 43.8%) of the non-conforming zone changes researched while the town boards denied 30.4% (20.7% + 9.7% = 30.4%) of the non-conforming zone changes researched.

The Planning Commission denied 1.6% of the non-conforming zone changes researched, but the requests were approved or reduced by the planning staff, town boards, and Board of County Commissioners (See Table 11). The planning staff, town boards, and Planning Commission denied 2.8% of the non-conforming zone changes researched, but the requests were later approved by the Board of County Commissioners (See Table 12). The results did not show a link between the planning staff and Planning Commission in terms of the numbers of non-conforming zone changes denied by the two levels. It shows 0.7% of all non-conforming zone changes researched were denied by the two levels (See Table 13). From the data collected, the results indicate that the Planning Commission almost always did not go along with planning staff recommendations.

The results also show 53.5% of all non-conforming zone changes were denied by the planning staff, town board, or both (See Table 10). It can be inferred, given almost half of the surveyed requests, that the results do support the alleged public perception that land
use plans are unimportant to the non-conforming zone change process because non-conforming zone changes were continuously being approved. If the planning staff strongly stated that the non-conforming zone changes were not in conformance with the land use plan, and these recommendations were supported by the local representatives in the respective town boards, but their additional recommendations were still not enough to convince the Board of County Commissioners to reject the request, then there remains a need to find the reason for these continuous approvals and what improvements can be made to improve the process. The overall results of final recommendation percentages are listed on Table 15 below:

Table 15  Overall Results of Final Recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Conforming ZC Denied by PS and TB</td>
<td>53.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Conforming ZC Denied by PS, TB and PC</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Conforming ZC Denied by PC</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Conforming ZC Denied by TB and PC</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Conforming ZC Denied by PS and PC</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Conforming ZC Reduced by All Levels</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Conforming ZC Approved by All Levels</td>
<td>37.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The continuous approval of the non-conforming zone changes lends itself to the possible perception of why the public has a negative perception about the unimportance of land use plans. The circumstances can create and perpetuate a bad public image of the county’s planning process, making it seem as though it is acceptable to overlook land use plans.

Forester (1989) argues that sometimes an organizational structure of the bureaucracies in which planners work can unintentionally cause planners to misrepresent facts or write statements that can be misleading in their intentions for important issues. The results of the research do not support the argument; however, there is indication the staff does not provide strong recommendations of why they think the application should be denied. For example, the reports from non-conforming zone change, ZC-1550-95 (See Appendix II), the planning staff stated that the non-conforming zone changes did not conform to the master plan due to density and the type of units proposed; however, there weren’t any detailed information or strong statements found to emphasize their denials. When the planning staff provides an alternative to a denial, the accompanying recommendations it gives help the upper level of decision makers to approve the application without feeling responsible.

Clark County’s tremendous growth has created pressure for developers to request non-conforming zone changes, and the high pressures have caused not only commissioners but also the planning staff to approve many non-conforming zone change requests. The trend has created development and improved the economy; however, there are also negative results that impact the community, such as increased pollution and reduction in open space. Sometimes the approving of non-conforming zone changes that
do not conform to the master plans can be justifiable, often citing that the government and elected officials are looking for solutions to create more revenue for the local government so it will be better able to provide social services to the growing population (Fainstein, 1991). This research, however, did not find anything that can explain the reasoning for its continuously approving non-conforming zone changes.

Regardless of why there was a continuous approval of non-conforming zone changes, it should not have to create negative impacts to the citizens of Clark County. When planning or approving non-conforming zone changes it is good to consider all components of the system such as air quality, transportation system, and water and find out how they are going to interact and affect each other to maximize output results.

The summary findings from this research show 47% of 687 non-conforming zone changes researched were denied by planning staff, but were later approved by the Board of County Commissioners. These findings support the first hypothesis that non-conforming zone change approvals did not follow the master plan. In addition, the Board of County Commissioners recommended approval and the planning staff, town board, and Planning Commission recommended denial on 60% of the cases. The findings support the second hypothesis that public involvement and consistency among the decision makers are low. These observations may raise some concerns of what the job and intent of the town boards or citizen advisory council are in the Clark County’s non-conforming zone change process. According to the Nevada Revised Statue (NRS 278), town boards are advisory boards or councils. Their recommendations are strictly advisory and do not have any official or legal weight. The Board of County Commissioners can evaluate and incorporate its recommendations into its final decision or may choose to
disregard it altogether. It can safely be assumed that the Board of County Commissioners hired the planning staff as professionals to enforce and provide them with recommendations on guiding planning principles. Therefore, the Board of County Commissioners final approval of non-conforming zone changes can incorporate planning staff and town board recommendations.

The summary results on Table 15 show 53.5% of the total non-conforming zone changes researched were recommended denial by the planning staff, Town Board, or both, indicating that the requests were not suitable for a particular area because of their density or intensity or were not compatible to the surroundings though the applications were ultimately approved by the Board of County Commissioners. The tendency of approving non-conforming zone changes without incorporating the town board’s recommendations may have created a negative perception from the public because members of the community feel their concerns are not valued in the decisions that affect them.

It can be concluded that the intent of the new non-conforming zone change regulation is to emphasize restoring the public’s involvement and empowering it to participate and become more responsive to their communities. Tonn, English, and Travis (2000) state that understanding differences among decision-making styles will help environmental decision makers to choose the appropriate approach to public participation. Although Tonn, English, and Travis (2000) were discussing environmental decision-making, the framework can also be applicable to land use decision-making.

The inconsistency among the levels of decision makers in the planning process may be due to lack of a common vision and coordination of what all levels want for the
community. For example, some of the town boards’ recommendations did not indicate in detail why it was denying a particular application. A specific example is non-conforming zone change, ZC-0303-90 (See Appendix II) within the Sunrise Manor Town Board area, which was recommended denial by the town board because the request was too high in density, compared to what already existed in that area. In this case, the town board could have added information of what existed in the surrounding area or added signatures from the neighbors within that area to make its denial recommendation stronger.

The findings from the research can be interpreted that town boards are being weak and that their recommendations were not regularly incorporated on final decisions by the Board of County Commissioners. In addition, the town boards’ recommendations that were denied often offered no explanation or, at best, sometimes comprised of one sentence. This minimal response does not really show the conviction of why the non-conforming zone change should be denied (See Appendix II). Because town board recommendations were often not followed at higher levels, it raises concern of whether town boards believe they are being heard, therefore, did not put forth the amount of effort needed to defend their communities.

Similarly, staff indicated denial of an application request with strong planning principles on why the request was not suitable on a particular parcel. However, they gave the Commissioners an option to a “denied” recommendation by indicating that “if approved” this is another alternative. By providing an alternative recommendation to the denial, it overshadows the strong intent of the denial recommendation.

As Vasu (1979) points out the planner’s recommendations play a major role on many policy-related matters that involve real economic stakes, and as a result, the role of
planners is a vital element in the politics of planning. In addition, planners can influence the political process with their routine recommendations with strong policy content, and through their power to influence the agenda of community decision-making (Vasu, 1979). The results do not really support Vasu’s (1979) argument, as it shows that with planning staff (PS) strong recommendations to deny non-conforming zone changes and having additional support from the town boards to deny the applications (53.5%) of non-conforming zone changes did not influence the final decision makers—the Board of County Commissioners.

Planning staff needs to empower the citizens of Clark County by educating them of values that are important to their communities, and by doing so it will influence the public to participate more in shaping the existing planning politics. Rake (2004), in his news report titled “Task Force on Growth to Focus Most on County, Commissioners Say Poor Planning Caused Bad Decisions in Past,” indicates that few commissioners thought that there is an immediate need to address growth, its effects, and how the community is to be shaped in the near future. In this news report, one commissioner indicated that some of the negative impacts of growth were caused by “poor zoning and planning decisions” made by earlier decision makers (Rake, 2004, 2B). The result in this research supports that statement and agrees that there is an immediate need to address growth, as well as determining what the Department of Planning did wrong and why. Moreover, the Department of Planning should find ways of bringing together all stakeholders, in order to work together for the common goal.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The objective of this research was to find information to test the two hypotheses. The research findings support the public perception as justified in believing land use plans are unimportant to the non-conforming zoning change process because they were not used as intended. The research also finds low public involvement and consistency among the levels of decision making in the non-conforming zone change process.

These objectives were addressed by identifying the reasons stated in the approved new regulations regarding the non-conforming zone change process. The report stated that the change was because of the “negative public perception” that land use plans were unimportant in the non-conforming zone change process and there was little consistency among decision makers. The reasons for this perception were that the Board of County Commissioners continued to approve non-conforming zone changes, which made the public ask whether master plans were truly important, as indicated in the Clark County Code or the Nevada Revised Statue.

The research findings show 53.5% of 687 non-conforming zone changes researched were recommended denial by the planning staff and town boards, but were later approved by the Board of County Commissioners. In addition, the results show 60% of non-conforming zone changes researched were denied by planning staff, town board, and Planning Commission; but were later approved by the Board of County Commissioners.
These findings support the second hypothesis that there is low consistency among the various levels of decision makers in the non-conforming zone change process. Communication among stakeholders is an important component in building consistency in planning decision making. When the parties lose trust in each other, there is a chance that they will have minimal communication between them (Fukuyama, 1995). Moreover, the findings show that monitoring and evaluating is essential and needs to be part of the non-conforming zone change process in order to provide feedback for improvements in process or policy-making.

The research conducted in this study identifies areas for improvement in the non-conforming zone change process and these are: 1) encouraging greater public participation through the various town boards, 2) improving consistency in planning decision making, and 3) conducting monitoring and evaluating to get feedback. Public participation is fundamental to the democratic process since it creates pressure on agencies or government to be answerable to the public they serve (Healey, 1992). Public participation enables the inclusion of all people with different economic and social backgrounds in decision-making and has the potential to strengthen the planning profession by increasing the visibility and value of planning in the public's eye (Laurian, 2004).

The role of public participation is much debated. For example, according to Berry (1999), one school of thought holds that citizens are a nuisance, and their participation should be avoided. He adds another view that the public participation process is little more than tokenism and is ineffective because citizens are not included in the actual
decision making. This argument would imply that the people affected feel there is a big
gap between government agencies and the public they serve.

How is the Clark County Department of Comprehensive Planning going to achieve
public participation and restore public confidence? To achieve a good public participation
process, a planning organization has to allow citizens to shape its planning decisions and
outcomes while increasing their levels of social and political empowerment (Laurian,
2004). Public participation in the Las Vegas Valley has been evaluated in three previous
studies conducted by Turnier, Garcia, and Wadkins, and their conclusions are almost the
same--there is some public participation, but it is limited. The problem here lies at the
degree of public participation.

According to Turnier (1999) in “Public Participation in Clark County, Nevada: An
Analysis of Public Participation in the Land Use Planning Process,” public participation
in Clark County allows citizens to be informed only by participating in the planning
process. The upper rungs on the ladder of decision making (i.e. planning staff, Planning
Commission, and Board of County Commissioners), though they inform citizens of the
process, solicits input from them without a proper method of incorporating their input in
the final reports or decision making. Town boards, for example, are considered advisory
entities that are supposed to forward their recommendations to the Planning Commission
and the Board of County Commissioners who appointed them. The results from the data
show town board recommendations were not always taken into consideration in the final
approval of non-conforming zone changes.

Another study on public participation was conducted by Garcia in 2000, who wrote
“The Effectiveness of Public Participation in Preparing a Regional Plan in the Las Vegas
Valley: A Case Study.” She concludes that public participation in the Las Vegas Valley does exist, but with variations to its degree of effectiveness.

The third study on public participation was written by Wadkins in 1995, titled “Citizen Participation Impact on City Land Use Planning: A comparison of Henderson Ordinances and the City of Las Vegas General Plan.” Findings in this study indicate that the highest levels of public participation were observed at neighborhood meetings compared to other levels of public meetings, such as Planning Commission or Board of County Commissioners meetings.

The three studies mentioned above were conducted specifically on public participation in regional plan/land use plan in the Las Vegas Valley. None of the studies discussed public participation in the zoning or non-conforming zoning change process. One can safely infer there is little difference in public participation in this study from the three additional studies conducted. However, it is important to note that the land use plan process is different from non-conforming zone change process, and the participation levels may reflect that. In this research, it is difficult to determine the exact level of public participation by evaluating data obtained in public recommendations through the town boards, representatives appointed by the Board of County Commissioners to represent their communities.

The research shows few samples of town board (See Appendix II) comments and correspondence regarding different zone changes, as required by the old non-conforming zone change process. For example, ZC-1794-94, the Sunrise Manor Town Board recommended the zone change denial because they believed it to impact their neighborhood too heavily and because there was overwhelming opposition from the
neighbors. Another is ZC-1843-00 (See Appendix II), which was recommended denial by the Enterprise Town Board. The comments indicated the application was applied before the area started developing, and that the small parcel did not make a good site for minor commercial development.

Another example of a town board recommendation of non-conforming zone change can be seen in ZC-0382-02 (See Appendix II) where the Spring Valley Town Board recommended denial because the application did not conform to the master plan. The town board suggested to the Clark County Planning Department to do a study of the residences on the Desert Inn corridor, and if the study finds transitional zoning is appropriate, then a comprehensive plan should be implemented for an orderly transition, rather than spot zoning. However, the non-conforming zone change was approved without incorporating the town board’s recommendation to deny the application (See Appendix II).

Some of the zone changes recommended denial and those with accompanying strong findings needed additional support from the upper levels of those doing the decision making. However, many of these non-conforming zone changes were approved.

The new regulation added hosting a neighborhood meeting as a new, mandatory step before attending the town board meeting. The new process requires the developer requesting a non-conforming zone change to send public notification to all neighbors within a 1,500 feet radius from the subject parcel(s) to allow neighbors to discuss issues of concern. It also gives the developer an opportunity to answer all public questions and make changes in either the design or request. The decision to include a neighborhood meeting is a step forward in increasing public participation and reducing any negative
perceptions from a lack of public participation. However, a neighborhood meeting is not enough by itself.

The department needs to restore faith in the citizens of Clark County so they believe that their participation in the process of non-conforming zone change is, indeed, valued and taken seriously by decision makers. Beierle and Konisky (2000) also suggest that public participation can be achieved by including the most important social goals of public participation, which is incorporating public values into the decision making process, resolving conflict among competing interests, and restoring a degree of trust in public agencies.

Thomas (1998) states that trust is often considered an important factor in establishing and maintaining relationships between public agencies and the general public. Public trust in government implies that citizens must place their trust in government agencies and its employees to get trust back in return (Thomas, 1998). Furthermore, Lowry, Adler, and Miller (1997) argue that if government agencies are interested in the publics’ actions, the public is more likely to participate. Likewise, Docherry, Goodland, and Paddison (2001) and Gopalan (1997) state that trust in government is important because it improves the level of public participation in any community.

In order to instill public confidence, the Clark County Department of Comprehensive Planning needs to invest more resources and time in emphasizing it is truly sharing in the social values of the community it serves. Fukuyama (1995) argues that people in high-trust societies are able to form middle-tier institutions that are competitive and operate more efficiently than in societies where the public has low trust.
It is important to note that public participation, alone, will not improve the non-conforming zone change process. From the results of the research, it may be safe to state that consistency among different levels of decision makers in the planning process needs to be improved. Improving any system or process within an organization needs both effort and willingness from the stakeholders to work together in a logical and professional manner. In other word, they need to have a common vision of what they want for their community. Stakeholders are people of different levels of education and experiences in a single organization that share the same values. In support of that argument, Kumar, et al. (2000) point out that when an organization is willing to work together to accomplish shared objectives, that cooperation is called collaboration.

The results of this study indicate that consistency among the various levels of decision makers in the planning process is low. For example, staff reviewed and prepared reports for non-conforming zone changes, indicating that a particular non-conforming zone change request was not appropriate on a certain area, citing compatibility, intensity, or density reasons. However, the upper level in decision making did not take any of these recommendations to deny or reduce the request. For example, ZC-0387-99 (See Appendix) was a non-conforming zone change request from R-E (Rural Estates Residential) to C-2 and M-1 zone for a shopping center and industrial complex. Staff researched the request and prepared a report indicating that C-2 and M-1 were too intense for the location, particularly since the site abuts an existing Rural Neighborhood Preservation and has a single-family residence that was within 330 feet of the site. Staff recommended denial of the M-1 (Light Manufacturing) zoning and reduction of the C-2 (General Commercial) zoning to C-1 (Local Business) zoning.
The Spring Valley Town Board recommended denial. The Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners, however, approved the C-2 zoning as requested and reduced the M-1 zoning to M-D (Designed Manufacturing) zoning. The town board approved the C-2 zoning as requested and reduced the M-1 zoning to M-D zoning. According to planning principles, the planning staff thought the request was too intense for the area because it was close to the R-E zoning, which is low density zoning. In addition, reducing the M-1 zoning to M-D zoning really did not alter that it was still slated as a high-intense use area.

Successful consistency among decision makers in the non-conforming zone change process is achieved only if all participants involved in the process share the same values and beliefs about their community. When there is a difference in both the values and the way decision makers want their community to be in 10 or even 50 years, the probability of having differing opinions on any subject matter within the planning process will be higher. Public participation and consistency in planning decisions enables the organization to restore public trust toward the organization, and overall, it improves the planning process.

Newman, Barnes, Sullivan, and Knops (2004) argue that the role of the state shifts from that of “governing” to a more direct control of “governance,” in which the state must collaborate with a wide range of stakeholders in the process, including the public, private, and voluntary sectors that operate across the different levels of decision-making. The findings indicate that in addition to public participation and consistency in planning and decision making, the department needs to have a continuous monitoring and
evaluating process in order to provide feedback on what is happening with the non-conforming zone change applications and the planning process in general.

The research revealed that the Department of Comprehensive Planning did not have a continuous research program on non-conforming zone changes that considers past data to evaluate the process or policy in order to obtain feedback. Baum (2001) states that evaluation is the systematic review of both the operations and outcomes of a program or policy that contributes information to help the program or policy improve. In agreement, McLoughlin (1969) points out that planning research is an important tool that provides feedback to planning staff and decision makers on how the system or process is viewed. To change an ordinance or regulation without really knowing what elements already worked in the old process and what needs modification is not suitable. It is important to get feedback that can be used to evaluate prior experiences and establish an improved process in order to create a livable community.

Berke and Conroy (2000) did an evaluation of 30 comprehensive plans, and their recommendation is that planning staff needs to establish a connection between plans, implementation efforts, and the end results of balanced community planning. In agreement with this finding is Talen (1996) who adds that evaluation of performance warrants investigation beyond what is found in past documents—it enables planning staff to focus from rhetoric to hard, relevant information. Therefore, information gained from past experiences is useful in assessing the progress of a new process or policy.

The quality of monitoring and evaluating a project depends on the resources and time allocated. Seasons (2003) points out that monitoring and evaluating should be a continuous process. However, there is also a need to be selective in what gets monitored.
and evaluated for the purpose of acquiring feedback (Seasons, 2003). In addition, Seasons (2003) states that when doing monitoring and evaluating there should be a careful and proper method in selecting indicators that will help planners to identify issues and opportunities, and overall, create better-informed advice that will play a major role in improving decision making.

Of equal importance to monitoring, evaluating, and selection criteria is the organizational structure through which a request moves. Working within a clear structure is a major component in achieving change because policy or process change evolves through cycles, with each cycle more or less constrained by time, funds, political support, and other events in the community (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Denzin and Lincoln argue that research is but a minor among the number of frequently conflicting and challenging sources that seek to manipulate what is an ongoing and constantly evolving process.

This study offers several findings drawn from the historical review of the non-conforming zone changes. The results support the two hypotheses presented in this research. The public was justified in believing that land use plans were unimportant because they were not used as intended by the Clark County Development Code and Nevada Revised Statue. The town boards that were supposed to be representative of their communities did not play that role, according to the results from the research. The results also show little collaboration among the different stakeholders. The statements made by the new regulation indicating the need to “alleviate the negative public perception,” restore public involvement, and enhance consistency among different decision makers in the non-conforming zone changes process are a step in the right direction. However, the
Department of Comprehensive Planning did not have any prior feedback that enabled it to understand what areas, specifically, needed improvements.

The Department of Comprehensive Planning will need to initiate a comprehensive community program meant to reach all citizens of Clark County. Smith (1993) states if a community does not have a rightful planning attitude from the appropriate elected official, those who elect him or her won't help to solve any problems or save any money, and their community will be of less value. Baum (2001) believes that community initiatives consider communities as their objects of which the major job is not just to change individuals but also to effectively cast and turn around the conditions in which they live. Rydin (1998) state that better planning can be achieved by integration of different components of the environment at a different scale into a broader, more coherent framework. This method allows the planning program to review the relationship between each component.

In addition, the decision makers of any planning process will need to consider not only the physical environment but also the way community perceives and utilizes each component of the environment. How should the Department of Comprehensive Planning emphasize public participation? It can be safely inferred that it should start by training citizens to add value to their communities, establishing a sense of ownership, and allowing them to participate more fully in the non-conforming zone change process.

Conclusions

In order to improve the non-conforming zone change process, the Department of Comprehensive Planning can provide training to the various participants on how to work
together across all levels of decision making in order to achieve common goals and build a better community. McLoughlin (1969) states that planning staff and decision makers demand to know what the ramifications from a housing development, a factory, a shopping center, or place of worship are and what problems are likely to arise in what order, with what magnitudes, and in what areas.

Likewise, Clark County’s planning staff and decision makers must strive to understand their community environment as a changing backdrop against which individual decisions are made, while at the same time recognizing that there is a significant effect and a set of subsequent actions altering that backdrop. In order to manage Clark County’s growth, the Department of Comprehensive Planning, town board members, Planning Commission, and Board of County Commissioners must treat the community as a system that is made up of subsets with interrelated parts, and in some cases, a complete whole in itself.

McLoughlin (1969) argues that when making decisions about one component of a system, there must be consideration of the other components in the system that may affect or cause impacts to other system(s). In a like manner, Clark County should establish a consistency in planning process that considers all components affecting the environment. For example, approving many non-conforming zone change requests for residential development should force decision makers to know the impact they may cause in the areas of transportation, air quality, or solid waste.

In order for the Clark County Comprehensive Planning Department to meet its ethical responsibilities, it must conduct the non-conforming zone change process as learning, exploring, discovering, and experimenting process. Sege, Lleiner, Roberts, Ross, and
Smith (1994) state that competent policy makers know that errors will come about as policies are implemented, and based on specific doubts, they design organizational capabilities in advance to embrace possible errors as soon as they occur, using the resulting understanding to constantly adjust the policy.

With all the findings from this research, it raises a bigger question: Is this bad planning? That cannot be determined in this study. To fully answer that question, a researcher would need to cover all approved and denied non-conforming zone changes in Clark County.

Recommendations for Future Study

Based on the results of this research, a number of areas for potential research related to the improvement of the non-conforming zone change process and planning, in general, have been identified. First, there is a need to analyze and evaluate all non-conforming zone changes in Clark County to determine whether these changes are merely a matter of “bad planning.”

Second, other factors in the non-conforming zone change process affect public participation such as socio-economic status and the affluence of the areas in which people live. To find whether there is any connection between socio-economic and non-conforming zone changes, it would be good to analyze non-conforming zone changes by areas, find demographic data showing the income from same areas, and make a comparison with the number of non-conforming zone changes approved or denied from those areas.
Finally, a detailed replication of the approach done in this research using non-conforming zone changes approved after the new regulations can give additional feedback of whether the change worked as envisioned.
APPENDIX I AND II ON CD-ROM
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