

OTTAWA

'Every day is a different day'



Photo by Elliot J. Sutherland/The Ottawa Herald/The Ottawa Herald

Wynndee Lee, director of planning and codes for the City of Ottawa, wears many hats in her position. Planners must know certain laws, the math and science that go along with construction, as well as communication and concepts such as the psychology of how people feel about space, she said.

Lee serves public through versatility

By JODIE GARCIA
Herald Staff Writer

It's a job that requires knowledge from a wide range of fields: math, science, psychology, communication and law.

As director of planning and codes for the City of Ottawa, Wynndee Lee said her days can be unpredictable and harried, but she embraces the issues and challenges that develop.

"Every day is a different day," she said.

Lee said parts of her days are spent like any other manager, dealing with issues like staffing and scheduling. She said she also works with other city departments.

Lee also is a point of contact for developers and those with upcoming projects, and she and her staff provide information about issues — rezoning requests or site plans, for example — that come before the Ottawa Planning Commission and/or the Ottawa City Commission for approval.

Lee said she didn't set out to be a planner but found that path after taking a job as a city program manager in Ottawa in 1992.

In that position, Lee managed grants and dealt with nuisance enforcement. She said the city manager at the time encouraged her to consider a master's degree.

Lee attended the University of Kansas and graduated with a master's degree in public administration. She said she took classes related to planning but initially was more interested in local government from the perspective of community development.

"The public participation appealed to me," she said.

In 1999, Lee became city manager for Concordia and was there until 2002, when she returned to Ottawa as director of planning and codes.

Lee said her path was unusual for a planner because most directors obtain undergraduate and master's degrees in planning.

Lee received her undergraduate degree in business from Ottawa University and noted that planning resonated a lot with her liberal arts background.

For example, planners must know certain laws, the math and science that go along with construction, as well as communication and concepts such as the psychology of how people feel about space, Lee said.

"So many of the disciplines come together," she said.

Lee said one of the best parts of her job is seeing a project come in and, with the assistance of staff and the

planning commission, help it along the way to become the best fit for Ottawa.

She said she and her staff want to help builders be successful, and they, in turn, help the community to be successful.

"We all need each other," she said.

Lee, who passed a stren-

uous test to become a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners in 1999, said leaving Ottawa for a few years and then returning made her value the community and its assets.

"We understand what it takes to be attractive to a market, but we appreciate what we have," she said.



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