BRENDA RICHARD-MONTGOMERY

When she became director of the city's Department of Community Development last August, Brenda Richard-Montgomery faced quite a challenge. She was the fourth person in less than two years to hold the job. She wasn't virginal to the complexities of the federal funding for which her department is responsible. And she had no real political experience (if that can be said of someone who, for a time, worked at ULI, but the initial period of learning and transition is coming to an end).

Despite the many changes at the top, Community Development wasn't really suffering from low morale, according to Richard-Montgomery. "The staff was waiting for things to settle down. Everyone has been extremely cooperative and very eager to move forward," she says.

Though the funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development is "technically tough" to understand, Richard-Montgomery is getting a better handle on it every day. What remains tough is "balancing what is good for our constituents with what is acceptable to public opinion and politics," she says. "The public has expectations for funding that doesn't necessarily meet the desires of the administration and City Council."

To balance the demands of politics with good public policy, Richard-Montgomery has two long-term plans for this year. First, she would like to assess fully the needs of the community. She says that, as far as she knows, no needs assessment has been done before. She has contacted the departments of community and marketing at ULI, to offer their assistance on the project.

Secondly, once the needs of the community have been identified, she would like to have Community Development take a more holistic approach. That means integrating the five different divisions within the department: housing, human services, community and economic development, arts and culture, and international trade.

For example, she thinks housing and economic development must go together. Nice housing will stay that way for only so long if the people who live there don't have jobs, she says. "I would like to develop a master plan for Community Development as a whole."

In the short-term, Richard-Montgomery wants to complete the transition by having the department finish the training of new department employees and to build up the economic development program, which she says "suffered somewhat" during the extended period of transition.

She also thinks the local homeless problem needs to be addressed with housing and more police. "Because President Clinton and Congress are appropriating more money, we will try to secure some of that money," she says. And she wants to further develop the international trade program, which she says spent its first few years of existence "getting its feet wet."

Richard-Montgomery's ears are definitely open by now, and she appears ready to give direction to a department that has lacked any for some time.