February 17, 2022

Permit Improvement Update - DRAC

Office of
Commissioner
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Task Force Focus Areas

- **Data**
- **Process**
- **Structure**

Theme/Comment
(# of mentions)

Customers say our. processes, requirements and systems are difficult to understand and navigate

Website issues
(40)

Poor Responsiveness
(40)

Communication Challenges
(34)

Confusing, Complicated Processes
(82)

Hard to get staff support
(24)

Negative Customer Service
(82)

Frustrated with Timelines
(76)

General Frustration
(40)

Offers Suggestions
(60)

Confusing Information
(66)

"Difficult"
(23)

Problems with Requirements
(32)

Inconsistent Information
(34)

Council Work Session 1/25 -- Call to Action

- *Our permitting system is siloed, disjointed, and spread across seven bureaus. Customers and staff struggle to partner efficiently and effectively. The move to a totally online process has exacerbated these problems.*

- ***We are asking the Council to listen to what we are actively doing to address these issues AND consider long-term system change recommendations that we want to develop which will require Council agreement and action.***

Council Consideration: System Design

PROBLEM

There is a clear need for coordination and leadership accountability for the entire plan review process. *This includes ongoing assessment of performance on City goals for development services and one-off responsibilities for resolution of customer issues caused by conflicting code requirements.*

Our audit from 1997 and a stakeholder report to reform City development reviews in 2000 both recommended the City consolidate existing plan review staff into a single bureau. But the then-Council decided not to make these changes.

Source: March 2021 City of Portland Audit

Four Solutions for Consideration: System Design

1. Multi-disciplinary Review Teams:

This model is used by the City of Phoenix, AZ, where:

- Permit reviews are done by inter-disciplinary teams, organized by project type (residential, commercial, etc.)
- Each team has a lead/supervisor who coordinates their work, monitors the flow, works out conflicts with reviewers, etc. and who is the point of contact if issues/problems arise.

2. Merge Public Works Development Review Under PBOT

This model is used by the City of Seattle, WA where:

- Establish one point of contact and decision maker for policy/code conflicts in the right-of-way. This role is given sole decision-making authority to resolve conflicts.
- Creates Opportunity for Equality of code regulations between BDS and the infrastructure bureaus (private property and the ROW is seen as one development project, not 2 separate parts.
- Cross-train the team so it is prepared to address external customers inquiries and internal City Hall staff questions.

Four Solutions for Consideration: System Design

3. Move all permitting employees to BDS

- Draft MOUs to articulate which bureau has authority for which types of decision-making.

- Assign decisions and appeals to the City Engineers/Urban Forester from their bureau.

- BDS makes process and organizational decisions, as well as staffing decisions. This could include creating multi-disciplinary teams, for example.

- Optional element to include Code-writing from these bureaus could be centralized so regulatory changes can be considered holistically rather than in silos, with a single system for gathering input, and communicating changes with the public, etc.

4. Hybrid which takes the most valuable parts from three proposals
- Design to optimize the qualities we want in the system.
- Interdisciplinary teams to improve client experience and increase staff ability to work with multiple elements + staffing/hiring/retention addressed for in-demand roles.

Questions and Discussion