

**City of Madison
Development Review and Permitting Staff Team
Report**

**STREAMLINING THE DEVELOPMENT REVIEW
AND BUILDING PERMITTING PROCESS**

**INCLUDING A PROPOSAL TO CREATE
THE CITY OF MADISON'S DEVELOPMENT REVIEW
AND PERMITTING CENTER**

**INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
REVIEW, DISCUSSION AND REFINEMENT**

August 24, 2006

INTRODUCTION

At the request of the Mayor and Common Council, the Department of Planning & Development is studying the reorganization of the department. As part of this process, the Mayor has requested that the department focus on five specific goals. This report and its recommendations address the following goal and charge from the Mayor:

Streamline the decision-making process for building permits and development approvals.

Regardless of whether the concept of a "one-stop shop" leans more towards the physical or the virtual, the Mayor will ask staff to develop a more seamless approach for building permits and development approvals. This will include the purchase of Enterprise permitting software as authorized in the 2006 Capital Budget. Major developments need approvals from a variety of City agencies. We need to bring together key staff from around the City to coordinate input early on in an attempt to prevent costly delays down the road. The Mayor will ask staff to look at the possibility of creating a simplified approval process for smaller and less complicated developments.

As part of this effort, the Mayor has asked staff to identify improvements which will make the department and the services we provide:

- More customer focused
- More efficient so that we can serve a growing city without significant additional resources
- Lighter on its feet so that it is better able to meet changing demands
- Streamlined so that our residents better understand where to go to get the services they need

Approach to the Project

The Department of Planning & Development created a staff team to develop these recommendations. The staff team consists of:

- George Hank, Inspection Unit Director (Co-Lead)
- Brad Murphy, Planning Unit Director (Co-Lead)
- Matt Tucker, Zoning Administrator, Inspection Unit
- Mike Van Erem, Plan Review Specialist IV, Inspection Unit
- Bill Roberts, Planner IV, Planning Unit
- Al Martin, Planner III, Planning Unit
- Tim Parks, Planner II, Planning Unit

In addition, the project team consulted with and met with staff involved in the development review and permitting process from other agencies to develop and review the recommendations contained in this report, including:

- Janet Dailey, City Engineering
- Larry Nelson, City Engineering
- Dan McCormick, Traffic Engineering
- John Leach, Traffic Engineering
- Si Widstrand, Parks Division
- Chief Debra Amesqua, Fire Department
- Ed Ruckriegel, Fire Marshall
- John Lippitt, Fire Prevention Engineer
- Barb Constans, Community Development Block Grant Office
- Michael Gay, Office of Business Resources
- Al Larson, Water Utility

The staff team reviewed the results of two workshops held in 2004 during the preparation of the best practices guide to improved communications between developers/applicants, neighborhood associations, policymakers, and staff during the development review process. In 2004, a workshop was held in June and another in November to work specifically on improvements to the development review process for the benefit of all customers involved. The results of the June workshop and November Roundtable have been reviewed by the staff team.

The team also asked for suggestions from the members of the Zoning Board of Appeals, Plan Commission, Urban Design Commission and Landmarks Commission. It should be noted that the staff team recommendations included in this report should be viewed as preliminary recommendations which should be reviewed with all of the customers of the development review and permitting process. Given the timeline for the preparation of the report, the team did not have an opportunity to get comments on the recommendations from our customers. This could be one of the activities which occurs as part of the implementation sequence recommended at the end of the report.

The staff team established several objectives to guide its work. The ultimate goal of these recommendations will be to increase customer satisfaction with services provided by the City.

1. Identifying opportunities to improve the predictability of the existing development review and building permitting processes within the Department of Planning & Development and those processes involving interdepartmental reviews and approvals.
2. Identifying opportunities to make the development review and permitting process more clear, customer-focused and user-friendly.
3. Strengthening the coordination between all agencies involved in the development review and permitting process, both within the Department of Planning & Development and between agencies in the Department of

Planning & Development, the Public Works agencies (City Engineering, Traffic Engineering, Parks and Water Utility) and the Fire Department.

Keeping in mind the goals and objectives for this work, the team identified recommendations for continuing improvements to the existing development review and permitting process and evaluated the feasibility of creating a development review and permitting center to provide a central point of contact for customers of the process and to better coordinate interdepartmental reviews and to track projects.

BACKGROUND/IMPROVEMENTS TO DATE

In the summer of 2004, Mayor Cieslewicz asked each agency to identify ways that City hall can be more responsive to the needs of the business community. As a result of this request, agencies within the Department of Planning & Development identified several recommendations to improve services provided to out customers. Other agencies responded in similar fashion. Over the past few years many improvements have been made across agencies involved in the permitting and development approval process. Examples include:

- Implementing a **web-based site plan/parking lot plan sign-off system** which allows concurrent review of projects by all agencies and access to the system by applicants,
- Preparation of a **project review checklist and stormwater management standards** in the Engineering Division,
- Providing a **common reporting format for development reviews by each development agency**,
- Developing a **development review projects website** in the Planning Unit,
- Providing **training for City commissions, interagency staff, developers, engineers and architects on fire apparatus access requirements of the Fire Department**,
- **Revision of City street standards** to allow the use of narrower streets 1997 and 2005,
- Completing a **new development services guide** with flowcharts, application requirements and contacts, board and commission responsibilities,
- Completion of a **Best Practices Guide** to promote early and effective communication between neighborhoods, applicants, City staff and policy makers involved in the development review process,
- **Amending the Zoning Code to allow, by right, smaller lot development** including R2S, R2T, R2Y and R2Z, as well as allowing the use of public alleys after almost 50 years of prohibition,
- Assistance in the implementation of **Legistar**, automated Common Council legislative tracking system which allows staff and our customers access to all legislative files and attachments, including plans, reviewing agency comments, etc.,
- **Scheduling interdepartmental review meetings with developers prior to application submittals.**

CHALLENGES/OPPORTUNITIES

While several improvements have been made to our ordinances and the development review process over the last couple of years, additional opportunities exist. Keeping in mind the needs of all of our customers (residents, property owners, neighborhood associations, Alderpersons, visitors, applicants, businesses, developers, contractors and/or agents, etc.), the staff team worked to identify recommendations to reduce the amount of time required to get development approvals and permits, increase the predictability of the development review process, and to make the entire process more customer focused and user-friendly.

The development process within the City of Madison continues to challenge both frequent and infrequent applicants. Depending on the type of project, reviews may be required by multiple boards and commissions, formal public hearings before the Plan Commission and Common Council may be required and as many as 10 or more City agencies may be required to "sign-off" on that project prior to permits being issued. The staff team looked for ways to restructure services around the customers' needs rather than along departmental lines. Some of the challenges faced by applicants include:

1. Knowing where to initiate discussions and to begin the process (a central point of contact).
2. Recognizing the need to inform the neighborhood and District Alderperson of their proposal and work through the informal pre-application process to gain acceptance/support for the project. This process can vary from project to project and neighborhood to neighborhood.
3. Gaining the support and favorable recommendations or approvals from multiple boards and commissions for certain projects. These projects are summarized in Attachment 1. Since January of 2005, when the City implemented its new automated/web based site plan sign-off system; the City has approved 227 projects which first required approval by the City's Plan Commission and/or the Urban Design Commission and Common Council. These included 96 conditional use permits and 81 zoning map amendments, 76 of which were Planned Unit Developments. Over this same period an additional 110 projects were approved as permitted uses which required no board or commission review. In addition, staff approved 143 alterations to existing conditional use permits and Planned Unit Developments for building additions and alterations which were administratively approved.
4. Coordinating discussions between agencies which provide critical advice and feedback during the pre-application stage of the process. Do applicants have to schedule their own meetings with City staff, or do City staff schedule meetings with applicants and multiple agencies to coordinate discussions?
5. There is currently no project tracking system in place prior to a formal application being submitted for project coordination. The pre-application stage of a project continues to be challenging, both for small businesses and infrequent customers and for large scale projects.

6. Departmental permitting systems (curb openings, street occupancy, etc.) only a portion of which are automated from department to department are not coordinated or linked with each other or with the City's geographic information system. There are 15 or more separate permitting and inspection systems in the City all using separate stand-alone software applications.
7. There is currently no central place where developers can go to receive information and advice on development approvals which are required for a project and to receive development brochures, application forms, permitting requirements, timelines and the like. While individual agencies have development requirements available for the processes they administer and some are available on line, these requirements are not provided in a central location or organized in any meaningful way between departments.
8. Some departments have developed checklists with review requirements publicized and available for applicants to review when preparing development plans and applications. However, not all departments have user-friendly checklists, brochures or information pamphlets available to guide applicants.

The following section summarizes the recommendations to create a development review and permitting center, which could be implemented over the next three years, and continuing improvements which should be implemented beginning in 2007. Following the recommendations, is an attachment which includes a summary of the types of development projects requiring approvals including:

- Projects requiring approval by one agency.
- Permits approved by multiple agencies.
- Projects approved by one or more city board or commission.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Create a Development Review and Permitting Center: A Summary

The staff team recommends a series of specific action steps which can be implemented to continuously improve the current development review and building permitting process and to move the City toward the creation of a development review and permitting center which is both physical and virtual and which brings together all staff involved in the development review and permitting process. The primary goals of the development review and permitting center include:

1. Providing adequate physical space to provide better customer service.
2. Bringing staff together in a central location at critical points in the process to strengthen the coordination between agencies and to consolidate the land development review, permitting, and assistance.
3. Create a more efficient and predictable development process by evaluating development proposals to identify application requirements, timelines and approval processes up front, and to implement a project tracking system.

4. Maximize the use of technology to replace stand-alone permitting systems, automate processes which are still paper-based systems and to improve communication between agencies and applicants to complete project review, permitting, and inspection.

The development review and permitting center, when fully implemented, will also allow staff from all agencies involved in the development review process to come together in a central location to provide assistance to our customers at the three critical stages of a development project:

1. **Preapplication stage** when developers/applicants are trying to identify the approvals which are required for their project, the criteria which must be met, complying with the neighborhood and Alderperson notice and the timeline and cost for completing the approval process.
 2. **Formal review stage.** For those projects that must be reviewed by boards and commissions all departments will come together to review development projects, identify issues which must be addressed, resolve conflicts between agencies' conditions, and communicate those early to the applicant.
 3. **Post Approval. Following approval of a project by the City's boards and commissions** when all conditions of approval are known, a meeting could be scheduled with applicants to review the conditions of approval. The meeting could involve all agencies which have conditions to be met.
- **Development Review and Permitting Center: The Physical Space.** Create a customer-focused physical space probably within the Madison Municipal Building or other suitable location to assist customers. The current location of the plan review and zoning counters has been noted by many as difficult to find for infrequent users of the process. Ideally, a first floor location would be far superior to the current basement space. A potential option may be to consider significant changes to the Wilson Street loading dock entrance to create a real lower level entry to the building off of Wilson Street. Additional convenient customer parking close to this entrance would be ideal. This space should include the following components:
 1. Create a single greeting area in the development services center where a receptionist directs the customer to the appropriate area, sets up appointments for the customer with plan reviewers, Zoning staff or staff from other agencies.
 2. Develop small conference room space within the department close to the development services center counters that can be used for interagency meetings with developers and which are reserved for this purpose. Conference rooms should be outfitted with projectors, computers linked directly with access to the project tracking and permitting system and all GIS layers, including zoning, utilities, roads and other infrastructure.
 3. Provide individual workstations for all agencies participating in the development services center. These workstations will allow staff from other

- agencies to continue to do their other work, when they are not assisting customers.
4. Create a lobby space off to the side of the permit counters with adequate seating to allow customers a place to discuss projects with each other informally while waiting for assistance from City staff.
 5. Provide a visible location to display informational brochures and handouts for various types of development projects requiring approval. These displays should build on the display cases already available.
 6. Create a development resource center within the development services center with access to materials including: relevant ordinances, informational brochures, special area plans, neighborhood plans, neighborhood development plans, historic preservation plans, Urban Design District requirements, corridor plans, the Comprehensive Plan, neighborhood and business association contact lists and maps, etc.
 7. Create a business center for applicants to layout plans, communication with their offices and make plan set revisions. This work currently occurs in the employee break area adjacent to the vending machines and bathrooms.
 8. Remodel the plan review and Zoning services counters to provide space for staff to speak individually with customers.

The staff team discussed the use of the Affirmative Action Office space on the first floor of the Municipal Building and concluded that the space was not nearly large enough to accommodate the functions which need to be part of the center.

- **Development Review and Permitting Center: The Virtual Center.** In order to fully develop the development review and permitting center, the City will need to fully automate all aspects of the development review, permitting, and inspection processes utilizing one software application. This software application should replace the 15 or so stand-alone permitting and inspection systems in place across City departments and include web-based access for our customers. The development review and permitting center will enable applicants, neighboring property owners, residents, neighborhood associations, business associations and elected officials to better follow projects which are being developed at all stages of the process. The center will greatly assist in providing notifications of project developments to all of our customers. The web-based interface for the center will allow customers to track progress on projects and stay informed of project development. The development of the center should also consider the element of a single application and payment process for all development projects.

Automated Enterprise Permitting, Development Review and Project Tracking Software. In order to implement the development review and permitting center, it is absolutely critical that the highest priority be placed on implementing as quickly as possible the new development review, permitting and project tracking software. This new permitting/ project tracking system should be tied directly to the City's Geographic Information System and electronic

document imaging system with web access being provided to our customers. Projects should be tracked from the initial point of contact through project completion (issuance of building permits, inspections and occupancy permits).

Website. The development review and permitting center will maximize the use of web-based technology by providing a development services center website which will ultimately include all application forms, agency checklists requirements, flowcharts, timelines, process requirements, staff contact information, relevant planning documents, ordinance citations, in one location on the City's webpage. The development review and permitting center website will be focused on the needs of the customer and organized along those lines rather than along departmental lines. The development services center website will bring together the requirements of all agencies and all processes into one central location and coordinate them as best as possible. Ultimately, the full implementation of the enterprise development review and permitting software (included in 2006 budget) should allow this system to be fully integrated to include project tracking through a web-based customer interface linked directly to the City's geographic information system.

- **Create Simplified Materials to Assist Customers.** Create an interdepartmental team to develop brochures, information pamphlets, coordinated application forms, flowcharts, checklists, and other application requirements that would ultimately be available in the development review and permitting center and on the center's website. Information currently provided in the development review guide, the Best Practices Guide, and on individual agency websites, should be reviewed. These materials should be developed with all of the customers of the development review and permitting process in mind including applicants, neighboring property owners, and residents, neighborhood associations, business associations, and other stakeholders.
- **Interdepartmental Coordination Meetings with Applicants.** One of the challenges faced by the project team was the question of how to bring staff from Engineering, Traffic Engineering, Planning, Zoning, Economic Development, Parks, Water Utility, Fire Department, or other relevant agencies like Community Development Block Grant together in a timely way at appropriate points in the development review process to provide good services to our customers. Interagency staff team involving the heads of each of the major agencies involved in the development review process or their key staff, should participate to follow-up on these recommendations and to identify appropriate additional interagency staff team meetings that would occur at the preapplication stage of the project and provide better opportunities for applicants to meet with staff.
- **Training.** The development review and permitting center should include a strong cross-training effort for staff from all agencies involved in the development review process to share the expertise, information and development requirements administered by each of the agencies involved. Staff from the Inspection Unit,

Zoning Administration Section, Plan Review Section, Planning Unit, Economic Development Section, Traffic Engineering, Fire Department, City Engineering, Parks Division and Water Utility should participate.

- **Staffing.** The development review and permitting center will be staffed by an interdepartmental staff team led by the Inspection Unit. Permanent full-time staff assigned to the center include the Zoning staff and Plan Review Specialists in the Inspection Unit. In addition to this core team, the center will also be supported by the Planning Unit, Traffic Engineering, City Engineering, Fire Department, Parks Division, Water Utility and Economic Development staff. The staff team will need to continue to work with all development review agencies to determine the appropriate level of staff commitment to the development center, the hours during the week when staff from other agencies will be present in the center, the scheduling of interdepartmental coordination meetings for interdepartmental staff to meet with applicants, etc. At this point, it is anticipated that the center will establish set hours at certain times during the week when staff from all agencies will be present to meet with customers either on a walk-in or by appointment basis. It is also anticipated that standing meetings will be scheduled on a weekly or bi-weekly basis to conduct inter-agency pre-application meetings with applicants and to conduct development review meetings with applicants following the formal submittal and review of projects but prior to board and commission review. Development services center staff should establish a project schedule and timeline for each project prior to the point of application using the flowcharts prepared by the project team, the development brochures to be prepared, and the project information pamphlets.

It will be important to have the staff assigned to the development center be empowered by their individual agencies to represent their Departments in providing advice and assistance to applicants during the preapplication, formal review stage and post-approval parts of the process.

Interim/Continuing Improvements to the System

Prior to the full implementation of the development review and permitting center, several improvements can be made to the existing process. It should be pointed out, however, that without the physical space deficiencies in the Department of Planning & Development's planning, plan review and zoning/planning area being adequately addressed, and the full implementation of the enterprise permitting software, the implementation of a development review and permitting center which makes any real difference for our customers will not be possible. Another major initiative of equal importance which should also be started in 2007 is the update of the City's Zoning Code. Both projects will have significant positive impacts on our customers. The following improvements can continue to be worked on prior to the full implementation of the development review and permitting center and the update of the Zoning Code.

1. **Enterprise Permitting/Development Review and Project Review Tracking Software.** Priority should be placed on securing funding to implement the Enterprise Permitting and Tracking software. Work with Information Systems to move forward with this project between 2006 and 2008.
2. **Update the Zoning Code and Look for Opportunities to Make Interim Improvements.** Priority should also be placed on fully rewriting the City's Zoning Code. This should occur between 2007 and 2010. The completion of the new code will take at least 3 years from the inception of work on the project. In the interim, the Zoning Text staff team which is comprised of members from the Zoning Office, Planning Unit, and City Attorney's Office should continue to identify and implement opportunities to reduce complexity, eliminate conditional use permits and to move certain conditional use permits to permitted uses with administrative review and approval where possible.
3. **Further Automate Parking Lot/Site Plan Interagency Review and Signoff.** Form an interagency staff team comprised of Zoning, Engineering, Traffic Engineering, and the Fire Department to evaluate the feasibility of moving away from the review of oversized paper plans by potentially requiring electronic plan sets for interagency review and signoff. Identify and evaluate the technology costs involved in implementing this recommendation. Seek input from private engineering and architectural consulting firms on the use of technology to eliminate the review of oversized paper-based plan sets where possible.
4. **Project Management and Facilitation.** Assign project manager/facilitators to the largest, most complex projects and establish a series of expectations for these facilitators so they know what their role is and what it is not and how other agencies are expected to work with them. Every project which is reviewed by the Plan Commission or Common Council is assigned a "case manager" by the Planning Unit. In addition, a subset of projects which eventually will be reviewed the Plan Commission and Common Council such as the St. Mary's project, have staff assigned from the department to function as a central point of contact for the City. The role of this central point of contact needs to be better defined and the expectations of the individual need to be identified. As a place to start, it is suggested that the Development Review Team meet with the Economic Development Team to further define the project manager/facilitator roles and responsibilities and to identify the type of projects which would be assigned a project manager, beyond the typical assignment of case managers which already occurs for every project. For example, it could be decided that any project which will require City financial assistance (tax incremental financing, community development block grant assistance, etc.) and which also must receive land use approvals by one or more board or commission be assigned a project manager.

It has also been suggested that the City designate an "ombudsman" to help infrequent customers navigate the City's permitting and development approval processes. The team believes that training of existing staff to recognize the special

needs of infrequent users of City services would be more effective than identifying an individual or individuals to come in to provide special services to the infrequent customer. Many City staff already are very aware of the special needs of infrequent customers and already make accommodations for these customers.

5. **Create a Simplified Approval Process for Certain Projects.** Since the automated concurrent site plan and parking lot plan approval review and signoff process was implemented in January 2005, staff have approved 176 projects which first needed to be approved by one or more board and commission. An additional 110 projects for new construction were approved as a permitted use with no board or commission review required. An additional 143 approvals were granted as administrative approvals for alterations to existing conditional use permits and existing Specific Implementation Plans. All of these later projects, not requiring board and commission approval, will move through the building review process in an average of 5 days and the site plan review process in an average of 7 to 14 days. This is a very efficient simplified process for those projects which can take advantage of it.

In reviewing existing conditional uses, the Zoning Text Staff Team should evaluate the feasibility of creating a set of uses which would reside in the Zoning Text between full conditional uses which require Plan Commission approval and permitted uses which require only staff approval. This interim set of uses could require notification of neighborhood associations and adjoining property owners similar to the conditional use similar to the conditional use process and the district alderperson, but if no objections are made to the proposal, these projects could be approved administratively with some additional design review.

6. **Cross-training.** An interagency staff team should be created to follow-up on cross-training opportunities for all staff involved in the development review process.
7. **Customer Feedback Mechanism.** Periodic meetings should be scheduled with the Department's most frequent customers to discuss changes in ordinances, processes, and to seek input from customers on improvements which could be made and problems which have been encountered. This should be a semi-annual or quarterly meeting. Periodic meetings should also be scheduled with the leadership of neighborhood associations, working with Council members to share information about the development review process, changes which have occurred in the process, and tools and techniques which can be used to foster productive communications between all stakeholders involved in the development review process. Staff should continue to utilize neighborhood roundtables, neighborhood conferences, and individual meetings with neighborhood associations for this purpose.

Timeline for Implementation

The following activities are recommended in this report:

- **2007 Implementation Priorities.**

1. Continue the work of the interagency staff team include representatives from the Inspection Unit, Planning Unit, City Engineering, Traffic Engineering, and Fire Department to address the staffing recommendations for the center. The interagency team should define staffing responsibilities and resource needs for the development review and permitting center. This work should be complete by July 2007 prior to the preparation of the 2008 Operating Budget. This team or other teams should be established to implement the other 2007 priority recommendations as noted in the previous section.
2. Review draft recommendations with customer groups and seek input on the mission, goals, and implementation recommendations for the development review and permitting center.
3. Approve budget authorization for full implementation of Phase 1 of the permitting software, \$750,000.
4. Approve budget authorization in the 2007 Budget to begin the rewrite of the Zoning Code, \$300,000.
5. Approve Capital Budget authorization to hire an architect to work with the Project Staff Team to finalize space needs and prepare plans and specifications for the physical development review and permitting center.
6. Website development. An inter-agency staff team should begin to work with Information Systems to develop a more comprehensive development review and permitting center website.
7. Move Conditional Uses to Permitted Uses. The Zoning Text staff team should continue to work to draft Zoning Text Amendments to move certain conditional use permits to the permitted use lists within various zoning districts.
8. Further develop the project manager or facilitator approach to major projects and define criteria for selecting projects.

- **2008 Implementation Priorities.**

1. Enterprise permitting software.
2. Zoning Code update.
3. Complete website.
4. Approve Capital Budget authorization for implementation of the development review and permitting center in 2009.
5. Complete plans and specifications.

- **2009 Implementation Activities.**

1. Remodel space in the Madison Municipal Building or elsewhere to implement the development review and permitting center.
2. Complete Enterprise Permitting Software implementation
3. Continue working on update of the Zoning Code.

ATTACHMENT 1

SUMMARY OF THE VARIOUS TYPES OF DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS REQUIRING APPROVALS (Updated on October 3, 2006)

The development review and building permitting process involves projects of varying types with approvals required by one or more City agency and/or one or more City board or commission.

Projects Requiring Approval by One Agency

Permits requiring approval by one City agency include, for example:

- Single-family and two-family home building permits, Inspection Unit with Zoning and Engineering sign-off.
- Driveway permits for one and two-family, City Engineering.
- Curb opening/driveway permits for parking lots with 5 or more spaces, Traffic Engineering Division.
- Connections to Sanitary and Stormwater Systems: Engineering.
- Sewer Credit Meters: Engineering.
- Connection to the Public Water Supply System: Water Utility.
- Sign permits, Inspection Unit.
- Erosion control permits for one and two-family homes, Inspection Unit.
- Erosion and Stormwater Management for commercial/multi-family and subdivisions: City Engineering.
- Electrical, HVAC and plumbing permits, Inspection Unit.
- Dedicated improvements to Parks and Greenways: Parks or City Engineering.

In order to obtain these permits, customers must often visit the individual department that issues the permit. Some agencies, however, have made their application forms available on-line to fill out and submit electronically, and some agencies have also issued permits electronically.

In order to pay for these permits, a customer typically writes a check or uses a credit card at the agency which issues the permit. There is currently an electronic database for all of the permits issued, but there is no common database available to share information across agencies. Frequent customers of the Engineering Division who apply for Excavation within the public right of way are billed monthly.

Plan review by the Inspection Unit for compliance with State building, HVAC and plumbing and Zoning Codes have a maximum turn around time of 5 days.

Permits Approved by Multiple Agencies

The next type of permit issued involves projects which require approval by more than one City agency. Examples of these projects include:

- Commercial and multi-family buildings, several agencies.
- Excavation within right of way: City Engineering (Sewer, Construction, Street and Sidewalks), Traffic Engineering (Traffic Control and Electrical), Water Utility. (Permit is also used for small-scale public works improvements for developments).
- Street occupancy permits, Inspection Unit following approval of Traffic Engineering.
- Parking lot plan review, site plan review prior to the issuance of building permits by up to 7 City agencies.
- Moving of buildings, Inspection Unit, Traffic Engineering, Forestry, Engineering, Water, Streets, and Police.
- Subdivision plat/certified survey map sign-off.
- Discharge of non-stormwater to the stormwater system (MGO 7.47): City Engineering and Health Department.
- Overweight and Oversize loads: City Engineering and Traffic Engineering.
- Right-of-way encroachments/Privilege In Streets, 5 agencies.

In January 2005 the City implemented a web-based automated plan tracking and sign-off system, which allows concurrent review of projects by individual reviewing agency and public access for applicants to track project status. Monthly, the City processes approximately 25-30 projects which require interdepartmental review or site plan approvals. Approvals for projects start and end with the administrative processing handled by the Inspection Unit. This involves acceptance of plans for routing, distribution of plans for agencies for review, and final sign-off when all agencies have completed their reviews.

The site plan review system includes an email notification utility, which serves dual roles: to advise reviewing agencies that a submittal has been routed for pickup; and notify applicant when comments are posted for their attention and/or reviews have been completed. The average length of time from submittal of plans to complete sign-off approval varies greatly depending on the type of development and response to comments from the applicant. For example, a conditional use for an oversized garage is reviewed by a handful of agencies and may take no more than a few days. Alternatively, a large mixed commercial/residential development in the Central City may involve approvals by up to 12 agencies, numerous permits, contracts and negotiated settlements may also require supplemental material from an applicant, and therefore may take a few months or longer to complete all reviews. One of the recommendations of the staff team is to evaluate the feasibility of routing digitized drawings for approval instead of the paper copies.

The Engineering Division administers the Excavation in Right-of-Way Permits involving approximately 2000 permits per year. The current system is based on Access Software which enables scanned plans to be reviewed on eleven or more workstations in Engineering, Traffic, the Water Utility and Forestry. The system allows for viewing the permits through the construction phase and the warrantee phase of three years. But, the capabilities of the software are being stretched to manage the system and it is not readily transferable to the web.

There are two general classifications of review for projects: projects approved by one or more commissions and projects that require administrative (staff) review. Of the two categories, since

January 2005 the following list of projects have been processed to completion using the new site plan review system:

Projects Approved by One or More Commission

- 96 conditional uses
- 5 rezoning (conditional zoning map amendments)
- 76 PUD-GDP, PUD-GDP-SIP, PUD-SIP (also zoning map amendments)

Projects that Require Administrative (Staff) Review

- 71 alterations of an existing conditional use permit
- 72 alterations to an existing Specific Implementation Plan (Planned Unit Development)
- 110 permitted uses

Projects Approved by One or More Commission

Plan Commission

- Conditional use permit approvals
- Demolition and moving permit approvals
- Zoning map change recommendations
- Subdivision plat recommendations
- Parking reduction approvals
- Certified survey map approval
- Street and alley vacation recommendations
- Acquisition and sale of public property, including easement recommendations

Landmarks Commission

- Certificates of appropriateness for landmark buildings
- Certificates of appropriateness for construction within local landmark districts
- Recommendations to the Plan Commission on projects close to landmarks

Board of Zoning Appeals

- Zoning variances
- Area exception permits

Building Board

- Building code variances

Board of Public Works

- Street and alley vacation requests
- Easement releases and acquisition request recommendations
- Plans and specifications for public infrastructure recommendations to Common Council
- Median Openings

Urban Design Commission

- Urban Design District project approvals
- Large scale retail/commercial development recommendations to Plan Commission
- Public building approvals
- Sign (street graphics) ordinance and RPSM variance approvals
- Planned Development recommendation

Common Council

- Zoning map amendments
- Subdivision plats
- Street and alley vacation requests
- Approval of projects appealed from the Landmarks Commission or Plan Commission
- Plans and specifications for infrastructure improvements

Flowcharting the Development

Review and Building Permitting Process

The project team prepared a flowchart of the development review and approval process from initial point of contact with staff through to the issuance of building permits and inspections by the Inspection Unit. Depending on the type of approval requested or required and the need for board and commission review, public hearings and notices, the permitting process can take as little as five (5) days or several months. For example, issuance of a permit for a single-family home in a neighborhood that has already been subdivided, where the plat has been recorded, and all infrastructure (road and utilities) have been designed and installed is very straightforward and involves review by one agency and typically occurs in less than one week. For multi-family buildings and commercial buildings, however, the City requires applicants to go through a site plan/parking lot plan review process which involves approval by four City agencies, including the Inspection Unit, Fire Department, City Engineering, and Traffic Engineering. For any project which receives approval from a City board or commission which may have applied additional conditions to the project, such as Landmarks Commission, Urban Design Commission, Plan Commission or the Common Council, the final plans also must be reviewed and approved by the staff to the appropriate board or commission. These projects are also reviewed and approved by multiple agencies.

The development review and permitting process can be divided into three general stages, including:

1. Pre-application.
2. Board/commission review including neighborhood notice/public hearings.
3. Plan sign-off and permitting/inspection.

The staff team looked for opportunities to improve the predictability of the process and its timeliness in each stage of the application process.

Generalized Zoning, Subdivision, Plan Review, Permitting and Inspection Process

Permitted Uses (Skip Step 2)

All Other Projects (Zoning Map Amendments/PUD, Conditional Uses, Demolition Permits, Urban Design, Landmarks Commission) Start at Step 1

