



CITY OF BEVERLY HILLS STAFF REPORT

Meeting Date: December 19, 2011

To: Honorable Mayor & City Council

From: Susan Healy Keene, AICP, Director of Community Development

Subject Recommendations from the Mayor's Task Force on Government Efficiency

Attachments: 1) List of Stakeholders Interviewed
2) Stakeholder Issues/Actions/Task Force Recommendations

INTRODUCTION

This report provides information on the work completed by the Mayor's Task Force on Government Efficiency and their recommended actions to improve and streamline the development review process.

BACKGROUND

At the City Council installation in March, Mayor Brucker announced the formation of a Task Force on Government Efficiency and appointed Vice-Mayor Brien as Chair. Subsequently, Planning Commissioner, Noah Furie, was selected as Vice-chair of the Task Force. Members of the Task Force include:

- Craig Corman, Vice-Chair of the Planning Commission
- Jerry Felsenthal, former Planning Commissioner
- Howard Fisher, recently appointed Planning Commissioner
- Steve Matt, CEO, Matt Construction
- Kathy Reims, former Planning Commissioner

At the initial meeting of the Task Force on June 14, 2011, Vice-Mayor Brien and Vice-Chair Furie identified the goals of the Task Force. These goals included:

- Improve customer experience
- Review/expand staff authority
- Provide efficiencies to reduce process times
- Provide metrics to assess performance

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- Provide standards for applicants
- Ensure quality, consistency, and predictability in the process
- Improve online resources
- Reformat Code to provide clarity and simplicity

In the following five meetings the Task Force interviewed multiple stakeholders who represented single family residents, contractors, land owners, business owners, architects, and applicant's representatives. The list of individuals interviewed is included as Attachment A of this report. In addition to addressing the issues raised, Vice-Mayor Brien encouraged the Task Force and staff to consider big, bold ideas.

DISCUSSION

A number of themes emerged from the stakeholder interviews including issues related to customer service, communication, process, inspections, timing, organizational structure, zoning code, commissions, fees, payment process, and outside agency approvals. The comments of the stakeholders, actions taken to date by staff, and recommendations from the Task Force are included in Attachment B.

During this process, staff began implementing changes and as a result the following streamlining efforts have already been accomplished:

Customer Service

- Restaurants - Code amendments approved to facilitate 70-day review/approval
- Initiated quarterly meetings with stakeholders (contractors/expediters/applicants)
- Dedicated a single Planner at the counter to improve consistency
- Updated checklists for staff and applicants

Plan Review

- Reinstated over-the-counter verification meetings each Wednesday
- Identified minor plan checks and initiated review at the counter
- Began review of Plumbing, Mechanical and Electrical plans at the counter
- Assumed responsibility for review and approval of Public-Right-of-Way plans for single family residential projects

Inspections

- Reinstated one Building Inspector to address inspection requests
- Building inspectors assumed responsibility for Public-Right-of-Way inspections for Single family residential projects

Technology

- Improved online access to property information from the GIS Map
- Purchased automated Appointment System for the Permit Center
- Simplified online and telephone inspection requests
- Established focused E-Government program
- Purchased electronic plan submittal and plan review software (ProjectDox)

Process

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- Initiated Streamlining efforts at Architectural Commission and Design Review Commission
- Continued internal, bi-weekly, Development Review Task Force meetings. The Internal Task Force consists of city staff from building & safety, planning, engineering, fire inspection, and the permit center.

Fees

- Simplified and reduced the cost of street-use and hauling permits
- Reduced certain fees for design review

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Task Force provided specific suggestions to improve the development review process based on the input they received. The following general recommendations were supported:

Customer Service

- Conduct Customer Satisfaction Surveys
- Provide additional customer service training for staff
- Provide additional handouts & checklists and maintain current information on webpage
- Need a live person answering phones
- Need front reception desk in Permit Center staffed to guide customers

Process

- Increase cross training
- Support for ProjectDox (electronic plan review)
- Support for "Open Table" type inspection request module
- Reformat Zoning Code for ease of use
- Consider hiring an outside consultant to take over authority for elevator inspections (currently conducted by State inspectors).

Fees

- Provide a check guarantee service for checks over a certain amount
- Consider elimination of maintenance fees and permit issuance fees for plans and permits obtained on-line

Metrics

- Provide metrics to measure progress of the streamlining efforts
- Include service indicators such as response time for returned phone calls, processing

The Task Force was also encouraged to provide big, bold ideas to improve the development review process. The following recommended items require review and

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approval as they may have resource and fiscal implications and/or require amendments to the code:

1) Increase Discretionary Review

The Task Force supported modification to the Zoning Ordinance to allow the Director to approve minor modifications to code requirements under certain circumstances. Several stakeholders cited examples where staff was limited in their ability to approve construction conditions that did not meet development standards, but the changes were minor in nature. The Task Force was comfortable with a modification of a maximum of 10% to development standards not including height or floor area ratio (FAR). There was also a discussion of whether a Director's modification should apply to both pre- and post-construction. The Task Force recommended that approval for post-construction modifications should only be granted where a good faith effort had been made to comply with Code, there was no willful violation, and when there were no health and safety issues. The Task Force recommended that there be a penalty imposed and a list of modifications granted be recorded with a six month to one-year review. The Code currently provides for some modification to development standards. If pursued, a text amendment to this section of the code would be reviewed by the Planning Commission with a recommendation forwarded to City Council for approval.

2) Modify Commissions

The Task Force heard concern from stakeholders regarding the amount of time spent during the development review process in either the Design Review Commission (for single family homes) or the Architectural Commission (for multi-family and commercial structures). The Task Force questioned the need for two design commissions and supported combining the two commissions. The Task force noted that a single design review commission could provide two meetings per month thereby providing applicants more opportunity to address revisions in less than one month.

The Task force also supported the addition of an Urban Designer to staff this combined commission. The combination of an Urban Designer and strengthened design standards could reduce the number of discretionary reviews and facilitate more staff level approvals. There is additional work necessary to coordinate this recommendation. Staff would consider the expiration of commissioner terms as well as the length of time required to make any modifications to the design standards. Analysis regarding addition of an Urban Designer could be considered in the proposed FY 2012-13 budget. The earliest any modification would likely occur is late 2012.

3) Restructure Community Development Department

Input was received from stakeholders and some Task Force members regarding a lack of communication and collaboration between the various city divisions involved in the development review process. The Task Force suggested a model used in other cities that combines all functions into one development services program.

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A development services program would co-locate all functions that perform plan review into one division within the Community Development Department. The benefits of this organizational structure would be multiple disciplines under unified supervision focused on common goals. The Development Review program would be comprised of planners, plan reviewers, inspectors and the addition of a Public Works Engineer and Fire Department plan reviewer. Staff associated with the proposed Development Services Program would all be located in the City Hall Permit Center. Transportation Planning would be transferred to the Planning Program. In order to address delays in elevator inspections, there was also consideration of hiring contract personnel to plan review and inspect elevators.

There are a number of logistical and fiscal considerations necessary to execute this plan and if supported would need to be worked out as part of the FY 2012-13 budget process.

4) Provide Additional Expedited Service

Several stakeholders expressed the need and willingness to pay for expedited plan review and inspection services to meet the schedule demands of tenants. While this service is now provided for an additional fee for building plan review and inspection, it is not available for all disciplines that review plans.

The Task Force considered several potential models for this higher level of service. Further consideration of this recommendation is needed.

FISCAL IMPACT

The recommendations in this report do not have any significant fiscal or budget impacts; however, direction to proceed on specific recommendations may have a fiscal impact. City Council may direct certain recommendations be enacted earlier than others and depending on the time frame would be requested at the time or will be included as part of the FY 2012-13 proposed budget.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that that City Council discuss and provide direction to staff, as appropriate.


Approved By
Susan Healy Keene, AICP
Director of Community Development

ATTACHMENT 1

LIST OF STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWED

Mayor's Task Force on Government Efficiency Interviews

Meeting Date: July 11, 2011

Interviewees: Avry Mizrahi
Sharona Nazirian
Kelly Schulman

Meeting Date: July 26, 2011

Interviewees: Walter Marks
Jack Neeson

Meeting Date: August 23, 2011

Interviewees: Mitchell Dawson
Morris Gasmer
Steve Webb

Meeting Date: September 13, 2011

Interviewees: Murray Fischer
Hamid Gabbay
Steven Schwartz
Arnold Rosenstein
Joseph Tilem

ATTACHMENT 2

STAKEHOLDER ISSUES/ACTIONS/TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

MAYOR'S TASK FORCE ON GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY

ISSUES			ACTIONS TAKEN	TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS
CUSTOMER SERVICE				
1.0				
1.1	Attitude - Staff needs to be problem-solvers		1) Ongoing Training	1) Customer Satisfaction Surveys 2) Additional customer service training
1.2	Permit Center Receptionist at Info Desk/ Ombudsman needed in permit center to guide customers		1) Volunteers provide some coverage supplemented by Customer Service Rep; 2) In process of providing fulltime coverage at front reception area	1) Consider additional expedited service (fee based) 2) Supports full-time staffing at Permit Center info desk
1.3	Need back up for planners and plan checkers		1) Staff provides info to supervisor for coverage 2) Supervisor reassigns as necessary	Action addresses issue
1.4	Misinformation/ inconsistent answers /Wrong comments sent to applicant		1) Added dedicated planner at counter 2) Established permit center manager position 3) Ongoing Training & improved access to public information	1) Quality Assurance 2) Project Dox 3) Handouts, Checklists, Website, Procedures
2.0	COMMUNICATION			
2.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phone calls not promptly returned / Full Mailboxes • Calls should be returned within 24 hours • Some people make appointment or inspection request just to get a response to an email or phone question • Takes about 1 week to get a response from an inspector • Need a fix "mailbox full". Can't leave messages for people—need to change limitation to length of message you can leave • Have a "back-up" person take messages when people are out of office (also leave a message when out of office) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Reinforcement of phone policy-return calls within 24 hrs; 2) Addition of inspector provides more time for inspectors to return calls; 3) Review of department voicemail boxes on a daily basis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Need live person answering the phones

MAYOR'S TASK FORCE ON GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY

		ISSUES	ACTIONS TAKEN	TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS
2.2	Inspection Line Problems	Improved with addition of inspector; was capacity not a technical issue; simplified inspection call process First meeting held	Proceed with "Open Table" type inspection request module is being developed by I.T. to create a wider offering of inspection request appointments.	
2.3	Meet with contractors quarterly to evaluate process/hear suggestions		Continue quarterly meeting schedule	
2.4	Need better info on "how to remodel" and "how to build a new house", "how to retain nonconforming elements"	Prioritized production of handouts	Prepare public information handouts	
2.5	Develop a course to educate homeowners/contractors	Contact information provided on first review letter to applicant	Work with Cable TV to develop an instructional video	
2.6	Provide applicant contact list of all people working on application	Phone number available upon request	Use Project Dox to include staff contact information	
2.7	Can't communicate with outsourced engineer	Staff notifies applicants to key issues in staff report but does not release report prior to decision makers review	If needed, augment Plan Review Staff to reduce outsourcing	
2.8	Allow applicants to see staff report prior to making available to public	Ongoing training to staff to maintain continuous communication with applicants	Action addresses issue	
2.9	Weekly meetings on larger projects are helpful even if phone conferences		Action addresses issue	
PROCESS				
3.1	Process is too difficult – make easier and people will pull more permits	Increased over the counter approvals; 70 Day Restaurant Review amendments approved	Clarify Code; increase on-line and over-the-counter permits	
3.2	Multiple reports of plans lost; drawings seem to get lost; it happens at every city, but more often in BH	Improved tracking	Transition to Project Dox will eliminate plan loss concerns.	
3.3	Need for more administrative authority Staff needs to exercise authority if granted (afraid of mistakes) / Commission & Council need to support staff	Additional director authority granted with the 70-Day Restaurant streamlining ordinance adopted 11/3/11	Propose text amendment to add Director modification language to allow 10% modification to development standards under specific criteria.	
3.4	Need to make separate appointments for separate issues—not efficient	Now schedule joint appointments based on project, not function	Cross train allowing a single review the ability to review multiple functions.	
3.5	Add back pre-application meetings	Remains an available option	Reconstitute in more productive format	

MAYOR'S TASK FORCE ON GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY

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3.6 Police escort needed for large hauls (not efficient use of police and police not always available)	Now only required for certain size vehicles	Explore alternate escort vehicles
3.7 Provide comprehensive first round plan review scheduled with specific time	Established timelines; reprioritized work	Project Dox has built in review times and administrative oversight that currently does not exist for supervisors
3.8 Even for permits that can be paid on-line you need to go to City Hall to pick up plans	Implementing ProjectDox	Action addresses issue
3.9 Can't renew heavy haul and other smaller permits on-line	Annual permit are now included as part of the building permit	Action addresses issue
3.10 Need a set process and a "go to" person for larger projects. Assign a project manager	During planning entitlement, the planner is the project manager. This shifts to the assigned plan review engineer during plan check	Action addresses issue
3.11 Need to provide "How to Remodel" information for single family residences (SFR)	Will include in handouts created and provide on website	Action addresses issue
3.12 Allow applicants to contract for environmental impact reports (EIRs)	Staff has improved consultant selection process to reduce time to initiate process. Applicant hiring consultant does not meet other city goals.	No action required
3.13 Suggested cities to research: Newport Beach, San Mateo, Palo Alto, Sunnyvale, Oxnard.	Information reviewed	No action required
4.0 INSPECTIONS		
4.1 Additional inspection items added each time an inspector is on site. Inspector says "do these 6 things" and then next time he's out there's 2 more corrections not included first time	Inspection staff has been made aware of this concern	1) Inspection checklists should be prepared and provided to the contractor and inspector so expectations are understood, consistent and documented. 2) Send customer satisfaction surveys when projects are completed to provide feedback and accountability.
4.2 Disconnect between plan checkers and inspectors	Ongoing training to staff to maintain continuous communication	Meet more regularly to improve communication.

MAYOR'S TASK FORCE ON GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY

	ISSUES	ACTIONS TAKEN	TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS
4.3	Inspection request system doesn't work. May take 1 ½ weeks to get an inspection. Elsewhere a typical TI build out takes 6-7 weeks (7-9 weeks max); in BH TI build out takes 10-14 weeks due to delays in inspections	One inspector has been reinstated to improve customer service and meet the demand.	Continue with "Open Table" type inspection request module being developed by I.T. to create a wider offering of inspection request appointments.
4.4	Inspector can only sign off on inspection that was requested	Inspection request system has been modified to provide for this. A one half-hour hour inspection appointment is provided to allow for any inspections that can be conducted within that time-frame.	Action addresses issue
4.5	Inspector doesn't show up during stated window of time	One inspector has been reinstated to improve customer service and meet the demand.	Provide cell phones for inspectors to notify customers if they are running behind schedule.
4.6	Building and Fire inspections are not coordinated and adds too much down time	Review of separate request systems.	Consolidate functions. Consider one request inspection time for both.
4.7	Inspectors suggest contractors request "after-hours" inspection & they can be there next day	Inspectors have been talked to address this concern.	Could be part of a Expedited Service (fee based)
4.8	Fire/sprinkler inspectors always booked causing further delay		Augment Fire Inspection Staff or consolidate functions.
4.9	Group first round of inspections-have one inspector perform all the rough inspections at same time	Inspection request system has been modified to allow this. A one half-hour hour inspection appointment is provided to allow for any inspections that can be conducted within that time-frame.	Action addresses issue
4.10	If inspector cannot make appointed time window call job superintendent to advise	Will request a budget enhancement to provide cell phones for inspectors.	Provide cell phones for inspectors to notify customers if they are running behind schedule.
4.11	Inconsistent message re conduit permit vs., electrical permit and inspection of same	Staff will prepare an information bulletin	Information Bulletin will be prepared.
4.12	Assign same inspector for entire commercial building even if different tenant spaces	Transition to this model in progress.	Action addresses issue
4.13	Inspector would not sign off on something because tree lawn had tall weeds	Reinforce to applicants the relationship between ongoing property maintenance and inspections	Action addresses issue

MAYOR'S TASK FORCE ON GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY

ISSUES		ACTIONS TAKEN	TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS
4.14	Provide on website <i>10 top items inspectors review</i>	Will provide on website	Action addresses issue
4.15	Consider use of Deputy Inspector or self certification to speed inspection process	Will investigate pros and cons	Action addresses issue
5.0			
5.1	Staff discretion	Limited Director discretion added in 70-day Restaurant Amendments	Propose text amendment to add Director modification language to allow 10% modification to development standards under specific criteria
5.2	Long waits to schedule an appointment (days delayed)	Reduced appointment times and combined certain project-related appointments; established verification meetings	Conduct customer satisfaction survey to evaluate success
5.3	What is reasonable amount of time to wait to get an appointment?	Question posed to Task Force	48 hours
5.4	Need ability to pre-schedule inspections (like a week ahead)	Staff working on system	Action addresses issue
5.5	Need for after hours inspection	Currently available upon request	Consider as part of Expedited Service
5.6	MEPs in Beverly Hills take too long--3-4 weeks	Assigned a dedicated plan reviewer at the counter. Most reviews completed at counter, longest review approximately one week.	Action addresses issue
5.7	Staff needs greater sensitivity to retail holiday season.	Increased staff awareness	Action addresses issue; confirm with customer satisfaction surveys
5.8	Over-the- counter/smaller plan checks should take no more than one week	Increased number of O-T-C (over-the-counter-permits)	Augment Plan Review staff to reduce turn-around times.
6.0			
6.1	Code search is challenging-need exact key words	Address as part of FY 2011-12 work plan item	Investigate options for new Code vendor
6.1	Not organized clearly	Address as part of FY 2011-12 work plan item	Action addresses issue
6.3	Need revisions Location of A/C and pool equipment	Address as part of FY 2011-12 work plan item	Action addresses issue
7.0	ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE		
7.1	Lack of communication between PW & B & S Task Force	Continue with bi-weekly Development Review	1) May be resolved with ProjectDox. 2) Consolidate functions.
7.2	"islands of authority" in development process		1) May be resolved with ProjectDox. 2) Consolidate functions.

MAYOR'S TASK FORCE ON GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY

	ISSUES	ACTIONS TAKEN	TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS
7.3	B & S should take over all Development Review	Address as part of the FY 2012-13 work plan item	1) May be resolved with ProjectDox. 2) Consolidate functions.
7.4	Building and Fire inspections are not coordinated. There is too much down time. Takes a couple days to do each and then make corrections on smoke alarms	Continue with bi-weekly Development Review Task Force	1) May be resolved with ProjectDox. 2) Consolidate functions.
8.0	COMMISSIONS		
8.1	Commissioner training insufficient (approach, respect, purpose – focus meeting flow)	Staff will schedule regular training	Action addresses issue
8.2	AC reviews small details while other applicants sit and wait for their item to be heard	Modified application requirement to include additional information	Provide regular training
8.3	AC needs to prioritize items- smaller vs., larger	Staff review of agenda	Advise Chair; review agenda order
9.0	FEES		
9.1	Too high	Trucking and hauling fees have been significantly reduced.	Eliminate Document Maintenance fees and permit issuance fees for plans and permits obtained online.
9.2	Parks & Rec fees are higher than anywhere else	Will pursue if directed	Need to evaluate
9.3	Cost to go to DRC-\$1500 for landscape	Will pursue if directed	Consider varied levels of fees
9.4	Applicants need to know fees earlier in the process	Staff will estimate costs and provide information earlier	No action required
9.5	Applicants need to understand better how fees are calculated	Information provided on website	No action required
10.0	PAYMENT PROCESS		
10.1	Appears on-line payment system does not take American Express, only Visa and MasterCard	American Express has been added to the online system.	Action addresses issue
10.2	Allow applicant to set up a funded account that can be drawn down rather than paying smaller change fees as they come up	Deposit account service is available now.	Action addresses issue
10.3	Not clear how/if can pay on-line with credit card with company card (may be an education piece)	This can be done.	Provide additional notification on website

MAYOR'S TASK FORCE ON GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY

	ISSUES	ACTIONS TAKEN	TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS
10.4	Pre-signed checks are difficult to use-large amounts need multiple sign-offs	Address as part of the FY 2012-13 work plan item	Recommend a check guarantee service for checks over a certain amount.
11.0 OUTSIDE AGENCY APPROVALS			
11.1	Timing regarding Health department approval	Purchased County equipment for Beverly Hills submittals	Loop outside agencies into ProjectDox
11.2	Timing re elevator inspection	Will pursue if directed	Recommend hiring an outside consultant to take over elevator inspections.