



SENT TO COUNCIL:

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City Manager's Office

Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR
AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Joseph Horwedel

SUBJECT: PERMIT CENTER SERVICES

DATE: May 2, 2011

Approved

Date

5/2/11

INFORMATION

The Development Services Permit Center provides a wide range of services to homeowners, developers, contractors, and other businesses in San Jose. We strive to offer high quality service levels to meet the needs of our customers.

We are continuing to provide several Building service options, such as Express Plan Check, Special Tenant Improvement, and Industrial Tool Installation. These special programs are supported by development fee revenue that covers the costs of Building and Planning staff participation. As discussed at the Community and Economic Development Committee on April 25, 2011, we have launched a Planning Expedited service modeled after the successful, coordinated review programs in the Building Division (http://www.sanjoseca.gov/clerk/CommitteeAgenda/CED/20110425/CED20110425_d4.pdf).

We are also piloting some different Planning service options due to recent retirements and resignations. As a result, we are currently operating at the expected level that would have occurred beginning June 27, 2011 with the implementation of the Proposed Fiscal Year 2011-12 Operating Budget which will delete General Fund positions and a limit dated position. Specifically, our current Planning services at the Permit Center include:

- Minor Planning Permit Adjustments and Single-Family House Permits are processed as an over-the counter service.
- Applications for other minor Planning applications (such as Tree Removal Permits, Preliminary Reviews, etc.) can be submitted electronically, mailed, or dropped off.
- Customers with quick, general inquiries (i.e., fifteen minutes or less) can come to the Permit Center to have their questions answered from 9 to 11 a.m. and from 1 to 3 p.m., as staffing is available.

- Alternatively, customers with quick, general inquiries can call the Planning phone line (408/535-3555) Monday through Wednesday (10 a.m. to noon and 1 to 3 p.m.), Thursday (1 to 3 p.m.), or Friday (10 a.m. to noon). These hours are expected to be reduced as more Planners retire and/or the number of non-Permit Center Planner positions are reduced as a result of the Proposed Operating Budget.
- Customers can schedule a longer Planning consultation appointment for a fee to discuss City policies, property requirements, or other questions.
- The option of customers using the self-help computers in the Permit Center to find information on the City's website and in the on-line permit records.

General inquiry services are provided by approximately one Planner II funded by the General Fund. This is the level of service expected in the Proposed FY11/12 Operating Budget. Based on our experience to date with these changes, we are finding that:

- Current staffing does not meet the demand for general inquiries. Some customers who have waited for service one day have needed to return the following day in hopes that staff would be available to answer their questions. In other cases, Permit Center staff spend back office time responding to general inquiries on the phone in addition to their over the counter services.
- Some customers are not comfortable dropping off or mailing in their applications, resulting in customers leaving without finishing their business because the drop-in service reached its capacity.
- Some customers are frustrated that the time with a Planner regarding general inquiries is limited to fifteen minutes.

We continue to assess the comments and concerns from our customers. This has resulted in further enhancements to the website to help customers get answers to their questions. Information on-line includes property zoning, general plan land uses, design guidelines and policies. Even with website improvements, we find that customers eventually prefer to talk to a staff member prior to making business decisions about a piece of property.

In addition, this week, we are installing a Qmatic kiosk for customers to check in for their appointments, obtain a service ticket, or access other services. The kiosk provides an alternative to the Development Services reception desk, which at times has long lines of customers. We expect the kiosk to be operational by the end of this week.

Our goal remains to provide the best service possible to the public as we grapple with the changes in staffing in the Permit Center and elsewhere in the Department. We will continue to look for opportunities to reshape our service delivery to reduce costs, improve efficiency, and maintain basic, quality service. We are also continuing to discuss service changes directly with our customers, the development community, and the Chamber of Commerce in order to

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incorporate their ideas and comments. As we continue to monitor and adjust these pilot service changes, we will keep the Council informed about these efforts.

/s/

JOSEPH HORWEDEL, DIRECTOR
Planning, Building and Code Enforcement

For additional information, please contact Joseph Horwedel at (408) 535-7900.