

PLANNING, BUILDING AND CODE ENFORCEMENT

The mission of the Planning, Building and Code Enforcement Department is to facilitate the preservation and building of a safe, attractive, vibrant and sustainable San José through partnership with and exceptional service to our diverse communities and customers.

PLANNING, BUILDING AND CODE ENFORCEMENT

The Planning, Building and Code Enforcement (PBCE) Department guides the physical development of San José. Through its three divisions, it reviews construction applications and issues permits consistent with law and policy.

In 2014-15, PBCE's operating expenditures totaled \$39.9 million. This followed several years of increases and exceeded the previous peak of \$37.6 million in 2007-08. However, in 2014-15, the Department's staffing, at 289.5 authorized positions, remained 20 percent lower than it was in 2007-08, when it had a peak of 363 authorized positions.

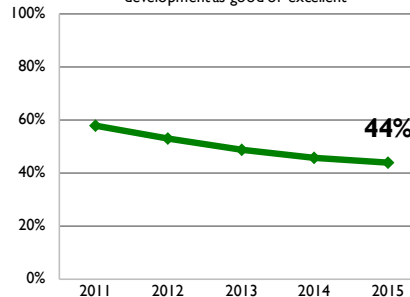
Under the collaborative umbrella of Development Services, PBCE works with other City departments to deliver the City's permitting function. Subsequent pages of this chapter discuss Development Services.

PLANNING

PBCE's Planning Division administers the City's long-range planning projects and processes land development applications to match the City's planning goals. Four years ago, the *Envision San José 2040 General Plan* identified twelve major strategies which promote active, walkable, bicycle-friendly, transit-oriented, mixed use urban settings for new housing and job growth. The U.S. Census estimates that San José had 418,000 jobs and 323,000 housing units in 2014. The City has begun reviewing the goals developed during the Envision 2040 General Plan process. See the *Development Services* pages of this chapter for more on the Planning Division's work. Also see *Planning in San José: A Community Guide* available online.

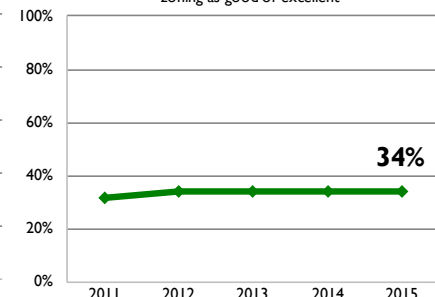
NATIONAL CITIZEN SURVEY™

% of San José residents rating overall quality of new development as good or excellent

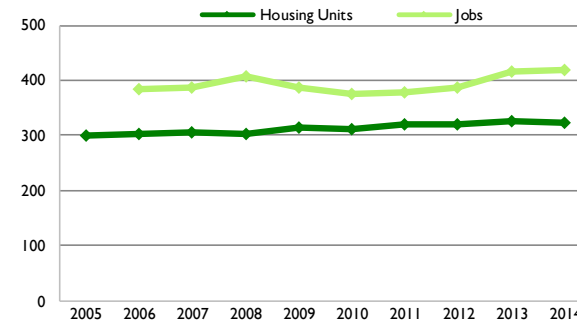


NATIONAL CITIZEN SURVEY™

% of San José residents rating land use, planning and zoning as good or excellent

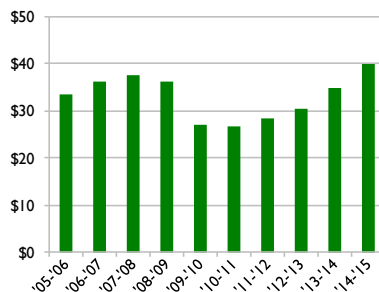


San José Housing Units and Jobs (thousands)

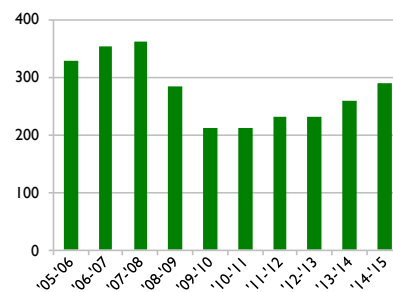


Source: American Community Survey, U.S. Census

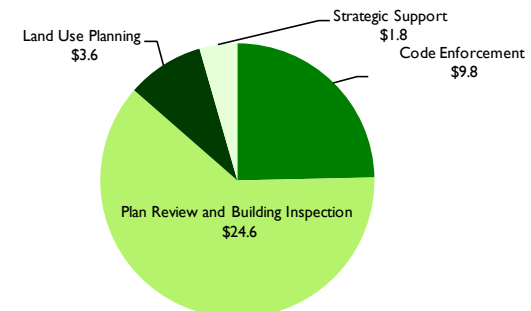
PBCE Operating Expenditures (\$millions)



PBCE Authorized Positions



PBCE Expenditures by Service (\$millions)

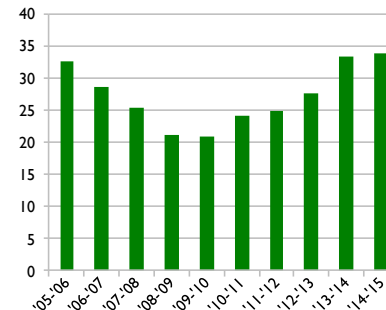


PLANNING, BUILDING AND CODE ENFORCEMENT

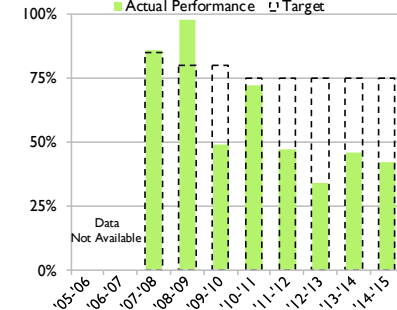
BUILDING

PBCE's Building Division reviews new construction projects within the City, ensuring they meet health and safety codes, and City zoning requirements. It is the largest Development Services program. With nearly 34,000 building permits processed, 2014-15 marked the fifth consecutive year of growth in the number of building permits. This increased workload, and staffing challenges in the department, may have contributed to the Building Division falling short of its timeliness targets. It achieved 87 percent of plan checks within cycle times and 42 percent of building inspections within its goal of 24 hours. See *Development Services on the next page for more on the Building Division's work.*

**Building Permits
(thousands)**



**% of Building Inspections
Completed Within 24 Hours**

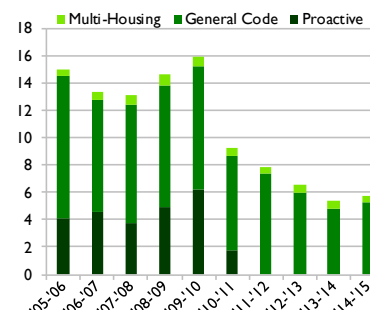


COMMUNITY CODE ENFORCEMENT

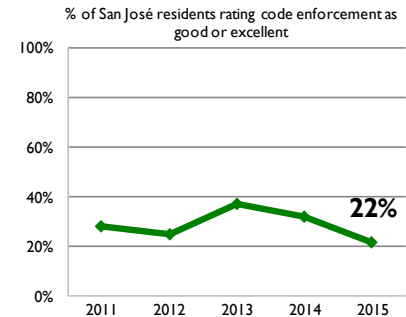
PBCE's Code Enforcement Division enforces laws that promote the health, safety, and appearance of existing buildings and neighborhoods. It also inspects businesses selling alcohol or tobacco; property and business owners fund these inspections with fees.

In 2014-15, PBCE opened 5,300 general code enforcement cases. Code Enforcement staff responded to all 64 emergency complaints within PBCE's 24-hour target, and 79 percent of the 1,400 priority complaints within the 72-hour target.* However, in response to budget and staffing shortages, staff now send letters in response to other types of complaints and only respond personally on an as-available basis.**

**Code Enforcement
Cases Opened (thousands)**

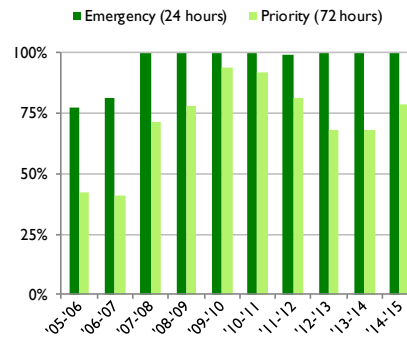


NATIONAL CITIZEN SURVEY™

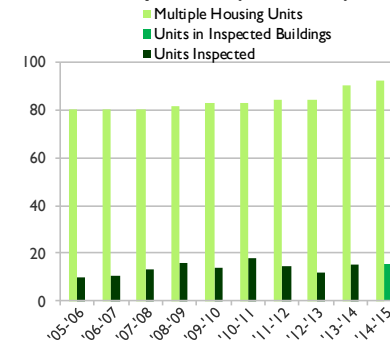


Previously, PBCE provided routine inspections on a 6-year cycle of multiple unit housing properties. In 2013-14, PBCE inspected 15,300 of the 90,100 units that qualified for the Residential Occupancy Permit Program. The department recently implemented a risk-based tiered inspection program whereby inspections are targeted to properties at higher risk of violations. Based on this approach, in 2014-15, PBCE inspected buildings that cumulatively had 15,100 housing units.**

**Response Timeliness
for General Code Cases**



**Multiple Housing Units and
Inspections (thousands)**



*Emergency complaints involve an immediate threat to life or property, such as unsecured pool fence. Priority complaints involve possible threats to life or property, such as unpermitted construction.

**Also see the November 2013 audit report: ["Code Enforcement: Improvements are Possible, But Resources are Significantly Constrained."](#)

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

The Permit Center in City Hall provides one-stop permit services for new building projects and changes to existing structures.

The **Development Services partners** in the Permit Center are:

- Building Division
- Public Works Department (*also see Public Works section*)
- Fire Department (*also see Fire section*)
- Planning Division

In 2014-15, Development Services:

- issued nearly 34,000 building permits (9,400 online),
- served over 26,000 Permit Center customers, and
- processed over 2,600 planning applications and adjustments.

Planning applications, plan checks, field inspections, and building permits all bottomed out in 2009-10, but have rebounded. 2014-15 saw sustained workloads from 2013-14, when plan checks, field inspections, and building permits were higher than they had been in at least ten years. In fact, planning adjustments, building inspections, and building permits all saw slight increases from 2013-14. Plan checks were slightly lower.

Construction volume and value decreased significantly in 2014-15, respectively declining by 20 and 26 percent from 2013-14 levels when building activity in the City soared and a number of large and complex building projects came online. Though lower than historic 2013-14 levels, 2014-15 building volume and valuation across residential, commercial, and industrial categories were higher than those of 2012-13 and earlier years.

The Permit Center located in City Hall



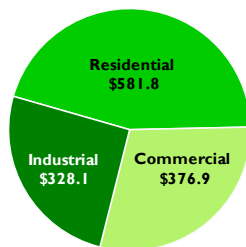
Source: Auditor photo from Fall 2015

Development Services 2014-15 Summary

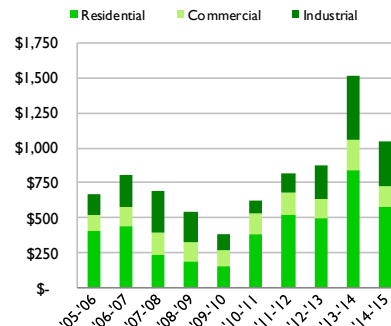
Partner	Revenue (\$millions)	Positions (rounded)
Building	\$28.6	158
Public Works	\$9.6	60
Fire	\$6.5	33
Planning	\$4.6	32
TOTAL	\$49.3	282

Source: 2014-15 Modified Budget as outlined in the City's 2015-16 Adopted Operating Budget

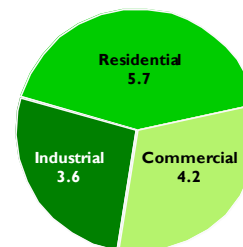
Value of Building Activity (\$millions)



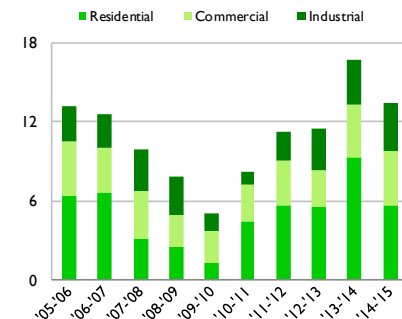
Value of Construction (\$millions)



Volume of Building Activity (millions of square feet)



Volume of Construction (millions of square feet)



DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

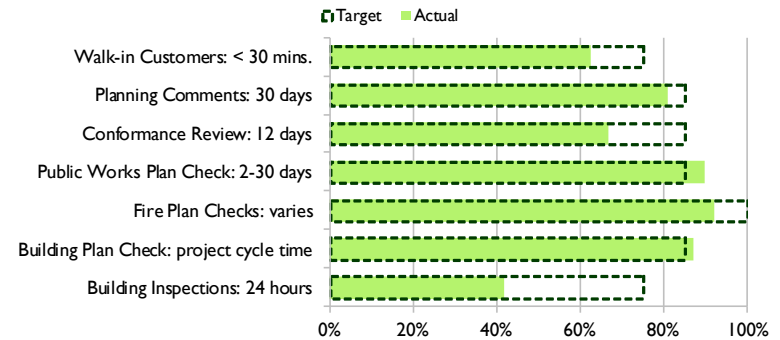
Across all the partner departments, Development Services was a \$49 million business of the City of San José in 2014-15, with revenues nearly as high as they were in 2013-14. Development Services projects vary broadly, from replacing a residential water heater to large, mixed-use developments of many thousands of square feet. One project may require multiple permits and inspections. Some projects require approval through a public hearing and inspections. Some projects require approval through a public hearing, but most (an estimated 80 percent), require only administrative approval. Projects only go through Public Works or the Fire Department when they have impacts on public facilities (e.g., traffic, streets, sewers, utilities, flood hazard zone), or fire-related issues (e.g., need for fire sprinkler systems or fire alarm systems), respectively.

The City offers a number of programs to expedite project delivery for companies, small businesses, and homeowners. However, turnaround times continue to be a primary concern. In some cases, significant time goes by before City staff can review applications.**

As described earlier, staffing levels in PBCE are still lower than they were when development activity was slower. The department continues to address ongoing staff vacancies. To free up staff and provide further convenience to customers, PBCE has expanded the availability of online permits. Of the 34,000 building permits PBCE issued in 2014-15, nearly 9,400 were online permits, many of which previously would have required more staff time and trips to the Permit Center.

**Also see the September 2014 audit report: [“Development Services: Improving the Experience for Homeowners.”](#)

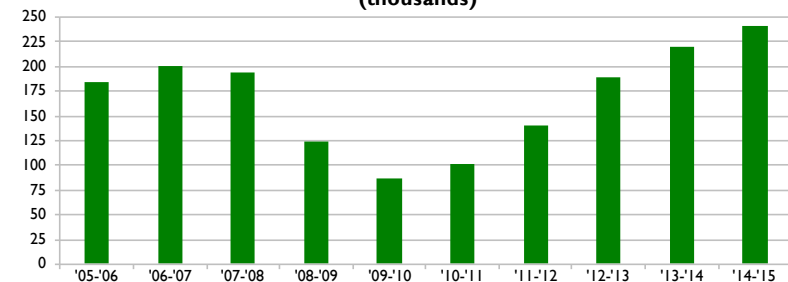
Timeliness of Development Services*



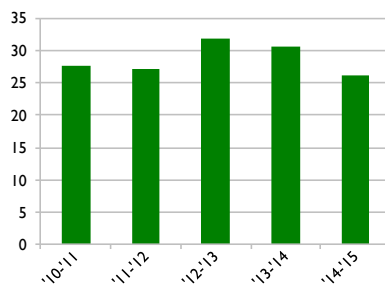
Source: PBCE from the City's Permits Database

*These selected measures may occur simultaneously; some are dependent on completion of particular processes. For other Fire and Public Works measures related to Development Services, see the Fire and Public Works chapters.

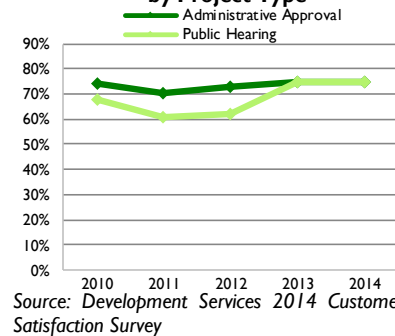
Building Inspections (thousands)



Permit Center Customers (thousands)



Development Services Overall Customer Satisfaction by Project Type



Planning Applications and Plan Checks

