



**COUNTY OF EL DORADO
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AGENCY
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DIVISION**

INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

Date: July 17, 2014
To: Board of Supervisors
From: Roger Trout, Development Services Division Director
Subject: **Personnel Allocations Request: FY2014-2015**

Background

Purpose/Benefits of Building Permits

The building permit process is beneficial to the County for many reasons. New construction that goes through the building permit process is typically superior to unpermitted work. Safety to the public is ensured with proper permitting and inspection, and also ensures better value for the land owner with structures that will last longer. It also ensures subsequent property owners that structures were constructed properly. The assessed value of new construction increases the County's property tax collections which provide for other County programs.

An effective and timely building permit process encourages public participation and improves quality, value, and safety. Understaffing the building permit process will slow processing times and result in lower quality plan checking and inspections. The consequences potentially compromise safety and may reduce the value of real property improvements and the correlated property taxes that support County programs.

Staffing/Workload

Staffing in the Development Services Division (DSD) historically has varied based on development activity (building permits and planning entitlements). In the past 37 years, the highest DSD staffing level was 122.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions, which reflected workload associated with as many as 7,500 annual building permit applications and an average of 6,500 applications per year in the early/mid-2000's. *(Note: Given the reorganization into the Community Development Agency, 122.5 FTE in 2007 is roughly equivalent to 90 FTE today).* Between 2007 and 2010, DSD personnel were reduced by approximately half to 44 FTE positions, which reflects decreased permit activity and revenue (3,400 permits in FY09/10). Current DSD staffing is 46 FTE.

Permit activity has increased approximately 15 percent per year for the past 4 years, culminating in 6,274 building permit applications in Fiscal Year (FY)13-14. This figure includes an increase

in single family dwelling permits from 90 in FY 07-08 to 546 in FY 13-14, which require more review and inspection than the smaller permits that have been issued in the past few years. Workload has increased not only due to increased permit volume and type but also due to the complexity of regulatory requirements. For example, there have been significant changes in the 2010 and 2013 State Building Codes (such as the requirement for residential fire sprinklers and Green Building Standards) and stormwater quality regulations that increase work required for each permit. In contrast staffing has not increased over the past four years to reflect increased workload.

Efficiencies

DSD has made adjustments in priorities and processes to improve efficiencies and better meet the increased workload during the past few years. Examples of major process improvements to date include:

- The operational focus of handling as many permits “over the counter” as possible. This strategy requires intense focus of resources early in the review process and at the front counter, but reduces administrative costs.
- The creation of “self-certification” protocols for some minor permits has reduced the need for some inspections.
- Developed a permit tracking system to better manage applications (“the virtual plan check shelf”).
- Inspection requests are routed, managed, and tracked in another system, enabling “next day inspections” more often and adding more certainty to the inspection process.
- Established an internal website for reference material such as current forms, policies, procedures, as well as education, training, links, and a forum.

Workload Indicators

Despite process improvements, DSD has not been able to meet its processing goals for residential permits, grading permits, non-residential permits and inspections for the past three years. C review of available statistics indicates that:

- Front counter wait times in excess of 15 minutes have increased in the past FY by 200.
- The “next day” inspection goal has been unachievable for weeks at a time.
- Building inspections have exceeded the nominal number of “maximum” daily inspections over 200 times in FY 13-14, up from 140 times in FY 12-13. This results in pulling plan check employees out of the office to perform field inspections, often delaying plan review or public assistance responsibilities.
- 10% of building plan reviews have not met DSD processing timelines. In part this reflects the practice of pulling plan check staff to perform field inspections and help at the front counter when those functions are busy.
- Site Assessments in South Lake Tahoe have been significantly delayed.

- Many administrative services have been delayed such as processing refunds, research requests, Notices of Non-Compliance, and Notices of Compliance.

The increased workload associated with increased permit activity and complexity has been too much for the current staffing level to consistently meet processing goals. While adjustments have been made to meet timelines, the risk of errors increases as staff tries to process a large number of permits/inspections too quickly. In order to improve the processing times and ensure quality work additional employees are needed.

Improving Customer Service

Permit Processing Audit

Recently, the Community Development Agency (CDA) conducted an audit of the building permit process with the assistance of an outside consultant. The consultant interviewed staff and customers regarding the permit process and provided a report with 52 recommendations and 9 follow-on projects, some of which are currently being implemented. This report will be used by CDA management to direct customer service improvements. However, adequate staff resources will be required to implement many of the recommendations in a timely manner. Several of the recommendations that should help provide for immediate improvements in processes include<

- Creating better information regarding permit processes to aid customers (requires documenting step-by-step processes needed to obtain a variety of permits)
- Allow electronic submittal of building plans (requires technology improvements, accepting credit cards online)
- Replace the aging Land Management Information System (LMIS) (requires a new electronic permitting data system)
- Update applicable policies for consistency purposes
- Cross training of staff (avoidance on depending on a few key staff members)

Right-Sizing

Increased staff, including supervision and management positions, is necessary to “right size” DSD and improve processing time for permits and inspections. Additional “front line” staff is necessary to keep up with increased workload. DSD needs additional management and supervisory positions, which would be “working” manager/supervisors, to provide improved customer service, and in particular to implement the recommendations of the permit processing audit.

Note also that staff reductions from 2007 through 2010 left DSD with a high ratio of employees to supervisors (7.5 to 1). This served adequately for the short term, but is not sustainable over the long term.

Recommendation

Staff recommends the addition of ; positions to bring total DSD staff from 46 to 55 FTE. The recommended additional positions are:

	Title	Primary Role	Projected Annual Salary and Benefits
1	Deputy Building Official	Management. Supervise permit center employees	\$138,051
2	Principal Planner	Management. Supervise Planners at Permit Center	\$126,367
3	Supervising Development Technician	Supervisor. Permit processing and supervise public counter employees	\$87,840
4	Building Inspector I/II/III	Building permit plan checking	\$86,773
5	Building Inspector I/II/III	Building permit inspection	\$86,773
6	Building Inspector I/II/III	Grading and Water Quality inspection	\$86,773
7	Administrative Technician	Department support	\$83,671
8	Development Technician	Permit processing; Permit Center	\$76,827
9	Office Services Supervisor	Supervisor. Customer service and supervise permit file room employees	\$66,102
		Total Annual:	\$839,177
		Total 8 month est.:	\$559,451

These positions were identified by careful review of the existing organizational structure, past organizational structures, current workload, and projected workload. Two of the positions are management level, two are supervisory level, four are front line employees, with one support staff. The additional management and supervision positions are “working” supervisor/manager positions that would provide improved customer service as well as supervision of the permit center employees.

All positions are existing job classifications. The Deputy Building Official position’s salary has not been updated since the position was last filled in 2005. The Human Resources Department has recommended updating the salary to \$38.83 at Step 5. Adoption of the Personnel Allocation Resolution includes the salary schedule update for the Deputy Building Official.

Benefits

Benefits of the proposed increased staffing include:

- Expediting implementation of permit processing audit report recommendations.
- Ensure timely plan checking and inspections.
- Expand office hours to 8 am to 5 pm.
- Plan for future turnover and succession planning.
- Expand employee training and cross-training.
- Provide better supervision/management.
- Allows planning to begin for implementation of future information technology-based improvements such as electronic plan submittal, replacing the outdated LMIS permit tracking system, and using mobile devices for inspection.

Conclusion

Additional employees are needed to address increasing building permit activity, related services, and DSD goals. Using building permit revenues and shifting funding from providing some stormwater quality services by contract to “in-house”, along with careful review of the existing organization, CDA recommends the following;

1. Amending the Authorized Personnel Allocation table for FY 14-15, increasing DSD by ; positions; and
2. Amending the FY 14-15 budget through the addenda process by increasing building permit revenue by \$530,841, shifting \$100,000 in funding to account for taking stormwater quality work in-house, and increasing appropriations by \$630,841.