



Planning and Land Services

Quarterly Report 1st Quarter 2009

Integration of Departments into PALS Plus Permit Tracking System

(1) how all departments in the planning and permitting process are being integrated into the PALS Plus system;

All departments in the planning and permitting process have been integrated into the PALS Plus permit tracking system. Integrated Departments include:

1. Public Works & Utilities (PW&U)
 - a. Water Programs
 - b. Traffic Engineering
 - c. Sewer Utilities
2. Department of Emergency Management
 - a. Fire Prevention Bureau (FPB)
3. Tacoma Pierce County Health Department (HEALTH)
 - a. On-Site Sewage
4. Planning and Land Services (PALS)
 - a. Advance Planning
 - b. Division of Building Safety & Inspection
 - c. Development Center
 - d. Development Processing
 - i. Current Planning
 - ii. Development Engineering
 - iii. Resource Management
 - iv. Code Enforcement

PALS and FPB are fully integrated, in that all of our permitting and inspection activity is within PALS Plus. Code Enforcement has a companion system called the Service Request System (SRS) that keeps track of enforcement activities. The systems are partially linked for viewing comments in SRS from PALS Plus.

HEALTH has their own permit system for septic systems. They have access to PALS Plus and enter review comments and their approval on building permits and land use applications.

All sections of PW&U have access to PALS Plus. The Sewer Utilities section process their applications and enters review comments and approvals on building permit and land use applications.

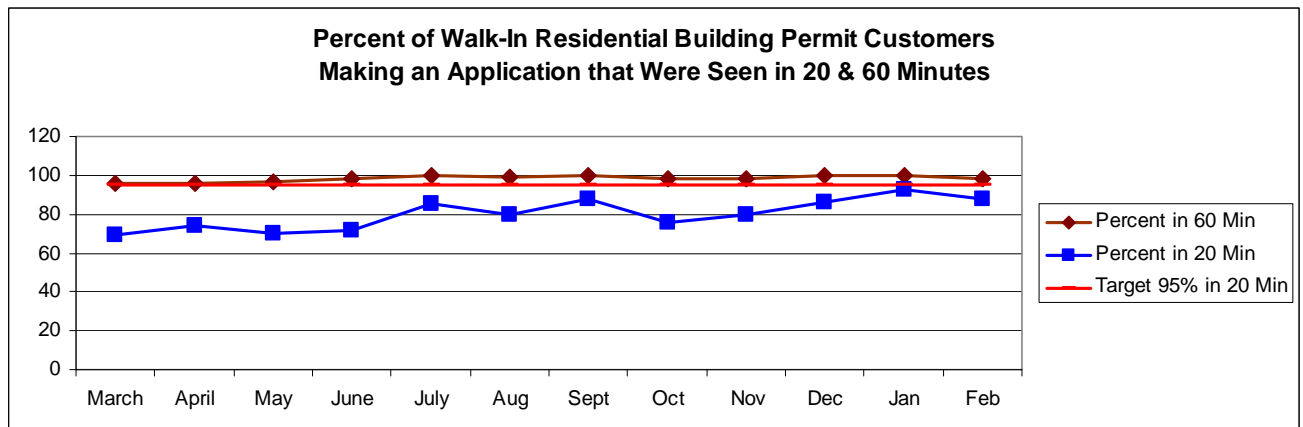
The Water Programs and Traffic Engineering sections can use PALS Plus to enter review comments but they typically route their requirements through Development Engineering.

20 Minute Lobby Wait

(2) how and to what extent the Department is progressing relative to meeting the 20-minute wait time goal;

Audit recommendation #117. No customer shall be required to wait in the lobby more than 20 minutes before being assisted by a staff member.

Meeting this performance measure has proven to be one of our most elusive. So much depends on the mix of customers each day and how many come in at the same time. Even so, we have improved our wait times and have achieved a level of consistency that customers can rely on.



How did we get there? The PALS Oversight Committee met in 2007 and 2008 to look at a proposed action plan to revise the permit intake process. The Lobby Wait study, released in June of 2007, adjusted the focus of two previous studies. It called for an emphasis on providing the best service possible to each customer in addition to the target of keeping customer wait times under twenty minutes.

This emphasis raised the need for a more flexible process because different customers have different needs. For instance, there may be customers who wish to wait for an answer to their questions provided the wait is reasonable even if it is longer than 20 minutes. Other customers may wish to drop off an application for review later, keeping their wait time to much less than 20 minutes.

The system we have developed is geared towards meeting the varying needs of our customers. It is designed to make the best use of staff resources, software capabilities and procedural efficiencies.

The revised process will use the following options:

1. **Drop Box.** Any applicant may drop off any type of application. The only exception to this will be commercial building permit customers, who will still be required to make appointments. In addition, we will encourage some applicants with complex applications to wait for the next available Permit Technician.

Base Plan Permit applications in newer plats will only be accepted as drop-offs, and will still be processed within three days.

At least one Permit Technician will be assigned to accepting application packets that are dropped off. Each application packet will be assigned a number that can be tracked in PALS Plus and via the internet.

Once the packet has been accepted in PALS Plus it will be reviewed for completeness. This part of the process has not yet been fully developed, but could be performed by Technical Support staff by statusing them within PALS Plus. Applications will be deemed complete or incomplete within five days (28 days maximum) and the customer will be notified. Incomplete application packets will be returned to the customer with a submittal standard. Complete application packets will be routed to a Permit Technician to create and process the applications.

If the application is complete, its vesting date will be the date it was dropped off. If the application is incomplete, its vesting date will be the date all of the required items are provided. These vesting rules will require policy changes and may require an ordinance change.

2. **Over The Counter (OTC).** Several permit types have simple fees and can be applied for quickly. They differ from applications received through the "Next Available" avenue due to their simplicity. Here is a preliminary list of applications which can be applied for using the "Over The Counter" process:

- All Land Use applications
- Fire Prevention Bureau applications
- Sign applications (up to three at a time)
- Base Plan Set Ups (with a goal to move this intake to our webpage)
- Commercial Site Development applications
- Road Deviations
- Geotechnical assessments
- Traffic Impact Analysis applications
- Wetland reviews
- Fish and Wildlife reviews

3. **Next Available & Information.** Customers who want to know for sure whether applications are complete may wait for the “Next Available” Permit Technician. This may often mean waiting more than 20 minutes. Customers must have a project-specific “Submittal Standard” (available through the “Information” process) to see one of five “Next Available” Permit Technicians.

If the application packet is complete, applications will be created and processed in PALS Plus before the customer leaves. If the application is incomplete, the Submittal Standard will be updated and returned to the customer with the application packet.

Information customers will be in a queue with those wanting to submit an application. They will receive a submittal standard outlining the requirements for a complete submittal for their project. If they have everything they need for a complete application, the Permit Technician will create and process the relevant applications before they leave.

4. **Appointment.** A limited number of appointments will be made available each day for the following customer types:
 - Commercial Building permit customers will be required to make an appointment. We are still looking at accepting simple Tenant Improvement applications Over The Counter soon.
 - Preferred customers will be afforded an opportunity to make appointments. To receive preferred customer status, customers will need to participate in required training. Preferred customers will be expected to bring in a clean and complete application each time or they may lose preferred status.
 - Some infrequent customers could be provided this option.
5. **Pick Up.** Customers whose permits are approved and ready for issuance will continue to be able to pay any outstanding permits and pick up their permits through a separate line.

What we Intend to Provide

By providing options to customers we accomplish the following key goals of the audit:

- We will meet the intent of on-time or timely service by providing customers with the option to drop off their applications in their first contact at the reception desk.
- We will provide face-to-face interaction with customers.
- Customers will be able to meet with a Permit Technician and Technical Support staff.

- Applications will be processed while the customer waits for those who choose the “Next Available” line and have complete applications.
- More staff will be dedicated to helping Information customers.
- We will hold monthly workshops to help applicants put together complete applications.

Goals, Objectives, Performance Measures and the PALS Oversight Committee

(3) how the Department is accomplishing the goals, objectives, and performance measures as established by the Zucker Systems evaluation of the development process and the PALS Oversight Committee.

We have completed the implementation phase of 2004 Audit of the Development Permitting Process and the two follow up studies. PALS continues to published a monthly report similar format as the monthly performance measure report we have presented over the last couple of years.

There are several positive outcomes from the implementation process.

- ✓ Better communication with all stake holders.
 - Through the monthly performance reports.
 - Each section has a monthly report - web site
- ✓ Adopted performance measures.
- ✓ An understanding of how each person’s role fits in the process.
- ✓ Stakeholder forums
- ✓ Project Managers

January of 2008 was the last time a copy of the audit recommendations, with a comment on each item, was published. At that time 81% of the recommendations were being worked on. That was also when we told our stakeholders that the remaining items (including those in all three phases of the Audit) were incorporated in four major initiatives for 2008. They were:

Permit Intake Process (20 min wait)
 PALS Plus improvements
 LUAC changes
 Project Managers

Those too, are now implemented to the extent we can and we are now in a maintenance/tweaking/streamlining mode. We now have a revised business model, new reports, performance measures, and initiatives to maintain.

The majority of the recommendations in the three phases of the Audit were implemented as suggested. Some were modified with concurrence of the PALS Audit Oversight Committee to avoid changing preferred business practices.

A stakeholders group was established in 2005 to monitor and assist in the implementation process of the 2004 Audit of the Development Permitting Process and the two subsequent audits from Zucker Systems. The group was named the PALS Audit Oversight Committee.

Our Department web page www.piercecountywa.org/PALS under the heading "Performance Audits" contains the following information:

Project Description including the full text of the Audit.

Final Report

A link to monthly reports from each reviewing Section in PALS

Monthly performance measure reports

Meeting minutes

Newsletters

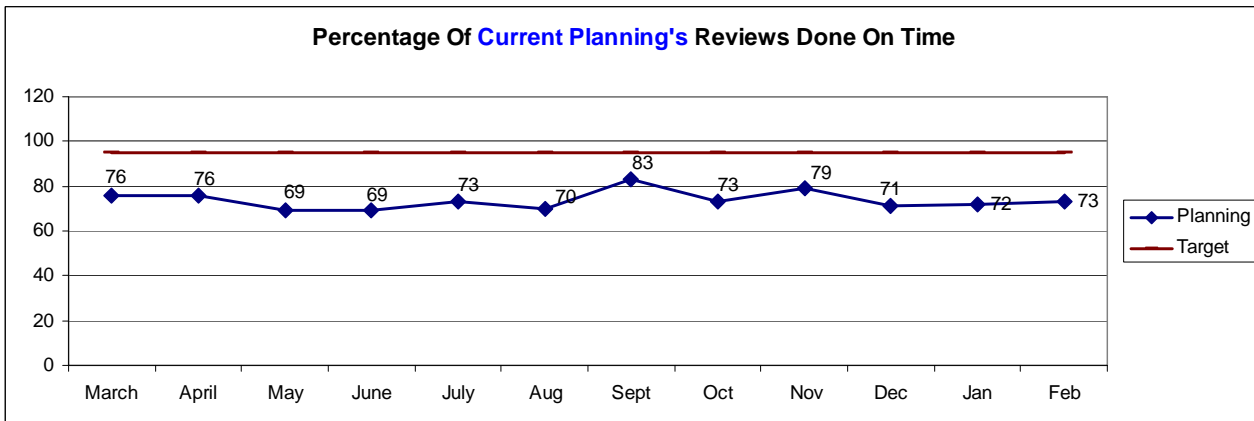
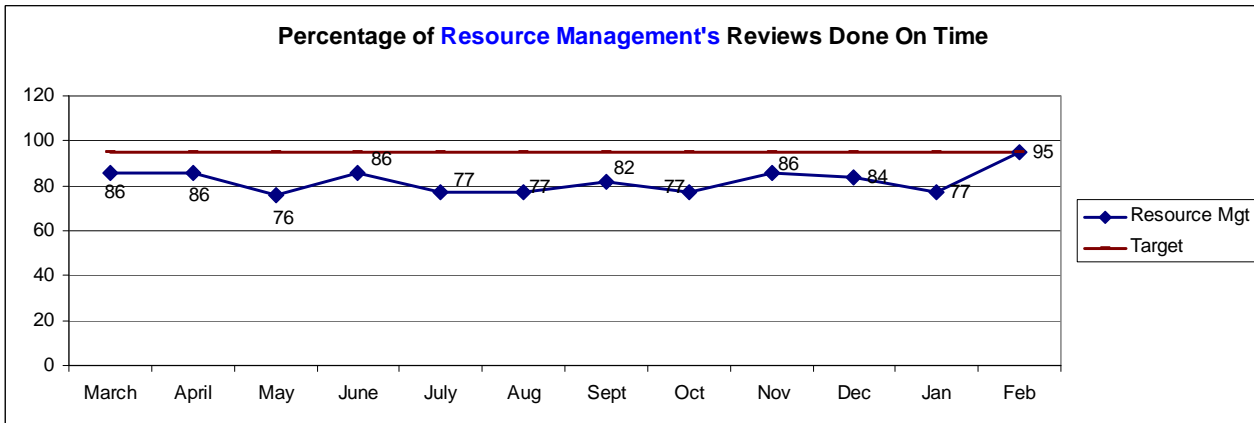
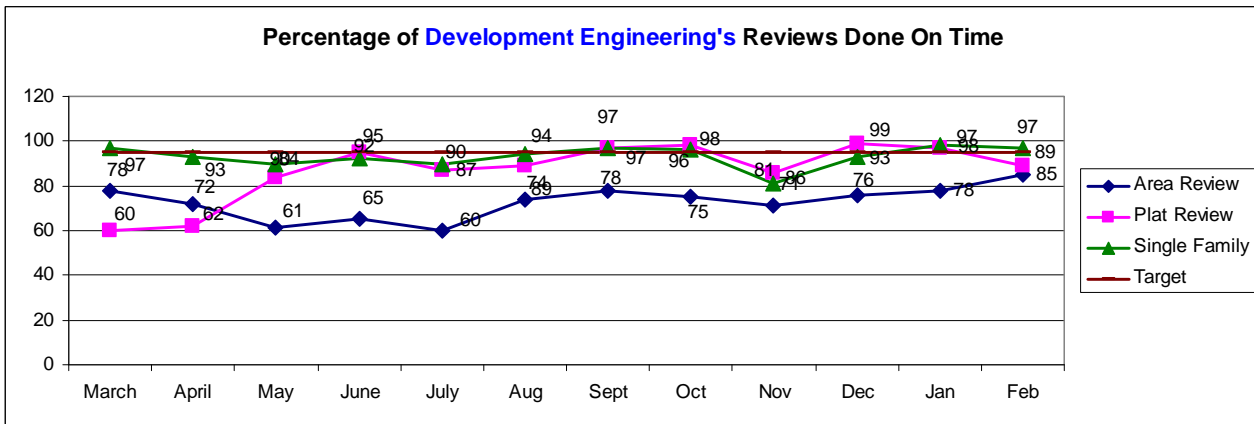
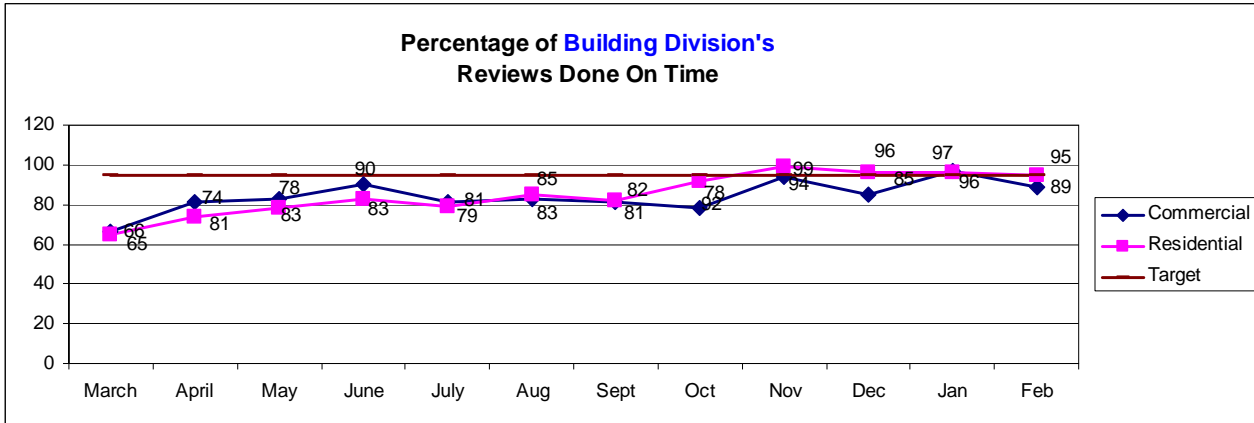
We are grateful to the PALS staff for the many hours spent in planning, meetings, and working on audit recommendations. We are likewise deeply appreciative of the members of the PALS Audit Oversight Committee for the time they devoted to the process over the last three years. Lastly, our thanks to the County Council and the County Executive for their guidance and support through this process.

Performance Measures

Each month the Department reports on the various performance measures we have set. As the reports have shown, our review times have stabilized. Those reports are found on our web page www.piercecountywa.org/PALS under the heading "Performance Audits"

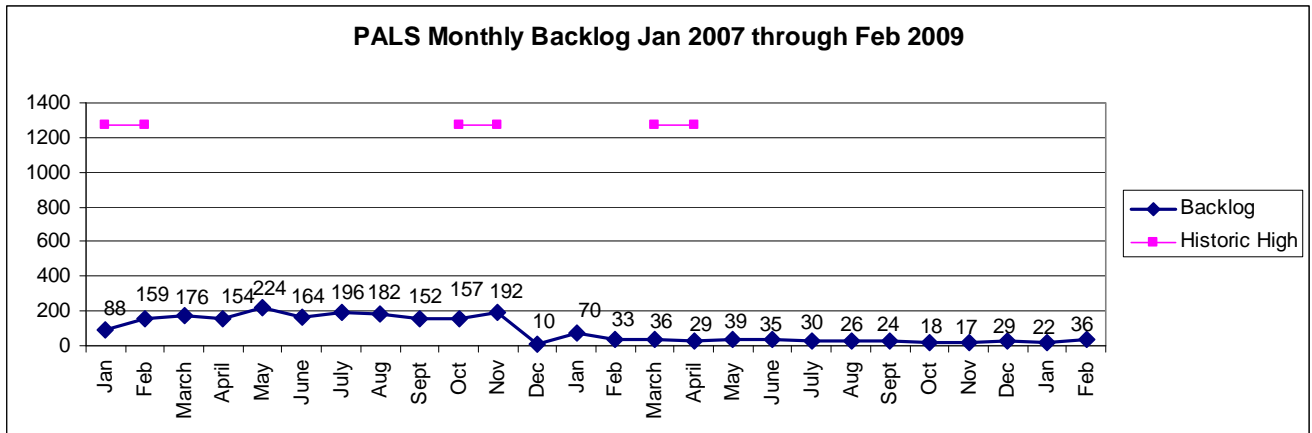
The monthly report also shows that review times are much more predictable. The graphs on the next page show our on time performance for the last year. The variation from month to month is small and generally improving.

Percent of On-Time Reviews for Last 12 Months



Performance Measures of 95% On-Time Reviews and Backlog

Backlog was the name we gave to applications that on the last day of each month, were not reviewed but should have been. It is a snapshot in time. Every application has a corresponding target for the number of days it should take to complete our first plan review that drives our on-time performance as shown on the previous page. Over the last two years we have stayed relatively flat in on-time performance and Backlog. As permit activity dropped in late 2007 so did our Backlog.



When the 2004 Audit was done we had over 1,200 applications that were considered Backlog. Many of those were several months beyond their target for first reviews. PALS Staff is especially proud that, with the support of County Executive and County Council, we were able to reach zero backlog by the end of 2005.

The staffing models in the 2004 Audit, designed to meet the proposed performance goals of 95% efficiency, were never fully realized. Civil engineers proved hard to find and keep. Then with the drop in permit activity we began to freeze vacant positions. Even with the staffing challenge we have been able to stabilize our on-time performance.

Staffing has had varying impacts on each Section to maintain a high on-time performance for plan review. With the current round of staffing changes we expect to see a drop in our on-time performance.

The drop in residential building permits in the later months of 2007 and through 2008 is only a partial indicator of the workload within PALS. This is most evident in the Development Processing Section (DENG, Current Planning, and Resource Mgmt). Their workload is comprised of projects that involve multiple applications, with multiple reviewing departments, with multiple regulations.

Projects which are less intensive like Pre-Development Conferences, Administrative Use Permits, Confirmation of Non-Conforming Rights, SEPA's, and Boundary Line Revisions are completed in one year or less.

More complex applications like Conditional Use Permits, Plats (Formal and Short), Planned District Developments, Shoreline, and Master Planned Communities require up to five years to complete the review process. Routinely, staff can be working on the initial review of an application accepted a month ago, as well as, the review of requested information/studies for applications submitted years ago.

For a complete picture of the Development Processing Section's workload we look at both the applications submitted within the last six months, and also the number of more complex applications submitted over the past five years.